



Holistic Self-Inquiry

By Miranda Macpherson

*'You speak as if you are here,
and the Self is somewhere else and you have to reach it...
but in fact the Self is here and now, and you are always it'*

Ramana Maharshi

Inquiry is an ancient practice that has appeared in many different traditions as a direct method to come home to who and what we truly are. I share a holistic approach to self inquiry that invites us to dive into our direct experience, in body, heart and mind – embracing all dimensions of our being to go within. Different to classical advaita approaches that focus on reaching a particular state, this approach invites you to inquire firstly into:

'WHAT'S here?' – the arising phenomena. Since everything that arises can only be arising out of the same source, if we meet the 'what' all the way, we naturally land in **'WHO'S here?'** without bypassing or manipulating our experience. I invite you to regard absolutely everything as a gateway home – from your egoic reactions to your soulful longings. This supports an integrated awakening where all parts of our being are included. Nothing is rejected....everything is arising ultimately from God.

Whether inquiring in meditation into more subtle depths of our experience, or working with a repeating question format, we tend to inquire with whatever aspect of ourself we are most identified with. Typically, most people in the west are very identified with their mind, their thoughts, and so their inquiry really stays at the level of the mind and the emotional heart. Thinking about your experience or just reporting your emotional state is not inquiry. For the practice of holistic self inquiry open up to its potential to deeply unleash the wisdom, love, clarity and depth of your true nature, challenge yourself in inquiry practice to include aspects of yourself that you typically tend not to go towards. **BE CURIOUS WITH YOUR WHOLE BEING:**

INQUIRING MIND:

Following the unfolding of your experience in the moment, asking, *'what's here now?'* and lean into the space between what you know and don't know. Peer inward into the depths that might include memories, thoughts, beliefs.

Ask *'how old do I feel in this?'* (such a question will reveal whether this is arising from your history or whether it is genuinely present time. You can almost guarantee that any ego reaction has history in it)

Relax the tendency to commentate about your experience.

Let seeing into your experience happen.....

aware not just of the CONTENT but also the AWARENESS that is seeing.

INQUIRING HEART:

To inquire is to FEEL INTO the AFFECT of whatever is unfolding.

As if every feeling offers a scent that draws you deeper into the truth of your own heart....This will include emotions, and if you relax the tendency to try to justify or simply talk about your feelings, it will also give rise to deeper qualities that do not need any reason such as love, joy, gratitude, compassion, forgiveness, space.

Relax the tendency to try to justify or simply talk about your feelings.

Rather, be willing to know by feeling everything. Ie:

'What is sadness/ tenderness/ hurt/ compassion/ delight actually like?'

'How are you affected by the tone of this experience?'

INQUIRING BODY:

Your physical body is not at all what you think it is. It is not an obstacle to enlightenment but a vehicle for God to fully live here on earth AS YOU.

SENSE INTO your experience. For everything that arises in your awareness, there is both an affect and also an embodied sensation....at first more obvious things like tension, contraction, relaxation, and as we get deeper we re-gain access to more subtle dimensions such as tingling, subtle energy and dimensions of presence that contain the light of the universe. Really! With everything, stay present and inquire;

Where is this located in the body?

Where does it begin and end?

The shape? (round/ square/ cylindrical/ oblong)

The texture? (knotted/ jagged/ hard/ jittery)

The temperature? (hot/ cold/ neutral)

TRUE INQUIRY IS NON-INTERFERENCE:

Remember with everything you encounter, your soul knows the way.

Transformation and deepening happens when we relax all fixing, trying, rejecting.

Holistic self inquiry when it really takes root, is incredibly enlivening, exciting and expansive. You can start to taste God alive in and as your own soul, with its intelligence, beauty and depth. Since your source and your very nature is boundless, there is no limit to where this practice can take you. In Yoga, Jnani yoga which is the yoga of inquiry, is considered the direct path which switches on the inner teacher to guide us all the way home.

Unwinding Practice:

The following are some pointers to help you to cultivate greater capacity to open through the layers of your more challenging experiences, to access greater depths of wholeness. You will find this most useful once you have begun to identify something within your process. Instead of trying analyze, repress or act out your experience, these pointers are designed to support you in diving INTO whatever is arising to contact deeper truth. Learning to compassionately soften your defensive habits, you can unfold more directly into what and who is truly here:

- **WELCOME SUPPORT:**
Call upon spirit of unconditional love and acceptance to be at the fore-front of your awareness, by prayer, chanting or whatever means works best for you. Welcome whatever spiritual references, enlightened beings, supportive people in your life and symbols of strength and truth that help cultivate within you the support and courage to you need to dive deeper. Feel that which your body rests upon, and relax into that as though relaxing into the arms of Love Itself, breathe and receive the blessing of oxygen as support of life itself. See if you can let that felt sense of loving support open up in belly, heart, and head centers.
- **CONTEMPLATE ALL WHO MIGHT SHARE THIS EXPERIENCE:**
Consider other beings on this planet and throughout history that might have grappled with this same experience, fear or difficulty. Ie: Who else on the planet might be grappling with feeling not good enough? Powerless? Lonely and frightened? Welcome the spirit of all who have ever grappled with this to explore coming home into deeper truth with you. Dedicate your inquiry to the liberation of all.
- **SUSPEND ALL BLAME:**
Acknowledge that the real knot of your suffering is not really caused by external circumstances or what someone did, but rather, is your sense of dis-connection, the negating self-concepts, confusions and defences of your ego structure, that keep you feeling disconnected from God/ your true nature.
- **STOP FEEDING YOUR STRATEGIES OF PROTECTION**
Use the power of your WILLINGNESS to stop trying to REJECT this experience, or GRASP for a different one. Just be willing to **BE HERE** un-defended with whatever is arising for a moment. *Whatever your experience is, vow not to abandon yourself in this place.* Just like in a difficult yoga pose, go to where you can go, stay there and breathe into it.
- **MEET THE EXPERIENCE MINUS THE STORY about it...**
Just be CURIOUS about whatever is here without trying to change it at all. Focus on *OPENING and SOFTENING, ALLOWING* the experience to unfold without trying to get anywhere in particular. If this is hard and you are feeling overwhelmed, focus on the sensations of the experience:
 - **Location:** where is the nexus of this happening in the body?
 - **Temperature:** it is warm, cool, hot, cold, a combination?

- **Texture:** *it is rough, smooth, sharp, lumpy, stringy, sticky, solid?*
- **Mood:** *what flavours of emotion flow through these sensations?*
- **Memories:** *what age do you feel in this place? If any memories come, just allow that without reaching for anything.*

Whatever you discover, just keep OPENING, SOFTENING, ALLOWING whatever is here to be here, without trying to analyze or rationalize your way out.

- **NOW ASK: 'what's here now?'**
(Often, the surface discord has passed, and there is temptation now to just come back to the surface.....but see if you can continue inquiring)
Just continue opening, softening, allowing and unfolding with curiosity into the experience as it is now.
- **ASK 'Who is here?'..... 'who is it having this experience?'** (don't grasp for a mental concept). Just soften, open, and notice the SPACE and the AWARENESS in which all of this experience has been happening. Stretch out in this space. Be open to meet possibly a new sense of who you are and what's so here.
- From this awareness, **WHAT'S true? What wants to be known?**