

Svetasvatara Upanisad

Transliterated Sanskrit Text

Free Translation

&

Brief Explanation

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Svetasvatara Upanishad - Chapter 1
Speculation about the First Cause
T.N.Sethumadhavan



aum shri ganeshaya namah

INTRODUCTION

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* belongs to the Taittiriya School of the Krishna Yajur Veda. It derives its name from the sage who taught it. This Upanishad is regarded as one of the authoritative works which form the Vedanta philosophy. Its mantras are quoted profusely in all Vedantic treatises.

The peculiarity of this Upanishad is that it contains passages that can be interpreted to support dualism, qualified non-dualism, non-dualism and even other systems of thought. Certain verses can also be related to the Sankhya philosophy of Kapila. Hence there are acute differences of opinion among the protagonists of different schools of philosophy who quote from it to support their respective views.

However it is apparent that *Svetasvatara Upanishad* contains a strong theistic strain unlike other Upanishads. Names like Hara, Rudra, Bhagavan, Agni, Aditya, Vayu, Deva etc., which appear in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* denote Personal God. It identifies the Supreme Brahman with Rudra who is conceived as the material and efficient cause of the world, not only as its author but also as its protector and guide.

The ingredients associated with theism like Personal God, devotion or *bhakti* towards Him, are prominent in this Upanishad. The emphasis is not on the Brahman, the Absolute whose complete perfection does not admit of any change or evolution but on the personal *Isvara*, omniscient and omnipotent who is the manifested Brahman.

Svetasvatara Upanishad also overcomes the dualism of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* of the Sankhya philosophy. It says that *pradhana* or nature is not an independent entity but belongs to the self of the divine, *devatma-sakti*. God is the *mayin*, the maker of the world, which is *maya* or made by Him.

These features of the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* make Ramanuja and other theistic Acharyas argue to establish the Personal God as the Ultimate Reality. But Sankaracharya gives the very same words a non-dualistic meaning and emphasizes that that the goal of this, like the other major Upanishads, is to prove the sole reality of the non-dual Brahman and the un-substantiality of the jiva and the phenomenal universe. Sankara's introduction to this Upanishad is a grand illustration of his broad canvas of arguments quoting lavishly from the *srutis*, *smritis*, *puranas* and *Bhagavad Gita* to establish his point of view. But many scholars doubt whether Sankara had in fact written his commentary on this Upanishad.

Leaving these controversies to the scholars, we will study this Upanishad as a guide which uses a simple and lucid language that propounds inclusiveness and "teaches the unity of the souls and the world in the one Supreme Reality treating it as an attempt to reconcile the different philosophical and religious views which prevailed at the time of its composition".-Dr.S.Radhakrishnan.

INVOCATION

*Om poornamadah poonamidam poornaat poornamudachyate
poornasya poornamaadaaya poornamevaa vasishyate
Om Shantih Shantih Shantih ||*

**AUM, That is full; this is full. This fullness has been projected from that fullness.
When this fullness merges in that fullness, all that remains is fullness.
AUM, Peace! Peace! Peace!**

*Om saha navavatu; saha nau bhunaktu;
Saha veeryam karavavahai;
Tejasvi navadheetamastu, ma vidvishaavahai
Om Shantih Shantih Shantih ||*

**AUM, May Brahman protect us both? May Brahman bestow upon us both the fruit of knowledge? May we both obtain the energy to acquire knowledge? May what we both study reveal the Truth? May we cherish no ill-will toward each other?
Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!**

THE TEXT

Mantra 1

*Harih Om brahmavādino vadanti
kiṃkāraṇaṃ brahma kutaḥ sma jātā jīvāmaḥ kena kva ca saṃpratiṣṭhāḥ /*

adhiṣṭhitāḥ kena sukhetareṣu vartāmahe brahmavidō vyavasthām //1.1//

By uttering Hari Om the Rishi remembers the Lord and commences the Upanishad. A few Brahmavadis discuss among themselves on these lines: O Knowers of the Vedas, who is that Brahman - the root cause of this world. From what have we been born? Due to what do we live? In what are we abiding? Under whose orders are we passing through pain and pleasure? Under what set rules are we being governed?

A few sages in quest of Supreme Brahman were talking among themselves. Being well-versed in the Vedas, they were questioning among themselves the following concepts. What is that Brahman whom we learnt as the cause of the entire world? From whom have we been born? What is our origin? Under whose majesty are we living? Who is the support of our life? In whom are we situated? Where have we been before we were born? Having taken the birth (in the past, present and future) in whom do we remain? Who is our ultimate refuge? Who is He who makes arrangements for us? Who is the in-charge of this establishment? Who is the master director of the entire world? Who runs it so efficiently? Under whose command are we experiencing pain and pleasure? Who is that Lord?

The issues raised in this Mantra relate to the creation, preservation and the ultimate dissolution of the Beings (jivas) and the universe.

VARIOUS ENTITIES WERE PROPOSED AS THE CAUSE OF THE UNIVERSE BUT DISCARDED.

Mantra 2

*kālaḥ svabhāvo niyatir yadṛcchā bhūtāni yoniḥ puruṣeti cintyam /
saṁyoga eṣāṁ na tv ātmabhāvād ātmā hy anīśaḥ sukhaduḥkhaheṭoḥ // 1.2 //*

Should time, or nature, or necessity, or chance, or the elements be regarded as the cause? Or he who is called the purusha, the living self? The cause cannot be the combination of these entities, since there is a living self, Atman, for whose sake the combination has been made. Yet, neither is the Atman the cause, for it in turn, is dependent upon good and evil.

Several answers were thought of to the above questions but they were all ruled out. The answers suggested were whether it could be

1. Time - because it causes change in all beings.
2. Nature - the intrinsic nature of each being such as the heat of the fire or the brightness of the sun etc.
3. Necessity or chance - The law of cause and effect which results in good or evil.
4. Elements - The five elements such as space, air, fire, water and earth.
5. The Purusha - The individual living self associated with body, senses, mind and ego.

The entities enumerated above cannot be independently the cause of the universe because the actual experience shows otherwise. Neither the combination of these factors could be the cause of the universe because it pre-supposes another entity which brings them together to serve its own purpose like a person constructing a house by bringing different materials together to serve his purpose of residing therein. In that case can it be the Atman or the living self or jiva, the indweller in the body who is the cause of the universe?

This last alternative also was ruled out because the living self or jiva is dependent, in its phenomenal state, upon the karma or action of previous births. Its happiness and suffering are determined by past good or evil deeds. Being itself dependent, the atman cannot be the independent cause of the universe.

It was not possible to arrive at a conclusion about the final cause of the universe by means of sense experience or logic. Therefore the Rishis took up the path of Yoga involving self-control and one-pointedness of the mind and found out that the Supreme Lord evolved the world with the help of His own *maya* which is discussed in the next mantra.

Mantra 3

*te dhyānāyogānugatā apaśyan devātmaśaktiṃ svaguṇair nigūḍhām /
yaḥ kāraṇāni nikhilāni tāni kālātmayuktāny adhitiṣṭhaty ekaḥ // 1.3 //*

The sages, absorbed in meditation through one-pointedness of mind, discovered the creative power, belonging to the Lord Himself and hidden in its own gunas. That non-dual Lord rules over all those causes - time, the self and the rest.

Finally, the sages found out through yoga that is to say through self-control and meditation, the ultimate cause of the universe. The discovery was that the attributeless Brahman or Pure Consciousness, which is beyond time, space and causality, is the only Reality which through its own power of *maya* was the cause of the creation of the universe. Maya is the power which belongs to Brahman and is not independent of it. Brahman and maya are inseparable as fire and its power to burn.

Brahman when associated with maya is called *Saguna* Brahman or with attributes (conceived as *Isvara*) which are the causes of creation, preservation and dissolution. Maya is thus the material cause of the universe that is to say that Brahman creates the universe along with the various objects contained in it out of the raw material called maya. This is Brahman's lower aspect. But as Pure Consciousness, the higher aspect of Brahman (which is without any attribute, *nirguna*) is the entity which is the efficient cause of the creation of the universe. Thus Brahman is both the material and efficient cause of the universe i.e., both the raw material and the entity that creates the world. It is just like a spider weaving a web out of its own silk. The same spider is the cause of the silk produced out of its own body and is also the entity which weaves the web wherein it stays.

This maya consists of three gunas viz. sattva, rajas, and tamas. All that exists in the world consists of these three gunas. Brahman, after projecting the universe, remains hidden in it just as a seed after producing the tree remains concealed in the tree itself and not outside of it. That is to say “the cause produces the effect and remains concealed in the effect’.

The process of creation can be illustrated as under:

Brahman is the Lord of Maya ►► The same Brahman is known as the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the universe ►► Creative aspect associated with Sattva is known as Brahma ►► Protective aspect associated with Rajas is known as Vishnu ►► Destructive aspect associated with Tamas is known as Siva. (Note: These three aspects are related to the phenomenal world and they have no bearing upon the attributeless Brahman or the Ultimate Reality)

This non-dual Lord rules over all the secondary causes of the universe like time, the self etc. The gist of this mantra is that Pure Brahman is not the cause of the universe; but associated with its power of maya it appears to be the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe. Thus from the standpoint of the Absolute, there is no creation but from the standpoint of the universe Brahman with *maya* appears to create, preserve and dissolve the world.

DESCRIPTION OF THE UNIVERSE

Mantra 4

*tam ekanemiṃ trivṛtaṃ śoḍaśāntaṃ śatārdhāraṃ viṃśatipratyarābhiḥ /
aṣṭakaiḥ śadbhir viśvarūpaikapāśaṃ trimārgabhedaṃ dvinimittaikamoham // 1.4 //*

The sages saw the wheel of Brahman, which has one felly, a triple tire, sixteen end-parts, fifty spokes with twenty counter-spokes and six sets of eight; whose one rope is manifold; which moves on three different roads; and whose illusion arises from two causes.

In this and the following mantra the world is compared to a rotating wheel or a flowing stream. Its chief characteristic is movement which these images bring about. Let us look into these technical terms.

- Wheel of Brahman - Refers to the universe which is non-different from the creator who is the same as Brahman.
- Felly - The outer rim of the wheel which supports it signifying the power of maya in creation as a causal factor.
- Triple tire - These represent three gunas.
- Sixteen end-parts - Refer to five elements, five organs of perception, five organs of action and the mind.
- Fifty spokes - Support the cosmic wheel representing mental condition.
- Twenty counter spokes - Organs of perception and organs of action and their corresponding objects.
- Six sets of eight - Forty eight types of human capabilities and qualities.

