

Self-Inquiry

**Dawn of the Witness
and
The End of Suffering**

Yogani

From The AYP Enlightenment Series

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—

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and
The End of Suffering

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“You will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free.”

John 8:32

Introduction

With *Deep Meditation* and the rise of abiding inner silence (the witness), we find ourselves with an increasing ability to observe our thoughts as objects. This volume on *Self-Inquiry* provides practical approaches for making use of our inner witness in daily activity and relationships, resulting in increased inner stability and happiness amidst the ups and downs of life. The prudent use of self-inquiry also enables us to realize the ultimate truth of existence – the *Oneness* we are and the *Unity* of all that exists.

It is hoped that this sharing will help bring clarity to the often misunderstood field of self-inquiry by revealing the relationship between our undifferentiated consciousness (subject/witness) and our thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the material world (objects). The philosophical schools expounding the so-called *dual* and *non-dual* views of existence have sometimes been at odds, even though they have been describing the same thing.

When our nervous system is systematically cultivated in ways that bring deep purification and opening, then we will be able to directly perceive the reality of *Self* and the true nature of the world, and describe it first-hand. The relevance of our own experience will surpass the philosophies that have informed us in the past, and we will know the truth.

The Advanced Yoga Practices Enlightenment Series is an endeavor to present the most effective methods of spiritual practice in a series of easy-to-read books that anyone can use to gain practical results immediately and over the long term. For centuries, many of these powerful practices have been shrouded in secrecy, mainly in an effort to preserve

them. Now we find ourselves in the *information age*, and able to preserve knowledge for present and future generations like never before. The question remains: “How far can we go in effectively transmitting spiritual methods in writing?”

Since its beginnings in 2003, the writings of *Advanced Yoga Practices* have been an experiment to see just how much can be conveyed, with much more detail included on practices than in the spiritual writings of the past. Can books provide us the specific means necessary to tread the path to enlightenment, or do we have to surrender at the feet of a *guru* to find our salvation? Well, clearly we must surrender to something, even if it is to our own innate potential to live a freer and happier life. If we are able to do that, and maintain regular practice, then books like this one can come alive and instruct us in the ways of human spiritual transformation. If the reader is ready and the book is worthy, amazing things can happen.

While one person’s name is given as the author of this book, it is actually a distillation of the efforts of thousands of practitioners over thousands of years. This is one person’s attempt to simplify and make practical the spiritual methods that many have demonstrated throughout history. All who have gone before have my deepest gratitude, as do the many I am privileged to be in touch with in the present who continue to practice with dedication and good results.

I hope you will find this book to be a useful resource as you travel along your chosen path.

Practice wisely, and enjoy!

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Chapter 1 – On the Trail of Truth

We would all like to know *the truth* of our existence on this earth. Throughout our life we may seek it by asking questions like,

“*Who am I?*”

“*What am I doing here?*”

“*Who or what is God?*”

“*What is the real nature of things?*”

“*Is what I am experiencing right now really true?*”

And so on...

If we ask our questions with feeling and persistence, if we continue to *inquire*, the answers will come to us sooner or later. How we go about it will determine our rate of progress, and the degree of ease or difficulty we may experience on the road to knowledge. Therefore, a methodology with predictable results can bring some important benefits. We will attempt to deliver a reliable approach to the field of self-inquiry here. It is a novel idea, because the traditional approaches to self-inquiry are often accompanied by much uncertainty, for reasons that will become clear as we move along. Is such uncertainty necessary? Not really. It is only a matter of gaining some education and understanding of the dynamics of human spiritual transformation. With some practical perspective, the journey can be made without pulling the hinges off the divine doorway of our nervous system.

It is a paradox that formal structured approaches to self-inquiry can lead to uncertainty and limited results. We will reveal why this is so. Here, we will take a less structured approach, and not offer a *cookbook* for self-inquiry. There are plenty of these available already. Instead, we will look at underlying principles, and how

we can apply these principles in concert with continuing spiritual progress resulting from a balanced *integration* of effective yoga practices.

