

Grace of Mind

An interesting aspect of India's spiritual heritage is the matter-of-fact, down-to-earth approach to human problems. Yoga psychology rationally surveys the problem, boils it down to its essentials, carefully separates the self-created part from the actual issue, and addresses the problem psychologically and existentially. This brings one face to face with the actual matter at hand, and urges one to exercise one's will to mould one's own destiny.

It is quite easy to circumvent our problems by invoking 'God's will' or 'fate' but exercising our intelligence and energy in unselfishly solving them, is a surer step to the grace of God and a 'good fate' than ignoring them. That is why the entire Yoga-Vedanta approach to tackling life's problems and progressing on the spiritual path advances the common-sense way of training, refining and grappling with our minds first before we hand over the reins to God. He who has worked hard on himself gets the right to urge and actuate the divine will.

In fact, God's grace comes to us in the form of a gracious mind. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi would quote from the famous Vaishnava maxim, "The aspirant may have received the grace of the Guru, the Lord and the Vaishnava; but he comes to grief without the grace of the 'one'. The 'one' is the mind." A self-driven, pure, supple and transparent mind, at once simple and intelligent, positive and aware, is the greatest blessing of the divine.

Many are the songs in the Hindu tradition that are addressed not to God but to the human mind. One famous song which Sri Ramakrishna adored, was written

by Ramprasad, a Bengali saint. It has the following lines:

*O mind, you do not know how to farm!
Fallow lies the field of your life.
If you had only worked it well,
How rich a harvest you might reap!*

This throws the brunt of every striving on our own shoulders and curbs the escapist overtures of our intellect and ego. They may very well give us counsel to our own undoing. The intellect may be clouded enough to rest and take the guise of devotion and surrender! As for the ego, it has the most obscure and shadowy presence in our personality structure. So are its interpretations and advises. However, it represents something real. That is its only value. So it seems clear that we need to earn the grace of the mind by self-effort and sincerity in order to proceed steadily.

But what does grace of mind actually mean? The ability of the mind to remain focussed on our goals and to bring to us what we want. The ordinary state of our mind consists of a smattering of several collected thoughts, with a will coursing through a priority jacket, which makes certain thoughts gain precedence over the rest. But the over-cluttered mental field, the constant deflection of attention, an erected priority-jacket, and the consequent turmoil of choice is over-burdening. So we suffer stress and distraction, angst and blood pressure. When we get the grace of our mind, we are suddenly inspired by a shining purpose. The muddy will now clears up and gains

sharp focus and our aims and intents start dominating the mental field. The goal beckons us with alacrity. Our vital energies respond eagerly. These create an upsurge of aligned thoughts and urge us into action towards very specific ends. Grace of mind would thus mean a state when the mind by itself pines for its goals, when it functions as one agent, steadily burning for one purpose, like the flame of a lamp without a flicker. The driving force of such a mind is tremendous. It will make us do anything for extended periods of time and that without fatigue.

Such a mind has grown alert due to the preponderance of *sattwa*, which best reflects awareness. So its understanding is crystal clear. It sharply denounces the stupidity of getting over-cluttered, it repels the morbidity of conditioning, it refuses to give in to impulsive desire for it has understood the trap of objects.

We would all agree that our sanest moments are the moments of deep inner serenity and calmness. They reveal to us the devastation caused by negativities in the mind. Knowing is turning away from that which is harmful and detrimental to our mental health. Mental clarity will also reveal the sheer springs of joy hidden within us. Through clear revelations, the mind learns to revel in the joy of higher awareness and will never compromise this joy for objects and thoughts related to them. Also certain facts become obvious—The intensity of awareness keeps the mind calm. And freedom from objects, keeps it happy. Its happiness percolates into the body and keeps the body also happy. Thus when one gets the grace of one's mind, one stops giving objects the importance they do not deserve. One naturally comes to the great conclusion exemplified in the lives

of saints and seers - that happiness depends on no externals.

