



Jnana Vahini

Divine Discourses of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

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1. Jnana Vahini

Preface

Before you read this Book ... Dear Reader, this is not just another book on the nature of soul and the technique by which it discovers its Reality. When you turn over the pages, you are actually sitting at the feet of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, the Avatar of the age, come in answer to prayers of all virtuous people and spiritual aspirant to guide them and grant them peace and perfection. "Place all your burdens on Me," He says. "Start on the spiritual pilgrimage this very day," He exhorts. "Why fear, when I am here?" He asks.

His grace is omnipresent; His miraculous powers proclaim His omnipotence; His wisdom, His analysis of the ills of humanity, and His prescription for their cure reveal His omniscience.

You have the unique chance of meeting Him, at the Abode of Peace (Prasanthi Nilayam), and receiving from Him His blessings for the success of your spiritual pilgrimage. He will know and appreciate your earnestness and faith, and you can continue with greater confidence and courage, because He is certain to assure victory. He is the Eternal Teacher of the Gita, the Charioteer in your heart.

In the pages of the magazine, published with His Blessings, and named after Him as Sanathana Sarathi, He wrote, out of His overwhelming love toward humanity, caught in the meshes of cynicism and credal fanaticism, this series of articles, called Stream of Spiritual Wisdom (Jnana Vahini). Month after month, thousands of readers awaited these articles (in the original Telugu as well as in the English translation), and when they received their copy, they perused it diligently and with reverential eagerness. These articles are now put together in book form for your guidance and inspiration.

- N. Kasturi
Editor, Sanathana Sarathi

Remove ignorance by incisive inquiry

Just as thick fog is dispelled by the rays of the Sun, ignorance melts away before the powerful rays of knowledge (Sanskrit saying). Knowledge is acquired by uninterrupted inquiry. One should constantly be engaged in the inquiry of the nature of Brahman - the reality of the I, the transformations that occur to the individual at birth and at death, and other such matters. Just as you remove the husk that covers up the rice, so too you have to remove the ignorance that adheres to the mind, by frequent application of incisive Atmic inquiry. It is only when full knowledge is won that one can get liberated, or, in other words, attain moksha. After attaining the abovementioned Atmic knowledge, one has to follow the path of Brahman and act according to the new wisdom.

All doubts that afflict the mind have to be solved by consulting those who know or the true teachers one has the chance to meet. Until one gets firmly fixed in the path that the spiritual teacher (guru) or sacred text (sastra) has shown, one has to steadfastly obey their rules and directions. One has to be in their company or be associated with them in one way or other. Because one can progress very fast if one keeps close to a wise person who has realised the truth, one must, with unrestricted renunciation and sincere earnestness, follow the instructions of the teacher and of the holy scriptures. This is the real penance (tapas); this spiritual exercise leads on to the highest stage.

Cognize the shining inner Atma as oneself

When ignorance and its concomitant delusion disappear, the Atma in everyone shines in Its own splendour.

All that we see is as a mirage, the superimposition of something over the Real and the mistaking of that for this. Things have a beginning and an end; they evolve and involve; there is evolution as well as involution.

When all is subsumed by involution (dissolution of the world, pralaya), only the causal substance (mula-prakriti) endures. Only the unmanifested cause survives the universal dissolution.

When gold is melted in the crucible, it shines with a strange yellow glory. Where did that light emanate from?

From the gold or the fire? What happened was only the removal of the dross by the fire; the effulgence belonged to the gold itself; it is its very nature. The fire is only an instrument for the removal of the dross. Nothing has been added to the gold by the fire in the crucible!

If fire could give the splendour, then why doesn't a stick or blade or pebble placed in the fire become as shining as gold? One has to conclude that the splendour came not through fire but out of its own inner nature.

The inner presiding Atma (Pratyagatma) is separate from the five sheaths of the individual (the panchakoshas).

It shines with its own splendour; it is the witness of the activities and consequences of the three qualities (gunas); it is immovable; it is holy and pure; it is eternal; it is indivisible; it is self-manifested, it is peace; it has no end; it is wisdom itself. Such an Atma has to be cognised as Oneself.

To realise the Atma, overcome four obstacles

To realise this Atma, this embodiment of spiritual wisdom (jnana-swarupa), four obstacles have to be overcome:

sleep (laya), waywardness (vikshepa), inertia (kshaya), and the enjoyment of bliss (rasa-aswadana).

Let's analyze them one by one.

1. Sleep (laya): When the mind withdraws from the external world, it enters

into deep sleep (sushupti), because of the overpowering influence of the objective world (samsara). The spiritual aspirant should arrest this tendency and attempt to fix the mind on the inquiry into the nature of the true Self (Atma-vichara). The aspirant must keep watch over the mind in order to keep awake and must discover the circumstances that induce the drowsiness and remove them in time. The aspirant must start the process of meditation (dhyana) again and again.

Of course, the usual producer of drowsiness and sleep during meditation is indigestion. Overfeeding, exhaustion through too much moving about, want of sufficient sleep at night - these also cause sleepiness and drowsiness.

So on those days when you wake up after a sleepless night, it is advisable to sleep a little at noon, although generally all those who engage in meditation should avoid sleep during the daytime.

Don't eat until you feel proper hunger. Practise the art of moderate eating. When you feel three-fourths full, stop eating; that is to say, stop even when you feel you can take a little more. In this way, the stomach can be educated to behave properly.

Over-exercise is also not good. Even walking can be overdone. You can walk until you conquer drowsiness, but remember that you cannot plunge into meditation immediately after you have warded off sleep.

2. Waywardness (vikshepa): The mind seeks to run after external objects, so constant effort is needed to turn it inward, away from the attractions of sensory impressions. This has to be done through the rigorous exercise of the intellect, of inquiry. Discriminate and get the conviction driven into you that these sensory impressions are evanescent, temporary, transformable, liable to decay, and, therefore, unreal (mithya) and not truth (sathya).

Convince yourself that what is sought after as pleasurable and avoided as painful are only the fleeting products of sensory contacts. Train yourself in this way to avoid the distractions of the external world and dive deep into

meditation.

A sparrow pursued by a hawk flies in despair for shelter into a house, but it is anxious to fly again into the outer world, right? So also, the mind is anxious to go again into the outer world, from the Atma, where it takes refuge. Waywardness is this mental attitude, this urge to run back into the world from one's shelter. Only the removal of waywardness will help the concentration of the mind in meditation (dhyana).

3. Inertia (kshaya): The mind is drawn with immense force by all the unconscious and subconscious impulses and instincts of passion and attachment toward the external world and its multitudinous attractions. Therefore, it experiences untold misery and might even get lost in its depths. This stage is called "decline of faculties due to inertia".

The state of inertia into which one is driven by despair cannot be called perfect equanimity (samadhi). One might even indulge in daydreaming in order to escape from present misery or start building castles in the air. All this is due to attachment, to the temptations of the outer world.

There is another type of attachment, the attachment to the inner world, the planning within oneself of various schemes to better oneself in the future as compared to the past. Both these form part of what is called decline (kshaya). The basis for both is the attraction of the outer world. Attachment brings about desire, and desire leads to planning.

4. Enjoyment of bliss (rasa-aswadana): When inertia and waywardness are overcome, one attains the bliss of the highest subject-object contact (savidya-ananda). This stage is called the enjoyment of bliss.

Even this is not the Supreme Bliss, which one does not attain or acquire but simply becomes aware of, so to say. The sweetness (rasa) of the differentiating superconscious state is a temptation that one has to avoid, for it is only second best. It is enough joy to act as a handicap. The joy is as great as that of people who just deposited a huge load they had carried for a long

time, or that of greedy people who just killed a serpent guarding a vast treasure they wanted to grab. Is the mind content with merely killing the serpent guarding the treasure? No. This is only the preliminary step of overcoming waywardness. True bliss is not experienced until the treasure is actually possessed. Likewise, one must not stop with mere subject-object type of superconscious state (sa-vikalpasamadhi).

From such a limited state, one must reach the highest superconscious state (nir-vikalpa-samadhi), where there is no mind or any ideation.

Eliminate egotism and desire and gain liberation by conquest of the mind

When the Sun rises, darkness, as well as the troubles arising from it, disappear. Similarly, for those who have realised the Atma, there is no more bondage and no more sorrow that arises from bondage. Delusion comes only to those who forget their bearings, and egotism is the greatest factor in making people forget their very basic truth. Once egotism enters people, they slip from the ideal and precipitate themselves from the top of the stairs, in quick falls from step to step, down to the very bottom floor.

Egotism breeds schisms, hatreds, and attachments. Through attachments and affection, and even envy and hatred, one plunges into activity and gets immersed in the world. This leads to embodiment in the physical frame and further egotism. In order to become free from the twin pulls of pleasure and pain, one must rid oneself of the body-consciousness and keep clear of self-centred actions. This again involves the absence of attachment and hatred. Desire is enemy number one of liberation (moksha). Desire binds one to the wheel of birth and death; it brings about endless worry and tribulations.

Through inquiry on these lines, knowledge is rendered clearer and brighter and liberation is achieved. Moksha is only another word for independence - for not depending on any outside thing or person.

If nicely controlled and trained, the mind can lead one on to moksha. It must

be saturated with the thought of God; that will help the inquiry into the nature of Reality. The consciousness of the ego itself will fade away when the mind is free from pulls and when it is rendered pure. Not to be affected in any way by the world - that is the path to self-realisation; self-realisation cannot be obtained in Heaven (Swarga) or on Mount Kailas.

