

## śraddhā-bhakti-dhyāna-yogād avaihi

*Third part of the serial article continued from April 2019 issue*

### ŚRADDHĀ

The Vedas are revelations of Īśvara. In accepting this, certain faith is involved. But it is not a blind faith. Some of the religions that are fundamentally committed to beliefs are called 'Faiths'. But we cannot say, 'Hindu Faith'. We say, 'Hindu *dharma*, *vaidika-dharma*'. There is a reason for it. Any belief we have has certain supporting arguments, though not proving arguments. This kind of argument is called *śrutyanukūla-tarka*, a reasoning that is conducive to assimilating what the Vedas reveal. I can cite a few things. For instance, the *jīva*, the soul, survives death. The *jīva* departing from the body is not seen because it is subtle. If the *jīva* departing from the body were seen, you would push the *jīva* back inside. That the *jīva* survives death is a belief. But it has supporting arguments.

We know that matter conserves itself. No one can destroy matter, much less energy. They are always in one form or the other, and there is not much difference between the two. They are convertible. No one can destroy an ounce of matter and no one can destroy a quantum of energy. We have this much knowledge. My physical body is not a mere matter-energy vesture. I am a conscious being who is conscious of matter and energy. I am the one who is conscious of matter in the form of particles, of atoms, and of energy in the form of electrons. Therefore, how can it be construed that the conscious being should come to a total decimation? When these two, matter and energy, are not destroyable, the third one, the conscious being cannot be destroyed, need not be assumed to be destroyed, until otherwise proved. So, if matter and energy cannot be destroyed, the assumption that the conscious being can also survive is an argument to support the *śruti*'s statement that the *jīva* survives death of the body.

The next belief is that the *jīva* re-incarnates. It need not necessarily be here, on this planet. It can be anywhere in the universe; there are many *lokas*, realms of existence. This also is an acceptable belief, one that is not unreasonable.

Further, we all have certain experience of luck and bad luck. Everything we talk about has a cause and effect relationship. A particular phenomenon exists because there is a cause. We are certain about it. The water in the kettle is hot because it is sitting on a hot plate. You got the bus today, but you missed it yesterday. When your turn came, the conductor said 'right'. It was right for the conductor, but not for you because you are left out. Missing the bus is everybody's experience

Now and then getting the bus without any waiting is also everybody's experience. This luck—being at the right place at the right time—shows that there is something else also working for you, besides your effort. That 'something else' working along with your pursuit is called *karma*. When you bring in *karma*, it means that the past has come. Past *karmas* are *adr̥ṣṭa*, not seen, but have a basis in the *śāstra*. It means there is a *jīva* who incarnates.

There are highly documented freak cases where children remember their past lives. In one case, a three year-old child said to her parents,

"I want to go to my house."

"This is your house."

"No, I want to go to my house, my husband's house."

"What? Husband's house?"

"Yes. I met with an accident; that is the house."

Then, indications like name, location, etc., are all given and when they are checked, they find an eighty-year old man of the name given who did lose his wife in an accident. These kinds of cases are well documented by people who are supposed to do research following all the norms of documentation. There are books on this subject matter. Even Western scholars and psychologists have done research in this area, but none of them have conclusive proof; all of the evidence is only supportive.

We accept the Vedas as a means of knowledge because it has come from *Īśvara*. The *karma-kāṇḍa*, the first portion of the Veda, talks about *sādhana-sādhyas*, means and ends. It talks about unknown means for known ends. For instance, wealth, progeny, rains are all known ends for which we have unknown means. We do know certain means, but those means are not adequate. The Vedas reveal the unknown means that are in the form of rituals.

A ritual is a form of prayer. These rituals will remove all obstacles coming in the way of our efforts. Thus, we have unknown means for known ends. The results of prayers can be checked. For instance, we can do *yajñas*, fire rituals like *kārīrī* and *japas*, chants, like *Varuṇa Japa* and bring about rains. Rains do come. We cannot say that the rituals and the rains are unconnected. Again, these are all supporting arguments; we cannot prove the connection definitively.

The Vedas further talk of known means for unknown ends. You do something good for the society. For instance, you help people affected by tsunami. These are all altruistic activities, charitable activities and they are the known good things that you do. There is *puṇya* for all this. *Puṇya* is *adr̥ṣṭa*, unseen, by you. Because of *puṇya*, you get into some favorable situations in life. If the *śāstra* does not mention a specific result for any *karma*, there is a general blanket rule that the result is *svarga*, heaven.

