

We Are Always the Same Person

Our late revered Vedānta teacher, Swāmī Brahmānandajī, used to say that the Upanishads teach two principal methods of *sādhana*. One is meditation on Om, the other is the study of three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. He preferred the latter method, because it is our own daily experience. We don't have to think of something that is abstract, but rather something that we experience every day.

Ultimately he wanted us to discover that we are not aware of ourselves in deep sleep, but we must be there, otherwise we wouldn't know that we have deep sleep. Who we are in deep sleep is absolutely unknowable, and that Unknowable must be present right now as the ground of our being or we wouldn't know that we had deep sleep.

Ramaṇa Maharṣi used to say, "Bring deep sleep into the waking state." In other words, be conscious of the Unknowable in our waking state, something that we know never changes as opposed to our present identity with the body and mind that is constantly changing and gives us nothing except problems.

Ramaṇa Maharṣi had another method. He said, "Enquire, Who am I?" It's a matter of negation. We are not the body because we know the body. We are not the mind because we know the mind. We're not the ego because there is something in us that knows the ego. What is it that ultimately knows? We say, "I know." But then, there is something as mysterious as the knower of deep sleep that knows the affirmation, "I know." Bring that mysterious knower into the waking state. Identify with that mystery rather than the ego that is constantly changing.

If neither one of those methods suits us—bringing deep sleep or that mystery that knows all else into the waking state—then there is something already in the waking state that will serve us just as well. That is our absolute conviction that we are exactly the same person that we were when we were born, and we will be exactly the same person till the day we die. Perhaps we were also the same before we were born and will be the same after we die.

That same person must be here and now, and yet, although it is very real to us, we find that we can't grasp it. We know that we are the same

person, but it is not an object to us in any way, whereas the ego is an object. We should bring that knowledge into our present moment. Instead of constantly identifying with the changing ego. We should remember that the ego is totally different now than it was when we were young and will be totally different again when we are old.

Therefore, the conviction that we are exactly the same person, no matter how much the body, mind and ego has changed, is an identity that we should gradually practice until that steadiness becomes the focus of our mind rather than the ever-changing and painful ego.