

21. Thath Thwam Asi

Atma is permanent. No one can destroy this *Atma*. There is no death or destruction for *Atma*. As one changes a worn-out garment for a new one, so also, when the body is worn out, the *Atma* will get into another body.

Pavitratma Swarupas!

Our *Sruthi* has been teaching us that there is nothing in this world other than Brahman. Not only in this world but any where there is no second to Brahman. There is nothing which existed prior to Brahman. Therefore we cannot get proof for the existence of Brahman from any place other than Brahman itself. There are no special qualities which can be attributed to Brahman. The point to be noted here is

that Brahman existed even before all the commentaries or expositions. Hence, no commentary can really expound the true nature of Brahman. *Prakruthi*, the material world or *nivritthi*, the process of taking recourse to the non-material world, both of them revolve round Brahman and they are close to Brahman. All that is existing in the form of knowledge including ignorance is simply Brahman. The basis for everything is Brahman itself. While Brahman is flowing like a stream continually and unbroken, to comprehend it becomes a very difficult task. What we should recognise is that while the stream is flowing in an uninterrupted manner, it is not losing its completeness. This kind of completeness takes the form given by the three names Ida, Saraswathi and Bharati. It also takes the corresponding three places of *Vasu*, *Rudra*, and *Aditya*. This strength and form also take three names, i.e., Sasi, Gouri and Savitri. These goddesses are laying down the form in which the world should move. Our *Sruthi* has also been preaching that the connection between this trinity of Goddesses is inseparable. These three are always together. The natural place which *Aditya* takes is Bharatha. The natural place which *Rudra* takes is Savitri and the natural place which *Vasu* takes is Ida. *Vasu*, *Rudra* and *Aditya* represent the natural form of

Veda Vani. For the name *Aditya*, we can take the word Bharatha as the true equivalent.

The name Bharatha is synonymous with *Aditya*. We have to recognise that this word does not apply only to one country but that it applies to the entire world. For us to think that this word Bharatha which has adorned the aspect of *Aditya*, has a limited connotation is an incorrect way of interpreting it. These are sacred and *Vedic* words. It is not possible to describe them fully in terms of words which are not of *Vedic* origin.

To try and explain the sacred *manthras* in terms of words which have come much later will be doing something incomplete, because the *manthras* themselves are coming from times immemorial. If we make an attempt to use ordinary words which have come into vogue much later to describe the aspect of Brahman, it would not be correct as in that way we would be limiting the aspect of Brahman. It is in this context that it has been said that it is not possible to comprehend divinity with either one's mind or eyes or even intellect. This is because Brahman existed long before mind and intelligence came into existence. Hence something which was there already cannot be described by means of words which came much later. Is it possible for a newly born

son to describe the qualities of his father who has been living even before the son was born? To describe the infinite aspect in terms of limited words and limited experience is not possible. The *Maharishis* who were very well versed in the *Vedas* and *manthras* realised that it is not possible to explain and describe the aspect of Brahman in terms of words. Hence, they have been indicating it only by their silence. They have been saying that experience alone can be the correct way of comprehending Brahman and exposition is not the correct thing to do.

In the realm of physical world, it is quite easy to describe something which we do not understand, by means of certain words. We created words like *nirguna*, *nirakara*, *niranjana* etc., but we do not even know the meaning of these words. What is the use of describing something we do not know in terms of words we do not understand? This is a common error which we all commit. Sankara gave a beautiful example for this. It is only when something is in existence that we can describe its *anti* or opposite. If there is not something which relates to the *para* or spiritual in the material world, we cannot think of explaining its opposite i.e *apara*.

If you accept that all materials are one and the same and there is no difference between one another,

where is the question of your accepting one thing and rejecting another? Thus, if you have reached a stage where you are able to recognise everything as an aspect of Brahman, then where is the question of rejection of something and acceptance of another? In that stage, whatever you do, such as accept or reject, is only a reflection of your own mind.

