

## **Asmitā**

Asmita derives from the Sanskrit “asmi”. The definition of the sanskrit word Asmita is the sense of “I”, egoism. In Yoga philosophy the word is described as how we view ourselves in terms such as I am. It can also be described as I exist. It is an awareness that I exist. It’s an ownership of body, space, skills and property. I desire to live and that is my asmita, my breath. Asmita is found in Pantanjali’s yoga sutras (1.17, II. 3,6, IV 4). The English definition describes the ego as a noun. The “I” or self of any person; a person, as thinking, feeling and willing, and distinguishing itself from the selves of others and from objects of its thought. It is also described as egotism; conceit; self-importance. Psychoanalysis describes the ego as part of the psychic apparatus that experiences and reacts to the outside world and thus mediates between the primitive drives of the id and the demands of the social and physical environment.

We must begin by trying to understand the brain process. As a child we are born without any knowledge. Our eyes open outward and we begin our journey of others in our world. All the senses open outwards. We are not aware of who we are yet we become quickly aware of what others think of us starting with our own mother. Ego is born. We all have to begin to pass through this aspect of life. The ego is a very important aspect of life. It is a need and an accumulated phenomenon. Everybody adds to our ego, our family, our teachers, our friends, our society, etc. Ego is always in search of food, affection and appreciation. Through the ego society is controlling us. As we begin to understand the ego and the self, we begin to

become afraid of finding our true self. We begin to question who we are and all we believe in and it feels wrong to allow this chaos to take over the mind. The ego lives on attention. We should try to observe our own egos and be aware of how they work.

In Yogic philosophy this is a state in which we can move beyond, by stilling the mind. Pantanjali describes the ego as when the soul forgets its true divine self and becomes identified with the powers of perception and action in the instruments of the body and mind. We need to begin to understand how the ego manifests in order to understand the degree of ignorance or enlightenment in each of us. Asmita can be how we view ourselves. We describe ourselves in terms of what we do, what we like, who we think we are, etc. Our asmita allows us to be separate and different from others. I am a mother, yogi, investigator, etc. This is my material aspect of being. This is my social status, my belief, and what I do for a living. The mind is outward oriented by nature and wants to hide in our life experiences and fears however, it is an incomplete picture of reality. Our asmita limits us from realizing our full potential. We must try to override the confining ego in order to find serenity and reduce suffering. Pantanjali believes that there are degrees of “I” ness depending on the level of identifying with the gross senses and the material world. The “I” ness can become a clearer sense of being when identified with the subtle world and knowledge of the astral body. The asmita can identify through pure intuitive wisdom and become a reflection of the soul. Einstein said “We are part of the whole and the idea that we are separate is a delusion. That delusion may be our egos working overtime. Freud states “The ego is not master in its own house.” According to Freud, the ego is part of our personality that prevents us from acting on our basic urges but also works to achieve a balance with our moral and idealistic standard. The ego allows us to be socially and

morally acceptable in many situations. Iyengar has called the ego a relentless task master and tends not to know how to balance activity and passivity, in asana as well as in the choices one makes in life. I now understand that the ego needs to not become a dominant force or it will become a problem. We need to practice freedom from the hold of the ego in order to attain awareness and tranquility. We need to limit the patterns formed in our minds and realize that our feelings are usually subjective and are not a complete picture of reality. According to Pantanjali (Sutra 2.6) the mind is an instrument of the self within, awareness and tranquility come when the unity between the mind, which is the seeing instrument, and the seer is attained.

A freedom from ego is expressed in a Mayan saying En Lak Ech “you are the other me”