

# **SPIRITUAL DIALOGUES WITH AKILESH**

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AKILESH AYYAR

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*How to Find What Isn't Lost: A Short, Pro-Intellectual, Pro-Desire Guide to Enlightenment*

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a collection of various questions I've answered online over the last two years as a spiritual teacher. They proceed from a vision of nonduality. Nonduality suggests that the sense that "I am a doing, suffering, enjoying person who experiences the world" is an illusion. This illusion is the root cause of suffering and of existential angst. All the big questions issue from this illusion. It is the purpose of nonduality to penetrate this illusion.

This is not the best book for someone absolutely new to nonduality. Much will be very confusing for someone with no background. For a good overview, I would refer readers to my earlier book, *How to Find What Isn't Lost: A Short, Pro-Intellectual, Pro-Desire Guide to Enlightenment*, and to my website, [siftingtothetruth.com](http://siftingtothetruth.com). This is more a companion text to those resources.

The penetration of this illusion is called, variously, enlightenment, awakening, nirvana, liberation, self-realization, moksha, escape from the cycle of birth and death, and so on.

I work within a modified version of the Hindu advaita

vedanta tradition. Advaita stands for not-two or nondual, and vedanta refers to the tradition that is based on the scriptures called the Upanishads. I am also very heavily indebted to Sri Ramana Maharshi, the great genius of advaita vedanta in the 20th century — a sage who tremendously simplified the path.

This collection covers, in a mostly unstructured way, many of the frequent concerns and questions that seekers have. It also shows how answers to questions are contextual. They can differ depending on the person being addressed and their circumstances.

Akilesh Ayyar

Learn more and feel free to reach out to me with questions or comments at [siftingtothetruth.com](http://siftingtothetruth.com)

## PRACTICE

**Q** : After I had genuine glimpses and insights how do I not let those become barriers?

**A:** They cannot become barriers, because there is ultimately no barrier to what you are. No barrier can stand in the way. Your path is guaranteed. Just keep going. You are assured of victory.



**Q:** Have you ventured into the work of awakening people yet? If so, what have you found to be most efficient? Thanks!

**A:** Yes. Ramana Maharshi's self-inquiry is without a doubt the most efficient way, but the real issue for 99% of the people is various psychological obstacles that have to be overcome first. People have to be honest with themselves about what they really want, and pursue it, whether or not it is enlightenment. That is the path. If someone tells themselves that they are interested in enlightenment but they are not, they will get nowhere. Self-honesty is itself a process,

however. Psychodynamic or psychoanalytic psychotherapy can be helpful in this regard.



Q: Why keep searching when the truth is evident?

A: If one can stop searching and simply unconditionally relax, that is the best. But most people's dissatisfaction won't allow that. And so they must search.



Q: CAN TRUTH/"ENLIGHTENMENT" be known and therefore experienced? Or is the closest to truth the ending of knowing/experience?

A: Yes, Truth can and does know and experience itself. It is, however, not the kind of knowledge and experience which we usually think of when we use those words. Most knowing is a dualistic knowing — "I know that object as something separate from me." This is a knowing of something by itself. It cannot be understood in words, only directly recognized.



Q: You seem to have an interesting path toward awakening. What teacher / teachings would you recommend to a seeker entering such this path?

A: Ramana Maharshi's approach, most certainly. Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi is a wonderful thing. But to understand that, I'd recommend reading as background other advaita texts like the Bhagavad Gita and Yoga Vasistha.

I'll also add in *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*. Beautiful.

I'd also recommend looking into your psychology. That's where 90% or more of the work usually is — figuring out psychological obstacles. I highly recommend getting psychodynamic psychotherapy — or even psychoanalysis if you're willing to spare the time. If you want a good analyst, email me and I will help you find one. A good analyst is a great guru to have.

Finding an expressive medium like writing or drawing and being able to express your emotions accurately and originally can be a critically useful instrument as well in understanding yourself and quieting the mind. Reading good literature and being acquainted with culture generally helps a lot with this.

Finally, the game is actually first and foremost figuring out your own desire. The cycle of expressing your emotions, understanding your desires, acting in the world, noticing how you feel, expressing those new feelings, and refining your understanding of what you want — that's critical. Therapy, expressive art, and everything else has to be oriented around that. It is honesty about desire that will lead you to the Truth.



Q: How much importance should one place on achieving enlightenment?

A: It's really not a question of how much you "should" place on it, but how much you do. If you want the Truth badly, that's when you'll get it.

If you don't want it that badly, I highly advise that you go after what you actually do want. That will get you to the

Truth faster than pretending that you want it now when you really don't.

