

LESSON 16 - Pañca-kośa-viveka (Part 2)

TAÑCA-KOSA-VIVEKA or the differentiation of the Self from the five sheaths is the Vedantic methodology by which the nature of the Self, which has already become clear intellectually through śravana (listening to the Guru) and manana (reflection on Vedānta) as Sat (existence), Cit (consciousness), Ānanda (bliss), Enlivener of the kośas, Nitya (eternal), Witness of the kośas,

Nirguna (without qualities), Niskriya (without actions), Nirvikalpa (without differences or thoughts) and so on, is used as the touchstone or criterion to examine whether the five sheaths are the Self. One compares the above- mentioned nature of the Self with the properties of each of the pañca-kośas (five sheaths) and, then, on observing that the characteristics of the pañca-kośas do not agree with or correspond at all to the Self's nature, all the pañca-kośas are negated one by one to be the not-Self. We had discussed in Lesson 15 (Pañca-kośa-viveka - 1) how the annamaya-kośa (food sheath), prāṇamaya-kośa (vital-air sheath) and manomaya-kośa (mental sheath) are not the Self. In this lesson, we shall discuss the remaining two sheaths, vijñānamaya-kośa (intellectual sheath) and anandamaya-kośa (bliss sheath) and know that they too fall under the category of the not-Self (anatman).

Constituents of the Vijñānamaya-kośa

- The vijñānamaya-kośa or the intellectual sheath is constituted of the following:
- Buddhi (intellect) - thoughts of the nature of analysis such as differentiation, judgement, reasoning and so on . Ahankāra (ego) - the doership and enjoyership thought.
- Jñāna-indriyas (organs of knowledge) - eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin.

We shall now discuss some of the salient features of the vijñānamaya-kośa and then proceed to negate it as the not-Self.

Features of the Vijñānamaya-kośa

(1) Vijñānamaya-kośa is the locus of cidābhāsa: The vijñānamaya-kośa can be considered, for the sake of understanding, similar to a water pool and the ahankāra or ego aspect of the vijñānamaya-kośa as its uppermost layer. Just as the sun, which though falling upon the whole water pool, is reflected pre-eminently in the uppermost layers of the water, so too the Self's presence, though generally experienced throughout the vijñānamaya-kośa as sentiency, is particularly reflected in the ahankāra or the ego thought, that is the uppermost layer of the vijñānamaya-kośa. This Consciousness reflected in the ahankāra is termed 'cidābhāsa' (Cit - Consciousness; ābhāsa - reflection). The cidābhāsa and ahankāra, so to say, become one compact entity, which is termed 'jīva' or the 'limited individual I'. Mathematically one may say: Jīva = cidābhāsa + ahankāra.

The vijñānamaya-kośa, which is inherently inert in nature, becomes capable of knowledge and understanding because of the presence of this cidābhāsa or reflected Consciousness. Thus, the vijñānamaya-kośa becoming sentient is similar to the case of the tungsten filament, which, though dark and essentially non-luminous in nature, becomes bright and luminous when an electric current passes through it.

(2) Locus of kartṛtva and bhokṛtva: The ahankāra or the ego-thought is characterised by 'kartṛtva' and 'bhokṛtva' and has the vijñānamaya-kośa as its locus. 'Kartṛtva' is the 'sense of

doership' or the notion 'I am the doer' (aham kartā) and 'bhoktrva' is the 'sense of enjoyership' or the notion 'I am the enjoyer' (aham bhoktā).

Both these notions arise because of the identification of the vijñānamaya-kośa with the other sheaths. When the prāṇas, organs of knowledge, organs of action, mind and so on are engaged in their respective functions, such as digesting, seeing, walking, doubting, volition, determining and so on, the vijñānamaya-kośa identifies with these various actions and considers itself to be their karta (doer). Thus, though it is the prāṇas that perform the function of digestion, the vijñānamaya-kośa identifying with the prāṇas claims, "I have eaten." The function of seeing belongs to the sense organ eye; yet, the vijñānamaya-kośa identifying with the eye declares, "I see." Identifying with the organ of action, the leg, it says, "I walk." Identifying with the mind it states, "I doubt." It is thus the identification of the vijñānamaya-kośa with the body, prāṇas, senses and other aspects of the not-Self that causes karttrva or the sense of doership.

