

## Chapter XXII. The Eternal Truths

The *Veda* is the Mother of all the scriptures (*sastras*). The *Veda* emanated from God Himself as inhalation and exhalation. The great sages, who were the embodiments of the treasure gained by long ascetic practices, received the *Veda* as a series of sounds and spread it over the world by word of mouth from preceptor to pupil. Since it was “heard” and preserved by generations, the *Veda* is known as *sruthi*, “that which was heard or listened to”. The *Veda* is endless.

### The Vedas: divine revelations

Who composed the *Vedas*? Until today, it has not been possible to unveil their names. Those who recited it had perhaps no desire to earn renown, for the names are nowhere seen mentioned in the *Veda*. Perhaps they attached no importance to their names, clans, or sects, or it is likely they had no kith or kin or clan. Whoever they may be, the sages were sure they were masters of all knowledge, for the sense of equality and equanimity found in the *Veda* is the innate quality of only such wise persons. So it is very appropriate to infer that the *Veda* was given to the world only by people endowed with all powers.

The word *Veda* originated from the root *vid*, meaning “to know”. “That which reveals and makes clear all knowledge is *Veda* (*Vidam thu anena ithi Vedah*).” The *Veda* can be mastered neither by limited intellect nor by limited experience. The sacred *Veda* instructs in all that one requires for spiritual advancement. It instructs in the means and methods of overcoming all sorrows and grief. It instructs in all the spiritual disciplines that can give unshaken peace.

No one has understood correctly the beginning or end of the *Veda*, so it is hailed as beginningless and eternal. Since the first and the last of the *Veda* are not known, it is everlasting (*nithya*). The intelligence of humans is tainted, but since the *Veda* has no trace of taint, it is concluded that it cannot be a human product. So the *Veda* is also characterized as non-personal (*a-pourusheya*).

### The Vedas: a unique source of all religions

The *Veda* is its own authority. Each *Vedic* sound is sacred because it is part of the *Veda*. Those who have faith in the *Veda* and its authority can personally experience this. The great sages were enriched by such experiences, and they have extolled it as the source of wisdom. These experiences are not bound by time or space. Their validity and value can be recognized not only in India but by people of all lands. It can be asserted that they lay down basic truths.

We don’t know when the *Vedic* religion originated, but others came later. This is the difference. So, if the Absolute has to be known, it isn’t possible to succeed with the help of the skill and strength that people have. Human intelligence can operate only within certain limits. (*Buddhi-grahyam atheendriyam*). But the *Veda* is beyond the reach of intelligence, which is restricted and can deal only with facts discoverable by the senses and experiences related to these. It can act only in the area of the visible, the viable.

### The Vedas: source of all sciences

Mother *Veda* has been kind to her children —the human race. To sanctify its cravings and to uplift the race, she has posited the concept of time —and its components, the years, months, days, hours, minutes and seconds. Even gods were declared to be bound by time. The individual (*jiva*) is caught in the wheel of time and space and rotates with it, unaware of any means of escape. But, really, the individual is beyond the reach of time and space. The *Veda* is bent upon the task of making it know this truth and liberating it from this narrowness. Mother *Veda* is compassionate; she longs to liberate her children from doubt and discontent. She has no desire to inflame or confuse. Wise ones know this well.

Gravitation has existed on earth since we do not know when. It had its origin along with the creation of the Earth. The Earth and the force of gravitation are both inseparable, indistinguishable. Just because it is not recognized by a few or because it is not visible as such, it would be foolish to deny its existence in the Earth. But the fact is, no one knew the existence of this universal force, even though it was there along with the Earth! The force was operating even when one was unaware of it. At last, after analyzing various principles and observing various experiments, the Western physicist Newton announced that the Earth had the force of gravitation. The world accepted the statement and placed faith in its truth. But the force was operating all the time, even before Newton's announcement. It did not start operating all of a sudden, when the experiments demonstrated it.

