

A Season's Harvest

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volume 1 - part 3
Yoga Vasistha

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The problem is I

We are reading and listening to the Yoga Vasistha everyday. If you pay some attention to it, you realise that it is not merely a scriptural text that has an intellectual value. If you try to understand it with your intellect or your mind, you will either fail to grasp it, or twist its meaning. It does not seem to make any sense at all, in some places it sounds illogical or absurd. In any case, it does not make any sense; it seems to make sense in one place and then you go on reading it, and suddenly all sense is lost, you are back at square one. If you put that and this together, you suffer from what is called confusion. So, it is not something which can be understood intellectually, nor is it meant to promote the comfort of man. At least one person has tried to extract a cogent philosophy from it, but if one honestly listens to it, with one's heart, it can easily be seen that it has a philosophy which is not a philosophy according to the usual definition of the word. It is not something which can be put into a framework. So, any system of philosophy that has a methodology or framework must fail to grasp it. Or it must declare that this is not a philosophical text, as indeed it is not.

The Yoga Vasistha is however meant to deal with something fundamental which we have turned into a problem. It is not a fundamental problem - life is not a problem at all. It is something fundamental which we have somehow turned into a problem. How does one deal with that? If you have made your own life a problem, and it bothers you one way or the other, then the Yoga Vasistha can help you straighten it out, provided you do not try to understand everything with your intellect. If you apply your intellect, you are lost.

As a matter of fact, if you apply your intellect, you will find you are lost all the way. I will give you a very simple exercise. You have one block. Take a number of blocks and put them all in a line so that you have only about eight inches of width, you are making a footpath about eight inches wide. You can walk on it without any anxiety, without any trouble. You can also walk on this terrace, because that is also eight inches wide. If it is on the ground, you are able to walk along an eight inch wide footpath without missing one step. When you walk on this terrace, you feel a bit wobbly, but you can still do it. If, however, you walk on the other side of the terrace overlooking the ravine, it is different. And if the same thing happens to be over the ravine itself, that is quite different. Intellectually there is absolutely no explanation. I am able to walk on this thing without any problem. Why should it become a problem in the other case? So, this problem cannot be understood by the intellect, for: it is created by something else, heaven knows what it is, and the intellect cannot solve it, the intellect can only make it worse. Probably if the whole place is dark, absolutely dark except that footpath, perhaps we might be able to walk. That is, if the mind or the intellect does not conjure up all sorts of possible dangers, that I may slip, perhaps we may be able to walk along that foot path in the sky without panicking. So, wherever the intellect is applied, it only creates a problem, and it does not solve any problem. Here is the solution to the problem and therefore it cannot be grasped by the intellect.

What is the background story? For some unknown reason this is also attributed to Rama and the guru Vasistha, and for that purpose an incident from the Ramayana is taken over in its entirety. We do not want to discuss that. The whole thing is said to have taken place at that point when Rama's father Daaratha sends for him for some mission. And Rama's attendant complains to the king that the prince went on a pilgrimage and when he returned from the pilgrimage his mood had changed. He is not interested in life, he eats and he sleeps mechanically; in psychological language, he is depressed. When at the king's insistence Rama finally comes, the king, Vasistha, all the sages in the court ask, 'Rama, what's wrong with you? Why are you like this?' But Rama only asks in his turn, 'What is there in this life which I can be happy about?' And the first section, called Vairagya-Prakaranam, is Rama's teaching. He says, 'I think of life, it is passing, everything is changing. We are here now and I see death. Whatever you do with this body, it is going to die. And even before then, look at the various stages of life. The baby is at the mercy of other people. It is all the time crying, crying seems to be the one pastime and mission of a baby. When you look at that baby, you feel miserable. Poor thing. That poor thing grows up a little bit, and then it plays, it falls, it breaks its bones, fracture, injury, compensation insurance. Alright, we spend a few more years, then we become a young man and the young man is not at peace either, he is not happy either. He is in search of happiness, he wants a young woman, the first prerequisite for happiness. So, chasing after each other is not happiness, it is unhappiness. If he is happy, he sits down and enjoys himself. He is not happy and therefore he is looking for happiness. So, that part of life is spent chasing something or other. He is miserable, miserable when he is chasing something, miserable when he gets something, miserable when he loses something. Then he becomes an adult: a wife, children, the very thing that he sought to make him happy makes him unhappy, now, more and more unhappy. Wife and children are now regarded as burdens, as a responsibility, as trouble. Then old age, once again dependency on other people, being mocked at by other people, sickness, senility, stupidity. And as the man grows older he says, 'Ah this is a nuisance, let me die.' But when death comes, he does not want it. It is crazy, isn't it. So, Rama says there does not seem to be any sense in life, there does not seem to be any happiness in life. There does not seem to be any meaning in life. Then wealth: it is misery acquiring it, it is misery protecting it, it is misery when it is lost. And then he says, we go on saying, 'I, I, I,' the ego. One wants to promote that ego, yes? And the stronger the ego becomes, the more difficult to satisfy it, the more it demands.

I can see it from my own life. When I was one of the two hundred swamis in Sivananda's ashram, I did not bother at all, nothing mattered. I did not have to play to the gallery, I did not have to satisfy anybody's expectations, I could lead my own life. I could sleep when I wanted to, get up when I wanted to, eat what I wanted, drink what I wanted, walk about naked if I wanted, anything. We could all do what we liked. Now that the ego has become big, you are a big swami, it becomes a greater nuisance. It seems to rule. Once you have built up your personality, that personality begins to rule. Once you have cultivated some habit,

the habit begins to rule. So, unhappiness there also. Everything in the world, everything concerned with life is tainted with unhappiness. And so, Rama asks, 'What shall I be happy about?' What do you want me to smile about, there is nothing in the world to smile about. Misery, misery, misery, the whole of life is tainted with misery.

