

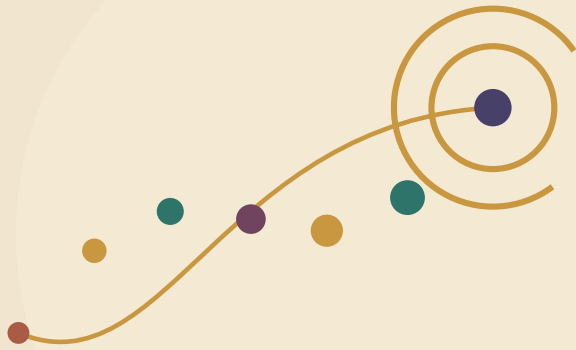
CONSCIOUSNESS SERIES

Atma Bodha

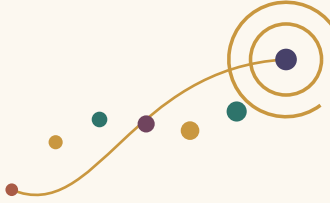
From Witness to Universal Consciousness

An Experiential Inquiry into the Nature of the Self

AN INTRODUCTORY EDITION



DHARMENDRA SINGH



Atma Bodha

From Witness to Universal Consciousness

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No authority.
No required belief.
No promised destination.

No imposed religious doctrine or scientific bias.

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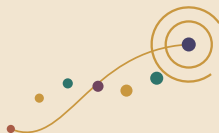
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This educational and reflective work does not replace individualized professional care.

Seven Movements

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From identity to living understanding



Why This Introductory Edition Was Developed

Atma Bodha is a large and gradual inquiry. The complete work moves through sixty-three chapters because its central question cannot honestly be settled by announcing a conclusion: What am I?

It would be easy to begin with the Vedantic answer: You are the Self; Atman is Brahman; Consciousness is one. But an answer received before the question has become alive can remain only a beautiful belief.

This introductory edition was developed as a doorway into the investigation, not as a summary of every conclusion. It follows seven movements - from the ordinary question of identity toward the Witness, the simple fact of 'I Am,' the Vedantic language of appearance and reality, and finally the meaning of understanding in daily life.

My source is the ancient inquiry associated with Atma Bodha, but this is not a conventional verse-by-verse commentary. It is also not another Vedanta textbook. Traditional language enters only after the reader has begun looking directly.

Throughout these pages, three kinds of statement remain distinct: what can be observed in experience, what reasoning may suggest, and what Vedanta teaches. The claim that Atman is Brahman belongs to Vedanta's culmination. You are not asked to accept it before investigating what you ordinarily call yourself.

The word self, in lowercase, refers to the psychological person - identity, memory, personality and the personal 'I.' The capitalized Self refers to Consciousness itself, not to a deeper personality.

No external authority can see on your behalf. A teacher, scripture or book may point; the seeing must occur within the reader. This is what I mean by the Guru within: not another hidden person, but the recognition that the deepest investigation cannot be outsourced.

No authority. No required belief. No promised destination.
Look first. Then consider what the teaching proposes.

Read slowly. When the book asks you to look, look. When it asks you to notice a thought, do not merely understand the instruction - notice the thought.

Do not answer from Vedanta, science, philosophy or memory before examining experience. Where something is directly evident, acknowledge it. Where a conclusion is inferred, say so. Where a tradition makes a metaphysical claim, identify it as tradition. Where nothing clear appears, allow 'I don't know' to remain honest.

This booklet returns to several words - known, Knower, Witness, 'I Am,' Self and Consciousness - but each return has a different purpose. Recurrence should deepen the inquiry rather than restate it.

Before the Answer, the Question

There are questions we ask because we want information.

Then there are questions that begin to rearrange the person asking them.

Who am I?

At first the answer seems obvious.

I am this body.

I am this mind.

I am this personality.

I am this history.

I am the person who has lived these years, loved these people, suffered these losses, made these mistakes and carried these hopes.

None of that needs to be denied.

But look more carefully.

The body changes.

Thought changes.

Emotion changes.

Belief changes.

Relationship changes.

The story changes.

Even our understanding of who we are can change dramatically across a lifetime.

Yet through all of those changes we continue to use one extraordinarily persistent word:

I.

What does it refer to?

That is the question of this book.

The Investigation Is Closer Than Philosophy

Self-inquiry can sound abstract until it enters an ordinary moment.

You are criticized and something contracts.

You are praised and something expands.

