

Mutual Superimposition

The scriptures declare that our fundamental error is wrong identification. Frequently that is explained by, “We who are pure Spirit have identified with a body and mind.” But the scriptures also give another explanation which is a little more difficult to understand, but helps to point out the way out of our predicament. And that is “mutual superimposition.” It’s a bit of a mouthful, but it does point to a psychological fact that we can discover within ourselves.

What it means is that the Spirit which is beyond thought, beyond imagination, superimposes Its existence-consciousness or “I am” onto the body and mind, allowing the body and mind to say, “I” and to think that it is the center of the universe. We think that we are the center of the universe which is a reflection of the truth that the Supreme is the center everywhere. On the other hand, this center of the universe, feeling itself to be the body and mind, superimposes its qualities onto the Divine, thinks that the Divine too is a part of time and space having some sort of dimension. Therefore, the Divine, which is beyond time and space, is thought to be located within them.

The formula that Gurudev gave to solve this problem, which is similar to what Lord Kṛṣṇa gave to Arjuna, is attach, detach. Lord Kṛṣṇa said practice and dispassion. What we require is an attachment to That which is beyond time and space, beyond our imagination. The preferred method of moving towards It is meditation or enquiry, but all our spiritual practices can lead us in that direction if we are willing to let go, to have dispassion for this false identity we have of being the center of the universe.

Part of letting it go, part of untangling ourselves from this mutual superimposition is to recognize that we are the witness of this center of the universe. We are not the center of the universe, it is a superimposition. Therefore, we have dispassion for that falsehood. We reject it. We detach ourselves from it and attach ourselves to That which is witnessing. From our human point of view we attach ourselves to That which is beyond our imagination. We know that there is something unknowable, unthinkable. We attach ourselves to That and detach ourselves from whatever is knowable.

Thus, the scriptural concept of mutual superimposition is in harmony with the teachings that the way out of our predicament is practice and dispassion or attach, detach. Attach ourselves to That which is beyond knowing, the invisible, or attach ourselves to that which is the witness of the center of the universe—whichever perspective we want to take—and detach ourselves from the center of the universe. Detach ourselves from time and space and return to our original face.