

Self realisation - Knowledge or Experience ?

by

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Link to watch - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cedlG7nGzAg&t=1s>

Is self realization knowledge or is it an experience? Before we dive into the topic, let's look at the journey of a human being.

The Victim

A little child is quite helpless and depends a lot on his or her parents to live and to survive. In the process of childhood, a lot of us have thought “*Why me? Why did my brother get chocolate? Why did I get what I deserved?*” That same “*Why me?*” continues into the teenage years with the thoughts of “*I really fancy that guy, why did he have to go with my best friend?*” or “*Why is that person more endowed, more talented than I am?*” This is what I will call, the stage of being a victim - the individual feels the world is too large, and too overwhelming for them.

The Survivor

But, as we discover our powers, this victim mode, might then change to survivor mode. “*Yeah, I have a few limitations, but I also happen to have a few strengths, and I will manage with that. I have some friends, I have a support network, I have some talents, maybe I am good academically, so I will learn to manage.*” The thinking is more of *you win some, you lose some, and that is good.* Even then, everyday feels like a struggle because in survivor mode, a huge amount of effort is required just to maintain our mood.

The Achiever

And then, generally we find in our 20's and 30's, we are at our peak, we have a tremendous amount of energy and ambition - we want to change the world! With this sense of strength and power, comes what I call the mode of an achiever. There is a great excitement and buzz when it comes to achieving something. This is a time when we find everyone wanting to run the half marathon, the full marathon, triathlon, etc. Because you enjoy the buzz of your power, or your shakti, and you find that you are able to create a lot of change in your own little world, and maybe you are able to contribute to change in other people's worlds, as well.

Well, now this achiever, is looking for experiences. Generally, when talking about achievements, what are we saying? We are speaking of relationships, work, and good health, generally - and you want to have achievements in all of these areas of your life. We all struggle and strive for that and everyone has different goals for these. Somebody might take the path of yoga, somebody else might do zumba, somebody might run, etc. In this striving, we want to be free from the sense of inadequacy we have. Why are we striving so much? Because, our secret sorrow is actually that we do not feel we are good enough. We think it is a psychological problem, but actually it's not. Everyone suffers from this because we are identified with this medium which is called the human body. This feeling of inadequacy is why we are not able to receive love. So, you will find yourself seeking external validation for this. You ask your partner *"but, darling, why do you love me?"* But, they cannot offer a logical reason for it. And you also secretly fear when you take up a job, that it's not going to last because the person will figure out how difficult you are as a person.

This thing that truly bothers us is that we feel internally, we are not good enough, and therefore, we have to struggle. Which is why we have to strive towards our many achievements. This is a very good thing - it is how society grows and thrives! This striving for our achievements is what gives us a good sense of self esteem. You think *"okay I can manage! certain situations, I can't manage, but the others are ok...I am ok."* This achiever, is now looking for different kinds of experiences.

You get inspired by what's on Instagram and Facebook. Everyone seems to be living a wonderful life and you feel you are missing out, so, you get ideas. You see someone who has gone to Greece, and you say *"Ah, actually, I have not been there!"* Or, you see somebody went to a yoga festival and you are a yogi and you think, *"Why have I not been invited?"* Or somebody went there and was raving about it and you think, *"damn, how could I miss it?"* So, this fear of missing out drives us for even more achievements because you want your status to always be elevated.

The Seeker

It is the achiever who transforms into becoming a seeker. If you have not had many achievements in life, whatever is your sphere of operation, you cannot become a seeker. You start to question the many achievements that you've had in your life. However, all the achievements were shifting goalposts. And they kept shifting some more. Earlier in life it was *"Oh, I just have my best friend in childhood"* and that was it, I didn't want anything more. Then came wanting a partner...then a child (who you never anticipated was going to be a 21 year old hulk, or a 16 year old teenager who is going to question you and say *"what did you do for me?"*) .. This achievement orientation is a very important one, and it gives rise to the birth of a seeker.

