

## Experiential Vedanta

A Short Story

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### It had to happen!

The gusts of wind were strong. The trees were wildly swinging in waves along the rocky forest valley as far as the eye could see. Showers fell in torrential waves and yet it was just around 9 in the morning. Ravi, Sudip and Anmol cowered under a bunch of young trees near the rocky ledges along the valley wall in the forest, having lost their way while trekking through the western ghats in Coorg. Ghats are dangerous and yet very inviting and beautiful. Sudip protectively moved his backpack to the front, hugging it. Others followed suit, standing nearby under different trees. It was quarter past nine. Having started early morning from the base camp in the village of Sundanakatte to enjoy the pristine nature in August, they risked the adventure to enjoy nature! Within an hour they had lost their way, deviating from the trail they were supposed to follow. Mobiles did not work – signal strength nil. And they have been trekking without direction not going in circles since then for about two hours – covering fast, for about 10 kms.

They were temple friends, smart, well-read and volunteers at its local community center. And with different professional backgrounds: Ravi a software engineer, Sudip a neuroscience researcher and Anmol an event management firm entrepreneur. They had a common interest in neo-Vedanta and liked trekking in the grandeur of nature and being one with it. The Coorg trek was one such.

Wet and cold, they looked around from under the protective foliage of the trees to spot nearby, a partly hidden temple – stone'n'lime structure long lost in time – with a solid wasted wooden door and rusted grill windows. “Some civilization around”, remarked Ravi. “Atleast, if we cannot make it to the village by nightfall, there is a place to stay.”

“We wanted to be one with Nature! Like the

rishis of the Upanishads, we wanted to experience Brahman in the nature's full pristine, glorious manifestations.. But this way?” exclaimed Anmol.

“Well, destiny is unpredictable – it is our karma that we are where we are. We never know what is in store for us. Perhaps that in itself is part of experiencing the oneness. The more we conjecture how future will unfold, the more we might be disappointed. Perhaps it is best to just let it unfold and accept whatever comes”, philosophized Sudip.

Anmol interjected, “That 'defeatist attitude' has been a bugbear for us vedanta students – not knowing how to handle the secular onslaught on this issue!” Ravi's response was quick, “I recall what one vedanta sage had said: It is easy but subtle! When you are neck deep living in your vasana world, you 'just do it!' - reacting as appropriate driven by your instincts! However, when deeply into *vedanta sadhana*, you do not react but you do respond. Part of the conscious cogitations that goes into formulating the response is to accept destiny and karma as it unfolds for us! It is that simple but subtle! The confusion is due to mixing up oranges and apples! The belief in *karma* as a defeatist attitude is valid only when living reactively with the *vasanas* like the wordly. The spiritual sadhaka accepts the reality unfolding as karma and cogitates an appropriate response! The worldly will never get this subtlety and hence the onslaught on this issue. We will have to fully accept and live with it!”. All became quiet absorbed in these thoughts of experiencing oneness, karma, destiny, unfoldment and being a witness.

Another few gusts of the chilly rain laden wind, and then their world came down. Literally! It was all very surreal! Ravi opened his eyes to see thick branches and foilage all over him. Surprised, he tried to reach his face – but no, he could not move his left hand. Painful though

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not much. Right hand – yes, some degree of freedom. He tried getting up but the tree branches were pressing him down. He saw that he was lying on the rocky floor with small shrubs underneath and the crashed tree's branches all over him – *Aakashamallige* or the Indian Cork tree. The crash had taken a toll of all the small trees under which they had taken shelter. He was pinned down. One leg was free but the other - not much space to move. The rain was gone. Where were the others? "Ravi, Sudip", Anmol was shouting, "Where are you?" He tried turning his head. And found Anmol further up under the trees. "Down, under the trees, Anmol", groaned Ravi. "Stuck! Can you help me move these branches?"

"Am helpless here. I was shouting out to you and Sudip all the while. You wake up now and you asking me to help you?", complained Anmol.

"Are you also stuck? Ask Sudip!"

"There is no response from him"

"What happened?"

