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अपाणिपादोऽहमचिन्त्यशक्तिः

पश्याम्यचक्षुः स शृणोम्यकर्णः ।

अहं विजानामि विविक्तरूपो

न चास्ति वेत्ता मम चित्सदाऽहम् ॥ २१ ॥

apāṇipādo'hamacintyaśaktiḥ

paśyāmyacakṣuḥ sa śṛṇomyakarnaḥ

aham vijānāmi viviktarūpo

na cāsti vettā mama citsadā'ham

अपाणिपादः - without hands and legs अहम् - I am अचिन्त्यशक्तिः - of incomprehensible power पश्यामि - I see अचक्षुः - without eyes सः - that शृणोमि - I hear अकर्णः - without ears अहम् विजानामि - I know विविक्तरूपः - of distinct nature, different from all न च अस्ति - there is no वेत्ता - knower मम - my चित् सदा - ever of the nature of knowledge अहम् - I am ;

I am without hands and legs, yet I am of incomprehensible power. I see without eyes, hear without ears. I am different from all. I know everything, but none knows me. Of the nature of pure knowledge I am. (21)

Apāṇipādaḥ aham; I am without hands and legs. *Acintyaśaktiḥ*, I am endowed with incomprehensible power. We know that our power is in our hands and legs, yet how many hands and legs should one have to be all powerful? That the self is all powerful even without any hands or legs means that its mere presence causes whatever is required to happen automatically. Since everything functions in accordance with the laws and in perfect harmony, we assign the agency of that functioning to somebody, and say that God does everything. Since the world seems to be created, we assign creatorship to God and call him the creator. The omniscience of *īśvara* is manifest as the whole universe. It is knowledge alone that manifests as this universe of names and forms. There is knowledge and intelligence or omniscience everywhere. Yet we are told that the self is of the nature of this omniscience

without a mind. *Paśyāmi acakṣuḥ*, I see everything without eyes. *Śṛṇomi akarṇaḥ*, I hear everything without ears.

The idea is that *īśvara* is omniscient and omnipotent in the primary sense, in the *upādhi* of *māyā*. Omniscience and omnipotence are the attributes of *māyā*, and with *māyā* as his *upādhi*, *īśvara* becomes creator, sustainer, omniscient, and so on. However, from the standpoint of the intrinsic nature of *īśvara*, he is *brahman*, the absolute reality, transcending all the attributes. In the *upādhi* of *māyā*, *īśvara* is immanent, whereas, as *brahman*, *īśvara* transcends all the attributes. The identity of the self is with the transcendent *īśvara*, one that transcends all attributes. Therefore, in this *mantra* and others, we see the negation of all attributes.

In the Kenopaniṣad, the aspirant asks of the teacher, 'Oh revered Sir, by whose command does the mind perform its functions? By whose command does the *prāṇa* or the vital air perform its various functions? Directed by whom or willed by whom do these people speak words? Who makes the eyes see? Who makes the ears hear?' The teacher replies, *śrotrasya śrotram manaso mano yadvāco ha vācam sa u prāṇasya prāṇaḥ*, he is the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech of the speech, the vital air of the vital air. What does the reply mean? Does it mean that there is another ear inside this ear and another eye inside this eye and another mind inside this mind? No. The teacher's reply indicates or points to that because of which the mind thinks, that because of which the eyes see, that because of which the ears hear, and that because of which the vital airs sustain life.

Figuratively, we do say that the self breathes and sees and hears, but there is no agency of hearing or seeing in the self. It is in its presence that hearing, seeing, and everything else takes place. You could also say that the self sees through all the eyes, hears through all the ears, and walks through all the legs without itself having eyes, ears, or legs. In short, it is in the presence of the self that all the organs of perception function and all the organs of action act. It is in its presence that the mind thinks and in its presence that everything happens. All that is necessary is its mere presence. *Ahaṁ vijānāmi* means I indeed know everything. *Viviktarūpaḥ*, I am endowed with a distinct nature, different from all. Different

from all of what? The nature of the self is distinct from the mind, the organs of action, and the organs of perception; distinct from everything. *Vijānāmi*, I know everything because I illumine everything. *Na cāsti vettā mama*, nobody knows me. 'I know everything yet nobody knows me,' means that the self cannot become the object of knowledge or be objectified by anybody; it is not knowable in the conventional sense. A flower can become the object of our knowledge, but the self or consciousness cannot become the object of knowledge in that sense. It cannot be objectified with organs of perception or the mind, because it is that which illumines them. The self does not need to be illumined. It is self effulgent; *cit sadā aham*, I am consciousness, ever self-effulgent. What does it mean when you say nobody knows you? Do you mean there is no way of knowing the self? No, there is a means of knowing the self. The next *mantra* tells us of the means to attain the knowledge.

