

Session 5 – Foundational Concepts and Overview of Hierarchy

February 9th, 2014

Jai Swaminarayan! Sahajanand Swami Maharajni jai, Bapashreeni jai, Sadguruoshreeni jai, Swaminarayan Bhagwanani jai, tatha anant anadi muktoni jai!

A humble prayer in their lotus-feet and lotus-feet of our Guru AMPP NarayanMama and LeelaMasi to augment this assembly with their divinity and grace, and to enhance our knowledge and guide us towards them.

Today, we will spend some time in understanding some common concepts and also get an overview of spiritual hierarchy. This will help build a foundation for coming weeks. We will talk about:

- Transcendent and Immanent form of God
- Self-Realization and God Realization or Atma-darshan and Prabhu-darshan
- Cause and Effect or Karya-karan bhaav
- Overview of hierarchy and cross references
- Three attributes
- Time permitting - Dual Nature of Universe

Last 4 weeks we spent time on understanding Soul, Body and Mind – which is a common belief in all the religions of the world. Another common belief across all the religions of the world is that there is God and a messenger/son of God. Again the understanding varies from religion to religion. We had looked at the statistics of world population on different religions in our very first interaction – 32% Christians, 23% Muslims, 15% Hindus, 7% Buddhist, 11% atheists and remaining 12% is all other minor religions in the world. Primary belief in Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists is that the divine form of God is formless. God is simply an all-pervading brilliance. That is 3 quarters of the world population. Of course there are bifurcations in each of them and some of these bifurcations believe that God has a definite divine form, but those believers are a minority. In the present day, Idol worship or worship of a definite divine tangible form of God, exists primarily in Hinduism. Amongst Hindus only 40-50%, may be even less, believe that God has a definite divine form, and Hindu's are about 15% of world population – so hardly 6-8% and may be some additional minority in other religions – so at the most 15-20% of world population today believes that God has a definite divine form. However, we learnt in our very first interaction that religion is not a number game.

So let's spend some time to understand this better. Let's first define two terms– Immanent form of God and Transcendent form of God. Immanent form of God is the formless all-pervading divine brilliance and Transcendent form of God is the definite embodied divine form of God that has the shape of body like ours, but is completely divine. Christian texts refer to human form of Jesus as transcendent form of God, but we are not talking about the human form here, we are talking about the definite divine form. The transcendent form of God is also all-pervading. So about 80-85% of world population believes that God

only has an immanent form and no transcendent form. Let's recall again that religion is not a number game.

Say God has only immanent form or God is only "Nirakar". So there is only this all-pervading brilliance and nothing else. By simple observation, we know that any light or brilliance has a source, and that source has some form. For example, light bulb has a definite form, sun has a definite form. The brilliance by itself cannot sustain, and it is dependent on the source. Brilliance by itself cannot create anything. There has to be a definite source – in whatever shape. Even with Big Bang, physicists believe that there was an initial source of energy that then expanded into the universe and was converted to mass. So there is always a source, and that source has a definite form. Anyone who says that there is only the light and no light bulb, is but only ignorant, and obviously has no idea about the existence of the light bulb. Similarly, if there is an all-pervading divine brilliance, that brilliance must have a source, and that source must have a definite form.

Let's look at the other perspective - Now let's say God has only an all-pervading definite divine form – that is to say God is only "Sakar", and no immanent form. It is essentially saying that there is a light bulb, but no brilliance coming from it. There is no immanent form. That makes it a very unidentifiable concept. If there is no brilliance coming out, how do you understand how bright is the transcendent form of God? For us to know that a light bulb exists, we have to perceive its light. Only transcendent form of God also does not paint the complete picture.

The picture is complete if God exists in Transcendent as well as Immanent form. The definite divine form is His transcendent form, and the brilliance that emanates from Transcendent form is His immanent form. Both the forms are all pervading, but the transcendent form is visible only to those who look for it. Others only see the immanent form. Just as sitting in a room, we may only notice that the room is lighted, but may not ever look for the source of light – the light bulb, and we may never find it since we do not look for it. The transcendent form is the cause and immanent form is the effect – just as light bulb is the cause of light, and light is the effect of light bulb. Lot of religious scriptures do not agree with or understand this concept since they have never looked for a divine transcendent form! They have simply gone ahead and believed that there is this brilliance that we can see and hats all-pervading, and that's it. They try to limit God with their own limited understanding.