The flame of desire cannot be put out without the conquest of the mind. The mind cannot be overcome without stamping out the flames of desire. The mind is the seed; desire, the tree. Only knowledge of self-realisation (Atma-jnana) can uproot that tree. So, these three are interdependent: mind, desire, and knowledge of Atma.

Brahman is perceived when all traces of "intention" disappear

The one who is liberated while alive (the jivan-muktha) is established firmly in the knowledge of the Atma.

That one achieved it by dwelling on the false-true nature (mithya) of the world and contemplating its failings and faults. By this means, that one developed insight into the nature of pleasure and pain and an equanimity in both. That one knows that wealth, worldly joy, and pleasure are all worthless and even poisonous. That one takes praise, blame, and even blows with a calm assurance and is unaffected by both honour and dishonour.

Of course, those who are liberated while alive reached that stage only after long years of systematic discipline and unflagging zeal when distress and doubt assailed them. Defeat only made them more rigorous in selfexamination and more earnest about following the prescribed discipline. They have no trace of the "will to live"; they are ever ready to drop into the lap of death.

The direct perception of Brahman (a-paroksha-brahma-jnana) is the name given to the stage in which the aspirant is free from all doubt regarding improbability or impossibility and is certain that the two entities, the individual Self or spirit (jiva) and Brahman, were one, are one, and will ever

be one. When this state is attained, aspirants will no longer suffer confusion. They won't mistake one thing for another or superimpose one thing on another. They won't mistake the rope for the snake; they will know that all along there was only one thing, the rope.

Also, they won't suffer from superimposing the boundaries of individuality on the Universal (abhasa-avarana).

That is, they won't declare - as they were wont to do previously - that the effulgence of Brahman is not in them. In the heart and centre of every individual (jivi) exists the Supreme Atma (Paramatma), minuter than the minutest molecule, huger than the hugest conceivable object, smaller than the smallest, greater than the greatest.

Therefore, spiritually wise people (jnanis) who have had a vision of the Atma in them will never suffer sorrow.

The Atma is there, in all living things, in the ant as well as the elephant. The whole world is enveloped and sustained by this subtle Atma.

Spiritual aspirants (sadhakas) have to direct their attention away from the external world and become insightful; they have to turn their vision toward the Atma. They must analyse the processes of the mind and discover for themselves the origin of all the modifications and agitations of the mind. By this means, every trace of "intention" and "will" has to disappear. Afterward, the only idea that will get fixed in the mind will be the idea of Brahman.

The only feeling that will occupy the mind will be the feeling of bliss, which arises out of its establishment in the stage of being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda).

Such spiritually wise people (jnanis) will be unaffected by joy or grief, for they will be fully immersed in the ocean of Atmic bliss (Atma-ananda), above and beyond the reach of worldly things. The constant contemplation of the Atma and its glory is what is connoted by the phrases "practice of Brahman

(Brahma-abhyasa)" and "cultivation of spiritual wisdom (jnana-abhyasa)".

Train the mind to dwell ever on God

The mind is influenced by the passion for objective pleasure and the delusion of ignorance with which it pursues - with amazing quickness - the fleeting objects of the world. So, again and again it has to be led on toward higher ideals. Of course, this is difficult at first, but with persistent training, the mind can be tamed; then it will get fixed in the perpetual enjoyment of the Om (pranava). The mind can be trained by following the methods of quiet persuasion, promise of attractive inducements, practice of withdrawing the senses from the outer world, endurance of pain and travail, cultivation of sincerity and constancy, and acquisition of mental equipoise (sama, dama, uparathi, thithiksha, sraddha, and sama-dhana).

The mind can be turned toward Brahman and the constant contemplation of Brahman by the study of the Upanishads, the adoption of regular prayer, sharing with others the ecstasy of devotional singing (bhajan), and adherence to truth. Very often, with the progress of meditation (dhyana), new desires and resolutions arise in the mind. But one need not despair. The mind can be broken provided one takes up the task in right earnest and follows a regular routine of training. The final result of this training is unlimited, unmodified bliss-consciousness (nir-vikalpa-samadhi).

This bliss-consciousness gives full knowledge of Brahman, which in turn results in liberation from birth and death (moksha). The mind must be attuned to the contemplation of Brahman; one must strive to tread the path of Brahman and live in Brahman, with Brahman.

Instincts and impulses must be put down

Knowledge of the Atma (Atma-jnana) can be won only by the triple path of (1) giving up impulses (vasanas), (2) uprooting the mind, and (3) analysing experience in order to grasp the reality. Without these three, the knowledge of the Atma will not dawn.

The instincts and impulses prod the mind on toward the sensory world and bind the individual to joy and misery. So, the impulses must be put down. This can be achieved by means of discrimination, meditation on the Atma, inquiry, control of the senses, control of desires, renunciation (viveka, Atma-chintha, vicharana, sama, dama, vairagya), and other such disciplines.

The mind is a bundle of impressions (vasanas). Verily, the mind is creation (jagath) itself; it is all the world for the individual. While in deep sleep, the mind doesn't function, so creation is practically non-existent for the individual. Creation is born (or "enters into the consciousness") and dies (or "disappears from the consciousness") according to the cognitive powers of the mind. Therefore, when the mind is destroyed, the world is also destroyed and one is free, one is liberated, one attains moksha.

Whoever succeeds in controlling the consciousness (chittha) can have a vision of the Atma. Consciousness is the grown-up tree, while the seed is the "ego", the feeling of "I". When the seed "I" is cast aside, all the activities of the consciousness also vanish automatically.

The spiritual aspirant who is earnest for these results has to be ever vigilant. At any moment, the senses might regain their lost mastery and enslave the individual. The aspirant might lose much of the ground already gained.

That is why spiritual aspirants are warned away from attachments to the world.

Be ever and always immersed in the search for truth. Don't waste time in the multiplication and satisfaction of wants and desires. One source of pleasure craves another source as a corollary. Thus, the mind seeks again and again to acquire the objects it has given up. So don't yield to the vagaries of the mind. Turn back, even forcibly, from sensory attachment. Why, even prayer can't be done according to the mind's vagaries. One has to stick to the same place and time! The Atma itself will sustain such spiritual aspirants and give them strength and steadiness.

The one who really knows God becomes God

The one who has subdued the mind will be the same in good times and bad. Grief and joy are but aberrations of the mind. It is only when the mind is associated with the senses and the body that it is affected and agitated and modified. When one takes in an intoxicant, one isn't aware of pain, right? How does this happen? The mind is then detached from the body, so it isn't bothered by physical pain or discomfort. Similarly, spiritually wise people (jnani) have immersed their minds in the Atma; they can establish mental peace and quiet by disciplining the mind.

Spiritually wise people get full bliss from their own Atma; they don't seek it anywhere outside themselves.

In fact, they will have no desire or plan to find joy in anything external. They are satisfied with the inner joy they get. The greatness of spiritually wise people is beyond description, even beyond your imagination! The sacred texts (sruthis) proclaim,

Brahmavith Brahmaiva bhavathi,
Brahmavith param apnothi.

The one who has known Brahman becomes Brahman Itself;
the one who has attained the Brahman Principle has become the Highest.

All bubbles are but the same water; so also, all the multiplicity of name and form, all this created world, are but the same Brahman. This is the fixed conviction of the spiritually wise (jnani), nay, their genuine experience.

As all rivers flow into the sea and get lost, so also all desires get lost in the effulgent consciousness of the realised soul. That is what is termed direct

vision of the Atma (Atma-sakshathkara).

The Atma has no death, right? It isn't born, and it is unaffected by the six-fold process of change. It is birthless (a-ja), without old age (a-jara), without death (a-mara), and without decline and extinction (a-vinasa). These processes are for the evanescent body; they are the six-fold processes of change. They mean being born, existing, growing, getting old, declining, and lastly dying. The Atma has no such modification. It is stable, unshakeable, fixed, the witness of all change in space and time. It is unaffected by transformations, like the waterdrop on the lotus leaf.

Liberation from the tentacles of the mind can be obtained by the acquisition of the knowledge of the Absolute (Brahma-jnana). This type of liberation is the genuine selfrule (swarajya). This is genuine moksha. Whoever grasps the reality behind all this passing show will be untroubled by instinct or impulse or any other urge; they will be the master of the real wisdom.

The robber who has robbed us of the precious gem of Atma is no other than the mind, so the gem can be regained by catching, threatening, and punished the robber. The possessor of that gem is immediately honoured by being installed as Brahman.

The four types of spiritually wise people

The spiritual aspirant must seek people who have attained this spiritual knowledge and learn their experience from them, honour them for it, and share their joy with them. Indeed, spiritual aspirants who do so are blessed, for they are on the road to self-rule (swarajya). This is the mystery of Brahman, the understanding that there is no other. This is knowledge of the Self (Atma-jnana).

There are four types of spiritually wise people (jnanis):

1. Knowers of Brahman (Brahmavid)
2. Master knowers of Brahman (Brahmavidvara)
3. Most excellent knowers of Brahman (Brahma-vidvariya)
4. Supreme knowers of Brahman (Brahma-vidvarishta)

These types are differentiated according to the development of the pure (sathwic) quality in the spiritually wise person. The first has reached the fourth stage called master of the path (pathya-pathi). The second has attained the fifth, the indifferent, detached (a-samsakthi) stage. The third has gained the sixth stage, the lack of awareness of material objects (padartha-bhavana). The fourth is in the seventh grade, the "beyond" stage (thuriya), the stage of perpetual samadhi.

