

Discussion Summary, October 11, 2015

Continuing his recap from last week of Mantra 6 in Part 2, Cantos 3, Swamiji reminded us that we have to know Brahman as Aham Brahma Asmi. He reminded us that the human being present in Manusha loka provides the best opportunity for us to gain this knowledge. Animals, he says, have only a Bhoga Shariram and do everything by instinct. We are lucky to have this human birth and he recommends we make the best use of this birth to obtain this great knowledge. Discussing Atma /Anatma , unless we understand that the “I” is the witness principle or Sakshi Chaitanya, we are still in Samsara and as such finite.

Tat Tvam Asi is only possible when one separates himself from this body mind complex. Swamiji reminds us that the body and mind are subject to arrival and departure while the “I” is constant and unchanging.

Mantra # 7:

Swamiji now presented another method of Atma / Anatma discrimination. He calls it the essence of Vedanta.

Refreshing our memory on the Pancha Koshas, Swamiji says we have to withdraw from each one of them. The Pancha Koshas are:

- 1) Annamaya kosha, “foodstuff” sheath (Anna),
- 2) Pranamaya kosha, “energy” sheath, (Prana /apana);
- 3) Manomaya kosha “mind-stuff” sheath (Manas),
- 4) Vijnanamaya kosha, “wisdom” sheath (*Vijnana*) and lastly
- 5) Anandamaya kosha, “bliss” sheath (*Ananda*)

This method sensitizes our mind, as it withdraws from gross to the subtle. Describing this process, Swamiji says, sense organs are controlled by the mind, which is subtler, stronger and more powerful. Superior to mind is the intellect, or Buddhi. Mind is the doubting faculty, while Buddhi is rationalizing capacity that removes doubts. Mind is given to emotion, Buddhi is not, and hence it is stronger. Thus, Buddhi is the Vijnanamaya Kosha. Describing adjectives we give ourselves such as: I am Tamilian> I am Indian> I am Asian> I am human> I am a Living Being (all beings)> and finally I am a "Being". Swamiji says we need to drop all adjectives. He says they all belong to Anatma. We have to realize I am a "Being". This is called Samashti Buddhi. Individual does not exist separate from Total. Micro does not exist separate from Macro.

Taking us to a different plane, Swamiji now says, "I am" Hiranyagarbha. Superior to Hiranyagarbha is the Avyaktam, the Total Karana Shariram. Karana Shariram is the state of blankness. In this blank state everything thing is in its potential state. He says blankness is not "nothing" rather it is in the Potential state or a state of Singularity. Learn to identify with Avyaktam. I am Turiyaha, the final state, state of Samashti Karana Sharira.

How to reach this state is now described.

Mantra # 8:

When all sensory operations are suspended we experience blankness. This state is called Avyaktam. Subtler than this blankness is Atma or Consciousness. So, where do we find Atma? Swamiji says Atma cannot be objectified. The One who is aware, the awareness, of the blankness , the Experiencer, is the Atma. There is nothing other than "my" self declares Swamiji. The unobjectifiable "I" is the Atma while the Blankness is the Anandamaya Kosha.

He says Purusha is also the Atma.

So, what type of consciousness is this? He says, it "all pervading" consciousness. So, like the wave we have a choice to identify with the small wave or the eternal water. Once we identify with the all pervading Atma, we will be removed from all suffering.

I am Nirguna Chaitanyam without any Linga attributes. As long as I identify with body, I am mortal. This small I needs to know the immortal I. Once I know it, I will be relieved of all "notion of mortality", as I do not identify with this body anymore. I can own up to my "natural" immortality. That is why, says Swamiji, Samsara is an intellectual problem.

Mantra # 9:

We have to use our human birth, our viveka shakthi. Atma / Anatma viveka should dawn on us.

Swamiji says for Viveka, a deep and complete mind is to be available for this teaching. A tremendous listening skill is required. A special mind, deep and total is required. We normally do not listen totally. If we can do this, the mahavakya sravanam can penetrate this state. Do we have a mind that is absorbed in the teaching? In such a person, knowledge dawns. It is called sukshma buddhi. This buddhi is required as the subject matter is very subtle.

