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Fifteen Verses of Wisdom

TODAY I AM GOING TO TALK ABOUT A SHORT text entitled “Fifteen Verses of Wisdom” (*bodhapañcadaśikā*) by Abhinavagupta, the great master of all aspects of Kashmir Śaivism. These fifteen verses provide a brief exposition, and capture the essence, of the doctrine of Kashmir Śaivism.

1. *The brilliance of the One Being’s light does not vanish in external light or in darkness because all light and darkness resides in the supreme light of God Consciousness.*

The light of a candle is outshined by the light of the sun but the radiance of that One Being’s light is not outshined by external light or overshadowed by darkness. This is because all external light and darkness reside in that Supreme light of Consciousness.

2. *This Being is called Lord Śiva. He is the nature and existence of all beings. The external objective world is the expansion of His Energy and it is filled with the glamour of the glory of God Consciousness.*

This One Being of infinite light is called Lord Śiva and the external collection which makes up the objective world is His

Energy (*śakti*). The external world is nothing more than the expansion of His Energy. It is not separate from His Energy. This Energy is filled with the radiance of the glory of God Consciousness. And so we see that Lord Śiva is the Energy holder, and the universal state of the objective field is His Energy, His Śakti.

3. *Śiva and Śakti are not aware that they are separate. They are interconnected just as fire is one with heat.*

If for the sake of explanation we make a distinction between Śakti and Śiva then one could say that Śakti is this whole universe and that from which this universe issues forth is Śiva. This Śiva and Śakti, Lord Śiva and this world, are not aware that they are separate. Why is this? Simply because in reality they are not separate at all. The state of Lord Śiva and the state of universe are one and the same, just as the fire is one with heat. Heat is not separate from fire; fire is not separate from heat.

4. *He is the God Bhairava. He creates, protects, destroys, conceals, and reveals His nature through the cycle of this world. This whole universe is created by God in His own nature, just as one finds the reflection of the world in a mirror.*

This universe is created by Lord Śiva in His own nature. The Lord protects and gives strength to the universe. The universe and the universe holder, i.e., the creator of universe, are one and the same.

This universe is a reflection (*pratibimba*) of Lord Śiva. It is not created in the same way as a woman creates a child, which at birth becomes separate from herself. Rather, this universe is created in the same way as the image of an object, such as a city, can be found reflected in a mirror. In the case of Lord Śiva, there is no city which exists independently of the mirror. The only thing that exists is the city seen in the mirror. There is no separate object reflected in the mirror, rather Lord Śiva creates this whole universe in the mirror of His own nature by His independence (*svātantrya*), His freedom.

5. *The collective state of the universe is His supreme Energy (śakti), which He created in order to recognize His own nature. This Śakti, who is the embodiment of the collective state of the universe, loves possessing the state of God Consciousness. She is in the state of ignorance, remaining perfectly complete and full in each and every object.*

Why has He created this supreme Energy in His own nature? He has done this for one reason—to recognize His own nature. This whole universe is nothing more than the means by which we can come to recognize Lord Śiva.

You can recognize Lord Śiva through the universe, not by abandoning it, but by observing and experiencing God Consciousness in the very activity of the world. If you remain cut off from the universe and try to realize God Consciousness, it will take centuries. But if you remain in universal activity and are attentive to realizing God Consciousness, you will attain it very easily.

So, in the universe there is ignorance and there is a way to get rid of this ignorance. This is the way of meditating in the activity of the world.

Lord Śiva creates this external universe for the sake of realizing His own nature. That is why this external universe is called Śakti, because it is the means to realize one's own nature.

When He was solely Śiva, He was in His full splendor of God Consciousness. He did not recognize His own nature because it was already there. But He wants His own nature to be recognized. And yet, because it is already there, there is nothing to recognize. Therefore, in order to recognize His nature He must first become ignorant of His nature. Only then can He recognize it.

Why should He want to recognize His nature in the first place? It is because of His freedom, His *svātantrya* (independence). This is the play of the universe. This universe was created solely for the fun and joy of this realization.¹ It happens that when His full-

1. This differentiation, which is the universe, has come out because of the overflowing of the ecstasy of God Consciousness. The ecstasy of God Consciousness overflows and the external universe flows out from His own nature.

ness overflows, He wants to remain incomplete. He wants to appear as being incomplete, just so He can achieve completion. This is the play of His *svātantrya*—to depart from His own nature in order to enjoy it again. It is this *svātantrya* that has created this whole universe. This is the play of Śiva's *svātantrya*.

