

Mundakopanishad

Mantra 3.1.5

सत्येन लभ्यस्तयसा ह्येष आत्मा
सम्यग्ज्ञानेन ब्रह्मचर्यो नित्यम् ।
अन्तःशरीरे ज्योतिर्मयो हि शुभ्रः
यं पशन्ति यतयः क्षिणदोषाः ॥ ३ ॥१ ॥५ ॥

*satyena labhyastapasā hyeṣa ātmā
samyagjñānena brahmacaryeṇa nityam.
antaḥśarīre jyotirmayo hi śubhraḥ
yaṁ paśyanti yatayaḥ kṣiṇadoṣāḥ. (3.1.5)*

eṣaḥ -- this ; *ātman* -- self; *hi* -- definitely;
labhyaḥ -- is gained; *nityam* -- always;
satyena -- by speaking truth; *tapasā*-- by religious discipline;
brahmacaryeṇa -- by control with reference to all the pursuits;
samyag-jñānena -- by clear knowledge; *hi* -- indeed;
yatayaḥ -- those of right effort; *kṣiṇadoṣāḥ* -- who are free from impurity;
yam -- whom; *paśyanti* -- know; *śubhraḥ* -- free from ignorance;
jyotirmayaḥ-- of the nature of light; *antaḥ* – within; *śarīre* --the body

The self is definitely gained by always speaking the truth, constant religious discipline, mastery over the senses and clear knowledge. Indeed, those who are of right effort and who are free from impurity know that self, which is free from ignorance, which is of the nature of light and which is within the body.

Samyag-jñānena eṣaḥ labhyaḥ: this *ātman* has to be gained by clear knowledge. The clear knowledge of *ātman*, *Īśvara* and *jagat* is called *samyag-jñānam*. It is gained by *śravaṇa*, listening to the words of *śāstra* and understanding their meaning. Listening implies *manana*, reasoning, and *nididhyāsana*, contemplation, also. *Manana* is not the means of knowledge, but it is meant to eliminate doubts, if any, with reference to *pramāṇa*, the means of knowledge and *prameya*, the object of knowledge. In *nididhyāsana* one re-enacts the whole listening and brings back to mind what is understood in the listening, to get *niṣṭhā*, clarity of the vision. So *śravaṇa* is the means, and *manana* and *nididhyāsana* are the main aids to *śravaṇa* in gaining *samyag-jñānam*. They are *antaraṅga-sādhanas*, the inner means.

Then, there are varieties of *bahiraṅga-sādhanas*, external means talked about in the *śāstra*. Among them, a life of *dharma* is praised here as the primary means. The words '*satyena labhyaḥ*' point to a life of *dharma*.

Satyena labhyaḥ: the *ātman* is gained by speaking the truth. The word '*satya*' does not mean here 'the absolute truth' which is to be known, because it is in the third case. The third case generally refers to an instrument. So the word '*satya*' is a means here referring to the value of speaking truth. *Satya* means not only speaking about what happened before 'as it is,' but also, speaking what one thinks.¹⁵⁷ The one who speaks truth is courageous enough to accept one's problems, and so one can deal with them also. When one avoids the problems, resisting 'what is true,' then one does not want to face oneself. One, then, cannot get out of the limitations that one is subject to. The value of *satya* is raised to a great level here because if that value is there, everything else will also follow. The word '*nitya*', at all times' joins every word in the third case. ¹⁵⁸ One has to follow the values mentioned here at all times.

The value of speaking truth stands for everything that is included in *sāmānya-dharma* and *viśeṣa-dharma*. *Sāmānya-dharma* refers to universal values like speaking truth, not taking advantage of situation and so on. *Viśeṣa-dharma* includes *sāmānya-dharma*, and also, personal conduct in a given situation that implies cultural sensitivity and propriety. Every culture has things that are valid to a person brought up in that culture. In another culture they may not be valid which is why it is *viśeṣa-dharma*. There are things that one has to follow at a given stage in one's life, as a student, as a householder and so on. They vary culture to culture. They may even consist of some conventions. In a particular country there may be some special rules like taxation laws, which a citizen of that country has to follow. These *viśeṣa-dharmas* are also important as they help one to live a life without coming into conflict with others. A particular time and place calls for a certain action on one's part, and that has to be done.

