

Mayapanchakam

(English translation by S.N.Sastri)

According to Advaita Vedanta Brahman is the only Reality. This Brahman appears to us as the universe of multifarious names and forms because of our ignorance of Brahman, in the same way as a rope, when not recognised as such due to dim light, appears as a snake. This ignorance is also known by the names 'Nescience' and 'Maya'. In his commentary on the Kathopanishad Sri Sankara says: "Alas, how unfathomable, inscrutable, and variegated is this Maya, that every creature, though in reality identical with the supreme Being and even when taught so, does not grasp that fact and does not recognise himself as the supreme Self, while, even without being told, he accepts as his Self the not-Self, namely, the aggregate of body and senses and thinks, 'I am the son of so and so', though these (the body, senses, etc.) are only objects (of perception, etc.) like pots, etc. Verily it is that they are being deluded by the Maya of the supreme Being, such that every one moves again and again (through the unending cycle of birth and death)".

In Vivekachudamani, verse 108, Sri Sankara points out that Maya cannot be known directly, but can only be inferred from its effects, namely, the world of names and forms which we perceive. It is the power of the supreme Being. In verse 109 it is said that Maya cannot be described as either existent or non-existent or both; it is indescribable (anirvachaniya).

In Mayapanchakam, a work consisting of five stanzas, Sri Sankara brings out succinctly how Maya makes incompatibles appear together and shows how it brings about what appears logically to be impossible.

निरुपमनित्यनिरंशकेऽप्यखण्डे

मयि चिति सर्वविकल्पनादिशून्ये।

घटयति जगदीशजीवभेदं

त्वघटितघटनापटीयसी माया॥१

1. Maya, which is adept at making the impossible happen, superimposes on me (the Atman) who am in reality pure Consciousness, who am incomparable (because the Atman is

the only reality and there is therefore nothing else with which it can be compared), who am eternal, partless, unlimited by space, time and other objects, in whom there is no differentiation whatsoever, the distinctions in the form of the world, God and the individual soul.

Note- The world, God and the individual soul appear to be different from one another only because of the limiting adjuncts. Intrinsically, there is neither difference nor identity among them, for all the three are in essence Pure Consciousness, homogeneous like a lump of salt. When the unconditioned Self has, as the limiting adjuncts, the body and organs which are characterized by ignorance, desire and action, it is called the transmigrating individual soul. When the limiting adjunct is the power of eternal and unlimited knowledge, which is Maya, the same Self is known as God, who is the *antaryamin* or Inner Controller of the whole world. The same Self, free from all limiting adjuncts, is Brahman (Br.up.3.8.12, Sankarabhashya).

श्रुतिशतनिगमान्तशोधकान-

प्यहह धनादिनिदर्शनेन सद्यः।

कलुषयति चतुष्पदाद्यभिन्नान्

त्वघटितघटनापटीयसी माया॥२

2. Maya, which is adept at making the impossible happen, makes even those who have mastered the Vedas and the Upanishads behave no better than four-legged animals by tempting them with wealth and possessions. What a pity!

सुखचिदखण्डविबोधमद्वितीयं

वियदनिलादिविनिर्मिते नियोज्य।

भ्रमयति भवसागरे नितान्तं

त्वघटितघटनापटीयसी माया॥३

3. Maya, which is adept at making the impossible happen, makes the Atman which is of the nature of Bliss and pure and infinite Consciousness and is without a second, identify itself with the body made up of the elements, namely, ether, air etc., and whirl intensely in the ocean of transmigratory existence.

अपगतगुणवर्णजातिभेदे

सुखचिति विप्रविडाद्यहंकृतिं च।

स्फुटयति सुतदारगेहमोहं
त्वघटितघटनापटीयसी माया॥४

4. Maya, which is adept at making the impossible happen, creates in the pure Bliss-Consciousness which is devoid of attributes such as caste, creed and the like, the notion of 'I'-ness, of looking upon oneself as a Brahmana, Vaisya, etc., as well as attachment to son, wife and home.

विधिहरिहरभेदमप्यखण्डे
बत विरचय्य बुधानपि प्रकामम्।
भ्रमयति हरिहरविभेदभावान्
त्वघटितघटनापटीयसी माया॥५

5. Alas! Maya, which is adept at making the impossible happen, creates in Brahman which is homogeneous, without any parts, distinctions such as Brahma, Vishnu and Siva and thereby perplexes even the learned by making them look upon Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva as different from one another.
