

Day 1 - Intro Talk

Welcome and Introduction

Welcome, everyone. It's been quite a journey leading up to this retreat. Over the past few days, I've felt the energy building, and I can sense the importance of the work we are here to do together. This is not just any work—it is the profound work of liberation.

Liberation is not something we achieve or attain. Instead, it is a process of undoing, a letting go of our identification with the “doer.” Awakening is not a goal in the future; it is a stripping away of illusion to reveal what is already here. When we come to know this awareness directly, we learn to love it, to open to it more deeply than to the phenomena of the external world.

Logistics and Support

We have approximately 250 people signed up for this retreat, and while some of you are here live, others will be joining via replays due to time zones. Replays of all sessions will be available shortly after each event, ensuring no one misses anything.

We've assembled a dedicated team to support you:

- **Lila**: For inquiries or emergencies, you can reach her through the chat or email.
- **Tech Support**: Our tech host, Ty, is available for assistance with Zoom or other technical issues.
- **Facilitators**: A team of facilitators will help guide the self-inquiry practices during the evenings.
- **Special Sessions**: Look forward to breathwork with Chad, yoga sessions with Jerome and Jason, and other contributions.

We encourage you to adjust your schedule to attend the sessions live, as there's a unique synergy when we engage as a group. If you're new to dyads, attending tonight's self-inquiry session is essential.

The Nature of Practice

This retreat is an opportunity to explore the two types of **Sādhana** (spiritual practice):

1. **Before Awakening**: This involves techniques, meditative focus, and working with the mind to overcome hindrances.
2. **After Awakening**: Here, the practice shifts to abiding as awareness. It's no longer about doing but about resting in the truth of who you are.

Techniques are like thorns to remove thorns—they serve a purpose, but they must eventually be let go. If held onto, they become part of the self-structure, a mechanism of control. The true aim is to use these practices as stepping stones to freedom.

Effort and Surrender

Meditation and self-inquiry blend two essential aspects:

- **Effort**: The intentional focus on being present.
- **Surrender**: The willingness to let go and be with what is.

These two components come together to dissolve the mind's habitual patterns, leading to the realization of direct experience.

The Role of Awareness

Ramana Maharshi expressed a profound truth about Sādhana: "I have never done any Sādhana." This speaks to the awareness that simply is. The awareness we seek does not require cultivation—it is ever-present, untouched by the movements of the mind or body.

The practices we engage in are for the clearing of the self-structure, allowing this awareness to shine through unobstructed.

The Stages of Liberation

Awakening is only the beginning. After realizing the truth of who you are, there is a journey of integration and stabilization. The self-structure begins to clear, and the human vessel transforms to allow awareness to express itself fully and permanently. Liberation involves this maturing process, where the energy within us flows freely from root to crown.

Practical Guidance

To make the most of this retreat:

1. Approach every moment with a **"don't know mind."** Let go of past experiences and expectations.
2. Engage in continuous inquiry. Whatever you are doing—walking, eating, meditating—experience it directly and fully.
3. Distinguish between productive and unproductive pain. Allow challenges to arise, but recognize when it's necessary to step back and nurture the body or mind.

Samyama: The Threefold Practice

From the yogic tradition, **Samyama** combines:

1. **Dhāraṇā**: Concentration or focus.
2. **Dhyāna**: Meditation or surrender.
3. **Samādhi**: Absorption or the merging of doing and non-doing.

This practice helps interrupt the habitual patterns of the mind and leads to profound inner stillness.

Embracing the Unknown

As we progress, the mind's preferences and conditioned tendencies drop away. This retreat is an invitation to explore the unfathomable, the ineffable awareness beyond the limits of the mind.

Ramana Maharshi described a state where awareness remains even during deep sleep—a glimpse of the timeless. This is the potential of continuous inquiry.

Final Thoughts

For the next seven days, I encourage you to immerse yourself fully in this experience. Whatever arises—joy, discomfort, stillness—meet it with openness. Practice effort and surrender, and trust the unfolding process.

Let's take a short break now. When we return, we'll begin a guided meditation session, followed by a period of silence. This is your time to explore the depths of your mind and body. Thank you for being here, and I'll see you shortly.