

Kaivalyopaniṣad
Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati's transcribed talk

This is the eighth part of the serial article, continuation from December 2021 newsletter.

In the statement of the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, quoted earlier,¹ in which the student approaches the revered teacher and asks, “What is it knowing which everything is as well known,” the student seems to want to know everything. When a person says he wants to know everything, it means he wants to be clear about everything, comfortable with everything. One can be comfortable with something only when one recognizes its reality. In knowing *brahman*, one knows everything. This is the reason why *brahma-vidyā* is called the most exalted knowledge.

The knowledge of the self is ever a secret

Why is *brahma-vidyā nigūḍhā*, most secret?

Brahmavidyā is held to be the most secret knowledge because it is where nobody would suspect it to be. Whoever is pursuing any form of knowledge, whether scientist, poet or artist, is in search of something fundamental. There is an inherent desire in every human being to know the truth; the intellect is as though wedded to the truth and the search can truly come to fruition only when *brahman* is discovered. When you are investigating the nature of a cell, you want to know the secret of life. A physical scientist wants to know the secret of matter. Yet, whatever it is that one wants to know, ultimately, the secret of all the secrets is *brahman*. This can be approached in any way—through chemistry, through physics, or whatever—because *brahman* is the fundamental truth that is behind everything: *Brahman* alone becomes the molecule, it alone becomes the atom, and it alone becomes DNA. *Brahman* is the fundamental essence of everything. As Lord Kṛṣṇa says, one's desire for knowledge is satiated when one comes to know *Brahman* : “It is that, knowing which, nothing else remains to be known.”²

¹ Mu.Up. 1.1.3

² यज्ज्ञात्वा नेह भूयोऽन्यज्ज्ञातव्यमवशिष्यते ॥ *yajjñātvā neha bhūyo'nyajjñātavyamavaśiṣyate* (BG 7.2)

Human curiosity knows no bounds. The more one knows the more one still wants to know; he does not ever seem to find what has to be known. However, when it comes to gaining the knowledge of *brahman*, the very desire for knowledge gets satisfied, it reaches its fruition.

When it is said there that upon knowing *brahman* nothing remains to be known, it also means that nothing remains to be done. Usually after something is known, there is something to be done because the knowledge of a thing creates a desire to acquire or achieve. For instance, when I come to know about the Grand Canyon upon having read the description and seen the pictures, I want to go there. The knowledge of something desirable thus creates a desire to achieve it, to acquire and enjoy it. Knowledge creates desire, and desire creates action.

Knowledge is usually not an end, but a beginning. *Brahmavidyā* is a different kind of knowledge; it is both the beginning and the end. Knowing *brahman* as the self, there remains no need to achieve anything, because, as said before, what it involves is *prāptasya prāptiḥ*, the achievement of that which is already achieved.

Vedānta teaches that what one wants to achieve is the limitless, which is one's own nature. When *brahman* is known, it is known as the self; the truth is known correctly when it is known to be one's own self. In the Upadeśa Sāram³, Ramaṇa Maharṣi says, "He (alone) knows God properly who knows God as his self." The knowledge becomes complete when there is total satisfaction. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna, *etadbuddhvā buddhimān syāt kṛtakṛtyaśca bhārata*⁴, knowing this, man becomes wise and gains fulfillment. We gain total fulfillment in life when we know that *brahman* or God is our own self. If we know God to be infinite but still continue to think of ourselves as limited beings, there can be no contentment in life.

³वेषहानतः स्वात्मदर्शनम् । ईशदर्शनं स्वात्मरूपतः ॥

veṣahānataḥ svātmadarśanam, īśadarśanam svātmarūpataḥ (Upadeśa Sāram 25)

⁴ BG 15.20

We take for granted that we are what we take ourselves to be, and that the truth is elsewhere and God is also elsewhere. Therefore, this knowledge remains ever a secret. As long as we look for it outside of ourselves, so long does it remain hidden from us. As long as the tenth boy keeps looking for the tenth boy, the tenth boy remains undiscovered. Therefore, the identity of the tenth boy is the most secret. Yet to whom does this remain a secret? It is a secret for the one searching for the tenth boy. Similarly, when the human being searches for happiness and freedom, which amounts to searching for *brahman*, its identity remains a secret because it is his very self.

Why does this continue to remain a secret? It is because he has already concluded that he is not *brahman*, already concluded that he is limited.

While its identity remains a secret, it is not as if the self can ever remain hidden. The nature of the self is consciousness and consciousness is ever manifest, ever evident, and ever experienced. Also, it is not that one never experiences the self, because the fact is that without the self no experience is possible. Therefore, the self is not 'hidden' in that sense; it is hidden only in the notion that one considers oneself to be a limited individual.

Vedānta presents the famous example of the rope and snake: What lies in front of us is a rope, but because of poor light or some other reason, we perceive it as a snake. The rope is thus 'hidden' from sight, but where is it hidden? It is merely hidden behind the notion of it being a snake. It is the notion of the presence of the snake that keeps the rope hidden from plain sight; the conclusion that it is a snake alone hides the rope. So also, that which keeps *brahman* hidden from us is our conclusion that we are *jīvas*, limited individual beings. That conclusion makes us look for *brahman* elsewhere and keeps us from looking for it where it is. It is in that sense that *brahmanavidyā* is *nigūḍhā*, hidden.

Another reason that the knowledge of *brahman* remains a secret is because it can be appreciated only by those who are eligible and qualified. This might make someone think that if this is the ultimate secret, either no one knows it or it is un-

knowable, or perhaps only a few privileged ones can know it. But that is not so; *sadā sadbhiḥ sevya mānām*, it is constantly pursued and also known by the noble ones, by the learned, and by those who have gained purity of mind; by them is *brahman* always known. The knowers of *brahman* behold it in their hearts as their own selves. Clearly, therefore, it is not that *brahman* is not known or cannot be known. The wise do indeed abide in the knowledge of *brahman*. The point here is that this extraordinary achievement is not arbitrary or mysterious and if many have achieved it so can we.

When can one always abide in something? It is possible only when it is one's own self. Only when we know *brahman* as our own selves can we always abide in *brahman*. As long as God is known as someone different and apart from us, we cannot always abide in God. Again, as Pūjya Swamiji would say, God comes and goes but the seer ever remains, because God is thought to be different from ourselves. As long as the mind is focused on God, so long is God an object of experience; when the focus of the mind changes, God is no longer an object of experience. We must understand that the self is not an object of experience. It is one's own self, and, therefore, ever shining and ever oneself.

Oh revered sir, please impart that knowledge of *brahman*, which is of this nature.

To be continued...

“Memory is not meant for self-judgment but purely for practical things. Without it you will be asking your wife every morning who she is, or you will be eating four lunches a day. To judge yourself on the basis of memory is the silliest thing. Use your memory only as it is meant to be used.”

- Swami Dayananda Saraswati