

Seven steps/stages to total satisfaction

The text Pancadasi (पञ्चदशी) composed by Swami Vidyananda is an important Prakarna Grantha प्रकरण ग्रन्थ, a book on a specific topic of Vedanta. The topic can be considered a review of Upanisads in a structured manner for easier understanding. The name Pancadasi means 'A book of 15 chapters. The 6th chapter is called Tripti Deepa Prakarnam (तृप्ति दीप प्रकरणं), or 'light on the topic of तृप्ति or fulfillment/satisfaction/joy.'

The topic of fulfillment starts with the very first verse of the 6th chapter, from Brihadarnyaka Upanisad (बृहदारण्यक उपनिषद):

आत्मानं चेत्विजानियादयमस्मीति पूरुषः ।

किमिच्छन् कस्य कामाय शरीरमनुसंज्यरेत् ॥१॥

If one should see that this unlimited person (ईश्वर) is none other than I, then by desiring what and striving for what will he/she undergo the sorrows of the body (and mind complex)?

In the 6th chapter, there is a segment of 15 verses (33 to 47) in which Swami Vidyananda has categorized 7 steps that a person can take starting from normal experience of a changing life of limitations, called samsara to one of total fulfillment of joy and independence from any problems. The study of these 7 steps can aid a person to better understand the teachings of Upanisads. In addition, they can be an excellent indicator for self-evaluation for a student of Vedanta, which step one is in life, how far one has to go and what the path forward is. The following article is based on these 15 verses, based on commentary in Hindi by Swami Maheshananda founder of the Dakshinamurti math in Mt Abu.

The 7 steps are:

- 1) अज्ञानं – ignorance, 2) आवरणं – covering, 3) विक्लेश – projection, 4) परोक्ष ज्ञानं – indirect knowledge, 5) अपरोक्ष ज्ञानं - direct knowledge, 6) शोक निवृत्तिः – cessation of sorrow, and 7) तृप्तिः – unrestricted fulfillment

अज्ञानमावृत्तिस्वद् विक्लेषश्च परोक्षधीः ।

अपरोक्षमतिः शोकमोक्षस्त्रिप्तिर्निरंकुषा ॥ ३३ ॥

सप्तावस्था इमाः सन्ति चिदाभासस्य तास्स्विमौ ।

बन्धमोक्षौ स्थितौ तत्र तिस्रो बन्धक्रितः स्मृताः । ३४ ॥

Ignorance, covering (of truth), and similarly a resulting projection of the mind, indirect knowledge of the truth, a direct cognition, freedom from sorrow and unbridled joy are the seven states of the reflected consciousness, the human being. The sense of bondage and freedom are included in the seven; the first three being bondage.

A brief summary of the 7 stages

Ignorance, meaning a person has no thoughts about ईश्वर, God. Covering meaning regarding the subject of God, there is opposite knowledge, namely it is there, but seems not to be. The non-apprehension of God results in the wrong apprehension that the world is real. The portion of the world that is nearest to us are our gross and subtle bodies. Then from the study of scriptures and in the company of the right people, one gets the indirect knowledge that God does exist. Only when one reaches this conclusion, there is ongoing self-enquiry. Self-enquiry leads to direct apprehension. When direct apprehension (of I being the only source of joy) takes place there is no chance for sorrow to afflict me. In the end there is unbridled joy. The joy resulting from things is bridled joy (bridled in the sense that the horses seem to have complete freedom to run, except when the reins can suddenly make them stop). As long the experience of things are there, there is joy; if not, joy disappears. God is not separate from you so there is no question of bridled joy.

In these 7 stages of the human being, the first 3 cause bondage, the last 4 are the door to freedom.

Step 1 - Ignorance

न जानामीत्युदासीनव्यवहारस्य कारणं ।

विचारप्रागभावेन युक्तमज्ञानमीरितम् ॥३५॥

“I don’t know”, “don’t care” type of behavior, prior to an enquiry is called ignorance.

‘I have no knowledge of God, therefore I do not care’ is the attitude of the person endowed with ignorance toward God. There is neither a movement toward knowing God, nor is there any attempt to avoid knowing God, because the mind does not grasp the possibility. The attitude is ongoing, because there is no start of any enquiry. Enquiry begins only when there is a doubt. There is no reason for any doubt so there is no enquiry. Only when a cause is there, there can be an effect. Like for making a pot, you need a clay as a cause. If there is only clods of earth or sand, the pot cannot be made.