Physical organs cannot perceive Brahman. Eyes cannot see him. So, how is he to be known?

He can only be known through Guru's teachings of Shastra. This is the Shastra mirror. I should also have the proper eyes to see in the mirror. The inner eye, Buddhi, should be qualified for this teaching. The nature of this Buddhi is a prepared intellect, subtle, deep and total. Only such an intellect can know the Brahman. The intellect is in our heart says Swamiji. The right understanding, provided by a qualified Teacher, received by a qualified man, results in knowledge.

Suggested Practice

To obtain the full benefit of the teaching of a great teacher we all need to come to Vedanta class with a very focused mind. Do not let Samsara get in the way of this great knowledge.

Discussion Summary, October 4, 2015

Continuing his recap from last week of mantras 1 and 2 in Part 2, Cantos 3, Swamiji reminded us that this third and final section of Katho Upanishad deals with Atmavidya, Brahavidya Sadhanani and preparation for Brahavidya.

Describing the role of Brahman as the Creator, Swamiji says, Brahman is the keeper of law and order. Behind Brahman is Maya the female principle. Swamiji says Brahman and Ishwara are interchangeable. He also clarified that Brahman + Maya=Ishwara. He says we have to accept Brahman as the law. With law we need an enforcement agency. This enforcement principle is called Ishwara. Ishwara is like Vajra or the fear and threat principle. Human beings and Beings in general, have poor self-discipline. Fear enforces discipline, hence the use of word God fearing person. One who knows this truth will attain liberation.

Shloka # 3:

Here Yama explains why Brahman is feared. He says all Devatas of natural forces function as per law of the Earth, Prithvi Devta. Similarly for Sun, there is Surya Devata. Yama says Devatas are frightened of Ishwara. Fire, Sun, Vayu, Indira (rain), are all afraid of him, the invisible intelligence.

Mrutyu (Yama) also runs to perform his work fearing this law. Swamiji says only Ishwara Aikyam can help us. Markandeya's embrace of Shiva lingam is an example. Here Markandeya was not embracing just the lingam, he was embracing the Shiva Aikyam.

Shloka # 4:

Now Yama explains the conditions required for Brahma Gyanam. First condition is, we should be human beings. The Shastra's say there are 85 lacs (8.5 million) of species, so chances of being human are fairly small. Swamiji says we should use our human birth properly. It is a boat for crossing over to God. It is a costly boat. It needs a lot of Punyam. We should remember that this boat will disappear. If one squanders this opportunity, he or she will be fit only for another birth, in another body and not necessarily in a human body. The birth may also be in any one of the 14 lokas created by the Lord.

Shloka #5:

Yama now discusses if the knowledge of Atman can be acquired in any other loka? He accepts it can be obtained in other lokas, however, he feels the human birth is the best of all. Describing different lokas he says:

1. In a human intellect one can gain knowledge like seeing one's face in a clear mirror.
2. In Pitra Loka also knowledge can be obtained. However, here, it will not be very clear. It will be more a like a dream, as it moves very fast.
3. In Gandharva Loka, a world of music, dance, art and enjoyment, knowledge appears like the reflection of your face in water. Here also one can gain knowledge.
4. In Brahma Loka knowledge is very clear, like darkness and light. Here also knowledge can be obtained.

Swamiji says. Of the four, two are vague, while Brahma Loka is very difficult to obtain. To obtain Brahma Loka, one has to perform a lot of Upasana, including at the time of death.

Swamiji says getting human birth is difficult. And since we are already here, let us not postpone obtaining this knowledge.

Shloka # 6:

Giving us the method of reaching this knowledge, Swamiji says, Atma/AnAtma Viveka must be discriminated. The knowledge Aham Brahmasmi should dawn in us. While Aham refers to Sthula Sharira, Karna Sharira, Sukshma Sharira and Chaitanya, the Aham referred to here is only Chaitanya. Any other reference of Aham does not identify with Atman. Withdraw from Anatma to Atma , says Swamiji.