Lets for a couple of minutes look at it simply from our own perspective. On a very simplistic plane (not an airplane – a level/surface), let's think of God as an all-pervading brilliance, we cannot see Him, He does not have a definite form, we cannot feel Him, we cannot conceptualize Him, but we want to attain Him and get liberated. How do we do that? What do we meditate upon? Who do we fall in devotional love with? It is a difficult thing to grasp and understand if one wants to progress towards God. It is therefore better to believe in a definite form. Even those who believe that God is formless, meditate on the symbol of Aouhm or a flame or something.... So believing in existence of Transcendent form of God as cause and Immanent form as an effect, is not a wasted belief. If God has a definite divine form, we will attain that form, and it will be more blissful than the immanent form. If God does not have a definite divine form, the belief will help us make quicker progress on spiritual path as we identify more with definitive concepts than abstract concepts. Whereas belief only in Immanent form as with the majority

of the population today, is incomplete as we saw a few minutes ago. So even if we cannot build the faith that God has a definite divine form, believing in definite divine form, is better than not believing in it.

Lastly, in Vachanamrutam, Lord Swaminarayan has given so many examples from Hindu scriptures where God has either listened or spoken or touched. If God was formless, how all that would be possible, He says. So God has a definite divine form – that we will now onwards refer to as transcendent form and the brilliance that spreads out from that form, we will now onwards refer to as immanent form. These two forms exist in all spiritual strata.

Closely associated with the belief of Immanent and Transcendent form in Hinduism, is the concept of “Vaad”s. There are 3 main types of Vaad’s or beliefs – Advait or Monotheism, Dvait or Dualism, and Vishishtavait as special Monotheism (some books translate as special dualism, but the concept is the same). AMPP NarayanMama used to say that divine knowledge is not subject to any such Vaad’s - it is only to explain the underlying principle that Lord Swaminarayan had to use the term “Vishishtaadvait”, as that is the term that is understood in this world. Advaitis believe that liberation is merging with the God and completely losing the identity. They primarily believe in immanent form of God. In other words, most of Nirakar-vadis are also Advaitvadis. Most of the religions that believe only in the immanent form of God, also believe in only one God. Also the roots of the most Niraakarvadi religions today are common. Just a little bit of study of Christianity, Islam and Judaism reveals that all three of them have same angels and prophets. For example, Gabriel as a common Angel. Ismail is a common prophet. The roots for Advaitvadi’s seem common. Dvaitis believe that the soul and God do not merge and remain two separate identities. The religions that believe in transcendent form of God are also mostly Dvait-vadi’s. Vishishtadvaita believe that there is a merger of the soul with God, but the identity is not lost for completely submerged and forgotten. The identity is not lost. But it is forgotten because the bliss is so immense that the soul does not recall its own identity, but it does exist. This concept exists in both believers of immanent form of God and believers of transcendent form of God. So that was a little discussion on Dvait, Advait and Vishishtadvait. Another common thing I wanted to talk about was cause and effect. Before we go there, I remembered one more thing I wanted to talk about.

One common roadblock hit by those who believe that God has only immanent form, is that they cannot distinguish between self-realization or soul-realization and God-realization or in other words, they cannot distinguish between Atma-darshan and Prabhu-darshan. Self-realization is that the soul, through grace and endeavors is able to see itself. God realization is that the soul, through grace and endeavors is able to see God. So Nirakar-vadis or believers of only immanent form of God, cannot distinguish between the brilliance of the soul and brilliance of God right away and get so engrossed in the bliss of the soul itself that they do not progress from there, believing that is the end. The bliss of our own soul could be captivating. When we start meditating, a lot of us first attain realization of the self or soul. That too is liberation – since we become free from the subtle bodies. But that is just a pre-cursor to God-realization or Prabhu-darshan, if one is pursuing that path for liberation – first attain self-realization then move to God-realization. It is a precursor but not a pre-requisite. The simple way taught to us by AMPP NarayanMama, cuts the path short and makes us first memorize the form of God, and then believe our soul to be brilliant and then visualize the Lord in that brilliance. So there is no chance for one to get lost.

Another common concept is that of cause and effect. Let's take a couple of simple examples to understand this. Say we have a desire to eat a sandwich. That desire will make us get up, slice some vegetables, put the bread in toaster, apply butter or margarine, add vegetables, add vegetarian cheese, may be put some chat masala on it, offer it to God and have it. In this entire process – the desire to have a sandwich was the cause, and the actions were the effect. Our room, our home, are all effects of the cause that is “us”. Sunlight is the effect of the Sun who is the cause. We are 5-6 feet tall, and a few 10s of inches in width, but our effect is greater than us – a few thousand square feet. Our effect which is our home, is larger than us. Sun itself is 865,000 miles in diameter, but its effect is all the way out to the Ort cloud 1 light year away, and the deity form of Sun, which is the cause of the Sun that we see, is much smaller in size. So the cause is always smaller or subtler in size than the effect. Secondly more powerful the cause, larger is the effect – map our effect to Sun's effect! Our effect is a few thousand feet, Sun's effect is one light year. This concept of cause and effect exists everywhere and is common across spiritual strata.

