

# Ātma Vichāraṇa (Self-Inquiry)

## How Should Self-Inquiry Be Done? Why Should It Be Done?

ॐ This chapter draws from the Varahopaniṣad, Bhagavad Gita, Kathopanishad, Vivekachudamani, Amritabindupanishad, Yoga Vasishtha, Mandukya Gaudapada Karika, and the teachings of Brahmaṛṣi Sadguru Sri Swami Ramananda Paramahansa. It presents the path of Self-Inquiry (Ātma Vichāraṇa) — the direct investigation into the nature of the 'I' — as the supreme means to liberation.



### Part I: The Necessity of Self-Inquiry

***Ātmanātmā vivekena punaḥ saṃsāra nivṛttiḥ Tadvina janma koṭyāpi bandha  
cchedona siddhyati (Vārāhopaniṣad)***

Through discrimination between the Ātmā (True Self) and Anātmā (non-Self) alone, saṃsāra [the cycle of worldly existence] ceases to recur.

Without that discrimination, even in crores of births, the severing of the bonds of saṃsāra cannot be achieved.

***Cittasya śuddhaye karma na tu vastu siddhaye Vastu siddhi rvicāreṇa na kiṃcit  
karma koṭibhiḥ (Vivekacūḍāmaṇi–11)***

All actions are for the purification of the mind — not for the attainment of the Ātma-vasu (the substance of the Self).

However, the Ātmā can be attained only through Vichāraṇa (inquiry/investigation), not through crores of actions.

Here, chitta-śuddhi (purification of consciousness/mind) is mentioned as secondary.

That is, Vedic karmas (prescribed duties/rituals) bring about ordinary mental purification.

But as stated — 'Śuddhānta karaṇam jñeyam... yogayukto viśuddhātmā' — through Yoga, complete mental purification is achieved.

That alone is the means.

'Vichāraṇāt jāyate jñānam' — through inquiry, knowledge arises.

'Jñānādeva tu kaivalyam' — through knowledge alone comes liberation.

This is why a human being truly justifies being called human only if he is contemplative.

However, not everyone is capable of Self-inquiry.

***Bahuvyākulacittānāṃ vichārāt tattva dhīrna hi yogomukya tarseṣṭānāṃ dhīḥ  
darpastena naśyati (Śrī Vidyāraṇya's Vedānta Pañcadaśī)***

For those engrossed in worldly affairs — those whose minds are very scattered — Ātma-tattva (Self-essence) inquiry is not possible.

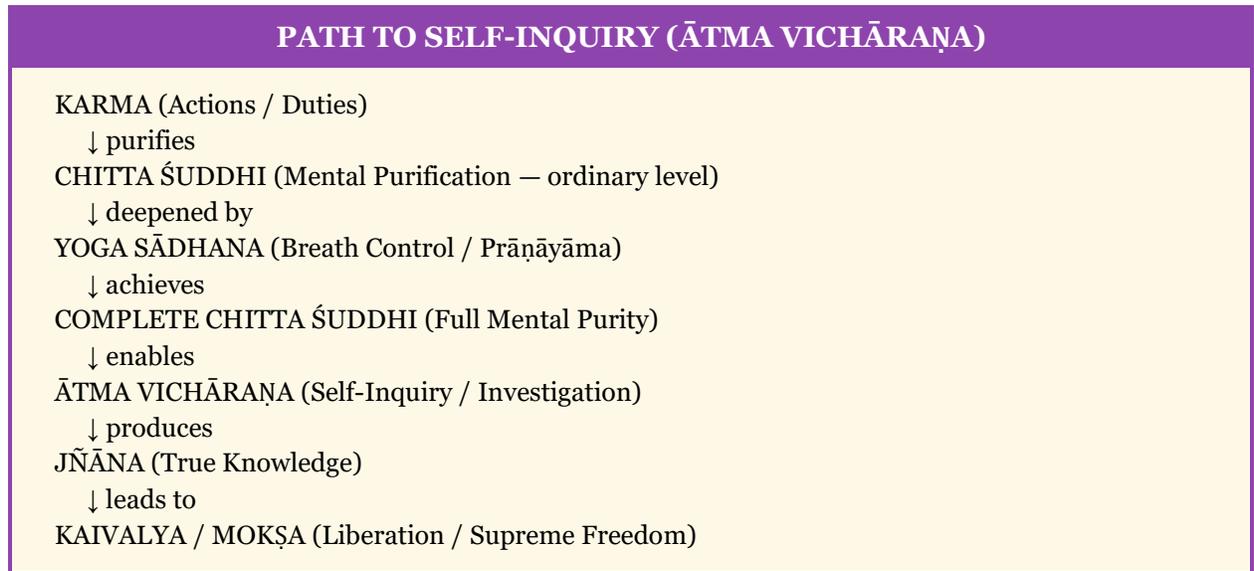
For such people, sādhana (spiritual practice) is primary, and through it the pride of the intellect is being destroyed.

Therefore, it is determined that those caught in the cycle of existence cannot do Ātma Vichāraṇa without first practicing Yoga.

Thus, those who seek liberation must first practice Yoga and then proceed to Ātma Vichāraṇa.



◆ **Concept Map: The Path to Ātma Vichāraṇa**



**Part II: The Nature of Ātmā, Brahman, and Their Relationship**

'Tat Brahma sa ātmā' — Brahman alone is the Ātmā.

Brahman has no upādhi (limiting adjunct/conditioning).

The Ātmā has an upādhi.

*(Upādhi means the basis or support that makes the existence of a thing known.)*

The Ātmā — in the original/source form — is called Paramātmā (Supreme Self), and in the reflected form is called Jivātmā (individual soul).

Māyā or Prakṛti (Nature) as upādhi makes one Īśvara (God), and avidyā (ignorance) as upādhi makes one a Jīva (individual being).

***Brahmaṇaḥ sākṣāt nānā vicitra jagannirmāṇa sāmārthya ka buddhi rūpaka  
brahmaśakti reva prakṛtiḥ (Nirālambo'paniṣad – 5)***

From the proximity of Brahman, the power of Brahman that exists in the form of Buddhi (intellect), capable of creating the wondrous universe in manifold ways — that is Prakṛti.

***Brahmaiva svaśakti prakṛtyā-bhidheyam lokān sṛṣtvā praviśyāntarātmīve  
brahmaādināṃ buddhendriya niyantrtvādiśvaratā (Nirālambo'paniṣad – 4)***

Īśvara (God) means: Brahman itself, with its own power assuming Īśvaratva (divine lordship), having created the visible worlds, having entered as the Antarātmā (inner controller/witness) of all beings from Brahmā onwards — He who controls the intellect and senses of those beings.