And if you want the Truth just a little, pursue it... just a little. The key is to be honest about your feelings, and not try to psych yourself into wanting something, even enlightenment, because you "should."

That said, of course enlightenment is the supreme goal. If you want Truth badly, then strive after enlightenment with every moment and muscle.

If you want the end of suffering, if you want absolute truth, if you want inner freedom, then enlightenment is the means.



Q: Is self-inquiry also good for anxiety?

A: Yes, self-inquiry is helpful for that. But for anxiety, I would mainly recommend a) psychodynamic or psychoanalytic therapy and b) expressing your anxiety and emotions in writing/art/music... the more precise you can be with that expression, the better. But therapy is my first-line recommendation now, because navigating your emotional landscape is easier with help.



Q: I'll practice self-inquiry in a location specifically intended for self-inquiry and awakening. I intend to do my inquiry practice here for some time everyday, maybe two or more times a day. Then during the day every now and then I intend to do an inquiry. Is that how you go about doing self-inquiry?

A: That's a good way to start, but self-inquiry has to be



taken out of the sitting position and has to be a constant inquiry that you intensely involve yourself in every waking moment. It can't be confined to a particular location or time.



Q: What is your recommended technique of meditation/yoga/contemplation?

A: The recommended technique is Ramana Maharshi's self-inquiry. It's very simple. You know that "I am" right now, right? It's obvious. Well, how do you know it? Where is that feeling coming from? Try to find out where in your experience it is coming from, that certainty that you are. Start in your body. Just like if someone asked you where you were feeling cold, and you searched your experience and said "Oh, my feet are feeling cold." In the same way, ask about the feeling of the "I" that you somehow know with certainty.

And every time you think you know where it's coming from, the rule is that you must ask yourself if you are aware of that thing which you think is the source of the I. If you are, you haven't found the real source yet. So you keep going

If, for example, you say "It's coming from my head" — well, ask yourself "Well, I am aware of the feeling and sight of my head, right?" Notice that. So where is the "I" that is aware of the head? It's not coming from the head — it is aware of it. So where is the I feeling? It's just like you notice that there is light in a room, and you're looking for the source of the light. Is it coming from this chair? No. The chair is lit up by something else. Is it coming from that table? Same deal. So keep searching until you find the light bulb. You'll know it when you find it.

. . .

Q: Is this what you strived to do all your waking hours?

A: Not at the beginning but at the end, yes. I encountered Ramana Maharshi a few years into my journey, and understood him only partially. I knew he was profound, but I had to go through a lot of psychological work before I was ready to hear him again and really understand.

Self-inquiry leads to lightbulb moments, glimpses, which one then tries to get to again and again, each time getting easier. Actually the glimpses ARE the truth. The problem is simply the mental conditioning that leads you out of them, seemingly.

Self-inquiry at the end melts into surrender, but there is still a bit of effort in that surrender. Finally effortful surrender melts into effortlessness, and effortlessness leads to the permanent Truth. One can also start with surrender and end in inquiry.



Q: I have done and still do neti-neti ("not this, not that") inquiry to the extent I feel like I'm partly becoming insane. Sometimes I get so detached that everything just seems like a roleplay, dream, and an invention. I scan my body and see no one, no one seeing through the eyes. The sense of self is there, but is much less than when I started a few years ago. And several times I've had no self, which was pretty terrifying at first, but lessened a lot.

How would you from your experience describe where I am on the path? Is there anything you would recommend?

A: Just to be clear, "neti neti" is just a thought. Simply repeating that about various things (that I am not the body, that I am not the mind, etc.) is not the point, of course.

That sense of self is the important thing. You feel that "I

scan my body and see no one." Well, who is the "I" that is seeing that? You feel it, right? Where is that feeling? How do you know that that I is there? Where is that knowledge coming from? What is it?

That's what you have to focus on intensely. Again, what is that feeling of "I" in the "I am seeing no one"?

If you are doing it intensely, you are deep into the path. Just keep going. It can be helpful to read, though. Read Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, and when you're done, read it again. And if necessary again.



Q: Is this the reason that the process of purification takes decades? Because the actual embodiment of those insights is the lengthy process?

A: The very thought that it requires a long time itself lengthens that amount of time, actually. Best to believe that what you are looking for is right here, right now, and that it is yours for the taking immediately. Because that's the truth.



Q: If you just get absorbed in the silence day after day, making the mind quieter and quieter, will it happen?

A: If you can remain in silence even while you are going about in the world (not just while sitting down on a mat), and you can surrender the need for something to happen, it might just happen.



