

Mahāvākya

Swami Dayananda Saraswati¹

Satyam-mithyā

We understand the word *mithyā* as a word referring to our understanding of the reality of an object, like a pot. *Mithyā* is not an object. Similarly, *satyam* is also a word revealing our understanding of reality. *Mithyā* is understood as the reality of an object which has no being on its own. The pot doesn't have a being without clay. Pot is not an independent object; it is just a word, a name (*nāma*) revealing a form and a function. The weight of the pot is the weight of clay. The touch of the pot is the touch of clay. The pot is not upon the clay, nor does it come out of the clay. We cannot even imagine a clay pot without thinking of clay. From this we understand that while the pot is clay, clay is not the pot. The word *satyam* is therefore used for clay, in terms of its reality, and the word *mithyā* is used to refer to the reality of pot. This has to be understood—*mithyā* is nothing but our understanding of reality. How do we understand it? That which has no being of its own, which has its being or basis in something else, and is not separate from the place where it has its being (*adhiṣṭhāna-ananya*) is *mithyā*. In other words, every product is *mithyā*. It is not separate from the material of which it is made. And *satyam* is the reality (*sadvastu*) in which all things have their being, otherwise called Brahman.

In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, the word that is used is *sat*. That reality, that existent *vastu* is real (*satyam*) and the world (*jagat*) is a product (*kārya*) not separate from the *vastu*, like a clay pot is not separate from the clay. As the pot is nothing but a name and form depending on the clay for its existence, the world (*jagat*) is nothing but names and forms depending for their existence upon *Brahman*. That is the existent 'thing' (*sadvastu*). Therefore this *sat* alone is real (*sadeva satyam*) like the clay alone is real (*mṛdeva satyam*) for the clay pot. The word *satyam* we can finally use only for Brahman, and everything else, including space, air, fire, etc., in our elemental model of the world, is *mithyā*. Therefore we say, "All this is Brahman," *idam sarvam brahma*. The cause of this entire world is *Brahman*, and all that is here, which in reality is *mithyā*, is not separate from that cause.

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Two Types of *Mithyā*

Now our understanding of this word *mithyā* has to be extended. If *mithyā* is anything that exists depending upon something, as an individual, in my experience, I find not one type of *mithyā*, but two. One is the tree that is there and that I see. Whether I see the tree or not, the tree exists. That is why when I walk with my eyes closed and don't see the tree, I bump into it. My not seeing the tree does not dismiss the tree. My not seeing a mountain does not dismiss the mountain. My not seeing the wall does not dismiss the wall. This happens all the time when we drive. When there is a pot-hole or a speed breaker and you don't see it, it doesn't cease to be. You get the jolt. There are many accidents because we don't see what is there. Thus, my not seeing an object does not dismiss the existence of the object. Therefore I can say the object is, and therefore I can see it. This is what we call objective. It is there, therefore I see it. And whenever I see the object, of course the presence of consciousness is there. Without the presence of consciousness I cannot see any object, even though I may call it *mithyā*. From the standpoint of *Īśvara*, the Lord, everything is *mithyā*. In my experience also, I find that the object is seen by me because it is there. Even if it is not seen by me, it is there. The pot-hole proves that. And we must understand that this is *mithyā*, because whenever I see the object it is not separate from consciousness. It is, therefore I see it.

There is another type of *mithyā*—I see it, therefore it is. This is what we call subjective. What is objective is also *mithyā*. With reference to my understanding I find that there is an object, therefore I see it; then the other situation is, I see it, therefore it is. The dream world is this second type of reality. I see the mountain, therefore the mountain is in the dream. I may be dreaming in the midst of the Pacific ocean. There are no mountains around, but I see a mountain. While I am in the dream, I don't take it as unreal or subjective. I take it objectively—that there is an object. But waking up, I say it is subjective. The mountain is because I see it. Anything in the dream is because I see it. This is true in dream.

In the waking state also, this problem exists. We are not totally objective. Because of one's own underlying pressure—you may call it unconscious, subconscious, fear and so on—one tends to interpret. This interpretation is the worst thing that a human being is subject to. If you don't interpret, especially with reference to others' attitudes and values, you are safe. But we all interpret, and we cannot but interpret. Therefore, the problem is only oneself. Really speaking, one is driven to interpret, that is, one has the pressure to do so—pressure caused by fear and so many other things. So when you interpret it is subjective; every interpretation is subjective. It

may be true, it may not be true. More often than not, it is untrue. If it is an interpretation that affects you, then generally it is not true. We read body language and all sorts of things, so that we tend to interpret in a way that may not have anything to do with the truth. Thus, when you are living in this world you are not always in the world of *Īśvara*. You are in the world of *Īśvara* plus your own personal projected world.

