

Awakening to Truth

The Ultimate Journey - The Ultimate Delusion

Insights Into the Non-Dualistic World View of the Vedanta

Dearest Reader, I salute you as your loving brother. What follows is an attempt to capture in words the heart of the mystical teachings known as Vedanta. This booklet is not intended as a scholarly work. It is merely hoped that it will clear up some knots and intensify your love for the Divinity, which is closer to you than even your own mind. Please join me in this voyage of exploration to realize the truth of who we are. With deepest affection and gratitude, I dedicate this work to the source from which it has emerged, the beloved Satguru who resides in all hearts as the one Self.

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I. Introduction

I would like to share some observations with you regarding the long journey we all seem to be on, namely, the trek through many life-times to return to our natural home. It is a required journey and an inevitable journey that everyone eventually makes. Yet, paradoxically, it is a totally unnecessary journey. It need never be made because we are already at the final goal, we are already there to welcome the weary traveler home. In truth we have never left home.

In this booklet, I hope to explore with you both the wonder and the dilemma of this human condition. Our discoveries will lead us to the same revelations that the great mystics of the *Upanishads* realized 2500 years or more ago, and that saints and seers have realized throughout the ages. Towards the end of the booklet I will touch upon the teachings of a renowned saint of our time, Ramana Maharshi, and I will also briefly take up one of the most sublime and most succinct of the ancient mystical outpourings, the *Mandukyo Upanishad*. This

Upanishad provides the basic framework for the whole *Vedanta*. It consists of only 12 short verses which cover the totality of everything.... physical, mental, supra-mental, and transcendental, as symbolized by the universal seed sound, Om.

To give you a little synopsis of the discussion that follows, let me skip ahead to the conclusion of this journey to truth we are all on, the journey which lands us back at the starting place we never left. As we follow the path that the *Vedantic* seers trod, we discover a remarkable view of reality, which to our surprise was always there, just waiting to be seen. It is this: When we look out at the world we no longer see the world as we had known it before. Now we see only multiple reflections of our self. And that self is not this familiar outer form and its associated personality, but the beautiful face of Divinity. Wherever we look we see only the one *Brahman*. For we discover that is all there is. There is nothing else. As many sages have proclaimed, to see anything other than *Brahman* is sheer ignorance. And ignorance leads to duality, which gives rise to all suffering.

But then there is the deeper discovery that even this ignorance and duality do not exist and have never existed. Being unreal they cannot be the cause of anything. There *can be neither* suffering nor bondage. Every being is already free and forever remains free. In truth, neither ignorance nor bondage needs to be removed, or for that matter can be removed, whether through spiritual practices or through divine grace. Because, ignorance and bondage *were never there to begin with*. When this becomes firm conviction and direct experience, then the concept of bondage, the feelings of suffering, the belief in a separate individual existence, the perception of an outside world, and the idea of an ego, of victims and victimizers, of good and bad, and all the rest, will be seen for what they are: *nothing*. Once we withdraw our energy and belief from these false perceptions and identifications, they naturally fade away.

Then what about our daily experiences in the world? From the moment of waking in the morning through every moment of the day, 365 days per year, we reaffirm our belief in the reality of this body and its individual personality, and the world which surrounds it. But in time, we realize that these individuals we thought we were, battered about by circumstances and forces outside ourselves, are just dream characters playing out their roles in an ongoing dream. All our daily adventures in the world are dream happenings experienced by dream characters. They are not real. We keep the error alive by constantly reinforcing the habit of believing in the reality of our worldly experiences.

Will the 'Right' Spiritual Practices Finally Awaken Us? It is we who have made up this dream and are responsible for every part of it. By opening the mind to the fact that it is merely dreaming, spiritual practices turn anxious dreams into joyful dreams. Nevertheless, these practices have only limited value in that they produce results only within the dream. In effect, they provide dream water to slake dream thirst. The thirst exists in the dream, not in reality, and the quenching of the thirst provides an outcome and a satisfaction only for the illusory dream characters. Spiritual practices cannot awaken us from our dreams. We are always already fully awake. It is just like having our spectacles sitting on our noses and then looking everywhere for the spectacles we think we have lost.

We will not find them elsewhere. All that is necessary is to realize that they are already part of us. The Self is our unchanging, eternal, immortal reality. It is ever-free, ever-awake, ever-complete, ever-undiminishable bliss. It is not affected by our spiritual practices. It knows nothing of dreams.

Spiritual teachings and spiritual efforts serve to purify the mind of the dream character, allowing the mind to become clear of ancient mistaken patterns of perception. A clarified mind penetrates beyond the objective world and learns to discriminate between reality and illusion. It perceives itself to be the dreamer as well as playing a part in its own dream as the subjective dream character. As dreamer of our dream we are totally unaffected by the vicissitudes of dream life happening to us as dream character. This step of mind purification is not the final awakening to truth, but it does herald the end of all suffering. Whether or not we continue to dream ourselves as the dream character having painful episodes in the dream world, we are not affected.

The Truth Is We Are God

Ultimately, all spiritual efforts aim at de-hypnotizing us from the hypnotic idea that we are not Brahman. We have been obsessed with the notion that we are limited individuals. The goal of spiritual practice is to remind us that we are the pure, unlimited Self and that we can never be anything other than unchanging bliss, infinite consciousness. In truth, we are the Absolute in all its fullness and in all its glory. Our true name is *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, pure beingness, unbounded awareness, eternal bliss. We were never born and we will never die. We are not the body, we are not the mind, we are not individuals. We are not in this world. It is this world and all worlds which are *within us*. We are the all of it. We are Peace itself. We are Love itself. We are God. We can never be different from God. Fear or grief or death can never touch us. This is what the highest wisdom proclaims to seemingly bound individuals who have identified themselves with characters in a dream.

We use spiritual practices to clear the mind of its dross in the same way that we pick up a thorn and use it to remove other thorns that have hobbled us. Here it is the *tamasic* thorns of sloth, inertia and delusion and the *rajasic* thorns of desires, repulsions and frenzied activities which are removed by the helpful *satvik* thorns of spiritual practice. But eventually, even the helpful thorns are thrown away, and we cease all doings and settle into the deep silence of being, far beyond the reaches of the mind and its understandings, and far beyond the influence of intentional spiritual exercises and penances.

When the clouds of illusion fade away and disappear, ie. when the illusory dream subsides, we speak of awakening as taking place. But, in truth, nothing at all is happening. The Self remains as it always is, and always was and always will be. The Sun does not know of darkness and never sees the shadows cast by clouds that appear to have come and blocked its light. So also, the Self knows no illusion and does not know of anything other than itself. Awakening has some meaning for us in the dream, but in truth it is a meaningless idea. The clouds, whether they come or go are always unreal. They cannot be the cause of anything. Time and causation have no place in reality.

Cause and Effect - An Illusory Concept

That there are no cause and effect relationships violates all our perceptions as dream characters. To us it appears that our spiritual activities are the cause of the disappearance of the clouds of illusion, ie. our practices are responsible for our awakening. But the situation is more like that of a coconut which is about to fall just as a crow lands on the coconut tree. It appears that the coconut falls because the crow landed, but there is no direct connection between the two happenings. To connect them in a time-ordered causal relationship is just a misperception. Spiritual practice is not the cause of awakening; it is merely a mark that awakening is in process. We can merely say that along with the awakening, when it appears to take place, the dream story line changes to take on the character of spiritual yearning, spiritual practice and heightened spiritual awareness.

Seen another way, awakening is frequently thought of as divine grace and spiritual practice is seen as the personal effort required to evoke that grace. Both grace and effort appear necessary and unavoidable. But all of these, namely, awakening, grace, spiritual practice, time-ordered causal relationships, time itself, and the whole perceived world, are all just the stuff of dreams which have been given meaning by the characters in dreams believing themselves to be bound. All these illusory concepts are equally unreal. Whatever form illusion appears to take, there is never anything separate from *Brahman*, the One Self. The truth is that nothing can disturb the unruffled field of pure consciousness that is our reality. The Self alone is. That is all.

A hint of this truth lies in the most common of experiences, a process we all go through daily, that of the cycling between waking and sleep. *The exploration of these common states of experience will be our principal focus in the discussion that follows.* We will look at these states of being from the point of view of the relative individual, ie. the illusory dream character, with whom we have mistakenly identified ourselves, for so long.

II. The Three States of Consciousness

I would like to begin our inquiry into the awakening process with some universally recognized experiences which we observe daily in our lives and in the lives of others, including the lives of our pets and even of unwelcome visitors in our homes, such as roaches and mice. All of us appear to cycle through three different states of consciousness during any given day, states that we have labeled *waking*, *dream* and *deep sleep*. There can be other states of consciousness that we can experience, such as the higher states of *samadhi* achieved by *yogis* and spiritual adepts, but these are relatively rare. For now let us focus on the three common states everyone experiences. I would like to propose that we need to redefine how we view these states, in order to more closely align our conceptual understanding with the truth of our being.

