

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati

PRATAḤ SMARAṆAM

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The nature of the Self is further explained in the second verse.

प्रातर्भजामि मनसा वचसामगम्यं वाचो विभान्ति निखिला यदनुग्रहेण ।

यं नेति नेति वचनिर्निगमा अवोचुः तं देवदेवमजमच्युतमाहुरग्रयम् ॥

*prātarbhajāmi manasā vacasāmagamyam vāco vibhānti nikhilā yadanugraheṇa,
yam neti neti vacanirnigamā avocuh taṁ devadevamajamacyutamāhuragryam.*

Early morning, I worship him in the mind who cannot be conceived by speech, by whose blessing all the words are manifest and whom the Vedas described by the words 'not this, not this'. That one, they say, is the foremost, the Lord of the deities, the unborn and changeless.

The first verse begins with the word *prātassmarāmi*, at dawn I remember, whereas the second verse begins with *prātarbhajāmi*, at dawn I worship. What does worship mean here? This is a different kind of worship. This is not the conventional worship involving the separation or duality between the worshipper and the worshipped. Normally, when I say I worship the Lord, there is a separation between the Lord, the worshipped, and me, the worshipper. When Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says *prātarbhajāmi*, it does not mean I worship the Self as someone who stands apart from the Self. I worship the Self as my own Self. Here, worship means identification.

Ultimately, we become what we worship

Worship always involves identification. When you worship someone or something, there is identification. You dwell upon the object of worship. For example, when you worship your teacher, you always think of him very fondly, with reverence, respect, and love. If the worship is very intense, we find that in course of time, the worshipper slowly starts identifying and imbibing the qualities of that which is worshipped. For instance, there are many worshippers of Lord Hanumān who imbibe his qualities. We also observe that when a child adores a parent, he or she starts talking and acting in the same manner as the parent. This happens due to identification. This is the whole idea of *upāsana*; you ultimately become what you are worshipping.

What is the culmination of worship? Lord Krishna says, “Those who worship a *devatā* become that *devatā*, and those who worship Me become Me.”

यान्ति देवव्रता देवान्पितृन्यान्ति पितृव्रताः ।

भूतानि यान्ति भूतेज्या यान्ति मद्याजिनोऽपि माम् ॥

yānti devavratā devānpitṛnyānti pitṛvratāḥ,
bhūtāni yānti bhūtejyā yānti madyājino'pi mām.

Those who are committed to the gods reach the world of the gods.
Those who are committed to the manes reach the plane of the manes.
Those who worship spirits go to the realm of the spirits. Whereas those who worship Me, reach Me [Bhagavad Gita, 9-25].

We become what we worship. What we are today is the result of what we worshipped in the past. We cannot change that. But we can change what we want to be in the future. What shall we be in the future? We shall become what we worship today.

Lord Krishna says,

यं यं वापि स्मरन्भावं त्यजत्यन्ते कलेवरम् ।

तं तमेवैति कौन्तेय सदा तद्भावभावितः ॥ ८-६ ॥

yaṁ yaṁ vāpi smaranbhāvaṁ tyajatyante kalevaram,
taṁ tamevaiti kaunteya sadā tadbhāvabhāvitaḥ.

And also, at the time of death, giving up the body, whatever he remembers, that alone he reaches, O son of Kunti, being always in the same state [Bhagavad Gita, 8-6].

With whatever thought the *jīva* departs at the time of death, that is what he becomes. Thus, we become what we are thinking. It is a very serious matter.

Meditation or worship implies deliberately planting a certain desirable flow of thought

We cannot get away by simply entertaining a thought and thinking that no one else in the world knows about it. Every thought that occurs has an impact. If you repeatedly entertain a particular thought, your mind gets influenced by it totally. It assumes that form and slowly becomes that! That is the nature of the mind. It can be molded into any form like wax. That is the idea behind *upāsana*, meditation. If I think of flying all the time, I might become a bird. If I keep entertaining business thoughts, I become a business person.