The *Vedas* are Eternal Truths; they existed even before the people of this land discovered, practised, and experienced them. Just as Western physicists announced the existence of gravitation after their experiments, the ancients of this land demonstrated the innate authenticity of the *Vedas* through their own experience. Here too, the *Veda* existed long before it was discovered and put into practice. Newton's laws of gravitation benefited the whole world; they express universal truths applicable to all places and times and are not confined only to Western countries. So too, the *Veda* is truth, not merely for India (Bharath) but for all people on earth.

### **The Vedas: drawn toward India**

It is not correct to claim that India (Bharath) is the birthplace of the *Vedas*. The utmost that can be said is that they were discovered by the people of India. To ask why a happening in one place did not take place in another place is also the sign of a confused mind. The Divine Author decides what should happen when and where. As the Divine Author decides, so it takes place. The atmosphere in India was congenial for the revelation and growth of the *Vedas*. The *Vedas* were drawn toward the hearts of the sages of this land, this land of Godward activity, this land of *yoga*, this land of renunciation. Other lands pursued sensual pleasures (*bhoga*), so their atmosphere was overcharged with worldly aspirations and achievements. Therefore, the *Vedic* message couldn't be easily understood there. Since in India the spiritual quest was sincerely pursued, along with material objectives, people here had the good fortune of Mother *Veda* incarnating.

Of course, this does not mean that Mother *Veda* has not blessed other lands or is absent therein. It is like the force of gravitation present everywhere. The *Veda* is omnipresent.

The heroic sages of India (Bharath) were able to receive the *Vedic* message as a result of their spiritual practice (*sadhana*) of denial and detachment, as well as their capacity to concentrate and to experience the bliss resulting from practising it. They were so selfless and full of compassion and love that they shared with those who approached them what they had heard and enjoyed. Therefore, they are called “seers of mantras”. Through the long line of their disciples, the message has come down the ages and spread all over the land. Like a continuing flood, the mysterious *Veda* was “visualized” by the sages as visionaries (*drashtas*). The *Bharathiyas*, people of

this country, are well aware of this debt.

The scriptural texts of India —the *Vedas*, limbs of the *Veda* (*Vedangas*), *Upanishads*, law codes (*smrithis*), *Puranas* (didactic ancient legends), and historical epics (*ithihasas*)— are repositories of profound wisdom. Each is an ocean of sweet sustaining milk, sacred and sanctifying.

The waters of the ocean can never be diminished in volume, however many pumps you ply to drain them. Enormous quantities of water are turned into steam by the hot rays of the sun, bundled into clouds, and returned to the earth as rain. This helps the harvesting of grain and renders the land green with vegetation.

The wonder is that in spite of this tremendous uptake and downpour, the level of the ocean does not go down even by an inch. Furthermore, even though thousands of live rivers pour their waters into the seas, the level is not seen to increase. Similarly, those who have supplemented their knowledge of the scriptural texts with the awareness of their validity acquired by practising the lessons contained in them are not affected by praise or blame, whatever the source and quantity. Their hearts will stay pure, unaffected, and calm. The holy scriptures of India are strongholds of such sustaining lessons.

However, one can imbibe those lessons only to the extent of one's patience and intelligent skill. After mastering the texts and gaining experience in putting the lessons into actual practice, one can share the light and the joy with others. The texts of India insist on the value of actual practice and the need to confirm the truths by experiencing their impact.

### **Sanskrit: mother of all languages**

A person who wants to understand clearly the sacred books and scriptural texts of India, to imbibe their message, must learn the Sanskrit language; that responsibility, that duty, cannot be avoided. The very mention of Sanskrit immediately arouses in many among us a prejudicial attitude. “It is the dead language of a dying culture; it is boosted by the fanatic attachment of antiquated conservatives”, contemporary moderns declaim. They condemn the language as surviving only in meaningless formulae, in fast-vanishing rituals and ceremonies, in wedding rites and other futile exercises. It is a very difficult language to learn, it is said. Such beliefs have dug themselves deep into the minds of moderns. These banal opinions and false attitudes have to be exorcised from the minds of people.

