

Kaṭhōpaniṣad

(Transcribed talk of Swami Tattvavidanta Saraswati at USA)

(The following brief summary of the Seven-Week Course classes on Kaṭhōpaniṣad, vallī 1 and 2 conducted by Sri Swami Tattvavidananda was presented on the concluding day of the Course.)

Someone said that there is essentially a tempest in every wave, but a real tempest is a phenomenon, a wonder. Sri Shankaracarya, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and Bhagavan Ramana are considered to be *mahā-vaibhavam*, great wonders, because there was a real tempest in them. Treading in their footsteps, Sri Swami Tattvavidanandaji is no less a tempest, a wonder.

Over the years, the tempest that Swamiji continues to create in us has been a life-changing journey. Swamiji's unfoldment of Kaṭhōpaniṣad is a continuation of that journey.

After the initial introduction, Swamiji pointed out that "The study of Vedanta is not a modification of thought; it is a means for cognitive transformation of consciousness. The understanding gained is converted into inner wisdom which is the *vidyā*. In this Upaniṣad, the significance of Yamadharmaraja teaching *brahma-vidyā* is to show that he is the embodiment of *niśedha*, negation. The knowledge of *ātmā* is attained by negating the illusory world and all the fixations we subject ourselves to. It creates an intimation about *ātmā*; that there is something more than this body. Logic does not come to the forefront here. *Ātmā* is beyond verbal expression because truth comes into its own in silence."

Swamiji says, "When you see yourself as you are, you see everything as it is. When you learn to see things as they are, there is freedom, which is Self-knowledge."

Following the story part in the Upaniṣad, an elaborate description of *svarga* pointed out that there is no fear, insecurity, sadness there, unlike on earth where life is but a charade, and that the state of mind one has in *svarga* can be created here on earth by leading a dharmic life. Extolling *upāsana*, mental worship, as an important means to gain *svarga*, Swamiji explains it further. "Upāsana is *apara-vidyā*, which in a way is *avidyā*, ignorance. The implication is that the result created by ignorance cannot be real. Another name for ignorance is mind or thinking, which is merely day dreaming. Is there any reality to it?"

In a reference to Daksinamurti Stotram, Swamiji has given an insightful clarification of dream. "Svapne jāgrati vā paribrāhmitaḥ. The dream continues because you have not understood that you are dreaming. I am talking about the waking state which is a dream. This is the essence of bondage, in which you mix the real with the unreal. You are on an inexorable cycle of pleasure and pain due to ignorance. So long as you remain consumed by *māyā*, which is this ignorance, the cycle will continue. All this can be eliminated by knowledge. The result of knowledge crosses the limits of the result."

“There is a systematic problem embedded in consciousness. The foregone conclusion is that there is a goal to pursue and so a means is needed. Now, if there is no goal to accomplish then you can with conviction, say “I am done with it. They are *anitya*, unreal.” Yamadharmaraja’s efforts to lure Naciketa away failed because of the boy’s conviction, his commitment to the goal. His response indicated not only maturity beyond his young age but also *vairāgya*, *jijñāsa* and *mumukṣā*, which are imperative to gain the knowledge of *ātmā*. He said, “Bhagavan, when consciousness is ensnared by the objects of the world, one is not eligible to know the truth. When a person realizes the transient nature of *bhogas*, he will reject them and pursue a higher *puruṣārtha*. What I am asking for is the *sāmparāya*, the great reality.” Swamiji elaborates on this in verse 29.

“*Yasmin idaṁ vicikitsanti mṛtyoḥ yat sām̐parāye mahati brūhi nastat* The boon has now entered into an inaccessible depth. Desires and fears are thought patterns of the mind. It is a superficial movement in consciousness, so you will not know the width of consciousness which holds the entire universe within itself, and you will not know its depth which is the divinity, the God you worship. When you hover in the surface consciousness, you are consumed by desires and fears. Naciketa’s interest was in something deeper. The boon had acquired the status of discrimination, which is not easy to come by. A boon becomes meaningful only when there is incisive discrimination. The rarity of achievement through a boon for self-knowledge is the topic.”

