

Mundakopanishad

Mantra 3.1.3

यदा पश्यः पश्यते रुक्मवर्णं
कर्तारमीशं पुरुषं ब्रह्मयोनिम् ।
तदा विद्वान् पुण्यपापे विधूय
निरञ्जनः परमं साम्यमुपैति ॥ ३ ॥१ ॥३ ॥

*yadā paśyaḥ paśyate rukmavarṇam
kartāramīśam puruṣam brahmayonim.
tadā vidvān puṇyapāpe vidhūya
nirañjanaḥ paramam sāmīyamupaiti. (3.1.3)*

yadā -- when; *paśyaḥ* -- the seer; *paśyate* -- sees;

puruṣam -- the ātman; *rukmavarṇam* -- which is effulgent like the sun; *kartāram* -- the creator; *īśam* -- the Lord;

brahmayonim -- which is the cause of Brahmaji ; *tadā* -- then;

vidvān -- the one who has knowledge; *puṇyapāpe* -- puṇya and pāpa;

vidhūya -- giving up; *nirañjanaḥ* -- free from impurities;

param-- Brahman; *sāmīyam* -- oneness; *upaiti* -- attains

When one sees one's self as effulgent like the sun, as the Lord who is the creator and the cause of even *Brahmaji*, then that person gives up puṇya-pāpa. Having become free from impurities, he attains oneness with Brahman.

Yadā paśyaḥ paśyate : when the seer sees. A seer alone can see, not a blind person. By using the word 'paśyaḥ' the śāstra quietly points out an *adhikārin*, a qualified person.¹³⁹ Paśyaḥ also implies one who is a conscious being. The one who sees with the capacity to see is called paśyaḥ. One gets that special meaning here. He is a vivekin, a qualified individual who is capable of seeing the ātman as it is unfolded. What does one see?

Puruṣam rukma-varṇam: (one sees) the person who is of the colour of gold. He sees the shining ātman. Like the shine of gold that remains the same, the shine of puruṣa, ātman, does not wax or wane. It means ātman is self-effulgent. The shine of the *ātman* is not subject to decay, just like the shine of the gold. Gold is a metal that is not subject to rust at all. Like gold, Śaṅkara says, "Ātman is self-effulgent and indestructible."¹⁴⁰ The self-effulgence of ātman is ever the same.

Kartāram īśam paśyate puṇya-pāpe vidhūya: one sees oneself as the Lord, the creator, having freed oneself from the bondage of karma. The words '*kartāram īśam*' are in *bādhāyām sāmānādhikaraṇyam*.

¹⁴¹ The meaning of the word '*kartā*' goes away and only the meaning of the word '*īśa*' remains.

When there is a situation where two orders of reality are involved, and there is confusion with reference to them, then a statement of revelation is made in *bādhāyām sāmānādhikaraṇyam* to resolve the confusion about the two orders of reality. For example, the sentence 'the pot is clay' swallows the pot and reveals the clay alone as the reality, and the pot as non-separate form the clay. There is an *akhaṇḍārtha*, oneness, revealed in such sentences.

Again, *bādhāyām sāmānādhikaraṇyam* is used to negate a subjective perception like in the sentence, 'This person (that one sees) is nothing but a stump of a tree.'¹⁴² Here, the word 'this' will join with the 'stump of a tree' and the 'person' will disappear. It all depends upon what type of error is there. In '*kartāram īśam*' the *kartā* is revealed as non-separate from *īśa*.

What kind of *īśa* does he see? *Brahma-yonim*: who is the cause for even *Brahmajī*. We can also interpret the compound as 'Brahman, the cause of everything.'¹⁴³ Either way the meaning is the same. The word '*īśa*' means the lord of the body. He is the lord for this chariot of body-mind-sense complex. So the word '*īśa*' does not reveal *Īśvara* really speaking. It has a restrictive sense. The restrictive sense is negated by the use of the word 'brahma-yoni' in apposition with it. It becomes a *mahā-vākya*. First, the upaniṣad presented the *jīva* as *bhoktā*, one who enjoys the results of action. The same *jīva* is mentioned here as *kartā*. There is nothing further for us to imagine or imply. When the *jīva* sees himself as non-separate from Brahman, which is the cause for everything, he becomes free.

