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SELF-REALIZATION AN ESOTERIC & MYSTIC TERM ROOTED IN VEDIC PHILOSOPHY

A Brief Pravachan

By

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WHAT DOES SELF- REALIZATION REALLY MEAN?

- *It means different things to different people.*
- *If one were to ask that question to a layman, the answer most likely will be, “Yes, I know, it means knowing myself. Of course, I know myself. I know all my likes and dislikes, all my good and bad habits, and my secrets which no one else other than myself knows, etc. etc.”*
- *When this mundane answer is assessed with a Vedic yardstick, one can conclude that apparently the person is totally ignorant of the real meaning of Self-Realization.*

WESTERN AND EASTERN DEFINITIONS OF THE TERM

- *While discovered and practiced for thousands of years by great Indian Rishis, the concept has spread to rest of the world over the years and has especially undergone drastic metamorphosis in the Western World.*
- *In the Western Definition, self-realization is the exploration and activation of one's full potential of talents, personality, character and capabilities to lead a happy, peaceful life.*
- *In Eastern (Indian) Definition, it is the knowledge of the True-Self, called **Atma-Jnaan**, which is beyond the boundaries of material body, mind, and senses. It leads to God-Realization or **Brahma Jnaan**.*

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WHY IS SELF-REALIZATION CRUCIAL TO LIVE A HAPPY, PEACEFUL LIFE?

- *This question can be addressed better with an example.*
- *Suppose you bought a new motorcycle or a car. You would not want to drive that vehicle until you know everything about its equipment and operation, including how its brakes, steering wheels, signals, light switches, windshield wipers, mirrors, etc work.*
- *Whether it is your car, computer, or cell phone, the more you know about it, the more confidence you will have in its operation. Similarly, the more you know about yourself, the better is your ability to handle every aspect of life it is associated with, whether moments of joy, distress, calamity, stress, fear, or anxiety .*

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IN WESTERN VIEW SELF-REALIZATION ALLOWS YOU TO CONTROL YOUR LIFE INSTEAD OF YOUR LIFE CONTROLLING YOU!

- *Chances are, you're busy hustling between the 40 hrs /week job, the family you need to provide for, and the bills that need to be paid, and look for a new job if you get laid off. At one point, you are totally burned out and you feel like you are no longer in control of your life, instead the events in your life are controlling you.*
- *Self-Realization allows you to take full control of your life.*
- *It forces you to seek the answer for the basic question of "Who Am I?"*
- *It eventually leads you to the answer that you are neither your thoughts nor your emotions, neither your body nor your mind. Your True-Self or Soul is pure, eternal and unchanging. So, you will begin to realize that you have been unnecessarily caught up in things that are not yours and have fallen victim to negative feelings and experiences such as stress, anxiety and fear that could have been avoided.*

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WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SELF- REALIZATION?

- *The ability to monitor your emotions*: You will learn how to effectively handle things like fear, anxiety and stress. Self-realization helps you do this by giving you the skill of letting go of debilitating feelings and taking hold of the empowering ones instead.
- *Improved focus and concentration*: Self-realization helps you easily identify when you are entering into distractions and eliminate them. You stay committed to what matters most.
- *Increased confidence, self-awareness and self-esteem*: It frees you from any insecurities, worries and low sense of self-worth.
- *Becoming more accepting of yourself and of other people*: You will connect with people with genuine relationships rather than trying to impress them.

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HOW TO ACHIEVE THE WESTERN VERSION OF SELF-REALIZATION?

- **It is Through Meditation:** Numerous Books, Articles, Video Clips, Training Facilities, etc are available on this subject. Aside from all the scientific evidence that shows the health benefits of meditation, it is also a prime way to achieve self-realization.
- **A Few Simple Steps in Meditation:** (1). Sit comfortably on a chair. (2). Start by leaving your eyes open with a relaxed soft focus. (3). Take about a minute to take deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. (4). After a few deep breaths, gently close your eyes while you are breathing out. (5). Resume normal breathing. (6). Take a moment to pause and enjoy being present in the moment with having nothing to do. (7). Take a moment to feel the pressure of your body on the chair beneath you. (8). Gently bring the focus back to your breathing. (9). As you sit there, don't try and stop your thoughts. Simply allow them to just come and go. (10). At this point, the only thing you need to do is when you've realized your mind has wandered, gently bring the focus back to your breath again. (11). Gently bring the attention back to your body, back to that feeling of contact to your chair and the space around you and when ready, gently open your eyes again.

