

LESSON 15 - Pañca-kośa-viveka (Part 1)

THE SELF'S REAL nature of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (Sat-Cit-Ananda) remains hidden from the seeker who identifies with the matter vestures. Not only is it hidden, but the Self also seemingly appears to be endowed with the vexing qualities of these matter vestures. To explain: just as a transparent paperweight seems to take up the colour of the table-cloth on which it rests, so too, the Self, due to its proximity with the not-Self, seems to assume the qualities of the not-Self. Hence, the experience of the Self as being a limited individual (jīva) suffering from matter-based modifications, such as birth, growth, disease, old age, death, hunger, thirst, joy, sorrow and so on – in short, the experience of bondage (bandha).

Since bondage has its foundation in the unholy wedlock of the Self and the not-Self, it is no wonder that Vedanta never tires of laying emphasis on the need to differentiate the Self from the not-Self. The student's previous question:

"Tayoh (atma-anatmanoh) vivekah katham - How does one differentiate the Self from the not-Self" - is a query on precisely this crucial aspect of Vedantic knowledge.

Lessons 15 and 16 provide the answer.

The Problem: Non-differentiation In atma-bodha (verse 15), Ācārya Sankara explains with an example the seeming association of the Self with the not-Self.

पञ्चकोशादियोगेन तत्तन्मय इव स्थितः।

शुद्धात्मा नीलवस्त्रादियोगेन स्फटिको यथा।

pañcakośādiyogena tattanmaya iva sthitaḥ,
śuddhātmā nīlavastrādiyogena sphaṭiko yathā.

Just as in the case of a crystal that appears to gather unto itself the colour of the blue cloth present in its vicinity, so too, due to the identification with the five sheaths, the immaculate Self appears to have borrowed their qualities upon Itself.

The five sheaths or pañca-kosas mentioned in this verse are the five layers of the not-Self:

(1) Annamaya-kośa or food sheath: This is the physical body and is also known as sthūla-śarīra (gross body).

(2) Pranamaya-kośa or vital-air sheath: The following are the constituents of this sheath: "pranas that govern the physiological functions, such as breathing, circulation and so on" organs of action (karmendriya), the legs and hands, for instance, that govern the motor functions of walking, grasping and so on

(3) Manomaya-kośa or mental sheath: The following are the constituents of this sheath:

- mind (manas)
- memory (citta)
- sense organs (jñanendriya) eyes and ears and the like

(4) Vijñanamaya-kośa or intellectual sheath: The following are the constituents of this sheath:

- intellect (buddhi)

- ego (ahankāra)
- sense organs (jñānendriya)

The prāṇamaya-kośa, manomaya-kośa and vijñānamaya-kośa are together given the appellation 'sūkṣma-śarīra' (subtle body).

(5) Ānandamaya-kośa or bliss sheath is made up of vāsanās (inherent tendencies) and ajñāna about the Self (ignorance) and is also called the 'kāraṇa-śarīra' (causal body).

As mentioned earlier, these five sheaths exist in close proximity with the Self, and therefore the Self seems to take upon Itself the attributes of these kośas (sheaths). The following table gives an overview of the various attributes of the five kosas that are superimposed on the Self.

	<i>Kośas</i>	<i>Attributes superimposed on the Self</i>
1.	Annamaya-kośa (food sheath)	The physical body's height, weight, gender, health, sickness and so on.
2.	Prāṇamaya-kośa (vital-air sheath)	Attributes of the prāṇas such as hunger, thirst, tiredness and so on as well as the attributes of the organs of action, the gift of the gab or lack of speech, for instance
3.	Manomaya-kośa (mental sheath)	Attributes of the mind and memory: worry, doubt, indecision, and various emotions; the attributes of the organs of knowledge, such as impairment in vision, hearing and so on.
4.	Vijñānamaya-kośa (intellectual sheath)	Attributes of the intellect: doubt and knowledge and doership and enjoyership, which form the attributes of the ego. Also are superimposed the properties of the organs of knowledge, such as seeing and hearing.
5.	Ānandamaya-kośa (bliss sheath)	Various vāsanās (tendencies) as well as joy of anticipation (priya), the thrill of attainment (moda) and the happiness of enjoyment (pramoda).