Supreme knowers of Brahman (Brahma-vidvarishta) are "liberated", although they are in the body. They have to be forcibly persuaded to eat and drink. They won't engage in any work relating to the world. They will be unconscious of the body and its demands.

The other three will be aware of the body in varying intensities, and they will engage in worldly work to the extent appropriate to their spiritual status. Those three have to acquire destruction of the mind (manas). This itself is of two grades: the destruction of the agitations, including their shapes and forms (swarupa-nasa), and the destruction of only the agitations (arupa-nasa).

While on this point, readers might be troubled by a doubt. They might ask, who are these who have conquered and wiped out the mind? The answer is: Those who have neither attachment nor hatred, pride nor jealousy nor greed. Those who are free from bondage of the senses. Those who have won the battle against the mind are really the heroes. That is the test. Such heroic people will be free from all agitations.

The effects of the three qualities

One who has achieved the destruction of agitations and their shapes and

forms (swarupa-nasa) would have eliminated the two qualities (gunas) of sloth (thamas) and activity (rajas), and will shine with the splendour of pure serenity (sathwa). Through the influence of that pure quality, such people will radiate love and beneficence and mercy wherever they move. (In the already liberated individual (Brahma-vidvarishta), even this serene quality (sathwa-guna) is absent.) The serene quality will have as its unmistakable concomitant characteristics: splendour, wisdom, bliss, peace, brotherliness, sense of sameness, self-confidence, holiness, purity, and similar qualities. He who is saturated in only that can witness the image of the Atma within. It is when the pure (sathwa) quality is mixed with the slothful (thamasic) and active (rajasic) qualities that it is rendered impure and becomes the cause of ignorance and illusion.

This is the reason for the bondage of humanity.

The active (rajasic) quality produces the illusion of something nonexistent being existent! It broadens and deepens the contact of the senses with the external world. It creates affection and attachment, so, by means of the dual pulls of happiness and sorrow (the one to gain and the other to avoid), it plunges people deeper and deeper into activity. These activities breed the evil of passion, fury, greed, conceit, hatred, pride, meanness, and trickery.

And the slothful (thamasic) quality? Well, it blinds the vision and lowers the intellect, multiplying sloth, sleep, and dullness and leading one on the wrong path, away from the goal. It will make even the seen the "unseen"!

One will fail to benefit even from one's actual experience if immersed in sloth (thamas). Sloth will mislead even big scholars, for scholarship does not necessarily confer moral stamina. Caught in the tentacles of sloth, the pundits cannot arrive at correct conclusions.

Even the wise, if they are bound down by sloth, will be affected by many doubts and misgivings and be drawn toward sensory pleasures, to the detriment of the wisdom they have gained. They will begin to identify themselves with their property, their wives and children, and such other

worldly temporals. They will even confuse untruth with truth and truth with untruth! Note what a great trickster this slothful quality is!

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-samya-avastha).

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 (vaishamya). 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.

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 (jagrath 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.

Remember constantly that You are not the body!

Look at the clouds that wander across the sky; note that they have no intimate lasting relationship with the sky, which they hide but for a few minutes.

Such is the relationship between your body and You, that is to say, You who are of the nature of Supreme Self (Paramatma). The body is only a temporary, passing phase, hiding and clouding the truth.

How can the body's behaviour - wakefulness, dream, and sleep - affect the Eternal Supreme Self (Paramatma) in any way?

What of your shadow? Isn't it something separate from you? Does its length or clarity or career affect you in any way? Understand that the relationship between the body and your Self is the same. If you take this bundle of flesh and bone as yourself, consider what happens to it and how long you can call it "mine". Pondering over this problem is the beginning of spiritual wisdom (jnana).

This physical frame, built out of earth, fire, water, wind, and ether, breaks up

into its components, as all builtup things do! Only ignorance will take it as real; only the uneducated will attach value to it as permanent and eternal. Did this body exist before birth? Does it persist after death? No. It appears and disappears, with an interval of existence! Therefore, it has no absolute value; it is to be treated only as the cloud or the shadow.

As a matter of fact, this physical world is like the mango tree raised by the magician's wand; it is the product of the trickster known as mind. The clay takes the form of pot and pan and plate, and after an interval, it becomes clay once again, shapeless clay. Similarly, all this is the formless existence-knowledge-bliss (satchidananda); the formless (nir-akara) appearing with form (akara) for some time, on account of the delusion and ignorance of the mind. Some things are useful, some are not, all because of this name and form.

All forms are He; all are He. You too are He, above and beyond the past, present, and future. You are not this body, which is tied up with time and which is caught in the toils of was, is, and will. Be ever fixed in this attitude.

Dwell constantly in the thought that you are of the nature of the Universal Absolute Brahman (Parabrahman); then, you will grow into a realised soul (jnani).

Develop non-attachment: Be in the world but not of it

The mind that is in bondage craves for objects, for the company of men, and it prefers this location or that.

Attachment is bondage; non-attachment is liberation (moksha, mukthi). To crave is to be imprisoned, to die.

Mana eva manushyanam karanam bandha mokshayoh.

To withdraw the mind from all attachment is to be free, to live forever. For people, it is the mind that either causes bondage or grants liberation.

The mind runs after an object and gets attached; the senses are alerted; an action results; the mind is rendered happy or unhappy; feeling ensues; fear enters; anger grows; affection develops. Thus, the bonds are tightened.

Fear, anger, and affection are the closest comrades of attachment, the comrades dearest to its heart! All four are inseparable companions, moving always together. That is why even Patanjali was forced to assert, "Attachment runs after happiness." And what grants happiness? The fulfilment of desire, right? Desire leads to hatred of those who thwart it, fondness for those who feed it, and the inevitable wheel of opposites of likes and dislikes.

There is no escape from this for the ignorant.

Impure gold is melted in the crucible and emerges shining and bright. The mind rendered impure by passion (rajas) and ignorance (thamas), by anger and conceit, by the impressions of a thousand attachments and desires - this mind can be made bright and resplendent by putting it into the crucible of inquiry and heating it on the coals of discrimination. That brightness is the light of realisation, of the knowledge that You are the Atma.

Like the dust storm that covers everything with dust, desires, attachments, thirsts, and cravings all blacken the mind. They have to be kept away so that the splendour of the Self might merge in the splendour of the Supreme Omniself (the Paramatma).

Whatever the crisis, however deep the misery, don't allow your grip over the mind to get loose. Tighten it further, fixing your eyes on the higher values. Don't allow the mind to stray away from the holy tabernacle of the heart. Make it bow before the Atma within.

Thus, one can proceed from merging with the differentiated (sa-vikalpa-samadhi) to merging with the undifferentiated (nir-vikalpa-samadhi). Delusion must disappear without even a trace; then only can one merge with the Undifferentiated. There is no duality there; it is Brahman and Brahman alone. All bonds of ignorance (a-vidya), desire (kama), etc., fall away, and one is genuinely, fully free.

Self-realization is the ultimate goal of life

The snake shoves off its coil and has nothing more to do with it. Develop that attitude of non-attachment. Escape from the body delusion. The weak can never grasp this fact. By constant meditation on the Atma and its glory, one can come out of the tangles of the world and worldly affairs. The earnest spiritual aspirant (sadhaka) must divert all their attention and effort from the sensory world and fix them on the eternal Brahman.

Humanity did not arise merely to wallow in casual joy and fleeting happiness. It is insane to believe so. Identifying oneself with the "I" and getting attached to "mine" - that is the root cause of sorrow and ignorance. Where there is no egotism, there will be no cognisance of the external world. When the external world is not cognised, the ego can't exist. Therefore, wise ones will dis-identify themselves from the world and behave ever as the agent of the Lord, being in it but not of it.

Once, in the midst of conversation, Vasishtha spoke to Rama; "Listen, Rama, the valiant! The individual with ego (jiva) is a bull reclining in the shade (delusion, moha) of a vastly spreading tree in the forest (the objective world (samsara)). It is bound by the rope of desire, so it is infected by the fleas and insects of unrest and worry and disease. It rolls in the mire of wrong, while struggling in the dark night of ignorance to slake the thirst of the senses. Then, some good people who are wise untie it and take it out of the dark recesses of the forest. Through discrimination (viveka) and inquiry (vichara), they achieve the highest intellect (vijnana), and through this intellect they are able to grasp the truth, to realise the Atma, to know the Atma. That is the ultimate goal of all life, the stage that is beyond the past, present, and

future." But one point has to be clearly noted and always remembered: merely giving up external activities connected with the satisfaction of sensory desires is not enough; the internal cravings have to be uprooted. The word *trishna* covers both of these: the internal promptings and the external proceedings. When all promptings cease, it is called free of desire (*muktha-trishna*). Knowledge of the Atma and faith in the Atma - only these can destroy the irrelevant thirsts.

The spiritually wise person (*jnani*) who declares, "I am Brahman", utters this truth from the sincerity of the experience. When the gross and subtle are transcended, when the mind (*manas*), the intellect (*buddhi*), and the life force (*prana*) are sublimated, that is to say, when the Self is no longer bound by feelings, thoughts, impulses, and instincts, only existence (*Sat*) remains, pure and unalloyed Absolute Brahman (*Parabrahman*).

Hence, the spiritually wise person feels one with the Omnipresent, the Omnipotent. But the uneducated, the uninitiated, the people who have not taught themselves the first steps of spiritual discipline - they feel that they are one with their physical frame.

