

śraddhā-bhakti-dhyāna-yogād avaihi

Second part of the serial article continued from March 2019 issue...

THE MEANING OF THE WORD 'UPANIṢAD'

Generally the word 'upaniṣad' is interpreted as: *upa*, near; *ni*, down and *ṣad*, sitting. When these meanings are combined, the word 'upaniṣad' would refer to a knowledge gained sitting near a teacher. This is also a possible meaning. But the real meaning of the word is self-knowledge, *brahma-vidyā*. It is the knowledge of the self being identical with Brahman.

The word 'upaniṣad' has three elements—*upa-ni-ṣad*. *Ṣad* is the word that comes from the root 'sad'. In Sanskrit, a root is not a word. Every word has its root that holds the meaning of the word. Nominal and verbal words are usually formed from the roots. You can trace the grammar rules for the formation of words. Sanskrit has an evolved grammar to explain how a word has come about from its root form. For the root 'sad' we have a zero suffix (*kvip*) added to get the noun form in the sense of the agent of action. In English also we have a zero suffix. From the verb 'cook' you get the agent noun form 'cook' one who cooks. A suffix, whatever it may be, if it was there, came and went away. Similarly, the suffix 'kvip' came and went away after converting the root 'sad' into the agent of the action revealed by the root.

The root 'sad' has three meanings: *viśaraṇa*, disintegration; *gamana*, reaching; and *avasādana*, total destruction. 'Sad' disintegrates something. What does it disintegrate? It disintegrates all that you do not want, basically, in life. The real cause of your sorrow and your incapacity to handle them, are disintegrated by *upaniṣad*. It disintegrates all the *anarthas*, the undesirable things. Suppose they come back?

No, *avasādayati*, it just puts an end to them. *Avasādana* means complete destruction of all *anarthas* along with their root cause. It destroys them for good. That is okay, but there is nothing positive said here. What do you gain positively? We always like anything positive. Positively *brahma gamayati*, it takes you to Brahman, the ultimate, the limitless. Now, you are interested to know what it is that does all these things. This is revealed by *upa-ni*.

Upa and *ni* are prefixes. *Upa* indicates the agent of all the above actions. *Upa* means *sanīpe*, near. The word 'near' is a very relative word. What is near? Whatever you consider near can become far away or remote from a different standpoint. When you look at the sun from the standpoint of the stars, the sun is our nearest star. Really our sun is a star. The *śāstra* recognizes the sun as the symbol of the entire universe; because we are in the solar system and the sun stands for everything. The *śruti* says,¹

¹*Sa yaścāyam puruṣe, yaścāsāvāditye, sa ekaḥ (Taittirīyopaniṣad 1.8).*

“The one who obtains in the individual and the one in the *āditya-devatā*, sun, are the same.” So the sun is very near from the standpoint of the stars; the stars are all far away. From the standpoint of the moon the sun is far away; the moon is near. The moon is far away, Delhi is near. Delhi is far away, the wall in this auditorium is near. The wall is far away, this mike is near. That is far away, the clothes on me are near. The clothes are far away, this body is near to me. Even the body is far away, the thought that objectifies this body is very near to me. The thought is far away, ‘I’ the first person singular, the subject who is aware of the thought, is the nearest.

‘I’ is referred to as *ātman*. The word ‘*ātman*’ is always used as the third person. But the meaning of the word ‘*ātman*’ is first person singular, that is, *aham*. ‘I’, *aham* is the nearest. ‘Nearest’ is not even an appropriate word because ‘nearest’ also implies certain distance. Here, relatively speaking, with reference to everything else, *ātman* is the nearest. There is nothing nearer than the *ātman*; that is the meaning.

About me, the subject, there is confusion. What I seek in life is myself, the subject. How can it be? Whatever I seek is not me. I seek only what is ‘not me’. That is the real problem. I need to ascertain what exactly I seek. The prefix ‘*ni*’ indicates the *niścaya-jñāna*, clear knowledge, about what exactly you want in life.

You want Brahman alone, but you cannot get it because you are Brahman. You cannot be bigger than Brahman. There is nothing other than Brahman. All that is here is Brahman. Brahman is you and cannot but be you. Brahman is limitless and the limitless is you. You cannot be separate from the limitless. You are the limitless. This is *niścaya-jñāna*. Therefore, *upa-ni* means *brahma-vidyā*, the knowledge of the oneness of the self and Brahman. What does it do? It destroys all *anarthas*. The knower of *brahma-vidyā* gains Brahman. He gains the ultimate. Ultimate means there is nothing more to gain. Every other gain is fun thereafter. The life of becoming comes to an end, for there is nothing more to become.

