

## Ātmacintanam

Ātmacintanam has been given to the strivers after emancipation, by the Sadguru, as a direct means to Liberation. Its subject matter is the Self (the soul) and it should be used as a basis for contemplation (which is the means to attainment). That which is to be attained is the Absolute Self.

Ātmacintanam contains twenty-one ślokas. The first śloka is in the form of obeisance to the non-dual Self which encompasses both 'you', the Supreme Person and 'me' the individual self. This śloka, together with the second, describes the subject matter of Ātmacintanam. The following fifteen ślokas (3-17) are divided into five songs, each containing three ślokas. The first song gives a general introduction to the phenomenon of Self, by describing its relationship with the gross body and with the universe. The second song describes the form of the individual self and the third shows its fitness to be identified with Brahman (the Absolute Being). The fourth song describes the self in its unqualified state (i.e. as Brahman), while the fifth shows that it is the eternal foundation in the form Omkara. The eighteenth śloka sums up the truth stated in the preceding ślokas, while Ātmacintanam and its author, the Sadguru, are praised in the nineteenth śloka. The twentieth śloka gives the strivers two direct indications (as to how the Self can be attained), while the twentyfirst describes the fruit of the knowledge of the Self with the help of a comparison between the ignorant and the enlightened man.

In some places more than one meaning has been given, this is because of the nature of the Sanskrit language and

because of the depth of the meaning of the śloka. It is also possible that there are more meanings than have been outlined here.

ॐ श्रीपरमात्मने नमः

Salutations to the Supreme Self

ॐ श्रीगणेशाय नमः

Salutations to Śrī Gaṇeśa

नमः परमर्षिभ्यः सद्गुरुभ्यः

Salutations to the first Ṛṣi, the Sadguru

॥ अथ आत्मचिन्तनम् ॥

Now begins Ātmacintanam

CONTEMPLATION ON THE SELF

Although the whole Ātmacintanam is auspicious, the first śloka is particularly so. The Self in its unqualified form, is Brahman ( The Absolute Being), towards which devotion and humility are naturally directed. In the first śloka obeisance is being made to Brahman (the Supreme Person), and at the same time He is being described. This śloka shows us the necessity for devotion in a consideration of the Self.

ॐ नमोऽनन्ताय नित्याय निरस्ताध्यस्तधर्मिणे ।

पुरुषायाप्रमेयाय नमस्ते हेतुहेतवे ॥१॥

1. Salutations to that which is without end (that is to say, the Infinite), to the Eternal, to that which is devoid of

superimpositions (in other words, which is above the state in which the Jīva or individual self resides), to the Immeasurable and to the cause of even the primary cause (Prakṛti). Salutations to you, the Supreme Spirit, that dwell in the cave of the heart. (1)

N. B. : The Absolute Self is devoid of superimpositions of the attributes of Prakṛti (such as ignorance) that are present in the Jīva.

In the first śloka salutations have been made to the Supreme Person and now His form is being described.

सर्वाश्रयः सकलसर्गमयोऽव्ययश्च  
सर्वेश्वरः सफलकर्मकलोऽक्रियश्च ।  
सर्वान्तरः सततशान्तिवहोऽवकाशः  
जिज्ञास्यतेऽमृतपदाय परात्परो ज्ञः ॥२॥

2. (The Supreme Person) is the support of all. The whole of creation is His form and yet He is unchanging. He is Lord of all, whose skill in action (such as that of creation) is always fruitful and yet He is actionless. OR He is skilful in giving fruits of (their good and evil) actions (to the Jīvas while He himself is actionless. He who dwells in all, is the constant bearer of peace and is unimpeded. Beyond Prakṛti and having the form of Pure Intelligence, the Supreme Person is being investigated for the attainment of the Immortal Abode i.e. Liberation. (2)

The form of the Supreme Person has been explained above. Now in the first song a general consideration on the Self will be made. In the next śloka it will be shown that because the Self is one's own form and always present in all men it is self-proven and accepted by all.

