

Inner Journey

From the Yoga Vasistha

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1. The Quest: Self-realization

What is Ignorance?

Better to ask questions about reality
Not unreality as it hath no existence
As gold remains gold—regardless of form
So infinite consciousness remains unchanged

Notions of unreality arise in consciousness
And vanish when inquired into
As long as the truth is not directly seen
One suffers in bondage of ignorance

This world appearance is a delusion
Based on egotism's utter ignorance
Egotism has no existence in the Self
The infinite Self alone exists

Whatever is seen, all that is known
All is that supreme pure consciousness
No beginning, no middle and no end
Divisionless, self-luminous—Brahman only

When a notion arises in the mind
Delusion follows very quickly
As notions are not based on reality
Experience of them can and must be avoided

If one thinks repeatedly in some way
Division is made firm in the mind
The thinker and what is thought of
What was thought is what is experienced

A crow alights on a coconut tree
A coconut falls at the very same time
You feel and affirm these events are linked
Experiencing one event—not two separate ones

Just this way by pure coincidence
Ignorance arose and was affirmed
A feeling about it gave it reality
This reality of ignorance is bondage

Since consciousness alone is all this
Everything appears ever so real
Not only the link between all things
But the substance of things as well

Different things just do not exist
Or it would be impossible to know anything
If they were not vitally connected somehow
Then how can you call them different?

In between the seer and the seen
Is the relationship known as seeing
When the division between these three
Is abolished—that alone is supreme

Be that pure undivided consciousness
Do not let imagination create a future
Do not get tangled in moods of the mind
Stay established in truth peacefully

When all mental conditioning is overcome
The mind is made perfectly tranquil
Delusion and ignorance come to an end
The illusion or maya is clearly understood

As long as the illusion is not understood
By one's direct observation
Most inevitable is great delusion
The source of endless sorrow and grief

Do not get wrapped up in the words
Theory or descriptions used to instruct
One alone is—all pure consciousness
Know this by your direct experience

Appearance and reality

The wise behold only the substratum
As a goldsmith sees gold, not ornaments
They appear to live quite normally
But rooted in truth and hence ever free

Only that ceases which has come into being
But this world only appears to be
Beginningless ignorance is its perception
It will vanish in the blaze of inquiry

Not realizing, one is subject to delusion
Realizing, all doubts and anxieties vanish
It is in the seer, sight and seen as seeing
When you know it, you realize your Self

Appearances are inherent in the Absolute
While the Absolute remains ever unchanged
Don't get caught in theory and discussion
Exert, and know for yourself the truth

Material sources cannot illumine it
Self-luminous is the Absolute
It cannot be realized by 'another'
Only the Absolute can realize itself

The Absolute is purer than infinite space
The world is even as that infinite is
But we are caught-up in habitual ways
Which must all be set aside as having no value

From the infinite, the infinite emerges
Existing in it as the infinite only
Hence there really has been no creation
What is seen is the same as its substratum

When the notion of self is destroyed
By withdrawing the fuel of mind's ideas
What is seen is that which alone exists
The Absolute which is the only reality

How does the world seem so real?

The knowable somehow is generated
All within infinite consciousness itself
Space, time, elements and individuals
Forgetting infiniteness for individuality

The elements act on each other in space
Forms appearing as ripples on the ocean
Material appearances are ever changing
The reality exists ever unchanged

What is seen as material substance
Is consciousness that only seems as such
All this is infinite consciousness alone
Which has undergone no change whatsoever

The five elements are the world's seed
Consciousness the seed for the elements
As is the seed, so is the fruit or tree
This world is but consciousness' play

This universe spread far and wide
Is conjured by consciousness within itself
All appearances, like forms seen in space
Owe their reality to their substratum

Do not feel that the world you see
Is something material and distinct
'Tis the power of consciousness absolute
Imposing appearances within itself

What about fate and destiny?

