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Identity of the self and brahman

The following *mantra* describes the self as distinct from the phenomenal world:

त्रिषु धामसु यद्भोग्यं भोक्ता भोगश्च यद्भवेत् ।

तेयो विलक्षणः साक्षी चिन्मात्रोऽहं सदाशिवः ॥ १८ ॥

triṣu dhāmasu yadbhogyam bhoktā bhogaśca yadbhavit

tebhyo vilakṣaṇaḥ sākṣī cinmātro'ham sadāśivaḥ

त्रिषु – in three धामसु – realms, states of awareness यत् – that which भोग्यम् - enjoyed
भोक्ता - enjoyer भोगः - enjoyment चंand यत् - which भवेत् - can be ते यः - from them
विलक्षणः - distinct साक्षी - witness चिन्मात्रः - pure consciousness अहम् - I सदाशिवः - ever
auspicious

I am distinct from whatever it is that constitutes the enjoyed, the enjoyer, and the enjoyment in the three states. I am the witness, pure consciousness, ever auspicious. (18)

The previous verse said that the 'I' illumines whatever there is in the three states of awareness. This verse says that the 'I' is distinct from everything that exists in the three states of awareness. Even though we loosely call them 'states' of awareness or consciousness, the waking, dream, and deep sleep states are, in fact, states of mind and not states of consciousness. Consciousness does not have states. Here three states of mind, whatever they may be, are illumined by consciousness.

The entire universe is available through the waking, dream, and deep sleep states. It is solely on account of identification with the mind that we say that we are awake, that we were dreaming, or that we were sleeping. In fact, waking, dreaming, and sleeping are functions of the mind or states of mind. Consciousness ever remains the same; it simply illumines the prevailing state of mind. There is a triad

or *tripuṭī*, which is involved in every experience; there is the *bhoktā*, the subject of the experience or the one who has the experience, there is the *bhogyam* or object of the experience, and there is the *bhogaḥ*, the experience itself. Every experience, therefore, involves the three factors of the subject, the object, and the interaction between the two. This triad constitutes, without exception, the entire creation or the entire range of existence. There are various sets of triads or *tripuṭīs*; there is the seer-the seen-and the seeing, the hearer-the heard-and the hearing, the eater-the eaten-and the eating, the one who touches-the touched-and the touching, the one who smells-the smelled-and the act of smelling, and so on.

The triad is but the three states of the mind. The self or the 'I,' is essentially distinct from all the three, as in the subject, the object and the experience, or the one who experiences, that which is experienced, and the experience. Consciousness is the illuminator of all the three abodes or three states of the mind, *triṣu dhāmasu*. It is *yad bhogyam*, that which is the object of experience, it is the *bhoktā* or experiencer, and it is *bhogaḥ ca*, the experience as well. We should carefully note what this *mantra* says. The verse says that the 'I' is distinct from all three, the object, subject, and the experience. For example, here is a flower in front of me. The flower is the object of my experience, I am the one who experiences the flower, and the experience of this flower is the process of the flower-thought taking place in my mind. Usually, we equate the self with the subject, the witness, the seer, or the 'experiencer,' the one who has the experience. Yet we are told here that the 'I,' the consciousness, is distinct from all the three.

What is the nature of the subject? The subject is the *aham-vṛtti*, the 'I-thought.' What is an object? The object is the external world. What is an experience? It is the *idam-vṛtti*, the 'this-thought.' Understand that the mind itself has the two aspects of *idam-vṛtti* and *aham-vṛtti*, the this-thought and the I-thought. Consciousness identified with the I-thought becomes the subject; consciousness identified with this-thought becomes the experience, and that which is illumined by the this-thought is the object. The 'I' is said to be different from the subject, the object, and

the experience; it is the illuminator of all three. Like the light of the lamp in the theater that illumines the patron, the dancer, and all the various gestures and modifications and is yet distinct from them all, the self is distinct from the triad. The 'I' is the consciousness in which even the I-ness is also truly not there. Even though the word *ātmā* indicates the 'I,' in the ultimate analysis, *ātmā* does not mean the 'I' that excludes every 'you' or one that excludes anything. The 'I' remains distinct from the subject, object, and experience, and, at the same time, illumines, accommodates, and sustains all the three.

