

शांति पाठ
Śānti Pāṭha

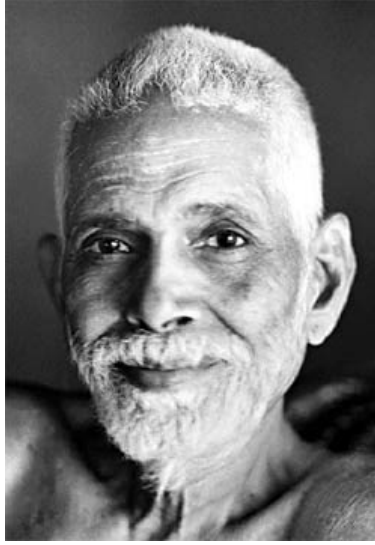
Ōṃ PŪRṆAMadaḥ | PŪRṆAMidaṃ |



Inspired Interpretation

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ॐ श्री गणेशाय नमः



श्री गुरुभ्यो नमः॥

गुरु ब्रह्मा गुरु विष्णु गुरु देवो महेश्वरः ।
गुरु साक्षात् परब्रह्मा तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते ।
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Ōṃ PŪRṆAMadaḥ PŪRṆAMidaṃ pūrṇāt PŪRṆAMudacyate |
Pūrṇasya PŪRṆAMādāya PŪRṆAMEvāvaśiṣyate |
Ōṃ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ ||

When this famous Veda mantrā is heard, the resonance of the recital fills our ears and hearts with great reverence. Virtuous Veda mantrās are so finely composed, when recited correctly, they bring subtle and positive transformation within every listener; even though their meaning not comprehended, the sound itself has the immense healing touch. However, Veda mantrā especially those that convey the supreme truth of Vedāntā, when clearly comprehended, bring far greater enlightenment. For the students of Vedāntā, studying and understanding the deeper import of the Veda mantrā under the guidance of able Guru, is mandated.

This mantrā is one of the Śānti Pāṭha.

Typically Śānti Pāṭha are Vedic mantrās, used as invocatory hymns, beseeching the supreme power to ward off all obstacles and to bring divine ambience to the endeavours. Many Śānti Pāṭha are therefore Vedic prayers either seeking boons or praising the benign grace of the Almighty.

This particular Śānti Pāṭha, although often recited as the ritual-completion of auspicious events in Vedic tradition, stands far beyond such customary use. It brings out the very objective of Vedāntā and for this reason, it is revered as special Śānti Pāṭha.

What is the objective of Vedāntā that this mantrā brings forth, and how does it benefit us?

This mantrā is in Shukla-Yajur-Veda and so appears as the Śānti Pāṭha in the Upaniṣads that belong to Shukla-Yajur-Veda (e.g. Isāvāsya-Upaniṣad). As the foremost of the ten major Upaniṣads elucidated by Bhagavān Sankarā, Isāvāsya-Upaniṣad starts with this beautiful Śānti Pāṭha, thereby posing an interesting challenge to the students of Vedāntā, right from the start, as the coded wisdom of this Śānti Pāṭha demands clear mind and sharp intellect for the comprehension. Pregnant with supreme truth, concealed in seemingly simple and repetitive words, this mantrā greatly enthrals when sincerely explored.

What does this mantrā convey?

The literal meaning makes the following assertion:

OM!

Whole is That; Whole is This; from the Whole comes forth the Whole; when the Whole is taken-off from the Whole, the Whole alone remains.

Om Santhi Santhi Santhi.

The significance of OM and the concluding phrase of Santhi have been already explored in the introduction to Śānti Pāṭha.

The word-meaning as shown above, although correct, makes no sense; the mantrā too sounds like a riddle. So for its true import, we have to replace the literal-meaning (*vācyārta*) with the appropriate intended-meaning (*lakshyārta*), based on the scholarly interpretations of the noble and able teachers. The commentaries on many

scriptural texts by Bhagavān Sankarā are the beacon of enlightenment and the guide to all seekers of Truth, we shall build the interpretation based on his teachings.