Sanskrit is an immortal language; its voice is eternal; its call is through the centuries. It has imbedded in it the basic sustenance from all the languages of the world. Revere Sanskrit as the mother of languages. Do not ignore its greatness or talk disparagingly about it.

### **The Vedas reveal nature's secrets**

When you yearn to slake the thirst for nectar offered by the *Vedas*, you have to learn Sanskrit. In order to interpret the *Vedas* and elaborate their inner meanings and mysteries, the sages have left behind textbooks of complementary sciences like grammar, poetics, philosophy, and astrology. Their researches and books range over several fields of knowledge like astronomy, geography, jurisprudence, ethics, epistemology, music, psychology, and rhetoric. Western scientists are struck with admiration at the wonders of astronomy they have unveiled and the truths they have unraveled in other sciences; they have benefited by the clues provided by these sages, and they are engaged in further research encouraged by the discoveries of these ancient seers. They have acknowledged

that these sages (*rishis*) had advanced far more than the Greeks in their astronomical knowledge.

In the *Vedas* and the supplementary literature they produced, we can find already revealed many secrets of nature, hailed as revolutionary discoveries by modern science, like the existence and explosive possibilities of the atom. Many sections of the *Atharvana Veda* are found to be mines of such important information when examined by westerners. The Germans established special institutes and universities in order to conduct research on the contents of the tons of palm-leaf manuscripts of the *Naadi* texts and horoscopes, and on astronomy, medicine, chemistry, toxicology, mathematics, etc. They are learning Sanskrit so that this work may proceed successfully. In America, Russia, and even Afghanistan, the universities are not only themselves eager to introduce Sanskrit as a subject of study but are being pressed by scholars to do so! Foreigners are revering these texts from India as gems of lucky discovery.

### **Science of yoga: a most unique contribution**

The science of *yoga* was assigned great prominence in the past by Indians. Even now, in many countries of the world, this science is being studied and practised. Institutions where *yoga* postures are taught exist in great numbers throughout America and Russia.

In India, however, when the practice of *yoga* or meditation is mentioned, people respond with the feeling that it is a spiritual path related to the *Vedantic* school of thought. As soon as *yoga* is mentioned, many who hear the word get pictures before their minds of lone hermits in the depths of thick forests, wearing the ochre robe of monks and living on fruits, tubers, and roots. Their opinion is that the discipline of *yoga* is the ancient discipline practised by such homeless ascetics. This is an ignorant guess; it is not true at all. The *yoga* science is being probed today by physicists and others in Western countries.

In this era of technology, it is becoming increasingly difficult to lead peaceful lives. People are becoming the targets of various types of mental ailments. In countries on the front line of civilization like America and England, people have lost the delight of natural sleep at night. They experience only artificial sleep induced by the tablets they swallow. As a consequence of these and many other drugs taken to ward off other ills, they suffer more and more from diseases of the heart and blood pressure. In the end, they render themselves unhealthy wrecks.

Such lives are highly artificial. People are sunk in fear and anxiety; mentally on one side and physically on the other, they have no rest. Drugs, tablets, capsules, and pills are produced in millions, but the general health has not improved. Besides, new varieties of illness have emerged and are developing fast. A few intelligent westerners have realized that their only refuge is *yoga*. They have confirmed their conclusion by means of experiments; they have taken to *yoga* with increasing faith.

The *Vedas* are the oldest literary creations of mankind. Now, the word “literature” is used to connote writings scribbled while eager to find something to spend the time hanging on hand. They have no inner worth or significance; they destroy the traits of good character in the reader and implant bad attitudes and habits; they do not adhere to the path of truth. But literature is a term that cannot be applied to writings or poems that reel off tales that are false. It should not emerge from the egotistic fancies of the individual.

