

Mundakopanishad

Mantra 3.1.8

न चक्षुषा गृह्यते नापि वाचा
नान्यैदेवैस्तपसा कर्मणा वा ।
ज्ञानप्रसादेन विशुद्धसत्त्वः
ततस्तु तं पश्यते निष्कलं ध्यायमानः ॥३.१.८ ॥

*na cakṣuṣā gṛhyate nāpi vācā
nānyaidevaistapasā karmaṇā vā.
jñānaprasādena viśuddhasattvaḥ
tatastu taṁ paśyate niṣkalaṁ dhyāyamānaḥ. (3.1.8)*

na -- not; *cakṣuṣā* -- by the eyes; *gṛhyate* -- seen/grasped;
na -- not; *api* -- even; *vācā* -- by word; *na* -- not;
anyaiḥ -- by the other; *devaiḥ* -- sense organs;
tapasā -- by religious discipline; *vā* -- or; *karmaṇā* -- by ritual;
jñānaprasādena -- by blessing that is knowledge;
viśuddhasattvaḥ -- one whose mind is pure;
ākramanti -- they go and claim; *yatra* -- where;
tataḥ tu -- thereafter; *paśyate* -- recognises;
taṁ --that; *niṣkalaṁ* -- free from parts; *dhyāyamānaḥ* -- by inquiry;

(The self) is not grasped by the eyes, or by words, by other sense organs, by religious disciplines or rituals. A person of pure mind enquiring into the partless Brahman gains it through knowledge.

You require a means of knowledge to recognise *ātman* in the *buddhi*. Can you use *pratyakṣa*, perception, as a means of knowledge to know *ātman*? The *śruti* answers, *na cakṣuṣā gṛhyate*: *ātman* is not seen by the eyes. It has no form,¹⁷⁰ so it is not an object for the eyes to see. *Nāpi anyaiḥ devaiḥ*: nor is it perceived by other senses either. A sense organ is called a *deva*. You cannot know the *ātman* by inference either, because any inference is based on perceived data.

What cannot be experienced by the senses can at least be described by words. For instance, you cannot see heaven directly, nor can you arrive at heaven by inference, but the words of the *śāstra* can describe the heaven. Words can describe Indra, whom you do not see as one who has a *vajra*, a weapon, in his hand. So, where senses cannot dare, at least words can. But the *śruti* says, *nāpi vācā*: it cannot be revealed by words either. It is not *vākya*, the immediate meaning of a word,¹⁷¹ like a pot.

When you say, 'pot,' there is an object for that word which you see. A thought takes place in your mind having the form of 'pot'. You recognise the pot. So too, with reference to the words 'tree,' 'chair,' 'table' and so on. Every word has a corresponding object. The meaning of the word 'consciousness,' however, is just you, without any attribute. Therefore, it does not have a meaning or an object that can produce an object-thought in the mind. Any other word is not going to fare better to reveal that consciousness.

How then are you going to understand Vedanta, which is in the form of words? Words reveal the *ātman* by implication. The word 'consciousness' becomes a *lakṣaṇa* an implying word, for *ātman*, which is the *lakṣa*, implied. It is unlike other words. It has a meaning and at the same time, it does not have an object. It is not one single object for the mind to comprehend. Everything is Brahman, and so it is the *lakṣa* of the words, which is why we say it is beyond words. Words only negate all misconceptions about 'I,' the *ātman*. The immediate meaning of any word does not reveal the *ātman*.

If you analyse the word '*satya*,' the immediate meaning is 'anything that exists.' Retaining the immediate meaning of the word '*satya*,' its limitations are removed by using the word '*ananta*' in apposition to it. *Ananta* means limitless in time and space. It helps you remove the sense of time-bound existence from the meaning of the word '*satya*'. Brahman exists, but it is not time-bound. This understanding is not based on the meaning of a given word. It is by eliminating the limitations in the meaning of a given word.

Similarly, the word '*jñāna*' also is understood. The root meaning of the word '*jñāna*' is 'to know'. It implies the presence of consciousness. Only when the conscious knower is there, knowledge is possible, which is why the word '*jñāna*' is used to reveal *ātman*. But the word '*jñāna*' can mean either the knower or knowledge or the known. All three are Brahman while Brahman is free from all three. Therefore, the limited meaning of the '*jñāna*' is eliminated again by the word '*ananta*' which is used in apposition with the word '*jñāna*'. It now reveals the essential nature of *ātman* as *jñapti*, consciousness. The knower status of the *ātman* is incidental because you become a knower only in the wake of an object to be known. The knower's essential nature is *caitanya*. The *satya* of the knower-known-knowledge is consciousness.

One may ask, "If you are negating the immediate meaning of a word, then why do you use that word at all? Why not use some other word?" From the other word also one has to negate the general meaning. So one person said, "Do not use words. It is beyond words!" Then, the one who says so, need not appoint himself as a *guru*. Even a symbol like *cinmudrā* is not going to reveal what cannot be revealed by the words. When you want to give a visual form for the teacher and the teaching, then you must give a symbol and the symbol is a language. It is purely arbitrary. The *śāstra* does use some special words like *satya* and reveals the *vastu* as the *lakṣārtha*, the implied meaning, of these words.

It is highly sophisticated method because the *śāstra* is trying to reveal the infinite from the collection of finite words that you have. Naturally it is not going to follow logic; it is going to beat all logic. Therefore, *ātman* is not grasped by the immediate meaning of the words.

