

Kaivalyopaniṣad
Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati's transcribed talk

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Why should one gain this knowledge?

Why would we want to gain that knowledge? What does it matter that it is the most exalted knowledge? What does it matter that it is always entertained by the wise or that it is a great secret? How does it matter to us? There are many great secrets in life, many great things in life. We don't necessarily bother to know them. Why, then, should we pursue this knowledge?

The reason is given in the second half of the verse, *yayā'cirātsarvapāpam vyapohya parātparam puruṣam yāti vidvān*. The knowledge is said to be that "By which a wise person destroys all evil and attains the highest *puruṣa*, who is beyond *māyā*." We want to gain the knowledge not because it is an academic pursuit, but because it is valuable to us.

Basically, we are all only interested in ourselves. As Pūjya Swamiji says, ultimately the only interest one has is to be the pleased self. A human being does not want God for the sake of God, he does not want *brahman* for the sake of *brahman*, and he does not want Vedānta for the sake of Vedānta. He does not want something for the sake of that thing; all he wants is to be the pleased self. The truth of the matter is that man is the problem and he is himself the solution. He is the problem because he finds himself displeased with himself, and he will become the solution when he finds himself pleased with himself. There is nothing else in life.

All problems arise because we are not pleased with ourselves. This being so, all problems are solved when we are pleased with ourselves. All the sorrow is present because we are not pleased with ourselves and all the sorrow is removed when we discover ourselves to be pleased with ourselves. That is why there is so much effort expended towards so many achievements. Vedānta says that the only way we can be pleased with ourselves is by knowing ourselves to be *brahman*. By knowing that we already are what we seek to be and by discovering that limitlessness is already our nature, we are pleased with ourselves once and for all.

Knowledge destroys evil, the product of ignorance

Sarvapāpam vyapohya means having crossed all evil. What is evil? Why is there evil? Why is there cruelty in this world? Why is there anger, injustice, and exploitation? These are good questions. When you analyze it, all evil is found to be the product of ignorance. If only we knew what we are, we would never be cruel or unkind. We would never be aggressive or hurtful. If we recognize that we are limitless and complete, the possibility of our being unkind would not arise because we would know everything to be our own selves; after all, we can never be unkind to ourselves. There will be no evil when this knowledge takes place. All the evil in the creation is the product of ignorance. A cruel person is not cruel by choice; he is helplessly cruel. Similarly, the terrorist is helplessly a terrorist, and so on. Ignorance and the false notions and perceptions born of ignorance make a person what he is.

As Lord Kṛṣṇa says, “Just as the blazing fire turns firewood to ashes this knowledge turns all the actions to ashes.”¹ What we call ‘sin’ is any action that is unbecoming. Sin can be described as an act that violates the existing order, called *dharma*. When we violate the order of *dharma*, we violate the harmony, which only means that we violate ourselves. When we perform an action that is in violation of our nature, conflict is created. This is what ignorance does or what ignorance makes us do. Because of ignorance, not only do we not know the true nature of ourselves, but we also take ourselves to be contrary to what we are. It is because of ignorance that we take ourselves to be limited beings and take ourselves to be doers and enjoyers. “One who thinks that he is the agent of action and another who thinks that he is the object of action, both of them do not know.”²

¹ यथैधांसि समिद्धोऽग्निर्भस्मसात्कुरुतेऽर्जुन ।

ज्ञानान्निः सर्वकर्माणि भस्मसात्कुरुते तथा ॥

yathaidhāṁsi samiddho'gnirbhasmasātkurute'rjuna

jñānāgniḥ sarvakarmāṇi bhasmasātkurute tathā (BG 4.37)

² य एनं वेत्ति हन्तारं यश्चैनं मन्यते हतम् ।

उभौ तौ न विजानीतो नायं हन्ति न हन्यते ॥

ya enaṁ veti hantāraṁ yaścainaṁ manyate hatam

ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṁ hanti na hanyate (BG 2.19)

We are born with the conclusions that we are the *kartā* or doer and the *bhoktā* or enjoyer, and, therefore, suffer from a sense of guilt and hurt. It is that which makes us think of ourselves as limited, helpless or hapless individuals.