The Day-Time Serial Dream

Let us start by considering this present state that we are now in. We call it the *waking state* and we consider it to be the principal state by which we define ourselves. This is the familiar state of consciousness in which we communicate through the

physical body, its mind and its senses. But, to call this the *waking state* is a lie, for in doing so, we delude ourselves into perpetuating a fiction that we are in truth individual beings, conscious of what is happening around us and within us, and that the perceived separation between us and everything else is real.

From now on, I suggest that we might more accurately think of this so-called *waking state* as the *sleep state*. It is the state in which the familiar serial dream of life in the world is playing on the screen of consciousness. In this state, consciousness has not only become impure but, apparently, it is also unaware of itself as consciousness. It seems to have become unconscious. To avoid confusion with our previous use of the term *waking and sleep*, let us refer to this state as the *serial dream*. This state can, of course, be active at any time of day or night, but it is most commonly associated with our day-time consciousness, and for clarity I will sometimes refer to it as the day-time serial dream. Here the pure screen of consciousness is covered by the drama of our serial adventures as individuals, which we experience daily. We consider this to be real and view it as our normal conscious state; but it is not real and it is not our natural state at all.

The Night-Time Ephemeral Dream

Also daily, whether they be human beings or animals, most living beings go through a change of consciousness which we call *going to sleep*. But calling it that is still more of the lie. Here we do not *fall asleep*. In this familiar state of fading out from our serial dream, which usually happens, at least for us humans, when we go to bed at night, turn out the lights, and close our eyes, we are really *coming out of sleep*. *We are beginning to awaken*, or so it seems. First, we usually experience the night-time dream, in which we take on a new persona, a new body, immersed in a new world, with a new perceived reality and new perceptions of time and space. While it is happening, it appears to be just as self-consistent and just as believable as our serial dream of the daytime. But this night-time dream is not of a serial nature; it is usually a one-time affair, generally having some vague relationships to the forms, emotional and psychic agendas of the day-time serial dream.

In this ephemeral night-time dream, time and space as we know them in the serial dream, seem to be warped. Sometimes, a number of story lines appear to be happening simultaneously and sometimes the mind seems to run riot, what the Course in Miracles calls 'having a perceptual temper tantrum'. Unlike the seemingly endless string of connected dreams making up the day-time serial dream, with an ongoing story line that continues 365 days a year for all the years of a given life, the night-time dream is usually a one-time happening, like a movie you see once or perhaps a number of times, but not day after day. There being no reinforcement coming from the serial nature of a repetitive reality, the level of absorption by the consciousness is lessened. The obscuring clouds are not quite so thick and we might say it is more like an afternoon shower than a prolonged season of ongoing weather. It usually passes quickly and is soon forgotten; but while it is remembered in the serial dream, it is clearly seen for what it is, merely a dream, not reality.

Like the day-time serial dream, the much more transitory night-time dream is just another form of impure unconsciousness, but with the veiling power of the clouds of illusion appearing less thick; the light of consciousness occasionally seems to shine through. For instance, it is not uncommon even as the dream is proceeding, to have the experience that one *is* dreaming and has the power to influence and change the events and outcomes in the dream, what we call lucid dreaming. It is also not too uncommon, at least for spiritual aspirants, to experience their spiritual master entering their dreams to provide teachings and life directions, or for the dream story line to unfold in a particularly poignant way that provides deep spiritual insight into the serial adventures of our day-time dream. So, this process which we normally call *falling asleep and having a dream* appears to be more like a step in waking up from all dreaming.

Dream as a Metaphor for Awakening

I say *appears* because the night-time dream does not lead to final awakening from all dreams. It is merely a representation of the awakening process, a metaphor which demonstrates the power of the mind and the I-thought with which it identifies, to make a world. In our dreams there will always be the personal pronoun *I* and the subjective dream character associated with it, and there will be a world of separate objects and individuals which might be called *you, he, she, they, it*. The latter are all dependent on the individual *I*, which is really just a thought, namely, the I-thought. In the dream, this I-thought always comes first.

As soon as the I-thought appears, it hides the substratum of pure consciousness and projects on to it a story which centers on itself, a self that may be clothed in a different persona from the familiar one of the serial-dream. The story unfolds, and then, quite inexplicably, sometimes in the middle of the plot, the veiling clouds begin to dissipate and the story suddenly ends. This fading out of the dream story on the screen of consciousness did not happen as a result of some event within the dream, or by a desire of the dream character for this to happen. We might say that the dreamer *put forth no further energy into maintaining the story*, and so the separate existence perceived by the *I* in the dream faded away and all the characters and objects of the dream, the I-thought itself and the dreamer who is the God of the dream, all receded again into the background screen of consciousness.

The thinning of the clouds of illusion can also appear in the day-time serial dream, as is sometimes spontaneously experienced by ordinary people and more frequently experienced by accomplished spiritual aspirants. For the latter, it appears that their spiritual practice is leading to awakening. But, just as events or desires or activities within the night-time dream did not lead to awakening from that dream, events or desires or activities within the day-time serial dream do not lead to awakening from that dream. As was mentioned earlier, every cause and effect relationship we perceive within the dream is illusory, and just as illusory as all of the rest of the dream. There are not different intensities or levels of illusion.

All of the dream, in which a separate subjective *I* character appears surrounded by an objective reality, is just made up in the mind. And every thought and perception of this *I*

character is also made up. Whether the dream is one of ordinary worldly life or of a spiritual seeker in the advanced stages of awakening, it is still dream and something we totally made up. It cannot be stressed too strongly or repeated too often that anything whatsoever perceived to be outside of the one universal *I*, is made up. This includes not only the world and individual beings and objects perceived to be outside of 'ourselves', but also our body, all our mind creations, our emotions and feelings, our desires and repulsions, all our past memories and concepts, and whatever else we mistakenly believe to be part and parcel of what we have been calling *I*, but which have no connection at all with the true *I*. In short, just like the images we fabricate in our imagination, everything objective and subjective we perceive in the world is made up. None of it is real.

Within the made-up story, ie. within the relative plane of the dream, spiritual effort is called for, whether in the current incarnation or in some previous or coming incarnation. It appears to be a prerequisite for awakening to take place. As a result, spiritual effort and the process of awakening usually are perceived to happen at the same time within the serial-dream. But, as has already been pointed out, one is not the cause of the other. What is done or not done by the dream character within the dream is not relevant to awakening. The need is not for the dream character to change his life within the dream, although his life will change quite naturally in a more spiritual direction. The story line that is playing in the dream, what we might call the content of the dream, which so strongly holds our fascination as dream characters, is not at all important. What is needed, however, is to totally transcend the serial-dream by having the subjective dream character, the dream world, and the dreamer all vanish back into their basis, the pure field of consciousness from which they appeared. This is not something we can make happen from within the serial-dream. It happens when it happens, in the same way that our ephemeral night dreams spontaneously come and later spontaneously depart on the blank screen of the mind, which is in no way affected by the rising and setting of the dream world that appears to have come and gone on it.

The Dreamless State

This leads us to the third of the three familiar daily states of consciousness. As the night-time dream fades away we fall into a remarkable dreamless state which we erroneously call *deep sleep*, yet, in which we are anything but deep asleep. It is not a true state of awakening because, with the apparent absence of mind in that state, consciousness appears not to be aware of itself, but nevertheless, for most beings, it is as close as they get on a daily basis to pure being, ie. to being awake. This state is a reflection of the ultimate reality, the immortal, fully awake Self. What makes the dreamless state so remarkable from the standpoint of our reference point within the serial dream, is that in this state there is no perception of the subjective I-thought, and of course there is no perception of the mind and its flow of thoughts. Nothing seems to be going on to disturb the tranquil field of consciousness. It is a more subtle state than even the most sublime and ethereal of dreams.

In this state, consciousness no longer appears to be covered by the impurity of the I-thought, the limited individualized consciousness which plays out its story

line in a world of otherness. So, there are no clouds that come and go; there is only a very fine haze, a blanket of stillness that covers the field of consciousness. Although the I-thought has disappeared, it has only reverted to its potential state. It has not been destroyed. Consequently, the dreamless state continues to contain the seed of the I-thought. And so, from it the I-thought again sprouts forth and either resumes the adventures of the serial day-time dream or produces dreams of the more ephemeral night-time variety. For that reason, the dreamless state is sometimes called the causal state.

