

Samudra Manthan

The Churning of the Ocean (Samudra Manthan) is not just a mythological story; it holds a deep spiritual meaning and supreme truth from the perspective of Advaita Vedanta."

Samudra Manthan: The Supreme Advaita Meaning

The story of Samudra Manthan describes how the Devas (gods) and Asuras (demons) churned the Ocean of Milk for the sake of Amrita (the nectar of immortality). When viewed through the lens of **Advaita**, this story stands as a symbol for our internal spiritual journey and the quest for Self-knowledge (**Atma-Jnana**).

1. The Ocean of Milk (Kshira Sagara) – The Inner Self:

- **Literal Meaning:** The Ocean of Milk is limitless, pure, and calm. Many treasures are hidden in its depths.
- **Supreme Meaning:** In Advaita, the Ocean of Milk represents our **Inner Self (Antaratma)** or the pure mind (**Chitta**). It is the abode of infinite bliss, knowledge, and peace, though currently covered by the veil of ignorance. We must explore this internal state of purity.

2. Devas and Asuras – Virtuous and Vicious Qualities:

- **Literal Meaning:** Devas represent good qualities and meritorious deeds. Asuras represent bad qualities, ego, and ignorance. In the story, they work together for Amrita.
- **Supreme Meaning:** Devas and Asuras represent the auspicious (Divine) and inauspicious (Demonic) qualities within us. To attain knowledge (Amrita), we must coordinate these two forces. This internal coordination is inevitable on the journey toward liberation.

3. Mount Mandara – Stabilizing the Mind:

- **Literal Meaning:** Mount Mandara is the churning rod used to churn the ocean.
- **Supreme Meaning:** This symbolizes the **stability of the mind** and meditation. The mind must be as steady and unmoving as a mountain; only then is internal churning possible. Self-knowledge is impossible without a focused and steady mind.

4. Vasuki – Breath (Prana) and Desires:

- **Literal Meaning:** The serpent Vasuki was used as the rope to churn the ocean. The Devas held the head, and the Asuras held the tail. Vasuki also exhaled poison.
- **Supreme Meaning:** Vasuki represents our **Life Force (Prana/Breath)** and our **Desires**.
 - **Breath:** Controlling the breath (**Pranayama**) is key to meditation and stabilizing the mind.
 - **Desires:** Desires are poisonous like a serpent; they cause us suffering. It is necessary to keep them under control. Both the auspicious and inauspicious forces within us use the breath and desires to pull toward their respective goals.

5. Kurma Avatara (Vishnu) – Control of Mind and Protection of Dharma:

- **Literal Meaning:** When Mount Mandara began to sink into the ocean, Vishnu took the form of a tortoise (**Kurma**) to support it on his back and provide stability.
- **Supreme Meaning:** This represents the **supportive power of the Supreme Soul** and Dharma. During our spiritual journey, when our mind wavers and loses stability in meditation, the Divine power (in the form of a Guru or inner wisdom) stands by us. This indicates that Divine Grace is necessary for **Chitta-Vritti-Nirodha**—stopping the agitations of the mind and making it steady.

6. Poison (Halahala) – Hardships in the Spiritual Journey:

- **Literal Meaning:** When the churning began, the first thing to emerge was the terrifying poison called Halahala. Lord Shiva drank it to save the world.
- **Supreme Meaning:** In our spiritual journey, while meditating or seeking Self-knowledge, our internal impurities, the tendencies (**Vasanas**) of past karmas, attachments, hatred, and negative thoughts accumulated due to ignorance emerge first. These are like poison; they cause us pain. Here, Shiva represents **sacrifice, dispassion (Vairagya)**, and the internal power that accepts these impurities with patience to clear the path for Self-knowledge. Amrita cannot be attained without overcoming these hardships.

7. Amrita – Self-Knowledge and Liberation:

- **Literal Meaning:** Finally, after the churning was complete, Amrita emerged, and Mohini (Vishnu) distributed it to the Devas.
- **Supreme Meaning:** Amrita represents **Self-Knowledge (Atma-Jnana)**, the experience of Brahman, and **Moksha**. This nectar is attained only through constant practice (churning) by overcoming ego, desires, ignorance, and internal impurities. When this Amrita is attained, the being gains eternal bliss and freedom from the cycle of birth and death.

Conclusion

Samudra Manthan is not just a mythological tale. From an Advaitic perspective, it is a powerful metaphor for our internal spiritual journey from ignorance to knowledge. When we steady our mind (Mount Mandara), control our breath (Vasuki), coordinate our inner qualities (Devas/Asuras), and overcome the hardships of the journey (Halahala), we finally attain the divine fruit of Self-knowledge (Amrita). Through this knowledge, the being realizes their true nature as **Brahman** and attains eternal bliss and liberation.

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