If you have not developed a concept of the basic unit, you cannot have the concept of many. You can move on and comprehend the meaning of many only if you have a clear concept of the one basis. That is why we say *Ekoham Bahusyamiti*. We have to realise the truth that it is from the one that several different manifestations arise. The knowledge of wisdom with the help of which we realise this aspect of oneness is called *bhakthi* or devotion. This is what devotion enables one to realise.

It has been the practice in our country that when one wants to worship God, he wishes to visualise the Lord in a form similar to his own form. He will associate with the Lord a head, a body, limitations etc., like those he has. That is based on his own idea about himself. He wants to picture God after his own self. There is also a natural feeling for an individual to think that God is something much bigger and higher than himself in

stature. If you ask a he-buffalo how God is, it will probably reply that God is like a He-buffalo, only many times bigger and many times stronger. So also, it is natural that each *Jiva* will picture God as something much bigger than himself, many times more in strength and in abilities. Here we see that God is being given a name and a form by us depending on our own concepts but He Himself has no form or *gunas*. The *gunas* that are ascribed to Him are given by us and even the form that we associate with Him is dependent on our notions but God himself has no name, form or *gunas*.

A new born baby is not coming with a name attached to it but on the tenth or the eleventh day, the parents or close relatives give a name to the baby. For a new born baby, parents or relations existed prior to its birth. Therefore, they are able to give it a name. For the *Parabrahma*, there is no one who existed prior to Him and so no one can give any name to Him. The devotees who worship God begin to give the Lord some name which is in accordance with their own experience and their own notions of the Lord. What people actually do is to visualise this omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent Divinity with some name and form of their liking and then experience the bliss in it. Depending on

the strength of devotion of the devotee who worships God and also in accordance with the depth of attachment which the devotee develops for Him, God becomes his companion and helper.

One may ask what about people who do not worship God? Does God not help them? Neither grace nor kindness, neither anger nor pleasure have their origin in God. These things depend only on the devotee. To understand this we can have an example. If one goes close to a fire, the coldness will be removed and he will experience the warmth of the fire. If he does not go close to the fire, neither will the coldness be removed nor will the warmth be experienced by him. In other words, to feel cold or warm depends on how close he is to fire. Similarly, whether or not you experience the grace or the kindness of the Lord will depend on how close you get to the Lord. It does not depend on God.

It is in this context that two words have been used by our ancestors, namely *Upasana* or *Upavasa*. *Upa* means close and *vasa* means residence and *upavasa* simply means that when you are close to God, all your bad qualities will be removed and you will attain good qualities. The word *upasana* means that you are sitting close to the Lord.

The word *Upanishad*, also, can be interpreted as—*Upa* means close and *Ni* means at a slightly lower level and *shad* means sitting. Thus, *Upanishad* means to go near the Lord and sit down. The implication of the word is that you have to go close to the Lord and sit down as you cannot take a position higher than the Lord because you are full of doubts. Here you are in the position of *Thwam* and God is in the position of *Thath*; that is, He is in a position to clear all your doubts and you have to sit down and get your doubts clarified. The relationship between *Thath* and *thwam* is such that knowledge has to flow from *Thath* to *thwam* and that is why it has been called *Thath thwam asi*. *Thwam* is the place from where questions generate and *Thath* is the place from where answers come. Because *Thath* is a position of knowledge, there can be no question from that place. *Thath* is full of knowledge.

In this context, we say that depending on the extent of *Prema* or love and affection with which one goes close to the Lord, God will reciprocate and look at the devotee with the same amount of *Prema* and grace. There is a small example for this. To such devotees who worship and respect God and who believe in God from the depths of their heart, God becomes a companion and

a guide to them. On the ninth day of the battle of Mahabharatha, the old grandfather Bhishma was waging war in many ways against the Pandavas. All the arrows that were coming from the side of the enemy towards the Pandavas were full of fire and power of destruction. All these harmful weapons which were intended to harm Arjuna actually protected Arjuna, and the reason for this is that the Lord Himself was the charioteer for Arjuna and under such circumstances the weapons not only did not cause harm but they even helped Arjuna. Krishna never told Arjuna the secret of this. But on the ninth day Arjuna, finding that victory was on his side and on returning to his camp, was a little bit arrogant and developed some pride.