Swamiji says we should disown instruments of interaction. Sense organs are only temporary instruments, only for my use. Even without them, I continue to exist. Giving an example, Swamiji says we sometimes forget that spectacle is not part of us. Thus every instrument is an intimate object to subjects and often considered a part of subject. During waking state all sense organs , including mind, "come out" and during sleep state, they all get resolved. However, through all this, "I" continue as witness. Whatever is incidental, such as sense organs, are subject to departure. Incidental stuff is not my Nature. They are separate from me. They are separately born and gone. Even when eyes are gone, "I" continue to exist as awareness and consciousness. Once this is understood, we can understand " Aham Brahma Asmi". I am the limitless one.

Such a person of fine intellect, a Viveki, gets the advantage of having no grief in life, says Swamiji. Grief comes with identification with body. This causes us to think we are mortals. The thought " I am mortal" is however not comfortable to me. This is against my nature. When anything unnatural happens "I" reject it, naturally. It will go away when I do not identify with my mortal body. Body is mortal. "I" am immortal. This way, old age, separation etc. become more acceptable.

Suggested Practice:

In context of Shloka # 6 following thoughts of Anusuyaji comes to mind: Eliminate the small "I" in all aspects of life. Don't think in terms of my wife, my son, and my house etc., where the "I" identification comes in. The eternal " I" will automatically arise.

Discussion Summary, September 27, 2015

An Excellent summary by Ram Ramaswamy.

Moving on to Part 2, Cantos 3, Mantra Swamiji says this third and final section of Katho Upanishad deals with Atmavidya, Brahavidya Sadhanani and preparation for Brahavidya.

Mantra #1: This is an important mantra. It deals with nature of Brahman. Yama now compares Creation to the Ashwatha Vriksha or Pipal Tree. Shankara in his commentary says there are many things common between the two. Describing them, he says:

1. Both are vast in size.
2. Both do not have a beginning or end. Thus, the tree was from the seed of another tree and so on and on until we do not know when it started. So also with Creation. It came into being due to Karma. Karma came into being because of creation. This endless paradox has been going on and knows one knows what started it all. The same is true of Creation itself. One creation after another keeps coming in an endless parade.
3. It is inexplicable. We cannot say which is the cause and which is the effect. Is the tree the cause or the seed?

Same with free will and fate, they are all mutually dependent.

4. There is an invisible root underneath the tree that nourishes it. It is also the cause of the tree. It is same for Creation. There is one invisible root called Ishwara.
5. Both have branches spreading widely. Some are upper, some middle and some lower. So also with Creation; you have Bhu-loka, Patal-loka etc.
6. Both bear fruit, called Phalatwam. Every tree bears fruit. Some are sweet, some sour and some a combination. So also with Creation, we have Sukha, Dukha and Mishraphalam.
7. Because of the fruits, many birds nest on the branches that support them. It is a very noisy tree. Thus also with Creation that provides Jivatma (birds in the body) to nest in the Bhu-Loka branch. Sometimes the nest changes to another higher or lower branch or Lokas. The world is a very noisy place says, Shankara, full of music, laughter and wailing.
8. Even this large and powerful tree is moved by powerful winds. So also Samsara is moved by Prarabhda Karmas. Swamiji clarified that Prarabhda Karma includes my karma as well as karma of my surroundings.)
9. Swamiji says, even this large endless tree can be uprooted. Cut off the branch, trunk and root and it permanently destroy the tree. So also the sword of Knowledge can destroy this Samsara. The aadhara of Samsara is the Atman, says Swamiji. Just as one holds on to the chain link when taking a dip in the fast moving river, so also hold on to Brahman even as you dip into this fast moving Life, says Swamiji. There is nothing that can exist outside the Brahman.

Elaborating further, even the biggest dream is in the Waker. Nachiketas asks Yama why are you talking about Brahman when I wanted to know about Atman. Yama tells him: You are

everything. You are Brahman.

Mantra # 2:

Providing further clarification Swamiji says, Brahman is the intelligent cause of life. Just as dream world emerges from the Waker, everything emerges and functions in presence of Brahman. He is the creator and maintainer of everything.