We talked about 2-3 concepts - the immanent and transcendent form of God, three types of Vaads, self and God realization, and cause and effect. Let's move on to take a look at the overview of the hierarchy that I have been mentioning for a couple of weeks. There are a couple of other concepts but they will be better understood after we have looked at the hierarchy. So we will talk about those later. But before we move on, I want to share that whenever I mention that there is a hierarchy, or levels in spiritual world, I get indescribable reaction. People look at me strangely and say, but there is only one God. Interestingly, spiritual levels and differences in the powers of deities or angels or prophets, belonging to different levels exists in all religions. It is not so evident as the references are made by-the-way and are not explicitly called out. Some religions explicitly call out these levels and some don't.

For example, Egyptian God Atum is said to have risen from the waters of Chaos, called Nun created all other Egyptian Gods. So Atum created all Egyptian Gods. But Nun again, is another Egyptian God, and Atum was created from Nun. Clearly the creator has greater power than the createe. Createe is not a real word, I just made it up to explain the concept. So there is a hierarchy there. Also, Geb, is said to be the father of Osiris, Isis, Nephthys and Seth, and Horus was son of Isis and Osiris – so there is a lineage hierarchy as well in the Egyptian Gods. Likewise, Greek Gods have a family tree. It is not clearly visible because it is big. I have included links for those, but simply search on Google for “greek gods family tree” and you will find, not one or two but numerous images showing the tree. They do not call it hierarchy, but reading their mythology it is evident that the father is usually more powerful than the son. Interestingly, like Egyptians, Greek also have the God Chaos sitting at the top. I will include links to the slides when I share them. I did not create these things myself. There is a similar Roman God family tree as well, and whoever is interested can research more. So these are the ancient religions of the world, but in present day, while Islam preaches one God, it believes there many are prophets (about 25 prophets) and each prophet was sent to improve the knowledge imparted by the previous one or to re-establish the knowledge imparted by the previous one. So there is a hidden reference to levels. Christians believe in heaven, hell, angels, demons, God, Son of God, Holy Spirit. Underlying is the reference to different levels or areas or entities. Lord Buddha after attaining Nirvana, moved on to attain MahaNirvana. After attaining MahaNirvana he said there was something beyond MahaNirvana

and the he would continue moving forward. Again an underlying concept of levels. So across all religions there is some sense of a hierarchy or a lineage that is depicted. Hinduism is not the only one.

In Hinduism hierarchy is depicted at different levels in different scriptures. I have included one based on Shreemad Bhagwat. Again, if you search on one these levels on the internet, there are a lot of representations that come up. In the slides today, I will also include a link to English translation of Shreemad Bhagwat by Hare Ram Hare Krishna ISCON for those who are interested. But the crux or the summary of whatever is written in Shreemad Bhagwat is already explained by Lord Swaminarayan. Amongst all these hierarchies that are available all over the world, once again, nothing compares to the clarity, completeness and greatness of the one in Swaminarayan philosophy. We will establish some of this along the way, but more interested aspirants can study deeper. However, be forewarned that there are so many belief systems, that studying each and every one would take a lifetime. The same effort will be well-spent in endeavors to see God instead. Because Swaminarayan philosophy as already encompassed other hierarchies described by other belief systems.

Let's look at the overview of the hierarchy in Swaminarayan philosophy. Those on Webex can see the chart that I have created. Those not on Webex, I will speak to it as much as I can. Also the picture is showing up very small on Webex. I hope people are able to read it. The chart shows the "Sthiti" avastha or the phase of operation, from the three phases of generation, operation, destruction.

Along the way, as we continue forward and understanding the hierarchy and the different levels and the deities on those different levels, we will be using the example of corporate world as we move through the hierarchy but for now, let's remember that there is a corporate world up there. I have the picture in the slides, but it is small, so I have also uploaded a PDF and hopefully that will give a better legibility. I will share the PDF as well, after our interaction today.