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HOW TO ACHIEVE THE EASTERN VERSION OF SELF-REALIZATION

- *Eastern Version of Self-Realization (Atma-Jnaan) is much more difficult to achieve, often requiring millions of rebirths.*
- *Unlike the Western Version, Meditation is only one part in the 8-part Scheme of conjoining the Individual Soul (Atman) with the Supersoul (Paramatman), and this whole process is called Ashtanga Yoga.*
- *Maharishi Patanjali has laid out the details of the 8-stages of this Ashtanga Yoga.*

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ASHTANGA YOGASUTRA OF MAHARISHI PATANJALI

▪ *Details of the 8-stages of Ashtanga Yoga of Maharishi Patanjali :*

(1) Yama: involves external disciplines such as Ahimsa (Non-violence); Satya (Truth); Asteya (Non-stealing); Brahmacharya (Chastity); and Aparigraha (non-possessiveness). **(2) Niyama:** involves internal disciplines such as Shaucha (Purity); Santosha (Contentment); Tapas (Austerity); and Svadhyaya (Study of the Vedas). **(3) Asana:** involves meditation postures, such as Padmasana (Lotus); Virasana (Hero); Bhadrasana (Glorious); and Dandasana (Staff). Note: In the West, Yoga normally means Asanas, but in the East Asanas play only a small part in the 8-limb Ashtanga Yoga. **(4) Pranayama:** involves various techniques of Breath Control. **(5) Pratyahara:** involves retraction of senses such as mind from its sense objects such as desires. **(6) Dharana:** involves concentration, introspective focus, and one-pointedness of mind. **(7) Dhyana:** involves contemplation, reflection, and profound abstract meditation. It is dependent upon Dharana in that if the focus in Dharana stage was on a concept/idea or a personal deity, Dhyana is contemplation of that concept/idea/deity in all aspects, forms, and consequences. Finally, **(8) Samadhi:** literally means Union. At this stage mind loses the sense of its own identity, and the actor of meditation, the act of meditation, and the object of meditation, all fuse together to form oneness. This is the pathway to liberation (Moksha) and Oneness with God.

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SELF-REALIZATION IN VEDIC SCRIPTURES

- *Vedas, Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, and Bhagavadgita all deal with Atman as well as Paramatman*
- *The earliest record on Atman is found in Rigveda ((RV X.97.11).*
- *Atman is the major theme in most of the Upanishads, including but not limited to Principal Upanishads, such as Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya, and Katha Upanishads.*
- *The 18 Chapters of Bhagavadgita are equally divided into three topics of Yoga, including Karma Yoga (Chapters 1-6), Bhakti Yoga (Chapters 7-12), and Jnana Yoga (Chapters 13-18), all of which talk about joining the Individual Soul (Atman) with supersoul (Paramatman) through the process of Self-Realization.*

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SELF-REALIZATION IN BHAGAVADGITA

- *The Topics of Self-Realization (Atmajnana) and God-Realization (Brahmajnana) are scattered all over the Bhagavadgita.*
- *I would like to recite just 2 Verses on Self-Realization from Chapter 4 and explain the meaning of those verses (Verses 36 & 37):*

अपि चेदसि पापेभ्यः सर्वेभ्यः पापकृत्तमः ।

सर्वं ज्ञानप्लवेनैव वृजिनं सन्तरिष्यसि ॥ ४-३६ ॥

Even if one is the most sinner of all sinners, one shall still cross-over the ocean of sin by the raft of self-realization

यथैधांसि समिद्धोऽग्निर्भस्मसात्कुरुतेऽर्जुन ।

ज्ञानाग्निः सर्वकर्माणि भस्मसात्कुरुते तथा ॥ ४-३७ ॥

As the blazing fire reduces wood to ashes, so does the fire of self-realization reduces all bonds of Karma to ashes.

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THE END

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