You lie awake rehearsing tomorrow.

You look at an old photograph and say, That was me.

You grieve someone you love and feel that part of your own world has disappeared.

You notice the body aging.

You become afraid.

You become still.

And through every one of these experiences, something knows what is happening.

The body is known.

The thought is known.

The emotion is known.

The memory is known.

The fear is known.

Even the thought I don't know who I am is known.

So the inquiry turns:

What is the Knower?

The Question Of The Self



CHAPTER ONE

The Longing to Know

There is a question hidden beneath almost every question we ask in life.

Who am I?

We may not use those words.

We may instead ask:

What will make me happy?

Why am I suffering?

Why do I feel incomplete?

What is the meaning of my life?

What happens when I die?

Is there something more than this?

These questions may appear different, but they can all lead us toward the same place.

Toward ourselves.

The Atma Bodha teaching begins with a person who has developed a longing to know the Self - a person whose mind has become sufficiently quiet and contemplative that ordinary answers no longer seem sufficient. The traditional verse speaks of freedom from cravings, peacefulness and a heart yearning for liberation.

But perhaps we should not misunderstand what this means.

It does not mean that you must first become spiritually perfect before you are allowed to investigate.

It means something much simpler:

You must become willing to look.

When the ordinary answers stop being enough

Most of us spend our lives learning how to live as a person.

We learn our name.

We learn our family.

We learn our culture.

We learn what is expected of us.

We learn what success means.

We learn what failure means.

We learn what we should desire and what we should avoid.

We construct an identity, and then spend much of our lives protecting, improving and defending it.

There is nothing inherently wrong with this.

A functioning identity is necessary for ordinary life.

The difficulty begins when we never question whether this identity is all that we are.

Something in us may eventually begin to ask:

Is this really me?

For some people the question arises through suffering.

For others, through contemplation.

For some it comes after success has failed to provide the happiness they expected.

For others, it may arise very quietly, without any obvious reason.

A person may simply discover that acquiring more knowledge, possessions, experiences or recognition does not answer the deepest question.

Something else is being sought.

Not another object.

Not another experience.

The truth of oneself.

The Known And The Knower



CHAPTER TWO

The Body Is Known

In the previous chapter, we began to question a very ordinary assumption:

What am I taking myself to be?

We saw that the body changes.

Thoughts change.

Emotions change.

Memories change.

Circumstances change.

And yet something seems to remain present through all these changes.

We have not yet said exactly what that something is.

That is deliberate.

The purpose of inquiry is not to hurry toward an answer simply because we are uncomfortable with not knowing.

Sometimes the willingness to remain with a question is itself part of the discovery.

So let us continue.

This time, let us look more closely at what makes up our ordinary experience.

The body is where we begin

The body is probably the most convincing candidate for the Self.

It is tangible.

It is visible.

It accompanies us everywhere.

When someone asks, "Where are you?" we point to the body.

When we look in a mirror, we recognize ourselves through the body.

When the body is touched, we feel it.

When it is injured, we experience pain.

When it is hungry, we say:

I am hungry.

When it is tired, we say:

I am tired.

When it ages, we say:

I am getting older.

There is nothing strange about speaking this way.

The body is undeniably part of our lived experience.

But Atma Bodha asks us to investigate something deeper than ordinary language.

Is the body the one who knows the body?

Look at your hand.

You know your hand is there.

You can see it.

You can feel it.

You can move it.

You can observe its shape.

You can notice changes in it over time.

The hand is known.

Now notice your whole body.

You can be aware of sensations throughout the body.

You can notice discomfort.

You can notice warmth or cold.

You can notice tension and relaxation.

Again, the body is known.

This does not prove everything that Atma Bodha will eventually say about the Self.

But it gives us something important to investigate:

The body is an object of experience.

And if it is known, perhaps we should be careful before saying that the body is the entirety of the knower.



The First Recognition of the Witness

CHAPTER THREE

In the chapters leading to this point, we have been learning to look at ourselves differently.

We began with the assumption that seems so obvious that we rarely question it:

I am this body.

Then we noticed that the body changes.

We looked at the senses and discovered that sensory experience changes.

We looked at the mind and saw thoughts, emotions and desires continually appearing and disappearing.

We looked at the intellect and recognized that even our understanding, beliefs and conclusions change.

We examined the layers through which we experience ourselves and began to see that none of them can simply be assumed to be the whole of who we are.

Something is being revealed through this investigation.