And so Rama's attendant describes for the king the symptoms of Rama's behaviour and depression. Rama, he says, is in that state where he is not a complete moron, where he is not totally stupid, nor is he enlightened. In fact, it is only the moron and the enlightened man who have no problems. If I am absolutely stupid, there is absolutely no problem. If I am enlightened, there is no problem. It is in between that we create problems. When you read Rama's discourse, it makes perfect sense. But where does it lead one to? It leads one into a state of depression, it leads one to withdrawal from the stream of life, not to enlightenment. Not surprisingly, Rama is perpetually moaning. You are miserable; you are miserable concerning your own life, other people's lives, the world in general. Only one thing is omitted here. Am I helping solve this problem by going into a depression. Life in the world is miserable. There is war, there are riots, there is killing, there is repression, there is suppression, there is hunger. This is a simple statement of fact. But, by becoming depressed over it, are you solving the problem? No.

What must I do in order to solve the problem? Where is it? Where is the problem? The problem is in me. So, one should look within, look where the problem is - look within is an absurd expression - and remove it there. Why did the intellect create it? Because it was unaware of the truth. Because it was unaware of the truth it saw a problem in a set of facts. It is a fact that everyone who is born undergoes childhood, youth, maturity, old age and death, this is obvious. It is the intellect that creates a problem. There is no problem. If you look at those trees, they do not cry, they do not grumble, they germinate, they sprout, they become a little plant, they become a big tree, they grow old and die. It is the intellect that, because of its ignorance, because it is not facing the truth, creates a problem in the simple set of events called life. There is no problem in life. People are born, people live, people die. That is no problem at all. And when there is pain in the abdomen, the eyes water and the throat cries. When there is some pain here, even 'pain' is a word, something is happening here, and when that something happens, the eyes begin to water, the throat starts uttering some funny sounds, that's all, there is no problem.

But something else turns it into a problem. So, is there a way of realizing the truth, that is not only trying to understand the truth, but make the truth more real than the opinion entertained by the intellect? The intellect cannot see the truth, the intellect can only perceive an idea, or opinion. So, can the truth be realised? When we say, 'Can the truth be realised?', we are not saying, 'Can the mind understand it? Can the ego appreciate it?' No. Can I realise the truth? No. Can the truth be realised? The truth is there already, but there is something which veils it: the intellect, and therefore the truth, even though it is true, is not

real. When truth becomes real, nothing undergoes any change, except that what the intellect had turned into a problem, ceases to be a problem.

If you come back to the little example I gave you: there is some sensation here which is called pain, and the swami's eyes begin to water and the throat begins to utter some funny sound, you are seeing it and you are moaning, 'Oh, my God.' When the truth is realised instead of doing all that, you will probably go and get a doctor or an ambulance, and get busy doing something about it - without describing it, without getting worried about it. Here is something - something is happening, and it demands an action. There is instant, spontaneous, and right action when the truth is realised. When the truth is not realised, you are going to get anxious. When the truth is not realised, the only thing that is absent is right action, everything else happens. That is the difference. When you realise the truth, the stomach ache is not going to disappear, the old man is not going to become young, which is not necessary. When the truth is realised, right action takes place instantly without any confusion whatsoever.

If that factor is borne in mind, you will also appreciate how, after a discourse lasting a number of days, Rama eventually gets up and says, 'Right, now I will do whatever you want me to do.' And Vasistha says, 'Go on, go and fight, get married, do everything, all that is necessary. Whatever has to happen, let it happen.' You want freedom? Freedom from what? Freedom from growing? It is not possible. Everything that is born must grow; a child must grow into a youth, a youth into an adult, an adult into an old man, that's life. This cannot be stopped. What sort of freedom do I want? I see that there is a problem here. Life is miserable, everything concerning life is miserable and I want to be free. From what? From life? That is not possible. From misery? What creates misery? I must know what it was that turned life into misery, into unhappiness. I must be free from that ignorance, or foolishness. Freedom from ignorance is real freedom. There is no other freedom.

At a later stage Vasistha asks, 'Where is ignorance?' Is ignorance something which can be presented, handed out, is it something like a pair of shoes? Now, when we talk of moksha or liberation, how does one attain this moksha? What are the essential ingredients of liberation? How do I know how to get this liberation? Will somebody give it to me? I see that whatever other people give me becomes a nuisance. People give you money, it causes problems; people give you buildings, they cause problems; people give you a boy or a girl, he or she causes problems. Whatever somebody else gives you, turns into a problem.

If you give moksha to me, it is your property, not mine. I do not even know what to do with it. And I will also be frightened that you may take it back. So, it is not something which can be given, it has to be realised. When the truth is realised, ignorance is gone, and with it, non-freedom has gone. When truth is realised, therefore, moksha is. When truth is realized, there is liberation.

There are some aids to moksha, and Vasistha describes them in a very beautiful

way. Vasistha tells Rama that there are four gatekeepers to the kingdom of God, or moksha: samo, santosa, vicara and sadusangame. Since moksha is not a gift, something which one person can give to another, it has to happen within oneself. These are the four aids, or qualifications, which may create the necessary climate for this to happen.

Samo is usually translated 'self-control' or 'discipline', which really means a state of inner tranquility. If the mind and the heart are not absolutely calm, truth is not reflected in it, confusion continues. Confusion continues creating more confusion. If the mind is agitated, then what the mind perceives is also agitated. When the mind is absolutely calm, then in that peaceful mind, truth is best reflected. Any agitation, even in the name of a spiritual agitation, is useless, is dangerous. 'I am restless for God-Realisation.' Until that restlessness stops, there is no God-Realisation. You can go from pillar to post, you can knock your head against a million stones, you can bleed, but till the mind comes to a stop, self-realisation is not possible.

One of the most essential characteristics of a true spiritual seeker is santosa. 'Santosa' is contentment. That is: a mind in which there are no cravings, because when there are cravings, there must be agitation, and when there is agitation, there is disturbance, you are not able to reflect the truth.

'Vicara' is loosely translated enquiry, not in the intellectual sense, but a steady and proper movement, an efficient movement. 'Cara' in Sanskrit means move, 'vicara' means move very efficiently. Very efficient movement is vicara. Very efficient movement of consciousness, so that nothing is taken for granted, nothing is assumed, and there is persistent movement of awareness towards the truth, vicara.