Even a cursory acquaintance with these states will make one take more care of the mind than anything else in the world. These states of mind bring home the conviction that it is wiser to invest time and energy in preserving and developing mind, rather than in decorating ones externals. Grace of mind comes when we have wilfully served it well, when we have been sensitive to its deepest needs, when we have nourished it with good food. Then we would harvest the bounties of life—the sheer joy of pure awareness, the rapture of unchanging love and the ecstasy of divine union.

Sri Ramakrishna speaks of '*abhyasa yoga*' in his conversations on handling mind. He says, "Through *abhyasa yoga* one may overcome attachment to woman and gold. This is there in the *Gita*. Practise brings one extraordinary power. Then it is no more difficult to control the senses – lust, anger etc. Even as a tortoise which withdraws its hands and feet into its shell. Even if cut into pieces, it will not release them from the shell." It is clear that grace of mind comes as the ability to acutely discriminate and live out our discernments joyfully.

Let us remember one liberating fact—We are not our minds. Nor is mind what we have been 'thinking' about. Mind is an ocean of awareness teeming with thoughts on the surface. Spiritual practice aims at extracting awareness by overcoming the thought process. Can one 'conceive' of the transcendental? Not as a 'thought' or *vikalpa*. This is again a triad of sorts. Then how does one proceed? Mind in its depths being an ocean of awareness, diving deep into it should bring us higher awareness. To so clean the purpose of our mind that it

is able to dive to its depths, and remain there, is the great challenge. Thus the essence of spiritual life is transcending the mind through the mind.

Sri Ramakrishna used to love the lines of another song which said, "Play the flute of your grace and bring the cow of my mind under control. May she find her home in the cowshed of my heart. This is my prayer to you, my Lord." In the simplicity of song and language is hidden an important Yogic technique for mindfulness and awareness. The habitual anchor or home of the mind is the heart. If tied to the heart, which means if attention is riveted to the heart, the mind remains 'at home'—restful, calm, satiated and alert. It revels in bliss. When it strays out, *samsara* begins.

One sure sign of the grace of mind is a constant mood of contemplation - The mind happily dwelling within. It is only possible when the mind is to a large extent empty of junk and able to considerably reflect consciousness. Then one delights in the state of awareness without thoughts. In fact thoughts become an interruption in the flow of heightened awareness, even as words interrupt the flow of thought.

Existential enquiry into the nature of reality is possible only if awareness dominates over mind function. As long as the mind is perpetually engaged and absorbed in thought, it remains in the dual mode. It can only "see" or connect with duality. For an instrument so framed and capacitated, the objective world is the only reality. A microscope can only detect micro-organisms and a telescope can only disarm distance to spot far away objects. Every instrument gives us knowledge as per its facility and make. Tinged and coloured by the dual mode, the mind will only try to 'understand' reality by dissecting

it into subject and object. And the mind sensitive to duality remains absorbed in the object.

The nature of the mind, given over to objects, is far from satisfactory. It gradually loses its ability to 'expand'. The boundless mind has circumscribed itself into such narrow folds, that it loses touch with its infinitude. If an enormous energy is constricted to a narrow space, it will create a veritable tornado. The restricted and wrongly conditioned mind behaves likewise. Naturally it becomes peaceless and restless.

Mother points out to this interesting phenomenon in a simple manner. While Mother was in Dakshineswar, hers was a life of hard work. At least apparently it appeared to be so. But her inner life was a lighted candle glowing with knowledge and peace. This kept her full of joy. A devotee called 'Pande's wife' would live near the Dakshineswar temple garden. She was fond of both the Master and Mother knowing them to be divine. Occasionally she supplied milk for the Master. When Mother was free in the afternoons she sometimes visited this devotee and carried food for her. She was a companion with whom Mother would share her innermost thoughts. Once Mother said to her, "People in our part of the country quarrel and fight over their property. They haven't enough patience to settle their matters amicably. The possession of land and property is so temporary, and still they are so proud of their ownership! It is only a play for a few days! This body has a form, but the mind is boundless. It can be expanded like the vast space, but it is bound by maya. People do not know this mystery of maya, so they suffer and inflict suffering on others."

