

Ending Ignorance - The *Sanātana Dharmā* Way

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In the previous article we discussed the idea of the self-manifested *Brahman* - the Supreme God of *sanātana dharmā*, who manifested the entire universe with all the movable and immovable entities, on His own, like the spider that brings out the web from its stomach, lives in it and swallows it back. The universe emanated from *Brahman*, is sustained by *Brahman* and ultimately dissolved by *Brahman* into His own self. *sanātana dharmā* thus believes that - all that which exists is *Brahman* or Divine - as it is made by and made of *Brahman*.

Though *Brahman* has no particular form and name, He incarnates as *avatārs*, time and again, to set things right in the society by not merely annihilating the evil and protecting the virtuous, but by transforming humans into better beings.

The question that intrigues one is, 'Though the world is nothing but *Brahman*, and human beings are also manifestations of the same *Brahman*, then why is the world saturated with problems?'

To understand this seeming contradiction, we need to delve into the teachings of the *upaniṣads*.

A quick look around will tell us that more or less all elements and creatures of nature follow a set path as governed by the natural law. For instance, the ecological balance is maintained through the food cycle, where the grass is eaten by the deer, which in turn are eaten by the lion. And when the balance is lost, there is natural extinction of the species in the food chain which sets the balance right. Or take the example of the water cycle, where the water from the oceans evaporate and condense to form clouds, which bring the rains into the rivers, and they flow and merge into the oceans, thus completing the cycle. However, in the case of human beings the balance is disturbed by their constant wanting for more, much more than they need, for which they diligently produce things and exhaust nature's precious resources. This incites imbalance causing societal disharmony and natural disasters, leading to chaos and confusion in creation. When an unlettered animal can behave according to its needs, then why is that humans are driven by greed, one may wonder.

The difference between humans and animals is that human beings are endowed with a mind. Simply put, mind is a collection of thoughts of all kinds, good, evil or just neutral. These thoughts are different from the instincts that are present in animals. Instincts like hunger, sleep, fear and procreation are common to animals and humans. While animals have instincts alone which drive them, humans have a mind that can think, desire, analyse, remember and discriminate between good and bad. One may argue that a lion killing a deer to eat is evil as it is sheer cruelty on part of the lion. Well, do not forget that mother nature made them that way. A lion must eat deer to live and a deer must eat grass; there is no choice there. It's their natural way of life. But humans on the other hand have the ability to make choices, decide to do what is good, and avoid what is bad. The mind of man, which

broadly has four abilities namely, *chitta* or memories, *buddhi* or intelligence, *ahaṅkāra* or identification with oneself, and *manas* or the thoughts that encompass all the other three, is responsible for all that humans do and experience. The scripture - *taittirīya upaniṣad* - describes this as '*manomaya kośa*' or the sheath of mind, which hides the pure existence of *Brahman* in humans, and thus makes them incapable of behaving like *Brahman* under the influence of this cover of the mind. Just like an object covered by a piece of cloth cannot be seen clearly, in the same way, humans fail to see that they are made of *Brahman* due to this cover of the mind that influences them to think of themselves as those other than *Brahman*.

How does one remove this cover of the mind and realise that he or she is one with *Brahman*? *sanātana dharmā* prescribes methods and means to achieve that. Just as a cloth is made of threads and the removal of threads would lead to the disintegration of the cloth thereby revealing the object covered by it, in the same way, removal of thoughts from the mind would lead to the realisation of oneness with *Brahman*. These thoughts in the mind are born out of desires that are in turn born out of associations. So when one associates oneself with noble and pure people, the desires gradually reduce, thoughts disappear, mind disintegrates and the truth of one's existence as *Brahman* is revealed. The conscious effort to be in the company of realised beings is the key to uncover the reality of *Brahman* within oneself.

Let me tell you a story. There was a lioness in the forest. One day, while hunting a flock of sheep she gave birth to a cub and died out of exertion. This cub joined the flock of sheep and was looked after by them. The cub grew up in the company of the sheep and started thinking of itself to be a sheep. One day, a majestic lion arrived in that forest. All the fearful sheep ran for their precious lives after seeing the lion. The cub was rather surprised to see a very different creature other than the sheep with whom it lived. The magnificent lion was equally surprised to find a lion cub roaming amidst the sheep. It asked the cub as to what was it doing with the other sheep. The cub, overcome by ignorance, simply replied that it was a sheep and therefore lived with them. This amused the big lion, who took pity on the ignorance of the poor cub and took him to a nearby pool. Upon seeing its own reflection in the water, the cub realised that it was also a lion and not a sheep. The constant company of the sheep made the cub think and behave like a sheep until this lion came by, and acquainted the cub with the truth, thus liberating it from the false identification and behaviour. The moral of the story is that, just like the poor lion cub, humans have lost themselves in the crowd of those who are under the wrong influence of their minds and ignorantly think that they are anything other than *Brahman*. However, a realised Master, who knows by experience the truth that he is *Brahman*, can guide the lost humanity to its true nature thus putting an end to the confusion and chaos caused by the ignorant behaviour of mortal humans. In the *vedic* texts this wrong impression of one's own reality due to the ignorance of the mind is called as *māyā*, which simply means that which is not. Ending this ignorance and realising the truth of one's true nature as *Brahman* is called *mokshā* (*moha* + *kshyā*) which means destruction of delusion, or sometimes *mukti* which means freedom from wrong thinking.

How does one find the right company and shed the preconceived false notions of *mayā*? When does one shake away the ignorance of the mind that covers the truth

of Brahman and thus attain *mokshā*? Does one get lucky like the lion cub to find the realised one, or is there an effort needed to find such a Master? Let's deliberate in the next article.

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