

CAUSE OF BONDAGE

Chapter 11

introduction

- In Lesson 10, we identified symptoms of bondage—individuality, doership, and suffering.
- **Recognizing symptoms alone doesn't solve the problem.**
- Like a doctor who treats a fever's root cause, **addressing the cause of bondage** is essential for the symptoms to disappear.
- Similarly, in the case of bondage, simply understanding it as the Self's identification with the not-Self, leading to the painful cycle of birth and death, doesn't eliminate it.
- One must **find and end the root cause of bondage**.
- Naturally, a student eager to end bandha (bondage) and its result, samsāra (transmigration), will ask, "**Katham eṣa bandhah āgataḥ - How has this bondage arisen?**"
- **Ignorance is the Cause of bondage**
- **Ignorance is the Cause of bondage**
- The root cause of bondage is the individual's ignorance of the Self, as illustrated by the following analogies:

(1) Rope-snake analogy

(2) Post-thief analogy

(1) Rope-snake analogy

- At twilight, one may mistake a rope for a snake **due to ignorance**.
 - Similarly, not knowing my true nature as Sat-Cit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss), I wrongly perceive the Self (Atman) as the not-Self (anātman).
- Once I recognize the rope as a rope, the **snake illusion vanishes**.
- Likewise, **through Vedantic insight**, when I realize my true nature as Sat-Cit-Ananda, the identification with the anātman ceases, and **I no longer see myself as just the body-mind-intellect**.

(2) Post-thief analogy

- In Vedānta, **ignorance is like mistaking a post for a thief**. Similarly, due to ignorance, we see the supreme Reality as the jīva (individual self).

- This false sense of individuality is dispelled when one realizes the jīva's true nature as the supreme Self.
- Just as seeing a post as a post removes unnecessary fear, **recognizing our real nature as the eternal, pure, and free Paramatman instantly dispels the mistaken identity** of the limited individual (jīvātman).
- Contd...
- However, **with Self-Knowledge, when we see the Sat-Cit-Ananda Paramatman, the illusory jīvātman vanishes**—just as the illusory thief disappears once the post is recognized.
- This happens naturally, as the **jīvātman is merely a mistaken projection** upon our true Self, the Paramatman, due to ignorance.
- **What is this ignorance, its nature, and its powers?**
- **How does it create the powerful illusion in which the supreme, immortal, blissful Paramatman mistakes itself for a limited, mortal jīva?**
- Vedānta masters have thoroughly analyzed and explained the nature of ignorance.

Nature of Ignorance

(1) Anirvacanīya

- Svāmī Sadānanda in *Vedānta-sāra* explains **ignorance (ajñāna) as Anirvacanīya** – the inexplicable.
- The illusory ghost or snake perceived on a post or rope is an **example of an anirvacanīya-vastu** or "inexplicable object."
- According to Vedānta, if something **cannot be described as either sat (real) or asat (unreal)**, it is termed **inexplicable**.
- Contd...
- In Vedānta, **sat is the permanent truth.**
 - In the rope-snake analogy, the imagined snake is not *sat* since it vanishes when rope-knowledge dawns.
- **Asat refers to utterly non-existent objects**, like a rabbit's horns or a childless woman's son—objects that have never existed and never will.
- However, the **illusory snake on the rope cannot be termed asat either, as it appears in ignorance, unlike the horns of a rabbit, which never appear at all.**
- Contd...
- So, Ajñāna (ignorance) is termed *anirvacanīya*, like the illusory snake, as it is neither *sat* (real) nor *asat* (non-existent).

- If ajñāna were **sat**, it would be permanent and indestructible, but it is dispelled by Self-Knowledge.
- It also cannot be **asat** since we observe its effects, such as the Atman's mistaken identity with the anatman, the sense of doership, suffering, and the belief in the reality of the world of forms.
- Thus, ajñāna falls into the category of *anirvacanīya* or "inexplicable."

(2) Jñānavirodhi

- Ignorance opposes knowledge, just as darkness opposes light.
- Illusions, born from ignorance, vanish with the arrival of knowledge.
 - For instance, once the rope is known, the imagined snake disappears, and when the post is seen, the ghost vanishes.
- Similarly, with Self-Knowledge, both ignorance (ajñāna) and its effect—bondage (bandha)—dissolve.
- Darkness exists only until the sun rises; likewise, when the "sun" of knowledge appears, ignorance fades away.
- Ignorance is thus considered directly opposed to knowledge, as it is destroyed by knowledge alone.