***Dehādeh parataratatvāt brahmaiva paramātmā (Nirālambo'paniṣad – 5)***

Since Brahman is beyond all bodies and beyond everything else, Brahman alone is called Paramātmā.

***Hṛdaya kuhara madhye kevalaṃ brahma aham aham iti sākṣāt ātmarūpeṇa  
bhāti prāṇa calana rodhāt ānandamagna vedakuvā hṛdaya guhale praviśya  
ātma niṣṭhudeva kammu!***

Only Brahman — without any upādhi — in the cave of the heart, shines as 'I am I' in the form of the Self.

Stopping the movement of Prāṇa, merged in bliss, searching — entering the cave of the heart — become established in the Ātmā!

What the above description reveals is: the one undivided, non-dual Brahman, assuming upādhis for itself, transforms — as Ātmā, as Paramātmā (with that Ātmā as the source), as Prakṛti, and as Jivātmā.

Currently, in the body we see as an individual Jīva, as Prāṇa, and as mind — it appears to have undergone transformation.

Things that have the six modifications — birth, growth, existence, change, decay, and death — whatever such things are — are not true/real.

That which exists at one time and does not exist at another — that which truly does not permanently exist — we call 'Asat' (unreal/non-existent).

Only Brahman is Satya (Truth/Reality). All else is asatya (unreal/illusory).

Attributing modifications/changes to the unchanging is called 'Adhyāsa' (superimposition).

Therefore, when adhyāsa is removed, only the true substance remains.

Due to adhyāsa, samsāra and its sufferings arise.

Therefore, when investigated/inquired, the adhyāsa is destroyed, and the eternally blissful Sat-Chit-Ānanda alone remains.

This removal of adhyāsa or superimposition is 'Ātma Vichāraṇa.'

To recognize an object in darkness, one needs adequate light.

Furthermore, one also needs the ability and knowledge to identify that object as what it truly is.

Just as the knowledge that the horns on a donkey are really ears — not horns — when revealed in light, the truth becomes apparent and the delusion is removed.

Light (Yoga) is needed to generate the power for recognition of reality.

Ātma-tattva-jñāna (Self-knowledge) is needed to recognize the truth.

That is, through Prāṇa one should attain 'Yoga' and through the mind one should attain 'Jñāna' (knowledge).

### ***Citta vāyuvat citrakṛyāyutā śākhayodvaru śakti mūlakā (Upadeśa Sāra)***

From one single power/source, two branches emerge — the mind (Manas) and Prāṇa (vital force/breath).

### ***Dve bījaṃ cittavṛkṣasya prāṇaspandana vāsanā ekasminśca tayoh kṣiṇe kṣiprameva api naśyati (Muktikopaniṣad 2-7)***

The tree of Chitta (consciousness) has two seeds: the movement of Prāṇa, and the Vāsanās (latent impressions/desires).

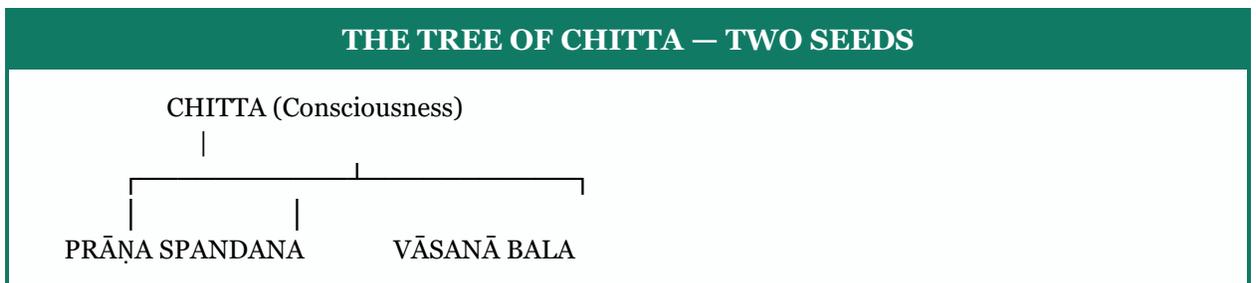
When one of these two decays/diminishes, the other immediately perishes too.

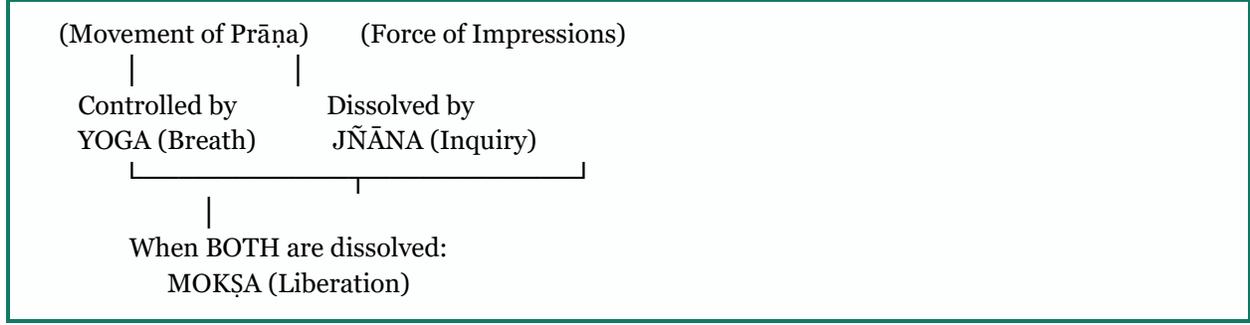
However, gaining control over just one of these two alone is difficult.

Therefore, both must be dissolved at the same time.



### **◆ Diagram: The Tree of Chitta (Consciousness)**





### Part III: The Nature of Mind and the 'I' Thought

***Manasaḥ spandanaṃ prāṇam prāṇasya spandanaṃ manaḥ etau viharato nityam  
anyonyaṃ ratha sārathēy (Yoga Vāsiṣṭha)***

When a chariot is moving, there is the one who sits in the chariot (charioteer) and the one who drives the chariot (chariot-driver).

Prāṇa and mind mutually act as charioteer and chariot-driver for each other.

Example: During Prāṇāyāma, Prāṇa acts as the chariot-driver and the mind acts as the charioteer – meaning Prāṇa is pulling/directing the mind upward.

Similarly, when we think deeply, the mind acts as the chariot-driver and Prāṇa acts as the charioteer – meaning the mind is directing/pulling Prāṇa upward.

The prayers, Japa (chanting), and Stotras (hymns) we do create this same state.

Most people in the world easily follow and practice this method.

