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# The Appeal of the Upanishads Today

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**M**ay my limbs wax strong. May my speech, vital force, eyes, ears, strength and all the senses also increase in power. The Brahman expounded in the Upanishads is the all in all. May I never deny Brahman nor Brahman ever deny me. Let there be non-denial [of Brahman]; let there be non-denial on my part [of Brahman]. May the virtues proclaimed in the Upanishads reside in me, who am devoted to the Atman; may these virtues reside in me. Om Peace, Peace, Peace.<sup>1</sup>

Our subject this evening is 'The Appeal of the Upanishads Today'—today meaning

the present time in which we live; this, significantly, is the turn of the century. I would therefore try to present the eternal message enshrined in the ancient wisdom, which is the Upanishads, vis-à-vis the revolutionary thought currents that have been sweeping over today's world during the century gone by and at the turn of the new century. This would help us understand the eternal appeal the Upanishads exercise on the human mind today, and how the modern world thought is re-echoing the Upanishadic wisdom in modern and scientific language.

## Revolutionary Changes in World Thought During the Last Century

**S**ince the beginning of the last century, during last the one hundred years, that is, world thought has undergone certain sweeping changes. We may broadly classify them into four categories:

- ✓ in the field of physics, that is, the science of matter,
- ✓ in the realm of bio-science/biotechnology, that is, the science of life,
- ✓ in the domain of psychology, that is, the science of mind,
- ✓ in the sphere of communication—computer science/engineering, leading to the search for Artificial Intelligence (AI).

### Revolutions in the Field of Physics, the Science of Matter

Revolutionary thoughts that completely altered man's conception of the physical world were first conceived at the very beginning of the twentieth century by Albert Ein-

stein. In 1905, he propounded his famous theory of Special Relativity, which revolutionized our conception of space and time. This threw open a hitherto-unknown, and therefore unconventional, world view—Weltanschauung—whose scientific and philosophical implications are profound. That Nature does not have any preferential frame of reference, which means that all physical laws remain the same irrespective of the frame of reference used, is Einstein's famous discovery—the relativity principle—which has given us a new physics and a new understanding of Nature. One implication of this principle, philosophically speaking, is that Nature is impartial, for it chooses to treat all the frames of reference on the same footing. The my-frame-versus-your-frame quarrel, the root of all fanaticism and bigotry, was set at rest, once and for all, by this scientific discovery, applied to philosophy and religion. Swami Vivekananda

spoke about this in his famous address at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, a decade before Einstein's enunciation of the relativity theory. Vivekananda called for the eradication of fanaticism and bigotry from the human heart. This call was echoed in scientific terms by Einstein, who proved that preferential attachment to one particular frame of reference—a framework of thought, in philosophical terms—is against Nature's scheme of things, for Nature treats all frames alike, on the same footing. This sameness—*samya* or *samatva* in Vedantic parlance—is a fundamental principle of Nature, whose violation leads to the undesirable feelings of fanaticism, bigotry, hatred and attraction/repulsion. The theory of Special Relativity was followed up by Einstein by the theory of General Relativity in 1925, in which he gave a very different interpretation of gravitation. Our concept of space, time and matter thus underwent a revolution. We were taught that the space that we see has a very special characteristic: it is 'curved' and, what is more interesting, its 'curvature' is influenced by the presence of matter. Thus space, time and matter are not to be considered as three distinct entities, but deeply intertwined with one another. It is not that matter is in space-time, but matter itself, in a sense, is space-time. Einstein was once asked to define the relativity theory in a few words. He said: 'Earlier, physicists thought that if all matter vanishes from the universe, space and time alone would remain; but the relativity theory has proved that space and time would also vanish with matter!' It is this continuum that brought about sweeping changes in our world view, *Weltanschauung*.

In parallel with Einstein's relativity theory came Max Planck's famous Quantum Theory, enunciated in 1900, whose centenary is now being celebrated all the world over. The tiny quantum—ubiquitous and powerful—began to dominate all science, not to speak of physics! Planck said that the emission and absorption of radiation takes place not in a con-

tinuous fashion, but in discrete bundles of energy, called quanta. Each quantum is a 'bundle of energy', and the energy content of a quantum is proportional to the frequency of radiation. Here we see how the particle concept, namely the discrete energy-bundle—the quantum concept—gets happily wedded to the wave concept, frequency being a typically wave concept. This was the beginning of the intermingling of the wave and particle concepts—that radiation takes place in terms of quanta. The quanta of electromagnetic radiation came to be known as photons, which soon came to be recognized as fundamental particles in particle physics, with specific characteristics.

When the correctness of Planck's quantum theory soon became a proven fact, thanks to its successful application in several phenomena, particularly in the atomic realm, a very strange idea was thrown up by de Broglie. Once again, the motivation for de Broglie's idea came from the philosophical world view of Nature already spoken about, namely, that Nature is impartial because it is symmetric. That Nature is symmetric and impartial is what makes it beautiful. The Sanskrit words corresponding to these concepts are, respectively, *shivam* and *sundaram*. It is well known in Indian spiritual thought that Truth (*satyam*) ought to be auspicious, just, impartial, fair, impersonal (*shivam*), and beautiful (*sundaram*). It is a simple fact that beauty is directly related to symmetry, for it is symmetry that engenders beauty. Further, there is a well-known theorem in physics, called Noether's Theorem, which states that it is symmetry that gives rise to conservation. Conservation laws are fundamental to physics, and in fact to all science, including perhaps social sciences like economics, political science and sociology. And the statement is that these conservation laws are a direct consequence of symmetry principles.

We thus see how the philosophical ideas of Vedanta in particular, and Indian spiritual thought in general, have found an echo in

physics and have exerted an unknown influence in shaping the world view emerging from the New Physics in the twentieth century. It would be too naive to claim that Indian thought has influenced these revolutionary discoveries in physics; what actually happens is that, as Swami Vivekananda pointed out, when certain fundamental ideas are conceived by great minds, these remain as a part of the Cosmic Mind—called Hiranyagarbha in Vedanta—and every mind being an integral part of the Cosmic Mind, becomes vulnerable and sensitive to these cosmic vibrations of thought. Thus the sensitive minds of these great physicists—an Einstein or a Planck or a de Broglie—‘catch’ these vibrations in the Cosmic Mind and with their training and education in physics, formulate the laws, principles and theories which now bear their name. This discovery of the Hiranyagarbha is one outstanding feat of the Upanishadic rishis—one of the ‘very bold generalizations’, in the words of Swami Vivekananda. It may be of interest to mention in this connection the joint research venture by Pauli, that genius of a physicist of the last century, and Jung, the famous psychologist and a contemporary of Pauli, in which they were trying to formulate a very generalized concept like the Cosmic Mind or the Hiranyagarbha. Unfortunately, their research in this direction is little known and has been left unpursued by later researchers. The Upanishadic echo is too loud in this attempt to be ignored.

De Broglie, then, came up with his startling discovery of the matter-waves in 1924-25. With belief—*shraddha* is the Upanishadic word—in the symmetry and impartiality of Nature, de Broglie argued as follows: If, according to Planck’s quantum hypothesis, radiation can have particle (quantum or photon) characteristics, then, by symmetry, a particle should also be endowed with wave characteristics. The two fundamental manifestations of Nature, namely, radiation and matter, should be treated on an equal footing, there being no

partial treatment in Nature’s symmetric scheme, and therefore wave characteristics of matter (particle) should follow as a natural consequence of particle characteristics of radiation (waves). He thus came up with his startling discovery—this should have been considered a ‘mad’ proposition when de Broglie first propounded it!—of the matter-wave. What these waves are, what their nature is, how they are to be interpreted in physical terms and a host of other questions immediately came up and the answers to these questions form part of what is now known as the Wave Mechanics of Schrodinger, with its more abstract and general-formalistic counterpart, Quantum Mechanics of Heisenberg.

