

THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

by

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We have been going through various important themes of the teachings of the Upanishads, and many subjects have been covered. There was a great sage called Yajnavalkya. His name occurs in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. He was a master of spiritual wisdom. One day, when he had become aged, he told his wife Maitreyi, and another wife known as Katyayani, that he was retiring; and he said: "Whatever property I have, I shall divide between both of you. I shall take to *sannyasa* and go for meditation, and you take my property."

The younger wife, Katyayani was very happy. "Good riddance, now the old man goes," she perhaps thought; but the other wife, Maitreyi, was very mature. She said, "Sire, you want to offer me all your wealth? May I ask you one question: Can I become immortal through wealth? With all the treasures that you are now prepared to offer to me, can I become immortal?" Yajnavalkya said, "Far from it. You will be a well-to-do person like any other in the world, but there is no hope of immortality through wealth." To that, Maitreyi said, "Then what for is this wealth that you are offering me? What shall I do with it, if through that I shall not become immortal?"

There is a very important psychological truth hidden in this query of Maitreyi, the consort of Yajnavalkya. Immortality is timeless existence. It can also mean, for our own practical purposes, a very long life that is not going to end easily; and if immortality cannot be gained through wealth, perhaps long life also cannot be assured through wealth; and this would mean that our life can end at any time, even with all the wealth that we may be having. If tomorrow is the last day in this world for a person possessing large treasures, what good is that treasure? If the owner or the possessor of the wealth is not to exist at all, what can wealth do? What is its utility?

Do we love wealth, and what is this love of wealth for? "Your question is a very important one," said Yajnavalkya. "You are very wise in raising this point. You are very dear to me. Come on; I shall teach you something. Sit down, and I shall speak to you."

Na va are patyuh kamaya patih priyo bhavati, atmanas tu kamaya patih priyo bhavati; na va are jayayai kamaya jaya priya bhavati; atmanas tu kamaya jaya priya bhavati; na va are sarvasya kamaya sarvam priyam bhavati; atmanas tu kamaya sarvam priyam bhavati (Bri.U. 2.4.5): Nobody loves anything for its own sake. Here is a masterstroke of genius from Yajnavalkya, the great sage: Nobody loves anything for its own sake. We are accustomed to this slogan of love, and we consider that as something very pre-eminent in our daily life. We love people, we love wealth, we love land, we love property. There is such a thing called love in this world, but who does love want, and what is the purpose of this love?

Psychologically, as well as metaphysically and philosophically, there seems to be an error in our notion that anything can be loved at all. The word 'love' becomes a misnomer when we investigate into its essences. If by love we mean affectionately clinging to something that is other than our own self, then love does not exist in this world. If love means asking for something other than one's own self,

clinging to something other than one's self, feeling happy with that which is not one's self – if that is the definition of love, then love is hypocrisy; it does not exist. But if we say that love does not always mean love for something other than one's own self - it should be love for one's own self - who will love one's own self? That is, again, a psychological problem. Neither does love for another seem to be justifiable, nor does love for one's own self seem to be meaningful.

For the sake of the Self, everything is dear – is a very precise statement of sage Yajnavalkya. This statement is so precise, so concentrated, that its meaning is not obviously clear on its surface, because it does not appear that people love themselves, and it is difficult to make sense of this statement if you just say you love property because you are loving your Self. Nobody will understand what exactly this statement means. Am I loving myself when I love property? It does not look like that. I cling to something that I regard as my belonging. It does not mean that I am clinging to my own body when I am clinging to something which is my belonging – property, wealth, treasure, relation. Yajnavalkya says: “You do not understand things properly. That is why the meaning is not clear to you.”

We have, in our earlier discussions, concluded that everything in the world has a pure subjectivity in itself. It is not true that things are objects of perception. They are also subjects from their own point of view. If you, as a perceiver or a cogniser of a thing which you consider as an object, remain as a subject for that particular thing which you regard as object, that other thing may consider you as an object from its own point of view when it beholds you as something outside itself. When I see you, I am a subject perceiving you as an object of my perception. So, you are an object and I am a subject. But when you perceive me, you are a subject and I am an object. Now tell me: Who is the subject and who is the object? Is there anything that we can permanently call an object?