However, due to Kapha (phlegm/mucus) forming daily in the Nāḍīs (energy channels), Nāḍī-śuddhi (purification of channels) does not occur through the mind alone.

Therefore, Yoga sādhana is the primary/most important practice.

Even so, if along with Prāṇāyāma the mind is also directed in single thought, it becomes completely under control.

***Prāṇabandhanālīna mānasakam eka cintanān nāśa meti tadāyāti (Upadeśa  
Sāra)***

When the mind that is caught and bound by Prāṇa-bandha (breath-binding) is placed in single-pointed thought, it gets dissolved/destroyed.

#### How to Achieve Single-Pointed Thought?

Before achieving single-pointed thought, one must know the nature of the mind.

Mind means a bundle of thoughts.

'Mana' (mind) means Brahman itself.

When many knots are tied on a rope, it becomes a 'mind' (Manas).

When the knots are removed, only the rope remains.

From the very beginning, only the rope exists.

But when it is wrapped with many knots, the 'world' (Loka) is created.

Still water in a pond creating waves — through those waves an illusion arises as if the water is flowing toward the bank.

Similarly, even though the ocean appears tumultuous with great waves, the ocean does not move even a single inch to the side or move forward.

That is, at its core/center, it remains forever still.

Similarly, beginning with just one wave called 'I' (Nenu/Aham), later emerging as many waves in the form of many thoughts — this world is being created.

These are called 'Chitta Vṛttis' (mental modifications/fluctuations).

All these Vṛttis (modifications) begin from the first Vṛtti of 'Aham' (I).

### ***Vṛtti yastu ahaṃ vṛtti māśraya vṛttayo mano vidyahaṃ manaḥ (Upadeśa Sāra)***

All Vṛttis are dependent on the Aham-Vṛtti (I-thought).

This collection of all Vṛttis is the mind.

Therefore, mind means the very first thought/conception of 'I' (Aham).

When we wake up from sleep, we immediately look at our body and think about the world.

That is, we are thinking new thoughts based on the Vāsanās (impressions) we had accumulated until now.

But all these thoughts arise from the first thought 'I' — we fail to understand or grasp this.

Just as in the morning a hen comes out of the coop, followed by its chicks, and in the evening when the hen returns to the coop all the chicks also return with the mother —

Similarly, while sleeping, the mind (like the mother hen) rests in the coop, and other thoughts (chicks) are absent — this is the state we attain in deep sleep.

When waking up, as soon as the 'I' (mother hen) emerges — immediately 'I have this body, and for this body the desires for food, pleasures, and the resulting happiness and sorrow' — these many chick-thoughts come and keep flowing.

That is, from the mother-hen, day by day the chicks grow, and this world and our samsāra becomes vast and expansive.

And for happiness and peace, we keep searching in this very world.

But even if some of our desires are fulfilled, they too are chicks born from the mother-hen.

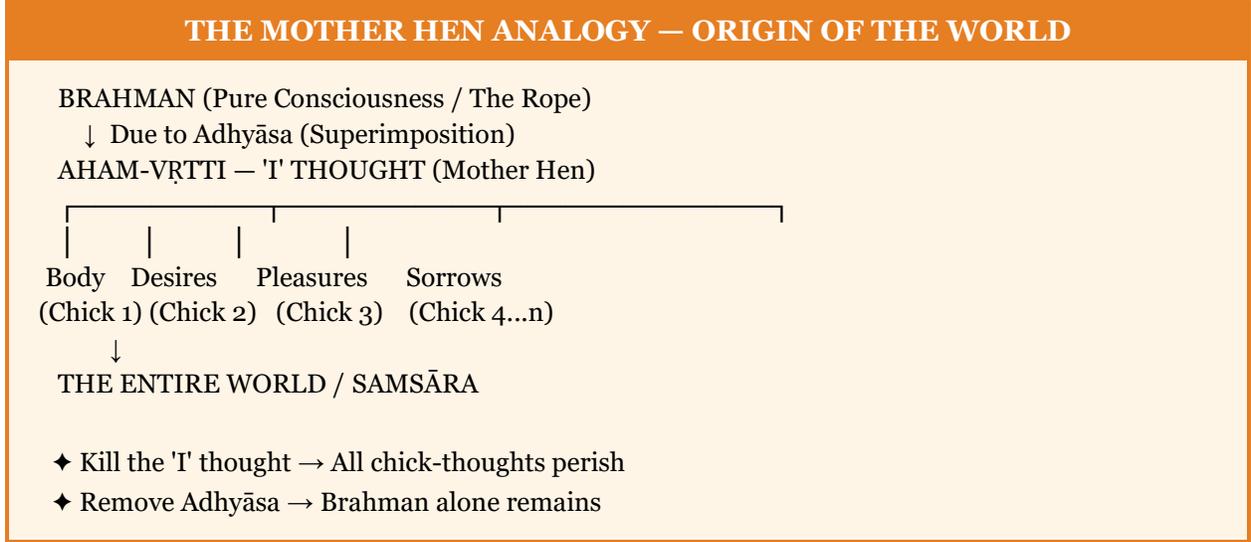
But we do not know the mother's origin.

The root cause of our samsāra's three-fold suffering (Tāpatraya — Ādhyātmika, Ādhibhautika, Ādhidaivika) and the three types of Karma-phala (fruits of karma — Āgāmī, Sañcita, Prārabdha) is this 'I' — this mother-hen.

Therefore, if the mother-hen is killed, all the chicks also die along with the mother.



### ◆ Diagram: The 'I' Thought and the World



## Part IV: Bondage, Liberation, and the Practice of Self-Inquiry

***Mana eva manuṣyāṇāṃ kāraṇaṃ bandha mokṣayoḥ bandhāya viṣayāsaktaṃ  
muktiḥ nirviṣayaṃ smṛtam (Amṛtabindūpaniṣad – 2)***

The mind alone is the cause for both bondage and liberation.

Attachment to sense objects causes bondage; the state without sense-objects leads to liberation.

Here, mind means the first conception of 'I' (Aham).

From this first conception 'I,' the three world-Vāsanās (desires related to the three worlds) are created, leading to bondage.

When 'I' is absent, the thought-free state is liberation.

Therefore, Ātma Vichāraṇa means: abandoning all other conceptions that arise from 'I,' focusing only on the 'I,' and then making that 'I' also cease to exist.

But due to the Vāsanās accumulated over crores of births, abandoning all external conceptions and focusing on this 'I' is not an easy task — as we clearly know.

It is like trying to hold still the trunk of a powerful elephant.

But when investigated with subtle intelligence, even such a powerful trunk can be controlled by placing a small chain or iron ring at its tip.

