

# SAGE YAJNAVALKYA IN THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

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by

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*Idam brahma, idam kshatram, ime lokah, ime devah, imani bhutani, idam sarvam yad ayam atma.*  
“This Source of knowledge; this source of power; all these worlds; all these gods; all these beings—All this is just the Self.”

This proclamation is like a *Brahma Astra* that Sage Yajnavalkya is discharging against every kind of attachment one can conceive in this world. It is somewhat easy to accept that *God is everywhere*. It becomes easy because we always externalise the location of God, however much we may try to universalise Him. The idea of location in space does not leave us so easily. God is everywhere, this is what we generally believe. The everywhere-ness of God implies that there is space, and inasmuch as our mind is wedded completely to the concept of spatial expansion, we feel a little bit comforted when we are told that God is everywhere.

Now, here, a thunderbolt is discharged by Sage Yajnavalkya when he says the *Self also is everywhere*. *Imani bhutani, idam sarvam yad ayam atma*. All the fourteen worlds are the Self. Here we will not find it so easy to accept it, because we cannot spatialise the concept of Self. Our Self cannot be somewhere else, it must be within us only. But,

what does one mean by saying “all the worlds, all the gods, all this is the Self”. What is this that the Sage is telling us? What exactly is the Self? Can anyone tell us what is the Self? What meaning can we attach to this word? There is myself, yourself, this self, that self! The self is something which cannot be externalised, objectified or spatialised in any way. *The Self is the utter subjectivity of universality.* The universal concept is rather easy to accept because we may spatialise even the universal being. But the Self cannot be spatialised—I cannot be anywhere else than in myself.

But what does this declaration say? *Imani bhutani, idam sarvam yad ayam atma.* All the created beings, all the worlds, *ima lokah*—all—*sarvam yad ayam atma.* Can I place myself in the location of something which is the extended world outside? Is the world outside my self? How can I tear the internal location of my selfhood and place it in the sun, or anywhere else? This is an exercise which is like the *Brahma Astra* to the human concept of any value in this world. Can anyone believe that his self or her self is anywhere else other than in one’s own self? Is it possible? Is the Self sitting in Brahma Loka, is it in Bhuvar Loka, Swarga Loka? Is it in Patala, is it in the sun, the moon and the stars? Can my self be conceived as being located there? But it is necessary to conceive such a possibility according to this great statement of Sage Yajnavalkya. This will rend the knot of attachment to personality, attachment to selfhood in an individualised form, and the result would be unthinkable. This exercise should not be attempted by anyone with even the least attachment to human individuality, personality, in whom the idea of ‘I’ or ‘mine’ has not gone. When an immature person attempts this kind of meditation and tries to wrench the self of oneself and place it on a tree outside, disastrous consequences may follow. If a purified mind tries this, liberation may follow.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is not intended for everybody. It is a cosmic meditation. In the Chhandogya Upanishad we have cosmological meditations which are wonderful by themselves. But in the Brihadaranyaka we have

the cosmic meditation. The whole thing is transcendent, beyond ourselves. How would we think of anything that is beyond ourselves? Even when we think of self, we place it within ourselves. My self is inside me. But this great admonition of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says the Self is not within us—it is within everybody, within everything, within all the worlds and the universes. In all space and all time, the Self is there. Can anyone close one's eyes and meditate thus? I am present in a far off distance of a world near the skies above! Can you place yourself in the skies and contemplate from there? But, you may say, 'this is an easy thing, I can do that, I can place myself in the skies', but when you place yourself in the skies, again you are bringing a spatial concept, which is not permitted in the case of the awareness of one's Self.

Difficult is this to understand. The Self cannot be placed in the tree, or the sun or moon, or stars, because if the Self is in the sun, then there is no sun, there is only Self there. But then, the idea of distance may be there, persisting again and again, as an inveterate habit.