### **The Vedas: source of spiritual formulae**

The *Vedas* are the soul that sustains the spiritual life of India (Bharath); they are the breath that keeps the

people alive. They possess a divine power, amazing in its effects. They are charged with the vibrations of mantras, which can be experienced by those who go through the process scientifically. They can also impart the strength derivable through symbols and formulae of a *tantric* nature. *Tantra* means “the means and methods of utilizing the mantras for one’s own good”.

People have only physical and material power. Their action (*karma*) becomes holy and sacred when the mechanics (*yantra*) of life are ruled by mantra and *tantra* (holy thought process). The technique of this spiritual practice is in the *Karma-kanda*, the part of the *Vedas* relating to ceremonial acts and sacrificial rites. The ancient sages became aware of this and have preserved it for mankind in the Four *Vedas*.

Unable to grasp these truths, those who pride themselves as “moderns” proclaim that the *Vedas* contain only verses and mantras that are learned by rote and repeated by aged cronies. Not only “moderns” but even those who earned distinction as “the foremost pundits”, those who expound to the people gathering fame, use the *Vedas* for promoting their material well-being and not for helping people on the spiritual path. They are unable to discover the sacred task for which the *Vedas* exist. Whenever the chance arises, they benefit by the scholarship, but they are not eager or able to use the *Vedas* to purify their daily lives.

As a result, “moderns” find it impossible to develop faith in the *Vedas*. When the pundits do not seek to practise the *Vedas* they have learned and parade their lack of faith by not instructing their own children on the glory of the *Vedas*, they naturally cause lack of faith in the entire society.

Many others, in spite of their ignorance of the meaning of the *Vedic* hymns, walk through busy places reciting the sacred texts in mechanical orthodoxy. Foreigners —especially German scholars— though they have not learned the *Vedas* by rote, have realized that the mantras possess and transmit profound power. Over the centuries, they have carried portions of the *Vedas* to their own country and conducted patient and painstaking research on them. Consequently, they have unraveled strange mysteries. They found that the *Vedas* contain the secrets of all the arts that confer progress on people.

Many scriptural texts emerged as adjuncts to the *Vedas*. The *Vedas* (knowledge) of archery, of medicine (*ayurveda* for maintenance, prolongation, and preservation of life), of impact of planetary movements (*Jyothirveda*) —many such texts were composed and promulgated.

### **Infinite power of the Gayatri Mantra**

Sage Viswamitra discovered the mantra that is named *Gayatri*, which is addressed to the energy of the Sun, Surya. This mantra has infinite potentiality. It is a vibrant formula. It has immense powers, powers that are truly amazing, for the Sun is its presiding deity. Students of the *Ramayana* know that the same sage, Viswamitra, initiated Rama into the mysteries of Sun worship through the mantra “the sun is the heart (*Aditya-hridayam*)”. The *Gayatri* enabled Viswamitra to use rare weapons that bowed to his will when the mantra was repeated with faith. Through the powers he attained in this way, Viswamitra was able to become a great scientist and create a counterpart of this cosmos.

A person who is able to increase the capabilities of their hands and senses is now considered a “scientist (*vijnani*)”, but the term was correctly applied in the past only to those who developed spiritual power and discovered the formulae for delving into the Divine within, those imbued with faith and devotion who could spontaneously demonstrate that power in actual day-to-day living. On the other hand, the “scientists” of today know only a bit



here and a bit there; they exaggerate and boast of what they have managed to learn. They are fond of pomp and proud display. They rise skyhigh on the fumes of praise. Such absurdities are quite contrary to the true behaviour of a scientist, who is humble and meek. He is aware that, however much he knows, there is a far vaster field that he has yet to know. He is conscious that Divine Grace is responsible for what little he knows.

### **Galaxy of India's sage-scientists**

Viswamitra was a scientist, who had recognized this truth. No scientist is greater than he was. But, though a sage of such immense eminence and with so expansive a heart lived in India, he is not remembered by the people of this land. They honour the foreigners who have glimpsed his greatness; they have not placed their faith in researchers who have elicited valuable lessons from the *Vedas*. The Veda is the Mother of India (Bharath), but the children don't revere the mother any more. They revere the stepmother and believe in her! This is the result of the anglicized educational system.