In order to feed this vichara, in order to ensure that this vicara moves in the right direction, the fourth is suggested: sadusangama, or satsanga. It is in satsanga that this lamp of vichara is kept bright and fed with the right kind of fuel, to keep it alive.

With the help of these four - santosa, samo, vicara and satsanga, it is possible for one to create an inner climate in which the truth can be realised efficiently.

The Problem is False

The teachings of Vasistha in response to the dejection of Rama constitute the Yoga Vasistha. The background is very much like the Bhagavad Gita, where Arjuna falls into a state of depression or despondency. If this despondency is not there, then the teaching does not seem to have a real value. When do I become despondent? When what I regard as unhappiness has somehow become real. Whether it is really real, or only psychologically real, imaginarily real, somehow or other it hits me as real. Not when I am theorizing, not when we are delivering a lecture, saying, 'All the world is full of misery.' That is only a lecture, there is no felt truth in it. The felt truth is that I am unhappy, whether, according to the spectator, it is really so, or, according to you, I am in an imaginary misery. For instance, if I have cancer, and I am crying, you think I have a reason to cry, that my misery is justified, it is based on reality. When on the other hand I get miserable because there is a change of government in Canada, psychologists will say that it is an imaginary thing, it is a neurosis.

Ignorant is the word. But the fact remains that whether this unhappiness is based on reason, according to you, or based on no reason, according to you, I am miserable. I am really and truly miserable. It needs a real state of depression or despondency to appreciate the truth, appreciate the teaching. I must get there, I must hit the bottom, and then I can only come up, I cannot go down further. This must be experienced within myself, really and truly, whether, according to you, it is real or imaginary. That is, I must reach the end of my own journey, my own tether. And it is there that there is true bewilderment, it is there that I can truly say, 'Lord, I cannot, find the way, please help.' Then the help comes. That is the teaching, the teaching of Vasistha here, or the teaching of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. And so Vasistha enters into a dialogue or vichara, an enquiry, into the nature of reality, because it is insisted on again and again and again, that your unhappiness arises from ignorance.

That concept is not very easy to understand that all unhappiness springs from falsehood, from ignorance. Falsehood and ignorance are synonymous terms. What is real does not cause unhappiness. Only what is unreal causes unhappiness in a state of ignorance. It is a funny and tricky statement.

Let's go back to Rama's discourse. Rama says life is miserable, because we go on living, we chase after something or other, and then we grow old and we die, and all this is misery, disease, unhappiness. But does growth in fact produce unhappiness? Does the fact that I am a grown man, that I am no longer a child, does that in itself cause unhappiness? No. The process of growing is not unhappiness. But disease - does disease in itself cause unhappiness? Pain, perhaps yes. But unhappiness?

Unhappiness is a psychological factor, not a physiological factor, not a neurological thing. Pain, yes, of course. But if you watch yourself when you are sick, for-instance, the physiological pain is hardly 5% of the problem. The other

95% is psychological. 'Why must it happen to me? What will they think of me now?' That is 95%. Does your sickness demand that? No. The fact you are old is just a fact. It is not responsible for your unhappiness, or psychological condition. The fact that the body is undergoing some change, which the doctor calls sickness, does not demand unhappiness in the mind. If the body is tired, lie down and sleep. Even a violent headache does not produce psychological unhappiness. It can cause pain, yes, of course. Pain and pleasure are inherent in your constitution. The nervous system responds one way in a painful condition, and another way in a pleasurable condition. That's all. Does what is real cause unhappiness at all? No.

There is no problem at all, nothing which is real in creation causes unhappiness. Unhappiness always springs from falsehood. So, what is ignorance? Ignorance is that mentality which considers this falsehood to be somehow real. So, in a state of unhappiness, I pursue that, I enquire into that: what exactly do I mean by unhappiness? Where is unhappiness in this? It does not exist at all. So, I go on enquiring into it: how does unhappiness arise? Unhappiness arises when there is an image in my mind of what I am supposed to be. Unhappiness arises when I want to do what it is impossible to do. There is an imaginary existence, a hope and a fear which are unrelated to fact. This is one aspect of this thing called falsehood or ignorance. Falsehood is that which does not exist. Falsehood is a name, is a word that denotes something which does not exist. I hope you heard it properly. Falsehood is a word, it is no more than a word, because if something which can answer to the description of falsehood exists, it is not false. If you can pick up this and say this is false, then this is, it is not false, it is real. So, falsehood is nothing more than a word which denotes something which is not real.

What does this mean? It means that all our hopes, all our aspirations, all our imaginations, all our thoughts, all our ideas, all our ideals, all these are covered by that one word - false, because you cannot possibly produce these things, you cannot possibly say, 'Here it is.' So, all that: I love you, I hate you, I am afraid of you, I am jealous of you, the whole lot, is just false. I cannot produce it. They are merely imaginings. And yet, when something is imagined - as an imagination it is real. Watch carefully. As an imagination it is real. If you are drunk and if you are suffering from some kind of a hallucination, the hallucination is real only as hallucination. The hallucination is not unreal, but the hallucination is not real either. The hallucination as hallucination is real; but in a state of ignorance you think that what you hallucinated is itself the reality.

Now, I think you understand what ignorance means. Ignorance is not ignorance of something. I do not know how to play the harmonium. That is not the ignorance we are talking about. In a state of ignorance, that which is merely hallucination or imagination is considered to be a reality. What you call unhappiness arises in this confusion.

