Baghawad Gita, Class 172: Chapter 13, Verses 13 to 15

Note: In this chapter the numbering of shlokas can be different depending upon Gita book you are reading. I am using Swamiji's numbering.

Shloka # 13:

I shall speak of that which is to be known, by realizing which one attains Immortality. The supreme Brahman is without any beginning. That is called neither being nor non-being.

From shloka # 13 onwards Sri Krishna is discussing the fourth topic of Gneyam.

Gneyam means that which is to be known by everyone; the ultimate truth, without this knowledge one can't obtain immortality. So, every human being must have this knowledge that is also known as Param Brahman. And every human being wants to conquer mortality, and therefore every human being should necessarily gain this knowledge. This Param Brahman is discussed in all Upanishads and that knowledge is called Brahma Vidya. Now Sri Krishna wants to give us the essence of Upanishads in shlokas # 13-19; it is the Upanishad Sara or Brahma vidya.

Shloka # 14:

That (Knowable), which has hands and feet
everwhere, which has eyes, heads and mouths everywhere, which has ears
everywhere, exists in creatures by pervading them all.

In
Upanishads, Brahman is revealed as ultimate substance out of which Universe is
made of.

It
is the ultimate content of universe. Science is also trying to find this
substance. Once they said 100 elements made up the universe; then they tried to
find out content of elements and found molecules; digging further they found molecules
were made of invisible atoms in motion. While atoms are invisible, together,
they create this tangible universe. Digging down further they found even atoms
were made of sub-atomic particles.

Then the particles also, they tried to divide further, and they said energy, the intangible energy is the ultimate stuff of the universe. Thus they are going deeper and deeper, and their aim is what, to find out, what is the basic, ultimate substance. And the interesting thing that we see is **as you go deeper and deeper, the visible becomes the invisible. The tangible becomes the intangible. The concrete becomes the abstract. Therefore we come to know that the ultimate substance must be intangible, formless and abstract substance.** And what is that final abstract substance, the scientists have not yet arrived at; they are still in the process of enquiry.

Vedanta has analyzed the same subject matter and Vedanta has arrived at the ultimate substance and Vedanta calls it Brahman. Brahman is the basic substance of this creation, and

the being the ultimate substance, it is going to be abstract, it is going to be intangible; it is going to be invisible; it is ashabdam, asparsham, arupam, arasam and avyayam. And, therefore, understanding that Brahman is going to be a relatively tougher prospect. So we are going to analyze a substance, which is not available for seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and therefore this portion are going to be abstract. Therefore, it looks like a jumble of words because we try to concretely conceive of something, but we are not discussing a concrete and tangible thing. But still if you go on dwelling upon this teaching, slowly, the words will begin to make sense but it requires lot of intellectual acclimatization.

So to understand Brahman, it requires certain Acclimatization, therefore, for new students, this topic will look like a bunch of words, but do not be disappointed, but slowly if you dwell on, it will make sense.

How should we approach this topic? Normally, we have seen a lot of substances in the world. So when we see a person, you qualify him/her as tall, lean, fat, fair etc.

We use a noun and an adjective. An adjective generally refers to a property like tall, short, fat, fair, round and in English, adjective, refers to properties of an object. And generally, the noun, like the tall tree, the fat man etc.; refer to substance. Adjectives reveal properties and attributes, while nouns reveal substances. This is where we have to begin. Adjectives reveal properties and nouns reveal substances; this is one thing we generally experience.

Now there is another experience we have, which also we have to notice. When I say a

fat man, a tall tree, a round object, etc.; this is what I experience. Now I
will give you another set of words; I say there is a golden bangle; there is a
wooden chair. When I say Golden bangle, golden is adjective; and bangle is the
noun. And when I say wooden chair, wooden is adjective; chair is noun.

Now in this particular case, when I say golden bangle, the word golden does not refer to a property, even though the word is an adjective; here in this unique and peculiar case, the world golden refers to the very substance of the bangle. So, Golden refers to the substance gold and not a property. And when I say a wooden chair, the word wooden is an adjective, but it still is not referring to a property; the word wooden here means the substance is nothing but wood.

And therefore in this particular case, adjective reveals a substance and not a property. Whereas, **when I say a tall person, adjective reveals a property, tallness. but when I say golden bangle, adjective reveals a substance.** Therefore rule No.1, I want to convey is that: an Adjective can reveal either a property or a substance. Both possibilities are there.

Similarly, when I say golden bangle, the word bangle is a noun. But even though the word bangle is a noun, really speaking, it does not reveal a substance at all; because there is no substance called bangle, there is only the substance called gold; bangle is a noun, but still it does not reveal a substance. If bangle is not a substance, then what does it reveal? If you analyze, Gold when it is in a particular form or shape, that shape alone is called bangle. Similarly when you say golden ring, there is no substance called ring; ring is the name of a particular shape. Similarly when you say wooden chair, there is no substance called chair; chair is the name of a particular shape alone.