Through endless inquiry and experimentation over the centuries, humankind has made much progress in determining the truth about our world, and beyond, to the point where applied science has harnessed many principles in nature for our betterment. Some may argue whether all of this progress has been for the better. Nevertheless, the steady expansion of applied knowledge marches on, and we are obliged to make the best of it. Such a progressive approach for the application of steadily accumulating knowledge can also be used in the development and implementation of practical spiritual methods. It is time for that.

In spite of our increasing mastery of the material laws of nature and this small planet we live on, we have done little so far to realize the ultimate truth of who we are and what we are doing here, let alone make much practical use of that elusive knowledge. Because of this we continue to suffer at the hands of our perceived mortality.

If finding the truth were simply a matter of developing an intellectual understanding, it would be easy – as easy as taking a high school class in physics, including an introduction to the principles of quantum mechanics. With that, we will know that all we see and do in life is playing out in a vast realm of *absolute emptiness*, with innumerable bits of interacting energy creating the appearance and substance of everything we consider to be our real world.

So, how *real* is our world, if all we are seeing, hearing and touching is nothing but energy interacting with itself in vast emptiness? This is a question that cannot be avoided when considering the ultimate

consequences of quantum mechanics. Why is there an apparent inconsistency between what physics tells us and the physical world we perceive around us? And how does this inconsistency affect the quality of our life? Can knowing the truth about this alleviate our suffering, as wise people both ancient and modern have promised?

We can find out for ourselves through direct experience.

It is a matter of perception. To experience and know more, our perception must be refined. While we cannot perceive radio waves with our normal senses, we have developed the technology to perceive them, and use them for great benefit. Modern technology has opened many doors for us in this way.

Interestingly, the ancient science of *Yoga* goes quite a lot further than modern science has so far in dealing with the unseen realm of absolute emptiness we are purported to be made of and living in. While modern science relies on devices enabling us to perceive and utilize principles in nature that we cannot see, the field of yoga relies on the human nervous system to do the same thing, and with remarkable results.

While utilizing our own nervous system as the primary instrument for discerning and applying the ultimate truth of life may seem like a new idea, there have been small groups of people doing it for thousands of years. It has been a fragile affair, with many disruptions and distortions coming from the forces of chaos that have been running roughshod over humanity for many centuries. The great religions of the world have spun off and grown from these small groups of spiritual innovators, inevitably mixing the truth in with politics and the long-running struggle of humanity to survive and thrive.

Now we find ourselves in the *information age*, where knowledge can be more easily distilled, preserved and shared, and it is more difficult for the forces of chaos to have their way. In this way, modern information technology has come to lend a hand to the ancient science of spirit.

Due to the rapid rise of knowledge, we have arrived at a turning point, a point where many people around the world can deepen their inquiry about the nature of things, shifting the perspective from being outside ourselves to include a more penetrating inquiry from the point of view of what is inside us – our radiant inner *Self*.

This has been made possible by the rise of knowledge about integrated spiritual practices in the modern world, with the principles and methods of practical *self-inquiry* being part of that.

Self-Inquiry – The Yoga of Knowledge

Self-inquiry is not new. It has been part of yoga and other systems of spiritual practice for centuries. It has been called *jnana yoga*, meaning “union through knowledge.” Jnana means *knowledge*, and yoga means *union* of the inner and outer aspects of life. Self-inquiry has also been called the *path of discrimination* and the *path of the intellect*. Knowledge of what? Discrimination of what? Intellectual knowledge of what? These are fair questions, and we will attempt to answer them in this book. Jnana also means *wisdom*, which points to a deeper level of knowing, a spiritual knowing, which is the end game of self-inquiry, and all of yoga.

Before we delve into the particulars of self-inquiry and additional yoga practices upon which its success depends, let’s look at the relationship of philosophy and

experience, which can help form a framework and basis for a practical approach to self-inquiry.