The Vedas also reveal both means and ends that are unknown. It says that if you perform  *jyotiṣṭoma-yajña* , you will go to  *svarga* . You cannot say anything to prove that it is not true. That itself is good enough for the Vedas to be an independent means of knowledge.

Now, the same Vedas reveal in the upaniṣads: “You are Īśvara who is the cause of this entire  *jagat* .” In this, there are two possibilities. Either what the  *śāstra*  says is wrong, is blasphemous, or what it says is not understood. If you say it is blasphemous, you have no  *śraddhā* . If you say, “Maybe it is saying something that I do not understand,” then it is  *śraddhā* .  *Śāstra*  does not simply say, “This person who is five feet seven inches, weighing one hundred and sixty pounds, the father of two children is Īśvara.”

*Śāstra*  has a certain teaching, a certain methodology of communication. The guru tells the  *śiṣya* , “All that is here is only one; there is no second thing.” The  *śiṣya*  says, “You tell me there is no second thing, but you are there, I am here, and so we are two. Minimum two are there already. If two are accepted then everything else is also accepted.” Here, the  *śāstra*  has a vision that includes this division of subject and object.

The fact that the  *śāstra*  says that there is no duality, shows it accepts the seeming duality; otherwise it will not say there is no duality. The negation itself shows that the  *śāstra*  sees the duality very clearly. Therefore, in spite of this subject-object difference that exists, the truth is revealed as non-dual. How is one going to negate this? To negate this, one has no arguments, really.

*Śāstra*  reveals that there is a  *vastu* , a reality, knowing which everything is as well known. In fact it says, ‘Everything is known,’ I am making it ‘everything is as well known.’ If I say, everything is known, you will immediately ask me, ‘Will I know French?’ So I say, ‘as well known, as good as known.’

In the  *Chāndogyaopaniṣad* , Śvetaketu, who had just then returned from his stay at the  *gurukula* , asked his father about this reality. He was a big  *anūcānamānin* , someone who thought, “I have studied everything.” He was just floating around. The father called him and asked, “Did you ask your teacher for that knowledge gaining which everything is known?” Śvetaketu knew that his father was a  *vidvān* , a scholar, and that he was asking a pertinent question. He replied, “My teacher did not know this.” The assumption here on the part of Śvetaketu was, “Had my teacher known, he would have definitely taught me, for I was the best student. He did not teach me. Therefore, he did not know that.” His father must have given him a stern look because, though there is no other mention in the upaniṣad, Śvetaketu then asked, “Is there such knowledge?”

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<sup>1</sup>  *Neha nānāsti kiñcana (Kaṭhopaniṣad 2.1.11).*

Just look at this. Suppose, out of clay different types of earthenware such as pots, jars, lids, cups and so on, are made. You can count them as one, two, three, four and so on. They are many. Now, I am holding these pots in my hand. If you count them as earthenware, then two different things are there. If you count clay, how many clays are there? There is only clay. Now, I am adding one more pot on my hand. I have three pots—three indicates the plural in Sanskrit—still, the clay is one.

You say, “This is a pot.” If I ask you just one question, you are in trouble. Now, I will do some magic here. I am holding this pot in my hand. Suppose I ask you, “What is in my hand?” You say, “It is a pot.” I say, “It is clay.” Since you say ‘pot’ I ask you, “What is the weight of this pot?” Whatever weight you say, in reality, it is the weight of clay. Therefore, you have a pot that has no weight. You have a pot that I cannot touch, for, the touch of pot is the touch of clay. What I touch is clay, what I hold is clay. Tell me, where is your pot?

“Swamiji, the pot is on the clay.”

“How can it be on the clay? If it is on the clay then I should be able to remove it like this flower that I keep on the pot.”

“No Swamiji, it is in the clay.”

“No, in the clay is only clay.”

So pot is not on the clay, it is not in the clay. It cannot be off the clay either. So where is the pot? This is real magic here. In any other magic, the hand is quicker than your eyesight. This is our *ṛṣis'* magic; hold the pot and dismiss the pot!

Even though there is no object for the word ‘pot’ still there is some form that holds water. You cannot dismiss the pot totally. Therefore, you have to say, “The pot exists.” But it is not a substantive. It is *nāma-rūpa*, a name and form. Pot is not an object as such; pot is only a form which is why you can also use the word for a belly and say ‘pot-bellied’.

A form is not a substantive; it is not a *dravya*, an object. So pot becomes an attribute of clay. Can you say that wherever there is clay there is ‘potness’ the pot attribute? No. Therefore, it is an incidental attribute to clay. This is *sṛṣṭi*, creation. Śvetaketu was convinced, “If I understand one thing made of clay, I have understood all that is made of clay. Ah, that is true because what counts is only clay, nothing else counts. Everything made of clay is counted.” This is the illustration given in the *upaniṣad*.