This process is also known as *unmeṣa* and *nimeṣa*. *Unmeṣa* is the flourishing of that God Consciousness and *nimeṣa* is the withdrawal of that God Consciousness. *Unmeṣa* is expansion and *nimeṣa* is contraction. Śiva contains both of these states within Himself simultaneously.

At the time when His nature overflowed, Śakti² was in His own nature. Then He had to separate Śakti from His nature. In that state of separated Śakti, Śiva also exists. However, in that state Śiva is ignorant and wants, as He did before, to have the fullness of His knowledge.

The evidence that, while being in the state of ignorance, Śiva was already filled with knowledge is found in the fact that, at the moment He realizes His own nature and is filled with knowledge, He has the experience that the state of knowledge was already there.³ So there was never really any separation. Separation only *seemed* to exist.

6. *The supreme Lord Śiva, who is all-pervasive and fond of playing and falling, together with the Energy of His own nature simultaneously brings about the varieties of creation and destruction.*

2. In the state of God Consciousness Śakti is complete, and in the state of ignorance Śakti is also complete. And yet, Śakti relishes possessing the state of God Consciousness. In each and every object She is complete, and in each and every object this completion is neither too little nor too much. In this external world, this completion is the same as it was in the state of the fullness of God Consciousness and the same as it was before the creation of the universe.

3. While experiencing an object, which is also in ignorance, in the field of ignorance, this experience is also full. But Śiva does not know this fullness and He does not know that He is full. He only knows this fullness at the time of realizing His own nature. And, when he realizes His own nature, this memory comes to His mind, "I was already full, so why was I meditating?"

This supreme Lord Śiva, who is all-pervasive, along with the Energy of His own nature, creates varieties of creation and destruction.

He creates birds, He creates bugs, He creates everything in this world. He creates whatever is possible and whatever is not possible. And He does not create it in succession. He creates it simultaneously (*yugapat*). But what is the purpose of all this? The purpose is to discover that God Consciousness also exists in all creation.

What is the Energy of His own nature? Universal existence, the universal cycle of universe. With this universal cycle Lord Śiva is fond of playing and also falling.

Take the example of a young boy. It may happen that when this young boy becomes too excited he begins to jump about wildly and may bump his head. In the same way God has masked his own nature because there is too much ecstasy. He wants to disconnect that ecstasy, but that ecstasy, in reality, cannot be disconnected at all. The Lord knows that, but still for His own amusement He temporarily disconnects it. Then, at the time when he again realizes His own nature, He feels that the ecstasy was *already* there.

7. This supreme action cannot be accomplished by any other power in this universe except Lord Śiva, who is completely independent, perfectly glorious and intelligent.

This kind of action can not be accomplished by any power in this universe other than Lord Śiva. Only Lord Śiva can do this. Only Lord Śiva, by His own *svātantrya*, can totally ignore and mask His own nature.

Lord Śiva wants, in His creation, to disconnect His God Consciousness completely and then to discover that it was never disconnected. Although it is disconnected, it is not disconnected. In the real sense it is not disconnected. This is the supreme action.

If you are full of life, how can you be without life? You cannot but Lord Śiva can. Lord Śiva can become without life. He can become completely insentient (*jaḍa*) and totally disconnected

from God Consciousness, just like a rock. For where is the existence of Lord Śiva in a rock? In rocks there is nothing, it is just a rock.

This is His *svātantrya*, His glory, His intelligence. Intelligence does not mean that in this super-drama called creation you will only play the part of a lady or a man. With this kind of intelligence you will also play the part of rocks, of trees, of all things. This kind of intelligence is found only in the state of Lord Śiva and nowhere else.

8. The limited state of consciousness is insentient and cannot simultaneously expand itself to become the various forms of the universe. The possessor of independence is absolutely different from that insentient state of consciousness. You cannot, therefore, recognize Him in only one way. The moment you recognize Him in one way you will also recognize Him in the other way.⁴

In this super-drama of creation the limited state of consciousness can play the part only in an individual way. When it has taken the part of a rock it cannot simultaneously, at that moment, become a tree, a bird, a tiger, a human being, or the gods Brahma, Rudra, Viṣṇu, Īśvara, and Sadāśiva. However, Lord Śiva can. Simultaneously he has become all these forms and every form in the universe as well. This is the way He spreads and expands His own nature.

You know that an ordinary limited being who lives in one place cannot at the same time live in another place. This is not the case with God Consciousness. God Consciousness is everywhere, in each and every way. God Consciousness is in all time: in the present, the past, and the future. God Consciousness is unlimited by time and space.