The Vedas have *karmas* for achieving everything in life--- for rain, son, money, cattle, *lokas* and so on. You may think that there may be some special Vedic rituals to bring about *mokṣa*. That idea also is negated now by saying, *na karmanā tapasā vā*: neither by ritualistic action nor by religious discipline. If *karma* can produce *ātman*, then you can see it. Action can produce only four types of result. It can create something, help you reach a place, cleanse an object or modify something. But none of these apply to *ātman*. The *ātman* cannot be created because it is here right now; it cannot be reached because it is all-pervasive; it needs no cleaning nor can it be objectified, it is ever pure; and it cannot be modified because it has no parts. It is not the result of an action. So it cannot be accomplished by action. It is *sat*, existence. *Karma*, from *agnihotra* to *aśvamedha*, has its desirable result, but it is going to be different types of *punya* and not *ātman*,¹⁷² which already exists.

Nor by *tapas* can one gain it because it is the *svarūpa* of the one who performs *tapas*. *Tapas* can accomplish anything, like tightrope walking, that is achieved by someone through dedicated effort. *Tapas* can accomplish what one has not yet accomplished. When it is an already accomplished thing, *tapas* has no access.

In *Taiirīyopaniṣad* it is said many times, "*Tapasā brahma vijijñāsva* may you know Brahman through *tapas*." Here it is said that *ātman* cannot be gained by *tapas*. There is an apparent contradiction between these two *upaniṣads*. But the context of each statement gives different meaning to the words. The meaning of the word, '*tapas*' in the *Taiirīyopaniṣad* is *vicāra*, inquiry. It is *jñānamayaṁ tapaḥ*, *tapas* in the form of inquiry leading to knowledge.

In the earlier *mantra* it was said '*tapasā labhyaḥ*,' *ātman* is gained through *tapas*. Here the *śruti* negates that by saying '*na tapasā gṛhyate*,' it is not achieved by *tapas*. It is exactly the style of teaching where something about the *ātman* is presented and then negated. The context is set up only to arrive at the true meaning. *Tapas* and *karma* are necessary. But they are not the means to accomplish the knowledge of the *ātman*. They are means to prepare a person for this knowledge. Therefore, assertion and negation are from different standpoints. Everything has its place in the scheme of things. In the scheme of the pursuit of *mokṣa*, one has to be clear about the position of everything. One has to clearly distinguish the primary means from the secondary means.

The primary means for gaining the knowledge of *ātman* is being said now. *Tu viśuddha-sattvaḥ jñānaprasādena taṁ paśyate*: whereas, the one whose mind is already rendered pure sees that (*ātman*) clearly with the blessing of the knowledge. By a life of *karma-yoga* and religious disciplines you do not come under the spell of *rāga-dveṣa*, likes and dislikes.

Sattva here means the mind. *Viśuddha-sattoḥ* is one whose mind is *viśuddha*, free from *rāga-dveṣa*. The purity of mind is purely neutralisation of *rāga-dveṣa*. It is not the absence of *rāga-dveṣa*, but the absence of coming under the spell of *rāga-dveṣa*. That is *prasāda*.¹⁷³ What a difference it makes! *Jñāna prasāda* also is the blessing that is knowledge. Knowledge alone is *prasāda*. It is called *prasāda* because it is given by the *guru* and received by the disciple. The attitude on the part of the receiver is one of reverence. Blessing is always received, and what is not received is not a blessing. Because of the blessing of knowledge, you recognise *ātman* as free from any attribute. How does you recognise?

Dhyāyamānaḥ : by thinking. Thinking refers to *vicāra*, inquiring here. The inquiry is in the form of *śravaṇa manana* and *nididhyāsana*. All three are covered by the word '*dhyāyamānaḥ*'. It is the particular or special means, *asādhāraṇa-karaṇa*, for knowing the *ātman*. You gain the knowledge of *ātman* from the teaching of the *śāstra*, but the knowledge can be vague due to doubts. You have to eliminate all the doubts through inquiry. Only then will you recognise the *ātman* as *niṣkalam*, free from attributes. Since *ātman* is free from attributes, you do not have to wait for a particular thought to take place. Brahman is invariable in every cognition. Every cognition is Brahman just as every wave is water.

We can also connect the words of the last two lines in this way, *viśuddha-sattoḥ niṣkalam dhyāyamānaḥ jñāna-prasādena paśyate*: a person of pure mind enquiring into the partless Brahman gains it through knowledge.

170 अरूपत्वात् । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

171 अनभिधेयत्वात् । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

172 तथा वैदिकेन अग्निहोत्रादि-कर्मणा प्रसिद्ध-महत्त्वेनापि न गृह्यते । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

173 ज्ञान-प्रसादेन आत्मावबोधन-समर्थमपि स्वभावेन सर्व-प्राणिनां ज्ञानं बाह्य-विषय-रगादि-दोष-कलुषितमप्रसन्नमशुद्धं

सन्नावबोधयति नित्यं सन्निहितमप्यात्म-तत्त्वं मलावनद्धम् इवादर्शम् । विलुलितमिव सलिलम् । तद्यदा

इन्द्रिय-विषय-संसर्ग-जनित-रागादि-मल-कालुष्यापनयनाद् आदर्श-सलिलादिवत् प्रासादितं स्वाचं शान्तमवतिष्ठः अते तदा ज्ञानस्य

प्रसादः स्यात् । तेन ज्ञान-प्रसादेन । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

to be continued...