

2018 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya Retreat at AVG, Saylorsburg, PA¹

Pūjya Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati taught the Śāṅkara bhāṣya of the Ajātaśatru Brāhmaṇa of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (Chapter II, section 1) during a week long retreat from July 7-14, 2018 at the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA. Swamiji continued with the 16th kaṇḍikā in this camp. As a preamble he brilliantly summarized the kaṇḍikās 1-15. The 15th kaṇḍikā concluded with the king Ajātaśatru showing Gārgya that *prāṇa* is not the agent or *bhoktā* by the experiment with a sleeping man. Swamiji's succinct summary resembled the adroitness that Śrī Vidyāraṇya muni exhibits in the Anubhūtiprakāśa verse when he introduces the 16th kaṇḍikā:

प्राणस्याभोक्तृतां गार्ग्यो व्यबुध्यत ततो नृपः । *prāṇasyābhokṛtām gārgyo vyabudhyata tato nṛpaḥ* ।

विज्ञानमयबोधाय चक्रे यत्नमुपायतः ॥ *vijñānamayabodhāya cakre yatnamupāyataḥ* ॥

After Gārgya understood the *abhokṛtvam* of *prāṇa*, Ajātaśatru proceeded to make the effort using a strategy for elucidating the *vijñānamaya ātmā*.

The strategy that the king adopted involved the waking up of a sleeping man. One cannot help wondering what the purpose of the śruti would be in employing such a seemingly innocuous experiment. Pūjya Swami Vidadatmanandaji expounded systematically how Bhāṣyakāra looks at the experiment and how he reveals all the Vedāntic implications through it. Swamiji was like an experienced pearl diver, diving into the deep depths of the Vedāntic ocean, picking the pearls of wisdom. Tethered to Swamiji, the diving seemed effortless to the campers who saw the grandeur of Bhāṣyakāra's cognitive process.

Having shown that the *vijñānamaya ātmā* is different from the *prāṇa*, in the 16th kaṇḍikā Ajātaśatru poses two questions to Gārgya: 1) where was this being full of consciousness before waking up and 2) where did it come from? Ajātaśatru uses the word *vijñānamaya*, meaning the 'being full of consciousness.' Śāṅkara takes a brief de tour to explain the use of the *mayat śabda* in the sense of 'full of,' *prāyārtha*, in order to be consistent with the same sense the word is used later in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (mantra 4.4.5). The two questions were posed to inquire into the nature of the conscious being. The śruti shows an interesting nuance in this context. The questions should have been asked by Gārgya. Notwithstanding Ajātaśatru raised the questions in order for Gārgya to respond. But no response was offered by Gārgya. But this did not make Ajātaśatru to be indifferent. He went on to explain the purport of the two questions, adhering to his promise that he will instruct Gārgya.

The answers to the above two questions were provided in the 17th kaṇḍikā. Ajātaśatru said that when the *being full of consciousness* (विज्ञानमयः पुरुषः) is asleep, it withdraws the functions of the organs through its own consciousness (विज्ञानेन) and lies in the limitless Self (आकाश) that is in the heart. Further, when the Self withdraws the organs, including the nose, the organ of speech, the eye, the ear, and the mind, it has the name, *Svapiti* (स्वपिति). The idea that is conveyed is that the Self remains in the sleep state devoid of its variegated differentiated forms on account of its seeming connection with the limiting adjunct, namely, the subtle body in this context.

¹Prepared by Dr. V. Swaminathan of New Jersey, an attendee at the camp. The report is not intended to be an exhaustive summary of the subject matter. Any error in the report is that of the author only.

²Swamiji taught kaṇḍikās 1-15 in the 2017 camp and the summary of it can be found in Arsha Vidya Newsletter - August 2017, p.15-17

³Anubhūtiprakāśaḥ, Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad vivaraṇam, Ajātaśatru vidyā prakāśam: 14.14.

Thus, the word, *svapiti*, denotes the real state of the person who is in deep sleep. Bhāṣyakāra corroborates this view with the Chāndogya śruti (Ch.VI.viii.1)

wherein *svapiti* is defined as *svam apīto bhavati tasmād enam svapitītyācakṣate*

meaning one who merges into one's true nature in deep sleep. Thus, he concludes at the end of the 17th kaṇḍikā that it is clearly discerned that the Self rests in its own self due to the fact that the organs being withdrawn, consequently, there is the absence of any modification such as action, its factors and its results.

