

VEDĀNTA 20/20
INTRODUCTION TO VEDĀNTA
JĪVA BRAHMA AIKYAM
The Knowledge, Means and the Result

In the last class we saw the main theme of *vedāntic* teaching is *jīvātma paramātmā aikyam*. The idea conveyed is that *ātmā*, the *caitanya* is only, *ekam*, one. *Aikyam* means oneness. *Ātmā* is only one! That one *caitanya* alone is expressing through matter principle, be it the individual or totality. When that *caitanya* functions through individual matter called *śarīra trayam*, then the Consciousness gets the name *jīvātma*. When the very same *caitanya* functions behind the total matter, *prapañca trayam*, then the very same *ātmā* is called *paramātmā*. So the one *ātmā* alone is called *jīvātma* as well as *paramātmā* depending upon the medium through which it functions. Once the *anātmā*, the medium is removed, the matter is removed, there is neither *jīva ātmā* nor the *paramā ātmā*. There is only *ātmā*! That one *ātmā* I am. I am called *jīvātma* when I function through this body. I am called *paramātmā* when I function behind the whole universe. This, *jīvātma paramātmā aikyam* or *ātma ekatvam* is the basic teaching.

There is one more important topic which I will mention briefly. The details we will see later. That topic is the relationship between *ātmā* and *anātmā*. We say that there is only one *ātmā*. We know the relationship between *jīvātma* and *paramātmā* is that they are identical, they both are one and the same. Now we ask the question what is the relationship between *ātmā* and *anātmā*. *Vedānta* points out that the relationship is supporter-supported relationship which means *anātmā*, matter depends upon *ātmā*, Consciousness. Even to prove its very existence, matter depends upon Consciousness. To say there is a clock in front of me, I have to see the clock to say whether it is existent or not. To prove the existence of anything in the creation, I have to see it or know it directly or indirectly. To show that I am existent, I do not

require any proof because my existence is self-evident. So matter depends upon Consciousness to prove its existence as well as for its functioning. Consciousness does not depend upon matter. Therefore scriptures point out Consciousness is *satyam* and matter is *mithyā*. Consciousness is *svatantraḥ*, independent, but matter is *paratantraḥ*, dependent. The common example used in *vedānta* is that of clay and pot. Even if a pot is broken, clay continues to exist, but pot cannot exist without the clay. So clay is *satyam* and pot is *mithyā*. Wood is *satyam* and furniture is *mithyā*. Gold is *satyam* and the various ornaments are *mithyā*. Water is *satyam* and the waves, rivers, lakes, ponds, oceans are *mithyā*. *Satyam* is independent, *mithyā* is dependent. *Ātmā* is *satyam* and *anātmā* is *mithyā*. *Ātmā* alone appears as *jīvātmā* at the individual level and as *paramātmā* in totality. So *vedāntic* teaching can be presented in three statements, *paramātmā* is *satyam*; *anātmā* is *mithyā*; *jīvātmā* is identical with *paramātmā*. This is *vedānta sāra*, the essence of *vedānta*.

Next we will take up the topic of the means and the benefits of getting this knowledge. The means of getting this knowledge is called *jñāna yoga*. We had touched upon this in one of the earlier lectures. This *jñāna yoga* which is the means of getting this knowledge is presented in three steps. They are *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*. *Śravaṇa* means listening, *manana* means reflection and *nididhyāsana* means contemplation. We will discuss each one of them briefly. *Śravaṇa* is systematic, continuous listening to the scriptures for a length of time from a competent teacher. Each word is important here. The study has to be systematic, a gradual progression from the basics to the highest. It cannot be a stray study of unconnected topics. It should be systematic in the sense that there is a connection between one topic and another, there is a gradual build up. It is like building a house starting from the foundation and then each level one by one. The bricks have to be arranged in an orderly manner and then cemented well. Then the walls are strong and then you can occupy the house. A truck load of bricks unloaded into a lot will not make a house to live in. Similarly gathering stray ideas here and