Although this mantrā appears as the Śānti Pāṭha in the Isāvāsya-Upaniṣad, Bhagavān Sankarā has chosen not to comment on this mantrā there; instead he does so in the Brahādāranya-Upaniṣad. Uniquely, this mantrā appears as the text-proper in the Brahādāranya-Upaniṣad. Perhaps it is because Brahādāranya-Upaniṣad is deemed as a Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad (i.e. texts that expand on the contents of other Mantrā-Upaniṣad such as Isāvāsya-Upaniṣad), this unique Śānti Pāṭha appears as its text-proper (chapter 5, verse 1), and thus subjected to the sublime and succinct interpretation by Bhagavān Sankarā upon which is this simpler interpretation made.

PŪRṆAM IS BRAHMAM

Firstly we notice one word that is often repeated in this mantrā: ‘PŪRṆAM’.

The literal-meaning of ‘PŪRṆAM’ is ‘unlimited’, ‘whole’, ‘complete’ etc. It also means ‘absolute fulfilment’, the boon that we all earnestly seek. So with the word ‘PŪRṆAM’ repeating so many times, it seems that this mantrā is all about what we truly seek.

The intended-meaning of the word ‘PŪRṆAM’ is ‘BRAHMAM’, although we shall see how the intended-meaning of this word changes in different places of the mantrā.

As BRAHMAM is the eternal, unlimited and all pervading divinity, there is no constraint to accept the statement:

BRAHMAM is PŪRṆAM (1)

According to Vedāntā, a ‘thing’ can be limited by three factors: Space (*desha*), Time (*kāla*) or objectification or attribution (*vastu*).

Take our ‘body’ as an example of a limited entity. The body is limited by space as it cannot be present at different places at the same time. The body is also limited by time, for it is subjected to perpetual changes. Also through attributions, such as the gender, physical-aspects, nationality, social status and many such classifications, it is objectified and thus remains limited.

On the contrary, BRAHMAM is the all pervading divinity; it is boundless (*anantam*) and therefore formless (*nirākārm*), filling everywhere (*sarva-vyāpi*), eternally existing (*nityam*) and void of all attributes of objectification (*nirguna*). Therefore, we assert (1), BRAHMAM is infinite, PŪRṆAM.

If this mantrā is only about restating this well known and accepted fact, then it would be superfluous. In fact, this mantrā stands for making a far more compelling assertion:

BRAHMAM alone, and nothing else, really exists; therefore all differences are apparent only and simply vanish when the object’s identity with the BRAHMAM is established.

This is the essence of Vedāntā and also the true import of this mantrā.

What are the objects that are to be identified with BRAHMAM?

These are indicated in the first two sentences of the mantrā.

First and Second Assertions

Ōṃ PŪRṆAMadah |

PŪRṆAMidam |

The first assertion is: PŪRṆAM (PŪRṆAM) is THAT (adah) and the second, PŪRṆAM (PŪRṆAM) is THIS (idam).

If THAT and THIS are deemed different, then there is a contradiction as there cannot be two infinities; therefore the assertion implies *the two*, THAT and THIS are none other than the same one.

The two entities indicated by THAT and THIS are the objects of contemplation in the context of identification with BRAHMAM.

By the term THIS, the created world (*Jagat*) and all forms-of-life therein (*Jīvarāsi*) are indicated; as *Jagat* and *Jīvarāsi* exhibit innumerable variability, leading to everlasting diversity, a representative object can be taken as the object of contemplation and for the intended meaning of THIS. In particular, taking *JĪVĀTMA*, the most sentient life-form as human-beings is appropriate, after all we are the seekers of Truth.

By the term THAT, the entity seemingly far from THIS is indicated. The notion of *ISHVARA* Who is deemed beyond our reach as the ‘creator and controller’ of everything, and also being different from all creations, is therefore the intended meaning, fitting the context of identification with the BRAHMAM.

So the two key words of the mantrā, ‘*atha:*’ and ‘*idam*’, respectively represent these two entities: ‘ISHVARA’ and ‘JĪVĀTMĀ’.

