

10. Mundaka Upanishad and Brahma Vidya

To attain the state of the Supreme Lord of all (*Puru-shottama*), we must entertain pure feelings and engage in pure actions. Appreciate one truth, and you have understood everything. What is this truth? This is what Saunaka asked Sage Angirasa¹, “Swami! What is the concept that, knowing it, I will know everything? What is the sight that, having seen I, I will have seen everything? What magnificent experience is equal to experiencing everything? What is so divine, ever new?”

Angirasa replied, “Knowledge of the *Atma (Brahma Vidya)* alone is true. All other education is illusory.”

Art, music, literature, sculpture, botany, zoology, physics, chemistry—all pertain to the ephemeral world. Do these sciences grant us true knowledge (*vijnana*)? No, no. Enquire calmly. These subjects are meant only for earning a living. True education must cater to true knowledge, spiritual wisdom. Only knowledge of the *Atma* qualifies as true education by this criterion.

What is knowledge of the *Atma (Brahma Vidya)*? Worldly education deals with what is visible to the eye, audible to the ears, felt by the mind, and accessible to the senses. Knowledge of the *Atma* cannot be seen by the eyes, heard by the ears, comprehended by the mind, or felt by the heart. It reminds one of the *Atma* and takes one to its threshold. When can we claim to have understood such knowledge of the *Atma*? Only when we become one in whom the 16 times (*kalaas*) have blossomed fully (*shodasa-kalaa-pari-poorna*).

For this reason, God is described in the *Vedas* as: *Sathyam jnanam anantam Brahma*. *Sathyam* means changeless, beyond past, present, and future. *Jnanam* is the wisdom of non-duality (*advaita*). *Anantam* is unlimited, infinite. *Brahma* is vastness.

Angirasa

Who is Angirasa? We read our epics and consider characters like Angirasa to be sages, highly evolved personages. Our scriptures are not mere stories (*kathas*) but the essence of infinite wisdom designed to dispel our sorrow (*vyathas*). This essence, or *rasa*², is Angirasa.

Anga means limb. Angirasa is one who is a *shodasa-kalaa-paripoorna* and, therefore, guards and fosters

every limb of the body with the essence of the sixteen times (*kalaas*). How does *rasa* flow? It melts the sixteen *kalaas*, makes them flow toward the *Atma*, and reveals the Divinity immanent everywhere. Therefore, Angirasa is none other than the embodiment of wisdom (*prajna*) within us.

Prajnana is the power or witness that pervades the body, senses, mind, inner instrument, life force, our actions—everything. Therefore, the *Vedas* declare, *Prajnaanam Brahma*. Four fundamental affirmations are associated with the four *Vedas*:

1. That You Are: *Tat Tvam Asi*
2. Awareness is Brahman: *Prajnaanam Brahma*
3. I am *Atma*, I am Brahman: *Ayam Atma Brahma*
4. I am Brahman: *Aham Brahmaasmi*

These statements are pregnant with infinite power. People need not look outward or consult scriptures. All knowledge is within. Having forgotten the totality of knowledge, people seek it outside and encounter frustration. They have lost it in one place and search for it somewhere else! Search for the missing article wherever you lost it. Search within. Then you come face to face with your brilliant *prajna*.

Akshara = perishable + imperishable

All is contained within this word: *akshara*. The union of the temporary and permanent is *akshara*. *Akshara* = A + *kshara*. ‘A’ stands for *anantam*, *aprameya*, *apramaana* (infinite, beyond measure, beyond proof). This is the *Atma*—true, permanent. *Kshara* means temporary, false, illusory, perishable. *Kshara* is perishable, *A* is imperishable. The merger of the two is *Akshara*. *Akshara* is not a single word but two words. The fleeting world and the durable *Atma* are an inseparable pair. One cannot leave the other.

God and devotee

Similarly, the devotee and God are a pair. The devotee creates God, and God creates the devotee! We think God has created all beings. No, no. The devotee, by dint of spiritual effort, creates the God of their choice! This is the process of materialising God to appear in physical form (*sakshatkara*). The feelings of the devotee gain name and form as *sakshatkara*. *Sakshat* (physical) + *akaram* (form) is *sakshatkara*. Therefore, it is the devo-

¹ In the *Mundaka Upanishad*.

² *Rasa* means sweet juice or essence.

tee who creates God! And the devotee is created by God as well.

Devotees today are blind to their power and constantly ask, “Where is God, where is God?” What ignorance, what foolishness! Why search for God when He is everywhere? Your delusion tells you it is necessary to search for God. Truly, it is the other way around — God is in search of a real devotee! Why? Even a single genuine devotee is not to be found! Such power of enquiry is rare today. The saint Tyagaraja³ sang:

In the ant, in Brahma,
In Siva, Kesava, and other Gods,
Present as Love,
You, who lives up to Your manifold names, Rama,
Save me!

