

The Nirvāṇaṣaṭka or a Sextet on God-consciousness

ॐ brahmaṇe namaḥ ॐ

Small introduction and note: The word Nirvāṇa literally denotes 'blowing out, blowing away'. It is the state wherein the ignorance and the illusion have been dispelled or extinguished forever; it is the state of the Supreme God-consciousness.

This Ṣaṭka or sextet is said to have been composed by Śaṅkarācārya, the famous Sage of the Advaitavedānta. It forms a beautiful description of the consciousness of a person established in God, i.e. the consciousness of God Himself, for there is no difference between one who has realized God and God.

Note: We have used the terms God, the Self, Brahman, Ātman to denote the Supreme Reality.

Verse 1

The first verse negates the Pure Ātman or the Supreme Divinity to be the illusory perceiving subject (the lower self), the instruments to perception (the senses), and the objects of perception (matter, the world):

मनोबुद्धयहङ्कारचित्तानि नाहं
न च श्रोत्रजिह्वे न च घ्राणनेत्रे ।
न च व्योम भूमिर्न तेजो न वायुः
चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहं शिवोऽहम् ॥ १ ॥

Manobuddhyahāṅkāracittāni nāhaṁ
na ca śrotrajihve na ca ghrāṇanetre ।
na ca vyoma bhūmiṛna tejo na vāyuḥ
cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'haṁ śivo'ham ॥ 1 ॥

Separation of words:

manas-buddhi-ahāṅkāra-cittāni – *the mind, the intellect, the ego and the subconscious*; na – *not*;
aham – *I*; na – *not*; ca – *and*; śrotra-jihve – *the ear and the tongue*; na – *not*; ca – *and*; ghrāṇa-netre
– *the organ of smell and the eye*; na – *not*; ca – *and*; vyoma – *ether, space*; bhūmiḥ – *earth*; na – *not*;
tejaḥ – *fire*; na – *not*; vāyuḥ – *wind*; cid-ānanda-rūpaḥ – *in the form of Infinite Consciousness and
Infinite Bliss*; śivaḥ – *lit. Śiva*; aham – *I*; śivaḥ – *lit. Śiva*; aham – *I*;

Translation:

I am neither the mind, the intellect, the ego, nor the subconscious; and I am neither the ear, the tongue, the organ of smell nor the eye; I am not space, earth, fire or wind; I am Śiva in the form of *Infinite* consciousness and *Infinite* bliss, I am Śiva.

Elucidation:

manobuddhyahāṅkāracittāni nāham – Human consciousness, philosophically termed ‘the lower self’, consists of the entities of Manas (mind), Buddhi (intellect), Ahāṅkāra (ego, self-sense) and Citta (subconscious).

What is the Manas? It is said that the Manas is the faculty of thinking in the aspect of intention and indecision. When a thought is in its beginning state of development, when something is for instance merely intended but there is no fixed determination regarding it, then the Manas-aspect is functioning. Manas may be translated as mind. The idea is that the God-realized Sage is not limited by a mind.

What is the Buddhi? It is said that the Buddhi is the faculty of thinking in the aspect of determination, certainty. When a thought is in a developed state, when for instance an action is certain to be performed, then the Buddhi-aspect, possessing the faculty of discrimination and thinking in processes, is functioning. Buddhi may be translated as intellect. Manas is the mind and Buddhi is the intellect supporting the mind. The idea is that the God-realized Sage is not limited by an intellect, because God’s infinite wisdom expresses itself through him.

What is Ahāṅkāra? People mostly take it to mean ego. But the word ego is usually taken to denote the proud and arrogant feeling of ‘I’ in man. Though it naturally includes the latter meaning, Ahāṅkāra is factually defined as ‘ahaṁ kartā ahāṅkāraḥ’, i.e. the thought that I am the doer is defined as Ahāṅkāra, ego or self-sense. In this definition, ‘I’ indicates the True Self. The True Self is known to be Akartā or the non-doer. In the Gītā, the Lord says: “prakṛtaiḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ | ahāṅkāravimūdhātmā kartāhamiti manyate”, i.e. the divisions of Prakṛti perform all action. With the understanding deluded by egoism, man thinks ‘I am the doer.’ What is Prakṛti? Prakṛti constitutes the impure entities of intellect, mind, senses and matter. The True Self, though deluded by ignorance and identified with these, is in reality the non-doer, an eternal witness. Actions are performed by Prakṛti alone, not by the Innermost Ever-pure Self or God. The above Ahāṅkāra also comprises the sense of individuality, causing the sense of diversity. The idea is that the God-realized Sage has no sense of individuality, because he is identified with God, the Self of all. What is the Citta? It is said that the Citta is the producer of thoughts. What is the producer of thoughts? The subconscious. The intellect and mind deal with thoughts. As soon as impressions enter the intellect and mind, they become thoughts, and the subconscious is that which feeds the two with such impressions. Impressions are either from the present or from the previous lives. All grave or impressive scenes which the individual perceives form some type of impression in the subconscious. These three entities, the subconscious, the intellect and the mind, supported by the notion of individuality (ego), form the illusory lower self. The idea is that the God-realized sage is not limited by a lower self. The true I is the Pure Self or God alone. And this pure Self is not the illusory lower self.