Meditation is deliberately planting a certain desirable thought flow in my mind. I decide what I want to think; I do not let my mind decide that. I control my mind by chanting 'Rāma, Rāma'. I want to think about nothing else. That is the principle of worshipping. It is a becoming.

The Self is beyond the reach of words, the sense organs, and the mind

In what way do I worship the Self? Here, worship is owning up to what I am. Normally, what I worship is something that I visualize in my mind. Can I visualize the Self in my mind? Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says, *manasā vacasāmagamyam*. *Agamyam* is that which cannot be reached or that which is out of reach. *Manasā vacasāmagamyam* is that which is not within the reach of the mind and speech or word.

This powerful idea is contained in many of the scriptures. For example, the Self is described elsewhere as *yato vāco nivartante, aprāpya manasā saha* [Taittirīyopaniṣad, 2-4], that from which speech returns along with the mind without reaching. The Self is beyond the reach of the word; you cannot describe it in words, nor can you visualize it in your mind. In the Kenopaniṣad [1-3], the Self is described as *na tatra cakṣurgacchati na vāggacchati no manaḥ*, that where the eyes do not objectify that (*brahman*); the organ of speech does not objectify (that *brahman*); the mind does not (objectify that *brahman*). The Self is beyond the reach of the eyes, words, speech, or the mind. The eye stands for all the organs of perception, therefore, the Self cannot be perceived by any of the organs of the perception. Thus, all the conventional means of understanding an object have been denied. Usually, we can understand a thing by either of two means: when somebody describes it to us, or when we can perceive it through our organs of perception. If we can then visualize it in our mind, we can say we know it. Thus, to feel that I know something, I should be able to visualize it in my mind or perceive it through my sense organs or describe it in words. However, the Self that I am worshipping at dawn cannot be described in words, visualized, or perceived through the sense organs. It is beyond the reach of words, the sense organs, and the mind.

Manasā vacasāmagamyam. Here, speech stands for all the organs of action and all the organs of perception. The Self is beyond the reach of the organs of perception, the organs of action, and the mind. That is, the Self cannot be objectified by the organs of perception. Our organs of perception are equipped to perceive only the objects of the world, the non-Self. The Self is the illuminator of the organs of perception. This question is asked in the Kenopaniṣad [1-1]:

केनेषितं पतति प्रेषितं मनः केन प्राणः प्रथमः प्रैति युक्तः ।

केनेषितां वाचमिमां वदन्ति चक्षुः श्रोत्रं क उ देवो युनक्ति ॥ १ ॥

keneṣitaṁ patati preṣitaṁ manaḥ kena prāṇaḥ prathamah praiti yuktaḥ,

keneṣitāṁ vācamimāṁ vadanti cakṣuḥ śrotraṁ ka u devo yunakti.

Willed by whom does the mind fall (on objects as though) it is forced?

Directed by whom does the main *Prāṇa* function? Willed by whom do (the people) speak these words? Which effulgent principle, indeed, directs the eyes and ears?

In this *kārya-kārana-sanghāta* or the body-mind complex, we find that the organs of perception and action, and the mind go about doing their respective jobs. We do know that the organs of perception, the organs of action, and the mind are nothing but products of matter. They are all inert; yet, they seem to function as though they are conscious entities. There must be a conscious principle, which imparts consciousness to them. For example, when we see a rotating fan, the question may arise as to what makes it rotate? The question arises because we don't see anything that is moving the fan; we do know that the fan cannot move by itself. There is something, which makes a fan rotate or a bulb glow. It is electricity. Similarly, what is that principle, which makes our organs of perception and action, and the mind function? The teacher says, *śrotrasya śrotraṁ manaso mano yad vāco ha vācam* [Kenopaniṣad, 1-2], it is the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, and the speech of speech. This statement does not mean that there is an ear in the ear, but that there is something because of which the ears are able to perceive sound. What is it that imparts to the ear, the capacity to perceive sound? What is it that imparts to the eyes, their capacity to see form and color? They would not have the capacity by themselves. They are inert and yet, they perform their actions as though they are conscious entities. Therefore, the teacher says that it is the Consciousness, the Self, because of which the eyes see, the ears hear, the mind thinks, and *Prāṇa* or the vital airs also perform their actions. The idea is that the organs of perception are able to function, and perceive objects only because of the Self and therefore, cannot objectify the Self.