- One rope - The rope of love which manifests as love for children, food and the heavenly world.
- Three different roads - Roads of righteousness, unrighteousness and knowledge.
- Illusion arising from two causes - Deception arises from two causes, virtuous action and sinful action on account of which the non-self (body) is taken as the Self.

The knowledge of Wheel of Brahman was revealed to the illumined sages in the depths of meditation.

PHENOMENAL UNIVERSE DESCRIBED AS A RIVER

Mantra 5

*pañcasroto'mbuṃ pañcayonyugravaktrāṃ pañcaprāṇormiṃ pañcabuddhyādimūlāṃ /
pañcāvartāṃ pañcaduḥkhaughavegāṃ pañcāśadbhedāṃ pañcaparvām adhīmaḥ // 1.5 //*

We meditate on the River whose five currents are the five organs of perception, which is made impetuous and winding by the five elements, whose waves are the five organs of actions and whose fountain-head is the mind, the source of the five forms of perception. This River has five whirlpools and its rapids are the fivefold misery; and lastly, it has fifty branches and five pain-bearing obstructions.

Now the Upanishad compares the universe to a river. A river is always flowing, moving, always in a state of flux. The word *samsara* means 'that which moves', 'that which is always changing'. Hence the Universe is compared with the river.

The components of a river:

- Five currents - They are the five elements (air, space, fire, water and earth) which make up the universe. In the body these are represented by the five organs of perception (eyes, ears, nose, skin and tongue). These are described as powerful and crooked because all the elements combine together and produce experiences in us which are sometimes good and at other times bad.
- Waves - These are five organs of action (hands, feet etc).
- Mind, the fountainhead - Mind is the root cause responsible for the perceptions of the five sense organs. The mind is behind these organs but for which the organs cannot function. The whole universe consisting of animate and inanimate objects is the state of the mind alone; when the mind stops, the world ceases to exist i.e. the multifarious universe is not perceived.
- Five whirlpools - These are the five objects of the senses (sound, form, taste, smell and touch). They are called whirlpool because they are the channels through which commotion in our minds is created.
- Fivefold misery - This consists of resting in the womb, being born, growing old, becoming sick and dying.
- Five pain-bearing obstructions - These are ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion and clinging to life.

The foregoing two mantras described the causal Brahman by means of the examples of the wheel and the river which manifests itself through the universe.

CAUSE OF BONDAGE AND MEANS TO ATTAIN LIBERATION

Mantra 6

*sarvājīve sarvasaṁsthe bṛhante tasmin haṁso bhrāmyate brahmacakre /
pṛthag ātmānaṁ preritāraṁ ca matvā juṣṭas tatas tenāmṛtatvam eti // 1.6 //*

In this great Brahma-Wheel, in which all things abide and finally rest, the swan wanders about so long as it thinks the self is different from the Controller. When blessed by Him the self attains Immortality.

The individual self is compared to a swan in this mantra. It says that all beings evolve from the Wheel of Brahma i.e., evolve from Brahman with attributes (with its creative power *maya*). The individual self, the jiva, roams about in the phenomenal world, assuming different bodies - human, subhuman, and superhuman. The cause of the jiva's wandering in the *samsara* is due to the mistaken notion that the individual self is different from the Supreme Self that is to say the Supreme Lord, the Controller of the Universe.

When blessed by Him i.e., when the knowledge that the individual self is non-different from the Supreme Self dawns, it gets absorbed in the Brahman, the essence of Bliss and Consciousness, the immortality or Liberation.

He who knows himself to be Brahman or the Ultimate Reality is liberated and he who knows himself to be other than Brahman remains bound.

SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF BRAHMAN

Mantra 7

*udgītam etat paramaṁ tu brahma tasmiṁs trayaṁ svapratiṣṭhākṣaraṁ ca /
atrāntaraṁ brahmavido veditvā līnā brahmaṇi tatparā yonimuktāḥ // 1.7 //*

It is the Supreme Brahman alone untouched by phenomena that is proclaimed in the Upanishads. In It is established the triad of the enjoyer, the object and the Lord who is the Controller. This Brahman is the immutable foundation; It is imperishable. The sages, having realized Brahman to be the essence of phenomena, become devoted to Him. Completely merged in Brahman, they attain freedom from rebirth.

This mantra clarifies that the realization of Brahman referred to in the previous mantra relates to the Brahman without any attributes in whom the Contemplator, the object of Contemplation and the act of contemplation or the individual soul, the world, and the Cosmic Lord (*bhokta, bhogyam, preritaram*) merge into one. This supreme Self is the substratum, the imperishable, on which phenomenal universe rests. Brahman is the

indwelling Spirit, *antaram*. He is within all of us. When we know this, when we see the universe is just an appearance, when we understand the Reality behind the appearance, we merge in Brahman, *brahmani linah*. “*Brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati*” - he who knows Brahman becomes one with Brahman. (Mundaka Up. III.ii.9).

Mantra 8

*saṁyuktam etat kṣaram akṣaram ca vyaktāvyaktaṁ bharate viśvam īśaḥ /
anīśaś cātmā badhyate bhoktṛbhāvāj jñātvā devaṁ mucyate sarvapāśaiḥ // 1.8 //*

The Lord, Isa, supports all this which is a combination of the perishable and the imperishable, the manifest, the effect and the unmanifest, the cause. The same Lord, the Supreme Self, devoid of Lordship, becomes bound because of assuming the attitude of the enjoyer. The jiva by realizing the Supreme Self is freed from all fetters.

Brahman, the Lord or Pure Consciousness, is the support of phenomena as the rope is the support of the illusory snake or the desert is of the mirage. When we think of Brahman as the cause of manifestation, it is called Isvara. Brahman is the support of all relative phenomena which include both the tangible effects and the intangible cause or Isvara.

“The perishable comprises of all creatures and the imperishable is said to be the unchanging. But there is another Being, the Highest, called the Supreme Being, Purushottama, who as the Immutable, pervades and sustains the three worlds”. (Bhgavad Gita 15.16-17).

Under the spell of ignorance, the Supreme Self appears as the jiva or a phenomenal being, who in association with body, senses, mind and intellect becomes individualized. This jiva is the doer of the action and the enjoyer of the results. Once the ignorance is destroyed, the jiva is freed from the fetters and becomes the Supreme Self. The concepts of bondage and liberation, pleasure and pain, do not affect Brahman. They are created by maya and apply to phenomena and therefore they are ultimately unreal.

ISVARA AND JIVA

Mantra 9

*jñājñāu dvāv ajāv īśanīśāv ajā hy ekā bhoktṛbhogārthayuktā /
anantaś cātmā viśvarūpo hy akartā trayaṁ yadā vindate brahmam etat // 1.9 //*

The Supreme Lord appears as Isvara, omniscient and omnipotent and as the jiva, of limited knowledge and power, both unborn. But this does not deny the phenomenal universe; for there exists further the unborn prakriti, which creates the ideas of the enjoyer, enjoyment and the object. Atman is infinite and all-pervading and therefore devoid of agency. When the seeker knows all these three to be Brahman, he is freed from his fetters.

Both Isvara and the jiva are in fact Brahman which is the substratum and hence they are called unborn. Maya is the material cause of the universe. Being itself inert, maya cannot function without the power of the Lord, Isvara, who uses it as an instrument for creation, preservation and dissolution. On account of this association with maya, Isvara himself appears to be like a phenomenal entity, having as it were a body and material substance. Thus the Lord, though non-different from Brahman, the Supreme Lord, on account of his association with maya he appears as a phenomenal being. Since maya is ultimately unreal, the ideas of the enjoyer, enjoyment and the object of enjoyment are also unreal. For this reason, non-dual Brahman alone exists without any ideas of agency, action etc., which belong to the phenomenal world alone.

To the illumined person, the substratum is non-different from what is super-imposed; for him the illusory snake is nothing but the real rope. Thus he who knows Brahman alone as Reality is free from all false conceptions and sees Brahman everywhere and in everything. He rids himself of the false notions of doership and being free from grief, he attains Supreme Bliss.

ISVARA AND PRAKRITI

Mantra 10

*kṣaraṃ pradhānam amṛtākṣaraṃ haraḥ kṣarātmānāv īśate deva ekaḥ /
tasyābhidhyānād yojanāt tattvabhāvād bhūyaś cānte viśvamāyānivṛtiḥ // 1.10 //*

Prakriti is perishable. Hara, the Lord, is immortal and imperishable. The non-dual Supreme Self rules both prakriti and the individual soul. Through constant meditation on Him, by union with Him, by the knowledge of identity with Him, one attains, in the end, cessation of the illusion of phenomena.

Prakriti (maya) is perishable and of changing nature. Its enjoyer, the jivatma, is imperishable and indestructible. It is one Brahman, which is called here as Hara, who rules over the perishable and imperishable both. Hara means the destroyer of ignorance. The word also signifies Siva or Rudra, one of the divine manifestations of Brahman in the phenomenal world. He is alone worth knowing and must be realized essentially. Pursuing this path, if somebody constantly meditates on Him, keeping himself always united with Him and realizing his identity with Him, eventually, he attains Him having known the unity between the individual self and the Supreme Self. Then he transcends the Maya; his relation with this illusory world is cut off permanently. This identity is called in the scriptures as “I am Brahman” (*ayam atma brahma, aham brhmaismi* and other such *mahavakyas*).

RESULT OF MEDITATION ON THE SUPREME

Mantra 11

*jñātvā devaṃ sarvapāśāpahāniḥ kṣīnaiḥ kleśair janmamṛtyuprahāṇiḥ /
tasyābhidhyānāt tṛṇīyaṃ dehabhede viśvaiśvaryaṃ kevala āptakāmaḥ // 1.11 //*

When the Lord is known all fetters fall off; with the cessation of miseries, birth and death come to an end. From meditation on Him there arises, after the dissolution of the body, the third state, that of universal lordship. And lastly, the aspirant, transcending that state also, abides in the complete Bliss of Brahman.

By constant meditation when the aspirant comes to know the Supreme Person, then all his bondages are destroyed forever because when the five afflictions viz., ignorance, ego, attraction, aversion and fear from death, are destroyed, then there remains no birth and death for him. He is never subjected to any bondage. He regards even the Brahmaloaka (called here as Third World) as insignificant, abandons all heavenly luxuries and attains the absolutely pure *Kaivalya* and remains satisfied with Brahman alone. He overcomes all desires which are the results of *maya*.