When you investigate into the nature of this phenomenon, and realise that this is hallucination - I am not denying the fact that something is seen, but that is

hallucination, not reality - instantly that 95% is gone, all the unhappiness is gone. The pain is left, pain we will deal with, that is the 5%, that's no problem. It does not create a serious problem at all. In fact, if it is not a physiological thing, there is no pain at all. For instance, if you call me an idiot, you and I know that the word idiot means that I do not have brains, that I am a fool, and it also means probably that you are annoyed with me, that you do not like me. I understand all that. But where is unhappiness in this? I understand the words, I understand the meaning, I understand the implication, I understand even the possibility that you do not like me. None of these demands that I should be unhappy, except when something else, an idea, arises in me, that that means disaster to me, that if you do not like me, it is disastrous. 'I hope you like me.' That creates unhappiness. There is no unhappiness at all in seeing this as it is, as the truth. In this there is absolutely no cause for unhappiness, unless what is totally unreal creeps into it. And, what is the unreal thing? I feel my honour, my dignity, my prestige, is shattered. Remember, I cannot see where my prestige is, I cannot see where my dignity is. And so, something which does not exist is shattered. That is what causes unhappiness. That is false. Something which does not exist. This is number one.

So, when enquiry continues in this manner, on investigation the false, which was assumed to be real, is seen to be false. That which disappears on investigation is false. And the investigation itself, being based on knowledge, cancels ignorance, so that that which arose and existed in ignorance is dispelled by vicara.

Vicara is the total sadhana or spiritual practice, recommended in the Yoga Vasistha. I entertained a hope, I had a fear, I had an idea which gave rise to this unhappiness. If I had not hoped that I would live for 2000 years, I would not be afraid to die today tomorrow. If I had seen the truth, then there would have been no problem. Because I entertain an idea, I become unhappy.

What is it that entertains this idea? What is this thing called 'I', what is this thing called 'me'? This enquiry is the next step. When you have arrived at an understanding of the ideas themselves, and their non-existence or falsehood, which means that you recognize them as ideas, not reality, then you turn round and have a look at this thing called 'me' - 'I' thought so, 'I' felt so, 'I' was hurt. What is it that gets hurt? And as an extension to this: what is it that considers one experience as happiness and another experience as unhappiness? One situation as success and another as failure? One as praise or glory and the other as disgrace? Who is the 'I'? Is there a little god or angel or demon stuck in some part of the anatomy - we do not know where it is - which could be identified as this is 'me'? It is not possible.

Take this body - this is the nose, these are the ears, this is the head. You chop them off and throw them away, one by one, even the inner parts of the anatomy. Yet, you soon discover that you have never thrown something called 'I' away, the ego away. Alright, then we come to the psychological analysis. There are thoughts, there are feelings, there are emotions, there are experiences of

pleasures and pain, and so on. And there is a mind and a certain intelligence. When you have done with all that, what do you call 'I'. You have not been able to find it. If 'I' itself does not exist, how does 'I' feel, or think, or love, or hate, be happy, or unhappy? So, first we discover that what are called unhappiness and happiness are false, and secondly we discover that what is called 'I' is also false. And therefore, the whole expression 'I am unhappy' is finished. It simply disintegrates. There is not a thing called 'unhappiness', and there is not a thing called 'I'. Then, what is 'I am unhappy'?

In a manner of speaking, perhaps, one can say that what is called 'I', or the ego, is a bundle of memory, a collection of memory. What is called the 'me' is nothing but the first two letters of that word 'memory', an abbreviation of the word 'memory'. Is there a thing called me, I, ego, apart from memory? 'Me' is merely memory. All these experiences which have been floating around seem to have condensed and become coalesced into a thing called 'me'. Experiences which are there in life coalesce and seem to assume the stature or the character of a 'me'. So, the 'me' is non-different from the aggregate of the experiences themselves.

Some philosophers called Vedantins have a lovely argument - that which ties these experiences together is the ego. Even that may not be. It may not be true that that which ties these experiences together and makes them a recognisable bundle is the ego. There is an analogy in the Yoga Vasistha: a wood cutter chops wood and then ties the pieces together with a cord made of wood fibre. From where did he get the cord? From the wood. With the same wood you tie your bundle of firewood and that is called a bundle. But that which brought these pieces of firewood together is also firewood. So that it need not be an agency other than what it binds. In the same way, I am made of all these experiences, but the 'I' that binds all these experiences together in order to form a personality need not necessarily be an entity other than those experiences. The experiences themselves, when they come together, suddenly assume the nature of personality.

This is also easy to explain in terms of physics. You have a substance. A substance is made of molecules, and whether you are going to call it bronze or rock or something else depends entirely on the nature of the molecules. If it is a certain molecule, you call it carbon, or iron, or salt. And the molecules themselves are made of atoms which distinguish one another by the components of the atoms. These atoms come together and form the molecules. And the molecules come together and form the substance. Is there a binding force, other than the molecules themselves and the atoms themselves, that keeps them together? No. They are just floating there and those molecules sit there. You call it Swami Sivananda.

Ramana Maharshi would also step in here and say that that does not say, 'I am Sivananda'. It is your mind that says, 'This is Sivananda.' To an agglomerate of the molecules, the mind, in a state of ignorance, gives a certain name, and the mind in a state of ignorance attributes a certain form. The form is conjured up only by the limited sight. We see things as we see them, only because of the

natural limitation of the sense of sight. If that limitation is changed, the whole thing becomes different, the whole world becomes different. To an ant you are a mountain, to a mountain you are a mouse. So, all these things depend upon what you call the point of view. Since the view is limited, the perception is distorted. What is 'I'? 'I' is nothing but a bundle of memory, and that bundle of memory continues to respond to the present situation in a certain way.

If you observe this very carefully, there is no need to cancel anything. Vasistha does not say that the yogi must smile when his head is cut off and cry when somebody gives him food. Nothing need be cancelled, but one should recognise that it is that bundle of memory that responds to the present situation in a certain way, and there is no I, no ego in it. The ego is totally non-existent. The bundle itself is made of experiences which are non-different from one another. What you call a pleasurable experience and what you call a painful experience are both experiences whose content is exactly the same. This is called a man and that is called a woman. The content is exactly the same, the same rubbish. It is not as though he is more precious than her, or she is more precious than he. There is nothing. You chop up the whole thing and sell it in the bazaar, they will be worth exactly the same thing. Once that is realised, then falsehood, which is imagination, is recognised as falsehood, ignorance disappears. Ignorance disappears, because ignorance was never there. Ignorance is not a thing, is not a substance. In the light of this investigation, ignorance disappears and falsehood is recognised as false, as a word, as an idea. Happiness is false, unhappiness is false. They are mere words. When the truth that these are mere words is recognised, there is the ending of unhappiness.

