

Persistence of Bondage

Chapter 12

2-fold effects of Anjana

In Lesson 11, we studied how ajñāna (ignorance) leads to bondage, having two effects:

Effect 1:

Anatmani atma-buddhi (mistaking the not-Self for the Self)

Ignorance of the Self's nature as Sat-Cit-Ānanda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) results in the misidentification of the Self with the sthūla, sūkṣma, and kāraṇa-sarīras (gross, subtle, and causal bodies).

For instance, thinking "I am a middle-aged person" (gross body), "I don't feel hungry" (subtle body), or "I slept well" (causal body).

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Effect 2:

Jagati satya-buddhi (seeing reality in the world)

Ignorance of the Sat-Cit-Ānanda – substratum, causes us to see the world of names and forms as real.

This misapprehension drives us to become attached, greedy, angry, or jealous, as we give reality to objects, people, and ideologies.

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Knowledge alone dispels ignorance, as light dispels darkness.

Both effects of ignorance—seeing the not-Self as the Self and believing in the world's reality—are erased only by realizing the Sat-Cit-Ananda Principle.

Yet, seekers find that despite intellectually knowing "I am Sat-Cit-Ananda-Paramatman" and that the world is mithya (illusion), **bondage (bandha) persists**.

This is shown in continued feelings of **"I am the doer" (kartṛtva)** and **"I am the enjoyer" (bhokṛtva)**, along with likes, dislikes, and negative emotions.

This raises the question: **Why does bondage persist despite understanding the Self and the world's unreality?** The student asks the Guru, **"Katham asya bandhasya pratisthā?"** ("How does bondage continue to exist?").

The Power of Vāsanās

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Intellectual knowledge alone, without experiential realization, **cannot end bondage**.

Only direct Realization of the Self can dispel ignorance and bondage.

Śankarācārya in Vivekacūdāmaṇi (verse 267) states that **vāsanās (deep-seated tendencies)** prevent intellectual knowledge from becoming experiential wisdom.

Even after understanding Paramātman, **vāsanās like “I am the doer” and “I am the enjoyer” persist, causing samsara**.

Sages advise **eliminating these vāsanās through continuous Self-identification**, as their destruction is seen as **Liberation**.

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Vāsanās are residual impressions from past actions, thoughts, and habits

such as the “eating vāsanā” in a glutton, or “speaking vāsanā” in a talkative person, ‘sleeping vāsanā’ of the slothful, ‘indulgence vāsanā’ of the worldly and so on.

Strong **negative vāsanās** like selfishness, anger, and the sense of doership **keep a seeker anchored in illusion**, even with intellectual knowledge of the Truth.

Until these **vāsanās are weakened, bondage (bandha) persists**.

Here, **ignorance is like a king**, with vāsanās **as its powerful guards**; without weakening these guards, one cannot conquer the king—ignorance itself.

Vāsanā-traya

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Vedantic texts classify the **vāsanās that block Self-Knowledge** into three types, known as vāsanā-traya (the vāsanā-triad):

1. **Loka-vāsanā** - attachment to the world.
2. **Śāstra-vāsanā** - obsession with excessive scriptural study.
3. **Deha-vāsanā** - preoccupation with the body.

Contd...

In Vivekacūdāmaṇi (verse 271), it’s stated that these **vāsanās hinder Wisdom**, as they make people chase **worldly pursuits, become overly absorbed in scripture, or indulge in bodily comforts**.

Despite scriptural knowledge, one cannot realize inner Perfection if the mind is controlled by these vāsanās.

We’ll now discuss the nature of each and ways to overcome these obstacles.

Loka-vāsanā

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Loka-vāsanā, or "**worldly tendency**," is the desire to shape our lives around societal standards and seek its approval by imitating its superficial values.

For a sādhanika (spiritual seeker), following society's trends and living a life based on imitation leads to a life of sensuality.

Thus, one must first **renounce the urge to conform blindly to societal expectations**, which often prioritize appearance over substance.

An excessive need for others' approval is a clear sign of loka-vāsanā. Thoughts like "I must act so others praise me" or "I want everyone to see me in a positive light" hinder true spiritual growth.

Trying to Please All

In this context, it is worth recalling from our school days an oft-narrated parable. Once an elderly man was walking along with his grandson and his donkey. When they passed a group of passers-by, they heard someone say, "How foolish are the old man and the boy! With a donkey, they are walking instead of riding on it!" The old man asked the young boy to ride on the donkey till they crossed another group of people, one of whom exclaimed, "How insensitive are today's children! Look at that strapping lad riding the donkey while his old grandfather walks along!" At once, the boy got off the donkey and insisted that the grandfather ride the donkey. A while later, a couple saw them and one of them said to the other, "What a mean old man - to be riding the donkey when the little boy is walking!" Now the only option left was for the old man and his grandson to ride on the donkey together. They had hardly gone a few feet when someone came up to them and said, "Don't you have any pity for the donkey? How can both of you ride on him?"

The story ends on a humorous note, with the old man and his grandson tying the feet of the donkey to a sturdy stick and carrying it between the two of them! Indeed, this is the fate of trying to be a please-all in society.

Śāstra-vāsanā

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Śāstra-vāsanā is the tendency to **indulge in scriptural study for intellectual pleasure** without applying it to life.

Scriptures serve as guides, not as the experience of Self-Realization itself.