Heisenberg’s general formalism of Quantum Mechanics, and more particularly, his famous Uncertainty (or Indeterminacy) Principle has very profound philosophical implications: Is Nature probabilistic or is it deterministic? One finds here an echo of the free will-versus-predetermination debate in philosophy. Conditioned as he was by his own religio-philosophical conceptions, Einstein could not till the end of his life accept the probabilistic interpretation of Quantum Mechanics. He argued that it is the inability of the limited human mind to be able to comprehend certain ‘hidden variables’ in Nature that leads him to say that Nature is probabilistic at the micro (atomic/sub-atomic) level. There was a famous debate between Einstein and Bohr: Einstein said, ‘I can’t believe that God plays dice; he certainly knows what he is doing and going to do.’ In reply, Bohr quipped, ‘But you can’t dictate to God what he should do.’ Recall Sri Ramakrishna’s simple statement: ‘The Divine Mother is *icchāmayī* (self-willed); how can you say what She should do at what time?’ When the probabilistic interpretation came to stay, however, Einstein still found it unacceptable and spent the last part of his life like a recluse, cut off from the advances in contemporary physics, searching for something he could not find!

The story of Einstein's search for a Unified Field Theory, which never ended during his lifetime, is a fascinating chapter in the history of physics. Having propounded his Special Theory and General Theory of Relativity and having become frustrated with the probabilistic interpretation of Quantum Mechanics, to which he could not find an alternative, Einstein spent his life in quest of the Unified Field Theory, the Holy Grail that eluded him till the end. The motivation for the search is itself illuminating and remarkable. Swami Vivekananda said in his lectures on jnana yoga that the human mind always looks for generalization; it goes from the particular to the general, from the general to the more general and so on, till it reaches the most general—Oneness. When that is reached, all search comes to an end, for in that consummation of the quest, 'peace that passeth understanding' is reached, culminating in the attainment of supreme Oneness—*shantam, shivam, advaitam* in the language of the *Mandukya Upanishad*. Swami Vivekananda pointed out how the Upanishadic rishis made some bold generalizations, and saw the particulars as manifestations of those generalizations. By the turn of the last century, physicists were investigating into and researching with Supersymmetry, Grand Unification Theories (GUTs) and so on. Salam and Weinberg got the Nobel Prize for the unification of three of the four fundamental interactions—forces of Nature: the electromagnetic, weak and strong forces; the gravitational force is still eluding our grasp. Physicists are trying hard to bring that too under their unification scheme, as also to integrate quantum theory with gravitation—the microcosmic manifestation with the macrocosmic one through their quantum gravity theories. The hope, ultimately, is to discover a Theory of Everything (ToE). Do we not get here a clear and loud echo, in unambiguous language, of the Upanishadic enquiry: *Kasmīnu bhagavo vijñāte sarvamidam vijñātam bhavati?*, Sir, what is it, by knowing which everything can be

known?<sup>2</sup> There have been speculations of late by some physicists that the ToE cannot be found at all, for no such theory really exists. But our ancient wisdom, enshrined in the Upanishads, clearly stated that it is possible to know That by knowing which everything else becomes known. But then, for this discovery to be possible, one should go beyond the level of matter and enter into the realm of pure Consciousness, absolute Awareness, or *chaitanya*.

### **Revolutions in the Realm of Bio-science, the Science of Life**

The last century saw some sweeping changes in the Science of Life. Interestingly, the pioneers, the founding fathers, of Quantum Mechanics were deeply interested in the question of Life: Schrodinger, the father of Wave Mechanics, wrote a book *What is Life?* Physics and bio-science were getting closer to each other and newer branches were getting developed: biophysics, biochemistry, biotechnology, biomedical engineering and so on. The revolutionary discoveries in the realm of life sciences during the last century, which began with the structure of the DNA, reached at the turn this new century a point where the decoding of the genetic code has become possible and a reality. Around the middle of the last century, hectic research activity was going on in the study of the DNA structure, and the final breakthrough came in 1953 through the researches of a British biophysicist, Francis Crick, and an American geneticist, James Watson. They suggested that DNA structure was a double helix—a conclusion they reached after studying X-ray photographs taken by the British X-ray crystallographer, Rosalind Franklin (1920-58). She used X-rays to look at DNA crystals. Crick, Watson and Maurice Wilkins (born 1916) got the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine in 1962. Franklin died before her contribution was properly credited. The basic rules of genetics were, however, worked out long ago, during the nineteenth century, by one Gregor Mendel (1822-84), an Austrian

priest and botanist who discovered how characteristics were inherited. He found out that inheritance does not work by blending characteristics together, as people then thought. Instead, they are inherited in pairs. In each pair, only one characteristic is usually expressed (shown). Although Mendel had worked out the basic rules of genetics much earlier, it was not until the twentieth century that scientists rediscovered and re-substantiated his work.

It is now common knowledge that every form of life, from an elephant to an alga, is put together and controlled by a chemical 'recipe'. Instead of being written down, this recipe is in the form of a chemical code. The code is contained in helical (spiral-shaped) molecules of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), which are packed away inside the cells of all living things. The chemical code is very complex. The code inside one human cell contains fifty thousand to a hundred thousand separate instructions, called genes, and each gene controls a different characteristic. Genetics is the study of the way inherited characteristics are passed on. Genetic engineering is the technology by which one could manipulate the genes, thereby altering the inherited characteristics at the microcosmic level. In a cell's nucleus, there are several lengths of DNA. Each one is called a chromosome. A gene is one area of a chromosome that has the instructions to make one protein. DNA works by telling a cell how to make the many different proteins that our cells need to work. To do this, a part of the DNA helix is temporarily 'unzipped', so that its code can be copied. The copy moves out of the nucleus. Once outside, it instructs the cell to assemble a particular protein, which could be an enzyme or a collagen (a skin protein), for example.

Just by the turn of this century, as we were entering the new millennium, there were reports from British as well as American groups of biophysicists and biotechnologists that they had successfully decoded the genetic code. They were thus claiming that human be-

ings have, for the first time, access to the 'mind of God', a challenge the now famous astrophysicist Stephen Hawking has asked the physical scientists to take up in a different context. The bio-scientists hence lay claim to the discovery of the language of God—the *brahma-lipi* in the language of our ancient scriptures.

### **Revolutionary Discoveries in the Realm of Psychology, the Science of the Mind**

The principles of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, discovered and enunciated by him at the turn of the last century, around 1900, and developed by him in later years, set in motion revolutionary changes in our conception of the human mind and its functioning at deeper layers. These developments made psychology an independent and fascinating branch of study. Freud's theories of the unconscious, of the libido, funnelled through a personality structure of id, ego and super-ego, his concepts of eros and thanatos, of free association, of transference as methods of psychiatric treatment and so on are now well known. Later modifications of Freud's theories and concepts by Alfred Adler and Carl G Jung, who rejected some of the Freudian concepts like excessive emphasis on the libido, identification of the libido with the sex-instinct and so on, opened up newer dimensions in psychoanalytical research. Adler developed his own school of psychology called 'Individual Psychology' or 'Ego Psychology', while Jung developed his school of 'Analytical Psychology'. Jung expanded and modified the Freudian concept of libido to mean and represent the whole of psychic energy and the unconscious as the storehouse of all our psychic energy and power. Jung's concept of Collective Unconscious which includes 'archetypes' that provide the religious symbols and myths of different cultures, his concept of polarities in the unconscious, namely, the persona and the shadow, the anima and the animus and so on made our understanding of the human mind,

the science of psychology, wider and deeper. As the development of the various concepts of psychoanalysis progressed over the years, newer ideas emerged, essentially by the galvanization and interaction of these concepts constituting what is now known as the 'Third Force' in psychology. It is sometimes called 'Humanistic Psychology', some of the prominent members of this school being Karen Horney, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Eric Fromm.