Q: Does en emphasis on relative silence with its focusing/ex-

cluding imply an imposed silence? Does this movement of focus/control sustain psychological conflict/division? As it does imply a controller.

A: It's true, it is a kind of focus/control that implies a controller, but the seeker already believes there is a controller. So they must be led through that idea into something else. It does not sustain psychological division but first reduces it, and then destroys it.

As Ramana Maharshi used to say, spiritual practice is like the stick that is used to light a funeral pyre. First it burns everything else, and then it itself burns away.

Q: But can we say that this sustains conflict as it is resistance/attachment which brings about reaction itself? Can we say that conflict itself sustains self/division? It's kinda like saying psychological time will end by moving on that path of psychological time. Do you understand what I mean?

A: I do. But unfortunately I do not think the way to end conflict is simply to pretend it doesn't exist... as I said, for a few very mature souls pure silence is enough. But for the rest, one division is needed to destroy another division, as one thorn removes another that is stuck in someone's flesh.

But Zen may be more to your liking. Zen tends to really stay away from abstraction.



Q: Do you think meditation is worth doing? Why or why not? Also, do you think courses like vipassana are helpful?

A: I believe Ramana Maharshi's self-inquiry is the meditation that is really worth doing. But other types of medita-

tion may resonate with certain people and help them calm their minds so that they can eventually engage in inquiry.



Q: How can I be a sincere seeker if I don't exist and lie to myself about that ?

A: You aren't lying to yourself about that. You believe, emotionally, that you exist. If you didn't, you wouldn't be a seeker. No amount of intellectual understanding will be enough until that emotional conviction changes. Saying what you really believed is you don't exist when you still feel that you suffer... *that* would be lying to yourself. It's the emotional truth that matters.



Q: I'm become obsessed with intellectualizing about non-duality and enlightenment throughout the day, getting bogged down trying to figure out the meaning of labels like awareness, consciousness, etc. I'm always trying to work it out. Is this simply pointless?

A: Well, I had to answer a lot of intellectual questions at the beginning first. There is nothing wrong with that, if those are really what concern you. Pick a tradition and read deeply in it, meet people and talk about it. Above all, ask lots and lots of questions of qualified masters. That's what's going to give you intellectual clarity.

Q: I've become so obsessed with spirituality that I feel I'm not living life to the fullest. I'm always searching, searching, doing this or that technique. I'm a hermit, very introverted

and see relationships as a distraction. Will this go against me in the long run? I'm worried I might be using spirituality as a smokescreen to avoid sorting out more obvious stuff.

A: As far as spirituality as a smokescreen, that is a very real possibility. That is, you probably really are interested in spirituality *and* are using it to avoid other things in life. That's one reason I suggest that seekers strongly consider psychodynamic or psychoanalytic therapy.



Q: Do you have any pointers on the best form of meditation for enlightenment?

A: Ramana Maharshi's self-inquiry IS a form of meditation, the best form. The others may be helpful too, I couldn't say. But Maharshi's self-inquiry is enough by itself.

The only other possibility is surrender. Surrender means that you attempt to accept whatever happens — whatever emotions you have, whatever events occur. You stop trying to change anything. Another way of putting it: ignore all thoughts.



Q: Why does it seem so difficult to awaken? I do the inquiry and it seems like I realize my true nature for a moment but it goes right back again, completely out of my control.

A: Yeah, unfortunately it's a struggle until it isn't. It's because of the intense power of built-up mental habits. They drag you back again and again.

It's good that you feel you are touching your true nature for a moment. That means you are making progress. It will get easier. Simply keep at it. The amount of time you will be

able to stay in that "true nature" will get longer and longer over time.



Q: It seems that when observing thoughts, they take on a random train of subject matter, or otherwise follow a succession of thoughts that build upon each other. By holding a certain intention in mind, the thoughts that arise tend to be about that intention, which I refer to as - "I am steering these thoughts toward so and so." Am I searching for this I that can steer these thoughts, or is it an illusion that "I" can do this?

A: That I which seems to be steering those thoughts — who is aware of that I doing that steering? "I am," right? *That's* the I you're trying to find.



Q: When you have the realization of oneness, does your visual field change at all? To a point where it literally seems as if another person is identical to your own arm for example?

A: No. Those are boundary-blurrings that are characteristic of either psychedelic effects or brain abnormalities. They might possibly happen for some people as a result of meditation, but they are not to be confused with awakening.



Q: If you have ever done psychedelics, does anything comparable to a trip happen such as intensified sensory experience/fractal imagery?

