

Satsang with Sri Swami Viditatmananda PRATAḤ SMARAṆAM

continued from July 2016 issue...

In these three verses, the nature of the Self is revealed very beautifully by ĀdiŚaṅkara.

प्रातस्स्मरामि हृदि संस्फुरदात्मतत्त्वं सच्चित्सुखं परमहंसगतिं तुरीयम् ।

यत्स्वप्नजागरसुषुप्तमवैति नित्यं तद्ब्रह्म निष्कलमहं न च भूतसङ्खेद्यः ॥

prātassmarāmi hṛdi saṁsphuradātmataṭṭvaṁ saccitsukhaṁ paramahaṁsagatiṁ
turīyam, yatsvapnajāgarasusuptamavaiti nityaṁ tadbrahma niṣkalamahaṁ na
ca bhūtasāṅkhaḥ..

Early in the morning, I remember the shining truth of the Self in the heart, that which is ever present, the limitless Awareness, the supreme goal of sannyāsīs, known as the 'fourth', which always witnesses dream, waking, and deep sleep. I am that undivided brahman and not an aggregate of elements. Prātaḥ, early morning. Smarāmi, I remember. Hṛdi, in the heart, by which we mean the mind. Saṁsphurat, shining. Ātmatatvam, the truth of the Self.

I can recognize the Self, which is the truth, in my heart or mind only when I withdraw my attention from everything else

In the early morning, at dawn, I remember. Remembrance is possible only when you already know something. Remembrance and memory presuppose experience. You can only remember what you have already experienced. When a teacher says that he remembers, he already knows. So what is it that I remember? I remember the truth of the Self. What is the nature of this Self? Its nature is to shine. Where is it shining? It is shining in my heart. The truth of the Self is that it is shining in my heart. In fact, we should not say the truth of the Self because the Self is the truth. We can say the truth that is the Self, or the truth of the Self to mean the truth of what I consider myself to be; the Self implies the 'I'.

The Self is all-pervasive, and therefore, it shines everywhere. However, it shines most wonderfully in the mind. Even though most surfaces reflect the rays of light off our faces, the mirror reflects the face most clearly. Similarly, even though the Self is everywhere, the heart or mind is the place where the Self shines most gloriously in its own light. It is here that the Self or ātmā is recognized in its true nature. When can I remember the Self that shines in my heart? It is when my attention is focused only upon my heart, which means that my attention is withdrawn from everything else. My attention should be on whatever I want to see. For example, if I want to see something through a pair of binoculars, I must first look in the direction of the object and then focus on the object; it is a means of seeing and should be focused properly on the object. Just as we need to focus the binoculars, so also do we need to direct our minds toward the Self in order to see it clearly. My attention should be focused on the subtlest aspect of my Self. For that, my mind should be free from the preoccupation with everything else. It should be directed to the core of my being. By core, we do not mean any particular place. By heart we do not mean any particular place

either, even though the heart is conventionally the focus of attention during meditation. In the Yoga-Śāstra, the heart is recommended as a place of concentration in order to meditate and, therefore, it is customary to use the word heart, but by the use of the word heart we mean the core of one's being, the core of one's mind, that from which the idea of 'I' originates. Thus, I concentrate my attention on the 'I'. The Self shines in the core of my being, the core of my heart, my mind.

What I take myself to be determines how I think or act

What do I think I am right now? Right now, I take myself to be a man or woman, a speaker or listener, a doer, an enjoyer, a limited being, an ego etc. For example, right now, I am a speaker and you are a listener. Later, it is possible that I may become a listener and you may become a speaker. At lunch, I become a bhoktā, an enjoyer. After lunch, you may become a walker and I may become a sleeper. How can it be possible that I can be a speaker or listener or doer or an enjoyer? How is it possible that I can be so many different things?

An example of this is the nature of crystal. What is the true color of crystal? If you put a yellow flower in front of a crystal, it appears to be yellow; if you place a blue flower, the crystal appears to be blue, and so on. The crystal seems to be changing its colors all the time. In reality a crystal is transparent. It does not have a color of its own. If it looks into a mirror to determine its color, it will see that it is yellow sometimes, blue at some other times, and so on. Similarly, I look in the mirror of my mind and declare myself different every time. When I am talking I say I am a speaker, I call myself a listener when the ears are listening, and I say I am a thinker when the mind is thinking. In fact listening takes place at the level of ear, but on account of my identifying with the ears, I say that I am a listener. Talking takes place at the level of speech, but on account of my identifying with my speech, I say I am the speaker and, similarly, thinking takes place at the level of the mind, but on account of my identifying with the mind, I say I am a thinker.