By replacing THAT and THIS with the corresponding intended-meaning, we get

ISHVARA is PŪRṆAM (2)

and

JĪVĀTMĀ is PŪRṆAM (3)

Thus from (2) (3) and (1) , the oneness of JĪVĀTMĀ with ISHVARA and the identification with BRAHMAM is given.

Since I am JĪVĀTMĀ, the inference is that “I am PŪRṆAM” and therefore “I am unlimited”. But I am aware of my limitations and no way I can identify myself with the all powerful ISHVARA. This contradiction is difficult to overcome. Clearly this is unpalatable!

Yet Vedāntā asserts the identity of the SELF with ISHVARA and also assures its validity, only through self-realization. When all the objective knowledge, based on our personal experiences using our body, mind and intellectual faculties contradict the teachings of Veda and the Sadguru, what should we do?

An easy option is to reject the assertions of Veda and the guidance of Sadguru, solely on the basis of our own limited views. But that would mean, we close the only path available to us to seek the truth. No objective science can dare to explore the realm of self-realization.

So an earnest aspirant will consider that his or her capacity to comprehend the truth is yet to be fully developed and therefore persist the pursuit of learning Vedāntā, placing total trust at the divine feet of the Sadguru. Such undiluted commitment for continual learning, driven by the intensity of purpose towards redemption is known as *shraddā*.

Therefore, with *shraddā*, studying for the true import of this mantrā will prove to be greatly beneficial.

In the mantrā, since PŪṚṆAM is given in neuter gender, it may be appropriate to replace ISHVARA and JĪVĀTMĀ into 'ISHVARA-Tattvam' and 'JĪVĀTMĀ-Tattvam' respectively. The word '*Tattvam*' here refers to the 'sentient-principle' or the 'consciousness-principle' of the being; it is also known as '*caitanya*'.

With these modifications, the assertions become:

ISHVARA-Tattvam is PŪṚṆAM (4)

and

JĪVĀTMĀ-Tattvam is PŪṚṆAM (5)

So the requirement is to prove that the 'sentient-principle' of ISHVARA and JĪVĀTMĀ are one and the same and are identified with BRAHMAM.

Ishvara-Tattvam:

Let us start with ISHVARA-Tattvam contained within ISHVARA.

If God - the all pervading, omniscient, omnipotent BRAHMAM - is deemed as the controller of the Universe with the onus of creation, sustenance, dissolution etc., then the 'cause' of all creations and the differences therein must be assigned to the BRAHMAM.

This first-assumption, *the desire of* BRAHMAM to create and control everything is an inevitable condition, although such attribution of the 'cause' (*KĀRANAM*) to BRAHMAM must be negated at the end.

Consequently, we call ISHVARA as the ‘KĀRANA BRAHMAM’

$$\text{ISHVARA} = \text{BRAHMAM} + \text{KĀRANAM} \text{ (6)}$$

From (6), we infer that the ‘sentient-principle’ or the ‘ISHVARA-Tatvam’ in ISHVARA is ‘BRAHMAM’.

We need to resolve KĀRANAM, the first-assumption for it to be absolved into BRAHMAM also.

JĪVĀTMĀ-Tattvam:

JĪVĀRĀSI (the life-forms) and the Jagat (the world) are the creations and therefore the ‘effect’ (KĀRYAM) of the ‘cause’ (KĀRANAM).

As ISHVARA is ‘KĀRANA-BRAHMAM’, we can therefore infer the JĪVĀTMĀ as ‘KĀRYA- BRAHMAM’, giving

$$\text{JĪVĀTMĀ} = \text{BRAHMAM} + \text{KĀRYAM} \text{ (7)}$$

As deduced above, the ‘JĪVĀTMA-Tattvam’ in JĪVĀTMĀ is ‘BRAHMAM’.

From (6) and (7), we prove the first two assertions of the mantrā, subject to the resolution of KĀRYAM in the JĪVĀTMĀ inquiry and KĀRANAM in ISHVARA inquiry.