The analysis of consciousness, into which we entered sometime back, has shown us that the nature of the subjectivity of anything is essentially consciousness. You have to bring back to your memory this analytical study that we conducted in the course of our going through the Mandukya Upanishad, etc. Consciousness is the essence of the subjectivity of anything. There cannot be a 'perceiving' of anything unless there is a consciousness of perceiving. This consciousness, as we noticed by an analysis of its nature, is incapable of being limited to a finitude of existence. Consciousness cannot be finite. That is to say, it cannot be located in any particular place. It cannot be even said to be inside somebody, because consciousness is the knower of the fact of its being inside someone. If someone says "consciousness is inside", it is consciousness itself making this statement possible. The so-called consciousness, which appears to be inside, seems to be asserting that it is inside. Minus consciousness, no assertion is possible. Therefore it is consciousness that is apparently holding the opinion that it is inside; that is to say, it is not outside.

I am just repeating briefly, in outline, the processes of analysis that we conducted earlier on this issue. Consciousness is inside, and therefore it is not outside. How does consciousness know that it is not outside? The process of perception is the commingling of consciousness with that which it considers as its object. Consciousness has to contact the object in order that it may become aware that the object is existing at all. The contacting of consciousness in this manner, in respect of the object, would preclude the old opinion that it is only inside. If it is locked up within the personality of an individual, no one can know that there is anything outside one's own skin. You will not know that there is a tree standing in front of you. Consciousness has to be capable of outstripping the limitations that it appears to be imagining around itself. All perception is an obvious demonstration of the non-finite character of consciousness. It is not merely inside, it is also outside; that is to say, it is everywhere. It is infinite; this is the point.

Yajnavalkya tells us that when we love somebody, some thing, some object - whatever it be, that which pulls us in the direction of the object so-called, is not the object by itself, because this object is a subject in its own status. Its essence is not objectivity; its essence is as much a center of consciousness as our own subjectivity is a center of consciousness. In all love, in all affections, in all attractions, the Self pulls the Self. The Universal that is hidden in the so-called object outside, pulls Itself (present in the subject) - as it were, in its own direction, and towards whichever side the action that is taking place. I hope you understand the point. It is as if one part of consciousness collides with another part of consciousness in perception.

As the Bhagavadgita tell us in another context, Sri Krishna, in one context, says that all perception which is sensory is actually the *gunas* of *prakriti* coming in contact with the *gunas* of *prakriti*. *Gunaha guneshu vartante* (B.G. 3.28): The *gunas* of *prakriti* - *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* - which are the constituents of the sense organs, come in contact with the very same properties of *prakriti* which also constitute the object of sense. So the object and the subject come in contact with each other because of the fact that both are constituted of the same substance, *prakriti* - *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*. On a deeper level, we may say that consciousness is the subject and it is also the object.

In technical language, the subject consciousness is called *vishayi chaitanya*. *Vishayi* is a Sanskrit word which means something or someone which is conscious of a *vishaya*, or an object. *Vishaya* means object, and the object consciousness is called *vishaya chaitanya*. The process of perception of the object by the subject is called *pramana chaitnaya*, or perceptive consciousness, or we may say perceptual consciousness; and the coming to be aware of the existence of an object - our being aware of the existence of an object - is called *prameya chaitanya*. The decision that we arrive at that 'we know the object' - the conclusion that the object has been known - is also a consciousness; and that conclusion consciousness in respect of an object being known is called

prameya chaitanya. The subject consciousness, which is *vishayi*, is also called *pramatr chaitanya*; and the object, which is also essentially consciousness, is called *vishaya chaitanya*; and the process is called *pramana chaitanya*. You can forget all these words. I am just casually mentioning these technologies of perceptual psychology.

The idea is that in all attractions, in all processes of contact of the subject with the object, it may be true that that the *gunas* of *prakriti* collide with the *gunas* of *prakriti*; but more profoundly, we may say that consciousness collides with consciousness. The sea of consciousness is everywhere in the universe. One eddy or wave of this consciousness is touching another.

