

The Four Requisites for Realization and Self-inquiry

(Sadhana Chatushtaya and Atma Vichara)

Since very ancient times, seekers yearning for Self-Realization, or Enlightenment, have sought instruction to assist them. Instruction from genuine sages established in the Knowledge of the Self has generally been in two ways: instruction about the nature of the Self, the Absolute, and instruction regarding the way to abide in, or realize, this Supreme Knowledge. The latter forms the instruction regarding a path or spiritual practice.

In the Teaching of Nonduality, which clearly reveals the identity of the Self and the Absolute (Brahman, God), Liberation or Self-Realization is recognized to be of the nature of Self-Knowledge. A path of Knowledge results in Self-Knowledge, and the primary method of the path is that of Self-inquiry. The inquiry is the introspection, or meditation, that ascertains in the most experiential manner what it is of which one's true identity consists. It is the self-revelation of the nature of Being, or Consciousness itself, unobscured by any definition or mis-identification. Questing inwardly as to "Who am I?" one realizes one's true state of Nondual Existence, which is ever free, ever at peace, immutable, without modifications, illimitable, timeless, indivisible, forever unconditioned, formless, undifferentiated—the One Reality.

In practice, the actual inquiry, itself, involves the relinquishment of the false superimposition of forms and attributes upon the Self. This involves the recognition of the false definition and the discernment of how it is not actually one's identity. It is the shifting of identity from where it has been misplaced, such as being associated with the body or with thought, and restoring it to its natural position, which is the Self alone. It is the ceasing of the confusion regarding what is real and what is unreal, so that the erroneous attribution of reality to the unreality, such as conceiving the world, objects, events, sensations, and thoughts to be real or to be the means of determining what is real, is relinquished.

Sri Ramana Maharshi summed up the inquiry in the concise phrase, “Who am I?” He stated that the seeker of Self-Realization could directly realize Liberation from the unreal bondage by inquiring, with each experience and notion, “For whom is this?” This approach negates the identity or reality from the objective aspect and returns it to that which is inward, the subject. Then, recognizing that whatever it is, it is for “me,” one should inquire, “Who am I?” This is the inner discerning of the true nature of one’s Being, which is to be practiced with a keen awareness. The determination of the answer to the inquiry cannot be in sensorial or conceptual terms, but is realized by the elimination of all definition, the dissolution of confusion regarding reality, and the destruction of the ego. Self-inquiry reveals the invalid nature of all personal definitions, the formless nature of Reality, and that the ego is nothing but a false assumption whose nature is nonexistence. When all that is unreal, not the Self, is removed, the real Self alone remains in its own Knowledge of itself—Self-Knowledge, which is devoid of such differentiation as the knower, the knowing, and the known.

The inquiry is the essential practice. The success of any spiritual practice in yielding freedom and peace is directly proportionate to the relinquishment of misidentification, the dissolution of the ego or false notion of individuality, that occurs in it. Self-inquiry may be practiced by itself as the direct means to Self-Knowledge, a way that does not include any of the dualism that one is attempting to transcend.

Since ancient times, instruction in the path of Knowledge has been given, and, in the course of this, certain excellent supports for Self-inquiry have been elucidated by the wise. These are actually more than supports; rather they are integral to the whole experience of inquiring to know the Self. In Advaita Vedanta, they have been referred to as the requisites for Realization or the fourfold-sadhana (practice) for Realization or Liberation. Although one can see references to these in numerous texts in many traditions, as what they refer to are more universal than specific to a particular people, place, or time, it is Adi Sankara, who expounded the clearest teachings of Nonduality and Self-Knowledge, known as Advaita Vedanta, who has most clearly stated them, in both brief and elaborated form, in several of the texts composed by him. During the many centuries that have followed Sri Sankara’s elucidation of Self-Knowledge, the discriminating inquiry, and these requisites, until the present day, these practices related to the attainment of Knowledge have served aspirants well as they dissolved the illusion of ignorant dualism and its consequent bondage and

suffering and realized the true, natural state of the Self, Brahman, which is of the nature of pure Being-Consciousness-Bliss.

This booklet is intended as a pithy reminder of some salient points regarding these requisites in the context of Self-inquiry.

The four requisites are: discrimination, detachment, the six essentials, and the desire for Liberation. The six essentials are peacefulness, self-control, renunciation or nondependence, endurance or fortitude, faith or conviction, and profound, concentrated, formless meditation. The original significance of them and the actual experience of them for those on the path of Knowledge are far-reaching.

Each of the four requisites is helpful to the inquiry to know the Self. Each of the four requisites supports the others. The order in which they are given is not to be construed as being strictly developmental or ascending. For example, though one requires discrimination to become detached (otherwise, one will not perceive who is to be detached and from what to be detached), it may be the desire for Liberation coupled with conviction in the teachings that give rise to that discrimination, which is further strengthened by meditation and expressed through some kind of renunciation on a basis of peacefulness or equanimity. Each may be considered separately, or they may be considered as one whole.

These requisites for Realization are to be understood, meditated upon, and practiced within the context of Nonduality for the purpose of Self-Realization. They can also be practiced, at least to a certain extent, by those who have as yet to ascertain that Nonduality is Truth, that Realization consists of Self-Knowledge, and that the means, which is Self-inquiry, must be in accord with or of the same nature as the end, that is, Self-Realization. Here, an understanding of this on the part of the aspirant is assumed and the four requisites for Realization are taught with special relevance to Self-inquiry, the introspective determination of the true nature of one's own Self, which is the Absolute Self.