Right at the bottom we have the trinity of Brahma-Vishnu-Mahesh who govern the 14 worlds or 14 Loks. They worship Vairaj Purush – also called Mahavishnu. The one who sleeps on a giant serpent. Vairaj Purush worships three Ahankars – Sattva, Rajas & Tamas – also known as Aniruddha, Pradyumna and Sankarshan. They in turn worship Mahattattva. Mahattattva is born from conjugation of Pradhan Purush and Pradhan Prakruti/Maya, who are in turn born from conjugation of Mul Purush and Mul Prakruti/Maya. Mulpurush worships the transcendent form on Vasuden Brahman. Vasudev Brahman worships immanent form of Mul Akshar and Mul Akshar worships immanent form on Lord Swaminarayan. So we already started using the concept of transcendent form and immanent form that we built earlier today.

In Vachanamrutam and Bapashreeni Vaato, there are Kotis or categories defined. On the left hand side, there is a big curly bracket going from the bottom all the way up to Pradhan Purush and Prakruti - this is what is referred to as Jeev-koti, Mulpurush is the Ishwar Koti, Vasudev Brahman is Brahma koti and Mul Akshar is the Akshar koti. So broadly there are 4 distinct categories.

A little more to the left are two ranges. First going from bottom all the way up to MulMaya. This is the perishable, instable world with distinction of body and soul. Let's understand each of these terms. The physical world that gets created from Mul-Purush and MulMaya, eventually gets destroyed, merges

back into MulMaya, who in turn merges back with MulPurush. So that world is perishable. It is unstable because it is in constant change and is subject to different states and phases. In last 4 weeks, we have understood that there we are souls and we are given a body. So in humans there is a distinction of body and soul. Likewise, all the way up to Mul-Maya, there is a distinction of body and soul. So there is a body of MulMaya and a Soul of MulMaya, there is a body of Pradhan Purush and soul of Pradhan Purush that resides in that body, and so on. Beyond Mul-Maya that distinction goes away and it is the soul itself that exists in the definite divine form. So whatever is that divine material, that material is embodied in a definite form. There is no other material or elements forming the bodies of the entities MulPurush and above. As a result, there is no gender distinction as well. Also beyond MulMaya, the world is not perishable, it is stable and never gets destroyed. MulPurush does not merge into anybody and does not get destroyed. Same with Vasudev Brahman and Mul Akshar.

Further to the left is the range from bottom all the way up to MulPurush, that has stages of expansion and contraction. One might say that MulPurush does not expand, but MulMaya emerges from MulPurush, unites with MulPurush, and the creation comes into existence, so eventually it is expansion of MulPurush.

So this is the hierarchy at a high level. I will share this so that we can refer to it during subsequent interactions. So we talked about perishable and unperishable world, we talked about soul and body distinction, we talked about evolution and contraction. There are a few more thoughts on this -

- Each higher stratum is cause of and subtle than the lower stratum. For example, Vairaj Purush is cause of Brahma-Vishnu-Mahesh, Mahattattva is the cause of 3 Ahankars,
- Secondly there are infinite crores or billions of each stratum underneath one higher level entity. So under one Vairaj Purush, there could be infinite billions of Brahma-Vishnu-Mahesh, each governing their own worlds. It is one-to-many relationship top-down, but for the sake of simplicity, we have only shown one. It is a huge world up there that we cannot see or perceive. In some cases there is awareness about those, sometimes there is not. For example, an SVP may hide existence of an EVP or a person running the branch of a company in a country may hide the existence of a real CEO someplace else. So in some cases, the hierarchy is known to all and sometimes it is not known to all in different strata.
- Thirdly, AMPP NarayanMama used to say that the deities from any level – be it in the perishable or unperishable category –all the way up to Mul Akshar, if they want to move to next level, they have to take a human being level birth. To understand this, let's take an example of mountain climbing. If we have climbed a peak, and we want to climb another higher peak, we first have to climb down, before we can climb up again. It is a similar concept, if we want to progress to any higher level, we first have to take a human birth.

I am sure those on Webex have noticed stages on right hand side. In subsequent Satsangs, we will go into the details of each stage. The reason for breaking down the hierarchy in stages is for better understanding and representation. There is no other reason. When I had created this in my late teens, early twenties, I had taken a top down approach – so Stage 1 is at the top, however, since we have started a bottom-up approach to derive cross-references to establish credibility, we will start our

journey from Stage 6 and go upwards to 5, 4, 3, 2, & 1 – we will count down. I wanted to reverse the numbering, but honestly, did not get chance to do so. Also, another thing I want to highlight is that end of perishable world will also be an end of most of the cross-references. There are references in Shreemad Bhagwat for stage 6 & 5. There lot of mapping from some religions of present day and past, mostly to Stage 6. Some enlightened ones have gone beyond Stage 6, onto Stage 5& 4. I have seen a couple of fleeting references to stage 3 – and those are merely references, nothing much. Along the way we will talk about them as well as we go into the details of the deities at each stratum.