When you project a snake upon a rope, you project something that is not there at all. This is one kind of superimposition (*adhyāsa*), a projection of something unpleasant or offensive (*aśobhana-adhyāsa*). There is a second type of superimposition. If you take money as money, there is no mistake. But giving greater value to money than it has is a superimposition (*śobhana-adhyāsa*). With reference to the object, money, you don't commit a mistake. You don't take Somadatta for Devadatta, or John for Tom. You take John as John. But at the same time, there is (*aśobhana adhyāsa*) if you take John to be hostile to you when he really is not. He has his own problems. His behavior is inhibited by the problems he is dealing with. It has nothing to do with you. But related to you his behavior has changed. And therefore, you project a person who has nothing to do with John. Many a good relationship is destroyed because of this kind of projection. There is a need to project, and to project something that is not good. This *aśobhana* and *śobhana adhyāsa* are purely subjective. For you it is very real. Why? Because you see it, you feel it. Because your feeling is real, the cause is also presumed to be real. It looks as though it is coming from the other person. But no other person can cause such a feeling. It comes from inside. We refuse to accept that. We always say that the other person is the cause, but there may or may not be any truth to it. When this is the case, the benefit of doubt is to be given only to the other person, not to ourselves. But we refuse to give that. In this situation, where your subjectivity creates a reality and this reality has nothing to do with *Bhagavān*, you can't blame him at all.

Īśvara is what is. Even the *mithyā jagat* is *Īśvara*. And there is a reality about it. That reality is what we call objective. This does not mean that there is a real object there; every object is nothing but *mithyā* with its form and name depending upon the reality (*vastu*). It is non-separate from its cause. The reduction of subjectivity alone is a project in one's life. One need not know Brahman or the meaning of "You are that," *tat tvam asi*. If one can reduce subjectivity, that itself is a great blessing. But you cannot completely reduce subjectivity unless you know you are the whole. This is another problem. There is a mutual dependence (*anyonya-āśraya*) here. But still, to a great extent I can be objective in looking into myself. That objectivity is the

qualification (*adhikāritvam*) to understand the sentence “You are that,” *tat tvam asi*. It is not an ordinary sentence. To understand it, the rope-snake subjectivity, John the bad man subjectivity, etc., has to be understood as subjective, a projection which is *mithyā*. That John is a person is objective, but that he is a bad man is subjective. I am conscious of John, and without my consciousness there is no John. So John the person is also *mithyā*. And John the person that I interpret him to be is my own creation. That part of it is there is because I see it that way, and it is also *mithyā*. Now we have two types of *mithyā*. It is therefore I see, and I see therefore it is.

That I am a *saṃsāri*, subject to birth, death, etc. is purely subjective. It is a conclusion. That the body is subject to birth and death is objective. It is *Īśvara*. But that I am a *saṃsāri*—tall, fat, small, insignificant, impure (*aśuddha*), because guilty and hurt—is purely subjective. This has no objectivity whatsoever. And what is subjective goes away in the wake of knowledge, like the dream, like the snake and like John the bad man. The snake goes away when the rope is understood; John is understood and the mistaken person you saw goes away; you wake up and the dream goes away. Therefore, what is subjective is meant to go away in the wake of knowledge, of gaining clarity of what is. Even one’s own past one also has to understand. How can the past really bother you? It is already gone. Only what is current can bother you, if at all. But the past continues to bother us. It controls a person, controls his or her behavior. There is a certain reality about it, but it is subjective.

What is subjective always goes away in the wake of clarity and understanding. This is what we are striving for here. But in understanding the sentence *tat tvam asi*, which is understanding *satyam* and *mithyā*, one *mithyā* is *Īśvara*’s expression, the second *mithyā* is my own. Therefore, if you are enlightened your body will not go away; your mind will not go away—nothing will go away. Nothing needs to go away. If I am free, if I am the whole, why should anything go away?

