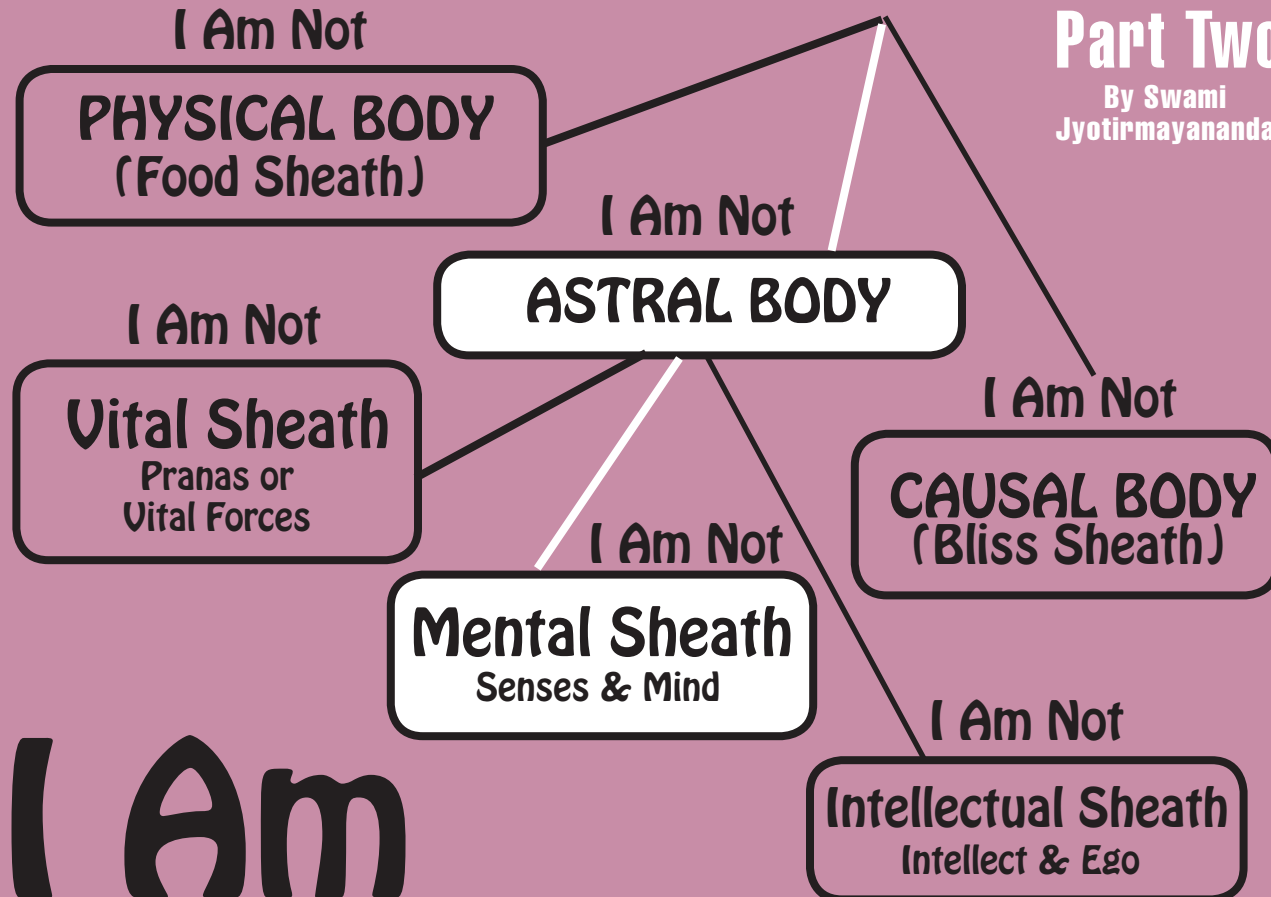


Who Am I?

Part Two

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I Am The Self!