If the mental condition is not there, there cannot be an enquiry. We cannot expect cats and dogs to think about God. But when a person is born as a human being, there can be an expectation of enquiring into God or godliness. So the scriptural authorities have said that the humans may not discover the truth, but at least there is a possibility that they might. This condition, this ignorance, a condition prior to enquiry, has been there forever (अनादि). ॥35॥

Everyone born is in this state of being. There is neither any knowledge about God, nor any desire to know. We act according to the laws of the world known to us. Up to a point, we can deal with success and failure, attributing it to the laws of the world around us.

Step 2 - A covering of truth

There comes a point where I start to look for answers for gaining success or happiness that may be beyond the tangible laws of the world. May be there is some knowledge beyond my worldly knowledge, by gaining which I can lessen my problems and increase my happiness. This is the start of an inquiry. Here, I can get wrong advice resulting in wrong thoughts, or the right advice. If wrong advice, then the result is the next stage, a covering of the truth.

अमार्गेण विचार्याथ नास्ति नो भाति चेत्यसौ ।

विपरीतव्यवहिततिरावृतेः कार्यमिष्यते ॥ ३६ ॥

Following wrong thoughts, one concludes that a changeless reality neither exists nor known. This is when ignorance changes into a form of covering.

What is the result of the second stage, that of covering? Wrong conclusion about God (which in fact is the changeless reality). This is different from ignorance, the first stage, where there is apathy and no movement toward a goal. In this stage, you do move in a path, but due to continued ignorance there is a possibility of taking up a wrong path. One moves forward from pursuing the hustle bustle of life, finding joy in the various experiences of worldly life, to other worldly ideas, such as religious practices, or astrology etc. Similarly devotion to various deities. If you do not see the expected results, you switch your devotion, from one devatas to another. Again, one may be told that the devatas are bound by mantras. So if one chants Vedic chant mantras, the devatas are duty-bound to give you results. In all these changing paths, you are convinced there is no single unchanging God. We just pay lip service to a concept of all powerful and all-knowing God, but in reality are dependent upon lesser forms of reality. This is the result of covering of God.

Step 3 - Projection due to covering

देहाद्वयचिदाभासरूपो विक्लेष ईरितः ।

कर्त्रत्वाद्यखिलः शोकः संसाराख्यो बन्धकः ॥ ३७ ॥

Along with gross and subtle bodies, the reflected consciousness (चिदाभास) is called the projection (विक्षेप). The cause of this sorrowful, endless projection (संसार) is the sense of doership.

What is this projection? It turns out that the combination of the gross-subtle bodies of an individual is the projection. The mere presence of the outside world is not the projection. Only when it is processed through our dual bodies does it become the projection. For instance, the presence of a bear or a tiger nearby does not cause fear. But if I happen to see them through my eyes, or hear their sounds, my fear begins. Vedanta does not say that the outside things are not there. But it says only when they are processed through your dual body will they become a source of joy or sorrow. In fact it says that it is not necessary for a thing to be there. Just a mere thought of something can make you fearful.

Verse #s 38 to 43 explain the projection in detail - an interplay of various elements that binds the individual in the endless loop of sorrow. The main points are given below in a bulleted form:

- First, sorrow (शोक) is defined as unhappiness (दुःख) plus I sense (अहं बुद्धिः), an enhanced form of unhappiness. An identification with I and mine (अहंकार, ममकार) is essential for this binding loop. Just a happening does not cause sorrow; but if it is associated with me, it becomes a source of happiness or unhappiness.
- A sense of doership (कर्तृत्वं) is what binds a person to sorrow. A firm belief that I am the doer binds one to the results. This is the reason one has to take birth after birth, as an endless loop of action and its results.
- All experiences, including sense of sorrow, or of doership, etc. can only be for a sentient being (चेतन वस्तु), not an inert (जड वस्तु) object.
- Now, there are only two sentient beings that have an appearance in my life; the original, real sentient being, (बिम्ब, साक्षी) or the reflected sentient being seen in a polished reflecting surface (प्रतिबिम्ब) known as the I sense (अहंकार, अहं बुद्धिः)
- These 3 aspects, अज्ञानं, आवरणं and the resulting विक्षेप, which together constitute the binding factors belong to the reflected consciousness, not to the original consciousness. Just like a black spot in the mirror superimposed on the reflected face appears as a spotted face, not to the real face.

Having described the first 3 steps, that cause a sense of bondage, now a group of two steps, that are the cause for liberation are taken up, indirect knowledge (परोक्ष ज्ञानं) and direct knowledge (अपरोक्ष ज्ञानं)

ज्ञानद्वयेन नष्टे अस्मिन्नज्ञाने तत्क्रितावृतिः ।

न भाति नास्ति चेत्येषा द्विविधापि विनश्यति ॥४४॥

By these two types of knowledge, the ignorance-based conclusion (अज्ञानं) that ‘there is no underlying, unchanging entity supporting everything, including me, nor is it known’ is negated, and as a result the covering (आवरणं) of its existence and appearance is also removed.

