

IS THE 'DESIRE' DESIRABLE?

(SWAMI SHUDDHABODHANANDA SARASWATI)

WHAT IS A DESIRE?

Guru : A desire (*kaama*) is a craving, longing, or yearning for something that brings satisfaction, enjoyment or relief from sorrow, pain or suffering. It originates from the fundamental and universal urge of *sukha-praapti* (acquisition of joy) and *dukha-nivritti* (avoidance of sorrow) in all the living beings without an exception. It can come to an end only on gaining the infinite or limitless (*ananta*) happiness (*aananda*) totally free from even the least trace of sorrow. Then the pursuit of *sukhapraapti* and *dukhanivritti* stops. As a result there remains no cause that can prompt desires.

Disciple: Oh *guro!* Is it not a Utopia to think of a state or an entity having limitless happiness (*ananta aananda*) totally free from sorrows, leave alone gaining it?

Guru : Yes, at a cursory glance it appears so to those who have no exposure to the teachings of Upanishads or Vedanta which is the ultimate essence (*taatparya*) of the Vedas. But it is not so. Definitely there is such a unique entity. It is none other than the real nature of what all of us refer to as 'I' which is a non-changing, ever-experiencing and ever-knowing principle called *cit* (pure awareness principle) or *atma* identical with Brahman. It is all along changelessly available as 'I' in and through our ever-changing three states of consciousness (waking, dream and deep-sleep) and the three bodies (gross, subtle and causal). The scriptures provide the means to gain it.

Disciple: Oh, now I remember that *atmavidya* or *Brahmavidya* is being referred to. But it invariably repeats and asserts the necessity of what they call *vairagya* (dispassion) asking us to give up all desires. It seems to be totally unnatural. Is it not a 'non-thinking' to speak against the natural tendencies that are universal in nature?

Guru : Sonny, you should be extra cautious before passing on such remarks without proper investigation or taking into consideration as to who has emphasized the need of *vairagya* and why? It is *adhyaatmashastra* (spiritual lore) that has emphasized the need of *vairagya*. Its authorship is traced to *aadigurus*, Brahmaa, Vishnu, Maheshwara and galaxy of *rishis* besides deities who were *jeevanmuktas*. They had nothing to gain from this world. They were full and all-accomplished. Their heart bleeds by seeing the suffering of others. If they say something, should we not investigate and try to understand why such an advice is given before passing on such hasty remarks?

IS THE 'DESIRE' DESIRABLE?

Disciple: It is true. But *guro!* Please tell me point-blank whether the desire is desirable or not?

Guru : The desire is both desirable and undesirable.

Disciple: How can that be an answer? Is it not ambiguous?

Guru : It depends on you. You first define whether you are a *bubhukshu* or a *mumukshu*.

Disciple: What does that mean?

Guru : *Bubhukshu* is the one for whom enjoying the sense-pleasures only by all means is the prime goal of life. But the *mumukshu* is a mature person who has discovered that even the best sense-pleasures etc. available here or hereafter in heavens cannot make anyone truly contented and totally free from sorrows so long as the inevitable death with transmigration continues.

Disciple: But what relevance this division of *bubhukshu* and *mumukshu* has got with having desires or not?

Guru : Desires appear to be desirable to *bubhukshus*. The scriptures even give to such immature people a long list of desirable things with the means to procure them, but of course strictly in accordance with *dharma*. Such a pursuit of permitted desires is allowed to those who are yet to develop a mature mind born of right evaluation of sense-objects. The life of *dharma* lived induces *viveka* in them by *duritakshaya* (ending of past sins). This leads to *vairagya* in due course. As a result they are no longer interested in the sense-pleasures. Having got convinced about the worthlessness, of the sense-pursuits they develop an intense yearning to get freed totally from sorrows and gain limitless happiness. They become *mumukshus*. Desires are no more desirable to them. On the contrary, they discover that desires obstruct their highest pursuit of gaining *atmajnana*.

SENSE-PURSUIT IS NOT WORTHWHILE

Disciple: Oh *guro!* I am still unable to understand the worthlessness of the sense-pursuits when the fulfilled desires give joy or relieve from sorrows.

Guru : This needs an unbiased investigation to discover what is really dear (*priya*) to us? What is the true source of everlasting happiness? What can be the entity wherein no sorrows are ever possible? Are you ready to embark upon such an enquiry?