For example, a bulb illumines the various objects such as pots and furniture in a room. The furniture, which itself is being illumined by the bulb, cannot illumine the bulb. The objects of the world, which are illumined by the sun, cannot illumine the sun. That which is illumined is inert; that which illumines is conscious. Therefore, the inert cannot illumine the conscious. The

eyes have the capacity to illumine the objects of the world, but have no capacity to illumine the Self. We are able to illumine objects because of the Self. Therefore, it is said that *ātmā*, the Consciousness, is beyond the reach of the organs of perception. The organs of perception can only illumine the inert objects of the world. The Consciousness is self-effulgent and self-shining and therefore, does not require the organs of perception to be illumined. It does not require to be grasped by the organs of action and does not require to be visualized by the mind.

When we meditate on something, we typically try to visualize it in our minds. Thus, when we attempt to meditate upon the Self, the tendency is to visualize it in the mind. Here, it is said that we cannot visualize it in our minds, describe in words, or perceive it through our sense organs. This is told to either frustrate us or calm us down. We are told, 'It cannot be described by words; don't attempt to do so, calm down. It cannot be objectified by the sense organs; let them stay where they are and stop objectifying. It cannot be visualized by the mind; let the mind stop trying to visualize it.' The sense organs, mind, and words can only function in the realm of the non-Self. What can my eyes see? With my eyes, I can only see that which is other than me! For example, what can my eyes see through a telescope? Only something that is other than me! Can I see my eyes through a telescope? Can my eyes see themselves through the telescope, which is itself the means of seeing? Similarly, through a small hole in a door, I can see whoever is on the other side. It is, however, not possible for me to see my own eyes through that hole. Can it be possible that the seer can see himself through the means of seeing? No. You cannot simultaneously be the seer and the seen. I simply cannot visualize myself. I am the one who visualizes; the seer.

In this meditation, I am trying to visualize *ātmā*. What am I trying to do? I am trying to create a split in my own Self: on the one hand, I am the one who visualizes, and on the other hand, I am trying to visualize myself. But I cannot do so. I have to stop the activity of describing through words, and objectifying with the sense organs, or with the mind. Let all these activities stop. Relax. Calm down. Just be. You don't need to experience yourself. You are of the nature of the very experience. You are self-shining; you don't have to become something. I am worshipping that which is beyond the reach of the mind, the faculty of speech, and perception. I am worshipping my own Self.

The non-Self is able to reveal objects only due to the presence of the Self

Vāco vibhānti nikhilā yadanugraheṇa. Yadanugraheṇa, by whose grace, *nikhilā vāco vibhānti*, all these words manifest, is speech also manifest. What makes speech function? Again, the Kenopaniṣad [1-5], says,

यद्वाचाऽनभ्युदितं येन वागभ्युद्यते ।

तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते ॥ ५ ॥

yadvācā' nabhyuditarṅ yena vāgabhyudyate,

tadeva brahma tvaṅ viddhi nedanṅ yadidamupāsate.

“*Brahman* is that very (consciousness) which one does not know with the mind and by which (consciousness), they say, the mind is known” – (Thus) you understand. This (deity), which (people) meditate upon, is not (*brahman*).

