



Glory of Bharath » Bharatheeya Samskrithi

Sama Vedic Upanishads - I

Kena Upanishad

The Kenopanishad is ascribed to Sama Veda and its Thalavakara branch and hence it is also referred to as the Thalavakaropanishad. The name Kena is derived from the first word of the stanza of the first section of the Upanishad:

"Keneshitham pathathi preshitham manah, Kena

praanah prathamah praithiyuktah, keneshithaam

vacham imam vadanthi, chakshuhsrothram kaudevo yunakthi?"

"Who impels the mind to alight on its object? Enjoined by whom does the vital force proceed to function? At whose behest do men utter speech? What intelligence, indeed, directs the eyes and the ears?"

The ear, skin, eye, tongue, nose-these five senses are able to cognize sound, touch, form, taste and smell respectively. Objects of knowledge are cognized through these five only. The world is experienced through these instruments, which stand intermediate between the knower and the knowable. The inner capacity to understand objects is named mind, or Manas. The Manas moves out through the Jnanendriyas aforesaid and attaches itself to objects and at that time, by that very occurrence, the manas assumes the form of that object. This is called a vritti or function. The manas is achethana and so, its transformations and manipulations or vikaaras are also achethana, non-intelligent, non-vital.

The achethana manas cannot achieve the knowledge of Chethana or of the Supreme Intelligence that pervades the Universe. Just as the unintelligent chariot is directed by a charioteer, there must be a Charioteer who directs the unintelligent Manas, seated in it and having it as His vehicle. The Motive Force that activates the Inner Instruments, the Senses of Action, the Senses of Knowledge, the Five Pranas, that Force is God. The question quoted above implies that this Force is distinct from the Senses. Naturally, therefore, the Motivator of the entire group of senses must be distinct from the Manas too, is it not? Those who seek to know the Eternal, convinced that all acts and activities are ephemeral will not worry about the Eternal. That Eternal Entity is agitation less and so it is not moved by the Threefold urge. It does not order the senses about for this purpose or that.

Then the question arises:

"Do the Manas, the Prana, the Vaak, the Eye, the Ear, etc., carry out their respective functions, prompted by the Law of Cause and Effect? Or do they act so, moved by the wish of a conscious force?"

That is the doubt. The ear has the capacity to know sound, the eye is endowed with the skill to know and distinguish form. The other senses are also similarly equipped. When the manas passes out through the knowing-senses towards objects and envelopes them, you acquire knowledge about them. The five senses and the manas are all, therefore, instruments of knowledge. How could they manage to perform this intelligent function, being themselves devoid of intelligence?

Well, the answer is: Due to the presence of the Atma, due to the reflection of the effulgence of the Atma on the Antahkarana. The Sun illumines the world and makes it active in a thousand ways. So too the Atma, by its Thejas (effulgence), activates and illumines the World. All instruments of knowledge are activated by the Atma. The current of electricity energizes the machines and does various operations -printing, etc.-but it is not visible or concrete. The electric current is the Mover of the movement, the Machine of the Machine. So too, the Atmic Tejas (splendour) is the Ear of the ear, the Eye of the eye. That is the activating current.

The wonder is: the Atma is inactive and without qualifications. It does not get anything done with the manas or the senses, remember. They get activated by the very presence of the Atma! The rays of the Sun are not aware at all of the activity they invoke. The Atma is not responsible for the activity of the senses. (This teaching was given by Varuna to his son, Bhrigu). The eye, when illumined by the splendour of the Atma, is able to grasp form, which is its sphere. It can never hope to illumine the Atma, which is self-luminous. The lamp illumines objects; but the objects cannot, in their turn, illumine the lamp. The Vaak can describe or denote only such as possess qualifications, like name, form, guna (quality), kriya (action, deed), etc. How can it describe or define that which has no qualifications, no name, no form, no characteristic-viz. the Paramatma?

One cannot describe sweetness or similar tastes by means of words. The Atma is not a subject for description. The non-intelligent Manas cannot experience the Intelligence. There is no knower who can know the Knower at all. He is beyond all knowable things. When known, He is no longer Knower or Knowledge. Brahmam is Jnanam itself: so, it can never be "known" by a "knower". By the process of knowing, other things can be known, not Knowledge itself. The lamp will not crave for another lamp to see itself nor will it crave for its own light. It has light, it is light-that is all. It sheds light on other objects. It does not shed light on its light. So too you are Light, you are Atma. The Atma in you is of the same nature as the Atma in all beings. It is the only one Reality. It has no limitation or attribute or qualification.

