

A Glimpse of the Road Ahead

No one starts out in life with a desire for liberation from the wheel of existence or moksha. The need when one is young, to see, experience and acquire what the world so temptingly offers is too strong to resist and quite rightly so. The desire for an alternative comes later when some healthy disillusionment has set in and there is a longing for inner peace and meaning. Everyone in our group has experienced this disillusionment to some extent but it usually takes some time before a hard and fast decision is reached to work towards that alternative end. This is because the gap between street level living and a full grasp of what non-duality (Advaita) entails is wide and negotiating that gap requires much preparatory work.

When preparing for any journey we need as much information as possible. It serves our purpose best to have first experienced life to the full. This is much more use to us than simply reading fellow travellers accounts of what to expect. We benefit most from our own mistakes. These are our stumbling blocks and they require much patience and self knowledge to make full use of. In this way we learn about the structure of our psyches and our individual strengths and weaknesses. Learning about our inner world with its 'shadow' helps us to purify our motives. Slowly our vision clears, like using windscreen wipers on a rainy day to afford an unimpeded view of the road ahead. Purity of vision or purpose is highly prized in the spiritual world. Where to begin with we were bombarded with a multitude of desires, with pure vision (requiring pure intellect or 'Buddhi') we end up with only one.

Innocence, on the other hand is a positive disadvantage. Attractive in the very young it becomes an obstacle to progress in later life suggesting a life un-lived, unconscious and unprepared to make an informed decision.

When we are a little clearer about our goal we can take steps to make the attainment of it more likely. One of these steps is to become quite careful about the kinds of food we take in. Most of us do this already with regard to the quality of the physical food we ingest. How many of us are equally careful to avoid taking in food in the form of impressions of a critical or violent nature? We forget that our minds, receiving stimuli through the eyes, act like photographic plates, recording indiscriminately and indelibly what we have not bothered to guard against. We cannot expect to purify our minds to a point where we can tune- in to the subtlest spiritual states if they remain clogged up with coarse material.

Supposing around mid-life we have been moderately successful in our chosen field and coped with the usual demands of a householder's life then we are bound to reach the conclusion that while there are many joys to be experienced with regard to family, house, partner, career etc., not one of these rewards is without its defects. Each is only relatively good, none absolutely good. The new acquisition you cannot live without this year is destined for the scrap heap next year.

If that is shown always to be the case then where, one asks, is a defect free goal to be found. Vedantic scriptures will answer that only the Atman is eternally defect free but then warns that you can never actually acquire the Atman. The Atman cannot be found anywhere, not because it isn't there but because you already are that Atman you are searching for. The sought is the seeker. That which you seek is that which is seeking. Naturally you cannot acquire what you already are.

This is difficult to take on board because Atman or Brahman is omnipotent, omniscient and eternal. Naturally such a description conflicts with the empirical experience each of us has that we are anything but perfect. With such a discrepancy between the experience of our personal limitations, contradictions and complexes, and how we are described in the Upanishads we are inclined to disbelieve the scriptures and mistakenly put such statements down to poetic licence.

In practice we can only gradually imbibe the Truth of who we really are over a long period of time. This is known as the process of Self enquiry. It's worth remembering that before Galileo no one questioned the assumption that the sun revolves around the earth. 'It's self evident' they said. 'Look how it rises over there in the east and then sets in the west'

When eventually one accepts that one's own experience is wrong and the Vedas are right the problem of objectivity returns. One says, 'Alright, I have truly grasped that I am not this body, feelings and mind and identity but how can I now come face to face with Atman who has been in my sights all these years? How many more hours of meditation must I do before I am ready to confront, know, see, experience Atman?' But of course none of that is possible. Atman is not an object to experience. It is ever only the subject . . . I . . . the witness of those meditations and everything else besides.

When surrender to the Truth of who one really IS , is complete, we are told there is no longer any effort. Effort always carries a degree of anxiety and when you discover you already have everything, are everything, then striving in any direction in time and space is meaningless.

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