Brahman is *sat*, *satyam*. *Satyam* means your understanding of *sat*. Brahman is *sat*, and it is *satyam* meaning that it is the cause of everything, and everything else is *mithyā* which includes my body, mind, sense complex. And that *satyam brahma* is consciousness; it is *satyam jñānam*. It is consciousness that is timeless, the truth of everything, the cause of everything. Brahman gives being to everything, and therefore is *anantam*, limitless in terms of place, time and object (*deśataḥ kālataḥ vastutaḥ*). There is no object that is other than Brahman. Anything that you think of, known and not known, is Brahman. If that is so, the *satyam, jñānam, anantam* is *ātmā* – *sat cit ānanda*. The *satyam jñānam anantam brahma* creates this *jagat*, or manifests in the

form of the *jagat*, and I as an individual also create my own subjectivity. Because I am self-conscious, in my innocence and ignorance I have gathered a lot. Therefore the capacity to be more subjective than objective is always a potential in every individual. If, as an individual, you have the freedom to be more subjective, then you also have the freedom to be less subjective. Being more subjective means having more suffering, less subjective means less suffering. No subjectivity means no suffering; only *Īśvara* is there. Therefore, you can understand where exactly you have to pay attention—in the reduction of subjectivity.

To reduce subjectivity, there are some guidelines we can follow. When you make an interpretation, make sure you give the benefit of doubt to the other person. This a rule that we can follow. And having given the benefit of doubt to the other person, also give him time to prove himself. Understand that your feeling is a feeling; it comes from inside. What does it mean when I say, “That is what I feel”? It is not that every feeling has to be right, that every thought should become a reality. Even though I have a right to my feeling, it need not be caused from outside. I have to accept the reality that it might have been caused by my own subjectivity. There is nothing wrong in that, but acknowledging it makes you a person who is real. Then you become more objective. When you say, “It may be my subjectivity,” then you are objective. This is how we grow in objectivity. And the more objective you are, the less of a problem you have.

Māyā

Brahman is *satyam*, real, the formless reality. To be *Īśvara*, to create this *mithyā* world there must be something with that Brahman. But Brahman ‘plus something’ doesn’t exist at all. Brahman is *satyam*, and any ‘plus’ is dependent upon Brahman. The effect, the *jagat*, must have an undifferentiated form which is what we call *māyā*. *Māyā* is name and form (*nāma-rūpa*) undifferentiated, *nāma-rūpa* differentiated. *Māyā* is there because this is how Brahman is. We don’t ask, “Why is there *māyā*?” because we don’t say that there is *māyā*. We say that there is only Brahman. The world (*jagat*) is Brahman. If Brahman is consciousness, limitless without any particular form then how could it became formful? It did not. Consciousness continues to be, without any change.

The gold has not become a chain. Only if it becomes a chain do I have to answer the question, “How did it become a chain?” Gold continues to be gold. Once you understand that clearly, then we can say Brahman has “become” the world (*jagat*) through *māyā*. There are rules here in the world (*jagat*); there are forces, causes and effects. Gold can be melted; it is a

malleable metal; it can be drawn into a wire; the wire can be made into links; they can be connected and you can form a chain. Gold is given those capacities, those characteristics. Similarly, someone is given the skill, a physical body, and knowledge to make the chain. Everything is given. And all that is given is *Īśvara*. The chain on your neck is *Īśvara*. The gold is *Īśvara*, and the chain also is *Īśvara*. Really speaking, *Īśvara* made the chain. The given person who made the chain, Devadatta, is not separate from *Īśvara*. When we look at it from one standpoint, Devadatta made the chain. From another standpoint, *Īśvara* made the chain. There is nothing wrong with saying that. The only thing is, the man who says it should mean it, he should understand the whole of it.

When we talk of *Īśvara* we understand that there must be something in Brahman which has this great power to create, and that the power itself is something that is superimposed (*kalpita*). This power of *māyā* (*māyā-śakti*) is a superimposed power (*kalpita-śakti*). That *māyā* is also *mithyā*, in terms of its reality. It has a power, and with that power alone Brahman is *Īśvara* and is the maker and material cause. If you look at *Īśvara* from the standpoint of knowledge and power, he is the maker, the intelligent cause (*nimitta-kāraṇam*). If you look at *Īśvara* from the standpoint of what makes him all-knowing, etc., then he becomes the material cause that undergoes a modification (*pariṇāmi-upādāna-kāraṇam*).

It is like the spider who, with reference to the product, the web, becomes the intelligent cause (*nimitta-kāraṇam*), from its own standpoint. From the standpoint of the web, he becomes the material cause (*upādāna-kāraṇam*). The spider, the conscious being who lives in his eight-legged body, who has knowledge and skill, is the maker of the web. He chooses the right place, never very near the floor, because he knows the lady of the house will come with a vacuum cleaner and his creation will be gone. Therefore, he puts it up in a corner near the ceiling, where the cleaning is done only once a year. By that time his life will be over. The choice of place implies knowledge. Where it should go, what it is for, is all well planned. In the body of the spider there is a conscious being who is the maker and has the knowledge and skill to make the web. He is also the material cause to create the web. From the standpoint of its own body, because of which it is called a spider, it becomes the material cause.