वेदैरनेकैरहमेव वेद्यो
वेदान्तकृद्वेदविदेव चाहम् ।
न पुण्यपापे मम नास्ति नाशो
न जन्म देहेन्द्रियबुद्धिरस्ति ॥ २२ ॥
vedairanekairahameva vedyo
vedāntakṛdvedavidēva cāham
na puṇyapāpe mama nāsti nāśo
na janma dehendriyabuddhirasti

वेदैः - by the Vedas अनेकैः - all अहम् एव - I alone वेद्यः - what is to be known वेदान्तकृत् - the author of Vedānta वेदवित् - knower of the Vedas एव - alone च अहम् - and I am न - not पुण्यपापे - results of good and bad actions मम - my न अस्ति - is not नाशः - destruction न जन्म - no birth देह-इन्द्रिय-बुद्धिः - body, senses, mind अस्ति - is

I alone am to be known through all the Vedas. I alone am the author of Vedānta, as well as the knower of the Vedas. I am not subject to the results of good and bad actions and I suffer no destruction. I have no birth, and no body, senses, or mind.

(22)

Vedaiḥ anekaiḥ aham eva vedyah, I am the only subject matter of all the Vedas. The Vedas are dedicated to revealing just one entity, namely, *īśvara* or the self. *Aham eva* means 'I alone am that which is to be known through all the Vedas.' Therefore, the self or the 'I' is the subject matter of all the Vedas. The Vedas are the means of knowing the self, not in the manner of knowing a pot or clay or cloth, but as our own nature.

The collective reference to all the Vedas can either mean all the four Vedas or all the sections of the Veda. There are two main sections in the Vedas, the *karma-kāṇḍa* and the *jñāna-kāṇḍa*. The *karma-kāṇḍa* contains descriptions of all the rituals; although indirectly, they also reveal the self, because they are meant for worshipping *īśvara*. The *jñāna-kāṇḍa* means the Upaniṣads, which reveal the nature of the self directly. So the Vedas present the self as either the object of worship or the object of knowledge. *Vedāntakṛt*, I am the very revealer or initiator of Vedānta; this indicates the Upaniṣads. *Vedavit eva ca aham* could mean, I am the revealer of the Vedas, as well as, I am also the knower of the Vedas.

When we are told, 'I am the one to be known through the Vedas,' someone might say, "Oh! Then the Vedas are greater than you. That you are to be known through Vedas means that without the Vedas you cannot be known!" Therefore, the *mantra* says, I am also the revealer of the Vedas, *vedavit*; the knower of the Vedas also I am. *Vedāntakṛt* can mean revealer of Vedānta and also the teacher of Vedānta. I am the subject matter of the Vedas, I am the revealer of the Vedas, I am the teacher of the Vedas, and I am also the knower of the Vedas. I am the student, I am the teacher, I am the text, and I am also that which should be known through the transaction between the teacher and the taught. *īśvara* claims the authorship of everything; nothing remains, for which anybody else may claim authorship.

Here the Veda or Vedānta is presented as the means of knowledge. The Vedas are in the form of words, and words generally provide indirect knowledge. But that rule applies to objects that are remote or unseen. Yet it is true that words can give rise to immediate knowledge, when the object of knowledge is being experienced but not recognized, as in case of the tenth man. Because *brahman* is our very self, it

exists and is self-effulgent, which means that it is always experienced; therefore, the words of Vedānta can generate *aparokṣa-jñāna* or immediate knowledge. That is done through the process of removing the false notions about the self.

It is not only the Vedas that have a single subject matter, which is the knowledge of the self or *brahman*, but also all the other scriptural texts and even the texts dealing with the material sciences, simply because the self is the only reality. Vedānta reveals the nature of truth directly, whereas, the other texts talk about it indirectly, by revealing its glories.

Further, this verse negates all the *viśeṣas* or attributes that may be associated with the self. *Na puṇya-pāpe mama asti*, no *puṇya* or *papa*, no virtue or vice, attaches to me. *Mama nāsti nāśaḥ*, I am not subject to *nāśa*, destruction or death. *Na janma*, there is no birth; I am never born. *Na dehendriyabuddhirasti*, I have no body, no sense organs, and no mind. The meaning is that all of these attributes belong to the *upādhi*. The self simply transcends the *upādhi*; it is that which illumines the very *upādhi*.

The verse says that I am *vedyaḥ*, to be known through the Vedas. This also means that the self is to be known or must be known. As the Kenopaniṣad says, if the self is known in this lifetime, there is truth or fulfillment. Otherwise there is only great destruction. The self must be known and can only be known through the Vedas. If *brahman* is the self of all, should all good and bad actions performed everywhere also be credited to *brahman*? The answer is no. The self transcends even virtue and vice. *Puṇya* and *pāpa* attach to the doer or one who has the notion of doer-ship. There is no doer-ship in the self, who is, therefore, ever free from virtue and vice.

