

HUNTING THE I

Expanded Version with Hotlinks
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Successful Self-Inquiry by Edward Muzika

www.wearesentience.com



“Correct practice” of self-inquiry is so important that I feel a need to articulate its many different ways, because the “successful” methods are subtle indeed. One can practice unsuccessful self-inquiry for a long time because you have no idea of what you are looking for. Therefore, I will explain the various methods in slightly different ways hoping that one way or another will connect with those truly interested in practice.

Some people are able to feel a sense of I Am almost immediately upon introspection and others not. One is by nature, naturally introspective or not. To do self-inquiry, one either has the talent or learns it by practice. The same holds true for psychotherapy. Those who are able to look within and “see” internal, imaginal objects will do well in talk therapy, while those who lack this skill, will not. However, one can learn this skill through repeated efforts to “look within” the imaginal spaces of the mind.

The problem is, a lot of people do not experience an ‘I Am’ feeling or sensation and therefore have nothing to work with. They look “inside themselves” and find only darkness, or they find a myriad of phenomena, such as inner light displays, thoughts, images, memories, body sensations, arising energies, etc., and don’t have a clue as to which is the ‘I Am’ that is to be concentrated on. They are lost in a forest of sensations and perceptions and have no sense of I or ‘I Am’.[1]

If this is the case, Robert offered the method of asking, “Who am I?”, or “To whom do these thoughts and objects occur?” This method CAN eventually lead you to the

witness, but the weakness is that this method is totally on the level of the mind and thinking, and one has to go beyond the mind.

Thus self-inquiry has two steps: Take a look at all phenomena available to you, both inside phenomena such as thoughts and images, and outside phenomena, such as objects in the world, both while meditating and throughout the day; observe them and “play” with the phenomena. Get familiar with and explore the inner world to an extent. Then ask yourself, “Is that phenomena me, or am I apart from it?”

What we are attempting to do is find the anomaly, that which does not change, and is different from all other sensations in the sense that it is not an observed phenomena, but is in fact the observer, witness, or “looker” itself. It is the singularity around which all the objects and world are arranged.

There are many phenomena that appear to be ‘I Am’ to the inquirer at various times, such as the I thought, or ego, and such as the great Void which is experienced when you are close to awakening. Many people also find several subjects, or “watchers.” One watches thoughts as a witness, and then one becomes aware that they are watching thoughts. That is, there are two orders of witnesses.

Mostly when people first think they experience the ‘I Am’ sensation, they are really observing the energy knot that connects the body to the mind. They are not yet aware that they are apart from this phenomena, and are observing it, and that this observer is the real I. The observer or looker, or witness, is so close to oneself that we often overlook it, as the Advaitic parable of the Tenth Indian points out. Often the observer is not counted because it is not an object and is taken for granted and not found.

All these false I’s have to be witnessed, explored and played with, and discovered not to be the true I. But the ‘I Am’ sensation Maharaj talks about is the ego knot connecting the body with consciousness. This knot is not you, but you have to discover that for yourself as a direct experience and not merely as a learning from others. Once this knot is severed, everything else is plain and clear, and it is severed through continuous observation, and one discovers that that knot is being observed by the imperishable Me.

Self-inquiry is a continuous, full-time job, not restricted to formal meditation periods. Formal meditation, practiced often, is a big help as it builds introspective power. Of course, too much meditation makes the mind sluggish and stupid, which is an error.

Formal meditation ought to be at least two periods a day, with two 25-35 minute sessions, separated by a five minute rest. This can be gradually increased for those who have the time to three or four sessions, of three 25-35 minute periods.

However, the beneficial effects of building introspective power during meditation will be dissipated if the rest of the day is spent devoted to serving the world. Once one has isolated what they think to be their 'I Am', the student needs to stop several times during the day for a few minutes, and look at that 'I Am' to better understand it during everyday life. The self-awareness should become continuous.

One will discover the 'I Am' changes over time, because the real I is not being seen; it is only an object posing as the I.

Then one day one discovers the anomaly, that which never changes, which is the subject of all the myriads of the objects. Once that is clearly seen, all objects lose importance, and the seeker's "job" is to stay in, or abide in that observer, that subject, that witness, from whom all the objects of the world arise. This is a resting state. Trying to stay in that center is not really an effort. What happens is the restless mind which we identify with needs to be active, and because of that identification with the mind, "we" get active. However, the real I is always resting, and by continuously bringing the mind's attention to the looker or witness, it loses interest in going elsewhere due to the deep peace felt in the resting state.