Speech reveals words, and through words, speech reveals various objects and ideas. The Self is that which cannot be revealed by speech, but that because of which speech reveals. It is that which cannot be seen by the eye, but because of which the eyes see. It is that which cannot be thought of by the mind, but because of which the mind thinks. The mind does not have the capacity to think on its own; it is only because of the grace of the consciousness imparted by the Self that the mind is able to think. It is due to grace of the consciousness imparted by the Self that the eyes, ears, and other organs of perception can illumine objects. It is by the grace of the consciousness imparted by the Self that the vital airs function. Therefore, the Self is beyond the reach of the non-Self. The non-Self cannot illumine the Self; in addition, the non-Self is able to reveal the objects only because of the presence of the Self.

Vāco vibhānti nikhilā yadanugraheṇa, by whose grace or in whose presence *nikhilā vāca*, all this speech, in fact, reveals the objects. That is, in His presence, the mind, organs of perception, and organs of action function, but He is beyond the reach of the mind, organs perception, and organs of action. This is said in order to help us gain the knowledge of the Self. In order to gain knowledge of an object, we use our organs of perception. When we see or hear, we feel or experience, or when we visualize with our minds, we feel we know the object. Thus, our knowledge is through our organs of perception and the mind.

To know a clock, which is in front of me, I require my eyes. The clock does not have the capacity to reveal itself unless my eyes illumine it. The furniture in a dark room does not have the capacity to reveal itself, unless it is

illuminated by a lamp. It is inert and needs another source to illumine it. So also, the objects of the world are inert and require the organs of perception to illumine them. The organs of perception require the light of the mind, which, in turn, requires the light of Consciousness to illumine them. In Vedantic terminology, all of these are inert, *jada*; that is, they require the light of Consciousness for their revelation. But Consciousness itself, being self-effulgent and self illumining, does not require the eyes and ears to illumine it. For example, in a dark room, we require a lamp to illumine the furniture to know that the furniture is; the furniture cannot make itself known. But we don't need another lamp to know that this lamp is; the lamp reveals itself. Similarly, we require the organs of perception and the mind to know the objects of the world because they cannot reveal themselves.

It is necessary to quieten the organs of perception and the mind to recognize the Self even though the Self is self-effulgent

We all shine in the light of Consciousness, but do we need the mind to reveal the Consciousness? No. Consciousness is self-shining. It does not require the mind or the sense organs to reveal it. They shine because of the Consciousness, while Consciousness shines in its own light. It shines and everything shines after it. Therefore, the activity of the organs of perception should be dropped in order to know the Self. Don't try to 'perceive' the Self because it is beyond the organs of perception. Don't try to see the Self; don't try to touch the Self; don't try to smell the Self, and don't try to taste the Self. We have a tendency to grasp all things through our organs of perception or action; don't try to do that. Don't try to visualize with the mind because it is because of 'that' that the mind visualizes. When all the attempts on the part of the organs of perception and mind are stopped, we recognize the Self, which always shines. We recognize the Self as the self-shining Consciousness. In fact, It shines even as the mind and the sense organs function. However, because of the clutter of many things in the mind, we do not recognize it. To recognize the Self, it becomes necessary to make our mind and organs of perception quiet. Therefore, we try to make our sense organs quiet in meditation. In meditation, there is nothing to be seen, heard, or touched. You tell the mind also to be quiet, with nothing to be visualized or thought of. Then, what remains is the unadulterated Consciousness, and that is what you are. You are that even when the mind is functioning. It is not that the Consciousness becomes evident only when the mind is not functioning. When the mind is functioning, we confuse the mind with Consciousness. Therefore, it is necessary to quieten the organs of

perception and the mind to recognize that Self or the Consciousness is self-shining. Hence, the Self is said to be *manasā vacasāmagamyam*, that which is beyond the reach of the mind and the sense organs, and moreover, *vāco vibhānti nikhilā yadanugraheṇa*, that by whose grace the mind and the sense organs perform their functions. Then, how do the Upanishads teach of this Self?