A: These can happen in meditative glimpses for some people... well, intensified sensory experience, not so much fractal imagery I think. But maybe. These are not, however, the essence of spiritual self-realization.



Q: What are the things to do or not do in order to awaken in your opinion ?

A: Do: Obtain a quiet mind by aligning your actions with your desires through a process of discovery. Understand the intellectual framework of awakening, quench your doubts, practice self-inquiry intensely.

Do not: expect to chase mystical powers, or expect that awakening is going to get you worldly success.



Q: How do I forgive myself?

A: Psychodynamic/psychoanalytic therapy, expressive writing/drawing/creation where you express your emotions in accurate, original detail and really try to capture what they feel like (what I call metaphorization in *How to Find What Isn't Lost*).

And self-inquiry — look into who wants to be forgiven.



Q: What is this thing, located within this 'body', that feels like me? That is aware of moving through space when it decides to move through space, that feels sensation when it decides to reach out and touch something? If I am not the



body, why do senses, which I experience, reside within the body?

A: Why not look for the "I" which knows these senses, the ones which you write "I experience"? Once you find that through self-inquiry, you will have the answer to these questions as well.



Q: So from the seeker's perspective, do you prescribe that conscious effort to become Enlightened is a must? Looking back, do you think you could dispel your seeker identity ever without putting any effort?

A: Yes, if you consider yourself a seeker, then you must put in effort — either to inquire into the self, or to utterly surrender and accept whatever happens without question. Even surrender will seem to take effort.

Looking back, there is no seeker and no dispelling of that identity. It's impossible to understand unless you see it for yourself. And that, for almost everyone, requires effort. It's a paradox you won't understand till the end of the path.



Q: Is it good to just concentrate on points of the body? For example, to just concentrate on the point behind my eyes, where I feel I am but in fact am not (there is just empty space)?

A: I don't recommend concentration on points on the body. I recommend Ramana Maharshi's self-inquiry method. It's very specific.



Q: The self-inquiry begins as following/seeking the 'I' feeling. But after some time it comes to a point when a sort of effortless witnessing happens. There is no longer attachment to any particular object. The attention is loose...just a simple knowing of presence prevails.

So at that time, is it better to stay in that relaxed witnessing mode or should I keep probing and seeking the source of this 'knowing' actively until a surrender happens on its own?

Note: In that mode, 'I' is not felt as something located anywhere particularly. Even the mind movements to seek in different directions are witnessed inside a borderless, aware presence.

A: If you are in a state of calm, clear peace even while you are awake and doing things in the world — which it sounds like it is — you can simply stay in it and relax. No need to interrupt that with further deliberate inquiry. But if you fall out of it (which you may), then use inquiry to get back. And repeat.



Q: Is self-inquiry a practice which is about waiting for an experience — not for an intellectual answer which can be understood by the mind, but one which can be embraced, let us say, within every cell?

A: I wouldn't say it's waiting for an experience. It's inquiring into your nature until you see past an illusion. That's not quite the same thing. Follow Ramana Maharshi's method.



Q: EVERY TIME THE "I" imagines, tries to see outside, it's within consciousness, morphed by my perception... until there's no "I". Only being. Does it really matter what I ask - Do you relate? Do "I" relate?

A: This sounds like you are glimpsing the Truth. Now knowing this, can you just relax, letting whatever happens happen, since there is no longer even an I, as you say? Might be worth a try.



Q: Is enlightenment simply about quieting the mind and, if there is still some occasional mind, having zero attachment to it?

A: No, enlightenment is a matter of piercing the illusion of personal identity. The best way is Ramana Maharshi's self-inquiry combined with other practices to quiet the mind. Quieting the mind has to be combined with some form of deliberate looking inward so that the mind can eventually be seen — quiet or noisy — to be non-existent.

There's no real use trying to understand the enlightened state beforehand, except to know that it is pure truth and bliss. It is beyond words and concepts, actually, and best not to weigh yourself down with expectations.



Q: How can I truly surrender? Please teach me to surrender with every fiber of my being.

A: You cannot fully surrender on your own. You can only partially surrender — that's the most you can do. What that means is that you let go of whatever happens — both in the outside world, and in terms of your thoughts

and emotions. Let it go. Let it all go. Let decisions go. Let pain go. Let the need to change things go. Whatever you do, think, or feel, let it go, let it go, let it go. Whatever pain you experience, let it go. Whatever desire you have, let it go.

If you feel like you cannot let it go, let *that* feeling go too.

Another way of putting it is that you ignore all these thoughts and concerns. Simply withdraw your attention from all these things and relax, and let nothing — no mental threat or fear — shake you from that lazy, utterly slack calmness. Refuse to lift a mental finger.