For this task, the help comes from the next assertion of the mantrā.

Third Assertion

pūrṇāt PŪṚṆAMudacyate |

*(pūrṇāt) From the PŪṚṆAM, (PŪṚṆAM) PŪṚṆAM,
(udacyate) comes.*

In this assertion, there are two occurrences of the word PŪṚṆAM, each having a different intended-meaning for their resolution.

In the first occurrence, the intended-meaning of PŪṚṆAM is ISHVARA and in the second, JĪVĀTMĀ, giving the assertion:

“from ISHVARA, the JĪVĀTMĀ (and all) comes”

Generally we don't see any problem with this assertion, as our common belief is on the theory of creation; everything is created by the supreme power, which the religions call as *GOD* and the agnostics as *the nature*.

This assertion establishes the Cause-and-Effect relationship (KĀRANA-KĀRYAM) between the Creator and all creations.

The sentence shows ISHVARA as the KĀRANAM and JĪVĀTMĀ as KĀRYAM. But what makes it interesting is the implied wisdom in the phrase ‘from PŪṚṆAM, PŪṚṆAM comes’.

If ISHVARA is PŪṚṆAM and JĪVĀTMĀ is PŪṚṆAM then what is created? How could there be an ‘infinite’ coming from another ‘infinite’!

A brief inquiry on the Cause and Effect relationship is needed.

Every effect is only a modification of its cause.

The effects are innumerable and of variety because the modifications are due to various adjuncts or the limiting-factors (*upādi*); it is because of the variety and limits of adjuncts, the effects manifest in different names and forms (*nama-rupa*).

Although Advaita employs the cause-effect relationship to establish a process of learning, at the end, even this approach is dropped at the end, which we shall briefly see.

With the definition of effect as the limited manifestation of cause, we have

$$\text{KĀRYAM} = \text{KĀRANAM} + \text{Upādi (8)}$$

Applying this to (7)

$$\text{JĪVĀTMĀ} = \text{BRAHMAM} + (\text{KĀRYAM})$$

$$\text{JĪVĀTMĀ} = \text{BRAHMAM} + (\text{KĀRANAM} + \text{Upādi})$$

$$\text{JĪVĀTMĀ} = \text{ISHVARA} + \text{Upādi (9)}$$

From (9) we see the identification of JĪVĀTMĀ with ISHVARA, once the unreality of Upādi is proven.

This is aided by the fourth assertion of the mantra.

4th Assertion

Pūrṇasya PŪRṆAMādāya PŪRṆAMEvāvaśiṣyate ||

(Pūrṇasya) from the PŪRṆAM, (PŪRṆAM), the PŪRṆAM, (ādāya) when removed, (PŪRṆAM-eva) PŪRṆAM alone, (avaśiṣyate) remains.

When the PŪRṆAM is taken out of the PŪRṆAM, PŪRṆAM alone remains.

It is like a riddle without the application of intended-meaning.

Let us evaluate the assertion with respect to JĪVĀTMĀ first.

In this assertion, the word PŪRṆAM occurs at three places.

The PŪRṆAM in the first occurrence refers to JĪVĀTMĀ, in the second occurrence to JĪVĀTMĀ-Tattvam or what gives the infinitude to the JĪVĀTMĀ, and the third occurrence to BRAHMAM.

In other words, if the 'sentient-principle' of the JĪVĀTMĀ is taken-out, then the BRAHMAM **only** remains.

This also means nothing else other than the BRAHMAM exist; the world of objects, the names and forms and the limiting adjuncts are all absolved.

An example may clarify.

Let us take WATERINESS (of being Water) be implied by the term PŪRṆAM; Let OCEAN be represented by the term THAT and WAVE by the term THIS.

Then the 4th assertion would mean:

*from the WAVE, when the WATERINESS is taken, then
WATERINESS only remains.*

This should be directly understandable and there is no contradiction. Taking the wateriness out of the wave means, the wave is removed as its form and name no longer can exist. Then only the WATERINESS remains.

Why don't we say 'only the OCEAN remains'?

