

## ***Pañcadaśī* Chapter 7, Verse 5<sup>1</sup>**

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The book *Pañcadaśī*, literally “Fifteen Chapters,” [authored by Vidyāraṇya ] is divided into three sections. The first five chapters are referred to as *viveka prakaraṇa*, a section on discriminative analysis of what is absolute reality (*sat*); the second five chapters, *dīpa prakaraṇa*, are a section focusing on ‘the light of consciousness’ (*cit*); and the third five, *ānanda prakaraṇa*, a section on what is ultimate contentment, the fullness of one’s being (*ānanda*). . .

The 7<sup>th</sup> chapter, called *Trpti Dīpa*, “The Light of Satisfaction,” is a very detailed discussion on a sentence from the fourth chapter of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.<sup>3</sup> Taking this one sentence, this chapter of nearly three hundred verses, reveals what is contained in the entire teaching of Vedānta. The many topics which one hears about in an initial exposure to the teaching often times may not ring clear due to doubts and vagueness on the part of the student. Here in a subsidiary text like this one, each topic is dilated and dealt with in a simplified logical order. . .

[The following is an exemplary verse from this chapter.]

भ्रमाधिष्ठानभूतात्मा कूटस्थासङ्गचिद्वपुः।  
अन्योन्याध्यसतो ऽसङ्गधीस्थजीवो ऽत्र पूरुषः॥

*bhramādhiṣṭhānabhūtātmā kūṭasthāsaṅgacidvapuḥ*  
*anyonyādhyāsato ’saṅgadhīsthajīvo ’tra pūruṣaḥ 5.*

*bhramādhiṣṭhānabhūtātmā* - the self being the basis, the substratum, for the mistake, the confusion  
*kūṭasthāsaṅgacidvapuḥ* - is in its nature, unchanging, uninvolved consciousness  
*pūruṣaḥ atra jīvaḥ*- the word person here is (means) the individual ( a notional limited individual )  
*dhī-sthaḥ* - resting in, abiding in the mind  
*asaṅgaḥ* - not connected, related ( to the substratum-self )  
*anyonya-adhyāsataḥ* - due to a mutual superimposition.

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<sup>3</sup> *ātmānam cet vijānīyāt ayam asmīti pūruṣaḥ, kim icchan kasya kāmāya śarīram anusañjvaret.* If a person were to know himself as “I am this,” desiring what and for whose sake would he suffer the body? *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.12. This verse is cited in the first verse of *Pañcadaśī* Chapter 7, and again chapter 14 verse 5.

***The self, whose nature is unconditioned consciousness which is unchanging and unrelated to the projected creation, is the very basis, the substratum for the projection. It 'becomes,' (is called) the limited individual being, abiding i.e., manifesting in the mind, due to a mutual superimposition of the self's attributes and individuals' attributes one upon the other. This individual is the person here (being talked about.)***

This is a very big and somewhat complicated verse because it alludes to several different, weighty topics. We will see each, one by one, then see the connections between all of them. So first we are told that the real self is of the nature of consciousness. What kind of consciousness?

Consciousness which is unrelated and uninvolved means from its own stand point it is uninvolved in anything going on in the entire creation, like sunlight is not involved when someone is digging a hole. It doesn't undergo any change, any modification, any conditioning, no matter what changes go on in the mind-body-complex of the individual. This is the essential nature of the self.

Then again further what is it? It just happens to be the basis, the locus, the substratum for the ongoing confusion, the projection. The notion of individual-ness, person-hood, the limited, defective self-identity, needs a 'place' to happen, to manifest, to appear. A projected snake needs the obscured rope in order to happen. This delusional self is taken as "I am a physical body, and I am my mind," but it has a cause. That cause for this physical body-mind-sense-complex identity is the real self, pure conscious being, but taken wrongly. When the real one gets taken for an imaginary one, in this analysis the real one is being referred to as the basis, the underlying hidden truth, just as rope for the snake or clay for a pot.

