

Mundaka

Mantra 3.1.1

द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया
समानं वृक्षं परिषस्वजाते
तयोरन्यः पिप्पलं स्वाद्वत्ति
अनश्नन्नन्योऽभिचाकशीति ॥

*dvā suparṇā sayujā sakhāyā
samānam vṛkṣam pariśasvajāte
tayoranyaḥ pippalam svādvatti
anaśnannanyo 'bhicākaśīti. (3.1.1)*

dvā -- two; *suparṇā* -- shining birds;
sayujā -- which are always together;
sakhāyā-- both having the same origin;
samānam -- same; *vṛkṣam* -- tree;
pariśasvajāte -- are perched;
tayoḥ -- of these two; *anyaḥ* -- one;
pippalam -- fruits; *svādu* -- of many tastes;
atti -- eats; *anyaḥ* -- the other one;
anaśnan-- without eating; *abhicākaśīti* -- watches

Two shining birds that are always together and have the same origin are perched on the same tree. One of them eats fruits of different tastes while the other watches.

Dvā suparṇā: two birds with beautiful wings. The wings are beautiful because they are shining like gold. The shining nature is pointed out to show the birds are conscious in nature. Both are of the same nature. *Dvā suparṇā* is Vedic usage, which in classical Sanskrit is *dvā suparṇau*. They are *sayujā*, that is, *sayujau* always united. They are always together. When one is there, the other is always there. That is the idea here. Their union is very natural. They are *skhāyā*, that is, *sakhāyau*—both of them are great friends. Let us say one is female and the other is male; the male is absolutely non-interfering. They enjoy similar qualities in the sense that both of them are conscious. It is the friendship here.

Samānam vṛkṣam pariśasvajāte: both of them are sitting on the same tree. Here, the tree is to be understood as this physical body. The physical body is compared to a tree because it can be felled like a tree.¹²⁵ In this body, which is similar to the tree of *aśvatta*, the two birds are abiding.

Śaṅkara further describes this tree of *saṁsāra* in his commentary.¹²⁶ The root of the tree is above, meaning, beyond time and space. It is Brahman which is the cause of everything. Just as the root is not available for direct perception, so too, Brahman is not available for objectification.

All the branches of this tree are down below, meaning, the *yare* within time and space. This tree is called *aśvatta*, a peepul tree, its botanical name being *ficus religiosa*. *Religiosa* means it is a tree connected to religion. 'Religiosa' comes only from India because nowhere else is this tree connected to religion except in India. Women wishing to have children go worship this tree by going around it.

It is called *aśvatta* because it may not be there tomorrow.¹²⁷ The idea is, it is not eternal. It has come from a cause that is un-manifest, like the tree has come from a seed in which the tree is un-manifest. Before creation, *saṁsāra* was not manifest and now it has come to manifest. It is also called *kṣetra*, a field, where one experiences the results of action. It is the locus for doing karma and also for enjoying *karma-phala*. These two birds are perched upon the tree of *saṁsāra* namely, this body that includes subtle body also.

Who are these two birds? One is *Īśvara*, consciousness conditioned by *māyā*, who is the cause of everything. The other is *jīva*, consciousness conditioned by a given mind, *prāṇa* and senses, together called subtle body. *Tayoh anyah*: of these two, *jīva* and *Īśvara* one of them. The word '*anyah*' generally means the other. Here *anyah* means one of them. What does it do?

Pippalam svādu atti: one bird avidly experiences the fruits of varied tastes. *Pippalam* means the fruit of The peepul tree. The *jīva* bird is sitting on the tree of *saṁsāra* in order to enjoy the *karma-phala*. The fruit is characterized by happiness and sorrow.¹²⁸ It is *svādu* because it has many and varied tastes. Some fruits are very sweet, some are sour and some are very bitter.

One does undergo the whole variety of experiences, pleasant and painful, in day-to-day life. The *jīva* bird undergoes the experiences with a degree of longing and appetite. Suddenly, it loses the appetite because it ate something unpleasant, like a bad peanut. While eating something delicious, the experience may be pleasant, but after eating, there is pain. All fried things are very delicious to eat. But after eating, the experience is not a very happy one, especially when one stands on the weighing scale! The *jīva* bird undergoes experiences sometimes perching upon the tree and sometimes flying out and coming back to the tree. Śaṅkara uses one more word there, that is, '*avivekatayā*' due to non-discrimination, not knowing that 'I am not the experiencer in reality.' What does the other bird do?

