

Śrī Śaṅkarācārya's Kāśī Pañcakam

With the commentary Tatva Prakāśikā by Svāmi Tattvavidānanda Sarasvati

(Continued from the last issue)

The body identification is three-fold: *aham*, I am the body, *mama*, my body, and *mahyam*, body is for me. We practise *karma yoga*, selfless service, to neutralize *mahyam*. The body is put to rightful action without seeking results; the results are surrendered to Īśvara or the society at large. Just as the wind does not blow for its own sake, but for the swake of the entire manifestation, so also the faculties of the body and mind function not for our benefit alone, but for the welfare of the entire humanity. The *mama* identity is neutralized by *bhakti yoga*, motiveless devotion. In the context of devotion, *namaḥ*, prostration, is very important. It means *na me*, not mine. Everything of this creation, including the body, belongs to śavara. Then, the ignorance that I am the doer is negated by discernment of Self as distinct (not different) from the body, which is the non-self. This is sāṅkhyā yoga.

Upaśāntiḥ, the dousing of the fire, the fire of affliction. There are three kinds of tāpa, affliction: ādhyātmika, related to the physical body like ill-health, ādhibhautika, the suffering caused by raging street dogs, thieves etc., ādhidaivika, problems like famine caused by the gods. The heart is at peace when these three fires are doused.

Why the adjective parama, supreme or ultimate, to upaśānti? When we sleep, all the afflictions are gone and when we wake up, the three types of afflictions come back. It is as if they are waiting for us to wake up. Thus the śānti, that we experience during sleep is brittle, not parama. In the

waking state too, there are many methods to reduce the agitation of the mind, e.g. taking tranquilizers. The agitation however comes back once the effect of the drug wears away. In fact, we often become more distressed after such temporarily acquired peace of mind. It is like lighting, which briefly lights up objects in the dark and disappears quickly. We want the real peace of mind, not the ephemeral one.

We seek permanent cessation of all suffering and pain and that is mokṣa, also called nirvāṇa. Vāṇa is suffering and nirvāṇa is freedom from suffering. Freedom is mostly described in negative terms. What it is cannot be described. It is not what is described in words. Therefore, what it is not alone is described. It is freedom from afflictions. It is conscious presence that transcends all divisions. We just abide in the self, 'I am', and discover that inner silence.

It is not the silence per se that is important. The flow of thoughts is harmless if and only if the content of the mind is realized as unreal. As we take the content of the waking consciousness as real and as 'other', we psychologically depend upon that content for self-fulfilment and happiness. And then, we try to manipulate the content as we seek pleasure and avoid pain. This is nothing but deeply ingrained ignorance and bondage.

The flow of thoughts acts as a screen that covers up the truth. The mind creates a world for us and presents it to us on a

platter every morning, and we accept that as real and take ourselves to be a small part of that world. Unless we negate this projection of the mind, we cannot discover the truth. This subject-object division and plurality projected by the ignorant mind is mithyā, unreal. To know the truth, we have to step away from the mind and watch it; then, it automatically becomes calm and quiet.

As we identify with the mind, we give a reality to the object of its thoughts. While paying attention to and investing interest in the objects of the world, we cannot realize it as illusion. Withdraw your attention, withhold your interest and draw back from the mind. Watch the mind constantly. Be kind to it, but in an uninvolved way. This is yoga. Initially, the progress is slow in yoga, and therefore, perseveringly withdraw from the thoughts. Be a witness to the mind, and the mind becomes pure. De-automatize every action. For instance, we talk while taking food, and eating becomes mechanical. Stop talking and experience fully the taste of the dish. That is also yoga. Similarly, watch yourself while walking.

When the mind is agitated, I am agitated, for there is no discrimination between the 'I' and the mind. 'I am' and 'I think' are not the same; they are diametrically opposed to each other. 'I am' is the motionless being, while thinking is changeful. As we identify with the mind, we remain trapped in it. As we withdraw from the mind and start watching it, we realize that we are the knower of the mind. The mind is kṣetra, field, and all the objects of thought are part and parcel of this field.

In yoga, one should not contradict oneself. One should not increase the impurities of the mind or work at cross-purposes. As we purify the mind by prāṇāyāma or control of the mind through regulated breathing, meditation, listening to the scriptures etc.,

we should avoid impurities like hate, jealousy, greed etc. at all costs. Once the mind is pure, we will realize that we are not the mind, but a witness of the mind. Since the mind is filled with the six-fold enemy such as greed, anger, jealousy, etc., realizing oneself as the witness is not possible. We have to know deep within that we are not the mind, and thus transcend the mind. We will be able to transcend the mind if and only if the mind is pure.

An impure mind that is attached to the world holds us back. Antaḥkaraṇa śuddhi or purification of the mind, is the most crucial starting point. As the mind becomes pure, it becomes sāvika in nature – calm and quiet, loses its rājasā (hyperactivity) and tāmasā (dullness) burden. Then, one can easily see oneself that he is not the mind. One is the intelligence behind the intellect; one is prior to the mind. This inner space is a deep, unshakeable peace. This inner silence is the conscious presence. It is not void, it is Kāśī.

In Kāśī, there is the river Ganges. It is vimalā, sanctifying. Water of the Ganges remains pure despite a lot of toxins and chemicals that are dumped into it. No other river has such power of self-purification. For example, it is relatively pure as the river enters the city of Kanpur, but the water becomes very dirty and toxic as the many tanneries of Kanpur dump their waste into the river; but within 10 miles of leaving Kanpur, the water again becomes almost pure. The sealed Ganges water remains pure for a very long time. The Ganges of Kāśī stands for the perennial manifestation of Atman, the timeless Awareness, in the form of waking consciousness. The movement of the mind and the senses are the content of that consciousness.

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