

Satsang with Swami Veditamananda Saraswati
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Self knowledge and experience

Question:

Is self knowledge an experience?

Answer:

Knowledge is not called experience. What we mean by knowledge is cognition. So, this flower is in front of me, my eyes contact this flower and cognition of flower takes place. In that cognition, I have no doership at all.

Ji ānam vastu tantram. Knowledge is determined by the object of knowledge. So what type of cognition will take place in my mind is not decided by me, it will be decided by the object, *vastu*. When you experience something means you are the experiencer and you are experiencing something different from you. So, the word ‘experience’ usually conveys duality. On the other hand knowledge conveys understanding. So, one can have an experience but not an understanding. That is, I can even see the Lord in front of me and not recognize him.

The common example that is given by a Vedantin is this: I am talking to a person for 10 minutes. A common friend comes and asks, “Swamiji, do you recognize this person? He is Krishnamurthi. Do you remember in New York City, in those days we used to do this and that?” “Oh, this is *that* Krishnamurthi”. Those days, he used to wear a suit and had short hair. Now he wears kurta and is with a beard and long hair!

Then I recognize Krishnamurthi. I had experience of Krishnamurthi but not necessarily recognition of Krishnamurthi. Experience can be there but recognition may not be there. In that sense, experience and recognition of knowledge are distinguished. If you use the word experience to mean understanding, then it's okay. To give an idea of the difference between experience and knowledge, I can be experiencing that person but not knowing him.

I can be experiencing God, but not recognizing him. So Vedantins will say that you don't need experience of God, because whatever you are experiencing is God. You don't need experience of Self because, Self is always self-revealing. In fact any experience is possible only when you first experience the Self. Therefore by experience of God, if you mean experiencing God in certain form, then it's okay. But if you mean experience of God as Vedanta explains to us, then everything is God. So whatever experience you have is the experience of God. Thus what is lacking is the recognition, not the experience. In that sense experience and knowledge or understanding are different. There cannot be knowledge without experience.

Of course, knowledge requires an experience because you know something which is there. So, something has to be there for you to know. If you are talking about God with certain description, then you require experience of that God to know. Therefore in *dvaita*, where God is looked upon as different from us, we require the experience of God because that God has certain description. So, whatever may be the description of God, it requires an experience.

However if God is your own self, he is always experienced. If everything is God, it's also always experienced. In that case that is a matter of recognition. You

don't need to create any experience because any experience will be nothing but revealing *Brahman*, provided you recognize.

So, when it comes to duality, experience is required. In case of non duality, recognition is required because what there is, *is* God. But to have any knowledge you require experience. Like, I must have experience of flower for the cognition to take place. Experience and knowledge need not be identical. You can have experience and still may not have understanding or recognition.

Transcribed and edited by Nirmala Krishnamurthy and Ravi Venkat