How pointed are Mother's

observations! She is speaking of the state the unmeditative mind finally comes to.

Mother's own life, even at that tender age when she had just finished her teenage years, shows us what this expansion of mind entails. She lived in uncomfortable cramped circumstances but without complaint. She did not have even the basic amenities of life, but never bothered about them. She cared for all the simple village women who would come to her and provided them with whatever was available at hand. The weak, unsophisticated and illiterate men and women who would come to her in the guise of fisher-folk, maids and servants, all received her motherly touch and found a safe refuge in her in times of need. She was the silent benefactor of all whose expansive mind bewildered even Sri Ramakrishna. In fact, much to his regret later, he one day told her that if she gave out things in such large measure, how would she manage her household. Mother is silently showing us the type of mind required for the spiritual path. Grace of mind is the maturity that allows the mind to enlarge, extend and encompass everything. The mind has resolved into its true substratum, pure awareness. And awareness has no boundaries. As long as the mind has knots it will refuse to do this.

All saints and sages have recommended the straight path of discrimination and spiritual practice. We can take the inspiration from Mother's words, "My child, this mind is just like a wild elephant. It races with the wind. Therefore one should discriminate all the time. One should work hard for the realization of God. What a wonderful mind I had at that time! Somebody used to play on the flute at Dakshineswar. As I

listened to the sound, my mind would be extremely eager for the realization of God. I thought the sound was coming directly from God, and I would enter into *Samadhi*. I experienced the same ecstasy at Belur also. The place was then very peaceful and I was constantly in a mood of meditation."

It is only spiritual practice, *sadhana*, that gives us insight into the goal of our spiritual striving. Knowing the Self is not another way of thinking but a mode of being. Gaining this is the actual grace of mind. Graciously the mind has stepped aside, but that does not mean it is absent. Bereft of dense content, this very mind transmutes into its source. The mind that has sensitively learnt to farm the field of life reaps a golden harvest. How would a mind that has awakened to its actual goal work?

To pick up the thread from Ramprasad's famous song quoted earlier – the mind starts by preserving its precious topsoil from eroding. The surface thoughts make the topsoil. They must be kept pure! It makes sure only good thoughts and positive images enter its farmland. It sows the right seed - the holy name of God. The fruit of God-consciousness requires the most potent seed of the divine name. The awakened mind faithfully waters the seed with love. Where there is love, there is patience. The mind patiently watches over the harvest. It hedges the crop and takes care that the crop suffers no canker or disease. It will choose the company of the holy in case of need. The seeds blossom into plants and the crop turns into a golden harvest. In time, the seed of God's name sown in the most fertile life and cared for by an awakened mind, yields the highest fruit of God consciousness. ❀

An Introduction to the Mandukya Upanishad

PRAVRAJIKA VIVEKAPRANA

The *Mandukya Upanishad* is the briefest and the most mysterious of all Upanishads. It starts with a very mysterious statement (mysterious from the modern point of view): the first statement of the Upanishad says, all that we think of as past, present and future in space and time, and whatever could be beyond space and time, is nothing but 'Omkar' [*Aum*]. It therefore states or claims that 'Omkar' is all that there is.

Is 'Omkar' just a sound uttered or heard by human beings? Or, is it some vibration in the universal consciousness, which can be heard by the human ears only after passing through many subtle states? Ordinarily, we do not know. But this categorical assertion of the Upanishad demands that we either try to experience it, or let it be, and just try to intellectually and logically grasp its meaning to whatever extent is possible for us.

