



Svaroopa® Vidya Ashram

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Big Questions #2

Why Am I Here?

By Gurudevi Nirmalananda

You were born to know your Self. You came here for this purpose. Even when you apply yourself to other things, life itself funnels you toward the discovery of your innermost essence. Without this inner knowing, you feel incomplete. Only when you know your own Divinity will you feel you've accomplished what you came here for. We call this "spirituality" but it is more. It is about you understanding life itself. You came here to get enlightened. And to give back.

For me, spirituality was always the focus of my life. I tried substituting worldly things, tried hard, I confess, but they never satisfied me for long. When I finally figured that out, I actively searched for ways to develop my spirituality, even when it was at odds with worldly gains. Finding yoga was like hitting the spiritual jackpot. So many techniques for exploring the inner infinity! Such generous help available from a living Master! Thousands of years of collected wisdom shining the light on my path! Part of that collected wisdom describes 12 different ways of seeing life and its goal. These are called the Darshanas, ways of seeing. I was surprised that some of these ancient systems substantiate attitudes currently prevailing in the West:

I only believe in it if I can touch it, hold it, pick it up and move it around.

Life is about pleasure and wealth. The goal is material happiness by any means.

Party hearty! You only get one time around.

Life is about doing. If you can't contribute, you're worthless.

I know and love many people who see life this way. While they don't understand my spiritual focus, my quest made me able to understand them. Theirs is not merely a modern perspective. It has existed as long as humans have been around, at least long enough to have a Sanskrit name: Vaibhaashika, Chaarvaka and Sautraantika Darshanas.

I know many people who have chosen a different goal than me. Does that make them wrong? No. It simply means that they'll have to repeat the grade, just like someone who parties all the way through 10th grade. They get to return and take the classes all over again. You can take as many lifetimes as you would like but the ultimate goal remains the same — to know your own Self.

You have free will. It's a defining characteristic of being human, unique amongst all the creatures in this universe. You are the one who defines your reason for living. You choose your goal or even choose not to have one. Your life is about whatever you say it is about. That's a lot of freedom! And with freedom comes responsibility. For when you choose what you're dedicated to, then you need to dedicate yourself to it. Even those with the goal to "party hearty" actually have to work at it. Once you make your choice and begin to work at what you've chosen, the test comes. How's it working for you? I remember one beauty queen, a winner of many competitions in her youth. She turned to yoga as part of her dedication to beauty. But she kept having birthdays. Her definition of beauty had to keep changing, until it became about the clothing and jewelry she wore, not about her formerly smooth skin and lustrous eyes. Did her dedication to beauty make her happy? This is the question that yoga asks. And yoga answers: if your happiness depends on external things, you'll always feel incomplete and needy.

Others of the 12 Darshanas agree, saying that the external world cannot fulfill you. From Madhyaamika, Saamkhya and Sautraantika come:

Everything that exists is empty; none of it has any meaning.

The spinning of the world keeps everything spinning.

The universe is an accident, a happenstance that came about on its own. There's no purpose.

In a world without meaning, what is happiness? No matter what you do, where you go, or who you do it with or for, these systems say it's just a way to kill time. None of it matters. When I reached this conclusion on my own, it didn't make me happy. What I could see was that the world was doing fine before I was born and it would continue to be fine once I was gone. That made me hurt inside because I wanted to make a difference. Realizing that was like a glimmer of light in the darkness. I had an inner sense of purpose even though I couldn't see how it fit into a universe without meaning. Learning about the law of karma was a step upward for me. As described above, you get multiple chances to accomplish the purpose of life. I found it reassuring to think that I'd lived before; it was affirming to a subtle inner sense I had. I began to hold myself to a higher standard in my life, believing as so many do:

Be good and good things will happen to you.

If I become completely pure, I'll make it.

I must do everything perfectly.

My search took on a new urgency. I felt I wanted to know something, but I didn't know what to ask nor where to look. I now distrusted everything I'd ever been taught. I needed to find something more:

Question everything.

All I need to do is to understand.

These principles are espoused by the Purvamimaamsa, Jaina, Vaisheshika and Nyaaya Darshanas. Without realizing it, I had been working my way through the ancient teachings, almost exactly in the chronology of their emergence. It was like I was growing through many millennia of ideas, beliefs and ideologies. Then I landed at my Guru's feet and he cleared it all up for me by quoting a sutra:

citi-sa.mkocaatmaa cetano'pi sa.mkucita-vi"sva-maya.h. — Pratyabhij-nah.rdayam 4

Even though having contracted, Consciousness is the essence of the individual,
who embodies the entire universe.

My essence is Consciousness? I'd never thought of that, never conceived of that possibility. I understood contraction so well, but Baba told me that the uncontracted whole of Consciousness is already within me. Thus, instead of trying to manage life perfectly or get all my questions answered, all I had to do was look within.

Not only did he tell me to look within, but he also opened the doorway. Early in my studies with him, during a long chant, my attention turned inward like a laser beam. It drilled inward, deeper and deeper, even deeper than I'd imagined possible. Then I broke through inside and found the universe within me. Space, stars, planets and galaxies all spiraled within the vast space of my own being. I've never felt lost or alone since then. Everywhere I go is home, another place within my own cosmic being.

What is this system, this Darshana? Named "non-dualistic Kashmiri Shaivism," this is the root system of all tantras, expounded by the Himalayan Masters over a thousand years ago. When you put even a toe on this path, you'll find yourself on a rocket ship to God. Except God is within, being your own Self, the mystery that has been hidden for lifetimes. The great initiation for which these masters are known, Maha-Shaktipat-Diksha, reveals the Truth of who you are, Consciousness Incarnate. Instantly you know who you are. You experience the truth of your own inherent Divinity. Except your mind tries to go back to its old patterns. It spouts some of the doctrines listed above, trying to trap you in distrust and despair, so familiar even while being uncomfortable. Your mind still needs some TLC. For that, you need to do more yoga. Specifically, do more japa (mantra repetition); it is especially for your mind.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES, "BIG QUESTIONS"

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