That the limitless person takes himself or herself to be limited is truly the 'original sin.' Such ignorance results in constant self-denial, which leads to self-non-acceptance, self-rejection, and self-condemnation. That is what Vedānta would call sin or *pāpa*.³ It is the fact of denying oneself, imposing smallness upon oneself, becoming a beggar. Even though *ānanda* or wholeness is our very nature, we become the seekers of happiness. That amounts to insulting ourselves, denying ourselves. It is like a millionaire, who, under the effect of intoxication, forgets his identity. The man lies drunk on the roadside near a gutter, begging like a pauper. Such a wealthy person as he is begging because he does not know himself! Similarly, the human being assumes a state of helpless existence and is constantly begging, "Please give me happiness; please give me love; please help me, please accept me." This is nothing short of self-denial and a violation of oneself and can be called a sin.

All external violence originates from the violence that goes on within. The primary violence is the inner violation of the self on account of ignorance, which then expresses as violence in one's interactions and evil behavior in the world outside. Therefore, what we call evil, such as *kāma* or lust, *krodha* or anger, and *lobha* or greed are products of ignorance. It is ignorance that results in the self-denial that causes all the problems of human beings. It is the behavior born of such ignorance that is responsible for all the pain or unhappiness in the world.

Yayā means by which. It indicates that sin is completely destroyed by *brahma-vidyā*, the knowledge of *brahman*, the knowledge that one is *brahman*. One is then

³योऽन्यथा सन्तमात्मानमन्यथा प्रतिपाद्यते ।

किं तेन न कृतं पापं चोरेणात्मापहारिणा ॥

yo'nyathā santamātmānamanyathā pratipādyate

kiṁ tena na kṛtaṁ pāpaṁ coreṇātmāpahāriṇā

One who takes the self that is limitless to be limited, what sin has that thief who has stolen the *ātma* not committed? (SS 1.33)

no more a limited being; one is limitless. The knowledge removes all the complexes and all the negative propensities born of these wrong complexes. All bondage comes to an end because the bondage is but a notion. Bondage is not a reality about the self. Therefore, becoming free does not mean that we have to become free of real bondage; it is merely the process of becoming free from the notion of bondage. In the wake of this knowledge, all false perceptions drop off. In the wake of a true perception of oneself, one sees that one is limitless, one-without-a-second and non-dual, free from any lack, and boundless. Upon gaining this knowledge, all sense of smallness disappears, all dissatisfaction with oneself disappears, and all desire to become someone or something else disappears.

The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad⁴ asks what desires could possibly remain when one gains this knowledge, because the desirer himself does not remain. In a dream, the dreamer is and so there is a sense of desire. Upon awakening, however, how can the dream desires remain when the dreamer himself is no more? Desire is there as long as there is a sense of smallness. When that goes away in the knowledge that one is limitless and non dual, neither the desirer nor the object of desire remains. What remains is one, *pūrṇam eva avaśiṣyate*, one wholeness, completeness alone, remains⁵. Such is the perception of the wise person. All negativities, which are products of false perception, drop off, *vyapohya*, before long, *achirāt*.

O revered Sir, please impart that knowledge to me. This is a very intelligent request. The student knows exactly what he wants, because he must have really thought about things. In the Kena Upaniṣad⁶, we read, *kena iṣitam patati preṣitam manah*, “Impelled by whom does the mind go toward its objects?” Most of us

⁴ आत्मानं चेद्विजानीयादयमस्मीति पूरुषः ।

किमिच्छन्कस्य कामाय शरीरमनुसंज्वरेत् ॥

ātmānaṁ cedvijānīyādayamasmīti pūruṣaḥ

kimicchankasya kāmāya śarīramanusāñjvaret

If a man knows the self as I am this (*brahman*), then desiring what and for whose sake will he be afflicted in the wake of the body? (Bṛ.Up. 4.4.12)

⁵ Bṛ.Up. 5.1.1

⁶ Ke.Up. 1.1

would not even think of the question, taking for granted that the mind just thinks and it is not a big deal. But the question of the student shows some prior reflection that there is perhaps someone or something behind the mind. Who is that?