The next section of the Upaniṣad goes into elaborate details about *śreyas* and *preyas*. Swamiji takes up this subject: “*Preyas* is to believe, to conform; it is a frozen thought, whereas *śreyas* is knowing and thinking. *Śreyas* and *preyas* are divergent, like east and west, but sometimes they are mixed up so intricately that without discrimination, one cannot distinguish between them. The result one gets for pursuing *śreyas* is timeless freedom, whereas for *preyas* it is ephemeral because it is operation in the flow of time.”

“The unconscious mind is tense with concern about the future. Tethered to the changing world, one gets disturbed. So, the person resorts to *yoga* and *kṣema*, accumulating and protecting that accumulation for future. This is *avidyā*, a myth.”

Swamiji likened *avidyā* to a deluge of darkness and brought out important points to ponder about ignorance.

“*Avidyā* is a clear path to self-gratification which leads to *saṁsāra*. As *avidyā* increases, desires increase and delusion follows suit. The *avidyā* is regarding the essential nature of names and forms, the reality within appearances, the knowledge of the world and myself. Ignorance makes us say ‘I know,’ which closes the door to knowledge. When I look around outside, which is people and the world, and when I look within myself, which is the body-mind identified person, I think that I know what I see. But the fact is I do not know. This is where knowledge begins. After this inner distillation, consciousness undergoes a radical transformation and becomes conducive to gaining the knowledge.”

In verse 2:5, Acarya Shankara seemingly goes to the very limits of reproach, comparing *avidyā* with the thick darkness of night, *ghanībhūta iva tamasi*. Not satisfied with that, in 2:6 the Acarya refers to it as covered by *tamas*, *tamasācchannam*. Elsewhere, in a totally different context, Nasadiya Suktam refers to this kind of intense darkness as darkness covered by darkness.

Swamiji, with his masterful handling of the *bhāṣya* took us on an exploration of the 'inner space', *ātmā* from where we couldn't but see the fact for what it is.

"People do not see the contradiction in wanting to keep their attachment to things of the world and also wanting to know *ātmā*. This is an obstacle to knowledge. The fixation of the mind on the false is not conducive to know the truth. *Ātmā* is *ananya*, none other than you. There is no other to know. Come into yourself to know yourself through *adhyātma-yoga*. It has nothing to do with *ātmā*, but it has everything to do with the mind. The mind has to be made transparent. Withdraw the mind from the fishing net that you throw to cover as much of the world as possible, and make it silent. Abide in the self; merge in it. When accumulated knowledge is floating within, there is no place for the real thing. Become free from this kind of limited knowledge. It becomes a screen, an armor. Being very subtle, truth gets hidden by the screen. As Ramakrishna Paramahansa said, "Do not run after the mirage water when there is a pond nearby. All you need to do is remove the moss on the surface and drink."

Naciketa said to Yamadharmaraja, "*Yat paśyati tat vada*, tell me what you see, what you know about that which is beyond *dharma* and *adharma*, beyond cause and effect, and beyond past and future."

Swamiji explains, "What is beyond *dharma* and *adharma* is the being. Naciketa wants to go beyond causality – beyond the realm of *kārya*, which is time-bound. We live in the illusion of time. Movement is the cause of time, as in day and night. It is a sequence in memory alone. So time is a mental category, it is momentary. Thought is in time. When you are silent, time stands still. In 'becoming', which is fulfilling desires, you are bound by time, and when you step out of it and just 'be' as a timeless being, you are in a timeless realm. The transactions of the masses are in the past/present/future, cause/effect, and *dharma/adharma*. When you are within this psychological time, you cannot seek the timeless because knowing is always in the 'now'."

In verse 2:15 Yamadharmaraja says to Naciketa, "To attain the goal, I am giving you a word that designates the goal: The sound *om*."

