

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda PRATAḤ SMARAṆAM

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The first verse describes the Self as sat cit ānanda, while the second verse describes It as self-effulgent. In the third verse, the Self is described as the Self of all.

प्रातर्नमामि तमसः परमर्कवर्णं पणूँ सनातनपदं पुरुषोत्तमाख्यम् ।
यस्मिन्निदं जगदशेषमशेषमूर्त्तौ रज्ज्वां भुज्जम इव प्रतिभासितं वै ॥

prātarnamāmi tamaṣaḥ paramarkavarṇam pūrṇam sanātanapadam
puruṣottamākhyam, yasminnidam jagadaśeṣamaśeṣamūrtau rajjvām
bhujāṅgama iva pratibhāsitam vai.

Early in the morning, I bow to the limitless, that which is beyond darkness, which has the lustre of the sun, which is the changeless support known as the supreme being, in whose limitless form the entire universe has appeared like a snake upon a rope.

Prātarnamāmi, early in the morning, I bow down to you, I salute you. We bow down to one who is worthy of worship and reverence. When I stand erect, I have a long shadow, and when I bow down, my shadow becomes shorter and shorter; when I fall flat, and there is no shadow at all. Bowing down is a symbol of falling flat at the feet of the Lord, the revered one. Falling flat means that I am not there, only the Lord is there. The ultimate limit of salutation is that I, who am saluting, am not there; only you, whom I salute, are there. The ultimate meaning of namaskāra is non-duality. I completely erase my ego and become one with you. It is like a river merging into the ocean. The river bows down to the ocean. That is, the name and form of the river is given up. The river is no more a river. One may think that the river is completely destroyed when it merges with the ocean. Yet, in doing that, the river only gives up its limitation of 'riverless'. It is now a limitless ocean, boundless. By giving up its boundaries, it becomes boundless. It is not that the river has become the ocean; the river does not have to physically merge into an ocean to realize its true nature. What is a river? It is only water. It becomes a river by identifying with a name and form. An ocean is also water. When the river recognizes that it is water, it is liberated. The river's merging into the ocean means that it loses its 'riverness' and 'becomes' the ocean.

Prātarnamāmi, early in the morning I bow down, I salute the Lord, the Self. Even the ego doesn't remain; there is only the Self. The duality is completely dropped and that is what is meant by namāmi.

Tamaṣaḥ paramarkavarṇam. Tamas means darkness. Param is beyond. Tamaṣaḥ param is that which is beyond the darkness. Arkavarṇam means of the luster of the sun, the self-shining sun. It is another way of enabling us to see the nature of ourselves. Darkness, here, stands for ignorance.

The Self is beyond the darkness of ignorance, meaning that which even illumines ignorance. The Self or Consciousness illumines ignorance. Both ignorance and knowledge are states of the mind. Therefore, we are also aware of our ignorance. For example, you know that you do not know the Chinese language. Your awareness of your own ignorance is also illumined by the Self; then alone can you know it. That which illumines ignorance is beyond ignorance. Ignorance is also mithyā. The Self is like the sun in that it is self-shining, self-illumining, or self-effulgent. It is thus beyond the darkness of ignorance, and even illumines ignorance.

Pūrṇam sanātanapadam puruṣottamākhyam. Pūrṇam is that which is limitless; it is filled from all sides like an ocean. Pru is to fill, fill completely. Sanātanapadam. Sanātana means that which is beyond the limits of time; it is all- inclusive, beyond the limitations of space. Puruṣottamākhyam is 'known as the supreme being'. Puruṣottama is the most exalted person or important being. Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita [15-16] that there are two kinds of puruṣas: kṣara, changing, or the effect and akṣara, changeless, or the cause. Puruṣottama is beyond cause and effect.

द्वविमौ पुरुषौ लोके क्षरश्चाक्षर एव च ।
क्षरः सर्वाणि भूतानि काटस्थोऽक्षर उच्यते.

dvāvimau puruṣau loke kṣaraścākṣara eva ca,
kṣaraḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni kūtastho'kṣara ucyate.

These two persons (exist) in the world, the perishable and the imperishable. All beings and elements are called the perishable, the changeless (is called) the imperishable.

