

Mundaka

Mantra 6

अरा इव रथनाभौ संहता यत्र नाड्यः
स एषोऽन्तश्चरते बहुधा जायमानः ।
ओमित्येवं ध्यायथ आत्मानं
स्वस्ति वः पाराय तमसः परस्तात् ॥ २ ॥ २ ॥ ६ ॥

arā iva rathanābhau saṁhatā yatra nāḍyaḥ
sa eṣo'ntaścarate bahudhā jāyamānaḥ.
omityevam dhyāyatha ātmānam
svasti vaḥ pārāya tamaśaḥ parastāt . (2.2.6)

bahudhā -- in various forms; jāyamānaḥ --being born;
saḥ eṣaḥ -- this (self); carate -- exists; antaḥ --within the mind;
yatra -- where; nāḍyaḥ -- all the nerves;
saṁhatāḥ -- are clustered; iva -- just as; arāḥ -- the spokes;
ratha-nābhau -- on the hub of the chariot wheel;
dhyāyatha -- may you meditate; ātmānam -- upon this self;
evam -- in this manner; Om iti -- with the help of the omkāra;
svasti -- may there be auspicious end; vaḥ -- for you;
tamaśaḥ -- of the ignorance; pārāya -- for crossing;
parastāt -- beyond

Being born in various forms this self exists within the mind where all the nerves are clustered just as the spokes are clustered on the hub of the chariot wheel. Meditate upon this self in this manner with the help of omkāra. May there be an auspicious end for you for reaching the other side of ignorance.

Here, the śruti is pointing out the heart as the physical place for the mind where ātman moves. What is that heart?

Yatra nāḍyaḥ saṁhatāḥ : where the blood vessels are placed. The heart is the place where all the blood vessels that transport blood to different parts of the body are placed. It is from the heart that all the arteries branch out. Blood goes to the aorta from the heart and from there it circulates all over the body. The heart is a ingenious creation. It has to pump the blood for which the muscles of the heart have to contract and expand. These muscles need blood for their function. Hence, the heart first pumps blood to one main artery called the aorta, and from there a sub artery goes back to the heart muscles to supply them with blood. In a heart attack, there is a block in the important arteries, stopping the blood flow to the heart muscles.

The heart pumps the blood to all the parts of the body, and also provides the blood it needs for itself to do the job. This is real 'self help'. It helps every other organ and in the process helps itself.

The heart is considered to be the physical place for the subtle body because it is the hub of all activities. If it fails, the subtle body leaves this physical body. As the heart is the centre for the physical body, the subtle body is said to have its centre in the heart. The ego is seated there. When one has done a job one owns it up by touching the chest. Suppose one does not want to own it, then one will place the hand on the head. This heart is an imaginary place for the mind, just for the purpose of understanding, because a subtle thing does not require any particular place at all. An example is given now to show how the vessels are placed in the heart.

Arā iva ratha-nābhau: like the spokes on the hub. In the wheel of a chariot there is a hub in the middle and the various spokes are placed on this hub. All the spokes move in different directions, but they all have their being in one and the same place. In the same manner, all the nāḍīs are placed in this heart. Nāḍīs refer to arteries or nerves. The self exists in hṛdaya-puṇḍarīka, the lotus of heart, where all the nāḍīs are placed. The phrase, 'hṛdaya-puṇḍarīka' is again an expression referring to the buddhi.

Bahudhā jāyamānaḥ carate : the self exists (there) being born in various forms. This ātman in which everything is woven moves in the buddhi as the ahaṅkāra, being born in various forms like anger, jealousy, happiness and unhappiness⁹⁰ and doing varieties of jobs like seeing, hearing, thinking and so on, as well as not doing any job too. Because of the changing thoughts, the ātman is 'as though' born in various forms and looks as though it is moving in all three states of experience. Like space is 'as though' born when a pot is born, so too when a thought is born, ātman is 'as though' born in that thought form.