FROM ONE MOMENT to the next, you never know who you are. For example, when you have to go to some place, who are you at that time? You are identified with the body, because your body becomes foremost. You have to put on the right type of dress or hat or necktie; you

have to move your legs in the right way to get to your appointment. It is the body that accomplishes all this. At this time you assert, “The body is me.”

But when you are extremely hungry, it doesn’t matter whether or not you have a hat on your head, or if your necktie is straight.

All that you want is food! At that time you are identified with *prana* and the vital sheath, not the physical body.

If your mind is upset and filled with worries, you won't care if there is sumptuous food in front of you or if nice platters have been arranged with silver spoons. You don't care about the food, because now you aren't the *prana*, you are the mind. Similarly, when you are more reflective, you are the intellect.

However, through the practice of enquiry into "Who am I?" leading to *samadhi* or super-consciousness, you give up these identifications with all things that are not you and realize that you are the *Atman*, the Self! That is what you are always. It is due to ignorance that your identity seems to be constantly shifting.

As was pointed out before, you begin your practice of *vichar* (enquiry) by focusing your attention on the physical body, and attempting to understand that you are not the physical body. If this understanding becomes profound enough, it changes all your values and your life becomes highly elevated. Then you move one step forward in your reflection, and focus your attention on the astral body which has three layers or sheaths—vital (*pranamaya kosha*), mental (*manomaya kosha*) and intellectual (*vijnanamaya kosha*).

In Part One of this series, we focused our attention on the negation of the physical body or food sheath, as well as on the negation of the vital sheath—the first of the three sheaths of the astral body. In Part Two, we will investigate into the nature of mind and one's false identification with the mental sheath.

What Do We Mean by "Mind?"

According to Yoga philosophy, the mind can be studied under four aspects: *manas*, the

conscious mind and the senses; *buddhi* or intellect, which organizes, analyzes and evaluates the perceptions amassed by *manas*; *ahamkara* or ego, which develops the sense of possession, the sense of I-ness and mine-ness; and *chitta*, the subconscious and unconscious levels of mind. These aspects of mind have been further categorized in this article as the mind sheath and the intellect sheath (which, along with the vital sheath go to constitute the astral body).

The four aspects of the mind function in intimate reciprocation. For example, suppose you encounter a shining piece of gold lying on the ground. The eye-sense has merely conveyed to you the golden brilliance and pleasant appearance of the gold. But your intellect, joining with the function of the unconscious, understands and recognizes that gold is valuable and can be used to satisfy many material desires. Soon you become conscious of the ego that gradually raises its head and whispers: "Acquire this gold!" And you assert: "This gold is mine; I have found it and will do anything to keep it!" If perchance the case goes into the hands of judicial officers, you will continue to worry about the gold you accidentally happened to find, and impressions of worry and greed continue to add to the unconscious store of your impressions.

The Mental Sheath

The aspect of mind that one is generally aware of is the mental sheath, which consists of the conscious mind (*manas*) and the senses. Through *manas* you are constantly perceiving the objects of the five senses: hearing, seeing, touching, smelling and tasting. *Manas* receives the sense impressions and forwards them to the intellect for evaluation, assortment, organization and rejection.

While a portion of the impressions brought by the senses is studied and worked upon by the intellect, a remaining part passes on into the realms of the unconscious, to be later attended upon by the intellect, or to remain in the form of unconscious impressions.

The function of *manas* is seen in the form of the ever-oscillating mind—the mind jumping from one object to another, ever in motion, ever in change. *Manas* and the senses of perception together go to constitute the instinctive realm of man.

If no higher function of the mind is revealed, one remains as an instinctive animal, and considers life nothing more than food and sex. But the fact that man's mind is much more developed than the instinctive mind of an animal forces him not to be satisfied with the instinctive plane of enjoyments alone. This dissatisfaction beckons him towards research into and revelation of the unknown within himself.

If one ignores the deeper levels of the mind and remains satisfied in the plane of the senses, he develops a perverted vision of life. It is this that has led to the development of the most perverted inclinations and subnormal developments in human society and culture.

