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Chapter II

Apavâda

The Removal of Superimposition

1. *D.:* Master, ignorance is said to have no beginning; it follows that it will have no end. How can the beginningless ignorance be dispelled? Being the ocean of mercy can you please tell me this.

2. *M.:* Yes, my child; you are intelligent and can understand subtle things. You have said right. Truly, ignorance has no beginning, but it has an end. It is said that the rise of knowledge is the end of ignorance. Just as the sunrise dispels the darkness of night so also the light of knowledge dispels the darkness of ignorance.

3-4. To avoid confusion, everything in the world can be considered by analyzing its individual characteristics under the categories: cause, nature, effect, limit and fruit. But the transcendental Reality, being non-dual, is beyond all these whereas all else, from *Mâyâ* onwards, being wrongly seen on It, are subject to the above analysis.

5. Of these, *Mâyâ* has no antecedent cause because it is not the product of anything preceding it, but remains in *Brahman*, self-evident and without beginning. Before creation, there could be no cause for its manifestation, yet it manifests and it must be by itself.

6. *D.:* Is there any authority for this statement?

M.: Yes, Vasishtha's words. He says: Just as bubbles spontaneously arise in water so also the power to manifest names and forms rose up from the all-powerful and perfect transcendental Self.

7-9. *D.: Mâyâ* cannot but have a cause. Just as clay cannot become a pot without the agency of a potter so also the power all along remaining unmanifest in *Brahman* can manifest only with *Îshvara*'s will.

M.: In dissolution there remains only the non-dual *Brahman* and no *Îshvara*. Clearly there cannot be His will. When it is said that in dissolution all are withdrawn from manifestation and remain unmanifest, it means that the *jîva*s, all the universe, and *Îshvara*, have all become unmanifest. The unmanifest *Îshvara* cannot exercise His will. What happens is this: just as the dormant power of sleep displays itself as dream, so the dormant power of *Mâyâ* displays itself as this plurality, consisting of *Îshvara*, His will, the universe and the *jîva*s. *Îshvara* is thus the product of *Mâyâ* and He cannot be the origin of His origin. *Mâyâ* therefore has no antecedent cause. In dissolution there remains only pure Being devoid of will, and admitting of no change. In creation, *Mâyâ*, hitherto remaining unmanifest in this pure Being, shines forth as the mind. By the play of mind, plurality appears as *Îshvara*, the worlds and the *jîva*s, like magic. *Mâyâ* manifest is creation, and *Mâyâ* unmanifest is dissolution. Thus, of its own accord, *Mâyâ* appears or withdraws itself and has thus no beginning. Therefore we say there was no antecedent cause for it.

10-11. *D.:* What is its "nature"?

M.: It is inexpressible. Because its existence is later invalidated, it is not real; because it is factually experienced, it is not unreal; nor can it be a mixture of the two opposites, the real and the unreal. Therefore the wise say that it is indescribable *(anirvachaniya)*.

D.: Now what is real and what is unreal?

M.: That which is the substratum of *Mâyâ*, pure Being or *Brahman*, admitting of no duality, is real. The illusory phenomenon, consisting of names and forms, and called the universe is unreal.

D.: What can *Mâyâ* be said to be?

M.: Neither of the two. It is different from the real substratum and also from the unreal phenomenon.

D.: Please explain this.

12-17. M.: Say there is fire; it is the substratum. The sparks fly off from it. They are the modifications of fire. The sparks are not seen in the fire itself, but come out of it. An observation of this phenomenon makes us infer a -power inherent in fire which

produces the sparks.

Clay is the substratum; a hollow sphere with a neck and open mouth is made out of it, and is called a pot. This fact makes us infer a power which is neither clay nor pot but different from both.

Water is the substratum; bubbles are its effects. A power different from both is inferred.

A snake-egg is the substratum and a young snake is the product; a power different from the egg and the young snake is inferred.

A seed is the substratum and the sprout, its product; a power different from the seed and the sprout is inferred.

The changing *jîva* of deep sleep is the substratum and dream is the effect; a power different from the *jîva* and the dream is inferred after waking up from sleep.

In the same way the power lying latent in *Brahman* produces the illusion of the *jagat*. The substratum of this power is *Brahman* and the *jagat* is its effect. This power cannot be either of them, but must be different from both. It cannot be defined. However, it exists. But it remains inscrutable. Therefore we say the "nature" of *Mâyâ* is indescribable.