Almost parallel to the psychoanalytical tradition, two other schools of psychology also developed, mostly in academic circles. These are behaviourism in America and gestalt in Germany. Some of the prominent names associated with behaviourist school are John B Watson, B F Skinner and Walter S Hunter, who reduced consciousness to a purely nervous phenomenon of 'stimulus and response', denying an independent existence of the mind apart from the brain. Many of the microbiologists also appear to hold this view about the mind. Gestalt Psychology developed in Germany with the researches of Wertheimer, Kofka and Kohler, who held that perception and other mental activities take place not as the coordination of a series of analytical processes but as integral wholes.

A third school of psychology parallel to the analytical tradition, known as Hormic Psychology, was founded in Great Britain by William McDougall around the beginning of the last century. This school differs from the psychoanalytical school in the introduction of will, which was conceived more or less as an instinct.

Yet another school of psychology was founded by some psychologists under the influence of the philosophy of existentialism. One of its leading exponents is Rollo May, who develops the essential ideas of this school in his book *Psychology and the Human Dilemma*.

Viktor Frankl emphasized that a human being's primary concern is the 'search for meaning', rather than the satisfaction of bio-

logical needs. Though not constituting a separate school of psychology, Frankl's ideas have considerably influenced several thinkers in the science of psychology.

The brief survey presented above gives a bird's-eye view of the vast amount of research and thinking that have gone into the understanding of the human mind in depth.

### **Revolutionary Ideas in the Field of Computer Science and Engineering / Information Technology, Leading to Speculations about Artificial Intelligence**

Over the past few decades, thanks to the enormous strides made by electronic computer technology, attempts at computer simulation of human intelligence are being made in a big way. This area of lively controversy that has been arousing tremendous interest in recent years is referred to as Artificial Intelligence (AI). There is a point of view, referred to as strong AI, which asserts that mental qualities of some sort could be attributed to the logical functioning of any computational device, even the simplest ones, what to speak of sophisticated ones like the computers. Computer science and engineering and information technology are still very young disciplines. Supercomputers are being developed; as years pass by, these devices will get faster and faster, will have larger and larger rapid-access memory stores, more and more logical units and will be able to perform larger and larger operations in parallel. All this is actually happening now, and that at a staggering speed. The idea behind strong AI is that mental activity is simply the carrying out of some well-defined sequence of operations via a specified calculational procedure, frequently referred to as an algorithm. AI protagonists believe that by developing powerful devices to execute these algorithms, computer simulation of human intelligence is possible.

Exciting and highly controversial research is going on in this field of intelligence, a revolutionary development at this turn of the

present century. Scientists (physicists, biotechnologists, computer engineers, artificial intelligence people) are now asking certain fundamental questions about consciousness, like 'What does consciousness mean? What is intelligence? What is awareness? Is the universe we see, perceive and live in, self-aware? What is the relation between consciousness and the brain?' In a word, consciousness research seems to be engaging the minds of scientists and thinking men and women all over the world.

Self-awareness appears to be a wonderful phenomenon in this consciousness research study. There is a funny story with which Roger Penrose's famous book *Emperor's New Mind* begins. The title of this book, as one can easily see, is a parody of the well-known story of the emperor's new clothes: how the nudity of the mighty and all-powerful emperor was exposed by the unsophisticated simplicity of an innocent little child! This parody of the story of the emperor's new clothes is about the emperor's new mind: how the mighty power and near-omniscience of a super-super computer was exposed as hollow snobbishness by a little boy, watching the inaugural ceremony where the mighty computer's great powers were being displayed.

The story is as follows: A super-super computer is created by a scientist, an AI protagonist. This near-omniscient machine is to display its might and genius at an inaugural ceremony where important dignitaries are present: scientists and technologists of all disciplines, political leaders, men of importance from all walks of life. The claim is that this super-super computer can, within micro-micro- or nanoseconds, answer any question that might be put to it.

At the inaugural ceremony, the President, the head of the whole country, gently requests anybody present in the audience to put the first question by way of inauguration. Everybody is keeping quiet—all the great stal-

warts among the scientists and engineers remaining silent and holding their breath, lest they appeared silly and stupid before such an amazing omniscience, by asking a question. A little boy gets up, puts up his hand, and says, 'Sir, may I have the privilege of asking the first question?' 'Yes, come on,' says the President. 'Go ahead, boy, it is your privilege to ask the first question.' The boy mutters in utter innocence: 'How does it feel to be a computer?' The computer activates, the various lights start glowing; seconds pass, minutes pass and almost an hour passes. There is no answer. The entire audience looks on flabbergasted, dumbfounded, confounded and nonplussed. There is a stunning silence all around. After a couple of hours of computation, the computer blinks and gives the message: 'I don't know.' There is uproar, hilarious laughter everywhere, and a curious joy at the performance of this 'God that failed', derision at this ignominious parading its wanton 'omniscience'!

The computer fails to answer a simple question, namely, how it *feels* to be a computer itself, because it is an 'unintelligent omniscience', capable of making very 'intelligent' computations at fantastic speed, much faster than an intelligent human being. Notice here the meaning of the word *intelligent* in regard to a human person and a computer. A human being is intelligent in the sense that he is self-aware. A computer is 'intelligent', in the sense of being capable of highly 'intelligent' computations, being itself absolutely 'unintelligent', that is, not self-aware. This 'unintelligent omniscience' is made to do all the bullwork by the 'little' intelligence of a human being, and it is doing things that he could never hope to do in a lifetime! But the 'little intelligence' of the human being has given birth to this fantastic 'unintelligent genius'! That is the paradox and the glory of Consciousness, the conscious Principle, *chaitanya* as the Upanishads would call it.

## Upanishadic Analysis of the Layers of a Human Personality vis-à-vis the Revolutions in the Thought Currents as Mentioned

The four main trends of thought mentioned above — the revolutionary changes in the thought current of the world during the last century and beginning of the present century—apparently look unconnected, or at the most running parallel, with hardly any meeting point. The physical, the biological, the psychic and the intellectual—how are they related to one another? Or, are they related at all? The human mind, as we have said, always looks for interrelationship, interconnectedness, unification and integration. There are attempts today to pursue what is known as ‘inter-disciplinary’ research. Most interestingly, in attempting this so-called inter-disciplinary approach, we have never asked whether these disciplines were separate at all at any time that an interrelationship is attempted to be discovered through inter-disciplinary approach? In India, the various disciplines, the branches of knowledge, were never separate from one another, all of them being classified under *aparā vidyā*.<sup>3</sup> In seeking the interrelation between these four, the physical, the biological, the psychic and the intellectual, we should seek how they are related to the individual, the person, the ‘I’, for whom they are intended in the first place. Without the ‘I’, the person, the conscious Principle, these disciplines have no meaning whatsoever.

