

BEYOND INQUIRY

Written by Judy Cohen — Paradoxica: Journal of Nondual Psychology, Vol. 7: Spring 2015

Summary

For decades, people have turned to some form of Inquiry method to explore consciousness, open doors to awakening, and alleviate emotional suffering. This paper asks, does Inquiry, as a method, work?

Judy Cohen is a formerly certified facilitator and trainer of The Work of Byron Katie and of Scott Kiloby's Living Inquiries, with a long-ago background in clinical psychology. Facilitating Inquiry with people worldwide, in private sessions and web classes, was her full-time profession, and even her own personal inquiring was a full-time job. Finally seeing the never-endingness of the Inquiry loop, she stepped off the hamster wheel and relaxed into enjoying the resulting new-found free time. Today, she continues to help clients notice their own direct present experience, without inquiry, by exploring practical nonduality in everyday life struggles and situations.

BEYOND INQUIRY

Most people spend years, sometimes lifetimes, trying to feel better, to be safe, to love themselves and be loved, to be successful, to have peace, to be enlightened and awakened. As we all know, this trying takes many forms; we've all gone through our own versions of boyfriends, drinking, therapy, sex, moving, meditation, medication, exercise, retreats, and seminars, attempting to get what we're after. Everyone has favorite ways of seeking to attain relief or enlightenment. For many people in the nondual community, that favorite way is inquiry.

Whether it's ruminating on "I am this," doing The Work of Byron Katie, practicing Scott Kiloby's Living Inquiries, or considering Rupert's or Adyashanti's questions, many of us turn to some form of Inquiry, spending fortunes and years hoping to achieve... well, what exactly?

What can inquiry do for us? Why sit for so much of one's life asking four questions or focusing on energy in the body or "I Am?"

Some have been taught that the right answer to that question is "for the love of truth." Since it is unclear why Truth matters (because when we are suffering or failing or in pain, is Truth even a concern?), perhaps we care about Truth only if it gets us something, some relief or awakening.

So it could be more honest (since we care about Truth) to admit that we do want inquiry to give us something. We want to feel better, to change our situations or ourselves; we want to wake up.

We want a solution or antidote to unhappiness, uncertainty, insecurity, fear, and various other forms of unpleasantness, and we're hoping inquiry will provide it.

There's a lot of wanting going on. That's why grasping and striving are an inherent part of any inquiry process.

Inquiry is specifically NOT about what is in this present moment. It is about "becoming." It's about "this moment is not right—I need a better moment." This striving is the opposite of acceptance or appreciation of what is.

No one can get to "a better place" and be here at the same time. Ironically, the contradiction of fixing and striving results in exactly what we do not want: a not-presence. Peace in the present cannot be found by seeking it in the future. This seeking is the opposite of enlightenment, the very thing we use inquiry to seek.

Even logically we can see that it makes no sense. So is there any hope of this working?

DOES INQUIRY WORK? DOES IT ACCOMPLISH WHAT WE WANT IT TO DO?

Does inquiry wake us up? If awakening is presence, how is awakening possible through seeking it elsewhere? If awakening is the act of seeing through the Self-story, how can awakening happen by solidifying that story?

Does inquiry help us feel better? Some would say yes, for a time. Creating a temporary sense of progress, inquiry may sometimes seem to help change circumstances, or give us more user-

approved feelings. But is it ever enough? We always need more of the so-called better feelings, more awakening, more safety. There's always another thought or feeling to look at. Which means we always need more inquiry. It's a never-ending, self-sustaining loop, like a snake eating its own tail, keeping us from noticing that the loop is infinite.

What inquiry does is give us the idea that we can DO something to get what we want or provide something to turn to when things get tough. It gives us the illusion that we have the power or technique to change things. And, when we essentially tell ourselves, "I am doing something about this problem," the identity of a fixer, the illusion of control, and a sense of safety are established. So inquiry reinforces the problem of Self while ostensibly seeming to try to fix it.

It's kind of funny when we consider how we attempt to manipulate existence into giving us what we want. "Damn it existence! I don't like this. I am going to fix it and be enlightened, by the sheer power of my will and my inquiry!"

So Doing perpetuates the Self-story and its attempts to solve and get. Inquiry keeps us focused on circumstance and situation, and in solidifying the Self-story, it prevents us from being present with life as it is actually, in this moment.

And as it happens, that is the opposite of what we want in the first place.

GIVE UP, IT'S HOPELESS

Being without inquiry might feel scary at first. But if it could be genuinely seen that there is never enough relief, that the effort is hopeless, that awakening can't be manipulated, brought on, or forced, would we keep trying to exert influence?

What if THIS IS IT, and there's nothing we can do to control the universe? A feeling, a thought... What else is there but this? That is existence itself. The experience is what we ARE. Everything else is thought. So attempting to shift it or dissolve it or even "sink into it" is like attempting to disconnect from existence, something we clearly don't have the power to do.

If we ARE the experience itself—as opposed to the one who experiences it, or the one who notices the experience—if we are the actual experience, would we want to inquire it away or be so eager to try to make it all change?

And if we ARE this experience—this feeling, then that one, and then that one—it is also us. This is it. If we are experience itself, then who is there to change it, and what would need anything to be different?

No inquiry or teaching can wake us up because we are already what we are seeking: Experience.

Then we just experience. Because it's not like there's a choice anyway. It turns out there's nothing we can do and nothing that needs to be done.

And then we may notice the peace of not trying to control what can't be controlled.

Beyond Inquiry 3

And we might see then that it's okay to be imperfect, scared, nasty, sad, anxious, drunk, blissed out, avoiding, triggered, unawakened or awakened, flabby, fit, loving, angry, neutral, peaceful. Even powerless, hopeless, and resistant can be seen as okay, as we come to realize that there's nothing that can be done about any of it. If it's already okay as it is, how could it possibly be fixed?

So perhaps we stop, experience whatever is present, give up trying to control or change it, and see our own powerlessness to influence the universe.

At this point, mind may start to freak out and say despairingly, "But then it's hopeless! What's the point of going on? What will I DO?"

And as we sit with that discovery, that it is indeed hopeless, without resorting to inquiry to try to chase powerlessness away, we might find that under the despair is relief—relief that we are not responsible for something that we can't control, relieved of responsibility to fix what we cannot, relieved of the struggle against powerlessness, relieved of the struggle to maintain false identity.

We may discover that giving up trying brings exactly what has been sought all this time. It lives in the giving up, in the acceptance.

In seeking, we're not present. Giving up, where else is there to go?

And with that giving up, we can relax and enjoy the weather rolling in and out.