

DISCOURSES ON
TAITTIRIYA UPANISHAD

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FOREWORD

An attempt of the finite to explain the Infinite is the content and import of all the scriptures of the world. The *Upanishads* are no exceptions to this rule. To define the Infinite is impossible, although, through words we can certainly indicate the Truth to one who is ready to recognise the indication, following up their direction and come to experience Godhood.

Any fact can ordinarily be indicated through two methods: one is the *direct* method of positive description and the other is the *indirect* method of indicating what the thing is not. Thus to indicate an ocean, we can *directly* explain it as an endless expanse of water surging and seething on its surface with its waves, but calm and tranquil in its unplumbed depths; and *indirectly* it can be indicated as that which has no outgrowths on it, that which is not solid, that which is not motionless, that which can never float in the air.

Similarly, Truth also is *directly* indicated by attributing to it certain qualities and *indirectly* it is indicated through its own manifestations. The direct method is called in Sanskrit as an explanation through *Swaroop-Lakshana*, and the indirect method is called as the *Tatasth-Lakshana*.

As for an example, in indicating the house of Mr. Gupta in a street, we may *directly* do so by

describing it as, "that two-storeyed building with the porch and balcony, with the decorations round the window sill," or we may *indirectly* point it out as "the house next that mango tree" or as "the house upon which that crow is sitting." Here the mango tree and crow are something other than Mr. Gupta's house, but they are indicated to show through them ultimately Mr. Gupta's house.

In this *Upanishad*, unlike in any other scripture in the world, the subjective Reality in the seeker is indicated both by the *direct* method of explanations and by the *indirect* method of indications. In the second chapter, there is a direct attempt at definition of the Truth in "*Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam*," and the text contains in its bulk an indirect indication of the Pure Consciousness through an elaborate description of the various matter-envelopments and the personality-layers in man.

Nowhere in the world do we get such a complete study of the human personality in all its exhaustive features as in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. Even in the tradition of Vedanta, the only occasion when we get a clear description of the Five Sheaths (*Panch-Koshas*) is in this famous *Upanishad*; and its fame mainly rests upon this extremely direct method of self-enquiry that it prescribes.

This *Upanishad* belongs to the Krishna-Yajur-Veda and forms part of its *Taittiriya Aranyaka*. There is a beautiful story that traditionally describes the title *Taittiriya*. It is said that this portion was taught to Yagnavalkya by his *Guru* but at the end of

the studies the *Guru* got annoyed with the disciple and asked him to return all that he learnt from the teacher. Yagnavalkya, it is said, "vomited" out all that he learnt seeing which the *Guru* advised his disciples to turn themselves into *Taittiri*-birds (sparrows) and consume the 'vomit.' They did so and thus they came to master this *Aranyaka*.

This story need not give us any disgust at all if we understand it properly. Annoyed at the lesser students of the class-room, the teacher asked Yagnavalkya to repeat the lesson that he had taught, and the genius in Yagnavalkya 'vomited' what was taught to him. When a student has absorbed a knowledge and when he gives it out, it becomes more palatable to the other students of the class-room, who could not so efficiently understand it directly from the teacher's learned discourse. Seeing that the delivery of Yagnavalkya was masterly, the teacher in appreciation asked the other students of the class to absorb it in the form of the "sparrows" which they did.

Of all the birds, sparrows are most energetic and industrious; the two great qualities that are unavoidable for any diligent student of Vedantic literature are indicated here.

The entire *Upanishad* is divided into three sections; (a) *Siksha Valli*—a section containing instructions in not only pronunciation, etc., but also in the different types of *Upasanas* by which a student can purify and sharpen his inner equipment; (b) *Brahmananda Valli*—in which the Truth is directly explained and indirectly indicated through a scientific

analysis of personality construction in man; and (c) *Bhrigu Valli*—a section in which we are shown the practical application of the philosophical theories propounded in the previous *Vallis*, and also, the section emphasises the need for constant enquiry and consistent meditation if a student is to come to enjoy a guaranteed success in the path of Vedanta.

