

14. This and That

Every living being refers to itself as “I,” “I.” “I am Ramayya,” “I am Krishnayya,” “I am Sita,” “I am Radha.” Each one, assumes the “I,” as his own, and uses it whenever he has to designate himself. If only birds, beasts and other living things could speak, they too would have behaved likewise and referred to themselves as “I.” Besides these, even mountain peaks, hills and trees might announce themselves as “I am hill,” “I am anthill,” “I am tree,” if only they could speak.

When we spend some time thinking over this, it will be clear that some great mystery is embedded in this expression, I. The illiterate boor uses this expression. The sage who has secured the Divine vision uses It. Even God, it is said, announces Himself as I. Nevertheless, who probes into this mystery? And among those who have dared probe, how many have succeeded in unravelling it? And even if

there are a few who have unravelled the mystery, how many among them have used the discovery to transform their lives? Have the celebrated intellectuals, the Pundits, the Paramahansas succeeded in delving into the meaning and significance of this “I”?

No, let us see whether the exponents and commentators of the *Bhagavad Gita*, who can reel off the eighteen chapters and the seven hundred slokas in a continuous stream, have grasped the full implications and importance of the word, “I.” In the Gita, the declarations by Sri Krishna—“*Aham moksha-yishyami*—I shall absolve you,” “*Maam ekam saranam vrja*—Come to me, the One, for refuge” “*Kshetraajnam cha api maam viddhi*—And, also know Me, as the knower of the Field,” and the like—He refers to “I,” does He not? So, this expression “I” is clearly omnipresent. It is the sign and symbol of all Jivatmas. It has unlimited forms and appearances. Like the string that passes through the rosary beads, it interpenetrates and holds together all names and forms.

However transient names and forms might be, the “I” persists without being affected. Therefore, one has to know this omnipresent “I” so that one can understand all that has to be known. He who has known it is the *Jagad-guru*, (the World-teacher), the *Viswa-guru*, (the Teacher of all Beings), the *Sadguru* (the Teacher to be followed).

The body is but the container, the *Upadhi*, the sheath. Nevertheless, imposing differences and distinctions based

on physical characteristics and material considerations, some are elevated as “touchable” and some condemned as “untouchable”; some are classified as “high” and others as “low.” Intellect cannot claim honour, and persons cannot claim to be Pundits if studies are directed to the amassing of money or earning the wherewithal for a comfortable living. Nor can skill and excellence in argumentative scholarship be worthy of reverential mention. Really, the word “I” leads you to the Supreme Godhead, when you dive into its significance. “That is you,” “That is I,” “I and That are One,” this is what the great Vedic dictum, “*Thath thwam asi*—That thou art”—declares. That is the very core of all teaching, the grandest of counsels.

This sacred principle embodied in the “I” is beyond the grasp of the most learned scholars, by means of lone inquiry, without guides and helpers. Only, the guides have to be those who are aware of the Truth and who are earnest in living the Truth. It is beyond the reach of scholarship, logic and grammar. Note that these are warnings administered by the Sruthis and the Smrithis.

Well, when one intends to learn in a general way about this “I” and its implications, he can be told the secret in just three sentences: “I am active in day time, when I am awake. I sleep at night. I experience dreams when I sleep. Thus, acting and experiencing both day and night, I die.” When one considers these statements of the individual, one can conclude that they are based on the individual’s knowledge

gained from this life. “The ‘I’ begins when I am born,” he believes. But did this “I” exist before birth? If it had, how can an existing thing be said to be born? Even if this objection is ignored, how did it exist and where? Was it disembodied apart from name and form? Was it beyond the pale of the senses? Doubts such as these pursue the seeker in waves. It has to be understood clearly that the “I” is not related or affixed to one object, thing, or being, to one name and form. Remember this when you identify and recognise the “I” or arrive at the true answer to the question, “Who am I?” you have identified and recognised the entire Cosmos and its mysteries.

It may be asked, what exactly is the urgency to understand the meaning of this “I” when there is an infinite number of topics that call for study in the Universe? One can well try to unravel the secrets of the Cosmos. Or, attention may be paid to understand what is meant by “Jivi,” or, by “Deva” (God). When such profound subjects as the Universe, the Individualised Divine, the Divine itself—subjects that are incomparably important—are clamouring for attention, why give them up and investigate the meaning of expression used by common folk and children, this “I,” “I”? Of what benefit can it be? People may ask.

The expression is simple, of course; but its implications are infinite, and fundamentally satisfying. This is the reason why all great teachers exhort the seekers, “Know thyself,” “Inquire into yourself, that alone can give you release.” The

Sastras too confirm this exhortation. “*Yad Vijnaanena Sarvam vijnaatham bhavathi*—That, which when known, everything becomes known.” The Sastras extol the importance and value of this inquiry, and make it clear that the inquiry into the Atma is essential. The assurance is given that the Atma is you, yourself, as in the sacred axiom, “*Thath thwam asi. That thou art.*”

Therefore, to fulfil the yearning, you have first to inquire into this mystery, who you are. You can then realise that you are *nitya*, eternal, beyond the boundaries of Time. The Sastras will help you to cast away the Ajnana, the dark clouds of ignorance that now hide this Truth from your awareness. Then, you can delight at the experience of the awareness of your genuine Nature. The awareness comes when the Truth is revealed with the dawn of light. But the Sastras which guide man into the knowledge of these great mysteries and into the region where such bliss can be secured are not studied now. Instead, man pursues with blinkered eyes his own silly notions. How then can he attain the Atmic Principle? How then can he reach the very embodiment of Ananda?

Mere worldly scholarship cannot delve into the meaning of the Sruthis. The Grace of God has to be won by devotion and dedication, and that Grace alone, the compassionate Gance of the Eye of God alone, can instil into him the real meaning of the Sruthis. Only persons who are embodiments of Divine wisdom and Compassion can decide what exactly is helpful to the spiritual progress and well-being of man.

Others only flounder. They will find it impossible to cope with the task. For, how can Gurus who fail to save themselves, help in saving others? The Gurus of today endeavour to cleanse society while their own houses are unclean. The number of such Gurus is increasing; and so, faults and failures are multiplying. Their haltings justified and explained away, in various ways, and so the confusion grows worse. As a consequence, endless argumentation ensues and Reality is lost to view. These Gurus interpret the Sastras to suit their prejudices and partialities, making them instruments for their aggrandisement.

Under these distressing conditions, the Grace of God is the only hope of man; that is the beacon to illumine the path. That is the compassion which rewards man for his spiritual struggle. That is the strong steady ship that can take him safely across.

Many preceptors and teachers declare that the path of inquiry into oneself is the path of liberation for man, “*Swa vimarso mokshah*—Self-inquiry leads to Liberation” is the assurance. “That is the Atma; that is my Self,” “I” and the Atma are not different.” “The Atma and the Paramatma are not separate.” The yarn “I” is both warp and woof of the cloth, the Atma. When the “I” yarn is found in different bodies and feels that in each body it is distinct from the rest, the Atma cloth can be said to disappear; but in both yarn and cloth, there is one substance ever persisting, in spite of how each feels—and that substance is “cotton.”

So too, Paramatma persists as the only Truth, in the “I,” the Atma. Without the cotton, Paramatma, there can be no “I” yarn. Without the “I” yarn, there can be no Atma cloth. These three—Paramatma, Atma and I—are only forms and names for the ONE—the Paramatma, the ONE Atma, the DIVINE Atma.