(3) Trigunātmakam

- Ajñāna (ignorance) consists of the three *gunas*—sattva, rajas, and tamas.
- Although *guna* literally means quality, in Vedānta it refers to the "characteristic constituents" of ignorance.
- This understanding of ajñāna's composition becomes clear when we examine the nature of creation.
- Contd...
- The created world results from ignorance. How?
 - When the true nature of the Self is unknown, the world of names and forms is projected onto the pure Self, the Sat-Cit-Ananda Paramātman.
- This is why creation is seen as an effect of ignorance.
- In creation, the cause transforms into the effect: for example, water becomes waves, froth, and bubbles; gold becomes various ornaments like bangles, rings, and necklaces.
- Contd...
- Since the effect is merely the cause in a new form, studying the effect reveals the cause.
- To understand ignorance, we examine its effect: the world (*jagat*).

- In Vedānta, the "world" includes everything objectifiable—not only sound, touch, form, taste, and smell, but also the senses, mind, and intellect through which they are perceived.
- These, too, are part of the objective world, as they are **objects seen by the Witness Self, the ultimate Perceiver.**
- Contd...
- Vedāntic masters, in analyzing the world—space, air, fire, water, earth, organs of knowledge and action, prāṇas, mind, intellect, etc.—**found that it is pervaded by three qualities: knowledge, action, and inertia.**
- For example:
 - Sense organs, mind, and intellect possess the **quality of knowledge**.
 - Organs of action and vital airs **embody activity**.
 - The cosmos is filled **with inert substances**, like earth, water, fire, air, and space, along with their modifications like mountains and rivers.
- Contd...
- Since **knowledge, activity, and inertia pervade creation**, it follows that the cause, ajñāna (ignorance), also comprises these three aspects, affirming the Vedāntic view that the **effect mirrors the cause**.
- Ignorance is therefore understood to have three aspects:
 - **a knowledge-generating aspect called 'sattva,'**
 - **an activity-inducing aspect called 'rajas,' and...**
 - **an inertia-creating aspect called 'tamas.'**
- Contd...
- **Sattva** brings peace and serenity (sukham);
- **rajas** fuels excitement and passion, which ultimately lead to pain (duḥkha); and...
- **tamas blocks knowledge and right understanding, resulting in delusion (moha).**
- Thus, **ajñāna** is understood to consist of three core constituents or 'gunas'—sattva, rajas, and tamas—earning it the name '**trigunātmakam**', meaning composed of these three qualities.

Various Appellations of Ignorance

1. Ajñāna

- Ignorance is known by various terms:
 - ajñāna,

- avidyā,
 - śakti,
 - māyā,
 - pradhāna, and...
 - prakṛti.
- While all signify ignorance, **each term highlights a different aspect of it.**
 - **Ajñāna** directly means ignorance, functioning to conceal the Truth. **As it veils** the true Sat-Cit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) nature of the Self, it is called 'ajñāna'.

2. Avidyā (a-vidyā)

- Avidyā (a-vidyā) is derived from “**na vidyate iti avidyā**,” meaning “**that which is not truly there.**”
- Illusory objects, like the imagined snake on a rope or a ghost on a post, lack real existence.
- Similarly, ignorance, being an illusion, is not truly existent.
- We’ve already discussed avidyā’s illusory nature in the context of anirvacanīya (inexplicable).

3. Shakti,

- **Śakti**, meaning "power," raises the question: whose power?
- It is the **power of the Self**, by which the Self appears deluded.
- This concept, though seemingly paradoxical, is clarified by example: *just as clouds, created by the sun, can obscure the sun itself, so too ignorance, though reliant on the Self, obscures it.*
- Contd...
- Thus, ignorance is viewed as the **Self's own deluding power.**
- However, just as clouds don't truly cover the vast sun but only block the observer's view, ignorance doesn't truly cover the Self, but seems to from a limited perspective.

4. Māyā

- **Māyā** signifies "illusion" and "magic."
- Just as a **magician** creates the illusion of pigeons flying from a hat, **the all-powerful Lord, through His māyā, crafts a magical world where the Infinite appears finite, and the formless Truth seems to have forms.**
- This phenomenon is profound, earning māyā the description "**aghatita-ghaṭanā**," meaning "**that which makes the impossible possible.**"
- Contd...