Once the witness is discovered, one has a broad road to follow to self-realization. The false I's fall away or are dissipated. Then one's full time job is to stay in that I, abide there, and infinite peace and happiness will fall, which will draw you effortlessly into itself all the way.

How this is to be done is explained below.

Before we go into more detail about the process, we need to be clear that we can and should perform the same analysis with respect to objects in the external world.

Choose an object, such as a person, a tree, a pet sitting by a window. Observe it and at the same time look into oneself for the sense of 'I Am' and see if one feels a connection between the I Am and that object. If the object is emotionally charged, such as a loved one, there will often be felt a connection between that person and the heart. When one discovers that heart source, one can deliberately try sinking into it. This will cause an immediate increase in happiness and centeredness that will help formal meditation and lead more quickly to freedom. Then one needs to observe whether that heart source is the witness or not.

Hopefully this overview explains the whole process, and now the process will be explained in more detail.

First, the best descriptions of self-inquiry found elsewhere are in two books: [The Path of Sri Ramana, Part 1 by Sadhu Om and Michael James](#), chapters seven and eight, and the [Nisargadatta Gita by Pradeep Apte](#). The latter is a compilation by Apte of about 230 paragraphs Nisargadatta uttered about the I Am sense and self-abidance. The Path of Sri Ramana description is more like what Robert Adams taught.

The way of self-discovery taught by Robert, Ramana and Nisargadatta is to abide in the I Am, but what does this mean? What is the I Am? How do I abide in it? How do I practice self-inquiry?

Further discussion of the practice of self-remembering, or self-abidance can be found in James' book, "[Happiness and the Art of Being](#)," especially the latter chapters.

One other book I recommend that provides an alternate method for abiding in I Am is that by [Michael Langford, "The Most Rapid and Direct Means to Eternal Bliss."](#) He created this method because he could not follow the method described in this book of following the I and abiding in the I Am.

Michael writes that he practiced various self-concepts of self-inquiry for 27 years with poor results. He was no more self-realized than when he started.

I want his experience to make one thing clear, self-inquiry is complex because there are so many inner experiences and finding the subject, which then is rested in, can

be quite difficult. It certainly is not a simplistic tool like using the “Who Am I?” question over and over again. Michael assiduously practiced self-inquiry for 27 years, read all the books, visited all the teachers, yet had not gotten anywhere. I can say the same about myself for over 20 years.

Nor is awakening merely finding out that there is no ego, and no object that the I thought refers to. These are still Kindergarten and first grade stuff.

Michael never was able to latch onto a feeling ‘I Am’. He described a method and concept that being aware of awareness itself is abiding in the I Am; the method he discovered, or I should say he rediscovered, appears to be a Soto Zen meditation called Shikantaza. He may deny his method is Shikantaza because he believes he discovered the awareness watching awareness method of self-inquiry, but his method is no more or less than Shikantaza, sitting in silence, doing nothing. This is not easy. It takes a while. The mind has to settle and become quiet. Often years have to pass before this quiet sitting is possible, because beginners invariably expect immediate results. If they don't get them, they often give up or go to the next teacher or technique. Beginners don't like quiet, they want action.

However, as Robert often said, "Persistence is everything."

One other main self-inquiry method is to tease out the real 'I Am' feeling and abide there. This is generally not easy either depending on many factors. Personally, I think this is the best way and I will discuss it some more.

If one practices Shikantaza first, and attains many, many samadhis over a long period, one gradually finds release. However, the practice must continue because the I Am has not been killed. The I Am still resides as a remnant of the personal you. The samadhis become like special walled off states, and one wonders which is the real, the samadhi states of oneness, or the waking/dream self that one always returns to. They are walled off in the sense that no matter how many samadhis one experiences, the same sense of human, body-bound beingness always returns afterwards.

The fastest way to kill the you, the I Am, is the abiding in the I Am as taught by Ramana and Nisargadatta. When this is done, the I dies forever; with Shikantaza there is a too early identification with the totality of consciousness and the Void,

rather than cutting the knot, which is the energy nexus between the mind and body, and between that nexus and deeper levels of being, such as the causal body experiences of true nothingness.

If release is found by the first method (Shikantaza/Langford), for it to become a permanent release, the I Am must be found again and followed. This is extremely difficult if one has dwelt in emptiness for years. It is hard then to find a self-sense for one has usually identified with emptiness through repeated Shikantaza meditations.

