

Who Are You?

WHO AM I?

This is perhaps the most profound question that you could ever ask yourself. It is not an easy one to answer though. For thousands of years, great saints, philosophers, and intellectuals have pondered this question. And in spite of the extensive focus on this question over such a long period of time, there is no universally accepted answer.

Though it's not an easy question to answer, it is an important one to consider. This is because whatever you believe to be the answer to this question will, to a great extent, determine the quality of your life.

So, before continuing, pause for a moment and ask yourself:

- *Who am I?*
- *Who am I, really?*

Keep asking and answering some more questions, such as:

- *Who else am I?*
- *How do I know that is who I am?*

Well, what were your answers to the above questions? To what extent were your answers based on one or more of the following:

- The **roles** you play (e.g., father, mother, wife, husband, brother, sister, son, etc.)
- Your **profession** (e.g., lawyer, teacher, CEO, etc.)
- Your **possessions** (e.g., millionaire, homeowner, business owner, etc.)
- Your **qualities** (e.g., kind, loving, generous, patient, adventurous, determined, decisive, etc.)
- Your **gender** (male or female)
- Your **nationality** (American, Australian, Irish, Italian, etc.)

Now imagine for a minute that you can't refer to any of the above attributes (i.e., roles, profession, possessions, etc.) in answering the "*Who am I?*" question. With this new constraint, again ask yourself: *Who am I?*

THE TWO CHOICES

At the highest level, there are two fundamental ways to reframe the "*Who am I?*" question:

1. *Am I a human being having a spiritual experience?*

or

2. *Am I a spiritual being having a human experience?*

My belief is that we are all spiritual beings having a human experience. What this means is that there is so much **more** to us than what we can see and experience—we are all **more** than the roles we play, our profession, our possessions, our qualities, and so on. In a nutshell, we are **more** than our personalities.

But what is this **more** that I am referring to above? The **more** is something that words can't accurately describe—words can only serve as pointers or signposts.

This **more** is the constant and unchanging reality that makes the human experience possible. This **more** is our consciousness; it is our higher self; it is the Divine within us; it is our ultimate awareness.

In Indian philosophy, **more** is referred to as *Atman*. A. Parthasarathy, in his best-selling book, *Vedanta Treatise*, provides an excellent overview of the relationship between *Atman* and our body, mind, and intellect.

"You are Atman appearing as an individual. Atman is omnipresent. It is like the sun whose rays are all-pervading. There is just one sun above. But wherever there is a reflecting surface there appears in it a reflected sun, an individual sun. The reflecting sun assumes the properties of the reflecting medium. The sun seen through a blue mirror appears blue. The sun seen through a dirty mirror appears dirty, through a broken mirror, broken and so on. But the sun above is immaculate and unconditioned by the qualities of the reflecting media. Similarly there is just one all-pervading Atman. But wherever there is a body-mind-intellect equipment, Atman appears through it as an individual human being. The individual takes to the properties of his body, mind and intellect but not Atman. Atman remains ever pure and uncontaminated like the sun vis-à-vis its images."

The more intensely you believe that this consciousness or higher self or Divine within is the real you, the more power, peace, and happiness you will experience.

As Oprah Winfrey once said, "It isn't until you come to a spiritual understanding of who you are—not necessarily a religious feeling, but deep down, the spirit within—that you can begin to take control."