Disciple: Yes, *guro!* Please guide me. Please have compassion on me.

Guru : First of all know a universal principle. Anything that is dear (*priya*) to us is necessarily the source of happiness (*aananda*). If it is more dear (*priya*) then it is the source of more happiness. If there is an entity which is the most dear, it should necessarily be the source of maximum or limitless happiness. Now consider the fact that the sense-objects (*vishayas*) are dear and desired for the sake of 'I' (*cit, atma*). Therefore 'I' is more dear (*priya*) than the *vishayas*.

Disciple: But the *vishayas* such as wife, husband, children, wealth, possessions, etc. are also dear.

Guru : The *vishayas* do appear so to begin with. But in the course of time they end in sorrows and therefore become disliked (*apriya*). That is what Bhagavan Krishna says that they are nectarine to begin with, but in the end like the poison they become the source of sorrow. In procuring sense-objects there is sorrow. In protecting them after getting also there is sorrow. When they get destroyed, there is nothing but sorrow. At times even for the sake of oneself, the *vishayas* are abandoned. That shows that oneself is more dear. A sense-object is dear (*priya*) so long it gives joy. Similarly an entity is disliked (*apriya*) so long it gives sorrow. No sense-object (*visaya*) can be permanently *priya* (pleasing, dear) or *apriya* (disliked). But 'I' (*cit, atma*) is always *priya* (pleasing, dear) and never *apriya* (disliked). It is universally observed that everyone without exception longs : ' May "I" live forever, may "I" never cease to exist!'. Even a person on the verge of suicide is not an exception to this. What he dislikes may be a particular condition of the body or the state of mind with some non-solvable problems according to him. If an infallible solution is offered, he will never commit suicide.

Thus 'I' (*cit, atma*) alone is the locus of limitless love (*parapremaaspada*). The obvious corollary is : 'I' is limitless happiness (*paraananda*). That 'I' is free from all *upadhis* in the form of threefold embodiment and perceptible (*drishya*) *jagat* which alone is the source of sorrow. The gross and the subtle bodies are the sources of sorrows. The causal body contains sorrow in a potential form. All these three with *jagat* are absent in 'I'. Therefore 'I' (*cit, atma*) is limitless happiness totally free from even the least trace of sorrow in contrast to the *vishayas* (sense-objects) which can give tinsels of transient happiness ever-mixed with sorrows.

THE TRIPLE CARDINAL TEST

What we have deduced so far is based on reasoning (*yukti*). The *sruti* (*Upanishads*) also declares that 'I' (*atma*) is *sat* (ever-existent principle), *cit* (fundamental knowledge principle) and *aananda* (happiness). The word *aananda* generally means *vishaya-sukha* (sense-pleasure). But here in the case of *atma*, such limitations are eliminated by juxtaposing '*aananda*' with '*sat*' (ever-existent principle) which shows it to be indestructible in nature. Such an entity has to be necessarily limitless (*ananta*). Thus *atma* is *ananta aananda*. *Chhandogyopanishad* (7-23) directly points out : 'That which is *bhoomaa* (limitless, *mahat, Brahman*) is itself *sukha* (happiness), there is no *sukha* (happiness) in the *alpa* (any limited entity, *saanta*). Further this is verified by *vidvadanubhava* (the *anubhava* of *jnanis* who have got *aparoksha Brahmajnana*). Thus the above fact is proved by the triple cardinal test accepted by Vedanta namely *sruti, yukti* and *anubhava*.

THE SOURCE OF SENSE-PLEASURE

Just as the *sat* (existence) nature of *atma* is the basis of the 'existence' or 'is'ness in all entities that are there in the entire Creation and its *cit* (knowledge principle) nature is the basis of all varieties of specific knowledge, so is the *aananda* (happiness) aspect of *atma* the basis of all *vishayasukha* (sense-pleasures) enjoyed by all living beings. Happiness is not the intrinsic feature of *vishayas*. The happiness that we experience by sense-indulgence is borrowed from *atma / Brahman* which is the limitless happiness (*ananta aananda*). This fact can be verified from the Upanishads.

