

## Enquiring, Who Am I?

Ramaṇa Maharṣi said that no matter what path we follow, ultimately we are going to have to enquire, Who am I? Why is this? Because our fundamental error is wrong identification, and unless that error is corrected, we cannot reach the goal. Gurudev too, in his most famous aphorism which begins Serve, Love, Give, Purify, Meditate, Realize, says, Enquire, Who am I? Know thyself and be free. Thus, he too puts an emphasis on the yoga of enquiry. However, unlike other yogas such as Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, or Nārada's *Bhakti Sūtras*, there is no method laid out for the enquiry, Who am I?, although on investigation it appears that there are two general methods. The first could be called negative, the second positive.

In the negative enquiry we negate what is not I. We negate all our possessions as not being who we are, even though we often identify with them. We ultimately negate the body as being who we are because we recognize that even if we lose parts of our body we are still the same person. We negate the mind as being who we are because we can watch the mind. The same is true of the intellect. We also recognize that even the ego, who we think we are, is an object to us. We can watch the ego. What is it that knows the ego? That we can't discover. It is a mystery, but we know that it is real.

Therefore, we can come to the conclusion that who we are is ultimately unknowable, but certainly real. Indeed, the same is said of Brahman—unknowable, unthinkable, unimaginable. That is the negative approach. We negate everything about ourselves except that which knows everything else. The only thing we can say about it is that it is I who know everything else.

The positive approach to who we are is to recognize that there is something in us that is convinced that we are exactly the same person that we have always been. We don't think that someone else was born from our mother's womb even though our present identity is totally different. When we imagine our old age, even though we know our thinking will be different, our body will be different, our circumstances will be different, we're convinced that we will be exactly the same person in old age.

But then, while that seems very real to us, we need to recognize that that very same person is here, now, ungraspable. What we do grasp on to is an image of who we are: I am so and so—male, female, young, old—whereas that which has ever been the same, the I who we are, has no image. It has no attachments. It just is.

When we identify with the passing ego, we are up and down, sometimes happy, sometimes sad. The solution is to identify with that which is obvious to all of us, that which we have been since the day we were born—or perhaps earlier—and what we will be until the day we will die—and perhaps thereafter too.

If our identification grows into that obvious experience that we all have, gradually we can leave behind that within us which is constantly changing and is the source of our sorrow.