The Upanishads have analysed the human personality into five layers or levels. Each layer is to be considered an autonomous self, governed and regulated by its own laws. Popularly, this scheme is known as *pañca-kōśa-viśleṣaṇa*, analysis of the five sheaths; but then the word *kōśa*, or sheath, does not occur in the original text, the second chapter of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. Commenting on this text, Shankaracharya introduced the concept of *kōśa*, or sheath, to suit his Advaitic philosophy. So, going by the original text of the Upanishad, we may seek the correspondence of

the four disciplines mentioned above with the hierarchy of the following four layers of human personality: (1) the physical (*annamaya-ātman*), (2) the biological (*prāṇamaya-ātman*), (3) the psychical (*manomaya-ātman*), and (4) the intellectual (*vijñānamaya-ātman*).

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* speaks of Bhṛigu, the son of Varuna, approaching his father with the following prayer: ‘*Adhihi bhagavo brahmeti*. Sir, teach me Brahman.’<sup>4</sup> Varuna says, ‘*Yato va imāni bhūtāni jāyante; yena jātāni jīvanti; yatprayantya bhisamviśantīti; tadvijjñāsasva; tadbrahmeti*. Know That from which all beings originate, emerge; That in which all beings rest; and That into which all beings finally merge—That is Brahman.’ (3.1.1)

He also instructs his son about the *sadhana*, the method or process by which this realization of Brahman could be achieved: ‘*Tapasā brahma vijjñāsasva; tapo brahmeti*. Know Brahman by means of *tapas*; that is, by means of penance, austerity, meditation and control of the senses. *Tapas* is Brahman.’ (3.2.1) A wonderful definition of *tapas* is given in the *Mahabharata*, which Shankaracharya quotes often in his commentaries on the Upanishads: ‘*Manasaśca indriyāṇāṃ ca aikāgryaṃ paramaṃ tapaḥ*. *Tapas* is the concentrated focusing of the mind and all the senses (on the object of *tapas*, which is the Reality, or Truth).’<sup>5</sup> Only by an absolute control over the senses and the mind, and a concentrated, intense and passionate enquiry into the Reality, can one hope to realize the Truth: ‘*Āvṛttacakṣuramṛtatvam icchan*’, as the *Katha Upanishad* would say;<sup>6</sup> that is, anyone who desires to attain Immortality (*amṛtatva*), must be *āvṛttacakṣu* (senses and mind turned inward and focused on the Reality within). Note that the Upanishad says that ‘*Tapas* is Brahman, *Tapo brahmeti*’. By saying that the goal is Brahman and the means (*tapas*) is also Brahman, the Upanishad indicates that in the ultimate Realization, the goal and the means

coalesce into one. Having been instructed thus, Bhrigu performs tapas, meditates. He then realizes the Truth, or Brahman, as physical, *annamaya*, for it is matter that pervades everything and is present everywhere; it is the physical universe that we perceive through our senses.

He then approaches his father again and tells him of his realization of Brahman as *annamaya*. The teacher does not say yes or no, does not give him the final answer, but encourages him to struggle further and to discover for himself the deeper layers of his self. The teacher says: 'Good, go on.' '*Tapasā brahma vijijñā-sasva; tapo brahmeti*. Know Brahman through tapas (meditation, austerity, penance); tapas is Brahman.' Bhrigu again goes back to do further tapas. Having performed tapas, having meditated, having investigated into himself, Bhrigu realizes Brahman as *prāṇamaya*, as life-force. He feels that the Reality cannot be just matter; for the whole universe is vibrating, animated, as it were, with life, prana. This principle of universal animation, this life-force vibrating through and through, is the *prāṇamaya*.

With this realization, he approaches the teacher once again and prays to be taught. With his characteristic style of propelling the student to further investigation, Varuna once again tells him: 'Good, go on. Meditate, do tapas and know Brahman.' This is the Upanishadic technique: the answer is not directly given to the student, for, then, he would never learn. The disciple should be taught the joy of struggle, the perseverance to investigate, to probe deeper and deeper into himself, until he comes face to face with Truth. The teacher just plays the catalyst and gently, but effectively, persuades the disciple to investigate into himself, to go deeper and deeper till he realizes the Truth for himself. Thus, on and on Bhrigu proceeds into the investigation of the nature of Brahman. He realizes Brahman next as *manomaya*—the mental. He feels that the entire universe is only thought, *bhāvamaya*. The objects

that we see and feel are also nothing but thoughts.

Again the teacher sends him back for further investigation, more vigorous tapas. Having meditated, having performed more profound tapas, Bhrigu realizes the Truth as *vijñānamaya*—the intellectual. Bhrigu comes closer and closer to the Truth, to the ultimate Consciousness. Life and Consciousness are not the same in Upanishadic parlance. The discovery of Consciousness as different from Life, enunciated by our Upanishadic rishis, is fundamental to Vedantic wisdom. Consciousness is at a much more profound layer than Life. And lastly Bhrigu realizes the Truth as *ānandamaya*—the blissful. He then feels that there is absolute, infinite Joy, and nothing but Joy pervading the universe.

This section of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* concludes by declaring that this Brahman-realization is 'established in the supreme Space (of one's own heart), *parama vyoman-pratiṣṭhita*'.<sup>7</sup> This, once again, is one of the most important of Upanishadic doctrines: That Reality which is all-pervading, supreme and immense (Brahman)—the macrocosmic consciousness Principle—is non-different from, that is, absolutely identical with, the Truth, or Reality shining in one's own *cidākāśa*, the innermost Consciousness-Space of one's heart—the microcosmic consciousness Principle.

The Upanishads therefore analyse the human personality, the fundamental Atman principle, into five layers or levels: *annamaya-ātman*, *prāṇamaya-ātman*, *manomaya-ātman*, *vijñānamaya-ātman* and *ānandamaya-ātman*. Each of these layers is an autonomous entity by itself, governed by its own laws; it is not that one is superior or inferior to another; it is not that one is superseded by another; it is not that one is sublated or eliminated by another; it is not that one is more true and another less, or one is true and another untrue; but that the Atman manifests itself in the human personality as five different layers.

An example from atomic physics would

perhaps make the meaning of these layers or levels more clear. When we say that the electron revolving round the nucleus in (elliptical) orbits is in the K-shell, L-shell, M-shell and so on, it is not that the K-shell is superior to the L-shell or one of them is sublated or eliminated in favour of another, but that the electron happens to be in a particular shell when it has a certain amount of energy, and when it acquires greater energy or loses some energy it would shift to the succeeding or preceding shell. Similarly, by dint of sadhana, or spiritual practice, when a sadhaka, spiritual aspirant, acquires greater and greater energy, he would move over to higher and higher layers, the strength to move to a higher layer requir-

ing a quantum of energy supplied either by the guru, the spiritual teacher, or coming from one's own inner reservoir of strength and energy.

(to be concluded)

### References

1. *Āpyāyantu mamāṅgāni ...* —Shanti mantra for the *Kena Upanishad*.
2. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.1.3.
3. *Ibid.*, 1.1.5.
4. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 3.1.1.
5. *Mahabharata*, 'Shanti Parva', 250.4.
6. *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.1.
7. *Taittiriya*, 3.6.1.

## Spiritual Practice

One accomplishes much in this life by dint of special effort and care. Man suffers in various ways because of his own foolishness. But one can minimize these sufferings if one succeeds in purifying the mind. Everyone experiences happiness and misery and no one can escape from them. They remain as long as the body lasts; but one is no longer overcome by them if one becomes devoted to God. They come and go. The wise person ignores them and keeps himself engaged in sadhana. Their influence ceases when one becomes rooted in spiritual practices. Then the mind is absorbed in the bliss of devotion and enjoys peace. Worship the Lord; the mind will be calm automatically. Without depending on a place or a person, take refuge in the indwelling Self. Try to purify the mind with all your heart and soul. Curb your outgoing tendencies and make an effort to be indrawn. And shunning all worldly desires, direct yourself towards God. Then you will no longer go astray due to the vain prompting of your mind; and you will be endowed with peace and goodness by the grace of the Lord.