What needs to happen then, is for the fine haze to lift and for the consciousness to become fully aware of itself, while at the same time, no new clouds arise to disturb the pure, objectless state. This is known as being *awake in dreamless sleep*. As the *Vedas* speak of it, this will happen when all the seeds of memory consisting of past actions and desires which adhere to us as limited individual beings, ie. the seeds of *karma*, are burned-up so that they cannot again pop-up from the dreamless state. This state of being awake in deep sleep is not an exotic, unreachable state; it is a totally natural state which is readily accessible every moment of every day. We will explore this further in a later section.

III. Death and the Soul's Journey

As we have been discussing, the on-going serial day-time dream is punctuated by interludes of transitory night-time dreams and the quiescent state of dreamless rest. An extended version of this is the serial dream of the soul. Its serial adventures continue on through life after life, punctuated by interludes of between-life dreams and a peaceful quiescent state of dreamless serenity. The death of the body and the interval between lives has been seen by the mystics as nothing more than a long sleep, with sleep understood in the conventional sense of signifying a temporary fading out of the serial-dream.

Death changes nothing. Life, in its truest sense, is unaffected. Illusory forms continue to change much as they had previously, when daily the ongoing serial-dream changed to the night-time ephemeral dream, but now the particular serial-dream of the body in this incarnation comes to an end, and does not subsequently pick up again where it left off before. Nevertheless, the cycling through the three states of consciousness continues unabated, with different content. Although the serial life adventures of a particular body have come to an end, there is another ongoing serial dream which continues over a much longer time frame. This is the on-going serial dream of the soul, which appears to take on a series of individualized incarnations in successive lives, tied together by the thread of soul identity.

One way of looking at the soul stream was pointed out by the American seer, Edgar Casey, in whose day the top male movie star was Clark Gable, playing in a new film every year. One year the rage might be Clark Gable playing the role of a Southern gentleman in the American Civil War, another year he was a British Navy officer during the 17th Century, then an American cowboy in this century, then a Chinese warlord a thousand years ago, and then a fictional character in the 21st Century, and so on. All these many movie incarnations, each with their own story line, are tied together by the single actor, Clark Gable, taking on all

these individual parts, putting the characteristic Gable touch and mannerism on every film.

Between films, in other words, after a particular character part has come to an end in one film and before a new role in a new film has started, Gable plays some other shorter parts, what we might call 'just being himself', in other words, living the personal life of Clark Gable. For instance, he may go fishing with his kids or he might unexpectedly find himself a patient in a hospital having an emergency appendectomy, or being threatened and terrorized by a robber who broke into his Beverly Hills house, etc..... what are just a succession of shorter dream episodes. But also during this time between movies, he spends some time simply resting and lying in the sun, until the next movie part crops up.

Seen in the larger time frame, Gable wanders from one movie to another, each interrupted by the end of the movie role, followed by the taking on of some other shorter life roles of a different nature and by periods of rest. Of course, in our discussion here, Gable represents the soul. In a similar way to Gable, the soul's ongoing serial soul dream continues through life after life, interrupted temporarily by the sleep we call death, when other shorter dreams of heavens and hells and between-life incorporeal experiences come and go, as the soul's I-thought spins out worlds and then again recedes into the stillness of dreamless rest.... until spontaneously the soul's longer-term serial dream once more resumes and a new incarnation begins. In one of these incarnations, we find ourselves as we now perceive ourselves to be, individuals sitting here this very moment, reading or writing this article, and reflecting on the true meaning of spiritual life and on the process of awakening permanently from all dreams.

Much as the ongoing serial dream of this particular body we now have will come to an end, the ongoing serial dream of the soul will also eventually come to an end. When all individualized consciousness ceases, all dreaming finally ceases, and we will have awakened to the truth of being, we will have returned home. More accurately, any sense of separate I will have dissolved into the limitless ocean of Self. But, in truth, nothing has happened. As was pointed out before, it is only the illusion, that which was always nothing, that has faded away. The Self is not affected by any of these dreams, short-term, long-term and long-long-term, playing on its surface. It is like the short-term foam and the longer-term waves and the still longer-term currents playing on the surface of the deep ocean. To the ocean they are all just water, all identical with itself.

Fear of Death

Although the on-going serial adventures of the body are temporarily suspended every day as we cycle through the three states of consciousness, there is a peculiar fear that grips us, identified as we are with the ongoing serial dream character. This fear comes when the serial dream is threatened with permanent termination. It is the fear of death. To see just how silly this fear is, consider for a moment when in the evening after a busy strenuous day, we as individuals *go to sleep*, as we call it. Do we view that with fear, even though terrible nightmares may come to disturb us in our night-time dreams, or the possibility exists that we may never awaken? No, sleep, as we view it from within the relative plane of our

day-time consciousness, is a familiar daily change of state that promises to refresh us.

For most of us, our nightly sleep feels totally natural, and we look forward to it since it provides a welcome interlude of rest, in other words, a relinquishment of the burdens of the world and our need to make our separate way in it, protect our bodies, do our work, amass wealth, accumulate objects, maintain our families, leave our mark, etc..... the whole human 'catastrophe', as Zorba the Greek spoke of it. We know intuitively that the fading out from our day-time serial dream into what we call *sleep*, provides an opportunity to take a little vacation from the world and our daily cares and begin to awaken into the truth of our being. Being a safe, non-threatening, change of state from what we consider to be our normal consciousness (ie. the day-time serial dream), the process of *going to sleep* is intuitively welcome to us as a kind of template for the return path to our true home, the home we all instinctively yearn for. At some deeper level of knowing, we realize that to awaken to our truth we must leave our serial dream identity behind and transcend this worldly life until all vestiges of separated individuated consciousness are gone. *Sleep* shows us a familiar way of transcending our bodily identity. And so, we certainly are not afraid of *falling asleep*.

In the same way, the soul is not afraid of the body falling into death and going through the cycle of *sleep* between incarnations. Many who have come back from death encounters speak of going through new ethereal experiences and being enveloped in a wonderful peace which awaits them on the other side. From all accounts they don't miss their serial-dream and their adventures in the world. For the soul it is a welcome interlude in which it gains a little respite from its ongoing incarnational sojourns, and in which it can take on some shorter, less gripping episodes of dream life. Just as Clark Gable looks forward to the interval between films and would laugh at any fear of a particular movie part coming to an end, the fear of body death is just a joke to the soul, which is in no way affected by it. Like Clark Gable expecting to do another film, the soul knows it will come back again into another incarnation and pick up its serial dream where it left off.

We see that fear of death arises for us because we have identified ourselves with the illusory individual body in this incarnation. We could easily solve the fear of death problem by shifting our identity to the soul, which is going through a stream of incarnations. Instead of clinging to our present body consciousness we could transfer our allegiance to our soul, which drops bodies and takes on new bodies in each successive incarnation, much as we seem to take on different dream bodies in our dreams at night and drop them again when the dream ends. Then the fear of death would not be an issue. Is that what we want to do? Obviously, it would be a step in the right direction, but the correct answer must be 'no', for the soul is also caught up in delusion. Rather than having its life goals as the accumulation of property and wealth, the development of profession and family, and the acquisition of a good reputation and a good name, which are the universal goals of human life within the serial dream, the soul's goal is the seemingly loftier one of spiritual evolution. But this is just more illusion playing out on a longer time scale within the relative plane of existence.

The soul is also ultimately unreal. It has come and it will eventually go. Does

the soul have a fear of soul death, when the on-going soul serial-dream finally comes to an end? We can speculate that the soul knows no such fears, being a little smarter than we are, misidentified as we are with these fear-ridden dream characters. But there is a soul-ego and in the illusion it too tries to hold on and stave off its ultimate disintegration. Within the on-going soul serial dream, this desire for soul perpetuity then becomes the principal obstacle to full awakening. But even that fear cannot put off the awakening. Within the illusion, it happens when it happens. In the absolute sense, of course, nothing at all happens.

It becomes clear that within the dream, instead of shifting identities, all identities must permanently vanish. Instead of changing disguises, the I-thought, ie. the ego, must completely and permanently disappear. This takes place naturally when awakening happens. It need not and cannot be programmed, but it can be directly experienced and it can be observed.

Near-Death Experiences

In connection with this discussion of the fear of death, there is a whole body of literature on near-death experiences. I myself have had several personal near-death experiences. Let me share one of them which revealed to me the totally unnecessary suffering that attends our fear of death. In 1978 I became very ill with a suspected liver cancer. The body lost 30 lbs. in a short time and was deteriorating so rapidly it looked like I would die within a month. At the time I had been running a 3-month workshop at Esalen Institute, called the Inner Road to Health. Health practitioners and healers of many different backgrounds came into the program to learn alternative systems of healing. It was a little embarrassing that the principal teacher was dying and unable to carry on with the classes. Actually, this episode is embedded in a much larger story in which, as a result of following inner spiritual guidance which directed me on this particular course, I took on the illness of another. But these details are not relevant here.