Those who pin blame for failures on fate
Are foolish and abandoned by good fortune

Exert ceaselessly in every moment
For direct self-realization here and now

As is the cause, so is the effect
As is the effort, so is one's fate
Fate being self-effort of the past
Therefore exert without remission

Unexpected gains too have their cause
It is always self-effort of the past
Not accident or good luck as people say
Not divine acts or chance events

If efforts in the present seem fruitless
Continue to exert wisely without ceasing
What are called obstructions by people
Are seeds sown in the past carelessly

Free yourself from likes and dislikes
Engage in right action, reach the truth
What is called divine will and destiny
Is nothing but the fruit of self-effort

Shape your destiny by right self-effort
Based on right understanding in the heart
Which rises within after being exposed
To scriptures and company of holy ones

You must keep your body free from illness
Mind too must be free from all distress
To pursue the path of self-knowledge
For freedom from the pains of rebirth

Threefold root and threefold cause
First is awakening in the inner intelligence
Second is a decision in the mind
Third is doing what ought to be done

Destiny can be shaped by these
First is knowledge of the scriptures

Second is instructions of the preceptor
Third is one's own right self-effort

Two tendencies are brought forward
Pure tendencies lead to liberation
Impure tendencies invite trouble
Choose wisely and shape your destiny

No one and nothing can impel you
Pure consciousness is your true nature
Strengthen the pure, reap a good harvest
The impure will wither away by disuse

All that anyone has ever attained
Has been had by putting forth effort
Fate can never give you anything
As it is itself fruition of self-effort

Fate or such god has never been seen
All experience results from actions done
So promote your own good and salvation
By holy company and right self-effort

If fate did really exist as an entity
What would exertion mean at all
Why would people work hard at all
So why believe in fate or destiny

Renounce fatalism, exert correctly
Fruition of action is fate and destiny
Sages attained the highest by self-effort
You too can attain if you exert intelligently

Self-effort

Listen attentively to the instruction
Darkness of ignorance will be dispelled
All gain is due to self-effort put forth
All failure is due to slackness in effort

Mental, verbal and physical action
In accordance with scriptures
Or the instructions of holy men
Is self-effort—fate does not exist

Self-effort now can triumph over
Effort and fruits of previous births
As fate is self-effort of the past
So strive sincerely in the present

Obstruction in fruition has a cause
It is deluded action in the past
Correct this by right effort in the present
All have this opportunity and ability

Grinding your teeth, exert here and now
Act wisely, exert in the present
Overcome what is called evil and fate
By wisdom-inspired present effort

Lazy people are shameless, avoid them
Never yield to laziness, exert ceaselessly
Life ebbs away every moment
Wasteful is indulgence in sense-pleasures

Where is the Self?

Not far at all is the true Self
Pure being, indwelling intelligence
He is the universe and all that is seen
Though all that is seen is not Him

Don't be too quick to say 'I know'
'Tis ignorance to feel this way
The knower cannot be known objectively
The seer and seen are pure subjectivity

The knowable, a false notion that rises within
Its involvement leads to interminable sorrow
Unless there is cessation of the knowable
How can pure intelligence be self-aware?

When there is cessation of all knowable
The knower shines bright in its own light
Then and only then is there fulfillment
And one goes far beyond sorrow's grip

How to reach the Self?

Without cessation of the knowable
One's attention will continue to rush outward
Mere awareness of this involvement will not do
The knower must realize its true nature

When the world ceases to be in one
The subject-object relationship also ceases
The universe appears to exist for him
Consciousness stands still like a mountain

One must be established in the unreality
Of the universe, just as the wide blue sky
The clouds of ignorance must recede
For the Absolute to shine as reality

The wrong notion of world's reality
Has become deep-rooted by persistent thinking
Resorting to good company and self-study
Are sure means to erase inner ignorance

When all wrong notions are dispelled
Truth's realization saturates one's being
One abides in this truth while still living
Rejoicing and teaching sincere seekers

What is liberation?

Realization of one's true nature
Is Self-realisation—the goal of life
Set your sights on this lofty peak
Where sorrow and suffering never reach

The realized ones appear to live normally
But never fooled by appearance's play

Ceaselessly awake to the truth and reality
With wisdom free from latent tendencies

Free from ego's icy grip
Warmed by flames of truth's fire
One realizes one is the all in all
Nothing exists except one's Self

None fear him, he's afraid of none
Coming and going—living right here
Not as the individual that appears to be
But as That—the very essence in all

Liberation is the Absolute itself
The Absolute is the only reality
'You' and 'I' only seem to be
Mere bubbles within the Absolute

The Absolute is the substratum
Appearances animate within it
As ornaments in gold, waves in water
Movement in air and emptiness in space