The

illustration of the colourless crystal (sphatika) assuming the colour of the cloth present in its vicinity is used by Sankarācārya in the Ātma-bodha verse (quoted on page 1) to clarify the idea of seeming transference of the properties of one locus (substratum or object) on the other. The Self too, which is by nature free of all qualities (nirguna), just like the crystal, seems to take on the qualities of the five sheaths or matter vestures that lie in its proximity. When this happens, I fail to experience the immaculate Sat-Cit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) nature of the Self; rather, I perceive myself as being endowed with the changes that happen to the kosas. To explain: When the body is unhealthy, I say I am unhealthy; when the mind is troubled by a situation, I say I am suffering; and when the intellect is in a dilemma, I say I am confused³. As

a result of my identification with the kośas I not only take on the various modifications of the kosas, but also fall prey to their demands and urges. When the tongue demands a sweet, I have to have it, else, I become miserable!

In short, my autobiography becomes the life history of the kośas - body, mind, intellect, senses and so on - and in this utter mix-up and confusion of identities, I lose the awareness of my true Sat-Cit-Ananda (Existence- Consciousness-Bliss) nature. The non-differentiation of the Self from the matter vestures that surround me is precisely the root cause of my suffering.

Differentiation: The Solution

How are we to retrieve the Self which has thus become inextricably, though only seemingly, mixed up with the matter vestures? How are we to separate the Self from the kosas (sheaths) covering it? Ācārya Sankara gives the solution to this vexing problem in Atma-bodha (verse 16):

वपुस्तुषादिभिः कोशैः युक्तं युक्त्यावघाततः।

आत्मानमन्तरं शुद्धं विविच्यात् तण्डुलं यथा।

vapustuṣāḍibhiḥ kośaiḥ yuktam yuktyāvaghātataḥ,

ātmānamantaram suddham vivicyāt taṇḍulam yathā.

Through discriminative analysis and logical thinking, one should separate the pure inner Self from the sheaths as one separates the rice from the husk, bran and the like that are covering it.

Rice grains are obtained by removing the sheath, such as husk and bran, that covers it. So too, the Self is to be recognised by removing the five sheaths covering it. This 'removal' is obviously not to be construed literally, for it is impossible to physically remove the kośas - body, prāṇas, mind and so on - from the Self. The 'removal' is an intellectual negation; it is of the nature of understanding - I am not the five kośas - arrived at through 'Ātma-anātma-viveka' or the discriminative analysis of the Self from the not-Self. It is verily this differentiation of the Self from the five sheaths that is described in Vedanta as the 'removal of the sheaths' and sometimes also referred to as 'transcending the sheaths'.

Logical Basis for Ātma-anātma-viveka

The five kosas (sheaths) are not the Self because of the following reasons:

(1) The kośas are known as 'mine': When I say 'my car', I remain the possessor of the car and different from it. So too, when I say 'my body', 'my thoughts', 'my hunger', it is evident that 'I', the possessor of the body, mind and the prāṇas, have to be different from them. The reason is: "Madīyatvena jñātam atma na bhavati - That which is known as 'mine' cannot be me," that is it cannot become the Self.

(2) The sheaths are objects of my knowledge: For the relation of the witness(er) and witnessed to exist, the witness(er) (drk) has to be different from the witnessed (drśya). That which is 'witnessed by me' (drśya) is different from the 'me', the one who witnesses (drk). The body, mind, senses and so on are all objects of my knowledge and therefore fall under the category of the 'known' or 'witnessed' (drśya). Different from them is the Self, the sole witness (drk) of all the five sheaths.

Both these logical conclusions: (1) that which is known as 'mine' cannot be the Self and (2) that which is an object of knowledge cannot be the Self, point to the fact that, 'I', the subject or the Self is different from the five sheaths.

Once the student has studied Vedanta and has gained sufficient understanding of the nature of the Self through sravana (listening to the Scriptures) and manana (reflection on the ideas learnt), he becomes capable of conducting the following detailed, yet potent 'pañca-kośa-viveka'.