The Upanishads describe the Self through a process of negation since It is devoid of attributes and limitations

Yam neti neti vacanirnigamā avocuḥ. *Nigamā* is the Vedas or Upanishads. *Avocuḥ* means describes. The Upanishads describe the Self in terms of *neti neti* or not this, not this. The Upanishads describe the Self through the process of negation. That is, what you visualize is not the Self. The one who objectifies is the Self, but not the object that is objectified. All the attributes and qualifications are negated. The self or Consciousness is unqualified. It is free of all attributes and limitations. The ultimate truth or the ultimate reality, which we may call *brahman*, Self, *ātmā*, *paramātmā*, *īśvara*, Rāma or Krishna, is devoid of all attributes and limitations. An attribute automatically means a limitation; it excludes some other attribute. For example, when we say a particular person is great, the greatness, which is an attribute, implies that he is not little. Or, when we say that a particular flower is red, we mean that it is not green or yellow; it limits the flower to redness and excludes everything else. Any entity that posses an attribute or qualification is limited because it is confined only to that and can be nothing else. But the ultimate truth is that which cannot exclude anything.

Truth is that which includes everything. If God is in heaven, it means that He is not on the earth. Different religious sects describe their gods as being in different heavens. Some say that their god is in Vaikunta, while others say that their god is in a place beyond Vaikunta. Almost everyone, except the Vedāntins, talks about heavens. In India, most people are Dvaitins. The followers of Lord Nārāyaṇa call their heavens Vaikunta; the followers of Lord Śiva call it Kailāsa, and the followers of Lord Krishna call it Gokula. That is where their god is and you will go there if you are devoted to that particular god. But the point is that if Lord Krishna is confined to Gokula, he is not here on this earth. However wonderful and divine that god is, as long as he is confined to a place, so long is he not in any other place. That is why we say that nothing can be outside the purview of God; otherwise, God becomes limited. In order for God or Truth to be limitless, It must be all-inclusive. There can be nothing that can be apart from the Truth or God. Even hell cannot be apart from God; neither can evil be

independent of It. Therefore, we say that God is apart from both *dharma* and *adharma*, virtue and vice. If God is only good, He is not bad; that means there is something that is excluded from God and therefore, God becomes limited. We say God is beyond both good and bad. He includes both and He is, yet, beyond both, just as the actor plays both the beggar as well as the king, while he is himself neither beggar nor king. Therefore, the actor pervades and also transcends both roles. Therefore, the Truth is both immanent as well as transcendent. In these verses, the teacher describes the Truth, which transcends all limitations, attributes, and conditions.

The implied meaning of the words of the scriptures, not their literal meaning describe the Self

A word can only describe that which is limited. Whatever word you use, *ātmā* or *brahman*, it really cannot describe *brahman* because every word describes a certain concept. A word is a sound symbol for describing a concept. When we say 'clock', the clock is a concept. Similarly, the word 'pot' is a concept. The concept is the form and the word is the name; they are the name and form. All words describe concepts, which are limited. Thus, the words 'God', '*ātmā*', or '*brahman*' cannot really describe the Self.

What is *ātmā*? You could say that *ātmā* is the 'I'. However, describing it as 'I' is also not sufficient because 'I' excludes 'you'. When we say *brahman* is great, we exclude that which is small. The description of one concept always excludes another concept. Thus, the word 'God' cannot describe what we want to describe. *Nigamā avocuh*, the scriptures talk about it. The scriptures say that God is beyond words; yet, the scriptures consist of only words. The Upanishads say that God or *brahman* is beyond words, and this statement itself is said in words. If words can never describe the Truth or *brahman*, does it mean that we will never know the Truth? Vedāntins say that the Truth or *brahman* cannot be the *vācyārtha*, the literal meaning conveyed by words, but are the *lakṣyārtha*, the implied meaning of the words.