'Your mind forever'—this is the right attitude. Everything in this world is very transient, lasting only a few days. Nothing is permanent except the Lord. Therefore, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, if we can live a God-centred life, no miseries can touch us.

There is no world outside. It is what we project outside. But how difficult it is to understand this, and how much more difficult to remember it always, even after understanding it. We feel unhappy when we make ourselves small. That is the bane. Yet we forget and are in the whirlpool of maya ever once again. But thanks to the grace of Mother, we remember it again soon. 'There is no happiness in that which is finite; that which is finite is perishable. That which is universal is Blissfulness itself.' Know the universal! That is thy real Self.

—Swami Turiyananda

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# The Appeal of the Upanishads Today

SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

(continued from the previous issue)

## Inner versus Outer: The 'Atman = Brahman' Equation

The Upanishadic rishis asked another question. By turning the senses inward, by going deep into the Core of one's own personality, one realizes that Atman within, in the *chidakasha*, the supreme Space within one's heart. What relation does this individual Consciousness Principle, Atman, bear to the cosmic Consciousness Principle, Brahman, which is, as it were, without? Sri Ramakrishna asked the question in his own simple, inimitable style: 'Can you see God only when you close your eyes? Can you not see Him with open eyes as well?' There comes a point of time in the life of a sadhaka (spiritual aspirant) when he longs to know how he is related to the universe; how his individual Self (the Atman) is related to the universal Self (the Brahman). This question takes him much farther—beyond his individual search within—until he realizes his cosmic Identity. From the analysis of the Atman as manifesting in the five layers—*annamaya*, *prāṇamaya*, *manomaya*, *vijñānamaya* and *ānandamaya*—the question may be reframed as follows: How is the individual (microcosmic) *annamaya* related to the Universal (Macrocosmic) *annamaya*, the individual *prāṇamaya* to the Universal *prāṇamaya*, the individual *manomaya* to the Universal *manomaya*, and the individual *vijñānamaya* to the Universal *vijñānamaya*? [*Ānandamaya* is always Universal (Macrocosmic) and does not have a microcosmic counterpart]. Actually, there is no outside or inside in Consciousness, but as long as we feel that we are conditioned by the *annamaya*, *prāṇamaya*, *manomaya* and so on, we need to ask how this individual *annamaya*, in-

dividual *prāṇamaya*, individual *manomaya* and the rest are related to their Cosmic counterparts. When we realize ourselves as Conscious entities, conditioned though by the individual layers like *annamaya* and *prāṇamaya*, in great wonder we ask how this Consciousness is related to the cosmic Consciousness. My individual eye, which sees; my individual ear, which hears; my individual mind, which thinks—all these are impelled by a consciousness Principle, which moves and animates me, the individual. In great wonder, the rishi of the *Kena Upanishad* exclaims: 'What is that Power impelled by which the mind is able to perceive; which is that Power that animates the prana, the life-force; what is that Force which impels speech; and who is that Shining One (*deva*) who activates the eyes and the ears to do their respective functions?'<sup>1</sup>

In asking these questions, the rishi is trying to investigate into the source of that Power, that Energy, that supreme Consciousness, which activates, animates and impels his own individual consciousness, and to realize the relationship between the two. At the end of the investigation, the rishi would realize that there is only one indivisible Consciousness, unbroken Awareness, which cannot be divided or broken up into the individual and the cosmic. But he begins his investigation with what he actually sees and knows and feels: his individual consciousness. This investigation, this process of enquiry, is of great current appeal, for today you cannot talk of the micro except in terms of the macro. There are two fundamental manifestations in nature: one is the

microcosm and the other is the macrocosm. Swami Vivekananda speaks about these two manifestations in his famous lectures 'The Universe: the Microcosm' and 'The Universe: the Macrocosm'. Thus for every level of consciousness like *annamaya* and *prāṇamaya* there should be two corresponding manifestations, the micro and the macro. Strictly speaking, it would be incorrect to say that these two are related; rather, they are one and same, manifesting as two. The Advaitic (non-dualistic) school will say that the two are absolutely identical and non-dual; the Vishishtadvaitic (qualified non-dualistic) school will assert that the micro is a part of the macro; and the Dvaitic (dualistic) school will claim that the micro is different from the macro, but eternal and absolutely dependent on and subordinate to it. These are philosophical wranglings into which we need not enter for the present. That the microcosm and the macrocosm are two manifestations of one and the same Reality and therefore are built on the same plan, was revealed to Swami Vivekananda in a famous vision he had while meditating under a peepul tree in Almora. He later told Swami Akhandananda, his dear brother disciple, 'Gangadhar, today I have solved one of my greatest problems in life; I have realized the oneness of the microcosm and the macrocosm.' He recorded thus the substance of his vision in a notebook:

In the beginning was the Word etc.

The microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same plan. Just as the individual soul is encased in the living body, so is the universal Soul in the Living Prakriti [Nature]—the objective universe. Shiva [i.e. Kali] is embracing Shiva: this is not a fancy. This covering of the one [Soul] by the other [Nature] is analogous to the relation between an idea and the word expressing it: they are one and the same; and it is only by a mental abstraction that one can distinguish them. Thought is impossible without words. Therefore, in the beginning was the Word etc.

This dual aspect of the Universal Soul is

eternal. So what we perceive or feel is this combination of the Eternally Formed and the Eternally Formless.<sup>2</sup>

Swami Vivekananda also spoke of having seen the 'whole universe in an atom'. It is interesting to note that Rutherford had a similar perception when he invented the now-famous Rutherford Atomic Model. In this model the electrons were thought of as revolving round the nucleus just like the planets round the sun. It was this vision of microcosm-macrocosm unity that prompted Rutherford to assert that the atom is built on the same plan as the universe. Much later, when Einstein was struggling with his General Theory of Relativity, he drew inspiration from a famous principle called Mach's Principle, according to which there is an unbroken continuum of matter. This gave rise to the idea that matter at the microcosmic level and matter at the macrocosmic level are just different manifestations of one 'ocean' of matter, as it were, and related to each other as a bubble or a wavelet to a huge wave. By the laws of unity of nature and uniformity of nature, this idea could be extrapolated and applied to the realm of the Spirit, and Advaita (non-duality) could be established. In one of his great Advaitic moods, Swami Vivekananda exclaimed: 'Never forget the glory of human nature. We are the greatest God that ever was or ever will be. Buddhas and Christs are but waves of the boundless ocean which *I am*.'<sup>3</sup> The 'I' he was speaking about was, of course, the 'Cosmic I', the 'Universal I', the '*virāṭ aham*'. He was speaking from the standpoint of the realization of his cosmic Identity. In such moods, he would also say that the ant and the worm, apparently small and insignificant in their manifestations, are non-different from Nazarene, the Prophet of Nazareth, Jesus the Christ, a Divine Manifestation of cosmic dimension.

