

What is Bondage?

Chapter 10

introduction

We've covered the student's first two questions:

1. What is not-Self (anatman)?
2. What is the supreme Self (Paramatman)?

Now, understanding both the non-permanent bodies (anatman) and the eternal Self (Paramatman), we're ready to tackle the next question:

What is bondage? (Ko nama bandhah?)

The three limitations

The three limitations

Vedanta says our true Self is eternal, pure, and free. But in reality, we feel **limited by space, time, and objects**. Let's explore these limitations.

1. **Spatial Limitation (desha-pariccheda)**
2. **Temporal Limitation (kaala-pariccheda)**
3. **Objectival Limitation (vastu-pariccheda)**

1. Spatial Limitation (desha-pariccheda)

An object with limited dimensions is said to be **conditioned by space**.

Vedānta states that the **Self is all-pervading and not limited by space**.

However, in my current ignorant state, I experience myself as limited in space, such as thinking "**I am in Calcutta**," "**I am in the office**," or "**I am at home**."

I see myself as a tiny speck in the vast universe.

2. Temporal Limitation ((kala-pariccheda)

All objects have a **beginning and an end** and are thus **limited by time**.

However, the **Self is "nitya"** (eternal), never born, never dying, and always existing.

Despite this, I see myself as having been born at a specific time, living for a limited period, and dying in the future, which gives me a sense of impermanence.

3. Objectival Limitation (vastu-pariccheda)

This refers to how every **finite object is limited by other finite objects** due to their **differences**.

For example, a human is different from a tree, one tree differs from another, and the parts of a tree (roots, branches, leaves) **differ from each other**.

Seeing oneself as different from other beings and objects is the experience of objectival limitation.

Three differences

The three differences

Vedanta teachers describe **three kinds** of differences (bheda) perceived by the mind:

1. **sajathiya-bheda**
2. **vijaathiya-bheda**
3. **svagata-bheda**

1.sajathiya-bheda

Differences between beings or objects of the same species.

For example, though all humans are Homo sapiens, there are differences between individuals, such as between a man and a woman or between people of different heights and features.

2. vijaathiya-bheda

Differences between beings or objects of different species.

For instance, humans are different from lions, and rats are different from cats.

svagata-bheda

Differences within a single object or being.

For example, the hand is different from the leg, though both are parts of the same body.

Defining bondage

Defining bondage

Vedaanta declares the **Paramaatman (Self)** to be "**akhanda**" (devoid of the three limitations) and "**kevala**" (free of the three bhedas).

However, in my current state of ignorance, I experience the Self with these limitations and differences.

I see myself as an individual different from others (experiencing limitations), existing in a specific place (spatial limitation) and at a specific time (temporal limitation).

This limited perception is called "jiva-bhaava" in Vedaanta—the notion of being a limited individual.

When I mistakenly perceive the unlimited Self as the limited self or ego, I separate myself from the world and view objects and beings as existing apart from me.

This renders them capable of causing pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, honor and dishonor.

This state of conditioned existence, caused by the notion of being a limited entity (jiva-bhaava), **leads to dependence** on the external world for happiness and comfort and a fear of sorrow, pain, and loss.

This life of inner turmoil and restlessness, experienced in our current ignorant state, is termed "bondage" (bandha) in Vedanta.

Why focus on "bondage"?

Because only by fully understanding a problem can we find a solution.

By comprehending the nature of bondage, we discover how to overcome it.

Hence the relevant question: "**Ko nama bandhaha?" – What is bondage?"**

Understanding bondage

Bondage is the notion that the anatman is the Atman

(1)

Bondage is the notion that the anatman is the Atman

The Atman's true nature is Sat-Cit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss).

The anatman (not-Self) includes the three inert bodies: gross body, subtle body and causal body.

Ignorant of the Self's true nature, one mistakenly believes the Self to be these bodies.

This misunderstanding of the Atman as the anatman is the essence of bondage (bandha).

Bondage arises from ignorance

(2)

Bondage arises from ignorance

Bondage arises from ignorance.

This misapprehension of the Self as the not-Self (anatman) is called 'tädätmya' in Vedanta and is caused by ignorance of one's true nature.

For example, in a dream, a rich man may forget his real nature and think he is a pauper, suffering as a result.

Similarly, **because I am ignorant of my real nature as Sat-Cit-Ānanda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss), I identify with the gross, subtle, and causal bodies.**

Contd...