Roles of Philosophy and Experience

As we begin to think about the true nature of things, it is helpful to have a foundation in the form of an idea or structure. Quantum physics was mentioned for this reason, offering the modern scientific model of emptiness underlying our physical universe. The ancient philosophical traditions of the East concur with this view, with an additional component added – the presence of *consciousness* in absolute emptiness and emerging from it. While it may not be possible to verify that the emptiness underlying everything is conscious, we can certainly verify that what manifests from emptiness is conscious, because we are conscious.

Ancient eastern philosophy, and some western philosophies also, hold emptiness to be the great *Self* of all, and that all individual selves are but rays emanating from the *One Great Self*, much the way waves dance upon the surface of the ocean, only to dissolve and reappear on the surface of the ocean again and again. The waves are ever-changing expressions of the great ocean they dance upon.

Whether the great ocean of emptiness beyond the manifested universe is conscious can be debated. But there can be little debate about whether human beings are conscious. It is this singular fact that underlies the entire field of self-inquiry.

There is a vast theoretical body of knowledge, which can be found in the amply documented philosophies of both the East and the West, plus the experiential component of consciousness which can be found in every human being. Put these two together, and you have the beginnings of self-inquiry.

It is really quite simple. If we can come to know that we are, in fact, the ocean before, during and after we are the wave, then the inquiry is done. Enlightenment is ours. Philosophically, that is called the *end of knowledge*. In the East, it is called *Vedanta – the end of the Veda*.

But, experientially, it is not so simple. Something more is needed, which is often overlooked by those who hold an uncompromising view of human enlightenment. If our experience does not fulfill the philosophy, or even what another may claim as their experience, then the inquiry is not complete. While purists may hold that only emptiness exists, it is up to each of us to verify the truth for ourselves. It is for this that the methods of self-inquiry are given.

But it turns out that self-inquiry is very much a moving target, depending on the person who is doing it. Just as certain ideas will resonate with some people and not others, the methods of self-inquiry may resonate with some practitioners and not with others. The reason for this variation is due to the inner condition of each individual nervous system. The degree of inner purification and opening deep inside has a direct bearing on the degree of consciousness that is available in the person for gaining knowledge of the nature of existence, at least insofar as knowledge can be gained through direct experience within the individual.

The key factor in this is the presence of what we call inner silence, also called pure bliss consciousness, the *Self*, or the *witness*. It is called the witness because stillness in our awareness is our ground state and, once established, is capable of experiencing all thoughts, perceptions and emotions as objects outside its own unmoving awareness.

The presence of the witness changes the complexion and effectiveness of all self-inquiry methods dramatically, and our perception of every day living also. What had been a moving target becomes steady, and the very knowledge we have been seeking is what we become. We were *That* all along, and the witness is *That*. There is the old saying that, what we are seeking is what is doing the seeking. Our inner awareness in the form of the witness is both the goal and the means for attaining it.

The witness can be cultivated in human beings by engaging in self-inquiry. This is its purpose. However, it is very difficult to do it using self-inquiry as the sole means. Ask anyone who has tried without using any other supporting practices.

A much more effective way to cultivate the witness is with daily *deep meditation*. Once this kind of cultivation is occurring on an ongoing basis, then self-inquiry will have the ability to gain some real traction in our lives, and add far-reaching additional benefits that could not be realized with either deep meditation or self-inquiry alone. When we say “traction,” we mean the formation of an intimate *relationship* between our native consciousness and the objects of this world, including our thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the external environment. Our abiding inner witness, combined with self-inquiry, can lead us steadily toward a condition of *Oeness*, beyond the ups and downs of life, even as we are fully engaged and going about our business each day. In this condition, there is not grasping or hanging on.

So, if we are looking for real self-inquiry, we should look beyond the dictums of rigid philosophical systems to the inner workings of our own nervous system. If we do that, we will go beyond ideas to the

experience itself. Then the wave will know itself to be the ocean, even as it continues as a wave.

Philosophy is therefore a stepping stone to the greatest knowledge, which is direct knowledge of our *Self*.