Being-Awareness-Bliss describes the experience of Brahman

The expression being-awareness-bliss (*satchidananda*) indicates the Eternal, without form (*nir-akara*).

What form can we posit of the All-pervasive, the All-inclusive? "Para", or "Param", means super, beyond, above, more glorious than all. *Parabrahman* indicates the One beyond and behind everything, grander than anything in the three worlds. It is non-dual, unique, eternal, and infinite. "Two" means difference, dissension, inevitable discord. Since Brahman is all-pervasive, It is one and only one. It is indivisible and indestructible.

Realising this fact is the highest wisdom (*jnana*).

The word Brahman is derived from the root *Brih*, meaning to expand, to

increase, to enlarge, etc. Brihath means big, enlarged, gross, high, etc. Purusha has its root pri, meaning to fill, to complete. Pur means a town "full" of inhabitants, that is to say, the body, in a figurative manner of speaking. He who completes or is immanent in or who fills it is the Purusha.

The word Atma has Ap as its root, meaning to acquire, to earn, to conquer, to overcome etc. He who knows the Atma can earn all knowledge, has acquired everything, has earned the knowledge of everything because the Atma is omnipresent. He is then fixed in Being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda), i.e. in the embodiment of Brahman.

Being is the essence of peace (santhi), and awareness is the essence of spiritual wisdom (jnana); together with bliss, they form the embodiment (swarupa) of Brahman.

The Taithiriya Upanishad has declared,

Through bliss (ananda), all this is born;
Through bliss, all this is living;
In bliss alone, all this is merged;
In bliss, all this rests.

The category "Atma within (antar-atma)" has the same attributes as the category Brahman: It is bliss-born, bliss-full, and bliss-merged. The more the knowledge (jnana), the more the awareness of bliss (ananda). The spiritually wise person (jnani) has joy as the right hand, helpful in all emergencies and always willing and able to come to their rescue.

Bhuma means "limitless". The Chandogya Upanishad declares that bliss (ananda) inheres only in the limitless, the Eternal, the Brahman. Another word used by the spiritually wise to describe their experience of Brahman is "the One whose nature is splendour, glory, or effulgence, who is Illumination itself

(jyothi-swarupa)". Ten million suns cannot equal the splendour of the Supreme Self (Paramatma). The word santhi-swarupa indicates that It is peace (santhi) Itself. In sacred texts (sruthi) like Ayam Atma Santho, it is proclaimed that the Supreme Self is Supreme Peace (Prasanthi) Itself.

This is why the Supreme Self (Paramatma) is characterised as eternally pure, eternally intelligent, eternally liberated, eternally illumined, eternally content, eternally conscious, etc. It is wisdom Itself, so it is the embodiment of all teaching. It is not attached to anything, so it is ever free. At the very moment that the Brahman is tasted, all hunger ceases and all desires come to an end, so It grants content.

The highest intellect (vijñana) is the name given to the actual experience of the Brahman; it is a special type of wisdom (jnana), unlike the common fund of information obtained from the study of books. The net result of the study of any branch of learning, the fruit of all that study, is also sometimes referred to as highest intellect.

The unique wisdom of the Brahman is known by a variety of names, like experiential wisdom (jnana), insightful wisdom (vijñana), intuitive wisdom (prajñana), consciousness (chit), and pure consciousness (chaithanya).

The opposite of pure consciousness is the unconscious or inert (jada). The knowledge of Self-realisation (Atma-jnana) makes everything conscious, active. Brahman is eternally conscious (nithya chaithanya).

Atma is immanent nonchanging Unity beyond time and space

Realised souls (jnanis) will feel that the Atma immanent in everyone is their own Atma. They will be happy that they are themselves all this; they will see no distinction between one person and the next, for they can experience only unity, not diversity. The physical differences of colour, caste, and creed, which adhere only to the body, are marks of only the external body.

The Atma has no parts (is nish-kala); It is without blemish (nir-mala),

unaffected by desire, anger, greed, affection, pride, and envy; It is without activity (nish-kriya); It is creation (prakriti), which undergoes all these modifications, or at least gives the impression that it is so modified. The Supreme Spirit (Purusha) is but the eternal Witness, the Ever Modification-less.

Of what can you say, "This is truth?" Only of that which persists in the past, present, and future, which has neither beginning nor end, which neither changes nor moves, which has uniform form, a unified experiencegiving property. Well, consider the body, the senses, the mind, the life-force, and all such. They move and change; they begin and end; they are inert (jada). They have three qualities (gunas): sloth (thamas), activity (rajas), and purity (sathwa). They are without basic reality. They cause the delusion of reality. They have only relative value; they have no absolute value. They shine only out of borrowed light.

Absolute truth is beyond the reach of time and space; it is indivisible (a-parichchinna). It does not begin; it is always and ever existent. It is the basis, the fundamental, the self-revealing. Knowing It, experiencing It, is experiential wisdom (jnana). It cannot be marked out as such and such and explained by some characteristics (it is a-nir-desya). How can something that is above and beyond the intellect and the mind be described through mere words?

It is also termed "invisible to the eye (a-drishya)", the eye being the optical apparatus that undergoes change and that is very limited in its capacity. Brahman can never be grasped by anything elemental or physical. Through Brahman, the eye is able to see, so how can the eye perceive Brahman itself? The mind is bound by the limitations of time, space, and causation. How can the Supreme Self (Paramatma), who is superior to these and unaffected by them, be limited by them?

The terms a-mala, nir-mala, and vi-mala applied to the Supreme Self connote the same meaning: a-mala implies absence of impurity; nir-mala, without impurity; and vi-mala, having all impurity destroyed. So too, the terms a-

chinthya (incapable of being conceived) and a-vyavaharya (without any activity) applied to Brahman for activity or work imply the existence of another or others, whereas It is unique and unaware of any move toward or away from another.

Know that creation (jagath) is the form (swarupa) of the secondary one (Virat-purusha), who arose from Brahma, the form imposed by illusion (maya) on the super-soul. Brahman is that which has become or appears to have become all this, the Inner Motive Force (Antar-yamin). In the without-quality (nir-guna) aspect, it is the primal cause, the cosmic womb (Hiranyagarbha), of which creation is the manifestation. Grasping this secret of the universe and its origin and existence - that is experiential spiritual wisdom (jnana).

Highest spiritual wisdom is Brahman

Many people argue that spiritual wisdom (jnana) is one of the attributes of Brahman, that it is of the nature of Brahman, a characteristic of Brahman, etc. But such opinions arise only in the absence of actual experience, of actual attainment of spiritual wisdom. Arguments and discussions multiply when there is no first-hand experience, for the realisation of reality is individual, based on revelation to oneself.

I declare that experiential knowledge (jnana) is Brahman, not a mere characteristic or attribute or quality of Brahman. The Vedas and spiritual texts (sastras) announce that Brahman is Truth (sathyam), Knowledge (Jnanam), and Bliss (Anandam), not that Brahman has these and other attributes. When Brahman is known, the knower, the known, and the knowledge all become one.

Indeed, Brahman cannot be described as such and such; that is why it is referred to as just "It is", or "Being (Sat)". Spiritual wisdom is also just Being, no more no less. The sacred revelations (sruthis) use the word Vijnanaghana to indicate Brahman, right? That word means: the sum and substance of the highest Knowledge (vijnana), knowledge with a capital K. Only those who are unaware of the sacred revelations will assert that spiritual wisdom and

Brahman are distinct. Spiritual wisdom is Brahman; distinction is impossible. It is a sign of ignorance to posit a difference.

All knowledge that is limited by the three qualities (gunas) is ignorance (a-jnana), not the spiritual wisdom of the transcendental, which is above and beyond the ignorant (thamasic), passionate (rajasic), and even the serene (sathwic) motives, impulses, and qualities. How can such limited knowledge be spiritual wisdom? Knowledge of the transcendental has to be transcendental too, in an equal measure and to the same degree.

It might be said that Brahman has form, while spiritual wisdom (jnana) is formless, but both are formless in the real sense of the word. The apparent form of Brahman is the result of ignorance (a-vidya); form is attributed to Brahman only to serve the needs of the embodied soul during the period of the embodiment. The Absolute is reduced to the level of the conditioned, because the soul is also conditioned in the body. Not to know that this human interlude is but the conditioned state of the Atma is to be reduced to the dullness of the beast.

Take up the chief path to acquire spiritual wisdom: devotion

"Spiritual wisdom (jnana) is the panacea for all ills, troubles, and travails." This is how the Vedas describe it.

There are many paths to acquire this wisdom, and the chief among them is the path of devotion (bhakthi), which was adopted by Vasishta, Narada, Vyasa, Jayadeva, Gauranga, and other great people. As the oil is to the flame in the lamp, so is devotion to the flame of spiritual wisdom. The heavenly tree of joy of wisdom thrives on the refreshing waters of devotion. Understand this well.

It is for this reason that Krishna, who is the personification of divine love (prema) and who is saturated with the quality of mercy, declared in the Gita:

Bhakthya-mam abhijanathi.
I am known by means of devotion.

Why was this declaration made? Because there are no hurdles in the path of devotion. Young and old, high and low, man and woman - all are entitled to tread it. Who among people are in urgent need of medical treatment?

