



Muṇḍakopaniṣad Mantrā 3



(continued from the last issue)

Having approached Aṅgiras in this manner, Śaunaka asked a question. What did he ask? He says, “he bhagavaḥ kasminnu vijñāte sarvam idaṁ vijñātaṁ bhavati: Oh, Revered Sir, by knowing which one thing alone, is everything known?” Idaṁ sarvam means this entire jagat, which is in the form of varieties of things, is an object to be known.

Here again Śaṅkara raises a question as to how Śaunaka can ask this question ‘knowing which’, unless such a thing is visible to him. Suppose a fire ritual is going on and there are many cups placed around the fire altar. If ghee is to be poured in one of them, and one does not know in which cup it has to be poured, one may ask, “kasmin nidheyam”, in which vessel does it have to be poured?” The other person may say, “place it in the cup which is on the southern side”. The question is proper here because all the cups are visible, and the questioner wants to know that particular cup in which action is to be done. Only when things are clear, can one ask the question, ‘kasmin, which?’

Similarly, the question ‘what is that one thing knowing which everything is as well known?’ implies that Śaunaka sees many things, and among them there must be one thing, knowing which everything is as well known. How come Śaunaka knows that there is such a thing, knowing which everything is as well known? We do not see such a thing.

The other problem is, if it is one of the many things, then by knowing that one thing, one is not going to know everything else. In our life that is the problem. We always find that by knowing one thing, only one thing is known and that also is not known completely. How much we know of that one thing is a big question mark. How can we know everything that is here in this world? By knowing one thing we do not know anything else. Therefore, how is the question on the part of Śaunaka possible?

Śaṅkara answers the question by saying that Śaunaka had heard¹ about the existence of such a thing from the words of exalted people in the society and their pursuits. He is already a mahāśāla,² a famous householder. That means he had studied the Veda, he had performed the rituals, he had matured in life. So, he knows what he is asking for. He has heard this, ‘If one knows that one thing, everything is known’. It is said in the Sastra also. Taittiriyaopaniṣad (2.1) says, “brahmavid āpnoti param, the knower of Brahman gains

¹ सर्वं यदिदं विज्ञेयं विज्ञातं विशेषेण ज्ञातमवगतं भवतीति एकस्मिन् ज्ञाते सर्वविद् भवतीति शिष्टं प्रवादं श्रुतवान् शौनकः । तद्विशेषं विज्ञातुकाम सन् कस्मिन्विति वितर्कयन् पप्रच्छ । - मुण्डकभाष्यम्

² The word literally means one who has a big establishment for the study of the Vedas, for performing rituals, for distributing food and so on.

what is limitless". Therefore, Śaunaka wants to know that 'one' thing knowing which everything is known.

In the world also we see such a phenomenon³. Suppose there are many ornaments made of gold. We know that all of them are nothing but gold. Ornaments are many and varied, but they are all born of gold which is the material cause of all of them. By knowing the truth of one gold ornament, everything else that is made of gold is as well known. By this, we know that knowing the material cause, all the products of it are as well known.

Similarly, there must be one material cause for the entire universe and knowing that cause everything else becomes as well known. If you know the svarūpa, nature, of the cause, the svarūpa of the effects is as well known because the effects are not separate from the cause. Śaunaka wants to know whether such a cause is there, and if it exists, he wants to know its svarūpa.

It is not that knowing Brahman one will know physics, electronics and so on. The point is that Brahman is satya; everything else is mithyā. Knowing satya and mithyā you become sarvajña, all knowledge. A second thing of the same order of reality as satya not being there, there is nothing else to be known. Therefore, everything is as well known. One becomes sarvajña also for this reason. Knowing that vastu you do not have the conclusion of your being ignorant. The conclusion 'I am ignorant' is swallowed by this knowledge, and therefore, that alone is knowledge. Every other piece of knowledge will keep you ignorant. The conclusion 'I am ignorant' is swallowed by this knowledge, and therefore, that alone is knowledge. Every other piece of knowledge will keep you ignorant. In any piece of knowledge there are pieces that you have to know. Therefore, 'I am ignorant' is always kept alive. This is the only knowledge which knocks off the conclusion 'I am ignorant'. Once that conclusion is gone then everything is as well known, because you are not ignorant any more. A wise person is sarvajña in the sense that he knows, "Every thing that is here is Brahman. I am that Brahman".