This Upanishad, therefore, is not about religion; it is not a study of mythology, rituals or anything like that. To study this text we need to go beyond our personality; we need to forget ourselves as the egotistical beings who "know it all"; we are asked to only have clear thinking with no emotions, no superstitions, and no biases; just to catch hold of the ability to use logic and reasoning. The pre-condition, even to study this Upanishad, is that we keep our logical mind alive at the expense of our personalities. We have to perceive all the states of human experiences in our total awareness to see what are they trying to show us. To successfully do that we

cannot have the personality interfering ... that is the demand of this Upanishad. And what does it imply to say we cannot have the personality interfering? We have to set aside or control our thoughts, opinions, fears, biases, desires and emotions, ideas and opinions, as against logical thinking.

The *Mandukya* is a very important Upanishad from the Advaitic point of view. The subject matter is just the three states of consciousness known to all creatures as *Jagrat* (waking state), *Swapna* (dream state), and *Sushupti* (deep-sleep state). Since these are universal experiences, one doesn't need to imagine that there should be some ritualistic or religious background to these concepts. From that point of view, it is the most secular of all Upanishads since it does not bring in any extraneous idea of a Creator God or gods. It should therefore, be acceptable to the most intellectually oriented human minds. But strangely it is perhaps, the least studied of all Upanishads. Both Sri Shankaracharya, and his grand guru Sri Gaudapadacharya, have given an exhaustive commentary to this Upanishad, which by itself, comprises only 12 *shlokas*. Therefore its prestige is known and accepted by the thinkers in India.

What Do Modern Science and Our Ancient Thinkers Say?

Science tells us that we started this journey as a single-celled amoeba and gradually evolved to develop this human nervous system, which has become sophisticated enough to give rise to 'self-

consciousness'. That is what evolution means. According to the ancient Hindu thought, beginning with the struggle for survival, we passed through many bodies from the jellyfish perhaps, to the animals with claws, horns, sharp teeth, and so on. Gradually, this outer frame, the toughened animal body, or 'hardware', vanished and the 'software', that is the nervous system, the seat of the mind and self-consciousness, became developed and fine-tuned. This nervous system is very sophisticated, and is now ready to reveal the truth, of the ultimate reality to us, but because most of us do not believe in this possibility of an ultimate truth, therefore we do not use it to its optimal capacity. Science tells us that we use only 10 per cent of the capacity of our nervous system!

According to the Hindu theory of evolution, it is Pure Consciousness that has been trying to manifest itself through the process of changing the outer and the inner framework. This nervous system is the ultimate gadget for us, as human beings. We have been fighting external nature, discovering many subtle laws, trying to make our lives more and more comfortable, at the expense of other creatures and physical nature, not realizing that now we need to overcome our selfishness. We still feel that we need to protect our personality in every way — physically, mentally, and emotionally, in order to survive, and therefore we try to protect this body-mind complex, at the external level, through struggles and competition.

States of Consciousness

As already mentioned, the *Mandukya Upanishad* essentially presents

to us with three states of consciousness — The waking state, or *Jagrat*; the dream state, or *Swapna*; the deep sleep state of *Sushupti*. It says that we cannot take the outer most state of consciousness, *Jagrat*, as the "be all and end all", and expect that it will give us the ultimate truth or happiness. We need to take the other two states of consciousness, *Swapna* and *Sushupti*, into consideration if we ever wish to understand the meaning of life. Not only that, it also points to a fourth state, of Pure Consciousness — *Turiya*, the final search and goal of all beings. Actually, *Turiya* is not a 'state'. It is called the 'fourth' only to make it clear for us that there is a level beyond the three that we know of. It is at the *Turiya*, the all-inclusive level of Pure Consciousness, that the mystery of life can be understood. In the other three states, it is covered to the extent that it can either be totally 'dark' as in *Sushupti*, or be partially manifest in the dream and the waking states. For example, the light of the sun can be covered by the thickest of dark clouds, or get eclipsed; or we can 'cover' our eyes with our fingers, which would lessen the direct sunlight but some would filter in between the fingers. There is a light of consciousness, and all experience shows that we are witness to our internal state as well as the external world of objects. That is a proof that the light of consciousness never vanishes.