Here
the name of the substance is wood alone. Similarly, bangle is a form; chain is
a form, ring is a form.

So we have two examples, in example No.1, tall tree; adjective reveals property; Noun reveals substance. When I say golden bangle, adjective reveals the substance; the word bangle reveals not a substance but a particular form. That is why when form is changed, bangle is gone. Therefore the word bangle refers to the property. And therefore **Vedanta says adjectives can reveal either a property of a substance. Similarly, nouns can also reveal either a property or a substance.** Should I remind you of the four examples:

Adjective
reveals property such as Tall, fat etc.

Adjective
reveals the substance such as golden, wooden etc.

What
is the example for noun revealing the substance? Tree.

What
is the example for noun revealing the property? Bangle.

Now Vedanta comes to this world. All this is only example. Now only we are coming to the original. When I experience a world, I say here is a book, and here is a fan; and there is a wall; there is a man; there is a woman. So when I experience the world, I refer to everyone as there is a man; there is a woman, there is a table, there is a chair. What is common to all of them: It is, It is, It is, and the verb “IS” refers to the existence of the world. When I say there is a clock, it means clock is existent. When I say there is a planet, the planet is existent. Therefore, every object that I experience is existent such as: existent tree, existent man, existent woman. Whatever I experience is, existent, existent, existent.

If anything is nonexistent, then I will not experience it. Therefore everything that you experience in the world is an existent object. Everything is existent.

In Sanskrit they say: San ghataḥ; san phata; sat patram; san purushaha; san or sat means, existent-object.

Now when I say an existent tree, an existent man, an existent woman, etc. what is the noun and what is the adjective in this?

When I say existent-man, existent-woman, table, chair, sun, moon, stars, etc. the word existent is adjective; and man, woman, table, chair, sun, moon, etc. are nouns. So the word existent is adjective and every object is a noun.

Now Vedanta asks the question, if the word existent is an adjective, and if the word man, woman, sun, moon, etc. are nouns, tell me what type of adjective it is and what type of noun is it? And why this question, because previously we saw, an adjective can either reveal a property or it can reveal a substance.

Generally, until we come to Vedanta, our general conclusion is world is the substance and the word existent is an attribute or property; this will be our general assumption.

Vedanta,
however, says that is the handiwork of maya. Maya
makes you commit a very big blunder. It makes me think that the word “existent”,
an adjective, is revealing an attribute and the world is the substance. Vedanta says that
is not correct.

According
to Vedanta, the word
‘existent’ reveals the basic substance just as the word golden reveals the
substance. It reveals a substance and the substance is called existence.
According to Vedanta, it is also
called Sat Brahma. Chandoyga Upanishad begins its teaching with this topic. According to this
Upanishad, the basic
substance is existence and existence is not an attribute of an object, but it
is the fundamental absolute substance. And being the fundamental absolute
substance, it is invisible, it is intangible and it is the abstract principle.

And
therefore according to Vedanta, the whole
world is not a substance at all. Just as chair is not a substance, the desk is also
not a substance; thus when I am touching the desk, I am not touching the desk
at all, rather I am touching the wood alone.

There
is no substance called desk; no substance called table; no substance called chair.
Therefore Vedanta says world
is nama rupatmakam.

Brihadarnyaka Upanishad says, the whole world is different names, different forms and different functions; there is no substance called world. Bangle is a name, given to a particular form, to serve a particular function. If it is a bangle name and form, what is its function? To decorate the hand; If its name is chain and what is its function; decorating the neck; if it is a ring name and form, the function is decorating the finger; there is no substance called bangle, chain, ring, etc. and the substance is gold and how many gold's are there; gold is ekam, one gold alone.

Applying this principle, **Vedanta says existence is the only basic substance, and everything else is name, form and functions.** So when you are experiencing a bangle, you are really experiencing gold alone, which is the only substance. When you are experiencing the ring, you are experiencing the gold alone, the fundamental substance. Similarly, when you are experiencing the world, you are experiencing only one fundamental substance which is inherent in all of them. That substance is IS, IS, IS, IS.

Shakaracharya says all this, in a, one line shloka, when you are experiencing different ornaments you are experiencing gold. Similarly, when you are experiencing world, it is existence. That existence is Brahman. Therefore, we experience Brahman everywhere.

In this experience I have a small difficulty. I am experiencing

existence with different names and forms (tree, chair etc). Is-ness is not experienced in a pure form. Through sense organs I experience nama rupa sat. Sense organs can reveal only nama rupa.