Many people have written to me that they were unable to find a personal sense of I even after years of thinking and meditation. Many have dwelled in emptiness for years and begin to feel angry because they have found no happiness or release. They have skipped the destruction of the I Am process/complex which means it is still alive but unfelt, covered by the focus on emptiness. They have become lost in emptiness and attained nothing.

You cannot skip steps. It is best to start with following the I Am and complete that task. Then abiding in the emptiness of the divine witness, the absolute, is effortless and permanent.

I once saw a book entitled “Hunting the I.” This to me is a perfect description of the self-inquiry process, hunting around in the internal phenomena that comprise our inner world, identifying the I, then latching onto that first-person sense.

This becomes complex because there is the 'I word' or 'I thought,' which is the central lynch pin of the network of thoughts and images we take to be the real world. This I-thought is not the same as the sense of one's personal existence, the 'I Am' sense which is much like a tactile sense associated with the body, and mostly centered around the heart, or sitting like some emptiness existing behind the body, or above the body.

Naturally to be aware of this already requires a good working ability to internalize and introspect subjective phenomena. This means either one has an innate ability, or one acquires this discrimination through years of practice.

I, being kind of dense, required years of practice. I was always introspective in a sense, easily lost in an inner world of thoughts and emotions, but that inner world was never open and spacious. I learned to open that inner, dark, subjectivity through opening the Third Eye by becoming aware of a light between the eyebrows and ever expanding that light downwards into the earth and then upwards and outwards, revealing an imaginal space filled with light, the so-called light of consciousness. But the problem was I spent years there in that lighted void space, thinking it was reality, recognizing I was still separate and witnessing the void, but expecting, at some point, a feeling of identification with the Void. It never happened. I was far beyond the void, but was caught in ignorance. I was waiting to find the absolute sense of subjectivity by continuing to look into the Void.

During years of self-investigation, one will find legions of internal experiences which one might misidentify as I Am. **Practice and persistence, as well as limiting oneself to reading just a very few books and listening to the guidance of a teacher is the best and fastest way out of this internal jungle.**

Is practice necessary for self-realization? Definitely; yes, most definitely.

This is where the concept of hunting the I becomes a workable method.

One looks within to find the I Am. Every few days, weeks or months one discovers something new that they believe might be the “true” I Am: the subject.

Sometimes it is the self-luminous light of consciousness, sometimes illuminated space-like internal emptiness, sometimes it will be a feeling wholly based on the body sense. Some will feel the sense of I Am as a sensation in the heart area of the self-perception of the feeling of the body. Others believe that they are aware of the body as an internal visual sense which is really an object in imaginal space and thus unreal. They will discover the inner sense of infinite (or non-infinite, limited) inner space and think they are that. They are not that.

One keeps exploring with the mistaken idea that at some point the I will be found, without realizing it is the I that is looking. The subject is not to be found, because the subject can never become an object. What one discovers is that all that one sees, experiences and knows is really an object experienced or known by the subject, which cannot be found.

This search can go on fruitlessly for years, for the self is not a thing, object, state, energy or anything that can be found or experienced. You may already understand this.

What to do?

At this point you must become aware that there is something that is aware of the self-inquiry processes. That “something” is the Self or the ultimate observer.

Then the “new” practice becomes looking at the looker, not at some body sensation or false I in imaginal space. You are already aware of the looker, but not that the looker is the true you. You have been caught in the misunderstanding that the looker may find the true Self, when in fact, the looker is the true Self. The looking “for” is the problem; the looker is already complete and at rest.

Therefore, join the looker.

So there are two steps: locate the looker, as the subject of sensations, and try to play with it to observe all its manifestations, then to rest in the looker, relax and let the looker look, and become the looker only.

When this is understood you have a clear way to abide in the self: just look towards the apparently internal sense of looking, not for a nexus, or an emptiness, or a heart sensation or any other sensation or experience. These are preliminary practices and steps before you discover the looker. Then after discovery, sink into the looker, the subject, and become the subject.

This sounds simple, but in fact the inner world is so filled with thoughts, objects, states, experiences, voids, emptiness, energies, and beingnesses, that clearly locating the “looker” is not all that easy. Just read the [Autobiography of a Jnani](#), and you can see how intricate the internal experiences are, and how difficult it is to find the fundamental state.