Similarly, repeatedly thinking about from where this 'I' conception comes, and investigating — it will be clearly observed that other thoughts begin to diminish.

When burning a corpse at a cremation pyre, one takes one log and uses it to push and arrange other logs — and when all logs are burned, that first log is also thrown into the pyre.

In the same way, to burn the mind (this pyre of thoughts), taking the 'I' conception out and repeatedly questioning 'Who am I? Who is this that says I?' —

Along with the body-identity and all other world-Vāsanās, they all burn away.

Finally, this 'I' log also burns out.

The Jīva that had gained adhyāsa (superimposition) as 'I' is burned away.

The one who said 'I' ceases to exist.

The Ātmā remains, shining as 'I Am I' in the heart-lotus.

It does not say 'I' — it simply remains as 'I' — the True Self.

***Deho na jānāti sato na janma deha pramāṇo na udeti madhye ahaṃkṛti granthi  
vibanna sūkṣmaśarīra ceto bhava jīva nāma (Sadvidyā-26)***

The visible body is inert matter — it knows nothing by itself, and so it cannot say 'I.'

The Ātmā inside, in its true form, also does not say 'I' — since it has no agency (kartṛtva).

But something between this inert matter and pure consciousness — a 'third entity' — is saying 'I.'

In reality, it does not exist.

Yet through adhyāsa (superimposition), it appears to exist under seven names: (1) Ahaṃkāra (ego), (2) Chid-Jaḍa-Granthi (knot between consciousness and matter), (3) Bandha (bondage), (4) Sūkṣma Śarīra (subtle body), (5) Manas (mind), (6) Samsāra, (7) Jīva.

It gains existence like a shadow dependent on a body.

Though this 'mind-entity' has no true existence — just as a person who belongs to neither the bride's nor the groom's family temporarily pretends to be an important person at a wedding, acts big before both families, and settles in as a key person for both —

Similarly, the mind creates greatness between inert matter and consciousness, causes grave sinful acts through them, and when the fruits of those sins become unbearable —

They call out to that 'I' — 'O I! You who came — protect us!' — and that 'I' suddenly disappears.

The Ātmā that was witnessing as a silent spectator all along is realized — 'I am present' — and this experience leads to liberation from all suffering.

Therefore, investigating with all the conceptions that arise from the mind, even for crores of births in this world, liberation does not come.

Taking that very first conception 'I' from the mind as the tool, and questioning the very root of the mind — 'Who is this I? Who is asking?' — then that mind ceases to exist.

***Boddhāram ātmanam vijñānato yo bodhāt sa kiṃ syāt tat paramārtha bodhat  
bodhasya bodhyasya ca saṃśraya svaṃ vijānatas tat dvitayaṃ vinaśet  
(Sadvidyā–13)***

Directing the gaze toward the Ātmā called 'the Knower/Witness' (Boddhāra), without knowing it, but knowing the world that arose from it — the knowledge thus gained is not Paramārtha-Bodha (knowledge of ultimate truth).

Like knowing everything in the light from a bulb — but looking at only what the light shows — is not true knowledge.

But turning the gaze back toward the bulb itself — knowing the source that illuminates everything — then we become 'those who know the one who knows everything.'

This is Āditya-vat Jñāna (knowledge like the Sun — that which illumines and is self-luminous).

Then the triad of knower, knowledge, and known (Jñātā, Jñānam, Jñeyam) dissolves.

The mind that goes outward through the ten senses should be made single/unified through Prāṇāyāma.

This is the practice of 'Ekādaśī' (the eleventh — collecting the scattered ten senses plus mind as one).

Thus, centering the mind and returning it to its source, dissolving it in the Ātmā — this is 'Dvādaśa Pāraṇa' (the twelfth — total dissolution).

This is what the Bhāgavatam calls 'Ambarīṣopākhyānam' (the story of Ambarīṣa).



## **Part V: The Unity of Jīvātmā and Paramātmā**

We generally think that Paramātmā is one but Jīvātmās are many.

If so, how can the many Jīvātmās become one with Paramātmā?

***Eka eva hi bhūtātmā bhūte bhūte vyavasthitaḥ ekadha bahudha caiva dṛśyate  
jalacandravat (Amṛtabindūpaniṣad – 12)***

The Bhūtātmā (Soul of all beings) is only one, yet situated in each and every being.

It appears as one and also as many — just as the one moon reflects in many bodies of water.

***Agni ryadhe ko bhuvanaṃ pratiṣṭho rūpaṃ rūpaṃ pratirupo babhūva ekastadha  
sarva bhūtāntarātmā rūpaṃ rūpaṃ pratirupo bahiṣca (Kaṭhopaniṣad 2–95)***

Fire, though one element, established on earth appears in many forms at many places. Similarly, the Antarātmā (inner Self), though one, appears externally as many beings in many forms.

Thus, the Paramātmā in the original/source form (Bimba-rūpa) appears as many Jīvātmās in reflected forms (Pratibimba-rūpa).

The Bimba (original) is Satya (true/real).

The Pratibimbas (reflections) are Asatya (unreal/illusory).

When we recognize that we Jīvātmās are unreal, these bodies are unreal — and that the Paramātmā alone, within us as the Sarva-antarātmā (inner controller of all), is the only truth — this recognition is the Aikya (unity) of Jīvātmā and Paramātmā.

### ◆ The TV Broadcast Analogy

Let us imagine we are watching TV.

Suppose we are watching a cricket match being broadcast live from Delhi on our TV.

Let us imagine the cameraman recording the match in Delhi as Paramātmā.

From there alone, it is being broadcast in all TVs.

All these TVs are the Jīvātmās.

Just as the match is happening there and just as it is being recorded — in the same way we are watching it here.

When we watch with complete focus — when our entire mind is engrossed in that match — we think we are sitting in the cricket stadium in Delhi.

At that time, it does not come to our attention that we are watching it in our TV here, nor that it is being broadcast from the camera in Delhi.

The reason: the match in the original form at that place, and the match in the reflected form in our TV — both are one.

That is, the cameraman there and we here have become one.

That is, the Transmitter and the Receiver have become one.

That is, Bimba and Pratibimba have become one.

That is, Jīvātmā and Paramātmā have united.

Analyzing this further... since the one who is watching here and the one who is recording have become one through identification (Tādātmya), the viewer has transformed into the recorder —

And he has also reached the state of being broadcast in all TVs.

That is, this reflecting Jīva has become the source Paramātmā and is also reflecting in other Jīvas.

Analyzing still further... the power in the eyes of the one recording and the power in the eyes of the one watching are one and the same.