What does an ant do? When you mix two grains of sugar in a pile of sand, it discards the sand and hauls the grains of sugar. When an ant is able to discriminate so acutely, why are people so blunt in their intellect? God is smaller than the smallest, vaster than the vastest (*Anoraneeyaan mahato maheeyaan*). Understand this unity.

The common meaning given to the word *akshara* is *indestructible*. No, no. Decay and destruction are also an aspect of *akshara*. Theism (*astikatwam*) and atheism (*nastikatwam*) are related in a similar manner. How? *Nastika* (athiest) = *Na* + *astika* (theist). *Na* means no; *asti*, yes. The denial of ‘yes’ is atheism. *Nasti* = *Na* + *asti*. Without *asti*, how can the word *nasti* exist? Meaning, the concept of ‘yes’ or acceptance of God is present within denial, within atheism!

The bud of a flower does not exude fragrance. Only when it blossoms into a flower does it emit a smell. The fully blossomed flower is theism, the bud is atheism. Both are one. One is dormant, the other is awake. The flower of the heart has not yet blossomed in atheists. It is bound to bloom, sooner or later. However, not necessarily in this birth. If they die with narrow hearts, that is their misfortune.

All is One

Thus, there are no two substances in this world — all is One. Only One exists, but seers express it in many ways (*Ekam sat vipraah bahudaa vadanti*). When you know the divine sweetness (*rasa*) called *prajna*, you come to know everything. When you behold it, you have seen everything.

You are, in reality, offering everything to that *prajna*. There is a direct proof to illustrate this truth. A man

³ Great devotee of Lord Rama who composed many songs in Telugu. Also one of the pioneers and pillars of south Indian classical music.

promised God that he would conduct a special worship for Him at the temple if his task was completed successfully. His chosen deity was Lord Krishna. He offered flowers one by one as he repeated the 1008 names of Krishna — “*Kesavaaya Namah, Narayanaaya Namah, Madhavaaya Namah, Govindaaya Namah, Madhusudanaaya Namah,*” and so on. The names are different but all offerings are to one God. This is — *Ekam sat vipraah bahudaa vadanti*. There is only one, but you call it by different names. Foods are different, hunger is one. Flowers are different, worship is one. Births are different, the being is one. Focus on the unity underlying the diversity.

Three kinds of knowledge

The concepts taught by Sage Angirasa to Saunaka were also clarified to Sukesa by Sage Pippalada. Sukesa asked, “*Swami*, there are three kinds of knowledge in this world: *jnana*, *sujnana*, and *vijnana*. What is their inner significance and how are they related? Kindly shed light on this topic”.

Pippalada smiled, “Foolish fellow! There are no glaring differences between the three kinds of knowledge. One form pertains to the body (*jnana*), another emerges from the mind (*sujnaana*), and the third deals with the heart (*vijnana*).”

One small example. Here are a handkerchief, a microphone, a plate, a tumbler, and a table. They are visible and tangible objects. This is related to the physical world, to the body (is *jnana*).

Next, the mind. “I wish to embark on this task. Is this work beneficial to me, to others?” — when you ponder in this manner and seek to help others, this is *sujnaana*. When you seek to do good to others even in actions done for your personal benefit, such deeds are *sujnaana*.

Having experienced both *jnana* and *sujnaana*, when you do that which lends satisfaction to your conscience, when you ask, “What actions will make God happy?” — all actions that seek to please God are *vijnana*. There is no need to search for *vijnana* in some secret enclave. Please God, and the world will be pleased with you, automatically.

Once, a devotee prayed to the divine Mother, “Mother! You haven’t granted me Your Vision. Why am I distant from You? Why do You not look at me? If I do not mean anything to You, without Your kind glance on me, I will not be worth anything to anybody.

If I fail to become Your Own, O Mother,
I will be derided by the world as well, Mother!

Sri Krishna and Gandhari

Sri Krishna explained this point to Queen Gandhari beautifully. After the death of her hundred sons, the Kauravas, Sri Krishna went to Gandhari to assuage her grief. Poor Krishna went there only to console her. Gandhari, on the other hand, let anger and grief overwhelm her when she was informed of Krishna's approach. Grief leads to anger, which gives rise to hatred. Hatred causes jealousy. Gandhari, as you know, had taken upon herself a permanent blindfold, in deference to her husband's blindness. Her maidservants told her, "O Queen! Sri Krishna is here."

Quivering in grief, Gandhari blurted out, "Krishna! You are full of partiality. You are the meanest of hypocrites! The Pandavas and Kauravas are cousins, sons of brothers. How could you be so partial to the Pandavas, so hateful to my sons? Even this partiality is acceptable. But why didn't you save one son of mine, while all five Pandavas are alive today? Not even a single son to perform the funeral rituals for the others! Why didn't You let your divine Look fall on just ONE SON of mine?"

