

Divinity: Matter & Energy forms of reality

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Many people seriously begin to read some spiritual texts and almost bring the noble intention to an end very soon. This is simply because it is one of the most confusing text to go through. Quite often we come up with passages such as “I am in everything but nothing is in me” or “I am not to be found anywhere but am everywhere”. For a modern convent educated rational mind this is too much to handle and a convincing reason to dismiss the literature as both illogical and uninteresting. In fact a good chunk of the spiritual literature in India has this pattern of describing divinity. We need not only an effort to make a right understanding of such frameworks but also guidance from a competent person. It is for this reason that the role of a Guru is very much emphasized once a person decides to seriously embark on a spiritual journey.

The notion of matter & energy

Let us think about electricity as an entity. In our modern living almost everything requires electricity. The oven in the kitchen, the water heater in the bathroom, the entertainment gadgets in the living room, the AC in the bed room, the handheld devices that we use, the locomotive that pulls the train, the traffic signal on the road etc. This is an endless list. If you ask, “Can you find or see electricity in any of these?”, the answer ought to be no. However, we may “experience” the presence of electricity because we see these gadgets working and when there is a power cut all these gadgets come to a grinding halt. Similarly if we ask does all these gadgets have electricity in them, the answer is again no, simply because these gadgets are merely the conduit through which electricity passes. When electricity passes through these gadgets, some work gets done.

Let us ask a third question. Is the fan, TV and the traffic signal reside in electricity, the answer is again no. Electricity by itself does not hold anything in itself. At most we can say it is a store house of energy. Another question of interest is “Will the gadgets be able to influence electricity?”. Again the answer is no. Perhaps, the vice versa is possible. For instance, the amount of electricity that passes through a fan will affect the speed of rotation of the blades and the amount of air it is likely to blow into the room.

What do we infer from these? There are two aspects of reality called matter and energy (or field). While matter is directly perceptible, can have forms, shapes and attributes, the energy is devoid of all these. The only way we know the existence of energy is through the “experience or feel” of it in some form. In order to experience energy in some form, the medium of matter is inevitable.

Our understanding of Divinity and its role and relationship to us closely resembles that of the above discussions pertaining to matter and energy. In order to provide a meaningful understanding of this, Shri Krishna has devoted several *ślokas* in the *Gītā*. Let us look at two of them from chapter 9 of the *Gītā*.

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Divinity – The Cosmic Energy

We all know that the living entities are in some sense connected with the Divinity. However, we do not seem to have some working understanding of this. Krishna provides this with some examples. Krishna says, “Behold and deeply understand (*paśya*) the great power and splendor of mine (*me yogam-aiśvaram*). I am (*mamātmā*) the primordial source and creator of the entire living entities (*bhūta-bhāvanah*). I am also the maintainer, nourisher and supporter of all living beings (*bhūta-bhṛt*). However neither the living beings abide in me (*na ca mat-sthāni bhūtāni*) nor they influence or materially affect me (*na ca bhūta-sthaḥ*).”

न च मत्स्थानि भूतानि पश्य मे योगमैश्वरम् ।
भूतभृन्न च भूतस्थो ममात्मा भूतभावनः ॥ 9.05

na ca mat-sthāni bhūtāni paśya me yogam-aiśvaram
bhūta-bhṛnna ca bhūta-stho mamātmā bhūta-bhāvanah

This *śloka* brings out the idea that divinity is the fundamental source of energy (the cosmic energy), which is the basis for all forms of creation and sustenance of all living beings. Moreover, it is also the source for all activities that get done through the created beings. In the previous example of matter and energy we did not think about the possibility of creation of all the gadgets mentioned. However, it is obvious that matter is created only out of energy. This is what the modern concept of law of conservation of energy postulates. This is why Shri Krishna says that the Lord is the creator, the nourisher and supporter of all beings. Also for reasons already mentioned in the matter – energy example, all the seemingly confusing statements and viewpoints expressed in the *śloka* fall in place.

Shri Krishna brings out a nice metaphor to explain how the living beings are connected to the Divinity. Know the truth to be thus (*ity-upadhāraya*). Just as (*yathā*) the mighty & great (*mahān*) wind (*vāyuḥ*) is ever present (*nityaṃ sthitaḥ*) in the open space (*ākāśaḥ*) and has completely spread and occupied everywhere (*sarvatragaḥ*), in the same manner (*tathā*) this entire universe of living beings (*sarvāṇi bhūtāni*) is resident in Me (*mat-sthāni*).

यथाकाशस्थितो नित्यं वायुः सर्वत्रगो महान् ।
तथा सर्वाणि भूतानि मत्स्थानीत्युपधारय ॥ 9.06

yathākāśasthito nityaṃ vāyuḥ sarvatrago mahān
tathā sarvāṇi bhūtāni mat-sthānīty-upadhāraya

Think of a vast open space of say 1 million cubic feet. Is it possible for us to say that the air will occupy only a small part (say 10,000 cubic feet) and the rest is nothingness? As much as is the space, the air will occupy and pervade everything that is part of the space. Further, there is nothing like a situation in which we say the space will be occupied by air until December 31, 2040 and after that air will not be available in the space. This is an everlasting phenomenon as long as the space exists. This is the relationship between Divinity and the living beings. As long as the living beings exist in a manifested form in the Universe (as matter), the Divinity not only plays a causal role to create them but also pervades through them (as energy). Since the entire matter comes out of the cosmic energy, they become part of the cosmic energy itself in that sense.

Reality - The subtle aspect

What is the use of this discussion for us? Are we any better or wiser with this perspective? The notion that God is a remote entity available somewhere and not in our reach is squarely challenged by this perspective. This notion of remoteness of Divinity is an outcome of our predominant approach of using “matter” as the means for understanding and accepting reality. This is similar to thinking that we have money only when we possess bundles of cash. In an era of digital cash, literally money is out in the ether, suspended in microwave form and all that we need is a handheld device with wi-fi capability to catch the cash and put it to use in the way we want using some app such as Patym. In a similar fashion, once we are able to see the enabling and fundamental role of cosmic energy as the ultimate manifestation of divinity, our world view changes. Our ideas about the relationship between *Jīvā – Jagat – Īśvara* will change.

The modern educational paradigm repeatedly coaches us to accept only those that can be seen and verified. “Seeing is believing” is not necessarily a very robust methodology for understanding the reality. It severely limits our perception and understanding of reality. We need to appreciate that the subtle “energy” could be far more fundamental and profound in our understanding of “reality”. In some ways, the matter and energy aspects of the divinity is described as “sat” and “chit” in our spiritual literature and the Lord is none other than *Sacchidānanda*.