The same light of Brahman, of pure consciousness shines through all states, but because of the continued grossness of the psychophysical system, the light becomes limited so that by the time we come to the *Jagrat* state, objectivity or a world full of objects, seems to stand out like a film on a screen and since we pay full attention to this we take it to be absolutely real. When

we go deeper into the physical universe it becomes more subtle and gradually invisible. The question then: is the visible more real or the invisible? For the ordinary mind, the visible alone is real and the invisible does not even exist. If we start saying that the invisible does not exist then we have to accept that even our mind does not exist! We are denying our own reality!

Levels of Functioning

The Upanishad gives us waking, dreaming, and deep sleep as the states in which we function. And then we are given the understanding that we oscillate between these states, and nothing is absolute in any of them. And the only way given to us to understand this statement is to compare our waking life to the dream life. Dreams come and go. We do know and accept this, because when we are awake we can perceive the transitoriness of the dream. We do not stick to them, or should I say they do not stick to us. We have endless dreams. But then, we give absolute reality to the waking state. Why do we give so much importance to our waking life? When we enter deep sleep, the awareness of the waking state is also lost, as the mind has momentarily merged into that Ultimate Consciousness, or into *Turiya*, giving rise to the statement, “I was at peace.” This clearly shows that the ‘I’ is the light of Consciousness. In a nutshell, the explanation the thinkers give us is that just as the dream is unreal or transitory when perceived from the waking state, deep sleep is another state of consciousness from which the waking state is equally transitory and unreal.

The deep sleep is nearer to the

fourth state, as that seems to lead us back to the dream and waking states. When we change from the dream level to the waking level of consciousness and we look back and compare, we say, “that was a dream, and this is real.” The rishis or the ancient thinkers, point out that there is no logic in that assumption! We can be and are hungry, eating, feeling excited, joyful, or afraid, and everything else in dreams just as much as we are in the waking state. What is the difference between the two? We believe that in the waking state any definitive action, like for example, of the hand picking a stone and breaking the window, that window remains broken; but that is also as real in a dream — as long as one is dreaming, the window, once broken, remains broken! The main point here is that there is a corresponding reality to the corresponding ego. For the waking ego there is a corresponding reality; for the dream ego there is an equally ‘real’ corresponding reality! In deep sleep, on the other hand, there is neither the stone, nor the window, nor the hand that throws the stone to break the window! What level of consciousness is that? Is it exclusively ours as individuals or is it universal? It is universal.

Given these facts the thinkers ask us, what right do we have to expect reality from just one level of experience — the waking state? What kind of intelligence is it that we want to assert that we must put “all our eggs in the ‘waking state’ basket?” We may argue that the waking state gives a sense of continuity, which perhaps the dream state does not... but that is again a relative comparison. In the dream state we never believe there is no continuity. Putting the two states side-by-side we can perceive that the experience in both the

states is equally 'real' and relevant, within that time and space.

As human beings each one of us believes in a centre within, which we call 'I'. It seems to be a unit and yet gets bifurcated like a lighted torch, by our thoughts and emotions, activity, and so on. We believe, that it is activity that will give us whatever we are searching for — call it happiness, success, joy, name and fame, and so on. The *Mandukya Upanishad* on the other hand does not lead us to activity. It says, now that we have reached a logical level of so-

called
r a t i o n a l
h u m a n
b e i n g s , i t i s
n o t a
m a t t e r o f
' d o i n g ' a n y
l o n g e r .
' D o i n g ' w a s
n e c e s s a r y
t o p r e p a r e
t h i s

psycho-physical system. Now reasoning, which is connected with the evolution of the higher nervous system, is pointing to an abstract level of mental activity, which is not connected with the mere activity of hands and feet. 'Doing' is so predominant in the human world because we have struggled hard all the way through external activity to reach this level. This Upanishad points to a level beyond activity, and asks us to experience the light of consciousness, which we are, and which *seems* to include the rest of the states of consciousness (*Aham Brahmasmi*— I Am Brahman). Just as the rope does not include the snake, this level of Pure Consciousness does not include the

other states of consciousness. Yet from the ordinary point of view, the three states, especially the *Jagrat*, are absolutely real where 'doing' is apparently the most logical activity and which does not include analysis of the other two internal states and, of course, we don't even think of anything beyond that.