Because, now you are saying *“well, you know what? Been there, done that, worn the t-shirt. I’ve had ok relationships, maybe I am in a happy one, maybe I’ve got rid of an unhappy one and then maybe I really wanted children and I have at least one child.”* - whatever it be, we are thinking *“well, you know, I did this, but why is it that something is missing? What is missing? I can’t quite put a finger on it.”*

And that is where Vedanta steps in. Vedanta, Veda is a revealed knowledge from Ishvara, also like every religion claims to be revealed knowledge. What goes in the name of Hinduism or Sanaatana Dharma, is revealed knowledge by Ishvara to different Rishis who were able to see mantras. These mantras, teachings in sacred sounds which have very profound meaning, were all collected and codified in a series of 4 books called the Vedas. And there is a tiny section at the end of the Veda, which is dealing with Moksha. The big chunk of the Veda deals with our 3 pursuits, which is your pursuit of security (*Artha*), pursuit of pleasure, companionship, power, fame, etc (*Kaama*), and *Dharma* (universal values and ethics, ideas and understanding of *Punya/Papa*) which I will come to later. This also includes going to *Svarga*, a place where there is a lot of comfort, pleasure, and youth, which may have its equivalence to heaven. Although, our *svarga* is temporary - once your “visa” expires you are back. So, a large chunk of the Veda covers these three pursuits and includes a lot of rituals which will help guide us in our main pursuits.

What we are focused on here, is the last section of the Veda. And because it is *antaha* of the Veda, at the end of the Veda positionally, it is called Vedanta. Which includes all that goes in the name of consciousness, or self knowledge. Vedanta, as a body of knowledge, is addressed to the seeker. As a seeker, one may experiment a lot with therapy, Buddhism, and other alternative healing modalities because the seeking of an experience continues. So, you think, *“I want a good therapist.”* or, *“I want to go for a yoga session, I want to be blissed out.”* I am now what we will call in Vedanta, a confirmed *“bhokta”* - experiencer.

Our belief is that *“Once I have a perfect relationship, once I have my perfect little house, once I have this brilliant job, once I have a good Ayurvedic lifestyle, I’ll be fine.”* So, we try all of this, but that emptiness continues. This is where *Viveka* (a certain discriminative inquiry) needs to step in. We must ask ourselves - What can you possibly get from your pursuits? Can you get limitless happiness from a limited pursuit? But, before we can ask ourselves, we get disillusioned and disappointed because all of these promised things by society, do not deliver the fulfillment we expected. Because of this, I begin to think *“oh, you know what, I’ve done all this external stuff. Now, I’m going to be a yogi - I will look within. I will keep my eyes closed most of the time.”* As if there's something magical about closing your eyes, but, there is something magical, because you are withdrawing. You are not allowing your senses to distract you too much. But then, you start shunning people. *“Oh I am in solitude, I am in maunam, so I’m going to have silence.”* You begin to discover a certain peace, and joy which is wonderful, but note,

that you are still seeking an experience. And the fact about an experience, is it begins in time, and naturally ends in time. Whether it is a physically intimate moment, or it is you having your mango lassi in one of the restaurants, or it is a yoga festival, or it is your vacation in Greece, the problem with any experience is it begins in time, and it ends in time. So now, the projecting mind thinks, “*things are still not okay, I have to have a special experience ... a Samadhi experience.. A yoga experience.*” Well, that's the same thing. In a Samadhi experience, subject and object resolve. That mind now wants more of the Samadhi, wants more of the yoga. Now what I'm trying to do is cut out all of the experiences. I've increased the frequency of all my experiences, which gave me a lot of pleasure. But then what I find, is the law of diminishing marginal utility sets in, which means what?

I love dark chocolate - I want the first piece, the second piece, maybe up until the fourth or fifth is okay. But, if you give me twenty pieces, I'm not going to touch dark chocolate at least for the next year. You don't quite like it anymore because the same thing that gave you a lot of pleasure, you looked forward to it, you perhaps even dieted before that so that you could enjoy this wonderful chocolate from Belgium - but now, you almost want to puke! The same thing happens in the beginning of a relationship “*Oh wow, she's strong and independent and I really enjoy that.*” Then back in family court, three years later: “*Oh, she's too strong and too independent.*” The same reason that attracted you in the beginning, becomes a cause of despair later. So now, where does the happiness lie? Is it in the nature of the experience, or is it elsewhere?

