



Antaranga Sadhana

Retreat with Swamini Svatmavidyananda, Sept 6th-7th 2025

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1. Inner Wealth vs. Outer Chaos

These transcribed excerpts from a multi-day retreat focus on Vedanta philosophy and the importance of cultivating a rich inner life to achieve spiritual freedom (moksha). Swamini explains that the primary obstacle to self-realization is the erroneous identification of the true self (Atma/Brahman) with the non-self (anatma), which manifests as various anxieties, desires, and emotional baggage (samskaras). The teachings detail a three-step process—shravanam (listening), manam (reflection/inquiry), and nididhyasanam (contemplation/meditation)—necessary to internalize this knowledge and resolve internal conflicts. Emphasis is placed on using mantra japa and guided meditation to clear the mind of unconscious psychological residues, particularly those stemming from relationships with primary caregivers, thus preparing the individual to abide in their limitless, conscious, and blissful nature.

2. How does Vedantic practice address internal conflict and dissatisfaction?

Vedantic practice, particularly *Antaranga Sadhana* (inner practice), addresses the fundamental human experience of internal conflict and dissatisfaction by identifying its root cause as a deep-seated misunderstanding of the Self and providing structured methods to resolve this ignorance.



The Vedantic approach focuses on transforming confusion into clarity and moving from resistance to reverence. The ultimate goal (*purushartha*) is **Moksha**—freedom from the affliction of being a constantly disappointed person.

I. Identifying the Root of Conflict and Dissatisfaction

1. The Mixup (*Adhyasa*): The core cause of internal conflict and sorrow (*samsara*) is the mistake (*adhyasa*) of mixing up the "I" (*Atma*, the Self) with the "not I" (*Anatma*, the body, mind, and senses).

- The "I" is immortal, infinite, whole, changeless, and free.
- The "not I" is mortal, changing, and finite.
- The mistake leads to sorrow because the immortal "I" is projected onto the mortal "not I," causing the feeling that "I am depressed," "I am afraid," or "I am mortal".

2. The Power of Desires (*Raga*): Human life is orchestrated by the force of desires (*Raga*). The constant, urgent pressure to fulfill these desires makes one "dance" and choreographs existence from "womb to tomb". This prevents the individual (*jiva*) from realizing the primary desire for *Moksha* (freedom).

3. The Unconscious Mind (*Kashaya / Maya*): Internal conflict is rooted in the **unconscious mind**, which is likened to a "sludge" or swamp (*kashaya*). This unconscious is the individual manifestation of the concealing power of *Maya*.

- It is filled with unresolved feelings, anxieties, fears, and conflicts from childhood, such as hurt, neglect, and lack of self-confidence.
- These unresolved feelings are often carried as emotional baggage (called *samskara*, or "some scar").
- These latent emotional patterns manifest as reactions and chronic patterns (*vikshapa*) like anger, fear, hopelessness, anxiety, and self-sabotage.

II. The Practice of Inner Transformation (*Antaranga Sadhana*)

The path to resolving conflict involves the three-stage process of study, reflection, and internalization: *Shravanam*, *Mananam*, and *Nididhyasanam*. The practices that specifically tackle internal conflict and dissatisfaction fall primarily under **Nididhyasanam** (contemplation and internalization).

1. Cultivating Abidance in the Self (The "I")

Vedantic practice begins with the need for developing a **rich inner life**. This is achieved by making an "appointment with the self" and abiding in the Self.



- **Observing the Witness (*Sakshi*):** Practice involves repeatedly bringing the mind back to the "I". The Self is recognized as the **sentient, conscious being** that is the observer (*sakshi*) of the body, mind, and senses. This recognition immediately offers freedom from being identified with afflictions, fears, tears, worries, or hurry.
- **Contemplative Affirmations (Bi-Contemplation):** The student is encouraged to initiate Vedantic statements to oneself, such as "I am whole," "I am non-lacking (*Purna*)," and "I am the nature of joy (*Ananda*)". Although these statements may initially feel "inauthentic" because one is habituated to sorrow and lack, the practice gradually replaces the "fake" sorrowful existence with the natural truth of the Self.

