

Discourses/Articles

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MEDITATION – PART II

During these last few days I have been highlighting the various aspects of the meditational process, since I feel that this is of crucial importance in everyone's life. You can know everything, but you cannot know yourself. That was one of the points which I tried to elucidate in various ways during these days. Why is it that you can know anything, even the stars you can count, but you cannot know your own self? It is because you are neither an object of sensory perception, nor are you an object of mental cognition. You are not able to know yourself because there is no one to know yourself.

In all processes of knowledge, there is a knower and a known. If you are to know yourself, here who is the knower and who is the known? Since you cannot stand outside yourself as an object, you cannot be the known. And inasmuch as you are the subject, pure and simple, where is the question of knowing yourself? The knower cannot know the knower because that seems to be a contradiction in the very operation of the knowledge process. Everything in the world—even in the high heaven—stands in the position of an object of cognition, thought and visualisation. But you are none of these things. You seem to be the pivot of all process of knowledge; and the pivot itself cannot be known, just as you cannot climb on your own shoulders. Yet, this great miraculous adventure has to be undergone. It is more difficult than Hercules trying to get the golden apples from the garden of Hesperides. It is more difficult than Jason trying to harness the brazen bulls. Yet, it has to be achieved.

In the Upanishads there are certain anecdotes which spotlight this problem and try to detail, as much as possible, the way in which we can tackle this question. I relate to you one such anecdote from the Chhandogya Upanishad. There were six great learned people. They knew all the scriptures, all the *shastras*, all the schools of philosophy. They discussed among themselves, "We have heard that there is a thing called Atman. Where is it located?" None of them could come to a conclusive answer. They heard that the king of that country knew this answer to the question. In ancient times, it appears that great secrets of spiritual wisdom were kept by the Kshatriya kings, more so than Brahmins who were learned in lore, because the knowledge of the Atman is not learning in lore; it is something quite different. It is a total topsy-turvy operation of the process of consciousness; instead of the knower trying to have knowledge of the known, the table gets turned in this process. That is to say, the knower has to know the knower only. Know thyself—*atmanam vidhi*—is the dictum.

These great learned people, six in number, went humbly to the king of that country, who was a Kshatriya; and these seekers were Brahmins. They sat on the outskirts of the palace of the king, seeking admission into his *darbar* so that they could speak to him the purpose of their coming. The king thought the Brahmins had come for receiving some gift. Under that impression he spoke to them saying, "Tomorrow I am going to have a

large sacrifice performed. You may come and participate. I shall give you a lot of *dakshina*."

These six Brahmins said, "It is very kind of you to have told that to us, but please give us what we want. We have not come to participate in a sacrifice, nor do we want any gold coin as *dakshina* from you. Tell us what you know."

The king was taken aback that they put such a question. He said, "It is not proper that a Brahmana should come and request a Kshatriya for knowledge. Actually the Kshatriyas, being less in the category of society than Brahmanas, should go for Brahmanas for knowledge. How is it that Brahmanas are coming to Kshatriyas?"

These six Brahmins said, "We are not coming here as Brahmanas. We have come as students of knowledge. Please, initiate us into the technique of knowing that which you know and nobody else knows."

The king was surprised. "All right," he said.

Generally when a student goes to a preceptor for knowledge, the Guru asks them to stay for several years, doing service and observing continence. But recognising the greatness of these people he absolved them of this requisition and merely said, "Tomorrow you may see me."

And the next morning, they took their bath and put on new clothes and went to the king.

The king asked, "Let us know what you know already."

One of them said, "I am meditating on the sun as the Supreme Reality."

The king said, "It is wonderful that you are doing this meditation, but the sun is the eye of Reality; it is not the whole of Reality. And you know that the sun is the presiding deity of the visual organ. Because of your meditation on the sun, the deity of the process of vision, you are seeing glory and abundance in your house; but you are doing a wrong meditation. If you had not come to me and placed this difficulty before me, you would have become blind. It is good that you have come to me."

Like that, he went on asking all of them what kind of meditation they are pursuing. One said, "I have done (meditation) considering the earth itself as the footstool of the whole Cosmic Being," and various other things.