The Atma can be cognized by the study of the Sastras and by following the injunctions laid down there. That which cannot be illumined by words or speech or by the senses, that which illumine the word and speech and all the senses-that is Brahmam, or Atma. The first Kanda of this Upanishad makes clear that Brahmam

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is incapable of being limited or discarded or overlooked. So, for those who claim that they have seen Brahman, "It" is yet a subject for further investigation and inquiry. They have not reached the final stage. For, theirs is not authentic Jnana. Theirs is but a delusion.

The Atma of the person, who knows, is itself the very Brahman. That is the undoubted verdict of Vedantha, is it not? Fire cannot burn itself. How can Atma know Atma, how can the knower know Himself? Therefore, the statement, I have known Brahman, is an indication of delusion, not of real knowledge. It is said that Brahman has various cognizable and countable forms; but, that is only in the limited sense of being qualified by Name and Form. By itself, the Absolute has not got sound or smell or taste or touch or form. It is ever-existing.

In whatever activity you become aware of its presence, that activity lends its appropriate characteristic. In whichever sphere the Sastras discuss and decide, that sphere becomes for the particular Sastras, the characteristic of Brahman. Consciousness becomes apparent when it is limited by certain bounds or vessels-that Chaitanya is Brahman. Chaitanya is attachmentless; but yet, when associated with objects like the physical body, It gives the impression that it is attached.

From the fact that when the waters of the lake are agitated the image of the Sun under the water shakes, you cannot infer that the Sun in the sky, which is remote and afar, also shakes! The Sun and the sheet of water are unrelated. No relationship can be posited between these two. Similarly when the body undergoes growth, decay, destruction, etc., it gives the impression that the Atma too is so affected; but, the Atma is unaffected. Brahman is beyond the reach of the intellectual seeker. It can be reached only by those who give up the intellect as a useless instrument. Experience alone is the method of approach, the proof, the result.

The ultimate state of Brahma Jnana is the end of all enquiry, all search. Actual Realization, Sakshatkara is the fruition thereof. This highest stage is reached in Samadhi, the quietening of all agitations in all levels of consciousness, though of course, the preliminary steps of Sravana, Manana and Nididhyasana are concerned with Buddhi or the Intellect. One will acquire the Sathya Swarupa if he understands the nature of the Atma. If he does not, then, it is a big loss, no doubt. The Jnani recognizes in every being and every object the Principle of the all-pervading Atma and when he leaves the world, he becomes free from birth and death.

Brahma Jnana (knowledge of the absolute) is the heritage of man. He is entitled to it. If he is aware of this and if by his efforts, he achieves the Jnana or Brahman, adopting the above-mentioned methods, then verily, his career in this world is worthwhile. Otherwise, it is all a waste. The Atma, when cognized in the Consciousness, flashes like a streak of lightning. In a second it will reveal its brilliance and splendour. It is impossible to grasp its full majesty.

Manas is the cloak of the Atma. It conditions the Atma, or rather appears to.

So, it seems to be very close to the Atma, and makes you believe that it attains It. It is incapable of doing so. Since it is closest, the Sadhaka imagines that his mind has realised the Atma and yearns for the experience again and again. This, of course, is good, for it fosters the search for the merger with Brahman. For the Brahmajnani, the opposites of Dharma and Adharma, of Merit and Demerit, are non-existent.

Dharmic life offers the Upper Lokas after death and Adharmic life leads one to the Lower Lokas.

But both are shackles for the aspiring Sadhaka whose eye is on the removal of ignorance and realization of Truth. He has to seek to snap the strings that bind the heart to the objective world. So, he wants an answer to the question with which this Upanishad starts: By which does the mind grasp things, etc.?

To attain the Jnana of Brahman, Thapas, Self-control, Vedic Rites, Image Worship, are all good helps. Jnana has Sathya as its location. This Upanishad gives all seekers the Upadesa of Brahma Jnana; it deals with Brahman, which is Sathyam, Jnanam (Highest wisdom) and Anantham (without end).