One evening I found myself in the worst pain I had ever had or could ever imagine. It felt like the liver was in a vise and was slowly being crushed into jello. One of the people in my workshop, a cardiologist, was with me at the time and wanted to give me some pain medication. I was writhing in bed but would not accept any drugs. I was afraid that if I took something that would knock me out, I would die. Suddenly and totally unexpectedly, my consciousness changed completely. As consciousness I shifted out of the body and was up on the ceiling looking down on the scene in the room, with the body still doubled over in pain and several people present trying to attend to it.

Gauging the reactions and perceptions of the seeming others in the room, nothing whatsoever had changed; but clearly I, as consciousness, was not present in the body. I was serenely peaceful and still, totally uninvolved with the scene in the room. Then all sense of time and all images disappeared, and a depth of peace beyond description and understanding enveloped the field of consciousness. It seemed to last forever, but in earth time the experience lasted only perhaps 5 minutes. When I returned to body consciousness, the fear of death had left me completely. Although it would seem that objectively nothing had changed, consciously everything had changed. From the viewpoint of the

soul, I had stepped out of the serial-adventure of this life to experience a different sense of *I*. For a moment I was in a new dream, an ethereal dream, one very transparent to the underlying basis of stillness and peacefulness that is the reflection of our ultimate awake essence. And then even this thin veil of dream receded into the pure awareness of consciousness.

IV. *Maya*

Great spiritual teachers often speak of the inexplicable wonder of *maya*, the divine play of illusion. *Maya* is that which is not. It does not exist and never has existed. Being unreal it cannot be the cause of anything. And yet, despite being nothing at all, it seems to achieve the impossible; it makes that which is real and forever existent appear to be non-existent and unreal, and it makes that which is never existent and never real appear to truly exist and be real. The age-old example that reveals both the wonder and the preposterousness of this trick of *maya* is that of the rope and the snake. The phenomenon happens when it is neither light of day when we can see well nor dark of night when we can see nothing; it is dusk or twilight, when the light is low and our seeing is impaired. There is a piece of rope lying on our path; we mistake it as a snake and immediately become frightened.

It is the ego mind, the instrument of *maya*, which concocts this scene by hiding the truth of the rope, and from its imagination, based on past memory, projects the untruth of the snake onto the rope that it cannot discern. Then it spins out a catastrophic expectation of being attacked and killed by the snake, and under its direction we, the individual, are flooded with panic as we become obsessed with the non-existent hobgoblin of fear.

From the point of view of true knowledge, the whole ridiculous scene is unreal and non-existent. To be taken in by it and to believe it to be real is totally insane. Yet, such is the very nature of *maya*. When truly seen, it is nothing, an absurd illusion with no substance. But when it is not seen, it becomes the impregnable power of imagination spinning out a totally believable nightmare that holds us in its grip. This then, in its insanity, is the make-up of the serial dream that we so tenaciously cling to as our reality. That we take it so seriously and assert it to be real, is not only insane but inexplicable. *Maya* and its hand-maiden, the mind, cannot be understood.

Maya has no beginning, it has no logical cause. We can only say that it has come, inexplicably. Somehow, it manages to obscure the eternal now with memories of the past, from which it projects a future and thereby totally hides the present. Having created time, it simultaneously creates space, or so it seems, putting forth the insane notion that the consciousness can be limited to be present at one place and not at another. But consciousness has no form and it has no boundaries; it cannot be contained.

All the powers of *maya* are derived from our imagination. It seems to exist and to be real only because we believe in it. Only because we have fallen asleep. The unchanging eternal truth of our being is unaffected. What we have made up and come to believe to be our reality, has in no way changed our true reality. We are, as we have always been, the pure unchanging field of pristine

consciousness, the ground on which all dreams seem to have come and gone, and seem for an instant to have held us in their grip. In truth, nothing ever happened. It was just an illusion.

The Two *Shaktis* of *Maya*

Looking at *maya* a little more closely, we see that it is made up of two very powerful *shaktis* or powers, a veiling power and a projecting power. The veiling power hides the truth and the projecting power projects an untruth, which is then mistaken to be truth. In the example of the nonexistent snake seen in the twilight, the rope is hidden by the veiling power and the snake is concocted by the projecting power. Both in the day-time serial dream and in the night-time ephemeral dream, these two powers of *maya* are active. As soon as they hold sway, the individual I-thought appears and takes over. Instantly, time and space and a whole world of objects, individualized thoughts, desires and repulsions, feelings of mine and thine, love and hate, and a host of other polar opposites and distinctions seem to arise. As a result, the consciousness appears to be transformed into impure unconsciousness.

The forms of the two types of dreams, the serial-dream and the ephemeral dream, are different, the spatial and time frames are different, and the intensity of the illusion appears to be different, but in essence these two types of dreams are exactly the same. The rope is always just the rope and nothing else. It is just that these two *shaktis* of *maya* seem to have come and obscured it, projecting some unreal scenes onto it.

Consider for a moment when in the night-time dream, the dream character fantasizes a scene in his mind. Clearly he knows that he is concocting this scene in his imagination, and thus he would not consider it to be real. Therefore, even in the dream, the dream character would recognize what was obviously made-up in his mind, and would not take it seriously. But when that same mind of the dream character sees a scene in the world (his dream world), which he experiences to be outside of himself, he considers this to be real. He does not even think of questioning his perception. Later, however, when this dream is remembered in the day-time serial-dream, it is realized that *all* of the night-time dream, whether it was perceived to be internal or external by the dream character, was illusory. It was all made up by the mind and superimposed onto the reality, the screen of pure consciousness.

In the same way, in the serial day-time dream which we now perceive ourselves to be in, when we fantasize a scene in the mind, we know it to be imagined and, therefore, not real. But when the mind appears to see a scene outside of itself we believe it to be real. Yet this is exactly the same as the experience just spoken of with respect to the night-time dream. Whether the activity is perceived 'inside' in the imagination or 'outside' in a seeming world, all of it is nothing but imagination, a story made up by the mind and projected onto the one reality, the pure screen of consciousness. All illusion, whatever changing forms it appears to take, is unreal, but always rests on the basis of unchanging reality.

The two *shaktis* are active in both dream states. But this is not the case in the

dreamless state that we previously referred to as *deep sleep*. Here only the veiling power remains; the projecting power has disappeared. Here the consciousness is no longer impure but it still appears to be unconscious of itself. Without the impurity of the mind or the individual I-thought or the distractions of the world and the needs of the body, we experience this state as one of deep inner peace and contentment, unburdened by any activity of the mind. But this is an indirect experience felt only after the dreamless state has passed and the mind resumes its activities and we have returned to the familiar serial-dream consciousness. While we are in the dreamless state, there is no conscious experience at all, since there is neither an individualized *I* in the form of mind, nor a concept of time in which to frame an experience. (And I must always add, 'or so it seems'. In truth, consciousness can never become unconscious. It is, of course, unchanging and unaffected by any of these states that we may define from our limited purview in the serial dream.)

V. Being Awake In Dreamless Sleep

The question then is how to remove this last *shakti*, the veiling power of *maya*, and become fully conscious as consciousness itself? In other words, how to become fully awakened? We indirectly experience the inner peace and contentment of the dreamless sleep state after we return to the serial dream, but how can we directly experience such peace, not afterwards but while it is happening? In short, how can we transcend the three states of consciousness that we cycle through daily? This is a familiar question asked from within the serial dream by the class of dream characters we call spiritual aspirants. It is a question that naturally arises when the dream bubble is ready to burst. But this question, in reality, has no meaning and hence has no answer. As previously pointed out, the pure consciousness is always conscious. It has not gone away. It has not become what it isn't. All that happens, or seems to happen, is that illusion, that which isn't, that which is nothing and yet seems to be something, is no longer taken to be real. It is no longer believed. Once the dream is seen to be just a dream it has lost its power of reality and its power to produce confusion and suffering. When the underlying rope is seen, the snake, even though it may still be perceived as a ghost-like image, is no longer taken seriously.

We see that behind the projection of individual and world, in other words, the seeming reality of both the day-time and night-time dreams wherein the veiling and projecting powers of *maya* and mind are active, there is the quiescence of the dreamless state, in which only the veiling power of *maya* remains. Here there is neither time nor space, subjectivity nor objectivity; there is only the infinite serene field of consciousness, radiant and shining. But here, consciousness still appears to be covered with a thin diaphanous veil that obscures it from itself. This dreamless state is the normally invisible unchanging background which is present 24 hours a day, every day, for all time. It is the basis on which the visible changing foreground of consciousness, all the dramas of our night-time and day-time dreams, play. In the past, it has always been the dreams that have held our attention, not their basis. But that can change.