That is, the Draṣṭā (Seer/Witness) is one.

From that one Draṣṭā, the Bimba (original) and Pratibimba (reflection) arose.



Similarly, crores of cells are decaying and being destroyed through excretions.

From childhood the body has been growing heavier, becoming gross, and when diseased, becoming thin — we constantly observe this.

All these changes depend upon some consciousness/energy inside.

That is the 'True I' (the Parabrahman) — the True Self.

But along with changes in the body, the mind also changes, creating another 'I' (the False I) anew — thinking 'this is permanent,' and covering/suppressing the inner permanent Parabrahman.

Similarly, this newly born false 'I' and the world we see are also constantly changing.

This creation too has growth and decay.

The seed sown in the ground today sprouts tomorrow, starts to grow from the day after, becoming a tree.

All rivers swell during the rainy season and dry up in summer.

The earth, the sun, planets, and stars — all are growing, and at the time of dissolution are reduced to dust.

Time too passes through countless Yugas (cosmic epochs), and at no one time does any creation remain in the same form.

Everything that is seen keeps changing.

Therefore, it must perish at some time.

But the one who sees does not change. He is the Truth.

### ***Ya dṛśyaṃ tannāśyam ya dṛk tat satyam (Śruti)***

That which is seen/visible is perishable. That which sees/is the seer — that is the Truth.

### ***Nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ ubhayorapi dṛṣṭo'ntah tvanayos tattva darśibhiḥ (B.G. 2-16)***

That which does not exist cannot come into existence.

That which exists can never cease to exist.

The one who recognizes the difference between these two is the one who has seen the truth.

Therefore, the one who does Ātma Vichāraṇa must always hold in mind: 'the body, the world etc. are perishable/impermanent — and the inner witness/seer alone is the Truth.'

For this, Ekāgratā (single-pointedness/concentration) is needed.

For concentration, Yoga is needed.

For recognizing the truth through investigation, Jñāna (knowledge) is needed.

### **Sṛṣṭi-Dṛṣṭi (Creation-first Vision)**

This is the understanding of ordinary/common people.

That is, first comes creation (Sṛṣṭi), then comes perception (Dṛṣṭi).

That is, when we are asleep, since our mind and thoughts are absent, in sleep we have no body or world.

But immediately upon waking, we see both.

Therefore, we think both must have existed even in sleep.

Others who are sleeping — even though they have no body-awareness — we see their bodies, do we not?

Similarly, even when we are sleeping, our body and this creation also exist — we think.

The reason for this is the firm Vāsanā/impression created in our mind.

Those Vāsanā-seeds sprout when waking up from sleep.

That is why, whether in sleep or in the waking state, we think: 'I always have a body; this creation exists permanently.'

### **Dṛṣṭi-Sṛṣṭi (Vision-first Creation)**

This is the understanding of Jñānis (wise/enlightened ones).

That is, where there is Vision/Perception (Dṛṣṭi), there is creation.

When there is no vision/perception, creation ceases.

That is, for one with Jñāna-Dṛṣṭi (knowledge-vision), there is no separate body or world.

Those practicing Yoga and achieving single-pointedness must cultivate this vision.

How so? 'I am the Ātman, the Draṣṭā (witness), the Dṛk (pure consciousness), the eternal one, the real one, only consciousness' —

And: 'The seen objects of the three states (waking, dream, deep sleep), the experiences related to those states — they belong to those states, but they are not mine' — thus one should contemplate.

One who is in an ordinary environment: if they go to Shimla or Darjeeling, they experience cold; if to a desert, extreme heat.

But a Jñāni knows: those experiences are the pleasures and conditions of those places — not his own.

While dreaming, the dream-objects are limited to that dream only.

Similarly, the pleasures and sufferings arising in the waking state are limited to that state — they don't truly belong to you.

Knowing that one travels through three states, and that there is no real relationship between them and oneself — knowing that when one transitions to another state, the previous creation is no longer — this is a Jñāni.

Therefore, though existing with the three Guṇas (qualities), though in three states — knowing there is no relationship between them and oneself, those things exist within oneself but one is not in them:

***Anāditvānirguṇatvāt paramātmāyam avyayaḥ śarīrastho'pi kaunteya na karoti na lipyate (B.G. 13-31)***

'O Arjuna! I, the eternal, attributeless, imperishable Paramātmā, though existing in bodies, do not do anything, nor do I get attached to anything.'

Even though creation exists, for one who is unattached to it, it is as if it doesn't exist.

This is Dṛṣṭi-Sṛṣṭi.

Though having qualities, for the Guṇātīta (one who has transcended qualities), it is as if there are no qualities.

***Sarvendriya guṇābhāsaṃ sarvendriya vivarjitam asaktaṃ sarvabr̥chaiva  
nirguṇaṃ guṇabhokṭṛ ca (B.G. 13-14)***

Paramātmā shines through all the senses, yet is beyond all sensory pleasure and pain.

With no attachment, yet appearing like one with attachment.

Without qualities (Nirguṇam) yet appearing as one who experiences qualities.

***Draṣṭā dṛśya vaśādaabandho dṛśyābhāve vimucyate (Māṇḍūkya Gauḍapāda  
Kārikā)***

The Draṣṭā (seer) is bound by being a slave to the Dṛśya (seen).

When the seen ceases, the seer is liberated.

Therefore, both the existence and non-existence of the Dṛśya are states of thought.

Therefore, firmly establishing the thought that 'there is no Dṛśya' is Mokṣa (liberation).



### ◆ Diagram: Two Views of Reality

TWO WORLDVIEWS: SRṢṬI-DRṢṬI vs DRṢṬI-SRṢṬI	
ORDINARY PERSON	JÑĀNI (Wise One)
SRṢṬI-DRṢṬI	DRṢṬI-SRṢṬI
(Creation → Vision)	(Vision → Creation)
World exists first → then I see it	Consciousness first → World appears in it
Body = REAL (permanent)	Body = UNREAL (changing)
Self = doubtful	Self = the only TRUTH
Bound by what is seen (Dṛśya-bandha)	Free — sees, but unbound (Dṛk-svarūpa)

Result: BONDAGE

Result: LIBERATION (Mokṣa)



## Part VII: Dhyāna (Meditation) — Its True Nature and Practice

By 'Dhyāna' (meditation) we generally understand: closing the eyes and focusing the mind on a particular form, or observing the breath without thinking about anything.

We do not need to make much effort for this.

Therefore, this appears practically suitable for most people.

From doing this, the mind's agitated nature diminishes and some peace is experienced.

But when investigating the changes happening in the mind and body during meditation, one can understand that the goal/target of meditation has not been achieved.

