

# The Enchantment of Maya

Part Two by Swami Jyotirmayananda

THE WORLD is a swirling mass of illusion or *Maya*. People the world over run after illusions in different ways, and there seems no end to it. They go from birth to birth trying to find happiness through interpersonal relationships, through the development of the physical body and its appearance, through learning and scholarship, through power, position, fame, and name. But their quest for happiness does not end in fulfillment. Therefore, every soul is caught in the swirling mass of illusion. An aspirant must learn the way in which *Maya* can be overcome, for only when the force of *Maya* diminishes does the soul begin to develop sensitivity for its real purpose, which is Self-realization. In order to overcome *Maya*, the forces that pull you away from God should be reduced.

Recall the simile of the grinding wheel. Saint Kabira sang that those grains that cling to the center of a grinding wheel remain intact, while the grains

that move away from the center come under the force of the wheel and are ground to dust. So, there are two movements: one is away from God, and the other is towards God.

AN ASPIRANT moves away from God when *rajas* and *tamas* increase. *Rajas* is the externalization of the mind through desires and restless thoughts. The *rajasic* mind goes after the objects of the senses in pursuit of pleasure. The objects of the senses are mechanized forms of experience because the same experience goes on day after day without end. As a result, one begins to develop a great many illusions. Boredom with objects is sometimes masked by fashionable language. For example, the ordinary food that you eat at home might be given some exotic foreign name in a fancy restaurant. There it is presented on a beautiful, ornate platter served by a waiter dressed in a tuxedo. You get excited when you open up the menu and see all those foreign names. When

the waiter brings you the food, you are thrilled to be eating something so different.

When the mind is externalized, you begin to weave a web of illusion that continually involves your whole attention in perishable objects and mechanized experiences. The vast majority of people do not find any end to this in their lives. Life goes on each day in the usual way. The same people gather in the kitchen and say, “Good morning.” Then they have breakfast while gossiping about each other’s lives. Finally, they depart to confront their respective desires, tensions, and conflicts, and then repeat the process when they come home at the end of the day. There is joy when conflict ends, and sorrow when it arises. People then begin to misunderstand each other. And it keeps going on like this day after day.

So, as *rajas* increases in your personality, your attention is drawn away from the Self, and you begin to seek values in names and forms. When *tamas* begins to develop, further degradation occurs. When joy arises out of animosity and destructive sentiments, that is *tamasic* joy. When you begin to enjoy seeing other people suffer, or you begin to delight in taking revenge on someone, *tamas* is predominating. As *rajas* and *tamas* increase in your personality, the force of *Maya* increases, and delusion becomes most intense.

**B**UT AS *sattwa* increases, through the development of Divine qualities, the force of *Maya* decreases. *Sattwa* increases when you begin to delight in serving others through sacrifice and self-effacement. As *sattwa* develops, the forces of *rajas* and *tamas* diminish. The movement away from God through *rajas* and *tamas* is known as *avidya* or ignorance, and the movement towards God through *sattwa* is known as *vidya*. So, from a broad point of view, *Maya* has two aspects: the *avidya* aspect of *Maya* takes you away from God, while the *vidya* aspect brings you closer. When you come closest to God, there is neither *vidya* nor *avidya*, for both processes cease.

Returning to the simile of the grinding wheel, the grains that move towards the center remain

unaffected while those that move away from it are crushed to powder. Similarly, the souls that move away from God will be affected by the whirling wheel of *Maya*. *Maya* seems to be pounding upon everyone. Life is restless, and no one remain the same. The body changes; values change; psychological concepts change; astral and causal bodies change, too.

**T**HEREFORE, no one can be at rest when the soul is identified with the body. But when *sattwa* develops, you begin to transcend your physical, astral, and causal bodies, and you come closer to God. The moment you are near Him the force of *Maya* diminishes. Without illusion, you find it is so easy to see things in the light of Truth. But when *sattwa* has not developed, the vision that might recognize the Truth is obscured, and you are seemingly blind. Though you have healthy eyes, you do not see. Though you have healthy ears, you do not hear. The truth is neither seen nor heard.