The macrocosmic counterpart of the individual Atman Consciousness (microcosm) is called Brahman. Since the microcosm and the macrocosm are one and the same, it follows

that Atman = Brahman, the famous Vedantic equation. Advaita will say that Atman = Brahman, that is, Atman is identically equal to Brahman, while Vishishtadvaita or Dvaita will say that it is not identically equal to, but slightly equal to and so on. These are but philosophical wranglings; but the truth of the equation is clear: microcosm = macrocosm. At that level of intuitive awareness, one cannot even assert 'I am Brahman', 'I' meaning the microcosm and 'Brahman' the macrocosm; for 'I' is but a tiny bubble in the infinite ocean of Brahman, as it were. The famous *mahāvākyas* of Vedanta, the Great Statements of Identity, namely, *Tattvamasī* (That thou Art)<sup>4</sup> and *Ahaṁ brahmāsmi* (I am Brahman),<sup>5</sup> also fall far below in comparison with this actual awareness of Identity. There is no 'Thou' or 'I' to say 'That thou art' or 'I am Brahman'; there is only one infinite, unbroken continuum of Consciousness in which the concepts of 'Thou' or 'I' become irrelevant and meaningless. In his own inimitable and homely fashion, Sri Ramakrishna gave a beautiful illustration: A salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean; now, who would be there to come back and give any information about the ocean? Similarly, when the 'I', the individual consciousness, seeks to fathom the fathomless infinity of the ocean of cosmic Consciousness, it simply melts away and becomes one with the Ocean: '*Brahmaveda brahmaiva bhavati*, A knower of Brahman verily becomes Brahman,' as the *Mundaka Upanishad* would say.<sup>6</sup> This means there is no question of knowing Brahman as an object; you can only know It by actually becoming It.

**Globalization concept related to microcosm-macrocosm oneness: Upanishadic method of Absolute Negation—'Neti neti'—leads to Absolute Affirmation**

This realization of the Upanishadic rishis of the oneness of the microcosm and the macrocosm at all levels—namely, *annamaya*, *prā-*

*ṇamaya*, *manomaya* and *vijñānamaya*—culminated in the 'Atman = Brahman' equation. The appeal of the Upanishads today is here: in today's world nobody can talk of the microcosm except as a part of, or as subsumed by, or as identical with, the macrocosm. The buzzword today is 'globalization', whose essence is the unity of everything: seeking and finding the uni-verse in this apparent multi-verse. The appeal of the Upanishads today is that they contain the only philosophy by which the whole universe can be united, globalized. In fact, Vedanta, the philosophy of the Upanishads, says that one cannot even talk of globalization, for it would mean that we are trying make global something which was not global already. In 'globalize', we have the suffix 'ize', the *abhūta-tadbhāva*, '*chvī*' *pratyaya* of Sanskrit grammar, which means that something was not global earlier, and we are now making it so. No; Vedanta says that the universe has been global and will be global all the time—only our ignorance, *ajñāna* or *avidyā*, makes it appear non-global. The so-called globalization means the removal of *ajñāna* or ignorance so that the immediate realization of globalization that already was, gets revealed to consciousness.

Now, globalization can take place at all levels of consciousness: globalization at the physical level, *annamaya*, is being attempted by the physical sciences; globalization at the life-force level, *prāṇamaya*, is being attempted by the life sciences, biotechnology and the like; globalization at the mental level, *manomaya*, is in the realm of psychology; globalization at the intelligence level, *vijñānamaya*, is being attempted by information technology, communications engineering and artificial intelligence people. The bliss level, *ānandamaya*, the Upanishads say, is always global: there is no individual, microcosmic *ānandamaya-ātman*. Thus, the Upanishadic philosophy alone is capable of uniting the world—again, you do not unite the world: you only perceive the Unity that exists already and always; and in this state

of perception, all differences cease. The moment one sees differences, says the Upanishad, one goes round and round the cycle of birth and death.<sup>7</sup> There is no manifoldness, there is no difference, *nānā*, anywhere, and this perception of the many, *nānātva*, is due to ignorance, *ajñāna*. In reality, there is only one. When we say there is only one, it is not that there is one as against two, three or four, but it is that there is just only one, without any possibility or conception of two, three or four. The Vedantic terminology, therefore, is One-without-a-second, *ekameva-advitīyam*. This is the only language in which we can express it. The moment we talk of two, three or four, that is manifoldness, we are in the realm of objects, things which we perceive by our senses—our consciousness, *prajñā*, is then outward-focused: *bahih prajñā*. On the other hand, if we talk of one inner reality, as against and as juxtaposed with two, three or four (the manifoldness), then our consciousness would be inward-focused: *antaḥ prajñā*. A third possibility would be that our consciousness has no focus at all; it simply remains as an unfocused, amorphous mass, as in the case of deep, dreamless sleep. In that case, our state of consciousness is *prajñāna-ghana*. The Upanishads reject all these possibilities, deny all these states of consciousness and assert that the ultimate Reality

is none of these, because all these states are relative, while the Reality is Absolute. The famous statement in the *Mandukya Upanishad* asserts: The absolute Consciousness, the Atman, is not outward-focused (as in the waking state), nor is it inward-focused (as in dream), nor is it a combination of both of these, nor is it an unfocused, amorphous mass of consciousness (as in deep, dreamless sleep). The Absolute Consciousness, is unseen, untranscendable, ungraspable, unrecognizable through any signs, unthinkable, unbroken, homogeneous, the death of all relativity, tranquil, supremely auspicious, non-dual, called *turiya-caitanya*.

In this language of *neti, neti*—not this, not this—you negate all that you see and perceive. Go on and on till you reach the end of all negation. At the end of this absolute negation is the affirmation, because affirmation is only a language to which you come when you negate everything. Absolute Negation and absolute Affirmation are one and the same thing. Buddha absolutely negated everything and asserted that the Reality is *śūnya*, meaning absolute Negation, while the Upanishads assert that the Reality is *pūrṇa*, meaning absolute Affirmation. We do not negate absolutely and therefore we see negation and affirmation as two different things.

### **The three bodies (*śarīra-traya*) and the three states (*avasthā-traya*) related to the five layers of the Atman: Upanishadic philosophy is derived naturally from our daily life and experience by the Principle of Projection—hence its eternal appeal**

In the Upanishadic paradigm, the five layers of the Atman—*annamaya*, *prāṇamaya*, *manomaya*, *vijñānamaya* and *ānandamaya*—are further reduced to three bodies (*śarīra-traya*): the *annamaya* is the gross body (*sthūla-śarīra*); *prāṇamaya*, *manomaya* and *vijñānamaya* together constitute the subtle body (*sūkṣma-śarīra*); *ānandamaya* constitutes the causal body

(*kāraṇa-śarīra*). Each of these three bodies has a microcosmic aspect and a corresponding macrocosmic aspect: *vyāṣṭi* and *samaṣṭi* respectively. In their micro-aspects these three bodies operate through our individual consciousness every day: consciousness steering the microcosmic gross body, called in Vedānta *vaiśvānara* or *viśva*, is operative in the waking

state of consciousness; consciousness piloting the microcosmic subtle body, called in Vedānta *taijasa*, is operative in the dream state of consciousness; and consciousness associated with the microcosmic causal body, called in Vedānta *prājñā*, is operative in the deep, dreamless state of consciousness. The macrocosmic counterparts of these three are, respectively, *virāt*, *hiranyagarbha* and *īśvara*.

Thus, when we talk about our body, Vedānta would ask: Which body do you mean? Is it the gross body, the subtle body or the causal body? When we dream, see buildings and people and all kinds of things in it, what is the light by which we see them? There is an inner light, *antarjyoti*, by which we are able to see objects and persons in dreams. That light cannot be of any external origin, because there is no externalized consciousness in dream, consciousness being inward-focused in that state: *antaḥ-prajñā*. The gross body, the *sthūla śarīra*, is not operating in that state; all the activities are of the subtle body, or *sūkṣma śarīra*. Our consciousness throws this light up, throws up all the objects and persons and sees all these things in that strange inner light. When you go still farther and deeper, when you lapse into deep, dreamless sleep, you do not see anything, perceive anything. From this state of deep sleep (*suṣupti*), you spring back to the dream state (*svapna*) and from there to the waking state (*jāgrat*). These are our daily experiences, and not some imaginary, philosophical speculations.

