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God has no Specific Form

*A tree can be fashioned without any twist and turn,
 A stone can be fashioned without any defect.
 Can we fashion the mind, without any defect?
 The word of Sai is the word of truth.*

(Telugu Poem)

The Three Akashas

Embodiments of Love!

OUR warden has asked me to talk about the three *Akashas* (infinities). “*Akasham Gaganam Soonyam.*” That which cannot be seen by the eye, or cannot be heard by the ear or cannot be expressed by words characterizes the realm of *Akasha*. It cannot be comprehended by the mind either. The sun and the moon, the clouds and the stars belong to the realm of *Akasha*. There are three *akashas*: *Bhutakasha*, *Chittakasha* and

Chidakasha. The *Bhutakasha* envelops the visible and the invisible phenomena. For example, some stars are visible in the sky; but there are many more that remain invisible. The distance between the earth and the sun is about nine crores and eleven lakh miles. The *Bhutakasha* spreads over an extent that is impossible to calculate. The sun is a star and there are countless numbers of other stars scattered in the cosmos. They match our Sun in size. Since they are so far away, they appear like tiny stars to us. Each star shines with the splendour of the sun. The light of these stars travels at an incredible speed of 1,86,284 miles per second! There are other stars whose light has not yet reached the earth.

The light emanating from the stars is stupendous in its intensity. The brilliance cannot be withstood by anything or anyone on the earth. Our sun imparts only a portion of its radiance to earth. Neither the huge stars nor the sun and the moon are capable of generating this effulgence on their own. There is a fundamental power that is the basis of all this. It is the basic illumination from which the rest of the brilliance originates. This primordial power is that of the Atma. It allows the stars, sun and moon to shine.

Chittakasha is a Reflection of Bhutakasha

All these mentioned above are encompassed in the *Bhutakasha*. What is *Chittakasha* then? Since everything that is visible is *Bhutakasha*, it cannot be

argued that those invisible belong to *Chittakasha*. There is a power that is invisible, silent, imperceptible and eternal. This power is the *Chidakasha*. In *Chittakasha* is reflected or imprinted everything that is seen in *Bhutakasha*. The span of the *Chittakasha* is very small and subtle. On the other hand, the gross and visible *Bhutakasha* spans a terrific extent. Yet, the entire contents of *Bhutakasha* appear in the *Chittakasha* as small blips! For example, you see a huge mountain. When you close your eyes after seeing it, you will be able to visualize the image of the mountain from the *Chittakasha*. Similarly, the stars and sky and all that is seen are permanently etched on the *Chittakasha*.

The exact physical extent and dimensions of the *Bhutakasha* have not been estimated to date. But something can be known of the *Chittakasha*. The entire visible creation is stored in *Chittakasha* in a subtle form. Every form and sound in the *Chittakasha* is a reflection of some entity in the *Bhutakasha*. *Bhutakasha* is physically perceptible. That which is mentally perceptible is *Chittakasha*.

Chidakasha or Atma Encompasses All

The third is called *Chidakasha*. It is also called Atma. Atma has no form. It has no movement. *Nirgunam, Niranjana, Sanathana Niketanam, Nitya, Suddha, Buddha, Mukta, Nirmala Swarupinam* (attributeless, pure, final abode, eternal,

unsullied, enlightened, free and embodiment of sacredness). He who has seen this *Chidakasha* is one who has had the experience of Atma. No educational qualifications, scholarship or special abilities are required to see *Chittakasha*. On the other hand none can see even the reflection or shadow of *Chidakasha*, however strenuous the effort.

The distance of several stars from the earth is measurable. But there are many more which are so far away that they are beyond any human estimation. Scientists have made several attempts to investigate such a phenomenon. They attempted to reach the *Chidakasha* with their scientific examinations. All their efforts can take them at most till the *Chittakasha* only and not a step more. *Chidakasha* could not be adequately described even by the Vedanta. Science too fails in its efforts. However, pointers are to some extent available from Vedanta on *Chidakasha*. The reflection of *Bhutakasha* is *Chittakasha*. That which reflects *Chittakasha* itself is *Chidakasha*. The relation between the three is explained as follows:

1. ***The one you think you are***, which is *Bhutakasha* because it contains all that you see, hear and experience.
2. ***The one that others think you are***, which is the *Chittakasha*, because, it reflects in your mind's eye whatever you contemplate on.

