

5 Devi Atharvashirsha :

अथर्ववेदीय देव्यथर्वशीर्ष *atharvavedīya devyatharvaśīrṣa*

This sukta from Atharvaveda is related to (in fact it borrows from) Rigveda, the mantras 1 to 8 of 125th sukta of 10th Adhyaya of the 10th Mandala. This sukta is a link between philosophy (दर्शन *darśana*) and techniques (तन्त्र *tantra*). Yogic techniques do not go very far without proper philosophy.

This sukta is considered to be very important in Atharvaveda. It is a tradition to recite this sukta before Durgasaptashati. It gives a rare insight into some of the deep concepts in Tantra and as such many teachers would not explain this sukta easily.

5.1 Text Translation and explanation :

ॐ सर्वे वै देवा देवीमुपतस्थुः कासि त्वं महादेवीति ॥ १ ॥ *Om̐ sarve vai devā devīmupatasthuh kāsī tvam mahādevīti || 1 ||*

All the gods, going near the Goddess, asked "who are you, O mighty Goddess?"

साब्रवीत् अहं ब्रह्मस्वरूपिणी ।
मत्तः प्रकृतिपुरुषात्मकं जगत् ।
शून्यं चाशून्यं च ॥ २ ॥

*sābravīt ahaṃ brahmasvarūpiṇī |
mattah prakṛtipuruṣātmakam jagat |
śūnyam cāśūnyam ca || 2 ||*

She said : I am an aspect o Brahma. From me this Universe, in form of Prakruti and Purush, is generated; which is both void and non-void.

The Universe is existing or not existing depending upon your view point or plane of reference or level of reality. We have already explained Prakruti and Purush.

*अहमानन्दानानन्दौ । अहम् विज्ञानाविज्ञाने । अहं ब्रह्माब्रह्मणी वेदितव्ये ।
अहं पञ्चभूतान्यपञ्चभूतानि । अहमखिलं जगत् ॥ ३ ॥*

*ahamānandānānandau | aham vijñānāvijñāne | ahaṃ brahmābrahmaṇī
veditavye |
ahaṃ pañcabhūtānyapañcabhūtāni | ahamakhilam jagat || 3 ||*

I am both bliss and non-bliss. I am knowledge and non-knowledge. I am brahma and non-brahma. The five primordial principles and non-principles is myself. I am the whole percieved Universe.

Doubt : Bliss and non-bliss, or knowledge/non-knowledge are understanable, but saying brahma/non-brahma does not make sense.

Reply : Remember that Devi is an inseparable part of the Attributeless Paramatma. She is beyond the Creation as indicated by Brahma or the non-manifest state called Abrahma.

*वेदोऽहमवेदोऽहम् । विद्याहम् अविद्याहम् ।
अजाहमनजाहम् । तिर्यक्चाहम् ॥ ४ ॥*

*vedo'hamavedo'ham | vidyāham avidyāham |
ajāhamanajāham | tiryakcāham || 4 ||*

I am Veda (knowledge about brahma) and non-knowledge. I am learning and ignorance. I am unborn and also born. I am up, down and crosswards.

The purport of these mantras is that Devi is beyond the usual characterization.

*अहं रुद्रेभिर्वसुभिश्चरामि । अहमादित्यैरुत विश्वदेवैः ।
अहं मित्रावरुणोभा विभर्मि । अहमिन्द्राग्नी अहमश्विनोभा ॥ ५ ॥*

*ahaṃ rudrebhirvasubhiścarāmi | ahamādityairuta viśvadevaiḥ |
ahaṃ mitrāvaruṇobhā bibharmi | ahaminḍrāgnī ahamaśvinobhā || 5 ||*

I move about in form of Rudra and Vasu. I move about as Aditya and All-gods. I sustain Mitra, Varuna, Indra, Agni and both the Ashvinas.

अहं सोमं त्वष्टारं पूषणं भगं दधामि ।
अहं विष्णुमुरुक्रमं ब्रह्माणमुत प्रजापतिं दधामि ॥ ६ ॥

aham somam tvaṣṭāraṃ pūṣaṇaṃ bhagaṃ dadhāmi |
aham viṣṇumurukramam brahmāṇamuta prajāpatiṃ dadhāmi || 6 ||

I convey Soma, Tvasta, Pusha and Bhaga. I bring Vishnu with wide footsteps, Brahma and Prajapati.

