

34. Destroy illusion by inquiry into the nature of Atma

Fevers originate because of your actions; they flourish on wrong methods of life and diet; they grow with the growth of such wrong conduct. The idea of the snake, which is an illusion (*maya*), flourishes on the ignorance of the real nature of the rope; it grows and becomes deeper the more one forgets the rope, which is the base. The ignorance that prevents and postpones inquiry into the nature of the *Atma* makes illusion flourish; illusion fostered by this attitude becomes as thick as darkness. When the flame of spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) illumines, the darkness is dispelled, along with the illusion of the individual soul (*jiva*), the Supreme Being (*Iswara*), and the world (*jagath*).

Inquiry (*vichara*) makes the snake disappear; thereafter, only the rope remains. So too, illusion and the blossoming of that illusion through the mind as the soul, world, etc., will all disappear as soon as inquiry is done about the reality of appearance. One knows that there is nothing other than Brahman. Brahman alone subsists.

To the question, “how can one thing appear as two”, the reply may be given that, prior to inquiry, Brahman appears as the world (*jagath*), although its real nature hasn’t undergone any change at all, just as the pot was understood as pot before inquiry revealed that it is basically only clay. Crown, earring, and necklace all appear as different until inquiry reveals that they are all basically, fundamentally, gold. So also, the one Brahman is apparent in many forms and under various names and thus gives the impression of multiplicity. Brahman alone is, was, and will be. The conviction that this world is but a superimposition is the real spiritual knowledge (*vidya*), which is the end of all ignorance.

The hare’s horn is non-existent; it is a description of something superimposed. Only knowledge of the reality will destroy the idea forever; then, the false idea will melt away. Only the ignorant will stick to illusion (*maya*) as truth; the wise will at best designate it as “indescribable” or “beyond explanation”, for it is difficult to explain how illusion originated. We know only that it is there, to delude. The wise refer to it as “the hare’s horn”. Thus, it is spoken of in three different ways, according to the point of view of each.

When unthinking children are frightened by calling out, “Watch out! a ghost is lurking there!”, they believe

it to be true and get terribly frightened. So too, unthinking, ignorant people get convinced of the reality of the objects around them through the influence of the illusion (*maya*). However, those endowed with discrimination (*viveka*) distinguish between the true Brahman and the false world (*jagath*); others, unable to do so or to find out the real nature of illusion, simply dismiss it as “beyond description (*a-nir-vachaneeya*)”.