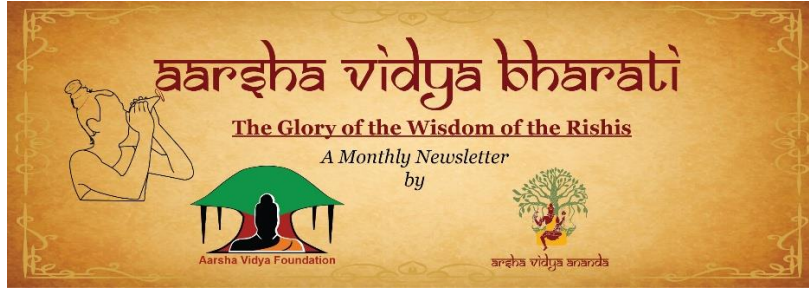

Aarsha Vidya Bharati - May 2022

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A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



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Joining the Dots - Uttamam Rahasyam

By Eric Oddliefson, USA

For much of my life I have sought acceptance and fulfilment, looking in all kinds of places to find these. My mantra has been, 'Achieve and become acceptable!', not realizing I am perfectly acceptable right now. But, to begin realizing this, my concept of 'me' needed to change.

I always defined 'me' as a body and mind, which of course I did not like or accept. As a result, I would often shy away from experiences if I thought I might fail, since that would expose my sense of inadequacy. And, if I felt exposed by someone or some experience, I was prone to responding with anger or withdrawal.



Due to *Bhagavān kṛpā*, my perception of 'me' and 'mine' is changing from studying Vedanta with this *Paramparā* for the past 1.5 years, transforming me from a *mumukṣu* to a *jijñāsu*. I am learning to understand 'me' as distinct from the body, mind, and senses and at the same time, all that is. I studied modern Vedanta for decades in another tradition and thought I got it! Pray and meditate hard enough and I will have a mystical experience of God! I was mistaken. **The Lord is not other than the very 'me' that I am.** This is the ultimate secret! This realization, even if incomplete, has led to profound changes in my relationships with my spouse, family, coworkers, the world, and the Lord as my understanding of *kausālam* and *samatvam* deepens with the changing understanding of 'me'.

As a *pramāṇa*, the Vedas reveal to me the nature of dharma-adharma, *pāpa-puṇya*, and *ātman*. My *jñāna śakti* has been densely covered by *avidyā* leading to confusion regarding the nature of the self, taking myself to be *kartā* and *bhoktā*. As a result, I am prone to being pulled around by unchecked *rāga-dveṣa* in the unending pursuit of happiness, always trying to solve that gnawing sense that something is amiss deep within. Growing up in a western culture, the answer to this sense of incompleteness is to consume. Consume and fill yourself with what is missing. Put another way, perform action to fill this void. But, all this accomplishes is to reinforce the very incompleteness I am seeking to solve! Vedanta, in the hands of a qualified guru, has given me the insight that action can never solve the problem of the self. It is only *jñāna* that liberates. But, action when aligned with 'what is', functional reality, has a mighty role to play in preparing my mind, inner instrument, for the dawning of self-knowledge.

At times during my typical day, my *svadharma* conflicts with the pull of *rāga-dveṣa*. As I develop *śama-dama*, I am more and more able to step back, and in the cognitive space created



though *sādhana*, engage my *buddhi* to choose to align my karma with dharma. This is not so easy when I am feeling the pressure of a strong desire. As an example, I don't like unloading the top half of the dishwasher! Silly, I know but it is a *dveṣa*! After dinner on most nights, my wife starts the dishwasher and it finishes up around 9:30-10 PM, right when I am the most tired and want to saunter upstairs and plop myself in bed. But, I know that if I don't empty the dishwasher, I am forcing my wife to do it. Knowing that she already does the grocery shopping, cleans the house, cooks most meals, etc., is trotting upstairs the right thing to do? No. Is it really helping me if the goal of my life is *mokṣa*?

Is it helping my wife to feel loved, appreciated, and cared for? Nope. A couple of years ago, I would not have understood this situation in terms of dharma adharma or *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. I had a very incomplete understanding of karma yoga in general. Now, I know that engaging my will and pushing against binding likes and dislikes is helpful not only to me, but to those around me. And, doing this again and again readies me to fully realize I am already free. This is the greatest secret!

Now, I have a greater ability to just relax into 'what is' and act accordingly. I still 'see' those *raga-dveṣa* and feel those pressures to act, but more often now I can choose. I am more aware that absolutely everything is pervaded by *Īśvara* as the intelligent and material cause of the universe. On one level 'I' am perfused with *Īśvara* as my very body, mind, and senses. On another level, *tat tvam asi*. I am not different from *Īśvara* intrinsically. That being, consciousness, 'isness' is me. In this understanding, what is not 'me'? This fabric of wholeness that Vedanta teaches us is the antidote to pain, suffering, loss, hopelessness that is so rampant in this Kali Yuga. It is right there for us to awaken to a greater reality. It is only a secret if we don't want to see it. Om Tat Sat.

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