We have seen that any experience, whether it's an internal experience or an external experience, the experience starts in time, ends in time and it is mixed with pain. To gain anything, there is an experience of some pain, some denial, some perhaps suffering, also. You wanted a child, you have to go through childbirth, labor pains and mothers are ready to do that. So, what we find is, that experience by that I am looking for, has its limitations. It is mixed with pain. It has a beginning and an end, and the same experience doesn't give me the happiness it used to.

So now what do I do? Now, I'm even more lost because everyone is sailing in the same boat. And that's when Vedanta comes in and says that you are more than an experiencer. The experiencer in Sanskrit is called *bhokta*. Now, you have projected happiness and fulfillment, onto external things. Onto a relationship, onto an object, onto your latest iPhone, onto some app - but actually, the *Ananda*, the fullness that you feel, is because you are *Ananda*, or fullness. I am not translating *Ananda* as bliss because bliss is an experiential word, it is subject to a beginning and an end.

This seeker who is now waking up to Vedanta, is now questioning his or her experiences, and is also now also questioning their identity? Because up until now, I have defined myself

through my experiences. When I say “*been there, done that*” it is an experience - “*I am single, I am married, I work here, I am the CEO*” - are all related to certain incidental aspects - they are not intrinsic to me. The reason I call it incidental, is because I could pick it up, and I can drop it. Even a relationship is incidental to me, no matter how great, it is incidental to you. This is because what defines you, really means that it can never change. What is the definition of fire that which burns? Can we make it cold? No, fire burns, and that's it. It's the nature of fire to burn. I may define myself through many different things, but all of those things are limited and I suffer the limitations of that, and then I'm always thinking I'm not good enough. So, the experiencer is now wanting a special experience of bliss. The experiencer has heard something in Vedanta and now they want that experience.

And again, some misconceptions will walk in. For *Ashtanga Yoga*, the paradigm is experiential. You cannot come to a class, and listen to it, you have to do it - you have to do your Asana, you have to do your *pranayama* and even *yama*. Even to come to *Asana Pranayama*, I have to prepare and earn my right for that - I cannot be living an all night partying lifestyle and come for an asana class, I will not be able to stretch. There is *Yama* and *Niyama*, certain things that I need to practice in my life and certain things to be avoided, so that I have a moderate lifestyle.

This yogi experiencer now hears about Samadhi and is now thinking, “*oh, this is a special experience, I want this Samadhi.*” The same person who thought “*I want this position*” ... “*I want this relationship*” ... “*and I want this Samadhi also!*” What is happening is, the projecting of the quality of happiness - *Ananda*, fullness - onto something that is external. That's where we have to bring in our enquiry.

Who am I?

There are many approaches and methodologies in Vedanta, but Vedanta is not a school of thought. It is presented like that - it is not a system, it is a means of knowledge. How do you see yourself? From different standpoints, we have different ways of seeing ourselves. From the biological standpoint, you are flesh, bones, blood, tissues, fat, etc. From a physics standpoint, you are a lot of energy. And then for a Vulture, you are just a packet to be eaten.. different standpoints. None of these standpoints are defining standpoints. For it to be defining, it will not change. But, because these are all subjective standpoints and valid because they are disciplines of knowledge, it works. So, what is it that defines me? Who defines me? What is it about me that will never change? What is it about me that is not subject to any increase or decrease? What is it about me that is not subject to any negation? There can be no debate about it. That's where Vedanta being a means of knowledge requires a teacher to step in who can handle the words of the Veda.

So, again, one misconception may come in, that “*oh, yoga has a theory and it has a practice*” and Vedanta says, “*you are consciousness, you are limitless.*” ... “*How shall I practice?*” At this point in our lives, we are having a little more of a disciplined lifestyle and are in this practicing orientation. So we want to know, how can we practice Vedanta. Well, let me ask you, are you a theory? No. Are you a practice? No. You're neither a theory, nor a practice.