Probing further and further into the scientific attainments of the sages of ancient India, the construction of vehicles capable of flying in space (*vimanas*) is described by Sage Bharadwaja. Mental science had advanced so much that they could reproduce what had happened or predict what would happen. The science of medicine was highly developed in India. It was Sage Bharadwaja who taught this science for the benefit of mankind.

Sage Atreya took up the task of propagating this science and technique of healing. Saint Charaka compiled all the discoveries into a "collection (*samhitha*)" named after him. It deals elaborately with the diagnosis of diseases, methods of healing and cure, foetal development, and other essential but not easily discoverable facts of medical science. The doctors proficient in that science could, in those ancient years, surgically remove or correct various diseased parts of body when the illness could not be cured by drugs.

Sage Sushrutha wrote in his compendium about many surgical processes. This text was discovered and is available for study. Dhanvantari, Nagarjuna, and other sages have brought to light many other medical discoveries of ancient India, made by adherents of the *Vedic* tradition of scientific research. There are also many valuable texts on ethics, jurisprudence, and other social sciences that are invaluable treasures for all time, like Manu's text on *dharma* (*Dharma Sastra*) and Gautama's logical system (*Nyaya Sastra*).

### **Science of absolute truth**

*Vedanta* is the legitimate property of every section, caste, community, and race, of the followers of any faith, and of people of both sexes. *Vedanta* means supreme spiritual wisdom (*jnana*). Wisdom relating to which field of knowledge? Knowledge of the *Atma*. This wisdom is the highest gain that can be earned in life. What greater gain can there be for a person than to become aware of their Self, themselves knowing themselves. Faith in the possibility of knowing oneself is necessary for every student of the *Vedas* (*sruthi*) and Moral Codes (*smrithi*).

The object seen is clearly separate from the subject who sees. This is a universally accepted truth. Who is this "I" that sees? All things that have form are recognized and seen by the sense organ, the eye. The eye sees the physical body, other individuals, even insects, worms, and things. It sees everything that is within its range. The body is also a thing that the eye sees, along with the rest. So, how can we conclude that the body is the I?

Then, who really is this "I"? Fire burns and also brightens. It burns things by heat and brightens them by the light it sheds. Fire is different from the things it acts upon. Now, who is it that knows this truth—the truth that

fire and the things that burns are different? It is the *Atma*, the divine Self. When a log burns, the fire is present and active in all of it. Similarly, the *Atma* pervades the entire body and enables it to perform deeds and to move itself and its limbs.

The light of the lamp is the instrument that informs us at night: “this is the cup”, “this is the plate”. The eye, a similar instrument, informs us “this is a house”, “this is a thorn”, “this is a stone”. The eye is not the *Atma*. In the absence of the lamp, the eye —or, in the absence of the eye, the lamp— cannot cognize the house, the thorn, the stone, the cup or the plate. Both the lamp and the eye are media or instruments of “illumination”.

The instrument, the eye, sees the body, where it is situated. The body that is seen cannot therefore be other than a similar instrument. The senses are the experiencers of hearing, tasting, seeing, touching, and smelling. When the eye is known as an instrument, the other four senses also have to be recognized as tools. All these senses are under the control of the mind, which is their master. Even this mind is being controlled and conditioned by some other master. The mind cannot be the core of a person.

The intellect (*buddhi*) examines the information offered by the mind. It is the instrument that judges and decides. For example, imagine a sharp knife. However sharp, it cannot cut a fruit on its own initiative. Nor can it cut the thinnest thread by itself. It can do so only when it is held by the hand of someone. The intellect is similar to the knife. It is helpless without the inner spirit, *Atma*, which has to wield it.

