

An Infinity of Infinities

*A discourse by Guruji Sri Amritananda Natha
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Seven *crore* (70 million) mantras – *sapta koti maha mantrah* – are said to have emanated from the five faces of Shiva (i.e., *sadyojata*, *vamadeva*, *agbora*, *tatpurusha*, and *ishana*) – plus *urdhvamnaya* (meaning, “the one above”) and *anuttaramnaya* (meaning “there is no reply;” *laa jawab* in Hindi; i.e., it is so supreme that you can’t conceive of anything beyond it; it is past description, beyond question or argument).

Obviously, it would be difficult to recite or do *sadhana* of all these mantras. So the great sages grouped them into several basic categories, corresponding to the seven chakras – and yes, there are some people who practice them all! But the *Parashurama Kalpa Sutra* does not refer to all of them; it simply picks up a few mantras from each chakra, and collectively they are called the *Rashmi Mala Mantras* – literally a “garland of rays” shining from the Mother Goddess. In the tradition of Parashurama, the recitation of these mantras is enough. They cover all the *amnayas*.

Amnaya means a chakra, a wheel, a *parampara* – that set of teachings and practices passed down through a given guru lineage. *Dakshinamnaya*, for example, is followed by the temples at Sringeri and Kanchi; *Urdhvamnaya* is followed by Badrikashramam; *Poorvamnaya* by Poori Jagannath, and *Paschimamnaya* at Sourashtra *peetam*. Although all of these *peetams* (holy sites) were established by Shankaracharya, they each follow different *amnayas*. And for each *amnaya*, a particular set of mantras is given.

Fortunately, however, it is not necessary to practice all of them. Why complicate your life? Simplify it! How much can you achieve in a 100-year lifetime anyway? A hundred years isn’t even a given yet; at best, you can probably start off at age 15 and keep going until you’re 60 or 70. So you have maybe 50 years to work with. And in those 50 years, how many mantras can you get the *siddhis* (results, fruits) of? Every one of them works; all of the *Dasha Mahavidyas* (the Ten Wisdom Goddesses and their respective *sadhanas*) work – so pick one path and stick to it. What’s the point in reaching the same destination from all different directions? Each path offers its own unique experiences along the way, yes; but the goal remains the same.

It’s like this: There is a hill and there is a peak. And there are many ways to climb that hill and reach that peak. And once you’ve reached the peak, then you’ve got a 360-degree vista – you can see all around; you can see all of the paths that are there. Yet, this bird’s-eye view is different from the view of the person who is still traveling below.

Or suppose you take a plane and travel from here to the U.S.A. – you can do it in 24 hours. But is that the same thing as walking to the U.S.A. over a period of 12 years – or is it different? In the same way, we’ve got to realize that the Infinite can be reached in any number of ways. And once we’ve reached it, we see the nature of all the paths. But that doesn’t mean you’ve got to *experience* every path, laboriously going through the whole sequence again and again.

To put it differently, let’s say you want to generate a picture by raster scan (i.e., by displaying or capturing a video image line by line, as on a computer monitor or television screen). You can complete that scan horizontally – line after line after line – or vertically, or diagonally at any angle; there’s an infinite number of approaches. But if you record the value of each pixel – the sequence of which produces the picture – each type of scan will generate a completely different history and evolutionary process. They are all equally valid; in the end you see the totality of the picture, which is in a sense sum of all its parts. And yet the “music” generated by each of these raster scans is totally different.

We’ve got to recognize that when we say “God is Infinite,” we mean that He-She-It is an Infinity of Infinities. Thus, the experience gained by any one person in reaching God need not tally with another person’s experience in reaching God – because they are each accessing a different region of these Infinities.

It is a common mistake to try and compare the experience of one seer with that of another; to say, “If they both reached the same spot, then they should both be seeing the same thing.” But that’s simply not correct. Different people see different things at the peak, just as they had different experiences in reaching the peak. You too would have a different set of experiences if you’d chosen another path. Because it’s the path that defines the experience, not the goal. Experience is a word we use to signify a flow in time – a set of pictures or feelings; things of that sort. These experiences are all subsumed in the goal, and at the same time they are not individually experienced. Different path, different experience.