Everything we have examined is known.

And now we must turn our attention toward the one word that has quietly accompanied the entire inquiry:

knowing.

Something Knows

Right now, you are reading these words.

You see the letters.

You understand some of them immediately.

Others may cause you to pause.

Perhaps you agree with something.

Perhaps you disagree.

Perhaps another thought appears while you are reading.

All of this is happening.
And you know that it is happening.
This seems completely ordinary.
So ordinary that we overlook it.
But stop for a moment.
You know the words.
You know the thoughts.
You know the sensations.
You know the emotions.
You know whether you are interested or bored.
You know whether you are comfortable or uncomfortable.
There is an undeniable fact here:
Experience is being known.
Before we give that knowing a philosophical name, let us simply remain
with the fact.

The Witness

The traditional teaching uses the word Witness to point toward that
which knows experience without itself being merely another experience.

This word can be useful.

But it can also create confusion.

When we hear the word witness, we may imagine a person sitting
somewhere inside us, watching everything that happens.

Perhaps we imagine a little observer behind the eyes.

That is not what we mean.

If there were a little person inside watching everything, we could ask:

Who is aware of that little person?

We would simply have created another object to observe.

The Witness is not another person hidden inside the body.

It is not a second personality.

It is not a spiritual character.

It is a way of pointing toward the knowing of experience itself.

Let's make the inquiry very direct.

For a moment, stop reading.

Look around you.

Choose one object.

Perhaps a cup.

Notice its shape.

Its colour.

Its position.

You are aware of the cup.

Now close your eyes.

The visual perception disappears.

But awareness has not disappeared.

A sound appears.

You know it.

The sound disappears.

You remain aware.

A thought appears.

You know it.

The thought disappears.

Another thought appears.

Known.

A sensation appears.

Known.

The content changes continuously.

But something is present through the changing content.

This is what the word Witness is pointing toward.

What If I Don't Feel Like a Witness?

Good.

Don't try to manufacture the feeling.

This is not about adopting a new identity:

"I am now the Witness."

That would simply be another thought.

Instead, investigate the fact that experiences are known.

You don't need a special feeling.

You don't need a mystical experience.

You don't need to see light.

You don't need to enter a trance.

You don't need anyone to tell you that you are aware.

The question is much simpler:

Is experience being known right now?

Look.



The Investigation Of 'I'

CHAPTER FOUR

Who Is the 'I'?

There is perhaps no word we use more frequently than:

I.

I am happy.

I am tired.

I am angry.

I am afraid.

I am successful.

I am a failure.

I am this.

I am that.

The word is so ordinary that we rarely stop to ask what it actually refers to.

Who is this I?

It seems obvious.

Of course I know who I am.

I know my name.

I know my history.

I know my body.

I know my family.

I know what I like and dislike.

I know what I have experienced.

I know what I believe.

And yet, if we are investigating the nature of the Self, we cannot simply assume that the thing called "I" is understood.

We have to look.

The "I" Appears to Be Obvious

When someone asks:

Who are you?

we usually answer with information.
We give a name.
Perhaps an occupation.
Perhaps a relationship.
Perhaps a nationality.
Perhaps an age.
Perhaps something about our history.
But none of these answers actually answers the question.
They describe the person.
They do not necessarily reveal the Self.
Your name can change.
Your occupation can change.
Your relationships can change.
Your body changes.
Your beliefs change.
Your circumstances change.
And yet you continue to say:
I am.
What is this continuity?

Additions to “I Am”

Consider how many things we attach to those two words.

I am young.
I am old.
I am intelligent.
I am stupid.
I am beautiful.
I am unattractive.
I am wealthy.
I am poor.
I am loved.
I am rejected.
I am successful.
I am unsuccessful.

Every description modifies the basic sense of “I.”

But does the “I” itself change with every description?

Or do the descriptions change?

MOVEMENT FIVE

From 'Me' To 'I Am'



CHAPTER FIVE

The Most Honest Starting Point

Perhaps the most honest place to begin is not:

"I am Consciousness."

That is already a conclusion.

Instead:

I Am.

This cannot be removed from the investigation.

Everything else can be questioned.

The body can be questioned.

The mind can be questioned.

The identity can be questioned.

The beliefs can be questioned.

Even the concept of Consciousness can be questioned.

But the immediate fact of being remains.

INQUIRY

BEFORE ADDING ANYTHING

Close your eyes for a moment.

Don't create a spiritual experience.