That is the continuous effort of surrender. This will turn into full surrender but you cannot control when that happens.

The other possibility is to practice Ramana Maharshi's self-inquiry at all waking moments, which will automatically turn into full surrender at a certain point.



Q: I started yesterday searching for this feeling of “I.” I flexed my fingers, watched my breath, walked, looking very closely at who is doing it and who is observing it. I got the feeling no one is doing anything and no one is really observing anything. I don't know how to really put it in words. It feels like the thing I am searching for it is the thing itself. The reason I cannot see it is because it is the thing itself.

Is that correct?

A: Yes, yes, these are exactly the insights you need to be having. Now you need to stay with it or proceed until you come to a state of calm peace even while you are doing things in the world — and then stay with that state. And if

you fall out of it, search for the I again until you come back to that state.



Q: How can I trust your words, when enlightenment is about nothing that can be spoken about or named?

A: True, but a seeker has to grasp on to anything they can! Trust my words only if they resonate with you, if they ring a bell in you. And enlightenment is full of paradoxes like the one you mention.

For example, it is ultimately true that "there is nothing to be done. You are already the Truth."

But for a seeker there very much is something to be done. Effort must be exerted. Even not to exert any effort at all — surrender — requires effort for the seeker.

So to know that enlightenment is worthwhile — even if it cannot be explained exactly how — can be motivating...and that can be helpful for a seeker.

So for a seeker, there is an ultimate truth (say, effortlessness), and an apparent truth (effort).

Or the ultimate truth is that nothing can be said about it, but the apparent truth is that it's the best possible thing in life to obtain.

Seekers need to keep both these truths in mind, until the apparent truth resolves into the ultimate.



Q: So I've started self-inquiry as described in this thread. I try to locate my consciousness, and if I can be aware/feel where I thought it come from, then I realize that it's not it and try to look for what is aware of it.

Or another way I'm practicing is that if I feel a sensation, I ask myself to try to find who is aware of this sensation.

Is it correct?

A: Yes, this sounds correct. Good work.

Keep going. Just to be clear, I wouldn't describe it as looking for your consciousness but as looking for the "I." It's a small difference, and they are very related, but I would emphasize the "I."

"Here's what I'm doing," you say. Who is this "I" who knows what is being done? Hunt for that I at all waking moments.



Q: I ask myself what is it that is always here, changeless and which yet goes unnoticed by the mind. And the answer I get is, this intangible, undefinable "thing" that gives Now its reality. Then I try to notice this "thing" and the mind calms down because it doesn't feel required to notice what is already here, prior to knowing.

After such a 'meditation', there is a general peace and stillness that I feel for a while. Is this correct?

A: Yes, it sounds legitimate to me. The key is to keep that peace with your eyes open in the world all the time, not just sitting with your eyes closed. As you are sitting, talking, walking, etc. — every waking moment — stay in that peace with your mind calm and resting.



Q: The biggest mindmelt up to this point that I can only experience and not conceptualize is the fact of the "timeless"

void. It's just ridiculous. There are no words. Even this very... only the experience. How on earth can that be expressed?

A: Yes, it cannot be expressed. No need to be expressed. If you have a state of clear peace that you are calling the "timeless void," stay in it through all your activities, every waking moment.



Q: Is self inquiry thoughtless? Or just free of rational thought?

A: Well, technically self-inquiry isn't necessarily free of thought... especially at the beginning, you might have to think about why you aren't certain things. "I'm the son of so-and-so, and I do this job, and I'm the kid who broke his arm at the age of 8 while playing tennis, right?"

But then you might have to think about the fact that "I am aware" of each of those things... and thus none of them can be the light that illuminates all experience. None of them can be the I. So that's the application of rational thought to experience.

Self-inquiry will, however, eventually lead to a thought-free state. Or rather an I-free state. Or rather a state free of the normal, burdensome I. Even there you can have thoughts, but they will have an entirely different feeling than thoughts had outside that state. They will not even be felt to be thoughts.

That state is of course your true & permanent nature. It is a "state" only because you are pulled back out of it because of mental habit... which of course is what has to be overcome through repeated practice of inquiry.



Q: As I notice the changeless, timeless Reality in the background of the Now, a general peace arrives. Should I relax and stay there or should I ask 'who is experiencing this'? There is no "I" in that state, unless I bring it up by asking a question like that.

A: No, if you are experiencing peace and an I-free state, no need to disturb it — if you can carry it around with you as you live your life.