This conclusion is beautifully captured by Vidyāraṇya muni in the Anubhūtiprakāśa:

वागाद्युपाधिसंबन्धात् संसारित्वमिवेक्ष्यते । vāgādyupādhisambandhāt saṁsāritvamivekṣyate ।

ते तूपसंहताः सर्वे ततोऽसंसारितात्मनः ॥ te tūpasamhṛtāḥ sarve tato'saṁsāritātmanaḥ ॥

The Self seems to be a *saṁsārī* only on account of the connection to the adjuncts such as the organ of speech etc. When they (the adjuncts) are withdrawn in deep sleep, the Self remains in its true nature as an *asaṁsārī*.

Having described the deep-sleep state, the 18th kaṇḍikā describes the dream state in which the Self becomes as it were, an emperor, or a noble Brāhmaṇa, or attains states high or low. A possible objection is raised with reference to the dream state in that despite the fact that all the organs are withdrawn, the Self still undergoes experiences such as 'sukhi' and 'duḥkhi.' This could mean that the attributes such as pleasure, pain etc. are not necessarily superimposed on the Self by its contact with the adjuncts such as the body and the organs. Bhāṣyakāra rejects the objection outright by showing that the dream experiences are only 'as though,' and that they are contradicted upon waking. In this regard, the Self is not actually connected with the experiences such as grief, delusion, etc., caused by the loss of relatives and so forth in dreams.

To this a counter point is posed stating that just as much as the waking experiences are not contradicted in that state, so also the dream experiences are not contradicted in the dream state, and hence, are a part of the Self and not superimposed by ignorance. Bhāṣyakāra refutes this argument showing that the dream objects and the dream activities do not exist outside of the body and that the dream is nothing but experiences of impressions that are previously gathered during the waking state and which are caused by past actions. He conclusively shows that the dream objects and experiences that never exist are falsely superimposed on the Self. He extends this to the waking experience as well, namely that the identification with the body and organs etc. in the waking state also is superimposed by ignorance. In summarizing the 18th kaṇḍikā Bhāṣyakāra repeats his famous assertion that the Self is pure and is never connected with action, its factors and its results and that the Self is ever pure, ever the seer and is different from the seen objects in the waking and dream states.

⁴Bhāṣyakāra comments that ākāśa means the limitless Self which is its own self - ākāśāśabdena para eva sva ātmocyate (आकाशशब्देन पर एव स्व आत्मोच्यते). Brahadāraṇyaka upaniṣad bhāṣyam, 2.1.17.

⁵By the word heart, hṛdaya, is meant buddhi as Sureśvara explains, "hṛdayaśabdena buddhiratrābhīdhīyate - हृदयशब्देन बुद्धिरत्राभिधीयते," Brahadāraṇyaka upaniṣad bhāṣya vārtikam, ajātaśatru brāhmaṇa v. 239.

⁶"yatraitatpuruṣaḥ svapiti nāma satā somya tadā sampanno bhavati svamapīto bhavati यत्रैतत्पुरुषः स्वपित नाम सता सोम्य तदा सम्पन्नो भवित स्वमपीतो भवित."

⁷स्वम् अपीतो भवित तस्माद् एनम् स्वपितीत्याचक्षते

⁸svameva ātmānam apīti apigacchatīti svapitītyucyate (स्वमेव आत्मानम् अपीत अपिगच्छतीति स्वपितीत्युच्यते), Brahadāraṇyaka upaniṣad bhāṣyam, 2.1.17.

⁹svarūpaṁ vāstavaṁ suptaṁ prāpyam (स्वरूपं वास्तवं सुप्तौ प्राप्यम्) in Anubhūtiprakāśaḥ, Chāndogya Upaniṣad vivaraṇam, Śvetaketu vidyā prakāśam: 3.69

¹⁰tasmāt upasaṁhṛteṣu vāgādiṣu kriyākāraḥ kaphalātmatābhāvāt svātmastha eva ātmā bhavatiyavagamyate । (तस्मात् उपसंहृतेषु वागादिषु क्रियाकारकफलात्मताभावात् स्वात्मस्थ एव आत्मा भवतीयवगम्यते ।) Brahadāraṇyaka upaniṣad bhāṣyam, 2.1.17.