We are what we take ourselves to be. It doesn't matter what we really are; what matters is what we take ourselves to be. In the same way, it doesn't matter what an object is, what matters is what we take it to be. For example, in the twilight, I mistake a rope lying in front of me to be a snake. Even though it is really a rope, my reaction is based upon what I take it to be. I see it and I jump, but someone else who sees it for what it is, may wonder why I am jumping. He sees a rope, but I see a snake. I am not jumping at the rope; I am jumping at the sight of the snake. Thus, I respond to a situation based upon how I see it. What is important in our lives is what we understand and how we interpret it. We generally live in the world of our own interpretations. How we interpret something may be quite different from how it is in reality. We rarely live in the objective world, the world as it is.

Whenever I meet you, it is not to you that I respond; instead, I respond to the person you are in my interpretation. If my interpretation is that you are my friend, my behavior is of one kind. Otherwise, my response to you is different. If I interpret that you don't like me, my response is of one kind; if I interpret that you like me, my response is of another kind. It doesn't matter what you are! We don't understand why someone acts in a certain manner or talks in a particular way, but, he has a perfect justification for his actions. From your stand point you are an angel, but he does not think so.

More often than not, there is no compatibility between what the realities are and what we take them to be. Therefore, there are all kinds of conflicts and misunderstandings. It is not what I take myself to be, but what I am that is important.

Every false notion of the Self is the cause of sorrow

Right now I take myself to be a speaker, listener, thinker, talker, man, woman, father, or mother, or to be successful, unsuccessful, handsome, not beautiful etc. There are infinite such complexes. Every complex is a source of sorrow, sadness, and pain. Even if I take myself to be good-looking, it is a cause for sorrow. If I take myself not to be good-looking, it is, of course, a cause for sorrow. Similarly, taking myself to be successful can also be as much of a cause for sorrow, as is taking myself to be unsuccessful. The former is a cause for sorrow that is yet to come, while the latter is a cause for immediate sorrow. Every false notion about my self is a cause of my sorrow and unhappiness. Vedanta explains to us there is no basis for our sorrow and unhappiness, other than our own misconceptions or misapprehensions about the Self. This misapprehension of the Self also causes a misapprehension about the world. Thus, my projections upon my Self extend to the people around me and then to the world around me.

Tatvam is the truth, and anāropita tatvam is that which is free from adhyāropa, superimposition. Ātmatatvam is the truth free from superimposition or the reality of the truth about my Self. Right now I have a notion about myself. We meditate upon ourselves all the time and that meditation determines our whole life. At any moment, I am as good as I take myself to be. All my thoughts, desires, actions, and responses are determined by what I take myself to be. For example, when I am sitting on the dais, I have a notion that I am a teacher and you have the notion that you are listeners or students. Sometimes, the notions are confused, leading to lots of problems. What I do is determined by what I take myself to be. What I take myself to be determines the way I think, desire, and respond. It is not determined by what I really am, but what I take myself to be.

Ātmatatvam smarami, I meditate upon the true nature of myself and that is possible only when I let go of all the roles. I recognize that I take myself to be the speaker because of my identification with the organ of speech. Therefore, I let go of all identification: I am not a speaker, hearer, thinker, walker, enjoyer, father, or a mother; all these are just roles I play. I meditate early in the morning upon the true nature of myself that is devoid of all the roles. Then who am I without these roles? Who am I meditating upon? The second line says sat cit sukham. Sat is Existence, cit is Awareness, and sukham is ānanda, Happiness. Sat is that which is, it is always present and can never cease to be.

The Self is cit

Cit is ever-shining, self-effulgent, shining on its own. Only one thing in this creation is self-effulgent; everything else shines after it. For example, the sun shines and the moon also shines. The difference is that the sun is shining in its own light whereas the moon is shining in the reflected light of the sun. The sun is self-effulgent; that is, it does not need any other source of light but its own. The part of the moon which shines is illumined by the sun; the other part which is not

illuminated by the sun does not shine. That is why there are variations in the moon, but no variations in the sun. There is no crescent sun. The sun is eclipsed occasionally, but there is no other change because the sun is self-shining unlike the moon. Similarly, the electricity shines and the bulb shines after it. The bulb is not self-effulgent; it can only shine when it has the grace of electricity.

Nothing in the entire universe is self-shining, although we say that the sun is self-shining for illustrative purposes. From a Vedantic standpoint, the sun is also not self-shining. Does the sun always shine? For whom does the sun shine? It shines for the sighted person. Is it not so? Does the sun shine for the blind person? Does it shine for the sleeping person? The sun does not enter into my dream world, or sleep world, or exist when I close my eyes. By definition, that something is self-shining implies that it shines in all conditions and in all situations without being dependent upon anything else. In fact, the sun shines because my eyes illumine the sun. The sun does not shine for me when I close my eyes in the waking state or in my dream or when I am sleeping; you can say my eyes illumine the sun. The eyes are also not self-effulgent. It is the mind that illumines the eyes. When the mind is not behind the eyes, the eyes cannot perform their function. Often, even though something is present right in front of me, I don't see it. I don't see what I am looking at when my mind does not direct my eyes to see it. I am not attentive then. Our eyes cannot perform the action of seeing if they are not backed by the mind. We can say that the eyes shine because the mind shines. However, the mind is also not self-effulgent. The mind can shine only when it is illumined by Awareness, when it is illumined by the Self. The mind shines in the light of Consciousness, Awareness, or the Self.

