

4. All Vedantic axioms posit only Brahman

Thath thu samanvayaath

It is clearly demonstrable that all *Vedantic* axioms posit only *Brahman*. The statements in the sacred scriptures, when studied in a spirit of reconciliation, reveal the *Brahman* and make known its reality.

There is the question whether the scriptures hold forth the supremacy of works (*karma*) or of wisdom. Though the profound mystery of *Brahman* is incommunicable to others, it has to be denoted by some categories of knowledge, however unsatisfactory they are. Or else, it might remain beyond perception.

Scriptures are not only world-oriented

One school of thought believes that the *Vedas* lay down works as a means of liberation and that the *Vedanta* (the *Upanishads*) does not. But the scriptures (*sastras*) are concerned with guidance and counsel, and not with exclusive adherence to some system or other. Advocacy of works is not the chief goal of the scriptures. When one is active through works, one has to do many merit-yielding tasks, and these promote purity of mind. Since work cleanses the consciousness, many argue that the scriptures teach this as the sole path, ignoring the fact that work is only a means to the end.

In this connection, we have to pay attention to another fact. One's desires —one's wants, longings, resolutions, and wishes— are multiplied and prompted by works (*karma*). And, the initial impulse for desire is unawareness of the reality (*a-jnana*). The doubt arises, naturally, how the consciousness that is unaware can transform itself into the consciousness that is aware (*jnana*). Darkness can never remove darkness, can it? So too, ignorance can never destroy ignorance. It can be accomplished only by spiritual wisdom (*jnana*), awareness of the truth. This is the dictum promulgated by Sankara. The world needs harmony very much. It also needs awareness, to an equal extent. How very difficult it may be to convey the knowledge of *Brahman* to others!

It has been said that there is a vast difference between the impact of knowledge of *Brahman* and the impact of works (*karma*). Merit and demerit, happiness and misery are the consequences of activity. The happiness attainable through work ranges from the region of humans up to the highest stage of the region of the Divine. So too, below the level of the human region there are regions where misery becomes deeper and deeper, more and more agonizing. They are relatively unreal and not absolutely real.

Awareness, not attachment to works, is the key

Therefore, awareness and bliss is innate, existing in its own right. It is eternally present. It is the one unchanging, unaffected truth. It cannot be acquired by practicing prescriptions and exercises. The state of liberation (*moksha*) transcends the body-mind-ego complex. Therefore, transcendence is beyond one's physical, mental, or intellectual effort. When awareness dawns, the darkness of ignorance disappears. When the lamp is lit, darkness is no more.

Some argue that it is not quite fair to declare that knowledge of *Brahman*, as the only truth, cannot be gained by personal effort. Sankara reconciles this point of view with his main thesis, mentioned already. The spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) that one is actually *Brahman* and nothing else is latent in the consciousness of everyone, but one cannot recognise it and establish oneself firmly in it by means of activity (*karma*), or even by scholastic inquiry. Activity can only bind one further, for it deals with diversity as if it is real; it cannot loosen bonds and liberate. It can at best purify the passions and emotions. Inquiry can at best clarify the intellect and indicate the criteria of spiritual wisdom. Only knowledge of *Brahman* (*Brahma-vidya*) can liberate people from bondage. Hence, one is warned not to develop too much attachment to activity.

Transform work into dedication

However, once in a while, we find the scriptures (*sastras*) dwelling on the value of activity. The scriptures are as affectionate to us as a mother. They teach lessons as a mother to her children, in conformity with the level of intelligence and according to the needs of time and circumstance. A mother with two children gives the strong and healthy one every item of food for which it clamours, but she takes great care not to overfeed the unwell child and gives it only items that can restore it soon to health. Can we, on that account, accuse her of being partial to one and prejudiced against the other in conferring love? The scriptures also draw the attention of those who know the secret of work (*karma*) to the value of work. For work can improve life and set its ideals aright. Everyone has to be instructed on how to transform work into beneficial activity. Yet, work is not all.

Human life lasts but a moment; it is a bubble on the waters. Upon this ephemeral bubble of life, people build for themselves a structure of desires and attachments. Wisdom warns that it might collapse or crumble any moment

Spiritual inquiry begins with the physical sheath and ends in the bliss stage

The supreme *Atma* (*Paramatma*), which is unattached and free from embodiment, has taken up a body and becomes a person. Viewed in gross terms, the body is a material encasement formed out of the food consumed (*anna-maya kosa*). Within this sheath, there lies the subtle sheath of vital airs (*prana*), the mental sheath, the sheath of the intellect, and the innermost sheath of all, the sheath of bliss (*ananda-maya kosa*).

This aphorism, “*Brahman* is the main purport of the *Vedanta* texts (*Thath Thu Samanvayaath*)”, makes known that spiritual inquiry involves the journey from the food sheath as the basis to the bliss-composed stage. However, the gross has two aspects: the dependent structure and the independent base.

Harmony of all religions

In the current spiritual beliefs of mankind, one cannot discern anywhere a harmonizing factor. The principles of coordination and reconciliation have to be expanded and expounded. Though religions have separate names and the doctrines are distinct from each other, in essence, all are one. The aphorism endeavors to emphasize the common core.

Unfortunately, the apparent differences among the religions have subverted the amity of all men and the feeling of international brotherhood. Today, the experience and wisdom of great seers who have unveiled the mystery of the cosmos and their feelings of universal love are not appreciated, accepted, and respected. All religious dogmas, except a few, can easily be harmonized and reconciled. The same God is extolled and adored under

various names through varied ceremonial rituals in the many religions. In every age, for every race or community of peoples, God has sent prophets to establish peace and goodwill. Since many separate religions have spread worldwide, they have lost fraternal feelings and thereby have suffered in validity.

There is an urgent need for harmony. All great people are images of God. They form one single caste in the realm of God; they belong to one nation, the divine Fellowship. Each must interest himself in understanding the practices and beliefs of the others. Then only can everyone, with cleansed mind and loving heart, attain the divine Presence with others. The principle of harmonizing is the very heart of all religions and faiths.