Then, we have to consider another equipment of humanity: the vital air (*prana*). Let us consider whether we can nominate it as the Self. During deep sleep, a person is not conscious of breathing and that the vital airs are alert! Of the three states —waking, dreaming, and sleeping— though the vital air is existent in all, a person is not aware of the experiences of the waking state while dreaming, nor of the experiences of the dreaming state while in the wakeful state. During sleep, the vital airs do not activate the intellect or the memory. They appear to be quiescent. When the boss is active, the dependents cannot keep quiet. Since they are not always uniformly active, the vital airs (*pranas*) or the vital air principle cannot be considered as the inner Self or spirit, *Atma*.

### **Never-changing Self-reality**

Now about the self, or “I”. It operates in two fields, so it has two meanings: (1) egotism (*ahamkara*), the body consciousness, the exterior “I” and (2) the inner “I” (*pratyagatma*). People who do not know this distinction confuse themselves and assert that “I” is applicable to the body consciousness, but this is wrong. As we have seen, the body is a tool, it is an object, it is the seen and not the see-er. How can the ego, identified with it, be the *Atma*? This ego also is of the “seen” category. It is absent in sleep and plays false in dreams. Truth has to persist unaffected, in the past, present, and future. How can that which is absent in two states be true?

As a result of this inquiry, it became plain that the senses, the mind, the intellect, the vital airs —not one of these can be accepted as *Atma* and accorded that validity. Therefore, the question arises: what else, who else is *Atma*?

It has no entry or exit, no hands and feet, no organs and limbs, no blot or blemish. It is the minutest among the minute, the hugest among the huge. Like space, it is everywhere. It is all, so it is free from “I” and “mine”.

### **Atma is its own proof**

The *Atma* is consciousness, as fire is heat and the sun is light. It has no affinity with distress or delusion; it

is supreme everlasting ecstasy (*paramananda*). It is the core, the heart of all beings; it is the awareness in all. It is the see-er of everything “seen”; it sees all objects seen. Everyone, whatever their nature or stature, who declares, after being served by the senses, “I see”, “I hear”, “I taste”, etc., is really only talking of lamps, of tools, and not of the *Atma*. The *Atma* is not a part see-er, a sequential or gradual see-er, a non-see-er or a pseudo see-er.

Like the moon, the intellect (*buddhi*) has no light in itself. Like the moon, it reflects light from another source adjacent to it, namely the *Atma*. The intellect can operate only by reflecting the cosmic intelligence, represented by the *Atma*.

The Sun is designated the cosmic eye (*jagath chakshu*), a name based on the Sun’s involvement with and proximity to other objects. The Sun has no ego-sense, no sense of possession and property, no will or want or wish. By His very presence, darkness disappears and light envelops the world. So, He is called the Enlightener. But He is not consciously doing so, as if in duty bound. The *Atma* also has neither obligation nor application. If asked how the *Atma* becomes a “doer”, the reply is: is the magnet a “doer” simply because the needle in its neighbourhood moves?

The basic question may now be raised. Does the *Atma* exist? If it does, how and with what proof can it be established? There is no need to prove that the *Atma* exists, for if it is capable of being proved by certain arguments and lines of reasoning, the existence of a person who uses those arguments and follows those lines of reasoning, has to be posited. That person will again be the *Atma*!

Of course, some people may reply that the *Vedas* are the authority for the existence of the *Atma* and that the *Atma* can be experienced and validated through the *Vedas*. The *Vedas* do prohibit certain activities as non-*Atmic* or opposed to the norms expected from a believer in the *Atma*; they do recommend certain other activities, like charity and moral behaviour, as *Atmic*. But the *Atma* is its own proof, its own witness. Its existence cannot be established by other facts or things.

The scriptures (*sastras*), which are texts supplementary to the *Vedas*, declare that God resides wherever six excellences are evident: enthusiasm, determination, courage, good sense, strength, and adventure (*utsaha, sahasam, dhairya, sadbuddhi, sakthi, and parakrama*). The inaugural prayer has to be directed to God (Ganapathi) to gain these six gifts, which can purify consciousness and reveal the *Atma*. One has to undertake the discovery of one’s *Atmic* core with bravery in the heart; this is no exercise for cowards. Wicked people, waverers in faith, doubting hearts, woeful countenances, are destined to go through life as sick persons (*rogis*) and not dwellers in *Atma* (*yogis*).