Just as a milestone pointing to "Mumbai 20 miles" requires one to follow its direction, not stop at it, a seeker must use scriptures as a guide to Truth, **not an end**.

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If a student mistakes **intellectual thrill** for real Experience, it's like **mistaking a menu for the food**.

Many get sidetracked, becoming engrossed in quoting scriptures or debating, missing the essence.

To avoid this pitfall, one should remember that **scriptures point toward Truth; they are not the Truth itself.**

This **doesn't downplay the value of svadhyaya (scriptural study)**, but excessive attachment to study can become an **obstacle on the spiritual path.**

A Warning from the Vedas

The Vedas themselves warn of how the pre-occupation with studies could become an impediment to spiritual progress. They recount the life of Bharadvaja Muni, who learnt the many Vedic passages with great effort and diligence for three lives continuously and finding his study incomplete, obtained a further lease of a fourth life. Even then he could not complete his study!

Another Muni by name Durvasa went to Lord Siva with a load of books to offer his obeisance to Him. Sage Narada, who was there at that time, compared him to an ass carrying a burden, thereby pointing to Durvasa Muni that Self-Knowledge does not accrue by mere mastery of the Vedas.

Deha-vāsanā

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Deha-vāsanā refers to **attachment to the body and sensual pleasures.**

Śankarācārya warns in Vivekacūdāmaṇi (verse 86) that seeking *Self-Realization while indulging in bodily pleasures* is like **trying to cross a river on a crocodile, mistaking it for a log.**

Such an approach is **doomed to fail.**

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Swami Tejomayananda further emphasizes that pursuing spiritual truth while attracted to worldly charms only brings sorrow.

The **body should be cared for** as a vehicle for spiritual growth, much like maintaining a car.

It **needs cleanliness, a nutritious diet, and exercise**, but it should not be used for indulgence.

Understanding the limitations of the body and world, **one should focus on Self-Knowledge.**

Vedanta advises that we transcend body attachment, recognizing that **we are more than just the physical self.**

Wasting a Treasure

Mr. Budhram had long dreamed of owning a fast sports car and saved diligently to make it happen. When he finally bought the sleek car, he was so thrilled that he skipped the guide's instructions and didn't even glance at the instruction manual. Confidently driving off, he noticed everyone smiling at him. He assumed it was admiration, but they were actually amused because, used to his old cycle rickshaw, he was unknowingly driving the high-speed car at a snail's pace.

This story reflects how many people approach life. They possess remarkable minds and bodies, yet ignore spiritual teachings and wisdom, much like Mr. Budhram disregarded the car's guide. Without guidance, they miss out on realizing their true capabilities.

"Cycle of ignorance" (anartha-parampara)

The "**cycle of ignorance**" (**anartha-parampara**) in Vedanta involves three stages that work together in a continuous loop, affecting a seeker at different planes of existence:

1. **Vāsanā (tendencies) at the causal body level**
2. **Cinta (desires or thought agitations) at the subtle body level**
3. **Kārya (actions) at the gross body level**

The cycle is a **cause-and-effect relationship**. When vāsanās (tendencies) grow, they generate desires (cintā), which in turn lead to actions (kārya). As actions increase, they reinforce desires, which further strengthen tendencies, perpetuating the cycle.

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For example, if an individual has a **vāsanā for alcohol**, it creates a **desire (cintā) to drink**. This leads to the **action of drinking (kārya)**. The more the individual drinks, the stronger the vāsanā becomes, which creates more desires to drink and leads to more actions.

This cycle of vāsanā, cintā, and kārya is known as the "anartha-parampara" or the "cycle of ignorance."

It traps individuals in a pattern of repetitive behaviors, driven by deep-seated tendencies and desires.

As they engage in actions that reinforce their tendencies, **they continue to repeat the cycle, leading to suffering and confusion in life.**

Cycle of Progress

To reverse the Cycle of Ignorance, we can use a **positive version** called the **Cycle of Progress**.

Start by identifying a weakness or tendency you'd like to overcome.

Understand how this tendency has deepened through the cycle of vāsanā, cintā, and kārya.

Then, **use the same cycle constructively by working on your actions (kārya) and thoughts (cintā)** to weaken the tendency.

A practical step is to avoid environments and company that intensify the negative tendency.

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However, simply avoiding triggers may lead to **suppression**, so also focus on changing your thoughts.

Reason with the mind and provide it with positive suggestions, and techniques like auto-suggestion or counseling can further support this process.

Sorry-Go-Round

After death, the subtle body, carrying the residual vāsanās from this and past lives, orders a new physical body to continue fulfilling these desires.

This creates an **ongoing cycle of birth**, death, and rebirth, driven by vāsanā, cintā, and kārya.

Once trapped in this cycle of ignorance, there seems to be **no escape**, keeping the seeker caught in samsara.

Unlike a merry-go-round, this cycle is a "sorry-go-round," continuously bringing birth, death, and rebirth.

conclusion

As long as the *three forces of ignorance*—vāsanā, cintā, and kārya—are not overcome, ignorance will continue to dominate.

Despite intellectual knowledge from Vedanta or the Guru, as long as these forces *remain strong*, *bondage persists*.

However, by using the *'cycle of progress'* to *weaken* negative tendencies, we make a meaningful start.

In the next lesson, we will *explore practical methods* from Vedantic texts to purify the mind (citta-suddhi) and break the cycle of ignorance.

Aum Namah Shivaya