Here's what I am thinking for next few weeks. We will have 1-2 Satsang each on Stage 6 & 5. We will have 1-2 Satsang for Stage 4 and phase of Creation and phase of Destruction. As I mentioned this is a picture of phase of Operation. One Satsang for Stage 3 & 2 and one Satsang for Stage 1. So that is anywhere from 5-8 weeks. Additionally, if there are other topics of interest that we want to touch upon, or Q&A Satsangs, we may take a couple of more weeks. So we are talking about 5-10 weeks and we will know better as we approach Stage 3.

Before we wrap up today, there are two additional common concepts that I wanted to talk about. And I wanted to talk about them, after discussing the outline of the Hierarchy. In the past weeks, we have made a couple of references to three attributes – Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. These start from Mul-Maya. Shreeji Maharaj has called Mul-maya “Guna-samya”, meaning all three attributes are in a harmony and balance. The state associated with Mul-Maya, and effect of Mul-Maya is the samyaavastha, because all three attributes are balanced. Every entity underneath Mul-Maya is affected by these three attributes. Some have one predominant over the other, whereas some have all of them in varying forms all the time – like us humans. Three attributes may be mixed into one another, creating 9 kinds – Pure Sattva, Rajasik Sattva, Tamasic Sattva, Saatvik Rajas, Pure Rajas, Tamasik Rajas, Sattvik Tamas, Rajasik Tamas and pure Tamas. Mulpurush and Stages 3, 2 & 1 are beyond the three attributes and are called Gunaateet. There is a lot of information available on the web on the three attributes. I have included some slides on characteristics of each attribute and have also included the links to those. Here is one slide that talks about the characteristics and the related adjectives and some examples. There is a second picture here talking about more characteristics. So there is a wealth of information available around these three attributes on the web.

During our entire day, we are governed by the fluctuations in these attributes. Our responses, behavior, thoughts, actions, are all governed by the prevailing attribute. To achieve ultimate liberation the attributes must first be balanced, and then one must get above and beyond the attributes – become Gunaateet. So how does one wear off the effects of these attributes? First is to cultivate an inner awareness to observe our own thoughts. All spiritually inclined are gifted with a keen power of observation – of others and of self. So we should observe ourselves and notice our own behavioral patterns when each attribute is prevailing. How do I behave and think when Sattva is prevailing? Or what did I do when I was feeling really calm and peaceful the other day? How did I deal with situation when I was calm and peaceful and how did I deal with a similar situation when I was not calm and peaceful? How can I bridge the gap between these two responses on mine. I am going to go to a completely different example and talk about Steven Covey's “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.”

There is one habit that has really helped me manage my responses irrespective of the prevailing attribute is, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." So always put yourself in the shoes of others and try to look at it from their perspective before responding to the situation or conversation just based on what is going on in our mind and the attribute that is prevailing. If we practice that in our day-to-day life, it really helps overcome the effects of attributes in the initial stages. Later on, a continuous practice of looking at a situation as a third party, being completely detached, diet control, and mind control helps. But as a starter, we can seek to first understand, then to be understood.

The last common concept I wanted to touch upon today was the dual nature of existence. There is duality at every level and this duality can be viewed as two extremes of a swinging pendulum. Where there is good there is evil, life & death, joy & sorrow, love & hate. Not only the situations and emotions are dual but this duality pervades at a much larger scale. Take for example a star - A Star throughout its life, fights with opposing forces – the pulling gravitational force and the pushing nuclear energy. There is a constant battle going on inside the star – just as there is a constant battle going on inside our minds and hearts between good and bad. In the larger universe, dark matter binds the galaxies together and dark energy pushes them apart. So this duality is visible even in the larger physical world, however, the paradigms of the duality are different and may be even their resolution is different, or overcoming of the duality is different. For liberation, the pendulum needs to stop swinging between the extremes, and become stable at one central point. We need to maintain that equilibrium between the duals and the attributes, to progress on spiritual path. Otherwise, we will keep being pulled and pushed throughout our lives. If we want to get out, we first have to get over the pull and push. We need to develop the internal resilience to not get pulled and pushed by the duals or by the attributes. That was the last concept I wanted to talk about.

Today was a little bit of many concepts. They may not seem fit together in today's conversation, but they will really help us in our journey further. For example after understanding of immanent and transcendent form, we right away applied it when we were talking about the hierarchy. We can think of today's interaction as a glossary of concepts. Thank you to the Satsang for patiently helping build this foundation. With that, lets wrap up our today's Satsang. Next week, actually next-to-next week, we will begin our journey with Stage 6. Jai Swaminarayan to everyone.