This is one tremendous appeal of the Upanishads today: Vedānta as a philosophy is not cut off from our day-to-day, actual experiences. Rather, it is these very experiences that form the basis of this philosophy. Vedānta is not speculative or other-worldly, but rooted in this very world of the daily experiences of you and me. This philosophy is therefore of immense appeal and value to men, women and children in all walks of life, in all places, in all situations all over the world. Vedānta has thus a universal appeal, for it deals with our daily

life and experiences. Everybody in the world, wherever, whoever or whatever he may be, passes through these three states of waking, dream and dreamless (deep) sleep. Only, we do not care to investigate into them or ask deeper questions about their fundamental root or source. In India philosophy is called *darśana*, which means seeing, perceiving. Every Indian is, therefore, a philosopher, if he tries to see through his daily experiences, analyse them, investigate into them and find out the deeper source from which they spring and on which they rest. According to Vedānta, therefore, philosophizing does not mean polemics, speculating or theorizing. It is actually seeing Reality, having a vision of Truth. You look at your daily life, ask profound questions about your daily experiences, investigate deeply into them and on the basis of this inquiry, this search as a rational scientist, form your world view, your Weltanschauung. This is of great appeal today, when dogmas and theories and speculations are being subjected to the test of reason and investigation; the baseless ones among them were 'crumbling away like masses of porcelain under the tremendous sledge-hammer blows of scientific research' in the words of Swami Vivekananda.<sup>8</sup> He therefore exhorted us to go back to the Upanishads, which propound the wonderful, scientific, rational philosophical system of Vedānta, discovered by investigation into our own daily life and experiences.

I know that I eat and drink and talk and move about while I am awake (*jāgrat avasthā*); I know that I see various kinds of objects and persons which I project out of my own consciousness while I am dreaming (*svapna avasthā*); I know that I lapse into a blank—no objects, no persons, no motion, no seeing and so on—while I am deeply asleep (*suṣupti avasthā*). These three *avasthās* are not speculative, but part and parcel of my daily experience. By investigating into these *avasthās*, I can easily see how they are self-contradictory: the waking state experience is contradicted by dream

state experience and both are contradicted by deep sleep experience. So I reject all of them as unreal, being mutually contradictory; I realize that the contradictions arise because I identify myself with these states and participate in these experiences. Therefore I see that if I dissociate myself from these states and the experiences, then the contradictions would cease to exist and would have no relevance for me. With this understanding comes the direct and immediate (*sākṣāt, aparokṣāt*) realization (*anubhūti*) that I am in reality the non-participating Witness of these three states (*avasthā-traya-sākṣin*) and my real Self (Atman) is absolutely dissociated from the three bodies and the five layers of consciousness, with which I was ignorantly associating myself (*sarira-traya-vilakṣaṇa, pañca-kōśa-vilakṣaṇa*).

My real Self is eternally Pure, of the nature of absolute Awareness and ever free (*nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta*); I am, in reality, Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute (*sat-cit-ānanda-svarūpa*). I permit all the three states to play on Myself, just like the cinema screen permits all the various scenes to have their full play on it, itself remaining absolutely unaffected by the changes taking place over it. When there is a scene of flood on the screen, the screen does not get wet; not does the screen get burnt out when there is a raging fire playing on it. When all these plays cease, the screen remains in its own true nature: the pure white. Likewise, when the Self is no longer caught in the play of the *avasthās* anymore, then it remains established in Its own true glory: *sve mahimni pratiṣṭitah*.

The Upanishadic investigation into the profound truths about our own selves, into the nature of Reality, is made with the help of very common examples from daily life. Philosophy thus grows out of everyday perception and experience. It is therefore meant for everybody who is anywhere, and in whatever state or station in life. This is the special appeal of the Upanishads today.

### An Example from the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*

The following interesting anecdote, the simple investigation into reality, by asking simple questions about our daily life and experience, is a case in point. It is from one of the greatest of the Upanishads, the *Bṛihadaranyaka*. Yajnavalkya, the great sage of this Upanishad and its hero, goes to King Janaka, with the desire of discussing Brahman. Janaka asks him some simple questions. Yajnavalkya's replies to them constitute the theme of this section in the Upanishad called 'Jyotirbrāhmaṇa':

Janaka: What is the light by which we see, move around and perform our daily activities?

Yajnavalkya: By the light of the sun, O king.

Janaka: When the sun has set, what is the light by which we see, move around and perform our daily activities?

Yajnavalkya: By the light of the moon, O king.

Janaka: When the sun has set and the moon has also set, what is the light by which we see, move around and perform our daily activities?

Yajnavalkya: By the light of fire, O king.

Janaka: When the sun has set, the moon has also set, and the fire is extinguished, what is the light by which we see, move around and perform our daily activities?

Yajnavalkya: By the 'light' of speech, O king. For, when it is pitch dark, so dark that we cannot even see our own hand, it is speech by which we identify people, move around and do our daily activities.

Janaka: When the sun has set, the moon has also set, the fire has been extinguished and speech has been hushed, what is the light by which we see, move around and perform our daily activities?

Yajnavalkya: By the light of the Self (Atman).

Janaka: What is this Self?

Yajnavalkya: This is of the nature of Consciousness, the inner Light, which lights up the hearts of all living beings; it is as if It meditates, It vibrates and so on.

(But in actuality, It is the non-participating Witness of all activities of body, mind and senses). From here on, the Upanishad analyses

the states of dream and waking states, pointing out that it is this inner Light by which we see dreams and so on.

An understanding into the cosmic mysteries like creation and the origin of the universe is sought through an understanding of the microcosm, by the principle of projection. This is the modern appeal of the Upanishads. We project from the microcosm, which we know, onto the macrocosm and try to understand the mysteries of the macrocosm. This is exactly the process by which science has progressed all along. How did Rutherford discover his atomic model? We have already seen how, having discovered the central positive core in the atom called the nucleus, Rutherford was unable to understand the arrangement of electrons in an atom. He then projected the macrocosmic scheme of the planets going round the sun into his micro-world of the atom and suggested that the electrons are moving round the nucleus like planets round the sun. In fact, he called his peripheral electrons moving round the nucleus as 'planetary electrons'.

When I dream, I create my own dream objects, which are nothing but my own consciousness; this shows that my individual consciousness has the capacity to divide itself into

the subject and the object. Make a projection from here to the macrocosm. The macrocosmic Consciousness, in a state similar to my micro-dream—may we call it the macro-dream!—creates its own dream objects, which are we, the created beings! You, I, all the beings, plants, animals and objects—in fact, everything we see in this created universe—may be conceived of as dream objects of the universal Consciousness, the supreme Purusha, who is in a state of macro-dream. Since this Purusha is Universal, we call Him Purushottama; the Puranas would call Him Mahavishnu, who is imagined to be always in a dreaming posture, *anantaśayana*, His dream resulting in creation. Just as the dream objects of my micro-dream do not know me as the dreamer, we, the dream objects of the macro-dream of the Supreme Purusha, do not know Him as the Dreamer! Thus is explained our ignorance of the Creator God, as long as we are identified with the creation, taking it to be real! The dream of the Purusha is called *yoga-nidrā*, because He is not helpless in His dream as we are in our micro-dream. His dream is supreme Yoga, and He shows us the power and glory of his Yoga through his creation: *Paśya me yogam aiśvaram*.<sup>9</sup>

## The most profound appeal of the Upanishads is that they deal with a subject that is of universal and timeless interest to everybody everywhere: 'I'

Lastly, the profound appeal of the Upanishads today is because it deals with a subject that is of universal interest and appeal. The subject matter of the Upanishads is *ātma-vidyā*, which is knowledge of the 'I', myself. The Upanishads investigate into the real nature of the 'I' consciousness, which each one of us possesses. Since this subject is universal, time- and space-independent, all peoples all over the globe, irrespective of nationality, creed, religion, gender, time and space, can draw inspiration from the Upanishads.

