

CHAPTER XXIV

The awareness of one being only the witness of everything is the secret of Self-realisation. Self-realisation is either the knowledge that “I am the truth of Me” or “I have known Myself” or “All are one Atma” or “I have experienced that the individual and the universal are not distinct.” This is what every person has to discover for himself. Mere asceticism without this, is sheer waste of time and energy. Man is not a mere animal. He has in him the spark of the Divine and he should not allow it to be extinguished.

Why, even when the senses operate, they are prompted by the presence of the Atma. When the sun rises, birds take to wing, flowers bloom, the human community starts its varied activities. The sun does not directly engage in any of these. It is the prompter, that is all. The sun is not the cause. He is just the activator, the witness, the onlooker. He is

above and beyond all this. He is not bound or based on man or beast or bird or flower.

Birds fly in the sky but they do not leave any trace behind of their path of flight. So too, however many sensory impressions fly through the inner sky of the heart, no impression should be left thereon. The heart is not affected by their flying through.

But man sees only the superstructure, not the basis. In the garland, no one observes the string that keeps the flowers together, the existence of the string can be known only by investigation and inquiry. The basis is the string. The flowers depend upon it and hang together on account of it, as a garland.

To understand this better, take another instance. Pots, pans, plates and pails are all made of clay. But though there is clay in all these, clay is only clay. It is not pot, pan, plate or pail. So too in the Atma, which is the basis, there are no Gunas (or characteristics) like pot, pan, plate or pail. But the Atma exists in the Gunas as Guna Swarupa. It is the Atma which is mistaken for the Gunas, because it is conceived as limited and as with name and form. The Atma is the only reality that persists through all names and forms, as the clay which is the only substance in all the pots and pans. By this kind of inquiry, the conviction that the basis and the substance of everything is Atma or Kshetrajna or Para Brahman gets strengthened.

Then, Krishna was asked by Arjuna, thus: “It is indeed very difficult to know that basic Atma, that inner reality of all things. He is everywhere but is nowhere visible! He is the inner core of all but cannot be contacted at all! What is the cause of this mystery?”

Krishna replied: “Arjuna! You have not understood yet. The Atma is subtler than the subtlest and so it is difficult to cognise it. You know the five elements, do you not, earth, water, fire, wind and sky? Of these, each subsequent element is subtler than the previous one. Earth has five qualities: sound, touch, form, taste and smell. Water has all these except smell; Fire has only three, sound, touch and form. Wind has only two qualities, sound and touch. And the last one, Sky has only sound. That is why each of these is subtler than the previous one and also more widely spread. The sky is everywhere, penetrating in and through all, because it has only one characteristic. How much more subtle must be the Atma, which has no qualities or characteristics! Imagine how much more immanent and universal it must be! Those who are objectively minded cannot grasp this phenomenon. Only the subjective minded can have the solution.

“This faith can come only to those who can reason things out. It is a fatal thrust on those who bark, in season and out of season, that God cannot be immanent in everything because He is not to be perceived at all. They do not believe that God is above and beyond the trivial qualities with which they seek to measure Him. It is a pity, indeed.

They tend to be as low as their thoughts. That is the inexorable law. God is as near to you, as you are to Him. If you keep afar, He too remains afar.”

There are some fine examples of this truth in the Puranas. Hiranyakasipu sought God in all things and came to the conclusion that He is nowhere. Prahlada, on the other hand, believed that He can be found wherever He is sought and so He appeared from out of the impenetrably hard iron pillar itself! Prahlada was close to God and so God was close to him.

The cow carries sacred sustaining milk in its own udder. But unaware of this, it runs after the water in which rice has been washed! So too man is unaware of Madhava who is in him as his own Atma nor does he make an effort to discover Him, who is his own reality. He runs after the much inferior joy obtainable from the fleeting objects, with his defective and deceptive senses. What colossal ignorance!

To revel in multiplicity is ignorance. To visualise the Unity is the sign of Wisdom, Jnanam. Savam or “those who are dead to reality” alone see this as “many.” Only “Shivam” or the Divine sees the seeming many as “One.” What is called *Jneyam*, Atma, Kshetrajna, and Parabrahman is that “One” only. This was taught to Arjuna so that he might experience the Bliss thereof.

Readers! As the rivers have the sea as their goal, Jivas have Brahman as their goal. Permanent joy can never be received by the “conscious” Jiva from “material” objects.

Moksha is the acquisition of permanent joy. It is also called the attainment of Brahman. Fixed exclusive devotion to Godhead can come only to those who have no attachment to the wild phantasmagoria of name and form, which is called the “World.” That alone can win Atma Jnana. The world is the instrument for the attainment of renunciation. That is the reason why it is so tempting and so treacherous. He is the real Vedanthin who sees the world as an instrument, for escape from its coils.

Usually, the word “*oordhwa*” is taken to mean “above,” “high,” etc. But if you consider the world to be a tree, then, it has its roots in Brahman. That is, the roots are above and the branches are below! This was taught to Arjuna by Krishna thus: “The tree of Samsara or Life is a very peculiar one. It is quite distinct from the trees of the world. The trees that you see in the world have their branches above and roots below. The *Aswattha* (the cosmic tree) tree of Samsara however has roots above and branches below. It is a topsyturvy tree.”

Arjuna intercepted with a question. “How did it get the name, Aswattha? It means a banyan tree, is it not? Why was the tree of life, called so? Why was it not called by some other name?” A strange name for a strange tree. “Listen. Aswattha means Anithya, impermanent, transient. It also means the ‘banyan tree,’ its flowers and fruits are no good for smelling or for eating. However, its leaves will be ceaselessly quivering in the wind. So it is also called *Chaladala*, meaning ‘quivering leaves.’ Worldly objects too

are ever wavering, unsteady, ever changing positions. In order to make people understand this truth and strive to overcome it, it is called Aswattha.

“This disquisition is to make man develop the higher vision and yearn for steady faith in Brahman. The objective world can be truly understood only by two types of examination, the outer and the inner. There is a reasoning that binds and a reasoning that liberates. He who sees the world as world sees wrong. He who sees it as Paramatma sees right. The world is the effect. It has a cause. It cannot be different from the cause. It is just a mutation of Brahman, which constitutes it. The millions of beings are the branches, twigs and leaves. The seed is Brahman, in which all the tree is subsumed and summarised. He who knows this, knows the Vedas.”