

Satsanga with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati

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1. Question

What does the word Mīmāṃsaka mean?

Answer

Mīmāṃsa means analysis. We call the school of thought that has analyzed the Veda as 'Mīmāṃsaka'. They were the first people to analyze the statements of the Vedas and arrive at the purport of these statements. They have done excellent work in developing methodologies to analyze and determine the meaning of the statements of the Vedas. The Vedantins also follow the methodologies developed by the Mīmāṃsakas in analyzing a text. It is important to determine the *tātparyā* or purport of a text. Since these scriptures are a *pramāṇam*, means of knowledge, we have to understand what is intended to be conveyed by these statements. Even as you listen to me now, a part of your mind is determining what I am trying to convey and my intention. Sometimes, we say exactly what we mean and sometimes it may be said in an indirect way; sometimes, we suggest the meaning and, sometimes, we leave the listener to infer what is meant. The listener has to continuously analyze the sentences and determine the purport, the intended meaning. Communication takes place only when the listener understands a statement in the same sense in which it was intended by the speaker. Similarly, the scriptures intend to convey a certain meaning and we should understand the intended meanings of those statements. Therefore, it becomes very important to analyze the purport of the statements. What is the theme of the Upanishads? What do the Upanishads intend to convey? The Upanishads may vary in size and content and many things may be stated. We have to analyze and understand the central idea. The Vedantins conclude that the Upanishads want to convey that 'you are Brahman'. The one who thinks that he is a *jīva*, an isolated individual, is Brahman. Not only is there one god, but there is *only* god – One without a second. We arrive at this conclusion upon analyzing the statements of the Upanishads. If somebody else comes to a different conclusion, e.g., you are different from god, the whole teaching will be different. Therefore, it is very important to determine the purport of a text

What does the Bhagavad Gita teach? Śrī Śaṅkarācārya would say that the Bhagavad Gita's main teaching is your similarity with Brahman; there is no cause for grief and you are already free. The study of the Bhagavad Gita is meant to free us from grief, sorrow, and delusion. What is the cause of grief and delusion? It is ignorance. How does the study of the Gita free us from ignorance? It leads us to the knowledge of the Truth. Therefore, knowledge is the main theme of the Bhagavad Gita. What about *karma*? It is a means of knowledge too. Some may conclude that *karma* is the main theme and knowledge is achieved through *karma*. There are certain methods of analyzing these scriptural statements that were developed by the Mīmāṃsakas. In fact, they are called Mīmāṃsakas because they are experts at analyzing the Vedas. After all their analysis, the Mīmāṃsakas determined that the Vedas teach us *karma* and that the main purpose of the Veda is to enjoin action – the various dos and don'ts. Why is it so? They believed that one can attain *mokṣa* by performing the rituals prescribed in the Vedas. However, the conclusion of the Vedantins is different. They believe that the Vedas primarily teach the knowledge of the Self. To a Vedantin, *karma* is the means to *jñānam*, not vice versa. The Vedantins use the analytic method of the Mīmāṃsaka to challenge their conclusion. These debates and discussions often determine the meaning of the text. What is the main subject matter? What is the theme? What does the Veda want to convey? When the purport becomes clear, everything else also becomes clear¹.

2.Question

Was the Mīmāṃsaka tradition very popular when the Upadeśa Sāram was composed? Does it have a following even today?

Answer

We use the *pūrvapakṣa*, the position of an opponent, to unfold certain ideas and principles. Ramana Maharshi seems to begin the Upadeśa Sāram by refuting the position of the Mīmāṃsakas. This is a particular style of teaching. The essence of the first verse is that *īśvara* is the ruler and dispenser of the results of the actions and everything happens according to His rules. To make this point, a background is needed and the tradition of the Mīmāṃsakas forms a convenient background because they represent those who do not accept *īśvara*. Thus, this verse is being told to those who have difficulty in accepting *īśvara*.

¹ 2005 Arsha Vidya Gurukulam Family Camp *satsanga*. Transcribed and edited by Chaya Rajaram and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.