आस्तिके नास्तिके चास्ति सुप्ते जागरितेऽपि च ।  
स्वभूतोऽयं स्वतःसिद्ध आत्मा कैर्नैव मन्यते ।  
आत्मा सर्वैर्हि मन्यते ॥३॥

3. The Self is present in both theists and atheists. It (the Self) is present in both the sleeping and waking states (as also in the dream state). The Self is one's very own being and is (therefore) self-proven. By whom (such a) Self not accepted? The Self is, of course, accepted by all. (i.e. everyone accepts himself). (3)

The Self, which is seat of love, exists within the bodies of all beings. Because of its presence in the body, all beings are pleased and satisfied in their bodies.

The next śloka explains how the Self, seen clearly as the abode of love, is accepted by all.

यतः प्रीताश्च तृप्ताश्च स्वेषु देहेषु जन्तवः ।  
प्रेमास्पदं सुसंलक्ष्य आत्मा कैर्नैव मन्यते ।  
आत्मा सर्वैर्हि मन्यते ॥४॥

4. The Self is the seat of love, from which all beings (gain pleasure and satisfaction, but because of their ignorance of the Self, they take the source of pleasure and satisfaction to be their body and are (therefore) pleased and satisfied in their own bodies. The Self, with this beautiful form, can be clearly perceived (from that pleasure and satisfaction). By whom is (such a) Self not accepted? The Self is, of course, accepted by all. (4)

Now it will be shown that because the entity of the Self is found interwoven everywhere (in our existence) the Self is the all of all.

यस्य भासा विभातीदं भावेऽभावे भवोऽभवः ।

सर्वेषामेव सर्वस्वमात्मा कैर्नैव मन्यते ।

आत्मा सर्वैर्हि मन्यते ॥५॥

5. With the light of which (that is to say, with the light of the Self) this (whole world both within and without) is lighted. As long as (the Self) is existing (in other words, is present in the body or universe, the body or universe also) exists. When (the Self) does not exist (that is, when it leaves the body or universe, the body or universe also) has no existence, (that is to say, the body or universe disintegrates).

OR The Self continues to exist both during the existence and non-existence of the body or universe and yet has no gross existence (that is, it is never, in actuality, manifested as the gross body or universe but is always, in reality, without form).

OR When devotion and sincerity exist, the Self can be seen to exist but when there is no devotion, it (the Self) appears to be non-existent. Therefore, the Self is the all of all. By whom is (such a) Self not accepted? The Self is, of course, accepted by all. (5).

The validity of the individual self has been illustrated. In the next song (3 ślokas), the individual self is being described in the first three quarters of each śloka, while the fourth quarter shows the true nature of the Self. The first śloka of this song describes the world as being made up of ignorance.

स्वप्नान् पश्यति सुप्तो वै सुप्तेर्जागर्ति भावितः ।

सुप्तिमात्रं जगद्ध्येतदात्मा साक्षी सदक्षरः ॥६॥

6. Sleeping, the individual sees dreams, then wakes, influenced (by ignorance). (In reality), the world is but sleep (that is to say, mere ignorance). The Self (directly perceiving the modification of the mind in all three stages of time - past, present and future and all three states - waking, dreaming and sleeping) is the Witness, is Truth, and is Imperishable. (6)

Now the meaning of the statement, 'The world is but sleep' will be made clear. As long as there is ignorance, the waking state is also a state of ignorance.

ज्ञानमज्ञानपर्यन्तं जीवनं मृत्युसंवृतम् ।  
स्वप्नवत् सर्वमस्पष्टमात्मा साक्षी सदक्षरः ॥७॥

7. (Empirical) knowledge is bounded by ignorance OR (waking functional) knowledge exists only as long as there is ignorance. Life is encompassed by death. As in a dream, all (the affairs of the waking state) is unclear. The Self is the Witness, is Truth and is Imperishable. (7)

Now in the next śloka an allegory will be used to show that the three states and the visible world are caused by confusion.