Therefore, every single person doing meditation should not rush thinking they have reached a complete state.

The reason: not knowing the complete experience of meditation, and not practicing according to the scriptures.

Meditation has two states:

- 1) Dhyāna that has the triad of Dhyātā (meditator), Dhyāna (meditation), and Dhyeya (object of meditation). This is considered as the Sādhana (practice) aspect by everyone.
- 2) 'Dhyānam nirvishayam manaḥ' — the state of mind with no thought/object is Dhyāna. This is not the Sādhana aspect. It is only the experience/fruit gained through Sādhana.

***Abhedadarśanaṃ jñānaṃ dhyānaṃ nirvīṣayaṃ manaḥ snanam manomalā  
tyāgaśaucimindriya nigrahaḥ (Skandopaniṣad –11)***

When meditating, by closing the eyes, the external visible world is not seen.

But the mind keeps wandering inside.

Initially there are more thoughts, but they keep decreasing gradually.

But those who meditate must sit upright — with head, neck, and spine completely straight.

But those who only meditate — without exception — fail here, and tilt their head, neck, and body forward, gradually drifting into sleep.

This is because there is insufficient blood circulation to the brain (Ischemia to the brain).

When sitting awake, the neck stays upright because the brain is receiving the blood needed for wakefulness.

Similarly, the mind inside is also in a state of alertness — this should be understood.

In the brain there is a special system in the brain stem called the Ascending Reticular Activating System (ARAS).

Only when sufficient blood circulates to this area can the neck region stay upright and remain in a wakeful state.

When it slows down, we begin to fall asleep.

We are doing meditation only for the sake of knowledge.

That is, knowledge arises only in an alert and awakened state — not in a fainting state or in sleep.

We cannot gain knowledge in a state of intellectual dullness, can we?

Similarly, merely because the breath rate slows down, knowledge does not arise.

In sleep, the downward-moving breath causes the Prāṇa force going to the head to decrease, and the head becomes heavy.

This is what everyone who meditates generally experiences.

But:

***Samaṃ kāyaśiroghrīvaṃ dhārayannacalaṃ sthīram samprekṣya nāsikāgraṃ  
svaṃ dīśaścānavalokayan (B.G. 6-13)***

Keeping the body, neck, and head still and straight without moving — without looking in any direction — 'with eyes open' — focusing only at the tip of the nose (or the midpoint of the eyebrows) — one should hold this contemplation.

***Sparsānkr̥tvā bahīrbāhyān cakṣuṣcaiva antarebhruvoh prāṇāpānau samau  
kr̥tvā nāsābhyantara cāriṇau (B.G. 5-27)***

Keeping the gaze fixed at the space between the eyebrows — equalizing the Prāṇa and Apāna moving inside the nose (through the Nāsopharynx) in the throat — thus the Paramātmā has described the Yoga Sādhana.

Withdrawing the mind from the external objects of sound, touch, form, taste, and smell:

***Puṭadvaya vinimurkto vāyur atrā vilīyate tatra samsthitaṃ manaḥ kr̥tvā taṃ  
dhāyet pāramīśvaram (Uttarāgītā 1-16)***

Practicing Yoga — eliminating the breath from the two nostrils — that is, channeling the Prāṇa force from the Iḍā and Piṅgalā Nāḍīs into the Suṣumnā (central channel) — one should meditate on Īśvara at the seat of God which is the midpoint of the eyebrows (Bhrūmadhya).

***Jyotirliṅgaṃ bhruvormadhye nityaṃ dhāyet sadā yatīḥ (Brahmavidyopaniṣad –  
55)***

By saying that Yatis (renunciants) should always meditate on the Ātma-Jyoti (light of the Self) in the space between the eyebrows — it is understood that before Dhyāna (the seventh limb of Ashtānga Yoga), Prāṇāyāma must be completed.

So doing Dhyāna properly means: keeping the body upright, doing Prāṇāpāna Saṃgharṣaṇam (friction/collision of Prāṇa and Apāna), increasing the Yogāgni (Yogic fire) in the body and head, and with a still mind — beholding the Ātma-Jyoti.

***Dhyāna nirmathana abhyāsāt (Śvetāśvataropaniṣad 1-14)***

***Omityekākṣaram brahma vyāharan māmanusmaran yaḥ prayāti tyajan dehaṃ  
sa yāti paramāṃ gatim (B.G. 8-13)***

By these teachings, it is understood that Yoga without proper Sādhana is useless.

It is like trying to rub a wet stick — with camphor — without allowing it to fly away — it is of no use.

The essence from a medicinal herb is released by finely grinding it — simply taking the whole herb is of no use.

***Nāsti dhyānam yoginaḥ***

'For non-Yogis, Dhyāna does not truly exist.'

***Viviktasevī laghvāśī yatavākkāyamānasaḥ dhyānayogaparaḥ nityaṃ vairāgyaṃ  
samupāśritaḥ (B.G. 18-52)***

Living in solitude, eating lightly, controlling speech, body and mind — the Yogi devoted to Dhyāna-Yoga, having attained Vairāgya (dispassion/renunciation) — becomes Brahma-Bhūta (established in Brahman).

***Vāgdaṇḍe maunam mātiṣṭhet kāyadaṇḍe tvabhōjayam mānasetu dhṛto daṇḍaḥ  
prāṇāyāmo vidīyate (Sanyāsopaniṣad 2-21)***

Silence for speech, dietary discipline for the body, Prāṇāyāma for the mind — these three disciplines embraced by a Yogi make him capable of Dhyāna-Yoga.

This means Yoga and Dhyāna are inseparable.

Wherever scriptures mention Yoga, Dhyāna is also implied — and wherever Dhyāna is mentioned, Yoga is also implied.

Only those who practice Vāyu-Sādhana (breath-practice) can keep the body upright and meditate. All others will have to bow their heads.

But some meditate by only observing the breath — without the rule of keeping the body straight — thinking this alone will restrain mental agitation.

However, in the body nourished by food, impurities keep accumulating continuously.

Through the imbalance of the three Doṣas (Vāta, Pitta, Kapha), Kapha increases in the body, making it diseased and drawing it toward death.

***Nityaṃ sannidhito mṛtyuḥ kartavyaṃ dharma saṃgrahaḥ (Parāśara Smṛti)***

Death is always near/close.

Practicing Dharma (righteousness) is the duty.

By saying this, the connection between dharma and overcoming death is revealed.

***Na tasya rogo na jarā na mṛtyuḥ (Śvetāśvataropaniṣad –12)***

Through Yogic fire (Yogāgni), diseases, old age, and death can be overcome.