Never should this meditation be attempted by an impure mind. We are happily conversant with the proclamations of all the religions and philosophies that God is everywhere, Brahman is everywhere, but nobody says that the Self is everywhere. This is a new thing that we hear in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. We feel that the Self cannot be everywhere, It cannot be anywhere except in one's own self. This '*one's own self*' is the crucial matter. That is to say, *all the worlds are your own Self*. Bhu-Loka, Bhuvar-Loka, Swar-Loka, Mahar-Loka, Jana-Loka, Tapo-Loka, Satya-Loka;—these widespread universal expanses of being are our Self! If you can imagine how your Self could be—that kind of imagination should be extended to all the worlds. The self will shudder, it can break into pieces, or it can melt down into the extent of the whole world in an instant. If this meditation can be continued a miracle can take place.

If anything is dear and lovable, the thing that is loved is not actually loved, it is not dear. The Self in the object is what is actually attracting. The Self in the object attracts the Self in us and then the object looks attractive. It is not the object that is attractive, because a corpse cannot attract anybody, a dead body does not attract. It is the life principle that attracts, the Selfhood in the object is attracting. The beauty and the grandeur of the life principle, it is that which attracts. Where is this Selfhood? Again the question arises—everywhere!

There are varieties of selves. The lowest is the physical self—‘I am coming, I am going’—statements like this indicate the physical self. When you speak of ‘my family’, ‘my son’, ‘my daughter’, ‘my husband’, ‘my wife’, you are identifying yourself with the family atmosphere. When you speak of ‘my community’, ‘I am from Brahmana community’, ‘Kshatriya community’, you are identifying yourself with a group of people of a particular category. ‘I belong to Uttar Pradesh, I belong to Gujarat’—if you say like that, you are identifying yourself with a larger location of human beings. ‘I am an Indian, I am a British, I am an American’—when you say that, you are expanding your concept of selfhood to a larger area geographically. All these are selves. An American loves an American, a British loves a British, an Indian loves an Indian, a Tamilian likes a Tamilian, a Kannada man likes a Kannada one—they will talk to each other in that language only. Language is the characteristic of the attachment of self to particular cultural patterns. Language attracts.

These are some of the various forms in which the Self finds itself cosily, and seems to be attracting everything everywhere. It is the Self that is attracting the Self in different connotations, in various areas of application. Here we are placing ourselves in a rather dangerous zone. We are habituated again and again to think that the Self cannot be anywhere else than inside us. By ‘us’ we mean this body! What else can the ‘I’ be except this body? “I am going tomorrow to Gujarat.”—Who is speaking this? Which self is speaking? It is the bodily self that is speaking. This habit

cannot be escaped from. Now, the Upanishadic dictum is that you cannot go to Gujarat like that. The whole universe you carry with you when you move. The universal Self moves with you who are the universal.

The Selfhood in the object attracts the Selfhood in the observer of the object. The Self pulls the Self. All love is this much. The husband does not love the wife for the sake of the wife, the wife does not love the husband for the sake of the husband, but for the sake of the Self present there. People do not love wealth for the sake of wealth, but for the sake of the Selfhood therein in a widened form. In what we call wealth, we love the Self. Whatever it be, in any part of the universe, in any context, in any location, the Self is present exclusively.

The Self need not necessarily be that imagined self inside the physical body. I have already given some idea that there can be many kinds of self exteriorised outside the physical location of oneself until it becomes the universal Self. The universal Self should not be considered as a pervading thing, because the Self is inside, it is inside something, and it is inside the universe. The universe is not an extended form in space. The idea of 'all-pervading' also should be given up, because the Self does not pervade, It is just what It is; It is utter subjectivity incapable of externalisation. We cannot split it into the object seen. The Self cannot be an object that is visualised. It is the visualiser. Thus, 'everything' is the Visualiser only. How would you like to know the knower by whom alone everything is known? Who will know the knower?