2. Cleaning the Mind and Letting Go of Baggage

Practices are designed to clear the inner room of the mind, which is often a "trash can" filled with "the thicket of *raga* and *dvesha*" (prejudices and preferences) and uncontrolled desires.

- **Externalizing Internalized Emotions:** Meditation involves recognizing that the **external world is not external**; it has been internalized in the form of unmet expectations and hurts. To regain freedom, one practices *granting freedom* to people (like primary caregivers) to be whoever they were or are in one's perception. By retaining love and care but dropping the feelings that they should have been different, the practitioner externalizes the emotional baggage (e.g., anxiety, fear of authority, hopelessness) that originated from these foundational relationships.
- **The Power of Mantra: Mantra *Japa*** is introduced as a "soap" to cleanse the inner instrument (*antahkarana*). This mental prayer (*manasa karma*) yields visible results (*drishta phala*), such as immediate tranquility and calmness. The mantra repetition helps to cleanse the mind of "old disappointments that have calcified into anger frustration hopelessness despair". It also serves to rebrand the identity, shifting focus from a role (e.g., son, doctor) to a devotee (*bhakta*), which is an objective, interim identity that helps manage the pains and hurts of that role.

3. Healing the Inner Child and Integrating Conflict

Vedanta directly addresses the deep-seated psychological conflicts stored in the unconscious mind.

- **Soft *Sakshi* Mode (SSM):** To deal with the triggers and emotional outbursts (*vikshapa*) coming from the unconscious, the practitioner must adopt the **soft *Sakshi* mode (SSM)** or "parent mode". This involves looking compassionately and dispassionately at the "inner child"—the part of oneself that is triggered, angry, or fearful.
- **Reparenting the Self:** Just as a parent waits patiently for a child's tantrum to finish, the adult self must look with love and kindness at the inner child without indulging or



becoming identified with the anger or sorrow. The goal is to **love up and integrate** the inner child into the adult self, ensuring that Vedanta "will not only go in but stay in". This crucial work leads to fewer and less intense triggers, with quicker recovery times.

- **Surrender to the Cosmic Order (Ishwarification):** Conflict and unrest are surrendered by invoking **Ishwara** as the **infallible psychological and karmic order** that governs all thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Seeing oneself as included in this vast, colossal order dissolves the feeling of being "limited, finite, susceptible to diseases".
- By seeing the unpleasant people and difficult situations in one's life as a manifestation of *Ishwara* in the form of the karmic order, one shifts from blame to accountability: "It's my own karma coming back... I am responsible". This allows the individual to let go of the smallness and conflict.

3. Why does the knowledge not stick?

I. Unfamiliarity with the Self (*Atma*)

The core reason the knowledge does not stick is the student's unfamiliarity with the "I" (*Atma*, Self, Brahman, Consciousness).

- **The Non-Object Status:** The Self is Awareness itself. When one says "I am," **no object comes into the head**. The mind is accustomed to objectifying everything (a pot, a tree, a hat). Since Brahman is neither the subject nor the object, yet without its presence neither can exist, the Self is not clearly understood because it cannot be grasped as an object.
- **Lack of Abidance:** People are too busy with their urgent, choreographed lives driven by desires to **spend enough time becoming familiar with or "abiding in the self"**.

II. The Persistence of Ignorance (*Adhyasa*)

- **The Mix-up (The Rope-Snake Example):** The great mistake is mixing up the "I" (immortal, infinite, changeless, whole, free) with the "**not I**" (mortal, finite, changing). The true Self is not afflicted by things like sorrow, fear, or anxiety, yet the individual says, "I am depressed" or "I am afraid".
- **Twofold Error (*Adhyasa*):** The error involves two components, which take the individual on a "terrible spin life after life":
 1. Mistaking the mortal, changing "not I" (*Anatma*) for the immortal "I" (*Atma*) (e.g., trying to run after the finite body to make it infinite).
 2. Mistaking the immortal "I" for the mortal "not I" (e.g., saying "I am depressed" when the Self is free of sorrow).