Why are we so much attracted towards things; and when we are pulled in the direction of something lovable or dear, we seem to lose our senses? We become crazy and mad. Why does it happen? It is because the whole universe is at the back of even this little drop of consciousness which appears as the object. A little wave that is rising up on the surface of the ocean has the entire sea at the back of it, which wells up as this eddy or the wave. The power of the entire sea is behind the wave. The infinite is incapable of resisting, because nobody can resist an attraction. This is because attractions, which are also loves, arise on account of a psychological impasse created unconsciously by the involvement of consciousness in the sense organs and through the sense organs coming in contact with the object, not knowing the fact that the sense organs themselves are propelled by an inward consciousness of the subject and that there is also something in the object which is basically consciousness.

There is another psychological factor in the process of attraction. We do not get attracted to everything so easily. A rock on the bank of the Ganga may not attract us so powerfully as the rose flower for instance, that is blossoming in the garden, and so on. There are varieties of circumstances which differentiate one kind of perception from another kind

of perception. Attractions are the outcome of a sympathy that is established between the subjective consciousness and the contour that is presented by the object outside, notwithstanding the fact there is consciousness. Now I am touching upon another aspect of the matter altogether - not the metaphysical one.

There are three aspects of this issue. Why is it that we are pulled towards something? One is what has been already told in the Bhagavadgita - *gunas* propel themselves toward *gunas*. *Prakriti*, as the subject, working through the sense organs, is pulled towards itself, as it were, outside, in the form of an object, which also is constituted of the very same *prakriti*. That is one answer to the question of why one feels pulled or drawn towards another object. The other one that I mentioned is that the consciousness that is infinite in nature is 'infinitudinously' - to take one's understanding beyond 'multitudinously' - pulling the subject consciousness, and there is a vice versa action; subject and object pull each other. The third aspect that I am mentioning is that the attractions are conditioned by certain features of the object. The Atman, the Soul, the Self, the consciousness in us is a perfect symmetry in perfection. It is the most beautiful of things. The Soul is the most beautiful thing. Nothing can be beautiful like the Soul. Nobody has seen the Soul, but if you can imagine what beauty is, if you have seen any surpassingly beautiful thing in the world - not a little beautiful thing, but enchanting, absorbing, enrapturing beauty - if you have seen that anywhere, you may say the Soul is something like that. Now, the Soul cannot be attracted to anything unless it sees some sympathy, that is to say, unless some quality of it is also present in that object to which it is attracted. Symmetry is one of the qualities. Any kind of hotchpotch arrangement cannot attract us. We are attracted to methodological arrangement, symmetry, proportion and meaningfulness. A meaningless object cannot attract us as much as a meaningful object can.

You may ask me what 'meaningful' is. Meaning is that character in the object by which we can consider that object

to be of some utility to us. If it is totally non-utilitarian, if it is a meaningless hotchpotch, then our mind cannot be attracted. Thus, symmetry of contour, perfection of presentation, precision and orderliness, together with the meaning that we see in it, pulls the subject towards the object. However, considering any aspect of the matter, it does not mean that we love the object for its own sake. There is some subjectivity involved in it. Unless a meaning is seen in the object, we will not be pulled towards that object. We want to put that object into some utility. If there is no meaning at all, no attraction takes place. So, *na va arey sarvasya kamaya sarvam priyam bhavati; atmanastu kamaya sarvam priyam bhavati*: Nothing is dear for its own sake; for the sake of the Atman, everything is dear. When we love a thing, we are loving our Atman. Now, you may again make the mistake of thinking "My Atman is inside. How is it that I am loving something outside?" Do not make that mistake. Again and again the same idea will come to the mind: "How can I say that I am loving my own Atman when I am loving something outside?" This Atman is not inside you only. Here is the point that you should always remember. The Atman is somehow or other masquerading in the form of all things outside. The Atman is infinite existence. The Infinite pulls the Infinite. The Supreme Self it is that pulls the Supreme Self.