Nothing has really been created
Everything just appears to be
The substratum and our conviction
Makes appearance seem a reality

11. The Help: Four Sentinels

Self-knowledge: your foremost duty

The entrance to the Realm of Freedom
Is guarded by four gate-keepers
Self-control, spirit of inquiry
Contentment and good company

Strive diligently to cultivate friendship
With all four or at least one of them
Overcome the deadly serpent of ignorance
Or endless suffering will be thy lot

Overcoming this sorrow of samsara
You will live here like gods right now
Delusion alone is the prison house
Inquiry into self-nature the means out

When the mind's disturbances have subsided
There is unbroken flow of peace within
The truth is seen by the heart directly
This very world becomes an abode of peace

Such a person is untainted by life's defects
Untouched by life's sorrows is he
He sees nothing to acquire or to shun
Though he appears to live quite normally

The past has lost its grip on him
His mind has given up its restlessness
He rests in the bliss of his own nature
All by direct experience of self-knowledge

Self-knowledge alone is your foremost duty
Disregard is an invitation to grievous harm
If you want to free yourself from samsara
Receive this wholesome instruction sincerely

Self-control: the first gate-keeper

This formidable ocean of samsara
Is like sleeping in a burning house
Resort to the eternal and unchanging
There alone does the mind find peace

You have nothing to lose by self-inquiry
Only freedom to gain from life's turmoil
Hence all should strive without remission
To conquer the mind and end bondage

A pure mind is peaceful and tranquil
Free from delusion and untangled
It does not long for anything at all
Nor does it feel a need to reject things

This is self-control or conquest of mind
The first gate-keeper to the Absolute
All that is good emanates from here
All evil is dispelled by self-control too

No gain or pleasure can ever compare
To the joy and delight of the self-controlled
All trust one who is self-controlled
It is the remedy for physical and mental ills

While functioning among the pleasant
Among that considered unpleasant too
He is neither elated nor depressed
Living naturally in unbroken self-control

He looks upon all in equal vision
Having disciplined the senses well
Living amongst all, unaffected by them
Even-minded is the person of self-control

Inquiry: the second gate-keeper

Inquiry is the second gate-keeper
Undertaken by an intelligence purified
By a close study of sacred scripture
It must remain unbroken until liberation

The wise regard all gain as inquiry's fruit
Spirit of inquiry is the best protection
Absence of inquiry renders the mind dull
Making one's life a journey in sorrow

Avoid the company of foolish ones
Who live without the spirit of inquiry
As they bring grief upon themselves
And others by being in their company

Inquiry is not reasoning or analysis
It is directly looking into oneself
To know directly "Who am I?"
"How has this samsara come to be?"

When the spirit of inquiry is ever awake
You enlighten all who come in contact
Dispelling ignorance and falsity
By the light and fire of inner clarity

The light of inquiry brings realization
Of what is unchanging amidst change
Freedom from delusion and attachment
One functions normally, completely free

Even in the midst of life's activities
The eye of inquiry shines brightly
Far better to be born as a worm in mud
Than be without the eye of inquiry

From inquiry arises knowledge of truth
From such knowledge arises tranquility
Then, the peace that passeth understanding
The end of sorrow and suffering permanently

Contentment: the third gate-keeper

Contentment is the third gate-keeper
All craving is absent in the contented one
He does not relish any sense pleasures
Delighting in contentment, the destroyer of sins

Contentment is complete renunciation
For all that is sought in every way
Satisfied with what comes naturally
Unsought, increasing the heart's purity

The contented mind is a continual feast
The heart blooms like a continual spring
Free from the sense of possessiveness
Thereby owning the entire universe

Good company: the fourth gate-keeper

Satsanga is company of the wise
The truly holy and enlightened ones

It brightens one's inner light
And awakens one's intelligence

Destroying ignorance and psychic distress
Most precious of all is this good company
Attain this at any cost to your own self
Satsanga is light on the path of freedom

Superior to any and all religious practices
To charity, austerity, pilgrimage and rites
Serve and adore saints and holy ones
Disrespecting them invites great suffering

Summary: four gate-keepers to freedom

Self-control, spirit of inquiry
Contentment and good-company
These four are the surest means
Of rescue from the ocean of samsara