Therefore, it is only the Upanishads, the Vedānta philosophy based on the Upanishadic wisdom, that can bring about a real 'global village', a theme of great contemporary relevance and importance.

The eligibility of the student, *adhikārin*, is an important question discussed in the study of Vedānta. Who is eligible to study the Upanishads? Leaving aside the classical concept in this connection, we may put it very simply in today's context: to study any subject, the first criterion of eligibility is the aptitude of the stu-

dent; that is, how the subject matter of the study interests the student—is it relevant for him? Since the Upanishads deal with the subject 'I', that is, 'myself', it cannot but interest everybody. Anyone who feels the 'I' consciousness is therefore an eligible student for the study of the Upanishad. Once upon a time, Upanishadic knowledge was considered esoteric knowledge (*rahasya-vidyā*), not meant for anybody and everybody. This sense of secrecy gave rise to an unhealthy tradition of monopoly of knowledge, clannish authority and privilege. This was one reason why it remained confined to caves and forests, mystified intentionally by its self-styled custodians, making it inaccessible to the common man. Swami Vivekananda, the prophet of this age, came to break down barriers and stretch the frontiers of knowledge to infinity. He exhorted everybody to 'go back to the Upanishads' and quench their thirst in its immortal springs. Exclusiveness and privilege will go when we realize that the subject matter of the Upanishads, which is the 'I' and its real nature, is within everybody's claim. Anyone with the 'I' sense is, therefore, eligible to be enlightened by the Upanishadic wisdom, which is the *ātma-vidyā*.

There was a study made in USA on which single English word people most often use. The study revealed that the word used most often was 'I', the first person singular pronoun. Everywhere, everybody says, 'I', 'I', 'I'. But nobody actually knows what this 'I' is, what its real nature is. It is this subject, the real nature of the 'I', that the Upanishads deal with. In fact, the Upanishads say that *aham* ('I') is the name of the Atman. When somebody knocks at your door, and you ask from inside 'Hey, who's that?' the answer you would invariably get is 'It's me'. The caller will not announce himself by telling his name; he has so identified himself with his 'I' consciousness, that the name he would use to identify himself is 'I', *aham*, which is the name of the Atman. Just as Om is the name of Brahman, the

macrocosmic counterpart of Atman, *aham* is the name of Atman. We do not, however, care to enquire: What is this 'I'? Who am 'I'? This was the path that was highlighted and propagated in recent times by Sri Ramana Maharshi, the sage of Arunachala. Interestingly, the compilation of the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna, who is conventionally taken to be overwhelmingly given to *bhakti*, by his beloved chosen disciple and spiritual son, Swami Brahmananda, opens by asking this profound question 'What is this "I"? 'Is it my hand or foot or any other part of my body? Reflect well and you will know that there is no such thing as "I". The more you peel off the skin of an onion, the more skin only appears—you cannot get any kernel; so when you analyse the ego, it vanishes away into nothingness. What is ultimately left behind is the Atman (soul).'<sup>10</sup> This being the most interesting subject for anybody, the Upanishads invite everyone to perform this profound investigation in the depths of his being. Who will not be interested in studying himself? All that I now study—science and technology, arts and crafts and the like—is being studied by me, for myself. It is me in whom I am most interested. It is you in whom you are most interested. It is oneself (Vedanta would say, one's Self), in which one would be most interested. The sage Yajñavalkya tells his wife Maitreyi in the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*:

It is not for the sake of the husband that the husband is beloved (of the wife); but because of the Self that the husband is beloved. It is not for the sake of the wife that the wife is beloved (of the husband), but because of the Self that the wife is beloved. ... It is not for the sake of everything that everything appears beloved, but for the sake of the Self that everything appears beloved. This Self should be seen (realized)—should be heard of, should be reflected upon, should be deeply meditated upon. For, on realization of this Self—on hearing of It, reflecting upon It and deeply meditating upon It—everything else becomes known.<sup>11</sup>

If you use the small 's' it is the ego, and if

you use the capital 'S', it is the Self, or the Atman. When we investigate into the truth of the self, we realize that there is only one Self, the Atman, and the ego is only an unreal myth, a shadow of the Self. Thus, there are not two selves. There is no small 's' and capital 'S'.

The question asked by the great householder, Shaunaka, to the sage Angiras, in the *Mundaka Upanishad*, 'Sir, what is that by knowing which everything else becomes known?', is answered here, as in the *Mundaka Upanishad*, by saying that it is the knowledge of the Self, *ātma-vidyā* (which is the same as *brahma-vidyā*) that would confer on the realizer a knowledge of everything else. The Theory of Everything (ToE), which physicists all over the world are seeking today, is here: Self-knowledge, *ātma-vidyā*. The appeal of the Upanishads is therefore eternal, for they deal with Self-knowledge, which is the key to the knowledge of All. When we realize the true 'I', the real 'I', as the Infinite and the Absolute, shining always as the Light of pure Awareness, vibrating as Life and Consciousness, saturating and percolating all living and non-living beings everywhere—it is only then that our lives become meaningful; there comes to us everlasting fulfilment and blessedness. Without this realization, our lives have no meaning or purpose—'great is the loss', in the language of the *Kena Upanishad*.<sup>12</sup> The Upanishads invite us to this Kingdom of God that is within every one of us. This is the appeal of the Upanishads today, when human beings are caught up in a mad rush to acquire more and more and more, with their minds outward-focused, consumed in an insatiable fire of sensory passion and desire. Such human beings can only engender an

acquisitive, consumerist and possessive society, with more violence, corruption and mutual suspicion. The saving message of the Upanishads comes like a shower of nectar amidst this 'scorching sun of the mid-day summer' of worldliness and sensuality and acquisitiveness that is fast roasting the innermost soul of humankind in its sweltering heat. The Upanishadic wisdom, which is the science of the Self (*ātma-vidyā*), is the only message that can quench this heat and redeem the 'modern man in search of his soul' (Jung) and save him from the great fear of destruction that is looming large on today's horizon.<sup>13</sup> This is the appeal of the Upanishads today to which we need to respond most urgently, if we are eager to save humankind from annihilation.

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## References

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3. CW, 7.78.
4. *Chandogya Upanishad*, 6.13.3.
5. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.4.10.
6. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.2.9.
7. *Mṛtyossa mṛtyuṁ gacchati ya iha nāneva paśyati*. —*Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.11.
8. CW, 1.317.
9. *Bhagavadgita*, 9.5.
10. *Words of the Master*, comp. Swami Brahmananda (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1938), 1.
11. *Brihadaranyaka*, 2.4.5.
12. *Na ced-ihāvedin-mahatī vinaṣṭiḥ*. —*Kena*, 2.5.
13. *Trāyate mahato bhayāt*. —*Gīta*, 2.40.

## Doing Good

**T**ry to do good to others to the best of your ability. Seeing your example, others will learn to do the same. Do not harbour any desire in the mind, except to serve God in human beings.

—Swami Turiyananda