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## Moving Closer to God

How does one develop *sattwa*? The scriptures give some insight. The first most important method is *satsanga* or good association. Allow your mind to be influenced by higher ideals – the ideals of Saints and Sages. If you are always in worldly company, then day by day you are being influenced by material values. If everyone around you is always talking about money, and prosperity is sought in the worldly sense, then your mind will be constantly whipped by the idea that you have to have a great deal of money and possessions to be successful and happy. But when you enter into *satsanga*, you begin to understand that it is not possessions but an internal change that secures your happiness. Therefore, you begin to work for spiritual goals. Material possessions and worldly values become just a means to an end; they do not become your goal.

That *satsanga* is a most important cannot be emphasized enough. The scriptures say:

*Satsangatwe nihsangatwam,  
Nihsangatwe nishchala tattwam,  
Nishchala tattwe jivan muktih.*

“*Satsangatwe nihsangatwam*”—If you follow *satsanga* or good association, you will be led to *nihsangatwam*, or detachment from the objects of the world. “*Nihsangatwe nishchala tattwam*.”—You discover the Self within you as absolutely detached from the world, and thereby you experience immutability of Consciousness. “*Nishchala tattwe jivan muktih*.”—The moment that sense of immutability develops, you attain Liberation. Therefore, *satsanga* is a most important foundation in the movement that takes you beyond *Maya*.

The next important point in the development of *sattwa* is surrender to God. This implies developing love of God and faith that there is a Divine sustenance within you. This again is developed

through *satsanga*. As you come into contact with Sages and Saints, a spark of the fire that burns in their hearts enters into your own, and you begin to relax. You understand that the world is sustained by a Divine power. Then you will worry neither about how to keep the things that you have nor about how to get the things that you do not have. People worry about these things constantly. When the mind relaxes, both types of worries vanish. Then *sattwa* begins to increase, and you come closer to God. By coming closer to God, you overcome *Maya*.

## Who Crosses over Maya?

In Narada Bhakti Sutras, Narada says, “*Kastarati, Kastarati, Kastarati Mayam*”—“Who crosses over, who crosses over, who crosses over *Maya*?” He repeats this three times to show the tremendous importance of the point. Then he indicates various ways that an aspirant can develop the devotion to God that allows him to conquer *Maya*.

Of prime importance, Narada says, is service of great men—Sages and Saints. This means *satsanga* (good association) and service of spiritual preceptor. Also of importance are developing detachment from the world and attachment to God, promoting more *sattwa* in your personality by leading a harmonious life, and repetition of mantra. If these are promoted, you will develop intense love for God, and learn to enjoy an integrated personality. Then the force of *Maya* will diminish and ultimately you will transcend *Maya*. This is your goal.

Led by *Maya*, you have passed through millions of embodiments. The moment you go beyond *Maya*, the moment you realize you are one with the Absolute Self, the process of birth and death ends. Further, Narada says, “He who has crossed beyond *Maya* begins to help others cross *Maya*.” Such a person becomes most glorious and adorable among human beings.

When the ego is dissolved by the waters of Divine Love, the light of knowledge begins to enlighten your mind. Your intellect becomes intuitive by the practice of Jnana Yoga, and you realize, “I am *Brahman*.”

**D**IFFERENT RELIGIONS have given different names for the same goal: the Kingdom of Heaven, *Nirvana*, Liberation. All these are identical. The task before you is to cross over the stream of *Maya* and to attain union with God. To do so, one must overcome three types of obstacles in the mind.

### Gross Impurities

First are gross impurities—such sentiments as jealousy, pride, desires of various types, resentments, and selfishness. Gross impurities of the mind are removed by selfless service to humanity—Karma Yoga—through which you utilize your energy in serving God in other human beings. You should never shirk from doing your duties because activity purifies the mind. This is the great art of Karma Yoga.