Dharma refers only to action and not a thought. In the *Mahābhārata* Kṛṣṇa tells Duryodhana, "You have been entertaining very sinful thoughts. But they do not attract any sin by themselves if they are not translated into action. You can even now give up acting upon them and still be totally free. Give the kingdom back and free yourself from any sin." The thoughts themselves are not sinful or virtuous because they do not attract *puṇya* or *pāpa*. When the thoughts are in the form of mental action like *mānasa pūjā*, however, they do attract *puṇya* because they are deliberate. In the *mānasa pūjā*, the action is complete. A wrong thought without a will behind is not an action--it is a passing thought. If it has a will behind it becomes a *mānasa karma*. So *dharma* is always *karma*.

The *karma* that you do is important. We do not have the problem of good thoughts and bad thoughts. All thoughts are just thoughts, sometimes silly. They do not have any hold over the person. Even if they have a hold, they do not really attract *puṇya* or *pāpa* until they manifest in action. Therefore, you need not bother about what is happening in the mind. Otherwise you will have a permanent problem. The more you try to avoid a particular type of thinking, considering it as sinful, the more those thoughts will come; it will become an obsession. You need to understand that *satya* is purely in action here.

Tapasā labhyaḥ hi: it is indeed gained by *tapas*. The word '*hi*' means definitely. *Tapas* stands for religious life and religious disciplines. *Satya* points to an ethical life. Mere ethical life is not enough, however, a religious life is equally important.

There are people who say, "We live an ethical life. We do not require religion or God." This particular thinking is due to some psychological problem. You cannot relate to Īśvara because you do not want to surrender. You do not want to surrender because you do not have the capacity to trust. The incapacity to trust is a childhood problem. You start your life with absolute trust. That trust is slowly eroded and when you lose it, the capacity to trust is damaged, which is why a religious life becomes very difficult.

Relating to Īśvara is very important for an individual. You are in the scheme of things and the scheme of things causes problems for everyone. The scheme of things non-separate from Īśvara. In fact, it is Īśvara. Therefore, if you are able to settle accounts with Īśvara, then you need not settle accounts with every individual in the scheme of things. It is impossible to settle accounts with every individual in the scheme of things. You may be able to accomplish it partially, but not totally. So, one should settle accounts with Īśvara.

These days, even in therapy they use prayer. In some forms of therapy there is a 12-step programme in which prayer is a very important element. Finally you have to accept Īśvara; there is no other way. Only then the individual is related to the total. In all our prayers, the word '*namaḥ*' is there. It is not an ordinary word; it is a very profound word. It means, 'I surrender.' Surrender really helps you settle accounts with Īśvara. A religious life is indicated by the word '*tapas*'. By an ethical life you avoid conflicts within yourself, and gains courage and fearlessness. A religious life then helps you to neutralise likes and dislikes, and takes care of other problems that obstruct your pursuit. In other words it is a life of *karma-yoga*. The *ātman* under discussion should be gained by *tapas*.

Brahmacaryeṇa labhyaḥ: this *ātman* is to be gained by *brahmacarya*. The word '*brahmacarya*' is generally translated as living with the teacher. It implies a mastery with reference to your pursuit. Pursuit of study and service to the teacher are included in it. These are the supporting means. Truly speaking, by knowledge alone *ātman* is gained because it is already you. *Samyag-jñānam* does not imply any doing, it implies knowing. It does not mean ethics and religion have no role to play. There is no spiritual pursuit minus ethics and religion. It never works; on the other hand it only creates problems. The *ātman* under discussion should be gained by clear knowledge preceded by *satya*, and ethical life, *tapas*, a religious life and *brahmacarya*, study of scriptures while living with and serving the teacher.