"I remember the sound of a big tree crashing through and then I think I blanked out!"

"Me too!"

"Yes, I regained my consciousness and called out to you guys to help! Only now you are responding. Are you okay?"

"Hurt. Not very painful. Just cannot move!"

"Me too!"

"Aaahhh!"

"That's Sudip! Sudip... Sudip... are you okay?", yelled Anmol.

There was no response. After some time, the clouds cleared a bit and the Sun lit up. It was not yet noon, yet it was damp, humid and bright green in patches. The little that Ravi or Anmol could see.

"Anmol! Ravi!", moaned Sudip, waking up from the catastrophe that blanked them out.

"Hey, Sudip, How are you? We are stuck under the tree branches. Can you help?", asked Ravi, eagerly, noticing that Sudip's voice came from beyond Anmol. He could partly see the fallen big tree trunk, the fallen small trees.. and yes, Anmol's shoes shifting through the foilage.

"No, I just cannot move! Am stuck! Am hurt! Got blanked out! Can anyone help?"

"God! All three down! In the grand isolation of the forest!", exclaimed Anmol.

Each tried all tricks to wiggle out. Could not push the tree branches – too heavy. Could not dig underneath in the dirt – too stony. Hands and feet stuck up with constrained movements. It was all in vain. The tree branches were holding them and their clothing firmly. Lucky that none were hurt in any big way. Atleast, they were not in tears.

Sudip popped his favourite, "What a way to experience the oneness with nature! Sure am enjoying it in a strange way! Enjoy it folks!"

"Remember Sri Ramakrishna had a pet parable about how intensely should one do sadhana?"

"Which one?", asked Anmol.

Replied Ravi, "On being asked this very question and after having been agreed with on practically demonstrating such matters, an accomplished *Guru* held his long time *shishya*'s head under water, until he almost drowned gasping for breath. After releasing, the *Guru* told the *Shishya* – that is the intensity of doing *sadhana* and praying to God – the intensity with which you were seeking to breathe! Forgetting everything!"

"With no other option, may be that is what we should do now, sincerely praying!", said Anmol.

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"Can you see me?", asked Sudip.

Ravi moved his head a bit and strained. He had seen Anmol's shoes. Yes, he could see Sudip's shoulders too. And, surprise, he saw something more - beyond where Sudip lay pinned down - a smiling face in the midst of broken branches and bunches of *aakashamallige* flowers pressing against the platform and wall like rocky ledges. A hermit? He too was trying to move but could not, his smiling face staring down at them and their pathetic situation. Confident in the face of danger, and relaxed, though the body seemed contorted due the branches weighing down mercilessly.

"Anmol, Sudip, We are not alone! Look beyond Sudip. Hello Sir, Can you help?", shouted Ravi.

"Who is there?" asked Anmol.

Silently watching all these vain-glorious efforts was the hermit! Supremely detached and in that contorted *yogasana* state – the hour seemed to have melted by. Anmol, too lifted his head a bit, moved the branches with his free left hand and saw the hermit! Perhaps living off in that temple. But now, sharing their fate, pinned down by the branches and unable to move much.

"Cannot help! Am stuck here. What are you all doing here?", the hermit looked at them and asked, after a few minutes.

"We lost our way – we wanted to enjoy trekking in the forest. Be one with nature. Sir, what are you doing here?", shot back Ravi.

"Being in the peaceful ocean of vibrant nature! Tapas! Meditation!", said the sadhu, slowly.

"What tapas?", asked Sudip as all the three's interest perked up. Though he could not see, he could hear the sadhu's voice from behind.

The sadhu responded with a slow sonorous voice that arose above the forest quiet, chanting away the long drawn *pranava mantra*. Sudip's query got answered melliflously. The trio were lost in that meditation. And suddenly, it dawned upon Ravi, their state of contradiction – the crisis of dying and the bliss of living. The chanting stopped after several minutes.

"What a maya! Here we are fully lost in the bliss of the chant, in the peaceful quiet of the forest and yet in a terrible shape – all pinned down, immobilized by the fallen trees! What a destiny! Looks like it had to happen!" remarked Ravi, wistfully.