Conclusion

The *rishi* of this Upanishad, does not seem to be interested in pandering to human

proclivity
for imagining
that the little
whirlpools
of human
thoughts,
emotions,
and so
called
external
activity is all
that there is
to human
life. If that



had been so, then humanity, which has lived long enough, should have found some solutions to the horrendous problems that we increasingly face in this age. Physicists, as far as I understand, have almost exhausted the search for a 'God Particle' in external nature. And all the technical devices that are based on this research seem to lead to tremendous weapons of mass destruction as well as to dubious gadgets for human comfort and convenience. It is therefore high time that we turn our attention to this ancient Upanishad, which is challenging us to find something beyond the ordinary three states of consciousness. ❀

God is Sat-Chit-Ananda

SWAMI NITYASTHANANDA

The students of Vedanta are very familiar with the term Sachiddananda which describes the Ultimate Reality, God, or Brahman- Atman. This compound word is translated into English as Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. Normally these three terms are prefixed by the word Absolute. Why is this word 'Absolute' added? 'Existence' is applicable to all objects of the world both living and non-living. But this existence is contingent, that is, it is non-eternal, dependent, and relative, whereas existence of God is absolute. Similarly, ordinary consciousness is related to objects and in some states like deep sleep, it seems to get obliterated, and even in the waking state, we are seldom aware of this consciousness, being identified with objects — external or mental. And moreover, the ordinary consciousness varies in different states. But God is pure, unassociated, absolute consciousness. The bliss one feels in empirical experiences is again transitory and relative to objects of various levels. The bliss of God is absolute.

These three terms – Sat, Chit, and Ananda—do not occur in combination in the major Upanishads, but they occur separately in different passages. There is a statement in the *Chandogya Upanishad*—*sadaiva saumya idamagra aasit*—in which the word Sat occurs. The statement of *Taittiriya Upanishad* — *satyam jnaanamanantam brahma*— contains *chit (jnana)*. And *Vijnanam anandam brahma* — of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* expresses the Ananda aspect of the Reality. These three terms

comprehensively and very succinctly reflect the nature of Reality, which is, in fact, beyond all expression. It is just a humble attempt to comprehend what is incomprehensible. Again, these expressions cannot be taken as different qualities of Reality; they are the very essence of Reality. They express themselves in human beings as desire to be, to know and to be happy, respectively. The ultimate fulfilment of this desire is called *moksha*; the state in which man becomes immortal, all-knowing, and all-blissful.

Now we shall try to understand why God is characterized as Sacchidananda. Every object that we perceive has its existence. Wherefrom does it derive its existence? The pot that we see derives its existence from clay; the pot cannot exist without clay. But the existence of clay does not depend upon any one pot or many pots. For us a pot is more tangible and has great utility and we seldom think of the clay, which has no utility for us as the pot does. Still we cannot think of having a pot without clay — the reality of the pot belongs to clay. Similarly, all different forms of waves derive their existence from the water of the ocean. Pushing this reasoning further, we can say that the whole phenomenal world derives its existence from the Ultimate Reality, God. Just as clay is the very existence of the pot and an ocean is the existence of waves, so is God the very basis of the existence of the whole universe. Therefore, is it reasonable to deny the existence of such a God? To do so is

like denying the existence of clay in the pot. “God is not *merely* one in the way that the finite object might be merely singular or unique but it is oneness as such, the one act of being and unity by which any finite thing exists and by which all things exist together.”¹ “God is not a being, but Being itself.” So He cannot be denied.