Anāśnan anyo' bhicākaśīti: the other bird witness without eating. Here the word *anyah*, the other, means the one who is distinct from the *jīva*, who does not have doer-ship and enjoyer-ship.¹²⁹ He is the truth of the *jīva* and remains as *sākṣī*, witness of the *jīva*.¹³⁰ He sit in every body without partaking in any experience. *Abhicākaśīti*¹³¹ means the one who just lights up. He is the effulgent witness. He is not subject to any *karma-phala*. He is always free, enjoying himself without doing anything.

If he is not eating, then why should he sit there and watch the other person eating? He sits there because without him the other cannot eat. A few examples are given here to unfold this clearly. Like a king who does not perform any action, but in whose presence the whole kingdom is active, or like a magnet which performs no action, but makes all the iron filings active. So too, *ātman* itself does not perform any action or enjoys, but by its mere presence it becomes the cause for the *jīva* to perform various actions and enjoy the results.¹³²

It is like the sun that lights up everything without any action on its part. One sees the objects lighted up by the sun; therefore one says the sun lights them up. But the sun itself does not perform an action of lighting up. The ātman illumines everything, including the sun, because the nature of the ātman is to illumine. It lends its existence and consciousness making it possible for this *jīva* to enjoy. It is not an action really. The use of the verb is only figurative.

The *jīva* himself is conscious because of the consciousness of the ātman alone. The 'I' thought in the one who things, 'I enjoy' is centered on ātman which is pure consciousness. Wherever there is a body, consciousness manifests in it as a doer and enjoyer. What is manifested is a shadow or reflection, and the one that manifests is the reality. This reflected consciousness in the mind, called the *jīva* is *mithyā*. The consciousness of the conscious *jīva* is, *satya*, and with reference to *māyā-upādhi* it is called *Īśvara*. Without the presence of *satya*, the *mithyā jīva* cannot exist and enjoy, which is why it is said *sayujau*, they are together.

The enjoyer-ship on the part of the *jīva* is *mithyā*. Even when the enjoyer-ship is understood as *mithyā*, it continues as such. If the enjoyer-ship goes away, then what remains is only one *ātma* and there is no need to mention 'two birds'. The mention of 'two birds' is there in the śruti because *mithyā* is not like the rope-snake. It is like the clay-pot. In the rope-snake, the snake goes away when one understands the snake to be a rope. But in the clay-pot, the pot continues to be there even when it is understood as *mithyā*. There is an 'as though' pot now. Similarly, even after the knowledge that ātman is free of doer-ship and enjoyer-ship, there is a transactional *ahankāra* that continues to be there with the reality of the doer-ship and enjoyer-ship sublated. It is important that the śruti mentions '*dvau*, two'. It is how the reality is. The doer and the enjoyer are ātman but the ātman is not the doer and enjoyer. That solves one's problem of *samsāra*.

The imagery of the two birds has given rise to a new philosophy - 'God is sitting in heaven and watching everyone. His eyes are all over, and there is no way of our doing anything without his knowing. Of course he loves all. Out of love alone he watches.' The *śāstra* has clearly said that all that is here is Brahman. In spite of such clear revelation, some people make out a philosophy of difference out of this imagery. One has to analyze and ascertain the meaning of the *śāstra* to get clarity in one's understanding of the vision.

The śruti explains this imagery further in the next mantra.

125 वृक्षं वृक्षमिव च्छेदन-सामान्यात् शरीरं वृक्षम् ज (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

126 अयं हि वृक्षः ऊर्ध्वम्यलोऽवाकशाखः अश्वत्थोऽव्यक्त-मूल-प्रभवह् क्षेत्र-संगणकः सर्वप्राणि-कर्म-फलाश्रयः ज (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

127 श्वे न तिष्ठति इति अश्वत्थः ।

128 कर्म-निष्पन्नं सुख-दुःख-लक्षणं फलम् । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

129 इतरः ईश्वरः नित्य-शुद्ध-बुद्ध-मुक्त-स्वभावः सर्वज्ञः सर्वोपाधिः । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

130 प्रेरयिता ह्यसौ उभयोः भोज्य-भोक्तोः नित्य-साक्षित्व-सत्तामात्रेण । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

131 चकासृ-धातोः यद्भ्रूलुगन्त-रूपम् । अभितः पश्यतीत्यर्थः ।

132 पश्यत्येव केवलम् । दर्शन-मात्रं हि तस्य प्रेरयितृत्वम् । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

to be continued....