To be sarvavit, knower of everything in detail, one has to be Īśvara. He knows everything without the need of antaḥkaraṇa, mind. Knowing through the mind means one has to know in sequence. That is how a human mind functions and gathers knowledge. When one knows one thing, one cannot know another thing simultaneously. So, Īśvara alone is sarvavit. A wise person is not sarvavit. He does not know the details of mithyā things. Being limited from the standpoint of a given upādhi, adjunct, like the mind, he can appreciate Īśvara who is limitless and praise him. Śaṅkara praises Īśvara in different forms through his various hymns. Therefore, Śaunaka's question is tenable.

³ अथवा लोक-सामान्य-दृष्ट्या ज्ञात्वैव पप्रच्छ । सन्ति लोके सुवर्णादि-शकल भेदाः सुवर्णत्वाद्येकत्व-विज्ञायमाना लौकिकैः । तथा किं न्वस्ति सर्वस्य जगद्भद्रस्य एकं करणं यदेकस्मिन् विज्ञाते सर्वं विज्ञातं भवतीति । मुण्डक भाष्यम्

Knowing everything by knowing one thing is possible only in Vedanta because we have two orders of reality. One is satya; the other is that which is non-separate from satya. We have to say 'the other' because it is there. It is called sṛṣṭi, creation, which is the meaning of 'idam sarvam' or 'jagat'. It is something that is useful, but is entirely non-separate from the satya, which is the vastu. The vastu, on the other hand, has nothing to do with the jagat. If you know that vastu, everything being non-separate from that vastu, is as well known.

From this we can make an arthāpatti, presumption, that the above set up is not possible unless the entire jagat is mithyā and Brahman, the satya, is the adhiṣṭhāna, basis for the mithyā and Brahman, the satya, is the adhiṣṭhāna, basis for the mithyā jagat. If Brahman itself had completely undergone a change to become the jagat, then Brahman would not be here any more. All that is here would be the jagat, and we would have to know tht in detail, which is not possible. But that is not the question here. The question is 'What is that vastu knowing which all that is here is known'. Therefore, the vastu is there as it is, and it is to be known. If by knowing that vastu this jagat is as well known, then the jagat should not be different from that vastu. From the question we understand that this is the only way to answer it. Every thing that is here has to be that very vastu itself, not separate from it. But the vastu has nothing to do with any of them. So, the vastu remains in its original form in spite of appearing as this jagat. Then by knowing it everything is as well known. Thus we get this answer through arthāpatti.

In the sixth chapter of Chāndogyopaniṣad, there is a similar question⁴. Uddāalaka asks his son Svetaketu, "Hey, did you ask for that knowledge from your teacher knowing which everything is as well known?" Svetaketu was a proud person and he said, "I do not think my teacher knew this". Then he asked his father, "Is there such knowledge?" He is a graduate and a good student, so he doubts the existence of such knowledge. How can there be a discipline of knowledge gaining which everything is as well known? Uddāalaka answers him with the help of certain examples.

He teaches: If you take a clay pot and enquire into what it is, you come to know that the pot is nothing but clay. If you know the clay, then the entire world of earthenware is known. In other words, an effect is not separate from its cause. If you know the cause, the entire effect is as well known. The truth of everything is one cause and a second thing is not there. What you count as second is only a nāma-rūpa, name and form. It is only from the standpoint of nāma-rūpa that we count as one, two, three and so on, but from the standpoint of the vastu, it is always one. Therefore, you have to know that one reality in order to know the entire jagat, if there is such a reality. That reality is unfolded thereafter in the Chāndogyopaniṣad. Here it is differently dealt with.

⁴ yena aśrutaṁ śrutaṁ bhavati amataṁ matam avijñātaṁ vijñātamiti | (Chāndoḷjnopaniṣd 6|1|3)