Different regions of Infinity can be totally different as well. There is just no comparison. You can’t say that one experience is greater or lesser than another – the question of comparison is just totally invalid in the domain of Infinity. You can compare finite domains using size or location or some other quantifiable factor as your basis. But on what basis could you ever compare Infinite domains? What possible criteria could you employ? And unless you draw such limitations, you have no basis for comparison. Therefore, since you cannot draw limits around Infinities, it follows that you cannot compare them. Concepts of comparison – such as *larger, better, best, supreme*, etc. – apply only to finite domains.

So if you follow, say, the path of Sufism, you’ll gain a particular sort of experience. But will it be identical to the experience one gained by Shankaracharya or by a *Vamachari*? No, they’ll be totally different. Just as the experience gained by a plant in meditating and in reaching God will be totally different from that of a human being, which is in turn totally different from that of a sage or a Deity.



The Infinite Destination

What about once you reached your goal of choice – ascended to the peak, reached God? Is it then a simple matter to go back down and experience the journey again via another path? That’s difficult to say. Experience, once again, is something that flows in Time. A Time-less state is something altogether different – a different set of rules applies. So you might reach full realization on that path a little faster; but, then again, you might not.

Suppose you’ve spoken Telugu since childhood, done your graduate work in English, and now you’ve decided to learn another language. It may well take you a much shorter time than it did when you were starting afresh on a new language for the first time. Because once you’ve learned one language, it can become easier to learn additional languages.

But I don’t see any similar shortcut whereby we can hope to speed up the process of “reaching Infinity.” The very concept of speed is predicated upon a domain of distances and Time – we divide distance by Time to get speed. But in a domain where Time itself is not moving, how can we talk of speed at all? How can we talk of any experience at all in a realm where there is no Time and no Space?

An example I commonly give involves the experience of watching a movie on CD on your computer screen. What exactly is happening in this scenario? Are we seeing the movie in the CD? Not really. We’re looking at the computer, not at the CD directly. So are we looking at a program inside the computer? No, it’s not really that either – we know the programs inside there are total nonsense to us; just vast tracts of binary code, nothing readily recognizable at all. At yet, when all of that data is run through a particular sequence, the experience becomes totally different – and suddenly we are enjoying a movie.

So the idea of “speeding up the learning process” on other spiritual paths by first reaching God via one of them isn’t really an applicable concept. Once again, the experience *might* help – because perhaps you’ve learned something. Learning is an associative process, and the more links you’ve forged to a particular concept, the easier it will be to establish additional links. So the learning process can be speeded up by creating an increasingly dense network of links.

But the basic issue remains: The laws that govern experience in Time and Space simply do not apply to the Time-less realm. After all, what does it mean to “reach your goal” when the destination you’re referring to is Infinity; when it’s completely beyond definition? How do you even know when you’ve reached such a destination? How far do you have to go before you reach the “end” of Infinity? When do you stop and where? The question of reaching a destination simply does not arise in Infinity; it’s a false assumption. When I called it “an Infinity of Infinities” just now, I only happened to stop at iteration number two. I could have said it’s an Infinity of Infinities of Infinities of Infinities of Infinities ... why stop at all? You never reach the destination.

Suppose an ant is crawling on a ball. It can keep moving for an infinite amount of time and its journey will never end. It can travel on and on – for eons and eons and ages and ages – and the end will never come, even though the journey takes place entirely within the infinite domain. Keep going around the Earth in an airplane and you’ll come to the same point over and over again, like a never-ending cycle – like a sine wave; where does it begin and where does it end? Even though Space and Time are finite, you’ll never reach the end as long as you keep going.

And if this is true of what is finite, then what of the Infinite, when the destination is *Brahma Jnana* (experiential knowledge of the impersonal Supreme Divine)? Where is that? Can you say that if I follow a certain set of instructions, I’ll attain *Brahma Jnana*? I’m afraid not. What is *Brahma Jnana*, after all? It’s creativity; a way to manufacture, to create new things. And is there any end to creativity? Is it a reachable goal or destination? Of course it’s not. That’s why I say *moksha* (spiritual liberation) is like a carrot dangling in front of your eyes. It can enhance your creativity and that’s about it. Every religion is a carrot; the cult of Devi is also a carrot – but at least it’s a loveable carrot. If you are a hare, you’ll love it!