The king said, "None of these methods of meditation are correct. Partial glory you are enjoying in your life because of this partial finitised form of meditation, but if you had not come to me you would have come to disaster. Some limb of your body would have gone. It is somehow a miracle and a destiny and Providence working, as it were, that you have come to me for rectification of your defects. What are the defects? What is the mistake you have made? Your meditation is involved in two defects. Number one: you are thinking—whether it is sun, or earth, or whatever it is—the object of your meditation is outside you. The object which you are trying to achieve is not outside. The second defect is you are considering the object of meditation as a location in one place. But the

truth is, the Supreme Reality is not in one place. Neither it is outside you, nor is it in one place. Now, can you adjust your consciousness to this position? That the one thing on which you are practising meditation should not be standing outside you, nor should it be in one place.”

It is a feat of the exercise of the will and understanding to appreciate and adjust oneself to this technique. How will you think something in your mind by placing it not outside you, and also not placing it anywhere, somewhere, in this structure of space and time? They were trained people, so they could grasp the intricacy and the significance of this instruction.

Does any one of you catch the point? Is it possible for you to think something by placing it not outside you, and also not placing it somewhere in the world? Great purification of the mind is necessary to think like this because the habit of the mind is to think everything as being outside oneself and also located somewhere. Everything is somewhere, and everything is outside. Other than this way of thinking, what other way is there in your operation of concepts? The Atman cannot be known so easily, as you are imagining, because it is not outside you, and it is not somewhere. Then what is the matter? Where is it? You use your intelligence and answer this question to yourself.

In another analogy, the Kathopanishad brings before you a wonderful, dramatic situation which arose when Nachiketas approached the great Lord Yama for knowledge. He was thrown out of the house by an angry father for some reason, which you will read in the Kathopanishad, in the beginning itself. He said, “Go to hell!” When you get angry, you say that. Nachiketas, the little boy, felt within himself, “Why should I go to Yama, the ruler of hell?” Anyway, the imprecation discharged by the father had an effect on the soul, because he himself was a great sage of meditation. Because of this imprecation, the soul of the boy was skyrocketed to the abode of Yama, and he stood there for three days and nights without being able to have *darshan* of Lord Yama. For some peculiar reason which we cannot understand, Yama absented himself for three days and nights. Or rather, the boy was told that Yama is not going to be available for you for three days.

After three days and nights Yama presented himself. “My dear little boy, I am very sorry that I have allowed you to stand here for three days and nights without food and drink and no one to talk to. As an expiation, as a recompense for this trouble that you have undergone for three days and nights in front of my palace, I ask you to seek three boons from me.”

The intelligent boy said, “May I return to the world as one who will be greeted in affection. May all things in the world receive me with affection, including my father who was annoyed with me for some reason.”

“Granted,” Yama said instantly. “When you return, the whole world will receive you with affection.”

You know very well, nobody can be received by anything in the world with such affection. Can you imagine anyone being received by the whole world with affection? It is also a transcendental boon that was granted.

“Ask for the second boon,” Yama said.

“My Lord, I have heard that there is a thing called heaven where people have no hunger and thirst. They do not have to sleep. They do not have fatigue. They are always youthful. There is glory everywhere. There, every desire is automatically fulfilled. Initiate me into this great technique of meditation,” asked Nachiketas.

“Here it is!” said Yama. “I grant you this knowledge.” And all of the methods of meditation on the cosmical setup of things were described. “Now ask for the third boon.”

The boy said, “I am glad that you have allowed me to ask for a third boon. May I tell you? People say the soul is, or perhaps is not, after it departs from this body. Please bless me with this knowledge.”

“Ask not this question! Don’t speak to me like this! Not even the gods can answer this question: ‘What happens to the soul when it is withdrawn from the body?’ Ask for any other thing,” replied Yama.

The boy said, “I do not want any other thing. I have come to seek the highest knowledge of this mystery, which you say even the gods cannot know; and if even the gods cannot know it, it implies that you know it. Then will I go back, defeated? I must have this knowledge from you!”

Yama said, “No, don’t press me like this. I am very sorry that I allowed you to ask for a third boon. This is not what I expected from you. Ask for something else. I will make you the king of this whole world. The entire earth will be under your control. You will live as long as the universe lasts. All the joys of heaven I grant you as a boon that will manifest itself instantaneously. What else do you want?”