The moment one gets pride and develops ego, it is natural that a situation develops where he forgets even the human nature. It is common experience that when we ride in a car the owner does not get down first but some assistant first opens the door for the owner to come down. Following this practice, Arjuna would not get down from the chariot first. He had an idea that Krishna the charioteer should first get down and open the door for him and then only he wanted to get down with great pride. But, Krishna addressed Arjuna as his brother-in-

law and asked him to first get down and go inside. Arjuna did not listen to this. Arjuna had the quality of being stubborn on certain occasions. He felt that Krishna should first get down and then he would get down. However, a little later, he realised that it would be unwise to enter into argument with Krishna, especially when the war was still going on. Hence, he got down from the chariot and went inside. But, Krishna insisted on his going further into the house. After Arjuna went inside, Krishna jumped down in an instant and immediately thereafter the whole chariot burnt down and was reduced to ashes. When asked for the reason, Krishna explained that all the weapons that were used that day in the war were deadly and were full of fire power and that He had to keep them under control until then by putting them under His feet. He also disclosed that if He were to get down earlier, Arjuna would have been burnt along with the chariot. He said that in order to protect Arjuna, he had waited until Arjuna got down and then jumped out in a moment.

It is in this context that Krishna was also called Bharatha because of His all-pervading nature. The meaning of this is that the aspect of Bharatha is connected with *Aditya* and *Aditya* is in turn connected

with *agni* and therefore if you want to control *agni*, you have to put it only in another place where there is *agni*.

Two days prior to this, Krishna undertook to protect the Pandavas in a different manner. Bhishma was swearing before Duryodhana that he would now enter a crucial and terrible phase of battle with the Pandavas and would even finish them off. When Droupadi heard such a statement emanating from Bhishma, she was quite afraid. She was afraid because she knew that Bhishma was very strong and that in one moment he could kill all the Pandavas. She was afraid that Bhishma would kill all her husbands and render her a widow. In this terrible fear, she had no one to go to and express her fear. She had only one person and He was the omnipresent, omnipotent Lord Krishna. She went and prayed to Krishna that in view of Bhishma's threat, He had to save her and protect her *Sumangalyatva*. The nature of God is such that He would submit Himself to the limitations which He himself has created. The Lord told Droupadi that He was prepared to rescue and protect Her but said that she must also make her efforts. The Lord said "I am residing in your heart as the *Atma*. Therefore, when you make an effort on your own, I will supplement your efforts." If we take a piece of wood

and go on moving it up and down, fire is not going to be generated. We have to take two similar pieces of wood and rub one against the other vigorously. It is only then that fire will be generated. Similarly, Krishna said “When my aspect of divinity manifesting externally and my own aspect which is residing in you internally as *Atma* come together, then only useful results will come.”

As in the analogy of an electric current, we will not get any benefit of the electric current if only we have the negative or the positive aspect. Unless the negative and the positive come together, current will not be produced. The Lord has emphasised, “I can give God’s grace. But you will have to supply human effort. Unless God’s grace and human effort come together, the result cannot be achieved.”

Immediately Droupadi enquired as to what she should do. She assured Krishna that she was willing to do anything to save her husbands. The Lord told Droupadi that she should go to the house of Bhishma that night and act as he advised her. It is true that in the battlefield, Bhishma swore but later when he went home he was in a great dilemma and was asking himself how he could fulfil his promise and how he could kill the Pandavas who were the embodiments of *dharma*. He was

also troubled because if he did not fulfil his promise, his entire life would be useless. In such a dilemma, he was walking up and down in his tent in the battle field.

