

The Means and Method of self-realisation in the Yoga Vasistha

In this paper I shall outline the means by which self-realisation is instructed and the method that aims for the goal of liberation while living as prescribed in Yoga Vasistha.

The works actually aim at the realisation of the Self; the doctrine is linked to the idea of self-release from the cycles of rebirths. The doctrine is interesting as the concept of self-realisation is detailed and highly developed with the use of specific technical terminology. I shall examine the methodological process of self-realisation at primary and secondary levels. At the primary level the doctrine is concerned with external physical influences and interactions. At the secondary level the process expands in detail on internal orientated issues of the mind.

Before one considers the means and method the basic questions needs to be addressed, What is the Self? What is that knowledge that brings about the end of suffering and leads to the state of living liberation (*moksa*)? How does the mind transformation take place? What are the key elements in the process?

The self-realisation is indicated via various parameters as necessary steps in the process. These being the idea of reflective enquiry (*vicara*) that is considered to give rise to what is considered to be valid or correct knowledge (*jnana*). It is this valid knowledge that is accepted as being soteriological and significant as the only means to self-realisation. The doctrine places emphasis on the individual to generate the correct desire to know them self, and that it cannot take place without self-effort. One of the important states developed at the primary level is the state of ultimate detachment known as *vairagya*, by ones own effort and correct desire. Theses act of self-effort, having correct desire and discriminative thinking (*viveka*) are regarded as crucial and an integral part of the method. Thus *jnana* the correct knowledge gives rise to *vairagya* the correct detachment

There are distinctive features in this doctrine; one of these is the idea of liberation while living (*jivanmukti*), this being the ultimate goal, which simply is the recognition that one is the undivided part of the whole, in recognising their true nature from the individual to the greater Self as *atma aham* (*Aham Brahman*), and that the universe has an illusionary nature, which is considered to have non-existence. The idea of Knowledge is of key importance as the only means, clearly the philosophy considers the visiting holy place, acts of austerities, charity, and recitations of mantras to be non-mean. In general the true reality is accepted to come about by reflection and investigation of the self by self-effort. I shall also address the idea of renunciation, which is different from that of the traditional ascetics practice. At the primary level the practices of self-effort; the act of enquiry, the state of contentment and the association with virtuous persons and scriptures is regarded as supportive to the means of knowledge.

Various stages are described as steps in the process where by the mind at an individual level appears to take transformation to a higher form. From initially having the notion "I am the body", secondly that "I am the mind", thirdly "I am the spirit" and then the higher state "I am the universe and exist in all and everything". Here the real nature of the Self is at question and the Self is recognised as being identical with *Brahman*(*Atman*), the ultimate supreme spirit, this being the Ultimate Consciousness. At this level the idea is "I am Brahman" I am the undivided part of the whole, that I exist in all and everything and everything exists in me.

The philosophy recognises three forms of living beings, gross, subtle and the highest transcendental, the gross is of the hands, feet, exist for enjoyment under the influence of the

indriyas, it experience's the object sense. *Chitta* is the subtle form of the living being, it is this that passes in the nature of ones thought, in ideation, as long as there is course for worldly existence. The highest form is the being without beginning and end, the pure consciousness that is devoid of distinction. The three-fold nature of the mind is accepted in the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. The Fourth state is noted to be that of *turiya*, where the individual self and the One supreme Self exist as One being. Thus the individual self recognises its self to be the Absolute Self, as one and the same, (thou art That); it is this state that is the final goal.

At the secondary level the text goes into detail on the mechanics of the method for self-realisation. It outlines three distinct areas as the physical, mental and spiritual. The physical refers to the body and its vital life force as *paranas*. The mental is concerned with the conscious mind and its thought, desires and emotions. The spiritual is concerned with the internal sub-conscious. The method is based around the transformation of the mind to recognise its true nature, beyond these states.

This method entails a procedure for stilling the mind; it is this still mind that is accepted to be rooted in Brahman, whereas the active mind is engaged in the thoughts of worldly activities and experiences of both pleasure and pain. The method is aimed at the cessation of thoughts, which are seen as the web of the mind, Expressions such as the stilling of the mind, annihilation of the mind or death of the mind, dropping the mind are description of the state to be achieved in which the world experience is annihilated. The question now arises how does one actually control the mind and merge it in the infinite supreme Brahman? This dissolution of the mind is suggested in a number of ways; as the recognition of the un-real nature of existence by reflective thinking, the control of the mind in the interactions with the objects of pleasure and pain, the controlling of desires, the abandoning of ego, the development of the state of inner detachment, the correct idea of renunciation, and the act of mind focusing (*samadhi*). The mechanisms in the method encourage the mind to transform from its three-fold nature as mention earlier of the waking; dreaming and deep sleep states, to the pure consciousness level as *turiya* in the state of *nirkalpanasamadhi*.

The text is detailed in its explanation of the control of the activity of the vital breath or vital energy (*prana*), which is regarded as the force that makes the body function. The philosophy assumes *prana* to be linked to the activities of the mind. The notion is that the physical and the mental are connected by some kind of parallel, which ultimately is of the origin of the mind. The belief is that by stopping the movement of the *prana* the mind and its activities come to rest and as such the mind has dissolved into a finer state and vice versa that when the activities of the mind are put to rest, so also the movements of the *prana*. It is here in this mechanism the text regards the significance of the syllable *Om* in the process. Here it is important to understand the exact mechanics of how the *prana* is brought to a stop, unfortunately the text doesn't actually expand much on this. It only describes the ways in which this can be achieved; perhaps it may be because it is considered to be a dangerous act without the intervention of a qualified practitioner.

Finally, self-realisation is simply the REALISATION of the SELF. That is the recognition of the Absolute Undifferentiated Consciousness. At this liberated level it is the realisation of Oneness without any notion of separateness. As mentioned there are various steps at primary and secondary levels that are deemed necessary to this end. Without doubt what has been prescribed appears difficult, some would say impossible, others theoretical. I leave the individual to make up his or her own mind, it seems only those engaged in it are the knowers.

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