Apart from its philosophical interest, the *Upanishad* gives us a vivid picture of the exhaustive training that was given in the educational system of that day, which ensured the development, the growth and the healthy sustenance of the brilliant Hindu culture of that Vedic period. The all-comprehensive instructions and the definite advice on “how to live Vedanta in life” are given by the teacher to the student—in the end of the first section on two occasions in the Valedictory Address and in the Convocation Message.

Immediately, our country needs a special study of these two portions which in clear terms hoot down our impotent Hindu misconceptions of our “Ideal Life”. Reconstituted on the basis of these healthy suggestions, we can certainly rebuild a Hindu India of Spiritual Communism based upon mutual love, reinforced with the cement of Hindu Brotherhood.

In it, one can clearly see a healthy message for the war-torn world labouring under its own misconceptions of what life is, and its own wrong evaluations of the factors that constitute true living.

Publisher.

INTRODUCTIGN

The attempt of the *Upanishads* is to express the inexpressible, to paint the Formless, to sing the voiceless beauty and bliss of the Absolute. The finite words are no instruments of echo the roaring silence of the all-full Spiritual Perfection.

Even in our ordinary experience, when we have to voice forth our intimate subjective experiences, we know that language fails in its own limitations. It is only a superstitious belief that language can do wonders everywhere; except, perhaps, in the market place and in the banker's office, everywhere else it must feel choked. Factual ideas directly perceived through the five sense-organs can be expressed, to an extent, by means of sound symbols which have, by mutual consent, come to represent literally some uniform meaning. Thus, a Botanist can, with ease and efficiency, describe the flower, part by part, but when the poet enters the field to express the message of the flower and the thrills of beauty it has produced in him, the trembling sentiments and the throbbing emotions must snap the silver strings of every language.

Even when such an ordinary experience as a taste, or a touch or a vision cannot completely be explained and fully conveyed through words. We can easily understand how impossible it is for words to express

the tranquil experience one gets when one has transcended oneself consciously the body, mind and intellect.

From this it should not be concluded that the experience of the Infinite cannot be conveyed and is not available for the teachers to teach.

From the above, we must only understand that a language which is generally used to express the finite experiences, is employed in the Scriptures with a difference. In objective descriptions, words are used in their direct import, but in expressing the subjective experiences the same words are used, together with their ringing notes and the suggestive imports. Every word has, in combination with others, a direct literal meaning and an indirect pregnant suggestion. This suggestiveness implied in each word is often used in our everyday life. "See that the crows do not come into the Dinning Room" does not mean that vultures and doves, dogs and cats, rats and cows can freely come and poison the food. Here, the word "crow" no doubt means literally that black bird of harsh looks and ugly melodies, but in the content it indicates all the animals and undesirable intruders into the Dinning Hall. Examples can be multiplied to prove this that words have got not only their literal meaning but, by usage, they gather a suggestiveness of their own stored up in themselves as their special flavour.

The inexpressible Infinite Truth is thus indicated by these words of the Scriptures, It is not openly and directly expressed. This is true in almost all other religions when the Prophets are in extreme ecstasy

of their own mystical experiences. But, in Hinduism, we find that throughout the Upanishadic lore almost every word of it is used to express its suggestive sense.

This is the difficulty in reading and experiencing the Truth from the Scriptures directly. The *Rishis* had, for this express purpose, prepared a handy language reinforced with suggestions and the language so purified for the purpose came to be called as *Samskarita* (purified), *Sanskrit*. Words can only bring about certain intended disturbances in the minds of the listeners. When I say "cup", the word penetrates and falls into your mind and the disturbance so caused makes the mind ripple out into the remembered memory of the form and the use of a cup. Thus, in transacting mutually known experiences, language can be a handy medium of sound. But when it is employed to convey the experiences of one to another who has known nothing similar to it, the conveyance becomes difficult. Therefore, it was insisted that the teacher and the taught should get themselves fully attuned to each other before the master's words could bring about the required emphasis of the goal for the disciples. Our initial discussions are all mainly to set up this attunement between us.