In the example of the sun and the moon, the world shines at night because the moon shines; the moon shines because the sun shines; the sun shines because it is self-effulgent. In truth, the sun shines because my eyes shine; the eyes shine because the mind shines; the mind shines because the Self or the Consciousness shines. What causes the Self to shine? The Self shines because it is its nature to shine, the Self cannot but shine. It shines effortlessly. It is cit, self-shining.

तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वं तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति ॥

tameva bhāntamanubhāti sarvaṁ tasya bhāsā sarvamidaṁ vibhāti

Everything shines after him who alone shines. By his light all this shines variously.

The 'I' is ever shining; it is self-effulgent. When it is pitch dark and I ask you, "Are you there?" You say, "Yes I am here." How do you say you are there? Do you see yourself? In order for you to determine your presence, you do not need a flashlight. You do not need to think whether you are there or not. You don't need to think, touch, or see. You don't need to do anything to know your own presence. Is that not so?

The Self is sat

How do you know that you are? Is it because the sun is shining? Is it because your mind is thinking? What is it because of which you know that 'you are'? You do not need anything to know that. That 'I am' is a self-revealing fact. Therefore, the sense of 'I am' is cit, self-shining, and it is always there, sat. It cannot be that the 'I' is not there at any point of time. During the waking state, I am always saying, 'I am', 'I am'. The 'I am' is always there behind all my knowledge and cognition. Is it not so?

When I say I am a father, son, woman, tall, short, happy, unhappy, speaker, or singer, the 'I am' is constant. This 'I am' informs all the roles just as the actor informs all the roles, whether of a beggar, king, or minister. Even there, 'I am' informs all the roles. Can there be any time in the waking state when the sense of 'I am' ceases to be? Is it possible for me to ever experience that 'I am not'? Sometimes I may get lost and not be present in a particular place and then I am not there. However, I am there at some place. Whether lost or not lost, happy or unhappy, the reality of 'I am' can never be denied. Even for me to be lost, the fact is I have to be there to begin with. For me to meditate upon 'I am not', I have to be there to begin with. Is it not so? The meditator must be there to meditate upon anything; therefore, can you meditate upon 'I am not'? The experiencer can never be denied. The sense that 'I am' is constantly flowing as the substratum of all of my thoughts and cognitions.

A similar experience exists even in a dream; I may have a different body, I may be in a different world, and I may have a different experience, but that 'I am' is an undeniable fact! How about the deep sleep state?

Can you say that you do not know anything in deep sleep and that maybe you are not present in that state? If you are not present or did not exist in deep sleep, who is it that wakes up in the morning? When you wake up in the morning do you say that 'I', the one who was not there, have woken up? You would say that 'I', who was there, have woken up! When you wake up in the morning, do you think you have come from nowhere? Or do you know that the 'I' who went to sleep is the 'I' who has woken up? We all have the cognition upon waking up that the 'I' who went to sleep is the same 'I' who has woken up!

Sometimes we do wish that a whole new 'I' wakes up and this saṃsāra vanishes. We all wish to start all over again! But no such luck; we are stuck with this 'I'! The one who wakes up is the one who went to sleep. I know this very well. When I wake up in the morning, it is not that a previously non-existent 'I' comes into existence. I do know that the 'I', who has always been, was sleeping and is now awake. That shows that even in deep sleep, the 'I' remains present. It is a continuous existence.

For example, the one who was here yesterday is sitting here again today. Isn't our recollection or recognition that the one who was sitting on the chair yesterday is the one who is here again today? The 'I am' is always there; it is never that 'I am' is not. Whether I am bad or good keeps on changing, and where I am changes and what I am changes, but that I am never changes. 'I am' is ever present in all the three states of existence: waking, dream, and deep sleep. Sat means that it is ever existent.

Why does the 'I' exist? The pot is because the clay is; when the clay is not, the pot is not. The clay is because of its molecules; when the molecules are not, the clay is not. The molecule is because of its atoms; when the atoms are not, the molecule is not. The atom is because of its atomic particles. Similarly, every effect exists because of its cause. This chain of cause and effect should end somewhere. Where does it end? It ends in the Self. The Self is and therefore, everything else is. There is no cause beyond the Self. This asking of why has to come to end at some point; I am because I am.

-to be continued