परमोपात्तपर्जन्यविद्युद्दामाहिसंभ्रम-  
भ्राजमानः प्रपञ्चोऽत्र आत्मा साक्षी सदक्षरः ॥८॥

8. The Supreme (Brahman) accepts clouds (symbolising ignorance, Prakṛti or Buddhi).<sup>1</sup> (In the clouds there is) a rope of lightning (symbolising cidābhāsa or Parā Prakṛti: i.e. the individual self).<sup>2</sup> Through confusion that rope is taken to be a snake<sup>3</sup> in the form of the visible world (which is Aparā Prakṛti and)<sup>4</sup> which is (seen) shining here.

OR the clouds could symbolise āvaraṇa śakti (the veiling power)<sup>5</sup> with the lightning symbolising vikṣepa śakti (the projecting power).<sup>6</sup>

OR the rope of lightning could also be taken to symbolise the satya (the truth) in this creation with the snake symbolising its asatya (falseness). The Self is the Witness, is Truth and is Imperishable. (8)

N. B. 1. It is believed that the sun creates clouds, by drawing water from the sea, and then, allows its light to be apparently screened by them. In the same way Brahman, by accepting ignorance, embracing Prakṛti (Nature) or by creating Buddhi (intellect), allows its light and knowledge to appear modified. But even as the clouds are actually far away from the sun and in no way have the slightest effect on the sun's light so the presence of Prakṛti in no way modifies the Imperishable Light or Knowledge of Brahman.

2. Cidābhāsa is the reflection of the Self in Buddhi (intellect). The combination of the Self (which is all pervading), Buddhi and the reflection of the Self in Buddhi is known as the Jīva (the individual soul). The Jīva is also known as Parā Prakṛti (The Higher Nature).

3. In a dim light a piece of rope lying on the ground is often, through confusion, taken to be a snake and so causes fear. Similarly, in the darkness of ignorance, the cidābhāsa (Jīva) is taken to be this visible world and causes fear.

4. Aparā Prakṛti (the Lower Nature) is this visible world which is said to be illusory and diverse. It consists of the five elements, the ego and the mind, (the sense organs and gross body being included in these).

5. Āvaraṇa śakti is the veiling power of tamas and it hides the real nature of anything. It also sets vikṣepa śakti into action.

6. Vikṣepa śakti is the projecting power of rajas and its form is activity. When the real nature of anything has been veiled by the āvaraṇa śakti, the vikṣepa śakti projects a new form. All activity stems from this power.

In the last song the commonplace form of the individual self has been shown and now its special fitness for identification with Brahman will be explained. This next song also describes methods by which the individual self can realise its true nature as Brahman.

एको गतिषु संभिन्नः किरूपः किल चिन्त्यताम् ।  
गुरुयोगात् प्रबुद्धः स्यादात्मा ब्रह्मोपपद्यते ॥९॥

9. One being (the Jīva or individual self) in all three states (waking, dreaming and sleeping), in different situations (heaven, hell etc.) and in different stages (childhood, old age etc.) appears to be varied. Consider, therefore, 'What is the actual form (of the individual self)?'

OR One Absolute Being (Brahman) who, in many different situations (that is, as the whole diversity of the universe) appears to be divided. Consider, therefore, 'What is the actual form (of Brahman)? The disciple who approaches and serves the Guru's feet becomes awakened (that is say, he comes to know the true nature of the Self). Then, the identification of the individual self with Brahman becomes appropriate. (9)

In the previous śloka it was suggested that the question, 'Who am I?' should be considered. This indicates the necessity for śravaṇa (study of the śruti - i.e. Vedas and



Upaniṣads - and of Guru's teachings). In the next śloka the practice of meditation which results in the manifestation of consciousness is shown.

