

The Chandogya Camp in Rishikesh

The Chandogya Camp in Rishikesh ended the day before Maha Sivaratri, 2013. Over the course of the camp we followed Svetuketu, the student in the sixth chapter of Chandogya Upanishad, as he was taught, and understood the *mahavakya*, *tat tvam asi*. Gratefully, Svetuketu asked his teacher, who was his father, to explain the *mahavakya* to him no less than eight times. Indeed, if Svetuketu had asked a dozen more times, no one attending the camp would have complained, extending as it would have Puja Swamiji's ever clear unfolding of the Upanishad.

Uddalaka, Svetuketu's father, teaches Svetuketu the truth of what is, knowing which all else is as though known. First Uddalaka explains the nature of creation. Uddhalaka explains how, by its own *sankalpa*, unmanifest *sat* as though becomes manifest. *Sat* created the subtle element fire. Fire, necessarily associated with *sat*, created the subtle element water, which likewise created the subtle element earth. These subtle elements, when combined become grossified, retaining their individual names according to the predominance of each in the three combinations. It is these subtle and gross elements which, having *sat* as their cause, make up the entire creation, including the human body, mind and senses. Thus it is that the creation is *sat*.

How can that which is one without second, which is undivided, which is not available for perception, be manifest? The answer is *vacarambhana*, having its basis in word and meaning alone. All perceived differences in the manifestation, including the manifestation itself, are word and meaning alone. Just as clay is clay whether it has pot-ness, bowl-ness, etc., so too, no matter what name is given, everything is *sat* alone. This is the magic, *mithya*, of the entire creation.

Having explained the creation, Uddalaka describes what happens at the end of manifestation. Just as, when the mind is resolved during sleep one is free from the mistaken identification with the body, mind and senses, when the *jiva's prarabdha karma* in a given body is exhausted, the *jiva* ceases to identify with that body, and resolves into *sat*. If the *jiva* has not yet achieved its purpose, to know the truth of itself as one with *sat*, it will manifest again in a different body in keeping with its *karma*. If, however, the *jiva* knows the truth of itself, it will not take another body. That *sat*, from which everything manifests and into which everything resolves, Uddalaka tells Svetuketu, you are that, *tat tvam asi*.

The text of the Upanishad does not provide specific questions asked by Svetuketu, after Uddalaka tells him, *tat tvam asi*. However,

after each repetition, Shankaracharya poses questions in the *bhashya* drawn from the teaching that follows. Thus, the first question is how it is possible that the *jiva* does not know the truth of itself as *sat*, despite the mind resolving daily in sleep? Uddalaka uses honey made of nectar collected from various species of plants by the bees, as an example. Regardless of where the nectar is gathered, in the process of being reduced to the sweet that is honey, any peculiar characteristic derived from the plant source is given up. In the same way, *jivas* lose individual characteristics associated with a given manifestation upon resolving into *sat*. Therefore, there is no thought of individual identity. Does this mean that they lose track of all the *karma phala*? No. The Upanishad says that no matter how long a *jiva* is unmanifest, that *jiva* will come back in keeping with *karma* it previously accrued.

Having understood why the *jiva* does not know the truth of itself as *sat* during the time it is resolved, the question arises why the *jiva* does not know it has come from *sat*? The example given is that of a river which when merged with the ocean cannot be identified as different from the ocean. Not having originally known itself as ocean, when it evaporates from the ocean and later, falling as rain, becomes another river, it does not know it came from the ocean. In the same way a *jiva*, not knowing that it has merged with *sat*, cannot know that it has come from *sat*.

Why then, *bhashyakara* asks on behalf of Svetuketu, is it that waves and bubbles, etc.,

resolving into water are destroyed, but a *jiva*, resolving in sleep, again emerges in the same body after sleep? By using a tree to explain how this is so, the Upanishad highlights that trees are living beings, thus negating a contention by Buddhists and Vasheshikas, that being stationary, trees are not living. Like other *jivas*, no matter where a tree is cut, there is sap which, like the blood of other living beings, is the product of water and nutrients/food imbibed by the tree. Other than this, the example is only to show that a *jiva* can withdraw from one part of a particular body and remain living. The whole tree does not die when the *jiva* withdraws from one or even several branches, it continues to live. Likewise, when the mind is resolved and sense perceptions are withdrawn in sleep, the *jiva* continues to live. Further, even after the body falls, the *jiva* continues to live. How is this known? In the world one sees that newborns do not have to be shown how to feed, there being some sort of memory in all *jivas* with regard to nursing/feeding. *Bhashyakara* points out that it would be contradictory if the Vedas enjoined *agnihotra*, etc., which give *karma phala* for the *jiva* after the fall of the body, if the *jiva* did not continue to live.

