

Self-inquiry: East and West

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Who am I? This is a question about the small self or ego, which is associated with a name; e.g., Bill, Jane, Bob, Sue, etc. The ego is a psychological construct that is both dynamic and self-referential. It is formed as a kernel within consciousness that forms during childhood development. The ego masks awareness of the larger consciousness from which it formed. Ego identifies with the body/mind that is the receptacle for embodied consciousness (local consciousness) that is projected by the unified field of Consciousness (non-local Consciousness). It consists of a narrative that ties together various stories related to but not necessarily true representations of experience. It is dynamic because it requires ongoing articulation by the memories and interpretation of those memories (stories) that make up our narrative or fictive-self (ego). In fact, there is a special brain network called the default network that feeds a steady stream of reinforcing memories and thoughts to ego whenever it isn't actively engaged in the external world. Our true Self is the larger consciousness within all of us that is an extension of the unified field of Consciousness, from which all of physical reality arises. The ego is said to be self-referential because, while all operations flow from unified Consciousness, most of us have no experience of Consciousness and so, when the body/mind acts, the question arises as to the source of the action. The fictive-self (ego) is created and maintained in part to answer this question; i.e., I acted. Thus, a psychological construct is mistaken for essential being or Self.

East: Sri Ramana Maharshi:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N38ZTMWJYaE&list=PLrwn66BgGr2auI4xhSWKImjFpTDw6ecjK&index=5)

[v=N38ZTMWJYaE&list=PLrwn66BgGr2auI4xhSWKImjFpTDw6ecjK&index=5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N38ZTMWJYaE&list=PLrwn66BgGr2auI4xhSWKImjFpTDw6ecjK&index=5)

Q: Is there any use to reading books for those seeking Self-realization?

A: All the texts say that in order to gain release, one should render the mind quiescent; therefore, their conclusive teaching is that the mind should be rendered quiescent. Once this has been understood there is no need for endless reading. In order to quieten the mind one has only to inquire within oneself what one's Self is; how could this search be done in books?

Q: What is the path of inquiry for understanding the nature of the mind?

A: That which arises in thought as "I" is the mind. By the inquiry, "Who am I?", the thought, "Who am I?" will destroy other thoughts (or What or Where for Who).

Q: How might one consistently hold on to the thought, "Who am I?"

A: When other thoughts arise, one should not pursue them but should inquire, "To whom do they arise?" As each thought arises, one should inquire with diligence, "To whom has this thought arisen?" The answer will be in the form of "To me." To this one should inquire, "Who am I?" The mind will go back to its source. With regular repetition, the mind will develop the skill of staying in its source.

Q: Are there no other means for making the mind quiescent?

A: Other than inquiry, there are no adequate means. Other techniques such as meditation on the breath can aid the mind in being quiet but will not stop the mind.

Ramana Maharshi's basic process for self-inquiry is to question every thought that arises that is extraneous to focused attention on a task. For example, one would not necessarily question thoughts related to repairing a door or trying to puzzle out how to improve the gas mileage in one's automobile. One would question thoughts related to how one isn't appreciated for one's effort to repair the door or thoughts about one's spouse's driving habits being a major reason for poor gas mileage by the family car..

The basic process for questioning taken from the above Q&A is:

1. Ask yourself, silently or aloud, "For whom does this thought arise?"
2. Your answer should be in the form of "For me."
3. Your response to the answer is, "Who am I?"

A simplified version of the above collapses steps 1 & 2 into a single step:

1. Respond to a thought with, "This thought arises for me."
2. Follow this observation with, "Who am I?"

Another version of the two-step procedure is to substitute your name (Bob, Sue, etc.) for the personal pronouns. This can produce an even simpler procedure:

1. Respond to a thought with, "A thought arising for Bob."
2. Followed by, "Who is Bob?"

West: Dr. Richard Moss:

<http://richardmoss.com/about-richard/media-press-room/>

Richard Moss has developed a tool for working on self-inquiry that he refers to as the *Mandala of Being*. This technique can be viewed as a variation on the self-inquiry approach described above. The mandala places present awareness at the center. This is a state some refer to as *being in the now* and I've previously written about as the *natural mind*. The mandala has a vertical line that can be thought of as a time line and is anchored at the bottom with the label "Past" and at the top with "Future." It also has an horizontal line that can be thought of as a line of separation and is anchored on the left with "Me" and on the right with "You." In the latter case, "You" covers everything that isn't included in "Me" and could be people, places, things, organizations, events, etc. For this reason my personal preference would to label this anchor point "Other."

