

Shreyas

The Art of Living

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Namaste. In last month's article, you read ideas related to the concepts of awareness and knowledge. That article concluded with an understanding that efforts, however small or large, if directed with awareness will lead to knowledge and thence will yield the best result for oneself and humanity. In this month's article, we will take a deeper look into a specific and very basic type of awareness emphasized in the vedas.

Awareness can mean many different things to many people based on their perspective. To a child, for example, it may mean staying alert for something unknown. Whereas to an adult, it may simply mean to stay focused. In Vedic concepts, the idea of awareness is taken to a different height. Vedas refer to the awareness of one's 'true self' as the highest form of awareness. Hence, the derivation of the term 'self-realization' and the ever-mystical question, "who am I?"

The vedas point out that our existence in daily life is limited by our senses and our ego. For example, most of us are functioning at a level of awareness created by our physical/material senses and by our mind's impression of who we are. That is, we are either focused in our awareness upon the look, taste and feel of material objects as we experience them using our five senses of taste, touch, vision, sight, and smell. It is these senses that tie up our desires to acquire that which is best looking, best tasting or, perhaps, feels the softest; or, on the other hand, we are focused in our awareness upon the status or title that we identify with. This is in the form of our ego. "I am a kind doctor" or "I am a pretty woman, when I walk, I turn all the heads." This ties us up with a sense of self that is manufactured by the ego. We are constantly trying to create or maintain this sense of self. Hence, the world that we experience in these physical/material and mental/ego realms is referred to as Maya. It is real at the level of the experience only. It is neither permanent nor absolute. It is fleeting and relative.

Let's take a look at the following example for clarity. Let's say we give a calculator to a 2 year old child. It's a regular calculator that performs the usual addition, subtraction, multiplication and division that the child initially uses as a teether, and then as a toy with buttons to press, and then learns to read the numbers and eventually, by high school, uses it to solve complex mathematical problems that would take someone three days to calculate without a calculator. Well, something funny happens along the way to this point in the child's life. You see, he has been using this calculator so much and that he has done so much math over the years that he becomes thoroughly identified with the calculator. He actually starts to think that he is himself, in fact, the calculator. He thinks he's the buttons with the numbers on it. He even takes special pride in telling everyone about his bright digital readout screen that gives answers to any mathematical problem to the eighth decimal place. He really forgets that he's a person and can only function in the world with the awareness that he is a calculator. Go figure.

Is that really possible? Can someone mistake their identity for a calculator? Absurd, you must be thinking. How can someone mix themselves up with a calculator?

Well, let's take a look. Let's see how close we come to thinking that we are a calculator in our own daily life. After all, our brain

is at its very basic level an instrument, just like a calculator. Of course, it is much, much, much more sophisticated and powerful than a calculator. But, at its essence, it is a tool. It is a tool used to experience and interact with the world, much like a calculator. And yet, once we become engrossed in using it, we forget the difference between it and our true self. We identify with the sensory and mental experience of the brain and claim that we are that experience. We take on different roles based on those experiences and fight tooth and nail to prove or disprove those experiences as validity of our being. We constantly act as those things that our calculator brings to our experience. We call this experience our reality. Furthermore, we simply think of ourselves as the one who are the body and the ego, both of which, for humans are defined by the experience of the instrument called the brain. So, we are not at all different from that child who mistook himself for the calculator. Are we really like that child who is identified and fixated on being the calculator? Or is there a different reality? Is it a reality that is perhaps not limited by the experiences of the senses or the ego? Or is it a reality that pervades those boundaries and brings us closer to an absolute and eternal reality? You make the call after you read below.

If we are to work towards realizing our true self, then it must be done through means outside of the physical and mental/emotional sense of self. Only then can we know our true self, absolutely and purely. Which raises the question, "How does one go about doing this?" Well, it's easier said and much harder done. But, I assure you, if practiced, many among us already do it. It requires awareness, intentional effort and serious commitment. I can tell you as one on the path, not as one who has reached the destination. You already have some sense of that awareness from reading this article. If it sounds more attractive than the reality of your daily experiential life, then it demands your intentional effort and commitment.

Remember, this is the awareness you can learn to maintain by practice. Through it, you will acquire the necessary experiences and the knowledge that will grant you a rewarding and self-sustaining living. You need not abandon your current life. Just live it with this awareness. The rest will fall into place automatically.

First, keep thinking about your sensory experiences as being separate from who you are as your true self. Do not become identified with the taste you taste and the clothes you feel next to your skin or get complimented upon by others. Be gracious, thank the person who compliments but maintain the awareness that you are neither the clothes nor the tasty food. Then, simultaneously, be aware that the thoughts that you are thinking about yourself and about the world that you call reality are also not your true self. You are neither the physical nor the ego. Both of those are experiences that your senses and your mind bring to you. They are not your total awareness. Your true self is separate from both. And that's it.

As you see, if you remove your sensory and mental experiences from misidentifying you, then all that is left is your true self. And being in constant touch with that self and living your daily life as that self is the true joy of life. Your experiences will be richer and your existence lighter and stress-free. Good luck and Namaste.