

5. The All-pervading Atma

There is only one common feature for all living things in this world and that is the eternal spirit. In all manifold forms of creation, in unity and in diversity, we find only the spirit of Atma and nothing else. It is the realisation of this aspect that constitutes the essence of all learning.

Truth is something which everyone has to respect under all conditions. Truth cannot be changed by arguments, by comments or by discussions. In the same manner, the eternal truths contained in the *Vedanta* will manifest themselves as if they have no relation to a particular religion, to a particular sect or to a particular community.

Vedanta stands for ultimate Wisdom. Here the words wisdom and knowledge do not refer to the knowledge about material things or knowledge about music or knowledge about any particular branch of learning, but it represents the knowledge of divinity. It is the knowledge and wisdom about *Atma* that will be of some use to one in one's life. It is most useful for man to know himself. There cannot be anything more useful than knowledge of one's own self. What do we mean by knowledge about one's own self? It is the knowledge of the *Atma*. To know the *Atma* and to know one's own self is the most useful aspect of one's learning.

What is this *Atma*? Is it identical with one's body? Is it the same thing as our mind? Is it the same thing as our intelligence? What is *Atma*? Can it be identified with any one of these things?

We have our eye. This eye looks at the body and looks at the various organs that compose the body. Here, it is quite clear that the organs in the body which are being seen and the eye which is seeing them are quite distinct from each other. The eye not only looks at the body and the organs but also looks at everything around us—the table, the house and the surroundings. It is obvious here that the things which are being seen are different and distinct from the eye with which we see these things.

We have fire and that fire burns matter. It also gives brightness. That which shines and burns is the fire. This is different from matter on which it shines and which it burns. Who is this individual who looks at this matter which is being burnt and the fire which is burning the matter? We see clearly that what is being burnt is different from what is responsible for this burning. This is a table, this is a tumbler. This is a kerchief. What is it that makes these things manifest and enables us to recognise them? This is a kind of light. This is an instrument. This instrument of light is shining on these various items and makes those items visible to us. As in that analogy, we shall have to regard the eye as an instrument. When this eye, an organ, is regarded as an instrument, how can we identify this instrument with the *Atma*? What has been said now applies not only to the eye, it applies to the ear which hears, the tongue which tastes, the hand which does work, the nose which smells. All these organs have to be regarded as instruments. When all these organs are treated as instruments, how can the human body, which is composed of these organs, be anything other than an instrument? It becomes clear that neither the organs nor the human body is identical with *Atma*.

Now we shall move on to the mind and enquire if there is any chance of identifying the mind with the *Atma*. We can see that mind is only a device by which one can distinguish and think. Mind is only a bundle of desires. Mind, which has this form of a bundle of desires, cannot be identified with the *Atma*.

We now come to intelligence. We will notice easily that intelligence is also an instrument, an instrument which can be used at the command of *Atma*. We know the nature of intelligence. We assume that we have a knife in our hand. With this knife, we make an attempt to cut a fruit. We cut a fruit only when the knife is sharp. So, as in this analogy, we can regard the mind as a knife, and only when the mind, which is the knife, has the sharpness, which can be referred to as intelligence, can we use the mind in a proper manner.

If we have already accepted that the mind itself is an instrument, along with the mind intelligence, which is only a quality of sharpness, which we have given to the knife is also a quality of an instrument. Can intelligence be anything other than a quality? If we enquire in this manner and go step by step, it will become clear that intelligence is also like an instrument.

The next stage is life. The life, or the *prana* in us is such that when we go to sleep during the night, it loses all the ability to find out even whether the *prana* exists or not. The *prana*, or the life in us, does not know whether the body is breathing in or breathing out. In that state of sleep, because all the sensory organs have become passive, they are not working. In those conditions, along with the organs, even this life quality is also not working. When the master himself is not doing any work, will the servants be active at all? In a similar

manner, when all the organs have become passive and are not working, can this *prana* remain active? Here also it becomes clear to us that the *prana* should be classified as one of the organs and is not the *Atma*.