This is the distinguishing mark that separates the wise (*jnani*) from the unwise. Krishna spoke, laughing with an outburst of joy; Arjuna listened, overpowered by sorrow. The wise one is always full of joy and laughs. The unwise one is afflicted with sorrow and weeps.

### **Self inquiry and four stages of life**

In order to achieve victory while inquiring into the nature of the *Atma*, one has to pass through the *asramas*—the four stages of life recognized and recommended by the scriptural texts of the eternal *Vedic* religion (*Sanathana Dharma*). Each one, while passing through each stage, aware of the duties and responsibilities prescribed in the texts, learns for themselves a quantum of the knowledge that leads to *Atmic* awareness.

Only after the childhood years will the routine of the four stages have an impact. Until then, one cannot



gather any special knowledge about one's duties and responsibilities. People have childhood, adolescence, youth, middle age, and old age as stages of growth; there are also corresponding stages in the growth of wisdom.

In the first stage of childhood, one is led from ignorance and "innocence" into the world of knowledge, when one is accepted as a pupil by a preceptor (guru). After that, one has to serve and obey the guru, without feeling burdened and bound. In the second stage of youth, one has to share with society the means and measures for its progress and security; one has to start earning a livelihood and spending one's income with intelligent care; one also has the duty to provide examples to younger people and guide them into socially useful paths. At the same time, one must follow the footsteps of elders and learn lessons for one's own advancement from them.

In the third stage of adulthood, intelligent attention has to be paid not only to one's own advancement and the advancement of the family and society but also to the advancement of people generally. That too is the responsibility of the grown-ups, and they must acquire the necessary skills. They must have wider visions of the peace and prosperity of all mankind and try to contribute to both, within the limits of their capacity and resources.

Old age is the fourth stage. By the time one reaches this stage of the journey, one must have discovered that joys available in this world are trivial and fleeting. One must be equipped with the higher knowledge of spiritual joy, available through delving into the inner spring of bliss. Through experiences, one's heart must have softened and be filled with compassion. One has to be engrossed in promoting the progress of all beings without distinction. And one must be eager to share with others the accumulated knowledge and the benefit of experiences.

### **Occupations and attitudes**

Thus, occupations and resultant attitudes have been assigned to the various stages of human life. Practice is as important for confirming one in wisdom as reading is important for confirming one in knowledge. Alongside of knowledge, youth has to cultivate the good qualities of humility, reverence, devotion to God, and steadfast faith. Youth has to engage in good works and enjoy them for the sheer elation they confer. During adulthood, along with the earning of wealth and involvement in the improvement of society, attention must be paid to the promotion and preservation of virtues and to the observance of moral codes. Steps should be taken to improve one's righteous behaviour and spiritual practice (*sadhana*). All levels of consciousness have to be purified and then directed to holy tasks.

During middle age, besides fostering the family and society, one has to live an exemplary life to inspire one's children and hold forth before society elevating ideals that are worth practising. No attempt should be made to belittle society and benefit only the family, for it is bound to fail. The *Brahman* principle can be realized only by purifying one's activity and utilizing that activity to serve oneself in all. It can never be realized as long as one relies on the caste into which one is born, the intellectual equipment one has added unto oneself, or the mastery of the *Vedas*.

### **Atma is eternal**

One who is born cannot escape death, some time, somewhere. Every moment, many are born and many die. But one has to discover how to "avoid" death. Now, the *Atma*, which is the core of humanity, is not born; since it does not take birth, it does not meet death. Death happens to the body with which it is associated, with which it mixes. The delusion that the body is the core, that the body is real, that verily is the death. Affliction by that

falsehood is the act of dying. To be free from that delusion is to attain immortality. The body disintegrates, not the *Atma*, the soul, the Self. The body is undergoing change every moment, and the final change is death, when the Self, changeless, remains. When one believes that the changing body is oneself and starts referring to it as “I”, that “I” dies, but the real “I” is deathless.