### **Vedanta – Awakening through the crisis!**

The sadhu said lovingly, "Life sometimes is like that my dear! If I could only move, you would not have been thus for long!"

"Sadhuji, will anyone come and rescue us?"

"I hope somebody does! Do pray! ", said the Sadhu, very sincerely.

"What tapas do you do?", asked Sudip again.

"Nada Brahman – Pranava Mantram! The essence of Vedanta!"

"Vedanta! We have been reading up and discussing it in so many holy places and in so many ways and yet...somewhere we seem lost!", remarked Anmol. Caught in the pain of helplessness and yet having a high in his vedantic interests, he asked testily, "Can you share with us practical vedanta? Vedanta with validating experiences! Ouch, God knows when anyone will come and move this tree out!"

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"Do seek sincerely and God will bless you with it!", replied the Sadhu. He was able to see all the three – parts of them - from the high perch on the rocky ledges, pinned down by the broken branches and yet adorned by bunches of the sweet smelling *aakashamallige*.

"Are you all hurt?", he asked after a few minutes of silence and having perhaps prayed eyes closed.

"No. None of us are from what I gather", replied Ravi. And continued, seeing a silent acceptance from the rest, "just pinned down and unable to wiggle out!"

"What are your names?", asked the sadhu.

"My name is Anmol, Ravi is further down from me while Sudip is nearer you", said Anmol though he could not see the revered Sadhu. He continued, frightened, "Will we all die here? Hopelessly pinned down, helpless, lost in the forest, exposed to the elements and the wild animals? What a fate!"

"No! Do not worry! Pray to Ganesha sincerely and help will come by! Are you these petty bodies? Or are you something different?", asked the Sadhu, chiding and strong.

"Okay. Are you talking vedanta? When we are clinging to dear life?", reparteed Sudip.

"No. Am not poking fun here! Wake up, dear Atmans! You are not these bodies!", replied the sadhu sincerely. And he continued, in his sonorous voice even as the rest heard it with all attention and alertness, "Aham Brahmasmi! Tatvam Asi! Pragnyanam Brahma! Ayam atma Brahma! Heard these mahavakyas? Now, quietly enquire within, who is it who is hearing, analysing and seeking to understand these mahavakyas? Do *Pranayama*, keeping the mind absorbed in *pranava*! Breathe slowly and deeply! Ask what is it that is pinned down, immobilized!"

If any thing, the paradox of being fully helpless and hurt even while getting fully soaked in the most profound vedantic wisdom seem to be so elevating. More so to this pretender of that vedantic wisdom called Brahman by something that is 'felt' as a high – something people refer to as the 'Self Esteem' or the Ego!

Several minutes of silence followed, . The trees rustled. The forest was humming busy – just that none seem to have noticed!

### **Vedanta – The Experience!**

"Ravi! A bloated black cobra is coming up straight at you. Perhaps, it might cross you in a few minutes. Watch out!", cried out the Sadhu.

"What? A cobra? Coming straight at me?", cried out a frightened and shocked Ravi, sweating profusely. "Am already dead!"

"No. Do not say that! You are not the body! Just be a quiet witness and meditate! Be absolutely calm! Remember Acharya Shankara when he

**Be still and soak into the mahavakyas, he told himself! He felt so dissociated from his body – it looked like he was a witness to himself being dead! Frame freeze! Time stood still. Every second was an eternity. The experience was overwhelming – witnessing death!**

was a boy, bathing in the river *Pampa*? Surrender to the Lord! Breathe slowly. Just be still whatever happens!” said the Sadhu firmly – words simple and yet very deeply impacting!

“Okay. *Sampurna Saranagathi O Ganesha!* Let whatever happen! Bye everyone!”, moaned Ravi, fully resigned to his fate! Or was it that he was fully accepting destiny, with the calm dignity as a witness rather than woefully. Within minutes, he felt a cold heavy scaly creepy sensation over his free arm. Be still and soak into the *mahavakyas*, he told himself! He felt so dissociated from his body – it looked like he was a witness to himself being dead! Frame freeze! Time stood still. Every second was an eternity. The experience was overwhelming – witnessing death!