A person becomes a *vidvān* and gives up *puṇya-pāpa* because of that very knowledge. The Veda tells us at the beginning that every *jīva* is bound to *puṇya-pāpa*. The same Veda now says at the end, "A *vidvān* is free from *puṇya-pāpa*." He does not give them up by an act or by a *saṅkalpa*. It is like the dreamer becoming free from the actions done in the dream, when he wakes up. Being awake to the reality, the sense of doer-ship and enjoyer-ship are sublated in a *vidvān*. He recognises himself as the other bird that just watches, *abhicākaśīti*.

Nirañjanaḥ : free from any impurity with its cause ignorance. One is absolutely free from all limitations born of ignorance, like mortality and sorrow. Being free from all impurities, *paramam sāmīyam upaiti*, he attains oneness with Brahman, *Sāmīyam* means that one does not undergo any change whatsoever. Brahman never underwent a change. It is free from any kind of modification, and one recognises oneself to be that Brahman. *Śruti* says, "The knower of Brahman is Brahman.

Mantra 3.1.4

प्राणो ह्येष यः सर्वभूतैर्विभाति
विजानन् विद्वान् भवते नातिवादी ।
आत्मक्रीड आत्मरतिः क्रियावान्
एष ब्रह्मविदां वरिष्ठः ॥ ३ ॥१ ॥४ ॥

*prāṇo hyeṣa yaḥ sarvabhūtairvibhāti
vijānan vidvān bhavate nātivādī .
ātmakrīḍa ātmaratiḥ kriyāvān
eṣa brahmavidāṃ varīṣṭhaḥ. (3.1.4)*

hi -- indeed; *eṣaḥ* -- this Īśvara; *yaḥ* -- who;
prāṇaḥ -- that which sustains all life forms;
sarvabhūtaiḥ -- in the form of all things;
vibhāti -- shines; *vijānan* -- knowing this;
vidvān -- a person of wisdom; *bhavate* -- becomes;
na ativādī -- one who does not cross the limits of discourse;
ātmakrīḍaḥ -- plays in himself; *kriyāvān* -- is engaged in activities;
eṣaḥ -- such a person; *varīṣṭhaḥ*-- the most exalted;
brahmavidām -- among the knowers of Veda.

Indeed this Lord who sustains all life forms shines in the form of all things. Knowing this, the *vidvān* becomes one who does not cross the limits of discourse. He plays in himself, revels in himself and is engaged in activities. Such a person is the most exalted among the knowers of the Veda.

Prāṇo hi eṣaḥ: this one is *prāṇaḥ* that sustains all life forms. *Prāṇaḥ* here is the one who has *prāṇa-upādhi*, that is, *hiraṇyagarbha*. The word '*eṣaḥ*' refers to the one who is under discussion, who was described as *brahma-yoni*.

Sarva-bhūtaiḥ vibhāti: he shines in the form of all things, sentient and insentient. He shines as the *ātman* of all beings, and is in the form of the various elements and elementals. Here, the *śruti* quietly knocks off the *jīvatva*. A single *jīva* cannot shine as the whole universe. Īśvara alone shines in various forms and in various bodies, giving and sustaining life. He is referred to here by the word *eṣaḥ*. One has to see the jagat including one's body-mind-sense complex as Īśvara.

Saḥ vidvān vijānan: the one who sees the above fact becomes a *vidvān*. One does not become a *vidvān* by being the son of a *vidvān*. If one's father is a *vidvān*, one becomes a *paṇḍita-putra*, son of a scholar. It is not an expression of praise, but an idiomatic usage meaning 'a fool.' Suppose a boy does not study well and does not understand things, he is called *paṇḍita-putra*. Here, one is a *vidvān* not by being a *paṇḍita-putra*, but by knowing the śāstra. To become a *vidvān* one must have a desire to know, and one has to have a guru from whom to learn the śāstra. He knows very clearly that Īśvara who is the *prāṇa* is the limitless *ātman* and 'I am that *ātman*.' Śāṅkara says, "He knows it as his very self, as 'I am that Brahman' and not as different from it."¹⁴⁴ What happens to him thereafter is being said now.

