

VALUES AS A MEANS FOR SELF-KNOWLEDGE

based on the book
*"The Essence of Enlightenment:
Vedanta, the Science of Consciousness"*
by **James Swartz**

www.shiningworld.com

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*"Hearing and reflecting on the teachings of Vedanta
are the primary means of self-knowledge,
but you cannot hear or reflect properly
if the mind is not prepared.
Therefore, a secondary means of knowledge
-the knowledge of values-
is required..."*

James Swartz

WORDS AS A MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE

For Vedanta to work, the teacher needs to communicate the vision of non-duality and the inquirer's mind must be prepared. **Vedanta is a means of self-knowledge whose words and sentences reveal the self.**

They can give **indirect self-knowledge** if the self is beyond my field of perception and **direct knowledge** if it is within my field of experience. Since the subject matter of Vedanta is me and I am always and only experiencing me, **words can give me direct self-knowledge.**

For the words to work, the inquirer needs to understand them as the teacher understands them. Imprecise definitions don't work, because they are open to interpretation. **Vedanta does not work if it is interpreted.** The words of Vedanta carry precise meanings.

To appreciate the intended meaning, unintended meanings must be eliminated. So the teaching establishes a context in which unintended meanings are removed.

Without the proper context, self-knowledge will not happen in the teaching situation. If words like unlimited, eternal, transcendental and samadhi are used but are not contextualized, they will only create confusion.

However, even if you have a teacher skilled in the methodology of teaching, one who can unfold the exact meaning of the words, and a dedicated inquirer who is seeking self-knowledge, **it will not happen unless the inquirer's mind is prepared.** Without a prepared mind Vedanta is like calculus for a person still working on the multiplication tables.

This does not mean that Vedanta cannot be understood, only that a prepared mind is required. Knowledge takes place only in the Subtle Body. If the conditions are favorable and knowledge does not take place, there is an obstruction.

VALUES A SECONDARY MEANS FOR SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Spiritual practices are useful for quieting the mind but they do not prepare the mind for Self-knowledge.

One does not need to be a mature or morally sound person to breathe a certain way or twist one's body into a yoga pose.

A prepared mind reflects non-dual values and ethical attitudes. **Values are the primary means to prepare the mind for inquiry.** Specific practices are secondary.

The knowledge of values is not self-knowledge. It is a means and self-knowledge is the end.

Self-knowledge does not necessarily happen when the appropriate values are present, but it may happen. Without the right value structure, self-knowledge will probably not happen and if it does, it will be basically useless.

UNIVERSAL VALUES SAMANYA DHARMA

Because reality is non-dual there is only one person, awareness with three bodies. The implication of this statement in terms of values is obvious: **you and I are one.**

If we are one spiritually, appearances created by Maya to the contrary notwithstanding, **I should value you as I value myself.** And since my actions reflect my values **I should treat you like I treat myself.** I treat myself well because I love myself and you deserve the same.

A behavioral norm based on the non-dual nature of reality is called a **dharma**, or right action. How I do not want to be treated is called **adharma**, wrong action.

I don't lie to you because I don't want you to lie to me. I don't injure you because I don't want you to injure me. Dharma and adharma are universal and stem from a common sense regard for one's own interests. They vary slightly from culture to culture.

SITUATIONAL ETHICS VISESA DHARMA

Although dharmas and adharmas are more or less universal, they are not absolute. The context that calls for a response plays an important role in determining how I behave.

To assimilate the teachings of non-duality, **I must follow dharma.** If I understand that both good and bad actions are apparently real, then values are no longer a problem for me.

However, this does not mean that my actions transcend dharma and adharma. It means that **my actions in the apparent reality will be dharmic** because I have nothing to gain or lose by violating dharma.

Only when I imagine that the apparent reality does not exist is it possible for me to violate dharma, disturb my mind and the minds of others. A conflicted mind is not helpful. It produces counterproductive emotions: anger, sadness, regret, low self-esteem and a sense of failure.

When my values are the same as those of others operating in my environment they cause no conflict, but if I am not willing to behave according to the expectations of others I cannot expect others to behave according to mine.

For example, if I have a value for non-injury, the number one universal value, and I do not like to be criticized, if I criticize others I will be conflicted.

If the world expects me to be truthful, which it does, and I expect the world to be truthful, which I do, yet being truthful conflicts with a personal value for money, for example, I may lie to get or keep my money.

I am quite happy to follow my personal values, but when they conflict with universal values there is scope for suffering because universal values do not go away when I override them to gain some passing comfort; they are built into the very fabric of my being.

THE KNOWER-DOER SPLIT

If I value truth but tell a lie, I feel guilty because **I have created a split between the knower and the doer.**

For example, the knower goes on a diet but the doer has a second helping; the knower decides to get up early and go for a walk but the doer turns off the alarm. This angers the knower, who starts to condemn me, making me feel useless and uncomfortable.

At the same time the disturbance hides the deeper reason for my actions. I never want what I want for the reason I think.

An **unconscious force** is always at work. The situational things that I value are not valued for their own sake, only for how they make me feel - for a sense of security or pleasure or virtue.

A vegetarian does not value vegetables for the vegetables' sake but for the feeling that she is doing animals a favor.

So what I really value is feeling comfortable with myself. If I understand this and appreciate the fact that there is an upside and a downside to every action, I am in a position to inquire directly into the self because the joy that comes from fulfilling any value, personal or universal, comes from it.

Nonetheless, **this analysis of values is intended to heal the knower-doer split and make inquiry workable.**

Swami Dayananda says:

"The source of a situational value is that I expect to feel good through exercising choice based on it. When I clearly see that a particular choice will make me suffer, I do not make that choice. Thus, when I become thoroughly convinced that acting contrary to a general value will result in suffering for me, my compliance with that value becomes choiceless, like the answer to the question, 'Do you want happiness or unhappiness?' If speaking truth is a value for me, and I am completely convinced that non-truth brings suffering, there is no choice but to speak the truth. Speaking truth becomes natural and spontaneous and my partial value for a universal value has now become a well-assimilated personal value."

For values to be valuable for me their upside and downside must be understood and not simply imposed from without in the form of religious or social dogma. **Therefore Vedanta calls these values knowledge.**

A "BETTER PERSON?"

Vedanta is not self-improvement. An inquirer is not trying to become a perfect or better person, because both good and not so good people suffer a sense of limitation and crave freedom.

He is trying to realize his primary identity, the ever-free self, the non-experiencing witness of the person.

Most approaches to enlightenment involve denial of the person, punishment of the person, transcendence of the person, or thoughtless transformation of the person, probably because making a person acceptable to himself is very difficult. But it is the person who wants freedom and it is the person that needs to seek it, so we have to take the person into account.

Our discussion of values is challenging because it clearly states that we may be saddled with values that prevent us from inquiry, which is to say that we are not up to the mark spiritually, which in turn may make us think that we are not good people.

The investigation of values is intended only to get our minds settled enough to discriminate, not improve us.

However, insofar as a person is little more than her priorities and values, any change in one's value structure amounts to a change in the (apparent) person. In general a good person is one who thinks and acts conforming to universal values and a bad person is one who doesn't. So if you have a feeling of inadequacy and low self-esteem and want to be a better person, the following analysis of the moral dimension of reality will be useful, whether or not you are a seeker of freedom.