अहं दधामि द्रविणं हविष्मते सुप्राव्ये यजमानाय सुन्वते । अहं राष्ट्री संगमनी
वसूनां चिकितुषी प्रथमा यज्ञियानाम् ।
अहं सुवे पितरमस्य मूर्द्धन्मम योनिरप्स्वन्तः समुद्रे ।
य एवं वेद । स देवीं सम्पदमाप्नोति ॥ ७ ॥

aham dadhāmi draviṇaṃ haviṣmate suprāvye yajamānāya sunvate |
aham rāṣṭrī saṃgamanī vasūnāṃ cikituṣī prathamā yajñiyānām |
aham suve pitaramasya mūrdhānmama yonirapsvantah samudre |
ya evaṃ veda | sa devīṃ sampadamāpnoti || 7 ||

I bring Wealth with Havi for a yajaman who gives the best Havi to gods and effuses Soma. I am the Empress of this whole Universe. I give wealth to worshippers. I am the observer and the first amongst those worth worshipping. I create on myself (as basis of all) the primordial elements (like Akash etc.) My abode is in the Waters of Samudra (the consciousness of self awareness). One who knows this obtains divine wealth.

त देवा अब्रुवन् नमो देव्यै महादेव्यै शिवायै सततं नमः ।
नमः प्रकृत्यै भद्रायै नियताः स्म ताम् ॥ ८ ॥

ta devā abruvan namo devyai mahādevyai śivāyai satataṃ namaḥ |
namaḥ prakṛtyai bhadrayai niyatāḥ sma tām || 8 ||

Then the gods said : Namaskars to the goddess, the great goddess. namaskars always to the goddess who is beneficial to all. Namaskars to the goddess who is the Nature and graceful. We, followers of rules, pay our respects to her.

तमग्निवर्णां तपसा ज्वलन्तीं वैरोचनीं कर्मफलेषु जुष्टाम् ।
दुर्गां देवीं शरणं प्रपद्यामहेऽसुरान्नाशयित्र्यै ते नमः ॥ ९ ॥

tamagnivarṇāṃ tapasā jvalantīṃ vairocanīṃ karmaphaleṣu juṣṭām |
durgāṃ devīṃ śaraṇaṃ prapadyāmahe'surānnāśayitryai te namaḥ || 9 ||

She, with colour of Agni, shining with knowledge, bright, being worshipped

to obtain fruits of actions, we are in her refuge. O Devi, destroyer of Asura, namaskars to you.

देवीं वाचमजनयन्त देवास्तां विश्वरूपाः पशवो वदन्ति ।
सा नो मन्द्रेष्मूर्जं दुहाना धेनुवाग्स्मानुप सुष्टुतैतु ॥ १० ॥

devīm vācamajanayanta devāstāṃ viśvarupāḥ paśavo vadanti |
sā no mandreṣmūrjaṃ duhānā dhenuvāgsmānupa suṣṭutaitu || 10 ||

The gods (of the form of Prana) created the shining Vak, which is spoken by animals of all types. She, like a Kamadhenu, pleasure-giving, giving food and strength, Vak be satisfied by our prayers and come near us.

All the living creatures have their brains working with help of the Vak. Vak gives food — all kinds of perceptions, pleasure — bliss and strength — intelligence.

कालरात्रीं ब्रह्मस्तुतां वैष्णवीं स्कन्दमातरं ।
सरस्वतीमदितिं दक्षदुहितरं नमामः पावना शिवाम् ॥ ११ ॥

kālarātrīm brahmastutāṃ vaiṣṇavīm skandamātaram |
sarasvatīm aditīm dakṣaduhitaram namāmaḥ pāvanā śivām || 11 ||

To the Night in form of Time, the power of Vishnu, prayed by Vedas, mother of Skanda (Parvati, Shivashakti), Sarasvati (Brahmashakti), mother of gods Aditi, and daughter of Daksha (Sati), destroyer of sins, beneficial Bhagvati, we convey our namaskars.

महालक्ष्म्यै च विद्महे सर्वशक्त्यै धीमहि ।
तन्नो देवी प्रचोदयात् ॥ १२ ॥

mahālakṣmyai ca vidmahe sarvaśaktyai dhīmahi |
tanno devī pracodayāt || 12 ||

We know the Mahalaxmi and meditate on her, the all-powerful one. May that goddess direct us in [correct] direction.

अदितिर्हाजनिष्ट दक्ष या दुहिता तव ।
तां देवा अन्वजायन्त भद्रा अमृतबन्धवः ॥ १३ ॥

aditirhyajanīṣṭa dakṣa yā duhitā tava |
tāṃ devā anvajāyanta bhadrā amṛtabandhavaḥ || 13 ||

O daksha, your daughter Aditi gave birth to immortal gods, worth praying.

