

Brief Summary of Puri Shankaracharya's talk on "Reality: Modern Science and Ancient Indian Wisdom"



In His opening remarks, He said that understanding the utility of the world will enable us to decide on the right direction for human development. This necessitates knowledge of the creator and controller of this universe. Such a knowledge can be obtained from the Vedas. The universe, according to Vedas, is created and dissolved in cycles and as such has no starting point.

Human life and our true nature

He then expounded on the nature of human life; it is a journey from mortality to immortality, ignorance to knowledge; misery to bliss. Securing absolute 'existence', 'knowledge', and 'bliss' is the ultimate and universal goal of human life. This ultimate state isn't an experience gained through any external aid. To illustrate this, He reflected on the blissful state of deep-sleep where even the 'fear of death' is absent. This non-dual state is experienced on account of our proximity to our true nature. However, despite lack of any 'duality', deep-sleep doesn't constitute Liberation because the seed of ignorance still remains. This ignorance manifests in our waking and dream states in the form of our seemingly endless search for happiness. Our true nature, the Self or the Supreme Being, is distinct from and remains as a witness to waking, dream, and deep-sleep states. Therefore, the happiness we are constantly seeking in the world is, in fact, our own true nature! We are what we seek!



Matter, Energy, and Controller

Both ancient wisdom and science agree that there is energy/force behind matter. Vedas go further and postulate a 'controller' (Chetan Niyamak or Shaktiman) without whom, energy/forces become directionless. According to Shiva Purana, the five basic elements represent creative, sustaining, destructive, regulative, and supportive forces respectively. The basic five elements also perfectly correspond to the five senses of knowledge human beings possess. In this way, at the microcosm, the Jiva operates the body through intellectual, emotional, and pranic forces, whereas, at the cosmic level, Ishwara runs the universe through various forces of nature.

Yantra, Tantra, and Mantra

Machine (Yantra) is that which is operated by the ‘controller’ using various forces. There exists a principle (Mantra) behind every machine and the method of operationalizing a principle into a machine is called technology (Tantra). In this way, the Vedas conceptualize of the hierarchy

Mantra → Tantra → Yantra. In the microcosm, our physical body is the Yantra; causal body the Mantra, and subtle body which connects the causal and physical is the Tantra. The Self lies beyond these three bodies and enlivens them. He who is desirous of developing a Yantra, shall necessarily possess the knowledge of Mantra. In other words, a scientist in the Vedic scheme of things is a Mantra-Drashta or the seer of Mantra. Such a scientist shall possess enough vigor to investigate himself (his body, mind, and what lies beyond) as rigorously as he investigates external phenomena. This enables him to understand he (Self) is different from the body and mind and is not limited by them. On the other hand, if scientific and technological activities are based on the wrong assumption that one (Self) is limited by the mind and body, the so-called ‘progress’ achieved under the shadow of this ignorance will surely lead to a gradual decline in quality of life. This is obvious in current times that is marked by rampant pollution, depleting natural resources, disrupted monsoon, global warming, and climate change. A model of development based on principles discordant to Vedas, is nothing but destruction in the name of progress.

