

This is the twentieth part of the serial article, continuation from Jan 2023 newsletter.

Meditation upon the meditator

The object of contemplation is the self that is *viśada*, clear, free from any kind of impurity. Like a pool of clear water that is free from any impurities, the self is free from the impurities of likes and dislikes; we are that self. All likes and dislikes belong to the mind and are but states of mind. Presently, because of our habitual identification with the mind, we get disturbed when likes or dislikes arise in the mind and brand ourselves as 'likers' or 'dislikers.' For instance, anger may arise in the mind and yet, on account of identification with the mind, we say, "I am angry." But that is not right. As Ādi Śaṅkarācārya says, *na me dveṣarāgau na me lobhamohau mado naiva me naiva mātsaryabhāvaḥ*, aversion and attachment do not belong to me and neither do greed and delusion or pride and jealousy; they are not mine."

A distance must be created between the self and the impurities. Actually, the distance does already exist; we don't have to create it. In reality, the self is never one with the mind. It transcends the mind, illumines the mind, and is the witness of the mind. It is on account of our identification that we erase the distance that exists. For example, when we watch a movie, we become so identified with whatever is happening that we become one with it. In reality, we are merely spectators. All the motions and movements take place on the screen, but our identification with it is such that we experience the same feelings as do the hero or the heroine in the movie. Therefore, even while there is clearly a distance, because we are neither the movie nor the actors, but merely spectators, totally unconcerned and unconnected, we feel connected on account of the identification. That is a false connection. Similarly, there is no connection between *ātmā* and *anātmā*, the self and the mind. Yet, on account of identification, it appears as though there is a connection and the self has become as small as the mind. That is the reason why, if there

is an impurity in the mind, we assume that we are impure, and if there is anger, we conclude that we are angry.

Through this form of meditation, we recognize that all impurities are in the mind. We are not the mind and we are none of these impurities. We are not the anger or the jealousy; we are that by which they are illuminated, we are that by which we become aware of them. The one who is aware is always different from that of which he is aware. That which illumines is always different from that which is illumined. Anger, jealousy, and the like are but different states of mind. The self simply illumines them, while remaining unconnected and ever pure.

Viśokam means free from grief. Grief belongs to the mind. It is not our nature; neither is sadness. It is the mind that is agitated, sad, and sorrowful. Are we not aware of sadness? The fact that we are aware of sadness shows that sadness belongs to the mind. That we become aware of the mind shows that we are clearly distinct from the mind. Therefore, the self is merely the illuminator of the sadness and is itself neither the sadness nor the grief. The attributes or characteristics of the self are described further. The self is *achintyam*, *avyaktam*, and *anantarūpam*. This is description of ourselves, not of someone else. Hence, this is the meditation upon the meditator.

***Upāsanā* is meditation upon the Lord with attributes**

Meditation can be said to be of two kinds. The first kind is meditation upon something that is different from oneself, and the second kind is meditation upon oneself.

Meditating upon something or someone different from ourselves involves mental visualization. When we meditate upon Lord Dakṣiṇāmūrti, for example, we visualize the form of the Lord. There are various *vigrahas* or forms given to us to help us meditate. We can meditate either upon the form that is Dakṣiṇāmūrti or upon that which is represented in that particular form. For example, the four arms represent the Lord's all-pervasiveness, and the weapons represent the Lord's omnipotence. In either case, we deliberately entertain a continuous flow of thought of the same nature, *sajātīya-vṛttipravāha*.

In Vedānta, the mental worship of the Lord, called *upāsanā*, is recommended as a preparation for the pursuit of selfknowledge. *Upāsanā* means maintaining a flow of thought upon the Lord possessed of attributes, *saguṇa-brahma*. This form of worship is performed with the help of a form and name or certain attributes of the Lord; whatever one is comfortable with, whatever one enjoys, and whatever invokes devotion is valid. In the Vedic times, the *omkāra* or *praṇava* was prescribed for such *upāsanās*. *Om* is the name of the Lord and a *mantra* as well. Today, however, we can do *upāsanā* with whichever name we wish. It can be Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, *om namaḥ śivāya*, *śrī rāma jaya rāma jaya jaya rāma* or any other *mantra*. A *mantra* is simply a sacred passage or chant. One can also visualize a form and perform mental *pūjā*, such as visualizing offering the Lord a bath, followed by offering flowers and various other such offerings. This is also an effective way of worship.

Worship has the effect of healing and purifying the mind and helps in becoming attuned to the Lord. *Upāsanā* is a process of tuning up. *Karma-yoga* is also a process of becoming attuned to the Lord, but *karma-yoga* involves external action. *Upāsanā* or mental worship is a stage subsequent to that; what one did earlier through physical action is subsequently done through *bhāvanā*, worshipful thoughts in the mind. We prefer meditation where God is involved, because it has the added advantage of devotion, which is purifying and healing. Not only is meditation or worship an aid to concentration, but it is also an aid to the purification of the mind.