You need to understand that what you will find is all that you had considered yourself to be, is not you, the looker, but objects, processes, thoughts and energies that you had previously taken as being you.

In a way, initially the looker often feels like just another sensation, another internal object; but it is not a physical sensation as is awareness of a body sensation or awareness of a thought.

The practice is to turn inwards towards the source, the looker, and look for it.

The process of locating phenomena, examining them and playing with them until you know them fully, and then eliminating them as the looker can be longer or shorter. This is the true self-inquiry process, not the one often referred to as mindlessly repeating, "Who am I?"

I have no idea of what you will experience; it appears different with different people.

But ultimately you will understand (see, experience, apprehend, discover, know) that there is no looking inside or outside. There is just one consciousness. The intentional effort of looking within was to counterbalance a lifelong habit of looking outwards and to develop introspective discrimination to eliminate internal and external objects and phenomena as the true you.

I want to emphasize that the phrase "look inward" is a lie. There is no inward--or outward. This distinction only lasts while you think you are a body. The phrase "look inwards" almost sounds like a command to look into the inner emptiness of imagination, as inside the body. It is a bad instruction. It reinforces the idea of the reality of inner and outer, inside the skin and outside.

The world, your inner state, your searching, your imagination about what self-realization is like, will all disappear and you will understand that everything you have experienced until that moment is imagination. You will be free of all concept and imagination. In this you must abide for a long while, but self-abidance itself does not become continuous for a long time. It is a matter of persistence alone, and that only arises after a sustaining passion for truth becomes the most important issue to you.

Then, at some point, “everything” will disappear as unreal and you will be left in silent mind existence. It is hard to explain this, but this does not disappear as if you floated in endless aware space, but rather the world will cease to exist as an apparent object. The I will disappear as an apparent subject too. There will only be oneness with no separate observer of the world or self.

Later even that will disappear as one realizes there has been witnessing even of this whole process in the background. There is this thingless "thing" that has cognized this entire process, has cognized the body, personal self, the world, the waking state, the dream state, and also the process of understanding.

Regarding this “state” one can say nothing because no attributes exist, and to state attributes or what it is like will lead you astray from the real practice. This is not a state; it is that which observes all the states.

Now, this is one way of explaining the awakening process. Michael Langford articulated his way, and both Robert and Ramana articulated their methods. Notice that Robert, Ramana and Nisargadatta rarely talked about the “experience” of finality, only the method and Advaita philosophy that entirely obscures the goal by adding a conceptual impediment.

Ditto Langford and every other teacher. They provided only distracting phenomenology and philosophy, artificial stories to lead you to their articulation of a method and your practicing it.

I do not want to lead you too far astray, but all these methods are what I called before, “massaging the ego,” and themselves have nothing to do with the finality, yet to apparently practice is a must for all, even for those who claim no method or practice is possible or needed. It is needed to increase discrimination.

I do want to repeat that repeated bringing attention to the I Am, to the apparent subject, is a doing only as long as the I Am is taken as an object of meditation, such as when focusing on the ego knot connecting body and mind which most people take as the ‘I Am’. However, the real subject, the I, is not an object. It is YOU, the observer, beyond all phenomena and the world, and is a state of not doing anything, just watching. It is the resting state of being. The apparent doing of bringing the

mind to bear on the I, really is a supplication of grace, for the I will take over and end the seeker's seeking. The I is the zero point of no movement and eternal rest. The apparent activity involved in abiding in that I, is really a resting, not a doing. It is discovering your nondoing, resting Self.

Abiding in the I Am, is really a practice in doing nothing, but it is successful only if you are truly aware of the real I, the witness, the looker, and you can only be sure after a long and intensive practice of investigating the mind. Without that learned discrimination, you can be surrendering to yet another object posing as the I, such as the ego. Therefore, beware of those who say no practice is necessary. It is not necessary or even possible for one who has discovered the true I, the resting state, but doing nothing in terms of practice before becoming aware of what that zero point is, is useless and foolish.

MY OWN METHOD: DOING NOTHING

Robert taught the "Who am I?" self-inquiry process only because SOME people felt they needed a method or way to occupy their mind. All methods, Robert taught, lead to silence. Deep silence, the "deepest" is not only where the absolute is revealed, but also is the absolute.

All of the above "methods" were those I practiced for years with no real change. They resulted in all kinds of experiences and new understandings, but there was no release or death of the I-ness. Only many little deaths.