Now, Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says a very interesting thing in the last line, yasminnidaṁ jagadaśeṣa-maśeṣamūrtau rajjvām bhujāṅgama iva pratibhāsitaṁ vai. Yasmin, in whom; idam jagat, this entire universe; aśeṣamūrtau, in the limitless form, rajjvām in a rope; bhujāṅgam, like a snake; pratibhāsitaṁ vai, has appeared indeed.

Creation is indescribable

What does Vedanta say about creation? Vedanta accepts the creation to be like the creation of a snake on a rope. A rope is mistaken to be a snake because of the ignorance of the rope. This ignorance gives rise to the delusion that it is a snake, or causes the projection of a snake where there is a rope. So is there a snake or not? If there is no snake, how do you see it? The person who suffers from the delusion of the snake does indeed see a snake. He has palpitations and high blood pressure, and is frightened by the snake. A non-existent snake cannot create all these effects in a person. If there is no snake, it will not be perceived. On the other hand, if there were a snake, it would not disappear when you throw light upon it. A Vedāntin would neither say that the snake is, nor that the snake is not. It is anirvacaniyam, indescribable. There are only two categories: is and is not; there cannot be a third category. The snake does not fall into any category. This is the nature of the creation. Just as a snake is created out of a rope, so also is the universe created from brahman. It is mithyā, unreal. Can you tell me where the snake is? Is it in the mind? If it were in my mind, the snake should be wherever my mind is. But it is not so. If the snake is not in my mind, is it in the rope? If the snake were in the rope, the snake should be wherever the rope is. Even upon shining light on the rope, the snake should be there; but, it is not. Thus, the snake cannot be said to be either in the rope or my mind. It is anirvacaniyam.

Every object in the world has asti, bhāti, priyam, nāma, and rūpa

Bhuja means arm; a snake moves on its arms, not on its feet, and that is why it is called bhuja. Just as a snake appears on the rope, so also, the whole universe appears in brahman, the Self. What is this universe? It is all the names and forms. For example, what is a clock? A clock has a name, nāma, and a corresponding form, rūpa; it is, asti; it shines, bhāti, and it is useful, priyam, dear. Thus, a clock has all five aspects in it: asti, bhāti, priyam, nāma, and rūpa. I speak of a clock because I am aware of it. It shines in my awareness, and it is dear to me because it is useful to me. Every object in the world has asti, bhāti, priyam, nāma, and rūpa. What separates one object from another is the name and form. Asti bhāti priyam is the most common denomination. For example, both a bangle and an earring have the common denominator of gold. We can say that gold appears as various ornaments: a bangle, an earring, a chain etc. Similarly, asti bhāti priyam, which is the real content, appears as the different names and forms. An ornament is gold plus a name and form. Similarly, an object is asti bhāti priyam plus a name and form. Just as gold appears as various ornaments, so also, asti bhāti priyam, sat cit ānanda, the Self, or brahman appears as this whole universe of names and forms. Just as a rope shines as a snake, so also, brahman, asti bhāti priyam, or sat cit ānanda appears or shines as the entire universe of names and forms.

We should change our focus from nāma and rūpa to the fact of asti bhāti priyam

Yasmin, in whom, aśeṣam jagat, this entire universe, has appeared. The entire universe can be reduced to names and forms. This universe of names and forms is nothing but the manifestation of asti bhāti priyam or sat cit ānanda. In the Īśvāsyopaniṣad, the first vākya is īśā vāsyamidaṁ sarvaṁ yatkiñca jagatyāṁ jagat, whatever is moving or changing, every name and form should be known as īśvara. This is the Lord, brahman, asti bhāti priyam, or sat cit ānanda. That is all that counts! What counts in an ornament? It is the gold. An earring, bangle, chain, or any ornament is but gold. All we need to do is change the focus of attention from the name and form to the gold. Similarly, all we have to do in this world is to change our focus from the name and form to the fact of asti bhāti priyam. Asti bhāti priyam is not out there; it is one's own Self. The whole universe of names and forms is superimposed upon the 'I'. It is the 'I', the Self, sat cit ānanda, which shines in the varied multitude of names and forms in this universe.

I bow down early in the morning to that Lord who is pūrṇam, Whole and Complete, sanātanapadam, the eternal abode, and puruṣottamākhyam, known as puruṣottama in the scriptures. Prātassmarāmi, I remember, prātarbhajāmi, I worship, and prātarnamāmi, I bow down, I salute¹.

¹ Transcribed by Richa Choudhry and edited by Krishnakumar (KK) S. Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.