

## Look at Yourself

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(Following is a brief summary of the vision in the first three meditation sessions conducted by Sri Swami Tattvavidananda during the Nine-week Vedanta Course on Kaṭhōpaniṣad at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg Oct -Nov. 2020)

Swamiji's guided meditation sessions, with the theme 'Look at yourself,' served as an optimistic beginning for the day and particularly powerful. Swamiji repeatedly guided us towards being deeply aware of ourselves and to abide in the peace all round. Swamiji walked with us, steering us patiently along the path to meditation pointing out the pot holes and pitfalls one could encounter along the way. The journey was indeed inspiring.

The first meditation session starts; Swamiji's voice comes on, "Look at yourself." And then? Silence, utter-silence. No, it is not Swamiji pausing. My mind is stunned to silence. I have heard of look at the mind, look at the body, etc. but look at yourself! No. So mind is baffled and doesn't know what to do with it; in which slot to deposit it. So it gropes and falls silent as if accepting defeat. For a moment it is as though the mind vanished. What is this 'look at yourself'? Eyes are closed but still I am looking at myself. How? No, Swamiji couldn't have cast a spell. Answer comes through the speaker, "*cakūṣa cakṣuḥ*, eye of the eye. I am aware of the inner eye by which I am looking at myself." End quote.

But, what is this looking at myself? What will I experience when I look at myself? Swamiji says, "As I look at myself, I experience myself as the pure being. That is how I sense myself, commune with myself as 'I am,' *aham asmi*. As I abide in myself, be a light unto myself there is no lacking so there is a sense of fullness, *pūrṇoham*; as I am with myself here and now there are no desires so there is a sense of desirelessness, *akāmoham*; there is no fear of anything so there is a sense of fearlessness, *abhayoham*." Unquote. How can I be all these three just by looking at myself? I will present the points one at a time.

How am I pūrṇaḥ, fullness? Swamiji continues, “When the mind is quiet in meditation, I am fully present. It is as though I regained myself. It simply means ‘I am,’ which symbolizes knowing being. So when I look at myself, I know myself; I know the being. How? Simply because, the being, *sat* shines as the knowing *cit*.” Unquote.

While unfolding Chāndogya Upaniṣad Swamiji shed more light on being knowing, *sat cit*. Quote, “Everything in the universe, known and unknown, is connected to my knowing as something known to me. Whatever that is connected to my knowing is connected to my being because being is not different from knowing. So, all that is here, all existence is connected to my being, my existence, means all existence is myself. *Ātmā vā idaṁ sarvaṁ*.” Unquote.

What a revelation this is! I am everything means I am not separate from my Source, which is the very nature of fullness, limitlessness. Therefore, when I look at myself, the inner essence of myself, it reveals who this ‘I am’ is and points to the oneness, *tat tvam asi*. Elsewhere, Swamiji gave an eloquent definition of *tat tvam asi*. Quote, “The statement *tat* is an emphatic acknowledgment of the reality that cannot be measured by words. It represents the mystery of the universe, which gives the flavor of the unlimited. The word ‘*tvam*’ is not an effort of using a word to measure your reality. It signals the non-verbal awareful being, which is your core, your inner being. The mystery of the universe and the mystery of the individual is one mystery – God. When I say mystery it is something the mind cannot fathom.” Unquote. With this clarity, when I look at myself, there is a sense of fullness, *pūrṇo-ḥam*.

Next, the topic on desires. When I look at myself how is there a sense of desirelessness, *akāmoḥam*? “Looking at myself creates a revolution in my mind,” Swamiji continued in this trend. Quote, “As I watch the continuous flow of the contents of the mind, if I identify with them as mine then the identification creates the ‘me and mine’ syndrome from which a sense of separation from everything else arises. It is the understanding of, this is how I am, this is what I am.” Unquote.