Therefore Yajnavalkya says to Maitreyi, "Nobody loves anything for its own sake." All love is love of the Self, in the pure spiritual sense. Not this self or that self, myself or yourself, itself - this kind of self is not the point. It is the universal Self that is actually pulling you in some form, and you are not able to catch the point. There is an illusion that is presented to the sense organs, and under the impression, due to the delusion you go to the object thinking that it is beautiful, that it is necessary, that it is meaningful. There is no meaning in anything in this world except the meaning of the Selfhood of that object. If the Self is absent in that object, it is a non-entity, and a non-entity cannot attract you. So if

the Self it is that pulls you, it is yourself only that is pulling you.

After having said this much, Yajnavalkya continues by saying, "After departure, there is no consciousness." "I cannot understand," Maitreyi says. "What are you saying, 'There is no consciousness'? You are confusing me by saying this." "No, Maitreyi. I am not confusing you. You do not understand what I am saying. When I say there is no consciousness, I mean that when the consciousness departs from this individuality of the bodily personality, there is no particularised consciousness."

To us, all consciousness is psychological consciousness; to us, every consciousness is sensory consciousness. When we make a statement like "I am conscious", we mean that we are conscious of something - which is psychological perception, sensory perception. Consciousness by itself does not perceive anything. It is the Self, the universal perceiver. "So why did you say that there is no consciousness after the absolution of consciousness from entanglement in this body?" The reason is: *yatra hi dvaitam iva bhavati, tad itara itaram pasyati* (Bri.U. 2.4.14). 'You will see another only when there is duality'. If there is something outside consciousness, consciousness can see something; but if there is only consciousness everywhere, what will it see? What does God see, for instance? You can put a more poignant question to yourself, in a more intelligible manner: Does God see anything? What does He see? If the entire creation is pervaded by God, what does God see? He sees nothing; He sees Himself only. The awareness by God is awareness of Himself. The so-called omniscience of God, which we attribute to Him, is actually an all-knowledge of Himself. The very quality that is attributed to God is actually connected with Himself, His own existence.

Therefore when there is no duality, no consciousness outside Its Self - It is Itself all things - there is no knowledge of anything. It is pure Being-awareness.

Yatra tv asya sarvam atmaivabhut, tatra kena kam pasyeth, tatra kena kam jighret, tatra kena kam manvita, tat kena kam vijaniyat? vijnataram are kena vijaniyad (Bri.U. 2.4.14): Who will know the knower? Who will think of the thinker? Who will understand the understander? Who will be conscious of consciousness? *Yad vai tan na pasyati, pasyam vai tan na pasyati.* You will be wonderstruck. What kind of thing is being told? No knowledge of anything? All-knowing and yet not knowing anything outside? Knowingly It knows not anything, not-knowing, It knows all things. It knows all things because It alone is everywhere. It does not know anything because outside It, nothing is. You understand the point. God does not know anything, because outside Him nothing is; but God knows everything because He Himself is everything. That is the meaning of this interesting instruction of Yajnavalkya at another place: *yad vai tan na pasyati, pasyan vai tan na pasyati; na hi drastur drister viparilopo vidyate* (Bri.U. 4.3.23). There is no gulf between the seer and the seen. Therefore the seer alone reigns supreme.

These are all Sanskrit verses I am quoting. You may not be able to understand them. Anyhow, they are interesting.

Salila eko drashtadvaito bhavati, esa brahma-lokah, samrad iti. Hainam anuhasasa yajnavalkya (Bri.U. 4.3.32): This is the sole seer, the sea of consciousness. *Salila:* Like the ocean it is. It spreads itself like the sea. *Eko drashta:* Single seer is that. The entire sea of consciousness, the universe, which is all seeing, is aware of itself. *Eko drashta bhavati, esa brahma-lokah:* This is called the supreme Brahma-loka, the region of the Absolute. Yajnavalkya tells Janaka here, in another context, *esa brahma-lokah samrad iti:* O your Highness! This is Brahmaloaka. *Esasya parama gatih:* This is the goal of life. *Esasya parama sampat:* This is the greatest treasure that you can think of. *Eso'sya paramo lokah:* This is the greatest possession you can imagine. *Eso'sya parama anandah:* This is the supreme Bliss. With a drop of this universe of Bliss, the entire creation is sustained. All the joys of this world, of all the creation put

together, are said to be one drop of this universal Brahman Bliss, the Bliss of the Absolute.

