

*This is the thirty third part of the serial article, continuation from February 2024 newsletter.*

In verses ten through fifteen of the tenth chapter of the Pañcadaśī, called the *nāṭaka-dīpa-prakarāṇa*, the author gives a very beautiful analogy of a lamp that illumines a performance in a theater. There he describes how the light of the lamp illumines the entire theater, the stage, the musicians, the patron, and the audience. The dancer then comes onto the stage. She dances, the instruments are played, and the spectators watch the various gestures and moods on her face.

The light of the lamp clearly illumines the dancer and her different expressions, the different transformations in the audience in sympathetic response to what she presents, as also the musicians as they play in accord with the dancer's movements. There are various changes in movement taking place in that theater, all of which are illumined by the light of this lamp. It is one lamp, the one source of light, yet it illumines every one of the continuously changing motions and modifications taking place, while itself remaining steady and changeless. The lamp remains *nirvikāra*, free of *vikāra* or change, even as it illumines all the changes.

The dance performance eventually comes to an end; the dancer goes off the stage, the accompanying artists also walk away, the patron leaves, the audience disperses, and, after a while, the theater is empty. We know that the theater is empty. Earlier, we knew that a dance was going on and there were spectators. How did we know that? We knew it by the light of the lamp. And how do we know now that there is no one there and the theater is empty? That is also known by the light of the lamp. It is the lamp that illumines both the presence as well as the absence of all movement.

We can apply this metaphor to our lives: The intellect is the dancer; the waking and dream states, during which the mind or intellect dances to various moods,

represent the various and changing movements of the dancer; the sense organs can be compared to the musical accompaniments; the sense objects are like the audience, and the *ahankāra* or ego is the patron for whom the dance is being performed. The entire *prapañca*, as in the display of the ego, mind, sense organs, and sense objects, is illumined by the one 'lamp' of consciousness, which alone is the changeless witness. The deep sleep state is comparable to the dance being over and everybody having gone away. Just as the dancer disappears behind the stage then and leaves, at this time, the intellect or mind merges into its own cause, which is ignorance. All the sense organs and sense objects also merge into the darkness of ignorance and there is nothing there other than ignorance. That absence of everything during deep sleep is also illumined by the same consciousness.

Sometimes, there is a question about whether or not there is consciousness in the deep sleep state. The reasoning is that, if there were consciousness in the deep sleep state, we should be aware of what is going on at that time; we should be aware that we are enjoying freedom, enjoying *ānanda*. However, because we do not have that awareness, there may be a doubt that perhaps there is no consciousness in the deep sleep state. Would you still say that there is consciousness in the deep sleep state? The answer is yes, because it is the consciousness that illumines the absence of everything. That is why, when a person wakes up, he says, *sukham aham asvāpsam na kiñcid avedīṣam*, I slept well; I did not know anything. Hence, we can say that, unless the person has the knowledge of the absence of everything, he would not be able to say that he slept well or that he did not know anything.

One could ask here, "If consciousness is said to be there even in deep sleep, why are we not aware of the experience of ignorance and happiness in the deep sleep state in the same way as we are aware of the experiences of the waking and dream states?" The reason is that the mind is required to be available for knowing the particulars of any experience. For instance, to see colors and forms during the day, we not only require the eyes, but also the presence of the light of the sun. The sun

illuminates all the differences in the colors and forms of objects. The eyes may be able to see what there is in front of them, but it is the sunlight that illuminates all the particulars, all the *viśeṣas* or uniqueness among the different names and forms. Well, we are able to see something even if it is dark and there is no sunlight, except that we cannot see the particulars of the different names and forms. At that time, we say that we do not see anything. But even when we declare that we do not see anything, it does not mean that one is blind; we do see the darkness.

In the absence of an external source of light that is required to illuminate the presence of objects, what we see is darkness and the absence of everything. Similarly, to know the particulars of the objects of the world, we require the mind and the sense organs to be active. As we said earlier, consciousness cannot illuminate the objects directly; it is only through agents, such as the mind and sense organs, that it illuminates the objects of the world. Since the mind and senses are not active in deep sleep, we are not aware of the particulars, but we are aware of the absence of any particulars. Just as, in darkness, our eyes may be open and we know that we are seeing, but do not see any of the particulars, so also, in deep sleep, consciousness is present, but because the mind is not active, there is no particular experience or awareness of experience.

In technical language, we can say that in the waking and dream states we have *viśeṣa-jñāna*, knowledge of the particulars or *viśeṣas* of the objects, whereas, in the deep sleep state, we have only *sāmānya-jñāna*, knowledge that is not particularized. That is why, not only in the waking and dream states, but also during deep sleep, the self is the consciousness that illuminates everything. One truly is that *brahman*. Upon knowing as much, one becomes free from the bondage that is of the nature of all the erroneous notions or complexes about oneself.

*To be continued...*