

SUTRA VAHINI

Stream of Aphorisms on Brahman

All the scriptures (*sastras*) derive their value and validity from their source: the *Vedas*. They lay down modes and norms in consonance with the principles and purposes defined in the *Vedas*. To discriminate between good and bad, one must resort to the scriptures.

Vedas, the voice of the Divine

The *Vedas* have no identifiable human authors; they are not from human beings (*a-pourusheya*). They emerged from God Himself and were “heard” by sages attuned to the voice of the Divine. These sages taught the words to their pupils, who in turn taught them to their disciples. This process of imparting the *Vedas* and the wisdom enshrined in them has continued through generation after generation of *gurus* and disciples up to our own times.

The *Upanishads* are the very core of the *Vedas*, the very essence of their teachings. The *Brahma Sutra* and the *Bhagavad Gita* contain the very essence of the teachings of the *Upanishads*. Therefore, these three scriptural texts are designated as the “three fundamental texts (*Prasthanam Thraya*)” of the science of spirituality. Since they were learned by listening to the *guru*, they are, along with the *Vedas*, named the “heard (*sruthi*)”.

Acquisition of the higher knowledge alone can fulfill the main purpose of human life. Such knowledge makes one aware that one is not the inert non-sentient body, etc., but that one is consciousness itself manifesting as the embodiment of being-awareness-bliss (*satchidananda*). When this truth dawns and is experienced, one is liberated; one is freed from the fog of ignorance (*a-jnana*) even while life endures till its term ends. One becomes a person liberated while alive (*jivan-muktha*).

Renunciation alone confers immortality

The *Kaivalya Upanishad* declares:

Not by means of works, not by means of man-power, not by means of wealth, but by renunciation alone can immortality be attained.

*Na Karmanaa na prajayaa dhanena
thyaagena eke amrithathwam-aanasuh*

The works referred to are rituals like sacrifices, sacred fire rites, vows, charities, donations to holy projects, pilgrimages, and ceremonial baths in sacred rivers and the ocean. Through such activities, one cannot achieve liberation (*moksha*) —that is to say, one cannot get rid of the veil of ignorance.

Not by means of human power (*na prajayaa*) means the following: acquisition of positions of authority and power, of skill and intelligence, which can manipulate people and things, of fame and supremacy, of personal charm, of full health and happiness, or of a large family with many children —these cannot confer liberation on people.

Not by means of wealth (*na dhanena*) means the following: the works and activities mentioned above and the acquisition referred to can succeed only when one has wealth at their disposal. If one is not rich, one cannot venture into sacrifices or ritual acts (*karmas*) or acquire authority, power, etc. But the *Upanishad* announces that spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) is not related to riches (*dhana*). And spiritual wisdom alone can lead to liberation. So, liberation cannot be earned by means of wealth. Wealth is not a means to attain liberation.

Then what exactly is the means? The answer is:

Renunciation alone can confer immortality.
(*Thyagena eke amrithathwam aanasuh.*)

The objective world (*jagath*) is unreal, non-existent, and the misunderstanding that it is real has to be renounced. The understanding that the idea of the objective world is a superimposition by our mind on the Reality is spiritual wisdom (*jnana*). Though the objective world appears real, one must be aware that it is deluding us. As a result, one has to give up the yearning for deriving pleasure from

the objects that appear and attract, both here and hereafter. That is to say, one is liberated as soon as one renounces all attachment and all desires. The false knowledge (*a-jnana*) can be destroyed only when one knows the *Atma* (the Divine Self) principle. When the false knowledge disappears, the sorrow produced by one's involvement in the ups and downs of the world of change (*samsara*) also gets destroyed.

Humanity is the embodiment of bliss

Ignorance (*a-jnana*) and sorrow (*dukha*) cannot be destroyed by rituals and rites (*karma*); this is the lesson the *Upanishads* teach us. In fact, what is happening now is that people have forgotten their real nature. They believe that they are the body, the senses, etc. *These* crave for objective pleasures, and the people convince themselves that this pleasure is wanted by *themselves*; and under this mistaken notion, they seek to fulfill the cravings. They delude themselves that they can secure bliss (*ananda*) by catering to the body and senses. However, such attempts cannot earn bliss. Instead, they are rewarded with disillusionment, defeat, and disaster. They reap sorrow and joy.