The Upanishads say *Sadaiva Saumya Idamagra Asit*, that is, “O beloved one, in the beginning Sat only was existing.” Here we should not take the word “beginning” to mean temporal beginning. It means God is the very essence of everything. It does not mean that Sat was there in the beginning of creation, and it is no more, or it completely transformed itself into this world, losing Its real nature. David Bentley Hart enumerates two causal relations: accidental and intrinsic (*ibid*, p. 103). In the case of the former, the cause need not exist after producing the effect. For example, the seed ceases to exist after the tree is produced, and similarly, the father need not be there for his son or his grandson to survive. Here the causal relation is only extrinsic. Whereas in the latter, the intrinsic, the cause is the constant wellspring for the effect to exist — waves cannot exist without the ocean, or the pot cannot exist without the clay. God’s causal relation to the world is that of the second type.

Let us look at the same issue from the subjective standpoint. I perceive and experience so many things including my own senses and mental modifications. Do they have their own reality independent of my perception or does their existence depend on my perception? This is a big question in philosophy, perhaps, one that can never be answered. Let us leave this question to philosophers to ponder upon. It only means

since my awareness is responsible for perception, objects are not apart from my awareness. It is I who give reality to them.

I can deny the existence of everything else, but myself. If no one perceives the world, who is to certify that the world exists? So really speaking, existence of the world depends upon my own existence. It is I, the Atman, who give existence to the world. That is why Atman is said to be Sat.

Now the question arises: if God is existence, is He inert matter just like any other material objects that exist? If we consider Him to be the material cause of the universe, as clay is the material cause of pot, such a God is no better than matter. We cannot appreciate such a God; and he is neither desirable, nor approachable and therefore cannot be an object of love and adoration. If God is only an ultimate Existence, of the material universe, the entire lore of religious literature, and all experiences of saints and prophets become devalued having no meaning whatsoever to mankind. If that is the case, it is as good as saying there is no God. That is why, God is also considered to be Pure Consciousness. What does this mean then? We cannot attribute any kind of awareness or consciousness to matter. One material object cannot be aware of another nor can it perceive another object. Although we say senses plus mind perceive the objects outside, the perceptual aspect here cannot be attributed to them because they are only finer forms of matter. They are like a camera and a camera cannot perceive. The real perceiver has to be something different from matter, i.e., somebody conscious. That is why the *Kenopanishad* asserts the Atman is the real perceiver.

Let us try to understand this from

the neurological standpoint. All the neurological activities in the brain become experiences, but for whom? Activities of a machine are not experiences, they are just processes. They become experiences to a conscious being outside it. But in the case of a human being the neurological processes become experiences to someone within the human personality. This experience can be attributed to a conscious being within the personality, the Atman.

It may be argued that consciousness emerges out of matter when it becomes more and more sophisticated and subtle, as heat emerges out of friction. Since consciousness is a subjective factor, is it reasonable to say that subject arises out of object? Even supposing it were so, something cannot arise out of something else unless it is already there potentially — as *satkaryavada* (concept of pre-existent effect) suggests. Artificial intelligence appears to act consciously. But the very word ‘artificial’ suggests a conscious agent behind it.

A machine cannot function without the presence of electricity or any other form of energy within it. Nevertheless, all the activities belong to the machine, not to the electricity. The machine, however, is neither the agent of action nor enjoyer of the result of action, both of which belong to someone outside the machine who uses it. Both *Kartritva* (doership) and *Bhoktritva* (enjoyment) cannot be attributed to electricity, but neither would be possible without it. Similarly, the Atman is neither the *Kartri* (doer) nor the *Bhoktri* (the experiencer), but without its presence, neither doing nor experiencing are possible. Interestingly, we cannot attribute these two even to personality structure, which is the product of *Prakriti*, matter. In matter

there is only activity, but there is no agentship, and there is enjoyment but there is no enjoyer. The doership and enjoyership are characteristics of the ego; that is, they are neither in *Prakriti*, which is inert (*jada*), nor in pure consciousness (*chit*), Atman, which is universal. When these two, *chit* and *jada*, are combined, ego, both the doer and enjoyer, arises. The ego is called *chit-jada-granthi*.