This leads me to an observation. Most practitioners are too much wrapped up in their experiences and explaining them, rather than persisting in going inward. It is as if they can't take the boredom of self-inquiry, and turn it into an intellectual discussion with the guru or teacher. They want their old "reality" of pseudo human contact with the guru, while the guru is only interested in taking them beyond anything they ever experienced or imagined.

This is time wasted, especially the time spent that so many people seem to, to understand an experience they had ten or twenty years ago. It is as if they think they can get that experience back, that is the end of their seeking, bringing them to rest.

Any experience that is not repeatable and frequent is worthless.

When I met Robert I just surrendered to him after about year two. I knew deeply that any method I practiced was only in the mind and could not destroy the personal I-ness. I was just massaging the ego--the mixture of imaginal "gases" I call the imaginal space or world. The surrender is an approach to the resting state. "I give up; not mine Lord, but Thine."

But, even this trust and surrender had not led to release by the time Robert left Los Angeles. When Robert left for Sedona I felt completely alone, abandoned.

However, the process of getting Robert packed and moved was quite chaotic and nerve racking, so much that I started just relaxing and listening to Eastern sacred music, especially that of Muktananda and Yogananda to escape the tension and

because I didn't know what else to do. This movement was forced on me, I could do no other.

I would just lay on a couch for hour after hour, day after day, week after week, listening to and being carried away by the music, thoroughly enjoying the unfolding show of consciousness within, the forms, the thoughts, the inner and out sensations. My body relaxed most of its tension. I felt I was sinking into myself. I did almost nothing except eat and do some walking. I began to feel blissfully happy. I was becoming totally nothing, but not in the Zen way of the Void, but in the personal way of being carried away by the bliss and happiness of chanting. I was relaxing into beingness, pulled inside by the happiness of doing nothing except being with all internal and external phenomena.

Then one day, an awakening happened in the form of the shower experience I describe on www.wearesentience.com and call [the first awakening.\[2\]](#)

I can hardly recommend this to anyone else. I loved sacred music and chanting. I also loved dwelling in emptiness and silence when listening to the chanting. Therefore, few would benefit, were they not also so disposed. They would just get restless.

One similar method that might work better for you would be to take all of Robert's recorded talks, put them on an MP3 player, an iPod, an external speaker system, or an MP3 or iPod playing clock radio, and just listen to them. Just listen to the talks whenever you have any time. Have sacred music in the background.

All of Robert's talks are always directed towards getting you to enter silence. His talks will repeatedly bring you to silence. The music will/could cause bliss. Both together allow complete relaxation, a melting of the sense of self--individuality--into a complete sense of happiness. You might say this is the easy way, but only if you are ready for it. Years of intense practice are usually a prerequisite, because one is used to using the mind to discover or create anything. When the mind is clearly seen as something that will not work to complete the task of awakening, there is a profound relaxation and sinking into deeper level of Self, as Rajiv talks about in [Autobiography of a Jnani](#).

By the way, the alarm on some clock radios can be set to pick a specific talk by Robert or a random one. You might want to be awakened by his instructions on how to practice self inquiry.

If you read the biographies or autobiographies of the great teachers, each will describe a different process and may actually recommend processes which were different from their own because they see the idiosyncrasy of their own processes, and like me, see that the way I did it would not work for all.

Probably one "method" closest to my "spontaneous method," I describe as "falling backwards into the self."

Lots of people identify the "feeling" of self, or "I Am," as the feeling of the totality of the body. Actually, it is not, but it feels that way initially to many.

The method is to feel that sense of self as initially manifest as the body sense, and then imagine or feel yourself falling backwards into it. Falling backwards by relaxing more and more into the comfort of those apparent body sensations. It is quite blissful and settling.

Sometimes, there is a sense of a dark presence behind oneself, which is identified as one's resting state. If you feel that strongly, imaginatively relax and fall backwards into that dark emptiness. The relaxation is the same.

Almost all of these methods will produce useless experiences and understanding that will go away but which might seem world shaking at the time. So, don't stop. Keep going.

I want to be quite clear: None of these methods will produce awakening/enlightenment/self-realization or whatever you want to call this state that you presently do not know yourself. All methods are on the level of mind.

Long practice of a method does not produce awakening, but, you might say, allows it to happen. I think that Nisargadatta said it best when he said someday the I Am lets you go.

However, all in all, I would first recommend people download the [Nisargadatta Gita](#), print it out, put it in a 3 ring binder and "practice" by reading a few paragraphs every morning. Then reflect on those words, then meditate on the sense of I Am. This is a most excellent meditation manual, a wide road to release.