संयम्य सर्वतो वृत्तिमिन्द्रियाणि मनो मतिम् ।  
योऽवशिष्येत् स्वयंज्योतिरात्मा ब्रह्मोपपद्यते ॥१०॥

10. Functions, having been restrained from all sides, (that is to say) the senses, mind and intellect having been controlled, that self-luminous essence, which remains, is the Self. Then, the identification of the individual self with Brahman becomes appropriate. (10)

After indicating śravaṇa, manana, in the form of the Yoga of Meditation, with its consequent manifestation of consciousness, has been shown. Now nididhyāsana (the setting into practice of truths heard and reflected upon) which results in a blissful nature, is introduced as a method to reach Brahman.

अमानः स्यात् समानः स्यान्निर्द्वन्द्वोऽसङ्ग एव च ।  
निष्कामः सर्वदानन्द आत्मा ब्रह्मोपपद्यते ॥११॥

11. One ought to be without pride and have equanimity. One should be free from the pairs of opposites (such as attraction and repulsion) and should be unattached. This would make one desireless and ever blissful. Then, the identification of the individual self with Brahman is appropriate.

The fitness of the individual self to be Brahman has been shown above. The next song describes the unqualified Self. In the first śloka the doctrines of those, who, even while accepting formlessness, believe in a divided Self (or, in a separate formless Supreme Person), of those who deny the

unity of the individual self with Brahman and also of those who believe in void, are refuted. At the same time the Vedantic teaching of the Self as non-dual and taintless (in other words, unqualified by Māyā-illusion) is put forward.

निराकारोऽपरिच्छिन्नः शून्यत्वे नैव सारता ।  
चिद्घनो निर्गुणो गूढ आत्माऽद्वैतो निरञ्जनः ॥१२॥

12. The Self is without form and is (thus) unfragmented. (This unfragmented formlessness is mistaken by others to be void. But) there is absolutely no essence in void. Full of consciousness, devoid of the three qualities (sattva, rajas and tamas) and, (therefore) concealed, the Self is non-dual and taintless (that is, unqualified by Māyā). (12)

Repudiating other doctrines, it has been stated that the Self, being non-dual, is one and is unqualified by Māyā. At this point the doubt may arise as to how the visible world has come about from Brahman, which, when unqualified by Māyā, has a form of Pure Consciousness (that is, a purely spiritual form). The next śloka removes this doubt.

अव्यक्तत्वादचिन्त्यत्वाद् ब्रह्मणि नैव विभ्रमः ।  
कूटस्थे तु बहिर्बाह्य आत्माऽद्वैतो निरञ्जनः ॥१३॥

13. There is no confusion in Brahman because it is unmanifest (that is, cannot be grasped by the sense organs etc.) and inconceivable (in other words, cannot be comprehended by mind). Brahman, which is immovable and impenetrable, appears to be situated within Māyā (illusion) but the confusion is on the outside, on the exterior (of that Being. That is to say, the confusion is only within Māyā and is, therefore, illusory). The Self is non-dual and taintless. (13)

It has been decided above that the non-dual soul (Self) is Brahman. This does not mean, however, that Saguna worship (that is, the worship of the Supreme Being with qualities) should be disregarded, because the worship of Nirguna (that is, of Brahman who is without qualities) is difficult for people who are identified with the body. Śaṅkarācārya has said that as long as duality is apparent, Saguna is to be respected. In reality, even as there is no difference between a lump of ice and melted ice, so Saguna and Nirguna are one and the same. Both aspects (Saguna and Nirguna) of Brahman are being shown in the next śloka.