Karttrva does not end in itself; it naturally leads to bhoktrva, the notion of enjoyership. Both karttrva and bhoktrva are like the two sides of a same coin - they necessarily exist together. Why should this be so? All actions produce their respective reactions; every action performed by the prāṇas, organs of knowledge, organs of action, mind or intellect leads to its corresponding result.

Thus when nutritious food is eaten - an action, there is a sense of fulfilment and good health - its corresponding result. Gluttony - the action, causes ill health - its corresponding result. The vijñānamaya-kośa, after arrogating the sense of doership, proceeds to enjoy or suffer the results (of the actions) by owning up these experiences and becoming their bhokta or enjoyer. It says: I enjoyed the food, I loved the movie, I hate him, I find his actions disgusting and so on. This sense of enjoyership, characterised by the notion I am the enjoyer is termed bhoktrva.

Both karttrva (the notion of doership) and bhoktrva (the notion of enjoyership), the two facets of the ahankāra, have the vijñānamaya-kośa as their locus.

(3) Vijñānamaya-kośa nourishes saṃsāra: Actions performed in any given lifetime are numerous. Some of their results are experienced in the present life itself as pleasure and pain and the individual jīva exhausts those results.

But what about those results that will manifest in the future - who is to experience them? The law of action demands that the doer alone must be the enjoyer; not that one individual is the doer of the actions and a different individual is the enjoyer of their results. The individual jīva, that is the cidābhāsa and ahankāra complex, which had performed the action, takes a new embodiment in order to experience the results of its past actions. In this way, saṃsāra, the cycle of birth and death, continues.

(4) Experiences the three states of awareness: The three states of awareness are waking (jāgrat-avasthā), dream (svapna-avasthā) and deep sleep states (suṣupti-avastha). The individual goes through all these three states of awareness and experiences various joys and sorrows therein. Waking and dream states have their unpredictable ups and downs - success and failure, joy and sorrow, honour and dishonour, pain and pleasure and so on. In the deep sleep state, the senses, mind and intellect are folded up and there is the absence of all perception. The individual herein experiences the absence of all knowledge (abhāva) and revels in the bliss of ignorance. The waking state individual is termed 'viśva', the dream state individual is called 'taijasa' and the deep sleep state individual is given the appellation 'prajna'. These names are thus the different appellations for one and the same individual

(ahankāra+cidābhāsa) as it goes through the three states of awareness. This individual has its locus in the vijñānamaya-kośa.

(5) Mutual Superimposition of the Self and Vijñānamaya-kosa: Fire has no particular shape or weight. Iron is dark in colour and cold to touch. But when these two entities, which are utterly different in character come together, there is a mutual transfer of each others' qualities - fire acquires the properties of iron, and iron exhibits the properties of fire. Thus, when a piece of iron is heated in a smithy and beaten into different shapes - sphere, cube, cylinder and so on - the fire and the iron seem to fuse and become one entity. Depending upon the shape of the iron pieces, the fire appears spherical, cubical, cylindrical, rectangular and so on. Also, fire comes to possess the borrowed weight of the iron pieces - one pound heat, ten pounds heat and so on. On the other hand, because of the contact with the fire, iron, which is naturally cold to touch and black in colour appears red hot to touch and bright in colour. This phenomenon of 'mutual superimposition', wherein there is the mutual transfer of properties occasioned by the close proximity of objects is termed in Vedānta 'anyonya-adhyāsa' or 'itaretara-adhyāsa'.

In much the same way, because of their proximity with each other, the Self and the vijñānamaya-kosa seem to assume the nature of the other. The Self exhibits the characteristics of the vijñānamaya-kosa such as kartṛtva (sense of doership), bhokṛtva (sense of enjoyership), transmigration (rebirth) and so on and appears to be bound and suffering. On the other hand, the vijñānamaya-kośa appears endowed with consciousness and exhibits the capacity to know and understand.

Pinpointing the Problem

The limited individual or jīva, that is the cidābhāsa and ahankāra complex, parades as the Self. To compound the problem, this limited individual identifies with the other kośas - annamaya-kośa (food sheath), prāṇamaya-kośa (vital-air sheath), manomaya-kośa (mental sheath) and ānandamaya-kośa (bliss sheath) - leading to the transfer of the various properties of these sheaths onto the limited individual or jīva. Thus the notions: I am sad, I am sentimental, I am dull, I am hungry, I am getting old and so on.