Involvement in objective pleasure leads ultimately to grief, so one needs to be directed toward the right means to attain bliss (*ananda*). Wherefrom can one gain bliss? It does not inhere in external objects. The pleasure obtainable from external objects brings with it grief as well.

The *Upanishads*, the *Brahma Sutra*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*—the three source texts—clarify the truth that *you* are the very embodiment of bliss (*ananda*). These three sources help people attain the highest wisdom.

Methods for knowing truth

It is difficult to grasp the meanings of the aphorisms of the *Brahma Sutra*. Unless one has acquired the necessary qualifications, one cannot unravel and master them.

What, then, are the qualifications? The scriptures lay down four spiritual disciplines (*sadhanas*) that have to be earned as preliminary for knowing the truth of oneself. When one is equipped with them, the meanings of the aphorisms become as patent as a fruit on the palm.

The *Brahma Sutra* is also known as *Saririka Sastra* and *Vedanta Darsana*. *Sarira* means the body, and *saririka* means all the components of the embodied *Atma* —ego, senses, etc. *Sastra* implies “examining the nature of all these to the greatest possible degree”. That is to say, the scripture (*sastra*) establishes that Brahman (the Cosmic Self) is the basis on which all else is imposed and that one's reality is Bliss itself.

Now about the name *Vedanta Darsana*: *Darsana* means “vision”; it promotes the sight or experience of the truth. The *Darsanas* are well known. They have been propounded by vision-blessed sages. *Sankhya Darsana* was established by Kapila. The *Nyaya Darsana* was authored by Gautama, the *Vaisesika* by Kanada, the *Purva Mimamsa* by Jaimini, and the *Uttara Mimamsa* by Veda Vyasa. Among these, Kapila and Vyasa are believed by the sages to be partial embodiments of Vishnu Himself. The *Brahma Sutra* of Veda Vyasa confirmed and consolidated the *Uttara Mimamsa* or *Vedanta Darsana*.

The technique of exposition

The *Brahma Sutra* adopts the technique of objection (*purva paksha*) and conclusion (*siddhatha*) to expound the truth. The aphorisms discuss contrary points of view in order to remove all possible doubts about the validity and meaning of *Vedantic* or *Upanishadic* statements. The body is taken to be the encasement (*upadhi*) for the “person (*jivatma*)”, and the *Brahma Sutra* explains its Reality. Hence, the *Brahma Sutra* is called the Ultimate Vision of Wisdom (*Vedanta Darsana*).

The aphorisms (*sutras*) in the text number 555; some schools count them as 449. The word *sutra* means “that which, through a few words only, reveals vast meanings”.

The quest for Supreme Reality

The word *mimamsa*, as used in ancient Indian philosophy, means the conclusion arrived at after inquiry and investigation, the inference adopted as correct after deep consideration of possible doubts and alternatives.

The *Vedas* deal with two concepts: *dharma* and Brahman. The *Purva Mimamsa* deals with rites and rituals (*karma*) as *dharma*. The *Uttara Mimamsa* (Concluding Validation) deals with Brahman and emphasises experiential wisdom (*jnana*).

The *Purva Mimamsa* starts with the aphorism

Thereafter, the inquiry on righteousness (*dharma*)
(*Athhaatho Dharma Jijnasa*).

The *Uttara Mimamsa* starts with,

Thereafter, the inquiry into Brahman
(*Athhaatho Brahma Jijnasa*).

The awareness of Brahman cannot be won by the accumulation of wealth or even by the giving away of riches. Nor can it be achieved by reading texts, rising to power, acquiring degrees and diplomas, or performing scriptural sacrifices and rituals.

The body is an anthill, with the mind inside the cavity. The mind has hidden in it the serpent named ignorance or nescience (*a-jnana*). The serpent cannot be killed by resorting to satisfaction-oriented works (*kamya karma*). Spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) is the only weapon that can kill it.

“That person alone who has faith can secure wisdom (*Shraddhaavaan labhathe jnanam*).” And faith means steady faith in the statements laid down in scriptural texts.