there, even if they are good, noble, spiritual ideas, will be useless. It will be cluttered in the brain and it will not be any use. It may create problems also. So *vedāntic* teaching will be beneficial only through a systematic study. It should be continuous. I cannot lay a few bricks and then come after six months and start the work again only to stop after a few days work. You may have to do additional work and the project will never be completed. Same is the case with *vedāntic* study. It should be continuous. The work must be done for a sufficiently long time to finish the building. *Vedāntic* study should also be pursued for a long period of time to be completed and to be fruitful. So time factor is also important. While doing *śravaṇa*, I only gather ideas, I do not ask questions. If I have doubts, if some questions arise, I keep them aside for the time being. Every statement in *vedānta* can raise many questions. Most questions get answered by themselves as we continue the study. This process is called *śravaṇa*.

The next step is *manana*. I tie all the ideas I have gathered and try to make a garland out of the teaching so that every idea fits into grand theme of *vedānta*. Every brick forms part of the building block. Similarly every idea should be part of the grand design of *vedāntic* teaching. We have already been introduced to many topics in this lecture series. All of them should be tied together nicely. We should clearly understand how does each idea fit, what is the role of *karma yoga*, what is the role of *upāsana*, what is the role of any *sādhana* for that matter. Everything should fall in its place. When I do that, lots of doubts will arise. There may be seeming contradictions. How can *jīvātmā* and *paramātmā* be one and the same? Why *ātmā* is *satyam* and *anātmā* is *mithyā*? Certain ideas may not be clear. All such doubts should be cleared. Some of the questions that arise may be answered by independent reflection and the rest should be taken to the teacher for clarification. The *vedāntic* teacher will answer these questions. *Vedānta* is not a mere belief or just faith. *Vedānta* being a body of knowledge, any number of questions are allowed. How long should you keep asking questions? Until all questions are

clearly answered. I must be convinced and I must be able to say I am indeed *paramātmā*; I am all pervading; I am immortal; I survive the death of the body; the world cannot affect me. I should be able to make each of these statements from my inner most core. Then *manana* is complete. Solving all intellectual problems and obtaining intellectual conviction is the purpose of *manana*.

Then comes the third step called *nididhyāsana*. This is nothing but solving the emotional problems. Even when the intellect is convinced, due to the impressions that have been gathered during numerous births, my habits, emotional reactions to the world are not consistent with my conviction. I have so many erroneous notions regarding myself and about the world. Even though *saṁsāra* is due to ignorance, that *saṁsāra* expresses as emotional turmoil. All my problems are from emotions in the form of likes and dislikes, desire, anger, greed, worry and so on. Until such problems are resolved, the knowledge has not been assimilated. I am not established in the knowledge. The conversion of intellectual conviction into abidance is done through *nididhyāsana*. Once I have removed my intellectual doubts through *manana* and removed my erroneous notions through *nididhyāsana*, the knowledge becomes assimilated knowledge. That is called *jñāna niṣṭā*, abidance in the knowledge. That is the benefit of *nididhyāsana*.

Śravaṇa is done with the help of the teacher. *Manana* is done by the seeker independently as well as with the teacher's help. *Nididhyāsana* must be done only independently. The teacher may give you instructions for preparing you to sit for a successful meditation. You have to sit and meditate yourself. If you should be doing *nididhyāsana* for the rest of the day when you are not sitting in meditation, that is day to day living in the light of the knowledge you have gained. That also has to be done by you. The teacher has done his job giving you the knowledge and clearing all your doubts by answering all your questions. You are convinced in that knowledge. Gaining abidance in

that knowledge is your job. So the means of gaining the knowledge and the means of assimilation has been said. This is called *jñāna yoga*. Only the assimilated food nourishes and not all the food that is just eaten. In the same way only the assimilated knowledge will benefit me, not mere listening. *Śravaṇa* is like eating only and not digesting the food. If a person does only *śravaṇa*, he comes and attends the weekly *vedānta* class regularly, but does nothing in between, that will not give him much benefit. Real benefit cannot come from mere *śravaṇa* alone. *Jñāna yoga* is complete and fruitful only if the knowledge is assimilated.