The way that one uses the mandala is to monitor and classify thoughts. Dr. Moss says that when we are not focused in the spacious present, there are only four "places" or combinations of those places that we can escape to, and those are the anchor points on the mandala. Instead of using the term "thoughts," he uses the term "story." Thus, one can be distracted from being present in the now by: Me stories, You stories, Future stories, or Past stories or combinations, such as Past Me stories. Whenever one catches one's thoughts (self-talk) not centered on the present, the procedure is to label the type of story or thought one is caught up in and then refocus on the present. In addition, he suggests that you make sure that as you return to a present focus that you regulate your breathing so that it is relaxed and rhythmic, check for tension in the abdominal area and relax it if there is tension, and focus your awareness in the body by placing your attention on the sensation in some body part. His suggested part is usually your hands, but the feet or face or shoulders should work just as well. This technique also has the effect of rendering the mind quiescent. His process is essentially:

1. Monitor and classify any self-talk that is taking place.
2. Refocus attention on the present.
3. Monitor and return to a relaxed awareness of embodiment.

These two approaches lend themselves to being combined into a single technique. One could incorporate Richard Moss's mandala with Ramana Maharshi's observation of thoughts arising into awareness so that the nature of the thought (or story) is noted. Further, one could then follow Maharshi's "Who" question with Moss' refocus on the present and return to awareness of embodiment. The combined process might go something like this:

1. Ask yourself, silently or aloud, "For whom does this (Me, You, Past, or Future story or thought) arise?"
2. Your answer should be in the form of "For me."
3. Your response to the answer is, "Who am I?", followed by:
 - a. Refocusing attention on the present.
 - b. Monitoring and returning to a relaxed awareness of embodiment.

A simplified version of the above collapses steps 1 & 2 into a single step:

1. Respond to a thought with, "This (Me, You, Past, or Future story or thought) arises for me."
2. Follow this observation with, "Who am I?", followed by:
 - a. Refocusing attention on the present.
 - b. Monitoring and returning to a relaxed awareness of embodiment.

Another version of the two-step procedure is to substitute your name (Bob, Sue, etc.) for the personal pronouns. This can produce an even simpler procedure:

1. Respond to a thought with, "A (Me, Other, Past, or Future story or thought) arises for Sue."
2. Followed by, "Who is Sue?", and then:
 - a. Refocus attention on the present.
 - b. Monitor and return to a relaxed awareness of embodiment.

Self-inquiry is not a meditation technique, at least not in the usual sense. The requirement is that you monitor your thoughts all day, every day and use the self-inquiry or refocusing or combination technique whenever you find yourself caught up in ego thoughts or stories. This technique can be combined with meditation and may be helpful in getting the procedure established, but it is not sufficient to do it for one or two short periods each day. In an interview, Eckhart Tolle said if one had a choice between two 50-minute meditation sessions per day or 100 one-minute meditations, he'd go with the 100 one-minute sessions hands down. He did say both would be better. However, he didn't say what he meant by a one-minute meditation. I think the techniques described above would make for a fruitful one-minute meditation. If you want to progress then you have to work at it all the time, not just in some isolated short-term practice session.

My Personal Method:

The critical issue for me in doing self-inquiry has been the use of the term "I", which can in some contexts refer to the embodied "self" or ego¹ and in other contexts refers to the higher Self. The task was to find a way to make clear to the "mind" which "I" was under inquiry. Thus, the following method has become my practice:

Either silently or aloud say, "I observe thoughts arising for David². Who am I? Not the thoughts. Not David." Then I briefly contemplate the state of awareness into which these thoughts arose independent of the content of awareness. In other words, do not attend to the content but instead consider the nature of the "field" in which the content arises.

I include under thoughts both visual and verbal stimuli. I also do a variation on the above for bodily sensations and for feeling/emotional states. For example:

Either silently or aloud say, "I observe pain arising for David. Who am I? Not the pain. Not David." Then I briefly contemplate the state of awareness into which the sensations arose.

Either silently or aloud say, "I observe anxiety arising for David. Who am I? Not the anxiety. Not David." Then I briefly contemplate the state of awareness into which the feelings/emotions arose.

If you think about it, you can easily see how this method puts the focus on "I" as it refers to the Self. Normally, when one says "I" the referent is the construct "David" that defines the body/mind. In this method, a distinction is drawn between I and David by their juxtaposition in the statement and is reinforced by the negation that follows the question. Richard Moss's Mandala of Being could also be integrated with this method, if you have found the mandala useful.

1. Embodied self or ego here is intended to refer to the body/mind
2. Substitute your name