3. ***The one you really are***, which is the *Chidakasha* or the principle of Atma – your true nature. It is Divine Bliss. Bliss, I, reflection of Divinity and Atma all mean the same. 'I' is related exclusively to the Atma. 'I' is a single lettered word. The Vedas declare "*Ekam Sat Vipahraha Bahuda Vadanti*". 'I' is the truth. It is interpreted in several ways by scholars. I may call 'Anil Kumar' and the reply comes 'I'. I may call 'Girigaru' – once again the reply comes from the other side 'I'. In this way I may call out the names of several lakhs of people; the reply is always 'I'. This unity in diversity is 'I'. It is the *Atmatatwa*. It cannot be explained as being the sky or earth, etc. It is so infinitely expansive that it has no measure at all. Scholars therefore say, "*Akasham Gaganam Soonyam*." There is nothing but empty space in which you may see a few stars and clouds. But, to what extent can you see them? Only upto a certain distance. Anything beyond that is invisible to your eyes. That which cannot be seen but only visualized is *Chittakasha*. 'I' also cannot be visualized. None can give its true meaning.

However, Vedanta always propounds unity in diversity through all its teachings. For instance the phrase "*Aham Brahmasmi*" translates to 'I am Brahma'. The word Brahma follows the single letter 'I'. Any other word has to follow Aham. Without the letter 'I' the word Atma cannot appear. Therefore the letter 'I' signifies the primordial principle.

The Vedanta advises that though one may have read scriptures and texts, he should still make every effort to find out his true nature. He should repeatedly ask himself: 'Who am I?' This question cannot be answered with your scholarship or practical applications. When asked 'Who are you?' you reply, 'I am Anil Kumar'. To whom is the name 'Anil Kumar' given? Your parents have given that name to your body. What was your name before you were so named? There is no answer. Therefore all names are only given, none of them is born with you. They were all added to you at the time of your birth or later for identifying you in this material world. They do not establish your true identity. Atma has no fixed name. It is its own identity. It has no other form.

Chidakasha is Attributeless

Bhutakasha and *Chittakasha* can be discussed and studied upto some extent. However *Chidakasha* has no form or attribute. What form and name can you assign to the formless one? It is therefore its own identity. No one is able to comprehend the true meaning of the word 'I'. *Aham* (I) should not be confused with *Ahamkara* (ego). Ego has form, but not 'I'. Vedanta describes 'I' by negation. It is not ether, ego, sound or any such thing. A master once asked his disciple to find out who he really was. The next day the disciple appeared and said, "Sir, I've found the answer. My

name is Ramaiah." The master once again asked him, "Who are you?" After further enquiry, the answer came, "I am the son of Mallaiah and my mother's name is Pullamma." These are all names of various bodies. None of them is your true identity because names relate to the body. They are useful for you to introduce yourself in the physical world. Only one name was born with you and not given. It is 'I'. Atma, 'I' all mean the same. Make efforts to realize the nature of 'I'. That is true *Sadhana*. There is nothing else you need to know further. There is no need for you to say, "I am Ramaiah" when announcing your true identity. 'I' is itself enough. No other words need to follow 'I' to reinforce your identity. 'I' is unique and always single. Realising this is the secret contained in all of Vedanta.

God is Formless – an Analogy

Chidakasha has nothing to do with reflections, reactions and resounds. It is beyond all the three. It cannot be identified or comprehended with any name or form. At one point of time, in Uttar Pradesh, there was a bangle seller on the banks of river Ganges. One day a radiant form emerged from the Ganges and asked him, "Sir, will you please sell me some bangles?" The bangle seller complied and taking out some bangles for her size, he made her put them on. She said, "I don't have the money for these bangles with me. However, I will give you an address and directions to reach the house. Go to

the person and collect the money from him. He is my father. Tell him that money is kept in the locker.” The bangle seller then asked her, “Mother, what is your name? I will need to identify you at your house for collecting the money.” The form replied, “You can tell them that my name is Ganga” and then vanished.

As directed, the bangle seller reached the house and told the owner that he had come to collect the money due to him from the owner’s daughter Ganga to whom he had sold some bangles. The astonished house owner replied, “I am not even married. How can I then have a daughter and how would she buy bangles?” The bangle seller replied, “The lady was certainly telling the truth. How else could I have discovered and found my way to your house? She even identified your name for me. Is this your name or not?” The person agreed that it was so. The bangle seller argued, “If all this is true, the lady certainly was not lying.” The house owner did not even know that he had the amount with him. He searched in his locker and was astounded to find the amount there exactly as predicted.