Vedanta is pointing to that - that you are the self-evident being. You're not a human being. When we use the word human being, what you *really* are is pure being - that which is not subject to increase or decrease, that which is the basis of your entire body mind sense complex, that which has always been there, from the time that you were born in this lifetime, of course, until your death - the one constant, invariable, being that has always been around.

Experiences have come, experiences have gone. Other people have tried to define you and those definitions have come, and they have gone. Some of those definitions have even created a lot of problems for us, our lives have been a reaction to how people treated us when we were little. Whatever it be, whatever be the different stages of our lives, YOU are the constant. You are the invariable. Everything else was variable. And that you, is pure being.

You are pure being which seems to be enclosed by this adjective of being human - It's like you're wearing a bodysuit. A bodysuit which has a skeletal structure, and it has blood, and tissues, and fat, and so on and so forth. It's pure being that is wearing this bodysuit and is listening to a class on what is being. Our experience is that this as though enclosure limits us, but this being is not limited by the enclosure. If I am in a particular place A, I am not in a particular place B. However, if you look at it the way your mind functions, you are able to think about sitting on any planet, you know that your mind is not limited to your body. It can think of anything and everything. The mind is not enclosed by the body structure. Then what is it that makes up the mind is again an inquiry.

This thing that I am calling pure being, that's going to be our inquiry. Is this thought only for a Hindu? No, this applies to all of humanity. What is it that changes, and what is it that stays the same, is our inquiry. The things around me are changing. But, my eyes are relatively constant. That's how I'm able to see the different colors, I'm able to see the different tents, different people, so on, and so forth. If I see an elephant, my eyes don't become elephant-like. If I see a microbe, my eyes again don't become microscopic, correct? My eyes more or less stay the same. But, *drishyam*, what is out there, is changing. That's how I'm able to recognize differences. Now looking at the eyes - I need glasses, so, I go to a world-famous ophthalmologist. He shows me different lenses and he consults me on whether or not I can see - he is world famous, why does he have to ask me? Because, I know if I can see or not. Because it is my mind there behind the eyes. Then, with respect to the mind, the quality of vision is changing. What about the mind, is it constant, or is it changing?

The mind is always changing. Everyone is moody, and our moods keep changing depending on something you read, some post that comes in, a message that comes in, there are dramatic changes. How do you know about your moods? Who knows about your moods? *“I'm not angry, I am just a little irritated.”* You will clarify even the degree of emotion. How do you know all this? Because you can see what's happening in the mind, correct? Even if you are confused about something, you will say *“I don't know, I am a little confused.”* You know because you can see the changes in the mind.

What does that mean? It means that you are different from the mind. This is a bit mind-boggling when you hear it for the first time. You are different from the conditions of your mind. The problem is, we define ourselves by the condition of our mind. *“I don't feel good, let me listen to some music.”* or *“I don't feel good, let me go for a walk.”* or *“I don't feel good, maybe I should just have a drink.”* It's this identification with the mind that drives us. What is it that we see in our own experience that I am more than the mind? I can change it. I can reason differently, I can memorize, I can analyze, I can synthesize, which means what? This means that it is an instrument in my hands. We have a Sanskrit word for the mind called *antahkarana* which interestingly means “inner instrument.”

This inner instrument doesn't function on its own, it needs somebody to wield the instrument. Therefore, the definition of yoga in the Yoga Sutras by Patanjali, is *mastery over the flow of thoughts*. But, what does one do with this mastery? One of my American friends who was a yoga teacher who came for a Vedanta course said very beautifully that *“I have been a yoga teacher for so many decades and I was busy mastering my mind, and now that my mind is mastered, what do I do with a mastered mind?”* What to do with it? Even with mastery, at the cemetery your tombstone will still read 1960-2022. All of your achievements, all of your relationships, everything, all of your possessions, the stamps on your passport, everything in that one dash. That's the definition of your life because we think life is defined by birth and death. And here is where Vedanta says that actually, it's just one lifetime, you have been wearing different clothes in every lifetime. *Vaasamsi Jeernani Yatha Vihaaya* - Bhagavad Gita. You have always been around, you just changed your clothes. When the clothes i.e. bodies got old, you dropped them and took on newer bodies. All these lives are, different bodies, new models.

