

## Remembering Who We Are

The fundamental teaching of Vedānta is that Brahman alone is without a second. It would be enough to say that Brahman alone is, but if we say that, we tend to leave ourselves out—as if there is Brahman alone but us recognizing it. So the declaration is Brahman alone is *without a second*. The *mahāvākya*-s explain further by declaring That thou art and that the nature of Brahman is consciousness—conscious of Its own existence, conscious whether there are objects present or no objects present.

The scriptures also tell us that our fundamental error is wrong identification. We are that pure consciousness whether objects are present or not, but we have identified with one particular object, with a body and mind. Why have we made this fundamental error? Two different basic reasons are given. One is that we have been conditioned. As a child we enter this world as pure consciousness, pure awareness, total innocence, but then the child is told that you are a boy or you are a girl, you belong to this family, you are this caste, you are clever or you are not clever. This conditioning is instilled into the child and, therefore, this pure consciousness identifies with what to it is an object—a body and a mind.

The other explanation for this error is that this conditioning would have no effect unless we brought with us into this world the propensity to believe it. And that propensity can be explained in either a philosophical or a scientific way. The scientific way would be that the propensity to believe that we are a body and mind is in our genes, it comes from a human racial belief. Philosophically, we can say that it is brought over from a previous birth. In any case, this approach would maintain that unless the propensity was there to believe that we were a body and mind, it couldn't happen. They could tell us a million times we were the body and mind and we wouldn't believe it.

So the reason we have adopted this wrong identification comes from both conditioning and propensity. However, the important thing to remember is the truth that we are divine now, we have simply made an error in our identification. In other words, we are not a body and mind trying to reach God, but we are divinity trying to remember who we really are. This makes a vital difference on how we approach our *sādhana*. The

purpose of our *sādhana* is not to try to get somewhere, but to try to remember who we already are—here and now.

Ridding ourselves of the conditioning is up to us. It is something we have taken on since we were born, and it is something that has to be eliminated through our spiritual practices. Thus there is something that we must definitely do. We must do spiritual practices to undo the conditioning that we have been given. But at all times we must keep in mind that finally it is the propensity to believe the conditioning that has to be dissolved or burned up, and that that is a matter of grace. So, as we do our spiritual practices, we work at getting rid of our conditioning, always knowing that the final step is up to God; it is a matter of His grace.

Gurudev gave us the perfect formula: “Surrender everything unto the Lord. Place your ego at His feet and be at ease.” Surrender everything unto the Lord means that as we are doing our spiritual practices to get rid of our conditioning, we constantly remember that everything, including our spiritual practices, belongs to the Lord because God alone is. Then, at the same time, we know that the final reconciliation, the final remembrance of who we really are, comes as His grace—when He unties the knots of our heart, when He burns up or melts our ego.