Different sides and stages of liberation are postulated here. Negatively, it is freedom from birth and death. Positively, it is oneness with Isvara so long as there is the manifested world and oneness with Brahman when the manifested world ceases to exist. Again a distinction is made here between *dhyana* or meditation which leads to Lordship in Brhamloaka and *jnana* or wisdom which leads to Liberation.

Mantra 12

*etaḥ jñeyaṃ nityam evātmasaṃsthaṃ nātaḥ paraṃ veditavyaṃ hi kiṃcit /
bhoktā bhogyaṃ preritāraṃ ca matvā sarvaṃ proktaṃ trividhaṃ brahmam etat //1.12 //*

The enjoyer (jīva), the objects of enjoyment and the Ruler (Isvara)-the triad described by the knowers of Brahman-all this is nothing but Brahman. This Brahman alone, which abides eternally within the self, should be known. Beyond It, truly, there is nothing else to be known.

The Supreme Person, Brahman, is seated in one's own heart as the indweller. There is no need to go anywhere else to locate him. One should always make effort to know him as there is no entity greater than this to be known. By knowing him alone everything else is known. He is the primal cause and the base for all. When the man knows that in reality, the *jivatma*, the sense objects and the God who is the inspirer of both are one, he knows everything. There remains nothing to be known. It is Brahman who is described as *Prakriti*, the *Atman* and the *Paramatman*, the substratum, all the three being only the different aspects of Brahman.

MEANS OF KNOWING BRAHMAN

Mantra 13

*vahner yathā yonigatasya mūrtir na dṛśyate naiva ca liṅganāśaḥ /
sa bhūya evendhanayoniḥthyas tadvobhayaṃ vai praṇavena dehe // 1.13 //*

The visible form of fire, while it lies latent in its source, the fire-wood, is not perceived; yet there is no destruction of its subtle form. That very fire can be brought out again by means of persistent rubbing of the wood, its source. In like manner, Atman, which exists in two states, like fire, can be grasped in this very body by means of Om.

The fire present in the fire wood is not visible in its gross form to the naked eye. But this does not mean that there is no fire in its latent or subtle form in the fire wood. This hidden fire comes out or gets manifested when the two pieces of the fire wood are rubbed against each other. Similarly the Atman which exists in two states that is as the Jivatma and as the Paramatma (manifest and unmanifest) is hidden in the heart. This Atman can be seen in its manifested form in this body itself by practicing Pranava Upasana or meditation on the sacred symbol AUM. The Upanishad says that nobody need have any doubt about this. Atman remains unperceived during the state of ignorance but becomes apparent through the repetition of AUM.

The fire produced by rubbing of the wood is compared to Atman, which though invisible during the state of ignorance, exists all the time and is revealed when the body is rubbed as it were by AUM. The words persistent rubbing in the mantra mean meditation on AUM. Through constant meditation the body becomes subdued, the mind stilled and the vision of Atman is revealed.

JAPA OF AUM

Mantra 14

*svadeham araṇiṃ kṛtvā praṇavaṃ cottarāraṇiṃ /
dhyānanirmathanābhyāsād devaṃ paśyen nigūḍhavad // 1.14 //*

By making the body the lower piece of wood and Om the upper piece and through the practice of the friction of meditation, one perceives the luminous Self, hidden like the fire in the wood.

The idea explained in the previous mantra is repeated here. The practice of meditation is compared to the churning of fire wood. Patanjali defines the term 'practice' as the continuous struggle to keep the mind in a state of complete restraint. The practice becomes firmly grounded by long and constant efforts coupled with great love for the end to be obtained. It should be accompanied by *vairagya* or the giving up of attachment for objects either heard of or seen.

Mantra 15-16

*tileṣu tailaṃ dadhanīva sarpir āpaḥ srotaḥsv araṇiṣu cāgniḥ /
evam ātmā ātmani gṛhyate 'sau satyenainaṃ tapasā yo 'nupaśyati // 1.15 //
sarvavyāpinam ātmānaṃ kṣīre sarpir ivārpitam /
ātmavidyātapomūlaṃ tad brahmopaniṣatparaṃ tad brahmopaniṣatparam // 1.16 //*

As oil exists in sesame seeds, butter in milk, water in river-beds and fire in wood, so the Self is realized as existing within the self, when a man looks for It by means of truthfulness and austerity - when he looks for the Self, which pervades all things as butter pervades milk and whose roots are Self-Knowledge and austerity. That is the Brahman taught by the Upanishad; yea, that is the Brahman taught by the Upanishads.

Just as there is oil in the oil seeds, ghee in the curd, underground water in the river-bed and fire in the fire wood, Paramatman is hidden in the hearts of all. The hidden substances come out of their respective storehouses by following the prescribed practices. Similarly, those aspirants who are detached from worldly attachments, who follow the norms of good conduct, practice meditation coupled with restraint can attain the Supreme Lord who is pervading everything as ghee in the milk. That Supreme Lord is Brahman as enunciated in the Upanishad. Prasna Upanishad (1.16) says ‘that stainless world of Brahman belongs to them in whom there is no crookedness, no falsehood, and no deception’.

“The divine in us becomes manifest only when we subject ourselves to certain disciplines. The divine operates in us but it requires effort to make it shine forth. Another Upanishad says that the divine dwells in us as ghee in milk but even as ghee is obtained after the process of churning, the churning of the mind is necessary to reveal the inner splendor. Like butter hidden in milk, the eternal wisdom dwells in each and every object; let there be constant churning by the churning stick of the mind. Bhagavatam (III.9.32) says ‘When men realize me as present in all beings, as latent fire is in wood, from that moment they discard confusion’. As fragrance is in the flower, as butter in milk, as oil in sesame seeds, as gold in the reef of gold, so God dwells in all objects.-Dhyana Bindu Upanishad.5.” - Dr. S.Radhakrishnan.

Iti Svetasvataropaniṣhadi prathamō dhyaayah ||

HERE ENDS THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE SVETASVATARA UPANISHAD

Svetasvatara Upanishad - Chapter 2
Invocation to Savitr (The Sun) and Practice of Yoga
T.N.Sethumadhavan



“*asaavaadityo brahma*” : The Sun is the icon of Brahman

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of this Upanishad brought forward the idea of yoga and knowledge as the effective methods of perceiving the inmost Self hidden in the body. In this chapter prayer and various disciplines of yoga are indicated for God Realization where prayer also is to be oriented towards the nature of Reality as the goal. Before going into the yoga aspect the seven introductory Mantras of this chapter invoke the Sun God, Savitr or Savita.

Of all the phenomenal objects, the sun is regarded with the greatest wonder, admiration and awe. In the Vedas the sun is described as the chief symbol of Brahman - *asaavaadityo brahma*. The Gayatri prayer is directed to the *Purusha* dwelling in the sun. Natural sunlight is the light of the Spirit. (Note: For a detailed exposition on the sun worship the reader may refer to the author's article entitled 'Sun Worship - Suryopnishad' appearing under the category 'Vedas and Upanishads' in this website).

The purport of this chapter is: 'May the Sun first direct our minds to the Supreme Self? Next, may he direct the cosmic forces which control the sense organs to withdraw their powers from external objects? Lastly, may he direct our understanding from worldly thoughts to the Self dwelling within the body so that we may contemplate the Knowledge of Atman?'

THE TEXT

PRAYER TO THE SUN

Mantra 1

*yuñjānaḥ prathamaṃ manas tatvāya savitā dhiyaḥ /
agner jyotir nicāyya pṛthivyā adhy ābharat // 2.1 //*

May the sun, at the commencement of yoga, join our minds and other organs to the Supreme Self so that we may attain the Knowledge of Reality? May He, also,

support the body, the highest material entity, through the powers of the deities who control the senses.

The initial part of the prayer to the Sun starts with an appeal to unite our minds and other organs (five sense organs and five organs of action) with the Supreme self. Among the organs, the mind is the leader which acts as a channel for knowledge and initiates actions based on that knowledge. It functions like a charioteer for controlling the wild horses of sense organs. All the calamities of life are the result of weakness of mind. The prayer is “O Savita, it is your power alone that is expressing through mind and organs and there is no other power besides. So, be gracious, restrain the power from dissipating through mind and organs and centralize that power within my body and organs for Knowledge of the Self.”.

This prayer is in accordance with the nature of reality which will tranquilize the mind of the seeker who will be anchored in Atman and undisturbed meditation will take place. Thus this prayer indicates the seeker’s surrender to the power of all the powers which will be later shown as Brahman itself.

In Vedanta the physical body represents the five elements and the sense organs are presided over by different deities symbolically representing the different aspects of the all pervading Consciousness. Adi Sankara comments “May the Sun take our thoughts away from external things in order to concentrate them on the Supreme Self and transmit to our organ of speech and other organs that power which lightens all objects and which inheres in Agni and other deities who control the various organs. Through the grace of the Sun we shall attain success in yoga”.

The natural power of the mind and organs is to perceive external objects. As long as they perceive the external objects the Self remains beyond our vision. Therefore the prayer is for their control and turning inward so that their energy is not dissipated. The 1st chapter told us that Brahman alone is real and all else is illusory or unreal. The seeker may find obstacles in his way to put this idea in practice in real life conditions. The main obstacle is the outgoing nature of the mind and sense organs which results in total absence of concentration. By praying to Savita, the Sun, the symbol of cosmic energy, the extrovertness of the mind is controlled, redirected inward and gets focused. The Sun is the power of all powers, Brahman with Shakti, the power of all the Devatas.

Mantra 2

*yuktena manasā vayaṁ devasya savituh save /
suvargeyāya śaktyā // 2.2 //*

Having received the blessings of the divine Sun and with minds joined to the Supreme Self, we exert ourselves, to the best of our power, toward meditation, by which we shall attain Heaven (Brahman).

By the blessings of the sun, the mind gets fixed on Atman and the powers of the deities who control the sense organs. Thereby, the body is strengthened. The Supreme Self or Brahman is called heaven here because it alone is the nature of absolute Bliss and in which all other joys are included. With the mind controlled we are under the command of the divine Sun so that we may have strength for attaining heaven or Brahman. Thus the purport of the Mantra is ‘let us, through meditation and by grace of Savita, strive for that Brahmananda which is the real joy itself and whose mere sparks are the worldly joys’.

