

*pañcendriyaiḥ pañcabhireva hotṛbhiḥ
pracīyamāno viṣayājjyadhārayā,
jājvalyamāno bahuvasānendhanaiḥ
manomayāgnirvahati prapañcam. (168)*

168. *The five sense organs act as priests who feed the fuel of numerous desires into the mental sheath, which is the sacrificial fire. This fire (mental sheath), brings about and maintains the entire phenomenal world when it is set ablaze by the sense objects which act as a continuous stream of oblations.*

Explaining the manomaya kośa, Śaṅkara gives us a metaphor from the Vaidika rituals. In the Vaidika period, when yajñas and yāgas were performed, fire was usually invoked first. So a trough was made which was called the ‘fire-altar’. In it, the fuel was kept and then the fire was kindled. As the fire blazed up, the priests and householders poured their offerings of ghī and so on, into it to the chanting of appropriate mantras. When into the blazing fire the offerings (ājya), were poured, the flames licked higher. This picture of the yajña is very familiar to all students of ritualism and hence Śaṅkara uses it here to explain the manomaya kośa.

The priests who perform the homa are called the ‘hotṛ’. The five organs of perception represent the priests. They bring the offerings to the fire-altar (kuṇḍa).

The sense objects are the offerings (ājya), in the subjective fire-altar within. The sense organs bring the sense objects in the form of sense stimuli to the individual. The eyes bring forms and colours, the ears bring sounds, the tongue brings tastes, the nose brings smells and the skin brings the sensation of touch. Thus the sense stimuli are brought by the sense organs as their oblations into the body which is the trough (kuṇḍa), serving as the fire-altar.

In the sacred trough, fire is already blazing and into this the offerings are poured. The fuel for the fire are the vāsanās which

are already burning in the flames of thought agitations. When the offerings are poured into the already burning fire, it blazes forth to the very roof of life.

Agni is the Lord invoked in this ritual. When the Lord is fully invoked, He manifests and blesses the priests and the householders. Here, as a result of the subjective yajña of the mind the Lord manifests and blesses to maintain the world of pluralistic phenomena.

The manomaya kośa is kept blazing because of the fuel of the vāsanās. Into the fire, the ghī (the sense stimuli), is poured by the five great priests, the sense organs. When they pour the offerings, the fire blazes forth. Thoughts are only imaginations (saṅkalpas) of the mind, expressed in the form of agitations because of its own burning vāsanās. When the sense organs bring the stimuli, the mind appears to be more ablaze, that is, the agitations become more and more. These agitations manifest as activities in the world. All this is maintained by the mental sheath.



न ह्यस्त्यविद्या मनसोऽतिरिक्ता
मनो ह्यविद्या भवबन्धहेतुः ।
तस्मिन्विनष्टे सकलं विनष्टं
विजृम्भितेऽस्मिन्सकलं विजृम्भते ॥ १६९ ॥

*na hyastyavidyā manaso'tiriktā
mano hyavidyā bhavabandhahetuh,
tasminvinaṣṭe sakalaṁ vinaṣṭaṁ
vijṛmbhite'sminsakalaṁ vijṛmbhate. (169)*

169. Apart from the mind there is no ignorance (avidyā). The mind itself is the ignorance which is the cause for the bondage of rebirth. When the mind is destroyed, everything else is destroyed. When the mind manifests, everything else manifests.