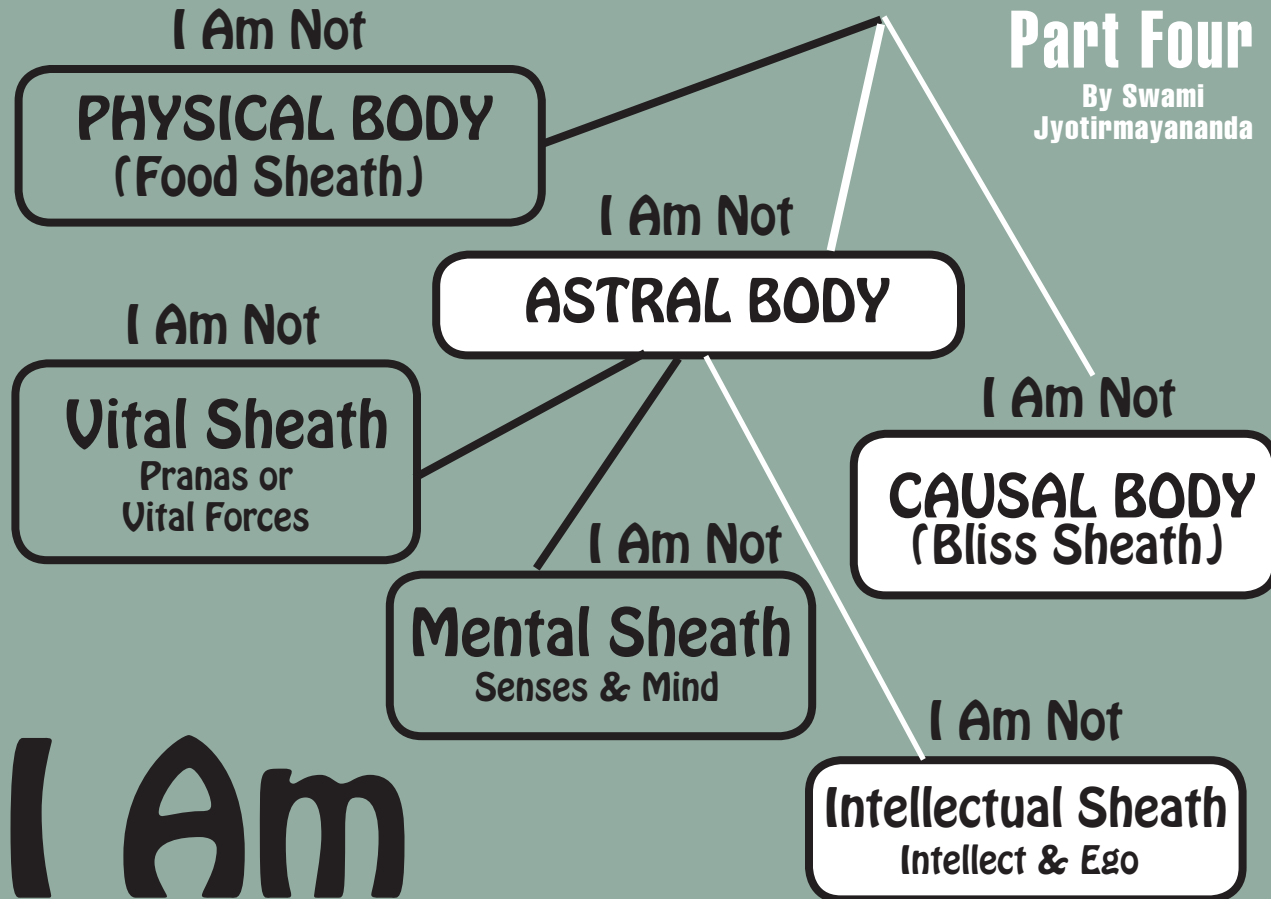


Who Am I?

Part Four

By Swami
Jyotirmayananda



I Am The Self!

The process of *vichar* or spiritual enquiry is not confined to the plane of intellect alone. It must express itself through every part of one's personality. When you begin to manifest Divine qualities through your thoughts, words and actions, you are discovering your essential Divine nature.

When the waters of devout meditation allay the sufferings of the heart and calm the agitated movements of the mind, there arises an awareness of transcendence that goes far beyond the ego-center. When clinging to the ego-center is relaxed, and one's vision extends far beyond the mental structure upheld by the fictitious ego, intuitive vision dawns,

revealing the true nature of the Self in the purified mind of the aspirant.