The second kind of meditation is meditation upon oneself. This is different from *upāsanā*, in which the duality between the meditator and that which is meditated upon is maintained. When meditating upon the self, we seek to remove the duality. This meditation is, therefore, more subtle; we seek to drop even the role of the meditator. In the first type of meditation, every other role is dropped and the role of meditator alone is assumed. In meditating upon one's own self, even the role of meditator is dropped. Therefore, every word that is used in this verse indicates the self that is formless, without attributes or qualities.

The only one thing in the world that is formless and free from attributes is the self; everything else has a form and attributes. The self that illumines all the forms and attributes is itself free from names, forms, and attributes.

Meditation upon the self is not an experience

Meditation upon the self does not involve any visualization. In this meditation, there is only the seeing of what is, not the visualizing of something that is not. It is not that we visualize ourselves to be free from sadness, because it is neither possible nor necessary to visualize the true nature of oneself; it is *acintya*, unthinkable, inasmuch as we cannot become the object of our own thoughts. While meditating upon the self, we should not attempt to feel or visualize or experience, because that causes or creates a duality. In trying to experience, one automatically assumes the role of 'experiencer' and creates a distance between the self and that which one seeks to experience. Therefore, inasmuch as it does not involve the duality of the 'experiencer' and the 'experienced,' it is said that self-knowledge is not an experience. Yet many people like to use the word experience in the sense of having intimate knowledge; it is all right, as long as it is understood that the self is *acintya*, not a thought. The self is beyond thought. 'I' is not a state of mind; as the illuminator of all thought, it is the very illuminator of the states of the mind.

How is it that one cannot be an object of one's own thought? It is so on account of the 'I' or the self being *avyakta*, unmanifest. *Vyakta* means manifest. *Avyakta* is unmanifest. The manifest is that which can become the object of sense perception. Whatever can be heard, touched, seen, tasted, and smelled is *vyakta*. The *avyakta* or the unmanifest, the self, is naturally, therefore, not an object that may be experienced by the sense organs, because it is the illuminator of the very sense organs. For example, we cannot see our own eyes through a telescope, because it is the eyes that are looking through the telescope. So also, the various sense organs are like various telescopes, through which we perceive various objects. In being the one that perceives through the sense organs, one cannot become the object of his or her own perception. What this means is that we should drop any attempt to

perceive ourselves or visualize ourselves. One must understand that visualizing the self cannot be done, because whatever one sees or visualizes is bound to be different from the self.

Anantarūpam means one that is of infinite or countless forms. On the one hand the self is formless, as we will be told later, and, on the other hand, it has countless forms. Is that not contradictory? In reality, however, it is on account of association with countless names that the self appears to have countless forms, just as gold, which is essentially formless, assumes the forms of various ornaments.

Śivam. One is *śiva*, auspicious, ever pure. *Śiva* means Lord Śiva. *Śiva* also means the auspicious, that which is good. Lord Śiva is shown seated in the midst of ghosts and goblins in a cremation ground, but aloof from them. He represents goodness in the midst of all evil and impurity, the goodness or purity that cannot be tainted by impurities. The wise person knows, 'I am *śiva*.' Each one of these words releases us from one complex or the other.

Praśāntam means ever tranquil. There is no disturbance, no distraction in the essential 'I.' All disturbances belong in the mind, while the 'I,' the illuminator of the mind, is *praśānta*, ever tranquil, ever silent. *Amṛtam* means immortal. *Amṛta* also means ambrosia. Ambrosia gives joy or happiness, hence, *amṛta* means *ānanda*. We are immortal or *ānanda*, of the nature of happiness. Each one of these aspects of the self helps address a particular state of mind. When we feel unhappy, we must remember, '*amṛto'smi*,' 'I am immortal, I am ambrosia, I am *ānanda*.'

Brahmayonim. *Yoni* means the cause, the source. So *brahmayoni* can either mean the *yoni* or cause of Brahmā or the *saguṇabrahma*, or mean *brahman* that is the *yoni* or cause of everything. Hence, as the self, one is the cause of Brahmā or *saguṇabrahma*, or one is *brahman* that is the *yoni*, the cause of all the beings.

The source of all the beings is *brahman*; such is the nature of one's self. Consciousness, as the source of all the beings, is that from which all the beings emerge. It is both the source of all the beings and the source of our thoughts, because the world is not different from our thoughts; what the world is at any time is nothing other

than our thoughts. What we are watching is actually thought, which reflects the external world. Consciousness, from where the thought emerges, where the thought abides, and into which the thought merges back, is the source of all thoughts. What there is before each thought arises and during each thought is consciousness, and what remains after each thought merges and before the next thought arises is also consciousness.