Those who are badly ill, right? So too, those who are groping in ignorance (a-jnana) are first entitled to the teaching and the training leading to the acquisition of spiritual wisdom. Why feed those who have no hunger? Why drug those who are not sick? Brahman or spiritual wisdom is the drug for the de-realisation of the falsely realised, the removal of the fog of misunderstanding (a-jnana). It will sweep away the dirt that hides the truth.

Everyone can win spiritual wisdom, regardless of status, class, or sex

Everyone, whatever the status, class, or sex, can win spiritual wisdom. If women aren't entitled to it, why is it mentioned that Siva taught Vedanta to Parvathi? How did the great yogi Kapilamaharshi teach the sankhya system to his mother, Devahuthi? How did Yajnavalkya, the great sage (rishi), impart the essential principles of Vedantic philosophy to his wife, Maitreyi, as mentioned in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad? The Upanishad cannot be false. The scriptures that mention these facts speak only the truth.

There is no doubt that sage Mathanga is a great ascetic. Doesn't the Ramayana declare that he taught the woman Sabari the secret of the sacred doctrine of Brahman? Is that statement false? Coming to this age itself, who does not know that the scholarly wife of Sureswaracharya contended with Sankaracharya himself in philosophic discussion of Brahman?

So the chief qualification for the path leading to spiritual wisdom (jnana) is

only spiritual discipline, the spiritual exercises (tapas) in which one is engaged, not the irrelevant consideration of caste, creed, or sex. Leaving all other matters aside, one should concentrate on spiritual discipline.

The Lord is accessible and available to all. He is all mercy. No one except the Lord has the authority to declare anyone unfit for the discipline of spiritual wisdom. If you reflect a little deeper, you will realise that the Lord would not deny anyone the chance to reach Him. How can the flame deny refuge to sparks of the same fire? How can the sea deny refuge to drops of that sea? The Lord also will not refuse or reject.

A father with four sons cannot state that one of them has no right to a share in his property. It wouldn't be just or proper. Then what should be said of the Lord, who is devoid of the slightest tinge of partiality or prejudice and who is full of mercy? To attribute favouritism to Him is to commit sacrilege.

Referring to this question of who is or isn't entitled to knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya), Krishna said in the Gita, I have no favourite. Nor do I dislike anyone. Whatever might be the caste, whether the person be man or woman, whoever worships Me with faith and devotion will reach Me. Nothing can stand in their way. I too will manifest in the hearts of such.

Is the Gita mistaken? No, it speaks profound truth.

Wisdom consists of the feeling of oneness without distinctions

There is another wrong belief current today. It is said that in order to be entitled to the practice of spiritual exercise for the realisation of Brahman - like prayerful repetition of the name (japa) and meditation (dhyana) - one must adhere strictly to certain modes of daily conduct laid down in tradition and thus attain purity. I do not agree. As an analogy, should a bedridden person have to take a course on medicine before being allowed to take medicines? To require a person to be pure and good and to follow certain codes of conduct before treading the path of God is to say that someone must be free from disease in order to deserve medical treatment! How absurd.

Purity, goodness, etc., are all consequences of the journey toward God; they can't be insisted upon as essential for starting upon the path. The taking in of the drug will gradually induce health and cheer; health and cheer should not be insisted upon before the drug is even prescribed or supplied! This obvious fact is ignored by many; that is a serious malady indeed!

All those suffering from the malady of ignorance (a-jnana) must read and ponder over the books dealing with the treatment of that disease, namely, the experiences of the great elders in the field of spiritual endeavour.

Only then can they understand the real state of things.

One other secret of success has to be kept in mind. Every course of medical treatment involves some regulation and restriction of diet, movements, habits, and conduct. These should not be neglected or taken lightly. In fact, if the doctor's advice on these matters is not strictly followed, even the costliest or latest or most efficacious medicine will be ineffective.

Consider the people who underwent the treatment - drugs, restrictions, limitations and all - and successfully emerged from the sickroom hale and happy! They are of all castes and ages and of both sexes. Vasishta was born of a public woman; Narada's mother was a washerwoman; Valmiki belonged to the hunter caste; Viswamitra was a warrior (kshatriya); Mathanga was a member of the depressed classes. The inference is that what is important enough is constant meditation on the Lord, not the labels of caste or creed. Wisdom (jnana) is the attainment of the feeling of Oneness, the realisation that there is nothing high or low. That is the true divine Principle, the Brahman.

A sugar doll has head, neck, arms, and limbs, but each part is as sweet as the other. From head to foot, it is one uniform sweetness; there cannot be two types of sweetness. That is why it is said to be not dual (dwaitha) but non-dual (a-dwaitha). Those who emanate from the Lord's face and those who emanate from His feet are both His children. The realisation of this truth is the sign of wisdom (jnana).

Some trees, like the jack tree, bear fruit from the root up to the topmost branch! Does the fruit near the ground differ from the fruit on the tallest branch? No, they are all the same? Or do they taste differently, like distinct fruits? Of course, among the fruits some may be tender, some unripe, some a little ripe, and some fully ripe, and they may differ in taste, too, as is only natural. But never can you find bitterness in the bottom and sweetness in the top or sourness in the middle. Tender, green, and ripe are three stages, or three characteristics.

Caste depends more on qualities than on birth

So too, the four castes are four characteristics (gunas). According to their nature and their activities, the four castes have been ordained. Like the fruits on the same tree, some tender, some green, and some ripe, men are classified into four groups according to their stage of development, which is judged from their actions and character.

Those in whose thoughts and behaviour the pure quality (sathwa-guna) predominates are grouped as brahmins, who are progressing along the path toward Brahman. Those in whom the active quality (rajoguna) is dominant are referred to as protectors or warriors (kshatriyas). Thus, the scriptures (sastras) have spoken of ingrained qualities as the basis of caste, not otherwise. Why? The Gita itself proclaims that the four castes have been established by the Lord, taking into consideration (1) the dominance of any of the three qualities (gunas) and (2) the practice of actions (karmas) like repetition of the name (japa), meditation (dhyana), and other disciplinary duties!

Although born as a labourer (sudra), a person does attain brahmin-hood through the struggle toward Brahman and spiritual exercise. Although born as a brahmin, if that ideal and the effort to attain it is not found, one becomes a labourer.

Good conduct (anushtana) and strict discipline (nishta) are the criteria, the deciding factors.

The inner Atmic principle is the same in all. It knows no caste or class or conflict.

Accept the rigours of spiritual discipline and follow the path of devotion

To realise that the Self is beyond all these lesser categories, devotion (bhakthi) is the first requisite. Devotion merges in wisdom (jnana) and becomes identified with it. Devotion ripens into wisdom, so don't speak of them as different. At one stage it is called devotion, at a later stage, wisdom. Once it is cane, later it is sugar.

Through devotion, the individual soul (jiva) is transformed into Siva - or rather, it knows it is Siva and the soul-idea disappears. To posit oneself as a soul is ignorance (a-jnana); to know oneself as Siva is spiritual wisdom.

A white cloth that has become dirty is dipped in water, soaked in soap, warmed, and beaten on a slab in order to restore its colour and condition. So too, to remove the dirt of ignorance that has attached itself to the pure being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda) Atma, the water of unblemished conduct and behaviour, the soap of Brahman, reflection on the warming of repetition of the name and meditation, and the slab of renunciation - all three necessary. Only then can the fundamental Brahman-hood of the Atma shine forth.

It doesn't help if the soap is good but the water is dirty. All that soap and all that bother of heating and beating are sheer waste, for the cloth continues as dirty as ever. This explains why many aspirants fail. Though they have meditated on Brahman for many years and studied about it for long, their modes of behaviour and conduct are all wrong. The fault lies in the water, not in the soap! The daily habits, acts, and activities are mean and low, and the meditation (dhyana) on Brahman is all a waste.

In their ignorance, people hesitate to accept the rigors of spiritual discipline, considering them as so many fetters to free living. They decry the divine

command and denounce divine grace. That command is not understood and appreciated; it is disobeyed and even fought against. But the wise one who plants wheat will be blessed by a harvest of wheat; the fool who plants tare weeps because wheat does not grow. For everyone in the world, whether we believe it or not, two plus two make four; the result does not depend on your likes and dislikes. The fact that in every being there is the Supreme is a similar inescapable reality. God will not give up if denied or enter if invited. God is there, as the being's very Being. This is the truth, and if you want to know it and experience it, develop the vision of the spiritually wise (jnani); without that vision, you can never see it. Just as the telescope alone enables you to see things that are far away, so the "wisdomscope (jnana-drishti)" is essential to see Brahman immanent in every being.

Just as the child refuses to believe in things beyond its circle of vision, the weakling, who is afraid of the travail of winning that intelligence (drishti) refuses to believe in the all-pervasive, all-inclusive Brahman!

Serve selflessly, without attachment to the fruits thereof

A set of people with curious ideas have cropped up recently, and they strut about with great pride, for they have no yearning for God, even no use for God; they engage in service (seva), and they are satisfied with service!

But the essence of service is selflessness and abnegation of the fruit thereof, and these service people have no right to look down upon the godly and the spiritual aspirants as inferior. For that is but reaching for the fruit while neglecting the tree! Selfless service is the final fruit of the Godward discipline. That is the attitude of renunciation of the fruit of action (who reall). How can the fruit be gained without the long and laborious nurture of the tree? The very foundation of renunciation of the fruit is love (prema) toward all beings, love that seeks no reward. Without spiritual experience of this higher love, selfless service is impossible.

At present, the world is full of people who clamour for good profit for themselves but are unwilling to give good value for the things they receive.