The *Taittiriyaopanishad* (2-8) and *Brihadaranyakopanishad* (4-3-33) contain an inquiry into the measure of *aananda* (happiness) enjoyed by beings in different species of embodiments. The enquiry starts with the happiness enjoyed by an ideal emperor as the basic unit, with a hundred fold increase in each successively higher embodiment upto the highest embodiment, *Hiranyagarbha*. The counting stops there. The *aananda* (happiness) enjoyed in all those embodiments is akin to a drop in the ocean of happiness that is Brahman, (*Br. U. 4-3-32*) called *Brahmaananda*. Thus *Brahmaananda* is limitless (*aananda*) happiness and non-dual in nature which is self evident in *aparoksha Brahmajnana*.

A *mumukshu* is in for gaining limitless happiness totally free from sorrows. Therefore he wants to know his real nature by its *aparokshajnana* (direct knowledge). He is not interested in sense-pleasures. The *Vishayas* (sense-objects) are no more desirable to him, nay, the desires are the main obstructions in gaining *atmajnana*. Considering this, none other than *Bhagavan Krishna* himself comes down heavily on *kaama* (desire) along with anger and greed in his statements: 'The *kaama* is voracious, great sinner', 'eternal enemy of *jnanis*', 'kill the enemy called desire who is unassailable' (*B. G. 3-32, 39, 43*), 'a self-ruining gateway to hell' (*B.G. 16-21*). All Upanishads invariably highlight the role of *vairagya* more or less. Therefore the desire is not desirable to a *mumukshu*.

KAAMOSMI – I AM THE DESIRE

Disciple: Oh *guro!* I do understand what you have said so far. I have read how *Bhagavan Krishna* has criticized the desires to the point of condemnation. But here is a small doubt. What is wrong if we entertain desires until we gain *atmajnana*? Notwithstanding his criticism of desire, *Bhagavan Krishna* also has declared, 'Oh *Bharatarshbha* (*Arjuna*), I am desire' (*kaamosmi Bharatarshbha*) (*B.G.7.11*).

Guru : Sonny, I had cautioned you earlier. A hasty conclusions without the proper investigation and analysis (*mimamsa*) is not desirable. First of all keep in mind that *Bhagavan Krishna* has not said that he is any and every desire in general. He specifies the desire referred to as : 'In the case of living beings (*bhuteshu*) the desire (*kaamah*) that is unopposed to *dharma* (*Sastra*, scripture) (*dharmaaviruddha*)'. *Bhashyakara* explains this as the desires to appease the hunger and quench the thirst necessary to sustain the body. A thorough *mimamsa* (sacred inquiry, analysis) is indispensable in this context.

The first six chapters of *Bhagavadgita* describe the *nirupadhika atma*/Brahman with the means of gaining it. The next six chapters unfold the *saguna* Brahman called *Isvara*. That is why *Bhagavan* Krishna makes a declaration in the beginning of seventh chapter that he is going to impart that *jnana* (knowledge) with *vijnana* (*svaanubhava-samyuktam*, endowed with one's experience) in such a manner that *Bhagavat-tattva* (divinity principle) can be known in its entirety (*samagram*). *Bhashyakara* explains the word *samagram* (entirely) as, 'endowed with the features such as glory, strength, power, overlordship etc.'. That means the knowledge of *Bhagavan* is complete when known in its *nirguna* and *saguna* form. This meaning gets corroborated by *Bhagavan* Krishna's statement : knows me (*maam abhijanati*) *yaavaan* (of what magnitude) *yah cha tattvataha* (of what nature in reality) *asmi* (I am) (B.G. 18-55). *Bhashyakara* explains *yaavaan* as the magnitude in terms of different glories born of *upadhi* (*upadhikrita-vistarabheda*) whereas *yah* as the *nirupadhika* nature (*vidhvasta-sarva-upadhibheda*). Thus to glorify *Isvara*, some of his glories are given in the verses 8 to 12 of seventh chapter of *Bhagavadgita*. *Bhashyakara* explains as a sample the first glory namely 'I am in the *rasa* (essence, pith) in the water' as 'in me (*Isvara*) who is the very *rasa* (essence) the water is centred'. It is worth noting what *Bhagavan* says in the same verse as that of *kaamosmi*: 'I am the *bala* (strength) devoid of *kaama* (hankering for sense-objects) and *raga* (love for sense-objects gained) in the *balavaan* (strong)'. The *Bhashya* clarifies that the *bala* (strength) referred to is the one that sustains the body etc. and not the one that is the cause of hankering for sense-objects and the love for them. In the light of all these explanations the statement of *Bhagavan*, 'I am the desire unopposed to *dharma*' should be understood. The word *kaama* here does not mean all desires. Only the good things are pointed out as the glories of *Bhagavan*.

