

# MESSAGE OF THE SHANTIMANTRA

Śāstranidhi, Vidyāratna, Dvaitavedāntarasajna,

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Yāska the celebrated author of the Nirukta has aptly said *Nahyesha sthanor aparadha vadenam andho na pasyati*. It is not the fault of the pillar that the blind man does not see it. Almost all of us are more or less blind and fail to see and understand the great spiritual truths set out in the scriptures. We repeat the passages by rote and fail to notice their true significance. Our approach is superficial, mechanical, and formal with the result that we miss the bus. It is the guru that opens our eyes to the inner significance of things, a well-known passage in the *Aitareya Aranyaka* runs thus.

*Parokṣapriya hi Devaḥ Pratyakṣadviṣaḥ*. The gods love the implicit and hate the explicit. The writings of Śrī Madhvācārya have thrown a search light upon many obscure and intriguing texts and contexts in the sacred literature of our country and helped us to drink deep at the fountain of wisdom called “Ānanda Tīrtha”.

Following the great Ācārya came other distinguished personalities like Śrī Jayatīrtha, Vyāsatīrtha, Vijayīndra, Vādirāja, Vidyādhīṣa, etc. As Śrī Jayatīrtha has rightly observed, it is only the gods incarnate that can bring out the full significance of the works of Madhva.

*Ānandatīrtha Bhagavad Vacasām*

*Vyākhyāna karmaṇi surādhikāriṇo atra*

Among such eminent personages who have enriched philosophy of Śrī Madhvācārya lay their writings is the illustrious Śrī Vādirāja Svāmī (1480-1600) who has shed much new light upon many texts and topics connected with Dvaita Siddhanta. In this short paper, I propose to introduce the reader to the beautiful way in which Śrī Vādirāja has established one of the crucial tenets of Dvaita Philosophy the preeminence of Vāyu as Jīvottama and Devottama on the basis of one such important text. What distinguishes Śrī Vādirāja is the easy and appealingly facile way in which he has tried to carry conviction to even the most sceptic-minded and the most bigoted opponents by taking the most obvious and universally accepted texts and making them yield unsuspected results. For instance, there is the well known Shantimantra recited by all Vedic reciters and students of Upaniṣads when they begin the Vedic recitation and end it

ॐ शं नो मित्रः शं वरुणः । शं नो भवत्वयमा ।

शं न इन्द्रो बृहस्पतिः । शं नो विष्णुरुक्रमः ।

नमो ब्रह्मणे । नमस्ते वायो । त्वमेव प्रत्यक्षं ब्रह्मासि ।

त्वामेव प्रत्यक्षं ब्रह्म वदिष्यामि ।

ऋतं वदिष्यामि । सत्यं वदिष्यामि । तन्मामवतु । तद्वक्तारमवतु । अवतु माम् । अवतु वक्तारम् ।

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Śrī Vādirāja asks us to ponder over the order in which the gods are named in the first four lines ending with Viṣṇu the Urukrama (wide pacer) at the conclusion of all. He then asks us to mark the reference to Vāyu as Pratyakṣa Brahman. This is not to be accepted as an identity proposition. Such identification is not extended to the other deities Mitra or Varuṇa. What then is the point here in accosting Vāyu alone of the Devatas as Pratyakṣam brahma. What else can the object of the invocation be, but to represent Vāyu as the highest (Pratīka or Pratimā) in and through which the supreme Brahman who is Vedavedya is to be accomplished? The manner in which the mantra proceeds is significant, says Vādirāja.

The supreme Brahman who is Veda vidya is first called upon and receives our salutation - Namō Brahmane. Next to the supreme Brahman our salutation goes to Vāyu who is styled Pratyakṣam brahma. If the Śruti intended a straightaway identity of Vāyu with the Supreme Brahman the epithet "pratyakṣam", would have been dispensed with as it serves no purpose. The text could have been worded simply as *Namaste vāyo tvameva Brahma asi Tvām eva Brahma Vadīṣyami*.

There is no special propriety in calling Vāyu Pratyakṣam brahma unless it be that Vāyu is the Pratimā (medium) in and through whom Brahman should be worshipped and meditated upon.

"Te" is used to address a person directly present (2nd person). No such expression is used in referring and Brahman in Namō Brahmane. Hence, the conclusion should follow that the Brahman referred to in the first line Namō Brahmane is different from Vāyu and as Vāyu is again referred to by the additional epithet "Pratyakṣam", the purpose of such a reference can only be to impress on the hearer that Vāyu is the gateway or medium of approach to the supreme, just as worshippers in temples adore the idol there with garlands and jewels and burn incense before it and worship it as the best medium of approach to the *invisible deity*.

This makes it clear that Vāyu among the gods is the best and the nearest and most immaculate medium in and through which the supreme being is to be meditated upon and realised by us.

Such is the simple, easy, and penetrating way in which Vādirāja has conveyed one of the most important tenets of Madhva Śāstra, viz., the preeminence of Vāyu among the gods as the purest among them and as one of the Paraśukla Traya.

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