In the fourth and final part of this series, we continue to investigate the nature of the ego and one's false identification with it. With negation of the ego, a highly advanced aspirant becomes ready to tear the veil of ignorance itself. This mystic veil that maintains the individuality of the soul is known as the causal body. It is the veil that separates the soul from the Universal Spirit.

The Mystic Art of Transcending the Ego

If the mind is highly elevated, an aspirant pushes his ego away and enjoys eternity and infinity. Pushing the ego away is simple as well as most difficult. It is like reaching out to a cobweb. If your broom reaches the cobweb, it can easily be brushed aside. If it does not, then you go on stretching your arm and trying to jump and still you cannot reach the cobweb. You may even break your legs trying to jump up to remove the cobweb.

Similarly, if your mind is well-disciplined and your personality is integrated and balanced, when you sit for the practice of enquiry your mind does not brood over the problems of the past, expectations for the future, or sentiments of love and hate. None of these dominate your mind. Then, that simple act of enquiry becomes a mystic key—opening the gates to eternity.

An aspirant must learn that great art of enquiry so that he can eventually outstep the ego itself. In order to transcend ego, an aspirant must harmonize his personality day by day. In an unharmonized personality, ego asserts itself. You cannot let the ego drop if your personality is not well integrated and balanced.

During a day when you are *satwic* and balanced, you will find that you do not need to draw the attention of others to yourself, or assert your ego. During that time, you feel relaxed and experience an inner joy. When you are more integrated, when you are really contented, when you attain success

in a real sense, your ego becomes minimized. You develop humility.

But when there is disbalance within yourself, you need encouragement and attention from others. You need to be noticed. You need to assert your personality in one way or another.

When you are balanced, people may praise you for things you have done, and you feel very humble about it. But when you are disbalanced, you may not have done anything that is commendable, and yet you look for praise.

Only when you are disorganized and disbalanced is the ego needed as a prop. Only when you do not feel strength within yourself do you use ego to assert your strength and compensate for your sense of weakness.

When *sattwa* enters your mind, you begin to rise beyond your ego. During that time, you experience inner spiritual expansion. If you are practicing meditation, you may even enter into deep *samadhi*. These *satwic* experiences are most profound. In comparison, all experiences that are within the realm of ego-consciousness are superficial.

And so, as you study and reflect upon the experiences in deep sleep, the experiences in *samadhi* and all experiences in those states when you are feeling positive and contented, you realize that in these states ego dissolves—and you are at your best because of it.

When you are *satwic* and harmonized and there is no need to assert the ego, there is an inner awareness, “I am all.” Humility and Cosmic Consciousness go together. Humility is the gateway to Cosmic Consciousness.

Humiliation, however, is not to be interpreted as humility. A sense of humiliation, or the feeling, “I am useless,” arises when the mind is burdened with the frustrations and sorrows of *rajas* and *tamas*. That type of feeling is not the Vedantic affirmation that ego is nothing—though they may seem alike. In a *satwic* state, you are aware of the Divine basis of the ego. When you assert that ego is nothing, there is no sense of humiliation; rather, there is a sense of great expansion of consciousness.

For the successful practice of *vichar* (spiritual enquiry), one's life must be planned in such a way that Integral Yoga is practiced every day. Selfless work, devotion, reflection, meditation and study of scriptures must be blended in daily life. Then, you are in a position to keep your ego at a minimum and to eventually step beyond the ego.

During every moment of daily life, develop a reflective mind. If someone insults you, notice how you feel at that time. If someone praises you, again notice how you feel. If the mind is easily elated or easily depressed, that shows that you are anchored to your ego and not to the Self.

By reflection learn to understand, "Ego is not me. If people are praising me, they are really praising God—because God is the Reality in me. And therefore there is no need to develop a swollen head."

If, on the other hand, people find fault with you and approach you with hatred, again be reflective. Ask yourself if you have done anything wrong. If so, correct your error in the future. If not, realize the problem is due to God's *Maya*, and you have nothing to be afraid of or to be affected by. People will always be asserting their own egocentricities. If you walk by an asylum and all the people inside the fence laugh at you and make faces, you are not affected, because you know that's the way they

are and they can't help it. Neither praise nor insult can affect a person who is beyond the ego and that is the goal that one must strive for.

