

*This is the twenty second part of the serial article, continuation from Mar 2023 newsletter.*

*Īśvara* means truth. Ultimately, of course, *īśvara* cannot be a *saguṇa-brahma*, *brahman* with attributes; he has to be devoid of every attribute. He has to be of the nature of truth, fairness, and justice, which have no attribute or form. We use these words all right, but these words eventually resolve into the attributeless, the formless. *Prabhum* means the one who is *samartha*, powerful, capable of creating, sustaining, and dissolving, and ruling the entire universe. Regarding the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the universe, one should not imagine that *īśvara* actually acts like a pot-maker, who takes clay and creates forms. It is said that *Brahmā*, the creator, had a whole heap of clay from which he created the different forms. That's alright as a children's story. However, for creation, sustenance, and dissolution, all it takes is the mere presence of the Lord. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* says, *mayā adhyakṣeṇa prakṛtiḥ sūyate sacarācaram*. "It is in my mere presence that *prakṛti* or *māyā* creates, sustains, and dissolves." Ultimately, *īśvara* is of the nature of presence, a presence that is complete, full, and so powerful that everything automatically takes place.

If the Lord needed to do anything more than be the complete and powerful presence that he is, if he needed even to bat his eyelid, he would get tired some day, isn't it? If even a slight effort were needed on the part of *īśvara* to create and rule, someday he would get tired. Wherever there is a change, there is an effort, some expenditure of energy, and, someday, *īśvara* would perish. Something can be imperishable only when there is no activity, no *vikāra* or change in it. Therefore, *īśvara*, the truth, has to be changeless. There need be only the presence in which everything takes place. Imagine how the mere presence of gravity keeps all the heavenly bodies circling. *Māyā* and *prakṛti* or matter function similarly in the mere presence of *śiva*, the consciousness; everything happens automatically.

*Trilocanam* means the three-eyed Lord. As the story goes, the third eye of Lord Śiva opened when Kāmadeva, the god of passion, disturbed the Lord from his *samādhi* or absorbed meditation. Lord Śiva is often in *samādhi*. Once he goes into *samādhi*, he stays in it for thousands of years; to meet him you have to wait until he emerges from it. According to legend, during one of the periods when Lord Śiva was in *samādhi*, a terrible demon named Tarakāsura was born. The demon was very powerful and could not be subdued by anybody, even Lord Viṣṇu or Lord Brahmā. All the *devatās* were in a quandary about what to do. Brahmāji, the creator, told the *devatās* that only a son of Lord Śiva would be able to kill the demon Tarakāsura. Lord Śiva was in *samādhi* and at that time Contemplation upon the self.

Pārvatī was performing penance to marry Lord Śiva. The *devatās* also wanted Lord Śiva to wake up and accept Pārvatī, so that the child that would kill Tarakāsura would be born. Yet what would wake him up?

When a disturbing thought, such as a thought of *kāma* or desire or passion arises in the mind, *samādhi* gets disturbed. The *devatās* wanted to create that kind of thought in Lord Śiva. They sent Kāmadeva, Cupid, the god of passion, to disturb Lord Śiva from his *samādhi*. Kāmadeva took his entire entourage with him—the spring season, music, and beautiful *apsarās*, divine damsels. He approached Lord Śiva, hid himself behind a branch of a tree and shot his arrow of flowers. Lord Śiva got disturbed from his *samādhi*. He opened his eyes in anger and thought, “Who has disturbed me?” He saw Kāmadeva hiding behind the tree. His third eye opened and the fire that emerged burned Kāmadeva into ashes in an instant and Lord Śiva is said to have smeared the ashes of Kāmadeva on his body. Of course, the story proceeds to describe how the *devatās* were able to subdue and overcome the demon Tarakāsura. This incident is symbolic of how *kāma* becomes an ornament in the wake of knowledge.

*Kāma* is the first product of ignorance; from *avidyā* or ignorance arises *kāma*, which

then leads to *karma* or action. Here the burning of *kāma* symbolizes the dispelling of ignorance by the light of knowledge. The fire that emerges from the third eye of Lord Śiva is the fire of knowledge. His right eye is the sun, his left eye, the moon, and the third eye on his forehead is fire. The sun, moon, and fire are the three eyes of Lord Śiva. Hence, he is *trilocana*, the three-eyed one. The sun, moon, and fire also symbolize *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda*, existence, awareness, and happiness. The sun is the principle of light, which dispels darkness; it stands for *cit*, awareness or knowledge. The moon is the pleasing one; it stands for *ānanda*, happiness. Fire, which cooks and sustains, stands for *sat* or existence. Thus, *sat-cit-ānanda* is the *svarūpa* or nature of Lord Śiva. Sometimes, the three eyes are explained as representing the self in the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep-sleep, at both the microcosmic and macrocosmic levels, while Lord Śiva is himself *turiya*, the fourth state or substratum of the other three.