The sadhuji's sonorous *pranava* chant wafted by, lost in the melody of forest leaf rustles. And it stopped. He then cried out to all, “The black long king cobra is coming up the fallen tree along the branches.... towards me! Boys, all of you keep still and be lost in the *mahavakyas*! Be relaxed! Not tense! That is the mantra! We never know what this King Cobra might do!”.

The accompanying silence and stillness was deafening and deadly. If at all anyone wanted to experience *mahavakyas*, this was it! Destiny could never be so cruel thought Anmol giving up on his efforts to force himself to be still and quiet. A sudden calmness enveloped him. Then there was this slide of a scaly and soft abrasiveness on his hip. Exposed hip. It was terrifying.. a chill ran up his spine.... but died before it could trigger a shiver... and soon those thoughts disappeared. Suddenly he felt very relaxed! Tension disappeared in thin air. And right before him, several feet away, eye to eye was the raised head of the King Cobra. It's hood was not spread. He stared at it and it stared back! None blinked! It was Anmol's longest unblinking stare – eternity filled in! Death was being witnessed at such close quarters, in the eye! Frame freeze! The *saakshatkara atma bhava* in Anmol was at its pinnacle! After several long minutes – very very long minutes, the royal cobra lowered its head out of view and slithered. Little by little! If there was any *tapas* for Anmol, this was it!

A human's search for meaningfulness in life was never as intense as that for Sudip. And here he was soaked up in *Vedanta*. Resignedly awaiting the creepy crawly scales. Witnessing things unfold rather than awaiting like mere mortals do! And the unfolding was equally petrifying! Minutes seem to pass on like eternity. And then something was tickling him behind his neck! Then it crawled up over his face. He was witnessing the creepy crawly feeling with the breath stopped, frozen! The crawl stopped! Minutes ticked into eternity. So did his breathing – never had he held breath this long! The movement resumed over his chin – thick scaly rope like. And again stopped. A long long minute rolled by. Again it resumed.... After many repetitions, Sudip opened his right eye to see what it could be ... and got the horror of his life. Shiny black on the top and greying out under, the scales moved, few inches from his eyes! He was the *saakshatkara*! What a way to experience it – death! And life beyond!

Ravi felt several eternities pass by. Long silence. Coming out of his *mahavakya* soaked mind that had 'relaxedly' experienced a creepy crawly up his arm, he lifted his head for a few seconds, to see what was happening to Anmol or Sudip or the Sadhu. And the sight was terrifying. A long shiny black snake was there, still and head raised, its long thick body across the still face of the eyes closed meditating sadhu! Perhaps 15 feet long! Was he smitten?

He raised his head again for a few seconds to take a peep, and kept it that way for the few long seconds... The King Cobra had moved and turned around, its body clear off the sadhu's face. Hood spread out and above the Sadhu's head – his face was smilingly blissful, eye closed. Was it threatened? What a grand sight it was! Ravi felt privileged to see it. Was there some implicit message? Was the sadhu alive? Several long minutes passed!

### **Death – Been There, Experienced That!**

The sonorous long chant of the *Pranava Mantra* wafted by. Hearing it, Ravi perked up, realising that the Sadhu was alive, meditating – whatever happened to the snake bite if it had happened. He lifted his head and found to his relief that the snake was no where to be seen. When the chanting stopped, He called out to the rest, “Guys, the snake is gone!” There was palpable relief in the air!

“Wonderful experience!”, exclaimed Anmol, floating away in ecstasy.

“What a world I was in. Great!”, said Sudip!

“Face to face with Death! Destiny unfolds to

give us an opportunity to experience the oneness! In death! And to be back from it!" remarked Ravi.

The Sadhu heard their chatter. He asked, in a disarming way, "Did you meditate on the *pranava* even as you kept still -- being one with and witnessing the unfolding of destiny?" Their silence was an acceptance of sorts.