Having said this, Yajnavalkya retired. This is a famous conversation in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad called Yajnavalkya-Maitreyi Samvada: conversation between Yajnavalkya the sage and Maitreyi, his consort. No teaching can go beyond this. This is the highest pinnacle of human thought. All philosophy is crushed into the essence of this teaching. However much we may think philosophically, our mind will not go beyond this thought. Indian thought has reached its peak in this teaching of Yajnavalkya, recorded for us in his conversation with Maitreyi.

Can we attain this state? This question will arise in your mind. Why should you ask such a question? It must be attained, because it has been already declared that this is your goal, this is your aim, this is what you are asking for. Even when you are asking for the silliest joys of life, you are actually asking for this infinite Bliss - asking unknowingly, not knowing what is happening to you.

How will we get it, if we want it? Great discipline of the consciousness is necessary. At the present moment there is an outward trend of consciousness. We are extrovert sensorily, objectively, spatially and temporally. We are causation-bound, and we are living in a relativistic world – one part hanging on something else. A daily practice of the abstraction of consciousness from its involvement in the senses is to be practiced. It can be done as a natural habit of your life, if you are mature enough and your mind is strong enough - that is, it can think only in this way and there is no other way of thinking. Now why should you not think in this way, when this is the aim of life? Have you any suspicion that there is something else also in this world other than this?

Or if your mind is not strong enough that it can think only in this way, you can find a time for your own self. This analysis that we made just now should be the analysis that you to carry on during the process of this wisdom meditation. Be seated in a particular posture and deeply

think over this issue. "What do I want?" One hundred questions will arise in the mind. "I want all kinds of things." Yajnavalkya has given the answer to your question. Do you really want all kinds of things? What are those all kinds of things? "So many things, so many objects." Do you love objects? "Yes, Sir." Is it true that you are in fact loving the objects? Now comes Yajnavalkya to your assistance. You are not loving objects for their own sake. Neither building, nor land, nor property, nor relatives, nor people, nor any blessed thing, not even this body itself. You do not want any of this. It is the great Bliss of Universal Existence that is summoning you, and the establishment of oneself in that Consciousness is the liberation of the spirit, *moksha*. This is *moksha* yoga that Yajnavalkya speaks – the yoga of the liberation of the spirit.

This sage, Yajnavalkya, is very famous in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. Very powerful person was he. I can tell you a little story as an example of how powerful he was. Yajnavalkya was one of the disciples of a sage called Vaisampayana, and Vaisampayana was the promulgator of the Yajurveda Samhita. There are four Vedas – Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. Yajurveda was the prerogative of this particular sage called Vaishampayana. They say there was a conference of sages on a mountain, and they stipulated a condition – all the invitees should come. If any invitee did not come, he would incur the sin of killing a Brahmin. This Vaisampayana somehow or other could not attend that conference. He had some other occupation that day, and the sin came upon him. He called all his disciples. Yajnavalkya was one of them. "You see, my dear boys, this sin has come upon me in accordance with the ordinance, because I could not attend that meeting. Will you do some *prayaschitta*, something to expiate my sins? All of you!"

Yajnavalkya stood up. "Why these little boys; I can do it myself," he said. "These are little boys. What can they do? I will do it myself." His Guru got very upset. He said, "You are a very proud boy. You are insulting the others by saying that they know nothing and you yourself will do everything. Give back all the Yajurveda, whatever I have taught you!"

Yajnavalkya vomited out the Yajurveda in the form of some exudation from his mouth. The other disciples took the form of some birds - *tittiris* as they were called, -and sucked up that which he vomited. That black stuff which is the embodiment of the knowledge which Yajnavalkya gained from his Guru, which he vomited, was partaken of by the *tittiris* - the form assumed by the other students assumed, and so that particular Veda became Taittiriaveda. *Tittiri's* Veda is the Taittiriaveda, and it is also called the Black Veda because he vomited some black stuff.