कामो योनिः कमला वज्रपाणिर्गुहा हसा मातरिश्वाभ्रमिन्द्रः ।
पुनर्गुहा सकला मायया च पुरुच्यैषा विश्वमातादितिविद्योम् ॥ १४ ॥

*kāmo yoniḥ kamalā vajrapānirguhā hasā mātariśvābhramindrah |
punarguhā sakalā māyayā cā purucyaiṣā viśvamātāditiṣṭyom || 14 ||*

काम क, योनि ए, कमला ई, वज्रपाणि ल, गुहा ह्रीं, ह, स, मातरिश्वा क, अभ्र ह, इन्द्र ल, ह्रीं, स, क, ल, माया ह्रीं, these are the root knowledge about the Mother of the whole universe and an aspect of brahma.

The mantra gives the following matras for meditation : कएईलह्रीं, हसकहलह्रीं, सकलह्रीं, *ka·eīlahrīm, hasakahalahrīm, sakalahrīm,*

This is a very important mantra for Tantra. It is said to have six types of meanings : भावार्थ, वाच्यार्थ सम्प्रदायार्थ, कौलिकार्थ, रहस्यार्थ, तत्त्वार्थ

bhāvārtha, vācyārtha sampradāyārtha, kaulikārtha, rahasyārtha, tatvārtha.

Some commentators show even more meanings to the level of meaning of individual letter.

एषाऽऽत्मशक्तिः । एषा विश्वमोहिनी । पाशङ्कुशधनुर्वाणधरा ।

एषा श्रीमहाविद्या । य एव वेद स शोकं तरति ॥ १५ ॥

*eṣā' 'tmaśaktiḥ | eṣā viśvamohinī | pāśaṅkuśadhanurbāṇadharā |
eṣā śrīmahāvidyā | ya eva veda sa śokam tarati || 15 ||*

She is the power of Paramatma. She is the one to bewitch all. She puts on tongs, Ankusha, bow and arrows. She is Shri MahaVidya. One who knows this well overcomes sadness.

नमस्ते अस्तु भगवति मातरस्मान् पाहि सर्वतः ॥ १६ ॥

namaste astu bhagavati mātaramsmān pāhi sarvataḥ || 16 ||

O Bhagavati, these namaskars to you. O mother, protect us in all ways.

सैषाष्टौ वसवः । सैषैकादश रुद्राः । सैषा द्वादशादित्याः ।

सैषा विश्वेदेवाः सोमपा असोमपाः च । सैषा यातुधाना असुरा रक्षांसि पिशाचा यक्षाः सिद्धाः ।

सैषा सत्वरजतमसांसि ।

सैषा ब्रह्माविष्णुरुद्ररूपिणी । सैषा प्रजापतीन्द्रमनवः

सैषा ग्रहनक्षत्रज्योतिः ।

सैषा कलाकाष्ठादिकालरूपिणी । तामहं प्रणोमि नित्यम् ।

पापापहारिणीं देवीं भक्तिमुक्तिप्रदायिनीम् ।

अनन्तां विजयां शुद्धां शरण्यां शिवदां शिवाम् ॥ १७ ॥

saiṣāṣṭau vasavaḥ | saiṣaikādaśa rudrāḥ | saiṣā dvādaśādityāḥ |

*saiṣā viśvedevāḥ somapā asomapāḥ ca | saiṣā yātudhānā asurā rakṣāṃsi
piśācā yakṣāḥ siddhāḥ |
saiṣā satvarajatamasāṃsi |
saiṣā brahmāviṣṇurudrarūpiṇī | saiṣā prajāpatīndramanavaḥ
saiṣā grahanakṣatrajyotiḥ |
saiṣā kalākāṣṭhādikālarūpiṇī | tāmahaṃ praṇomi nityam |
pāpāpahāriṇīm devīm bhuktimuktipradāyinīm |
anantām vijayām śuddhām śaraṇyām śivadām śivām || 17 ||*

She is these eight vasus. She is the eleven Rudras. She is the twelve Adityas. She is the All-gods — drinking Soma or non-drinking. She is Yatudhan, Rakshahas, Asuras, Pishachas, Yakshas and Siddhas. She is Satva, Rajas and Tamas. She is Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra. She is Prajapati, Indra and Manu. She is the planets, stars and constellations. She is various measures of Time. She is destroyer of sins, giver of both enjoyment and Moksha, without end, giving victory [over distractions of Samsar], pure, worth taking refuge, giver of peace, peace personified, we pray to her.