विशिष्ट इष्टतो मान्यो भक्तापेक्षितविग्रहः ।

निर्विशेषः शिवः शान्त आत्माऽद्वैतो निरञ्जनः ॥१४॥

14. Saguna Brahman is endowed with special attributes, and because He is desired by His devotees, He is worthy of respect. He takes form according to the wishes of His devotees. Nirguna Brahman, however, without any distinctions, is auspicious and tranquil. The Self is non-dual and taintless.(14)

In the last song it was explained that the Self is non-dual and taintless. Now in accordance with the Śruti (Vedas) the Self's perpetuality and its state of being the basis and support of all will be described. The first śloka introduces the sacred syllable 'Om'.

वेदानां त्रिपदा सारं तस्या ओंकार उच्यते ।

ओंनामासि त्वमेवेति आत्मा धर्मः सनातनः ॥१५॥

15. The essence of the Vedas is the Gāyatrī mantra, which has three quarters (and) the essence of the Gāyatrī mantra is said to be the sacred syllable 'Om'. You (Self) are named

‘Om’. (The Self is known as Dharma, from dhāraṇāt, that is, from the act of supporting and sustaining all). The Self is the eternal foundation.

It has established that Omkāra is Brahman and is, therefore, the eternal foundation of all. In the next śloka the meanings of separate syllables of ‘Om’ are explained and the benefit of gaining this knowledge is also shown.

मात्राऽवस्था समाख्याता जानन्नेति त्रिधा गतिम् ।

अमात्रो निर्गतिस्तुर्य आत्मा धर्मः सनातनः ॥१६॥

16. The three parts (mātrās) of ‘Om’, that is, the letters ‘a’, ‘u’ and ‘m’, have been stated to be equivalent to the three states (waking, dreaming and sleeping). With a correct knowledge of the first, second and third mātrās, the three types of situations or positions (viśva<sup>1</sup>, taijasa<sup>2</sup> and prājña<sup>3</sup>) are attained. The fourth state of the Self known as Turiya, has no mātrā (is immeasurable) and is without anyone position or movement. The Self is the eternal foundation. (16)

N. B. 1. One who knows the identity between the letter ‘a’ and the waking state attains to viśva and gains identity with Vaiśvānara.

2. One who apprehends the identity between the letter ‘u’ and the dream state, attains to Taijasa and gains identity with Hiraṇyagarbha.

3. One who apprehends the identity of the letter ‘m’ with the sleeping state attains to Prājña and gains identity with the Unmanifest (Īśvara).

Having stated that the knowledge of the mātrās of Omkāra leads to the three states (of the Self), it has been explained

that the Self, which has no mātrā (is immeasurable), is without movement and is known as Turiya (the fourth state). Now we are shown that the Praṇava (Omkāra) is applicable in both the path of action and the path of renunciation. The Self, in the form of Praṇava, assents not only to Karma-Kāṇḍa (that part of the Vedas that deals with ceremonial acts and sacrificial rites) and Jñāna-Kāṇḍa (which relates to the knowledge of the Self) but to all types of worship and every type of inclination (both theistical and atheistical).

ओमित्युक्त्वा प्रवर्तन्ते निवर्तन्तेऽथ ब्राह्मणाः ।  
ओं सर्वं स्वीकरोतीव आत्मा धर्मः सनातनः ॥१७॥

17. Having uttered 'Om' the Brahmanas commence (their work) and then pronouncing 'Om' they cease from those actions. Om (that is, the Self) seems to accept all (beliefs and emotions, because the meaning of the syllable 'Om' is also of consent. In reality, the Self is distinct). The Self is the eternal foundation. (17)

On the basis of the Vedas it has been shown that the Self is non-dual and is the eternal foundation of all. The greatness of the Praṇava has also been described. This is now being confirmed by reason from other śāstras (scriptures).

स्फुरति विशति संविद् यत्र सकृद् विभातः  
विविधविभवभावान् नेहते नेति नेति ।  
अविदितविदिताभ्यामन्यताऽनन्य एव  
अहमिति परिपूर्णप्रत्ययः प्रत्यगात्मा ॥१८॥

18. Where knowledge (Brahman) shone once (that is to say, is constantly shining), there that knowledge manifests

(in the form of the universe and again) enters (its unmanifested state).