They want God, but they are engaged in the cultivation of some other crop!

They don't seek God and strive for God day and night; on the other hand, they have installed the god of wealth in their hearts and spend all their time and energy worshipping it and praying for its favour.

How pure is the heart full of devotion (bhakthi) to God and love (prema) toward all things! Selfless service is possible only by such; the rest only prattle about it and pretend to be impelled by it. Only those who are well established in the faith that all are children of God, that He is the inner motive force of every being, can include themselves in that class of social servants.

Those who say they have no use for God or devotion have egotism as the core of personality and exhibition as its outer rind. However much is written and read, that egotism will not wither away. Ego consciousness leads to self-aggrandizement, and when self holds sway over the heart, no deed worthy to be styled service can emanate from them. It is sheer selfish greed that makes one label the deed as service.

Ignorance will not vanish until this discrimination dawns:
This world is only God and nothing else.
Everything, every being, is but His manifestation,
Bearing withal a new name and a new form.

Love this truth, and believe in it. Then you have the right to speak of service (seva), devotion (bhakthi), and righteousness (dharma) as well as the authority to preach these three paths. Knowledge of the reality will show you that service, devotion, and righteousness are all one and indivisible. Without that knowledge, selfless service, etc., become mere exercises in hypocrisy.

Every act done with the consciousness of the body is bound to be egotistic; selfless service can never be accomplished while immersed in the body-

consciousness. But consciousness of God (Deva) instead of body (deha) will bring forth the splendour of love (prema). With that as inspiration and guide, one can achieve much good without even knowing or proclaiming selfless in outlook. For such a person, it is all God's will, His play (leela), His work.

The paths of devotion, wisdom, and non-attachment are inseparable

Light is wisdom. Without light, all is darkness. If you haven't secured the lamp of wisdom (jnana) to illumine your path, you stumble along in the gloom, with fear as your companion. There is no falsehood greater than fear, no ignorance mightier than that. Decide therefore to travel in the daylight of spiritual wisdom and be worthy of this human birth. Through your success, you can even make the lives of others worthwhile.

Non-attachment (vairagya) depends upon spiritual wisdom (jnana) as well as devotion (bhakthi). Deprive non-attachment of that basis, and you will find it crumbling fast. Why, this is the prime cause for the want of spiritual progress at present. All these three have to be emphasised in spiritual discipline; they are not to be separated and striven for individually.

Devotion includes spiritual wisdom. Non-attachment isolated from devotion and wisdom, wisdom isolated from devotion and non-attachment, and devotion isolated from non-attachment and wisdom - each is ineffective.

The best that each isolated path is capable of is to give some training in purity. Therefore, never develop conceit and declare that you are a devotee or spiritually wise or non-attached. Spiritual aspirants (sadhakas) must dip in the triumvirate (triveni) of devotion - wisdom - non-attachment. There is no other way to salvation.

See life as a manifestation of the three qualities

Before everything, be pure and holy. There are plenty of spiritual aspirants, but few of them are pure in heart.

For example, observe this fact: Many people religiously read the Gita over and over again, many expatiate on its meaning for hours and hours, but people who practise the essence of the Gita are rare. Instead, people are now like gramophone records, reproducing someone else's song, incapable of singing themselves, ignorant of the joy of song. They are not spiritual aspirants at all. Their spiritual discipline doesn't deserve the name.

Life must be seen as only the manifestation of the three qualities (gunas), as a play of temperaments pulling the strings of the dolls. This awareness must saturate every thought, word, and deed. That is the wisdom (jnana) you need. All else is ignorance (a-jnana).

Be spiritually wise: without ego, without desires, with equal love for all

The spiritually wise (jnanis) will have no trace of hatred in them. They will love all beings; they won't be contaminated by the ego; they will act as they speak. The ignorant (a-jnanis) will identify themselves with the gross body, senses, and mind, things that are but tools and instruments. The eternal pure Atma is behind the mind, so this mistake of the ignorant plunges them into trouble, loss, and misery.

All the names and forms that fill up this universe and constitute its nature are but creations of mind. Therefore, in order to perceive the truth, the mind has to be controlled and its wayward fancies calmed. The ever-flickering waves of the lake have to be stilled so that you can see the floor clearly, right? So too, the waves of ignorance that ruffle the mind have to be stilled.

Keep the mind away from low desires that run after fleeting pleasures. Turn your thoughts away from them and direct the thoughts toward permanent bliss, which is derivable from the knowledge of the immanent divinity.

Keep before the mind's eye the faults and failures of sensory pleasures and worldly happiness. Thus, you will be helped to grow in discrimination and non-attachment and to make spiritual progress.

Just as gold melted in a crucible gets rid of dross and shines in its pristine glory, so too, one has to be melted in the crucible of yoga by the fire of detachment (vairagya). Being possessed of this spiritual wisdom (jnana) is the sign of samadhi, as explained by some.

For those capable of self-control along these lines, the native power will gradually assert itself, and the Reality that is now misunderstood will be rid of that fog. Patiently cultivate the habit of meditating on your Atma-hood and see the particular as the universal. Through samadhi, progress is guaranteed and liberation is won.

The springs of egotism, etc., arise from ignorance of the basic truth. When knowledge of the Atma arises, ignorance, with its brood of worry and misery, will vanish. The mark of the spiritually wise (jnani) is the absence of egotism, the extinction of desire, the feeling of equal love for all, without any distinction. These are the fundamentals of knowledge of Self-realisation (Atma-jnana).

The Lord's eyes, ears, hands, and feet are everywhere

You can see without eyes, hear without ears, speak without the tongue, smell without the nose, touch without the body, and walk without legs. Yes, and experience without even the mind. For you are the pure essence itself; you are the Supreme Self.

You have no understanding of this truth, so you are drowned in ignorance. You feel that you are only the senses, so you experience misery. The five senses are bound up with the mind; the mind separately activates the senses and is affected by their reactions. People read through the mind-associated eye, so they fail. But the spiritually wise (jnanis) have the divine eye (divya-chakshu), for they have divine vision. And they can see and hear without the aid of the senses.

As said in the Gita, the Lord's feet are everywhere, the Lord's hands are everywhere. His eyes, His ears are everywhere. So He sees all, He does all.

Devoid of senses, He makes all senses function. To grasp this mystery, the path of spiritual wisdom (jnana) has to be trodden. This path is very helpful. When people develop into full wise persons (jnanis), they themselves becomes It, It merges in them, and both become indistinguishable. Then, they realise that they are the inscrutable, the indefinable Brahman, not limited by the illusory superimposition of name and form.

When fire burns, its light can be discerned from a distance, but those who are far can't hope to feel its warmth. So too, it is easy to describe the splendour of knowledge (jnana) for people who are far from acquiring it, but only those who have actually neared it and felt it and are immersed in it can experience the warmth, the joy, the melting away of the illusion.

For this, continuous concentrated spiritual exercises (tapas) and continuous meditation on God are needed.

The pure Essence can be known by the spiritual discipline of devotion (bhakthi), and in fact the goal of devotion is indeed spiritual wisdom.

The world is the Lord's three-act play

When an author writes a play, the entire play will already be in their mind before setting pen to paper. Act after act, scene after scene, with no picture of the entire drama in their mind, the author will never entertain the idea of writing it at all, right? But take the case of the audience. They grasp the story only after the drama is fully over; it unfolds itself scene by scene. Once they have understood the theme, they too can confidently describe to others the purport of the play.

Similarly, for the Lord, this drama of time in three acts - the past, present, and future - is clear as crystal.

In the twinkling of an eye, He grasps all three. For He is omniscient, and it is His plan that is being worked out, His drama that is being enacted on the stage of creation. Both the actors and the spectators are lost in confusion,

unable to surmise its meaning and its development. For how can one scene or one act reveal its meaning? The entire play has to be gone through for the story to reveal itself.

Without a clear understanding of the play in which people are acting their roles, they hug the mistake that they are souls (jivis) or spiritual aspirants (sadhakas) and waste away their lives, beaten by waves of joy and sorrow.

When the mystery is cleared and the play is discovered as mere play, the conviction dawns that you are He and He is you. Therefore, try to know the truth behind life, search for the fundamental, and bravely pursue the underlying reality. Seekers of wisdom (jnana) must always be conscious of this.

The Lord is in every heart, in the subtle as well as the gross forms. So the spiritually wise (jnani), who has had a vision of the Atma presiding over the inner stage, will never be affected by sorrow; it can never hold sway over the spiritually wise. The Atma is in the ant and the elephant, in the atom and the atmosphere. Everything is saturated with Brahman.

Make God your constant focus

Seekers must divert their attention inward from the exterior world; they must discover the origins of the agitations of the mind. This process will diminish and destroy the activities of the mind, which make them doubt, discuss, and decide. From that stage onward, the exhilaration of being Brahman oneself will be constant. This will stabilise the being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda) that arises from the experience.

The spiritually wise (jnanis) can never be affected by joy or sorrow, however big; they will be immersed in the ocean of Atmic bliss (Atma-ananda), blissfully unaware of the world around, far above and beyond its coils.

This is the discipline called the practice of Brahman (Brahma-abhyasa), that is to say, the ever-present exercise of remembering the basic Brahman of the

universe, praying to the formful aspect of that Brahman, speaking of His glory, being in His company, and living always in His presence. That is why the Panchadasi says, Thoughts dedicated to Him alone, speech devoted to Him alone, conversation centred on Him alone - this one-pointed existence is referred to by the wise as the discipline of spiritual wisdom.