We have seen how thoughts emerge from consciousness and merge back into consciousness, and, therefore, a thought is nothing but consciousness. Because thoughts correspond one-to-one with the objects of the world, consciousness must be understood as the source of the universe. The very universe emerges from consciousness, remains in consciousness, and merges back into consciousness. Therefore, one recognizes the self as the consciousness that is the very source of the entire universe. When we recognize that we are the very source of the universe, the oneness between ourselves and the universe is established. That alone helps erase the thoughts of duality.

Ādi-madhya-anta-vihīnam means devoid of beginning, middle, and end. The 'I' has no beginning or birth. It is of the nature of consciousness, which illumines all the changes taking place in time, even birth and death. It is, therefore, unaffected by time. When there is no birth, there is no question of other modifications such as growth, decay, disease, and death. One is devoid of all changes and modifications. One is changeless, immovable, ever the same.

Ekam is one. The changeless consciousness that is the 'I,' is indeed one, nondual. Duality exists at the level of names and forms and in the body-sense-mind complexes, but not in the self that manifests through them. The Muṇḍakopaniṣad explains the unity obtaining in the diversity with the example of fire and sparks, "As from a fire fully ablaze, fly off in their thousands, sparks that are akin to the fire, so also, O good looking one, from the imperishable, originate different kinds of beings and they merge again into It." It appears as though the fire is divided into many sparks, because each spark looks different from the others, but they are only

caused to look separate from one another by the carbon particles that fly off the wood as it burns. On account of association with these particles, fire seems to be divided into many, but from the standpoint of fire, which is nothing but heat and light, there is no division. The essence of every spark is heat and light, which is also the essence of fire.

It is not a form that is called fire, but the principle of heat and light, which is formless and indivisible. Similarly, the self that is consciousness is formless and indivisible, but it appears as though it is divided into many 'sparks' of consciousness, each *jīva* or living being representing one spark. It is the division in names and forms, in the body-sense-mind complexes, the *upādhi*, that creates this appearance of separateness or 'manyness' in consciousness.

Vibhum means all-pervasive. Consciousness is all pervasive. Just as space is all pervasive and accommodates all objects within it, so also, consciousness is all pervasive. The divisions of time, space, and object obtain within consciousness, are sustained by consciousness, and are illumined by consciousness. Nothing whatsoever is apart from consciousness, the self. *Cit* means consciousness. The self is consciousness. The 'I' is self-effulgent; everything other than the 'I' can shine only when illumined by consciousness. The objects of the world are illumined by the organs of perception, which are illumined by the mind, which is itself illumined by consciousness, the self-shining witness and the very self.

Ānandam mean happiness or fullness. The self is of the nature of happiness. Whenever we experience happiness, we may feel that its source is some object that we were experiencing, but the fact of the matter is that an inert thing cannot give happiness. Even as it appears to fulfill a desire, an object only makes the mind inward-directed, upon which the mind experiences the self. The self is consciousness, and that alone is the source of all happiness. An object thus becomes an apparent reason or pretext that causes the happiness, which is the self, to manifest. That happiness is always shining, only, the experience of it is obstructed by the cloud of desire or grief. Any desirable object becomes a cause that makes this cloud clear mo-

mentarily, causing the sun that is the self to shine through, which is then experienced as happiness. This experience, however, turns out to be fleeting, because another desire or grief arises soon after, leaving one in search of happiness again. The experience of happiness becomes abiding only when, in the wake of knowledge, the mind abides in the self. One then discovers that one is happiness that is uncreated and boundless. Boundless happiness is *ānanda* which is the self. We are that *ānanda*, wholeness.

Arūpum means formless. Just as space appears to assume the form of any enclosure, such as a pot or a room, so also, the self appears to assume the forms of each of the various *upādhis*, body-sense-mind complexes. The forms belong to the *upādhis*, whereas, the self manifesting through them is formless. We are truly *arūpa*, formless.

Adbhutam means a wonder. It is a wonder that while we think we are mortal, we are, in fact, immortal, while we think we are ignorant, we are of the nature of knowledge, and while we think we are limited, we are the limitless happiness itself, a happiness that is self-shining and effortless. Indeed, we are independent and free, quite contrary to what we have been taking ourselves to be all the while. That is the greatest wonder of all.

The sixth *mantra* has been a meditation upon *brahman* or the self without attributes. The seventh *mantra* describes the meditation upon *saguṇa-brahma* or *brahman* with a form and attributes. Since the mind is accustomed to dwelling in the realm of names, forms, and attributes, meditation upon the formless may not be easy at first. That is why the Vedic culture gives us many names and forms, which become stepping stones for ultimately seeing that which is beyond all names and forms. This *mantra* is a typical meditation of the first kind of *upāsanā*, where the meditator and the object of the meditation are different. It is a meditation upon *saguṇa-brahma* in the form of Lord Śiva.

To be continued...