The limited state of being is insentient (*jaḍa*), and yet the possessor of this state of insentience is completely independent

4. The moment you recognize Him in a universal way as unlimited you will also recognize Him individually as limited. This is His play. The limited insentient state of consciousness is also the Lord.

(*svatantra*), intelligent (*bodha*), and absolutely different (*vilakṣaṇa*) from that state.

So this limited “form of consciousness” is attributed only to insentience. But He has created that. For example, a rock is a creation of God when it is only a rock. But a rock is God itself when, while it is rock, it is also a human being, a god, a tree, a bird.⁵

This is His play and the reason why He has created differentiated existence. In His play He has played this kind of trick wherein the rock becomes only a rock. It is totally unaware of anything, including its true nature as universal God Consciousness. And in His play He enjoys the state of a rock being limited to being a rock and also being universal.

So there are two states to consider: the state of ignorance and the state of knowledge. When there is knowledge, a rock is not only rock, it is also universal. With knowledge, a rock is a rock and it is also all people; it is all trees, it is everything. When there is intelligence a rock is everyone and everything. But when a rock is just a rock, when it is ignorant, then it is a rock and nothing else. But at the same time, in that rock God is satisfied.

Lord Śiva enjoys the seeming limited aspect of ignorance because He knows that ignorance is not, in the real sense, ignorance at all. He enjoys that. So you cannot recognize Him in only one way. At the very moment you recognize Him in one way you will recognize Him in the other way as well. This is the reality of Kashmir Śaivism as explained by Abhinavagupta.

9. This Lord Śiva, who is completely independent (svatantra), has the diversity of creation and destruction existing in His own nature. And, at the same time, this diversity is found existing in its own way as the field of ignorance.

5. From the point of view of the rock, a rock is only a rock. This is the state of insentient limited being. From the point of view of Universal Consciousness, the rock is one with the Lord. From the point of view of Universal Consciousness, there is nothing that is outside of Universal Consciousness. The rock is, therefore, a human being, a god, etc., because it is one with the universal state of God Consciousness.

This is why our masters have taught us to meditate, to find out what the rock truly is. When you meditate then the rock will become universal.

When there is nothing then there is no problem. When there is only yourself then there is a problem. When there is only the other person then there is a problem. But when you come to know that you are universal then there is no problem. This is why meditation has been expounded in Śaivism, in order for you to realize the reality of God Consciousness.

Creation and destruction (*sriṣṭi-samhāra*) also take place together. In this way there is creation and destruction in the cycle of action, and creation and destruction in the cycle of knowledge. Creation and destruction in the cycle of action is just what takes place in the world of ignorance. For instance, there is a mountain. It is created and it exists in the realm of action. The results of this action are that after one thousand centuries this mountain will become dust. It will fall and crumble. This is creation and destruction in the cycle of action.

Now, you have to transform this action, the activity of this created thing, into knowledge. Then action will become universal. In that universality there is knowledge, pure knowledge (*pūrṇajñāna*). So, in this creation and destruction, when action is created, knowledge is destroyed, and when knowledge is created, action is destroyed.

For instance, I perceive a mountain, it is in action. It is gradually crumbling into dust. If I perceive it in knowledge, the knowledge of God Consciousness will transform this perception making it universal, and I will not feel that it is in action. The reason being that after one thousand centuries, this mountain will become dust. I will feel that it has taken the formation of dust. I will not feel that it is destroyed. So it was not in action, it was in knowledge. In universality a rock is God and dust is also God.

Knowing that there is no difference between the dust and the rock is knowledge. In the beginning the dust was rock and it had the shape of rock. After two thousand centuries the shape of the rock changed and it became dust. And yet, when there is real knowledge, there is no difference between these two, the rock and dust. That is God.

So the variation of creation and destruction take place in this way so that there is no effect at all, no effect in either way. If the variation of creation and destruction were only in action, and not in knowledge, then creation and destruction would actually take place. But whenever, after many lifetimes, real knowledge dawns, you will find out and you will recognize that from the very beginning nothing has actually happened. You were already there. Though real knowledge appeared to be destroyed, it was not destroyed. This is the trick, the play of Lord Śiva—to make knowledge appear as if it has been destroyed.

So what is the purpose of action? It is completely independent and it is play. The purpose of this action is play.

It is said,

At the time of reaching the superstate of God Consciousness, pleasure and pain have no value. Pleasure is the same, pain is the same, death is the same, life is the same. At that moment bondage and liberation are the same. Existence and nonexistence are the same. Becoming a rock and becoming intelligent are the same.