*Nīlakaṇṭham* is one with the blue neck. This blue mark on the neck of Lord Śiva is considered a mark of beauty. How did the blue mark come about? According to legend, it happened when Lord Śiva drank the poison that emerged when the gods and demons were churning the milky ocean in order to produce ambrosia.

As the story goes, there was a time when the gods and demons went to battle and the gods were defeated. The victorious demons were very strong and did not allow any *yajña* or fire ritual to be performed. It is through fire rituals that devotees make offerings, which become the food of the *devatās*. *Yajñas* are their source of nourishment. When the demons stopped the performance of the *yajñas*, the *devatās* stopped getting nourishment and became emaciated. They went to Lord Nārāyaṇa and asked for his advice and help. He told them, "If you drink ambrosia, you will get all your strength and vigor back and become immortal." "How do we get ambrosia?" "You must churn the milky ocean to make it surface." "But we are so weak that we can't churn the ocean." "Take the help of the demons, they are very strong." "But why would they help us?" "Assure them that when

the ambrosia comes out, you will share it with them. They will help you.” The *devatās* went to the leader of the demons and made the deal and the churning began.

During the churning of the ocean, many ‘jewels’ emerged from the ocean, such as the wish-fulfilling tree, the Kalpavṛkṣa, the wish-fulfilling cow, Kāma-dhenu, heavenly *apsarās*, the moon, and the goddess of wealth, Lakṣmī, as well as wine, and other things. A total of fourteen jewels emerged. One of them was poison. The poison emerged all of a sudden and, as it started spreading, it looked like it would destroy the whole universe. This created panic among both the demons and the gods, and they scurried around seeking help from the different *devatās*. When even Indra, Brahmā, and Viṣṇu admitted that they would not be able to help, they went to Lord Śiva. Lord Śiva did not hesitate even for a moment. He immediately rushed to the spot, took the poison in his palm and drank it. Pārvatī had accompanied him. She saw Lord Śiva drinking the poison and was concerned that he would perish. She rushed up to him and pressed his neck even as he drank the poison. It forced the poison to remain right there; if it went down it would destroy the heart, and if it went up, it would destroy the head. The poison remained stuck harmlessly right in the middle of the Lord’s neck, turning it blue in color. This is why Lord Śiva is called *nīlakaṇṭha*, the blue-necked one. This story illustrates the compassionate nature of *īśvara* and shows how he rushes to help any devotee in distress.

*Prasāntam* means ever tranquil. Even in the midst of the ghosts and goblins dancing around, Lord Śiva remains unaffected, always abiding in his own nature. *Svātmārāmaṁ muditavadanaṁ dakṣiṇāmūrtimīde*. Dakṣiṇāmūrti is *svātmārāma*, one who abides in his own self, which is the *ānanda* evident in the gentle smile on his face. *Prasānta* is one who is tranquil and absorbed in *ānanda*.

*Dhyātvā munih gacchati bhūtayonim*. Meditating upon the self in this manner, the contemplative sage, the meditator, attains the source of all beings. We have seen

that the cause of the entire creation is nothing but consciousness that is *asti, bhāti, priya* or *sat-cit-ānanda*. The meditator recognizes that he is the *samastasākṣī*, the witness of all, and *tamasah parastāt*, beyond the darkness of ignorance.

A question can arise here: If the self is of the nature of consciousness, how can ignorance coexist with it? The answer is that two completely opposite entities enjoying the same degree of reality cannot coexist, just as darkness and light cannot coexist. But two entities enjoying different degrees of reality can coexist, just as the rope and the snake can coexist, because the snake is *mithyā*, a false appearance, whereas the rope is real. Similarly, consciousness is the truth and therefore real, while ignorance or *māyā* is *mithyā* and unreal, so they can coexist. In the same way as the *mithyā*-snake does not in any way affect the rope, which is real, ignorance also does not in any way affect the consciousness or the self. Hence, just as one may say that the rope is beyond the snake, similarly also, it is said here that *brahman* is beyond *tamas*, which means darkness.

Darkness is ignorance, ignorance is *māyā*, and the self that transcends *māyā* is the very substratum of *māyā*, yet free from the influence of *māyā*. This idea is also conveyed by the mention of the Lord's blue neck. The color blue stands for ignorance; the blue-necked Lord transcends the ignorance. The *muni* recognizes that his self is the very self of all. The next *mantra* explains how this happens.