PART 2

LOCATING THE I AM SENSE

For some reason some people cannot locate an I-sense. Mostly this is due to thinking that the I-sense is something mysterious and special, a special state to be newly acquired versus something we feel all the time[3].

This is entirely wrong. The I-sense, according to Ramana and my own experience, is open to all if you don't make it difficult.

If you can't find it, it makes things more difficult because you are stuck with staying in the void, emptiness, oneness state, and are bypassing the personal I, which is part of I Am, which will always cause a problem in the future for lack of attention.

Nisargadatta uses the term 'I Am' in different ways.

Sometimes he says I Am is the KNOWLEDGE that you exist. Sometimes he equates it with a sensation of I Am-ness.

It is the latter that some of the neo Advaitins ask you to explore. Find the sense that you exist. If you didn't have a sense of existence somewhere, you would not be acting or reacting in the apparent world.

For those who cannot find it easily, it is mostly because they are looking for something special, but it is quite ordinary. Sometimes it is experienced as a tingling energy when you first turn your attention inside your body to the heart or abdominal area. Focus on the energy and it grows and changes. Just stay with it now that you found it and the rest just flows from that attention. Sometimes it is felt as a "presence" near the heart or abdomen, or a "fullness," or in many other ways as a quasi-body phenomenon.

If you still can't find something you are willing to label "I Am," you can more easily get a glimpse by just sitting watching people at a coffee house, at a bookstore or at a mall. Do nothing else. Just look at any random person, perhaps a sexy woman or man, or a pathetic and ill looking person carrying or walking a dog.

Look inside towards the heart area. What do you feel? Is there a reaction or tugging or energy at this area aimed at that person? Sexual, loving, disgust? If so, that is a part of you responding silently, feelingly, to the scene, the object. That tug is part of the I Am. Just continue this exercise until the I Am is more readily available.

Another way to the I Am, is to wait until something happens in day to day activities, where an emotional reaction is elicited. Feel the emotional/movement in you. That is part of the I Am sense too. That is the thing we talk about when we say "I am angry," or "I am in love." In fact, the sense of vulnerability, hurt and love are all strongly connected to the I Am sensation. Stay with it once you find it.

During sleep you have no knowledge that you are. Suddenly you awaken, and suddenly you know you exist, although usually that does not come to foremost attention unless you have been practicing a while. That is, along with consciousness, the knowledge that you exist arises. Later, after spending much time with meditation, you will realize that the knowledge that you exist happens to something that is "you" in a way, that is beyond existence. The knowledge that you exist is incorrect. It is consciousness that exists and that consciousness, and the knowledge of existence comes to you, who IS even before the knowledge that you exist arises. That is, you are before existence and consciousness.

Besides the knowledge that you exist, and besides the I Am sensation, there is the concept that you exist as some separate entity in the realm of consciousness existence. That is, you assume that the word 'I' refers to something that exists within consciousness as an objective existence of some sort, much like Alice, Fred, Tom, Dick and Sheila appear to exist as separate individuals animating a separate body. The I-word supposedly stands in for that entity as a proper noun.

In me, that was the first to go. I saw that the I word was only a mental entity and there was no other semi permanent mental or personal entity that the I-word pointed to. The apparent I did not point to anything. I was only emptiness, and the emptiness contained everything, and everything was only apparently existing objects that only had existence in my mind. But it was no longer "my" mind, but the one mind. I had been only loosely linked thoughts in the one field of consciousness, until I discovered that I was that one field of consciousness and the thoughts were meaningless and transient.

This can be a very happy (or initially frightening since there is no longer anyone in charge) place. But it is not real. It is only constantly changing mental phantasy, as is the I Am sense. But until you can locate the I Am sense, the concept I, the word object I, and see all are empty, changing, with no permanent existence or status, you cannot maintain the state of oneness, which becomes transcendental knowledge even if the oneness state leaves.

There are many ways to get at the I or I sense that I have just pointed out. Once you get a taste, just keep it up.

There is the word I, There is the concept I. There is the I-sense of I Amness, a sensation. There is the knowledge that I exist. There are my emotional reactions to people, insults and other external events that elicit a heart-centered reaction and movement. Then there is the oneness state, which is after the personal I dissolves.