You must read the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, especially the Second and the Fourth Chapters where Yajnavalkya pours the highest wisdom on Maitreyi and King Janaka, till they become stunned completely.

"Go on, Yajnavalkya, say further, I will give you a thousand cows as big as elephants. Go on, tell me further, further. I am not satisfied. You are raining nectar on me. Go on, Yajnavalkya." It would be good if we had been present there in that audience. Oh, how blessed it would be! Nectar

flowed from the words of Sage Yajnavalkya, and the highly satisfied King said, “Go on, go on further, great Sage, further! I am not satisfied. I’m giving you thousands of cows as big as bulls, take.”

Oh, I cannot find words to tell you what all this actually means or implies. The most difficult thing, the most frightening thing is that your self can be somewhere else. “Oh, it is in all creation! How is it possible? I am sitting here. This person with this qualification, this length, this breadth, this much responsibility; how can I be somewhere else?” You are really somewhere else. This is the meaning of the Universal Self, for want of better words. “Whoever knows this possesses the whole world. He himself is the world.”

Can anybody contain all things inside oneself and be at rest? It is not possible even to hear these things. These admonitions and teachings are damaging to the egoistic individuality which locates the self inside the body only. Enough of it. Can you imagine that your self is sitting in the most distant stars? Can you imagine that you yourself are the stars, you are shining as the far-off luminary, and ‘I am the Self’? You are not seeing the stars; you yourself are the stars. You are the sky; therefore the sky is not extended. The moment you say sky is extended, it becomes an object. But you yourself are the space—then the spatial characteristic of space vanishes. If you go on drumming this into your ears, and go on racking your head, scratching yourself—how is it possible? Is it possible? You will find this is not possible. This is why preliminary qualifications are prescribed: *Viveka*, *Vairagya*, *Shatsampatti*, *Mumukshutva*—discrimination, dispassion, the six virtues and longing for liberation. These preliminary qualifications are necessary. If anyone is distracted in the direction of anything else than the Self, then the Self will hide itself fully away somewhere.

There are very great things in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad which should not be read by impure minds. With these subtle longings, we should not go to the Upanishads to seek, “let me see if I can find something there.” You should

not experiment with these things. You should say, “I shall find it.” The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is a supermarket—you can find anything there. It is a forest, a large, large forest of knowledge—Brihadaranyaka. It is *aranyaka*, a forest of knowledge. That also, *brhat* very large, impregnable forest for every kind of knowledge. Very vast: it will take one year to say anything about this book. Even one year is not sufficient. You are touching the Self, that is the most important thing. You can touch anything and go scot-free, but we cannot touch the Self and go like that. It will do some mischief afterwards.

“Do not talk much about it,” Yajnavalkya tells some of the questioners in the assembly of Sage Janaka. “Do not talk much about it.” And one Shakalya went on arguing, “Where is its location, where is it located? Where is the heart located? Yajnavalkya said “Hey, don’t ask too much lest your head may fall off.” “Tell me the great *Purusha* that is declared in the Upanishads. If you don’t understand this, your head will fall just now.” And he did not know the *Purusha* in the Upanishads that well, and robbers took the head away.

There was a very learned lady in that assembly of Janaka called Gargi. “I’ll challenge Yajnavalkya with my questions. Answer them!” She discharged arrows like Rama’s arrows. “Where is the sky located? Where is time located? Where is *Brahma Loka* located? Where is anything located?” “Don’t ask more. Don’t ask questions like that,” said Yajnavalkya, “lest your head be down.” Then she did not speak, she kept quiet.

Do not talk too much about the Self, you are interfering with your own Self. You can go scot-free by interfering with other people, but you cannot interfere with your Self and then be all right. You will destroy your very existence. So Upanishadic knowledge is like dynamite—it can burst on your own self if the purity is not enough. That is said because with the Self there is no seeing process. But does it mean that the Supreme Being does not see anything? It does not see, and yet it sees.