Don't try to become peaceful.

Don't meditate.

Just notice.

There is awareness of whatever is happening.

There may be thoughts.

There may be sensations.

There may be sounds.

And there is an unmistakable sense:

I Am.

Now ask:

What is this “I Am” before I add anything to it?

Don’t answer.

Look.

Don’t Turn “I Am” Into Another Object

This is where the mind can become clever.

It may imagine:

“I Am” is a bright light inside me.

Or:

“I Am” is a spiritual presence.

Or:

“I Am” is a tiny point of consciousness somewhere in my chest.

Be careful.

We have already spent many chapters removing places where the reader unconsciously locates the Self.

Do not put the Self somewhere else simply because the new location feels more spiritual.

If it can be located as an object, it is still something being experienced.

The Self Is Not a Spiritual Object

This distinction will become increasingly important.

If you experience a light:

the light is known.

If you experience bliss:

the bliss is known.

If you experience stillness:

the stillness is known.

If you experience an expansive state:
that state is known.
These experiences may be beautiful and meaningful.
But they are still experiences.
We must not confuse a profound experience with the Self itself.

The Guru Within

This is where the meaning of the Guru within becomes important.
An external teacher may tell you:
“You are not the body.”
Another may tell you:
“You are Consciousness.”
A third may give you a practice.
All of these may be useful.
But eventually there must be an inward recognition that does not depend upon someone else’s assertion.
The teacher can point.
The teaching can point.
The book can point.
But the seeing must happen within the reader.
That is why the Guru within is not another person hiding inside.
It is the recognition that the deepest investigation cannot ultimately be outsourced.



Appearance And Reality

Seeing What Is There, Misunderstanding What It Is

We have spent many chapters examining the difference between what appears and what is taken to be ultimately true. Before we move into the language of reality, substratum and superimposition, there is an image that can hold the whole inquiry lightly: a mirage. The appearance is not denied. What changes is our understanding of what the appearance is.

The Mirage

Imagine walking across a desert.

You see what appears to be water in the distance.

It looks convincing.

Perhaps the light is reflecting in such a way that the surface appears to shimmer.

You move toward it.

But when you arrive at the place where the water seemed to be, there is no pool.

Was there something there?

Yes.

There was an appearance.

Something was being seen.

But was there water?

No.

The problem was not seeing.

The problem was misunderstanding what was seen.

The Mirage Was Not a Lie

This distinction matters.

The mirage did not deceive you deliberately.

Your eyes did not manufacture a false experience.

The appearance was genuinely present.
What was mistaken was your interpretation:
“There is water there.”
The appearance was real as an appearance.
The interpretation was mistaken.
This is precisely the distinction we need as we investigate experience.

Appearance and Reality

We often assume that if something is experienced, it must be exactly what it appears to be.

But everyday life shows us otherwise.
A stick can look like a snake in dim light.
A shadow can look like a person.
A reflection can look like another world.
A dream can feel completely real while it is occurring.
A photograph can look like the person it represents.
An image can be mistaken for the thing itself.
In each case, something appears.
But the appearance is being interpreted incorrectly.

This Is Not About Denying the World

Please notice this carefully.
When we say the mirage is not water, we are not saying:
“Nothing is there.”
Something is there.
Light is behaving in a particular way.
The desert is there.
The appearance is there.
The experience is there.
What is absent is the water we imagined.
This is an important principle.
The mistake is not necessarily in the appearance. The mistake may be in what we take the appearance to be.

The Mirage Does Not Need to Disappear

This is another important point.
You do not need to destroy the mirage.

You simply need to recognize it as a mirage.

Likewise, we do not need to destroy personality.

We don't need to eliminate thought.

We don't need to stop using the word "I."

We need only recognize what the word is actually pointing to.

"I" Has Two Uses

When you say:

"I am hungry,"

the body may be hungry.

When you say:

"I need to go to work,"

the person is functioning in the world.

When you say:

"I love my family,"

the human relationship is real and meaningful.

There is no problem with practical identity.

The difficulty begins when we unconsciously turn practical identity into metaphysical identity:

"This person is what I fundamentally am."

That is the assumption we are investigating.

Living The Understanding



CHAPTER SEVEN

Peace Without Becoming

If the inquiry into Brahman remains only metaphysical, something essential has been missed. What does recognition mean when the mind becomes quiet, when nothing needs to be added to Being, and when the person no longer has to carry the impossible burden of being the whole of what we are? We begin with peace.