Step 4 - Indirect knowledge and Step 5 - Direct Knowledge

First, indirect knowledge takes place. By it the conclusion that there is no such thing as God is replaced by a conviction, not just casual thoughts that an unchanging, God does exist, as the underlying basis of all. This is removal of covering, which was the result of ignorance. Still the conclusion is that God does exist, but remote from me, certainly not seen/experienced by me. That part of the covering still remains.

When direct knowledge takes place, even that covering is removed, because one understands that I cannot be apart from the fullness and non changing nature of God. Since I always am, therefore the experience of God is never apart from me. This is a natural conclusion based on personal experience.

Before, the experience of I was always there, but as a changing me -walker, eater, seer and hearer. This is in the reflected consciousness. Now the understanding of I makes it clear that all that is a reflection of the unchanging effulgent consciousness.

Like seeing my face in the mirror is one experience, but knowing that it is merely my own reflection is another experience. Similarly, now my understanding makes it clear that the reflected consciousness obtaining in the I thought shows that I am the unchanging consciousness. For a long time whenever I thought of I, it was always in terms of being endowed by the dual bodies. So the impressions (संस्कार) of I become a bondage for me. Even after knowing, we often forget that I am just the pure consciousness.

Whenever the moment the old experience of ‘I am the changing body-mind’ pops up its head, I double up the dose of listening and analysis (श्रवणं/मननं) of who I really am. When the new impressions take hold, then I will naturally take up my true nature.

An example is given to show this phenomenon. A person called Devadatta took sannyasa and was given a new name Sivananda. For a while, when someone would call ‘Devadatta’, he would instantly respond. After many years of being known as Sivananda, if someone calls out ‘Devadatta’, he would smile and say to himself - ‘that’s right. At one time I used to be called by that name’.

For transactional purposes, one might still behave like a human being, but in inner reality, the feeling that I am a human being has long been destroyed by the wisdom of employing both indirect and direct tools of knowledge- that I am something more than that.

It has been stated that by combination of indirect and direct knowledge, both ignorance and the covering – first and second steps – are removed. Now it is shown which knowledge is responsible for which step.

परोक्षज्ञानतो नश्येदसत्त्वावृत्तिहेतुता ।

अपरोक्षज्ञाननाश्या ह्यभानावृत्तिहेतुता ॥४५॥

Indirect knowledge removes the segment of ignorance responsible for the conclusion that the unchanging reality (कुटस्थ) does not exist. Direct knowledge removes the segment of conclusion that it is not directly experienced by me.

By indirect knowledge, one comes to know that the Paramatma/Isvara/Brahman alone is the creator of this universe, nothing else is. Some believe that particles coming together creates this universe, some say nature is capable of creation, others say some kind of power is the cause. By the indirect knowledge born from the study of Vedic scriptures leads to a firm conclusion that there is no other cause of the creation possible other than Brahman alone. By the removal of ignorance about the cause, the covering of Brahman is also gone.

However, despite that experience, one feels one does not experience Brahman. Even though Paramatma is continuously present, due to ignorance one feels it is not known to me. It is like on a cloudy day, there is no sun. Is it not so that the absence of sun is also set up by the presence of the sun – you are not using a flashlight to determine there is no sun. Similarly the seeing of things like tables and clothing etc. is set up only by the effulgence of Brahman. If that effulgence were not to be there, nothing would be visible.

May I reflect on the fact that my nature of beingness (अहं अस्मि) and of knowingness (अहं भामि) is always there, and that is my innate nature, and not a quality. When am I, the consciousness entity not there? And when is my knowingness absent? Never. Not possible. So by seeing that I, the nature of beingness and knowingness (सत्-चित्-रूप) destroys the ignorance and misconception about myself.

Step 6 - Cessation of Sorrow and Step 7 - Unbridled Fulfillment

Now, the result of the two kinds of knowledge resulting in the last two steps are explained.

अभानावरणे नष्टे जीवत्वरोपसंक्षयात् ।

कर्त्वाद्यखिलः शोकः संसाराख्यो निवर्तते ॥४६॥

By the destruction of ignorance and self-covering, the false conclusion that I am a limited and changing individual, the entire sorrowful world of becoming (संसार) in the form of doership is gone.

Direct knowledge destroys the covering that hides the thinking 'I do not know'. It is like seeing golden ornaments, one says I do not see gold. In the same manner, even while seeing all things endowed with beingness (अस्ति) and knowingness (भाति), one feels I do not know beingness and knowingness. Like gold permeates all ornaments, similarly beingness and knowingness, which is I, permeates all thoughts and forms. So do not think that the names and forms will need to go away to reveal another experience. Whether names and forms are there or not, the experience in the form of beingness and knowingness is still there.