What about the external world? People always identify themselves with the external world. What type of identification? Attachment to the world. From ignorance arises the notion that the world is real. From this notion arises some type of attachment and this attachment is like an identification. This external world will be negated in the fourth quarter of the first verse. But preceding this, the author asserts the non-realness of the senses, the instruments connecting the internal lower self with the external world:

na ca śrotrajihve na ca ghrāṇanetre – What is the Śrotra? It is the sense of hearing. Not the ear, which is but a physical abode of the sense of hearing. The sense of hearing is the instrument for the lower self to receive information in the form of sound. The Jihva is the sense of taste. Not the tongue, which is but a physical tool, but the sense of tasting itself. The sense of taste is the instrument for the lower self to receive information in the form of taste. Ghrāṇa is the sense of smelling. Not the nose, which is but a physical abode of the sense of smelling, but the sense of smelling itself. The sense of smelling is the instrument for the lower self to receive information in the form of smell,

i.e. good or bad fragrance. Netra is the sense of perceiving or seeing. Not the eyeball as physically perceived, but the energy within it which functions through it, named the sense of seeing. The sense of seeing is the instrument for the lower self to receive information about external forms. Though not mentioned in the verse itself, Tvac is to be included here. It is the sense of touch, functioning through the physical skin. It is an instrument for the lower self to receive information about the touch (warm, cold, soft, hard etc...) of external objects.

All these form a link of the internal lower self with the external world. By identification or acceptance of their realness and separateness from God, they begin to function. The idea is that the God-realized Sage is not limited by the senses. Having negated the entity which perceives (i.e. the mind etc...) as well as their assisting instruments (i.e. the senses), the author further negates the realness of the objects of perception, all in all the external world:

na ca vyoma bhūmirna tejo na vāyuḥ – The world as we perceive it consists of the five primal elements. What is Vyoma? It is the space which supports the existence of matter. Matter cannot subsist without space. Identification or acceptance of the realness and separateness from God of space leads to the limitation of perceiving diversity. What is Bhūmi? Here it represents physical and tangible matter, matter having a relative hard form, graspable matter. Tejas is fire or light. It is the illuminating entity in the world. Bhūmi or graspable matter cannot be seen without light, therefore light is said to be the illuminating principle of the world. Tejas also represents fire or chemical gasses. Vāyu is air. Air can only subsist in a place covered by an atmosphere. As the earth, to humans presently the only place of humanlike life, is such a place, the element of air was mentioned in the negation, though air such as ours is not necessarily present everywhere in the universe. Like previously the sense of touch, the element of water or liquidity is to be included here. It is generally known to be the fifth among the five gross elements. The idea is that the God-realized person doesn't identify himself with the external world consisting of the five elements. Everything has of course an essential realness, but only in its true nature, God.

Thus has been negated the identification or acceptance of realness and separation from God of the lower self, the senses and the external world. But is God only described through negations? The author proceeds with imparting what he really is, namely the Supreme Reality:

cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham – The Supreme Reality is Cit. What is Cit? The essence of all consciousness, Pure or Infinite Consciousness. Philosophically Cit is defined as 'jñānasvarūpaḥ', i.e. the nature of knowledge. An explanatory example to this is: we have space, ether. There are two houses separately covering this space. The space in the first house is so far different from the space in the second house, as the houses are present. The houses alone are the causes of a diversity in the space. Removing the two houses, one space alone remains. In a human understanding, knowledge always means the knowledge of objects. Man thinks that there is no knowledge without an object to know. But it is not so. Taking away all objects of knowledge, knowledge itself remains in its true nature. And this nature of knowledge, namely Infinite Consciousness, is defined as Cit. The Supreme Reality is Infinite Consciousness. And the God-realized Sage is one with this Infinite Consciousness. The Supreme Reality is Ānanda. What is Ānanda? It is defined as 'sukhasvarūpaḥ', i.e. the essence of all joy, bliss. In the same way as Cit was knowledge or consciousness in its pure and unlimited nature, so also Ānanda is joy or bliss, in its pure or unlimited nature, not limited by objects of joy. Removing the objects of joy, Infinite Joy or Bliss alone remains. The Supreme Reality is Infinite Joy or Bliss. And what is this Supreme Reality called? Śiva. Śiva does not necessarily refer to the God Śiva, but in this case refers to the One Supreme Brahman, Ātman or God. The God-realized Sage is himself the Supreme Reality. A quintessential meaning of the first verse would be Swami Omkarananda's beautiful statement: "God with mind is man, man without mind is God." God alone is real and the mind is illusory. So, we all are in reality God Himself. Mind alone, here referring to the lower self, is the entity which makes the external world real. In deep sleep the mind is sleeping or not functioning; so no world, no problems are experienced. By supreme purity however, attained through the grace of God, the lower self loses its bondage, and then again through the grace of God, one's own true Self, God Himself is realized. (1)