If self-knowledge is *upaniṣad*, why is the book called *upaniṣad*? Like even a book having the subject matter of Indian History is called Indian History, a book whose subject matter is *upaniṣad* is called *upaniṣad*.

INTRODUCTION TO KAIVALYA-VĀKYA

Upaniṣads are at the end of the Veda, in the form of dialogues. These dialogues are named, and thus we have *upaniṣads* with different names. Though we have many *upaniṣads* only ten of them have been commented upon by Śaṅkara and therefore they are often studied. They are *Īśa*, *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Praśna*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Māṇḍūkya*, *Taittirīya*, *Aitareya*, *Chāndogya* and *Bṛhadāranyaka*. In *Kenopaniṣad*, the first word is ‘*kena*’ and hence it is called *Kenopaniṣad*. Similarly, in *Īśāvāsyaopaniṣad* the first two words are ‘*īśa*’ and ‘*vāsya*’.

There are some other *upaniṣads* in the *Atharvaveda* that are not commented upon by Śaṅkara. They are called 'Minor *Upaniṣads*' by some people. We do not call them minor. If you know these ten *upaniṣads*, then you can easily understand the other *upaniṣads* yourself. They need not be commented upon, which is why Śaṅkara left them. There is no minor or major among the *upaniṣads* because each *upaniṣad* is adequate and revealing the subject matter of Brahman.

One among them is *Kaivalya*, an *upaniṣad* in the *Atharvaveda*. We will take a sentence from this *upaniṣad* for our *vicāra*, inquiry. *Kevala* means one; *kevalasya bhāvah* is *kaivalya*, which means oneness. In the *Kaivalya Upaniṣad*, the *ākhyāyikā*, narration, begins with Sage Āśvalāyana going to Brahmaji and asking him, "Please teach me this *brahma-vidyā*." He is thus taught. The first line of the teaching is *śraddhā-bhaktidhyāna-yogād avaihi*.²

Brahmaji is the creator, the four-faced Lord. The narration here is just to tell us that this knowledge comes from Parameśvara which is why it is considered an independent means of knowledge. If it had come from a *puruṣa-buddhi*, human intellect, however great that *puruṣa* may be, it would not become an independent means of knowledge. It would come under perception, etc., mentioned before, and remain a theory just like many other theories that have come from great thinkers. To look upon the Veda as a means of knowledge, it must necessarily come from Īśvara.

ŚRADDHĀ

The Vedas are revelations of Īśvara. In accepting this, certain faith is involved. But it is not a blind faith. Some of the religions that are fundamentally committed to beliefs are called 'Faiths'. But we cannot say, 'Hindu Faith'. We say, 'Hindu *dharma*, *vaidika-dharma*'. There is a reason for it. Any belief we have has certain supporting arguments, though not proving arguments. This kind of argument is called *śrutyanukūla-tarka*, a reasoning that is conducive to assimilating what the Vedas reveal. I can cite a few things. For instance, the *jīva*, the soul, survives death. The *jīva* departing from the body is not seen because it is subtle. If the *jīva* departing from the body were seen, you would push the *jīva* back inside. That the *jīva* survives death is a belief. But it has supporting arguments.

We know that matter conserves itself. No one can destroy matter, much less energy. They are always in one form or the other, and there is not much difference between the two. They are convertible. No one can destroy an ounce of matter and no one can destroy a quantum of energy. We have this much knowledge. My physical body is not a mere matter-energy vesture. I am a conscious being who is conscious of matter and energy. I am the one who is conscious of matter in the form of particles, of atoms, and of energy in the form of electrons.

²Know through *śraddhā*, faith; *bhakti*, devotion; and *dhyāna*, meditation. (*Kaivalyopaniṣad* 2).

Therefore, how can it be construed that the conscious being should come to a total decimation? When these two, matter and energy, are not destroyable, the third one, the conscious being cannot be destroyed, need not be assumed to be destroyed, until otherwise proved. So, if matter and energy cannot be destroyed, the assumption that the conscious being can also survive is an argument to support the *śruti*'s statement that the *jīva* survives death of the body.