Q: How do I know when I've gotten there?

A: When you directly know, beyond any doubt, that you've never had to go anywhere, that all along you've been there, that you never left that perfect quiet peace beyond time and space and limitation which you are.

Q: "I" have absolutely no doubt of knowing that. Yet, it is non-abiding. However, each time I return to the self-based mindset, the self is weaker, a little less there. Is enlightenment a process? For me, it seems like the self has taken several heavy blows during the process and is gradually dissolving away to nothing.

A: It cannot be called full realization until you've crossed the point where you realize it is not and never was a process. The "process" based idea is still in the seeking stage. Maybe the final stages of seeking... but still seeking. The end of the "process" will be a realization that there was never any process, there was never any returning to the self-based mindset, etc. In fact that's a good way to think even now. All these "returns" are illusory.





Q: Can you be enlightened and still go to a 9 to 5 job?

A: Yes. The enlightened person does not identify themselves with the doer of actions. Their mind is quiet and relaxed. So when work happens they do not feel it is their painful effort.



Q: Should I pursue enlightenment hardcore if I'm young and am not fully financially independent yet?

A: If you feel the drive to truth, then yes, absolutely! But pursuing enlightenment is not just self-inquiry, it is also about discovering and being honest about what you want. I basically recommend psychodynamic/psychoanalytic therapy to all seekers. If you're young and financially dependent, you can probably get it pretty cheap.



Q: Yet, even in the busiest mind, is there not an underlying stillness? As if one is sitting in a busy area of NYC at complete peace?

A: Yes, there certainly is. And that busy-ness can occur even when the mind is utterly relaxed — those busy thoughts will arise as if involuntarily, and effortlessly, and will not feel as if they have any burden to them.



Q: Seekers search for truth all over the world for years and

years, only to realize they were enlightened all along. It's the greatest cosmic joke ever told.

A: Yup, it is absolutely a cosmic joke.



Q: Seekers in early stage like myself often fall into the trap of confusing Yoga Nidra for abiding in the Self. Ramana Maharshi spoke about this trap. How can one differentiate between the two?

A: Yoga nidra is a blissful state of mind experienced with your eyes closed (yoga nidra = "yogic sleep"). If you experience a blissful state with your eyes open and doing stuff, that's totally fine.



Q: No matter how hard I try, I cannot find the truth when I ask the question "Who am I?" All I can find is, "I am none of A, B, C, D..." then I conclude that I'm nothing

When I go "Sometimes I am A, but other times B, but other times C... but not at any time am I both A and B, " then I conclude that I can be everything but not at once.

When I intellectually acknowledge the illusion of time I finally conclude: I am everything at once.

Is this correct?

A: No, this is *intellectualizing* self-inquiry. That's not the right way to go about it. The point is not to *think about* who you are.

The point is simple: right now, you *know* that you are. Right? You know "I am reading these words." You know that automatically, instantly, immediately, and it is beyond a shadow of a doubt.

So the question is: *how* do you know that? Where is that absolutely certain feeling of knowledge that "I am" coming from? Where *in your field of experience*? If someone lit a match under your hand and then asked you where the heat was coming from, you wouldn't have to intellectually think about it ("sometimes matches heat hands and sometimes feet... I wonder which one it is this time?") — you would know, immediately, that it was coming from your hand.

Similarly, it's not about *thinking* about theories of where it could be coming from, but literally trying to feel where that feeling of "I-ness" is coming from. Is it coming from your body? Is it coming from your mind somewhere? Hunt that feeling. And every time you think you've found it ("it's coming from my head") — ask yourself who is aware of that ("who is aware of my head? I am") and then keep going ("but then where is *that* I coming from?").

So in this way, go deeper and deeper and focus on that feeling. It may be frustrating at first; you may not easily find it. But hold on to that feeling.

Stop only when you have a dramatic change of perspective about that "I" — and enter a state of clear peace.... you'll know it when you have it. Then stay in that state. And if you fall out of it, repeat the self-inquiry.



Q: Can self-inquiry mean trying to feel who is aware of me?

A: You can put it that way. I prefer focusing on the "I" concept, because I've found that goes deeper and is more relevant, but basically these are very similar.

Q: In inquiry, can I skip the questions inside my head completely? To me it feels completely unnecessary to ask the actual question "Who am I?"

It makes more sense to only use awareness and feelings.

A: Yes, you can skip the questions entirely. You can do it by feeling alone if you want, and eventually every inquirer does.



Q: As long as I keep moving and searching for solutions to problems, I create waves. When I become still and let the waves carry themselves out by listening to each of them, allowing them to pass, I soon come to rest in still waters. How do I know what is the right question to ask, when the right question asks itself when I am silent?