Yajnavalkya decided: "I shall not have any teacher any more. I shall go to the supreme teacher for getting new knowledge." He went to the Sun directly and prayed to the Sun: "Give me fresh knowledge of the Vedas which nobody else knows. Whatever I learnt from my Guru, I have given back. I do not want to have any further Guru. Surya Bhagavan! You are my Guru. Give me a fresh Veda." And it seems that Suryanarayana appeared before him in the form of a horse and spoke unto him a new Veda, a new Yajurveda - white Yajurveda, not black - and it is called Shukla Yajurveda. It is also called Vajasaneya - connected with *ashva*, or horse - because he came in the form of a horse. The last Skanda of the Bhagavata Purana narrates this story, and a beautiful prayer that Yajnavalkya offered to the Sun also is recorded there - worth committing to memory. Yajnavalkya then became the teacher of a new Veda, called White Yajurveda or Shukla Yajurveda. He also wrote a Smriti, called Yajnavalkya Smriti, and there is also a yoga text under the name of Yajnavalkya, which is not very much known to people. It is called Yoga-Yajnavalkya, and a special psychic method of meditation is described there.

Yajnavalkya is the highlighting feature in the central portion of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. He once went to the court of king Janaka. Janaka was a learned person, and he invited learned people to his court to have discussions - learned discussions or arguments on lofty themes in spirituality. Hundreds of these great learned Brahmins were seated there in the audience, and the king stood up and said,

“Great ones! Lords of learning! Here is large number of cattle, with gold decked horns, looking as big as bulls or elephants. Whoever among you considers yourself as the best among the knowers may drive all these cattle to your house.” Nobody uttered a word; all kept quiet, because who can get up and say “I know everything” and “I am the best”? Yajnavalkya stood up and told his disciple. “Boy, drive all these cows to my house.” All were agitated. “What kind of person are you? You consider yourself as the most all-knowing here. We will put questions to you. Answer all the questions. Let us test you.” One of them stood up. Another stood up. Some eight people bombarded Yajnavalkya and threw arrows of complicated questions at him, which were difficult to understand ordinarily, and every one of them he answered on the spur of the moment. So Yajnavalkya actually justified the driving of the cattle to his home. We will not go into the details of all these arguments, as it is not necessary for you. I am just mentioning casually, for your information, the greatness of this wonderful master Yajnavalkya.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is the vehicle of the teachings of this great master. Many questions were put to Yajnavalkya. One of the questions raised by a person in the audience was, “What is it that is inside and outside? What is its nature?”

“Yes, I know that,” said Yajnavalkya.

“What is the good of saying ‘I know that?’” said the person asking the question. “Tell me what it is. Everybody can say ‘I know that, I know that’. Let me hear what it is.”

Then Yajnavalkya gives a description of *antaryami brahmana*, as it is called. Much of the Vaishnava theology of Ramanuja Sampradaya is based on this doctrine of the interconnecting consciousness, or *antaryami* consciousness delineated by Yajnavalkya in one of the sections of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. Everything is connected to everything else.

To Maitreyi, he told something different, which actually landed us in the conclusion that all existence is scintillating with awareness, and One Reality alone sees itself, and it loves itself, and nobody loves anything else. Now here, he gives another sidelight of this issue: The fact of the unitary existence of this sole sea of consciousness also implies the interconnection of all things. There is one entity in us – the Atman. Because of the presence of this Atman, which is the consciousness in us, every limb of the body appears to be connected to every other limb of the body. Isn't there interconnection of the limbs of the body? There is an organism, which is our physical personality. The word 'organism' implies an interconnected body, an organisation which is complete in itself, of which every part is connected to every other part. Modern science has confirmed this truth of everything being connected to everything else. Scientists today tell us that every cell of the brain of a person is connected to every atom in the cosmos. Can you imagine this astounding conclusion? Every cell of your brain is vitally, organically connected to every atom in the cosmos, so that in your head you are carrying the entire cosmos, but because of a blockage, you are not omniscient.

So Yajnavalkya mentions here, in answer to another question, that everything is connected to everything else. The inwardness and outwardness of things is a fallacy. There is a totality of interrelation, and all things are everywhere; you can find anything at any place. Everything is everywhere at any time. Remember this interesting recipe: Everything can be found at any place, at any time. You need not go to any distant place for getting things; it is just here. Wonderful is Yajnavalkya! Glory to his teaching! Blessed are you all!