Similarly Brahman with *māyā* is *Īśvara*. With *māyā* he is all-knowing, all-mighty, the maker. From the standpoint of *māyā*, he has undergone a change to become the world of space, time, etc. From that standpoint *Īśvara* becomes the material cause. But that *Īśvara* is nothing but

Brahman, and that *māyā* is not separate from *Brahman*. Therefore, Brahman alone counts—Brahman plus *māyā* is Brahman; Brahman plus the world (*jagat*) is Brahman. One is *satyam* and everything else is *mithyā*. And that *satyam* you are (*tvam asi*). “This self is all this,” *aitadātmyam idam sarvam*. This entire *jagat*, including your body-mind-sense complex, has its being in this Brahman, *sat-cit-ānanda*. You are the whole. Even from the standpoint of the body, *Īśvara*’s manifest form includes your body too. Then why is there this feeling that one is only as much as the body?

Value Addition

Even an enlightened man who knows he is the whole doesn’t think that when he gets up the whole world should get up. No. This physical body has another body called the subtle body (*sūkṣma-śarīra*) which identifies with only one body. Beyond that it doesn’t go. There is a discreet entity, the body, that still doesn’t deny the fact that you are the whole. In fact, when you are whole without the body, mind, and senses, you are not going to become less whole by the addition of the body, mind, and senses. As simple consciousness I am the whole; with one body, mind and set of senses added to it, I do not become less whole. Then where is the problem? If I am the whole how did I become the body, mind, sense complex? Is it a loss? Some people say this is descending from the whole. Then you have to ascend! It seems the infinite has descended to become finite, and the finite has to ascend to the infinite. Nothing finite can ascend to the infinite. Nothing infinite can descend to the finite. What is infinite is that which cannot descend. What is finite is that which cannot ascend. So where is the problem with having a body? I am the whole plus the body-mind-sense complex. Though I am the whole, having a body provides a slight difference. What is the difference? The whole cannot walk, I can walk. The whole cannot talk, I can talk. The whole cannot think, I can think. The whole cannot act, I can act. The whole cannot respond, I can respond. What an addition! All these are additions, and if you look upon them as additions, they are luxuries. This is the expression of a person who is liberated while still in this body (*jīvan-mukta*). He is happy with himself alone, not rejoicing or detesting (*ātmaiva ātmanā tuṣṭaḥ na nandati na dveṣṭi*). They are all value addition, without addition.

Coimbatore in India is a textile town. How it became a textile town is very interesting. Originally they grew cotton there. It was ideal because there was not much rain in those parts. The cotton used to be sent to Bombay. Then one person came up with the idea of ginning the cotton (removing the seeds) himself instead of sending it to Bombay. So he started a ginning factory. This is called value addition. Nothing is added really. It is the same cotton. Another

person started a spinning a factory to spin the cotton into yarn. The yarn was sold. Then someone started a weaving factory and the woven fabric was sold. A dying factory was started and the dyed fabric was sold. A garment factory was started. This is called value addition—an addition without any addition, really. They started with cotton and ended with cotton. *Īśvara* is the greatest value adder. He goes on adding without really adding. Therefore, we have an addition to the whole without a real addition. One is *satyam* and the other *mithyā*. The gold plus a chain is not an addition, but still, the chain is useful. Thus, there are additions that are ornamental, and additions which are functional. All these are from the same *vastu* alone. This is *sat-cit-ānanda*.

An individual, due to not knowing this fact, is under the veil of *māyā*. He is called the *jīva*. Until he calls the bluff, inquires into the reality, he continues to be a *jīva*. And once he understands the meaning of the sentence *tat tvam asi* very thoroughly, he is free and whole. He is no longer bound by *karma* etc. The whole performs no action, all action is ‘as though’. Everything becomes ‘as though’. The whole remains the whole. When that person dies away he does not come back. This is called *mokṣa*. Gaining the knowledge of this *mahāvākya* is called *mokṣa*. And to make this knowledge happen alone is the purpose of the whole teaching. Even if one gets the insight into this fact, the knowledge can be inhibited by a variety of things. The one thing we can do, in fact the only thing we can do, is to reduce subjectivity. How do we reduce subjectivity? Bring in more *Īśvara*. As we bring in more *Īśvara*, subjectivity goes.