Even now, as I write this and you read this, this background state is present

and fully available. Allow it to be present in your awareness. Taste it, now. Abide in its serenity and silence for a brief moment of respite from the steady onslaught of thoughts and impressions. It is never far away. It is always available. It is always waiting to be imbibed. It is there in the instant between every thought. This very moment it beckons you to return to it and rest awhile and be refreshed. Here, the individual I-thought and all its delusory effects dissolve into a uniform field of stillness. This taste of the infinite, this flavor of the eternally tranquil and peaceful *now* in which no I-thought is present to intrude, is known as being *awake in dreamless sleep*.

Being Always Watchful

Loving this stillness, being ever vigilant to not forget it for a moment, is what true meditation is about. It does not require a formal sitting in front of an altar with the body held in a fixed pose, such as the lotus, and the mind repeating a holy mantra or concentrating on a divine form. For many, these meditational props help to still the mind and in the beginning are very useful, and even essential. But the shift of focus from foreground to background can happen at any stage of the serial dream, whether the dream character is sitting, walking, eating, doing or not doing, thinking or not thinking. For this no effort is needed. In fact any effort at all gets in the way and makes it impossible. It is our hunger and our yearning for this stillness of being that inspires us to remember the background, the uniform unindividuated wholeness. And it is this love of undisturbed peace that makes us watchful to see in our clarified mind's eye, the clear stage free of all props, even while the myriad of individualized characters and objects, mind thoughts, words and ideas play out their parts in foreground. In this way, we give no further energy or credence to the unreal, but keep our vigilance focussed on the unchanging basis, the indwelling silence of being. This is true integral vision. This is true meditation.

For this exercise, nothing needs to be changed in foreground. There is no need to change one's activities or change one's thoughts, or for seeming others to change what they are perceived to be doing. All that is required is a shift of awareness, a shift of focus, a broadening of the field of perception to return to stillness, even while foreground continues unabated and is seemingly unaffected. It is the shift of perception from the individualized character in a novel to the author of the novel, or from the dream character to the dreamer, or from the painted character, the Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck, to the painter, the Walt Disney, who out of his imagination creates the phantasmagoria of all that is visible in foreground, which quite magically appears on the empty, normally invisible canvas background, the blank screen or the blank book of infinite possibilities.

An important spiritual practice which helps turn our awareness to the omnipresent background, is to shift our focus by perceiving the perceiver, by watching the dreamer, by inquiring into the I-thought. Who is this *I*? What is the source of this *I*? Who am *I*? The question when asked earnestly, with a totally open, unjudging and receptive mind, is not answered by an intellectual insight but by pure silence, a cessation of the activities of the mind. When the thoughts quieten, the underlying basis of pure consciousness stands revealed.

This shift of consciousness from impure to pure is simply an inner change of perception. When it happens it is like the instant recognition of the rope as the snake. Although the snake, or in our case the world, may come and go, it is never again believed to be real. It is just like the dream world and its events and characters conjured up by the dreamer. The dream world may continue as a shadow play even after we realize we are the dreamer and we are just making up this dream, but now the happenings of our dream can hold no threat to our equanimity. They can only provide delight. The pure ever-unchanging, self-conscious awareness, the underlying basis for all three states of consciousness that we cycle through during the day, is our true nature. It is one of infinite joyousness and bliss, wherein only the one loving Self is seen reflected and extending everywhere in all directions.

VI. The Play of the Divine

There is a little story that Sai Baba tells that illustrates this shift of consciousness. Imagine the divinity as a child, the divine child, alone and whole, totally self-absorbed. Being a child full of joy and playfulness he entertains himself by imagining that he is entering a room made up of mirrors. Now, everywhere he looks he sees a reflection of himself. In his divine imagination he puts a mustache and beard on one of his reflections, a sari and female features on another of his mirror images, he slightly warps some of the mirrors to present a thin image, another a thick image, another a short image, another a tall image, another a saintly image, another a demonic image. And so, in his divine imagination, he has created more himself to love and play with.

Of course all these images are merely reflections of himself. There is only one 'I' and all he sees is but himself. Yet, to make the play more enjoyable he pretends that all these images are separate beings and that they relate to each other as well as to him through many plots and subplots. Oh, he likes this game very much! It is a thoroughly enjoyable play, a wonderful game of pretend. But all games eventually come to an end. When this one does, the divine child turns around and walks out of his imagined room of mirrors. All his reflections which had instantly appeared, now instantly vanish, and the divine child is again absorbed in his native state of unreflected, undifferentiated consciousness, what Sai Baba calls the *CIA*, *Constant Integrated Awareness*.

This story is our story. It is the story of our daily progression through the house of mirrors of our dreams. We are that divine child, playing with all these seemingly different reflected images of ourself. And now we are in process of turning inward and leaving the house of mirrors behind. Just a few more moments and our awareness will again be bathed in the infinite joy of self-absorption. We simply do not realize it yet.

Dog Consciousness

Sai Baba says, contrast this play of the divine child with the actions of a dog who happens into the room of mirrors. Everywhere he looks he sees other dogs facing him. He becomes agitated and ready to defend or attack; he bears his teeth and snarls at the band of dogs surrounding him. Now he finds that his ad-

versaries are also getting excited and signaling threatening gestures. He becomes afraid, adrenaline rushes into his blood stream and he prepares to fight for his life. He barks and growls and menacingly faces one after the other of his attackers to keep them at bay. But there is no relief, the standoff continues and the threat is unabated until he finally wears himself out, becomes weak and gives up; then the band of dogs around him seem to relax as well. Of course, the whole scene of threat and attack and the anguish that resulted from it, was all concocted in the dog's mind. A shift in perception would have been so very easy to make and would have so completely changed what he sees and experiences, but it is a seemingly impossible task for dog-consciousness to manage.

Slowly through a long history of experiences, through the law of *karma*, the dog realizes that he himself is responsible for all his actions, that everything he seems to do to someone outside of himself, that every hurt he inflicts, he himself will suffer from, that whatever he appears to be doing to someone else he is really doing to himself. Eventually he realizes that all these projections perceived to be others outside of him are really just himself. When the dog learns to look lovingly on his reflections, 100 dog reflections look lovingly back at him. Every kind act he takes is magnified and returned a hundred-fold. It has been said that when you take one small step towards the Divinity, the Divinity takes 100 steps towards you. Align yourself with truth and all the awakened and realized beings of the ages will come to bless you and shower their grace upon you.

And so, in time, the dog changes changes his perceptions; he reverses his spelling and instead of a d-o-g, he becomes the g-o-d that he has always been. Sai Baba says, "Dust if you think, dust you are. God if you think, God you are. Think God! Be God! You are God! Realize it!"

This change in perception need not take eons. It can happen in an instant. Right now we can leave our dog-consciousness behind and return to God-consciousness. Nothing need be done. We only need to stop giving our false perceptions continued validity by perpetuating the belief that they are true. To let go of our belief in the reality of illusion is the only spiritual practice that is required of us. Truly, we need do nothing; we merely need to be willing to stop reinforcing life-times of mistaken seeing and conditioning by continuing to see the false as true and thereby making the error real.

Sai Baba illustrates the letting go of false beliefs, by calling attention to a handkerchief he holds in his hand. As he clutches the handkerchief, he says, "Holding on is difficult." As he lets go of the handkerchief and it falls to the floor, he says with a twinkle in his eye, "Letting go is easy." In other words, when we give up all efforts to hold on to and give meaning and value to the illusion, the truth reveals itself naturally, of its own accord. It is so simple.

Sometimes the shift in consciousness comes quite unexpectedly, as for example in the personal experience of consciousness leaving the body, that I related above. In that incident, without any effort and without any warning, grace had descended and instantly changed the perception. For me this was a totally new state of consciousness. Quite unexpectedly it had come, and subsequently it again left. It was not a permanent experience. But it was a direct experience; the

mind was in no way involved. Awareness had spontaneously shifted to its natural state. It was a taste of true awakening.

This shift in consciousness is available every moment of our day. All that is required is a willingness to commit our lives to it totally and relinquish all efforts to hold on to even the least part of the illusion by considering any of it to have real value. To attempt to purify or sanctify the illusion with sacred forms and rituals and incantations, in other words, to attempt to bring truth into the illusion, as some spiritual paths advocate, will not get us there in the end. Even our attempts to spiritualize our lives within the serial dream and hope thereby to awaken to truth, will also not do it; they will not get us there. All these efforts are useful and necessary when we first undertake the spiritual path, but they will not get us there because *we are already there*. In the end all efforts directed towards achieving awakening turn out to be cul-de-sacs.