- Another derivation is "*yā mā sā māyā*," translating to "**that which is not really there.**"
- As discussed, ignorance is illusory and not truly existent, aligning with the concept of *anirvacanīya-vastu*.
- Additionally, the terms ***pradhāna*** and ***prakṛti*** are used in Vedānta to describe ignorance.

The Two Powers of Maya

1. Āvaraṇa-śakti (veiling power)

- Ajñāna, or ignorance, has two main powers.
- This **veiling power conceals** the true nature of an object.
- In the **rope-snake analogy**, **ignorance veils the rope**, preventing us from perceiving it as it is.
- This act of veiling is called **āvaraṇa**, causing non-perception of the object.

2. Viṣeṣa-śakti (projecting power)

- Following this non-perception, ***viṣeṣa-śakti*** projects an illusory object onto the concealed substratum, like a snake or garland onto the hidden rope.
- This **projecting power leads to misapprehension**, where we perceive something unreal in place of the real.
- In essence, **āvaraṇa-śakti** conceals the reality, while ***viṣeṣa-śakti*** projects an illusion onto it.
- Contd...
- In relation to the Paramatman (Self), **āvaraṇa-śakti veils the true nature of the Self**, hindering our perception of its Sat-Cit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) essence.
- This initial veiling leads to misapprehension (**Vikshepa**), where the illusory world of names and forms is projected onto the Paramatman.

the Dual Powers

- The dual powers
- Swami Vidyaranya first describes ***viṣeṣa-śakti***, the projecting power of *ajñāna*, which **casts the cosmos—both gross and subtle bodies, along with the external world of names and forms—onto Brahman, the supreme Reality.**
- This **projected world**, as he explains, is **merely an appearance of names and forms on Brahman**, likened to foam, bubbles, and waves appearing on water.
- Contd...

- Just as water remains unchanged while taking different shapes, **Reality itself doesn't transform to create the world.**
- Similarly, as a snake appears on a rope without the rope changing, **the world is a projection on Reality** (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) **without any actual transformation.**

āvaraṇa-śakti: Role 1

- Svāmī Vidyāranya explains that āvaraṇa-śakti, the veiling power, **has two main roles:**
- It **obscures true knowledge** of the Self by masking the distinction between ātman (Self) and anātman (non-Self), creating an identification between them.
- Although the Self is the Witness and distinct from the gross, subtle, and causal bodies, āvaraṇa-śakti leads to the mistaken identity of "**I am the body, mind, and intellect.**"

āvaraṇa-śakti: Role 2

- It **conceals knowledge** of Brahman, the base of the superimposed world of names and forms, **by lending reality to these illusions.**
- Just as waves, foam, and bubbles are merely appearances on water, the **world of forms is only an appearance on the ocean of Sat-Cit-Ānanda** (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss).
- Yet, due to **āvaraṇa-śakti**, one fails to recognize this underlying Truth.
- Ponder

If an actor is acting as a king in a play, as long as he remains aware that he is only acting as a king, he will be fine during and after the play. But, even after the play, if he deludes himself that he is a king and goes about his daily life accordingly, he will have to be put away soon! This seems obvious to us. **But let us ponder - what are we doing in our life?**

- Contd...

We are the supreme Consciousness, and if we remain aware of this and then go about playing the various roles in life such as parent, professional, citizen and so on, we would be fine. However, very unfortunately, we think we are something far less and forgetting that these are mere roles to play, we think we are the roles. **Think of what you would call the actor who acted as if he was the king even off the stage! Do you see how similar is our situation?**

- Contd...

Do you see the colossal difference between playing the role of a parent (where there may be sad scenes to enact as well as happy ones, but I am fine either way) and being a parent (where every up and down of the child creates tsunamis in my own mind and tosses me about like a helpless log in the rough sea of life)?

Ponder thus in all the roles that life expects us to play

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- In ignorance, I mistakenly identify the *anatman* as the *Atman* and see the world of names and forms as real, overlooking the true *Sat-Cit-Ananda* Principle.
- **This results in bondage:** I perceive myself as a limited *jiva*, bound by doership and enjoyership, initiating *samsara* and leading to endless suffering.
- **I am driven by desires,** running towards what I like and away from what I dislike.
- **My life becomes dominated by the mind's** whims, emotions, and the exhausting waves of fear, greed, anger, excitement, and elation.
- **The root cause is ignorance.**
- *Vedanta* teaches that **overcoming ignorance is the path** to freedom, our birthright.