

## Can asking “Who am I” lead to self-knowledge?

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There is a fairly popular notion, that one only needs to ask a question “Who am I?” to gain *mokṣa*. The idea is - there is no need for scriptural study or a teacher. How far this is true needs to be examined. The following article is based on a talk by Pujya Swamiji covering this topic, questioning the adequateness of asking the question “Who am I” as a means to gain *mokṣa*.

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You can ask the question. If person asking the question can answer the question, he/she need not ask the question. If one already knows, then why should one ask the question?

In order to know properly, one should take the proper route. Proper route is to find a teacher and learn from him/her - *ācāryavān puruṣō vēda*.

One needs a teacher. If you ask “Who am I?” and stay with that question, you will have certain quietude – if that is satisfaction for you, that is fine. However, it will not lead to self-knowledge. But the question “Who am I” is an important question - it will lead to the teacher, *śāstra* and *ātma-jñānam*.

No Guru, no *śāstra* is needed - that is the contention of some people. It will not lead one anywhere.

One has to find the answer – I am the *jagat-kāraṇam*. How will you find it? It is *śāstra-siddhānta*. If one listens to *śāstra* and then contemplates upon “I am the cause of the entire world - that is *Vedanta* and not just “Who am I”. Only from *śāstra* and teacher, one understands the truth.

People do not want teachers generally, because Guru is an authority figure. They are afraid of authority. That is a psychological problem. The fear is of an authoritarian figure, stemming perhaps from father having being an authority figure. There is also a fear of loss of control, if one grew up in the house where things were not definite, like parents whose behaviour was inconsistent. So one feels he/she compulsively has to control everything, one has to operate in a controlled situation the whole life time. That person thinks - “If there is a Guru, I will lose control”. This is the issue.

In reality, the altar of surrender is not the Guru as a person, but Guru as an institution. It is a surrender to *śāstra pramāṇa* the Guru wields. The surrender is not unlike how we accept our ears and eyes as the last word with reference to any sound that is heard or form that is seen.