Mantra 3

*yuktvāya manasā devān suvar yato dhiyā divaṃ /
bṛhajā jyotiḥ kariṣyataḥ savitā prasuvāti tān // 2.3 //*

May the Sun bestow favor upon the senses and the mind by joining them with the Self, so that the senses may be directed toward the Blissful Brahman and may reveal, by means of Knowledge, the mighty and radiant Brahman.

The Sun is prayed for turning our minds and the sense organs inward. Let the organs withdraw from the sense objects and turn towards the Self. Unless we turn our minds inward and re-direct the course of our thoughts from the external world we cannot know our Self. Once the mind and the sense organs become strong and refuse to be swayed by the external attractions and distractions, we become fit for the experience of Brahman. Our prayer is to prepare the body, mind and intellect in such a way that we can attain Self-Knowledge.

We may note that these prayers indicate the stages of spiritual evolution in the seeker. First, it was for stilling the outgoing mind and organs. Now the prayer is that they may not slip-back to the worldly ways again.

Mantra 4

*yuñjate mana uta yuñjate dhiyo viprā viprasya bṛhato vipaścitaḥ /
vi hotrā dadhe vayunāvid eka in mahī devasya savituḥ pariṣṭutiḥ // 2.4 //*

It is the duty of those Brahmanas who fix their minds and senses on the Supreme Self to utter such lofty invocations to the divine Sun, omnipresent, mighty and omniscient. For He, all-witnessing and non-dual, is the dispenser of sacrifices.

After reiterating the necessity for the prayers to make the mind inward, this Mantra makes a reference to the learned sages who have been able to unite their minds and organs with the Self. They offer abundant praise to the Sun as all-pervading and all-knowing, all-witnessing and non-dual, who has granted them their prayers to bestow them Self-Knowledge and unite them with the Self.

Mantra 5

*yuje vāṁ brahma pūrvyaṁ namobhir vi śloka etu pathyeva sūreḥ /
śṛṅvanti viśve amṛtasya putrā ā ye dhāmāni diviyāni tasthuḥ // 2.5 //*

O senses and O deities who favor them! Through salutations I unite myself with the eternal Brahman, who is your source. Let this prayer sung by me, who follow the right path of the Sun, go forth in all directions. May the sons of the Immortal, who occupy celestial positions, hear it!

This is one of the important Mantras of this Upanishad as it refers to the entire human race as 'amritasya putrah' - sons of immortality showcasing all the humans as divine. Swami Vivekananda elaborated this Mantra and its ideas at the Parliament of Religions held in 1893 at Chicago. This Mantra is important for another reason also as it blends the concepts of *bhakti*- devotion and *jnana* - knowledge which is the unique feature of this Upanishad as stated earlier.

This Mantra describes the final stage of evolution of the seeker. This final stage is *Samadhi* and the coming down to the relative plane of existence after Samadhi. Samadhi is the state where the seeker's absorption in Brahman is complete by following the right path of Knowledge.

The seeker salutes the sense organs and their presiding deities by whose grace he is able to concentrate and attain Brahman. It is because of the tranquility of mind and organs he could experience Brahmic Consciousness which would have been impossible had there been no such stillness. (State of *sthitha prajna* in the language of Bhagavad Gita).

With that tranquility the seeker now feels that the whole empirical universe is the manifestation of Brahman. No longer would the mind, senses, the individual and the phenomenal world remain as separate existence. Hence the tranquility of mind and senses is the golden path which the seeker travels from the beginning of *sadhana* till its end. In the beginning stage the seeker realizes the oneness or the immanence of God because of his feeling of *bhakti* and when his mind and senses become completely calm he sees the transcendental aspect of God i.e. goes beyond names and forms through *jnana*. It should not be overlooked that in both these stages tranquility of mind and senses is a fundamental requisite of *Sadhana*.

Now the stage after Samadhi is taken up. At this stage the seeker feels everything in the world as Divine. Hence he says "let this truth be known to all the *amritasya putrah*, all the sons of immortality and spread in the four corners of the world; let this hymn in the form of prayer of what I have realized become intense and spread over the whole world".

Mantra 6

*agnir yatrābhimathyate vāyur yatrādhirudhyate /
somo yatrātiricyate tatra saṁjāyate manaḥ // 2.6 //*

If sacrifices are performed without first propitiating the Sun, then the mind becomes attached to sacrifices in which fire is kindled by the rubbing of the pieces of fire-wood, the oblations are offered to the deity Vayu and the soma juice is drunk excessively.

We have seen in the previous Mantras that the essential attitude in the Sadhana is the control of mind and organs. Right attitude leads to Samadhi or Mukti or Liberation. If this right attitude is lacking then Samsara or life of enjoyment will be the result. “Mind is born when the routine or automatism is broken”.-Dr.S.Radhakrishnan.

Philosophically viewed, if subject-object consciousness (I and Mine attitude) remains in Sadhana the result is Bhoga or enjoyment. If the Sadhana is devoid of subject-object attitude then it leads to Liberation. So the tremendous importance to the attitude of mind is prescribed for Sadhana by condemnation of the attitude based on ignorance.

Another interpretation of this Mantra is as follows. The aspirant should first perform the sacrifices and other rituals prescribed in the Vedas. Then he should practice breath-control and other disciplines of Yoga, cultivate meditation and finally realize the meaning of *Mahavakyas* like ‘Thou art that’ and ‘The Atman is Brahman’ and so on. Thus in the end he will attain Bliss and the Highest Good.

CONCLUDING ADVICE

Mantra 7

*savitṛā prasavena juṣeta brahma pūrvyam /
tatra yoniṃ kṛṇavase nahi te pūrtam akṣipat // 2.7 //*

Serve the eternal Brahman with the blessings of the Sun, the cause of the universe. Be absorbed, through Samadhi, in the eternal Brahman. Thus your work will not bind you.

The sage concludes this topic here emphasizing the importance of performing work with the right attitude as opposed to merely performing work taking the world and the work to be real as such. Right attitude means desirelessness and right perceptions. For example, if one perceives a woman as a woman his reactions will be different from that when he perceives her as a manifestation of the Divine Mother; the one leads to bondage and the other to Moksha. The Mantra suggests that a spiritual seeker should seek the blessings of Savita who is the source of the Universe and concentrate on that eternal Brahman. This will save him from being drawn into worldly activities and entanglements. “As fire, well kindled, reduces wood to ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of Knowledge reduce all works to ashes”. (Bhagavad Gita 4.37)

PRACTICE OF YOGA

Mantra 8

*trirunnataṁ sthāpya samaṁ śarīraṁ hṛdīndriyāṇi manasā saṁniveśya /
brahmoḍupena pratareta vidvān srotāṁsi sarvāṇi bhayāvahāni // 2.8 //*

The wise man should hold his body steady, with the three upper parts erect, turn his senses, with the help of the mind, toward the heart and by means of the raft of Brahman cross the fearful torrents of the world.

In the previous Mantras the seeker was advised about concentration and meditation on Brahman. Now how this can be brought about in practical life through practice of Yoga is taken up. First about the body postures, the teacher says that the body should be held steady and the three parts viz., chest, neck and head should be held erect. Then, by using the mind to control senses, thoughts should be directed toward the heart which is believed to be the abode of Brahman where one feels very vividly the presence of the Spirit. Thereafter, repeating and meditating on the meaning of the sacred syllable AUM (which this Mantra refers to as Brahman - *brahma sabdam pranavam varnayanti* - Sankara) are prescribed. By following this procedure, the unenlightened life of the world sustained by desires, ignorance, actions, which make the person, assume various bodies in the repeated cycle of birth and death and which prolongs the suffering in the phenomenal world can be crossed over.

This is suggested in the Bhagavad Gita also as under:

*samam kaayashirogreevam dhaarayannachalam sthirah
samprekshya naasikaagram swam dishashchaanavalokayan // 6.13 //
prashaantaatmaa vigatabheer brahmachaarivrate sthitah
manah samyamy macchitto yukta aaseeta matparah // 6.14 //*

“Let him firmly hold his body, head and neck erect and still, gazing at the tip of his nose without looking around, serene minded, fearless, firm in the vow of Brahmacharya, having controlled the mind, thinking on Me and balanced, let him sit in yoga, having Me as the Supreme goal”.

The teacher of this Upanishad recommends the disciplines of Patanjali Yoga Sutras for the attainment of Samadhi in which the Knowledge of Brahman is directly realized. Mere intellectual knowledge gives only an indirect perception of Reality. (Note: For a detailed exposition on Patanjali Yoga Sutras, the reader may refer to the author’s articles entitled “Patanjali Yoga Sutras” and “A Note on the Concept of Yoga in Patanjali Yoga Sutras” appearing under the category ‘Yoga And Meditation’ in this website).

Mantra 9

*prāṇān prapīḍyeha sa yuktaceṣṭaḥ kṣīṇe prāṇe nāsikayocchvasīta /
duṣṭāśvayuktam iva vāham enaṁ vidvān mano dhārayetāpramattaḥ // 2.9 //*

The yogi of well regulated endeavors should control the pranas; when they are quieted he should breathe out through the nostrils. Then let him undistractedly restrain his mind, as a charioteer restrains his vicious horses.

Pranayama or the control of the breath by regulating inhaling, exhaling and withholding of breath, which helps to steady the mind in the contemplation of Brahman, is elaborated in this Mantra. Sankara says *pranayama* is not the goal but the means for controlling the mind just as a charioteer is the means for controlling the unruly horses of a chariot.

The Bhagavad Gita 5.27 and 28 say “Shutting out all external contacts and fixing the gaze as though between the eye-brows, equalizing the outgoing and incoming breath moving within the nostrils, with senses, mind and intellect ever controlled, having liberation as his Supreme Goal, free from desire, fear and anger - the sage is verily liberated for ever”.

Mantra 10

*same śucau śarkarāvahnivālukā- vivarjite śabdajalāśrayādibhiḥ /
mano'nukūle na tu cakṣupīḍane guhānivātāśrayaṇe prayojayet // 2.10 //*

Let yoga be practiced within a cave protected from the high wind, or in a place which is level, pure and free from pebbles, gravel and fire, undisturbed by the noise of water or of market-booths and which is delightful to the mind and not offensive to the eye.