Peace Is Not Something We Manufacture

Most of us have been taught to think of peace as something we must obtain.

We imagine that when our circumstances improve, we will be peaceful.

When the relationship is right.

When the financial situation is secure.

When our health is good.

When our children are doing well.

When our future is certain.

When we finally achieve what we have been pursuing.

Then, we think:

I will be at peace.

But look carefully at this assumption.

It makes peace dependent upon circumstances.

And circumstances are constantly changing.

If peace depends upon circumstances, peace can never be secure.

We Have All Experienced Moments of Natural Peace

Think of a moment when you were not trying to accomplish anything.

Perhaps sitting quietly.

Perhaps looking at the ocean.

Perhaps walking through a forest.

Perhaps watching a sunset.

Perhaps sitting beside someone you love.
Perhaps simply waking before the day begins.
For a moment, nothing needed to be solved.
Nothing needed to be achieved.
Nothing needed to be defended.
And there was peace.

Where did it come from?

Did the ocean give it to you?

Did the sunset manufacture it?

Did the forest insert peace into your mind?

Or did something else happen?

Perhaps, for a moment, the struggle of the “me” became quiet.

Notice the Difference

When the mind is constantly saying:

I need this.

I don't want that.

What will happen to me?

What does this mean about me?

What will they think of me?

What if I lose this?

What if I fail?

There is movement.

There is resistance.

There is psychological conflict.

But when that movement becomes quiet, what do we often discover?

Not necessarily bliss.

Not necessarily ecstasy.

Something much simpler:

peace.

Peace Does Not Need to Announce Itself

Real peace may be almost invisible.

It does not necessarily feel extraordinary.
It does not need to produce fireworks.
It may simply be the absence of conflict.
The absence of resistance.
The absence of the constant demand for life to be different from what it is.

This is why peace can easily be overlooked.
We are often looking for an experience.
Peace may be the absence of the need to experience something special.

What Is Disturbing the Peace?

Let's investigate.
Right now, perhaps you are sitting quietly.
Is there anything fundamentally wrong with this moment?

Perhaps there is.
Perhaps there isn't.
But notice what happens when thought says:
"Something should be different."
Immediately, there is tension.
The present moment is no longer enough.
The mind has created a comparison:
what is
versus
what should be.
And the conflict begins.

EXPERIMENT

NOTHING TO ADD

Stop reading for a moment.

Allow everything to be as it is.

Don't try to become peaceful.

Don't try to stop thinking.

Don't try to control your breathing.

Don't try to improve the experience.

Let the body be.

Let sounds be.

Let thoughts be.

Let feelings be.

Nothing needs to be removed.

Nothing needs to be added.

Now ask:

If I don't demand that this moment be different, what is disturbed?

Wait.

THE COMPLETE INQUIRY

Where the Full Book Continues

This introductory edition opens seven movements of Atma Bodha. The complete work develops them across sixty-three chapters, moving from the question of identity through discrimination, the three bodies and states of experience, the Witness, the investigation of 'I,' 'I Am,' Consciousness, appearance, reality, superimposition, non-separation and living understanding.

The full edition does not ask the reader to accept the Vedantic culmination by authority. It approaches the movement from the individual Witness toward universal Consciousness step by step, while distinguishing direct experience, philosophical reasoning and traditional teaching.

The complete market edition will be available through ProbingConsciousness.com.

Dharmendra Singh

Dharmendra Singh is a writer, independent investigator and the creator of Probing Consciousness.

His work centres on direct inquiry into Consciousness, human dignity, self-understanding and freedom from fear and imposed authority. For more than four decades, he has explored how philosophical and contemplative questions can remain rigorous while becoming directly relevant to ordinary human life.

Atma Bodha: From Witness to Universal Consciousness brings that approach to the ancient Vedantic inquiry into the Self, allowing traditional language to emerge from direct investigation rather than precede it.

Dharmendra writes not as a guru, but as one human being inviting another to look.

No authority. No required belief. No promised destination.

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What am I?

Atma Bodha begins with a question more intimate than philosophy. The body, thought, memory, personality and even the sense of a separate observer can be known. What is the Knower?

Across seven movements, this introductory edition travels from ordinary identity toward the Witness, 'I Am,' appearance, reality and living understanding.

Vedanta's conclusion is not hidden, but neither is it imposed. The reader is invited to look before believing.



CONTINUE THE INQUIRY

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