Self-control is supreme happiness
Self-inquiry is the highest wisdom
Contentment is the supreme gain
Satsanga is the very best company

If unable to befriend all four sentinels
Then resort to at least one sincerely
With diligent practice without remission
The others will grow in you gradually

Tame the wild elephant of the mind
Wisdom will seek you of its own accord
Without this, there is no spiritual life
No progress, only increasing vanity

Strive by all means to attain these four
Necessary when on the spiritual path
If you have these in good measure
You are qualified to ascend spiritually

III. The Path: From Ignorance to Wisdom

The seven states of wisdom

Some accept world-appearance as reality
They bind themselves by attraction
Others who question world-appearance
Strive to know the truth by direct experience

The latter are seekers, they seek the truth
Not answers, explanations or vain theories
Dispassion naturally arises in seekers
As they seek truth, not passing pleasures

Truth is enduring, never at the mercy of change
But passing pleasures ever are
The seeker finds strength in the changeless
Those after pleasure must stay in pursuit

Hear now the seven states of wisdom
First is when pure wish or intention arise
Second is the spirit of inquiry into truth
Third is when the mind becomes subtle

Fourth is the mind established in truth
Fifth is total freedom from bondage
Sixth is cessation from objectivity
Seventh is beyond these—liberation

First is when one begins self-inquiry
"Why do I continue to live unwisely?"
One seeks holy men and teaching
Having cultivated dispassion and wisdom

Second is when direct observation begins
To see the mixture of the real with unreal
Looking within oneself thins the unreal
One discovers abidance in the substratum

Third is when non-attachment arises
Based on one's own direct observation

Of what is unreal and what is real
The mind becomes subtle and transparent

Fourth comes about on practicing these three
The seeker turns from pursuit of sense-pleasure
This happens naturally—without suppression
As one has seen pursuit of pleasure to be pain

Fifth is when non-attachment arises
As does conviction in the nature of truth
One rejoices in one's own Self
One's direct experience is light on the path

Sixth is when there is rootedness
In experience of unity as the truth
Ideas of objectivity that lingered earlier
Have been abandoned completely

Seventh is when self-knowledge
Is spontaneous and unbroken
One is liberated while living here
This is the transcendental state

There is another state beyond these
The abandonment of body-consciousness
Rare indeed is this most high state
Holy are all who ascend these seven

Those attaining to the states of wisdom
Go beyond the grip of sorrow
They may lead an active or passive life
Rejoicing in the Self—fully satisfied

All who strive can attain these states
Unlearned people and animals too
For it involves the rise of wisdom
Great are they who have attained to them

In ignorance does the self imagine
Separate existence as the ego

But gold remains gold in a bracelet too
So too the Self can never be non-self

Pure wish or intention: the first state

When one is disinterested in passing pleasures
Seeing the defects in pursuing the sought
One faces the unchanging with all being
The seed of inner change flowers into dispassion

One is afraid to sin or cause anyone hurt
Knowing truth deep in heart—'one alone is'
He has set foot on the first rung
And is devoted to the service of holy ones

With scriptures he engages in self-study
One thought fills his mind at all times
"Just how to cross samsara's ocean"
He alone is a seeker, true to the Self

Direct observation begins: the second state

Inquiry's beginning heralds the second state
He now resorts to the company of holy ones
He seeks to understand the way, the path
The means of yoga for the other shore

He knows well what is to be done
And also knows what is not to be done
The blossoming of this inner clarity
Leaves no doubt about any decision

If there is still faltering in decision
Understand wisdom has not as yet dawned
Intellectual understanding is but ignorance
Concepts are impotent to empower change

He earnestly learns the yoga way
To discover the underlying unity
Sincere, humble, with unwavering dedication—
Inner flowering has begun

Non-attachment arises: the third state

Non-attachment heralds the third state
Freedom comes with non-attachment
One simply leaves the past without effort
Like taking off a coat as it gets warmer

He resorts to seclusion and solitude
Inwardly and perhaps outwardly as well
Striving to understand the mind's chaos
Attention's flame restores inward order

Virtuous conduct becomes natural to him
The old ways are not even a choice at all
Virtue's gift is inner strength to face the light
With nary a glance in the rear view mirror