Seriously, though, I don’t think there is any end to the journey. If there is an end, then why does Shankaracharya say, “*na bandhO na mOkshaH*” – there is no bondage, and there is no release. Only if there is bondage to begin with can you have release. If there is no bondage, then what release can there be? If you’re in a prison cell, then you can be set free. But if there’s no prison, what is there to escape from? If something is not true, how can you make it true?



Truth is Experience

So there’s no point at which we can say, “This is it. I’ve reached the destination.” There’s just no such thing. How could there be? What is the point, for example, at which the number *Pi* (π) ends? After you cut a circle into three parts, *Pi* times the diameter gives you the circumference of the circle. You’ve measured off the three units and what remains is *Pi*; 3.14159 ... at what point does that number end? It never ends. That is why it’s called *Sesha Naga* (the Infinite Serpent, or Infinite Wave); it is the unending remainder. The three units are finite, but the remainder is infinite. Thus it’s called the Infinite Wave – unending waves of numbers. If you calculate *Pi* to 5 billion numbers, can you say you’ve reached the destination? What about the 5 billion and first number? You can always add another 1. You can always add another billion. There is no end. You never reach the destination.

In this regard, I’ve been asked, “If there is an Infinity of Infinities, a journey without end, then why do the Vedas refer to the *Sarvajnatvam* (the Knower of Everything)? Just what is that Everything? And what about the states that Buddha and Mahavira reached? Is that only the beginning?” Well, who am I to know what states they have or haven’t reached? But it’s precisely the question I was addressing earlier, isn’t it? One sage tells us one thing about Infinity and then another turns around and tells us something completely different. Who’s right, the first seer or the second one? Both are right and both are speaking the Truth. Truth is Experience. And different people can have different experiences – what’s wrong with

that? Problems only arise when you start saying, “My Truth is the only Truth, and nobody else’s is true.” That’s where things go wrong. Infinity is a domain in which even opposites can be true.

Thus we can have one fellow who comes away from his experience feeling, “Wow, now I know *everything!*” and another who feels, “Wow, I don’t know anything.” Both views are true in the realm of Infinities, along with every shade in between. So when the Vedas refer to reaching that “by knowing which I know everything” – that’s fine; that’s correct. I’ve no argument with it. But what about those others who say, “I don’t know anything”? Are they not also correct? What I’m saying is that the first sage has – like all other realized souls – seen up to a point, has seen a certain region of Infinity – but only *believed* and *declared* that he saw everything. In actuality, it is not possible to reach any point like that.

// Yato vacha nivartante apraapya manasa saha //

“Whence words return saying, ‘Oh, I’m not able to describe it anymore! All descriptions fall short of the experience!’” Indeed, how can you describe such an experience?

We must keep in mind that the subject of Infinity is not amenable to our normal conceptions. Our everyday ideas and understandings don’t apply there at all. In general, when we attempt to translate the experience of Infinity into concepts that make sense in our finite domain, we fail miserably. They just don’t apply here.

We’re struggling to find some order; trying to understand the unknowable in terms of the known. But I don’t think the Vedas – which were codified in a certain region of Time and Space – are telling me how to reconcile my bank accounts. There is much, much more beyond that. There is much, much more beyond all the religions in the world.



Beyond Space and Time

Can we somehow remove these limitations on our ability to completely explore the Infinity of Infinities? Only by dying; only by Death – the process by which we lose our individuality and our egos. Unfortunately, that doesn't help us much – because we cannot die.

Look at your own body – it's a river of life! Whose life are you living? There are billions of living cells within you. Millions are dying and millions more are being born with every passing second. But “you” are continuing through it all, right? The continuity of your life flows on through all of those deaths, can't you see it? How can life die? It just is! It's not possible to live and it's not possible to die. We simply *are*.