We could. But if we define OCEAN is WATERINESS with WAVES, then, when the WAVE subsides, there is no OCEAN but WATERINESS only.

Bhagavān Sankarā cites this simple and insightful example to elucidate.

Similarly, when the JĪVĀTMA-Tatvam is taken out of JĪVĀTMĀ, the limiting adjuncts have no independent existence and so dissolve, leaving nothing but the BRAHMAM. Remember, ISHVARA is assumed as the KĀRANA BRAHMAM. When all effects (KĀRYAM) are dissolved due to the removal of all upādi, then the cause (KĀRANAM) has no reason to manifest and so subsides into the PŪRṆAM, the BRAHMAM.

Thus we are shown effects to be the modifications of the cause only; effects have no existence without upādi, the limiting-adjuncts; the upādi has no existence independent of the underlying substratum BRAHMAM.

This fourth assertion could be also analyzed with respect to ISHVARA.

In this case, the PŪRṆAM in the first occurrence refers to ISHVARA, in the second occurrence to ISHVARA-Tattvam or what gives the infinitude to the ISHVARA and in the last occurrence to BRAHMAM.

In other words, if the ‘sentient-principle’ of the ISHVARA is taken-out, the first-assumption KĀRANAM is absolved and only the BRAHMAM remains.

The most important word in this sentence is ‘*eva*’ or ‘only’. It stresses that BRAHMAM alone is eternal existence, SATYAM and everything else is only an apparent-reality and therefore called as MITYĀ.

Since KĀRANAM, the first-cause is the power of BRAHMAM, it has no independent existence; Thus we resolve the KĀRANA-KARYA implication for moving from the duality to non-duality.

This may yet to be difficult to comprehend.

If all effects are not real, then how do we account for all our experiences with the world of objects?

Also, if we need to treat everything in the world as unreal, what is the very purpose of our role and relationship with the world in this embodied life?

What practical use such an approach to life offers?

Such questions are natural and necessary for the spiritual inquiry; sincere aspirants will find out that the realization of SELF and the identification with BRAHMAM, so as to be in the state of *advaitam* does equip them to be blissfully free and eternally happy even when they transact in the duality of world during their embodied life. .

Relevance of Advaita-Vedāntā

The assertion “BRAHMAM SATYAM” or the “BRAHMAM is the eternal truth” poses no difficulty for acceptance. But when Advaita declares “BRAHMAM EVA SATYAM” or the “BRAHMAM alone is the Truth”, and everything else is MITYĀ, we don’t easily accept.

To resolve this impediment, first we must understand that Advaita-Vedāntā declares the unreality of all names and forms from the view point of BRAHMAM and from the state of absolute-awareness of non-duality only. This is a critical point. By approaching from such perspective only, we are able to unravel the mystery. The state of non-differentiation or the non-duality can be only through self-realization; it cannot be explained as it is beyond objectification.

From the point of view of JĪVĀTMĀ, who in the midst of diversity of the world, where the world of objects and their dualistic nature are offering tangible evidences for their ‘real existence’ and the ‘impact of experience’, rejecting the world as MITYĀ is hard. But this ignorance can be progressively corrected by analyzing our embodied life to be a ‘chain of experiences’ and therefore far beyond the experiences of waking state only.

In the dream-state JĪVĀTMĀ has various impacts from the dream-experiences. In some cases, the dream-impact may last even after the dream-state is end. What seems real during the dream is easily shed as unreal in the awaken-state. Therefore an object may not be necessarily real just because it gives tangible experience.

There are many discussions within the texts of Vedāntā to raise and resolve such legitimate doubts. As long as one has the *shraddhā* to pursue this knowledge, the doubts are subsequently resolved when right understanding dawns. Ignorance vanishes like darkness leaving at the entrance of light.

Is not duality the essential nature of embodied existence? Is not duality the common experience?

Yes. Duality is the default common-sense. From the moment we are born, we see only diversity. All our up-bringing mainly reinforces the differences amongst creations, both as a necessary knowledge to survive and as the belief to uphold. Even the large part of Veda deal with Karma and the rites only, all in the context of duality! What is the need?

