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## Know Reality and Stay Contented

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### Abstract

*Mind and body are related in such a way that one influences other automatically. When the mind is fresh and peaceful, it becomes steady; it stays wherever we put it. The lack of proper knowledge breeds lack of proper thinking and acting. Ignorance of reality situated within and true nature of object commingles us with the body and accessories related to body. As a result we put importance on I-feeling or ego, rather than I-consciousness. Ego creates possessiveness within our mind and motivates us to have a lot keeping aside others' interest and makes our mind turbulent and agitated. All ego prompted activities are necessarily associated with selfish motives and these activities drain out a lot of our energy because of mental agitations. But when we become aware of our real nature, know that our soul is eternal, not the ego, our desire to have more and more vanishes, and mind becomes calm, life peaceful. So, with the help of spirituality we can save ourselves from the fetters of ego and can know our real nature and ultimately lead a peaceful life.*

**KEYWORDS:** Ego / I-feeling, Self / I-consciousness, Possessiveness, Reality, Ignorance

Every state of consciousness has a corresponding state of physiology. The activity of the body corresponds to activity of the mind. The mind and body are like legs of the same chair; pull one leg and the other comes along automatically. Since the mind and body are intimately connected, an influence on one automatically affects the other. When the mind is disconnected or agitated, it wanders constantly in search of happiness. When the mind is fresh and peaceful, it becomes steady; it stays wherever we put it, making focus laser-like. The root cause of all problems, which bring us sorrow and pain, is almost entirely ignorance of myself and the world in which I reside. The lack of proper knowledge breeds lack of proper thinking and acting. Wrong thoughts lead to a defective vision of the world and a chaotic relationship with it. As a result, we have false expectations and disappointments at every step. If we can only improve our thinking by having proper knowledge of my true existence and the world, we can mend our homes and make the world a better place to live in.

A person becomes negative because of being unaware of the real cause. He attributes the cause to another person and holds this person responsible for his difficulties. He fails to realize that all these due to the law of nature. If you attribute the cause of

problem to the divine law of nature, it will arouse no negativity but when you attribute it to a person, it brings on negative thinking. This is because the law of nature is not your rival, whereas you see a person as your competitor. When you attribute the cause of your problem to a rival, it will invariably arouse negative thoughts and cause anger. When you follow nature-based thinking instead of man-based thinking, you will try to discover its wisdom and will realize that whatever has happened is for your betterment. When this thought comes to you, your mind will automatically change from negative to positive. You will be grateful towards the law of nature for bestowing this blessing in disguise. This is a good way to help de-stress the mind and to live normally.

Human beings may be viewed into two types-(1) popular view or Egoistic View, and (2) Spiritual view. According to the Spiritual view, *Ātmā* is the same as Brahman. 'I' or 'Aham' is an inseparable entity to Supreme Being. "That thou art" (*Tat tvamasi*) and "I am Brahman" (*Aham Brahma asmi*) mean that the principle underlying the world as a whole, and that, which forms the essence of man, are ultimately same. The establishment of the spiritual character of *Brahman* and the removal of the uncertainty about its existence are both accomplished by its identification with *ātmā* or self. The pronoun 'I' is the symbol of self-consciousness. ".....Rāmānuja points out that self is always known in terms of the 'I' and that the 'I' in relation to it reflects its real nature. The 'I' is not the product of the association of the self with anything dead and inert. It is the very nature of the self as a spiritual Centre of experience to appear always in the form of the 'I'" "There is, however, another sense also of the 'I'- the 'I' to suggest the unique spiritual nature of self. In this sense, the application of the 'I' to the self is only natural. *Knowledge* of the self as 'I' is never contradicted."<sup>1</sup> It was the Primordial, pure and unadulterated Universal 'I'. In self-conscious state the self is aware of itself, the subject itself is the object of its awareness. The spiritual, which is higher than the empirical, must transcend this subject-object dichotomy. "There is, in the self of man, at the very centre of his being, something deeper than the intellect, which is akin to the Supreme."<sup>2</sup> Following the Gita Vivekananda describes the *Ātmā* "It is the self, beyond all thought, one without birth or death, whom the sword cannot pierce or fire burn, whom air cannot dry or water melt, the beginningless and endless, the unmovable, the intangible, the omniscient, the omnipotent Being, that it is neither the body nor the mind, but beyond them all."<sup>3</sup> From this view of Vivekananda, this aspect of man is similar to Divine Being, and the awareness of this aspect is the pronoun 'I'