One feels he is neither doer nor enjoyer
Does not afflict others and is unafflicted
All past momentum towards facing the light
Joins present effort as helping hands

He rises free above all mental distress
Physical illnesses too are taken in stride
He sees change brought about by time alone
Practicing non-attachment, freedom is gained

Diligence in treading the yoga path
Resorting to good and holy company
Avoiding those who prefer worldliness
Steady on the path without compromise

Steady on the path and ever vigilant
One realizes the supreme in the heart
Essence of truth, beyond samsara
Doership and its limitation fall away

He abandons vain and meaningless words
Abiding in unbroken inner quietude
This is beyond mere absence of speech
Inner quietude is mental silence

Superior to non-attachment and freedom
Dependency has been long abandoned
He shines like supportless, limitless space
Enjoying peace, contentment and self-inquiry

Turning from pleasures' pursuit: the fourth state

Mind's divisionlessness heralds the fourth
The mind is now free from all division
Unity is unceasing, unbroken and steady
One sees this world just as a dream

Mind established in truth: the fifth state

Established in non-division heralds the fifth
Hence it is likened to the deep-sleep state
Though engaged in diverse activities
The yogi rests in himself unmoved

Experience of unity as truth: the sixth state

Moving through states, turiya is reached
This is the sixth, a glorious state
One transcends real, unreal and ego
Ignorance's fuel has run completely dry

Like a lamp without fuel is the yogi
Empty and yet full within
All doubts have been laid to rest
The yogi rests in himself as himself

Established in self-knowledge: the seventh state

Words cannot describe this seventh state
Though many attempts have been made
All words fall short so best to just say
They are known as fully liberated

IV. Vasistha's Final Teachings

There's no division in consciousness
Just how can the world seem separate

Waking and dream are creation's parts
Enlightenment is characterized by pure light

Beginningless false self-limitation
Makes the unreal appear very real
This generates tremendous confusion
Only because you have not inquired

Who tells you to go along with the flow
You have inner intelligence—awaken it
Empower it—the way out will be seen
Exert, make self-effort and go beyond

Delusion is an accepted weakness
Taking the path of least resistance
Why swallow the poison of self-limitation
And endure the results of conditioning

This delusion continues till you reach
The feet of those who have overcome
Seek right knowledge from these sages
And exert relentlessly in yoga's path

What did not exist in the beginning
Cannot exist now, think about this
Something cannot come from nothing
The Absolute is the only reality

All appears and disappears in the infinite
The ocean of samsara is ignorance
The notion of 'I' is self-limitation
Generating mineness, attraction and repulsion

When these notions take root within
One falls prey to endless calamities and grief
Dive deep into the existing inner peace
Never into turbulent waters of diversity

Self alone is the only reality
Why get lost in false notions

Truth is simple, it is just One
Why complicate by standing apart

Reject all theories about creation
They are stories for the childish only
Meant to entertain the foolish and ignorant
The enlightened abide in the unchanging

When the mind's movement ceases
The Self shines brightly by its own light
In that light sorrow comes to end
The Self experiences its bliss—that's all

Those desiring freedom from samsara
Should engage themselves in right action
Free from defects of selfishness and sin
Till the mind is free of all its qualities

Those who practice this supreme yoga
Ascending the seven steps diligently
Come to no harm or grief or incur loss
Putting the mad elephant mind to rest

This elephant is intoxicated by desires
Completely maddened by sensuousness
Restless, driven by its own conditioning
This elephant destroys everything everywhere

The mad elephant mind has to be slain
With the weapon of courage and determination
Born of the realization of existing oneness
Or it will subject you to repeated suffering

This mad elephant mind is samsara
The feeling, 'this is...' about everything
Its death is moksha or liberation
This is the essence of jnana or wisdom

Abandon all thoughts concerning the past
Abandon hopes for the future too

These ropes will bind you to suffering
Samsara is not outside but self-sustained

I declare with uplifted arms again and again
The thought-free, notionless state is best
Infinitely superior to world sovereignty
A mind free of thought is the best yoga

Remain established in this yoga state
Do actions that feel appropriate to you
Or, you can choose to do nothing at all
For when thoughts cease—sorrow ceases

Knowing all about this supreme yoga
Do as you please, it is your choice
The thought-free, notionless state is best
A mind free of thought is the best yoga



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