Omityevam dhyāyatha ātmānam : may you know that self through the contemplation upon Om. One has to understand Brahman as the lakṣya of Om. Om is a simple sound and it does not do anything by itself as a sound. Some people say that in the manifestation of the jagat Om came first, and is called nāda-brahman. Nāda refers to the space that came first from Brahman, because sound is the unique attribute of space, nāda is generally used in the sense of musical notes. So, nāda- brahma is nothing but Parameśvara in the form of nāda, all sound manifestations and possibilities including the seven musical notes: 'sa ri ga ma pa da ni'.

Before starting the creation of the world, it is said that the Lord uttered two words⁹¹--- Om and 'atha'. The words Om and 'atha' are associated with Brahmaji while narrating the sṛṣṭi. Chanting Om, he saw the whole jagat' because Om contains the whole jagat. It is not that before he started creating this world, he had some kind of Om with him. Om stands for omniscience. When it is said that the Lord uttered Om it means that he identified with his knowledge. Then he said 'atha', 'now, thereafter,' because he was going to create. When one starts something, one says 'Okay...'. This is what Lord did and his 'okay' is the word 'atha'. Then the sṛṣṭi took place. These two words that came first from Brahmaji's mouth are, therefore, considered auspicious sounds. One always utters these auspicious sounds before starting anything, which is why Om is added first before any sacred chant. When one says 'Om is everything' it means Brahman is everything. One should not get carried away by the sound itself.

Because of the changing thoughts, the ātman is 'as though' born in various forms and looks as though it is moving in all three states of experience. Like space is 'as though' born when a pot is born, so too when a thought is born, ātman is 'as though' born in that thought form.

In ' Om iti evaṁ dhyāyatha ' the word 'iti' is very important here. It indicates that one should look at Om as Brahman. It points out meditation. In the sentence 'satyaṁ jñānam anantaṁ brahma' there is no use of the word 'iti'. However, some people try to explain away the sentence as saying that one should meditate upon Brahman as satyam, as jñānam, as anantam. This is not true.

An ignorant person is going to develop a big ego by saying, 'I am Brahman.' He cannot handle it because he is superimposing Brahman upon the ahaṅkāra that is small. One gets an idea of grandeur about oneself without wisdom, and becomes a megalomaniac, nothing else. 'I am Brahman' is a fact. The sentence is not meant for meditation. Here, one is asked to look upon Om as Brahman. Wherever there is 'iti' one must know that there is some superimposition. One is loading everything upon Om that is Brahman. Why should one do this meditation?

Tamasah pārāya : for crossing tamas. This meditation is a bridge for crossing ignorance. Śaṅkara takes parastāt beyond, that is, the other side of ignorance. It can also mean hereafter, after the teaching about what is Brahman and how to gain it. The teacher now blesses the disciples for reaching the other side where there is absolutely no darkness of ignorance at all. He says, vaḥ svasti astu : let there be an auspicious end for all of you.⁹² Let your pursuit come to a successful end. Let there be absence of any kind of obstacles in gaining the knowledge of ātman.

In crossing ignorance, what is to be understood and what is to be gained in terms of knowledge is said in the following mantra.

90 बहुधा अनेकधा क्रोध-हर्षादि-प्रत्ययैः जायमान इव जायमानः अन्तः-करणोपाध्यनु-विधायित्वाद् वदन्ति लौकिकाः हृष्टो जातः क्रुद्धो जात इति । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

91 Omkāraścātha-śabdaśca dvāvimau brahmaṇaḥ purā kaṅṭhaṁ bhityā vinir-yātau tasmād māṅgalikau ubhau, in the beginning these two words ' om ' and 'atha' came out from the throat of Brahmaji. Therefore, both these words are auspicious.

92 शिष्याश्च ब्रह्म-विद्या-विविदुषुत्वात् निवृत्त-कर्माणः मोक्षपथे प्रवृत्ताः । तेषां निर्विघ्नतया ब्रह्मप्राप्तिम् आशास्ति आचार्यः । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

-to be continued