18-20. D.: What is the "effect" of *Mâyâ*?

M.: It consists in presenting the illusion of the *jîva, Îshvara* and *jagat* on the non-dual substratum of *Brahman*, by virtue of its veiling and projecting powers.

D.: How?

M.: As soon as the power lying dormant shows forth as mind, the latencies of the mind sprout forth and grow up like trees which together form the universe. The mind sports with its latencies; they rise up as thoughts and materialize as this universe, which is thus only a dream vision. The *jîva*s and *Îshvara* being its contents, are as illusory as this day-dream.

D.: Please explain their illusory character.

M.: The world is an object and seen as the result of the sport of mind. The *jîva*s and *Îshvara* are contained in it. Parts can be only as real as the whole. Suppose the universe is painted in colors on a wall. The *jîva*s and *Îshvara* will be figures in the painting. The figures can be only as real as the painting itself.

21-24. Here the universe is itself a product of the mind and *Îshvara* and the *jîva*s form parts of the same product. Therefore, they must be only mental projections and nothing more. This is clear from the *shruti* which says that *Mâyâ* gave rise to the illusions of *Îshvara* and the *jîva*s, and from the Vasishtha *smriti* where Vasishtha says that, as if by magic, the latencies dance about in the mind as, he, I, you, this, that, my son, property, etc.

25-27. *D.:* Where does this *smriti* speak of *Îshvara*, *jîva* and *jagat*?

M.: In this statement *sohamidam,* i.e., "He, I, this," "He" means the unseen *Îshvara*; "I" means the *jîva* parading as the ego, the doer, etc.; and "this" means all the objective universe. From scriptures, reasoning and experience *(shrutyuktyânubhâva)* it is clear that the *jîva, Îshvara* and *jagat* are only mental projections.

28-29. *D.:* How do reasoning and experience support this view?

M.: With the rise of mind in waking and dream, the latencies come into play, and the *jîvas, Îshvara* and *jagat* appear. With the subsidence of the latencies in deep sleep, swoon etc., they all disappear. This is within the experience of everyone.

Again when all the latencies are rooted out by knowledge, the *jîva*s*, Îshvara* and the *jagat* disappear once for all. This is within the experience of perfectly clear-sighted great sages established in the non-dual Reality, beyond the *jîva*s *Îshvara* and *jagat*. Therefore we say that these are all projections of the mind. Thus is explained the "effect" of *Mâyâ*.

30-32. *D.:* What is the "limit" of *Mâyâ*?

M.: It is the knowledge resulting from an enquiry into the sense of the *Mahâvâkyas*. Because *Mâyâ* is ignorance, and ignorance subsists on non-enquiry. When non-enquiry gives place to enquiry, right knowledge results and puts an end to ignorance.

Now listen. Ailments in the body are the results of past *karma*; they subsist on wrong diet and increase with its continuation. Or, the ignorance of rope, so long as it is not enquired into, projects a snake into view and other hallucinations follow in its wake. In the same manner although *Mâyâ* is self-evident, beginningless and spontaneous, yet it subsists in the absence of

enquiry into the nature of the Self, manifests the universe etc., and grows more massive.

33-35. With the rise of enquiry, *Mâyâ*, hitherto grown strong by its absence, loses its nourishment and gradually withers away along with its effects, namely the *jagat* etc. Just as in the absence of enquiry the ignorance factor of rope made it look a snake but suddenly disappeared with the rise of enquiry, so also *Mâyâ* flourishes in ignorance and disappears with the rise of enquiry. Just as the rope-snake and the power which produces this illusion persist before enquiry, but after enquiry end in simple rope, so also *Mâyâ* and its effect, the *jagat,* persist before enquiry, but end in pure *Brahman* afterwards.

36-38. *D.:* How can a single thing appear in two different ways?

M.: Brahman, the non-dual pure Being, presents itself as the *jagat* before enquiry, and shows Itself in Its true form after enquiry.

See how before proper consideration clay appears a pot and afterwards as clay only; or gold appears as ornaments and then is found to be only gold. Similarly with *Brahman* too; after enquiry *Brahman* is realized to be unitary, non-dual, impartite, and unchanged in the past, present or future. In it there is nothing like *Mâyâ*, or its effect, such as the *jagat*. This realization is known as the supreme Knowledge and the limit of ignorance. Thus is described the "limit" of *Mâyâ*.

