

Enquiry into the nature of *ānanda* Swamini Atmaprakashananda

Ānanda is of two types: *ātmā ānanda* and *koṣa ānanda* (we will retain the word *ānanda* without translation because it loses its expressiveness in translation). We need to understand the difference between these two types of *ānanda* before entering into the enquiry.

Ātmā ānanda means fullness – the very nature of one’s own self. Every individual’s intrinsic nature (*svarūpam*) is *ānanda*. Vedānta says: you are happiness, because you are fullness. Just as heat is the intrinsic, inseparable property of fire, so too happiness or fullness is the real nature of the individual.

Ātmā ānanda is original and *koṣa ānanda* is the reflection of fullness or the manifestation of fullness. As an example, heat in fire is original, whilst heat in hot water is borrowed. Or your face is the original and your face in a mirror is reflected. This is the first difference between these two types of *ānanda*: i.e. one is the original and the other a reflection.

The second difference is that because *ātmā ānanda* is original it does not come and go, just as heat being intrinsic to fire does not come and go: fire remains ever hot. *Ātmā ānanda* is eternal (*nitya*). *Koṣa ānanda* being a reflection is dependent on the reflecting medium for its existence: whenever the medium is available there will be a reflection, but when the medium is not available there will be no reflection. *Koṣa ānanda*, or reflected *ānanda*, or manifest *ānanda* is *anitya*, time bound.

Ātmā ānanda being original, being eternal, has no gradation.¹ *Koṣa ānanda*, on the other hand, has gradations.² The description of the *ānandamaya koṣa* in the Taittirīya Upanishad makes the different gradations clear: the body made of *ānanda* has pleasure as its head, greater pleasure as its left arm, greatest pleasure as its right arm.³ The sight of something desirable creates pleasure, the possession of something desirable contributes to greater pleasure – joy – and the enjoyment of something pleasurable leads to the greatest pleasure – happiness. So the third difference between the two types of *ānanda* is that the original is devoid of gradation whereas its reflection has gradation.

Now for the fourth difference: *ātmā ānanda* being the intrinsic nature is independent and unconditional, whereas *koṣa ānanda* is dependent on the reflecting medium and therefore conditional on the state of the reflecting medium. It is similar to the distortion of the reflection of the original face according to the condition of the mirror. The gradations in reflection are not due to the original face but are due to the state of the reflecting medium. Similarly, according to the different conditions of the mind, there will be gradations in the reflected *koṣa ānanda*.

To claim – not gain or attain – *ātmā ānanda* as our own *svarūpam* we need just one means: *jñānam*, knowledge of what fullness is. We need not do any work for this *ānanda*, all that’s required is to know: to claim what we already have, we only need to know. On the other hand, since *koṣa ānanda* is possible only if we maintain mental serenity or tranquillity and this in turn depends on a choice of two means – either adjusting everything around one or having a proper mental attitude towards them – we have a choice of two means for *koṣa ānanda*.

¹ In English we have degrees of comparison e.g. good, better, best, or big, bigger, biggest. If you add the suffix ‘*tara*’ to a Sanskrit word it becomes comparative. If you add ‘*tama*’ to a word it becomes superlative. For example: *sthulaḥ puruṣaḥ* (fat man), *sthulataraḥ puruṣaḥ* (fatter man), *sthulatamaḥ puruṣaḥ* (fattest man). *Ātmā ānanda* is said to be *tāra tamyā rahiṭa ānanda* (*ānanda* devoid of being expressed using comparative or superlative affixes) or *niratiśaya*, (unsurpassed).

² *Koṣa ānanda* is said to be *tāra tamyā sahita ānanda* (*ānanda* capable of being expressed using comparative or superlative affixes) or *sātiśaya* (good, better, best).

³ *priyam eva śiraḥ, modo dakṣiṇa pakṣaḥ, pramoda uttaraḥ pakṣaḥ...* (Tait. II.v.1)

We all have our own expectations of people, situations and things around us. If everything is to our expectations, we will be serene and tranquil. If not, we will be disturbed, and not only that, our disturbance will be such that we will also helplessly disturb others. My mental tranquillity is dependent on whether or not things are to my expectations.

How do we 'tranquillise' the mind? We have to keep adjusting all the time. It's like having different knobs that we have to keep on adjusting to maintain everything perfectly to my expectation: one knob for husband, one for wife, one for children, one for money matters, one for financial problems, etc. In the middle we also sometimes bring in *bhagavān*, and some worship and prayer and a little bit of meditation. If at all some *samādhi* is gained, it is also still *koṣa ānanda*. Adjusting the external world to maintain tranquillity is a very tough job.

Another way of maintaining tranquillity is to let things be as they are and have *viveka*, a proper attitude, accommodation. The work for proper attitude is internal, not external, and is possible only if you have *viveka*, (discriminative knowledge of what is permanent and what is transient). A proper attitude is present when you are not dependent on anything external – people, situations, things – for your happiness. Without changing anything external – over which you have no say anyway – you can be tranquil. How? By accommodating them – not out of helplessness, but by having proper understanding that nothing in the world can make me happy, that my happiness or unhappiness is not because of another person's behaviour. The other person's behaviour may not be easily tolerable, but you can put up with the other person's behaviour if you are not dependent on it for your happiness. If you accommodate out of helplessness you are weak.

Being accommodative means being detached; being detached means being dispassionate; being dispassionate means being independent; being independent means not being dependent on people, situations and things around me for my happiness. Having *viveka* means being sure that an impermanent thing cannot give permanent happiness. Whether one knows what is permanent or not, one can know that everything in the universe is impermanent. This *viveka* alone will result in maturity, which in turn will bless you with accommodation and thereby you will gain a proper attitude towards everything external and thus maintain your tranquillity. We have been blessed with an intellectual capacity, *buddhi*, which needs to be used to be clear that nothing in the universe is permanent and thus nothing in the universe is capable of giving me permanent happiness.

'Let me not rely on anything in the world for my happiness. Let me be with people, have concern for people, let me accept situations and things, but let me not depend on them for my happiness.' If this is your understanding then you are an intelligent person and your life becomes a meaningful life. You are an intelligent person only when you learn one thing from your own life's experiences, without which all your other knowledge will be useless: everything in this universe is impermanent and therefore nothing in the universe can give me permanent happiness. One needs to rely on permanent things for permanent happiness and there is only one thing that is permanent and that is *paramātmā*.

Paramātmā alone is the source of permanent happiness.