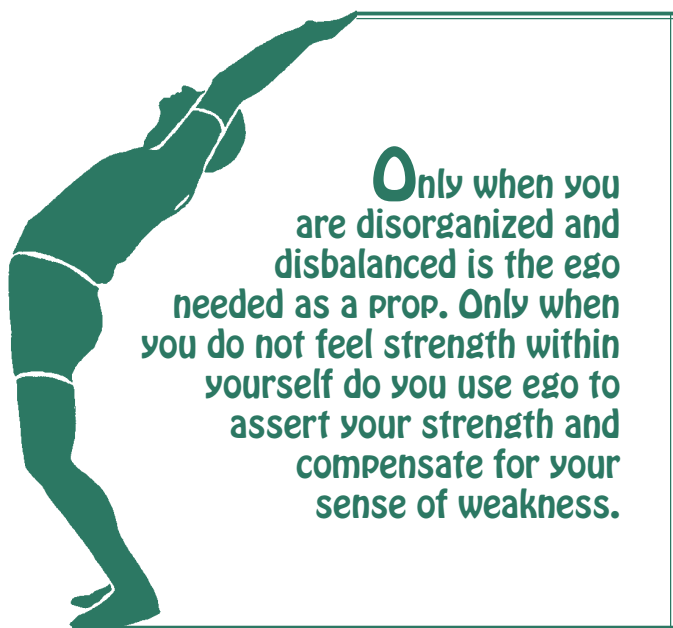
Whenever you notice that your mind has been overpowered by *rajas* and *tamas*, gripped by thoughts of the world, or consumed by worry, grief, and anxiety, just ask a simple question, "To whom do all these belong?" And if you pursue that question with a serene mind and begin to probe into "Who am I?" immediately those problems will begin to disappear.

As you advance, you are able to practice enquiry even during the most disturbing situations. When you are badly insulted by someone and the ego hisses like a snake that has been whipped, you can still stop to ask yourself "Who am I?" And the moment you reflect upon that question, you withdraw yourself from the wounded ego. The moment you withdraw your attention from the ego, the whole problem dissolves.

As you detach yourself from the problems of ego, you gain insight into how to resolve them. But, when you are unable to detach, you remain involved and caught.

As you successfully practice Vedantic enquiry, you experience an inner expansion. You become the gatherer of impressions of nonduality, harmony, peace, eternity, and infinity. But when ego dominates the mind, you gather impressions of duality, of desires and frustrations, of anger and hate.

As you succeed in enquiry, you develop a different dimension of peacefulness within your mind. When you sit relaxed, without any duties to perform, you do not think about petty things of the world, but rather, you lift your mind towards the Divine Self. Whenever your mind is drawn by worldly values and begins to long for perishable objects, the moment you enquire into "Who am I?" you develop *vairagya* or dispassion. You become detached from the desire, and again mind flows toward the Self. This constant flow of mind to God is a most joyous experience and is one of the great benefits that results from the successful practice of *vichar* (spiritual enquiry).



Ego Is a Stranger to You

There is an interesting parable that shows clearly how ego is a stranger to you—not your very Self:

Once there was a husband and wife who had a nasty quarrel. As a result they were not on speaking terms with each other and stayed in different rooms of the house. One evening, there was a knocking at the front door, and the couple's young child went to see who was there. Seeing a stranger, the child asked, "Who are you?"

"Why, I am surprised to see a little boy answer the door," replied the man. "Where are your parents?"

"They are in separate parts of the house because they are not talking to each other. But I will tell each one that you have come—if you will please tell me who you are."

Actually, the man was really a stranger to the family. But hearing of the difficulty between the parents, he decided to take advantage of the situation and see if he could cleverly get a free meal. So he said, "I am a maternal uncle. Please tell your father and your mother that I am here."

So the child went to the mother and said, "Maternal uncle is there at the door." The mother thought the visitor must be the maternal uncle of her husband because her maternal uncle did not look like that.

And the child also went to the father and said, "Maternal uncle has come." Well the father thought the visitor must be the maternal uncle of his wife because he didn't have a maternal uncle looking like that.

Since they were not talking to each other, the husband and wife each accepted the visitor as the maternal uncle of the other. As a result, this stranger began to receive the full attention of the wife, the husband and the child, and he had a wonderful time in the house for a while.