Then we ask the question, what is the nature of the *Atma*? This *Atma*, which is present in everyone, experiences the world with the assistance of the organs. Even in the dreaming state, in a very subtle manner, the *Atma* experiences the intelligence and the mind. The experience, which the *Atma* has in the wak-ing state and in the dreaming state, is also possible in the deep sleep state. We thus conclude that the quality of *Atma* is such that in all the three states: the waking state, the dreaming state and the deep sleep state, it does not change.

In our description, these three states may have three different names and three different aspects; but the *Atma*, during these changing states, does not change in reality. It is the same in all the three states. We take the example of a small plate. The plate is a silver plate. When we do not like the form of this plate, we can give it to a silversmith and convert it into the shape of a spoon. When we do not like the spoon after some time, we can change that form also and make it into a cup. At first it was a plate, then it became a spoon, thereafter it became a cup. What has changed in it is the form and the name, but the silver, the base for all the three forms, does not change.

In the same manner, like the form and the name which have changed in the case of the plate, the spoon and the cup, we refer to the waking state, the dreaming state and the sleeping state; but the *Atma* (like the base) remains unchanged in all the states. It is important to recognise this permanent

truth that *Atma* remains unchanging. When we talk of the 'I,' we note that there are two kinds of 'I.' 'I' in one sense is the recognition of your external human form and the body. This is the eye with which you experience the external aspect. There is a second 'I' referring to the inner aspect. These two relate to two aspects, the body and the *Brahman* inside the body. Between these two extremes, there is also an intermediate state and that is the identification of the 'I' with the *jiva* in you.

To say that you are identical with the *jiva* in the intermediate state between the body and the *Brahman* is like the dreaming state. To say "I am the body" corresponds to the waking state. To say "I am *Brahman*" corresponds to the deep sleep state. The three forms, the waking state, the dreaming state and the deep sleep state, are only different forms given to the unchanging *Atma*. These are, however, simply reflections of the *Atma* and they cannot be identified with the *Atma*.

There is a state which is higher than all these three states and is referred to as the *Turiya* state. Here is one small example. We look at our own face in the mirror. You say that that is your face. But strictly speaking, that is not identical with your face. What you see in the mirror is something distinct and different from your face. In the image, your right eye appears as the left eye and the left eye appears as the right eye. It is not possible to establish the identity between the two. One should conclude that what you see in the mirror is only an image and not yourself. The reason for this is that the instrument in which you see yourself, namely the mirror, is something different from you. Here, one who sees is different from what is being seen. It is only when what you see and what is being seen are one and the same, that you can call them identical.

The 'I,' when it identifies itself with the *Brahman* in you, is what you see from the aspect of *Brahman*. In that description, there is a description of your own self as I. That description should become a selfless description of your self to bring about true identify. It should be a selflessness in self. That is the true self. When you identify your 'I' with your body, you are saying it with an ego or *ahamkara* in you. When you identify it with the *Brahman* in you, the identification is not complete if you say it with a selfish motive. The true identification should be above ego and selfishness.

In this context, the *Atma* should be regarded only as a witnessing consciousness, when alone it will be the true *Atma*. You are only a witness. You, through the help of your organs and your body, are witnessing all the things around you. *Atma* is present everywhere. There is no place in the world where there is no *Atma*. That kind of omnipresent *Atma* enters a container, a form, and through that container, the human body, it makes use of you.

In order to understand and expound the true nature of this kind of *Atma*, Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrugna went to *Guru* Vasishtha and started a discussion. The kind of teaching which is contained in this exposition of *Atma* is called *Vasishtha Gita*.

The first step, or the negative step, is to say that *Atma* is not that, *Atma* is not this, and in that way, we remove all possible comparisons. In their childhood, the nature of *Atma* was discussed in this manner by arguments and expositions between them-selves and the *Guru*, and whatever they had given in that form to the world is now called the *Vasishtha Gita*.