Then again, what kind of basis? It is hidden by the confusion. The confusion is due to ignorance, the afore mentioned two-fold nonapprehension-misapprehension phenomenon. It is often asked, "When and why does this ignorance begin?" The answer has to be, "It doesn't begin, it has no beginning." If someone glances in the direction of a rope and imagines that he sees a snake, but we know exactly what has happened, can it be asked, "When did the rope ignorance begin and then the snake come?" You might be tempted to play with words here and say, "It came at the time when he glanced at the rope." But the ontological truth is it would have to mean that prior to that glance there was knowledge of the rope. The ignorance and the false appearance are due to a helpless, hapless state of being which is said to have no reason, it is inexplicable, incomprehensible and beginningless.

Still, any mistake happens because there is an opportunity for it, i.e. it will have an underlying cause, a 'location'. We don't sensibly project a snake in thin air. There is some kind of logic even in an error; one doesn't project an elephant when glancing at a rope. Whenever there is error there also must be a basis. When I see the rope, I don't see the rope as a basis for rope. I see only the rope, one thing alone is. Then it is not a "basis." Only if there is a misapprehension do we need to talk about basis. With reference to the individual, 'what I am' becomes the basis for my delusion, 'what I think I am'. I think I am the body-mind-sense complex, while the 'I am' which is the simple, unconditioned consciousness is the basis. 'I am-ness' allows, lends, a seeming reality to the conditioned 'I'. This means what? The conditioned 'I' becomes conscious; the individual lives in a conscious body and has a conscious mind. Therefore this consciousness, a body-mind individual, exists because of the essence which inheres in it and gives it sentience. But unfortunately because the basis, the essence is not seen, is hidden as it were, the individual suffers the apparent loss of his true self, which is infinitely more interesting than his own pathetic notion of a self.

A misunderstanding of what has just been discussed here is possible and often seen. Some say that the erroneous self is something we have to get free of by removing or transcending the body-mind complex layer by layer. This is a bit of a good joke, it is not much different than saying, "In order to be free of the snake and realize the rope we should dissect the snake part by part to remove it." This is talked about under the topic of 'five sheaths', the five layers of the individuality. The five sheaths have also been discussed in an earlier section of this text: gross body, vital functions, mind, intellect and bliss sheath. And many people think that one has to transcend, get free of these sheaths which are covering the self. What they fail to see and teach clearly here, is that the sheaths are not ontologically something other than the real I but rather they are the real I being taken wrongly. Like a famous actor on stage is Hamlet, but never gives up being Richard Burton the actor. The two are one and the same, it is just that there are two different points of view about the one entity; one view has the 'better' reality.

Still, it is commonly heard that one has to go a long way to get free from the physical and mental entrapments; one must go deep into the innermost core of his being until finally the self, the real self [is] reached. It is taken that five sheaths are covering layers of the individual and are all realities sitting upon one final reality. That final reality is the true self and the five sheaths are the not-self, and the poor self is burdened by all these a-little-less-real layers. And we all know how the un-self layers are very heavy, emotions are heavy and the physical body is always too heavy. Thus the self is buried and one has to dive deep and in the white heat of meditation the

pure self will be experienced as the ultimate, ever shining true self. Otherwise it remains inaccessibly hidden in the cave of the heart. These kinds of things are heard and read too often.

One main point of this verse is to make it understood that wherever there is a superimposed mistake such as the snake on the rope, there itself the basis is very much present as its content. When you touch your body it is the unchanging, uninvolved consciousness which is there. When somebody asks a guru, "How to realize the self?" he should say, "Pinch yourself." It will become very clear. Consciousness is present all the way in each and every layer of your being. Whatever you see, know, experience, it is all the essential reality alone. The snake is not on the rope; the snake is the rope. Therefore the self which is unconditioned consciousness is there as the substrate reality, the content inhering in everything and it need not, cannot be, separated out in any actual way. The 'separation' to see which facet is real and which facet has only an appearance of reality is in terms of understanding, in terms of analysis leading to knowledge.