Thath chinthanam, thath kathanam,
anyonyam thath prabodhanam, ethath eka param thwam cha,
jnana - bhyasam vidur budhah

This is the lesson taught in the Gita by Krishna:
They fix the mind on Me, they survive only because they breathe me,
they inform each other about Me, they talk only of Me - they are happy and content with these only.

Math chinttha madhgatha prana bodhayanthah parasparam,
kathayanthascha mam nithyam thushyanthi cha ramanthi cha.

This ceaseless thought of the Lord is also referred to as reflection on Brahman (Brahma-chinthana), or cultivation of spiritual wisdom (jnana-abhyasa) or the Atma (Atma-abhyasa).

Calm the mind by steady, continuous discipline

The mind pursues only exterior objects either because of the pull of the senses or because of the delusion caused by superimposing the characteristics of permanence, etc., on the external world. So the mind has to

be brought back to travel to the correct goal again and again.

At first the job is hard. Still, by proper training, all the agitations can be calmed by the prayerful repetition of Om. The training consists of controlling the mind by good counsel, superior attractions, withdrawal from sensory objects, ability to bear the ups and downs of fortune, steadfastness or faith, and poise or equanimity (sama, dama, uparathi, thithiksha, sraddha, and sama-dhana).

If, at first, the recalcitrant mind is shown the sweetness of devotional singing (bhajan), the efficacy of prayer, and the calming effects of meditation, then it can be slowly turned toward meditation of Brahman. It must also be led on by the cultivation of good habits, good company, and good deeds. Meditation will, as it proceeds further and further, give rise to greater and greater keenness. Thus, the mind has to be caged in the cave of the heart. The final result of this discipline is no less than undisturbed, undifferentiated equanimity (nir-vikalpa-samadhi).

This samadhi is, really speaking, knowledge of Brahman itself, the wisdom (jnana) that grants release, or moksha. The discipline for this consists of three exercises: the giving up of craving, the elimination of mind, and the understanding of the Reality. These three have to be cultivated uniformly and with equal ardour. Otherwise, success cannot be ensured; no one of them is enough. The instincts and impulses (vasanas) are too strong to yield easily; they make the senses active and greedy and bind the person tighter and tighter. So that the mind won't achieve mastery, attention has to be paid to the sublimation and subjugation of the senses and the promptings behind them, to the development of self-abnegation, and the relentless pursuit of reason and discrimination. When the mind is won, the dawn of wisdom (jnana) is heralded.

The aspirant (sadhaka) has to be ever-vigilant, for the senses might recoil any moment, especially when the yogi mixes with the world and worldly. The basic truth must be kept constantly before the mind's eye. Wants shouldn't be multiplied. Time shouldn't be frittered away, no, not even a minute. The

craving for one pleasant thing will give rise to another craving for a still more pleasant thing. Cut at the very root of desire itself and become master of yourself. The renouncing of desire will take you fast to the pinnacle of spiritual wisdom.

Liberated people (jnanis) will be unaffected by joy or sorrow, for how can events produce reactions in them who have wiped out their minds? It is the mind that makes one "feel"; when one has taken a drug that deadens the consciousness, one feels no pain or even joy, for the body is then separated from the mind. So too, when it dawns, spiritual wisdom separates the mind and keeps it aloof from all contact.

By special discipline, the turbulence of the mind can be calmed. As a result of this, it becomes possible to taste the bliss of the Atma, free from its pulls. The mind attracts people outward and offers only external objective joy, but wise ones know these joys to be fleeting. The Atma is enough for them to fulfil all their desires for happiness, complete and permanent. So, they will have no need for the external world.

Worship the great souls who have won wisdom

Liberated people (jnanis) will also acquire some special powers through their beneficent resolutions, their beneficent promptings and purposes. Through these, they can attain whatever they wish. The greatness of the status of liberated people is indeed indescribable, beyond your imagination. It is of the same nature as the splendour and magnificence of the Lord Himself. Why, they become the Brahman that they have always been.

That is why it is declared,

Brahmavid Brahmaiva Bhavathi,
Brahmavid apnothi param.

The one who has known Brahman becomes Brahman;
that one attains Brahman-hood.

The fact that this world is unreal and that Brahman alone is real must become patent; then, all impulses are destroyed and ignorance is demolished. The gem of spiritual wisdom (jnana) has been stolen by the mind, so regain the gem by catching the mind. The gem entitles you to the status and dignity of Brahman, which you assume immediately.

The great souls who have won this knowledge of self-realisation (Atma-jnana) deserve worship. They are holy, for they have attained Brahman - which is the right of everyone in the world, however great or whatever the spiritual discipline (tapas). That is the kingdom they seek, the honour for which they aspire. This is the great mystery, the mystery elucidated in the Vedas, Upanishads, and spiritual texts (sastras). The solving of this mystery makes life worthwhile; it is the key to liberation.

Truth and untruth must be cut apart by means of the sharp sword of spiritual wisdom (jnana). It keeps the world afar and brings the residence of the Lord within reach. That residence is eternal bliss (nithya-ananda), the highest bliss (param-ananda), the bliss of Brahman Itself (Brahma-ananda).

Illusion makes Brahman appear as soul, God, and world

Worldly illusion (maya), by means of its power of (1) hiding the real nature and (2) imposing the unreal over the real, makes the one-and-only Brahman appear as the soul (jiva), God (Iswara), and the world (jagath) - three entities where there is only one! The faculty of illusion is latent, but when it becomes patent, it takes the form of the mind. It is then that the seedling of the huge tree (that is, this world) starts sprouting, putting forth the leaves of mental impulses (vasanas) and mental conclusions (sankalpas). So, all this objective world is but the play of the mind.

The individual soul and the Supreme Being are caught up in this proliferation, and they are inseparably intertwined in the world, so they are also creations of mental processes, like the things appearing in the dream-world.

Imagine the individual soul, the Supreme Being, and the world as having been painted; the pictorial world has both the soul and the Supreme Being incorporated in it, and all three appear as different entities, although they are created by the same paint. So also, the same mental process creates the appearance of the soul and the Supreme Being as pervading and immanent, in the background of the world.

It is illusion (maya) that produces the illusion of soul, Supreme Being, and world; this is declared by the oral texts (sruthis). Didn't the Vasishta-smrithi make clear that mental processes are responsible for the magic dance of He and I, this and That, and mine and His? The expression "I am God-This (Soham-idam)" found in that text indicates the soul (jiva), the Supreme Being (Iswara), and the world (jagath). "Sah" means He, the Unmanifested, the Super-soul, the Power beyond and above, the Supreme Being (Iswara). "Aham" means "I", the entity enveloped by the consciousness of doer, etc. "Idam" means this objective world, the perceivable sense-world. So, it is clear that these three are only the products of mental processes and have no absolute value; their value is only relative.

In the waking stage and during dreaming, these three appear as real, but during deep sleep or while unconscious (as during a fainting fit), the mind is not working, so the three don't exist! This fact is within the experience of all. Therefore, it is easy now for you to realise that all three will disappear for good when, through spiritual wisdom (jnana), the mental processes are destroyed. Then one gets release from bondage to all these three, and one knows the one and only entity. In fact, one gets established in knowledge of nondualism (a-dwaitha jnana).

Only spiritual knowledge won by the analysis of the mental processes can end illusion. Illusion flourishes on ignorance and absence of discrimination. So, spiritual education (vidya) spells the doom of illusion.

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)".

Attaining enlightenment destroys ignorance as well as enlightenment!

The wise (jnani), 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 nonexistent, and one has only to know that to dismiss it from the consciousness. So say the spiritually wise (jnani).

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.

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 (vijñana-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).

Atma is the Universal Cause and Seer

The Atma is present everywhere and is in everything. It is unaffected. It is omnipresent, like ether (akasa). It is even beyond the ether - It is the ether in the universal consciousness (chit), so It is referred to as "beyond (param)". It is described in the oral texts (sruthis) as "This Supreme Lord is unattached (asangohyayam purushah)".

The Atma is unaffected and untouched by anything; it is beyond everything and devoid of agitation or activity.

Don't doubt whether it is unlimited or not. It is beyond the three limitations of space, time, and causation.

You can't state that the Atma is in only one place and not in another. It is not limited by space. You can't state that it exists at one time and not at another. It is not limited by time. Atma is everything; there is nothing that is not Atma. Atma is All, so it has no limitation of name or form like material objects (vasthus) have. Atma is full and free. Knowing this is the highest truth, the fullest knowledge (jnana).

A doubt may be raised here: If the Atma is immanent in everything, like the ether, isn't it a transformation (vikara), a change? No. Existing, emanating, growing, changing, declining, dying - these are the six transformations.

But the Atma is the universal, eternal witness, cognising ether and the other elements, so it has no modifications at all. It is changeless (nir-vikara).

Saying that the Atma is changeless means that some other things have modification (vikara). So, the question may be asked how the word nondualism (a-dwaitha) can be used. Now, some things have modification and some don't. But when there is nothing besides Atma, it is wrong to speak of a two-fold entity - it is not two, it is one!

There is no doubt possible of this; it cannot arise. How can it be said that there is nothing outside the Atma? For this reason: the Atma is the cause of all this, and there can be no distinction between cause and effect. The cause cannot be without the effect, and the effect cannot be without the cause.