The Importance of Practice

There are those who say that practice is not necessary to reach enlightenment. Indeed, the unconditioned state of pure bliss consciousness is beyond all practice. So they are right in saying that the end state is beyond all practice, and even beyond all experience. When the fluctuations of the mind have been transcended, only the absolute remains. To be in this condition, nothing must be done, and nothing is, at least from the point of view of someone who is in this state on an ongoing basis. But what about everyone else?

The advice not to practice is an extremist view that leads many into confusion, particularly those who have responsibilities in the world. Such advice may be interpreted to mean going on with life as it has always been (having learned what?), or rejecting life completely in favor of *doing nothing*. Either way, there will be a problem.

So, while philosophically the argument not to practice, or do nothing, has appeal, on the practical level it has little relationship to what most people are involved with in daily life – living and doing. And neither is the advice to not practice particularly helpful for people who are contemplative in their nature, as it will often be interpreted to mean sitting around all day doing nothing.

The question is not so much about whether practice is necessary or not. Practice is not the enemy. Effective

practice is about changing the point of view of the practitioner (you and me) in relation to the objects of our experience. Consciousness as it manifests through us has a strong tendency to identify with everything it experiences, mistaking itself to be the objects it is observing. This includes the very thoughts and feelings we are having right now.

Once identified with external phenomena, our awareness will say, “I am these thoughts and feelings. I am this body. This is my family, my nation and my world.”

Once this occurs, we are on the roller coaster of life – the *wheel of birth and death*, as the philosophers say. It is very much a dream we create for ourselves.

Those who see through the illusion we have built up within and around ourselves will say, “Just stop identifying with all this. Do nothing. Let it all go!”

There is a certain amount of determination a teacher may have in wanting to wake people up to *what is*. Lacking more practical means, a teacher may resort to radical advice, which will not be able to be implemented by most people with any degree of reliability.

There are several problems with this radical approach. First, doing nothing is doing something. On the level of the mind, the act of letting go is a doing, so it will be a contrary experience for many people. And it is not so easy anyway for most people who are living regular lives. Attempting to take such a radical view with the mind can actually be very destructive to the motivation of the person and seriously disrupt effectiveness in daily life.

So perhaps the conclusion will be to go off to a remote cave where letting go and doing nothing might be more doable. But, alas, there is a problem with this

too. Our mind goes with us to the cave, and all that we have been identified with goes with us also. We take ourselves wherever we go.

The *don't practice* guru will tell us to be vigilant in doing nothing. We should *practice* this in our every waking moment!

It is pretty silly, isn't it? Building a mountain of intention and mental strategies, all for the purpose of doing nothing. The mind can never figure itself out. Only by transcending the mind can we know what the mind and everything else really is.

Once we have come to the recognition that doing nothing is actually doing something, we can begin to take a more practical approach, by doing something that actually can work. And that something is engaging in methods that can gradually dissolve the identification of our awareness with the objects of perception. As this identification and the dream we have been in begin to dissolve, the experience will be the rise of inner silence, our consciousness without the encumbrance of identification with the objects of perception, including our own thoughts. This unencumbered awareness, we call the *witness*.

The witness is not a condition we conjure up in the mind. It cannot be manufactured by the mind. It is a real and permanent presence of our awareness devoid of attachment to the experiences of temporal life. The witness is beyond the mind. Cultivating the witness is the object of self-inquiry, and of all yoga. Later on, we will learn how the witness also becomes dynamic, illuminating all objects we perceive, from within. Then we are able to do everything without doing anything. But it takes some particular kinds of doing to cultivate this condition of non-doing. This is the outcome of combining a full range of yoga practices.

While there is a strong tendency for teachers and practitioners to cling to a singular methodology for producing spiritual progress, this is not the most effective approach. It doesn't matter what method is touted as *the way*. There simply is not a single way that will carry everyone through to the realization we all seek.