Swamiji says Brahman also polices this Creation ensuring the Universe functions in an orderly manner. This policing intelligence is also called Ishwara. Those who know this achieve immortality. Swamiji adds every suffering we undergo is a punishment for some violation. Every violation of Dharma results in sorrow.

Suggested Practice:

Mr. and Mrs. Narayan recently visited Swamiji during their trip to Chennai. They informed him of our group's activities. Swamiji was very happy. He suggested that the Vedanta group read and practice the teachings of Chapter 17 of the Geeta. This chapter deals with the Gunas or our qualities.

Discussion Summary September 20, 2015

In today's class, Swamiji continued verses 11 to 15, of the third section of the second chapter of Kathopanishad. The subject of these verses are nature of paramatma, jivatma/paramtma aikyam and benefits of jivatma paramatma aikyam. Swamiji continued to mention the common features of surya prakasha (sun light) and chaithanyam or atma:

- They both are ekam, only one, without a second
- They both are all pervading
- They both are formless
- They both are indivisible
- They both are not tainted by any impurities; the impurities of sukshma sareeram do not affect atma because atma is higher than sukshma sareeram. This is very similar to the pictures projected on a movie theater screen; the screen is not affected by flood or fire that is projected onto the screen.
- They both illumine everything. Sun light illumines all objects; everything internal and external is known only because of atma or chaithanyam

Consciousness does not need matter for existence; consciousness need body/mind complex only for manifestation, but consciousness can exist without body/mind complex. Consciousness does not depend on matter, but matter needs consciousness. Consciousness remains one but seemingly appear to be many because it manifests into many objects, and as a result we mistakenly think that the consciousness in one person is not the same as the consciousness in another person.

Yama dharma raja says that all pervading consciousness resides in your own self, in the form of witness principle, I the experiencer. Only rare seekers recognize this fact. Paramatma is neither inside you nor outside you; it is you. The seeker who recognizes this wisdom gets everlasting happiness and permanent fulfillment.

Explaining verse 13, Swamiji states that Paramatma is there in every sentient being in the form of consciousness. This consciousness with the power of Maya is Eeswara, and Eeswara fulfills all desires.

Brahmananda, the superlative, unexplainable, everlasting ananda, is never an object of experience because Brahman is not confined by time and space. Brahmananda is the nature of

consciousness itself. One can get Brahmananda in the form of wisdom that Brahmananda is the very consciousness, I myself. Sunlight, moonlight, star lights, flashes of lightening or fire do not illumine consciousness. But all these are illumined and known because of consciousness. Swamiji says everything is known only because of self-evident consciousness.

Discussion Summary – **September 13, 2015**

Continuing his overview of Part 2, Cantos 2, Swamiji says Yama promised to discuss “after death” of an Agyani as well as Brahmaswarupam a little more in mantra # 6. In Mantra 7, Yama describes the endless process of birth and rebirth or Samsara an Agyani has to go through. He describes Samsara as meaning constantly moving, sometimes up and sometimes down. Living in Samsara is a helpless state, says Swamiji.

Mantra # 8: Describing Brahmaswarupam, Swamiji says, it is not a new identity. It is the Consciousness that illuminates the external world, internal world and the state of total blankness (sleep). It is also known as the “I”, the Experiencer and Witnesser. Nothing exists beyond the Brahman.

Mantra # 9: Swamiji says all mantras starting with # 9 through # 15 are important because they describe Brahman.

Consciousness is aware of everything. It is in the formed body, but it itself is formless. Citing example of Light, Sawmiji says, it illuminates the hall; it is everywhere

although light itself is formless and thus not located in a particular place. Body is located, but formless light is not located. It is all pervading and non-localized. The evidence for us is the perceptibility of the body by light.

The light seems to have a shape because of the body. This "one" light seems to become plural by association with body. Yama says the same phenomenon happens to Consciousness. When Consciousness pervades the body, it seems it is located in the body. Thus, we have this feeling of one body and one consciousness. We also feel consciousness is only in our body and that another body has another consciousness. Each Atma also appears to be limited. That, after death, Atma travels, is another misconception, says Yama. He says, Atma is not limited; does not travel and does not separate.

