

# IS THE 'DESIRE' DESIRABLE

(SWAMI SHUDDHABODHANANDA SARASWATI)

.....Continued from previous issue

Disciple: Yes *guro*, but if I am not impertinent, may I ask another question?

Guru : Go ahead.

Disciple: It is true that the desire is a produced entity whereas *saguna-brahma* or *Isvara* is the Creator. Therefore we are told that *Bhagavan's* statement 'I am *kaama*' does not mean an equation in the form of '*Isvara* is equal to *kaama*'. But the *sruti* itself tells us in the form of an equation: '*Sarvam Brahman*' (Everything is Brahman). Is there not a contradiction?

Guru : My dear, both these statements are from two different standpoints. The statement from the *Gita* takes for granted the *Isvara*, *jagat* and everything that is there in it at the level of *vyavahara* to describe *Isvara's* glories which are useful to *mumukshus* and devotees in their *saadhanaa*. But the *sruti* declarations such as *sarvam Brahma*' is only to reveal the immanent (*sarvavyapi*) nature of Brahman as the basis (*adhithana*) of the entire *adhyasta jagat*. The *jagat* has no independent existence apart from Brahman. Such *sruti* statements do not intend to confer the status of *nirvikari* (changeless) Brahman on the *vikari* (ever-changing) *jagat*. The *samanadhikaranya* (juxtaposition) '*sarvam Brahma*' is used only for the sake of dissolving Creation (*prapancha-pravilapanartham*) (*Br.Su.bh.1-3-1*). The principle is: though the *jagat* is non-different (*ananya*) from Brahman on account of the cause-effect relation between the two, the true nature of *jagat* is Brahman but the true nature of Brahman is not *jagat* (*Br.Su.bh.2-1-9*). Thus the equation '*Sarvam Brahma*' holds good but not '*Isvara is kaama*'. It is just like the nature of the mistaken silver (*rajata*) in the place of sea-shell (*shukti*) is the shell, but the nature of shell is not the silver.

Oh disciple, are you convinced by now that desires are not desirable for a *mumukshu*?

Disciple: Yes *guro*, but I find that it is very difficult to control desires because senses (*indriyas*) run to the sense-objects forcefully.

Guru : You are right. There is a reason for that. The bodies of all *jivas* are meant in general to undergo the *bhoga* (enjoyment and suffering) according to one's *karmaphalas*. It requires the contact of *indriyas* with the external *vishayas*. Therefore *Isvara* has created *indriyas* extrovert (*paraanchi*) by their nature. But sensing the danger of *jivas* being immersed in *samsara* for ever, *Isvara* has provided a provision of withdrawing the mind and the *indriyas* from the sense-objects and make them introvert by *viveka* and *vairagya* to gain the *atmajnana* (*Kathopanishad, 2-1-1*). Therefore a *mumukshu* has to take a right about-turn from extrovertedness to develop *vairagya*. But *vairagya* is possible only when the *viveka* is highly mature. *Viveka* dawns only when *durita-kshaya* (ending of past sins) takes place. It depends on discharging one's duties in dedication to *Isvara* as enjoined by the scriptures. This shows that gaining *atmajnana* is certainly difficult. It is not that easy as picking up informations from Vedantic texts and parroting them. It needs perseverance with perfect eligibility until the *aparoksha Brahmajnana* is gained.

Disciple: Revered *guro*. One main question still lingers. How does desire or extrovertedness obstruct the pursuit of gaining *atmajnana* because of which *Bhagavan* Krishna totally condemns it?

#### NATURE OF ATMAJNANA AND ITS PREREQUISITE

Guru : This question originates from the non-understanding of the exact nature of *atmajnana* , how can it be gained, and what is its most essential prerequisite. In the case of *pratyaksha* (direct perceptual knowledge) and *atmajnana* / *Bhrahmajnana*, an *antahkarana-vritti* (thought) totally conforming to the entity to be known which can serve as its replica is indispensable. Such a *vritti* with respect to *vishayas* is called *vishayakara-vritti* (*vritti* having the form of sense-object) or in general *tattadakara-vritti* (*vritti* having the form of the entity to be known). In the case of *atmajnana* / *Bhrahmajnana* such *vritti* is called *atmakara* or *Brahmakara* or *akhandakara*. *Atma* / Brahman has no *akara* (form), but its nature is *atyanta* (completely) *nirmala* (pure-free from all the *drishya jagat* that is *adhyasta* / superimposed on it), *svaccha* (clear – completely unconnected to the virtues and vices of all *drishyas* illumined by it) and *sukshma* (subtle / *nirguna* / free from all attributes). But *Ishvara* has created the *buddhi* (*antahkarana*) capable of assuming the exact nature of *atma-chaitanya* free from all that is superimposed on it. This needs an *antahkarana* which is totally introvert and not at all extrovert or preoccupied in the *drishyas* on account of desires, sense-objects and *karmas* thereof. In short without such *vritti* the *avidya* of *atma* and its effect the *jagat* cannot be ended. Thus, knowing *atma* is to end the *adhyasa* of ignorance (*avidya*) with its effect the *drishya jagat* (*Bhashya*, B.G. 18-50 and *Br. U.* 1-4-10). The following quotes will corroborate this fact. If an individual gains *tattvajnana* (*atmajnana*), then itself his desires cease. *Tattvajnana* and desires cannot co-exist like 'light and darkness'. (*Yogavaasishtha*, *Ni.U.* 37-30).

