

Ananda

Swami Dayananda Saraswati¹

Atman, the self, is defined as sat cit ananda. In this three-word definition, sat is often translated as existence, cit as consciousness, Ananda as bliss. It is obvious that these three words are not adjectives to atman, for atman is revealed by the sastra by these three words. If they are adjectives, there are many atman-substantives among whom one is distinguished with the special attributes of sat cit ananda. If we say, "Here is a blue, big, fragrant lily," all three adjectives distinguish the lily from other lilies without those attributes.

That I am is self-evident, but is this existence of the self time-bound? If it is, atman, the self, is like any other object. It has to become evident. Every object becomes evident to the self. The existence of the self is evident. To whom does it become evident? It has to be evident only to the self. When the existence of the self is evident to the self, it is understood as self-evident. In fact, the sastra presents the atman as satyam, self existence, and everything else, including the knowing subject, as one whose existence is drawn from the existence of atman. This self-existent atman has got to be self-evident. Otherwise, there is no way of recognizing the existence of the self. So this self-evident nature is what is indicated by the second word cit consciousness. Every evidence being knowledge, there is the presence of consciousness.

The self-existent atman is in the form of consciousness revealing itself. The nature of sat is consciousness and the nature of consciousness is sat. The third word, ananda, must have the same status as sat and cit, since it is a word revealing the nature (svarupa) of atman. If sat cannot be displaced by a thought, and much less cit can be displaced, how can Ananda ever be displaced by a condition of the mind? If ananda is translated as limitless (ananta) there is no possibility of it getting displaced at any time. If it is bliss, it has its opposite, unhappiness, displacing it. So this word ananda has really caused a lot of confusion in the minds of seekers as well as teachers (acaryas). Sukha (happiness) and dukha (sorrow) are opposites, and therefore, they are mutually opposed to each other. When the one is, the other is not. When I am happy I am not sad, and when I am sad I am not happy. But the truth is, the self that is sat and cit sustains every condition of the mind (vrtti) like the water every wave. Whether the condition of the mind is pleasant or unpleasant, it is sustained not only by sat cit, but also ananda, because sat cit is ananda.

The reason why there is so much insistence on the experience of the self is that that self is taken as a special experience of bliss. Even if there is a special experience of bliss, how will one recognize that it is the bliss of atman? In fact, the sastra is very clear that every experience of happiness is nothing but a condition of the mind (antahkarana) which does not stand opposed to the limitlessness of atman. The common experience of this happiness reveals that the subject- object situation does not oppose the limitlessness, the wholeness of atman. The non-recognition of this fact commits a person to seeking such an experience [of happiness] as often and for as long as he or she can have it. That is the life of sastra. The sastra stops this pursuit by revealing that the atman one is seeking is oneself. ananda is never displaced by any condition of the mind, because it is the nature (svarupa) of atman, like sat and cit. An unhappy condition of the mind is sustained by consciousness which is sat. If this is true, it is Ananda that sustains the unhappy condition as well as the happy condition.

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