Veda does not reject the existence of the world. It only shows its impermanence and dependence for existence.

As shown in this mantrā, although the world emanates as an effect it does not give up its nature, infinitude, the state of the supreme self. MITYĀ is not unreal; but neither its is real. This inadequacy of definition only shows that we cannot explain MĀYĀ, the power of BRAHMAM and therefore take it as inexplicable and focus on the substratum of MĀYĀ, the BRAHMAM as discussed before. Many other schools of thought, to avoid this ambiguity and circumvent this problem, stay within the bounds of duality to establish their approach to the Truth.

Veda reveal the truth beyond the apparent duality – the eternal BRAHMAM as the only existence-knowledge-bliss.

There is only one GOD is the final celebrated assertion of all religions. **There is ONLY GOD** is the true import of Advaita. By realizing this, we are empowered in the dealings of transactional world of duality. Advaitam empowers us to see everything as divine, and the one undifferentiated truth, only masked by the diversity of names and forms. Thus, it is the guiding knowledge for the entire humanity.

Therefore, Veda does start with what is the common sense – the dualistic world as it is – created by the inherent ignorance of JĪVĀTMĀ – provide the guidance for the performance and rites to achieve the desired ends of embodied life in the dualistic world, which befits those with natural ignorance and defects such as attachments and aversion.

In due course, when the futility of objects of desire is known, they seek to give-up the attachments to attain their real state of being-alone, the opposite of duality, the scriptures teach them, as a means to it, the knowledge of Brahman, consisting in the realization and union of the Self. When such real state of oneness is achieved, there is no more the need of even the scriptural steer while in the bliss of non-duality. Therefore for the seekers who have realized the futility of worldly objects-of-desire and acquired the required qualifications such as the clarity of mind, sharpness of intellect and the intensity of purpose, the Sadguru shows the **cause of duality as ignorance** (*avidyā*) and therefore the cure is not any action (*karmā*) but true-knowledge (*jñānā*).

If ignorance is inherent in us, where is its root? Since when we are afflicted by ignorance?

Ignorance is beginning-less. No one can say since when one does not know about a thing, but can vouch at the moment he learns about the thing, its ignorance ends. *Avidyā is anādi* – beginning-less but surely it can end. That is assuring.

Vedāntā says that there is no need to waste our efforts to find out the root cause of ignorance or to be concerned about its origin. Instead, we should seek to end the ignorance. At the dawn of the right knowledge, ignorance ceases. We need to understand the attributes of *avidyā* in order to rid of it.

Duality exists because of the sense of mistaken ascription. In other words, there is a fallacious identification by mistaken superimposition of unreal on real. This is known as '*adhyāsa*' in Vedāntā.

Vedāntā describes two kinds of *adhyāsa* using simple but quite insightful examples.

The first type of *adhyāsa* is called '*Nirupadhika-Adhyāsa*' or 'superimposition without a limiting adjunct or Upadhi'. This is also called '*Svarupa-Adhyāsa*'. In the inquiry of JĪVĀTMĀ, we find *adhyāsa*, superimposition between I, the SELF and the mistaken-I, the NON-SELF. The example is the identification with an 'illusory snake' superimposed on a 'rope'. Here the **superimposition of the NON-SELF on the SELF** is indicated. The result is the existence of the SELF is not recognized at all, and the NON-SELF, (that is, the embodiments), is alone recognized as existing. That is why to the question 'Who am I', one defaults to the answer of one's own body, mind and intellectual components, which are limiting adjuncts and therefore NON-SELF. The JĪVĀ, the embodiments with the borrowed sentience, is only the illusory snake that is superimposed on the ATMĀ, the real sentient-principle, as rope in the example. Therefore JĪVĀ is the limited identity of ATMĀ, the pure Consciousness.