न भूमिरापो न च वह्निरस्ति
न चानिलो मेऽस्ति न चाम्बरं च ।
एवं विदित्वा परमात्मरूपं
गुहाशयं निष्कलमद्वितीयम् ।
समस्तसाक्षिं सदसद्विहीनं
प्रयाति शुद्धं परमात्मरूपम् ॥ २३ ॥
na bhūmirāpo na ca vahnirasti
na cānilo me'sti na cāmbaram ca

*evam viditvā paramātmārūpaṁ
guhāśayaṁ niṣkalamadvitīyaṁ
samastasākṣiṁ sadasadvihīnaṁ
prayāti śuddhaṁ paramātmārūpaṁ*

न भूमिः - not earth आपः - water न च वह्निः अस्ति - and there is no fire न च अनिलः - and not air मे (मम) - for me अस्ति - is न च अम्बरम् - and not space च - and एवम् - thus विदित्वा - knowing परमात्म-रूपम् - the exalted nature of the self गुहाशयम् - residing in the cave (of the heart) निष्कलम् - partless अद्वितीयम् - nondual समस्तसाक्षिम् - witness of all सद्-असद्-विहीनम् - devoid of cause and effect प्रयाति - attains शुद्धम् - pure परमात्म-रूपम् - the nature of the limitless self of all

For me there is neither earth nor water, or fire, and no air, or space. One attains the very limitless self knowing thus the exalted nature of the self, as the one that resides in the cavity of the heart, that is partless, nondual, the witness of all, devoid of cause and effect, and pure. (23)

Na bhūmirāpo na ca vahnirasti. The five elements I am not. Both the body and the universe are made of the five elements; that I am not. What this means is that, in spite of being the material cause and thus pervading everything, the self transcends everything.

Evam viditvā means upon knowing the self in this way. What is the way in which the self must be known? *Na puṇya-pāpe mama asti*, I have no *puṇya* or *pāpa*; it must be known that virtue and vice do not touch me. As Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the Gita, *na kartṛtvaṁ na karmāṇi lokasya sṛjati prabhuḥ*, “The Lord does not create agency or any actions for anyone.”¹ Lord Kṛṣṇa says that the self does not have *kartṛtva*, it does not take on the role of the doer or one who experiences, nor does it cause anything to be done or experienced. It is ever free from *kartṛtva*, doership, and *bhoktṛtva*, enjoyership.

Evam viditvā means upon knowing the self to be such that one is free from doership and therefore does not accrue *puṇya* and *pāpa*; knowing that one is free from enjoyership and is therefore not affected by them either; knowing that one is not the five elements; knowing that the body, which is made of the five elements, nei-

ther describes one nor belongs to one; knowing that the sense organs do not define one or belong to one; knowing that one is not even the mind, and knowing that birth and death do not attach to one.

As Ādi Śaṅkarācārya has said, *manobuddhyahaṅkārācittāni nāhaṁ na ca śrotrajihve na ca ghrāṇanetre, na ca vyomabhūmīrna tejo na vāyuscidānandarūpaḥ śivo'haṁ śivo'ham*, the mind, intellect, ego and memory I am not. The faculties of hearing, tasting, smelling, or sight I am not. The elements of space, earth, fire, and air I am not. I am of the nature of consciousness and fullness. I am *śiva*."

Evam viditvā means knowing the self in the manner in which it is unfolded in this Upaniṣad. We are told that one is the witness of all the three states, the illuminator of everything; that one is the material cause of everything, the self of all, and that one is nondual, ever changeless, and ever auspicious. *Evam viditvā*, knowing the self in this manner; we learn that one is of the nature of *paramātmā*, the limitless self, the supreme self.

Guhāśayaṁ niṣkalam advitīyam indicates that which is partless and nondual and resides in the cavity of the heart. It is the body that has parts, and the the mind that has parts; the self is partless, nondual, and ever pure, shining in the cave of the heart as the I-thought, *ahaṁ*. Knowing the self in this manner, as *paramātmā*, as the *samastasākṣī* or witness of all, as being *sadasadvihīnam*, ever devoid of *sat* and *asat*, cause and effect, *prayāti śuddhaṁ paramātmārūpam*, one attains *paramātmārūpam*, the nature of the supreme self. Upon knowing the *paramātmā*, one becomes *paramātmā*.

In the very first *mantra* of this text, the student requests his teacher, Parameṣṭhī, for the knowledge. "Please teach me that *brahma-vidyā* by which the wise, destroying all the sins, attains the *puruṣa*, the *paramātmā* that is beyond *māyā*." The entire Upaniṣad is in reply to that request. The teacher concludes his teaching with the words, *prayāti śuddhaṁ paramātmārūpam*, "Oh Āśvalāyana, knowing the self in this manner, one indeed attains *paramātmā*, the supreme self."

To be continued...