

40. The realisation of “I am Brahman”

The investigation of the truth and unity behind all this is the duty of the wise (*jnanis*), their real characteristic. Some people declare that they have had realisation! How can that be taken as true? Consider the statement “I am Brahman (*Aham Brahmasmi*)”. The soul (*jivi*) that is the “I” is a mutable entity (*vikari*), so how can it possibly grasp this statement? A destitute cannot realise that he is a monarch; so too, mutable entities like people can’t grasp the immutable Brahman or posit that they are Brahman.

Who is this soul that calls itself “I”? Reflecting on this problem, one will see that the “I” is the immutable Ever-witness, the *Atma*, which, forgetful of its real nature, considers itself affected by change through sheer ignorance. When one deliberately spends thought on one’s identity, one will know that “I am not a changeable (*vikari*); I am the witness of the ego, the ego that suffers continuous modification.” From this step, one will proceed to identify the Immutable See-er or Witness (*sakshi*) with oneself. After this stage, there is no difficulty in realising “I am Brahman (*Aham Brahmasmi*)”.

How can it be said that the witness realises “I am Brahman”? Who is it really that realises it? Is it the witness, or soul, who calls itself “I” and undergoes modification? If we say that the witness understands, the difficulty is that it is the witness of the “I”, and it has no egotism or “I am (*Aham*)” idea. If it is said that it is the “I am”, then how can it be the witness also? If it is the “I am”, it will have to be subject to modifications. Then the witness also becomes changeable (*vikari*)! It can have no idea like, “I am Brahman”, so it can never understand “I have become Brahman.” Therefore there is no meaning in saying that the witness realises “I am Brahman”.

Then who is it that so realises this Truth? It becomes necessary to say that it is the soul (*jivi*), the “I” that does so. Note that the practice of meditation on identity with Brahman is done by the ignorant (*a-jnanis*) to obtain liberation from the shackles of that illusion. The witness has no ignorance (*a-jnana*), so it has no spiritual knowledge (*jnana*) and no need to get rid of it! Only the ignorant need to take steps to remove it. Qualities like ignorance or knowledge attach themselves only to the soul, not to the witness. This is proven by actual experience, because the witness that is the apparent basis for knowledge and ignorance is devoid of both, while the soul is actively bound up with these two.

Some may doubt how this distinction came to be. “Does the witness (*sakshi*) know the soul (*jivi*), the “I”, which changes and gets modified and agitated? And again, “who is this witness? We are not aware of it”, they may assert. By undergoing the sorrows of ignorance (*a-jnana*) and seeking solace in the study of *Vedanta*, one infers that there must be a witness who is unaffected by the passing clouds. Later, the witness (*sakshi*) or *Atma*, which one knew by reasoning, is realised in actual experience when the superimposition of illusion of the world is removed by spiritual exercise.

The experience of spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) is available only for the soul (*jivi*), for it alone has ignorance (*a-jnana*). So, it is the soul, not the witness, that knows “I am Brahman (*Aham Brahmasmi*)”. After the dawn of that knowledge, “I-ness” will disappear, for one becomes Brahman.

Now, who is it that saw? What is it that was seen? What is the sight? In the statement “I saw”, all these are latent right? But thereafter, to say “I saw” is meaningless; it is not correct. To say “I have known” is also wrong; by merely seeing the immutable once, the mutable soul cannot be transformed into the witness (*sakshi*)! Seeing the king once, can a beggar be transformed into a monarch? So too, the soul who has once seen the witness cannot

immediately become the witness. The mutable soul cannot realise “I am Brahman (*Aham Brahmasmi*)” without first getting transfused into the witness.

If it is said that the soul, who has no idea of its basic substratum, can by reasoning realise that it is Brahman, how then can it “declare” so in so many words? When one has become king, the kingship is recognised by others and not declared by the king himself, right? —that is a sign of foolishness or want of intelligence.

Caught up in the coils of change, it is very hard —well nigh impossible— to realise that one is just the witness of all this passing show. So, the soul (*jivi*) must first try to practise the attitude of a witness, so that it can succeed in knowing its essential Brahman nature. Getting a glimpse of the king inside the fort does not help the beggar to acquire wealth or power; so too, the soul not only must know the witness but must become the witness—who is more ethereal than the sky, beyond the three-fold category of knower, known, and knowledge, eternal, pure, conscious, free, and blissful. Till then, the soul continues as soul and cannot become Brahman.

As a matter of fact, as long as “I” persists, the state of witness (*sakshi*) is unattainable. The witness is the inner core of everything, the “immanent”, the embodiment of being-awareness-bliss (*satchidananda*). There is nothing beyond it or outside it. To say that such fullness is “I” is meaningless. It is also wrong to call it a vision or a direct experience of the Lord (*sakshatkara*).