A: Great, if you can simply allow yourself to remain in silence calmly no matter what happens, that's perfect.



Q: In that stillness, *all* of the ideas, concepts, deities, enlightened masters, principles and so on are within the illusion.

For a being at this stage, would you recommend more sitting with nonverbal inquiry such as "what is perception?", "who am I?" as a bridge to the stillness of everything/nothing? Is part of deeper surrender letting go of spiritual concepts?

A: Yes, nonverbal inquiry is totally fine. The key is whether you can stay in that space of stillness. Yes, let go of spiritual concepts if you feel they are a burden, absolutely. Surrender of everything is the end game anyhow.



Q: Sometimes when I am looking for the "I", it feels like the

only "I" here is the one looking for the itself — in other words, the meditator. So there is an "I" as long as I am looking for it, because I, the looker, am it. Where do I go next?

A: You say "I'm the one looking for the I" — but who is noticing that fact?

Q: Does enlightenment only answer the Who am I question, or does it also satisfy one's curiosity about all the other existential questions — like what this world and life are really all about?

A: When your mind recognizes and rests in the Self, you will be satisfied in realizing that all these existential questions rest on false premises. They are born out of a misconception. They will no longer bother you.

In a sense there is a mystery that remains, but it is not speakable or thinkable and it is not painful.



Q: During meditation, the mind became still and the self-inquiry question "What is Love?" arose. There was no analysis or thinking about what love is. The question just existed there in the stillness. It just sat there. Then it would dissolve into nothingness and reappear. Yet, nothing else related to Love appeared.

Should there be effort to maintain the presence of the inquiry?

A: No, you can just let it go. The only inquiry that needs to be maintained is into the "I" — or else simply surrender and relax all thinking. Those are the two linked ways.



Q: In my daily life, as I do self-inquiry, how can I think the thoughts I need for my work?

A: You can do both. It seems like you cannot because you are identified with the doer — it is of course the purpose of enlightenment to see that you are not the doer.

Initially try to pay, say, 50% attention to both... and steadily more and more attention to self-inquiry and the work will still get done — or it won't. The reality is that you may or may not end up thinking the thoughts you require for work, but actually you have no control one way or the other over that. Whether you attempt to do inquiry or not has no bearing on that fact. What will happen will happen regardless of your spiritual efforts.

So, if you want to be a little braver, simply self-inquire — ask yourself who is worried about the work being done? Be relentless.

Q: You say that self-inquiry leads to a I-free state and then we are to just abide there, right? But how do I know when to stop?

A: When that question does not arise. You will know it when your mind is calm, expansive, clear, and you feel a sense of peace, with the normal "I" totally seemingly vanished.



Q: There is part of me that feels like "something" is supposed to happen with self-inquiry. Sometimes it doesn't feel like "self"-inquiry because the self isn't present. It feels

simply like "inquiry". That the inquiry is acting like a stillness stabilizer.

A: Yeah, that's totally fine. These things will happen as it becomes more habitual. The point is that if you are in a state of vast, clear, peace with your eyes open and that you can continue in while you are doing other activities... no need to disturb it.

And if you "fall out of it," you will need less and less to get back. Sometimes it may be a simple word, a blink, a non-verbal flick of your mind and you will be back. Eventually not even that will be required.



Q: While I was walking I started noticing how stuff moves, including me (my body), but if I stay as awareness it is immovable and unchangeable. Is this a glimpse of the truth? Is it useful to do this as a form of walking meditation? It felt like I entered a timeless realm.

A: Yes, this is a glimpse of truth. I would recommend Maharshi's self-inquiry however as a more disciplined way to go about things.

Q: What constitutes a glimpse of the truth?

A: A glimpse is when you've noticed the background peace of the mind. At the moment when you call it a glimpse it is already gone.

Q: I have had a brief state in which I just *was*. I "noticed" the desire to think about the state or make a comment about it,

but I simply remained as that. It was amazing. Is that a glimpse?

A: It is. And as you saw, your noticing that desire is what threatened to interrupt it, and when you relaxed anyway, it was amazing. When you keep practicing that, you will eventually know that state is your permanent nature.

Q: Can glimpses happen even without ego fear?

A: Yes, there's no need for there to be fear beforehand for it to be a glimpse. Though there might be. Depends on the mind.



Q: If Self is always present, then why when I feel tired is it really hard to notice it?

A: At the deepest level, because you identify with the noticer, and think the Self is something to be noticed, when it is actually simply what you are.