To inquire about oneself is a great means of gaining freedom from all problems. This inquiry leads one from the conclusion of 'I am a just a living being' to the enormous conclusion that I am indeed the unlimited being, Brahman. I take myself for granted, with the conclusion 'what is there to inquire' _ I am already there. But if I were to inquire, this inquiry leads me to see that I am none other than Paramatma. As Paramatma says clearly in Bhagavad Gita 'अहमात्मा गुडाकेश सर्वभूताशयस्थितः' I am in all thoughts of all beings. Paramatma is in the heart, but the thoughts are in the form of my limitedness (जीवत्वं). If you just pay attention, you will find God. But the trick of Maya is that one does not think about what is the basic content of thoughts. If I were to look into it, Maya's trick will be exposed. Confounded by this trick of Maya, even the intelligent among us hold this view 'what is there to inquire about yourself? Is it not just being selfish, just being concerned with yourself? Just do some good in the world'. They do not understand that by this inquiry one gets to realize that 'I' is the same in all beings, so it is not selfish.

When one understands that what I take myself to be me, along with all my limitations, is actually a mere superimposition (आरोप) on I the Brahman, like a person can see that what I see in the mirror is merely my reflection and is a superimposition on the real I, then the entire false structure of the jiva collapses. Once this takes place, then let the jiva still function, but that is no longer a problem. Just as there is no problem to continue to see myself in the mirror, since the cloak of reality has been taken away.

Thereafter is no sorrow left, because the cause of sorrow is a continuous flow of wanting to have and do things, but not being able to get them. But this understanding leaves me with nothing needed to desire. Whatever needed to desire has already been achieved by me; there is nothing that needs to be desired or done. As it says in the Gita – नानवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं'. If I see an inviting bunch of grapes in a movie, I do not have a desire to cut it and enjoy, because they are not real.

The worldly experiences are not the cause of sorrow; they are the very nature of sorrow. Even experiences of happiness should be seen to be party to unhappiness, because they are the cause of prolonging unhappiness.

Also, the scriptures point out that one should not be under the false impression that once I have a vision of oneness, I will inherit the problems of others on to myself. On the contrary, because all experiences have been falsified, both my own as well as others' experiences lose their sting.

The reason I don't 'see' Brahman is that I look for it away from / different from me. This search is never going to be successful because Brahman is none other than I. So this search lasts life after life; the search is in the form of doing and obtaining results, doing and obtaining results, on and on. Life becomes

full of regrets – why did not do a better job, or if only I had done this or that, I would not be in this sorry state. This continuous journey of ‘becoming’ is like being in a never ending ocean (भाव सागर). This is the nature of taking (संसरणं) one life after another.

But once I understand that I was never the nature of coming and going, that it is not possible (as in space), that I am the platform in which all travel takes place, then an uncommon sense of satisfaction takes place. This is the next stage:

निवृत्ते सर्वसंसारे नित्यमुक्तत्वभासनात् ।

निरङ्कुशा भवेत् तृप्तिः पुनः शोकासमुद्भवात् ॥४७॥

When the world of duality is destroyed by the experience of one’s being ever released, there arises, with the total absence of grief, an unrestricted and everlasting sense of satisfaction.

How does doership and enjoyership (कर्तृत्वं-भोक्तृत्वं) and its resulting sense of bondage gets destroyed? By the direct experience that I am the very nature of freedom. One does not have a feeling that I was bound at one time, and now I am free. Instead the appreciation is Wow! I have always been free, I just did not realize it. The sense of bondage is in the reflected consciousness (चिदाभास) never was and not possible to be the nature of consciousness (चित्).

In this satisfaction, there are no restrictions (अङ्कुश). At the moment my satisfaction is restricted. Restriction of location (देश) – Hawaii is pleasant, but after one week, I go back to Chicago, where it is uncomfortably cold. Or restriction of time (काल) – today it is sunny and warm; in a couple of days, rain and cold front moves in. Or restriction of things (वस्तु) – I thought I had a good meal, but alas I had an allergic reaction to something I ate. But in I, the सत्चिदानन्द वस्तु, there are no such restrictions. I am all pervasive (सर्व व्यापक), so there is no restriction by location. I will always be what I am – so there is no restriction by time. And I am independently existing – so there is no restriction by anything else (also they are a lower level of reality).

As long I am different from ईश्वर, I cannot have unrestricted satisfaction, since I am under his control. Only when I discover that my nature is the same as ईश्वर’s nature – that both are one and the same, my satisfaction becomes unrestricted – निरङ्कुश.

OM. Shanti, shanti, shanti.