Because there is no distinction between seeing and not seeing there, in that condition. God has two kinds of knowledge—general knowledge and particular knowledge. The general knowledge is that the structure of the universe is clear to your mind. Every detail, every bit of the universe is known to you. The particularised knowledge means even the hair of a person can be counted. How many living beings are there? How much hair does each one have? They are all counted. And counting does not require timing; one, two, three, four. It is a non-mathematical calculation at once, an unthinkable mathematical feat is achieved there. God knows every little thing. If a cat is moving on the mountain there, He will know that the cat is moving. You will think that God has no other work.

In the Atharva Veda there is a Sukta called Varuna Sukta. It is available in English translation. If you have any longing, it will melt down in the fire of this inclusiveness of God-being. All these statements of the Upanishads in different places amount to one thing: that by externalizing consciousness we will achieve nothing. It is not enough if you merely internalise it also. You should neither be an extrovert nor an introvert but, if you can coin a word, an omnivert. Everywhere you perceive everything. That 'I' is not the physical 'I' with which you see the world—it is the soul observing itself in things which look like non-Self. The non-Self does not exist; but even in that so-called non-Self the Self is peeping through Its own eye.

The Plenum, the felicity, the incomparable, is the only source of bliss. Where do you find that bliss? In that condition you have not to see anything; no use of peeping out, and no use of hearing anything. No use of thinking anything or understanding anything—all the sense organs convert into one point of total awareness. That you may consider as the Supreme Self, God-Self, or whatever you may call it according to your wish.

The greatest qualification is wanting It; no other qualification is adequate. You must want It. "I want It and I

don't want anything else. I shall get It," like Nachiketas insisting in the abode of Yama: "Whatever you have given, take it back. I shall go with this answer to this great question that I have put. Without that I do not want anything else that you have offered me—long life, all joys, suzerainty over all the worlds; no, you take them back. Answer my question."

Such determination, if there is in any one of us, the Truth reveals itself automatically. The Truth is seeking us much more than we seek it. As it is wider than our concept of itself, it is a greater force, it calls you. God calls you with greater severity of intensity than we are calling Him.

"Maitreyi, I have told you everything, I am now departing from this place," Yajnavalkya said. All this teaching to his consort Maitreyi ended with this renunciation. This renunciation is of a different kind. It is called *Vidvat Sannyasa*. It is not the *Sannyasa* that people take ordinarily for the sake of knowing something. Here, it renounces having already known everything. It is called *Vidvat Sannyasa* and not *Vividisha Sannyasa*. It is not *Karma Sannyasa*. What happened to Yajnavalkya afterwards, no one knows. The whole story ends here with this stunning, shaking, earth-shaking statement. We cannot say anything more than this. Nowhere will you find statement or speaking of this kind.

"The Pranas depart", we generally say. "Oh, the Prana has departed." But in the case of this person who is totally desireless, who desires only the Self that is everywhere, who is 100% satisfied, such a person's Prana will not depart. Where will it go, because his Self is everywhere? And therefore the question of departing does not arise. There is no particular part of the world where the Prana will go. It will melt down here. A drop of water floating on the surface of the ocean wants to enter the ocean. What distance does it have to travel? It has to sink down there itself. So, it has not to depart anywhere, crawling distances; it melts down, the bubble bursts into the ocean.

This is called *Sadyo Mukti*, immediate salvation, and not a stage-by-stage *Krama Mukti* or gradual salvation.

Yajñalkya's instructions lead to immediate salvation—it is not a question of tomorrow but (in our case there is a big 'But') the *karmas* that we have performed in the previous births are sitting inside our mind like a knot, hard knot in the form of *Brahma-granthi*, *Vishnu-granthi* and *Rudra-granthi*—Avidya, Kama, Karma as they call them. They are the *Granthis*—they have to be melted down. You cannot cut them like a Gordian knot, but melt them down by dispassion, daily meditation, and wanting That only, and wanting nothing else.