Some might be suffering under the doubt: How can the Atma be the Universal Cause? The Atma is the Universal Cause because it is the Universal See-er. The see-er is the cause of all the delusion of this world. The see-er creates silver in the mother of pearl, as well as the varied scenes of the dream world. So too, for the multiplicity of things experienced during the waking stage, the Atma, who is the see-er, is the instrument, right?

Attachment and affection are the result of delusion

The world is a play of illusion (maya). Because of this play, the world seems to

be subject to evolution of names and forms and involution of the same until the whole is melted in dissolution of the world (pralaya).

The illusion disappears with the illumination of spiritual knowledge (jnana), just as light dispels the delusion of the snake with which the rope was covered! Then, the knowledge that the Atma is all fills and fulfils; one is Atma through and through! The sacred texts (sruthis) also declare this.

The Atma is always content and blissful. To you, one thing appears more attractive than another, so this sensual attachment and affection are the results of delusion and greed. It is like a dog that gnaws a bone; when blood oozes out of its tongue and gets mixed with the bone, it relishes the bone the more for that additional taste. When it gets another bone, it drops the first one and runs after the second. Thus, the Atma superimposes its inherent bliss upon the external, evanescent object and envelops that object with a certain attractiveness.

Objects are taken to be pleasure-giving, but they are not really so; they only add to the grief. This affection toward things seen through the deluded eye is ever-changing, and it is limited, not unlimited.

The nature of Atma is Being-Awareness-Bliss

The attachment to the Atma won't undergo any modifications. Even when the senses and body fall, the Atma will remain and infuse bliss. It is unlimited and indestructible. Everyone has attachment to the Self, or Atma.

It is of the nature of the highest bliss (param-ananda). For this reason, it is also described as of the nature of being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda).

Are these three the characteristics or qualities of the Atma? Or are they its essence, its nature? A doubt of this type may arise. Redness, heat, and splendour are the nature of fire, not its attributes. In the same way, Atma has being, awareness, and bliss as its very nature. Fire (agni) is one, and Atma is also one, though both may appear as different. Liquidity, coldness, and taste

are of the very nature of water; yet, water everywhere is the same, with no diversity.

Atma is one; it subsumes all, and by knowing It, all is known. The Atma is the witness of the five sheaths (kosas) of the individual: the food, vital-air, mental, body, and bliss sheaths (anna-maya, prana-maya, manomaya, vijnana-maya, and ananda-maya kosas).

How can Atma be all-knowing, it may be asked? Atma is consciousness (chit), and all else is inert (jada).

Atma alone can know, and nothing else is capable of knowing. And Atma knows that all else is Atma. Can the pot know the ether (akasa) inside it? Although it does not know, the ether is there all the same. But the Atma in people knows even the inert in the presence of the senses. Thus, the body, the house, the field, the village, the country are all "known". So too, the unseen items like heaven are "understood".

Though the multiplicity of body, country, etc. is non-existent, they appear so because they are formed by the tendencies of the mind; they simply appear on the screen as different and varied. In the dream, though one experiences a multiplicity, one knows that they are unreal creations of one's own mind; this is clear to the witness of the dream. Similarly, the experience of the waking stage is at most a mental picture. People also talk of heaven, though they have no experience of it.

The realisation of "I am Brahman"

The investigation of the truth and unity behind all this is the duty of the wise (jnani), 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 (ajnana).

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 (sakshathkara).

The sacred revelations allow a restricted identity of soul and Brahman

The sacred revelations (sruthis) also did not consider the soul (jiva) and Brahman as of the same nature. The more important identity, according to the sacred texts, is of the ether (akasa) within one pot and the ether in another pot. The ether in the pot is the same as the ether in the pan; the ether in the pan is the ether that has filled everything everywhere. The ether in the pot is the ever-full immanent ether. That is the primary general principle (mukhyasamanadhi-karanya). The wind in one place is the wind in all places; the sunlight in one place is the sunlight everywhere; the God in one image is the God in all images. This type of identity has to be grasped.

So too, the witness in one body is the same as the witness in all.

The sacred revelations don't declare that the soul (jivi) is Brahman, as the statement "I am Brahman (Aham Brahmasmi)" would indicate. Instead, they do allow a limited, restricted identity. That is to say, the I-ness of the soul has to be eliminated by reasoning; then, Brahman remains as balance, and knowledge of "I am Brahman" dawns; this is the restricted process of identity. Continuing as a soul, one cannot grasp the Brahman essence.

The beggar has to forget his body to recognise that he is the king; so also, people have to bypass the human body, which is the base for their I-

personality, to realise their nature, which is divine.

The human personality has to be discarded by inner devotion and discipline and the acquisition of the divine.

Then, knowledge dawns that one is divine. Limitations of the individualised Self (jivi) has to be overcome before Brahmahood dawns.

Of course, one can get a glimpse of the Brahmahood during deep sleep, when one is free from all mental agitations (vikalpas). The dream-body (taijasa) during the dream stage becomes the creation (viswa) in the deep sleep stage and ponders, "Did I travel all this time over various lands and undergo multitudes of experiences?"

Wasn't all this a fantasy? I was never involved in all this; I was happily sleeping, unaffected by everything." Just as someone recovering from intoxication or freed from illness, or as a beggar coming by a fortune and forgetting their indigence, people realise their divinity and enjoy divine bliss.

Experiencing identity with the Lord, the individualized Self (jivi) declares, "I am Brahman. Where has all the changing world fled? How deluded I was to be caught in the tangle of soul and world (jagath)! Past, present, and future don't really exist at all. I am the embodiment of being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda-swarupa), devoid of the three types of distinction." He is immersed in the bliss of Brahman. This is the fruition of spiritual wisdom (jnana).

Realise your true Self by destroying all limitations

The soul can realise itself only by the destruction of all limitations. The mind is the greatest of these. The mind undergoes two stages while being destroyed: destruction of form (rupa-laya) and destruction of the formless aspect of the mind (a-rupa-laya). The agitations of the mind stuff are the forms (rupas). Then comes the stage of equilibrium where there is the positive bliss (ananda) of being sat and awareness (chit), where also the

formless mind disappears. The annihilation of the mind is of two kinds, namely, the mind pattern and the mind itself.

The former applies to sages liberated while still alive; the latter to the liberated when deceased (videha-mukthas).

Now, only the destruction of form (rupa-laya) is possible. This makes the person enjoy the bliss derived from the experience of identity with Brahman.

So, the mind is a limitation of the individual soul (jivi). It has to be conquered; the body-consciousness must disappear; steady faith has to be cultivated in wisdom (jnana). Delusion will then fade away. All "I-feeling" will go, and every moment, the spring of being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda) will well up in the individual. That is the real direct experience of the Lord (sakshatkara). The great masters also emphasise this discipline and dwell on this bliss. This, verily, is the truth.

Four qualifications for inquiry into the Atma

To entitle one to inquiry into the Atma, one must be endowed with the four qualifications. Scholarship in all the Vedas and scriptures (sastra), asceticism, mastery of ritual, dedication to repetition of the name of God (japa), charity, pilgrimage - nothing will help in granting that authority. The sacred revelations (sruthis) say,

Shantho dhanthah uparathih thithikshah

So equanimity, self-control, withdrawal of the senses, and steadfastness - only these confer that title, not caste, colour, or social status.

Be one a pundit versed in all the holy scriptures, a wise person (vidwan), or an illiterate, child, youth, or old person, a celibate, householder, forest dweller, or renunciate (brahmachari, grihastha, vanaprastha, or sanyasin), a

brahmin, soldier, merchant, or labourer (kshatriya, vaisya, sudra), or even an outcaste, man or woman - the Vedas declare that

Sadhana - Chathushtaya

Everyone is qualified, provided they are equipped with the four qualifications

Mere reading of the scriptures (sastras) does not entitle one. Instead, the attainment of the four qualifications mentioned therein is essential.

The doubt might then arise: How can a person who has not read the scriptures attain the four qualifications?

My reply is, how does the person who reads scriptures attain them? "Because one knows the scriptures, one acts in a spirit of dedication to the Lord, gets mental purification thereby, and acquires renunciation (vairagya) and other qualifications in increasing measure." But then one asks: How can these be cultivated by one who doesn't know the scriptures. Well, why can't they be cultivated? By the accumulated fruit of the educative influences and good deeds in past births, it is possible to get qualified for inquiry into the nature of Atma (Atma-vichara) in this birth, without scriptural study.

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).

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.

Approach the preceptor for help in grasping the Atma

Then one might ask, how can one not versed in the scriptures master the process of this analysis and consummation?

One can learn it from a guru, or an elder spiritual aspirant (sadhaka), right?

But one fact has to be emphasised again. The Atma principle is beyond the reach of even the most profound pundit who has learned the scriptures (sastras); it can be understood only by direct experience. That is why it was said of old that even that pundit has to approach a guru, a person who has already had the vision. Without guidance from such a teacher, Atma cannot be grasped. Even Narada had Sanatkumara as guru, Janaka had Suka, and other saints had other gurus. Maitreyi (the consort of Yajnavalkya), the unlearned Leela, and Chudala are examples to show that, without prolonged study of the scriptures, also women in the past learned the knowledge of the Atma (Atma-vidya) from the guru and attained success.

The grace of the Lord makes everything else superfluous

Of course, when one has the grace of the Lord, the guru often becomes superfluous, for the Lord makes everything known. Whatever else a person may not have, however deficient they may be in the usually accepted qualifications, if they are blessed with the grace of the Lord, they can certainly have a vision of the Atma.