What *does* get us there, is our recognition that we are already there.... that we have kept the illusion alive through force of habit and through non-inquiry, and this has covered our realization of our truth. We have constantly reinforced the illusion by all our daily actions and thoughts, by our judgments and perceptions as separate individual beings. We need but to stop feeding the illusion with our belief in its existence. When we no longer see differences and specialness, then all we see wherever we turn is ourself, the one Self. In Christian terms, all we see is the face of Christ, everywhere. Then love abounds, and illusion, shorn of all our beliefs in it, wastes away and vanishes. And then the truth, which illusion appeared to have covered, but which was always there unaffected, being no longer obscured, now stands revealed. That is all.

VII. The Ego Mind – Our Personal *Maya*

Sai Baba says you need not try to bring God and man together, they are already together naturally. They are always one. Without God there can be no man and without man there will be no God. But then, why don't we always experience them together as one? It is because the false 'I', what we have been calling the I-thought, gets in-between. This 'I' is the ego. Ego imposes itself between God and man, or in *Vedantic* terms, between *Atma*, the Self, and *Jiva*, the soul, the individualized life-stream. Sai Baba tells a story about the ego.

In the story, the marriage is between *Atma* who is the bridegroom and *Jiva* who is the bride. The wedding ceremony was to take place in the bride's village, at the house of the bride's father. The bridegroom, that is, the son-in-law-to-be and his party, were put up in a separate bungalow. Soon after they arrived and settled down in their quarters, a very important-looking and boldly-acting person appeared at the bride's house, and began to order that family around, asking for better accommodations for the groom, for a better dowry, for a greater number of invitations for the wedding, and stating various other conditions and demands. Since this unknown stranger appeared shortly after the bridegroom's family had come into the village, the bride's family naturally thought that he represented the bridegroom, and was their spokesman. As the demands went on and on without end, everyone in the bride's party soon became totally miserable.

But then, this same forceful, self-assured spokesman appeared at the bridegroom's bungalow, and there also began ordering people around, asking for so many things and making so many special demands that they too were soon feeling thoroughly miserable. As a result of the machinations of this character,

both parties began to lose the natural joy that accompanies such a happy occasion. Both sides got very disturbed and irritated. They got so unhappy and discouraged, they didn't even want to go ahead with the wedding arrangements.

As this stranger continued his visits to both parties, making more and more demands, each side began to realize that it was the same person going back and forth between them. In each case they thought he had represented the other side, but now they had some doubts. They finally got together to inquire about this person. The party of the *Atma* said, "Who is he?" The party of the *Jiva* said, "Who is he?" As soon as this inquiry was made, the meddlesome trouble-maker vanished from the scene and was not heard from again. He was a complete impostor; he had no credentials at all to be there and no authority to make demands, no less to order anyone around. He was the false 'I', the ego. Within our spiritual hearts, *Atma* and *Jiva* are always already married. But we are not aware of this in our minds and we believe we must bring them together in marriage. But somehow, in the absence of inquiry, ego manages to come between *Atma* and *Jiva* and foments misery.

In the spiritual field, ego first claims to represent the side of *Atma*, the bridegroom, and makes such statements as, 'You must be holy and perfect before you can relate to me. You must spend every moment in spiritual practice and study all the scriptures. You must fast and go on pilgrimages.' It is all just ego talking, making demands on the one side. But then it will switch over to the other side, the side of *Jiva*, the bride; and there it will make statements like, 'You must wipe away my *karma* and give me a good future and good spiritual experiences. You must take care of my health, my wealth, my family, my position, my name in the community, all my needs. Since I have been so persistent and earnest in my devotion to spiritual life and I have reached great insights of spiritual understanding, you must now give me liberation.' Like this the dialogue goes on... demands from both sides, made by the same questionable character.

When, as a result of inquiry into the true identity of this character, the sun of knowledge shines and rises to its zenith, the illusory character disappears like a passing cloud, or like our shadow that merges and disappears into our feet when the Sun is directly overhead. Then only the pure 'I' remains, which of its own accord silently dissolves into the depths of being, the limitless ocean of consciousness which is the Universal Absolute, the one Self.

VIII. Full Awakening

What we have just spoken of is the final step of full self-realization. It is beyond the state of being *awake in dreamless sleep*; it is being fully awake from the point of view of the awake state itself. As has been stated several times earlier, when the long serial dream that has been going on for eons finally comes to an end, this last step of awakening happens spontaneously and naturally. It is abidance in our true nature which has never left. It is turning away from the room of mirrors and allowing all the images of our projections to fade into the pure consciousness of being.

This ultimate awakening is not another state; it is the absolute reality, the true

unchanging ground of being that transcends all experience. It is our natural native reality of pure consciousness, infinite and undisturbed, fully conscious of itself. It is beyond words and forms and concepts and experiences. It is the basis of all forms, concepts and experiences. It cannot be objectified and it cannot be named.

Nevertheless, it has been given many names by mystics who have realized such full awakening. These blessed souls who are asleep to the three states of consciousness and awake to the truth of being, have called that unspeakable mystery which is beyond all knowledge and yet is the basis of all knowledge, as *Atma*, Self, *Brahman*, the *fourth* (that which is beyond the three common states of consciousness), Absolute Reality, *Satchitananda* (Being, Consciousness, Bliss), the Immortal One, Spirit, Heart of Hearts, the Ultimate Source, Splendor, Light, Infinite Consciousness, Pure Awareness, Divinity, Nonduality, the All in All, the Emptiness, Isness, *Shiva*, That which dwells in the core of every heart, in short, God. It cannot be described, it cannot be understood, it cannot be taught, it cannot be spoken of. It can only be.

To paraphrase the Course in Miracles, we say that *God is*, and then we cease to speak, for in that knowledge words are meaningless. There are no lips to speak them, and there is no mind aware of something not itself. The mind is united with its Source, and like its Source, it merely is.

Here our story ends, in the pure essence of being that is and always has been our one truth. Nothing has happened. Nothing has changed. The only thing that seems to have happened is that the blocks to love's awareness of itself, seem to have inexplicably faded away; and the ego which appeared to have been so powerful has totally disappeared. As always, without ever having been diminished, the Self shines in undiminished glory.

Divine Love

I have not said much about love in this discussion so far, yet love underlies every discovery we make. It is our true nature. Whether we are aware of it or not, the currency of existence, its very life-blood and breath, is love. Everyone perceived as other is only a reflection of the one Self, which is love. Every interaction we have with another, however it appears to eyes covered by the film of delusion, is in truth an extension of love or a call for love. There is only love. Everyone, every thing we perceive disguised as world, disguised as friend or foe, as family or stranger, as likes or dislikes, as ideas and thoughts, disguised as anything that appears to be other than love, is but love itself. Love is a synonym for peace, for bliss, for divine truth, for essence, for Self, for God. We need not develop our love because we already are divine love.

Our play has been to clothe love with a multitude of forms, to name each of these forms, whether physical or subtle, and call them either 'self' or 'other'. When we play the part of spiritual aspirants, our delight shifts from that game to another game of finding only the one self in all forms and discovering that self to be pure love, that all there is is love. We realize that every block that we have made to cover love, is absolutely nothing. Illusion seems to cover love, fear seems to cover love, hatred, separation, judgment, even what we call and

experience as 'love' seems to cover love. But when, with a clear, open and inquiring mind, we focus our attention on these seeming blocks, penetrating into the very heart of them and see them for what they are, they vanish away and pure divine love remains. This is just another way of speaking of awakening, liberation or self-realization. In other words, it is our return to the essence which we have never left.

IX. The *Mandukyo Upanishad*

What I have been describing in this booklet, in modern terms, is the mystical understanding in the *Vedantic* teachings of the seed sound Om. One of the shortest and greatest *Vedantic* classics is the *Mandukyo Upanishad*. It consists of only 12 verses. Each of them deal with an aspect of Om, the universal sound that represents the totality of all states of consciousness and experience, and what lies beyond.

As a symbol, the Om encompasses all possible universes, the physical, the subtle and the causal universes, and their underlying all-inclusive basis which is the unchanging reality of pure beingness. The *Upanishad* dissects the Om into its component parts. What we previously referred to as the three states of consciousness are represented by the three Sanskrit vowel sounds *A U* and *M*. *A* represents the physical gross state of the day-time serial dream, *U* represents the subtle mental state of the night-time ephemeral dream, and *M* represents the causal dreamless state of quiescent consciousness. Each is seen as a limb of the one Divinity. Behind and underneath these three, there is what it calls the *fourth*, the omnipresent transcendent reality, represented by the deep silence, which is the true Om.