The second kind of superimposition is about the **SELF imposing on the NON-SELF**. This is known as '*Sopādhika-Adhyāsa*' or '*Samsarga-Adhyāsa*'. An example is the redness of the transparent crystal due to its proximity to a red flower. The red flower which makes the nearby transparent crystal look red is the upādi. The impact is that everyone identifies oneself with the upādīs of their embodiments.

Both these *adhyāsā* exist in all. That is why one ignores the underlying undivided ATMĀ, the SELF, for the sake of false identification with the differentiated ANĀTMĀ, the NON-SELF.

All schools of thought lead to Advaita only

Like Advaita-Vedāntā, other schools of thought that are also built on the spirit of Vedāntā prescribe a discerning temperament to tease out truth from untruth. That Truth, according to these schools of thought, transcends discourse and any words that might be used to describe it. Therefore Truth is purely an experiential matter and not a matter of expression. Unlike in the Western or other schools of thought, where Truth is a fact of predictive knowledge, in Vedic schools, Truth is the culmination of a spiritual quest, experienced in the self-realization.

Advaita-Vedāntā is the forbearer of this beacon of wisdom. Its approach is quite candid as it rejects everything other than the Truth as not-real. The experience of oneness with the Truth and therefore being in the state of non-dualism alone is real. What appears as the world is therefore ‘not really real’ from the standpoint of Truth, but ‘appears to be real’ otherwise. This inexplicable nature of things, MĀYĀ, is the power of BRAHMAM. Why MĀYĀ is wielded by BRAHMAM is unknowable. The apparent-reality of all objects, ‘MITYĀ’ is only due to MĀYĀ.

Not recognizing this and wrongly identifying the SELF with this ephemeral or temporal objects is ignorance or AVIDYA, according to Bhagavān Sankarā.

For most of us, the thunderous truth of Advaita may be hard to comprehend. As we see the world of objects as hard evidence of reality, from the inherent dualistic point of view, rejecting the world as MITYĀ is not palatable. Therefore, like a mother feeding medicine to the ailing children using a capsule of honey, the great sages have established a number of ways, and so their schools of thought, to steer their followers towards the absolute truth.

Saivism is a great example.

Although some may argue otherwise, Saivism is only a lucid exposition of Advaita-Vedāntā on the Truth of non-dualism, but the approach to reach there may appear to be different in Saivism.

Both Advaita Vedāntā and Saivism advocate a sort of ‘nullification’ process, where the seekers of Truth progressively shed the concepts to which they have become attached and identified but through a slightly different approaches. For Vedāntā, it is straight forward negation of all objectification as ‘not this, not this’ (*‘neti neti’*) and for Saivism it is the step-wise removal of *vikalpā*, (petrified edifices of thought) that serves the task of aligning one’s identity with the Truth of Being. End goal is the same.

For Advaita-Vedāntā, only Brahman is real, the unchanging ground of everything. MĀYĀ, the world of appearances, is not real and is illusory. For Saivites, all is real without exception but the goal of reaching the non-dual Truth is intact.

No matter which approach a seeker takes, she ultimately arrives to a point of ‘nothingness’. Gautama-Budda called it *‘sunya’* and the process of reaching there as *‘nirvana’*, and unfortunately, subsequent Buddhists missed the point as they took *‘sunya’* to be void of anything and declared nothing exists in the end.

In contrary, the ‘nothingness’ is the ground of pure awareness. The ‘nothingness’ is actually the ground of all possibilities. It is called ‘nothingness’ only from the perspective of world of objects as there is nothing objectified.

In fact, the ‘nothingness’ is ‘fullness’, the ground of all potentialities, the scope for all objectification, the substratum that holds all superimpositions.

For Vedāntā, this ground is BRAHMAM, the completely still and unchanging ground of Being. For the Saivism, that ground is SIVAM. So it is only the nomenclature difference.

The important contribution of SAIVISM is to shift the ‘negation’ approach of Vedāntā to ‘affirmation’ approach so that the pursuit of Truth can be integral to the way of life in the world and not entirely discarding the world of objects.