There is Nothing to be Got Rid Of

Experiences that arise in the course of life coalesce, come together, and what is known as the experiencer, or one who responds, is born, that becomes a personality. It is usual to say that the binding factor is the ego, but it need not be so. The binding factor is none other than an experience in itself, which experiences bondage. That whole thing is the personality and that personality responds to the events in what is called now. In this confusion there is nothing called I, the ego. The ego is the only one that does not exist. Experiences exist, and they somehow seem to have come together, forming a thing called a personality, and the whole thing has got consciousness as its base, because consciousness seems to be everywhere, that's all. Life goes on, and in that life there are no problems, there is no unhappiness at all. Because it is totally natural.

What is the content of this experience? And how are these experiences formed? One sees these two factors without any difficulty whatsoever. There is movement in the world, in the universe, in everything that is created, including the body. There is change, there is movement, which means energy. Movement means energy. Without energy there is no motion. Energy is never totally still. Energy means motion. If there is no movement at all, you cannot call it energy. And such a thing does not exist. Even when they talk of static and kinetic forms of energy, it is only in a relative sense. Static only means that I cannot perceive that the tape recorder is moving. A fellow is sitting absolutely still - 'Absolutely still', that is how we put it. He is not absolutely still; terrific activity is going on in every cell of his being. But that I am not aware of. I cannot see it, and therefore I call it static. Nothing is static.

What brings these molecules together to form what is called the body? What brings the molecules together to form what is called a banana? It is here that Vasistha is ruthless. Without wanting to get caught in all sorts of crazy theories of evolution - the moment you have a theory of evolution, you must answer the question, 'Why is it so?'. Then you come up with a theory: survival of the fittest. And how do you know that this is the fittest? Because it has survived. It is an absolutely ridiculous argument. In logic it is called a circular argument, explaining one with the other, and the other with the one. Vasistha totally avoids it. How did these things come together? He says they came together. What do you mean, how did they come together? Coincidence. It just so happened that two or three of these atoms came together and formed a molecule - do not ask why or how. Once that is formed, you have got all these sequential events. The first is fortuitous, that is, accidental, and then there is a sequence of events. You sow a seed, and the tree comes up, that is all. Why is it so? Because only that tree was there in that seed. That is all. Accidentally these things happened in the first place, or even now, and experiences are formed because all these particles of energy - we shall call it that way - are also endowed with consciousness or awareness. There is nothing that is unconscious in this world, just as there is nothing that is totally static, nothing that is totally insentient. If you think that this stone is totally insentient, Vasistha questions it. That is exactly like saying a

man is absolutely still, it is not true. It is relatively true, it is not absolutely true. In the same way there, is nothing totally insentient. In that stone, consciousness is asleep.

There is nothing absolute in this universe. In this universe everything is relative. Somebody is active and, in relation to that person, the other fellow is lazy. Somebody is very intelligent and, in relation to him, the other man is stupid, that is all. There is consciousness everywhere and energy everywhere, and the movement of energy brings all these molecules together. When the molecules collide with one another, a certain experience is experienced, because all these are endowed with consciousness. Somehow or other, certain experiences come together and get themselves tied into a bundle with another of their own kind, and what is called a personality is formed. So, we are all masses of floating energy, held together somehow by the same energy, and these masses of energy are called personalities - for want of a better word. But in that, is there an ego-sense? No. The ego-sense is only one of those little fibres with which this bundle is held together, it is not an independent thing. That is the one thing that is totally absent. The 'me' does not exist. It is when, in ignorance, the bundle somehow assumes an independent individuality, that it thinks it is in bondage. It is not in bondage, it thinks it is in bondage. A thought arises, 'I am in bondage.' And from there on that bundle goes on thinking, 'I am a fool,' 'I am a swami', 'I am an idiot', 'I am a great man', and all that. And since all these thoughts also arise in the sphere of consciousness, they are experienced. There is the confusion again.

All these notions arise in that bundle of chit-shakti, energy and consciousness combined. That is life. When you suffer, you suffer. You do not suffer! You think you suffer. What happens to the body, I think happens to me. 'I am this body, this body is mine.' This is questioned consistently in the Yoga Vasistha. How can I say this body is mine? If this body is mine, why can I not produce two noses? I like it, I have two ears, why should I not have two noses? - so, if one catches cold the other is all right. If the body is mine, why should I not be able to do it? Or if the mind is mine, why can I not change the mind? Since I cannot do any of these, the body is not me and it is not mine, the mind is not me and it is not mine. Why is it so? Because there is nothing called me. The 'me' is a non-entity, and this non-entity cannot work upon something which exists.

The wonderful thing in the Yoga Vasistha is that the existence of the body and the mind is not totally denied. They are sublimated into something else. The body as body exists, of course. But if this body is sleeping here, it does not come and say, 'I am a body.' The thought that this is a body arises in our mind, but, whereas that notion is wrong - that there is something here - is not denied at all. What exists is not denied. So, the body is, the mind is, but the stupid notion that 'I am the body' does not exist except as a notion, and the notion 'the body is mine' is false.

If I am flying through a dense dark cloud as I have often done in Madagascar, in Singapore and in Malaysia, can I say that this is my cloud? And yet that is what we are saying all the time. I am supposed to be a little jiva, or soul, stuck in the

centre of my heart, and somehow the body is mine. I am in the body and the body is mine. It is a self-contradicting statement. If I dwell in the body, I must belong to the body, not the other way round. The cloud cannot say, 'The sky is mine', but the sky may say, 'The cloud is mine.'