Then there is THAT which stands behind all this phenomenal/manifest stuff, which observes it all, and whose existence cannot be known in the way everything else is known, but can only be known by being it, which is a different kind of knowing altogether.

When I first started practicing in the 1960s, I followed the Ramana/Zen way of just repeatedly asking, "Who am I?" and looking for that I-source. I always ended up staring into the Void from which thoughts emerged and disappeared in to. But I never found an I-sense that way. The Void properly should be explored as the non-essential aspects of I-Am-ness dissolve into nothingness under the focus of awareness. To bypass the various levels of I Am, including the personal, means endless problems and obstacles later, such as retaining ego level problems of rage, dependency, too much romantic love, etc., long after deep meditative states have revealed the primary presence of Nothingness, bliss and happiness. Something always comes up to disturb the happiness and bliss.

PART 3

YOUR MIND IS NOT YOUR FRIEND

Many who are attracted to Advaita or Buddhism do so because of the rich intellectual traditions of both. But this is a trap. Your mind is not your friend as Robert used to say. You can't "figure your way out" of the conceptual prison that your mind has created. The mind cannot "see" outside the mind. Freedom can come only when you leave the entire conceptual framework behind.

U.G. Krishnamurti used to say something to that effect also. I think the quote goes, "Mind is not the instrument..." to find freedom.

Rinzai Zen was invented to confuse and perplex that mind so that "TRUTH" of No-Mind could peak through the conceptual map of mind. The koan was meant to bring all thinking to a dead halt, and encourage a no mind solution to the koan or any life problem.

Robert also used to say that you have no freedom whatsoever except to turn inwards. All is predetermined except for your ability to escape from the illusion by turning inward and begin to find the witness.

Everything I write is aimed to turn you away from any kind of teachings, and towards advice on attaining freedom by turning inwards. Then it is all so simple.

I usually avoid referring to the work of Michael Langford because I believe his method of Awareness Watching Awareness is incomplete, it does not impact the personal level of I Am, and any emptiness and Samadhi states attained will not be permanent, but will be undermined by unhealed defects in the ego structure.

However, [the first few chapters of his book](#) are wonderful as he shows how 99.9% of all seekers avoid attaining freedom because the ego undermines all spiritual efforts by creating questions, doubts and speculations that destroy the effectiveness of any spiritual practice.

In fact, a defective ego does the same thing to the person in everyday life by undermining any effective focus and action with doubt, "what ifs," "should I's," and

useless speculations.

He is entirely right that effective practice requires perseverance, focus, and lots of timely dedication. It also requires a belief in yourself and in the method of introspection and self-inquiry. That comes with practice.

Look at it this way, how long does it take a person, even with great talent to become a professional tennis player or baseball player? A week, a month, a year? No, it takes years of training.

Now the mind is even more subtle than the body, and the training can take even longer. So don't give up when you have failed to find an I Am that is stable after just a few days or weeks or months of practice. If you are not finding it, try something else.

The belief in yourself will come when you begin to have results. But it takes time, patience, and intelligence.

Try something different. If you have been looking into yourself with your "visual" sense, looking into the blank void, stop it. Instead, probe inside yourself with your tactile or emotional senses. That is, "look" with your feelings for your sense of being, not with a visual sense concentrated on the clear void, or look with your touch sense, to detect some movement or entity inside your chest or abdomen. Some first find the phenomena of inner light between their eyes, and concentrating on it allows it to expand and over months or years expand into the clear light of the Void. In this, all of consciousness seems empty and contains all objects and thoughts and is seen to be self illumined. But this is not the I Am. Don't get too distracted by the beautiful Void experiences as did I.

Be intelligent and increasingly subtle. Watch what you feel and see. Try effort, then try no effort. Try asking "Who am I?," then ask "Where am I?." Feel for your heart center. Feel in your abdomen. "Look" inside your head for light, feel for the background to fall back into. Be creative, be intelligent.

You need to recognize that the way you have been proceeding now has failed due to doubts and too much thinking, self-arguing, arguing with the teachings or method. There is a constant fighting by the ego (which only appears to exist and after

awakening you see it never existed, nor was there ever a struggle to awaken) to avoid effective practice that will kill the ego. So be subtle and creative.

Just look at the many questions from seekers posted on this blog. Some oppose the teachings, find contradictions in them, question apparent contradictions between what Ramana said at one time and Nisargadatta said at another, or what I wrote three years ago to one student, versus what I write now to another student in an entirely different situation.