It is in this context that Rama took truth as His very basis and in that way, He gave up the kingdom that was

rightfully due to Him. He never had any aspirations for kingdoms. Ramachandra took truth as His foundation and based all His *karma* on the foundation of truth. It is in this context that it has been said that “*Sathyam nasti paro dharmah.*” Different from truth, there is no *dharmah*. There is no truth which is different from *dharmah*.

He regarded *sathya* and *dharmah* as the two foundation walls. He also regarded them as the two wheels for the chariot of His life. He propagated that with *sathya* and *dharmah*, one can carry on one’s life in this world. This is why Rama has been described by saying “*Ramo vighraha van dharmah.*” Rama is the embodiment of *dharmah*. Rama’s form is *dharmah*, Rama’s conduct is truth. Here Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrugna can be identified with the four *purusharthas*: *dharmah, artha, kama and moksha*. Ramachandra has been looking at these four *purusharthas* as distinct ones. He took *dharmah* as the base, *moksha* as the destination which we have to reach. When we have a ladder and when we want to climb to the top using the ladder, the ladder rests on the ground as the base. The ladder has also got a destination which we have to reach. This ladder rests on the ground of *dharmah* and attempts to reach the top mansion which is *moksha*. In between there are two steps, the steps of *artha* and *kama*. Both these steps, *artha* and *kama*, are to be joined either on one hand with *dharmah* or on the other hand with *moksha*. If one is to expound it in a simpler way, one can say that *dharmah* and *artha* join up and constitute one part, and *kama* and *moksha*, join up and constitute the second part. When *dharmah* and *artha* are put together, we see that by a *dharmic* life, one may acquire wealth or *artha* or you have the aspiration to acquire wealth for the sake of *dharmah*. Do not have *kama* towards the world. Do not have a desire to enjoy the world but have *kama* or the desire for *moksha*. All your earnings and acquisitions should be related to *dharmah* and your desires to *moksha*.

Following the promise he gave to Rama on the mountain of Chitrakoota, Bharatha was spending all his time in the village of Nandigram. None of the citizens of Ayodhya could see Bharatha who was leading a secluded life in Nandigram. The reason for this is that Bharatha took a vow to lead the same type of life which was being led by Ramachandra, wear the same kind of clothes which Ramachandra was wearing and eat the same kind of roots and fruits which Rama-chandra was eating.

After living for fourteen years in the forest and after the death of Ravana, Rama was returning to Ayodhya along with Lakshmana, Sugriva and various other attendants. On the way, He reached the *ashram* of Bharadwaja. Rama knew very well the agony in the mind of Bharatha. Rama knew that if He delayed even a little beyond fourteen years, Bharatha would probably enter fire and destroy himself. So, Rama sent Hanuman in advance to Bharatha to tell him about his impending arrival. When Hanuman reached Nandigram and told Bharatha that Rama was coming, Bharatha was overjoyed and was in ecstasy, and he quickly made all arrangements in Ayodhya for the reception of Rama. He called Sumanta and asked for his chariot to be brought. This chariot was placed on the outskirts of Ayodhya and Bharatha was waiting anxiously for Rama.

As soon as Rama, Lakshmana and Sita arrived Bharatha prostrated before them and, as a result of his being overjoyed, he went and embraced his brother Rama and felt exceedingly happy. He made his brother Rama sit in the chariot and he himself was leading the chariot. When Rama was sitting in that chariot and Bharatha was leading the chariot through the streets of Ayodhya, the citizens of Ayodhya could

not distinguish between Bharatha and Rama. The reason for this was that Bharatha was also wearing his clothes and his hair like Ramachandra. Moreover, the brilliance in Ramachandra's face was exactly the same as the brilliance in Bharatha's face. Their bodies were different but their ideas, their thoughts and their views were identical. Bharatha was continually thinking and uttering the name of Rama. Consequently, Rama's form and Rama's brilliance entered Bharatha's body.