In verse nine, Abhinavagupta explained that the varieties of creation and destruction are residing in Lord Śiva's own nature. Lord Śiva creates, protects, and destroys this universe. Lord Śiva also, in His own nature, conceals and reveals Himself. In the next verse he says,

10. In this world you will find varieties of creation and destruction, some of which are created in the upper cycle, some of which are created below, and some of which are even created sideways. Attached to these worlds smaller portions of worlds are created. Pain, pleasure, and intellectual power are created according to the status of being. This is the world.

You find varieties of creation and destruction in this world. And there is also variation in these varieties. Variation means that the varieties of creation and destruction do not correspond to

each other. For instance, our period of twenty-four hours is the span of a mosquito's life. That is, twenty-four hours for a human is equal to one hundred years for the mosquito. Now the greatest span of a human life is one hundred years. It is said that six months to a human is equal to twenty-four hours for those gods residing in the worlds of the ancestors (*pitṛi-loka*). This is how time expands. Our six months is equal to their twenty-four hours. And this expansion of time continues all the way to Lord Śiva where the blinking of His eyes is equal to the lifetime of one hundred years of *Sadāśiva*.⁶ This is the variety we come to know in this universe of one hundred and eighteen worlds.

This is variation in the varieties of creation and destruction, and these varieties are according to time. You cannot, therefore, depend upon time. Time only appears, it does not exist.

This is why Abhinavagupta, in this verse, says that in these one hundred and eighteen worlds there is an infinite variety of creation. And moreover, in this world pain, pleasure, and intellectual power are all created according to the status of being.

For example, a mosquito cannot meditate. Whereas, on the other hand, Lord Śiva can. Intellectual power, therefore, is also created with variations. A mosquito has intellectual power according to its existence and Lord Śiva has intellectual power according to His existence. And, this intellectual power is also a trick, part of Lord Śiva's play. This is the world.

11. *If you do not understand that there is actually no span of time, this misunderstanding is also the independence (svātantrya) of Lord Śiva. This misunderstanding results in worldly existence (saṃsāra). And those who are ignorant are terrified by worldly existence.*

If the notion of time were correct, then there would not be this difference of time where your one human day is equal to one hun-

6. The words "blinking of His eyes," are used just to make you understand that it is just a flash. "Blinking" is not exactly the blinking of His eye. When Lord Śiva opens His eyes *Sadāśiva* is created and when He closes His eyes *Sadāśiva* is destroyed.

dred years in the life of the mosquito. This difference of time is also the independence (*svātantrya*) of Lord Śiva. If you want to ask the question, "Why?" I will answer you by saying that you should not delve deeply into it. The "why" cannot be understood. And if it is not understood, that too is the *svātantrya* of Lord Śiva.

In this worldly existence (*saṁsāra*), ignorant people are terrified and cry out because of this independent, free will of Lord Śiva. They do not know of its existence, and they do not know that they do not know. They do not even feel that they do not know. If they did feel that they did not know, they would know. As soon as they felt that they did not know, they would know. What terrifies them is just not knowing and not knowing that they do not know. This is pure ignorance. This is that ignorance where those who are ignorant do not know that they are ignorant.

12. & 13. *When, because the grace of Lord Śiva is showered upon you, or due to the teachings or vibrating force of your Master, or through understanding the scriptures concerned with Supreme Śiva, you attain the real knowledge of reality, that is the existent state of Lord Śiva, and that is final liberation. This fullness is achieved by elevated souls and is called liberation in this life (jīvanmukti).*

Yogis understand that *saṁsāra* is only a trick, that there is actually no span of time. They know that if there were a span of time then differences of time would not exist. If time *really* existed then twenty four hours for the mosquito would be the same as it is for humans and the same as it is for Lord Śiva.

In this universe of 118 worlds all varieties of creation are in the grip of time (*kāla*), and this time is controlled by the Lord of Death (*Yama*). When there is time there is death. When there is time there is birth. When there is the kingdom of time there is everything: there is pain, there is pleasure, there is sadness, there is happiness, there is joy, there is sex, there is the absence of sex, there is detachment, and there is attachment. In this world you are caught in the grip of time to the extent of your own capacity.

Now sometimes, in some places, on some occasions it happens that the grace of Lord Śiva is showered on a person. When that grace of Lord Śiva is showered on you, or when your God Consciousness is vibrated by the vibrating force of the teachings of your master, then you come to understand that there is no time. Then you realize that a trick is being played on you by Lord Śiva. Otherwise, you will not realize that you are just like a football being played in this world. When one is filled with ignorance, he has the false understanding that he is the player. He thinks that he himself is playing. This is a false notion! He is not the player, he is the one being played.