- **The Classroom vs. Reality Gap:** In the classroom, the concepts are clear ("I am Brahman, everything else is *mithya*"). However, during a simple break, this knowledge seems to "go out," and the individual reverts to their worst tendencies, forgetting they are Brahman and moving from contentment to total discontentment, and from fulfillment back to being a wanting person.

III. The Unprepared and Cluttered Mind (*Antahkarana*)

- **Lack of Qualifications (*Adhikara*):** For the knowledge to stick, the student ideally needs to be an *uttama adhikari* (exalted student) possessing mental qualifications such as **tranquil mind (*Shama*)**, control over actions (*Dama*), letting go (*Uparati*), patience (*Titiksha*), reverence/trust (*Shraddha*), and single-minded focus (*Samadhanam*). Most seekers are *madhyama adhikaris* (intermediate students) who lack these qualifications.
- **The "Trash Can" of the Mind:** The mind's "inner room" is often a **"trash can"** or a **"forest fire of uncontrolled desires"** and the "thicket of *raga* and *dvesha*" (prejudices and preferences). This clutter prevents the mind from hosting Brahman or allowing the "light of the *shastra* to light up *Ishwara*" within.
- **The Ocean of Notions and Doubts:** The minds of intermediate students are full of "lot of questions [and] **lot of notions**". These notions, often stemming from internalized emotional baggage regarding primary caregivers, make assimilation difficult.
- **Oppositional Tendency (*Viparita Bhavana*):** The knowledge fails to stick because of this psychological problem. This is the **"oppositional tendency to what I know"** (e.g., "I know I'm Brahman but I'm behaving like an idiot... I still get angry, I still get sad"). This habitual orientation stems from an "unhealed" inner child constantly being triggered.

IV. Addiction to Sorrow and Inauthenticity

The knowledge is resisted because the individual is strongly identified with their sorrowful state and finds the truth "inauthentic".

- **The Inauthenticity Paradox:** When Vedantic statements are contemplated (e.g., "I am whole," "I am non-lacking"), they initially feel inauthentic because the person is habituated to sorrow, lack, and identification with the terrified, wanting self.
- **Faking Reality:** In fact, the experience of being in the "non-Brahman mode" (sad, wanting, distressed) is the **"fake"** life. The individual has developed an "addiction to sorrow" or to certain ways of being that block the natural abidance in the Self, making the true Self feel foreign.



4. How can one see Ishwara?

Vedantic practice provides a clear trajectory for "seeing" or realizing **Ishwara** (the Cosmic Order, or Bhagavan), moving from a perceived fragmentation of the world to its unification under the Supreme Reality.

The method involves a fundamental philosophical shift, known as **Ishwarification**, and the application of this vision to one's daily psychological and experiential reality.

I. The Philosophical Shift: From Resistance to Reverence

The initial step in perceiving Ishwara is transforming one's outlook on the world itself.

1. **Seeing Intelligent Manifestation:** One is invited to **see the world not as fragmented or threatening, but as intelligent manifestation.**
2. **Shifting Perspective:** By adopting this view, the individual shifts their response **from resistance to reverence, and from confusion to clarity.**
3. **Surrendering the Small Self:** To live in alignment with this flow—the unseen current of cosmic order—is to surrender the small self and rest in the vastness of the being.

II. Seeing Ishwara as the Unified Cause and Effect

The core non-dual teaching required for seeing Ishwara is recognizing that the entire universe is non-separate from its cause.