“Please, take all these three blessings back to yourself. What is long life? You said ‘as long as possible, as long as the universe lasts’—that you can give me. But when the universe ceases to exist, the long life becomes short. So, do not tempt me with all these arguments. The longest life is short because when it ends, it is short—and it has to end one day or the other. Why do you tell me that I shall have long life? And you say I have the whole earth for enjoyment. What is enjoyment with the weariness of the sense organs which become old, decrepit, and perish by the very enjoyment that you are speaking of? No. There is no use of having this boon of being a king of the whole earth. It is a temptation which is worth nothing—and long life is short. ‘Ask,’ you said. I have asked, and it is up to you to answer this question,” said the boy.

“I am very sorry that you are troubling me like this,” Yama said.

What was the difficulty in answering this question? Why was Yama reluctant? He was able to easily give all these wondrous boons like affection from the whole earth itself, and the joys of heaven, but he would not say what happens to the soul after death.

Actually, if you go deep into the mystery of this question, Nachiketas was not asking what happens to the soul after physical death, because he knew very well what happens

to the soul after physical death as he already knew the technique of enjoying the cosmic life due to the boon number two that was granted to him. So he knew that the soul exists after death somewhere, but he persisted in asking the same question again and again because the implied meaning was what happens to the soul when it attains complete freedom. *Mahati samparaye* (K.U. 1.2.1) is the word used here, in this context. He did not say, “What happens to the soul after ordinary death?” *Mahati samparaye* means, “What happens to the soul after the great death?” Great death means the abolition of the soul itself in liberation. At that time, where is the soul?

Now, this circumstance is identical with the other one, which arose in the query of the king before the six learned people. If you can adjust your consciousness to the circumstance of not placing anything, any object—even the object of meditation—outside you, and not placing it somewhere, that difficulty is identical with this difficulty in knowing what happens to the soul in liberation. Where does it exist at that time? Some say it does not exist; it is destroyed. Is it so? If the soul is really destroyed, then all the efforts the soul puts forth in its life are a waste. You try to do good things. You try to be virtuous. You want to lead a good life. What for, if your soul is going to be destroyed tomorrow? Your aspirations for being good, being virtuous, being charitable and all that imply that you will not be abolished tomorrow—otherwise, who would do anything at all in this world? Who will lift a finger? There is something in you which tells you that you will not be abolished. “But if I am not going to be abolished, where I am going to be?”

All the philosophers of the West have failed in answering this question. I have met several deans of philosophy and doctors of philosophy from Western universities; I had conversations with them. When I led the argument to this point, they said, “This is something impossible to think in the mind, because if you say that the soul exists somewhere even after liberation, it would mean that it is located in space. Then it contradicts the requisition that the object of meditation should not be in one place. If it is nowhere, then the attainment of liberation has no meaning.” The Western mind cannot imagine that there is any significance in the merging of the soul in the Absolute. Not one, except some mystics of the West, could grasp this great secret. Would you like to be drowned in the ocean of the Absolute? Maybe it is the Absolute, but who would like to be drowned? Would you like to be drowned in an ocean of nectar? Of course, nectar is very good. But who would like to be drowned? The idea of drowning is terrible.

So, these wonderful circumstances posed by the great master, Yama, and the king Ashvapati before these learned ones, is posed before every one of us. Inasmuch as it is taken for granted that we all want ultimate freedom, and ultimate freedom is only in the recognition of the imperishable soul in us, it becomes a lifelong task on the part of everyone—a dedication for the whole of life—because nothing can be more dear than one’s own self. Every action is, finally, a tendency towards the joy of the self, the knowledge of the self, and the imperishability of the self. There cannot be a fear greater than the fear of self-annihilation. And there cannot be a joy different than the feeling that one is perfectly safe and no threat can be discharged against one’s own existence. To live is a great joy, whatever be the kind of life that you live. Even a beggar would not like to die, though he is suffering with penury. A diseased person would not like to die. “Cure me,” he will say, but he will not say “kill me”. “Make me well-fed and happy,” the beggar will say. No beggar will say “annihilate me”, because the greatest joy is existence.

It is not merely existing like a tree, or a stone, or a pig. It is not that kind of existence that you are asking for. It is an enhanced form of existence. In what way can existence be enhanced? By adding consciousness into it. The existence should be attached with consciousness. It is a conscious existence that you want—not an unconscious existence like a stone. A stone also lives long. Would you like to live long, like a stone? “No. I want to be conscious.” Would you like to be conscious for few minutes only and then perish? No. There is another condition that you are putting forth: “I want to be conscious of my existence for all time to come.” It means to say you want to defy the process of time itself. But inasmuch as your physical location in one place, which is the finitude of life, is subject to destruction—everything that is in one place will be destroyed one day or the other by the ravages of time—therefore, what are you asking for when you are asking for existence which is unlimited freedom and consciousness? You are asking for defiance of the limitations of time and defiance of the restrictions placed by the spatial expanse before you. You do not want to be somewhere, and you do not want to be somewhen. What do you want, then? Everywhere you should be, everything should be yours, and for all time it should be. Time has to go. Space has to go. Eternity should reign supreme.