Again, like the nature of Supreme Being, this aspect of 'I' cannot be described in language but none can deny the presence of 'I' or self-consciousness. Reality is termed variously as self-consciousness, the innate experience of 'I'. "Self-conscious is ultimate

and there is no state when its existence can be doubted.” “*Ātmapratyayavijñeyojñātānaḥsarvadaivahi*”- Kumarila’s ŚlokaVārtika.<sup>4</sup> The ‘I am’ current exists while I am in the waking, dreaming, sleeping or deep-sleep states. The fourth state, called as ‘*turiya*’ continuously resonates with in me. This gets validated because on waking up from deep slumber I confirm my experience of a peaceful rest. This ever present state is self- consciousness. Everything appears and disappears in this state, as fleeting experiences. They are concepts created by ‘I’ is debatable. But the creator ‘I’ is beyond debate. ‘I’ or *Aham* or Individual soul is akin to the Supreme Being and ‘I’ as self-consciousness, is beyond debate. In Western Philosophy Descartes, too, wants to build his philosophy on this ever existing reality, the reality of self- consciousness. “----- this truth, ‘I think, therefore I am,’ was so solid and so certain that all the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics were in capable of upsetting it, I judged that I could receive it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy that I thought”<sup>5</sup>

But due to ignorance of spirituality we are not able to look inward, our reality, our soul or *Ātmā*, I-consciousness. Notwithstanding this I-consciousness always prevails in our consciousness, our ignorance of that reality compels us to cloak the reality and put importance on body and accessories related to body. This is also represented as ‘I’ which may be called ego or I-feeling, entirely adverse to I-consciousness like light is untoward to darkness. According to the popular view or egoistic view, ‘I’ is the ego-ridden bodily individual ‘I’, superior to others. Ego is ignorance because it hides self from reality and creates spurious knowledge. Ego is a virtual defence but since it is based on illusion and self-deception, it increases our vulnerability to false self-projection. Ego is the mind’s way of keeping us from having contact with our spiritual nature, and is the greatest veil, which never allows you to see the truth. It makes you believe that you know everything. The one who understands and accepts what is lacking in him, where he is going wrong, can very easily go ahead but the one who keeps denying till the very end—nothing can be done for such a person. No one can know more than I, can acquire more wealth than I etc. here ego plays a vital role and always ‘I’ fights for holding better position, more wealth, more fame than others. Ego manifests in many forms-pride of wealth, pride of knowledge, pride of beauty and pride of power. I may suffer from the ego of wealth in which I am proud of how much money and expensive passions I have. I may have ego of knowledge in which I become proud of how much I know or the number of educational degrees I have. I lack humility and think I am the source of all knowledge and look down on others who know less than I do. There is also the ego of beauty. I may flaunt my looks to such a degree that I make others who are not as beautiful feel inferior. I can become egoists, talk or think too much about myself. As I think that I am superior to others, and I prefer myself to others, and take other persons as my competitors. This man-based thinking makes me

hostile and revengeful which makes my mind turbulent and agitated for keeping me ahead from others taken as competitors. As a result I become segregated from the community gradually and ultimately a resident of lonely island.

Thus the ego creates anti- social attitude. Society has a common out-look and common goal. But ego breaks this unity and makes a man flatter, whimsical and dictator. In the social contest this egoistic view is really harmful. According to Radhakrishnan, "Every individual must subdue his senses which make for self-assertion; pride must give place to humility, resentment to forgiveness, narrow attachment to family to universal benevolence."<sup>6</sup> Actually the ego is a product of my continued state of ignorance. My beauty fades with age. If I do not have the beauty of spirit, few will be attracted to my outer beauty as wrinkles appear on my face. Wealth can disappear with changes in the economy or a serious illness or any other event like that may drain my finances. . If we closely analyze our skills, talent and achievements, there is nothing that is purely ours. Everything is created by God. There is logically nothing that justifies our pride. Emptiness is the absence of ego, a willingness to be hollow on the inside, as to be able to be filled by divine love.

Thus ignorance of real nature of self creates ego and ego creates passions, another name of which possessiveness. Possession is a physical state but possessiveness is a mental attitude. The man should denounce possessiveness, not possessions. Possessiveness is defined as excessive desire to acquire, possess and dominate. The sticky desire springs from dependence and lack of self- sufficiency. The root cause is a sense of emptiness, incompleteness, deficiency. But 'I' is totally fulfilled, entirely self-conscious, completely satisfied. Ignorance of 'I' causes an imaginary void. Desire arises in the mind to acquire and possess things to fill void. Possessiveness arises out of lack of self- awareness or self- consciousness. Thus, the possessive form of 'I' i.e.my/mine is a distortion of the real nature of the 'I' as self- consciousness and the cause of this distortion is the ignorance of the real nature of 'I'. From the ignorance of the real nature of 'I', we give an overemphasis on ego, and right then possessiveness becomes prominent. "The ego is the knot of our continued state of ignorance and so long as we live in the ego, we do not share in the delight of the universal spirit."<sup>7</sup>

We can expand the term 'ego' as 'Edging God out'. Ego is nothing but I-feeling inflated to the point of occupying one's entire inner space and the consequent exclusion of everything other than the self. It connotes vanity, pride and stupidity. We are living in an age of narcissism where everyone is desperate to be admired and people try to grab attention for some reason or other. When any one suffering from this 'look at me' attitude manages to be in the limelight they appear happy. Threats to ego produce anxiety and hostility, its collapse results in self- contempt. In our relationship to the world, there is no room either for ego or self-condemnation. Struggle is considered an

intrinsic part of human life. In reality, our life is very simple by nature. Our mind enjoys creating complexities and satisfies ego by solving them. Life has become an ego trip. All ego prompted activities are necessarily associated with selfish motives and these activities drain out a lot of our energy because of mental agitations. It is the individuality which includes pride of its isolation, effort of giving shape to a unique idea unparalleled in the world. If this individuality is destroyed, individual faces no material loss but the creative joy which is already within the heart of individual vanishes. If one is deprived of individuality, specialty, s/he is absolutely bankrupt because it is the only thing of his/her own. The same 'I' without vanity and arrogance is called *asmitha* in Sanskrit, meaning innocent or the very personification of innocence.