But then how can it happen that the very content of myself, which alone is real, is missed? Just because there is an appearance of an erroneous self, how can it hide the real one? Vidyāraṇya says it is due specifically to mutual superimposition. The problem is because there is 'mutuality' of superimpositions one upon each other. Superimposition here specifically means [that] one thing is taken for another, not that one contributes to the other. It means that the attributes and qualities of the body, mind, senses, all of them, get transferred onto the self. Therefore "I am the body, I am a priest, I am a mortal, etc." Such and all attributes that actually belong to the body-mind 'costuming' are presumed to be the self. And at the same time, "I am a self-evident, conscious being **in** a sentient, awareful body," is an undeniable fact for the same person who will say, "I am fat." So two points of view are fused and confused as though they are one.

The problem actually lies herein, in this transference of attributes; no one goes about actually saying, "I am the body." But what we hear is: "I am fat, or ugly or mortal or weak, etc." These are all attributes **of** the body. It is paradoxical that even when I will not say that I am the body, I do say: "I am fat, etc." This is as good as saying, "I am the body," because what I have done then is relegated to the 'I' all the characteristics that make 'my' body a body. So what's the difference? None, except that semantically at least, we are able to sense something [is] not correct and we do not like to be silly enough to say, "I am a body." But still, experientially I have a deep-rooted sense that "I am this body," and daily live out that identity. Luckily this curious

semantic quirk does provide an opening for an inquiry to begin on the topic of a self other than just the mistaken one.

Then we can apply this same analysis with regard to the mind. Any attribute I can pin on 'my mind', even if I don't say, "I am my mind." I wind up saying it like this: "I am smart, I am dumb, I am angry, I am an engineer, etc." Then I do feel and take it as though [it is] real, that those attributes are 'me', and therefore that I am the mind. So this mistaken identity is due to ignorance. I take it that this much alone is what I am, a limited and ever changing body-mind entity, never suspecting the possibility of an infinitely 'better' self.

There is no loss greater than this, not only because the self is so much more, but also because it is a loss due to mere misunderstanding. While the self lends its existence and 'fills-up' all the appearances of the attributes of the individual, i.e. a conditional unreal self, it doesn't protest whatever way it is taken. The rope doesn't protest when you take it as a snake. It is unconcernedly available for whatever you want; you can see a snake on it and run or you can reach to pick it up, this nice stick. So the self is not going to care to pop up and say, "Mistake!" Being a basis it simply makes itself available all the time for whatever projection is put upon it. The presence of the self, which is consciousness, is in any and every thought, in any and every conclusion, in any and every experience. Thereby what is not actually conscious, those definitive, apparent configurations become, as it were, conscious. So the self seems to become a mortal individual **and** the mortal individual gains the status of conscious being. Thus is the mutual superimposition.

Because of this superimposition there seems to be one entity, a limited, separate individual and he obtains in the mind. And what kind of mind is it? A mind which is not in any way tangibly connected to the self. There is no connection or relation, because the self is unconditioned, formless consciousness and the mind is nothing but a flow of thought forms. Therefore one being formless and the other 'formful,' where is the connection between them? There can never be a tangible, conventional connection. One is absolutely real and the other is an ephemeral appearance. It is exactly like there being no [possibility of] marriage between a groom in the waking realm and a bride in his dream. There is no connection between a rope and a snake, between a wave and water. No connection because the rope is the snake, they are one, wave is water. Therefore the mind never has a relation to the consciousness self, the 'I' which is uninvolved, unconditioned consciousness. Yet obtaining in the mind while having no actual

connection with this walking notion of an individual, that is the one here called the person (*pūruṣa*) in the verse.

From this, what we understand is that it is a paradox; the person standing in and as the mind is the self whose true nature is unchanging consciousness. If this person knows, comes to know the self—how?—in its essential nature, as that uninvolved consciousness, he gains what is real. If his real nature is not understood, missed, he is lost to himself, and the fullness of his being 'serves' only as the basis, the locus for the whole tragic-comedy appearance of the shadow-play person. He is a, “Woe is me” character not knowing it is a cosmic joke.