One day the husband and wife began talking to each other again. And when they did so, the question arose: "Whose maternal uncle is he?"

The moment the man saw that the parents were speaking again and questioning his identity, he ran away and vanished.

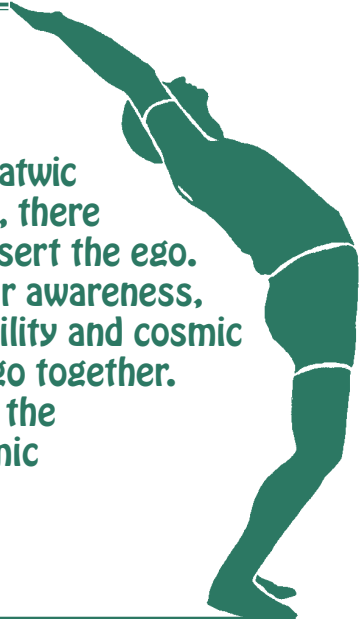
Similar is the situation in human personality. The parents represent the soul and God. Due to ignorance, the individual soul (*jiva*) is not on speaking terms with God (*Ishwara*). It does not really commune with God. Therefore, ego arises like the stranger, asserts itself, dupes the mind, and receives attention from both God and the soul.

Whenever you pray for anything, you pray for the desires of the ego: "I want this, oh God. Give me what I want." You are not asking for something for your Self. You are giving attention to the ego.

God then thinks, "Well, since the soul is not on speaking terms with me, let me grant whatever the ego wishes." So, you enter into a process of karma. But the moment there is communion with God, the ego vanishes.

Therefore, an aspirant must learn the spiritual art of being on "speaking terms" with God. You must be able to feel the Divine presence, to feel that you belong to God. If that experience develops, then ego cannot assert its importance. Ego begins to fade away.

When you go beyond ego, you become a Saint, a Sage. An egoless personality is the blossom of humanity. And the fragrance that emanates



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from that blossom is of immense importance. It continues to help and nurture mankind for a long, long time.

Negation of the CAUSAL BODY

Such a Sage, who has gone beyond the physical body, beyond the astral body with its *pranas*, senses, mind, intellect, ego and vast unconscious mind known as the *chitta*, is ready to tear the veil of ignorance itself. This mystic veil that maintains the individuality of the soul is known as the causal body. It is the veil that separates the soul from the universal Spirit.

Through *samadhi*, or superconsciousness, the Sage tears that veil of ignorance within his heart, attains infinite knowledge and transcends even the causal body. He attains Self-realization and discovers his essential identity as *Sat-Chit-Ananda*: Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute.

“Who am I?” he asks. And the answer rings through the universe like a song of Liberation:

“Lo! I am the only Reality. Personalities and individuals are mere waves in the Ocean of I. I am the Soul of all souls. I am of infinite glory. I am the sustainer of the vast sky lit up with myriad stars. I am the author of past, present and future. All those who were in the past, all who are at present, and all who shall be in future are my very Self. Encompassing time, including all planes of existence, I am the Absolute Self. The world of names and forms is but a mere speck in my shining effulgence. I am That am I. I am *Brahman!*”

Thus, practice enquiry in your daily life. Separate yourself from the three bodies and five sheaths. Be rooted in *Brahman*. You will attain freedom from the cycles of birth and death, and experience boundless peace and bliss within your own heart!

May God bless you!



FROM SWAMIJI'S
KITCHEN

Delectable Mashed Potato Pancakes

2 large Idaho Potatoes
Corn starch 1T
Ginger shredded 1t
Salt to taste
Black Pepper 1/4 t or to taste
Whipped butter 1 T
Whipped Cream cheese 1 T
Chili sauce 1 t or to taste
Toasted cumin seed 1 t
Chopped green coriander (cilantro) 1 T
Lemon juice 1/2 t or to taste
Yellow corn meal

Boil the potatoes with the skin on until moderately soft. Peel the potatoes and mash together with all the above ingredients (except for the corn meal). If the mixture is too soft, add instant potato flakes. Shape the mixture into 6 balls and then flatten the balls into pancakes and lightly coat both sides with corn meal.

Fry the pancakes on a hot griddle with ghee or oil until golden brown and emitting a delightful fragrance.