Sureshvaracharya highlights the above fact in *Panchikarana-vartika*: ' A *jnani* whose mind is absorbed steadfastly in *atma* does not perceive the *drishya-jagat* '.

Sage Ashtavakra warns : 'Oh Son! You may learn or even teach different *shaastras* many a times. Nevertheless, your mind will not get absorbed in *atma* unless you withdraw from all *drishyas*'. (*Ashtavakra-gita* 16-1).

*Mumukshus* should know very clearly why the mind or *antahkarana* totally free from the experiences of *drishyas* or preoccupation in them alone can know *atma*. Consider an example. Suppose there is a person who does not know that the sugar is sweet. He is given a pinch of sugar. But to know it, he has to be aware of that sweetness exactly as it is through a *vritti* corresponding to sweetness for which he has to taste it. If he is aware of its sweetness because of tasting and yet knows not that it is sugar, it needs to be introduced by a person who knows the sugar, by saying: 'what you have tasted now is sugar'. Thereby he gains its knowledge. The same is the case with the knowledge of *atma* ('I') which is *aparoksha* (*svaprakasha*, *svayamjyoti*, self-evident).

*Atma* is simultaneously *anubhava-svarupa* (self-experiencing principle), *jnapti-svarupa* (self-knowing principle) and *cit-svarupa* (self-awareness principle). These are not three distinct natures of *atma* but one and the same nature, expressed differently. We are experiencing or are aware of *atma* moment by moment as 'I', but erroneously. We do not know it exactly in its true nature of being totally free from all the features of *adhyasta* (superimposed) *drishyas* which comprise the calamitous *samsara*.

Vedanta describes the means by which all the *adhyasta drishyas* on 'I' (*atma*) can be ended wherein the seeker becomes aware of *atma* exactly what it is in its real nature free from *sukha-dukhatmaka samsara*. This is called *shodhita (nirupadhika) tvam pada* (the 'you' in '*tat tvam asi*' 'you are Brahman/*tat*'). Let us remember that in the state of ignorance, *atma* ('I') is available as *anubhava-svarupa* with *upadhis* i.e. it is *sopadhika anubhava-svarupa*. But when *atma* is made *shodhita (nirupadhika) tvam pada* by ending the *adhyasta drashyas*, it remains as *nirupadhika anubhava-svarupa*. Its nature of being self-experiencing principle (*anubhava-svarupa*) does not become extinct in any state of *antahkarana*. *Atma* does not cease to be *anubhava* (experience) by itself in any state whether it is *sopadhika* (with *upadhis*) or *nirupadhika* (free from *upadhis*). The accomplishment of *shodhita tvam pada* wherein one is aware of one's *nirupadhika* nature is the first step in gaining *Brahmajnana* because that itself is Brahman. *Shodhita tvam* itself as Brahman is indicated by the *pramana* such as '*tat tvam asi mahavakya*'. Then what remains is described synonymously by the phrases such as *anubhava-svarupa, jnapti-svarupa* or *cit-svarupa* (self-evident) *atma* identical with Brahman. That is *aparoksha atmajnana*, that is *aparoksha Bhrahmajnana* which is self-experiencing without *triputi*. Anything short of it is only *paroksha-jnana*, which cannot end ignorance or liberate. It is incapable of ending the pursuit of *sukha-prapti* and *dukha-nivritti* which is the *sine qua non* of *samsara*. *Bhashyakara* points out in *adhyasabhashya* that the actions of a *paroksha-jnani* is similar to that of cattle etc. (*pashu aadibhihi avisheshaat*).