When you come to know that this is a trick, you have nothing to do. But how do you come to know that this is a trick? You come to know by the grace of Lord Śiva; you come to know by the grace of your master; you come to know by the grace of the scriptures (*śāstras*).

If you say that you can come to know that this is a trick from lectures or from reading, I say that this is not real knowledge. It is attached knowledge. Real knowledge exists when you know yourself exactly.

14. *These two cycles, bondage and liberation, are the play of Lord Śiva and nothing else. They are not separate from Lord Śiva because differentiated states have not risen at all. In reality, nothing has happened to Lord Śiva.*

In the two cycles of bondage and liberation, the cycle of bondage is concerned with the not-knowing cycle. When you do not know what you are doing, then you do not know where you are established. That is the cycle of bondage. What is the cycle of knowledge? It is liberation! What is liberation? Liberation exists when you come to understand that it is only a trick, that it is the play of Lord Śiva and nothing else. At that point you understand that nothing has happened, nothing is lost, and nothing is gained.

In brief and exact words, these two cycles, bondage and liberation, are not separate from Lord Śiva. Why? Because differentiated states have not risen at all. It is only a trick that you are ignorant and somebody else is elevated. But the question arises—

whose trick is it? Is it your trick or Lord Śiva's trick? It is your trick. Why? Because if it were not your trick then you could not be liberated. It is your own trick that has made you ignorant. You fool yourself. And when that supreme force enters you it will shatter this ignorance into pieces. You do not need anybody's help in shattering it. You have enslaved yourself; you can free yourself and become a king.

You must understand that, in reality, nothing has happened to Lord Śiva. He is never ignorant, He is never elevated. From which point would He be elevated? Was He not elevated before? Why even use this word "elevation"? Elevation is meant for those who are sunk or who are sinking. If He has never sunk down, and you are one with Him, then why talk of elevating yourself? You are already elevated, you are divine.

This is Kashmir Śaivism. This theory of Śaivism is misunderstood by many people. You must first come to understand this theory and then you will begin to become Lord Śiva. According to the theory of Śaivism, you are Śiva, and will eventually come to the conclusion that you are Śiva. And yet, you are not actually Śiva, because you have not achieved that state.

Even though you have not actually realized that you are Śiva, it is not a mistake to think that you are Śiva. You should go on thinking that you are Śiva. You should always elevate yourself with the thought that you are Lord Śiva—but do not boast of this. If you tell someone that you are Śiva it means that you are not Lord Śiva. You must actually understand that if you are Lord Śiva, then this whole creation is all a joke, an expression of your play.

One might ask, "How do you know whether or not you are fooling yourself thinking that you are Śiva, or whether you really *are* Lord Śiva? How do you know?" The answer is that you will come to know yourself because you will be blissful, you will always be blissful. When you are in that state and when something bad happens to you, you will not get worried; and when something good happens to you, you will not get excited. While experiencing pain you will be peaceful.

You must come to know and see in yourself situated in this way. If you are not situated in this way and boast, saying, "I am

Lord Śiva, I am Lord Śiva,” you will be slapped and made to understand that you are not Lord Śiva.

To actually know who you are is a big problem. You have to find out yourself where you are situated. It happens by the grace of Lord Śiva, or by the grace of a master, or by the grace of the śāstras.

15. *In this way the Lord, Bhairava, the essence of all being, has held in His own way in His own nature, the three great energies: the energy of will (icchā-śakti), the energy of action (kriyā-śakti), and the energy of knowledge (jñāna-śakti). These three energies are just like that trident⁷ which is the three-fold lotus. And seated on this lotus is Lord Bhairava, who is the nature of the whole universe of 118 worlds.*

The nature of the universe is the existence of Lord Śiva. Lord Śiva's existence is naturally everyone's nature. Lord Śiva is found in rocks; Lord Śiva is found everywhere. Lord Śiva is even found in the absence of Lord Śiva. Even there He is not absent, He is existing.

There He resides, alone in His kingdom. No one else is found there.

16. *I, Abhinavagupta, have written and revealed these verses for some of my dear disciples who have very little intellectual understanding. For those disciples, who are deeply devoted to me, I have composed these fifteen verses just to elevate them instantaneously.*

7. The *triśula* is a trident carried by ascetics, a symbol of Lord Śiva.