It is said "*Brahma vid Brahmaiva bhavathi.*" One who has the knowledge of *Brahman* will become identical with *Brahman*. As he was continuously thinking of Rama, he was transformed into Rama. Citizens who came to garland Rama could not recognise who was Rama and who was Bharatha. They put all the garlands on Bharatha thinking that he was Rama. Bharatha was quite smart and was quite alive to the situation. So, he was telling the citizens, please garland my brother and not me. Bharatha was so intensely devoted to Rama that people could not tell who was Bharatha and who was Rama. What we should notice here is that Lakshmana's devotion was apparent and was always seen easily. Lakshmana had always attributes and qualities, whereas Bharatha was attributeless and without *gunas*. Here the form-less and the form are like the two legs. Here is an example for this. This is a pillow. There is a cloth covering the pillow. Inside the cloth is cotton. There is cotton inside and there is cotton on the outside in the form of a cloth. The cloth is the quality and has a form. The cotton is without quality. Here we see that the formless is contained within the form. In the outer cloth, cotton is contained. In *Vedantic* parlance, we can say that the cloth and the cotton are one and the same. Bharatha has demonstrated this simple truth.

They all reached Ayodhya. The citizens of Ayodhya were extremely happy. In that happiness, they cleaned up all the streets, made all preparations for the coronation of Rama. The next day Rama was proclaimed King and Bharatha was proclaimed the Yuvaraja. After the ceremonies were gone through, Rama and Lakshmana stated that all that they had done was for the prosperity and happiness of the people. While this was the situation, a king by the name Gandharva was causing a lot of trouble to the people in the two cities, Takshasila and Pushkalavati, of his kingdom. The people came to Rama and Lakshmana and described their difficulties to them and begged that somehow or other their difficulties should be removed. Bharatha, who recognised that the people's prosperity and the people's happiness is also the ruler's prosperity and the ruler's happiness, went along with them in order to remove their difficulties.

Bharatha challenged this King Gandharva and fought with him very hard for seven days and with the help of the name of Rama, he defeated Gandharva. After defeating Gandharva, Bharatha made one of Gandharva's sons Takshaka, the king of Takshasila. The second son of Gandharva, by name Pushkala, was made the king of Pushkalavati. He returned to Rama and said that he does not want anything more, and that he has no more ambition. He said that he only wanted to spend the rest of his life at Rama's feet.

Lakshmana and Bharatha were such that they regarded their entire lives as belonging to Rama and their ambition was to be nearest to Rama. All their life was surrendered for the service of Rama.

Divya Atma Swarupas:

It is very necessary for you to recognise the affection that was shown between the brothers in the *Ramayana* and the sacredness of such affection. At no time and on no occasion did the brothers of Rama exhibit any selfishness. With a selfless attitude, they were regarding that service to the people was the main concern of their life. All these good qualities were acquired by them from their *Guru* Vasishta, even while they were young; and they shaped themselves so as to be ideals for others in the world. It is only when we can recognise and understand the true nature of *sathya* and *dharma*, even while we are young, that we can get the most beneficial results out of such an understanding when we grow older.

This age of yours is a very sacred age. In this sacred age, you must make an attempt to get such good notions implanted in your mind. It is only when the young plant is straight that the tree will also be straight. But if the plant becomes crooked when it is young, the tree will also become crooked. If the plant is crooked, how can it change into a straight tree when it grows big?

You are like tender young plants. If, at this stage, you can get rid of all crookedness, you can grow into a straightforward useful citizen of the country. It is to give you this chance that this opportunity has come your way. Truly, your body is like the temple of God. You should make an attempt to keep this temple sacred and clean and use it in a good manner. You are going to make your body the living place for the *Sanathana*, the age-old God.

Along with your mind, you must keep your body sacred. Along with your body, you must keep your mind sacred.