That the Self is never contaminated by the apparent connection with the limiting adjuncts and remains ever pure is shown in the 19th kaṇḍikā. Bhāṣyakāra elaborates that the Self when dreams, is pure, and when it is asleep, it attains its natural state of purity, giving up, like water, the impurity that it is in contact with incidentally. When it is perfectly asleep it does not cognize anything in particular such as sound etc. In other words, there is no particular consciousness (*viśeṣavijñānābhāva*) in the state of deep sleep. The kaṇḍikā explains the process by which the inner Self comes to the sleep state along the seventy-two thousand *nāḍīs* or veins, *hitā nāma nāḍyaḥ*. Further, it highlights the fact that in sleep there is nothing to distinguish a child, an emperor, or a noble Brāhmaṇa, all abiding in the very limit of happiness. Albeit the vast differences between them in the waking state, the Self of the emperor, that of the baby and that of the learned Brāhmaṇa is one and the same. The distinctions are obliterated in deep sleep state as they all resolve into the one, non-dual, limitless Self.

The purport of the discussions in the 16-19 kaṇḍikās is mainly to demonstrate the nature of the Self through the waking-dream-sleep experiences. The śruti first demonstrates the similarity of the waking and dream experiences in that both are characterized by subject-object duality. Second, it shows the *mithyātvam* of both the experiences by the simple fact that the experience of one state is contradicted by that of the other. On the other hand, the experience in the deep sleep state is devoid of the subject-object duality and in that sense it serves as a window to recognize the true nature of the non-dual Self. Vidyāraṇya muni succinctly summarizes this:

अद्वयानन्दरूपत्वमित्थं सुप्तौ प्रदर्शितम् । advayānandarūpatvamitthaṃ suptau pradarśitam ।

एतावता स्वभावोऽस्य निर्णीतः प्रत्यगात्मनः ॥ etāvatā svabhāvo'sya nirṇītaḥ pratyagātmanaḥ ॥

The advayānandarūpatvam of the pratyagātmā as revealed in the deep sleep state can be ascertained to be its true nature.

I and my wife consider ourselves privileged and blessed to have attended the 2018 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya course taught by Pūjya Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati. With three classes, morning meditation, and evening satsang on every day for a week in the close company of Swamiji, the learning experience was unequalled. At times it appeared that Śaṅkara was talking to us directly. Swamiji's thoroughness in explaining the intricate details was simply astounding and inspiring. In expressing our gratitude, I can only take the recourse in Śrī Vidyāraṇya Swāmi's verse:

अविद्यायाः परं पारं यस्तारयति तस्य ते । avidyāyāḥ paraṃ pāraṃ yastārayati tasya te ।

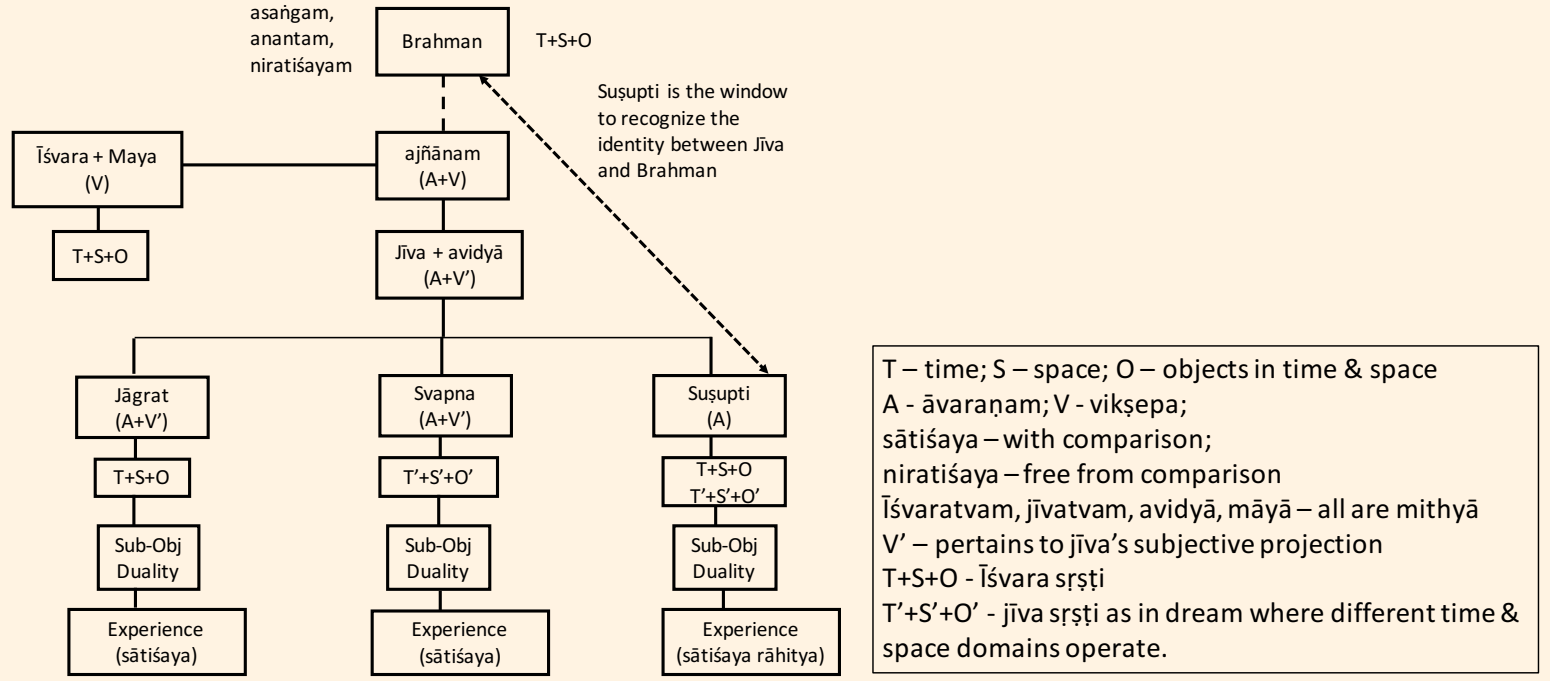
शुश्रूषामुचितां कर्तुं न शक्ताः प्रणतिं विना ॥ śuśrūṣāmucitāṃ kartuṃ na śaktāḥ praṇatiṃ vinā ॥