So, it is possible for us to see that the body and the mind themselves are part of something greater and belong to something else. They do not belong to me. The 'me' does not exist. It is what that Something - whether you call it cosmic consciousness, or cosmic energy, or God, Atman, Brahman - determines, that happens to this. Whatever is determined by That, happens to this. The body then, is neither me nor mine. The mind is neither me nor mine. And when you enquire deeper into this, you realise that the 'me' itself is not there. What is the content of these experiences and what is the content of even this concept called me? Nothing. Since there is no substantiality associated with the notion called me, it is nothing more than a notion, a notion being consciousness, an idea. And the idea, being non-different in content from consciousness, is consciousness. An idea arises in consciousness. Okay, let it arise, no problem. And if you still want to use the word 'I', go on using it, knowing that it is nothing more than a word. In the full knowledge that 'mind' is nothing more than a word - go on using it. There is no need to accept or to reject a word, a word is only a word. But on investigation it is realised that there is no truth or substantiality, there is no substance which corresponds to the notion called 'I' and the notion called 'mind'. They do not exist. The body exists just as the material world exists, the body being part of the material world, the mind exists and consciousness exists, the mind being part of the total consciousness.

This consciousness, itself thinks of itself as the universe. There is this cosmic consciousness, and movement in cosmic consciousness is what is called energy. Even they are not two completely different categories. Cosmic consciousness and movement in cosmic consciousness is what is known as energy. And this energy colliding and coming together produces what is called experience, and those experiences happening in consciousness give rise to name, thought, and form simultaneously. It is consciousness, there is energy moving in it, again without distinction or difference, and that movement results in the collision of particles of energy, and when they collide, some form is formed. And when a form is formed, consciousness thinks, as it were - this is a swami, this is a man. All this is accidental coincidence. And the world is formed, the sun is formed, the moon is formed. As particles collide and bring about a form, the consciousness looks upon it, thinks of it in a certain way, that is all. And you is formed, I is formed, the tape recorder is formed, the tent is formed.

All this is perfect. But from somewhere, for some unknown reason, the notion called 'I am', 'I am this body' arises. That is the only genesis of mischief. How is it to be got rid of? What is to be got rid of? There is nothing to be got rid of. You can get rid of 'only' that which is real. When this is something which does not exist as a substance, how can it be got rid of? So, in the very effort to get rid of it, you are creating it. This teaching is found only in the Yoga Vasistha. Why are you

struggling to get rid of it? In that, you are creating it, giving rise to it. That is, when you say, 'I do not want it', you are giving rise to the very thing you do not want. Leave it alone. Investigate this whole truth. I am unhappy, what is this unhappiness? And who is it that is unhappy? Why do I say 'I', why do I say 'I am', why do I say 'I am unhappy'? If this enquiry is undertaken, one discovers that that which has never been, and is not is nonexistent. That's all.

Life is freed instantly. Life is freed from this ignorance. And freedom in life, which is called jivanmukti, does not suddenly bring about a radical change in one's physical appearance, nor even in one's mental activity, and yet a tremendous and radical change has taken place.

Likes, Dislikes, and Fear

Some experiences that just happen accidentally, as it were, get together, again accidentally as it were and, for some unknown reason, a thing called a personality arises. Trees grow, leaves sprout, wind blows - they shake; there is really no cause and effect relationship in this, these things just happen. But, for some unknown reason, a thing called a personality arises. Why did I repeat that for some unknown reason? That is the main argument in the Yoga Vasistha, that since there is no reason, it did not happen. Only the notion or the thought exists that it has happened, that I am a personality, and therefore something that has not happened is assumed to have happened, which is ignorance.

If you look at a building, a house, or even this tent where we are seated, it is space. This space was there before, this space will be there for ever and ever. But now we call it a terrace or a building or a house. It is only a word. 'House' has really no meaning, because the space in which we live, which is called a house, was there even before the walls were put up, and will continue to be there even after the walls have fallen down. Somehow, here again, you can see the accidental coincidence. It is an absurd thing. If I am built into the wall, then you can say something has happened to me. But no, I live where there is empty space. That is how the personality or the ego is born. But here, there is a problem. Since the personality is a mere aggregate of experiences, those experiences keep responding to circumstances, and the personality thinks, 'I am doing this'. And once the personality has assumed the doership of those actions, it also experiences further impact of external circumstances and divides them - these experiences I like, these experiences I do not like. Up to that point, there is no danger, there is no risk. Since the personality has no reason to come into being, it has not come into being in reality, and so there is no problem. And a thing called a personality is supposed to have arisen, there is no problem either. The problem arises when this personality, which is merely an aggregate of diverse experiences, which just happens in the cosmos, begins to entertain ideas, 'I like this', 'I do not like this'. From there on there is trouble.

This false personality that has arisen, begins to divide. These I like and these I do not like. And these I desire. Why do I desire them? Because I like them. Why do I like them? Because I desire them. Here there is no sense either. They are desirable because I desire them, and why do I desire them? Because I consider them desirable. There is no sense at all in it. And I hate something, I dislike something. Why do I dislike something? Because it is undesirable. How do you know it is undesirable? Because you hate it. There is absolutely no logic in it. You can see also that even these are not stable. Something which you like today, you dislike next year. Your friend of this year becomes your enemy of next year. And someone whom you dislike - sometime ago, becomes your wife - now. It is a crazy thing, this business goes on. It has no rhyme or reason. All these are common experiences; there is no problem. Which means that this thing called likes and dislikes is neither in me nor in the object. It arises just like that because, ... no because! It is the fact that these things have no cause at all that makes them non-

existent, according to Vasistha. They are not truth at all because to be truth there must be some reason for their coming into being. That is the whole theory of accidental coincidence.

These likes and dislikes are the worst enemies. What do they lead to? They lead to my running after what I like and running away from what I do not like. Because I think my happiness comes from those which I have chosen to like, and my happiness is threatened by these which I hate, and since I want to be happy, I am constantly pursuing something and constantly running away from something. But as I go on in this game, I find that it is useless. However much I try, I am still unhappy. And however much I flee from this unhappiness, it seems to run just two steps ahead of me. And by going on in this manner, this personality, which was born of ignorance, continues to entertain ideas, notions.