In fact, it should be known for certain that everything whether in the category of *dharma* or *adharma*, good or bad, right or wrong is nothing but the manifestation of *Isvara* only in the sense that the entire *jagat* is superimposed on Brahman as its basis (*adhithana*). It has no independent existence. Only the glories are described here.

Disciple: Then revered *guro*! Why does the *Shastra* make the difference of '*dharma*, *adharma*' or 'good, bad' etc. when everything is *Isvara*?

Guru : The *shastra* has a point. It wants all to avoid *adharma*, bad and wrong things or pursuits and take to *dharma*, good etc. in the beginning to prepare the mind to know *Isvara* or *atma*/Brahman. Finally *nirupadhika atma*/Brahman free from both alone has to be known which is beyond the realm of both *dharma* and *adharma* etc.

Truly speaking the referred statement by *Bhagavan* **does not** mean, '**I am the desire unopposed to *dharma***'. Actually it means, '**I (*Isvara*) is the one to whom the desires unopposed to *dharma* belong**'. It should be taken as an attributive compound (*Bahuvrihi samaasa*).

Disciple: How can that be so *guro*? Even a child who knows the Samskrit language will tell the meaning of that statement by *Bhagavan* as 'I am such and such desires'. What is the *pramana* that it is an attributive compound? *Bhashya* on that verse has not said anything like that.

Guru : Look, I have already cautioned you that a proper investigation is indispensable if a statement coming from an authentic source such as *Bhagavan* Krishna is either not clear or is seemingly ambiguous. When *Bhagavan* has described the *kaama* (desire) as an unassailable eternal enemy of *jnanis* and a self-ruining gateway to hell, can the desire be his nature only because the phrase 'I am desire' is used? This needs a thorough investigation. It is true that the *Bhashya* of that verse is silent on this matter. You may ask, 'where to look for help?'. Please know for certain that *Bhashyakara* himself has come to our rescue elsewhere in a similar context. In the *Chhandogyaopanishad* as a part of *Shandilyavidya*, the *upasana* of Brahman in its *saguna* form is enjoined. Therein some of the attributes (*gunas*) suggested in the case of *saguna* Brahman are: *sarvakarmaa*, *sarva-kaamah*, *sarva-gandhah*, *sarva-rasah*, etc.

The *saguna-brahma* (*Isvara*) is called '*sarvakarmaa*' because the entire (*sarva*) Creation (*vishva*) is Created by him. Thus the one whose Creation (*karma*) is the entire *jagat* is '*sarvakarmaa*'. Further the word '*sarvakaamah*' is defined as 'the one to whom all (*sarva*) harmless (*dosharahitaah*, i.e. non-binding) desires (*kaamas*) belong'. To corroborate this *bhashyakaara* quotes the statement of *Bhagavan*: '*dharmaaviruddho bhooteshu kaamosmi*' (B.G. 7-11). A contrary proposition (*purvapaksha*) objects the attributive compound employed to resolve the word '*sarvakaamah*'. It says attributive compound is not applicable here because *Bhagavan* has told 'I am *kaama*' in the *Gita*. *Bhashyakara* refutes this stand by pointing out that a desire needs to be produced like a sound. If the desire is equated to *Isvar* because of the statement, '*I am kaama*', then *Isvara* will be dependent on some other entity to come into existence as an effect (*karya*). *Isvar* will no longer be *anaadi* (uncaused). Therefore just as the attributive compound is applicable in the case of '*sarvakaama*' here in this *sruti*, similarly the *Gita* statement also should be interpreted. (*Ch. U. Bh. 3-14-2*). Desires being the products of *avidya* are invariably binding in nature. And yet, those which are on account of sustaining the body cannot bind. Therefore *Bhagavan* counts them in the category of glories. Is it clear to you?

'SARVAM BRAHMA' IS AN EQUATION FOR 'PRAPANCHA PRAVILAAPANA'

to be continued...