

Self Inquiry

Date / Time

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

Thoughts? Heart? Body? None of the Above

PURPOSE/EFFECTS

This is a meditation technique to get enlightened, i.e. “self realization.” By realizing who you are, the bonds of suffering are broken. Besides this goal, self-inquiry delivers many of the same benefits as other meditation techniques, such as relaxation, enhanced experience of life, greater openness to change, greater creativity, a sense of joy and fulfillment, and so forth.

METHOD

Summary

Focus your attention on the feeling of being “me,” to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

Long Version

1. Sit in any comfortable meditation posture.
2. Allow your mind and body to settle.
3. Now, let go of any thinking whatsoever.
4. Place your attention on the inner feeling of being “me.”
5. If a thought does arise (and it is probable that thoughts will arise on their own), ask yourself to whom this thought is occurring. This returns your attention to the feeling of being “me.”

Continue this for as long as you like.

This technique can also be done when going about any other activity.

HISTORY

Self inquiry or atma-vichara is an ancient Indian meditation technique. A version of it can be found, for example, in the [Katha Upanishad](#), where it says:

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Self Inquiry

*The primeval one who is hard to perceive,
wrapped in mystery, hidden in the cave,
residing within the impenetrable depth—
Regarding him as god, an insight
gained by inner contemplation,
both sorrow and joy the wise abandon. [K.U. 2.12]*

Here the “primeval one” is the Self, which is to be contemplated. The “cave” is the body, in which the feeling of the self arises.

Self inquiry was popularized in the 20th century by the great Indian saint Ramana Maharshi, who made it the centerpiece of his teaching.

CAUTIONS

Many people misunderstand the self-inquiry technique to mean that the person should sit and ask themselves the question, “Who am I?” over and over. This is an incorrect understanding of the technique. The questions “Who am I” or “To whom is this thought occurring?” are only used when a thought arises, in order to direct attention back to the feeling of being “me.” At other times the mind is held in silence.

NOTES

The Sanskrit term atma-vichara can also be translated as “self investigation” or “self reflection.” Due to Ramana Maharshi, the translation “self inquiry” has become standard.

Some notes on the technique, from [Wikipedia](#):

This practice of Self-attention or awareness of the ‘I’-thought is a gentle technique, which bypasses the usual repressive methods of controlling the mind. It is not an exercise in concentration, nor does it aim at suppressing thoughts; it merely invokes awareness of the source from which the mind springs. The method and goal of self-enquiry is to abide in the source of the mind and to be aware of what one really is by withdrawing attention and interest from what one is not. In the early stages effort in the form of transferring attention from the thoughts to the thinker is essential, but once awareness of the ‘I’-feeling has been firmly established, further effort is counter-productive. From then on it is more a process of being than doing, of effortless being rather than an effort to be.

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thank you for your mindfulness practice

May I continue to look deeply into
my mind, my heart and body.

May I see things and meet things
AS THEY ARE

and may this clear and sustained knowing free me
**FOR THE SAKE OF
ALL BEINGS.**

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