



Overview of Self-Inquiry

From my viewpoint, the traditional “Who Am I” technique of self-inquiry is not only a waste of time, but it is also a great distraction from the better practices.

Why?

- 1. It splits the mind into two, the object and a witness to be found. Both are objects and the subjective disappears. This can be overcome if the practitioner recognizes that the fake I and fake searcher are themselves observed by the ultimate witness. This witnessing is the true position of awareness or Consciousness.*
- 2. Everything in this method is on the level of mind—mental objects in the imaginal world.*
- 3. However, when the searching is strong enough, and one pointed, the imaginal world will disappear and oneness CAN happen.*
- 4. The difficulty is rarely does anyone succeed in awakening by this practice. It does not work very well; it is a beginner's method happening on the level of mind-- words. is hunting for the I Am is easily mistaken for focusing on the I Am word or concept, not the feeling I Am.*
- 5. In any event, the I thought soon disappears leaving just emptiness, and there is no longer something to guide mediation.*

This is what Michael Langford describes. He had long lost or never experienced the sense or feeling Ramana refers to as the I Am sense. When that is lost, one is just dwelling in an inner emptiness or space. Be aware though that you are aware of that space.

I spent many years in this place, contemplating emptiness with little result except repeated Samadhis with no particular point. Afterwards I'd ask, which is the real or fundamental state, that revealed in Samadhi, or the usual world that preceded it sequentially, and succeeded it afterwards? You see, the imaginal world disappeared in Samadhi, but had not been permanently transcended.

The happiest and most blissful practice happens when and if you can isolate the sense or feeling of I Am. This is not easy for most people because of the confusion in the imaginal space which contains the thought processes that ultimately direct the searching and I discovery process.

It is difficult to distinguish between the subject and the object in the imaginal space. Usually the witness of the body or even the felt 'I Am' is really only a fake observer. Both are objects. However, when you recognize that there is an observer of the witnessing process, you will know there is that, which you are, beyond the imaginal space, beyond the space that is human consciousness.

Nissargadatta:

In this spiritual hierarchy, from the grossest to the subtlest, you are the subtlest. How can this be realized? The very base is that you don't know you are, and suddenly the feeling of 'I amness' appears. The moment it appears you see space, mental space; that subtle sky-like space, stabilize there. You are that. When you are able to stabilize in that space, you are space only. When this space-like identity 'I am' disappears, the space will also disappear, there is no space. When that space-like 'I am' goes into oblivion, that is the eternal state, 'nirguna', no form, no beingness. Actually, what did happen there? This message 'I am' was no message. Dealing with this aspect, I cannot talk much because there is no scope to put it in words.

Now, at this point you can take the first person position; the mind will cease and the external world will "pop out at you," leaving what Seung Sahn and others call "That which is." What has changed is the absence of thinking. Holding onto this place whenever and wherever it arises, is practice. Thinking has created the world as separate from you.

This is really hard, because the sense of I has to be teased out of the confusion of the imaginal space which requires an intensive focus at first, a scalpel of discrimination. One has to find the sense of I am amidst all the confusing feelings and thoughts, as well as the feeling and sensing of the phenomenal world.

The phenomenal world, the world of body sense, thoughts, and emotions, is ignored and there should be only a clinging to the sense of I am as long and as often as possible. Then recognize there is that which is observing the whole process. “Fall back” into that observer and you will find peace and happiness. That is the true mark practice is correct.

You see, there is the knowledge, as Nisargadatta states, that the world and the three states are witnessed by you, the absolute, impersonal awareness, the absolute subject of one and all.

Nisargadatta:

This I Am has dawned on you and you stand apart from it as a witness with no participation in any of its activities whatsoever.

For me, it happened as a [recognition that the world, the waken and dream states were not me](#), they were merely added onto me; they were superimposed, and they were not real. Then came the thought, I have nothing to do with that; that is not me.

The saving grace of this method is that from almost the first moment of cognition or apprehending the I Am sense, one will begin to feel happy, at peace, blissful. Then the method becomes easier because you just have to follow the happiness like a road and trust the bliss to lead you the right way.

Still, this method requires a lot of energy, focus, effort not to get distracted.

You can practice this method like they do in a Zen monastery, you practice intensely and formally during several set intervals a day. For someone in the regular world with work and distractions, that could mean getting up an hour early, and sitting in two ½ hour segments with a 5 minute break in between.

Formal sitting is better than relaxed sitting, because the focus is stronger. Sitting with a group that sits in absolute silence is even better.

Then at noon, or whenever you come home from work, practice again for half and hour, and then two hours before going to sleep, you practice two half hour sessions again.

It does no good to sit for more than half an hour without a break.

The ability to practice longer and longer will come as well as the desire to practice. During non-formal practice, as often as possible, come back to sinking into the feeling of I am. Gradually (or almost immediately; it depends on circumstance), the true subject, I, will reveal itself and with that, peace and silence come, gradually spread and deepen, until one day it becomes instantaneously permanent. Teachers often refer to this as the death of the ego, but that is just words. What you are is totally beyond the ego or even practice. But you do not know that now.

I do not want to get more specific than these descriptions or it might taint your self-discovery.

Lastly, if you have no idea of what I am talking about, feel no sense of existence or presence, or no sense of I-Am, you can practice what Langford describes as awareness being aware of awareness. Ultimately you will come to this state anyway as the felt sense of I Am will disappear, but it is a far more interesting journey than dwelling in emptiness from the beginning. The I-sense can be hidden by the apprehension of emptiness and not dismantled as it would be by attending to that I sense.

I have not found Langford's description as very helpful but some do. If you can't even be aware of the sense of existence, or the sense of I am, the instruction of "Be aware of awareness" is really not very helpful as a directive for MOST, but it is for some.

The closest traditional practice to this instruction is Soto Zen, where in one just sits and turns the attention away from thinking and thoughts. Eventually, for some much longer than others, one just sits in silence and the phenomenal world will disappear, the imaginal world disappears. There is only space and awareness.

Go to a Zen center to learn how to practice this. Some Tibetan centers will practice this, but too often they get diverted into Tantric methods of Mandalas and using the imaging space for some purpose or another. This would be an extraordinary waste of time.

As you see, I urge people to go to places for formal sitting practice. Progress can be made more rapidly here if you don't get too distracted by the social aspect of group practice.

I have the highest regard for the synergy of a meditation center and unified practice, but it appears the time of the communal "meditation" center has past. Voluntary communal living around a common purpose does not attract people now. It is so hard to find people who want to know themselves as they truly are. This is a great loss.

For those of you who have the time, money and sincerity, I highly recommend going to Mt. Baldy Zen Center just outside Los Angeles. Perhaps we can do a group visit. Meditation there is very powerful, with utter stillness and silence required during Sesshin. I recommend going to Mt. Baldy at least a week ahead of a week-long Sesshin to acclimate to the environment and long meditation sitting.

Mt. Baldy does not practice Soto Zen, but Rinzai, which means koan study. However, with strong sitting the koan disappears and becomes no obstacle.

[Kyozan Joshu Sasaki Roshi](#) is about 104 years old at this point (2011). I have not seen him in years, but this is the way to go to get a fast charge in self-awareness.

[Mt. Baldy Zen Center](#)

[Hunting the I](#)