This makes me seek happiness in impermanent objects, situations, and beings, resulting in temporary pleasure but **ultimate grief and disappointment.**

In contrast, **one who has Self-Knowledge and is aware of their blissful nature is a liberated, perfect, God-Man on earth.**

Forgetting my blissful nature, **I seek happiness outside myself □that too, in impermanent objects, situations and beings.**

In the process, I do get temporary flashes of pleasure but, in the ultimate analysis, **I am left only to grieve and be disappointed, for everything I clung on to was perishable and either left me one day or I them!**

Bondage is the cause for the miseries of birth and death

(3)

Bondage is the cause for the miseries of birth and death

Bondage causes the miseries of birth and death.

The body, subject to birth and death, is mistakenly identified with the eternal Self, which is inherently birthless and deathless.

This false identification attributes mortality to the Self.

Through bondage, one considers the unreal body to be the Self and goes all out to nourish it, bathe it, and preserve it with the help of sense objects

(4)

The body, which exists only temporarily between birth and death, is categorized as **mithya (unreal)**.

When we mistakenly consider the body as the only reality and devote ourselves entirely to its care and desires—feeding it, pampering it—**we become slaves to it**.

This obsession with the body's well-being consumes most of our waking hours, overshadowing everything else in life.

We chase after objects desired by the body under the mistaken belief that its happiness equals our own.

This **self-created bondage** leads to suffering birth, death, and transient experiences like pleasure, pain, honor, and dishonor.

This descent from **eternal perfection to ephemeral imperfection** is solely due to this **mistaken self-identification**.

Man is God apparently suffering the sorrows of matter!

Because of bondage, one becomes bound like the silk-worm in its cocoon woven by its own thread

(5)

Because of bondage, one becomes bound like the silk-worm in its cocoon woven by its own thread

Just as the silk-worm weaves its own cocoon and gets trapped, once the misconception "**I am the body**" arises, it leads to relentless pursuit of bodily pleasures.

These demands grow strong, conditioning one's personality and stifling vitality, capacity, and intelligence.

This state, marked by ignorance of the Self, is termed 'bandha' or 'bondage' in Vedānta—a perfect metaphor for self-imposed suffering.

Who is a badh-dha?

Characteristics of a 'baddha'

Thinking and speaking solely in terms of the not-Self (anātman): "**I am so-and-so, aged 45, overweight...**" They are primarily characterized by ignorance of the Self.

This leads them to identify with bodily conditions like aging, sensory impairments such as weak eyes or ears, and mental disturbances, causing suffering.

Characteristics of a 'baddha'

Bound persons (baddha) also **gauge their progress solely by material comforts** and measure their standard of living by the pleasures they indulge in.

They often prioritize material prosperity over spiritual growth, using **their belief in the Lord as a means to fulfill worldly desires**.

Characteristics of a 'baddha'

A **baddha** (bound person) is tied by the sense of '**doership**' (**kartrtva**) and '**enjoyership**' (**bhoktrtva**).

Identifying with the body, senses, and mind, **they believe themselves to be the doers of actions** and consequently the enjoyers or sufferers of their results.

This perpetuates **a cycle of action and reaction driven by egocentric desires, reinforcing existing impressions (vasanas) of likes and dislikes**.

Characteristics of a 'baddha'

Accumulated over lifetimes, these **vasanas compel rebirths**, perpetuating the cycle of birth and death (samsara).

Bound persons also **grant reality to the world of names and forms**, experiencing joys and sorrows as real due to ignorance of the world's unreality (mithya).

This ignorance is the hallmark of bondage, marked by sorrow and fluctuating emotions.

The Man of Wisdom

The Man of Wisdom understands that the world is not real (mithya), so life does not weigh heavily on him.

For example, seeing fire on a movie screen does not prompt us to rush for water because we know it's not real.

In this light, Swami Chinmayananda advised,...

conclusion

"Take one thing in life seriously and that is – don't take life seriously."

summary

Bondage is non-apprehension of true nature, leading to identifying with the not-Self. This confusion causes bondage as a restricted individual.

Identifying with the not-Self leads to becoming the 'doer' and 'enjoyer,' cycling through birth and death.

Bondage brings joy and sorrow mistakenly linked to the Self, while it's the body-mind complex experiencing them.

Next: How does this bondage arise? Exploring ignorance as its root cause.

Om namah shivaya