Therefore, overcoming the breath through Yogāgni is the duty of a spiritual seeker.

***Mumukṣubhiḥ prāṇajaye kartavyo mokṣa hetave (Tṛśikhī Brāhmaṇopaniṣad)***

For seekers of liberation, control of Prāṇa (Prāṇajaya) should be practiced for the sake of Mokṣa (liberation).

***Adho mukham pravachyāt tat tama sevā kālagajet guru vākyaṭ suṣumnāyaṃ viparīto bhavet japaḥ (Yogaśikhopaniṣad 1-23)***

Through the Guru's instruction, the breath should be made to move in the opposite direction through the Suṣumnā path.

That is, not merely observing the downward-moving breath — but making it go upward — this is how Mokṣa comes to a Jīva.

Making the breath move upward means: through the Prāṇāpāna-Saṃgharṣaṇam (friction between Prāṇa and Apāna), the Yogāgni thus born makes the breath lengthen upward.

Through that power, the Buddhi (intellect) sharpens.

Then, doing Ātma Vichāraṇa, one destroys Ajñāna (ignorance/darkness).

***Vāyunā saha jīvo rdhva jñānī mokṣam avāpnuyāt (Śrī Vidyāraṇya's Vedānta Pañcadaśī)***

With the support of Prāṇa-Vāyu, the Jīva should be taken upward — and the Jñānī thereby attains Mokṣa (liberation).



## ◆ Diagram: Dhyāna — Correct Practice

### THE TWO STATES OF DHYĀNA (MEDITATION)

STATE 1: SĀDHANA DHYĀNA      STATE 2: NAIRVĪṢAYA DHYĀNA  
(Practice / Triad Meditation)      (Fruitful / Thought-Free State)

Dhyātā (Meditator)	No meditator — only Pure Being
+ Dhyāna (Meditation)	No object of meditation
+ Dhyeya (Object)	No thought / No Vṛtti

Requires effort	Beyond effort
Tool: Focus on form/breath	Fruit: Nirvīṣaya Manas

Prerequisites for CORRECT Dhyāna:

1. Straight spine, neck, head (Samam Kāyaśirogrīvam)
2. Eyes open, fixed at Bhrūmadhya (midpoint of brows)
3. Prāṇāyāma — Prāṇāpāna friction → Yogāgni
4. Withdrawal of senses (Pratyāhāra)
5. Suṣumnā activation through Guru's instruction



## Chapter Summary

- Self-Inquiry (Ātma Vichāraṇa) is the direct investigation into the nature of the 'I' — it is the supreme means to Mokṣa (liberation), beyond all rituals and karmas.
- Karmas and rituals only purify the mind at an ordinary level; complete mental purification (chitta-śuddhi) comes through Yoga, and then the Ātmā is realized through Vichāraṇa (inquiry).
- Mind and Prāṇa are two branches from one source-power; both must be simultaneously controlled — Prāṇa through Yoga and mind through Jñāna (inquiry).
- The mind is nothing but a bundle of thoughts — all of which originate from the single 'Aham' (I) thought. Eliminating the 'I' thought dissolves the entire world of suffering.
- Bondage arises from attachment (Vāsanā) and the false 'I'; liberation is the thought-free, object-free state where the Paramātmā shines as 'I Am I' in the heart.
- The Jivātmā and Paramātmā are eternally one — like the moon in many pools of water, or a cricket match transmitted from one camera to countless TVs. When the receiver and transmitter become one in awareness, Aikya (unity) is realized.
- There are two worldviews: Sṛṣṭi-Dṛṣṭi (ordinary view — world first, then perception) and Dṛṣṭi-Sṛṣṭi (Jñāni's view — perception/consciousness first, world arises in it).
- The True 'I' (Parabrahman / Pure Consciousness) never changes; the False 'I' (ego/body-mind identity) is ever-changing, superimposed, and ultimately unreal.
- Proper Dhyāna (meditation) requires keeping the spine, neck, and head upright — with eyes focused at the Bhrūmadhya (midpoint of the eyebrows) — and practicing Prāṇāyāma for the activation of Suṣumnā and Yogāgni.
- Just as the first log at a funeral pyre is used to burn all other logs and is then itself burned — the 'I' thought is used as a tool to dissolve all other thoughts, and is itself finally dissolved.
- Yoga and Dhyāna are inseparable — Dhyāna without Yoga Sādhana is like rubbing a wet stick; knowledge arises only in full wakefulness supported by proper Prāṇa-flow to the brain.
- The ultimate goal: through Prāṇajaya (mastery of Prāṇa) and Ātma Vichāraṇa, the Jīva is led upward to Mokṣa — liberation from all bondage, old age, disease, and death.



## Key Concepts — Sanskrit & Telugu Spiritual Terms

Term	Meaning
Ātma Vichāraṇa	Self-Inquiry — the direct investigation into 'Who am I?' to realize the True Self
Ātmā / Ātman	The True Self / Pure Consciousness — the unchanging witness within
Paramātmā	The Supreme Self — Brahman as the universal source/original

<b>Jīvātmā / Jīva</b>	The individual soul — the reflected 'self' with upādhi (limiting conditions)
<b>Aham / Aham-Vṛtti</b>	The 'I'-thought — the first and root thought from which all other thoughts arise
<b>Adhyāsa</b>	Superimposition — attributing properties of one thing onto another (e.g., ego onto Ātmā)
<b>Brahman</b>	The Absolute Reality — infinite, unchanging, non-dual Consciousness
<b>Māyā / Prakṛti</b>	The cosmic creative power / Nature — the upādhi of Īśvara
<b>Avidyā</b>	Ignorance — the upādhi of the Jīva; cause of bondage
<b>Upādhi</b>	Limiting adjunct — a condition or medium that makes something appear qualified
<b>Chitta Vṛtti</b>	Mental modification/fluctuation — thought-waves in consciousness
<b>Vāsanā</b>	Latent impression/desire — subtle impressions from past actions driving future karma
<b>Samsāra</b>	The cycle of worldly existence — birth, death, and rebirth driven by karma and desire
<b>Prāṇa / Prāṇāyāma</b>	Vital force/breath; its control — the yogic technique of regulating breath
<b>Yoga / Yogāgni</b>	Union; also the practice of union — Yogāgni is the inner fire generated through Yoga
<b>Jñāna</b>	True knowledge — not intellectual knowing, but direct recognition of the Self
<b>Mokṣa / Kaivalya</b>	Liberation / Aloneness — freedom from bondage, the state of realized Selfhood
<b>Dhyāna</b>	Meditation — the seventh limb of Ashtānga Yoga; focused awareness
<b>Draṣṭā / Dṛk</b>	The Seer / Pure Seeing — the unqualified witness consciousness
<b>Dṛśya</b>	The seen/visible — everything that is perceived; ultimately unreal
<b>Sṛṣṭi-Dṛṣṭi</b>	Creation-first worldview — world appears to exist independently of perception
<b>Dṛṣṭi-Sṛṣṭi</b>	Perception-first worldview — world arises in/from consciousness
<b>Bimba / Pratibimba</b>	Original / Reflection — as a TV signal (Paramātmā) and its reception (Jīvātmā)
<b>Suṣumnā / Iḍā / Piṅgalā</b>	Central / Left / Right subtle energy channels (Nāḍīs) in the body
<b>Bhrūmadhya</b>	The midpoint between the eyebrows — the seat of Ātmā-Jyoti; Ājñā Chakra



