

The Five Sheaths from the *Moksha Gita*

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गुरुवाच ॥

असावन्नमयः कोशः पञ्चभूतात्मकः स्मृतः ।
आद्यन्तवान् जडश्चायं भूतोत्पाद्योऽथ खण्डवान् ॥१॥
मलसान्द्रोऽप्यतो न त्वं कोशोऽयं पार्थिवाङ्गभृत् ।
त्वमस्य वर्ष्मणः साक्षी तद्रहस्यमिदं शृणु ॥
नाहं शरीरमेवास्मि ब्रह्माहं केवलं त्विति ॥२॥

1, 2. The Guru said: This Annamaya sheath or good sheath is made up of the five elements. It has a beginning and an end. It is inert and full of parts. It is an effect of the five elements. It is full of impurities. Therefore you are not this physical body or the Annamaya sheath. You are the witness of this body. Understand, therefore, "I am not the body. I am Brahman."

The physical body is the grossest form of thought. The food consumed by the parents is converted into Sukla (semen) in men and Sonita in women and by the combination of these the physical body is formed. After birth, the body grows by suckling the milk which is only a transformation of the food consumed by the mother. The body is further developed by taking food. It gets dissolved in earth which is another form of food. The body is itself a food for other creatures. Hence it is called the food sheath, the material body or the earthly engagement of the soul. The food sheath is an object of perception. The Atman is the cogniser and the body is the cognised. Hence the Self is different from the body. In dream and deep sleep there is no consciousness of the body.

The five elements constitute the physical body. These modifications of Maya are not the Truth, the body and its Dharmas, size, form, birth and death are not actual modifications of the Self. Varnashrama, name and class differ in different births. They are mere accidental attributes of the body. There is no physical body either before birth or after death. Hence it is non-eternal.

Existence, birth, growth, modification, decay and death are the six Vikaras of the physical body. Just as the ether in a pot is not affected in any way by the destruction of the pot, so also the Atman is not at all affected by the destruction of the body or the Annamaya Kosha. Atman is unattached. Ether is subtle, but the Atman is still subtler. Atman is formless, changeless, birthless, deathless, free from old age. It is neither born nor is killed. Hence one should meditate on this Atman or Brahman.

अथ प्राणमयः कोशो रजोगुणसमुद्भवः ।
आद्यन्तवान् जडः कार्यस्तत्त्वं न प्राणकोशकः ॥३ ॥
अस्य कोशस्य साक्षी त्वं तद्रहस्यमिदं शृणु ।
नाहं प्राणमयः कोशो ब्रह्माहं केवलं त्विति ॥४ ॥

3, 4. The Pranamaya Kosha or the vital sheath is a product of Rajoguna. It also has a beginning and an end. It is inert. It is an effect. Therefore you are not the Pranamaya Kosha. You are the witness of this sheath. Understand, therefore, "I am not the Pranamaya Kosha. I am Brahman."

The Pranamaya Kosha consists of the five Pranas and five Karma-Indriyas or organs of action. Though the Prana is waking when one is sleeping, it does not invite a friend and entertain him; it cannot stop a thief who tries to remove the articles in a house. Therefore it is insentient. The Self is a mass of Intelligence. It is Chaitanya-Swarupa. It is entirely different from the Prana. The Self is the knower, seer and witness of this sheath.

Prana is only the active working of the mind. A pure-hearted man breathes rhythmically. The breath of an evil-minded person is disturbed. When the mind is controlled the Prana is automatically controlled. The Vedantic aspirant does not practise Pranayama, because his breath is automatically regulated and Kumbhaka naturally follows when the mental Kumbhaka or concentration and meditation are practised. The Pranas are the Rajasic manifestations of the dynamic mental force which with their ups and downs maintain the balance of individual existence even as the bicycle is kept in balance when its wheels are vigorously turning. When there is a break of this movement, the bicycle falls down and when the Prana is inhibited the individualising mind together with the ego breaks down and dies.

Hence there should be no identification with the Pranamaya Kosha and the aspirant should assert the Self-existent Atman distinct from it.

योयं मनोमयः कोशः स च सत्त्वगुणोद्भवः ।
आद्यन्तवान् जडः कार्यस्तत्त्वं नैव मनोमयः ॥५ ॥
अस्य कोशस्य साक्षी त्वं तद्रहस्यमिदं शृणु ।
नाहं मनोमयः कोशो ब्रह्माहं केवलं त्विति ॥६ ॥

5, 6. The Manomaya Kosha or the mental sheath is a product of Sattwa Guna. It also has a beginning and an end. It is inert. It is an effect. Therefore you are not the Manomaya Kosha. You are the witness of this sheath. Understand, therefore, "I am not Manomaya Kosha. I am Brahman."

The Manomaya Kosha consists of the mind and the five Jnana Indriyas. It is a means of enjoying pleasure and pain. The mind causes egoism in the body and "mine"-ness in house, sons, wife, wealth, etc., and passes outside through the avenues or channels of these five Indriyas. It is the internal instrument for gaining the experiences and knowledge of this world. Mind is associated with the Vrittis or waves of lust, anger, etc., and is a terrible objectifying agent. Mind is a Vikari, it constantly changes itself.

The Self is a witness of the Manomaya Kosha. The Self is Nirvikari. The mind is not the Self. The Self is the Atman or Brahman, unblemished, eternal and changeless, and one should meditate on it as such.