Pañca-kośa-viveka

In Vedanta, the methodology of differentiating the Self from the five sheaths is termed 'pañca-kośa-viveka' (pañca - five; kośa - sheaths; viveka - differentiation). In Vivekacūdāmaṇi (verses 151 and 152), Śaṅkarācārya speaks of the importance of this pañca-kosa-viveka when he says: "When all these five sheaths have been negated, the pure, ever blissful, supreme and self-effulgent inner Self is apprehended. The wise man who has attained the knowledge of Vedanta should learn to differentiate the Self from the not-Self, in order to remove the shackles of bondage. Only then does he know his own Self to be Existence-Knowledge-Bliss and enjoy the bliss of the Self."

In this methodology, the nature of the Self, which has already become clear intellectually through prior listening to the Guru (śravaṇa) and reflection on Vedānta (manana) as - Sat (existence), Cit (consciousness), Ānanda (bliss), Enlivener of the kosas, Nitya (eternal), Witness of the kośas, Nirguna (without qualities), Niskriya (without actions), Nirvikalpa (without differences or thoughts), Nirañjana (untainted), Nirvikāra (without modifications), Nirākāra (without form), Nirmala (without dirt) and so on - is used as the touchstone or criterion to examine whether the five sheaths are the Self⁶. In this pañca-kośa-viveka, that is the scrutiny of whether the five sheaths are the Self, one compares the above-mentioned nature of the Self that one has already understood with the properties of each of the pañca-kosas (five sheaths) and, then, observing that the characteristics of the pañca-kosas do not agree with or correspond at all to the Self's nature such as Sat, Cit, Ānanda, Nitya, Nirguṇa and so on, all the pañca-kosas are negated one by one to be the not-Self. This meticulous methodology of pañca-kośa-viveka will become clear as we negate each of the five sheaths in the following sections.

Negation of Annamaya-kośa

The physical body is the most powerful attraction for the majority of living beings. But what exactly is this physical body? The body begins its life journey as a seed from the mother and the father. The seed was formed from the food assimilated by them. When in the mother's womb, it was maintained by the food consumed by the mother. After its birth, the body grows in size and weight because of the food consumed and assimilated by it day after day.

When it perishes, the body becomes food for other living creatures such as birds, insects and plants. This physical body, which is born from food, exists in food and finally becomes food, is rightly called the 'food sheath' or 'annamaya-kośa'.

Constituted of skin, flesh, fat, blood, bones, marrow and so on, the annamaya-kośa parades as the Self. The annamaya-kośa (food sheath) is not the Self because:

- (1) The body is impermanent: The body's existence is only for a short time, from its birth to death - at the most a span of eighty to hundred years. The Self is 'nitya' (eternal). How then can the transient body ever become the permanent Self?
- (2) The body is subject to modifications: During the time span it lives, the body changes from moment to moment. Age, disease, climatic conditions, the condition of the mind, one's lifestyle and many more factors take their toll on the body, and it changes accordingly. Since the Self is 'nirvikāri' (changeless), how can the changing body ever be the changeless Self?

(3) The body is inert: The Self is of the nature of Consciousness while the body, being made up of inert substances - calcium, carbon and their compounds - is inert in nature. The inert body can never be the Self, the very embodiment of Consciousness.

For these reasons, I am not the annamaya-kosa; and because I am not the annamaya-kośa, I am free from birth, death, disease, age, height, weight, gender, nationality and so on, which are all the properties of the annamaya-kosa. Whenever the seeker observes the body to be surreptitiously parading itself as the Self, he should bring this knowledge to mind and deny emphatically - I am not the body.

Negation of Prāṇamaya-kośa

The five prāṇas - prāṇa, apāna, vyāna, udāna and samāna, which govern the various physiological functions such as respiration, evacuation of wastes and circulation of blood along with the five organs of actions (karma-indriya) - the hand, leg, the organ of speech, genitals and anus together form the prāṇamaya-kosa or the vital-air sheath.

The organs of action as well as the pranas originate from the five inert elements⁹ and are hence inert in nature. Your breath does not know that you are studying Vedanta! In contrast with the pranamaya-kosa, the Self is of the nature of Consciousness, ever enlivening and illumining all the activities of the prāṇamaya-kośa.