The next belief is that the *jīva* re-incarnates. It need not necessarily be here, on this planet. It can be anywhere in the universe; there are many *lokas*, realms of existence. This also is an acceptable belief, one that is not unreasonable.

Further, we all have certain experience of luck and bad luck. Everything we talk about has a cause and effect relationship. A particular phenomenon exists because there is a cause. We are certain about it. The water in the kettle is hot because it is sitting on a hot plate. You got the bus today, but you missed it yesterday. When your turn came, the conductor said 'right'. It was right for the conductor, but not for you because you are left out. Missing the bus is everybody's experience. Now and then getting the bus without any waiting is also everybody's experience. This luck—being at the right place at the right time—shows that there is something else also working for you, besides your effort. That 'something else' working along with your pursuit is called *karma*. When you bring in *karma*, it means that the past has come. Past *karmas* are *adr̥ṣṭa*, not seen, but have a basis in the *śāstra*. It means there is a *jīva* who incarnates.

There are highly documented freak cases where children remember their past lives. In one case, a three year-old child said to her parents,

"I want to go to my house."

"This is your house."

"No, I want to go to my house, my husband's house."

"What? Husband's house?"

"Yes. I met with an accident; that is the house."

Then, indications like name, location, etc., are all given and when they are checked, they find an eighty-year old man of the name given who did lose his wife in an accident. These kinds of cases are well documented by people who are supposed to do research following all the norms of documentation. There are books on this subject matter. Even Western scholars and psychologists have done research in this area, but none of them have conclusive proof; all of the evidence is only supportive.

We accept the Vedas as a means of knowledge because it has come from *Īśvara*. The *karma-kāṇḍa*, the first portion of the Veda, talks about *sādhana-sādhyas*, means and ends. It talks about unknown means for known ends. For instance, wealth, progeny, rains are all known ends for which we have unknown means. We do know certain means, but those means are not adequate. The Vedas reveal the unknown means that are in the form of rituals.

A ritual is a form of prayer. These rituals will remove all obstacles coming in the way of our efforts. Thus, we have unknown means for known ends. The results of prayers can be checked. For instance, we can do *yajñas*, fire rituals like *kārīrī* and *japas*, chants, like *Varuṇa Japa* and bring about rains. Rains do come. We cannot say that the rituals and the rains are unconnected. Again, these are all supporting arguments; we cannot prove the connection definitively.

The Vedas further talk of known means for unknown ends. You do something good for the society. For instance, you help people affected by tsunami. These are all altruistic activities, charitable activities and they are the known good things that you do. There is *punya* for all this. *Punya* is *adrṣṭa*, unseen, by you. Because of *punya*, you get into some favorable situations in life. If the *śāstra* does not mention a specific result for any *karma*, there is a general blanket rule that the result is *svarga*, heaven.

The Vedas also reveal both means and ends that are unknown. It says that if you perform *vyotistoma-yajña*, you will go to *svarga*. You cannot say anything to prove that it is not true. That itself is good enough for the Vedas to be an independent means of knowledge.

Now, the same Vedas reveal in the upaniṣads: “You are Īśvara who is the cause of this entire *jagat*.” In this, there are two possibilities. Either what the *śāstra* says is wrong, is blasphemous, or what it says is not understood. If you say it is blasphemous, you have no *śraddhā*. If you say, “Maybe it is saying something that I do not understand,” then it is *śraddhā*. *Śāstra* does not simply say, “This person who is five feet seven inches, weighing one hundred and sixty pounds, the father of two children is Īśvara.”

Śāstra has a certain teaching, a certain methodology of communication. The guru tells the *śiṣya*, “All that is here is only one; there is no second thing.” The *śiṣya* says, “You tell me there is no second thing, but you are there, I am here, and so we are two. Minimum two are there already. If two are accepted then everything else is also accepted.” Here, the *śāstra* has a vision that includes this division of subject and object.

The fact that the *śāstra* says that there is no duality, shows it accepts the seeming duality; otherwise it will not say there is no duality. The negation itself shows that the *śāstra* sees the duality very clearly. Therefore, in spite of this subject-object difference that exists, the truth is revealed as non-dual. How is one going to negate this? To negate this, one has no arguments, really.

Śāstra reveals that there is a *vastu*, a reality, knowing which everything is as well known. In fact it says, ‘Everything is known,’ I am making it ‘everything is as well known.’ If I say, everything is known, you will immediately ask me, ‘Will I know French?’ So I say, ‘as well known, as good as known.’

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