All that I see is different from me. Which means that what I see, what I experience, is different from me. If you see a donkey, do you become a donkey? But if you see a sad thought in your mind, what happens? *“It's my thought, I am so sad.”* You are seeing the sad thought, you are seeing the intensity change, but still you identify with it, because you don't know what you are and what you are is pure being - that being which is not subject to any change.

What is there in any experience, whether it's an intimate experience, or you are having ice cream, what is there is some sense data - some sensations, some wonderful feelings, thoughts, emotions, and your emotional response to it. For example, you broke up with your boyfriend when the sun was setting - now sunsets remind you of endings, and you don't like sunsets. The sun has done nothing to you, and it's still very beautiful. Somebody else, who proposed to his girlfriend at sunset time, looks forward to every sunset. Here the sense data is the same, but the emotional response to it determines the nature of my experience.

So, the misconception that comes along is that Vedanta is a theory you have to practice it, but it is not a theory because you are not a theory. There is no theory, and there is no practice. Is Vedanta a special experience? No, you are pure being that is not an experience. You are pure being and with this bodysuit, you are going through different kinds of experiences, What inhibits us are what are called *raga* and *dvesha*. *Raga* is a craving for something, and *dvesha* is an aversion for something.

When under the influence of ecstasy(the drug), you are so happy you want to hug the whole world. Why? This is because your inhibitions have dropped. You are the same person, the same uptight person, but when you had a drink or whatever substance it was, or when you are feeling high for no reason, all of your inhibitions have gone - you want to hug the whole world, nothing is wrong, and you have nothing bad to say about anyone. What is it that really happened? It is your fullness that is able to manifest without being inhibited by a craving or aversion. So that's why we think Vedanta may be a special experience. We want to feel okay everywhere wherever we go, we want to feel at home wherever we are. Well actually, the truth is that this body mind that I have, is given to me.

This world that I experience, who put it together? Let us look at the nature of the world. We have a mantra in the Upanishad – *Yasmat va etaasmaat aakasha sambhutah, Akaashaat vayuh..* The whole thing, all these five elements came from what is Satyam Brahman. The one who knows this Brahman, is Brahman himself - the only one who knows the truth, is Brahman. Brahman comes from the root *brih*, what we call root, or *dhatu* in Sanskrit, which means “big”. In this context, big is not an adjective. This is because there can be a big mountain, and there can also be a big mosquito. Here, the word big is being limited by the noun. A big mountain will never ever become big mosquito, and likewise. Thus, Brahman comes from the root which means “the big” - limitlessly big. The Veda, points out that you are the limitless - you are not just a human being - human is just an adjective to you. We often pile on a lot of adjectives to ourselves because we have a need to be unique and special, and then we end up feeling very limited. What you really are, doesn't have any boundaries. You might feel very limited, *but*, that's only what you are feeling, and emotions are transient

We have to arrive at a relative level of peace to be able to appreciate what absolute peace is. All that is here, we find has been given to us - this body, the cells, the intelligence in which the cells support us, everything. When you look outside, the different phenomena that are present, is all intelligence, deep intelligence. Atheists might say they do not believe in God, that they believe in nature because they see it's intelligence. But, where there is intelligence, there is a conscious being. There is intelligence operating everywhere in this world, weather patterns, medical doctors, etc. All of the different experiences we have are a combination of different bodies of knowledge that are already discovered, or not yet discovered - and all of that is given to me. This world that is given to us, is so deeply intelligent, and there is a conscious being where that intelligence is.

Across all different cultures and religions, when there is talk about this being called God, everyone looks up. We behave as if God is dead here. And Vedanta helps us to see that all that is here, is God. And there is a word we use, Ishvara. So wherever there is intelligence, wherever experiences are there, there is a conscious being. An infinitely limitless being that is blessing us with all that we have and all that we are. I am not asking you to believe in God, but, you refute the logic that where there is intelligence there is a conscious being.