"Yes, the snake as destiny made our *manas* and *buddhi* forget the entangling *bandams!*", said the Sadhu. The picture was perfect -- the master and the seekers. He continued, "One needed to be stuck in such a situation -- absolutely beyond your control and totally helpless and yet be fully calm, composed and cool. With time coming to an absolute standstill. In that state of being, with no escape routes whatsoever, with only *sampurna saranagati* as the way, the BEING becomes apparent. BEING that has been there as part of your experience all along and will be there forever!"

"Yes, that is the validating experience I have been through! I have seen it from far -- with the huge King Cobra, hood spread out, over your head sir," said Ravi.

"Why, I stared at the *Naga Raja*, unblinking, eye to eye. That was my *saakshatkara* experience!", claimed Anmol.

"Nothing like having the snake slither up your neck and your cheek! I was a witness to my self! Dead? I did not know! But yes, dead-still!", said Sudip.

"Yes, when the body is still, the *prana* is kept in absolute harmony, the *manas* and the *buddhi* are free of all *vrithis*, then one has the *anubhava* of *anandamaya atman!* One needs to go beyond this too, to BE *sat-chit-ananda!*", the sadhu said.

"Is it that simple?", asked Anmol.

"Just that with the blessings of Mahamaya, you had destiny unravel itself in the form of these catastrophies -- you are totally conscious and helpless -- to be able to witness it! Yes, getting lost in the forest, getting stuck helplessly under the trees and then to cap it, having a deadly king cobra give you a taste of what it is like being near death, made it happen for you -- of being a witness of self different from what others would experience! This is the experiential vedanta! Had you panicked, your heart palpitated too fast, you would reacted terribly and the King Cobra, sensing threat, would have delivered you to Lord *Yama!* Your good *karma* accumulated over the years, made you know more about Vedanta and therefore

have the right background. In addition, you were sincere in your approach and hence you could experience the sense of self different from that of your body or mind or intellect or individuality -- you experienced the oneness -- with the snake and the nature when it was near you!", replied the sadhu.

**One needed to be stuck in such a situation -- absolutely beyond your control and totally helpless and yet fully calm, composed and cool. With time coming to an absolute standstill. In that state of being, with no escape routes what so ever, with only *sampurna saranagati* as the way, the BEING becomes apparent. BEING that has been there as part of your experience all along and will be there forever!**

"You mean to say that our sense of self keeps varying?", asked Anmol.

"Yes, the 'you' is not a single monolith experience. It is layered, multifold and so are the corresponding experiences! Vedanta Rishis called it the *panchakosha anubhava* -- the five layers experience. The *annamaya kosha* which is your body layer, gives you a sense of physical identity -- watch yourself in the mirror! The *pranamaya kosha* gives you a sense of identity derived from the dynamism -- *prana* -- actions that you undertake, say your duties -- *aham kritah* -- I did! The *manomaya kosha* is the sense of identity you associate with your feelings and emotions! Ofcourse the pride that you get after intellectually formulating a solution including a worldview on events happening around comes from the *vignanamaya kosha!* Cut away all these sense of identities, and the blissful individuality that you experience -- like the *saakshatkara* of the snake that was slithering on you -- witnessing an event detached and as is -- is the *anandamaya kosha!* In deep samadhi you will go beyond this individuality! That is your true nature! *Sat-chit-ananda!*" The sadhu's succinct summary of experiential vedanta with a practical correlation to their experienced event was overwhelming.

### **Vedanta Sara -- The Essence**

"Wonderful! I never had such a simple and wonderful explanation of our everyday living!" said Ravi and continued, "Does this mean that the 'I' is a mix of these sense of self identities?"