Now we come to the third characteristic, *Ananda*. According to Vedanta, *moksha* is considered to be the ultimate goal of life. *Moksha* is explained as freedom from the bondage of transmigratory existence. And it is also characterized as *atyantika dukha nivritti* —ultimate freedom from all suffering. However, this is only a negative description of *moksha*. Is there no positive content in the state of *moksha*? We notice so much of joy, *Ananda*, in the lives of great saints who having attained ultimate freedom, remain in a state of God-intoxication. Wherefrom is this joy derived? Matter cannot give us any joy. Moreover, the realized souls are detached from all forms of matter. If they are deriving so much of joy, it must be from God or the Atman only. So God is considered to be *Anandaswarupa*.

In fact, according to Vedanta, even the ordinary worldly pleasures of various levels are hierarchical manifestations of the bliss of Atman. It is a mistake to think that we are enjoying the world; the world of matter cannot make us happy. We are always enjoying the bliss of Atman, even while indulging in worldly pleasures. The Upanishads question: *Etasyaiva anandasya anyaa maatra upajivanti?* (How can any living being be happy, if the Self is devoid of Ananda?) We mistakenly think that we

are deriving happiness from the things of the world. When we turn back to ourselves and confront the infinite reservoir of happiness, then we realize that we are only sipping a tiny drop of that happiness through worldly things. It is really like digging a well at the bank of Ganga. When the mind becomes calm and pure, the great inner joy wells up from within, and that joy is not related to any object; it is untouched by anything. It can be considered as objectless enjoyment, in contrast to other enjoyments, which depend upon the things of the world. What is the source of this joy? It is the manifestation of the Self that makes one feel that pure joy. Since it is not related to anything else, it must be the joy of the Self, and so the Self is blissful. The Ultimate Reality — objectively called God or Brahman, and subjectively called the Self or Atman — is described as full of Bliss. That Bliss of God manifests Itself, according to the Bhakti schools of Vedanta, as Bhakti in the heart of devotees and draws them towards God. Madhusudana Saraswati says:

*Bhagavan paramaananda
suarupah vayameva hi |
Manogatastadaakaara
rasataameti pushkalaam ||*

“The Lord Himself who is of the nature of Supreme Bliss enters the mind of a devotee and assumes the form of intense devotion.”

Let us try to understand this from another angle. Just imagine the world prior to any living being in existence. At that time, there existed only the material world and only existence (*sat*) could be attributed to it. Gradually in course of time consciousness (*chit*) emerged first in the

form of life (plants), then mind and intellect in animals and finally in the form of self-awareness in man. As man also evolves he reaches the state of God-man in whom the Ananda aspect manifests fully. That is why we find men of God always so full of joy. In this way the three aspects of Reality manifest themselves in the course of evolution. This reminds us of Swami Vivekananda’s observation about evolution, “History of evolution is nothing but progressive reading of spirit in matter.”

So we can say that Sat-chit-ananda is a very comprehensive description of the Ultimate Reality. It encompasses both the subjective and objective reality from the lowest to the highest manifestation of it, and also both absolute and relative aspects of it. Individually these three aspects of Reality manifest themselves externally as urge **to be (sat) to know (chit) and to be happy (ananda)**. When we give this a spiritual twist, it becomes an aspiration for immortality, to know the Ultimate Reality and to attain Eternal Bliss, the ultimate end of all sufferings (*Atyantika duhkha nivritti*). This is the consummation of the whole process of evolution, and the ultimate goal of all religions. That is why, perhaps, Swami Vivekananda said three things, “Arise! awake! and stop not till the goal is reached.” Arise, sleep no more and see the Reality, and awake, be fully conscious of it, and stop not till the eternal bliss is attained. ❀

Reference:

1. David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God*, Yale University Press, London, 2013

