

Kaivalyopaniṣad
Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati's transcribed talk

This is the fourteenth part of the serial article, continuation from June 2022 newsletter.

The significance of *tyāga*, renunciation

In the recognition that immortality, *sat-cit-ānanda*, is all we want, naturally, whatever makes us immortal becomes important. We recognize that mortality is the product of ignorance and not a reality. So “to become immortal” means to remove the ignorance that creates the notion or complex of mortality. That is how the knowledge becomes important. Then the means of knowledge, *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* become important. When the mind is free from every other pre-occupation, it becomes available for *śravaṇa* etc. Giving up all the preoccupations is called *tyāga*, renunciation. Renunciation is the letting go or the dropping off or the giving up of everything other than the self. That is the result of the recognition of what it is that we truly want.

The wise, who have *viveka* or discrimination, recognize what they want in life. By the use of the word *tyāgena*, through renunciation, this verse tells us that their priorities are very clear to them. They recognize that there is no need to achieve the various ends, such as wealth, fame, name, prosperity, heaven, or anything else, because gaining them can neither add anything to the self nor take anything away from it. Therefore, the wise leave these ends where they are and also drop their pursuits of achieving these external ‘band-aids.’ It is like a person who is able to walk well not needing to hang on to crutches. Therefore, the wise give up all *karma*. *Karma* here means actions that are the means for achieving those ends that no longer have any meaning.

The verse says, *na karmaṇā*, not through action, *na prajayā*, or through progeny, *dhanena*, or through wealth, can one ever gain *amṛtatvam*, because all of them are but means to achieve limited ends. There are four recognized *puruṣārthas* or human pursuits - *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*, and *mokṣa*, of which these represent

dharma, *artha*, and *kāma*. Here *karma* means *dharma*, the Vedic rituals, which are the means of attaining heaven. *Prajā* or progeny is *kāma*, which stands for all the pleasures and sense gratifications that one is seeking. *Dhana* is *artha*, wealth and prosperity and name and fame. *Mokṣa*, liberation, is the fourth *puruṣārtha*. One's commitment to *mokṣa*, the fourth *puruṣārtha*, becomes firm and single pointed only when the commitment to the other three goes away. In the wake of this understanding, we recognize that wealth, security, entertainment or sense-gratification, even heaven, are not meaningful. We then become free from the need to achieve or attain them.

We are told that it is not through *dharma*, *artha*, or *kāma* that the wise attained immortality; it is *tyāgena*, by renouncing all three, that they attained immortality. As long as we believe that *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* are important, the mind will be occupied with habitually thinking of those things even when we are trying to listen to Vedānta. If wealth, name, fame, prosperity, and heaven are valuable to us, they will surface in the mind now and then and draw our attention, "OK, now enough of this study. When are we going back to having fun?" We cannot enjoy focus or single-pointedness of mind.

Renunciation is the discovery of freedom from the need for those ends, so that the mind becomes free from any preoccupation with them. The mind is then totally available for the pursuit of knowledge. That is the idea of renunciation. Renunciation as a way of life is desirable in the sense that, at least in the Vedic tradition, it meant that the person has no other commitments. As Pūjya Swamiji would say, the *sannyāsī* is the only person who has no role to play. Otherwise, a person has many roles to play because there are many duties and commitments. As long as there are duties and commitments, one has to play roles; one has to do things that are required to be done, there is no question about it. Therefore, in the Vedic times, the teacher initiated the students into renunciation as a lifestyle to free their minds from guilt about not performing duties during the course of study. Otherwise, one would feel that one has failed to perform certain duties. When duties are

formally renounced, the mind becomes free from guilt and every other preoccupation and becomes available for study and contemplation.

How is immortality attained?

How did they attain immortality? Where is immortality?

The second part of the verse says, *yatayaḥ viśanti*, the *sannyāsīs* enter. Here entering implies discovering immortality as being one's own self. These sages and renunciates enter the cave of the heart and 'see' immortality. Seeing immortality means 'becoming' immortal or discovering oneself to be immortal, discovering oneself to be what one is seeking.

Pareṇa nākam means that which is beyond heaven. Heaven has always fascinated people living on earth, whether in the Vedic times or the present, because people are acutely conscious of the difficulties, pain, and conflicts on earth. There is birth and death, disease, old age, and conflicts. Humans want to be free of the pain, and heaven is the realm that is said to be free of all pain. There, we are told, there is no death or old age, no disease, no pain, and no problems. Heaven seems to be an ideal place where there is only pleasure and nothing else, and, therefore, one desires to be there.

Even if we were to suppose that there is indeed such a place, where one can enjoy the pleasures for a great length of time, the *śāstras* tell us that the pleasures in heaven last only as long as one's *pun̄ya-karmas* or virtuous deeds last. *Kṣīṇe pun̄ye martyalokam viśanti*¹, they return to the world of mortals when their merits are exhausted. Just as you can stay in a five-star hotel only as long as you have money in your pocket, one can stay in heaven only as long as the money in the form of *pun̄yakarma* or virtuous actions lasts. When that gets exhausted, one is out. When you enter a hotel, the bellman receives you and carries your bags and escorts you to your room. Everything is nice as long as you keep paying your bills. When they discover that you cannot pay the bills any more, you will be sent away unceremo-

¹ BG 9.21

niously. Even in heaven, there is only relative happiness; it is not absolute or unconditional happiness and there are always some conditions to be fulfilled.

Pareṇa nākam. Here, however, it is said that the sages enter what is even beyond heaven. It refers to unconditional happiness, happiness that is natural and uncreated, not happiness that is acquired from sources other than oneself. Happiness that is not created also does not die; it is timeless. Where is such timeless happiness located? *Nihitam guhāyām*, it obtains within their hearts, as the self. When it is said that the wise enter the caves of their own hearts, it means that the wise discover their own selves to be the immortality, the unconditional, timeless happiness that they are seeking.

Yad vibhrājate means that which shines. The self is consciousness, ever shining, ever evident, and of the nature of *ānanda* or wholeness. That it is *pareṇa nākam*, beyond heaven, means that it is a happiness that is not created or ever destroyed or attained, and which is naturally there, ever shining. Then why do we not experience it all the time? It is our ignorance and erroneous notions that deny us the experience of the one true self. It is not that one has to gain or achieve immortality from wherever it lies hidden, but that the immortality simply lies veiled behind the various notions born of ignorance. The wise become free of all the notions in the wake of the knowledge. Therefore the self, which is of the very nature of *ānanda*, appears shining in its total brilliance and the sages abide in it. The wise do not come to know immortality, *ānanda* or unconditional happiness as the self either through *karma* or other means, but through knowledge, which is attained through renunciation alone.

The next verse describes renunciates in greater detail.

To be continued...