39. *D.:* What is the 'fruit' of *Mâyâ*?

M.: That it fruitlessly vanishes into nothing, is its fruit. A hare's horn is mere sound having no significance. So it is with *Mâyâ*: mere sound without any meaning. Realized sages have found it so.

40-43. *D.:* Then why do not all agree on this point?

M.: The ignorant believe it to be real. Those who are thoughtful will say it is indescribable. Realized sages say that it is non-existent like the hare's horn. It thus appears in these three ways. People will speak of it from their own points of view.

D.: Why do the ignorant consider it real?

M.: Even when a lie is told to frighten a child, that there is a spirit, the child believes it to be true. Similarly the ignorant are

dazed by *Mâyâ* and believe it to be real. Those who enquire into the nature of the real *Brahman* and of the unreal *jagat* in the light of the scriptures, finding *Mâyâ* different from either and, unable to determine its nature, say it is indescribable. But sages who have attained Supreme Knowledge through enquiry say, "Like a mother burnt down to ashes by her daughter, *Mâyâ* reduced to ashes by knowledge is non-existent at any time."

44.46. *D.:* How can *Mâyâ* be compared to a mother burnt down to ashes by her daughter?

M.: In the process of enquiry, *Mâyâ* becomes more and more transparent and turns into Knowledge. Knowledge is thus born of *Mâyâ*, and is therefore said to be the daughter of *Mâyâ*. *Mâyâ*, so long flourishing on non-enquiry, comes to its last days on enquiry. Just as a crab brings forth its young only to die itself, so also in the last days of enquiry, *Mâyâ* brings forth knowledge for its own undoing. Immediately, the daughter knowledge, burns her down to ashes.

D.: How can the progeny kill the parent?

M.: In a bamboo forest, the bamboos move in the wind, rub against one another and produce fire which burns down the parent trees. So also, knowledge born of *Mâyâ* burns *Mâyâ* to ashes. *Mâyâ* remains only in name like a hare's horn. Therefore the sages declare it non-existent. Moreover, the very name implies its unreality. The names are *avidyâ* and *Mâyâ*. Of these the former means "ignorance, or that which is not"; again, "*Mâyâ* is that which is not". Therefore it is simple negation. Thus, that it fruitlessly vanishes into nothing is its "fruit".

47-49. D.: Master, *Mâyâ* turns into knowledge. Therefore it cannot be said to vanish fruitlessly as nothing.

M.: Only if the knowledge, the modified *Mâyâ*, be real, can *Mâyâ* be said to be real. But this knowledge is itself false. Therefore *Mâyâ* is false.

D.: How is knowledge said to be false?

M.: The fire from the friction of the trees burns them down and then dies out; the clearing-nut carries down the impurities of water and itself settles down with them. Similarly, this knowledge destroys ignorance and itself perishes. Since it is also finally resolved, the "fruit" of *Mâyâ* can be only unreal.

50-52. *D.:* Should knowledge also vanish in the end, how can *samsâra,* the effect of ignorance, be eradicated?

M.: Samsâra, the effect of ignorance, is unreal like knowledge. One unreality can be undone by another unreality.

D.: How can it be done?

M.: A dream-subject's hunger is satisfied by dream-food. The one is as unreal as the other and yet serves the purpose. Similarly, though Knowledge is unreal, yet it serves the purpose. Bondage and release are only false ideas of ignorance. As the appearance and disappearance of rope-snake are equally false, so also are bondage and release in *Brahman.*

54-55. To conclude: the supreme Truth is only the non-dual *Brahman.* All else is false and does not exist at any time. The *shrutis* support it saying: "Nothing is created or destroyed; there is no bondage or deliverance; no one is bound or desirous of release; there is no aspirant, no practitioner and no one liberated. This is the supreme Truth." Removal of superimposition thus consists in the knowledge of non-dual Reality, pure Being, beyond *Mâyâ* and its effects. Its realization is liberation while alive in the body *(jîvan-mukti).*

56. Only a careful student of this chapter can be desirous of knowing the process of enquiry into the Self as a means of undoing the superimposition of ignorance. The seeker fit for such enquiry must possess the fourfold qualities which will be dealt with in the next chapter. Then the method of enquiry will be dealt with.

A competent seeker must carefully study these two chapters before proceeding further.

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