The importance of physical surroundings is highlighted here. A congenial place and ambience is always recommended for Yogic Practices in various scriptures. A convenient location without external disturbances caused by noise, fire, human traffic etc., and also pleasing to the eye is recommended to help concentration of mind and still the senses.

A reference may be made to the Bhagavad Gita which says:

*yogee yunjeeta satatamaatmaanam rahasi sthitah
ekaakee yatachittatmaa niraasheeraparigrahaḥ // 6.10 //
shuchau deshe pratishthaapya sthiramaasanamaatmanah
naatyucchritam naatineecham chailaajinakushottaram // 6.11 //
tatraikaagram manah kritvaa yatachittendriyakriyah
upavishyaasane yunjyaadyogamaatmavishuddhaye // 6.12 //*

“A Yogi should always try constantly to concentrate his mind (on the Supreme Self), remaining in solitude, living alone with the mind and body controlled, free from desires and possessions. Having established in a clean spot his firm seat, neither too high nor too low, made of a cloth, a skin and Kusa grass, one over the other. There, having made the mind one-pointed, with actions of the mind and sense controlled, let him, seated on the seat, practice yoga for the purification of the self”.

The main point to keep in mind is to concentrate the mind on Brahman in a calm and peaceful environment.

Mantra 11

*nīhāradhūmārkānalānilānāṁ khadyotavidyutsphaṭkāśaśīnām /
etāni rūpāṇi puraḥsarāṇi brahmaṇy abhivyaktikarāṇi yoge // 2.11 //*

When yoga is practiced, the forms which appear first and which gradually manifest Brahman are those of snow-flakes, smoke, sun, wind, fire, fire-flies, lightning, crystal and the moon.

Certain visions which the seeker experiences as the forerunners to the revelation of Brahman in the path of Yoga have been described. They indicate the progress in the Yogic Path. But one should keep in mind that visions do not occur to all and the crux of the matter is the change of character of the seeker for better whether visions occur or not. The idea is that if one has many visions but no transformation in character those visions are as good as useless. The main thing to observe is whether those visions enhance one's God vision or not.

Mantra 12

*pṛthvyaptejo'nilakhe samutthite pañcātmake yogaguṇe pravṛtte /
na tasya rogo na jarā na mṛtyuḥ prāptasya yogāgnimayaṁ śarīram // 2.12 //*

When earth, water fire, air and akasa arise, that is to say, when the five attributes of the elements, mentioned in the books on yoga, become manifest then the yogi's body becomes purified by the fire of yoga and he is free from illness, old age and death.

In this Mantra and the next the emanation of subtle powers of the sense organs due to the gross personality becoming subtle by the practice of Yoga are being described. Each of the subtle elements is endowed with its unique characteristic like earth with smell, water with taste, fire with form, air with touch and *akasa* (space) with sound. Through concentration the Yogi can experience these attributes. Thus by concentrating on the tip of the nose he enjoys a heavenly fragrance; by concentrating on the tip of the tongue; a heavenly flavor; on the middle of the tongue, a heavenly touch; on the root of the tongue, a heavenly sound. By means of these perceptions the whole personality becomes subtle and the mind becomes steady, for it is no longer attracted by outward objects. This is referred to as attaining *siddhi* in Patanjali Yoga Sutras. But the seeker should not become arrogant with attaining these powers as his final goal is realizing Brahman.

Mantra 13

*laghutvam ārogyam alolupatvaṁ varṇaprasādaḥ svarasauśṭhavaṁ ca /
gandhaḥ śubho mūtrapurīṣam alpam yogapravṛttiṁ prathamāṁ vadanti // 2.13 //*

The precursors of perfection in yoga, they say, are lightness and healthiness of the body, absence of desire, clear complexion, and pleasantness of voice, sweet odor and slight excretions.

The previous Mantra told us that Pranayama awakens the subtle powers in the seeker. This Mantra gives the details about the effect of such awakening on the body such as lightness, clear complexion etc. But it should always be noted that these are only initial stages and Pranayama should not be considered as the final objective. It is only a purification process for the final goal of concentration and self-absorption in Brahman.

VISION OF GOD

Mantra 14

*yathaiva bimbaṃ mṛdayopalīptaṃ tejomayaṃ bhrājate tat sudhāntam /
tad vātmataṭṭvaṃ prasamīkṣya dehī ekaḥ kṛtārtho bhavate vītaśokaḥ // 2.14 //*

As gold covered by earth shines bright after it has been purified, so also the yogi, realizing the truth of Atman, becomes one with the non-dual Atman, attains the goal and is free from grief.

The seeker's attainment of the state of Samadhi is described in this Mantra. A gold plate covered with dust regains its original state of brightness and shining when the dust gathered on it is rubbed out. So too, from the state of ignorance when the impurity of subject-object relationship is removed the real nature of Pure Consciousness or Atman shines forth and the seeker attains the non-dual perception of universal unity. Avidya is the dirt, Sadhana is Tapas and Pranayama is the means to achieve this goal. The seeker then becomes free from all sorrows of the world of duality.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE DESTROYS GRIEF

Mantra 15

*yad ātmatattvena tu brahmatattvaṃ dīpopameneha yuktaḥ prapaśyēt /
ajaṃ dhruvaṃ sarvatattvair viśuddhaṃ jñātvā devaṃ mucyate sarvapāśaiḥ // 2.15 //*

And when the yogi beholds the real nature of Brahman, through the Knowledge of the Self, radiant as a lamp, then, having known the unborn and immutable Lord, who is untouched by ignorance and its effects, he is freed from all fetters.

The question what happens when the seeker is absolutely purified by knowledge is answered in this Mantra. The answer is that he simultaneously realizes his identity with Brahman just like a lamp becomes luminous when it is lit. As the luminosity is the very nature of the lamp which it regains when it is lighted so also the seeker identifies himself with Brahman and its power the moment he acquires Self-Realization. The point to note is that the identity of Sadhaka with Brahman is not something which is attained but it is their very nature, an eternal fact, which is cognized only in Samadhi. The realization is

that the seeker was never different from Brahman or the thing that is sought just as the lamp and its luminosity were never different from each other and that there was never a Sadhaka really speaking. Thus Shuddha Atma and Shuddha Mind are one and the same.

IMMANANENCE OF GOD

Mantra 16

*eṣa ha devaḥ pradiśo 'nu sarvāḥ pūrvo ha jātaḥ sa u garbhe antaḥ /
sa eva jātaḥ sa janīṣyamānaḥ pratyañ janās tiṣṭhati sarvatomukhaḥ // 2.16 //*

He indeed, the Lord, who pervades all regions, was the first to be born and it is He who dwells in the womb of the universe. It is He, again, who is born as a child and He will be born in the future, He stands behind all persons and His face is everywhere.

On attaining Self-Knowledge the seeker starts looking at the world through a different looking-glass. Earlier he was feeling 'I am', 'My body' 'Your house' etc., and now he feels that all relative things of the world as that very Brahman itself. He sees the gross world of multiplicities as the manifestation of Brahman and that there is no difference between them - he concludes 'Verily all this is Brahman', "*sarvam khalu idam brahma*". Everything that is perceived in human consciousness is seen as the manifestation of Brahman. This truth becomes a fact in the Sadhaka's life. This is called '*samyakdarshana*'.

CONCLUSION

Mantra 17

*yo devo agnau yo apsu yo viśvaṁ bhuvanam āviveśa /
ya osadhīṣu yo vanaspatīṣu tasmai devāya namo namaḥ // 2.17 //*

The Self-luminous Lord, who is fire, who is in water, who has entered into the whole world, who is in plants, who is in trees - to that Lord let there be adoration! Yea, let there be adoration!

So far the seeker was adoring the Lord as an auxiliary aid to Sadhana and now he adores the Lord as an expression of devotion or *bhakti* wherein no dualistic salutation is meant but a salutation in which the person who salutes, the saluted and the salutation all three are the one Brahman. Such a realized person points out that the same God who is in the fire, water and who pervades the whole world is in the plants as well as in big trees, and everywhere. He salutes such a God again and again indicating that there is nothing other than God anywhere including himself and his salutations. "Not I, but Thou and Thou alone". This is Advaita and Bhakti. The whole Sadhana is a blend of Bhakti and Jnana.

Iti Svetasvataraopanishadi dvitiyo 'dhyayah ||
HERE ENDS THE SECOND CHAPTER OF THE SVETASVATARA UPANISHAD

Svetasvatara Upanishad - Chapter 3

The Highest Reality

T.N.Sethumadhavan

INTRODUCTION

Just as we plan our journey to reach our destination, the Svetasvatara Upanishad has designed a well laid out step by step plan for the Sadhakas to reach the destination of Self-Realization.

In the 1st chapter, the seekers who were already in the know of the Vedas started discussing among themselves questions such as who is that Brahman - the root cause of this world, from what have we been born, due to what we live, under whose command we undergo pain and pleasure and from what set rules are we being governed?

They discovered the creative power, belonging to the Lord Himself or Brahman was the root cause for the universe and concluded that this Brahman has to be known and beyond which there is nothing to be known.

The 2nd chapter, dealt with the means of knowing Brahman It started with a prayer to the Sun God and elaborated on the practice of yoga to have the vision of God. It was pointed out that the yogi, who realizes the truth of Atman, becomes one with the non-dual Atman and attains the goal and is free from grief. This chapter concluded with an appeal to adore this Self-luminous Lord who pervades the whole world.

The 3rd and subsequent chapters of this Upanishad deal with the nature and different aspects of the Lord, prayers and eulogies to Him and the state of a seeker on knowing Him.

The unique feature of the Svetasvatara Upanishad is that it is a mixture of *Jnana* and *Bhakti*, knowledge and devotion. In other Upanishads the sacred word AUM has been stated as the symbol of Brahman while here Rudra or Siva is equated with Brahman, the Ultimate. This is very significant as Siva indeed is the expression of *Ananda*, Bliss for whom a devotional outpouring has been made in the Svetasvatara Upanishad in His aspect as *Ananda (satyam, sivam, sundaram)* mixed with the intricacies of Advaita. Another feature of these chapters of the Upanishad is that many Mantras or their wordings or their meanings are to be found in other popular devotional works like *Rudra Prasna*, *Purusha Sooktam* and *Vishnu Sahasranaam* besides the *Bhagavad Gita*.