"yes, you are a mix with some predominating, depending on the context! No doubt most exhibit all the confusing behaviours -- you know, my heart says do it but my intellect says

don't – how many times have we not been through such a dilemma? What is the sense of self then? And what predominates? Remember you are not a split personality with five distinctly experienced identities – that could be an insidious *roga* of the brain!", said the sadhu. He continued, "In the majority of us humans, the *annamaya kosha* sense of self is the strongest! Followed by the *manomaya kosha* sense. All other *koshas* add to this to make this sense of self or ego stronger! Thus the hierarchy! A person's emotions are used for enjoyment and survival. The intellect is used to articulate a selfish materialistic worldview. Typically, it is either the *manas* or the *buddhi* ego that dominates the worldly person - making them narcissistic! The spiritual *sadhaka* seeks to disrupt and turn around all these hierarchies! In the *adhyatmic* world – the hierarchy starts with the inner most sense of self or ego – of the *anandamaya kosha*!"

**Mahamaya is that meaning assigning abstraction that interfaces you, the sense of self, with the dynamics of the chemical reactions and electrical signals in your brain! Remember, modern science decisively says that the physical universe that we experience, does not exist absolutely. In fact each of us seem to be creating our own universe – our own world of thoughts, worldview, opinions, emotions, experiences etc! Very much like how Acharya Shankara expressed while praying to Sri Dakshinamurthy!**

He continued after several minutes of pregnant silence. "Our actions are dictated by state of our *gunas* – *thri-gunas*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *thamas* – which forms the basis of our *samskaras* or *vasanas* --- executed by the *annamaya kosha* and influenced heavily by the *manomaya kosha* – the emotions – in an unconscious way! Every *yogi* seeks to make the *vignanamaya kosha* execute the actions – for conscious thought and living. Every outer layer is made to work aligned with and as per the needs of the inner layers. Thus the *vignanamaya kosha* sense of self drives the conscious way of everyday living consistent with the worldview of the *anandamaya kosha*! The *manomaya kosha* or the emotions, including one's subconscious and the unconscious, works for and is aligned with the *vignanamaya kosha*! The *pranamaya kosha* sense of self works as per the needs dictated by the *manomaya kosha* sense of self which is aligned with the inner layered sense of self. You can see this in accomplished *yogis*! Ofcourse,

the *annamaya kosha* for the *yogi* best reflects the maxim: eat to live! He or she is fully in control and fully healthy through *yoga*!"

"That is a very succinct view of the ego-state of the *yogi* vis-a-vis the ordinary person! What *sadhana* is all about is clear!", said Ravi.

"Is this true when I am asleep as well?", asked Sudip, trying to correlate it with the sense of self, say in a dream!

"There is another dimension to this *pancha kosha* sense of self experiences – it can show up in the *jagrana*, *swapna* and *sushupti* states of the sense of existence! Waking, dreaming and deep sleep states! The *Tureeya* state of deep awareness without a sense of identity is the state of *Brahman*. It is beyond the *anandamaya kosha*!"

"You said *Mahamaya* blessed us with such an unfolding destiny! What is this *Mahamaya*?" asked Anmol.

"The power of *Brahman*! Clearly understand this: if you have a functional, transparent dial, mechanical wristwatch without explicit markings on the transparent dial, what would you see there?", asked the Sadhu.

"Ofcourse, the moving gears, flywheel, spring and the hands", replied Ravi the engineer.

"What would be the time?"

"Based on the position of the straps and the hands, I would interpret it and tell", said Ravi.

"Exactly! That is exactly what *Mahamaya* is!"

Everyone were perplexed!

"There is this little universe of mechanical parts moving driven by the energy in the spring! And there is this universe of you looking at the position of the two hands attached to the wheels, using the context of the straps and coming up with the notion of time! Both are independently and concurrently functioning! One is the mechanical contraption, ticking away -- absolutely meaningless in its own universe! Another is the meaning assigning chemicals triggering electrical signals flying off back and forth in your brain, registering the visuals of this! And creating the notion of 'Time'. *Mahamaya* is that meaning assigning abstraction that interfaces you, the sense of self, with the relative position of the hands of the mechanical wristwatch or with the dynamics of the chemical reactions and electrical signals in your brain! Remember, modern science decisively says that the physical universe that we experience, does not exist absolutely. In fact each of us seem to be creating our own universe – our own world of thoughts, worldview, opinions, emotions, experiences etc! Very much like how Acharya Shankara expressed while praying to Sri Dakshinamurthy! Remember we worship

**It is not enough that you should just understand all this! You need to internalize it and live according to these realities! That is wisdom!**

*Mahamaya* as the all powerful *parashakti* – the power of *Brahman*!”