Tebhyo vilakṣaṇaḥ sākṣī, I am the witness. Witness here means illuminator. Witness also is a relative term. We use the word witness with reference to what is witnessed and, therefore, the word witness cannot be primarily applied to the self. The self is simply pure consciousness. Then why is the word witness equated with the self here? Well, it is because some word has to be used, after all, and regardless of what word we use, it is never going to be adequate. Suppose I use the word illuminator, it would imply a deliberate act of illumination, even though there is no calculated attempt or act of illumination on the part of consciousness, the 'I.' In fact, all words, such as subject, witness, or even *ātmā*, the self, convey their meaning through their *lakṣya-artha*, their targeted or implied meaning, and not through their *vāchya-artha* or literal meaning. Therefore, *sākṣī* here does not mean witness in the primary sense, but means that which remains even the very witnessing is also dropped; that is simply pure awareness, the *cinmātra*. We are of the nature of that pure awareness. *Sadāśivaḥ*; *śiva* means auspicious and *sadā* means always. *Sadāśiva* is ever auspicious, and auspiciousness is present where there is happiness; there cannot be auspiciousness in unhappiness. In India, if the death of a relative occurred somewhere, they would send you a postcard informing you of the event. And usually, if the recipient was a close relative of the deceased, he or she would have to take a bath of purification. So the senders would normally write the word *aśubha*, inauspicious, on one edge of the postcard. What is it that is considered 'inauspicious'? It is the news of death; so death is inauspicious. Similarly,

ignorance is inauspicious and sorrow is inauspicious. The self is ever auspicious; free from death, ignorance, and sorrow. We are of the nature of *sat-citānanda*, existence, awareness, and happiness. Lord Śiva is also called *sadāśivaḥ*, ever auspicious. Not even a whiff of sorrow ever touches him—not a whiff of ignorance or a whiff of death. He is called *mṛtyuñjaya*, one who has conquered death. He is *sadāśiva* ever auspicious, even though he lives in the midst of all the inauspicious things. It is very well known that Lord Śiva lives in the midst of inauspiciousness. He dwells in the cremation ground; the most inauspicious of all places. He smears ashes from the funeral pyre on his body; an inauspicious act. He wears around his neck a garland of skulls; a most inauspicious sight. He holds poison in his neck; again, an inauspicious attribute. Snakes crawl on his body and ghosts dance around him; the most inauspicious feature of where he lives. Everything around Lord Śiva is inauspicious and yet he is *sadāśiva*, ever auspicious. This only indicates that the external aspects of inauspiciousness do not attach to him.

Lord Śiva is *asaṅga-udāsīna*, ever unattached, unconnected, and unconcerned. If one is physically isolated from everything and remains auspicious, we may wonder what would happen to that person if he were ever to be in the midst of the inauspicious or touched by the inauspicious. Yet here is Lord Śiva, who is in the midst of every kind of inauspiciousness, and still we always see great tranquility, serenity, and purity in his face. 'That *sadāśiva*, the ever auspicious Śiva I am.' The self also dwells in the midst of many things that are inauspicious. It dwells in this physical body, which is not only subject to death one day, but is also constantly dying. This physical body, characterized by death, is like the cremation ground where death is constantly present, and the various impulses of the mind, like lust, anger, and greed, are like ghosts that are dancing around the self, the consciousness. Many other tendencies are like poisonous snakes. The self is in the midst of all of them, illuminating them all, and still remains untainted by them. The self is ever auspicious.

The equation of nonduality

This *mantra* says, *tebhyo vilakṣaṇaḥ*, I am distinct from them all, the subject, the object and the experience. That seems to mean that the self is one and everything else is different from the self, or that the subject, object, and experience are different

from the 'I.' Does one accept the duality that the self is different from them and they are different from the self? Does one accept that the world of the triad or *tripuṭi* is different from oneself? The answer is no. The fact is that the self is different from the states of the triad, but they are not different from the self. This is an equation of nonduality, as in the example of the actor-beggar, B is equal to A, but A is not equal to B. The beggar is never apart from the actor, while the actor is always distinct from the beggar.

Vedānta teaches of a nonduality that is not an absence of duality, but one that is a fact in spite of the duality. Duality in no way negates or hides the nonduality. If it did, it would be what Pūjya Swamiji calls, "Submarine-philosophy." He asks, rhetorically, "Is the self like a submarine, which is under water and has to surface? Is the nondual *ātmā* submerged in duality, and, will it surface when the duality goes away?" No, it is not that nonduality surfaces in the absence of duality. Nonduality is present in spite of the duality. In fact, the duality is because of nonduality.

This *mantra* said that the self is distinct from all duality. The following *mantra* says that duality is not different from the self. The self has independent existence, but the world of duality does not have any reality apart from the self or independent of the self.

To be continued...