This person was an ardent devotee of mother Ganges. He was thrilled and told the bangle-seller, “Sir! I worship mother Ganges. She is my patron deity. I have offered myself to her and have hence chosen to remain unmarried. I am eager to see the sacred spot where you saw my mother Ganges. Let us go!” The bangle seller

obliged and soon both arrived at the banks of the river. The bangle-seller ardently prayed, “Mother! You appeared to me and took the bangles. You guided me to your devotee’s house to take the payment. Will you not appear again and show me your form? I have come to you with gratitude to tell you that I have received the payment due to me.” A voice replied, “Here is the blessing that I confer for your gratitude” and a hand emerged from the river, with the newly bought bangles adorning it! The devotee saw the hand and was ecstatic. He exclaimed, “Mother! Will you not show me your true form and sanctify me?” He thus kept pleading and praying. The voice replied, “Son! I cannot show any form to anybody. That is because I do not have a particular form. All forms that you can see are God’s forms only! God can appear in any form that a devotee prays to Him to appear in. God Himself has no specific form or attribute. I showed you my hand filled with bangles just as a proof that I have indeed bought the bangles and you must pay the bangle seller.” The devotee saw the hand; he was thrilled at the grace conferred on him and said, “Mother! I have seen at least your hand and have been sanctified! I do not want anything else in life”. He then fell into the Ganges and breathed his last.

Ramakrishna’s Dilemma

Divinity always assumes the form that a devotee visualizes and prays for. None can actually fix and

estimate what Divinity looks like, because there is no form at all! Ramakrishna Paramahansa too had a similar experience. He was staying at Kamarpukur. He was gripped by a strong desire to have *darshan* of Goddess Kali. Unable to bear the pain of separation anymore, he attempted to commit suicide by jumping into the Ganges. Surprisingly, however far he walked into the river, he found that the water came only up to his knees! He prayed, “O’ Mother of the universe! Why are you testing me so? Why do you not reveal your form to me? Why do you not allow me to merge in you? I am unable to bear this tortuous pain.” The mother Goddess replied, “Son! I can show you my form if I had one in the first place! I have no form for you to see. My only form is that of Atma. So, contemplate on the principle of Atma. You can see God in any form that you think of. All the forms that you attribute to God are products of your illusion. None of them can be taken to be the true identity of Divinity.”

Be Attached to Atma

You say that Rama or Krishna or Sai Baba has appeared before you. Several people make such claims. These are all figments of one’s illusion (*Bhrama*). As long as you have *Bhrama* you will be far away from Brahma (Divinity). On the other hand if you have realized Brahma, *Bhrama* can come nowhere near you. The need of the hour is therefore to overcome this

illusion. Get rid off the body attachment. Cultivate attachment to the Atma instead. Your true identity is Atma. It has neither a name nor a form. It is the embodiment of bliss. Atma is therefore described as, “*Nityanandam, Parama Sukhadam, Kevalam Jnanamurtim, Dwandwateetam, Gagana Sadrisham, Tattwamasyadi Lakshyam, Ekam, Nityam, Vimalam, Achalam, Sarvadhee Sakshibhutam, Bhavateetam, Trigunarahitam*” (God is the embodiment of eternal bliss, He is wisdom absolute, the One without a second, beyond the pair of opposites, expansive and pervasive like the sky, the goal indicated by the *Mahavakya Tattwamasi*, the eternal, pure, unchanging, the witness of all functions of the intellect, beyond all mental conditions and the three *Gunas* of *Sattwa, Rajas* and *Thamas*).

These are the various names and descriptions of the Atma. However, it has no form. Hence do not aim to see the form of God. Instead consider all the forms that you see to be that of God. Do not fix various forms as unique to God.

Atmic Bliss Alone is Eternal

The feature of *Bhutakasha* is that, it encompasses the sun, the stars and all the galaxies in it. Do not take these to be the permanent attributes of God! They will all perish someday, pass on or change forms. They will withdraw themselves and disappear from creation itself

at some point of time. There is only one thing that will always be with you, in you, around you, above you and below you and that is *bliss*.

