

## **VEDIC AWARENESS**

### **AWARENESS OF THE UNCHANGING SELF**

When I was nine years old, I went to a horse riding holiday camp. It was the most cherished time of my youth. Mrs. McHardy ran the camp, a strong and spritely sixty-five year woman whose husband had died in World War II, leaving her to bring up four daughters on the remote coastline of Hawkes Bay, New Zealand, where they still rode horse and buggy to take the children to school.

I have lived in India since my early twenties, and each time I went home to New Zealand I visited Mrs. McHardy. I adored her and respected her greatly. She was an open minded woman, very well read and knowledgeable, but also a sincere listener to what she didn't know. She was interested to hear what I was learning in India and loved to engage in philosophical talks over a drink of sherry in the early evening. She challenged my new-found philosophy at every point, prompting me to speak what I truly perceived inside, rather than parrot a philosophical theory I had learnt.

Mrs. McHardy lived to ninety-nine years of age. Although her eyesight was failing and she was almost deaf, we could still engage in a deep and touching talk at our last meeting. She said to me, "All these years you have talked of the unchanging being. I could not accept it at first. But now I see my body and personality has gone through many changes; I have lived many, many experiences; I have met many people. Now, my senses are failing me, I can hardly walk, I have no interest for food or to go out and meet people. I sit here and reflect, "I am the same as I have always been. Experiences have come and gone, but I have remained the same. My body has weakened, but I am the same."

It was such a tender moment to see her not really talking to me, but confirming within herself that after a lifetime of experiences and discussions with many people whom she inspired, she remains as she has always been, the unchanging. She was truly at peace from a simple recognition that there need be no struggle to try and prevent the inevitable change she was facing.

#### **The Nature of Experience Is Changing**

It is not just at the time of death that recognition of the unchanging will allow one to be at peace. Every moment of life is a changing experience, and at

every moment there is a choice between struggle with change, or allowing the ocean of human experience to happen.

It is natural for the mind to be drawn to experience – to enjoy and be delighted, to love and be loved, to be surrounded by beautiful things. But due to the changing nature of experience, delight is followed by worry and fear as one tries to preserve pleasurable experiences and avoid illness, suffering and unhappiness.

Having struggled to try and manipulate the changing realm for the sake of gaining stability and a sense of security, one might start to inquire into the meaning and purpose of life.

The unchanging is obscured by the mind's fascination with the changing. The mind becomes absorbed in what is right or wrong, good or bad, trapped in a limited experience of the pairs of opposites. Inquiring minds are often confused as to how love can turn to hate, how that which brought happiness can become suffering. Every worry, fear or state of agitation, every disease, every injustice, every experience that one considers to be wrong – wrong within themselves, the wrong one sees in others or in the world – is due to limited perception. Unless the knowledge of the unchanging is cultivated, one remains caught up in changing circumstances and experiences.

### **The Unchanging Awareness**

When human experience is analysed more closely, one recognises an underlying awareness, which permeates all experience. This awareness is far deeper and vaster than the accumulation of changing experiences.

Meditation offers an opportunity for the mind to be released from its changing viewpoint in order to directly perceive that there is an unchanging, underlying awareness, which is never bound in the changing thoughts and feelings.

Meditation is exquisitely uncomplicated. To struggle in meditation with techniques –expectations and efforts to transcend– can clutter the mind such that the pure recognition of the unchanging space is not able to unfold. Simply sit quietly and comfortably, close your eyes and take a moment not to respond to the coming and going of thoughts, similarly to how you would watch children playing in the park. Let your thoughts come and go, come and go, and watch that the witness of the thoughts is a vast space of unchanging awareness.

Meditating in this way, the mind is released from the constant agitation of its relation with the capricious nature of the senses, and is given the space to be drawn back to its source, whose nature is stillness as opposed to agitation, clarity as opposed to confusion and doubt, and stability and security in its true state of being.

### **Vedic Awareness**

Ved in Sanskrit means true knowledge. When one reaches a point where the changing knowledge of things, relations, and situations has not evolved freedom from agitation, worry and insecurity, then one is ripe for meditation. Knowledge of unchanging awareness is not relative information; it is a direct experience of our true unchanging Self.

*Vedant* is referred to as a 'revealed wisdom' rather than a philosophy, because it is based on direct experience, meditation and realization of our true Self.

### **Why Discern the Changing from the Unchanging?**

It is integral to human nature to seek the source of being, to know who one is deeper than one's personality-based reactions to living. In Vedant the inquiring soul is called the Jigyasu, who goes through periods where the mind is endlessly spinning its wheels in a state of disillusionment that changing knowledge has not brought a state of inner resolution. Freedom from suffering eludes even the most sincere seeker, often adding to their mental disquiet for some time.

Discernment between the changing experiences and unchanging awareness reveals that the body is destructible, relations are changing, and the mind can be triggered in to a state of doubt and worry. When the struggle is relinquished, what remains is the true nature of Being, doubtless, free, and fulfilled. This is the purpose of discerning the changing from the unchanging.