THE TEXT

BRAHMAN AS ISVARA

Mantra 1

*ya eko jālavān īśata īśanībhiḥ sarvāṃl lokān īśata īśanībhiḥ /
ya evaika udbhave saṃbhava ca ya etad vidur amṛtās te bhavanti // 3.1 //*

The one who spreads the net, who rules alone by His powers, who rules all the worlds by His powers, who is one and the same at the time of creation and dissolution of the worlds - they who know Him become immortal.

In this chapter, the Supreme Self is represented as the Isa or Rudra who rules by His own creative powers of Maya. These words describe the indefinable Brahman. Brahman always exists as one who is free from the slightest duality. Indeed, there is nothing but Brahman at any time. But Brahman appears as many.

When we understand Brahman as one without any attributes (*upadhi*) then it is Nirguna Brahman, the Impersonal Absolute, the Unmanifest, which is free from Maya, the creative power. When we consider the same Brahman as with attributes, then it becomes Saguna Brahman or Isvara, the Manifest, the Personal God who is connected with Maya which is under His perfect control.

This Mantra refers to Maya as *jala* which means a net and creation of the universe as casting of the net (*Maya jaal*). It is through Maya, the creative power of Brahman, the universe is projected, sustained and dissolved and hence Brahman appears as many.

As concentration on the Absolute is difficult the one Impersonal Absolute becomes the Personal God, Isvara, for the purposes of devotion and meditation of the devotees. Brahman is nirguna, without any qualities or traits, but Isvara is saguna, possessing innumerable qualities. So although we cannot conceive of Brahman or speak of it, we can say a great deal about Isvara, even though we cannot encompass His total being.

Isvara controls and guides the evolution of all creation through His divine power of Maya. All that is “done” is done by Him in conjunction with Maya, for Brahman never acts. Isvara, as an emanation of Brahman, arises as the first step in creation, and remains as the last step at the time of dissolution. Then He merges into Brahman which alone remains.

The Mantra says that those who come to know Him in essence i.e., who realize that individual Self is non-different from the Universal Self, Brahman, become one with Brahman. Therefore it is a wrong belief that meditation on Saguna Brahman has a different result than meditation on Nirguna Brahman. This is also explained in the Bhagavad Gita (12.1-8).

Mantra 2

*eko hi rudro na dvitīyāya tasthe ya imāṁl lokān īsata īsanībhiḥ /
pratyañjanās tiṣṭhati saṁcukocāntakāle saṁsṛjya viśvā bhuvanāni gopāḥ // 3.2 //*

Rudra is truly one; for the knowers of Brahman do not admit the existence of a second, He alone rules all the worlds by His powers. He dwells as the inner Self of every living being. After having created all the worlds, He, their Protector, takes them back into Himself at the end of time.

In this Mantra, the Highest Reality, Brahman is identified with Rudra who is assigned the three functions of creation, protection or maintenance and dissolution of the universe. The epithet Rudra means the destroyer of all that is false or evil, ignorance and their effects, sorrow and suffering and who confers wisdom and bliss. In the Rig Veda Rudra is the personification of Brahman in its destructive aspect. In the later portion of the Veda, Rudra is described as Siva, the auspicious, as Mahadeva, the great God. Siva has two aspects viz., *Rudra* meaning fierce and *Saumya* meaning the Good. The Upanishad speaks about Brahman as Rudra because its teaching lays stress on the destruction of false or ego, which obstructs spiritual progress.

Rudra after creating universe with his own power, *Maya*, takes them back unto himself at the end of time or cosmic *pralaya* or dissolution. Rudra is the *antaryamin*, the indweller of all beings. He lives as *pratyagatma* -inward or individual soul, as the mirror image of the Self which pervades the entire universe (*rupam rupam pratirupo babhuva*). He witnesses silently all the actions and thoughts of men and dispenses the fruits of their actions.

RUDRA IS DESCRIBED IN HIS UNIVERSAL FORMS

Mantra 3

*viśvataścakṣur uta viśvatomukho viśvatobāhur uta viśvataspāt /
saṁ bāhubhyāṁ dhamati saṁ patatrair dyāvābhūmī janayan deva ekaḥ // 3.3 //*

His eyes are everywhere, His faces everywhere, His arms everywhere, everywhere His feet. He it is who endows men with arms, birds with feet and wings and men likewise with feet. Having produced heaven and earth, He remains as their non-dual manifestor.

We find this idea in the Bhagavad Gita also as under:

*sarvataḥ paanipaadam tat sarvato 'kshishiromukham
sarvataḥ shrutimalloke sarvamaavritya tishtathi // 13.14 //*

With hands and feet everywhere, with eyes, heads and mouths everywhere, with ears everywhere he exists in the world, enveloping all.

The functioning of all the parts of the body in every human being is based on the Life Principle. The functions of perception, feeling and thinking work out only so long as there is life in the body. A person is said to be alive when the Principle of Consciousness rules over his functioning through his various instruments of action and knowledge. (This is not to be confused with the medical theory stating that one can be alive despite losing consciousness as in the case of brain death). This Consciousness behind every living being that which is common to all, is *Paramatman*, *Para Brahman*, the Supreme Self, which this Mantra refers to as the One God.

Hands and feet etc everywhere suggest the Principle of Consciousness pervading the entire universe. As the one subject of all objects of experience, He is said to envelop all and have hands and feet, ears and eyes everywhere. In the absence of the seeing light of consciousness there cannot be any experience at all.

The ignorant may see the diverse objects of the universe but wise will see in all of them only one reality, Brahman because for him names and forms, independent of Brahman, are all unreal. Isvara is Consciousness Itself and in this capacity of omniscient omnipresence He interacts with all beings.

PRAYERS TO RUDRA

Mantra 4

*yo devānāṃ prabhavaś codbhavaś ca viśvādhipo rudro maharṣiḥ /
hiraṇyagarbhaṃ janayāmāsa pūrvaṃ sa no buddhyā śubhayā saṃyunaktu // 3.4 //*

He, the omniscient Rudra, the creator of the gods and the bestower of their powers, the support of the universe, He who, in the beginning, gave birth to Hiranyagarbha- may He endow us with clear intellect!

(This Mantra is repeated in Chapter 4.12)

This is a prayer to Rudra for obtaining a pure, auspicious and subtle intellect so that one can realize Brahman. Rudra is described as *maharshi*- the omniscient seer, the creator of lesser cosmic powers such as Agni, Vayu etc., the sustainer of the universe and the creator of *hiranyagarbha* - Cosmic seed at the beginning of creation (Brahman).

These ideas and words are echoed in the Bhagavad Gita as under.

*etadyoneeni bhootaani sarvaaneetyupadhaaraya
aham kritsnasya jagatah prabhavah pralayastathaa // 7.6 //*

Know these two - My higher and lower natures - form the womb of all beings. Therefore, I am the origin and dissolution of the whole Universe.

*gatirbhartaa prabhuh saakshee nivaasah sharanam suhrit
prabhavah pralayah sthaanam nidhaanam beejamavyayam // 9.18 //*

I am the Goal, the Supporter, the Lord, the Witness, the Abode, the Shelter, the Friend, the Origin, the Dissolution, the Foundation, the Treasure-house and the Seed which is imperishable.

*aham sarvasya prabhavo mattah sarvam pravartate
iti matwaa bhajante maam budhaa bhaavasamanvitaah // 10.8 //*

I am the origin of all, from Me everything evolves, understanding thus, the wise worship Me with all their heart.

Mantra 5

*yā te rudra śivā tanūr aghorāpāpakāśinī /
tayā nas tanuvā śaṁtamayā giriśantābhicākaśīhi // 3.5 //*

O Rudra, Your body which is auspicious, unterrifying, showing no evil - with that most benign body, O Dweller in the mountains, look upon us (manifest yourself) .

Siva is having two forms viz., one that is calm or benign (*santa*) and the other that is terrific (*ghora*). The prayer is for bringing the highest good or revealing only what is good with His kind glance, pure form without slightest trace of impurity and pleasing.

Mantra 6

*yām iṣuṁ giriśanta haste bibharṣy astave /
śivāṁ giritra tāṁ kuru mā hiṁsīḥ puruṣaṁ jagat // 3.6 //*

O Dweller in the mountains and Bestower of happiness, make benign that arrow which you hold in your hand ready to shoot, O Protector of the mountain! Do not injure man or other than human!

The wordings and ideas of Mantras 5 and 6 above are also occurring in the Anuvaka 1 of Rudra Prasna (Namakam). These are prayers to the Lord to withdraw His terrible form and shower upon the world His blessings.(Note: For a detailed exposition on Rudra Prasna the reader may refer to the author's article entitled "Sri Rudra Prasna or Satarudriya -A Flag Post of Universality And Inclusiveness of Hinduism " appearing under the category 'Vedas and Upanishads' in this website).

KNOWLEDGE OF THE SUPREME AS THE WAY TO ETERNAL LIFE

Mantra 7

*tataḥ paraṁ brahma paraṁ bhantaṁ yathānikāyaṁ sarvabhūteṣu gūḍhaṁ /
viśvasyaikaṁ pariveṣṭitāram īsaṁ taṁ jñātvāmṛtā bhavanti // 3.7 //*

The Supreme Lord is higher than Virat, beyond Hiranyagarbha. He is vast and is hidden in the bodies of all living beings. By knowing Him, who alone pervades the universe, men become immortal.

The Supreme Being is everywhere, pervading the entire world and existing in all beings. But He is also beyond the phenomenal world. *Virat* is the totality of physical bodies in the universe. Brahman through his Maya identifies himself with Virat. Hiranyagarbha is

the cosmic seed at the beginning of creation which is also called the totality of the mind of the universe and Brahman is identified as beyond this.

Brahman, the Pure Consciousness, is stated to be hiding behind the physical bodies of living beings just as oil is hidden in the oil seeds and fire in the fire-wood. Through self-control, discrimination and meditation one realizes Brahman as one's own inner Self and attains Liberation. He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman, the Immortal - *barhma veda brhamaiva bhavati*.

The next Mantra says that a seeker, by realizing his identity with the non-dual Brahman attains the Highest Good.

Mantra 8

*vedāham etaṃ puruṣaṃ mahāntam ādityavarṇaṃ tamasaḥ parastāt /
tam eva viditvāti mṛtyum eti nānyaḥ panthā vidyate 'yanāya // 3.8 //*

I know the great Purusha, who is luminous, like the sun and beyond darkness. Only by knowing Him does one pass over death; there is no other way to the Supreme Goal.

