

11. Illusion hides the individual's true blissful nature

This power of super-imposition that illusion (*maya*) has hides from individuals (*jivis*) the Universal that they are, the being-awareness-bliss (*satchidananda*) that is their nature. All this creation (*jagath*), with its manifoldness, is born out of the ascription of multiplicity where there is only One. When all this evolution is subsumed by the process of involution (*pralaya*), the three qualities (*gunas*) are in perfect equilibrium or balance. This is the stage called balance of the qualities (*guna-saamyavastha*).

Then, through the will of the Super-Will (*Iswara*), the balance is disturbed and activity starts, leading to consequences that breed further activities. In other words, the world originates and develops and unfolds. This is the stage called unbalanced (*vaishamyavastha*). Thus, from the subtle inner unconscious and subconscious to the gross outer physical body, everything is due to illusion (*maya*), or the power of superimposition of the particular over the Universal. That is why these are referred to as non-*Atma*. They are like the mirage, which superimposes water over desert sand. They can be destroyed only by the vision of Brahman or *Atma*.

12. Use the “Who am I” inquiry to cease the agitations

The affection one gets toward one's relations, the satisfaction one gets when one secures the things craved for, the happiness one gets when one utilises such things—all these are bondages that the consciousness imposes on itself. Even sleep and dreams are such “agitations” and have to be overcome before the *Atma* can be well visualised and realised. In sleep, the element of ignorance persists. The “I” and “Mine” feelings produce an endless series of activities and agitations in the various levels of consciousness. But, just as a single soldier in a vantage position can successfully tackle hundreds of enemy personnel who come in single file through a narrow gap, one can tackle each agitation as and when it emerges in the consciousness and overwhelm it. The courage to do this can be obtained through training derived by practice.

All agitations will cease the moment one enters on the inquiry, “Who am I?” This was the spiritual discipline that Ramana Maharshi achieved and taught to his disciples. This is also the easiest of all the disciplines.

First, there must be the yearning to procure one's own welfare (the *subhecha*). This will lead to the study of books about Brahman and its principles, the search for the company of the good, the withdrawal from sensory pleasures, and the thirst for liberation.

Even the divine maxim,

I am Brahman (*Aham Brahmasmi*)

has a trace of ignorance sticking to it, the *aham* being considered as separate but identical.

This *aham* is so persistent that it will disappear only through ceaseless meditation on the implications of

You are That (Thath twam asi)

and the all-inclusive *Atma* or Brahman. This is the enquiry (*vicharana*) stage or basic step in *yoga (bhumika)*; the stage subsequent to the desire to procure one's own welfare (*subhecha*) stage. By these means, the mind can be fixed very soon on the contemplation of Brahman. Each stage is a step in the ladder for the progressive rise of the mind from the concrete to the subtle and the subtle to the non-existent. This is the last stage, the "state of diminished body consciousness (*thanumanasi*)" stage.

The three stages referred to above and the disciplines they involve will destroy all desires and cravings and illumine knowledge of the reality. The mind is rendered fully holy and saturated with truth. This is called the stage of no-attachment or no-contact (*a-samsakthi*). That is to say, all contact with the exterior world or even with one's own past is wiped out. No attention is paid to the internal and the external; the spiritual aspirant reaches the state of non-cognition of objects (*abhava-pratheethi*), as it is called. Such a person has no awareness of objects (*padartha-bhavana*) of their own; that is to say, no object can create any sensation in this consciousness. The perfect realised soul (*jnani*) is ever immersed in the bliss of the *Atma*, with no awareness of the seer, the seen, and the sight, the triple thread. This is the fourth stage, the "beyond" stage (*thuriya*).

Some are wakeful-dreamy (*jaagrath swapna*); they build castles in the air, planning with the known and unknown, the seen and unseen. Others are extra-wakeful; through many births, their "I" and "mine" have become too deep-rooted. All these are only agitations of the mind (*vrittis*). Wisdom can dawn only when these are destroyed. Until then, however, no matter how much one may know of names and forms, one can't grasp the reality. The ceasing of all consciousness or agitation is the sign of the person who really knows the reality.