

कठोपनिषद् Kāthopanīṣad

हन्त ते इदं प्रवक्ष्यामि गुह्यम् ब्रह्म सनातनम् ।
यथा च मरणं प्राप्य आत्मा भवति गौतम ॥ २।२।६।
hanta te idaṁ pravakṣyāmi guhyam brahma sanātanam ।
yathā ca maraṇam prāpya ātmā bhavati gautama ॥ 2।2।6।

O Gautama, I shall explain to you this secret and ancient Brahman and also what happens to the Self after death.

Hanta te idaṁ pravakṣyāmi: Again I will teach you Sanātanam Brahma. Why this teaching again? Because it is guhyam, gopyam. It is something secret to be known, knowing which all the samsāra will be gone. Avijñānavān — one who has not known this guhyam—gopyam—Brahman will gain only death—maraṇam. I will tell you what happens to that jivātmā and how does it undergo change.

Here the word Ātman is used to indicate the ego-centre and not the Self. If we were to assume that the word literally means its own special connotation, it would mean that the mantra here is contradicting the very philosophy of the Upanishads. Nothing ever happens to the Truth. When Pure Consciousness presides over the function of the body, with reference to the body, it is said to be the 'individual soul' just as the all-pervading space with reference to the four walls of a room is said to be the 'room space'. Space as such can never be limited by the walls which themselves stand in space. Self reflected in the mind-intellect is the jīva. Lord Yama says he would explain what happens to the jiva when it leaves the body.

योनिमन्ये प्रपद्यन्ते शरीरत्वाय देहिनः ।
स्थाणुमन्येऽनुसम्यन्ति यथा कर्म यथा श्रुतम् ॥ २।२।७।
yonimanye prapadyante śarīratvāya dehinaḥ ।
sthāṇumanye'anusamyanti yathā karma yathā śrutam ॥ 2।2।7।

Some souls enter the womb for acquiring bodies and others follow the motionless, in accordance with their work and in conformity with their knowledge.

Yonimanye prapadyante śarīratvāya dehinaḥ : Certain embodied persons, who do not know the sanātanam Brahma, will only enter the wombs; not for the sake of remaining there, but to be born again for the purpose of getting a new body.

Sthānumanye'nusamyanti—Sthānu means 'immovable'. Here it refers to trees, plants etc. - vṛkṣādi sthavara bhāvam according to the karma performed by them— yathā karma—and according to yathā śrutam—what they had heard, meaning, gathered knowledge from the Scriptures.

य येष सुप्तेषु जागर्ति कामं कामं पुरुषो निर्ममाणः ।

तदेव शुक्रं तद्ब्रह्मतदेवामृतमुच्यते ।

तस्मिन्लोकाः श्रिताः सर्वे तदु नात्येति कश्चन । एतत् वै तत् ॥ २।२।८ ।

ya yeṣa supteṣu jāgarti kāmam kāmam puruṣo nirmimāṇaḥ ।

tadeva śukraṁ tadbrahmatadevāmṛtamucyate ।

tasminlokāḥ śritāḥ sarve tadu nātyeti kaścana । etat vai tat ॥ 2|2|8|

The Puruṣa who remains awake shaping (all sorts of) objects of desires (into dreams) even while we sleep,—verily, that is the pure, the Brahman, and that is also called the Immortal. In That rests all the world and none can transcend That. This verily is That (which you asked for).

Ya yeṣa supteṣu jāgarti : When the prana, karmendriya, senses and the mind go to sleep, the Puruṣa does not sleep at all; He is very much awake. Whatever that is desired is according to one's saṁskara or vasana. In the waking state when something is remembered, it is called memory. In dream it is not called memory; we call it vasana. We call it as smṛithi. Smṛithi itself in the form of impression creates a world.

Ātmā—asuptaḥ san—without going to sleep—meaning keeping awake, creates— kāmam kāmam tam abhipretam striyādi artham avidyayā nirmimāṇaḥ—desirable things as woman etc. With the power of creation, avidyaya, it covers the Atma.

Tadeva śukraṁ tad brahma tadevāmṛtamucyate: That Puruṣa is indeed śukraṁ—white, meaning pure, being free from puṇya and pāpa. Na anyat guhyaṁ brahma asti. Don't think that there is some other Brahman available. The Brahman that we are talking about is nothing but the one who does not go to sleep even though prāṇis go to sleep. Tadeva amritam uchyate. That indeed is called the indestructible in all scriptures— sarva śāstreṣu.

What is that amritam Brahma? All the worlds are Brahmaṇi āśritāḥ. Just as the earthen wares are supported by the clay, all the lokas are supported— asritāḥ—by Brahman. Tadu nātyeti kaścana. Transcending Brahman, nothing exists. Sruti again and again says what is the vastu because what is being said is not easily understood.