So, how can I experience pure existence? By filtering out nama rupa? Once you filter out nama rupa, only pure existence should be there. But if I remove nama rupa, sense organs can't experience existence.

How to do so? Close all sense organs to remove nama rupa and let only basic substance or pure existence remain. How to experience pure existence?

Chandogya Upanishad's 6th chapter is the most well known section of the entire Upanishadic literature, because it begins with pure existence and the student is now eager to know how to experience the pure existence. The teacher says: Oh Student, you can never experience the pure existence, because it is never an object of experience. Then the student raises his eyebrows; if I can never objectify the pure existence, how do I know it is there? Then the teacher gives the well-known statement of the Upanishad. Teacher answers, pure existence can't be objectified. It is nothing but you the Witnessing Consciousness. It is you, the Seer. Hence the saying, Tat Tvam Asi or Aham Brahma Asmi. My nature is Existence Consciousness. This is essence of Vedanta. You have to go on dwelling on this teaching that I am the ultimate substance; I am sat and I am chid; and the whole world is nama and rupa resting upon me.

When

this is said, it will be very difficult to swallow. And that is why scientists are
not able to find because they are looking for the substance; but they are not
going to come across the substance, why? **They
are not able to come across the substance, because the searcher is the searched
for object.** It is extremely difficult to swallow that I am the substance.

And to help us accept this truth; the Upanishad gives a well-known example, and that example is our dream experience. When I am dreaming, and seeing varieties of objects giving me happiness, giving me sorrow, giving me fear, what does it mean?

Dream is capable of frightening you. And imagine you are in a dream and you are seeing terrible things and in the dream a dream guru comes and tells: you do not be frightened of all these things; you are the essence of this dream world, the dream has come out of you, the dream is resting on you, on waking up the dream will resolve; if he says this in the dream, it is unbelievable. It is so realistic. But on waking up, he knows there is no dream river, dream man, dream object; none of them exist separate from me-the-waker. Vedanta tells us that world is just another dream channel.

Now it is unbelievable; it is very difficult to accept that I am the substance, but the ultimate truth is I (not this body, because body is also part of this world only), I, the witness, sakshi chaitanyam; I am the substance of the dream world; Similarly, **during the time of our ignorance, it is unbelievable, it is difficult to** accept that I am the substance; but according to Vedanta, I am the salt of the earth. And that I is Brahman, that Brahman is existent and that existent Brahman alone appears as the world with different nama rupa. And when Brahman, the existence, the only substance, appears with different nama Rupa’s, it is called

Vishva rupa Ishvara. It is the name of Brahman, the existence, which is along with all the names and forms. Therefore, the one Brahman alone has become you, me, that and this, etc. This is the teaching here.

The
Shloka says: That existence pervades everything. As we used Is to describe an
object. It has eye, head, face; it is everywhere with ears, it pervades
surroundings, everything.

Shloka # 15:

Shining through the functions of all the
organs, (yet) devoid of all the organs; unattached, and verily the supporter of
all; without ality, and the perceiver of alities;

All the sense organs are revealing that Brahman all the time; for example, the eyes can reveal only colors; they cannot reveal sound; ears reveal only sound; and when I experience sound, I do not experience colors; When I experience colors, I do not experience smell; Therefore Shabda, sparsha, etc. are mutually exclusive; shabda comes sparsha is not there, rupam comes, sparsha is not there; but all the sense organs experience one thing commonly. It is that sound IS: when you hear, sound IS: Similarly, when you use the eye, the form IS: therefore all sensory operations, uniformly reveal that Brahman alone, all sensory operations uniformly reveal that Brahman alone in the form of shabda san, sparsha san, rupam sat, etc. But the problem is you are attracted by nama rupa, and you lose sight of the inherent existence in all of them. Therefore, what should you do to experience Brahman? Sri Krishna says, you are experiencing Brahman alone every moment. When you say, shabda IS, sparsha IS, rupam IS. But because of mixture, because of mixing up of nama and rupa, we are absorbed in nama rupa and lose sight of this fundamental truth

and therefore we require a sensitive and subtle intellect to appreciate that.

Take away:

As you go deeper and deeper, the visible becomes the invisible. The tangible becomes the intangible. The concrete becomes the abstract. Therefore we come to know that the ultimate substance must be intangible, formless and abstract substance.

Vedanta says
existence is the only basic substance, and everything else is name, form and
functions.

Scientists
are not able to come across the substance, because the searcher is the searched
for object.

During
the time of our ignorance, it is unbelievably difficult to accept that I am the
substance; but according to Vedanta, I am the
salt of the earth.

With Best Wishes,

Ram Ramaswamy