### Subtle Impurities

Next are the subtle impurities, like the sense of ego and tiny traces of selfishness and hypocrisy. These subtle impediments cannot be removed easily. One needs guidance and Divine Grace to remove them. The scriptures have given us the art of devotion, or what is termed as *upasana*—devout meditation. By meditating upon God with great devotion according to your concept of Divinity, you allow your mind to be purified. The subtle traces of ego cannot be washed away by enquiry, no matter how much you reflect within yourself or analyze your mind. But when you learn the art of turning to the Divine Self with devotion, a subtle power develops that enables you to eradicate any kind of impediment. Therefore, in spiritual move-

ment, you should not overstep devotion thinking that you will work out your Liberation just through reflection and enquiry.

There are certain ingredients of devout meditation that are noteworthy because they have been given great importance in every religion. One of these involves reciting a certain prayer again and again with the help of a rosary or *mala*. In Yoga, this is called *japa* or repetition of the Divine Name. The purpose of repeating the Divine name is to develop the awareness that God abides within you, and that you are in touch with Him. If you develop that awareness, your mind will begin to relax. *Japa* leads you towards surrender to God. This is the great art of keeping the mind free from the influence of illusion.

Two types of worries always keep one’s mind restless: worrying about the things you do not have, which you would like to have, and worrying

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to the Self  
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diminishes.  
Without  
illusion you  
find it is so  
easy to see  
things in the  
light of Truth.*



about holding on to things once you have acquired them. The mind is always caught up in acquiring what you do not have and securing what you have. This creates terrible tension. When you learn the art of *japa*, prayer, and devout meditation, you gradually develop a sense of surrender. Gradually you become relaxed as you realize that a Divine power sustains you. It is that power that will look after the things that you have and the things that you do not have. This does not mean that you stop performing your self-effort. It means that you do it with a relaxed mind and internalized vision.

As you advance in the devotional aspect and begin to surrender, you experience an inflow of Divine Grace into your heart that washes away the subtle impurities. As these subtle impurities are gradually washed away, it becomes possible for you to practice reflection and self-enquiry. The real you—the Self within—is the essence of God.

Different religious systems have proclaimed in different ways that every human being is an image of God. Lord Jesus said, “The Kingdom of Heaven is within thee.” Similarly, in Islam, a man is a ray of God, and those who enter into advanced mysticism develop complete communion with Him. The Upanishads emphasize that the innermost Self within you is the same as *Brahman*, the Absolute.

## Avidya or Ignorance

The third obstacle is *avidya* or ignorance, and it is the same as *Maya*. As I have pointed out, *Maya* has two aspects. Ignorance is that which takes you away from God, forcing you to become more and more involved in the world of names and forms. The process by which you gradually turn towards God is known as *vidya* or mystic knowledge. Mystic knowledge unfolds when you remove gross impurities by selfless service.

You remove subtle impurities by *upasana* or devout meditation. The cause of these subtle impurities is *avidya* or ignorance. It is like a screen

that separates the soul from God. Removal of ignorance is accomplished through profound enquiry and reflection along with the affirmation, “I am not this body. I am not this individual personality. I am One with God.” This form of affirmation is known as *Atma chintan*—reflection upon the Divine Self. It is also called *Brahma chintan*. *Chintan* is a blend of a rational process of analysis known as *vichar* and of profound feeling known as *bhavana*. In *chintan*, feeling and enquiry are blended. In your intellect you understand that the inner spirit is free of body, mind and senses and that it is Divine.

HAVING GRASPED this intellectually, try now to feel that you are a channel of Divine power. All that is negative in you is born of *Maya*. Pride, haughtiness, selfishness, hypocrisy, violence, worry, anxiety, and tensions are not your essential nature; they have been superimposed; they are external. Begin to feel that everything that is positive is right there within you. You are essentially the Self. You are the source of all that is good, benevolent, and noble. Along with that affirmation, allow your intellect to probe into the mystery of your existence through enquiry.

Behind all of this is a devotional backdrop that does not allow you to develop egoism and pride. Through the processes that I have discussed, you attain Self-realization, whereby intellect becomes intuitive, and *Maya* is transcended. You develop a saintly vision that the world is just Divine sport—the glory of God.