Swamiji's analysis on the subject of *om*: "*Om* designates the goal. It signifies the supreme reality. Coming from deep within the heart, it is the sound of the soul. It transcends the realm of speech and thoughts and takes you to the ineffable. In chanting *om*, thoughts merge in the chant and the chant resolves within, along with the thoughts. Thus, inner harmony is maintained while chanting which helps to rise above emotional problems. Its glory is that the soul merges with the divinity within and the world melts away. You are engulfed in the sound. It courses through the veins and pulsates in the heart. The silence that ensues is not void but the light of divinity."

In bringing out the nature of *ātmā*, Swamiji's endless angles and refreshing new approaches gave the message distinctive connectivity.

"The light of awareness, *ātmā*, ever shines therefore. It cannot have birth and death. Because it is birthless it is *nitya*, timeless, deathless. It is timeless, so the element of time is not there. Since *ātmā* has no birth and death, it cannot kill or be killed. By choosing the act of killing to take away doership from *ātmā*, all sentiments about death are swept away. *Ātmā* does not know itself. Knowing means doing and *ātmā* is not a doer. *Ātmā* is eternally new. A new thing goes through the process of growth, but *ātmā* does not grow because it is free from effect, the operation of time. Since it does not grow and is eternal, it does not decline. It is ancient and yet timelessly present because it does not come from memory. When you abide in *ātmā*, which is yourself, there is no memory. The perception of a pot is through the prism of eyesight and mind or memory. They are the *pramāṇās*, the software. *Ātmā* knows the mind directly, so it does not need a *pramāṇa* to know happiness/unhappiness, etc. Even though it inheres in the body, when the body dies *ātmā* is not affected because it is spacious like *ākāśa*, not limited to the body."

Swamiji unfolds the topic on *karma-niṣedha*: "There are many thoughts in the apparatus called the body/mind, but ego, the 'me thought', says, "I think." One particular cause does not create an effect. Therefore the notion 'I am the doer' is wrong. What you say, do, etc. is the thought-structure. This mode of living creates struggle and strife in life. Activity is the copyright of the ego, by and for the benefit of ego. It is not the truth because ego is a phantom. It claims action and result, and thus creates the doer and enjoyer, which results in pleasure and pain. Pain is inevitable in life, but suffering is needless. Realize this as a game of the ego and become free from all suffering."

Probing into the all-important verse 2:20, *aṅoraṅīyān mahatomahīyān ...*, Swamiji inundated us with multi-faceted approaches and brought out amazing facts about the smallness and bigness of *ātmā*.

Our question is, "How are we to know *ātmā* or its nature if it is not *kartā/bhoktā*?" Swamiji answers, "Saying *ātmā* is smaller than the smallest and bigger than the biggest means that space becomes irrelevant. This establishes the spaceless category of *ātmā*. Being formless, *ātmā* cannot be perceived, *aṅoraṅīyān*. It is the origin of perception. If it is perceived, it will be enveloped by space. But the fact is that it encloses space. Therefore it is bigger than the biggest, *mahatomahīyān*. The Earth is big, but your knowingness envelops it. The body is a dot in the universe, but the mind/knowingness envelops the entire galaxy. When you go from mind to awareness, the entire universe is enveloped in the light of awareness, which is you, the *ātmā*. Knowingness is bigger than the biggest. All existence is connected to your knowingness. This is a quantum leap from one dimension to another."

This is the *tattvamasī*, "You are that." It is not that you are equal to that because to be equal, you have to become something. There is no becoming here. While expounding on Yoga Vasistha, our Swamiji's emphatic statement was, "It is not an equation, it is an identity. When the *śruti* says, "You, Svetaketu are that," Svetaketu, the individual, is negated. From the universal point of view, the particular does not exist."

Swamiji continues about *ātmā*: “*Ātmā*, the consciousness, is the essence of all cognitions, and therefore it is all objects. The universe is cradled in consciousness, and my being is cradled in my consciousness, so all are in consciousness. The universe has one *ātmā*, my *ātmā*. The *advayam*, oneness is with reference to two things: the world and myself, and *ātmā* and I. Being the same consciousness, they are but one, not two. This is the vision. *Ātmā* is safely hidden in the heart of all life forms. The ‘hiding’ here means that your vision, covered by ignorance, hides the ever shining *ātmā*.”

