

That Sivam (the Self) is not known unto itself¹ nor does it know anything that is other than itself.² If it possessed thought then there would be for it the absence of thought, forgetfulness. [Therefore it does not possess thought]. There is for it no birth or death. The five divine operations unfold in its mere presence.³ The blissful voice of the Vedas and Agamas gives only the merest hint of its nature.

1. *taṇṇai ariyādu* – [That Śivam] does not know itself. That whose very nature is pure knowingness, consciousness, cannot, by definition, know itself. It can only be itself. As Sri Ramana points out in v. 33 of *Ulladu Narpadu*, the very question as to whether the supreme reality, the substratum of the individual consciousness, can know itself is an occasion for ridicule:

enṇai ariyēṇ [n]āṇ enṇai ariṇḍēṇ [n]āṇ
 enṇal nagaippukk[u] iḍaṇ āgum – enṇai?
 taṇṇai viḍayam ākka iru tāṇ uṇḍō onrāy
 aṇaivar aṇubūdi uṇmaiṃyāl.

To say 'I do not know myself' or 'I have known myself' is an occasion for ridicule. Why so? Can there be two selves, with one making the other its object, when it is the experience of everyone that they are one?

2. *vēru uṇḍāy tāṇ ariyādu* – It does not know [anything] as existing separate[ly from itself]. By the same token, because Śivam contains and transcends all that is or ever could be, there cannot be anything separate from itself, which it knows or which knows it. Again, Sri Ramana makes a similar point in v. 12 of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

aridaṅk[u] arivittark[u] aṇṇiyam inr[u] āy avirvadāl
 tāṇ ariṇḍāy āgum.

Since it shines without anything other which it knows, or which makes it known, the Self is [true] knowledge.

3. *cannidikkē aṅcu toḷil ām* – Through its mere presence, the five [divine] operations take place. The five operations of the deity are *creation, preservation, destruction, veiling* and *granting of grace*. In presiding over the creation, preservation and destruction of all the worlds through the agency of *māyā*, the deity is comparable to the sun, which, by virtue of its mere presence, gives rise to all worldly activities whilst remaining uninvolved in them.

Is the Self, which is infinite bliss, exterior [to the individual consciousness]?¹ Observe the nature of a life subjugated to the ego, which is like that of a fish swimming in the milk ocean, [yet unable to drink the milk]! The light of the Self endures without rising [or setting], yet that [ego] transforms it into darkness, just as the action of fire can be suspended by *mantras*.²

1. In this verse the author advances yet another potent argument in favour of the non-dual view of the world. He asks *pūraṇa ānandam ām tāṇḍō puṇambu* – *Is the Self, which is infinite bliss, exterior [to the individual consciousness]?* Without even attempting to say what reality is, surely we must admit that, whatever it is, we are in it and of it, and, in a real sense, we are it, yet somehow remain unable to ‘realise’ that fact. The author expresses this idea by comparing the *jīva* to a fish swimming in the Ocean of Milk. The Ocean of Milk, which in Puranic legend was churned by the *devas* and *asuras* to extract *amrita*, is compared to the bliss of the Self, and the *jīva*, to a fish swimming in it, feeding off only the other flora and fauna it finds there (i.e. the phenomenal world of *māyā*) rather than drinking the milk (i.e. the bliss of the Self), the medium within which it is living and from which it is never separated. This image appears also in v. 34 of *Tiru Aruḷ Payaṇ* – *The Fruit of Divine Grace* by Umāpati Śivācāriyār, a member of the school of Meykaṇḍa Dēvar, in which he gives a masterly summary of the tenets of Saiva Siddhānta in a hundred terse *kural venba* verses:

pāl āḷi mīṇ āḷum pāṇmait[u] aruḷ uyirgaḷ
māl āḷi āḷum maṇittu.

*Souls, [immersed] in grace, [rejecting it], turn back to the sea of delusion, like fish
in the Ocean of Milk.*

2. *akkiṇi tambam* – *suspending the action of fire through magic*. The Tam. Lex. states that *akkiṇi-t-tambam* (Skt. *agni stambha*) is the art of suspending the action of fire by magic, one of the *aṇḍattunālu-kalai* – *sixty four arts*. The essence of fire is its heat, just as the essence of the individual consciousness is the pure consciousness of the Self, Śivam. In the same way that certain *mantras* can supposedly be employed to mask the heat of fire, *āṇavam*, the eternal principle which gives rise to the ego, masks the true knowledge, *jñāna*, which is the essence of the personal self.