Here there is something very subtle and very tricky. The real experiences, the real movement in space, in consciousness, which is called life, seems to be totally independent of these notions 'I like this', 'I do not like this'. When this personality entertains notions saying, 'I want to avoid this unhappiness', 'I want to get that happiness', it soon finds itself saying, 'Well, since this circumstance does not seem to be suited to my being happy, I will change those circumstances.' But I cannot change those circumstances.

Unable to deal with this, this notion - called a personality - raises within itself another notion called, 'I have overcome this trouble,' or 'I am going to overcome this trouble,' 'Now I am going to practise yoga, I am going to go into samadhi,' and that is another notion - 'I am rid of all these problems, I am now an enlightened being,' another notion, or it says, 'I still want to enjoy life, so I will be born not in this kind of silly society but as a king.' Life goes on, it is totally untouched. And since what this notion entertains is itself notional, it is not a reality. The fool who sits on the throne is still a fool, absolutely a total idiot, but somehow he thinks he is somebody other than me or you. And that 'I am a king,' or that 'I am a wealthy man', or that 'I am a swami,' is nothing but an idea in the mind of this stupid thing called personality which is itself born of ignorance and is therefore a non-entity.

What is missing here? The recognition that since this whole wretched thing is born of ignorance, we must attack the ignorance. That we are not prepared to do somehow. We want to rectify, modify, reform our problematic existence. 'Reform' means keep the same stuff, keep the same ignorance, and put it into a different shape. As if changing the shape is going to change the substance! This substance is still the same, but we merely change the shape and pretend that we have solved the problem - till the problem arises again. It was never really tackled. And so, this personality, which is nothing but the product of an idea of ignorance, keeps on changing its notions within itself.

That is what we call reincarnation. The whole theory of reincarnation is beautifully dealt with in the Yoga Vasistha. For instance, a couple had ten sons -

they were very good people. And the sons were deeply devoted to them, and they died. When they die, these sons are heartbroken. They say, 'What must we do now that the parents have gone? Well, they have gone, alright, but at least we should become something. We should get a job, but that is unending. What shall we aspire for? We can become a king, but that is useless. Fifty years later we are thrown into the dust. We can become a god, but even that is useless, there is still somebody on top, Indra. Why not become Indra? Well, even if I am the chief of the gods, that also comes to an end. What does not come to an end? Brahma, he said, the creator of the universe, because he lives at least as long as the universe lasts, he creates it and he dissolves it. God, we should all become creators, all ten of us. How do all ten of them become creators? What is the technique? The eldest of them said, I will tell you the technique - meditation. Tremendous, whole hearted, whole souled meditation. Sit down, contemplate, I am the creator, my head is the sky, my shoulders are the two ends of the universe, in my abdomen there are all these millions of stars. Contemplate like that and go on till you realise it. That means till this has become a reality.

What happens? You go on sitting like this. Now, you must be very careful, otherwise you will miss the joke. Here is Swami Venkatesananda; nothing more serious than that, sitting, contemplating, 'I am the creator of the world. The body is there according to you, according to me it is not there. Because the personality is contemplating, 'In my abdomen is the whole vault of the heavens with millions of stars. My head is in the highest heaven, my shoulders are the ends of the universe.' Because I was so keen, and so determined, I went on, and in the meantime the body disintegrated. When the body disintegrates, what exists in that space? That notion, that thought exists in that space, it has become so powerful, and in that space itself, that personality in which I thought 'I am the creator of the universe', experiences being the creator of the universe, as if it were a fact. And in this manner we go from one embodiment to the other, without ever realizing that the whole thing is a big joke, that we should right in the beginning have investigated this mystery and tried to see if this personality is real or not real. Such an investigation must inevitably lead us immediately to enlightenment. Is it possible for us, after having heard all this or read all this, to bluff ourselves, saying, 'I am enlightened?' If you are enlightened, says Vasistha, then these three will become completely absent - likes, dislikes, and fear. For as long as there is desire and hate and fear in the heart, there is no enlightenment.

Enlightenment

In the Yoga Vasistha all types of yoga practices are mentioned. Meditation of a variety of forms, karma yoga, different types of bhakti, penance or austerity, all these are mentioned. There are even very beautiful instructions on diet and medical treatment. But for enlightenment, if we understand even the word correctly, none of these things has any direct connection. If enlightenment means light, which means the dispelling of darkness, none of these things has any direct relation. This does not mean that they are useless. In order to have enlightenment, you may even have to have a cup of tea. But this is unrelated to enlightenment. You are drinking tea to keep your blood liquid, not in order to attain enlightenment. You are eating in order to keep the body alive, not in order to attain enlightenment, not directly. You may attend satsang, study, all this; they are not directly related to enlightenment. Enlightenment is had by enlightenment. How does one wake up? By waking up. You can have an alarm clock. You can ask your husband, your wife, or your servant to beat you up, not just wake you up; but you may still not wake up. So, how do you wake up? There is only one way, wake up. How do I become enlightened? When there is light, there is enlightenment.

There are however indirect aids to it. Enlightenment is had only by enlightenment, which is the correct and total and perfect understanding of the truth. And this is not an action, but the removal of ignorance. Correct understanding of the truth does not mean that I must go and study this Yoga Vasistha six times. But, the understanding of it is brought about by the dispelling of the ignorance which gave rise to a thing called personality, and only that goes, nothing else goes. There is a tent here, there is a terrace, there are some of us sitting here. If it is dark, we do not see one another, but when the light is put on, we see one another. We were not created when the switch was put on, we were there before, even in darkness. Nothing whatsoever changes, except that the light is on. This is to be very clearly understood. Enlightenment means just that, nothing else. The light is on.

In that light, a very simple truth is seen in all its simplicity - the destruction of vasana. How do experiences immortalize themselves? Where do they leave an impression? How does an experience become a memory? This is of vital concern. Why? Because, if the experience leaves an impression and that becomes memory, from there it is that memory that acts, not you, not that fresh experience. You drink a cup of tea today, and you say, 'Ah, it is not as good as the tea I had in Rishikesh, which means you are not drinking this tea at all. You are not even tasting this tea. It is the experience left behind by the Rishikesh cup of tea that is tasting the present cup of tea. The present is completely lost This experience is not had at all by the intelligence. It is quite different in the case of the enlightened. There is this awareness or intelligence everywhere, and there is movement in that awareness which is prana or shakti or chit-shakti, and it is the combination of these two that forms experience. Now that is the experience of intelligence, brahmajnana. In our case, this intelligence does not operate. In its

place, it is the memory that operates, so that I am not experiencing, or rather, the experience is not there. It is merely that old memory reacting to the present circumstance. Lived thus, the life becomes totally meaningless.