यो विज्ञानमयः कोशः सोऽपि सत्त्वगुणोद्भवः ।
आद्यन्तवान् जडः कार्यस्त्वं विज्ञानमयो न तत् ॥७ ॥
अस्य कोशस्य साक्षी त्वं तद्रहस्यमिदं शृणु ।
नाहं विज्ञानकोशो हि ब्रह्माहं केवलं त्विति ॥८ ॥

7, 8. The Vijnanamaya Kosha or this Buddhi sheath is a product of Sattwa Guna. It has also a beginning and an end. It is inert. It is an effect. Therefore you are not the Vijnanamaya Kosha. You are witness of this sheath. Understand, therefore, "I am not the Vijnanamaya Kosha. I am Brahman."

The Vijnanamaya Kosha consists of the intellect in conjunction with the five organs of knowledge or the Jnana-Indriyas. During sleep it gets involution or Laya along with Chidabhasa or the reflection of Pure Consciousness. During waking state it is the doer. It is an effect like a jar and is inanimate. It shines in borrowed feathers. It borrows its light temporarily from its source, just as the moon borrows its light from the sun. It is not the eternal Self.

The Pranamaya, Manomaya and the Vijnanamaya Koshas constitute the subtle body. The subtle body is composed of the five unquintuplicated elements. There is neither breathing nor talking, neither seeing nor hearing in the dead body. There is also no warmth. The self-cognitions such as "I speak; I hear; I am hungry; I am thirsty;" and the like appear distinctly in the subtle body. The subtle body operates in the waking and the dreaming states. Ghosts and apparitions are the manifestations of the subtle body only.

The ego is hidden in the intellect and the memory (Chitta) is hidden in the mind. The subtle body thus, contains nineteen principles or Tattwas. It is also called the "Puri-Ashtaka" or the eightfold city. The five organs of sense, the five organs of action, the five vital breaths, the five subtle primary elements, the fourfold Antahkarana, ignorance, desire and action are the eightfold city of the subtle body.

The physical body is only an instrument in the hands of the subtle body. When the subtle body is disciplined through Pranayama, abstraction and concentration, the physical body also becomes very healthy and strong. Whatever the subtle body is, that the physical body

also becomes. The mind which is the ruler of the subtle body gets fattened by worldly affections, by avarice for wealth, by the acquirement of women and gold and by attachment to the external fleeting forms of beauties. The mind is thinned out by eradication of the Vasanas and egoism.

The subtle body is the distracted expression of the self through Avidya, the causal sheath. Therefore it is not the Truth. Truth is Brahman and all else is false. One should meditate that he is not the subtle body and that he is the self-effulgent Atman.

य आनन्दमयः कोशः स च प्रकृतिसंभवः ।
अविद्याकर्मजन्योऽपि व्यभिचारिगुणान्वितः ॥९ ॥

जडश्चायं त्वमानन्दकोशो नैव भवस्यतः ।
अस्य कोशस्य साक्षी त्वं तद्रहस्यमिदं शृणु ॥
नाहमानन्दकोशोऽपि ब्रह्माहं केवलं त्विति ॥१० ॥

9, 10. The Anandamaya Kosha or this bliss sheath is Avidya or ignorance, a modification of Prakriti. It is the effect of past deeds. It is endowed with changing attributes. It is Jada or insentient. Therefore you are not the Anandamaya Kosha. You are the witness of this sheath. Understand, therefore, "I am not the Anandamaya sheath. I am Brahman."

The Anandamaya Kosha is made of Mula-Ajnana. It is the Karana Sarira or the causal body which is the substratum of all other sheaths which are external to it. Its three attributes or Dharmas are Priya, Moda and Pramoda, affection, delight and intense happiness. It is the indescribable beginningless Avidya, the nescience of the Atma, and is composed of Malina Sattwa. It is inanimate, beginningless, but has an end in Atma-Jnana.

The ignorance of the real nature of the Self constitutes this causal body or seed-body. It contains the potentialities or the seeds for the subtle and gross bodies. It projects the appearance of the whole universe through the subtle sheath. It is the food of ignorance for the hungry ego. The mind has come out of this ignorance and gets involved in it during deep sleep. In the sleeping state there is a vigorous functioning of this ignorance in which everything is lost as in pitch darkness. The Karana Sarira screens the Satchidananda Brahman.

He who knows the ignorance or the negation of the existence of the Atman and the denial of its appearance is the true Self, the Atman. He who knows the effects of ignorance, such as "I am a man, I am the doer and enjoyer, I am happy, I am miserable," is the witness and the Atman. Hence in reality the Self is the seer, knower and the witness of the causal body or the ignorance. The Self is the Knowledge and the Light itself.

As the light that enlightens the jar is different from it, so is the Self different from the bodies witnessed by it. Therefore the Self is Consciousness itself and not the bodies.

The aspirant should endeavour to rise above the five Koshas to realise the identity with Pure Consciousness. Just as one draws out the thin stalk from the Munja grass by stripping off its upper layers one by one, so also one should take out the innermost essence of the Atman from all objects of perception, i.e. the five Koshas, by the "neti, neti" doctrine of negating unreality. Just as butter is removed from milk by churning the mixture of curd, so also the butter of the Atman should be taken from the mixture of the five Koshas by the churning of constant meditation on the Immortal Brahman which fictitiously appears as the sheaths, the world, etc. When the identification with the sheaths ceases, the self realises the Infinite Being and gets liberated beyond death.

इति श्रीमन्मोक्षगीतासूपनिषत्सु ब्रह्मविद्यायां योगशास्त्रे
गुरुशिष्यसंवादे पञ्चकोशयोगो नाम नवमोऽध्यायः ॥९॥