The next topic we will look into is *jñāna phalam*, the benefit of knowledge. The benefit is presented in two forms. One is while we are living, that is the benefit before death. The second is the benefit after death. One is before death and the other is after death. The first is called *jīvanmukti* and the second is called *videhamukti*. *Jīvanmukti* is the *phalam*, the benefit enjoyed at the mental level in various forms. It is purely at the mental level and not at the physical level. It is knowledge and so the benefit is at the mental level only. The first benefit and the most important benefit is independence. I am mentally, emotionally or psychologically independent. The presence and absence of things will not affect me emotionally. Only when I am dependent on external factors, their presence or absence will affect me. You get upset only when setup is disturbed. When I depend on the setup of the family in one way, the setup in my office or in the society, and when that setup is gone, I get upset! Knowledge frees me from this kind of dependence on the various setups. I do not depend on an object, or a person or a situation. If I have plenty of money and wealth, wonderful! If I am impoverished, still fine! Whether I have a job or unemployed, no problems! Even when you retire from a job and not just unemployed, your status, even if your own house will change. Still you are not upset! Position comes, position goes; respect comes respect goes, I am not dependent on those things. None of that affects me! I do not seek company. I do not feel lonely. Older we are, we become more

and more lonely, but you do not have to feel lonely or want companionship because you are independent. You become free! This is one benefit. The second benefit is *pūrṇatvam*, sense of fulfillment in life. I know I am the *ātmā* that is not confined to this body, I am *sat, cit, ananta svarūpaḥ* and so I am free from all limitations. Nothing is away from me, everything is in me, everything belongs to me. There is no sense of isolation. There is no sense of rejection. Therefore the second benefit is fullness, completeness. The third benefit is *samatvam*. I have the emotional strength to face the ups and down of life. Knowledge becomes a great shock absorber. When you drive on a rough road, what saves you is a vehicle with a heavy duty shock absorber. Then you do not feel the bumps in the road. Similarly there are so many situations in life which you cannot control or repair, and the only way to deal with that is through the knowledge, the emotional shock absorber. *Guruṇāpi duḥkhena vicālyate*, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* says, even the greatest tragedy does not shake him. This is called *jīvanmukti*, presented as *svāntaravam*, *pūrṇatvam* and *samatvam*, independence, fullness and balance of mind respectively.

Then comes the benefit after death. This is *videhamukti*. To understand this we need to know what happens to an ignorant person after death and what happens to a *jñāni* after death. Let us see what happens to a *ajñāni* first. In his case, at the time of death, the physical body is dropped. The definition of death is separation of the subtle body from the physical body. The physical body decays and merges into the elements. Even though the physical body perishes, the subtle and causal bodies continue to exist. These two bodies along with *ātmā* (of course *ātmā* is eternal), continue to survive even after the fall of the body. Then it acquires another body to continue the journey. This is called *purnarjanma* or rebirth. Dropping one body is death and acquiring another body is rebirth. This cycle continues for an *ajñāni*.

In the case of a *jñāni*, all the three bodies merge into the *samaṣṭi*, totality. The *śarīra trayam* merges into the *prapañca trayam*. The *jñāni* does not

survive as an individual, but merges with the total. He is no more a *jīvātmā* because only when the body is there, the prefix *jīva* can be applied. When the *śarīra trayam* is gone *jīva* adjective is dropped. He becomes one with *paramātmā*. *Jīvātmā* has now become *paramātmā*. Just like when a river enters the ocean, it loses its identity as the river and becomes one with the ocean, *jīvātmā* loses its identity and becomes one with *paramātmā*. Therefore there is no question of *punarjanma*. There are no subtle and causal bodies to acquire another gross body and take rebirth. So *videhamukti* is freedom from *punarjanma*. How does knowledge give one *videhamukti*? Scriptures present this topic in a particular way. It is said that knowledge stops rebirth by destroying all the *karma*-s. So the next question is what do you mean by *karma*? That is a big topic and we will discuss that in the next class. What is *karma* and what is the law of *karma*?