In the seeming play of separation, the one eternal Self plays all these different parts represented by *A U M*. In the three states of consciousness it plays as *maya*. In the *fourth*, it leaves off all play and remains as itself alone. In other words, the Self plays as the world and the embodied individual in the long serial-dream that we have mistakenly called the waking state. Similarly, the Self plays as a whole series of more ephemeral worlds and embodied individuals in the night-time dream state. And the Self plays at being veiled and ignorant and peaceful when it is in the deep dreamless state. To make it clear that all these states are just aspects of the one Self, the *Upanishad* gives each of the states the name of a divinity whose divine qualities are those of that state. But, in truth, the Self is always whole and beyond all qualities. When it gives up all play and relinquishes all the illusory states, it abides in itself as the ultimate truth, the one reality.

The dreamless state is a field of ignorance, a total lack of knowledge; but paradoxically, all illusions are embodied in it as seeds and arise from it. So, the dreamless state is also the mother of all worldly and supra-worldly experiences, and therefore the source of all knowledge. In it all things originate and again disappear. The entire physical and super-physical universe is latent within it. It is *maya*, illusion, but it is also *Ishvara*, the God of the Universe, the controller of *maya*. It is the seat of the I-thought, the ego, but it is also the gateway to the *fourth*, the *That*, the Transcendental, the Ultimate, the unchanging truth of being.

To be conscious of the dreamless state and to experience it directly while in the serial dream state is to open the door to inviting the fourth to reveal itself. Like space, the dreamless state cannot be perceived directly; it can only be intuited or inferred. It is the lost, sweet moments from which all other moments emerge. Its nature is non-apprehension of reality. It is there between each thought and idea and sensual impression. The spiritual practice is to return constantly to this causal state from which everything perceived, externally or internally, has originated. That is dwelling on the original source of the I-thought. That is dwelling on God.

Dwell there with love in your heart. Give it your attention rather than giving attention to the misapprehensions of the dream states. Let the peace of the absence of misapprehensions envelop you. Let it beckon you thither, a sweet state free of all movement but filled with energy and all knowledge, potentially known but not apprehended or expressed. Then the *fourth*, the pure immortal Self, graciously reveals itself. The *fourth* stands alone as all there is. It is the one reality.

A very powerful spiritual exercise is to constantly separate the real from the non-real through the mental practice of discrimination. In Sanskrit this process of discernment is called *viveka*. When, in this way, we separate the illusion from its basis, the illusion disappears and the basis stands revealed. This is the gist of the snake and rope example. At first there appears only to be the snake. The rope is not seen. When we infer a separate rope and snake, then the snake disappears and only the rope remains.

But the exercise does not stop there. Since all there can ever truly be is the one reality, to hypothesize anything other than reality is itself illusion. There can be no non-reality. Even that which is being imagined is not separate from reality. Even the imagined snake is real because it is and always has been the rope. There is only reality. All is *Brahman*. The Sanskrit word *vairagya* means renunciation. This process of renouncing all concepts of illusion and non-reality, and seeing all as *Brahman*, is the true renunciation, the true *vairagya*. *Viveka* and *vairagya* are the two wings of the bird of liberation, which permit it to fly out of the cage of bondage that it has imagined itself to be in.

This is the deeper mystical message of the Upanishad, as beheld by the great Upanishadic seers and by Gaudapada and Shankara, the celebrated 5th and 6th century non-dualist interpreters of the Upanishads. Shankara spoke of these two wings of *viveka* and *vairagya* in this simple couplet: Sathyam Brahman, Jagath Mithyam. Jagath Brahman. Which means: God is real, world is illusion, world is God. In other words, first we separate out illusion from truth, and hold on to truth, namely, hold on to God, not the world. But then we realize that all there is, is God. What we have called world or illusion is nothing but changing names and forms of the one reality, namely, God.

The great *Upanishadic* seers considered the world of objects, perceived in what we call the waking state, as merely an idea, a modification of the mind. And this is just like the modification of the mind that appears to happen in the dream state. All ideas, projections and whatever seems to go on in dreams, are nothing but

the one, pure, non-dual, unchanging cosmic mind, the pure consciousness, on which all dream stuff appears to be superimposed. In dreamless sleep in which all mentations disappear, that pure, unchanging cosmic mind is quiet. This mind which appears to be individualized, but is in truth the universal consciousness, is the pure witnessing awareness on which, through ignorance, the three states of consciousness seem to play their illusory game. This universal mind of pure consciousness is *Brahman*. It is all there is. There is nothing else. Over and over the *Vedanta* emphasizes: There can never be anything separate from Brahman. *Brahman* alone is.

X. The Non-dual Wisdom of Ramana

I would like to conclude with some paraphrased excerpts of the teachings of Ramana Maharshi, the universally revered, non-dualistic saint who lived in South India during the first half of the 20th century. These passages come from answers he gave to devotee's questions over the years, They present an eloquent confirmation of our truth, derived from his direct experience.

It is false to speak of realization. What is there to realize? The real is as it is, always. How to realize it? All that is required is this. We have realized the unreal, in other words, we regard the unreal as that which is real. We merely have to give up this attitude. That is all that is required for us to attain wisdom. We are not creating anything new or achieving something which we did not have before. We have simply to throw out all the age-old tendencies which are inside us, and when all of them have been given up, the Self alone will shine.

There is no greater mystery than this, that being the reality ourselves, we seek to gain reality. We think there is something binding our reality and that something must be destroyed before the reality is gained. It is ridiculous. A day will dawn when we will ourselves laugh at our efforts. That which is, on the day of laughter, is also now.

The very doubt "Can I realize?" or the feeling "I have not realized" are the obstacles to realization. Realization is not something to be gained afresh. The Self is already realized. All that is necessary is to get rid of the thought, "I have not realized".

No one can be an *ajnani*, a non-knower of the Self. Not knowing this, men wish to become *jnanis*, knowers of the Self. They think they must pass through rigorous spiritual practices and austerities before attaining realization. But why should they wander in that maze? All they gain in the end is cessation of the trouble of seeking. The Self which is eternal is always self-evident. Why should they not get this repose even at this moment.

One goes through all sorts of austerities to become what one already is. Having the mistaken impression that one is limited and bound by the woes of *samsara*, the objective world of multiplicity, one engages in all kinds of efforts to get rid of what was never there.

There is solitude everywhere. Your business is to seek it within and not without. When distractions seem to come, inquire from where they arise. You say that the answer does not seem to come despite the search that you have been

conducting inwards. But it is the inquirer himself who is the answer. No other answer can come. Whatever comes cannot be true. What is, alone is true.

The world which you try to prove to be real is all the time mocking you for seeking to know it, without first knowing yourself. If you rightly know the truth of yourself then both knowledge of the world and its opposite ignorance will disappear.

The world is a mere shadow of the real. It is impossible to know it, to get hold of it. A child tries to touch the head of its own shadow but cannot do so, because when the child moves, the shadow-head moves also. The mother then puts the child's hand on his own head to show that the shadow-head is touched also. So too the world is got hold of and known only by getting hold of the Self.

The seer and the seen together constitute the mind. See if there is such a thing as mind. When you search for it, the mind will merge into the Self and there will be neither seer nor seen, only the Self.

The world and the individual mind arise and set together as one. Of the two, the world owes its appearance to the mind alone. But, neither is real. That alone is real in which this inseparable pair, the world and the individual mind, has its risings and settings. That reality is the one infinite consciousness, having neither rising nor setting.

It is immaterial to the enlightened whether the world appears or not. In either case, his attention is directed towards the Self. He sees nothing separate from the Self. He is the Self. He always remains as the Self. That is all.

You say dreamless sleep is empty of all consciousness, but you say so after waking from sleep. You do not say so while actually asleep. The mind was not present in deep sleep and it is natural for the mind to be ignorant of the consciousness that is in deep sleep. Not having experienced dreamless sleep, it is unable to know what it is like and it makes mistakes about it. The state of deep sleep is beyond the mind.

Sleep is not ignorance; it is one's pure state. Wakefulness is not knowledge; it is ignorance. There is full awareness in sleep and total ignorance in waking. Your real nature covers both and extends beyond. The Self is beyond both knowledge and ignorance. The sleep, dream and waking states are only modes passing before the Self. They proceed whether you are aware of them or not. To the realized saint, the *jnani*, waking, dream and sleep pass like the bullocks moving, standing, or being unyoked, while all the while the passenger in the cart is asleep. The *jnani* is asleep to the three states of consciousness, but he is ever awake to the one pure unchanging consciousness.

In sleep you were not aware of that which troubles you now in the waking state. But you are the same being in both states. Troubles may arise in the waking state, but they are merely thoughts. Thoughts change but not you. Keep hold of the unchanging you. To do so, you need not stop the mind's thinking. Just remember the source of the thoughts and be in earnest to find it.