Except for doing (repeated) prostrations to the teacher who takes us across the great ocean of ignorance we are incapable of doing any other appropriate service to him.

Notes for the diagram:

1. The dotted line below Brahman depicts that it is devoid of any connection whatsoever. It is limitless, free from the 3-fold limitations of time (T), space (S) and objects in time & space (O). It is *niratiśayam*, devoid of any comparison.
2. Ajñānam, ignorance has two powers, veiling (*āvaraṇam*) and projecting (*vikṣepa*).
3. Jīva is under the spell of ajñānam (named as avidyā) while Īśvara is not. He wields Maya which has the projecting power.
4. The jīva undergoes three states of experience – jāgrat, svapna, and suṣupti.
5. In jāgrat, the jīva experiences the T, S & O of Īśvara sṛṣṭi. Jīva may have an additional subjective projection (V') on the Īśvara sṛṣṭi. There is a subject-object duality which necessarily characterizes the empirical experience of the waking state.
6. In svapna, there is only a subjective projection (V') based on the experiences collected during the waking state. The jīva experiences the T', S' & O' which are exclusively of jīva sṛṣṭi. As in jāgrat, there is a subject-object duality which characterizes the purely subjective experience of the dream state.
7. The experience of subject-object duality is common for both the jāgrat and svapna states.
8. In both jāgrat and svapna, the experience imposes a variability giving rise to different degrees of pleasure and pain (*sātiśayatvam*).

The three states of experience as discussed in the Ajātaśatru Brāhmaṇa can be pictorially represented as shown below:



Notes for the diagram (cont'd):

9. In suṣupti, only A remains and there is neither T, S, & O, nor T', S' & O' due to the absence of V and V'. The experience is of the absence of subject-object duality. Since it cannot be compared to anything else it is free from *sātiśayatvam*.

10 The absence of the subject-object duality and the absence of *sātiśayatvam* make the suṣupti state a window to appreciate the true nature of jīva as being identical with brahman. Ajñānam (A) is still there, and it has to go by the knowledge jīva = brahman.

¹¹na bandhuviyogādijanitaśokamohādibhiḥ svapne sambadhyata eva (न बन्धुवियोगादिजनितशोकमोहादिभिः स्वप्ने सम्बध्यत एव). Brahadāraṇyaka upaniṣad bhāṣyam, 2.1.18.

¹²viśuddhaḥ akriyākāraḥ kaphalātmako vijñānamaya ityetatsiddham |
tasmāt anyo'sau drśyebhyaḥ svapnajāgaritalokebhyo drṣṭā vijñānamayo viśuddhaḥ || (विशुद्धः अक्रियाकारकफलात्मको विज्ञानमय इत्येतत्सिद्धम् ।
तस्मात् अन्योऽसौ दृश्येभ्यः स्वप्नजागरितलोकेभ्यो द्रष्टा विज्ञानमयो विशुद्धः ॥) Brahadāraṇyaka upaniṣad bhāṣyam, 2.1.18.

¹³Anubhūtiprakāśaḥ, Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad vivaraṇam, Ajātaśatru vidyā prakāśam: 14.54.

¹⁴Anubhūtiprakāśaḥ, Praśnopaniṣad vivaraṇam, puruṣa tatva prakāśam: 7.98.