

## “I Am; I exist”

One direct way to access the Divine is to remain with the simple sense of “I am; I exist.”

We can say that “I am; I exist” with certainty. Just a simple ever-present sense of aliveness. It is the only thing in this life that we can say with absolute certainty. A lot of things may be relatively true, but not completely true. When we *sense* into “I am; I exist,” we may not know what “I” is. But we can know that there's something there that is intimately associated with this sense of our aliveness. We sense that there is something deeper that is at the core of our being.

However, when we try to pin down exactly what this sense of “I” is, we are puzzled. We have referred to “I” a million times in our life, and yet, when asked, we can't really say what that is. Sure, we can talk about our story and history and beliefs, but those are all subject to change. The more we look, the more mysterious (and perhaps frustrating) this search becomes.

This mystery can be explored by remaining, whenever it comes to mind, with the simple sense of, “I exist.”

The reason we're able to make this statement “I am; I exist” with certainty is because you can't say the opposite. We can't say, “No, I don't exist.” You have to exist to say, “I don't exist.” So, this is the one thing that we can be certain of. I am.

However, we tend to add qualifiers after the verb “am.” We say, “I am,” but then add, “... an ambitious person, an intelligent person, an unworthy person.” Whatever. We characterize ourselves. None of those characterizations are ultimately true. But when we sense into, “I exist,” there is truth in that. It's a worthy starting point if we're looking for something of ultimate importance. What is of ultimate reality might be called the Divine, Life, spirit, God, Unity, etc. Regardless of what we choose to call it, that sense of simple aliveness – simple I am-ness – is a worthy thread to follow.

One of the beauties and difficulties of the human mind is that it loves complexity. We can hear a simple teaching like “remain with the sense of I exist” and can very quickly conceptualize it: “Okay, I understand that. What's next? What's the next idea that I must learn, believe in, or think about?”

The challenge is to stay with this one simple thing with curiosity: “I wonder what that is. I wonder what this ever-present sense of aliveness is.” It's mysterious, is it not? We can't quite say what it is, but we know that it is closer than close. We can easily see that we exist. The challenge is to stay with this one simple recognition.

We should expect that the mind will quickly get bored with it. That's fine. We don't need the mind in this endeavor. Mind is great for a lot of things. It's great for figuring things out, like the things we get paid to do at work. But the thinking mind wants to reduce the vastness of our experience into a tidy, conceptual package. The mind is not happy about us remaining with a mysterious, non-conceptual simplicity. This is not something to try to figure out. All that's required is to remain with the sense of “I am; I exist.” It may not be easy, but it is simple.

When we endeavor to remain with this simple sense of aliveness, we should anticipate that we're going to frustrate our conceptualizing mind. We should expect a reaction like: "This is boring. What's the point of this? How does it benefit me to do this? How does it pay the bills?" That's fine. Just know that the mind will do and say anything to stay in control. We do not have the power to make it cease its objections. However, we can notice these attempted distractions and return again and again to the sense of "I am."

It may not look like much at first, but staying with this simple sense of aliveness will lead us back to a non-conceptual recognition of Life in its purest form. This recognition is the non-conceptual answer to the question, "What am I?" What we are is what we are. We have never been other than what we are. We don't have to attain anything to be what we already are. We just need to recognize that which we inescapably are. It is more fundamental than all the self-limiting qualifiers. It is a recognition that we are not separate from Source.

This simple, yet challenging, practice can lead us into a sense of Oneness with the Divine.

Just sense into the mystery of this aliveness further and further and do it consistently. Devote some time to it. You don't need long periods of meditation. Longer meditations are certainly helpful when we can manage it. But they are not helpful if we put off doing it because we don't have the time. I believe that it is of equal or greater value to come back frequently to this simple sense of "I am" often throughout the day. For example, we can check in when we're stopped at a stoplight, or standing in line at the supermarket, or waiting for the gas tank to fill. We can see, "Ah, I'm still here. I still exist." It feels mysterious, but it is undoubtedly present. When we come to realize that it is present whenever we stop and look, we begin to understand that sense of raw aliveness is never really absent. Sometimes it feels in the foreground; sometimes in the background. But it is never entirely absent.

Gradually, we can see that a subtle sense of "I am-ness" is still present even when we are not focused on it. This sense of aliveness remains present to whatever is happening. It doesn't have preferences. It is not approaching Life from any pre-conceptions or dogmas. It is open to whatever arises. We have heard the instruction in spirituality to be choiceless, but this innate aliveness is *already* choiceless. It is more useful to notice this inherent openness than to practice being choiceless.

As this sense of "I am; I exist" becomes more grounded, we can explore whether this simple sense of aliveness is *what we are* at the deepest level. We can call this sense "consciousness" or "awareness" or "aliveness." Again, it doesn't matter what we may call it. The only thing that matters is our own direct experience of it.

Next, we have the opportunity to recognize that not only are we *experiencing* it, we *are* it. Please don't take this statement as a belief. Ask yourself the opposite question: "Do I know with absolute certainty that what I am is not this consciousness?" And be honest in your response. If you don't know, that is a good starting point. But allow the question to persist: "I wonder if that is really what I am?"

Our discovery of our own answer to that question transforms everything.

Approaching Life with curiosity and steadfastness using the “I am; I exist” practice is a valuable path back to our true nature and to finding our way back home to the Divine.

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