Negation of the

MENTAL SHEATH

Through reflection one must understand “I am not the senses and the mind (*manomaya kosha*).” The loss of the senses does not destroy the feeling of “I.” One continues to exist even if he becomes blind or deaf. We speak of the senses as if they are our possessions, referring to them as “my ear, my eye, my nose.”

Further, the senses are colored by the illusions and misunderstandings of the mind. The following example illustrates this:

Once there was a farmer who was working hard cutting wood when he unexpectedly had to attend to some other business. He put his axe down and concentrated on solving his new problems. When he came back to the door of his hut to get the axe, it was not there, and he thought within himself, “My axe has been stolen!”

Since an axe is as important to a farmer as a Rolls Royce is to a rich person, the man became extremely upset. As he frantically looked around for it, he saw at a little distance a young man seated outside a hut belonging to another family of farmers. “How strangely that boy is looking at me. Look at the cunning and nasty look on his face. I bet that boy has stolen my axe.” Thus thinking, his whole mind was colored with agitation, and he began planning how he would get the axe back from the young man.

While he was deliberating about what to do next, the farmer paced back and forth in agitation. Suddenly he saw the axe. It was leaning against a wall where, in his haste, he had actually left it. The moment he discovered the axe, he became relaxed and went outside to continue chopping wood. The boy was still sitting at the other hut. But this time, as the farmer looked at him he thought, “How wonderful that boy looks sitting there in the sunshine. He has such a gentle look upon his face. He certainly must be a kind and virtuous person.”

Thus, instantly, all his perceptions changed. When he had the thought that the boy might have taken the axe, his whole vision was colored in a negative way. The moment the doubt was not there, the moment he was not suspicious, his whole vision changed. Similarly, how you perceive things around you and encounter your

realities from morning to evening depends on how your mind looks at things. You look at the world from one angle if your mind is filled with agitation; you look at it from another angle if your mind is relaxed.

Since, in all ways, the senses cannot exist without the mind, if you were to negate the mind through enquiry, the senses would be negated automatically. How then does one negate the mind?

You begin to understand that mind is like a possession. That is why we speak about controlling the mind. If you were the mind, then you couldn't control the mind.

Mind is an instrument that you use for your evolution; it is a product of *Prakriti* or Nature. From the three *gunas* of *Prakriti*—*sattwa* (purity), *rajas* (distraction) and *tamas* (inertia)—the senses, the *manas*, and the intellect are formed. Therefore, mind is different from yourself.

Notice how mind is always in a state of flux. If your mind is bright, good ideas develop. If your mind becomes dull, ideas do not come. You can watch various states of your mind that come and go, but you are different from all those states. If the mind is dull, you do not become dull yourself; you can do something about it.

“My mind is not clear today. Tomorrow I will think about this.” Such an expression shows that “I” is different from the mind. Mind is varying and changing, while the “I” is constant and everlasting. Mind is able to experience objects of the world only because it reflects the light of the Self within you.

Notice how mind subsides when you are in deep sleep and you exist without its operation. When you wake up you begin to operate through the mind again.

Through this type of reflection you learn the profound art of keeping yourself above the

mind. Thus, you remain unperturbed in conditions that normally agitate the minds of others.

If you have a deep-rooted understanding that you are not the mind, that you are not dependent on the mind, then praise or censure will not shake your balance. You will not become elated if someone praises you, nor will you become terribly upset if someone insults you. When you lean upon your mind, however, you are easily affected.

So by enquiry you separate yourself from the body, *pranas*, senses and conscious mind (*manas*). All these are like swamps and streams that may cause difficulty for a luckless traveller. The traveller may accidentally begin to sink in a swamp and then, free of it at last after a great struggle, he moves forward only to begin to drown in a nearby stream. By effort and by Divine Grace he is saved. Similarly, the Spirit has as if fallen into the body, but by enquiry you can lift it from the body. The Spirit has as if fallen into the *pranas*, but by enquiry you can lift it from the *pranas*. It has as if fallen into your mind, but by enquiry you can break that identification and lift it from the mind.

(To be continued next month)