- **The Universe is Ishwara's Form:** Ishwara is defined as *Sat-Chit* (Existence-Consciousness) imbued with the *Shakti* (power) to be the cause. The resulting universe (*jagat*) is seen as **jagat in the form of Ishwara.**
- **Non-Separation of Effect from Cause:** This principle, called the *Karya-Karana* relationship (effect and cause), dictates that the effect is non-separate from the cause. For instance, every ornament is gold, and the shine and weight of the ornament belong to the gold. Similarly, everything in the universe is seen as non-separate from Bhagavan.
- **Universal Pervasiveness:** This is the message of the *Anupra*: having created everything, **Bhagavan entered, as it were, everything.** If this concept is difficult to handle, one uses an interim understanding to "Ishwaraize the whole universe".
- **Abiding in the Whole:** Ultimately, one reaches a place of *Sarvatma Bhava* (oneness with everything), where all is seen as one *Atma*. This understanding progresses to seeing that Ishwara, who is formless and nameless, is the source without whom no form or name can exist.

III. Recognizing Ishwara as the Infallible Order

In practical life, particularly in the context of internal conflict and dissatisfaction, Ishwara is seen as the governing order for all experiences.



- **The Psychological and Karmic Order:** Ishwara is invoked as the **infallible psychological and karmic order** that governs all emotions, thoughts, and experiences. This is a "mega order" that includes anatomical, physiological, psychological, and geographical orders.
- **Including Conflict in the Order:** Unpleasant emotions (anger, sorrow, fear, lack of self-confidence) are included in this vast order. The unconscious mind itself is understood to be **Ishwara's projection**.
- **Seeing Difficulties as Ishwara:** When confronting difficult people or situations, the individual must "**Ishwaraize them**". This involves abstracting oneself from the particularities of the situation and seeing the unpleasant person or event as **Ishwara in the form of the karmic order**.
 - This recognition leads to accountability, where one sees difficult situations as "**my own karma coming back**".
 - This framework provides a specific contemplation (*Nididhyasana*): "**More difficulties means more Ishwara in my life; Ishwara is close to me**".
- **Embracing "What Is":** The level of understanding reaches a point where one recognizes that "**whatever it is in any situation is Ishwara**" because "**it is what it is because it cannot be what it is not**".

IV. Practice and Progression of Worship

The ability to "see" Ishwara progresses through stages of devotion and inner surrender:

1. **Connecting Through Form:** A beginner is encouraged to form bonds with a particular name or form of Ishwara (the *kula Ishwara* – *from family lineage*).
2. **Surrender and Alteration:** The mantra repetition serves as an "**altar of surrender**" for unrequited feelings and emotional baggage. This "altar of surrender has the power to alter you". The devotee, or *mumukshu*, prays to Ishwara to retract the psychological projection (unconscious mind) back to the "projector" (Ishwara).
3. **Worship of the Formless:** The progression leads from devotion to forms (worshipping *saguna* Ishwara) to the **worship of Arup Ishwara** (formless Ishwara), where abidance in the Self takes the place of ritualistic worship.



5. Recommendation for daily Nididhyasana

The daily practice of *Nididhyasana* (internalization or contemplation) in Vedanta is designed to firmly establish the knowledge of the Self and resolve deep-seated psychological errors (*Viparita Bhavana*).

Recommendations for daily *Nididhyasana* practices are often integrated into meditation, *japa*, and specific methods of contemplation, moving the seeker toward **abidance in the Self**.

Here are recommended practices for daily internalization:

1. Developing Abidance in the Self (The "I")

Nididhyasana begins by prioritizing an "**appointment with the self**" and practicing self-awareness:

- **Posture and Breath:** Sit in a comfortable posture with the head, neck, and back in a single straight line, maintaining the posture without a break. Focus on the **breath**, elongate it, and being mindful of the cool air entering and the slightly warmer air exiting.
- **The Sakshi (Witness) Gaze:** Recognize that the body, mind, and senses are **objects** that can be observed. Repeatedly remind yourself that "**I**" (the Self, *Atma*) is the sentient, conscious being that is the **observer (sakshi)**, which is free of afflictions, fears, tears, worries, or hurry.
- **Contemplative Affirmations (The "I Am" Mantra):** Bring the mind back to the mantra: "**I am,**" "**I am now,**" "**I now am,**" "**I am now**". This constant focus is a seed of contemplation, helping to become familiar with the Self.