Bliss has no form. There is only one way to know it. People think that bursting out into laughter is bliss! Even laughter should not be a guffaw. The bliss of divine personality is expressed by a delicate smile. No sound accompanies this smile. It is not a guffaw; but it confers plenty of joy to those who see it. Loud laughter is called a “*prahasan*” while the soundless smile is called “*hasan*”. God always smiles and never indulges in loud laughter. What you see in cinemas is an exercise in histrionics that is passed on as laughter. Seeing this, people imagine that God too must be laughing like this!

Identify God by Expressing Gratitude

There is one aspect that you can use to identify Divinity and show your gratitude. God is giving you so many things. When you are not well a doctor comes and gives you an injection. You pay the doctor his fees. Your expression of gratitude ends there. When you are hungry you tell your mother that you would like to eat something. Your mother gives you some food that you relish with great joy. This itself is an expression of gratitude to your mother. You may be suffering. When someone comes and consoles you and gives you strength, you express gratitude to him. In this way, all help rendered is gratefully acknowledged without fail.

This should be the custom. Unfortunately, there is no such tradition today.

God is giving you so much. You are getting free education, free medical aid and free water. He is talking with you so freely and moving about amongst you so freely. He is giving you everything so ‘free’! How do you express your gratitude for all these? You must give up your ego and spread happiness like He does. That will be the right thing to do. As it is said,

“That heart which you have given me, O Lord!

I give it back to you, O mighty one!

What else can I offer you, my Master!

I offer my prayerful salutations with tears of gratitude. O Lord!

Accept them all with my heart.” (Telugu Poem)

Offer your salutations to God. Without doing this, you will become an ungrateful wretch. You will collapse into the endless cycle of birth and death. Suffering and agony will cling to you. Your tears of gratitude will liberate you from all such problems. You will always be blissful, with cheerful smiles. This is the result of constantly expressing your gratitude to God.

Once, there lived a devotee of Lord Krishna who spent his time ceaselessly contemplating on Krishna’s name. But he had a problem! Krishna was depicted in various ways in different pictures. Which form to select

while contemplating on Lord Krishna? He could not decide. These photographs are artificially created ones. It is said, “*Daivam Manusha Roopena*” – God is in the human form. The crowns and jewels in the pictures are additions provided by artists; they are not his true form. His true nature is that He is ever smiling and is always making others smile! He is always blissful and presents bliss to others. That is the true hallmark of Lord Krishna. ‘Be happy; make others happy.’ It is a give and take philosophy! Give bliss and accept bliss in return. That is the only true form of gratitude you can express to God.

Without expressing your gratitude, you cannot aim to please God with anything that you may do. You will not attain any happiness in return. When you see your presiding deity, give a smile. Do not stand with a frowning face! With such a serious face, you can never hope to experience bliss. You must always be happy because bliss is your true nature. Always maintain a pleasant smile on your face. You may definitely encounter problems and obstacles in life. Grief and sorrow may sometimes assail you. Do not break down and cry. These are things that come and go. They are passing clouds and will never stay permanently to trouble you. Do not yield to them; face them head long instead. A steady faith in God will give you the satisfaction of being a true devotee.

Merge in Chidakasha

Today, you worry about your mother, father, kith and kin. How do you expect to attain happiness with so many worries? Who are your parents? They are the ones who gave you a physical body. Whose body is it? It is only a physical entity. Forget the body. Contemplate on Divinity instead. This is true devotion. Ignore *Bhutakasha* entirely, though it is what you actually see. *Chittakasha* can be relied on to the same extent. Once you assimilate everything in *Chittakasha*, you will reach *Chidakasha*. Hence, develop the capability to completely merge in *Chidakasha*.

How will you visualize and merge into *Chidakasha*? I shall explain it in detail later. In this world, several scholars and experts explain Divinity quite extensively. However, Divinity that can be explained is not the true Divinity! These are only descriptions and pointers to Divinity. They can easily make you happy or even delude you. But you must go beyond these and aim to see the reality that is ‘*Tat*’. ‘*Tat Tvam Asi*’ – Thou Art That. ‘Thou’ means ‘this’. ‘That’ is ‘*Tat*’. Both should therefore become one.

In response to Narasimhamoorthy’s prayer, I have explained the three *Akashas* of *Bhutakasha*, *Chittakasha* and *Chidakasha* to you. True ‘*Akasha*’ is ‘*Hridayakasha*’ – the heart. *Chidakasha* is vital and

ultimate. Every attempt should be made to know its nature.

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