Ativādī na bhavate : he does not become *ativādī*. The one who crosses the limits of discourse to establish his own view is called an *ativādin*.¹⁴⁵ But a *vidvān* does not become *ativādin* in talking about any topic in the world. Even if he talks about a mountain, he knows the mountain also is ātman. So he does not talk about anything other than a ātman. It is very interesting. All words are ātman alone; all objects are also ātman, there is nothing outside ātman. The idea conveyed here is that one can never cross ātman in talking, because there is nothing other than ātman.¹⁴⁶

Some people translate this expression as, 'He does not talk anymore about anything else except *ātman*.' That is not the meaning here. If you do not talk of anything other than ātman, it implies that there are things other than the *ātman*. If that is the case, ātman becomes one of the many objects in the world. People do say, "Do not talk about these things, you are a spiritual seeker." It is how one becomes a snob. People develop a special language, special ways of doing things. Perhaps it is also acceptable as a stage in a spiritual pursuit. But when the ātman is understood, there is no division such as 'spiritual' and 'temporal'. The object of enjoyment is ātman, enjoyment is ātman and the enjoyer is ātman. You are never away from ātman. Therefore, śruti says, *na ativādī bhavati*.

Further, you cannot do anything that is outside the ātman at any time. Neither time nor place takes you away from the ātman. You can never say, "I have strayed away from ātman." Whether you are confused or enlightened, you are there wherever you go. Not only you are ātman, what you confront also is ātman. You can never get away from the ātman.

Therefore, the śruti says, he is *ātma-kṛīḍaḥ*: one who plays in himself.¹⁴⁷ Let him sport anywhere, still he is *ātma-kṛīḍa*. Suppose he is playing football. The hitter is ātman, the hit is ātman and the hitting is the *ātman*. So nothing is really hit. There is 'as though' hitting as though. What is there is a play of the *ātman*.

He is *ātma-ratiḥ*: one who revels in the ātman. He has satisfaction in himself.¹⁴⁸ Others seek their reveling in *anātman*. They may say, "We are at least sure about *anātman*. We know about disco, television, internet and so on. Let us therefore revel in it. What is the big deal in reveling in ātman?" They say so because they do not understand the ātman.

Ātman is *pūrṇa*, complete in itself. Satisfaction is the nature of the ātman; it does not lack anything. Wherever there is any kind of joy, it is not separate from the ātman, so the love for any object is also the love of ātman alone. The word '*ātma-rati*' is the expression of ātman 's fullness. For *kṛīḍā* one requires an external means, a source of amusement like a friend, a movie, a soccer ball and so on. For *rati* one does not require any external means. That is the difference between these two words.¹⁴⁹ Because ātman is of the nature of ānanda, the one who revels in ātman is happy without any means. With the means also, he is happy.

Kriyāvān: one who has actions. He is not a doer but he has actions, that is, he does actions without the sense of doer-ship. The word '*kriyāvān*' is very interesting word. Here one can explore this with logic:¹⁵⁰ One who has action has the attribute of doer-ship because action presupposes doer-ship. But it is not true because the logic is subject to a condition.¹⁵¹ The condition is 'when the *ātman* that is free from doer-ship is not known'.¹⁵² It means there is no rule¹⁵³ that 'one who does action has the attribute of doer-ship'. The Lord says ¹⁵⁴ in the *Gītā*, "I am the one who has created this entire world. At the same time I am not the doer." As a *kriyāvān* one is with the world. Even though one does various actions, one is not the doer in the sense that one is not a *saṁsārin* because of the knowledge.

The word '*kriyāvān*' is very significant. The person who knows *ātman* is described as *ātma-rahiḥ* and *ātma-kriḍāḥ*. One may get the idea that he will not do anything, he would simply close his eyes and sit. He would live his life without performing any action because he does not require external means for his happiness, and he simply sits and enjoys himself. That is not true. So, the *śruti* negates that notion by saying *kriyāvān*. It means he is active.