Īśvara is the *kartā*, the creator and the ruler. Everything takes place in accordance with His rules. This point is explained against the background of the Mīmāṃsaka's viewpoint so that it becomes clear to us. Thus, we may use the views of the opponent to make our own point. We pose questions and answer them; we present the opposite standpoint, show how that standpoint is incorrect, and then present the *siddhāntā*, our conclusion. These are questions that do arise in our own minds. This is the method of unfolding this knowledge. Whether or not there are Mīmāṃsakas today, there may be many who may have difficulty in accepting *īśvara*. All these people are taken into account and the first point made is that *īśvara* is the creator, the ruler, and the dispenser of the results of our actions. This is stated in the first line '*karturājñayā prāpyate phalam*', the result of action is obtained by the laws of *īśvara*.

The Mīmāṃsakas have done great service to the Vedic tradition. They are *vaidikas*, who adhere to rituals. It is not that there are many such traditional people nowadays. Ādi Śaṅkarācārya had to contend with the Mīmāṃsakas because they were very strong in his time. In fact, it was the Mīmāṃsakas who were largely responsible for establishing the Vedic religion in the context of Buddhism. When Buddhism, which rejected the Veda, had begun to spread in India, the great teachers of the Mīmāṃsakas re-established the Vedic religion and rituals. However, they went too far with the rituals; they believed that *karma* alone is the means to mokṣa. Ādi Śaṅkarācārya refuted them and asserted that it was *jñānam* or knowledge that is the means to mokṣa. That is why we find arguments against the teaching of the Mīmāṃsakas in Śrī Śaṅkarācārya's writings.

The Mīmāṃsakas represent people who have an aspiration for svarga, the heavens. Not all Indians believe in non-duality; most are dualists, worshipping *īśvara* in Kailasa, Vaikunta or elsewhere. Most people have a plan to go to some loka or the other according to their tradition. There are no traditional Mīmāṃsakas as such nowadays. What we have are different schools of duality such as Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita. These schools of philosophy emphasize karma or upāsana. According to them, worship is the main means to achieve mokṣa. Only the Advaitins emphasize the role of knowledge in liberation.

In India, the mainstream accepts the existence of *īśvara*. However, each school of thought has its own views on the nature of *īśvara* and one's relationship with divinity. There may still be some traditional Mīmāṃsakas, but they are not in predominance. However, in unfolding the principles of Vedānta we refute the different positions of the Mīmāṃsakas, the Sāṅkhyas, the Naiyāyikas etc. These opposing positions are very important for us to understand and give us greater clarity regarding Vedānta. It is one thing to say that there is god. However, it is

quite another thing to analyze the position of one who says there is no god as in 'What are his arguments?' or 'Why does he say that?' The position that there is god then becomes much clearer to us. Therefore, these positions of the opponents are taken up for discussion so that we may gain further clarity. Often, these questions or similar questions arise in our own minds. Therefore, even though we may be addressing a Mīmāṃsaka, perhaps part of our question is also answered when we counter the views of the opponent¹.

3.Question

Will you please explain the standpoints of the Mīmāṃsakas, the Sāṅkhyas, and the Naiyāyikas?

Answer

The Mīmāṃsakas look upon *karma* as a primary means to *mokṣa*. The Sāṅkhya is another system of philosophy. The Sāṅkhyas accept two realities, namely, *puruṣa*, the spirit and *prakṛti*, matter. They claim that one gains liberation by knowing the difference between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. The Naiyāyikas, on the other hand, assert that the world is real; that *īśvara* is different from the world and you are a *jīva* who is a *kartā*, doer, and a *bhoktā*, enjoyer. The Naiyāyikas claim that one becomes liberated by knowing the different elements of which the world consists. Therefore, they analyze the world and provide the reasoning behind it. The Naiyāyikas are well known for giving us *nyāya*, logical reasoning. Their main contribution is '*pramāṇa-vicāra*', the analysis of the means of knowledge, e.g., perception, inference etc. They have analyzed the means of knowledge in great detail and their strength is their method of inference¹.

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