Elsewhere in the text Vidyāraṇya uses the term "reflection of consciousness" (*cidābhāsa*) for this person. It is a term which helps us understand this paradoxical phenomenon of how the person exists in and as the mind even though his true nature is something totally unconnected to that mind. "Reflection of consciousness" can be easily understood like this: Think of sunlight reflecting in a mirror; it is the best analogy for this. The pure, unfettered, uninvolved sunlight can 'come down', 'transfer itself', 'be caught', onto the surface of a mirror where it is brightly reflected. And the ensuing reflection, shall we say it is or is not sunlight? At one and the same time it is **and** it is not, it depends upon from which standpoint we are talking. As a matter for analysis it is a paradox to be understood with no need for argument that it is only one way or the other, if we say both are sunlight but one is a temporary conditioned form of sunlight and the other is the original unconditioned formless sunlight. A problem of error arises only when half of the phenomenon is seen and known; there is only the temporary reflected form and it exists separately from its source. Then definitely that single particular reflection is highly inconsequential to say the least, i.e. it is maximally vulnerable, fleeting.

Now applying this to understand the person, the reflected consciousness, consciousness reflecting in the mind, does not undergo any real change. It has not 'fallen down' and gotten caught up in and become involved with the mind. (A misunderstanding that gets bandied about is that this person is who he is, the suffering individual, because he has fallen down and away from his original source and therefore he must raise himself up out of the mire of his miserable existence and return to the source.) If it is said that the sunlight 'comes down onto' or 'falls upon' or is 'caught in the mirror', it is all figuratively speaking, by way of example for pedagogical purpose; there is no actual 'fall'. There is no fall and rise of man, there is only a lack of understanding [of] **what is** the source because of which the reflection can exist.

To reiterate, another analogy: The pot thinks, "I am a small pot, a useless pot, I sit in a dark place most of the time on a bottom shelf; occasionally I see the light of day; for what I was made, I don't understand. I have no job satisfaction, I make no contribution in this universe, why did God create me to be a pathetic nobody?" This is the pot's complex, the problem of his life. Then somebody told him, "What you suffer from is 'the fall of pot, the fall of all pots'." A fall from what? From the clay, your source! So then it has to do what? Get back to clay! Shouldn't he be confused? He was told, "You have fallen, you have to rise." Out of desperation he swallows this and now he wants to become clay. As long as the attempt is for 'becoming', it is not going to achieve anything, because the clay pot already is clay. It is like this: Will you attempt to get a head over your shoulders? It is another special, spiritual life of suffering within the generic life of suffering.

In life one tries to become something better all the time; this 'becoming' is a miserable life 'trip'. It is in our efforts to become something other than what we are that we are caught in a maze and never see the truth of the problem. We can never see the light at the end of the tunnel; we have to be so busy becoming—because it's an endless job—that there's never time to inquire into the real problem. Everything and anything I want to become, I already am. I need not, in fact cannot, become a 'full-er' self, without recognizing what is the real, fundamental problem. Like the clay pot trying to become clay **only** because he doesn't see that he is clay in the first place, and he got some poor advice.

Therefore one needs to be told: "Come on, stop trying to become something else, forget about this 'becoming' business, see what you already are! It's great . . . it's everything and more than you could ever hope for!"

But this unique 'telling' means it requires a means of knowledge, a teaching. To a pot, "There is something called clay, and you are that clay from out of which all pots have come, to which all pots go back, because of which all pots exist. It is your true nature, this reality, your real and **essential** content." This is the kind of teaching that is found in the Upanisads. There is something called a *mahā-vākya*, meaning "great sentence." And this is what the 'great sentence' is all about; it says, "That thou art." The Upanisad uses the example of the clay and exploits it all the way. So the example [would be]: "Oh pot, that (clay) thou (already) art." Now to the person, what does the same sentence convey? The Self alone is, like the clay alone is for all pots etc. There is no fall or rise.