

35. Attaining enlightenment destroys ignorance as well as enlightenment!

The wise (*jnanis*), who have clearly grasped the truth, characterise it as the mother, whose corpse is cremated by the son! It is the experience of illusion (*maya*) that gives rise to “the revealing wisdom (*jnana*)”. The child spiritual knowledge (*vidya*) kills the mother as soon as it is born. The child was delivered for the very purpose of matricide, and its first task is naturally the cremation of the dead mother.

When tree rubs against tree in the forest, fire starts and the fire burns both. So too, the knowledge (*vidya*) that arose from illusion (*maya*) destroys the very source of that knowledge. Ignorance (*a-vidya*) is reduced to ashes by knowledge.

Like the expression “hare’s horn”, which is but a name for a non-existent thing, illusion (*maya*) is non-existent, and one has only to know that to dismiss it from the consciousness. So say the spiritually wise (*jnanis*).

Nor is this all. You label anything nonexistent as ignorance (*a-vidya*) or illusion. Whatever becomes meaningless, valueless, untrue, baseless, and existenceless when knowledge grows, that you can take to be illusion’s manifestation.

Another interesting point is this: It may be argued that since illusion produces spiritual enlightenment (*vidya*), illusion is right and proper and deserving of respect, but the enlightenment that arises out of it is also not permanent. As soon as ignorance is destroyed through enlightenment, the enlightenment also ends. The trees and the fire are both destroyed when the fire finishes its work.

The nut of the kataka tree that is placed in water to remove the dirt in it is itself wasted away in the process. So, spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) is the gaining of this end, the attainment of complete vacuity, equilibrium, peace.

36. Direct experience is obtained by continuous reflection on truth

The knowledge derived from the mere hearing of *Vedanta* cannot be termed direct knowledge. Since the error of taking one thing as another is not removed by actual experience in such a learning process, how can it be treated as direct or authentic? No, it cannot be; it is indirect only.

Of course, by hearing about the essential nature (*swarupa*) of the Brahman, which is only Being-awareness-bliss (*satchidananda*), one may be able to picture it or imagine it. However, one has to actually “see” the Brahman, who is the witness of the five sheaths of the individual —the food sheath (*anna-maya*), the sheath of vital airs (*prana-maya*), the mental sheath (*manomaya*), the sheath of the intellect (*vijnana-maya*), and the sheath of supreme bliss (*ananda-maya*).

You may know from the scriptures (*sastras*) that Vishnu has four arms, with the conch (*sankha*), disk (*chakra*), mace (*gada*), and lotus (*padma*) in each of them. You may even picture Him as such in meditation. Yet, unless you have actually “seen” Him by your own vision, the knowledge gained by the study of iconography can never be honoured by the adjective *direct* (*pratyaksha*).

Since Vishnu's form is considered different and outside when understood through the study of the scriptures (*sastras*), what you get is really indirect inference, not direct experience. Though a person is ignorant of the fact that the Brahman is His own self (not different or outside), why can't he realise Himself as Brahman as soon as he hears the exposition of a maxim like "You are That (*Thath twam asi*)", which reveals that basic Truth? But he doesn't.

You may doubt whether the knowledge obtained from scriptures (*sastras*) about things different from you, like Heaven, etc., has any value, but you shouldn't declare so! For the same scriptures have said, by means of divine pronouncements, that you are the Brahman Itself, that You are fundamentally Brahman and nothing else. They also warn you that direct experience is not obtained by merely hearing these divine pronouncements!

The progress of aspirants is of this nature: They reason out with faith and care what they have heard until they understand the characteristics of the *Atma* in an indirect way. Then, to bring that knowledge into the field of actual experience, they take up the process of reflection (*manana*), i.e. revolving it in the mind (*manas*).