Here Śaṅkara dismisses gramatically¹⁵⁵ and logically¹⁵⁶ an interpretation given to this word '*kriyāvān*' in combination with the word '*ātma-rahi*'. It is understood by some to mean one who has the action of reveling in oneself alone. This interpretation is given to establish *jñāna-karma-samuccaya*, the combination of knowledge with action, as a means for *mokṣa*. The interpretation is not valid because one who revels in oneself is not going to be engaged in any external action to seek happiness. Reveling in oneself and engaging in external action in search of happiness are opposed to each other.

Eṣaḥ brahmavidām variṣṭhaḥ: he is the most exalted among the knowers of Veda. One cannot say, "Among the *jñānins* he is the most exalted." A *jñānin* is one who knows. The knowledge 'I am Brahman' is the same in all *jñānins*. Brahman being limitless, it is not that one is more free than the other *jñānin*. So one has to explain this by saying that one person's knowledge is clearer than the other's. Instead of this explanation, the word 'brahman' can be better interpreted as Veda. *Brahmavid* means one who knows the Veda. Among the people who have the knowledge of the Veda, he is the most exalted. There are a lot of people who have vast knowledge of the Vedas, but they do not have the knowledge of Brahman. This person has the knowledge of Brahman, and therefore he is exalted. Every Vedic scholar has to become a *brahmavid*, that is the point. The knowledge of Brahman is the pay-off of all the Vedic study. Brahman alone is the most worshipful and that alone has to be gained in terms of knowledge.

- 139 पश्यतीति विद्वान् साधकः इत्यर्थः । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)
- 140 स्वयंज्योति-स्वभावं रुक्मस्य इव वा ज्योतिरस्य अविनाशी । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)
- 141 Also refer to the commentary on mantra 2.1.1
- 142 स्थाणुरयं पुरुषः ।
- 143 ब्रह्म च तद्योनिश्चासौ ब्रह्मयोनिस्तं ब्रह्मयोनिं ब्रह्मणो वाऽपरस्य योनिम् । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)
- 144 साक्षाद् आत्मभावेन अयम् अहमस्मि इति विजानन् । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)
- 145 अतीत्य सर्वान् अन्यान् वदितुं शीलमस्येति अतिवादी । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)
- 146 सर्वं यदा आत्मैव नान्यदस्तीति दृष्टं तदा किं ह्यसौ अतित्य वदेत् । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)
- 147 आत्मन्येव च क्रीडा क्रीडनं यस्य नान्यत्र पुत्र-दारादिषु स आत्मक्रीडः । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)
- 148 आत्मन्येव रती रमणं प्रातिर्यस्य स आत्म-रतिः । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)
- 149 क्रीडा बाह्य-साधन-सापेक्षा रतिस्तु साधन-निरपेक्षा बाह्य-विषय-प्रीतिमात्रमिति विशेषः । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)
- 150 यः क्रियावान् स कर्तृत्व-विशिष्टः क्रियायाः कर्तृत्व-पूर्वकत्वात् ।
- 151 A condition in a logical statement is called upādhi.
- 152 अत्रोपाधिः अकर्त्रात्म-ज्ञान- रहितत्वे सति ।
- 153 क्रियावान् कर्तृत्व-विशिष्टः इति न नियमः ।
- 154 चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं गुण-कर्म-विभागशः । तस्य कर्तारमपि मां विद्वद्यकर्तारम् अव्ययम् ॥ (भगवद् गीता 4.13)
- 155 (आत्मरतिक्रियावान् इति) समास-पाठे आत्म-रतिरेव क्रिया अस्य विद्यते इति बहुव्रीहि-मतुबर्थयोः अन्यतरः अतिरिच्यते । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)
- 156 न हि बाह्य-क्रियावान् आत्म-रतिश्च भवितुं शक्तः कश्चित् । बाह्य-क्रिया-विनिवृत्तो हि आत्म-क्रीडो भवति ।

to be continued....



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