Here is a good place to bring in Swamiji's fiery exposition on the me and mine syndrome which was a magnum opus in the 2011 Course. Here are a few excerpts from it. Quote, "*Ātmā* gets crystallized as me and mine. This is the *khilya bhāva* which separates you from your true self and develops angularities. It is an illusion, a dream which is renewed from moment to moment. Ignorance prepares *khilya bhāva* palatably and you swallow it. *Khilya* gets lodged in the heart like a shrapnel causing suffering with every move you make. See the implication? What a predicament! Step out of the *khilya bhāva* created by the mind and step into the timeless *ātmā*. An explosion of *khilya bhāva* is the being. The *khilya* having originated from Awareness, when brought near its source resolves in it." Unquote.

Regrettably for me, being oblivious of the fact that I am under the spell of the 'me and mine' syndrome, there is no alternative but to prefer the life I am forced to accept as normal rather than my true life, my normal life. But then does it have to be this way?

"No," says Swamiji. Quote, "The understanding of 'this is how I am, this is what I am' can be turned towards self-knowledge. By shifting the focus away from the contents of the mind, which is name and form, I can lead it towards the silence behind the mind, Consciousness which lights up the mind. The flow of the mind will continue but I will not be tethered by it. The 'me and mine' will vanish." Unquote.

Over the years Swamiji continues to exhort us to give up me and mine, the name and form. In Advaita Makharanda Swamiji said that forms are content of the reality. The reality holds the entire universe within itself. Through all the changes in forms the reality remains pristine. So when I give up names and forms I am in the embrace of the reality. The 'me and mine' dissolve in that silence. Knowing this, I can say, "Where then are desires; where then is the need for anything?" So, now when I look at myself there is a sense of desirelessness, *akāmoham*.

The final topic is on fearlessness. When I look at myself how is there a sense of fearlessness, *abhayoham*? Swamiji dwelt on the topic of meditation extensively in Kaṭhōpaniṣad chapter 5.1 and brought in the topic of fearlessness.

Quote, “Thought cannot flower if it is tethered to formulations. Freedom in thought enables it to be peaceful and abide in meditation. When all expressions and images in thought cease, there is a welling of love, an inner silence that cannot be measured with words. It is the spaciousness the divisionless brahman.”

“*Sarva eṣaṇā vinirmuktaḥ*, all deep-rooted desires have to be given up to launch into this kind of meditation, in which I go beyond the frontiers of the known. To be at peace means to be empty of all desires. The mind is brought under sufficient self-control to render desires powerless. A desireless mind is a peaceful mind. There is no fear when there is no desire because I have nothing to lose. Putting aside the becoming, abiding in the being, when I contemplate on it, immerse myself in it, the unknown flows into the known and there is harmony. I gain fearlessness because there is no second thing to cause fear.” Unquote.

When explaining *hṛdā manīṣā manasā* in Kaṭhōpaniṣad 6.9, Swamiji looked at fearlessness from a different angle. Quote, “Freedom from fear comes when you are able to think freely. Freedom here means you understand the process of life; you discover the process of life. That discovery proves to you that there is nothing to lose and therefore nothing to fear.” Unquote.

In Advaita Makharanda, Swamiji pointed out that while in deep meditation, a link is established between the manifest and the unmanifest. In that connection, the Real and unreal become one and the one becomes all. Meaning, you will know that the world and its experiences are unreal and Consciousness alone is real. In that sense, the real and unreal become one – the Real holds the entire universe within itself. This is what is meant by the unknown flowing into the known. Like even the mighty ocean flows upstream and embraces the on coming river.

When I am in this sheltered lap of the limitless being, can there be a trace of fear. Now, with this awareness, when I look at myself as fearless I sense fearlessness. Therefore, *pūrṇaḥ aham; akāmaḥ aham; abhayaḥ aham*.

And thus, with utmost clarity, Swamiji unfolded how the flow of fullness into desires transforms it to desirelessness; furthermore the flow of desire-

lessness into fear transforms it into fearlessness. The pinnacle of this inspiring vision is that when you make this knowledge your own, make it a reality, and then, when you give up the becoming you discover your being.

I conclude this presentation with a prayerful heart that as we immerse ourselves in this 'look at yourself meditation,' this flow of transformation, may we realize, that the glorious transformation itself is the embrace of the reality – the Source of our being – *Brahman*, which is *pūrṇam*, the nature of fullness. So, when we say *pūrṇoham* it indeed is *brahmoham – aham brahmāsmi*.

*Om santih santih santih*

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