In Vedic texts two types of gods are shown — those who drink Soma, सोमपा somapā and those who drink ghee, घृतपा ghr̥tapā. The first type of gods represent various regions and activities of our brain while in deep meditation, while the second type of gods denote regions and activities of brain while one is doing some mental activity.

Yatudhan are a kind of demons.

वियदीकारसंयुक्तं वीतिहोत्रसमन्वितम् ।
अर्धेन्दुलसितं देव्या बीजं सर्वार्थसाधकम् ॥ १८ ॥

*viyadīkārasamyuktam vītihotrasamanvitam |
ardhendulasitam devyā bījaṃ sarvārthasādhakam || 18 ||*

एवमेकाक्षरं ब्रह्म यतयः शुद्धचेतसः ।
ध्यायन्ति परमानन्दमया ज्ञानाम्बुराशयः ॥ १९ ॥

*evamekākṣaram brahma yatayaḥ śuddhacetasaḥ |
dhyāyanti paramāṇdamayā jñānāmburāśayaḥ || 19 ||*

Akash means ह, with ई-syllable, Agni र, ॐ is the Bijamantra (ह्रीं) for the goddess. It is able to satisfy all desires. Those Yogis whose mind is pure, meditate on this one syllable Brahma, they are having extreme happiness and like an ocean of knowledge.

वाङ्मयाया ब्रह्मसूस्तस्मात् षष्ठं वक्त्रसमन्वितम् ।

सूर्योऽवामश्रोत्रविन्दुसंयुक्तष्टात्तृतीयकः ॥
 नारायणेन संमिश्रो वायुश्चाधरयुक् ततः ।
 विद्ये नवार्णकोऽर्णः स्यान्महदानन्ददायकः ॥ २० ॥

vānīmāyā brahmasūstasmāt ṣaṣṭham vaktrasamanvitam |
sūryo'vāmaśrotrabindusamyuktaṣṭātrtīyakah ||
nārāyaṇena sammiśro vāyuścādharayuk tataḥ |
vicce navārṇako'rṇaḥ syānmahadānandadāyakah || 20 ||

Vak ऐं, Maya ह्रीं, Brahmas or Kama क्लीं, the sixth consonant च with Vaktra आ, Surya म, the right ear उ, and Bindu अं, the third from ट्, i.e. ड, with Narayana आ, Vayu य, with lips ऐ, and विद्ये – this नवार्ण mantra gives pleasure (bliss), and nearness to Brahma to the meditator.

ऐं ह्रीं क्लीं चामुंडायै विद्ये ।

The meaning of this mantra is O Sarasvati, O Laxmi, O Kali, all of us pray to you to obtain the realization of Brahma. O Chandika, here are namaskars to you. Please remove the tight knot of this bond in form of Ignorance and release me from Samsar.

हृत्पुण्डरीकमध्यस्थां प्रातःसूर्यसमप्रभाम् ।
 पाशङ्कुशधरां सौम्यां वरदाभयहस्तकाम् ॥
 त्रिनेत्रां रक्तवसनां भक्तकामदुधां भजे ॥ २१ ॥

hrtpuṇḍarīkamadhyasthām prātaḥsūryasamaprabhām |
pāśaṅkuśadharām saumyām varadābhayahastakām ||
trinetrām raktavasanām bhaktakāmadudhām bhaje || 21 ||

I worship the goddess staying in the middle of my Self (or mind), bright as the morning Sun, holding tongs and Ankusha, with beautiful looks, with the hand in Varad (benefactory) and Abhaya (protecting) mudra, with three eyes, with red cloths and who satisfies the desires of her worshippers.

Trinetra – one having three eyes; eyes denote the source of information or knowledge; because it is Vak which makes me know the world, while I am awake, asleep or dreaming, Vak has three eyes, one for each state of mine. Or, some interpret the states referred as awake, asleep and meditating, the Third eye corresponding to the meditative state.

with red cloths – cloths are the outer covering; the outer layer of Vak is the activity that goes on during the waking state and it is denoted by the red colour, which is a standard colour code in Rigveda for Agni, the activity at Cerebral Cortex.

नमामि त्वां महादेवीं महाभयविनाशिनीम् ।

महादुर्गप्रशमनीं महाकारुण्यरूपिणीम् ॥ २२ ॥

namāmi tvāṃ mahādevīm mahābhayavināśinīm |
mahādurgaprasāmanīm mahākāruṇyarūpiṇīm || 22 ||

I offer namaskars to the goddess destroying fearsome troubles, eliminating mighty obstacles, personified compassion.