Let us see whether there is any logical basis for extreme egoism. Two types of ignorance are seen behind the ego or I-feeling. One, we become addicted to the objective world due to ignorance of the true nature of object and another, due to ignorance of our true nature we represent ourselves as what we are actually not. Thoughts have two basic components: - 1) a subjective factor-I, me or mine and 2) an objective factor- a state, condition or object with which we are associated, like our own body and mind or external circumstances like relationships, possessions or activities. We get so deeply absorbed in the 'object' portion that we fail to direct our mind inward to see our true nature apart from these external conditioning influences. This objective factor of thoughts is called ego or I-feeling which is different from the pure 'I' or I-consciousness. As the ego or I-feeling predominates due to ignorance of having true nature within us, the result is that we remain ignorant about our true nature and the pure 'I' remains obscure to us.

As we are residing in the objective world, we are unable to survive ourselves without matter in the material world; we cannot spend a moment without matter or object as possession in this world. So, we should aware of the real nature of the object. A misconception that the object makes us happy breeds lot of problems. When we are guided by this misconception, we become attached to the objects. The more we become happy, the greater we become attached to the objects. This tendency causes possessiveness and from possessiveness creates jealous and fear which later leads to sorrow, tension and agitation. So, having imagined happiness in the objects, we remain bound by the rope of attachment like an animal leashed to a post. But, if the nature of objects were happiness, then the objects would give the same effect to all, the same degree of happiness to all at all times. An object, for example a piece of ice can give you comfort in scorching hot summer but the same piece of ice becomes unbearable to patient who is in feverish condition. Even all the objects in normal condition cannot give same degree of happiness or comfort to all at the same time.

Again, more often we take an object to be 'joy-giving'; eventually this particular object turns out to be disappointments. Thus the object remains same, but the effect changes from person to person, time to time, condition to condition. So, the effect cannot be born from object and the effect really is not objective, it must be subjective and depends on our mind. The mind cannot remain without holding on to something. It is impossible to unhook the mind from a particular object until and unless it gets another for fulfilling desires around the new object. Annihilation of desires is possible only when the superimposition of the experience of happiness on sense-objects is removed. So long as you consider the non-self to be the source of happiness; you are interested in acquiring and enjoying sense-objects. But as soon as that notion is removed, you are no more interested in indulging in them. Rabindranath Tagore says in this context, "Things in which we do not take joy are burden upon our minds to be got rid of at any cost; or they are useful, and therefore in temporary and partial relation to us, becoming burdensome when their utility is lost; or they are like wandering vagabonds, loitering for a moment on the outskirts of our recognition, and then passing on. A thing is only completely our own when it is a thing of joy to us." <sup>8</sup>

Thus we are aware of neither our true nature nor the objectivity of the objects. These two types of ignorance make us egocentric and ego creates possessiveness which provokes us to gather a lot bereaving others. Thus the world becomes a battle field and each one of us warrior. The urge to achieve more is unending; there is no satiation. Making more money, achieving high positions, fame and name- all these goal-oriented pursuits are not significant in themselves. The more you achieve, the more you crave for. This made us stressful, agitated. Contentment is something that engenders right living and helps one find joy within. When you feel satisfied, calmness is experienced and there is no urge to acquire more even at the cost of compromising one's health or relationships. People are happier who live simple and think right. They feel less stressed and less depressed because they have figured a way to balance their living environments.

But when we know discrimination between eternal (*nitya*) and non-eternal (*anitya*), possessiveness of non-eternal possession must be removed. Śankaracārya defines knowledge as *nityānityavastuvivekah*- reflection on the distinction between the permanent and impermanent.<sup>9</sup> Only Brahman is eternal, all other things different from Brahman are non-eternal. Eternal or *nitya* is not limited by time or *kāla*, and its opposite i.e., which is limited by time, is called non-eternal or *anitya*. Everything in the world is passing, ephemeral, transient. The wise one does not invest in the world. He looks for the permanent in and through the impermanent. You ultimately merge with the permanent. Through this knowledge human beings can give up lust, greed and attachment around these possessions and ultimately possessiveness for non-eternal

possessions. "When you know that whatever there is is filled by him and whatever you have is his gift, then you realise the infinite in the finite, and the giver in the gifts. Then you know that all the facts of the reality have their only meaning in the manifestation of the one truth, and all your possessions have their only significance for you, not in themselves but in the relation they establish with the infinite."<sup>10</sup>

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