“That is a fantastic interpretation!”, exclaimed Sudip, jumping in joy – eureka, eureka – struggling to wiggle from under the tree! He continued, “Now I get it! There are several parallel universes working simultaneously! Modern science gives the details of each – the universe of humans as individuals which is part and subset of the universe of the humming live biological eco-system together with other living beings, animals and plants! There is this parallel universe of the DNA proteins, enzymes and molecules. Ofcourse physics pitches in with several parallel universes contained one within another – the universe of elements – atoms; the universe of subatomic particles and quantum mechanics; and ofcourse the all explaining string theory unifying various forces – very large and very small! These universes seem to operate concurrently, layer within layer almost independent of each other!” Ofcourse Sudip was a neuroscience researcher – who had science deep in his mind and brain! Ravi and Anmol expressed their agreement and appreciation at what was just said – very simple and yet seemed very complex!

“It is not enough that you should just understand all this! You need to internalize it and live according to these realities! That is wisdom!”, said the Sadhu.

“Internalize! The most challenging part!”, remarked Anmol.

“Yes, if your karma *samskaras* are good and you put in the right *sadhana* efforts then over a period of time, this internalization becomes spontaneous – at the various *kosha* levels! It is that simple!”, said the Sadhu sincerely.

“*Karma*! We hear it frequently, used to lay blame. We talk about it. But we understand it vaguely! What is it?”, asked Ravi. The Sadhu said, “*Karma* is the effects of that which you are doing, that which you did and that which you want to do! Interestingly even as it effects the universes around you impacting them in all kinds of subtle ways, it also effects your inner *koshas* – either reinforcing existing *samskaras* or *vasanas* or disrupting them or creating new ones. It is very subtle and we seek *Mahamaya*'s blessings to be able to ride out of its binding or entangling effects”. Some minutes passed. He continued, “Remember, if you wish ill or do ill to others, justice is built into that action! *Karma* ensures that such

*vasanas* in you get reinforced – so much so that when you need to do something critical perhaps, the same very *vasanas* obstruct your efficient execution resulting in your fragmented success! Justice is thus served, subtly and effectively! Which is why *sadhakas* and *devotees* of the God do not seek to avenge! With *kshama*, they will do good, for themselves and others. However this does not mean that those charged with law, order or justice get to sleep over! They will have to discharge their duties in bringing the violaters to accountability. And *sadhana* is all about generating good *karma* – internally and externally – for *adhyatmic* progress.”

### Deva Krupa – Vedanta Sadhana

“God, Please rescue us!”, prayed Sudip and continued, a bit surprised himself, “where does God fit into all these? What is the *sadhana*?”

“But for God's grace, one cannot progress in the *adhyatmica* marga! *Mahamaya* is the power of God for each one of us ignorant humans! When you are lost in the world of senses, you have a very distinct sense of self or ego that views the world as so many distinct individual entities! You are in the *dwaita* world and you worship God in your *ishtadevata* accordingly. Like Lord Shiva in the form of *lingam* over there in the temple.” He then chanted very melliflously the *Lingashtakam* - a short and sweet prayer to Lord Shiva. Several minutes of silence followed. He continued, “After sufficient progress in the *bhakti marga* as well as after fulfilling several pre-requisites, the *sadhaka* starts praying to the *ishtadevata* as the consciousness within, then it is the *vishishtadvaita sthithi*. Just you and the Lord within you. The *Bhagavad Gita* is a key guidepost in this journey at this stage. The pinnacle of *sadhana* success here is the *savikalpa samadhi* experiencing the *sakara brahman* core of your *ishtadevata*! The *chatura koshas* are fully aligned. Humility is at its best – the *sampurna saranagati sthithi*. It is at this point that vedanta becomes more and more relevant. Seeking and obtaining the guidance of an accomplished Guru is the best blessing that one can get. Going beyond, with due *sadhana*, and the wisdom from the *Upanishads* as well as various writings of the *Rishis* and *Swamis*, we reach that state where we experience the oneness with our *Ishta*!”. He then went off into the sonorous chant of the *pranava mantra*! For several minutes.