// AjA kshaya vinir mukta //

Aja means “who is not born.” *Kshaya vinir mukta* means “She cannot die.” *Kshaya* suggests reduction; She cannot be diminished or reduced. You can not reduce Her, you cannot increase Her. Because increase and decrease are concepts applicable only to the finite realms. Infinity cannot be decreased or increased. The concept of measurement does not apply to Infinities. Time is not a parameter, nor is Space.

Just as you cannot go beyond thought via thought, you also cannot go beyond Space via Space or beyond Time via Time. “Beyond,” in the sense we're using here, means “overcoming limits.”

Remember our ant, crawling endlessly over the finite surface of a ball? He will never get beyond that ball by means of crawling on it, no matter how long he crawls. He's got to leave that plane of existence. In the same way, you and I will never reach Infinity using means that are limited by Space and Time. We have to leave the realms of Space and Time, and enter into strangeness. We must enter into the domain of constants, unbound by Space or Time.

Take the number 1, for example – where is it located? At what point in Space and Time is the number 1 to be found? Is the concept of numbers bound by Space and Time? Or Life itself – where is Life located in Space and Time? Is Life a constant determined in terms of Space and Time?

Life as we know it – life as we experience it – is a concept. The Totality of Life being explored via a limited Time scan – that's the experience we typically refer to as Life. That limited conception of Life is what we're exploring in our present state via this scanning process. But it's not the Totality of Life; it's a narrowly bounded peek at a tiny sliver of Life. To get beyond that, you've got to get beyond Space and Time. They are the barriers.

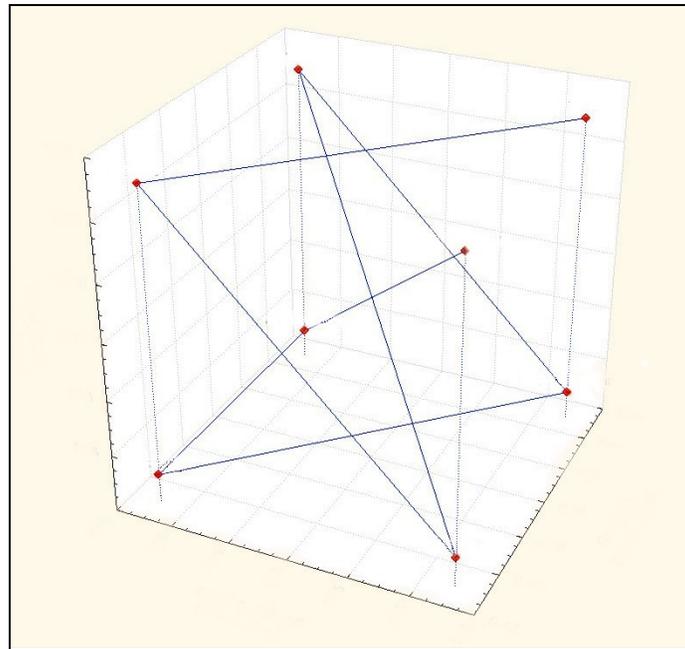


Into the Fourth Dimension

// Yonistu vaishnavi Shaktihi / Lingo rupa sadashivaha //

Space we can call *Vishnu*, or *Yoni*, or Shakti. Time we call *Linga*, or Shiva. The Shiva Linga governs at four levels: (1) Fear and Sex; (2) Power and Love; (3) Space and Time; and (4) *Bindu*, the point into which everything *implodes*. The *explosion* of Bindu is the Universe of Space and Time and Matter. But why should the Universe be limited to Space and Time? What about spin? What about strangeness? Our present understanding is that the Universe is made up of seven dimensions. We're confined to three of them – and what we're trying to do here is focus on a fourth.

But what is this fourth dimension? To get some idea of it, let's do a thought experiment: Think of a cube – one centimeter deep, across and high. And now, let's add a fourth dimension – the width, depth and height remains the same, but now we add “one second” of Time to the description. And imagine that in this one second, the cube becomes twice as big. Say that every corner is connected to its corresponding corner by a line – a total of eight corners and hence eight diagonals, all of them parallel. They appear to be non-parallel when projected into Space, but they are parallel in the direction of Time.



