

## **Are Bliss and Knowledge Inherent?**

**By Satyanarayana Dasa**

Among modern spiritualists there is a common belief that each individual being is full of bliss and knowledge. They claim that everyone is perfect, and it is just a matter of discovering one's real nature. The Self is part of God, as confirmed by Sri Krsna, "The living being in this world is My eternal fragment" (*Bhagavad Gita* 15.7). Just as a drop of ocean has the quality of the ocean, they believe that the Self has the quality of bliss and knowledge. Somehow the bliss and knowledge have become covered by ignorance, but once ignorance is removed, the Self will shine in its own glory. The Self will be like God.

The *Mundaka Upanisad* (3.2.9) says, "One who knows Brahman verily becomes Brahman." In fact, some spiritual teachers even claim that we are all God but have forgotten it. We are like a lost young prince who is wandering in wilderness and suffering, not knowing that he is a prince. Once he is informed that he is a prince, he can return home and his suffering comes to an end. Or we are like a person who is wearing a golden necklace, but somehow doesn't know it and is searching for it everywhere. When someone points it out, the search is over. It was always there, but the person was ignorant about it.

### **Knowledge Covered by Ignorance?**

A similar belief is that we are already perfect, but out of ignorance, we think of ourselves as limited and conditioned. Sri Krsna says in *Bhagavad Gita* (5.15), "The knowledge is covered by ignorance that bewilders the living beings." If the ignorance is removed, the Self will shine in its own glory. Just as when a cloud covers the sun, there is darkness, but when the cloud is driven away by the wind, the sunlight pours through. Even when the sun was covered, it had not lost its brilliance. Similarly, they believe that the knowledge and bliss of the self are covered by ignorance; when the ignorance is removed, the Self realizes its own bliss and knowledge. Some also argue that there is no need for gurus or teachers since all knowledge is within us.

No two individuals are the same. Everyone has a distinct history, experiences and *samskaras*. What is applicable and beneficial for one may be detrimental to another. Indeed one man's meat is another man's poison. One has to walk from the place one is standing upon. The goal is one, but paths are many. Nobody should try to imitate another's practice, because it will not suit him. Some protagonists of this theory decry even the scriptures. They say that scriptures are dead words of dead people. The scriptures only limit and bind us by imposing rules, which restrict our freedom.

These are some of the popular ideas floating around among modern spiritualists. Such theories are antagonistic to the common traditional and organized spiritual systems. At first, they may seem very

logical and convincing, but when scrutinized with the proper logic and acumen, they collapse like a house of cards. They certainly do not stand against scriptural scrutiny.

### **Darkness Never Covers Light**

If full of knowledge and bliss, then why does the Self never feel it? Why is the Self incessantly hankering for knowledge and bliss? In fact, all our actions are ultimately aimed at attaining these two goals. Just as darkness can never cover light, ignorance can never shroud knowledge. Darkness is nothing but absence of light. It is not a positive entity. To cover something, the covering agent must have positive existence. When Krsna says that ignorance covers knowledge (Gita 5.15), He means ignorance covers the discriminating faculty. In other words, a person loses the ability to make proper decisions and is thus bewildered. Krsna Himself recommends approaching a teacher and acquiring knowledge from him (Gita 4.34).

If knowledge were inside the Self, He would have recommended to approach a teacher to get the covering of inherent knowledge removed. Indeed He would not even have recommended going to a teacher but to a peeler, who can peel away ignorance. Krishna specifically uses the words, “The teachers will impart knowledge to you.” In the same vein a few verses later (Gita 4.39), Krishna says that a man of faith who attains knowledge (*jnana*) become peaceful. If that knowledge were already there, there was no need to attain it in the first place. In verse 7.2. again, Krishna declares to Arjuna that He will now impart unto him this knowledge.

### **Inconceivable by Mind or Logic**

The Self is meta-physical and thus beyond any sense perception and mind. It is not subject to logic. The only way it can be understood is through the scriptures. Sri Krishna describes the self as *acintya*, or inconceivable by mind or logic (Gita 2.25). Bhishma says, “That which is inconceivable, *acintya*, cannot be understood by logic. Metaphysical objects are called *acintya*” (*Mahabharata, Bhishma Parva* 5.12). The sun may be covered by clouds to others but it is never covered to itself. Similarly, if I were full of bliss and knowledge, then how could I lose sight of it even if I were covered by ignorance? Ignorance can only cover, but not take away, that knowledge. Even though there may be ignorance all around me, I would still be full of knowledge and bliss. But such is not our experience.

A drop of the ocean does not have all the qualities of the ocean. The ocean has waves, a drop does not. The ocean is full of aquatics, but not the drop. One can sail on the ocean, not on a drop. If I have forgotten about my necklace around my neck and someone points it out to me, I immediately know it and give up my search. But no matter how many times someone tells me that I am full of knowledge and bliss, I realize no bliss and remain as ignorant or knowledgeable as I was before. Why? Because I do not have knowledge and bliss inherent in me. Such examples neither prove nor disprove anything. Examples only assist us in comprehending a known conclusion.

If I am a pauper, I remain a pauper, even though someone may repeatedly tell me that I am a prince. In *Paramatma Sandarbha* (28), Sri Jiva Gosvami explicitly says that the self is devoid of knowledge, although conscious by nature, and it lacks bliss although free of any material misery. In other words, it has the potential (*svarupa yogyata*) to get knowledge and bliss but not yet the functionality (*phalopadhayi yogyata*). To give an example, a child has the potential to be an athlete or a graduate, but that potential is not realized unless he practices on the track or goes to college and studies.

### **Only One of God's Potencies**

This explains why we have an innate drive for these two things. A baby is inquisitive from birth, and this inquisitiveness continues until death. Although the Self is part of God, it is only part of one of His potencies, i.e., intermediate potency, or *tatastha sakti*. It does not have in it the other two potencies, i.e., *bahiranga* or external and *antaranga* or internal. When it is said that a knower of Brahman becomes Brahman, it means that he becomes *like* Brahman. He acquires some of the features of Brahman (*Sadharmya Gita* 14.2). Nobody can become Brahman. The Self is infinitesimal in size and does not have internal potency in it, hence it is prone to be influenced by the other two energies, i.e., *bahiranga* or *antaranga*. In the present state, it is under the influence of *bahiranga*, or external potency.

This influence is affected by the inconceivable power of God, called Maya. Maya belongs to God and for this reason one can become free of Maya's influence only by the grace of God or His devotee. Even after being freed of this influence, the Self does not become God but remains a fragment of God—only now it has knowledge and bliss.