Where is this *ātman*? *Antaḥ śarīre hi śubrah*: It is within this physical body and is pure. *Ātman* is not something that is to be sought after either outside or inside; it is just you. As the locus of recognition, it is said to be in the *buddhi*, which is located in the body. Where you recognise the world, recognise the doer-enjoyer, there alone the *ātman* is to be recognised as the very truth of the experiencer, truth of what you experience, as the invariable content of the subject and the object. It is in the *buddhi* that you recognise the existence of the world. In the *buddhi* alone there is ignorance as well as right and wrong perceptions. In sleep there is neither right perception nor wrong perception because the *buddhi* is not manifest there. Where exactly the *ahankāra*, the confused *jīva* is, there alone the correction has to take place. Therefore, the *buddhi* is the place for recognising *ātman*. How is *ātman* to be recognised there?

It is *jyotirmayah*: in the form of light, that is, self-effulgent consciousness. It is a light that is not comparable to any other light. Generally you do not require a lamp to illuminate another lamp. Here all other lights require this light in order to shine. It is the light of consciousness because of which alone all lights come to light, and everything else in light comes to light. One is *satya* and the other is *mithtyā*.

The suffix of '*maya*' is used in the sense of modification like in *annamaya* which means a modified form of food. The physical body is made up of food converted into various elements, so it is called *annamaya*. This sense of '*maya*' is not the meaning here because *ātman* is not subject to any kind of change. Another meaning for the suffix '*maya*' is predominance. But predominance always accommodates something else. When you say *annamayah yajñah*, a ritual in which food is predominant, it means lot of food was distributed in the ritual. Besides food, many other things were also distributed like gold, cows and money. The *anna* was predominant, and other things were also there. In *jotirmayah* it is nothing but *jotiḥ*, light. The predominance here is total. You have to see the context and find the meaning. *Jotiḥ* cannot accommodate anything else. You cannot say it is *jotiḥ*, and at the same time, some darkness is there. Where the *jotiḥ* is, darkness is not. It is so even with reference to worldly light. The word '*hi*' means well known. The *jotiḥ* is self-evident as the I. 'I' is very well known in and through all experiences. It is *śubhrah* meaning it is totally free from ignorance.

Yatayah kṣīṇa-doṣāḥ yaṁ paśyanti: the people of right efforts, free from impurities, see. Right effort means doing things that are to be done. Those who follow a religious life and pursue knowledge see the *ātman* clearly. Those who are capable of putting forth appropriate and adequate efforts are called *yatayah*. Having lived a life of values and *karma-yoga* they have become *kṣīṇa-doṣāḥ*, free from defects such as anger, jealousy and so on. They do not come under the spell of *rāga-dveṣa*, which is the impurity. This is emphasised again and again so that it is not taken lightly. One tends to gloss over something that is repeatedly said. The *śāstra* is never tired of saying that those who have a pure mind understand the *ātman*.

The whole spectrum of means and end is presented here in one *mantra*. It was not mentioned before. It is one of the purposes for which the *Muṇḍaka* was started. One has to note here how seriously the *śruti* views all these inner means by mentioning them directly. Śaṅkara highlighted that while introducing this section. ¹⁵⁹ That is what the tradition is about. He knew exactly what the message is in this *Muṇḍaka*.

157 सत्येन । न केवलं भूतार्थवदनेन किन्तु यथार्थ-वदने ।

158 नित्यं सर्वदा । नित्यं सत्येन । नित्यं तपसा । नित्यं सम्यग्ज्ञानेन । इति सर्वत्र नित्यशब्दः अन्तर्दीपिका-नित्यायेन अनुषक्तव्यः । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

159 Refer footnote 122

To be continued.....