

Yoga Vāsiṣṭha

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Part 10 (Chapter III concludes)

We are now at the end of the third chapter and the teachings are subtler. It is difficult to find precise verbiage for the teachings because, like a finger pointing to the moon the teachings try to point to something beyond them too. Still, let us journey together once again and try to feel the finger pointing and its direction.

1. Yoga - the way of purification

Our inner conditioning is itself all the agitation we experience in our lives as it prevents the experience of our true nature which is peaceful. Reality is simple, it just is. Our minds are complex and hence, always in conflict with things as they are and the reality of all things as well. We have grown too used to our conditioning and it seems natural, whereas, our true nature seems like a nice idea in theory but not practical.

Some say that times have changed and all of this needs to be rethought. Times may have changed but what we are talking about is the inner dynamics which has been and still is the same through time's march. Something or someone beyond change can know that things are changing. To get to the bottom of all this, the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha asks you to challenge this habit by your own direct inquiry. Vāsiṣṭha's 'Seven States of Wisdom' which we discussed last time, are a roadmap of inner restoration. Gradually, inner tranquility is restored by purifying the mind of its conditioning and this is known as yoga.

The goal of all these states is known as Brahman, in which there is no 'I' or 'soul' or 'the other', no vision of division, or notions of being and non-being. It is absolute peace, eternal and all-good.

Truth, reality or Brahman, cannot be described as real nor as unreal, the all nor not-all—for it is beyond description. When one is aware of it, it is said to pervade all; when this awareness too is transcended, there is pure peace.

2. Appearances - reflections in consciousness

Concepts and notions arise in one's consciousness of their own accord, and they are also reflected in the consciousness of others. There is no harm in the rising of these concepts and notions but we take them to be real and act on them, this is the root of much of the turmoil we experience and it can and should be avoided.

When we face these while forgetting or turning our backs on our true nature—there is bondage.

When we lead an examined life, we are aware of the rise and eventual fall of these concepts and notions along with all that appears outside. Being aware of notions as notions and outer conditions for what they appear to be, we can do what needs to be done as situations occur, free of inner conditioning and its turmoil—before, during and after.

We can thus weaken the entire accumulation of conditioning by disuse, engaging present conditions by the inner intelligence instead of the habitual and conditioned mind.

As we come to the close of the third chapter, let us bring some of what we have covered so far into three broad steps.

First, there must be a ‘real awakening’. An awakening is quite different from a mere stirring that comes as an effect of some situation in our lives. Though many factors contribute to an awakening, the main cause is leading an examined life and seeing the defects in how we respond to life or in our way of perception, action and experience.

Second, it is on awakening that we see the danger in living an unexamined life and start leading the examined life. This is called ‘staying awake’. Along with spiritual practices, one leads an examined life by doing what needs to be done, as it needs to be done and existing conditioning is thinned by disuse. Inner joy begins to rise the surface automatically when it is not obscured. The scattered rays of the mind begin to gather once again and the mind becomes concentrated.

Third, the gathered rays of the mind which are now stable (*in that they are not scattered or charged with desires*), are turned upon their source in self-inquiry.

3. Reality - the indivisible consciousness

One often hears that life is complex nowadays but life is just what it is and has always been just what it has been. We have become complex and it is necessary to return to simplicity, not just outwardly but inwardly as well. This return to simplicity is a return to oneness within and without. Having a clear goal and way to live so that all activity contributes to one single goal reduces inner conflict and increases focus.

Without first gathering the rays of the mind, inquiry will be an exercise of struggle at best as one will never be able to turn the rays of the mind upon their source in self-inquiry. Inner simplicity coupled with outer simplicity and bonded with the glue of earnest sincerity, will not give the mind a reason or avenue to want to move outward and conditioning will gradually start to unravel. When the mind stays together naturally for a while and is deeply observed, one’s true nature is gradually seen.

Between the seer and the object is the experience which alone is the truth which is the infinite and indivisible consciousness.

That is your true nature, devoid of the conditioned mind—remain firmly established as that. You are that which remains when the conditioned mind is abandoned.

Cut asunder the bondage of conditioning—then the unconditioned being alone will shine as the truth.



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