The nature of *jiva* having been explained, the creation itself is taken up. How can the physical world, having names and forms, be the manifestation of something so subtle that it cannot be known through the senses? Uddalaka asks Svetuketu to break open a fruit from a banyan tree. Inside the fruit are many atom-sized seeds, one of which

Uddalaka again asks Svetuketu to break open. Having broken the seed open, Svetuketu is not able to see anything inside it, being as small as it is. Even though nothing appears to be there, Uddalaka points out, that it is from this that a whole banyan tree grows.

It is clear that Svetuketu is not convinced that the whole *jagat* can come from something that appears to be imperceptible. He asks for further explanation, which Uddalaka obliges by giving another example. Svetuketu is asked to put some salt crystals into water and leave them over night. When Uddalaka asks Svetuketu to fetch the salt from the water the following day, the salt has dissolved and the crystals cannot be seen. Does that mean the salt is not there? No, it is always there. By tasting the water at the top, middle, and bottom of the container, Svetuketu confirms this. Although imperceptible to the *pramana* of sight, the cause for the salty water is available for knowledge by another *pramana*. Understanding this example, Svetuketu naturally wants to know the *pramana* for the knowledge, knowing which all else is as though known.

The answer is, of course, the guru who knows the *shastra*. Uddalaka describes a scene in which a person from Gandharas is kidnapped and, having been blindfolded and had his hands bound, is left alone in a deep forest. The person represents the *jiva*, the blindfold, *avidya* and the forest is the body. How can anyone, so completely lost and helpless, find a way out of this

suffering? It is only because of the endless compassion of a guru, depicted as a learned traveler in the scene described by Uddalaka, that one can be freed from the suffering. That guru, hearing the cries for help, removes the blindfold and other bonds, and then teaches the one who is lost, how to go.

Uddalaka responding to Svetuketu's last two requests to explain more, tells Svetuketu the process by which the *jiva* leaves the body and resolves into *sat*. Uddalaka further explains why it is that, even though both the *ajnani* and the *jnani* leave the body in the same manner, the *ajnani* returns while the *jnani* does not. It is one's commitment to truth that protects one from the suffering which is a result of *kartrtvam*, doer-ship, and *bhoktrtvam*, experiencer-ship. By means of the following example Uddalaka explains this to Svetuketu. A suspected thief is asked to hold a heated iron axe. Uddalaka points out how the suspect who makes himself false, denying the allegations while having committed the theft, will be burned, *kartrtvam/bhoktrtvam* being there. However, the suspect who denies the allegations and is telling the truth, will not be burned by the axe. His commitment to truth, protects him from *kartrtvam/bhoktrtvam*. How does the truth protect? Even though the contact of the hot axe with the hands is the same, for the one committed to the truth there is no *kartrtvam/bhoktrtvam*. Further, when there is no *kartrtvam/bhoktrtvam*, there is no agent for accumulated *karma* and, therefore, no cause for another body to be taken. The one who due to ignorance is committed to

kartrtvam/bhoktrtvam, however, will take another body in keeping with his or her understanding.

At this point, Svetuketu understands what he has been taught and the Upanishad ends. A few additional doubts are addressed by Sankaracarya in the *bhashya*. One of these is why it is that the body does not drop immediately upon gaining the knowledge as there is no longer a *karta* for the *karma* unfolding. The *karma* that brought this body into being having already begun has its own momentum and does not stop until it is exhausted. Thus, a *jnani* continues to live until the *prarabdha karma* giving rise to the body is exhausted. However, the *jnani* lives without the suffering inherent in mistaking oneself to be the *karta/bhokta*.

The final class ended with several students acknowledging those who made this camp the gift that it was. Swami Shuddhanandaji was thanked repeatedly for his continuous attention to details. The facilities, the scheduling, the food, and the willingness of

all the Rishikesh ashram staff to cheerfully assist in whatever way they were able, made one well aware that a lot of collective *punya* was unfolding! Swami Sakshatkrtanandaji was acknowledged for his complete and continued dedication to the students of the course. Added to his already long list of roles was that of knowledgeable tour guide when he accompanied 80 or so students for the day on a trip to local places of interest.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the grace of Pujya Swamiji. Any thank-you, seems almost too perfunctory when it comes acknowledging Pujya Swamiji. Being no other way to express in writing, however, I offer my greatest thanks and *pranams* to you, Pujya Swamiji, who so unswervingly and continuously, lives and teaches the true meaning of the *mahavakya*, *tat tvam asi*.

By Julie Carpenter

आचारः कुलमाख्याति देशमाख्याति भ्राषणम् ।
संभ्रमः स्नेहमाख्याति वपुराख्याति भोजनम् ॥

ācāraḥ kulamākhyāti deśamākhyāti bhāṣaṇam ।
sambhramaḥ snehamākhyāti vapurākhyāti bhojanam ॥

A man's behaviour shows his class, a man's language reveals his native place, a person's hospitality betrays his affection and a person's bulk tells about his food intake.