This Mantra is very popular in the daily Vedic chanting of *Purusha Suktam*. It occurs in many scriptures. The *Purusha Suktam* is an important part of the *Rig-veda* (10.7.90.1-16). It also appears in the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* (3.12,13), the *Vajasaneyi Samhita* (31.1-6), the *Sama-veda Samhita* (6.4), and the *Atharva-veda Samhita* (19.6).

An explanation of parts of it can be found in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, the *Taittiriya Brahmana*, besides the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*. The contents of the *Suktam* have also been reflected and elaborated in the *Bhagavata Purana* (2.5.35 to 2.6.1-29) and in the *Mahabharata* (Mokshadharma Parva 351 and 352).

The Upanishadic Mantra under our study occurs in the *Purusha Suktam* twice with slight modifications from each other. One of it reads as under:

*vedahametam purusham mahantam adityavarnam tamasah parastat
tamevam vidvan amrita iha bhavati nanyah pantha vidyate'yanaya (20)*

"I have known that great Purusha (Supreme Being) who is brilliant like the sun and who is beyond all darkness. One who knows Him thus becomes immortal (even) here. There is no other path for liberation than this"

Brahman is referred to here as Purusha because He dwells in the body (*pura*) or because He fills the universe (*purnam*). The sage of the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* says with all emphasis at his command, that knowledge of Brahman, the Absolute, who is described as *adityavarnam* - bright, effulgent, shining like the sun, alone can destroy the darkness of ignorance (*tamasah parastat*) and free men from the round of births and deaths (*tameva viditva'timrtyumeti*). There is no other way of escape (*nānyah panthā vidyate 'yanāya*)

i.e., no attainment in the phenomenal world can be eternal. There is no other path to liberation than the realization that one's inmost Self is the birthless and deathless Brahman which constitutes immortality.

Mantra 9

*yasmāt paraṃ nāparam asti kiṃcid yasmān nāṃyo na jyāyo 'sti kiṃcit /
vīkṣa iva stabdho divi tiṣṭhaty ekas tenedaṃ pūrṇaṃ puruṣeṇa sarvam // 3.9 //*

The whole universe is filled by the Purusha, to whom there is nothing superior, from whom there is nothing different, than whom there is nothing either smaller or greater; who stands alone, motionless as a tree, established in His own glory.

The whole world is filled with Purusha (Brahman). Hence there cannot be any question of somebody being superior or inferior to Purusha or something being different from Purusha or something being bigger or smaller than Purusha. Thus Brahman stands alone by Himself as a tree, established in His own glory.

Brahman pervades the universe as gold pervades an ornament. He is the only substance in the universe while the names and forms are all created by Maya. Maya creates the ideas of superiority, inferiority, difference etc., which belong to the realm of phenomenal world.

Mantra 10

*tato yad uttarataraṃ tadarūpam anāMayam /
ya etad vidur amṛtās te bhavanti athetare duḥkham evāpiyanti // 3.10 //*

That which is farthest from this world is without form and without affliction They who know It become immortal; but others, indeed, suffer pain.

The knowledge that Brahman alone, through Maya, appears as both the Creator and the world, bestows immortality upon the seeker. Again, knowledge by itself is not of much value unless it is followed by personal experience of that truth. We must experience that we are one with Brahman. The whole focus is on this realization. One experiences sorrow in the phenomenal world without such knowledge and realization.

COSMIC PERSON

Mantra 11

*sarvānanaśirogrīvaḥ sarvabhūtaguhāśayaḥ /
sarvavyāpī sa bhagavāṃs tasmāt sarvagataḥ śivaḥ // 3.11 //*

All faces are His faces; all heads, His heads; all necks, His necks. He dwells in the hearts of all beings. He is the all-pervading Bhagavan. Therefore He is the omnipresent and benign Lord.

The 1st Mantra of Purusha Suktam says:

*Om sahasra shirsha purushaha sahasrakshas sahasrapat |
sa bhumim vishvato vritva atyatishthad dhashangulam ||*

The Purusha (the Supreme Being) has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet. He has enveloped this world from all sides and has (even) transcended it by ten fingers of breadth.

The implication of the above statements is that when we see multiplicity like you and me, mine and yours, he and she and so on, we develop relationships based on differences such as love and hatred, likes and dislikes. But when we are able to go beyond these diversities and perceive all as the one unitary whole, we automatically love all and hatred cannot appear on the scene.

This Mantra calls the Supreme Being as Bhagavan. The word Bhagavan means He who is the embodiment of all the six divine attributes viz., *aisvarya* - total power, *virya* - strength, *yasa* - fame, *sri* - wealth, *jnana* - wisdom and *vairagya* - dispassion.

All faces, heads, and necks, belong to the Lord only as He is the Virat Purusha, the Universal Person. He fills the entire universe. He is the inner personality of all, *antaryamin*. So He guides the senses, mind and intellect and actions of all. This Bhagavan, this omnipresent Siva, is the embodiment of all that is good. That is his real nature.

The previous Mantra described Brahman as transcendental (*nirguna*) and this Mantra describes the same Brahman as Personal God (*saguna*). This is the uniqueness of this Upanishad where we find the synthesis of the ideas of Personal God and Impersonal Absolute.

Mantra 12

*mahān prabhur vai puruṣaḥ sattvasyaiṣa pravartakaḥ /
sunirmalām imāṃ prāptim īśāno jyotir avyayaḥ // 3.12 //*

He, indeed, is the great Purusha, all pervasive and all-powerful. He also inspires the mind to attain the state of purity. He is the Supreme Lord, self-luminous and imperishable.

This Mantra further eulogizes the Purusha. It says Siva is

Mahan - all pervasive, *prabhuh* - all powerful, *vai purusah* - certainly the Great Being, *sunirmalam* - pure, free from any trace of ignorance, *imam praptim* - this state, *sattvasya*

- the mind, *pravartakah* - inspires to attain, *isnah* - this Supreme Lord, *jyoti* - self - luminous, *avyayah* - imperishable.

The Supreme Being directs our intellect and inspires us to attain the state of pure spiritual enlightenment, the transcendental experience which is imperishable, non-decaying.

Mantra 13

*aṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo 'ntarātmā sadā janānāṃ hṛdaye saṃmiviṣṭaḥ /
hṛdā manīṣā manasābhikṣpto ya etad vidur amṛtās te bhavanti // 3.13 //*

The Purusha, no bigger than a thumb, is the inner Self, ever seated in the heart of man. He is known by the mind, which controls knowledge and is perceived in the heart. They who know Him become immortal.

In many places we find that the Self has been described as *angushtamatrah*, the size of a thumb or as *dhashangulam*, ten fingers of breadth. We should not take these terms too literally because the Self is not a physical entity so that we can measure it or describe it as big or small. It means that it is just immeasurable or infinite as Sankara puts it. Such a Self is *antaryamin*, resides inside everybody, commonly stated as inside the hearts and hence who can be perceived only by the mind alone. When such knowledge of the Self arises, when such transcendental experience takes place, we are free, become immortal. We have to keep in mind that we are always free but only we are not aware of it. Realization is a matter of a change in our consciousness about what we perceive.

Mantra 14

*sahasraśīrṣā puruṣaḥ sahasrākṣaḥ sahasrapāt /
sa bhūmiṃ viśvato vṛtvā atyatiṣṭhad daśāṅgulam // 3.14 //*

The Purusha with a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet, compasses the earth on all sides and extends beyond it by ten fingers' breadth.

This Mantra is the same as in the Purusha Suktam which we have already discussed under Mantra 11 above.

Mantra 15

*puruṣa evedaṃ sarvaṃ yad bhūtaṃ yac ca bhavyam /
utāmrtatvasyeśāno yad annenātirohati // 3.15 //*

The Purusha alone is all this-what has been and what will be. He is also the Lord of Immortality and of whatever grows by food.

Purusha Suktam (2nd Mantra) also has this Mantra as follows.

*purusha evedagam sarvam yadbhutam yaccha bhavyam |
utamritatva syeshanaha yadannenatirohati ||*

All this is verily the Purusha. All that which existed in the past or will come into being in the future (is also the Purusha). Also, he is the Lord of immortality. That which grows profusely by food (is also the Purusha).

The Purusha is the Lord of the Past, Present and future. He is the Lord of Immortality and also the bestower of immortality because unlike the mortals He is beyond the concept of time. This mastery or lordship over time is what is depicted as Viswarupa Darshana in the 11th Chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. There is no such thing as absolute time; the concept of time itself is relative which is proven by the fact that in common parlance the unit of time is taken to be 'the second' not as 'the first'. Hence the sages say the Reality, Brahman is beyond time. He is timeless, immortal - *amrita*.

Mantra 16

*sarvataḥpāṇipādām tat sarvato'kṣīromukham /
sarvataḥśrutimal loke sarvam āvṛtya tiṣṭhati // 3.16 //*

16 His hands and feet are everywhere; His eyes, heads and faces are everywhere; His ears are everywhere; He exists compassing all.

This Mantra occurs in the Bhagavad Gita (13.14) also which we have studied under Mantra 3 above in this section of the Upanishad. The idea is that Brahman is everywhere and He fills everything. He is beyond time, space and causality.

Mantra 17

*sarvendriyaguṇābhāsam sarvendriyavivarjitam /
sarvasya prabhum īśānam sarvasya śaraṇam suhṛt // 3.17 //*

Himself devoid of senses, He shines through the functions of the senses. He is the capable ruler of all; He is the refuge of all. He is great.

The 1st line of this Mantra occurs in the Bhagavad Gita (13.15) which is quoted below.

*sarvendriyagunaabhaasam sarvendriyavivarjitam
asaktam sarvabhricchaiva nirgunam gunabhoktru cha // 13.15 //*

Shining by the functions of all the senses, yet without the senses, unattached, yet supporting all, devoid of qualities, yet their experiencer.

The Self in us functioning through the sense organs looks as though It possesses all sense organs. But the sense organs decay and perish while the Consciousness which functions through them and which provides each of them with its own individual faculty is Eternal

and Changeless just as electricity is not the light in the bulb and yet when it functions through the bulb it looks as if it were light.

The relationship of refuge or support of all can be explained as follows. Waves are not the ocean but the ocean supports all the waves in as much as there can be no waves without the ocean. Cotton is in the cloth but cloth is not the cotton. But it is the cotton in the cloth that supports the cloth. Similarly the world of plurality is not the Consciousness but it is the Consciousness that supports the world of multiplicities.