Yama illustrates this phenomenon by providing the three examples of Fire, Air and Sunlight.

Fire or Heat does not have any form. It is everywhere. It is not located. However, it manifests itself in burning wood and this is associated with Agni. Because the burning wood is located in a place, we think Fire is also located in wood. In reality Fire is beyond location of wood. It only appears located because of the manifesting medium, the wood. This medium is also called Upadhi in Sanskrit.

Thus the **unwise** think Atma is in body, while **wise** understand that Atma is all pervading and it is only manifesting itself in a body. Swamiji also says, Consciousness beyond body is normally not experienced. He adds invisibility does not prove Consciousness does not exist.

Mantra #10: The mantra gives us the analogy of air in the same manner as used with fire. Air is manifest in different bodies and it is called Prana. It is in every living being. In between, it is without manifestation. So, here also we think it is plural.

Swamiji says, Scientists also think Consciousness is a limited faculty in an individual. They also believe, at death, it goes away.

Mantra # 11: Here describing Sunlight, Yama says, it is all pervading. It also cannot be polluted by anything. It also does not take the attribute of an object. The Sunlight does not distinguish between good and bad. The illumined one's properties do not affect the illuminator. Thus, the light that falls on water does not make it wet. So also, Chaitnaya spreads over the body and mind but it does not become contaminated.

Describing impurities, Swamiji says, some are inner (and invisible) and some are outer. Inner ones are things that should not be seen and are known as Adhyathmika dosha (psycological issues or sensory issues). Consciousness, however, illuminates all objects.

Take away from today's discussions:

My suggestion:

Our Atma cannot be polluted. Our inner self is always pure. Keep this thought always in mind in good times and bad.

With my good wishes,

Ram Ramaswamy

Discussion

Summary

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September 6, 2015

Continuing his overview of Part 2, Cantos 2, Mantra # 5 again, Swamiji says, Atma alone blesses life. Sukshma Sharira allows this body to live. Prana is within Sukshma Sharira. As such, superficially, it appears as if Prana is the basis for life. Yama says, both Prana and Sukshma Sharira are Jadam (inanimate) as such they cannot give life. It is Atma alone that blesses the body with life.

Describing the mechanics of this: Jada Prana is able to borrow life from Atma and thus become sentient. This sentient Prana blesses the body with consciousness. Giving example of a mirror, it reflects sunlight to lighten a dark room. When mirror is removed, the room becomes dark again. The mirror is not the one illuminating, though.

The sun, while it illuminates, it cannot illuminate the room because of walls. The mirror borrows from sun and lightens the room.

Mantra 6: Hereon Yama discusses the very subtle topic of Brahman. He also describes what happens to an ignorant Jivatma after death. In a wise person, the Karana Sharira, Sthula Sharira and Jivatma, all dissolve in Ishwara. He is called a Videhimukta.

Mantra 7: This mantra is important because it discusses rebirth as well as what happens to an Agyani Jivatma after death. Swamiji says science has found no evidence of rebirth, to date. He says, as per Shastras, rebirth is an Aupurusheya subject. Shastras only provide supporting evidence, not direct evidence. So, when an Agyani dies the Sthula Sharira mingles with Pancha Bhutam. His Jivatma also cannot travel. The subtle and invisible Sukshma Karana Sharira alone survives. It can travel. It travels to another body. The type of body it gets depends on its punya papa Karmaphalani. God does not determine our rebirth, says Swamiji. The body may

get its rebirth as a Superior one, such as Devas; as an inferior one such as Plants or animals; or Medium one, such as a Human being. The Sukshma Karana Sharira gets an appropriate body to exhaust its karma phalas. Even to experience a body in the dream state, a physical body is required, says Swamiji. It is not possible to predict the time of another birth, as time cannot be measured and it is relative. As an example, Swamiji says, in a dream we can experience a whole lifetime.

Birth is not an accident. Laws of Karma determine it. We may not remember our previous birth, but God remembers everything, says Swamiji. Our rebirth depends on our Upasana. Upasana here means the topic we dwell on or think of most of the time. He reminded us that: Thought>Action> Habit>Character>Destiny (or destination). Everything begins with thought, says Swamiji.