OR Where (in Brahman) knowledge becomes manifest (with the act of perceiving at the beginning of creation--tadaikṣata) and enters (the material objects of creation as their inner witness), there that knowledge is constantly shining.

OR Where knowledge becomes manifest (in the form of waking state and again) enters (into the sleeping state) there that knowledge is constantly shining. That knowledge (Brahman) does not desire (that is to say, rejects) the varied and magnificent substances and states (of creation). This is shown by the Vedic utterance) 'Neti, Neti' '(Brahman) not this way, not this way'. Different from the known and from the unknown, the Self is unique (that is to say, non-dual).

OR Other than the known and the unknown the Self is non-other (than one's own self). The self has the conviction that, 'I am the inner self which has the form of completeness.'

OR The inner self has the conviction that, 'I am complete'.  
(18)

The next śloka points out that all that has been said until now has not just been the imagination of a fanciful mind but the essential truth of the Vedas.

निगमगदिततत्त्वं प्रस्तुतं सत्यसत्यम्  
अमृतमभयमेतद् भाव्यते भाग्यवद्भिः ।  
दमयति दमनीयं दक्षिणामूर्तिमौनं  
गमयति पदमन्त्यं स्वस्तिमूलं मुमुक्षून् ॥१९॥

(19). The reality, stated in the Vedas and propounded above, is the real truth. The immortal and fearless state is experienced by the fortunate. The silence of Dakṣiṇāmūrti<sup>1</sup> suppresses that which is to be suppressed and causes strivers after emancipation to attain the last and Highest Abode, which is the root of well being.<sup>2</sup>(19)

N. B. 1. The Guru, who is an embodiment of Śiva, is also known as Dakṣiṇāmūrti.

2. The word Dakṣiṇāmūrti can also be broken down to mean the skilled one who is without embodied form, that is to say, the Supreme Being.

Because of the depth of the subject under investigation, constant repetition is necessary. Success will not, generally, be gained by only one reading. Again, one should not give up this study, thinking that the attainment of such knowledge is impossible. This knowledge is definitely attainable. The śloka brings this fact to light and, by means of illustration, the truths set out above are further clarified.

परं स्वं स्वं परं मत्वा मृगवन्मृग्यते मृषा ।  
शाखाग्रे लक्ष्यते लीनो धीरैरभ्युपलभ्यते ॥२०॥

(20) Having (mis)taken another (body etc.) to be one's self and thinking one's self to be another (that is some separate Supreme Being, (man) like the musk deer, searches vainly (for satisfaction). (In order to show a child the new moon in the sky) its position at the end of a branch (is pointed out and it is) perceived hidden (there). (In the same way the self is perceived concealed within the five sheaths, within the Upaniṣads and also here in Ātmacintanam). (The Self) is attained by the resolute. (20)

N. B. The five sheaths that cover the Self are gross material sheath (the body), the sheath of Prāṇa (the vital airs), the sheath of mind, the sheath of the intellect and the sheath of bliss. The sheath of bliss immediately covers the self, while the gross body is the outer sheath.

Having stated that the Self is attained by the resolute, now, the state and experience of the self in relation to the universe both before and after Liberation, is described.

अस्मिन् बृहति ब्रह्माण्डे लघुरूपोऽहमीदृशः ।  
आत्मतत्त्वे च विज्ञाते लघुरूपोऽयमीदृशः ॥२१॥

21. (Not knowing the reality of the Self, one thinks), 'In this vast universe I (have) such an insignificant form'. When the reality of the Self is known then this (vast universe has) such an insignificant form. (That is to say, when the knowledge of the Self is gained, the universe which is just a fabrication of the mind, appears as not larger than a small fruit placed in the palm of one's hand). (21)

हरिः ॐ तत्सत्  
इत्यात्मचिन्तनम् ।

**Thus ends (this) contemplation on the Self.**

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