Verse 2

In the Vedantic tradition, there are some further components of the lower self, physical ones as well as subtle ones. Also they, for the clarification of the aspirant, should be negated:

न च प्राणसंज्ञो न वै पञ्चवायुः
न वा सप्तधातुर्न वा पञ्चकोशः ।
न वाक्पाणिपादं न चोपस्थपायू
चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहं शिवोऽहम् ॥ २ ॥

Na ca prāṇasamjñō na vai pañcavāyuh
na vā saptadhāturna vā pañcakośaḥ ।
na vākpāṇipādaṁ na copasthapāyū
cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham ॥ 2 ॥

Separation of words:

na – *not*; ca – *and*; prāṇasamjñāḥ – *termed Prāṇa*; na – *not*; vai – *emphatic*; pañcavāyuh – *the five vital airs, forces*; na vā – *nor*; saptadhātuḥ – *the seven components*; na vā – *nor*; pañcakośaḥ – *the five sheaths*; na – *not*; vākpāṇipādam – *the organ of speech, the hands and feet*; na – *not*; ca – *and*; upasthapāyū – *the generative organ and the anus*; cid-ānanda-rūpaḥ – *in the form of Infinite Consciousness and Infinite Bliss*; śivaḥ – *lit. Śiva*; aham – *I*; śivaḥ – *lit. Śiva*; aham – *I*;

Translation:

I am not the five vital forces termed Prāṇa, nor the seven components or the five sheaths. Neither the organ of speech, the hands or the feet, nor the generative organ or the anus; I am Śiva in the form of *Infinite Consciousness and Infinite Bliss*, I am Śiva.

Elucidation:

na ca prāṇasamjñō na vai pañcavāyuh – Prāṇa is a term denoting the five forces of Prāṇa, Apāna, Samāna, Udāna and Vyāna. Prāṇa is the force produced through inhaling, Apāna the force through exhaling. Samāna is the force which regulates the nutrition and digestion. Udāna is the force moving upwards around the neck and the head. Vyāna is the force causing the circulation of blood etc... Through identification or acceptance of the realness of these, body-consciousness and dependence on them arises. Thereafter their presence is constantly necessary. The idea is that the God-realized Sage is not limited by these.

na vā saptadhāturna vā pañcakośaḥ – What are the seven components? In Vedantic biology the physical body is considered to consist of seven components, such as blood, flesh, fat, bone etc... Though the body itself feels very real, it is not so in reality. The Self is not the body; it transcends the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect and even the ignorance. What are the five sheaths? They are sheaths which cover and conceal the True Self. The Annamaya or the physical sheath is the external body perceived; the Prāṇamaya, or the body of energy, constitutes the five forces of life together with the energies or organs of action, explained in the third quarter of the verse. The Manomaya is the joining of the mind with the senses. The Vijñānamaya is the joining of the intelligence with the senses. The Ānandamaya is the causal body wherein joyous feelings are experienced, as for instance, in deep-sleep. It also constitutes the ignorance or Māyā of every individual. By acceptance of the realness of these five sheaths, the individual begins to experience the world. The idea is that because the God-realized Sage transcends all these, he is not limited by them.

na vākpāṇipādaṃ na copasthapāyū – In Vedantic tradition, man is said to have five organs of action, instruments or faculties by which actions are accomplished, namely the organ of speech, the hands, the feet, the generative organ and the anus. Through acceptance of their realness or identity with these five, the world takes hold of man. The idea is that the God-realized Sage is not limited by these five.

Then what is the God-realized sage? What is his real nature? He says:
cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'haṃ śivo'ham – I am Śiva, I am that Supreme Divinity, transcending everything, in the form of Infinite Consciousness and Bliss, I am Śiva, Ātman, Brahman, God.

The second verse has dealt with other components of human life, as well as several wrong identifications. (2)

Swami Vidyabhaskarananda

(To be continued)