

44. Mastery of the scriptures is not enough

Now the following question might arise. While efforts in previous births are rewarded by endowment with the four qualifications, how can study of the scriptures (*sastras*) here and now not help! Some persons are also handicapped by the evil effects of past *karma*, and they don't get fruit from scriptural study. But as far as character and bent of mind are concerned, the lucky ones who have engaged in good deeds in past births are at an advantage. The student whose study is handicapped by past mental impressions (*samskaras*) is as unlucky as the aspirant who has failed to develop a spiritual bent of mind by activities in past births.

Well! Even when one has mastered the scriptures, if one hasn't taken up spiritual exercises (*sadhana*), one cannot grasp the *Atmic* basis of existence. Of course, one who has understood the scriptures has greater chances of entering upon a course of spiritual exercises and practising them more steadfastly. The merit acquired in past births appears now as a keen thirst for liberation, as a sincere endeavour to approach a *guru*, as a determined struggle to succeed in spiritual exercises, and it comes to fruition with the realisation of the *Atma*. Success comes to those who have faith (*sraddha*) more than anything else. Without faith, the prompting to translate what has been read in the scriptures will be absent and scholarship will hang as a burden on the brain.

Since renunciation (*vairagya*), etc. are the qualifications for realising *Atma*, scholars and the rest are equally entitled to it. Isn't it only through spiritual exercises (*sadhana*) that the *Atma* can be known? Then why bother with the mastery of all the scriptures (*sastras*)? Well, to know the Self, scriptures are not indispensable; having known it, they are unnecessary. But all that is inferred from scriptures is only indirect experiences; direct perception is impossible by any means other than spiritual exercises. Direct understanding alone is spiritual wisdom (*jnana*).

45. See the Atma by unraveling the five sheaths of the body

What exactly is inquiry into the nature of the *Atma* (*Atma-vichara*)? Not the study of the attributes of *Atma*, as given in books, but the analysis of the nature of the "I", laying bare the enveloping five sheaths (*panchakoshas*), through concentrated discrimination that is directed inward. It is not inquiry (*vichara*) of the external world or the outer objective world, or the academic scholarship directed toward the interpretation of texts. It is the analytical penetration of the secret of the *Atma*, achieved by the keen edge of intellect.

Is it then impossible to realise the *Atma* through study of the scriptures (*sastras*)? The answer is: yes, it is impossible. The *Atma* is of the nature of being-awareness-bliss (*satchidananda*). It transcends the gross, subtle, and causal bodies (*sthula*, *sukshma*, and *karana sariras*); It is the witness of the waking, dream, and deep sleep stages. How could a mastery of the meanings of these words give direct vision of *Atma*?

How, then, is the *Atma* to be seen? By unraveling the five sheaths that cover up the personality, by negating

each of them, experiencing “not this”, and passing beneath and beyond to the substratum of the *Atma*, the Brahman, which all the while appeared varied and manifold.

Anything misplaced in the home must be searched for in the home itself—it can’t be found by a search in the woods. The Brahman hidden by the five sheaths must be searched for in the five-sheathed body, not in the woods of scriptural lore.

Though Brahman cannot be discovered in the scriptures (*sastras*), the scriptures do tell you of the five sheaths (*pancha-kosas*) and of their identification marks and characteristics, so, by exercise of the intellect, it is possible to reach down to the *Atmic* truth.