In the same way, if there is one thing out of which everything has come, by which everything is sustained, unto which everything goes back. Then if that one thing is understood, everything is as well understood.

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<sup>2</sup> Swamiji held a couple of pots in his hand and asked the audience to count them.

Everything else becomes an attribute to that one thing. This 'everything else' includes your body, mind and senses.

If one understands this even vaguely, it is enough to begin the study; that glow is enough to become a flame. Vedanta talks about what is already there. It is the main thing—knowing which everything is as well known and gaining which everything is as well gained. It means the gain is of the ultimate. What it says, is to be understood.

What is to be gained here in terms of knowledge is something for which the means of knowledge is Vedanta.

“Swamiji, can you prove it gives me knowledge?”

“Yes, I can prove it gives you knowledge.”

“What is the proof that it can give me knowledge?”

“You do not require a proof for a means of knowledge. You have to use the means of knowledge to prove that it is a means of knowledge.”

Here, I give an example for this. Suppose, there is a person who was born blind and has never been able to see. But his blindness can be corrected by a surgical procedure available in the USA. So the Rotary Club and the Lions Club together sponsored him to go to New York and undergo the surgical procedure. When everything was over, he was kept blindfolded for two days. Then the doctor came and removed what was covering his eyes and asked him, “Hello, please open your eyes.”

“Doctor, I will not open my eyes.”

“Why?”

“You prove that my eyes will see, only then will I open them. Suppose they do not see, my heart will stop. Therefore, you have to prove to me that my eyes will see.”

How can you prove this? There is no proof. The eyes themselves are the means for visual perception. To see whether a means of knowledge works, you have to use the means. There is no other way. You do not require any other means of knowledge. And no other means can prove the validity of a given means either. What the eyes can do, only the eyes have to prove, other means of knowledge cannot, which is why it is called a *pramāṇa*. Therefore, the person has to open the eyes to see whether his eyes see or not. But this patient would not open his eyes. Then, the doctor called a special nurse to pin his hands to the bed and used his fingers to open the eyelids. When he did so, the patient exclaimed, “Ah, Oh, Oh, I...” What happened? The patient's eyes see.

That the eyes see, the eyes have to prove to me; that the ears hear; the ears have to prove to me. That Vedanta works, Vedanta has to prove. So the pot example is given and the possibility of gaining the limitless is established. Therefore, what the *śruti* says may be true. It has to prove itself, and what I need to do now is to allow the *śruti* to do the job. We cannot force a person to sit in the class.

The person has got to decide whether he or she wants to know or not.

The subject matter of the *śāstra* cannot be the subject matter of any other *pramāṇa*. Therefore, it cannot come from any given intellect; it can come only from Īśvara. If you look at the various means and ends of the *karma-kāṇḍa*, they can come only from Īśvara. If you look at the Vedānta *śāstra* also, it can come only from Īśvara. Whether it comes from Īśvara, it works for me and for you; that is enough. It works because it comes from Īśvara. Otherwise it will not work because the subject matter is not available for other means of knowledge.

We need to understand the nature of knowledge and Īśvara properly. Īśvara is all-knowledge. All-knowledge already exists; no new knowledge is ever created by anybody. We can ask “If all-knowledge already exists, then what about the *pramāṇas* like the eyes and so on?” The eyes are only a means for us to gain knowledge. When the eyes, mind, etc. remove the inhibiting factor, we then appreciate the knowledge that is already there. The *pramāṇa-pravṛtti*, operation of a means of knowledge, such as eyes, etc., is for removing the inhibiting factor called ignorance. Therefore, for a *jīva* other *pramāṇas* are necessary.

All *pramāṇas* are only for *ajñāna-nivṛtti*, removal of ignorance. Do not ask me, “Why is ignorance there?” You came along with ignorance. “Why did I come with ignorance?” If you did not come along with ignorance, you would have come with all the wisdom. Or, you would not have been born at all. The *śabda-pramāṇa*, like other *pramāṇas*, is also meant to remove ignorance and it has to be acknowledged as a *pramāṇa*. Acknowledging it as a *pramāṇa* is *śraddhā*. Therefore, Brahmaji tells Āśvalāyana, “*śraddhā-bhakti-dhyāna-yogād avaihi*, understand what the *śruti* says, with *śraddhā*, *bhakti* and *dhyāna*.” The *śāstra* says, “you are already that which you want to be.” *Śāstra* is the *pramāṇa* for this. With the help of the *śāstra* you understand this.

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