2. Contemplation (*Nididhyasana* Content)

This form of contemplation involves integrating Vedantic statements, often customized to address a personal lack or confusion:

- **I Am Whole (*Purna*):** Contemplate the understanding that "**I am complete**" and "**I am non-lacking in anything**". This helps counter the "wanting person" identity.
- **I Am Uninvolved (*Asanga*):** Repeat statements like "**I am asanga**" (uninvolved), and during practice, visualize "**letting go of dysfunctional connections**".
- **I Am Joy (*Ananda*):** Affirm "**I am the nature of joy**" and understand that even sadness rides on the wave of *Ananda* (joy).



- **Embracing the Present:** Repeat the affirmation "**I am in the present, I am now,**" and recognize that being oneself is easy and effortless.

3. Psychological Clearing and Inner Child Work

A major part of *Nididhyasana* is handling the *kashaya* (unconscious mind/sludge) which harbors unresolved hurt and conflict:

- **Externalizing Internalized Feelings:** The practitioner visualizes the external world—especially primary caregivers (mother/father)—and, retaining love and care, **grants them the freedom to be whoever they were or are** in one's perception. This practice helps externalize emotional baggage like anxiety and unmet expectations.
- **Soft Sakshi Mode (SSM):** To handle emotional triggers (*vikshapa*) that arise from the unconscious, adopt the **Soft Sakshi Mode (parent mode)**.
 - **Reparenting the Self:** Gently look upon the "inner child" (the part of oneself that is angry, scared, or sad) with love and compassion, without indulging or becoming identified with the strong emotion.
 - The goal is to "**love up and integrate**" the inner child into the adult self so that the knowledge "will not only go in but stay in".

4. Mantra Japa (Mental Prayer)

Mantra repetition (*manasa karma*) acts as a "**soap**" to cleanse the inner instrument (*antahkarana*) and prepare the mind for knowledge.

- **Altar of Surrender:** Use the mantra as an "**altar of surrender**" for deeply ingrained feelings and emotional baggage that are otherwise difficult to remove. The mind is asked to think the same thought repeatedly, leading to focus and purification.
- **Recommended Mantra:** A simple, powerful mantra, such as "**Om Namah Shivaya,**" can be chanted mentally.
- **Dealing with Guilt and Hurt:** When guilt, hurt, or pain arises, invoke Bhagavan (Ishwara) mentally, saying, "**I cannot deal with this. You please take it away.**" Using the mantra "**Hari**" is recommended as it means "the one who takes away".

5. Ishwarification (Surrender to the Cosmic Order)

This involves a shift in perspective to dissolve the feeling of smallness and conflict by seeing all experience as the manifestation of Ishwara:

- **Seeing Order in Conflict:** Invoke **Ishwara as the infallible psychological and karmic order** that governs all thoughts and emotions.



- **Ishwarizing Difficulty:** When encountering difficult people or situations, view them as **Ishwara in the form of the karmic order**. This leads to accountability ("It's my own karma coming back") and growth.
- **Contemplations for Difficult Times:** Use the affirmation: "**More difficulties means more Ishwara in my life; Ishwara is close to me**".
- Use the general understanding: "**Whatever it is in any situation is Ishwara**" because "**it is what it is because it cannot be what it is not**".

Practical Advice on Scheduling

- **Start Small:** Begin with **one-minute meditation (OM)** to overcome the mind's resistance.
- **Increase Frequency, Not Duration (Initially):** Instead of immediately increasing from one minute to ten minutes, do the **one-minute meditation twice or three times a day** until the mind cooperates.
- **Timing:** While morning is often recommended because others have not woken up, **anytime is good** for practice.

..... OM Shanti Shanti Shanti