To understand this better, we can look at one experience that all of us have had - a dream or a nightmare. You had a dream last night of a holiday in Turkey, you see these very beautiful blue and white tiles, and you meet some lovely people while you were backpacking. You have very deep conversations, you enjoyed the tea, the coffee, and some very good food. You saw all of this in your dream, and then you remember it in the morning. Before you went to sleep the night before, did you have to go shopping for the tiles and the experiences? No, the moment you thought it, it was there. You were that intelligent and conscious being from which all the materials in your dream came - all of the different paths you took, the tiles, the people - real flesh-and-blood people, not dolls, they were all there, vividly, in the dream. You were one unitary source of the intelligence and the material in the dream, however crazy it was. With this single example, you can appreciate that there is one unitary source for the material and the intelligence of what we call the *jagat*, the creation.

We know now that all that is here is intelligence, and where there is intelligence, there is a conscious being called Ishvara. When I am interacting with you, I am interacting with a manifestation of Ishvara. You are not a creation, because a creator is different from the created. Truly, you are just another form of the same being, and that's what we call *oneness*. All that is here is one - just in different forms. Different forms interacting with each other and it is all happening in one being, and you are that limitless.

I find that there is so much variety, everything is different which prompts the question - what is the status of the reality of this world? What is the status of reality of this body mind? Is it

absolutely real? I find that it is subject to change, and if it is subject to change, it is a source of suffering for me. Here we will introduce two words: one is *satyam* and the other is *mithya*.

Two words do not mean two entities, two words mean my understanding of the reality of that. We will use an example of a gold chain to explain this further. When saying gold chain, we are using two words: gold - adjective, and chain - object. There are two words in gold chain, but only one thing. Which of these is most important - is it the chain or is it the gold? The chain can be made of any material, but without the gold, there is no chain. Chain is the object, but actually, it is gold that is the object. If you take away the gold, the chain does not exist. If you take away the chain, the gold still exists. Gold is the defining reality of the gold chain. Pure being is our defining reality, that which doesn't change. What changes is just the form. The chain has functional utility - I cannot carry a lump of gold, the gold has to be converted to a form. Whatever form we give it, whether it be a watch or a pendant, the form does not have an independent reality from the gold, it does not exist on its own - it needs the gold to exist. In the context of a human being, human is the form, and pure being is the reality. What changes, and has a dependent reality, is what we call *mithya*. And what doesn't change is pure being, which is *Satyam*, which is limitless.

You might wonder about what you see out there - it is changing, it is separate from me, what is its status? If it is changing, it is *mithya*. And *mithya* is very much like my dream. When I wake up, I am the wise one. For example, if I wake from a nightmare, I will be relieved it is over because it was not real and it was never real.

When I wake up to the fact that all that is here is pure being and all of these different forms - sadness, conflicts, sorrows, etc - are occurring in consciousness, then I can see that I am unaffected by all of this, and I was never affected. I was never born, and I will never die. What I see is changing, and I am the invariable. Everything else is variable, and I am that consciousness, that being. This is the understanding of *satyam* and *mithya*.

For me to be able to see this truth, I need to have an ethical life. I need to have the base of Dharma. Even with some familiarity with this knowledge - I am Brahman, the limitless, you will still think, nothing has changed in my life. There are still traffic jams, difficult colleagues to deal with, and so many other experiences that make me feel uncomfortable, what should I do? This is where we have to be rooted in our universal values and ethics.

For Vedanta, there is a certain preparation that is required. When you hear these insights, you know that you are more than every experience because you've lived through so many experiences, you know you are more than your mind, you know that you are more than your body, you see the truth of it all. You have this knowledge, but there is a whole process of qualifying yourself for this knowledge. This requires discipline, and a certain lifestyle. And, for

me to be able to see all that is here is *mithya*, not an illusion or delusion, but a status of reality of being dependent.

Where there is being, there are forms, and there are five elements. Where there is pure being, there is also human form and this human form is subject to change. The human form does not exist on its own. What it depends on, is the independent reality called pure being - Satyam. The one who sees this *satyam* is indeed that *satyam*, limitless Brahman.