Till this point, there is really speaking, no problem per se for the Paramatman (supreme Self), as the problem of identification with the kośas (sheaths) and the resultant suffering lies merely at the level of the individual ego. However, when the intellect makes the blunder of mistaking the individual jīva to be the supreme Self, kartṛtva (sense of doership), bhokṛtva (sense of enjoyership) and the characteristics of all the various kosas, which exist in the sphere of the vijñānamaya-kośa, are now transferred, all in one go, onto the realm of the supreme Self and It then appears bound. Please note that in reality there is no bondage for the Self and that It is ever-free, but owing to the intellect's wrong perception that the jīva is the Self, the characteristics of the jīva and the kośas become superimposed on the Self and the Self appears bound.

If we are to pinpoint the actual cause of the supreme Self's bondage, it is this: the intellect imagining the limited individual to be the supreme Self. Thus, it is through the agency of the intellect (vijñānamaya-kośa) alone that the Paramatman (supreme Self) appears bound. The whole effort of the seeker should therefore be to 'veto' the limited individual which claims for itself Selfhood.

Negation of Vijñānamaya-kośa

In his work Vivekacūdāmaṇi (verse 206), Śankarācārya enumerates the reasons for negating the vijñānamaya-kośa as the not-Self.

अतो नायं परात्मा स्याद्विज्ञानमयशब्दभाक्।

विकारित्वाज्जडत्वाच्च परिच्छिन्नत्वहेतुतः।

दृश्यत्वाद्यभिचारित्वात् नानित्यो नित्य इष्यते॥

ato nāyam parātmā syādvijñānamayaśabdabhāk,

vikāritvājjadatvācca paricchinnavahetutaḥ,

drśyatvādvvyabhicāritvāt nānityo nitya isyate.

The vijñānamaya-kośa cannot be the supreme Self because it is subject to change, is inert, limited, remains an object of knowledge and is not always present. Indeed a perishable thing cannot be said to be the imperishable Self.

Let us now examine each of the above-mentioned reasons for negating the vijñānamaya-kośa as the not-Self:

(1) Vijñānamaya-kośa is subject to change (vikāritvāt): The intellect's ideas and ideals often undergo change. The vijñānamaya-kośa is subject to the vagaries of the gunas. When sattva-guna is predominant, the intellect is steady, capable of knowledge and intuitive. When rajas predominates, the intellect becomes restless and hasty. When tamas takes over, the intellect becomes dull and sleepy. The Upanisads indicate the Self to be without any changes or modification (nirvikārī). How can such a changeless Self ever be the changing vijñānamaya-kośa?

(2) Vijñānamaya-kośa is inert (jadatvāt): The intellectual sheath is essentially inert as it is born from the five subtle elements (tanmātras) - space, air, fire, water and earth - that are inert in nature. It is only when the light of Consciousness 'touches' it that the vijñānamaya-kośa becomes sentient and capable of its varied functions - thinking, rationalising, differentiating, judging and so on. The Upanisads affirm the Self to be pure Consciousness (cit-svarūpa).

How can the vijñānamaya-kośa, which subsists on borrowed sentiency, ever be the Self which is Consciousness itself? Can the borrower and lender be one and the same?

(3) Vijñānamaya-kośa is limited (paricchinnavāt): The vijñānamaya-kośa is spatially limited and hence not all-pervasive; every thought appears in the 'intellect-space', dies and then gives way to the next thought to arise. Such a limited intellect can never be the Self which is described in the Upanisads as 'vibhu' or 'all-pervading'.

(4) Vijñānamaya-kośa is an object of knowledge (drśyatvāt): The intellect is an object of our awareness. Hence we are able to say, My intellect is dull today, My intellect was much sharper a few years ago and so on. The vijñānamaya-kośa, which is an object of our awareness, can never be the witness Self, the subject that never becomes an object at all.

(5) Vijñānamaya-kośa is not constantly present (vyabhicāritvāt): In deep sleep and if a person swoons, the intellect is absent. In the waking state, it is in full action. In dreams, the intellect is overpowered by the projections of the mind and its important faculties, such as the power of judgement and analysis, remain clouded. This inconstant and variable vijñānamaya-kośa can never be the eternal Self.

Solution: Shifting of Attention

Use the following analogy in your seat of contemplation to firmly negate the Selfhood of vijñānamaya-kośa. Consider the case of the sun getting reflected in a bucket of water. In this analogy, the sun represents the Paramatman (supreme Self), the reflected sun the cidābhasa (reflected Consciousness), the water in the bucket the vijñānamaya-kośa, and the top layer of the water the ahankāra or ego-thought.