These are desperate acts of the ego to find a reason not to meditate or introspect. These doubts are all on the level of mind, and nothing deep or liberating will happen on this level.

Others complain they can't find the I Am sense and become desperate and ask what they should do. I always say, read the [Nisargadatta Gita](#) every morning, read chapters 7 and 8 of [The Path of Sri Ramana](#), read [Hunting the I](#), and continue to practice. You will not learn how to hit .400 in a few weeks, and what you are trying to accomplish--finding total freedom--is far more rare than becoming a .400 hitter.

Really, it is all so easy: Just turn your attention around and find the I Am sense, or the I Thought, or the witness. Do this for five or ten years and watch what happens. If you are lucky you will reach freedom in three years as did Nisargadatta, or 27 years as it took me because I got distracted so many times, or when I was practicing, I had the wrong instructions.

Or, maybe you will never go free, like 99.9% of seekers who get exhausted and who become discouraged after a few months or years. Yet just the correct practice of abiding in the I-sense brings great happiness.

Don't expect instant success.

PART 4

STOP THINKING, STOP WOBBLING

About every other Satsang, Robert would tell us, "Your mind is not your friend."

Often he'd stop in the middle of a talk and just say "Stop thinking" as loudly as he could, two or three times. But he couldn't speak very loudly due to Parkinson's.

Seung Sahn Soen Sa used to tell me all the time, mainly because I was always thinking too much, "You must become very dumb, dumb as a brick." He would also say, "Go straight ahead," meaning don't constantly try to figure things out with your mind even including the correct practice.

In Sesshin at Mt. Baldy you do not speak for seven days except to Roshi or when given work instructions. Everything is silence.

But so many of you who read this are trying to figure things out with your mind. You ask what is the best practice? Am I doing this right? What about what Ramana said one time? Nisargadatta said xxxxx at one time, what do you think about that?

Your mind is always stopping you from getting deeper than mind. You are deeper than your mind and even deeper than consciousness, but until you stop following the lead of your mind, you will never get below mind, you will never find freedom.

I did all that self-doubt, self-checking, got distracted, worried about making money, employment, played endlessly with philosophical and spiritual concepts, and just plain dawdled for 27 years. I could have done it in half the time if I hadn't "wobbled" so much.

Therefore, based on my own experience, I urge you to stop thinking. Just get hold of the [Nisargadatta Gita](#), download it, print it out and read it every morning and evening. Then sit and ponder the meaning. Then sit as strongly as possible, find the I Am feeling, and dwell in it, abide in it, immerse your attention in it. If you do it strongly and continuously, in a very short time you will begin to feel happy, and all your questions will begin to go away.

Just go straight ahead with that practice.

It is a matter of persistence and focus.

All the experiences you have along the way are irrelevant, meaningless distractions. Just follow the deepening peace, the deepening I Am until the I Am disappears.

At this point you are where Rajiv was near the middle of [Autobiography of a Jnani](#). This is when "self-discovery" becomes really, really interesting. But until you reach this point, just follow the I Am. Stop checking to see if you are making progress by comparing what I or anyone said about anyone's understanding or progress.

It is all up to you, your focus, your dedication, your persistence, and not getting distracted.

[1] I do find it strange that so many of the neo Advaitins don't find anything inside when they look. They only state that they found no I. To me this seems to mean either they were not capable of introspection, or they ignored all the inner phenomena or lumped them altogether as One consciousness. In any event, their description of their inner worlds seem awfully barren.

[2] This is the same awakening that the neo Advaita teachers talk about, seeing that there is no ego entity, leading to seeing that there is only one consciousness. There no longer is an I and an external world. There is no inner and outer. There is only one consciousness, and the world as we had known it disappears and is seen to be concept only. This is not the final awakening. This is still the first grade.

[3] There are also other reasons. Often the unconscious mind buries painful memories in "secret" storerooms in the unconscious. Those storerooms of pain are totally connected to the conscious sense of I-Am, so that when the sense of I Am is approached in introspection, many defense mechanisms are activated to hide the I Am. In these cases, a person needs to do psychotherapeutic introspection first, before true self-inquiry can take place. This is best done with a good psychotherapist. If none are available, go ahead with self inquiry, but be aware if emotional pain arises, **THAT MUST BECOME THE FOCUS OF YOUR INVESTIGATION UNTIL THE PAIN IS CLEARLY SEEN THROUGH**. There is no need to eliminate it entirely, but there is a need to deal with it and know it is there.