

Ananda is not bliss

An Article by Swami Dayananda Saraswati | Version 1.01

Ātman, the self, is defined as *sat-cit-ānanda*. In this three-word definition, *sat* is often translated as existence, *cit* as consciousness, *ānanda* as bliss. It is obvious that these three words are not adjectives to the self, for the self is revealed by the Upanishads by these three words. If they are adjectives, there are many self-substantives among whom one is distinguished with the special attributes of *sat-cit-ānanda*. If we say, “Here is a blue, big, fragrant lily,” all three adjectives distinguish the lily from other lilies without those attributes.

That I am is self-evident, but is this existence of the self time-bound? If it is, the self is like any other object. It has to become evident. Every object becomes evident to the self. The existence of the self is evident. To whom does it become evident? It has to be evident only to the self. When the existence of the self is evident to the self, it is understood as self-evident. In fact, the Upanishads present *Ātman* as *satyam*, self existence, and everything else, including the knowing subject, as one whose existence is drawn from the existence of the self. This self-existent *Ātman* has got to be self-evident. Otherwise, there is no way of recognizing the existence of the self. So this self-evident nature is what is indicated by the second word *cit* consciousness. Every evidence being knowledge, there is the presence of consciousness.

The self-existent *Ātman* is in the form of consciousness revealing itself. The nature of *sat* is consciousness and the nature of consciousness is *sat*. The third word, *ānanda*, must have the same status as *sat* and *cit*, since it is a word revealing the nature (*svarūpa*) of *Ātman*. If *sat* cannot be displaced by a thought, and much less *cit* can be displaced, how can *ānanda* ever be displaced by a condition of the mind? If *ānanda* is translated as limitless (*ananta*) there is no possibility of it getting displaced at any time. If it is bliss, it has its opposite, unhappiness, displacing it.

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So this word *ānanda* has really caused a lot of confusion in the minds of seekers as well as teachers. Happiness and sorrow are opposites, and therefore, they are mutually opposed to each other. When the one is, the other is not. When I am happy I am not sad, and when I am sad I am not happy. But the truth is, the self that is *sat* and *cit* sustains every condition of the mind like the water every wave. Whether the condition of the mind is pleasant or unpleasant, it is sustained not only by *sat cit*, but also *ānanda*, because *sat cit* is *ānanda*.

The reason why there is so much insistence on the experience of the self is that that self is taken as a special experience of bliss. Even if there is a special experience of bliss, how will one recognize that it is the bliss of the self? In fact, the Upanishads are very clear that every experience of happiness is nothing but a condition of the mind which does not stand opposed to the limitlessness of the self. The common experience of this happiness reveals that the subject-object situation does not oppose the limitlessness, the wholeness of the self, *Ātman*. The non-recognition of this fact commits a person to seeking such an experience [of happiness] as often and for as long as he or she can have it. That is the life of *saṃsāra*, of becoming. The Upanishads stop this pursuit by revealing that the *Ātman* one is seeking is oneself. *Ānanda* is never displaced by any condition of the mind, because it is the nature of *Ātman*, like *sat* and *cit*. An unhappy condition of the mind is sustained by consciousness which is *sat*. If this is true, it is *ānanda* that sustains the unhappy condition as well as the happy condition.