When the water is muddy, the reflection appears hazy and when the water is clear the reflection too is clear; when a breeze unsettles the water, the reflection is broken; when the water evaporates, the reflected sun dies. During all these modifications and changes, the sun in the sky ever remains untouched by the fortunes and misfortunes of the reflected sun because of the very fact that the reflected sun is not the sun shining in the sky above. In the same way, when tamas makes the vijñānamaya-kośa dull, the cidābhāsa appears hazy; when winds of rajas disturb the tranquillity of the vijñānamaya-kośa, the cidābhāsa seems all unsettled; when sattva predominates in the vijñānamaya-kośa, the cidābhāsa is clear and bright. But during all these changes that happen to the vijñānamaya-kośa and therefore to the cidābhasa, the Self, which is the pure Consciousness, remains ever the untouched and unaffected Witness.

As long as our attention is on the reflection, the real sun is not perceived. In order to see the sun, we will have to lift our eyes away from the jar, the water and the reflection and look high up. In the sun there is no jar, no water nor any reflection.

Shift your attention from the vijñānamaya-kośa and the cidābhāsa, the limited individual, and turn your attention to the Paramatman by focussing on the witness Self. Make this U-turn in your attention now, at this very moment. Śankarācārya guides the seeker's attention from the vijñānamaya-kośa, the scene of the turmoil, to the Paramatman, the abode of peace and bliss (Vivekacūdāmaṇi, verses 220 and 221):

देहं धियं चित्प्रतिबिम्बमेवं विसृज्य बुद्धौ निहितं गुहायाम्।

द्रष्टारमात्मानमखण्डबोधं सर्वप्रकाशं सदसद्विलक्षणम्।

नित्यं विभुं सर्वगतं सुसूक्ष्ममन्तर्बहिःशून्यमनन्यमात्मनः।

विज्ञाय सम्यङ्नजरूपमेतत् पुमान् विपाप्मा विरजो विमृत्युः॥

deham dhiyam citpratibimbamevam visrjya buddhau nihitam guhāyām,

draṣṭāramātmānamakhaṇḍabodham sarvaprakāśam sadasadvilakṣaṇam.

nityam vibhum sarvagatam susūkṣmamantarbahiḥśūnyamananyamātmanah,

vijñāya samyannijarūpametat pumān vipāpmā virajo vimṛtyuh.

Thus leaving aside the body, the intellect and the reflection of Consciousness in it, and realising well in the cave of the intellect the witness Self, which is of the nature of absolute Knowledge, the illuminator of everything, distinct from the gross and the subtle, eternal, omnipresent, all-pervading and supremely subtle, without exterior or interior, become free from sin, blemish, grief and death.

All problems cease the very moment the intellect understands the nature of the Self and negates the individuality as a mere charlatan and a veritable panjandrum. Shift your attention to the pure Self and put an end to bondage here and now!

Ānandamaya-kośa

The ānandamaya-kośa is constituted of (1) ajñāna (ignorance of the Self) and (2) vāsanās (tendencies). The happiness of deep sleep, wherein there is the complete ignorance of both the world of objects as well as the Self, is the experience of the anandamaya-kośa. The bliss sheath is also experienced in the waking and dream states during moments of intense quietude. Thus, when one watches the sun setting in the distant horizon past the ocean, peace wells up in one's heart. A writer, an artist, a poet, a scientist and a mathematician experience joy when they are immersed in their respective creative fields.

These moments of bliss are all expressions of anandamaya-kośa. Priya (joy of perceiving the object of one's desire), moda (thrill of possessing the object of one's desire) and pramoda (happiness of actually enjoying the object of desire) are also expressions of the ānandamaya-kośa.

The anandamaya-kosa reflects the Bliss aspect of the Self. When one transcends the layers of thought encrustations - the manomaya-kosa and the vijñānamaya-kośa - and reaches the ānandamaya-kośa, one gets to enjoy the reflected bliss of the Self. Note that the bliss experienced at the anandamaya-kośa zone is just the reflected bliss of the Self and not the pure Bliss of the Self.