The *mumukshus* must bear in mind that *mahavakya pramana* such as '*tat tvam asi*' will not operate unless one is directly (*aparokshatayaa*) aware of or experiences *shodhita tvam* as (*nirupadhika I / atma*) or what is called *nirupadhika anubhava-svarupa atma* free from the features of *samsara* in contrast to the *sopadhika anubhava-svarupa atma* experienced with all *samsara* comprising *sukha dukha* (joys and sorrows) in the state of ignorance. To say that such experience of *shodhita (nirupadhika) tvam pada* is not necessary because *atma* is *anubhava-svarupa* does not end the problem of sorrowful *samsara*. The *anubhava-svarupa atma* alone brings invariably the calamitous *samsara* presented to us by inert *antahkarana-vrittis* (called *avidya-pratyayas*) in the ambit of our experience. The *samsara*, bondage, transmigration etc. are exclusively our problems and not that of *atma*. *Atma* has none of them nor *moksha*. It is always in its *Paramaananda svarupa* whether *mithya* Creation is present or absent. Even attaching a label that the *samsara* is '*mithya*' (false) because the *sruti-pramana* says so is not a solution. It does not end the *samsara*. If *adhyasta samsara* is *anubhava-siddha* for the *jiva*, its absence also in the self-evident *atma* should be equally *anubhava-siddha*. That is precisely what the *shodhita-tvam pada* accomplishes. It reveals to us directly (*aparokshataya*) the *nirupadhika anubhava-svarupa atma* free from even the *triputi*. The *sruti* provides the means to gain it. That is why *bhashyakara* emphasizes that to gain the knowledge, 'I am Brahman' (*Aham Brahma asmi*) the entire *adhyasa* beginning from self-ignorance onwards has to be ended (*Br. U. bh. 1-4-10, B.G. bh. 18-50*). Vedanta is not a lip-service or some psychological consolation. *Sutrashashya* makes it very clear when it describes the finale of *Brahmajnana* in its statement: '*Anubhavaavasaanatvaat Brahmajnanasya – अनुभावसानत्वात् ब्रह्मज्ञानस्य* (*Br.Su. Bh. 1-1-2*). That is where the role of *sadhana-catushtaya, suddha-antahkarana, citta naishchalya, sarvakarma sannnyasa* etc. to be eligible to gain *atmajnana* becomes meaningful. This should make it clear that the Vedantic pursuit is not an academic study. Moreover without the *aparoksha anubhava* of *shodhita (nirupadhika) tvam* (you) i.e. 'I' in its true nature, the *mahavakya* will be akin to introducing a person to a schizophrenic whose basic perception of the person being introduced is already distorted.

The equation of the *mahavakya* points out that *tat* and *tvam* are identical. This will hold good only if there is awareness of *tvam* (you, i.e. 'I') exactly in its true nature totally free from the features of *samsara* including all the *upadhis*. The *tvam* (you i.e. 'I') as experienced now as *samsari* identified with *upadhis* cannot by itself be the *nirupadhika tat pada* – Brahman. In the absence of *shodhita tvam* the *sruti-pramana* will fail to produce *atmajnana*.

An extrovert (*bahirmukha*) mind cannot accomplish *shodhita (nirupadhika) tvam pada*. Therefore a totally introvert (*antarmukha*) pure mind is indispensable. This requires a total abstinence from desires, *vishayaasakti* (love for sense-objects), *karmas*, sense-indulgence or anything else that demands the mental pre-occupation. That is why Vedanta insists on the eligibility in terms of *sadhana-catushtaya*, *shuddha antahkarana*, *citta naishchlyya*, *amaanitva* etc. The *Mundakopanishad* (3-2-4) clearly declares that *atma* cannot be gained by *tapas* (knowledge) that is *alinga* (devoid of *sannyasa*). The eligibility to take to *sannyasa* and the conduct of *sannyasis* as envisaged by the *sruti* are such that by strict adherence to them a *sannyasi* alone can command a totally introvert mind necessary to gain *atmajnana* and *nishtha* (steadfastness) therein. Perfect *vairagya*, no *vishayaasakti*, total freedom from *karmas*, no possessions (*aparigraha*), having well developed *antahkarana-shuddhi*, *shama*, *dama* etc., living in solitary place, total *shraddha* in *Isvara* for the sustenance of his body, no talk of worldly things or *anatma* (*Mu.U.2-2-5*), and strict adherence to the conduct of *Sannyasis* make him totally introvert. By the mention of *sannyasa (alinga)*, the *sruti* does not mean just the external marks. There must be total commitment to gain *atmajnana*. It cannot be a part-time pursuit. *Mundaka sruti* expresses this fact in its statement : 'The person who longs for (*vrunkte*) gaining *atma* by all means, to him alone *atma* reveals (*viunkte*) its true nature' (*Mu.U. 3-2-3*). It is well-known that desires invariably prompt the extrovertedness of the mind. Therefore desires cannot co-exist with the introvert mind which is so indispensable to gain *atmajnana* and *nishtha* in it. Desires and introvert mind are like light and darkness.

Oh disciple, is it clear to you by now as to how desire obstructs the pursuit of gaining *atmajnana* and why *Bhagavan* condemns it so vehemently?

Disciple: Yes, revered *guro*. Now I can see very clearly why the desire is not desirable to a *mumukshu*.

*Om Namo Gurubhyah.*

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