## Reflective Questions & Answers

### Q1. What is Ātma Vichāraṇa, and why is it considered superior to all other spiritual practices?

A. Ātma Vichāraṇa is the direct investigation into the nature of the 'I' — asking 'Who am I?' and tracing that question back to its source. It is considered superior because karmas and rituals only purify the mind at a surface level, while Ātma Vichāraṇa dissolves the very root of all ignorance — the false 'I' (ego) itself. As the Vivekachudamani states, the Ātmā is attained only through inquiry, never through crores of actions.

### Q2. Why can't everyone do Self-Inquiry directly? What preparation is needed?

A. People with scattered, distracted minds cannot do Ātma Vichāraṇa because the inquiry requires a still, purified mind. The text from Vidyāranya's Vedānta Pañcadaśī says those lost in worldly distractions must first undertake Yoga Sādhana. Yoga purifies the Chitta (consciousness), stills the Prāṇa and mind, and creates the inner stability needed for genuine Self-Inquiry.

### Q3. What is the 'I' thought (Aham-Vṛtti), and why is it considered the root of all suffering?

A. The 'I' thought (Aham-Vṛtti) is the first and most fundamental thought that arises in consciousness. All other thoughts — about the body, desires, fears, pleasures — arise from and depend on this one thought. Like a mother hen from whom all chicks are born, the 'I' thought generates the entire samsāra. The text says the three-fold suffering (Tāpatraya) and the three types of karma-fruits all have the 'I' thought as their root cause. Kill the 'I' thought, and all suffering ends.

### Q4. How does Adhyāsa (superimposition) create bondage, and how does Vichāraṇa remove it?

A. Adhyāsa is the act of attributing the properties of one thing onto another — specifically, superimposing the ego and body-identity onto the pure, unchanging Ātmā. Because of this, we mistake the ever-changing body-mind for our true self. Vichāraṇa (inquiry) reverses this by repeatedly tracing the 'I' back to its source — revealing that it has no independent existence. Just as light dissolves darkness, inquiry dissolves adhyāsa, leaving only the pure Sat-Chit-Ānanda.

### Q5. What does the TV broadcast analogy teach about the unity of Jīvātmā and Paramātmā?

A. The analogy illustrates that Paramātmā is like the cameraman broadcasting a live match; each Jīvātmā is like a TV receiving the broadcast. The image on the TV and the actual match are not two separate realities — they are the same signal in two forms (Bimba and Pratibimba). When a viewer becomes so absorbed that they forget the TV and feel they are at the stadium, the receiver has merged with the transmitter. This is the Aikya (unity) of Jīvātmā and Paramātmā — it's not achieved by going somewhere; it's recognized by removing the illusion of separateness.

### **Q6. What is the difference between Sṛṣṭi-Drṣṭi and Drṣṭi-Sṛṣṭi worldviews?**

A. Sṛṣṭi-Drṣṭi ('creation first, then vision') is the ordinary view — the world exists independently, and we perceive it. Drṣṭi-Sṛṣṭi ('vision first, then creation') is the Jñāni's view — where there is consciousness/perception, there is a world; when consciousness withdraws (as in dreamless sleep), the world disappears. The Jñāni knows that the seen world belongs to the state in which it is seen, and that the true Self — the Seer — is ever free and unchanged by any of it.

### **Q7. How is the 'I' thought used as a tool in Ātma Vichāraṇa, and what happens when it is traced to its source?**

A. The text uses the cremation pyre analogy: one log is used to keep all other logs burning; when all others are ash, that first log too is thrown in. Similarly, the 'I' thought — though itself unreal — is used as the inquiry-tool to burn away all other thoughts ('Who am I? Who is this that says I?'). When all other thoughts have dissolved through this inquiry, the 'I' thought itself has nothing left to hold onto and dissolves. What remains is the pure Ātmā — which shines as 'I Am I' (Aham Aham) without any ego-sense.

### **Q8. What is Yogāgni, and why is it essential for proper Dhyāna?**

A. Yogāgni is the inner fire generated through the friction (Saṃgharṣaṇam) of Prāṇa (inbreath) and Apāna (outbreath) — especially when both are channeled through the Suṣumnā Nāḍī at the Bhrūmadhya (midpoint between the eyebrows). This fire burns away physical and subtle impurities, sharpens the Buddhi (intellect), keeps the practitioner truly awake (not drowsy), and generates the inner light (Ātma-Jyoti) that is the real object of Dhyāna. Without Yogāgni, meditation often collapses into sleepiness.

### **Q9. Why does the text say 'there is no Dhyāna for non-Yogis'?**

A. Dhyāna in its true sense requires a fully controlled, purified, and energized mind. Without Prāṇāyāma and Yoga Sādhana, the physical body accumulates Kapha (phlegm) and impurities, the Prāṇa-flow to the brain is insufficient (Ischemia), and the meditator inevitably becomes drowsy and falls asleep. The 'Nāsti dhyānam yoginaḥ' statement means: what ordinary people call 'meditation' — sitting with closed eyes, nodding — is not true Dhyāna. True Dhyāna is a state of heightened, still awareness, achievable only through the foundation of Yoga.

### **Q10. What is the final fruit of Ātma Vichāraṇa according to this chapter?**

A. The final fruit is Mokṣa — complete liberation from bondage, suffering, old age, disease, and death. When through Prāṇajaya (mastery of breath) and sincere Ātma Vichāraṇa the 'I' thought is fully dissolved, the ego-Jīva dissolves. What remains is the pure Ātmā — the undivided Parabrahman — shining in the cave of the heart as 'I Am I' (Aham Aham). The knower, the knowledge, and the known become one. As the Vedānta Pañcadaśī says: 'With the support of Prāṇa, the Jñāni (Jīva) is taken upward to attain Mokṣa.'