Since I am not the prāṇamaya-kosa, the properties of the prāṇas, such as hunger and thirst, as well as the functions of the organs of actions, such as speaking, writing, sitting, running and so on, do not belong to me.

The seeker should put an end to the pranamaya-kosa arrogating Selfhood to itself. Notions such as I am hungry, I am thirsty, I am walking, I am speaking are all due to one's identification with the pranas and the organs of action.

Relegate unto the prāṇamaya-kośa these qualities and become free!

Negation of Manomaya-kośa

The manomaya-kośa or the mental sheath is constituted of the mind, memory and the five organs (or faculties) of knowledge - ear, skin, eye, tongue and nose. The organs of knowledge by themselves do not perceive objects. The mind flows through an organ such as the eye and reaches the place where an object, for example a pot, is, and then the experience, 'I know the pot' is generated.

The phenomenal powers of the mind are evident in one's dreams, wherein it projects a whole new world of dream objects. The mind itself, like an actor playing many roles, becomes the manifold world of the dream - the dream-subject, dream-object as well as the dream-experience of joy and sorrow. Thus, the triad of 'experiencer-experienced-experience' of the dream state is the mind alone.

The mind alone causes man's attachment to the body and sense objects. These attachments bind him like an animal being bound by ropes, denying him the freedom to be the infinite blissful Self. Thereafter, the same mind creates distaste for the sense objects, as though they were poison, and liberates man from bondage. Therefore the famous declaration of the Amrtabindu-upaniṣad - "Mana eva manusyāṇām kāraṇam bandhamokṣayoḥ - The mind alone is the cause of both bondage as well as Liberation."

The manomaya-kośa cannot be the supreme Self because:

(1) Manomaya-kośa has a beginning and an end: The mind arises in the waking state and ceases in deep sleep state. But the Self has no beginning (anādi) nor end (ananta).

(2) Manomaya-kośa is subject to modifications: Desire, doubt, faith, fortitude, fear and so on are all the modifications of the mind. The mind is ever fickle; at one moment sorrowful and at another moment joyful, at one moment peaceful and at another moment agitated. Also, the faculties of knowledge, the eyes, ears and so on, grow weak with age. The fickle mind and the regressing senses cannot be the changeless (nirvikārī) Self.

(3) Manomaya-kośa is of the nature of sorrow: From the standpoint of eternal Bliss, the little joys and pleasures that the mind ekes out from the world are at best, comparative sorrows. This may be hard to accept initially but a little investigation will only establish it so. Even when the mind is joyous, its joyful nature is accompanied by the fear of change. Its very desire to acquire the unacquired, hold the acquired, and not be willing to let go the gained are all causes of pain. Thus, the very fabric of the mind is restlessness and pain.

Interestingly, therefore, Vedanta only recognises the two states of mind - happiness and sorrow - but with a difference. It regards sorrow as 'present sorrow' and happiness as 'future sorrow'!13 The mind, which is ever in the shadow of or directly in the grip of sorrow, can never be the ever-blissful Ātman.

(4) It is the object of knowledge: The seer and the seen cannot co-exist in the same locus, that is both of them cannot be the same. The Self is the seer and the mind is the seen. This is evidenced in experiences such as 'my mind was elsewhere, I did not see', or 'my feelings are not good today' and so on. Since the manomaya-kośa is an object of my awareness, it cannot become 'me', the witness Self.

Conclusion

In the next lesson, we shall see how the other two kośas, vijñānamaya-kośa and anandamaya-kośa, are also not the Self. These are important lessons. They are not meant for mere study and intellectual comprehension. The student should try to bring this knowledge in his actual day-to-day life experiences.

Thus, when you suffer, say with a fever, bring this knowledge to actual use and tell yourself: "The body has fever, not me." So also when the mind is under the grip of desire and you are fighting against it, just assert your freedom: "This desire does not belong to me; it belongs to the mind." It is not easy to do this, but if you sincerely, intensely and repeatedly practise this, you will find that the desire loses its hold over you. For only as long as Selfhood is superimposed on the matter vestures do they become powerful masters and we their slaves. But the moment we deny the 'loaning' of our Selfhood, the matter vestures become our obedient servants. Try. You can!