Swamiji brought out the underlying principle in the seeming contradictions about *ātmā*. “*Ātmā* is paradoxical reality. In spite of right ideas about it, you may not know it, but the paradoxes help to understand *ātmā*. It sits in one place, yet goes places; sleeps and yet does not; intoxicated, at the same time it is not. These are the paradoxes, but they can be resolved positively. When identified with the body, *ātmā* sits; but with the mind, it goes elsewhere. *Ātmā* is sleeping, but goes everywhere in dream. *Ātmā* is intoxicated only when identified with an intoxicated person. When you understand one thing about *ātmā*, it changes its nature. Only in association with a variety of adjuncts, *ātmā* appears different – fixed/moving; timeless/time bound.”

“*Ātmā* means none other than you, the essential you, the innermost self, *pratyagātmā*. A wise man knows *ātmā* as *ayam aham*, ‘I am this.’ The reward for knowing *ātmā* is removal of all *śoka* – the general un-satisfactoriness of it all. *Ātmā* is neither easy nor difficult to know. Since it is timeless, it cannot be known by a methodology, which involves time. When you approach *ātmā* without any fixations, it is easy because it is you.”

The verse on *akṣara-brahma-nirūpaṇam* asks, “In this perishable universe, is there an imperishable?” Swamiji says, “The answer is yes. It is *brahman*. Motion in the perishable requires a fixed point and that is immobile, *brahman*. To search for the truth, search for the imperishable in the perishable. From the perishing seed, the imperishable sprout of life comes. The sprout is within the seed. Similarly, search for the truth, *brahman*, within you. Leave the conceptualization and stay with the deep silence, which helps to purify the mind. Truth cannot be described, only experienced and understood deep within.”

“Self-knowledge is the full knowledge of what you are not. You will continue to discover yourself, and there will be no end to the discovery. The discovery comes from a source deeper than thought.”

It is incorrect to say that whatever needs to be said about *ātmā* is said because *ātmā* expressions are infinite. When mahatmas of yesteryear and today talk about it, it sounds ever so fresh and inspiring. And after all this, we were stunned to hear the 2nd vallī conclude with the declaration, “*ka ithā veda yatra saḥ*, who can know thus where that *ātmā* is?”

Swamiji’s inspiring explanation: “Who can know God as ‘this is *paramātmā*’? The ocean does not know its own depth. The very attempt to know *paramātmā* with the mind is an inherent contradiction.

The significance of the statement is that Truth is a timeless state of being, which you can experience only in the present. Thought is the response of memory to an outside stimulus. The result of the known, being founded upon the past, cannot know the immeasurable, the timeless. When the thought process ends, the timeless comes into being and engulfs you. *Sve mahimni tiṣṭhati, ātmā* abides in its own glory, is a glorious statement.”

Swamiji’s elucidation about Truth in Nasadiya Suktam: “Vedanta claims that Truth cannot be ascertained with the mind... It states that one can arrive at Truth only by following the method of open-ended inquiry. The seeker may keep an open mind, listen to the scriptures, reflect on them, and meditate assiduously. When the mind is pure, it explodes, in the sense that none of its predilections remain intact, and Truth, like the Sun, comes into its own.”

hariḥ om tat sat śrīkṛṣṇārpaṇamastu

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Retreats offered by AVG Anaikatti in May,2018

The following are the retreats planned in May,2018. Retreat will include temple puja, meditation, classes on vedanta, satsang (Question and answer sessions). Chanting, yoga and sanskrit classes may also be included. Participation in Gurukula seva during the camp as needed will be appreciated.

You may register for these retreats at <http://arshavidya.in/camps-retreats>

Retreat Id	Retreat Dates	Retreat Description
R18-05	8:00PM Saturday, 19 th May to 12:30PM on Saturday, 26 st May	7 day Family retreat on <i>Selections from Yoga-sutras and selections from the Bhagavad Gita</i> with Swami Sadatmananda and Swami Shankarananda. Children over 6 can accompany their parents and will be offered separate classes.