As intense elevating activity and fearless inquiry into one’s truth are practised more and more, the consciousness that the “body is oneself” can be overcome and negated. Consider the fruit of the tamarind tree. When unripe, it is not easy to separate the rind, the pulp, and the seed. So too, those who have stuck to sensual desires and to fondling and feeding the body cannot earn the awareness of the *Atma*. When the tamarind fruit becomes ripe, the rind can be broken off, the pulp detached from the seed, and the seed isolated without effort. Inquiry and unselfish activity ripen the consciousness, and the *Atma* can be isolated from the body, clear and pure.

### **Five encasements of the body**

The body has five encasements, which hide the *Atma*. These are grouped under three categories: the gross, subtle, and causal. The physical case (flesh, blood, bone, etc.) and the vital case (breath) form the gross (*sthula*) body. When these two sheaths—the gross body—fall or disintegrate, the body also falls and cannot rise.

The word *sukshma*, which is generally translated as “subtle”, means “small” in Sanskrit. But it has another meaning: that which expands. Air expands more than water; space is more expansive than air. Compared with the expanse of the liberated soul, even space has to be considered “gross”! Steam is more expansive (subtle) than water. Although a block of ice and a lump of camphor appear “gross”, they become subtle when heated or lit.

The rule of the world is that the seen causes the unseen, the manifested explains the unmanifested. But the rule in the realm of the spirit is different. The latent *Atma* causes the patent world. Being is behind becoming, and finally, becoming merges in being; the patent is absorbed into the latent. Like milk from the cow, the power of relativity (*maya*) flows from the supreme Person as the five-element constituted cosmos, the patent manifestation. The cosmos is cognized as a composite, just as milk is a composite of cream, curd, and butter, which can be got out of it by the action of heat and cold, the addition of sour drops, and the process of churning thereafter. Churning separates the butter from the milk. In the same manner, through cosmic processes and upheavals of heat and cold, the five fundamental elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space) were separated and Earth, this ball of butter, emerged as the product of the churning.

### **Three character traits, five basic elements**

If a person or thing has one of the three character traits (balanced, passionate, dull) predominant in the make-up, we denote the person as having that trait. So also the element that is predominant in any created entity gives its name to it. This is why the world on which we live is called the Earth (*bhumi*). The realms in space where the element of water predominates are known as the atmosphere (*bhuvarka*) and the celestial plane (*swaroka*). The materials therein flow in currents and streams.

In short, what appears as the five element-constituted cosmos is only the superimposition on God of the non-real individual Self and the five elements. God seen in and through the non-real appears as nature. This is but a distorted picture of Reality, this everchanging multiplicity. The fault is in the mirror that reflects, the mind that perceives, the brain that infers. What the mirror presents as true has no authenticity. The mirror is coated with

dust, and its face is not plain at all. God has no illusion (*maya*); He has no intention or need to delude, nor does He will that it should happen. But people in their ignorance see things that do not exist and believe that they do exist just as they see them. This weakness is named “superimposition (*adhyasa*)”.

When God is reflected as nature, the reflection becomes illusion (*maya*). Just as milk curdles into yogurt, God becomes the world (*jagath*) of incessant transformation, the image (*maya*) of the unchanging Divine. His will causes this unreal multiplicity on the One that He is; by His will, He can end it. He is the Master of illusion.

God is omnipresent, omnipotent. Of the three entities Overself, Self and nature, nature has the fulfilment of the wants of humanity as its purpose. God has no wants or wishes. He is the fullest and highest attainment. The bliss (*ananda*) of every being and for every being flows spontaneously from God; His words to Arjuna in the *Gita* are, “I have no duty to discharge, O Partha, in the three worlds.” He has created duties only to foster the consciousness of all living beings. He has no activity and no obligation. He brings about the result of every activity. Without Him, no activity can yield result! He decides which result should accrue from which act.