Whatever the dream, the only thing that has value and is worth doing with regard to dream is to wake up. When you wake up do you say that the experiences of the dream were real, although within the dream everyone there

would have tried to convince you of it? No. Similarly, when you wake up to the Self these experiences of the world will be unreal, like in a dream, although others in that state will try to convince you that they are real.

All the activities that the body is to go through are determined when it first comes into existence, and so you might as well be indifferent to them for you cannot really affect them. The only freedom you have is to turn your mind inwards and renounce activities there. The body is designed for the various things that are marked out for it in this life. A man is always free not to identify himself with the body and not be affected by the pleasures and pains resulting from its activities.

Realize your pure being; have no confusion with regard to the Self. The body is the result of thoughts. The thoughts will play as usual but you will not be affected. You were not concerned with the body when asleep; thus you can always be.

To destroy the ego and just to be, in other words, to abide in the Self, is the supreme attainment. The wisest thing for one to do is to catch hold of the I-thought from which all other thoughts rush out spontaneously. Dissect it by finding the answer to the question 'Who am I?' An answer that comes in and by the mind is no answer at all. The only true answer is in the silence, the egoless state of pure awareness. Hold to that awareness and then what does it matter if the world appears or disappears? World is merely a manifestation of the Self. It is immaterial whether the Self manifests or ceases to manifest.

There are only two ways to conquer destiny or be independent of it. One is to inquire who undergoes this destiny and discover that only the ego is bound by it, not the Self, and that ego is non-existent. The other way is to kill the ego completely by surrendering to the Lord, by realizing one's helplessness and saying all the time, 'Not I, but Thou, O my Lord' and giving up the sense of 'I' and 'mine' and leaving it to the Lord to do what he likes with you. Surrender can never be complete as long as the devotee wants this or that from the Lord. True surrender is love of God for the sake of love alone and for nothing else, not even for the sake of salvation. In other words, complete effacement of the ego is necessary to conquer destiny, whether you achieve this effacement through Self-inquiry or through the path of devotion.

There is only one real state, that of pure consciousness, pure awareness, pure existence. Existence or consciousness is the only reality. The three states of waking, dream and sleep cannot be real and so we cannot speak of them as having such and such a degree of reality. They simply come and go. The real must always exist. The pure 'I', the pure existence that alone persists through all the three states is real. Because of long habit we have been regarding these three states as real. We call the state of pure awareness or consciousness the *fourth*. But there is no *fourth* state. There is only one state. The Self alone remains as it always is. In truth nothing comes or goes. Existence is. That is the all of it.

Appendix – Two Creation Stories

Spiritual life provides a view of reality which is so different from what we have been taught to believe all our lives, we find that as soon as we embark on the spiritual journey in earnest, we are confounded by a number of very pressing questions. At the beginning we still strongly believe ourselves to be individuals in this world, but, at the same time, we feel more and more estranged from the world. It no longer fits into our understanding, it no longer satisfies our hunger for peace and contentment, we can no longer subscribe to it or support its values. We feel like strangers in a strange land. Then the *why* questions come:

“Why am I here in the world?” If we were to receive a true answer to our question, it would be, “You are not here in the world! The world as world does not exist. You ever exist, you are eternal.” Unsatisfied, we try another question, “Why was this world created?” Again the answer comes, “It wasn’t created! Nothing happened. The world of multiplicity you believe you see has no reality at all.” “Then why am I being buffeted around by circumstances and find myself suffering in the world?” “There is nothing that can happen to you. You are always free. You cannot suffer!” “But, if I’m already free then why don’t I feel free?” “Whatever you feel, the truth is you *are* free and always have been!” “Why do I have to die?” “You were never born and you cannot die.”

As we continue this line of questioning we realize that in the spiritual domain, *why* questions, and, for that matter, when and how questions, even when answered truly, do not seem to help us. They ultimately lead to unsatisfactory answers because our minds cannot bridge the chasm from the mind's world-bound frame of reference to the non-dual truth. So, these questions turn out to be dead ends that keep us ungratified and stuck in the mental plane, rather than leading us to true knowledge. The questions that open the door to insight and revelation are *who* and *what* questions. ‘Who am I?’ ‘Who is God?’ ‘What is life?’ ‘What is this world?’ ‘What is another?’ These questions lead not to intellectual answers but to direct experience of the reality. They point us to the silence of being.

Yet, at the beginning, all spiritual teachings attempt to assuage the need of the seekers at their level of understanding, to have some reasonable answers to their troubled *why* questions. The usual answer given is a creation story. But, as has been pointed out in this article, perhaps the most remarkable revelation for us on this path of inner inquiry, is that the true creation story is a non-creation story. There is no cause for all this, because none of it is real. What is nothing cannot be the effect of some cause. The truth is that nothing ever happened to disturb the unruffled field of pure consciousness. Only the Self is. That is all. Nevertheless, the spiritual literature and teachings abound with creation stories. Here are two of them, which give a penetrating insight into the ultimate truth.

The Creation According to the Course in Miracles

Jesus, the author of the Course in Miracles, presents the creation from the viewpoint of the ego thought system, ie. from the relative point of view. In the metaphysics of the Course, we are always the Christ, the Son of God, one with and undistinguishable from God. But, inexplicably, we fell asleep in heaven and dreamed that we became separated from God. And in our dream we liked our autonomy and tried to forget all

about God. But the God of our dream will not let himself be pushed away. This made-up God becomes angry and will catch us and punish us. Being afraid of his wrath we make a world and a body that shuts God out. But this hiding place from God cannot hide the enormity of the sin we have committed by effectively killing God in our lives. We feel a deep sense of guilt which becomes too painful to bear. So, we try to dispose of our guilt by projecting it onto others that we made up in our dream. Now we can claim to be innocent victims while others all around us are the guilty ones. Eventually God catches up with us anyway, and kills us. And so, our ultimate fate is death.

This is the dream we dreamed in heaven. Inexplicably, we have taken the dream seriously. But it was all just made up in the mind. In truth, nothing at all happened. We remain the Christ, one with God. The instant we dreamed a world, the correction for that error came and we woke up in heaven, which we had never left. All this happened long, long ago, for such a short instant that heaven paid no attention to it at all. It remained only as a very, very brief memory of a momentary event that happened long ago. Yet, we keep that ancient memory alive in every judgment and belief in separation and sin. Through our recollection of this dream we live and re-live a memory from the past that is long since over. To help us realize this, God sends His representative, the Holy Spirit, into our minds to teach us the lessons of oneness with all our brothers, and the truth that we are pure love, that there is no sin, and that we have never left our father's house. So, although we have been using the world as a hiding place from God and as a means for projecting out our insufferable guilt, the Holy Spirit uses this world as a classroom to teach us the truth of our divine heritage as the Son of God.

Here are some passages from the Course strung together, (with my additions in parentheses, to clarify understanding):

.....Into eternity, where all is one, there crept a tiny, mad, idea (that of an objective world of multiplicity and a subjective individual separate from it) at which the Son of God remembered not to laugh. In his forgetting did the thought become a serious idea, and possible of both accomplishment and real effects..... you (remain) at home in God, dreaming of exile.... Only in the past, an ancient past, did this world appear to rise. So very long ago, for such a tiny interval of time, that not one note in Heaven's song was missed. Yet in each unforgiving act or thought, in every judgment and in all belief in sin, is that one instant still called back, as if it could be made again in time. You keep an ancient memory before your eyes, (and) imagine (you are) elsewhere, in another time. (You) delude (yourself) that this is true, and pass from mere imagining into belief and into madness, quite convinced that where you would prefer to be (in this world you made), you (really) are.

The Creation According to Sai Baba

Sai Baba gives another creation story. This one is from the viewpoint of the Divinity.

There was no one to know who I was until I separated myself from myself so I could love myself. Immediately the world sprang up, mountains, rivers, oceans, sun, moon, all forms of beasts, birds, human beings. All powers were bestowed

upon them. The first place was granted to mankind and my knowledge was placed in his mind. So, do not be ungrateful. Faithfully serve the Lord. And love Him, love Him, love Him.

This is the grand reminder that what God is is pure, unconditional love, and what we truly are is that very same divine love. This story points us on the path of devotion. In utmost gratitude we direct all our love towards God, who is the indweller in our hearts. Then we can surf over the tumultuous waves of the world, unaffected by them. Baba once said that the secret to a happy life is to say to the Lord, "Whatever has been....Thanks! Whatever will be....Yes!" In that spirit of surrender we totally rely on the Lord to lead us. He says, "I will give you what you want so that you will want what I have to give you." He takes care of all our worldly needs and gives us stories to pacify our doubts. But what He really wants is for us to wake up to our truth, to go beyond all stories and realize that we ourselves are the Divinity in all its fullness.

Om Tat Sat