

Satsang with Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Definitions of Some *Vedāntic* Terms

Question

Can you please define *upādhi*?

Answer

Upādhi consists of ‘*upa*’ and ‘*dha*’. ‘*Upa*’ means ‘in the sense of *sāmīpya* or proximity’. *Dha* means ‘to place’. Hence *upādhi* means ‘*samīpavartini vastuni svadharmān ādadhāti*’, or ‘that which places its own attributes to something that is nearby’.

The typical example is one of crystal and a flower placed behind the crystal. The crystal, by its own nature, is transparent and colorless. When a colored object or flower is placed beside it, the crystal appears colored. Thus the flower imposes or places its own attribute upon something that is placed nearby. Hence, the flower is called ‘*upādhi*’ of the crystal, which ‘as though’ conditions the crystal. We call it the conditioning element or the conditioning adjunct. It limits the crystal. The crystal has the infinite possibility of appearing in any color. Once it appears in one color it is limited. The flower does not color the crystal. The flower only creates an appearance of color in the crystal. So that which does not really limit, but creates a sense of limitation, is called ‘*upādhi*’.

Question

Can you please explain why we use the word *śarīra* in *kāraṇa śarīra*?

Answer

The word, *śarīra*, has both a common or conventional meaning and a derivative meaning. The conventional meaning of the word *śarīra* is body. It is used in this conventional sense for *sthūla śarīra* or gross body and *sūkṣma śarīra* or subtle body. In the case of *kāraṇa śarīra*, however, it is used in a derivative sense.

The word, *śarīra*, is derived from the root *shrū*, *shiryamanatvāt śarīram*, that which is subject to disintegration, or that which is perishable is called *śarīra*. Ignorance is called

‘*kāraṇa śarīra*’ because it is perishable in the wake of knowledge. In that sense it is *śarīra*, not that it in the sense of a body. Gross body and subtle body are a kind of body in a tangible sense; therefore the word *śarīra* is used in its primary sense for *sthūla* and *sūkṣma śarīra*. But ignorance is not a body in that sense, but as *śarīra*, it is perishable. Therefore in a secondary sense the word *śarīra* is used for ‘*kāraṇa śarīra*’.

Question

Can you please elaborate on *iccha śakti*?

Answer

Śakti means the power to do something. By ‘*iccha*’ we mean the desires arising in your mind. *iccha śakti* means the power to will or the power to create; as long as you have this power, you can will or create. In deep sleep, you don’t have *iccha śakti*. You do not have *iccha śakti* even in dream state.

Desire is one thing that never grows old. Bhartrihari, referring to an old person, says:

bhogha nā bhuktā vayameva bhuktāḥ tapo na taptam vayameva thaptāḥ
kālo na yāto vayameva yātāḥ tṛṣṇā na jīrṇā vayameva jīrṇāḥ [*Vairāgya Śatakam*, 7]

Bhogha nā bhuktā vayameva bhuktāḥ, all along I thought that I was enjoying the pleasures in my life, but now I recognize that pleasures have enjoyed me. *Tapo na taptam vayameva thaptāḥ*, it is not I who performed the austerities; austerities have performed me. *Kālo na yāto vayameva yātāḥ*, it is not time that has gone away; it is I, who in fact, has worn out in time. *Tṛṣṇā na jīrṇā vayameva jīrṇāḥ*, the craving has not become old; I have become old.

Iccha śakti means the power to create which is different from craving. It is the power to will. *Sah akāmayata*, He willed or desired in the beginning of creation [*Taittirīya Upanishad*, 2-6]. The power always rests in that which is powerful. There is a locus. I am the one who is the locus of that power and therefore I enjoy those powers. Therefore we call them powers. As a power, we should call it deliberation -- the power to will; the power to

create; the power to deliberate. “I am the very desire unopposed to *dharma* in all the beings, *dharmāvīruddho bhūteṣu kāmo’smi bharatarṣabha*,” says Lord Krishna [BG 7-11]. So really the power to will is the power to desire in keeping with *dharma*. When it opposes *dharma*, then you are driven by it. Otherwise you drive the desire.

Question

What is mind? What is intellect?

Answer

Mind is a flow of thoughts. Every thought is a state of mind. Mind keeps on assuming different states, and that is how we have new thoughts. Thus the flow of thoughts can be called mind. It is not a tangible entity, but it is a subtle entity. According to *Vedānta*, the mind performs four kinds of functions.

First of all, it performs the function of perception. Through organs of perception, it perceives the information brought by organs of perception. It also directs the organs of action to perform the action. That is called *manas* or mind, which also has feelings and impulses. The second function the mind performs is called *buddhi*, i.e., knowing, determining, deliberating, controlling, judging, analyzing, scrutinizing, and inquiring. The third function that the mind performs is that of *cittam*, i.e., remembering and reflecting. The fourth function it performs is called *ahaṅkāra*, asserting.

It is one mind alone, which performs these different functions at different times. Therefore, it gets different names of *manas*, *buddhi*, *cittam* and *ahaṅkāra* depending upon the function it performs.

Intellect is the deciding faculty, while mind is the impulsive faculty. Various impulses rise in our mind. They are all ultimately resulting from some understanding and conclusions from various experiences tucked away in memory. It is the intellect that concludes. When such experiences come up again and again, they become a habit, and that habitual faculty is called mind. Ultimately all of our conclusions and habits are all derived from the intellect. When you do something again and again it becomes a habit. Some times

you do that without thinking. But in the beginning it was done with a deliberate purpose and with some understanding.

Mind takes on each one of these four modes depending on what function needs to be performed. When the mind is in the mode of the intellect, then the mind is determining. When the mind is in the mode of *manas*, then it is feeling or reacting. The idea is that our understanding controls our reactions.

In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Lord Krishna describes the hierarchy of control. Sense organs are controlled by the *manas*. And the *manas* is controlled by the *buddhi* and the *buddhi* is conscious because of the Self. *Buddhi* is the determining faculty, therefore, it gives the command to the mind and the mind gives command to the sense organs to perform actions. Mind alone assumes the role of *buddhi* and *manas*, etc., and it functions through the sense organs. So, it is one part of the mind commanding other part of the mind to do things.

Question

What is brain?

Answer

Brain is the center where the mind manifests -- like eyes are the center where the faculty of seeing manifests. Ears are the locus where the faculty of hearing manifests. Similarly, brain is the locus where the mind manifests.¹

¹Questions and Answers from a satsang with Swamiji on *Tattva Bodha*, NJ, Summer 2001 and from a Family Camp at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, 2002. Transcribed and edited by Chaya Raj and KK Davey.