Now suppose that, in the process of growing, this cube has also moved sideways. How does our four-dimensional object look now? It's one second long and it's growing and moving in space, pulling outward simultaneously in all directions. Or let's say it's *not* moving linearly, but in a curved trajectory, so that the curves connecting the corresponding corners are

curving parallel to one another – parallel, that is, to their direction in Time; but *perpendicular* to their direction in space! And now let's add another layer of variables; let's say that time does not move linearly but *cyclically*, from 0 to 1 second and back to 0 over and over, behaving like a sine wave ...

Okay? Do you see the complexity of the Space-Time description? There is a tremendous amount of complication in a four-dimensional structure. All of these configurations can be represented in three dimensions by some strange-looking pictures – a virtually infinite number of representations, all depending on how you scan them in Time.

Life is like that, too.



The Blade of Time

Try to imagine Universal Consciousness (or Universal Awareness, if you like) as a ball of thread – a single thread wound into a large ball. This Awareness – that is, the thread – both constitutes and permeates the entire ball. The thread knows itself at all points. It is all one Unified Consciousness. But now let's say we bisect that ball across a given plane. What happens? Each of the individual points of thread we see in the cross-section becomes a unique awareness. How many awarenesses are there? A vast number of them – countless points of awareness.

Looking at any single one of these tiny little awarenesses, you're seeing only a part of the Totality of Awareness. Each point of partial awareness observes the others (since it is the nature of awareness to observe). Each awareness thinks that it is different from all the others. I'm one dot of awareness, you're another. I think you're different from me, and that you're different from him. You think she's different from me, and I'm different from you. What happened? The Unified Consciousness of the thread of Awareness has been shattered into a huge assembly of substructures, each looking around and observing its Self – while *thinking* that it is observing something different. These perceived differences were induced by the process of sectioning the ball.

What is the blade that thus divides Total Awareness into separate individuals? That blade is called Time. And if Time is a blade, then so is Space. Infinity is continually being sectioned in an infinite number of ways. The evolutionary history of the Cosmos consists of Unified Awareness splitting itself into various awarenesses and then seeing itself as all of those many different awarenesses.

But Time and Space are both relative concepts; there is no absoluteness of Space or Time. And that is why the Infinity of Infinities and the experience of lives – though they appear different – can be unified by moving beyond, to a point that is beyond Space and Time. When the scanning effect of Time is removed, then all of these points of partial awareness become merged once again into a single Unified Awareness.

Unifying “the experiences of lives” – people are always quite interested in this concept. They ask me, “When you go beyond Space and Time, do others’ experiences become your own?” Well, yes, in a sense – the very concept of “other” disappears then. But all the same, that “experience” is not the same as or even similar to the idea of “experience” as we know it in the finite domain – that’s what I’m trying to say. You can’t really even call it experience because it is not flowing in time. Is there life in a constant? Does the number 3.14 have life?

And what about a statue? Is there life in a statue? A statue is an unchanging constant, right? That’s why statues can represent God – better than movies or animations can, for example. With a statue, the scanning stops and the image before you becomes a constant. Just as when you take a photograph, it stops time and everything in that particular moment in Space and Time fills the film.

Change is induced by the movement of Time – and if Time is not flowing, there cannot be change. “Happen” is a verb, verbs need action, and action needs Time in which to unfold. So in a realm beyond Time, there can be no action, no force, no speed, no acceleration. And when you are able to transcend your “scanning” view of this world – when you learn to stop filtering it through Space and Time – your “world photograph” too becomes a constant. It becomes an invariant and does not change.

Is this state of constancy itself a limitation? Not really, I’d say. When you overcome the limitation of Time, you arrive at a richer representation of Time. Suppose you project a picture of an object into two dimensions. If you then take each point within those two dimensions and project them outward to Infinity, associating a different value with each, is that a richer or poorer representation? Now take the picture and collapse it vertically, so that the whole thing becomes a single line. Again: Is it a richer representation, or poorer? Now collapse the line into a point – so it becomes a Zero or a One. How is that, better or worse?

Hindu philosophy tells us that it’s a richer representation; Buddhist philosophy tells us that it’s a Zero because nothing is there – no Time; no experience. We say it is not nothing, but *everything* – not empty, but full! They call it *shoonyam* – we call it *poornam*.