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These are the days of blind and unintelligent 'Guru Worship' on one hand, and 'Guru damnation' on the other. Those who believe, do so like the dumb

driven cattle in a herd and there is no active enthusiasm or diligent intellectual stock-taking on their part when they hear an advice or follow a path; unfortunately, religion is not meant for the unintelligent or for the stupid.

On the other hand, there is now a growing majority of blasphemers who are to be congratulated, for, their calumny is rightly directed against the false pretenders and the professional priest class. *Gurudom* has become, in this country of general ignorance and particular superstitions, a very paying business, wherein there need not be any investment and therefore, it is a safe activity of "all gains and no loss"!!

But, between these two extremities of opinions somewhere lies the truth and the Hindu Scriptures are amply clear in their definition of a true *Guru*. They are never tired of repeating that a *Guru* is not one who has temporarily inspired an individual to live a nobler life, but a *Guru* in *Brahma-Vidya* is one who is well read in the *Sastras* and also well established in his experience of the Supreme. In short, he must be well versed in the theory of Self Perfection and must equally be well grounded in the technical aspect of Self Discovery.

When we read these qualifications so palpably defined, we are apt to consider it as an exaggeration or an over-statement, but we forget that in our work-a-day world, a Final Year Medical College student getting a telegram that he has passed his examination, is not, we all know, yet a safe doctor to consult or to

perform any operation. So too, a Law Graduate. Similar is the case of a boy who has finished the course in Bachelor of Engineering. No knowledge is complete by a mere study of the theory. Study of the cookery book does not make a dependable cook. In view of this understanding, when we re-read the insistence of the scriptures, we are able to appreciate how a *Sastry* who can quote all the scriptures or an illiterate saint in the cave enjoying his 'Self-experience' cannot be a complete teacher and guide to any one who wants to walk the path and reach the goal.

Not only is it sufficient that we discover a *Guru* of these qualifications, but we must be able to tune ourselves completely with him. There are some un-intelligent atheists who, in their haste, have come to wrong conclusions about the relationship between the teacher and the taught in ancient India. According to them, the complete surrender of the taught to the teacher is a convenience for the *Gurus* and that, according to them, in these days there should be some sort of a 'Union of Disciples' guarding them from the tyrannies of the *Gurus* !!

Closer observations and examinations of the working of the system will make it clear that in this relationship, instead of the *Guru* exploiting the disciple, it is the former that subjects himself to exploitation.

It is very well known that we can appreciate only that art which is already in us and our capacity to appreciate the finer points in it depends upon our own growth and development in that line. A painter

is no reviewer of poems ; a sculptor is not critic of music. To enjoy music or painting, we must have the same art to some extent in us. The more I can tune myself to the mental emotions of an artist, the more I can appreciate that art. Similarly, the Divine perfections experienced by the master's mind can be re-lived by the disciple in himself only when the teacher and the taught have, to an extent, come to feel an inner identity, a divine attunement between each other ; thereafter, the scintillating joys of the master, symbolically represented by his gasping language, can centre in the mind of the disciples, in their echoing presence, a similar atmosphere of purity and divinity. Mere word meaning of the scriptures are not only half truths, but, in many cases they prove to be positively dangerous. The suggestiveness of the words, like 'scent' in flowers, has a reach farther than the word, and it is with this aura of the vocabulary that the Truth is illumined.

In order to raise the attunement to the necessary pitch, the methods of *Upasanas* are advised in all the *Upanishads*.

Upasana is an intellectual process of conscious thinking over a subtle idea superimposed for the purpose by the mind temporarily upon a grosser object. To have upon a lesser object (*Nikrishta Vastu*) a superimposition of a nobler ideal (*Utkrishta Drishti*) is *Upasana*. For example, to superimpose the idea of the Goddess of Learning and Her divine method upon an ordinary river *Ganga*, and thereafter to worship its waters as sacred and to worship it with

flowers and lights, to offer in devotion milk and rice, is a typical example of *Upasana*.