The methods of yoga are not mutually exclusive. They are mutually integrative. Bypassing the full range of yoga methods that are available in favor of a fixation on a single method is a risky proposition at best. Maybe there will be some results, and maybe there won't. It will depend more on the initial condition of the practitioner than on the method itself. Of course, the initial condition of the practitioner will always determine the initial results. In fact, we could say that those who tend to oversimplify the task of revealing the truth within all of us were naturals from the beginning, needing very little in the way of practice, and what they offer is suitable only for those who are nearly enlightened already also.

And what about the rest of us?

We want more than philosophical platitudes that might tickle a sense of the infinite residing within us. We want to realize it. For this, we have an array of practices that can be integrated in a highly complementary way. Self-inquiry is one of these practices, and it comes into play in a variety of ways in relation to our over all strategy of daily yoga practices.

Let's delve deeper.

Chapter 2 – An Approach to Self-Inquiry

While we may often hear that enlightenment is an absolute condition which can be realized immediately by using absolute measures, this is fiction for the vast majority of people. It is an attractive proposition for the mind. We could even say that it is intellectually and emotionally seductive. But it is fiction all the same. Taking such thinking too seriously may lead us to extremist approaches that can delay our spiritual progress rather than enhance it.

There is a middle way.

As soon as we come to the realization that enlightenment is a *journey* rather than an instant event, we will open to the possibilities, and many doors will begin to open. If we remain open, we will find that an integration of methods can bring us to realize what we have been seeking, and with far less effort. Ironically, the multifold path is the path of least doing, and certainly the one of least angst.

Could it be that simple?

The AYP approach to self-inquiry is to integrate it naturally into our life as part of our over all routine of practices. In part, self-inquiry is what we have the option to do as we go about our normal every day life, between our twice-daily sittings of structured practices. Self-inquiry of this kind is less structured and highly individual. It may draw on different teachings at different times. However, there are several levels of application in self-inquiry which are essential to understand, mainly so we can stay in synchronization with our own spiritual progress. It is important to understand where we are in relation to our practice, and pace our practice to accommodate the changes that are occurring within us. This applies to self-inquiry as

much as with any other practice we are utilizing. So we will be systematic in our approach here, but not issuing *cookbook* instructions for self-inquiry. Our practice will be determined by our own inner inclinations and the application of sound principles. It is the most progressive and safe approach to spiritual development, assuming we are working with the underlying principles of human spiritual transformation and integrating time-tested techniques.

We will be doing many things in order to be doing nothing in the stillness of our inner awareness.

The primary aim of self-inquiry is to remain established in the unconditioned inner silence that resides within all of us – the experiencer, the witness to all thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the body and external phenomena.

Self-inquiry seeks to dissolve the identification of awareness with all of these perceptions. The traditional wisdom holds that the abiding presence of the witness (undifferentiated consciousness) will be the *effect* of self-inquiry. It can be, and this is the aim of all who pursue self-inquiry as a stand-alone path. All of the various strategies (*mental algorithms*) of self-inquiry are for realizing *That*.

However, it is also true that the presence of the witness is the *cause* of self-inquiry. When the witness is present, a natural inclination toward self-inquiry becomes self-evident, for then the innate condition of the practitioner *as the witness* becomes the answer to every inquiry – the eternal stillness that does nothing even as life carries on in all of its diversity. Once the witness is present, self-inquiry becomes more or less automatic. The witness is both the fuel and the destination of self-inquiry.

Further Reading and Support

Yogani is an American spiritual scientist who, for forty years, has been integrating ancient techniques from around the world which cultivate human spiritual transformation. The approach is non-sectarian, and open to all. His books include:

Advanced Yoga Practices – Easy Lessons for Ecstatic Living (Two Volumes)

Two large user-friendly textbooks providing over 400 detailed lessons on the AYP integrated system of practices.

The Secrets of Wilder – A Novel

The story of young Americans discovering and utilizing actual secret practices leading to human spiritual transformation.

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Easy-to-read instruction books on yoga practices, including:

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