But at a more practical level, it's because for seekers calmness of mind is what's required to inquire into the Self. Lethargy & exhaustion is a state of non-calmness. This is why a balanced life (eating moderately, sleeping moderately, etc.) is suggested for spiritual seekers, along with psychological work to become honest about one's desires and feelings.



Q: It seems there needs to be some sense of duality to operate in the world. To deal with coworkers, realize my pen is used to write, language etc. Is this a sense of "enlightened



duality"? Or perhaps the final frontier is collapse of the distinction between duality and nonduality.

A: Yes, that's still duality. Inquire into it. If there is any sense that "I have to put in effort to operate in the world because that's what the world requires" — you need to inquire (or utterly relax and surrender). Only if you have a state where you feel totally effortless and at peace should it not be disturbed.

Q: There are still impulses such as "I need to do xyz" , "I don't like xyz." Is this a problem?

A: Well, the thoughts themselves aren't the problem, exactly, but it's the sense — and only you can tell if it is occurring — of it being a *burden*.

If these thoughts are simply happening, as if automatically, in an atmosphere of total peace... well, no problem. But then again if that is there, the question will not arise as to what to do about it. It will feel blissful and you will not want to interrupt it. It's only when it's been interrupted already that the question arises.



Q: Is there a final ah-ha moment?

A: There is and isn't a final a-ha moment. The final moment is to realize you were there the whole time.

Q: Do you recommend or think its useful to use drugs like LSD or DMT as part of the journey?

A: Psychedelics can reveal glimpses and give some

psychological insight, but they are neither necessary nor are they enough.



Q: What would be the markers in the body-mind of progress in awakening?

A: Increasing mental peace and calmness, increasing steadiness of concentration in inquiry.

Q: So what we actually should be focusing on achieving is mental peace, calmness, and steadiness of concentration in inquiry?

A: Those are not different goals. The inquiry is: "Who am I?" Focusing on that with "steadiness of concentration" will eventually bring peace and calmness.

Q: So I'm supposed to do this every time I have a thought?

A: Not just when you have a thought, but continuously. Now. Grab on to the "I" feeling and hold on to it with a death grip no matter what else happens till you figure out what the hell it actually is. What actually is that feeling? When you say "I," which seems obvious, what are you actually referring to at a deep, felt level? And then of course you knock out all the things you think you are when you notice that "I am aware of them." So when you've eliminated all of those, what's left?



Q: What is the difference between looking for the "I" and being the "I"?

A: Looking for the I means looking for it through the lens of the mind — as an object; being the I means knowing yourself as the Self without pinning it down as an object, knowing it directly as the total stillness that always is.



Q: I've seen people who claim enlightenment encounter serious problems with their families. Will the infinite love take over and truly make it alright if I pursue it?

A: Yes, it will. If you seek sincerely, infinite love will protect you. But you must not judge HOW it chooses to protect you. You must surrender to it and accept that its wisdom is greater than yours.

Q: What if that infinite love means abandoning my job and family and just going off?

A: Then that's how the infinite love manifests itself — and it would have happened no matter what you tried to do or not to do.

That said, if you are afraid of that — do what is called karma yoga. Do all your family and other duties, expecting no reward for it. Do it as duty alone. You can pursue self-inquiry even while you do all these activities. There is no need to leave or go anywhere. Even this controlled effort will take you closer.

Then again, look at the Buddha: he abandoned his royal "job" and his family. Sometimes the spiritual calls in seemingly extreme ways. Depends on the person. Not everyone

goes that route. If you want the truth enough, you will allow the spiritual wind to blow you where it will.



Q: When I do self-inquiry I focus really hard on the I, but then after a while my mind just sort of gives up since I have nothing to really focus on. Then the focus automatically shifts to the sensations of my body or the room, there is just an awareness of what is going on at the moment, and I relax. Is that OK?

A: If you are in a relaxed, peaceful awareness of things you can just let it be. The next time you feel dissatisfied or irritated in any way, immediately ask "who is it that is dissatisfied?"

Q: I still have thoughts going on most of the time that I try to ignore but it's like a broken TV, going on and on, sucking me in from time to time. What should I do about it?

A: When you notice any of the "broken TV" thoughts, to look who is aware of them. Use them as a platform for self-inquiry.



Q: What are the pros/cons of meditation vs. self inquiry?

A: Meditation in the sense of simple concentration or mindfulness can be useful preparation if makes your mind peaceful, but someday you will want to know "Who is doing this meditation and why?" That is when you can inquire into the I.

Actually, self-inquiry is simply the ultimate form of meditation.