Mantra 8:

What is Brahman is the topic of this mantra. It is the Consciousness that resides in every being that is also called Purushaha. Puru-Shaha or In-Dweller. Consciousness is always awake, even in our sleeping state. It is the one that illumines the blank mind in sleep state.

Essence of Brahman

“I did not know anything in sleep” is a declaration. Swamiji asks who is this “I” who did not know anything in sleep? “I” am the eternal illuminator of the waking and sleep state of mind. “I” know, when the mind knows and “I” also know, when the mind does not know. “I” am also the creator, as I like, of my inner universe, through my Vasanas. I am also the creator of the external universe, during the waking state. “I” the illumining consciousness is ever pure. This consciousness is Brahman. This “I” is “in” the body as well as “outside” the body. Like space it is all pervading. It is immortal and does

not die, when body dies. Swamiji now says, "All bodies" are in this consciousness. Thus, "in" our body is consciousness. Nothing exists beyond this consciousness. That Atma is you, declares Swamiji. The whole world is in me; it arises in me and dissolves in me. We constantly think of ourselves as "in" this world and are buried with our worries and problems. Swamiji asks us to change our perception to: "The World is in me".

Take away from today's discussions:

Suggested Practice:

1. Constantly be aware of the eternal "I" within us. This is the greatest Upasana we can perform.
2. Essence of Brahman described above, try to understand it and internalize it.

With my good wishes,

Ram Ramaswamy

Discussion Summary July 26, 2015

Discussing part 2 Cantos 1, Shlokas 6,7, 9 and 8, Swamiji continued the discussion of the Atman or Consciousness. The subtle universe was born out of Causal universe (the seed). The Causal universe was always there even before creation. He compares the Causal Universe to the state before the big bang.

Thus: Karana Sharira (Causal) > Sukshma Sharira (Subtle also called Ishwara) > Hiranyagarbha (first born). Ishwara through tapas creates Hiranyagarbha. Tapas is the mere wish of

Ishwara.

Thus, the one Samanya Chaitanya, general consciousness, expresses itself in micro and macrocosm. It expresses itself in the three pairs:

1. The Physical body, we all can experience it.
2. The Subtle body, that only I can experience and not others.
3. The Causal Body, that remains dormant and can be experienced only when it manifests itself. This is the subtlest stage of inner material.

And correspondingly we have:

1. Waker consciousness
2. Subtle body consciousness
3. Causal body consciousness

The total deity is born as Hiranyagarbha. Hiranyagarbha consists of the 17 Tatvas or elements They are: 5 organs of perception (Ear, Eye, Tongue, Skin and Nose), 5 organs of action (Speech, Hand, Leg, Excretion and Genital), 5 Vital air's (Prana, Apana, Vyana, Udana and Samana), the Mind (manaha) and Intellect (budhi).

Swamiji says for each of the 17 Tatvas or elements there is a corresponding Devta. Prana Devta is most important, as without him we cannot survive. All Devtas are born, maintained and resolved in Hiranyagarbha, in its cycle of creation, maintenance and destruction.

Swamiji says Agni Devta represents Vishwavidya or Stula Prapancha. Virat- Agni is worshiped by a group of people by lighting the sacred fire. Rubbing two pieces of wood called Arani lights the sacred fire. Another form of Agni called Vaishwanar-agni (our internal digestive power) is also worshiped by some. All of them, says Swamiji, represent our one consciousness, the Atman.

The take away from this session was the idea of a Yagna is making an offering to God. In the same spirit we should offer every action of ours as an offering to our Atman. Discussing Karma Yoga, Swamiji says "And when I perform the actions out of Ishvara Arpana Bhaṁana, and when I receive the processed Karma in form of Phalam, I don't call it Karma Phalam, but I call it Iṣhvara Prasaḁaha."

With my good wishes,

Ram Ramaswamy

Goḷu Padi with PVC Pipes

Navarathri/Dasara is fast approaching and many people from India celebrate by displaying goḷu. Here are some instructions on how to build a five step goḷu padi at less than \$100.