यस्याः स्वरूपं ब्रह्मादयो न जानन्ति तस्मादुच्यते अज्ञेया ।
यस्या अन्तो न लभ्यते तस्मादुच्यते अनन्ता ।
यस्या लक्ष्यं नोपलक्ष्यते तस्मादुच्यते अलक्ष्या ।
यस्या जननं नोपलक्ष्यते तस्मादुच्यते अजा ।
एकैव सर्वत्र वर्तते तस्मादुच्यते एका ।
एकैव विश्वरूपिणी तस्मादुच्यते नैका ।
अत एवोच्यते अज्ञेयानन्तालक्ष्याजैका नैकेति ॥ २३ ॥

yasyāḥ svarūpaṃ brahmādayo na jānanti tasmāducyate ajñeyā |
yasyā anto na labhyate tasmāducyate anantā |
yasyā lakṣyaṃ nopalakṣyate tasmāducyate alakṣyā |
yasyā jananaṃ nopalakṣyate tasmāducyate ajā |
ekaiva sarvatra vartate tasmāducyate ekā |
ekaiva viśvarūpiṇī tasmāducyate naikā |
ata evocyate ajñeyānantālakṣyājaikā naiketi || 23 ||

Even Brahma etc. do not know her real form, so she is called Ajneya. We do not find its limit, so she is called Ananta. We can not find the meaning, so she is called Alakshya. Her birth is not known, so she is called Aja. She is found one alone evrywhere, so she is called Eka. She one alone has taken up all the various forms, so she is called Naika. Because of this she is called these various names.

मन्त्राणां मातृका देवी शब्दानां ज्ञानरूपिणी ।
ज्ञानानां चिन्मयातीता शून्यानां शून्यसाक्षिणी ॥
यस्याः परतरं नास्ति सैषा दुर्गा प्रकिर्तिता ॥ २४ ॥

mantrāṇāṃ mātṛkā devī śabdānāṃ jñānarūpiṇī |
jñānānāṃ cinmayātītā śūnyānāṃ śūnyasākṣiṇī ||
yasyāḥ parataraṃ nāsti saiṣā durgā prakirtitā || 24 ||

Amongst the mantras she is the original sounds, in the words she is the essence of knowledge. Amongst the knowledge she is beyond what is comprehensible by analysis and in the Shunya, i.e., during deep meditation, she is the witness to that state. She is well known as Durga, there is

nothing better than her.

तां दुर्गां दुर्गमां देवीं दुर्गाचारविघातिनीम् ।
नमामि भवभीतोऽहं संसारार्णवतारिणीम् ॥ २५ ॥

*tām durgām durgamām devīm durācāravighātinīm |
namāmi bhavabhīto'haṁ saṁsārārṇavatāriṇīm || 25 ||*

I, afraid of the Samsara, offer namaskars to Durga, difficult to know, destroyer of sins and pilot while crossing this sea of Samsara.

इदमथर्वशीर्षं योऽधीते स पञ्चाथर्वशीर्षजपफलमाप्नोति ।
इदमथर्वशीर्षमज्ञात्वा योऽर्चां स्थापयति शतलक्षं प्रजत्वापि सोऽर्चासिद्धिं न विन्दति ।
शतमष्टोत्तरं चास्य पुरश्चर्याविधिः स्मृतः ।
दशवारं पठेद्यस्तु सद्यः पापैः प्रमुच्यते ।
महादुर्गाणि तरति महादेव्याः प्रसादतः ॥ २६ ॥

*idamatharvaśīrṣaṁ yo'dhīte sa pañcātharvaśīrṣajapaphalamāpnoti |
idamatharvaśīrṣamajñātvā yo'rcām sthāpayati śatalakṣaṁ prajaptvāpi
so'rcāsiddhiṁ na vindati |
śatamaṣṭottaraṁ cāsyā puraścaryāvidhiḥ smṛtaḥ |
daśavāraṁ pathedyastu sadyaḥ pāpaiḥ pramucyate |
mahādurgāṇi tarati mahādevyāḥ prasādataḥ || 26 ||*

One who studies this Athrvashirsha gets credit for reciting it five times. One who establishes and worships an image without knowing this Atharvashirsha will not get any benefit, even if does 100,000 recitations. Repeat this 108 times — that is the method of Purascharana. Even repeating ten times makes him free of sins due to the grace of MahaDevi.