स ब्रह्मा स शिवः सेन्द्रः सोऽक्षरः परमः स्वराटखे ।

स एव विष्णुः स प्राणः स कालोऽग्निः स चन्द्रमाः ॥ ८ ॥

*sa brahmā sa śivaḥ sendraḥ so'kṣaraḥ paramaḥ svarāṭ*

*sa eva viṣṇuḥ sa prāṇaḥ sa kālo'gniḥ sa candramāḥ*

सः ब्रह्मा - he is Brahmā सः शिवः - he is Śiva सः इन्द्रः - he is Indra सः अक्षरः - he is the immutable परमः - the ultimate स्वराटखे - self-effulgent सः एव - he alone विष्णुः - Viṣṇu सः प्राणः - he is Prāṇa सः कालः - he is time अग्निः - fire सः चन्द्रमाः - he is the moon.

He is Brahmā, he is Śiva, he is Indra; he is the immutable, the ultimate and the self-effulgent. He alone is Viṣṇu, he is Prāṇa, he is time, and fire, and he is the moon.

Notice that now the gender has changed. The earlier description, *acintyam avyak-tam anantarūpam*, was in the neuter gender. The same truth is now referred to as *sah*, in the masculine gender, indicating that gender has no relevance here. “Swamiji, is God a he or she or it?” The answer is that God is a he or a she when worshipped with specific attributes, but God in his entirety transcends gender, and hence you can address him however you want.

God is the father, the mother, and also the child. If God were only a he, it would mean that God is not a she; we are reducing God to an entity within the creation and fighting about him. The Upaniṣad uses different genders indiscriminately, perhaps even deliberately, to mean that gender doesn't have any significance. Gender belongs to the physical, gross body alone and doesn't attach even to the subtle body. That is the reason why the subtle body can go from one gender to the other. Who knows, a person who claims to be a woman in this birth was perhaps a man in the previous birth, or vice versa.

He is Brahmā, he is Śiva, he is Indra. That self, *brahman*, alone is the self of all the *devatās*, celestials, the self of all the beings. It is *bhūtayoni*, the cause of all the beings, the source of all the beings, the self of all the beings.

Here names of certain *devatās* are mentioned. All of these are described in the Vedas and the *purāṇas*, and people who are familiar with Vedic culture know these *devatās*. They are mentioned here to convey that this meditator knows himself as the self of all of the *devatās*. He recognizes himself as Brahmā, as Śiva, as Indra, as *parama*, as *svarāt*; that is what he is: Brahmā, the creator, Śiva, the destroyer, and Viṣṇu, the preserver. *Īśvara* identified with the *rajoguṇa* becomes the creator. When identified with the *sattoaguṇa* he becomes the preserver, and when identified with the *tamoguṇa* he becomes the destroyer.

The wise person says, "I am the creator. I am the sustainer. I am the dissolver." Yet is it logical? How can an individual create the world? He cannot create the world through his *upādhi*, but he is saying this here in identifying with *brahman*. 'Brahmā, the creator, I am. Śiva, the destroyer, I am. Indra, the Lord of all the *devatās*, I am. *Parama*, the supreme I am and free from the limitations of time, place, and condition. *Akṣara*, the imperishable, the immutable, I am. *Svarāt*, the self-effulgent, I am.'

*Sa eva viṣṇuḥ*, he alone is Viṣṇu. 'Viṣṇu, the preserver I am.' *Sa prāṇaḥ*. 'The Prāṇa also I am.' Prāṇa is vital energy. It is that which keeps the entire universe alive and throbbing, that which keeps the entire universe running. Prāṇa is the cosmic vital energy.

*Kāla* means time, death, and the principle of change. *Kāla* devours every being; death robs everything of its life. Creation, sustenance, and dissolution take place in time. 'Kāla, the principle of time I am. It is because of me that change takes place.'

*Agni*, fire, is another *devatā*. 'The fire-god that burns everything, that illumines everything, that fire I am. *Candramā*, the moon, which pleases everyone, which showers nectar at night, and pleases all the living beings, that *Candramā* also I am.' It is very interesting to see that on the one hand the meditator recognizes that he is *Agni* or fire, while, on the other hand, he is also *Candramā*, the moon. He is both the principle of burning and the principle of cooling.

Similarly, he is the principle of creation and the principle of destruction, as well as that of preservation. He alone is, in the form of all the *devatās* or cosmic forces. He is the very self of the entire cosmos. He alone is manifest as the whole universe, including all the various *devatās*.

*To be continued...*