This idea of the anandamaya-kosa's bliss being merely the reflected Bliss of the Self can be explained with an analogy. On a full moon day, when the clouds that cover the moon clear up, we get to see the full moon and enjoy its brilliance. But note that the moon's effulgence does not truly belong to it; it is only borrowed from the sun. In this analogy, the clouds stand for the manomaya-kośa and vijñānamaya-kośa, the moon for the ānandamaya-kośa, the moon's effulgence for the reflected Bliss of the Self and the sun for the pure Self.

Negation of Ānandamaya-kośa

Śankarācārya enumerates the various arguments for negating the ānandamaya-kośa as the not-Self (Vivekacūdāmaṇi, verse 209):

नैवायमानन्दमयः परात्मा सोपाधिकत्वात् प्रकृतेर्विकारात्।

कार्यत्वहेतोः सुकृतक्रियायाः विकारसङ्घातसमाहितत्वात्॥

naivāyamānandamayah parātmā sopādhikatvāt prakṛtervikārāt,

kāryatvahetoḥ sukṛtakriyāyāḥ vikārasaṅghātasamāhitatvāt.

Nor can the anandamaya-kośa be the supreme Self because it is conditioned (by causes such as the perception, possession and enjoyment of desired objects). It is the modification of ignorance, is an effect of good deeds occasioned due to the results of past action and it lies embedded within the other sheaths, which are themselves all modifications of inert matter.

Let us now examine briefly some of the important reasons adduced by Śankarācārya in the above-quoted verse that justify the negation of this ānandamaya-kośa as the not-Self:

(1) Ānandamaya-kośa is conditioned (sopādhikatvat): Priya, moda and pramoda are conditioned in the sense that their existence depends respectively upon the perception, possession and enjoyment of the desired objects. The Upanisads describe the Bliss of the Self as not dependant on any external causes. The anandamaya-kosa that depends on external factors cannot be the unconditioned and unlimited Self.

(2) Ānandamaya-kośa is a modification (prakṛteḥ vikārāt): The ānandamaya-kośa is a modification of ignorance⁸. That it is a mere modification of ignorance is evident from the experience we all have in deep sleep because, upon waking, everyone has the memory: 'I did not know anything'. The Self, which is described in the Upanisads as being without any modification (vikāra) and of the nature of Knowledge, can never be the anandamaya-kośa, which is merely a modification of ignorance.

(3) Ānandamaya-kośa is an effect of good deeds (kāryatvahetoḥ sukṛtakriyāyāḥ): The law of causality affirms that an individual gets his share of happiness based on his past good deeds and suffers because of his past bad deeds. The various states of bliss experienced through this sheath, such as priya, moda, pramoda and the blissful ignorance of deep sleep, are thus occasioned by the fructification of one's 'punya' or 'sukṛta' (i.e. results of past good deeds). The experiences of the anandamaya-kośa, being thus effected by one's punyas have a beginning and, therefore, inevitably come to an end.

The Upanisads describe the pure Bliss of the Self as without beginning and end; therefore, the joys of the anandamaya-kosa cannot be the same beginningless and endless Bliss of the Self.

(4) Ānandamaya-kośa is associated with other matter vestures (vikāra- sanghāta-samāhitatvāt): The ānandamaya-kosa lies embedded and immanent in the other four kośas - vijñānamaya-kośa (intellectual sheath), manomaya-kośa (mental sheath), prāṇamaya-kośa (vital-air sheath) and annamaya-kośa (food sheath). This anandamaya-kośa, which ever remains associated with the other matter vestures, cannot ever be the unattached pure Self that is beyond the pale of the matter vestures.

Conclusion

Lesson 15 (Pañca-kośa-viveka - 1) and Lesson 16 (Pañca-kośa-viveka - 2) have answered the student's question: "Tayoh (atma-anātmanoh) vivekaḥ katham – how does one differentiate the Self from the not-Self?" In these two lessons, we have seen elaborately how all the five matter vestures, the annamaya-kośa (food sheath), prāṇamaya-kośa (vital-air sheath), manomaya-kośa (mental sheath), vijñānamaya-kośa (intellectual sheath) and ānandamaya-kośa (bliss sheath), are not the Self. A note of caution: Even while negating these sheaths Ānanda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss). If this is not done, one is invariably led to an erroneous notion that if the Self is none of the sheaths, then the Self must be an absence of everything - a mere 'śūnya' (non-entity). Vedānta Acāryas have warned their students of this hazard⁹. Negation of the not-Self must run parallel with the assertion of the Sat-Cit-Ānanda Ātman.