While Bhishma was struggling in his own mind in this way, everyone else was sleeping in their respective camps after the tiresome battle during the day. Then Krishna woke up Droupadi and said that she should somehow disguise herself by using a big blanket to cover herself and follow Him. Krishna was leading and Droupadi was following him. The reason was that even Droupadi did not know the residence of Bhishma and so Krishna was leading her. As soon as they approached Bhishma’s camp, Krishna moved aside a little and told Droupadi that Bhishma was struggling because of sleeplessness and that she should enter the house quietly and fall at Bhishma’s feet. When Droupadi was moving gently, Krishna found that she was wearing shoes which were appropriate to wealthy people in those days and they were making some noise. Then Krishna stopped Droupadi and asked her to remove the shoes as they were making a lot of noise. She removed the shoes and Krishna wrapped them and held them in his own hands. She went into Bhishma’s tent where he was moving up and down restlessly. As soon as she was face to face with Bhishma,

she, with her bangles and ornaments making a lot of noise, immediately fell at his feet. Bhishma realised that she was a family woman and a married woman and he immediately blessed her by saying *Deergha sumangali bhava*. That was the blessing which he spontaneously gave to Droupadi.

Then Droupadi got up and she was shedding tears of joy. Bhishma saw her in that state and was very much surprised. He said “I have now given you blessing that you should be a *deergha sumangali* whereas I took a vow to kill your husbands; what a conflicting situation have I landed myself in. Surely you would not have come by yourself at this dead of night. Someone must have given you this idea and made you do this and extract the blessing from me that you will remain a *sumangali* for a long time.” Droupadi said that no one else except Lord Krishna would help her at this juncture, and immediately on hearing that Krishna brought her there, Bhishma started looking for Krishna. Krishna walked in with Droupadi’s shoes in his hand, tied in a cloth. Bhishma touched the bundle of cloth and saw that they were Droupadi’s shoes. Then Bhishma shed tears of joy and said that Krishna was so great and if his grace was achieved, he would even carry the shoes of his

devotees. The next day it so happened that all the weapons released by Bhishma aimed at Arjuna were received by Krishna and thus Arjuna was protected.

Krishna found that Arjuna’s body was in great discomfort and the latter felt very hurt because for his sake, Krishna had to suffer all this. By thinking like this, he became weak in mind and Krishna was sure that if he allowed this situation to continue Bhishma would surely kill him and victory would be on Bhishma’s side. At this juncture, Krishna jumped out of the chariot and was himself going out to fight Bhishma and Bhishma realised that the very God Himself was coming down to kill him and protect Arjuna. Then Bhishma prayed to the very person coming to kill him because He was the Lord Himself, in the following terms.

“As you jump out of the chariot with a leap, the brightness with which your earrings shine fills the whole sky. The universe that is inside you gets so shaken that the world is unable to bear the jolt. As you advance with the wheel in your hand, the cloth on your shoulders slips down. Even as Arjuna pleads again saying ‘I have staked all my reputation with full faith in you. Pray do not let me down.’ Like a Lion, you roar, ‘Today, I shall kill Bhishma and I shall save you’ and you ask Arjuna to

step aside to let you go; Oh God! You are advancing like a thunder; you alone are my saviour and none else. Save me as I seek thy protection!”

The whole situation had changed suddenly and Krishna took great pity on Bhishma. Here it is necessary for us to understand the context in which Bhishma had offered his prayers. It is quite natural for us to pray to God to save us if someone else is coming to harm us. Here we must realise that Bhishma did not recognise any other form of God. The Lord Krishna who was advancing towards him was the only God for him and therefore he addressed Krishna himself to save him. We have to observe the oneness of the God to whom Bhishma prayed here. Divine strength can be understood only by divinity and divine strength can be controlled only by divinity. No one else can either understand or control divine strength. The aspect of Brahman is that which is in possession of such divine strength which can be controlled only by divine strength. These aspects of Brahman which enable us to realise the oneness of divinity are the aspects contained in the trinity of Ida, Saraswathi and Bharathi. These are the three forms which protect and give satisfaction to the entire world. It is unfortunate for us to think that the word Bharathi which

expounds such an infinite meaning comes from the name of some king and that it is not a *Vedic* word. This is a *Vedic* word. It has not come from any king or country. There are many words in our *Veda* which describe the aspect of Bharath and which expound the greatness of Bharath.