Krishna had a perpetual smile dancing on His lips. He was always happy, even when everyone around Him cried! He removed and granted grief as well! He turned paupers into millionaires, millionaires into paupers. Enquire —why would Krishna cause grief at one time and remove grief at another time? No, no. Each person experienced only the results of their destiny.

Realising that Gandhari could not understand His role, Krishna decided to enlighten her by quoting her personal experience. "Mother Gandhari! You know you had a hundred sons. But had you ever set eyes on them? How do you know you had a hundred sons? Only through the words of others. You haven't seen even one of them! How could your wicked sons, unworthy of their own mother's loving glances, ever become fit for God's kind looks?"

Do you see? Children who cannot obtain their mother's blessings remain distant from God's Grace. "When you do not see your children, how can you cultivate true love for them? Your sons were wicked, unfit for their own mother's love. They hated and envied the gentle Pandavas beyond limits. The Pandavas are righteous. Your sons heeded the words of no well-wisher. They grew in hatred day by day. They had no power of discrimination whatsoever. They were selfish to the brim. Selfishness led them to a pitiable plight.

Justice and fairness dictate that the kingdom belongs to the Pandavas. They appointed your husband, Dhritarashtra, only as an interim ruler. When the Pandavas, also your children, trusted your husband, is it right to cheat them?" In history, we do not know some truths, and, without factual knowledge, we are confused.

Unity of gross and subtle

Therefore, one who invokes God's kind glances upon himself can easily conquer the world. The one who distances himself from God is unworthy of respect from anyone. When you recognise God, you understand all the secrets of the world, because the world is nothing but a part of God.

Men today are fools who look at only one side of a coin. Look on both sides — only then will you know its true worth. One side is the world, the other is God. One is perishable (*kshara*), the other is permanent (*akshara*). One is the basis (*moolam*), the other is the based or the gross (*sthoolam*). Today, no one endeavours to discern the basis hidden behind the diversity. The basis is the key to all knowledge, to all acts of God.

Therefore, no one can demarcate God as such and such.

Based on ancient writings, we develop the duality of like and dislike. We must strive to go beyond attachment and hatred to understand their unity. For example, we listen to interpretations of scholars and presume that Krishna was an immoral man. Similarly, we believe Rama had certain traits. No, no. We should go beyond these interpretations, to the Truth. Both Rama and Krishna are based on a changeless Truth.

Transform Your Heart

Therefore, the cowherd maids (*gopikas*) said, "Krishna! We see You with our eyes. To what extent is sight reliable? As long as our eyes can see You. Therefore, this cannot be the truth. We must look at You with our hearts. But our hearts are like a moss-covered lake in which Your reflection is unclear.

"The centre of our eyes, the pupil, is dark. Your complexion is dark as well. Our heart, the lake of our mind (*manasa sarovaram*) is dark with impurities as well. The sky appears dark in the dark lakes of our hearts. For us to see You, there is no need to transform our dark eyes or Your dark form. But the "background", the dark sky can be changed to a white sky. When our hearts are made bright, your dark reflection will appear as clear as crystal. Change our hearts."

What is the inner significance? We do not need to change our bodies, or even our mind. When we transform our heart, which is related to the highest wisdom (*prajana*), we achieve all. The mind's nature is to be impure! You may wash it forever, but stains will remain. Can you wash charcoal with milk and expect it to become white? Instead, the milk will become black! If you wash coal with soap, the soap turns black.

Students must think clearly. What was the original form of charcoal? Wood. When wood burns, it turns in-

to coal. However, coal is formed only when the burning is incomplete. To complete the process, put coal back into fire. Then it becomes ash, which is white. “Krishna, we are neither wood nor ash. We are midway, like black coal. Burn us in the fire of your Grace and grant us the whiteness of purity.”

You must recognize, “I have forgotten the beginning and the end. I am midway through the journey. That is why my mind is like black charcoal. Yes, I have lost my original status of wood, but I can still reach the final state of white ash. To achieve this end, the burning must be as intense as ever.”

We yield to difficulties and sorrow because we do not try to reach the end, because we remain satisfied with the dualities of this interim existence.

Yes, we must acquire physical amenities. Next, we must obtain mental peace. Finally, peace of the *Atma*. For this reason we repeat, “peace, peace peace (*shanti shanti shanti*)” three times. First, peace in the body. Recitation of the divine Name (*namasmarana*) is very important in this regard. For mental peace, a divine outlook (*Brahma bhaavam*) is essential. Finally, for peace of the heart and conscience, spiritual practice (*sadhana*) is the path. Journey from the body to the mind and then to the *Atma*.

[Swami concluded with the *bhajan* “*Hari Bhajana Bina Sukha Shanti Nahin*”.]

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