This is what you are aspiring for, finally. The mind cannot grasp all these truths unless the mind is purified. In the Upanishads we have instances of great seekers humbly going to great Gurus. Narada is another instance, which we have in the Chhandogya Upanishad. There was no science or art of which Narada was not a master, but he had no peace of mind. Do we not have people here in this world who are rich enough to burn their money and wield authority, but are disturbed in mind, with no peace within?

This Narada, who was a master—all knowledge, art and science—went to the wondrous sage, Sanatkumara, and begged of him, “Teach me.” *Adhihi bhagavah iti* (C.U. VII.1.1): Teach me Brahman.

The great sage, Sanatkumara, said, “What do you know already? Please let me know.”

“I know cosmology, ontology, epistemology, psychology, astronomy, aesthetics, axiology, political science, economics, history, religion, philosophy; but I have no peace of mind,” replied Narada.

“All these things that you have told me are only words, my dear boy,” said Sanatkumara. “Words cannot bring you joy. You may describe what gold is, but it does it does not mean by a description of it, you are a possessor of gold. A professor of knowledge is not necessarily a possessor of knowledge. That is the distinction. So, all these things that you have recounted before me are of no utility, finally. The peace that you seek is in your own Self, which is the Atman.”

“Tell me the Atman,” said Narada.

By a long drawn discussion—stage by stage, step by step—the sage, Sanatkumara, took the mind of Narada to the apex point.

“The great Truth alone is the source of peace and bliss,” said the sage.

“Tell me the Truth,” asked Narada.

“The Truth is the Infinite,” said Sanatkumara.

“Tell me what the Infinite is,” asked Narada.

“Where you see nothing else outside you, where you hear nothing else outside you, where you are not thinking anything outside you, that is the Infinite. Where you see something outside you, where you hear something outside you, where you are thinking something outside you, that is the finite. The Infinite alone is bliss. Know that!” replied Sanatkumara.

“Where is that Infinite?” asked Narada further.

“*Sa evadhastat, sa uparistat, sa pascad, sa purastat, sa daksinatah, sa uttaraah, sa evedam sarvam* (C.U. 7.25.1) Where is the Infinite, you are asking me. It is in front of you. It is behind you. It is to the right. It is to the left. It is above. It is below. It is everywhere. It alone is. One who knows this has freedom in all the worlds. No passport is necessary; no visa is necessary to move in the realms of being,” replied the sage.

Such a person who knows this secret becomes the Self of worlds galore. You become the Self of beings. He becomes everything! Such a person is the object of gravitation for everything in the universe. *Yathaika ksudhita balah mataram paryupasate evam sarvani bhutany agni-hotram upasate ity agni-hotram upasata iti.* (C.U. 5.24.5) If that person who knows this secret eats food, the whole universe is satisfied. In earlier days there was a concept of feeding Brahmins. The idea is a Brahmin is one who knows Brahman, and if he eats, everybody is satisfied. This knowledge makes you such a potentate in the cosmos that the worlds—all beings—gravitate around you for blessing in the same way as children sit around their mother for food. “Mummy, give me food. Give me something to eat,” so children cry around the mother. So all beings, all creation—everyone will rally round you and seek your blessing because what you are, they also are. What you eat, they eat, and what you feel, they feel. Your joy is their joy. Your existence is their existence.

This is the import, finally, of this one wondrous story I mentioned to you of the six great people going to Ashvapati the king for the knowledge of the Atman, which is not outside and not somewhere, and that Atman about which Yama the Lord refused to speak. *Ascaryavat pasyati kascit enam* (B.G. 2.29), the Bhagavadgita also reiterated. “Wonder is this thing that you are speaking. It is a wonder!” The teacher who can explain this is a wonder. The student who can understand this is a wonder. The thing that is explained is a wonder. The whole thing is a wonder. The greatest wonder is the Ultimate Being you call God Almighty, the Absolute. May this wonder bless you, is my prayer!