Jijñāsā or the desire on the part of the student to know the truth is very important. Vedānta gives great importance not to questioning, but to the asking of questions. The *śāstra* says very clearly that this knowledge should not be imparted to one who does not seek the knowledge, to one who does not ask for it.⁷

Why do we consider the act of formally asking for the knowledge to be important? Well, it is not a mere act of formality. When a person asks for it, it shows that he has a value for it and that he has thought about it. It is apparent that he must have gone through a lot of inner struggle or inquiry and not found a satisfactory answer and also that he, at the same time, cannot remain without the answer either. Therefore, he goes to the teacher. That is why *paripraśna*, the all-encompassing question, becomes very important. Here the student wants the knowledge of *brahman* so that he can become free from sorrow once and for all and attain unsurpassable happiness.

Parātparam puruṣam yāti vidvān, the knower of the truth attains the highest *puruṣa*. The word *puruṣa* shows the oneness between the *jīva* and *brahman*. It is derived from the root *pṛ*, which conveys the sense of filling up. Thus, *puruṣa* means one who fills up everything, one who is complete, whole, limitless. In that sense it means *brahman*. In addition, *puruṣa* is also derived from the word *puri*, which means a city. *Purau śayanāt puruṣaḥ*, the one who dwells in the 'city' of the body is the *puruṣa*. In that sense, *puruṣa* means the *jīva*, the self, the one that dwells in the hearts of all. Thus, the word *puruṣa* means *brahman*, as well as the *jīva*, indicating that they are one.

If *puruṣa* means whole and limitless, *puruṣam yāti* means that one attains the limitless; 'through this knowledge, burning all his sins, the wise person attains the limitless.' Yet, as we have seen, the limitless cannot be attained. Whatever is attained

⁷नापृष्टः कस्यचित् ब्रूयात् ।

nāpṛṣṭaḥ kasyacit brūyāt (MS 2.110)

is fated to be limited. However, it is as though we attain the limitless. For instance, sometimes, you wear a necklace on your neck and then run around looking for it all over. Then, after considerable searching, you suddenly discover it is right there on your neck. It then does feel as though you got it, even though you did not really 'get' it; you already had it. The feeling of having gained it arises because you thought it was lost. Here, upon gaining the knowledge, the feeling is that one has reached the limitless. The implication is that the *vidvān* or wise person knows the *puruṣa* or the limitless to be his own self.

Sādhana and *Sādhyā*: Means and End

Now the teacher responds to the request of the student.

तस्मै स होवाच पितामहश्च
श्रद्धाभक्तिध्यानयोगादवेहि ॥ २ ॥
tasmai sa hovāca pitāmahaśca
śraddhābhaktidhyānayogādavehi

तस्मै - to him सः - he ह - indeed उवाच - said पितामहः - the grandsire च - and श्रद्धा-भक्ति-
ध्यानयोगात्वे - by trust (in the teaching), commitment and meditation अवेहि - may
you know

To him the grandsire said, "May you know through *śraddhā*, trust in the teaching, *bhakti*, commitment, and *dhyāna*, meditation." (2)

Pitāmaha means grandfather. This is another name of *Brahmājī*, because, as the creator, all the creatures are his progeny. He is the grandfather also because he created the *Prajāpatis*, who then created this world. *Prajāpati* is our creator and father, and his father, *Brahmājī*, is, therefore, our grandfather or grandsire.

To be continued...