

This is the thirty second part of the serial article, continuation from January 2024 newsletter. One may wonder, 'I can understand that *brahman* is limitless, but wait a minute, am I *brahman*? How can I be that *brahman*? I am limited in every way, while *brahman* is limitless, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. I can be a part of it, a fraction of *brahman*. *Brahman* is my self all right, but how can I be the self that is *brahman*?' It is possible that a doubt like this may arise, because the statement '*tat tvam asi*,' from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, has been explained in different ways by different *ācāryas*. One *ācārya* explains *tat tvam asi* as meaning "You are a fraction or part of *brahman* or God." Another *ācārya* explains it as "You are his (servant)." Yet another *ācārya* explains it as *atat tvam asi*, meaning "You are not that." The use of *sāmānādhikarāṇya* or the placement in the same grammatical case of *tat* and *tvam* can be explained in many ways. Therefore, different *ācāryas*, using their expertise in grammar, seek to distort the meaning of this simple statement revealing identity, and explain it in a way that conforms to their own notions of reality. However, this Upaniṣad eliminates all such doubts by saying "You are that," as well as "That you are," leaving no doubt about the mutual identity.

Think about who you are. "Well, I was born some years ago and I am going to die in some years." No, no. That is not how it is. Now consider this. Who was it that was born? It was the body that was born and it will be the body that will die; you will not die. "I am so helpless." No, it is the mind that is helpless; not you. This statement of identity, the *mahā-vākya*, forces us to look at ourselves and scrutinize every notion we entertain about ourselves. The self is the connecting link between the various experiences of the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep. What is the common denominator? *Ādhāram*, *ānandam*, *akhaṇḍabodham*; the *jīva* is the support of all, the substratum of all, remaining undivided through all the experiences that are divided. All the states are mutually exclusive, but the *jīva* connects them all, illumines them all, informs them all, and sustains them all.

Brahman identified with the individual body comes to be called the *jīva*. As Ramaṇa Maharṣi¹ has said, the only difference between the *jīva* and *īśvara* is in the *veśa* or costume. It is only the costume that is different. When wearing the costume of *māyā*, *brahman* comes to be called *īśvara*, and when wearing the costume of ignorance, *brahman* becomes the *jīva*. It is like the same actor playing king, beggar, and also minister. Yet is he really any of those people? The beggarliness of the actor is purely incidental, and so is his kingliness. This teaching challenges us to question the notions about who we are. It helps us get over our identification with what we are not and establish an identity with who we really are: ‘You are *brahman*, you are the plain, simple consciousness.’ When we remove from *īśvara* the costume of *māyā*, what remains is the plain, simple consciousness, *sat-cit-ānanda* or *satyam jñānam anantam*, existence, awareness, wholeness. That is *brahman*. The *upadeśa* is, ‘that is what you are.’

The next *mantra* tells us of the reward this knowledge confers.

जाग्रत्स्वप्नसुषुप्त्यादिप्रपञ्चं यत्प्रकाशते ।

तद्ब्रह्माहमिति ज्ञात्वा सर्वबन्धैः प्रमुच्यते ॥ १७ ॥

jāgratsvapnasuṣṭyādiprapañcaṁ yatprakāśate

tadbrahmāhamiti jñātvā sarvabandhaiḥ pramucyate

जाग्रत्-स्वप्न-सुषुप्ति-आदि-प्रपञ्चम् - the realms of waking, dream, deep sleep etc. यत् - which प्रकाशते - illumines तत् - that ब्रह्म - *brahman* अहम् - I इति - thus ज्ञात्वा - having known सर्व-बन्धैः - from all bondage प्रमुच्यते - is released

“I am that *brahman*, which illumines the realms of waking, dream, deep sleep etc.”—thus knowing, one is released from all bondage. (17)

¹ ईशजीवयोर्वेषधीभिदा ।

सत्स्वभावतो वस्तु केवलम् ॥

īśajīvayorveśadhībhidā

satsvabhāvato vastu kevalam

Both *īśvara* and *jīva* are essentially one and the same reality. Their apparent differences are due to their costume. (US-24)

The three states include the one who experiences, the experience, and the objects of experience, and *ādi* indicates that everything else is included. The one that illumines the realms of waking, dream, and deep sleep states is *brahman*. Instead of bothering about the details of the three states of experience, we are asked to look at that because of which the very experience is; that is what Vedānta wants us to do. What you see is not important, but that because of which you see is important. What you experience is not important, but that because of which you experience is important. This teaching of the *śāstra* is to be followed, in the knowledge that it is the consciousness because of which every experience comes about.

If you are asked what illumines all objects, such as trees, in the waking state, you may say that the light emerging from the eyes illumines the trees. That is true. But do the eyes function independently, or do the eyes also depend on some other light? Yes, the eyes need the light of the mind, because something may be right in front of us but we may still not see it; even if the eyes are looking at it the mind is elsewhere. Thus, the eyes see because of the mind. But is the mind itself an independent seer? No, the mind also requires another light, the light of consciousness, the self. It is the light of consciousness that enables the mind and sense organs to illumine the sense objects.

Consciousness requires a medium, such as that of the mind and the organs of perception, to illumine the objects of the world, just as electricity by itself cannot dispel the darkness in this room. Electricity requires the medium of a bulb, the tungsten filament through which it glows, to dispel darkness. So also, the pure consciousness cannot illumine the objects by itself. Consciousness is transcendent and is the *pāramārthikasattā* or absolute reality, whereas the mind and senses are immanent or *mithyā*; they function in the realm of *vyāvahārikasattā*, transactional reality. The absolute has no contact with the transactional, and so consciousness also needs to gain the same degree of reality as the objects. In reflecting through the mind and senses, consciousness gains the same degree of reality as the objects, and is then able to illumine them. Ultimately, what illumines all objects is nothing

but consciousness; the object, the subject, and the experience are all illumined by consciousness. The same holds true for the dream.

A similar discussion is found in the first chapter of the Pañcadaśī, verses three through seven. There the author says that in the waking state, the objects keep on changing but the *samvit* or consciousness that illumines the objects does not change. Similarly, in the dream state, the objects of consciousness keep on changing, but the consciousness illumining them does not change. The consciousness of the waking state is the consciousness that is present in the dream state, illumining the dream objects. Even in the deep sleep state, it is the consciousness that illumines the object of deep sleep, which is ignorance. Thus, consciousness, being homogeneous, is the same in all the three states.

Consciousness stays the same through the past and the future, and through the many months, years, ages, and cycles of creation; it neither rises nor sets and is self-revealing. The consciousness that illumines the worlds of waking, dream, and deep sleep is *brahman*. Call it consciousness, call it existence, call it *ānanda*, call it immortal, call it eternal, call it limitless, call it whatever you will; it still is *brahman* and it is self-effulgent. What is the commonality between *brahman* and ourselves? It is not the body or the mind, the *upādhi*, but the fact of consciousness, the essence, the self that we all are. *Sarvabandhaiḥ pramucyate*, in knowing thus, one becomes liberated from all bondage. What is the bondage? We saw earlier that the bondage is our notions about ourselves. Yet who binds us? We bind ourselves. How do we bind ourselves? We do that by holding fast to various notions and conclusions about ourselves as being so and so, as being this much alone and no more etc. All these notions and complexes are resolved and dispelled in the wake of the knowledge that one is *brahman*, limitless, and of the nature of consciousness. All the sense of limitation then drops off. The wise person becomes liberated from all the notions that create the feeling of being bound, being limited.

To be continued...