Vedāntā also recognizes the need to deal with the dualistic nature of embodied existence. When BRAHMAM, the ground of absolute awareness, *wills*, then there is ISHVARA and MĀYĀ, where MĀYĀ, the power of ISHVARA causes MITYĀ, the apparent-reality of world of objects, the names and forms. In a way, the pair ISHVARA-MĀYĀ may be seen as the seed of duality, but at the realization of advaitam, MĀYĀ subsides into ISHVARA; the world of objects is thus only a superimposition on BRAHMAM.

Saivism sees every appearance as an expression of the encompassing consciousness that is SIVAM. SIVAM is both changing and unchanging, called respectively as Shiva-Shakti. The transcendent and the immanent are equally expressions of SIVAM, just registered on differing levels of perception.

Yet the Learned will see the alignment of purpose in Advaita-Vedāntā and Saivism even though the approaches may seem to differ. Both prescribe an involution into the absolute-awareness. While Advaita-Vedāntā mainly focuses on taking us to the absolute-awareness and once there, the freedom to be one with the absolute truth or to expend the embodied life in the world as ‘liberated being’ (*Jivan-mukta*), free from all grief and fear. Saivism considers the state of absolute-awareness only as the necessary first step, for the seeker should complete the embodied life, considering everything in the world as real and the manifestation of Shiva-Shakti.

In other words, both Vedāntā and Saivism prepare us to be free and lead a life that is full of love, seeing divinity in all.

The resolution of KĀRANAM and KĀRYAM is therefore in the understanding of the wielding power of BRAHMAM. The MĀYĀ, the divine escort of ISHVARA in Vedāntā or the SHAKTI of SIVA in Saivism, is the power of all creation and the associated controlling activities, all in the name of BRAHMAM. As we cannot ascribe a reason for this, the scriptures call it a divine-play (*leelā*) and so the power of BRAHMAM in the form of mother Sri Lalitha.

In Sri Lalitha Sahasranāmam, every divine name is a seed of this supremely secret knowledge, when planted in the heart and nurtured with purity of thought and devotion, germinate and grow to yield the flower of supreme knowledge and the fruit of liberation.

Benefit of this knowledge

Samsāra, the eternal cycle of birth, or the persistence inadequacy of fulfilment is the result of not understanding the Truth of oneness with the BRAHMAM. Not understanding the true identity of the SELF with the ISHVARA causes separation.

This separation is eternally painful and to resolve only, we always seek objects of desire, hoping those would offer the fulfillment. Thus by not knowing the true cause of redemption, we keep on loiter in the pursuit of worldly objects and forever dwell within the clutches of *Samsāra*.

This supreme knowledge leads to *mukti* or the liberation from *Samsāra*, at the every moment of Self-realization and the experience non-duality.

Although Advaita Vedāntā adopts the method of cause and effect, in its final purport of asserting non-duality, the very concept of cause-effect is rendered unreal. The whole creation theory is tossed away.

The application of cause and effect and the characterisation of their relationship is only used to bring out the real nature of BRAHMAM.

For example, Cause is One, Effect is many (e.g. Gold is one, the golden ornaments are many), Cause is eternal, Effect is ephemeral (e.g. Gold is the residue but the forms of ornaments go), Cause is substantial, Effect is insubstantial (e.g. Gold is the core material, the forms of ornaments are immaterial), Cause is real, Effect is unreal (e.g. Gold exists in all ornaments; but we say not bangle, not ring etc. by looking at the forms). In the same way, BRAHMAM is the Cause and everything else the effect, that are variegated.

By understanding the characteristics of cause and effect, as applied to Vedānta, the aspirants will be able to her *sāadhanā* in the right direction.

The important point is that we should focus and grasp what is substantial and leave behind the insubstantial for our freedom. In a way, this is experienced in the deep-sleep state, where we shed all our upādi, all the variegated effects of the world, and the duality behind thereby in the state of tranquillity. If only we could remove the veil of ignorance in the deep-sleep, the Truth blisteringly would shine forth.

The benefit of understanding this mantrā and pursuing the path to Truth is therefore the liberation.

Ōṃ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ |





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