In the *Upanishad* under discussion, one-third of the entire bulk is spent in advising different items of *Upasanas* which clearly shows how essential is the preliminary technique of self-integration for a seeker of knowledge.

The technique of *Upasana*, as is met with in the *Vedas*, is adopted for a later generation, to suit the psychological demands of that age in the *Bhakti-cult* or the *Bhagawan-cult*. Sri Vyasa Bhagawan is the master intellect that gave us the new adaptation of the method. To meditate upon a formless Power as it is advised in the *Upasanas* is essentially a dry and arid path over which the intellect strives forth in all its dreadful might and ugly strength. The same path becomes a flower-garden of scented beauty and soft pleasures when the formless God becomes the carved beauty of the Pauranic age ; in the garden of *Bhakti*, the tender and the soft hearts dance in ecstasy among its arbours of music and joy.

Thus, it becomes clear that without a certain amount of positive ethical and moral life, a fair share of self-control (*Brahmacharya*) and a lot of conscious and deliberate practices through 'devotion' and 'selfless-work', the individual student of philosophy will not have in himself the necessary amount of inner integration. Without the minimum amount of intellectual sharpness and mental tranquillity, it is certainly impossible to understand the scriptures as they should be understood if our studies were to fulfil

themselves in bringing out the beauty that is now lying concealed within ourselves.

The entire opening chapter of this scripture contains different methods of *Upasanas* (meditations) which may sound to us as strange and meaningless, but we shall try to go through them as best as we can. In our examination we shall try to get an idea of the old methods advised by those teachers the development, of concentration and intellectual poise of the seekers of their time.

Taittiriya Upanishad

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* belongs to the *Krishna Yajur Veda* and forms a part of its *Taittiriya Aranyaka*. There is an interesting tradition attached to the *Taittiriya*. It is said that saint Vaisampayana got annoyed with a prominent disciple of his, Yagnavalkya, and the *Guru* ordered the disciple to return back all the knowledge so far taught to him. Yagnavalkya 'vomited' the entire knowledge acquired, seeing which Vaisampayana ordered his other disciples to take the form of partridges (*Taittiri* birds) and consume the leavings. This is the reason, it seems, that this portion of the *Veda* was traditionally labelled as *Taittiriya*.

This story, if we understand it literally, may read as vulgar and abominable; but there are teachers who interpret it to mean that Yagnavalkya the genius that he was, was asked by his teacher to repeat what he had learnt and, seeing that the prodigy had not only understood the true import of what the Master

taught, but had in his own originality brought an independent charm into it, that the teacher asked his other disciples to consume it as best as they could. In this connection it would be interesting to note that the *Taittiri*-birds, the partridges, though small in size, are the most active and ever vigilant among the plumed variety. The story includes a healthy instruction to the students of the *Upanishads* that they are to be intellectually as smart, as vigilant and as active in their quest for knowledge as the *Taittiri*-birds are in their ordinary life.

All *Upanishads* start with a 'peace invocation,' a prayer to the Cosmic Powers to ward off all obstacles on the path of study, and this prayer is daily chanted together by the teacher and the taught. A prayer is an invocation, and not a contract. Now-a-days, we are misusing this technique of prayer in our own ignorance and therefore we find that our Gods are deaf to our prayers. This is true today with all religions. The science of prayer explains, that when an individual surrenders himself—meaning, all his identifications with his body, mind and intellect—through devotion, reverence and understanding-love, he removes from himself all the causes for his limitations and what is thus left over is the Absolute Perfection which is the essence of his very being. Thus prayer is the active part of the divine action, while the final successful invocation is its fulfilment.

Here in the Peace Invocation, the thing desired or invoked is not something to satisfy the physical

comfort or the mental desires of the students. He is no beggar even at the feet of the Lord! All that he demands of the Cosmic Powers, whom he is invoking, is that no obstacles shall come during the study of the *Sastra* at the feet of his Master. In the *Upanishad* the very Peace Invocation is repeated as the first "section" of the opening *Valli* and so we shall explain it as under the opening section.

OM TAT SAT!