So, I must discover what causes an impression to be formed. What is an impression? How does an experience leave an impression? How is memory produced? And if I know this, I can - you understand the 'I can' is not there, but words are words - find a way of ending this impression being formed. I can realise when the past impression reacts in the present. And when that impression is looked into, it is seen clearly that the impression itself was merely a notion that arose in pure consciousness, in the pure mind. There was an experience that created a movement in consciousness, that is perfectly alright, but somehow there was an idea or a notion of permanency in it, that somehow became permanent. One sees from one's own life that not all experiences leave similar impressions behind. There is something which I do not know, which suddenly springs up and says, 'This is an important experience, I must remember it.' It is that which later pretends to be an ego; otherwise there is no ego. The enlightened person sees the reality as it is. The personality is made up of all these memories and the memory itself is nothing more than an idea of a past experience which one pretends exists for ever. But your past experience does not exist now. It is dead and gone. What remains now is what you call memory, which is a vague idea of the experience I am supposed to have had sometime ago.

If you take a movie film of some experience you had some time ago, and while someone else is replaying that movie in the next room, you narrate your experience now, it is not the same. Some details are omitted, some imaginary details are added on. It is never the same. The mind plays its own tricks in the meantime. So, I see that memory is not completely factual, its content is basically the same mind, and the same consciousness, and there is an idea that I experienced this. 'I had the experience' really amounts to, 'I am that experience, I am that which thinks it had this experience.' I do not even know that the experience was real. So, it is only a notion. 'I had this experience' survives now and spoils the whole thing. What is its content? Its content is pure consciousness or mind which has for the moment taken the form of this idea of a memory. Even this memory is not so rigid and fixed and factual and all that as we pretend. Memory is totally unreliable.

So, one does not know what all this means, and the yogi is not interested in all that. The yogi is interested in the fundamental thing - what is its substance? what is the truth? what is the reality? Nothing but consciousness, with an idea of a thing supposed to have happened. When the yogi sees this, the I is gone, the ego is melted away. That is enlightenment. Then, memory does not act. In fact, memory does not act in our case either. No memory can act in our case, but we are caught in the idea that it does, and therefore get into endless trouble. So, in the case of the yogi, the memory does not act, and he knows it does not act. When the memory acts, as for instance in the case of a habit, which is - in the case of the yogi - more physical than psychological, he knows that this is the function of

memory. Every time you drive a car, you do not go and ask a mechanic where is the clutch and where is the brake. You have already learned it, and memory operates there; that is quite in order. That is the function of memory, memory has its own role to play. While talking, memory comes into play. You are talking in a certain language, all that comes from memory. But deeper than that, in personal relationship, in his view of the world and in his experiences, the yogi does not allow memory to interfere. It is not its province at all, it is not its role.

Then all experiences become new. The present experience is totally new, unrelated to anything past, unrelated to anything in the future. Then you become like the sky, like the planets, like air, not receiving any impression. Air does not receive any impression. You burn sandal wood here, it is very nice, it gives a lovely smell for a few minutes and then it is gone. The entire nature is like that; a tree grows, and it decays, it dies, it is gone. No impression is ever left in nature. In nature, nothing natural leaves an impression behind. All experiences are experienced for the time being, and when the experience leaves, that is the end of it. No trace is left; and therefore there is no 'me' in the yogi. When the memory goes, the 'me' is also gone.

Four things are mentioned as possible aids to this enlightenment.

First: *adhyatmavidyadhigamah* - relentless pursuit, that is not quite right, relentless seeking, and that is not quite right, of self-knowledge. The yogi is constantly engaged or involved in self-knowledge.

The second aid to enlightenment is *sadhusangama* - constant company with holy men, or women, or books, so that the mind, which is a bundle of memory, is not allowed to slip back into the state of ignorance. Otherwise this kind of meeting is of no use at all. In *sadhusangama* or *satsanga*, the idea is that the mind is not allowed to slip back into the state of ignorance. One is constantly reminded that that is not it, this is it; this is the truth, not that.

The third aid is *vaanasam parityagah* - the abandonment of immortalising memory. It is at the moment when an experience leaves an impression, becomes a memory that the 'me' is formed, and it is that 'me' that wants to perpetuate a certain experience, whether it likes it or dislikes it, whether it is a pleasant or an unpleasant pleasant experience. *Vasana* is not even a memory, it is only an idea. *Vasana* means an impression, *vasana* means the mental conditioning, *vasana* means a tendency, and *vasana* also means a fragrance. You light an *agarbati* here and the scent is wafted away. As long as it is there, it is there. And it goes. But in my case it carries on, it determines later how I act and how I experience life. That must be ruthlessly abandoned. This means its truth as a non-existent myth must be really seen, and in order to see that, you need the inner light.

The fourth aid is called *pranaspandanirodhanam*. The only yoga practice, according to the modern definition, that is strongly recommended in the *Yoga Vasistha* is *pranayama*. The *pranayama* of the *Yoga Vasistha* is fairly complicated,

not merely inhale, exhale, and hold; it is correct and immediate understanding of the movement of prana. Where does prana vibrate? How does prana vibrate? How do the cells even of this body live? And to what extent does the vitality of the body or the vital essence of this body, or the prana circulate. It is a very complicated thing. That is the only physical practice that is recommended. But what is most essential is an understanding of the movement of the life force, not merely the breath. How is life maintained? What is life? What does life mean? What keeps it going? Vague theories are not enough - it must be understood immediately. Without complicating it further by reforming this, or trying to change it, can one directly and immediately understand it? Then there is immediate enlightenment.