Five hours and famished, they awaited for someone to come and rescue them! God? Perhaps God as an unknown human. To tell them what they could do, to cut and relieve

themselves from this and all such state of affairs. Or was destiny unfolding it already in general with vedanta? Prayers! Peaceful calmness inside! With such responses was better forms of destiny being formulated?

Several minutes of silence followed. Everyone seems to have forgotten their plight and soaked themselves in what the Sadhu had said. And then there was some noise. Wild animals? Cannot say. Any shouting or shaking could attract unwarranted wild attention with dire consequences. Everyone stayed quiet. The noises, breaking branches, grew louder. Was it the wild elephants?

Something lifted Ravi's head! He looked up and stared into the smiling creased face of an elderly khaki-clad forest guard, who said, "Lucky, you are still alive!"

"There are three more! Can you help?," begged a relieved Ravi, who then shouted out to the rest, "Folks, *Ganesha* as the forest guard has come to our rescue!". Welcome shouts went out. The forest guard used his axe to cut the branches. First it was Ravi. He wiggled out fast. He was visibly shaken and tired. Then together, they cut loose the branches and tree trunk pinning down Anmol who was tired and weak. While Ravi yanked out Anmol, the forest guard lifted the last of the weighing branch. Next, while Anmol helped out Sudip, Ravi climbed upto the Sadhu's ledge. Soon the rest followed. Slowly and carefully the forest guard cut off the crucifying branches and bunches of the *aakashamallige* so the Sadhu could slowly get up free of the broken branches around. All of them had plenty of bruises. But luckily none had any broken bones or gaping wounds. The

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***Karma is the effects of that which you are doing, that which you did and that which you want to do! Interestingly even as it effects the universes around you impacting them in all kinds of subtle ways, it also effects your inner koshas - either reinforcing existing samskaras or vasanas or disrupting them or creating new ones. It is very subtle and we seek Mahamaya's blessings to be able to ride out of its binding or entangling effects.***

trio collected their backpacks, helping the sadhu come down to the temple. The sadhu then meticulously helped everyone clean up their bruises and apply appropriate medicines and bandages that the trio carried with them. Ravi collected together all the snacks they carried and the Sadhu offered it to Lord Shiva, worshipped as a Linga in that temple. Then, along with the forest guard, they had their unconventional *prasad*, the first meal of the day. Though he looked rustic, the sadhu was knowledgeable in all that was happening in modern science and the world.

It was almost four in the afternoon. The forest guard, it seemed used to visit the sadhu in this temple once in a few days whenever the sadhu came by. It was godsend that day that he visited. It was time to bid goodbye to the sadhu, who was now sitting taut in yoga asana.

"*Sadhana! Vedanta Sadhana!* How do we do it? How can we progress? What pitfalls should we be aware of? Perhaps we should come again to hear you.", asked Ravi, with the all the humble seriousness. "*Swamiji*, we shall definitely come again! We definitely seek your blessings and wisdom to practise and progress!", prayed Anmol. Sudip added, offering *pranams*, "*Swamiji*, please bless us that we do not loose the intensity of the experience and understanding that we've had today with you."

The Sadhu silently accepted their requests, blessed them for their onward journey – including the inner journey. After leaving some food they had carried, for the Sadhu's use, along with a few utility items, they paid their pranams and respects again, and departed. For *Sundanakatte*, heavy hearted, along with the forest guard as their guide. It was a three hour trek – a long time to digest their extraordinary experiences on that blessed day. In all this, they had forgotten to ask about the Sadhu himself. The forest guard pitched in with what he had creatively named – *Sri Shiva Swami*. That name stuck in their memories. forever! Their long real spiritual journey had just started then.

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