The words are like the pole used in a pole vault. The pole is used to vault over a high bar, as high as eight or nine feet. One has to necessarily let go of the pole to cross the bar. If one holds on to the pole, one will not be able to cross the bar; on the other hand, if one does not use the pole, one will not be able to rise as high as one needs to. The pole itself is used to transcend the pole. Similarly, in describing *brahman* words are used to transcend words. If you use the words properly, they will enable you to transcend the words. Therefore, the teachers

communicate with us through the words and we have to understand their *lakṣyārtha*, not their *vācyārtha*.

Neti neti, it is not this, it is not this. What is negated is the *vācyārtha*, the literal meaning of the words. All the attributes are negated in *brahman*. The Self or 'I' is free from all attributes and qualifications. Everything in this world has qualities. Is it not so? 'I', the knower is always different from the known. For example, the knower of a pot is different from the pot. All attributes are known to us. Therefore, 'I', the Self must be free of all the attributes because all attributes are known to me.

Pujya Swami Dayanandaji tells this story of a person who once came to him and complained, "I am restless, I am agitated." Swamiji said, "You are all silence." "But Swamiji, I tell you I am restless and agitated." Swamiji told him again that he was all silence. The person got more and more agitated as Swamiji kept telling him that he was all silence. Finally, Swamiji asked him, "How do you know you are agitated?" "I can see that my mind is agitated." "Okay, your mind may be agitated. Now, you are the knower of the agitation in your mind. The knower is always different from the known. Therefore, as the one who knows of the agitation in your mind, you are indeed free of the agitation. Otherwise, you would not know of the agitation."

You can know the movement of a train, only when you are standing on a platform that does not move. If you are in a moving train adjacent to another train, which is also moving at the same speed, you will not see the movement of your train. To notice a movement, you have to be free of the movement. To notice an agitation, you should be free from that agitation. To notice a change, you have to be apart from that change. To know an attribute, you have to be free of that attribute. Therefore, who is the Self? Who is the 'I'? What is Consciousness? It is devoid of all limitations, attributes, qualifications, and conditions. It is the one which illumines all the attributes, conditions, and qualifications.

The scriptures reject the many ideas that arise in our minds: I am tall; *neti*, you are not. I am fat; *neti*, you are not. I am short; *neti*, you are not. I am a woman; *neti*, you are not. I am a man; *neti*, you are not. I am good; *neti*, you are not. I am bad; *neti*, you are not. I am a doer; *neti*, you are not. I am a non-doer; *neti*, you are not.

Each one of these qualifications is negated because each of these ideas arises when we identify with one or the other aspect of our personalities. It is the

body or mind, which performs various actions in identification with the 'I am'. When the body is not acting, I say I am not acting. But the Self is devoid of the idea of acting; acting or not acting belongs only to the non-Self, matter. Not doing anything is also an attribute of the body and the mind. The Self, 'I', is beyond the idea of doing and not doing, right and wrong, good and evil, *dharma* and *adharma*. The Self, which is beyond all pairs of opposites, is attribute-less. It is self-shining; therefore, you don't need the sense organs or mind to illumine the Self. It is beyond all limitations, self-existing, self-shining, and because of which everything is illumined. You don't have to make any effort to reach, know, or experience it. You are That. You don't have to experience yourself because *you are*. The question of experiencing comes only when there is something other than you. You cannot be an object of your own experience. You don't need to experience because you are what you are trying to be. Just be; because that is your nature.

Tam devadevamajamacyutamāhuragryam. *Deva* means god, the shining one. *Devadevam* is the God of gods, the illuminator of all shining ones. The sun is a *deva* or *devatā*. Other *devas* include the moon, fire etc. *Brahman* is called *devadeva*, the one who also illuminates all the *devatās*, deities. The sun and the moon shine in the light of the Consciousness; they are not self-effulgent. *Ajam* is birth-less, and *acyutam* is changeless. *Agryam* is the foremost, the first one, the one who is the cause the substratum; he is there even when nothing else is¹.

¹ Transcribed by Richa Choudhry and edited by Krishnakumar (KK) S. Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.