The influences which govern the human minds are called Gunas or Qualities. They are Sattwa (Unactivity), Rajas (Activity) and Tamas (Inactivity). A live mind alone can experience these influences. But Life is the illuminator of these influences. Thus Consciousness conditioned by the mind is Jiva, the Ego and that is the experiencer of the Gunas. Unconditioned by the mind, Consciousness in itself is 'Its own nature', 'It is the Absolute'.

Thus the Self, the Absolute, is beyond sense organs, mind and intellect, detached from everything and without any relation to the various Gunas. But the same Self conditioned by the sense organs looks as though It possess all these sense organs, It is the sustainer of them all and It is the experiencer of all the Gunas.

Hence this Mantra describes the Self as a capable Ruler of all and that He is great.

Mantra 18

*navadvāre pure dehī haṁso lelāyate bahiḥ/
vaśī sarvasya lokasya sthāvarasya carasya ca // 3.18 //*

The Swan, the ruler of the whole world, of all that is moving and all that is motionless, becomes the embodied self and dwelling in the city of nine gates, flies outward.

The Bhagavad Gita says as under (5.13)

*sarvakarmaani manasaa sannyasyaaste sukham vashee
navadwaare pure dehee naiva kurvan na kaarayan // 5.13 //*

Mentally renouncing all actions and fully subduing his senses, the embodied soul dwells happily in the city of nine-gates, neither acting nor causing others (body and the senses) to act.

This Mantra refers to the Supreme Self as *Hamsa*, the swan, the destroyer of ignorance. Pervading the universe The Lord appears or becomes the embodied self, the Jiva, and yet He is not affected by the body or other objects in the world just as a swan is not affected by the water in which it swims.

Navadvarepure, the City of nine gates, means the body which has nine apertures in its physical form viz. two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, one mouth, the genital and the excretory outlet without which life cannot be sustained. The Self dwelling within this physical structure flies outward that is to say He activates the instruments of action and perception governing the activities of life though by itself it does not perform any actions. The Self observes the activities around him unaffected, unattached and hence he neither acts nor causes others to act.

Mantra 19

*apāñipādo javano grahītā paśyaty acakṣuḥ sa śṛṇoty akarṇaḥ /
sa vetti vedyaṃ na ca tasyāsti vettā tam āhur agryaṃ puruṣaṃ mahāntam // 3.19 //*

Grasping without hands, moving without feet, It sees without eyes, It hears without ears. It knows what is to be known, but no one knows It. They call It the First, the Great, the Full.

The Lord sees, hears, walks about, and tastes without senses because He enlivens or is the Consciousness which activates the instruments of action and perception. He is omnipotent and does not depend upon anything else. Hence He is called the First Person, the great and ultimate cause of this universe (*agryam purusham mahāntam*).

Mantra 20

*aṅor aṅīyān mahato mahīyān ātmā guhāyāṃ nihito 'sya jantoḥ /
tam akratuṃ paśyati vītaśoko dhātuprasādān mahimānam īśam // 3.20 //*

The Self, smaller than the small, greater than the great, is hidden in the hearts of creatures. The wise, by the grace of the Creator, behold the Lord, majestic and desireless and become free from grief.

This whole Mantra occurs in the Kathopanishad also (2.20) where the reference is to Atman instead of Isam.

The Atman is stated to be smaller than a grain of sand and greater than the entire universe. It is the inmost essence of all things that exist, large or small. It gives all things a nature of reality. But by itself it is free from all limitations. The wise ones realize their oneness with the Supreme Self and become free from grief. The Absolute is majestic and desireless because it is free from all *upadhis*, limitations.

Mantra 21

*vedāham etam ajaraṃ purāṇaṃ sarvātmānaṃ sarvagataṃ vibhutvāt /
janmanirodhaṃ pravadanti yasya brahmavādino hi pravadanti nityam // 3.21 //*

I know this undecaying, primeval One, the Self of all things, which exists everywhere, being all-pervading and which the wise declare to be free from birth. The teachers of Brahman, indeed, speak of It as eternal.

This chapter is concluded with the statement by the *brahmavādin*, the teachers of Brahman, paying a bouquet of flowery tributes to the Supreme Purusha as: *Ajaram* - never aging, *Purānam*-eternal, *Sarvātmānam* - the Self of all, *Sarvagatam* - everywhere and in every being, *Vibhutvāt* - all pervasive, and *Janmanirodham* - without birth and death and chanting that the Self is *nityam* - eternal.

CONCLUSION

This chapter makes out that the Impersonal and the Personal *Brahman* and *Isvara* respectively are not two different entities but the same in two aspects.

Iti Svetasvatropanishadi tritīyo'dhyayah ||

HERE ENDS THE THIRD CHAPTER OF THE SVETASVATARA UPANISHAD

Svetasvatara Upanishad - Chapter 4
The One God of the Manifold World
T.N.Sethumadhavan

INTRODUCTION

Prayers to The Lord started in the previous chapter are continued here. The entire Svetasvatara Upanishad is a hymn of adoration in praise of The Supreme, the *Mahesvara*. It is because of this it is known as the Upanishad surcharged with a feeling of devotion. It is a garland of songs worshipping the Great Being, the Infinite Purusha who is both existent and non-existent.

THE TEXT

THE ONE AND THE MANY

Mantra 1

*ya eko 'varṇo bahudhā śaktiyogād varṇān anekān nihitārtho dadhāti /
vi caiti cānte viśvam ādau sa devaḥ sa no buddhyā śubhayā saṁyunaktu // 4.1 //*

He, the One and Undifferentiated, who by the manifold application of His powers produces, in the beginning, different objects for a hidden purpose and, in the end, withdraws the universe into Himself, is indeed the self-luminous. May He endow us with clear intellect!

The world was inactive and unmanifest before creation. The *Paramatman* in His formless aspect is devoid of form and color, yet, in the beginning of creation for some unknown reasons assumes various forms and colors through His various powers (of *maya*) which are non-different from Him. In the end, this universe of all forms and colors merge in Him. He initiates this cycle of creation, maintenance and dissolution without any selfish purpose but for the ultimate good of the Jivas (*agrhita prayojanah, svaartha nirapekshah*). That Supreme Lord is really one without the second. Apart from Him, there is nothing. May that Lord of self-luminosity, bestow auspicious intellect upon us? The purpose of creation is stated to be hidden meaning that we, the finite, cannot understand the reasons behind the creation by The Lord, The Infinite. It is His *Lila*.

In the above Mantra, Brahman is described as One in whom both the beginning and the end find their abode. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita :

*avyaktaadeeni bhootani vyaktamadhyaani bhaarata
avyakta nidhanaanyeva tatra kaa paridevanaa // 2.28 //*

Beings are unmanifest in their beginning, manifest in their middle state and unmanifest again in their end O,Arjuna. What is there to grieve about?

The gist of this Mantra is that the beginning and the end is unmanifest and only the middle state represents the manifest. The basic nature of things is the Unmanifest and the manifest is only a condition which appears for the time being in between the two states of

the unmanifest. The grace and modesty of the manifest lies in not clinging to its existence and where it makes no effort to prolong its continuity. The manifest is only a passage from the unmanifest to the unmanifest.. In the passage one must move on and not settle down. Life is a bridge, pass over it, but do not build upon it. The inspiring teaching of this Upanishad is “The beginning and the end reside in Brahman, the world is only a passing phase of the Manifest”.

PRAYERS TO HIM AS PHYSICAL OBJECTS

Mantra 2

*tad evāgnis tad ādityas tad vāyus tad u candramāḥ /
tad eva śukraṁ tad brahma tad āpas tat prajāpatiḥ // 4.2 //*

That Supreme Self is Agni (Fire); It is Aditya (Sun); It is Vayu (Air); It is Chandrama (Moon). That Self is the luminous stars; It is Prajapati; It is water; It is Brahman.

The One Supreme is described in various terms. The Brahman is all - fire, water, sun, air, moon, and other luminous bodies, the Lord of creation and Brahma. All these are the manifested glories of the same Brahman, the One Supreme; they are not independent and different. This way He should be meditated upon in the form of physical world.

Mantra 3

*tvaṁ strī tvaṁ pumān asi tvaṁ kumāra uta vā kumārī /
tvaṁ jīrṇo daṇḍena vañcasi tvaṁ jāto bhavasi viśvatomukhaḥ // 4.3 //*

You are feminine, you are masculine; you are a bachelor and a spinster too. You as an old man totters along with the help of a stick; it is you alone appear in the cosmic form and have faces in all directions.

The entire universe is the Lord’s manifestation alone. There is no limit to His expression; there is no limitation to the form in which the Formless incarnates. The Formless appearing in a multitude of forms from moment to moment is His great play, *Lila* as in the case of His appearances before Gopis or His *visvarupa darshana* before Arjuna and Yashoda.

Atharva Veda (10.8.27) says: “Lord! You are within men; you are within women; you are within the young; you are within the old; you live within all of us, and you exist everywhere”.

Mantra 4

*nīlaḥ pataṅgo harito lohitaḥ śas taḍḍigarbha ṛtavaḥ samudrāḥ /
anādimāṁs tvaṁ vibhutvena vartase yato jātāni bhuvanāni viśvā // 4.4 //*

You are the dark-blue bee; You are the green parrot with red eyes; You are the thunder-clouds, the seasons and the oceans. You are beginningless and omnipresent. From you alone all the worlds are born.

The seeker perceives only the Supreme in all objects, sentient and insentient; having all colors and forms because all these worlds and dwellers therein emanated from Him. In His all-pervading aspect he is in everything, omnipresent, and takes up every form. He is the master of *Prakriti* which is discussed in the next Mantra.

UNIVERSAL SELF AND THE INDIVIDUAL SOUL

Mantra 5

*ajām ekām lohitaśuklakṛṣṇām bahvīḥ prajāḥ sṛjamānām sarūpāḥ /
ajo hy eko juṣamāṇo 'nuśete jahāty enām bhuktabhogām ajo 'nyaḥ // 4.5 //*

There is one unborn prakriti - red, white and black - which gives birth to many creatures like itself. An unborn individual soul becomes attached to it and enjoys it, while another unborn individual soul leaves it after his enjoyment is completed.

The gist of this Mantra is explained clearly in the Bhagavad Gita as follows. The Lord says that He is of two kinds of nature or *prakriti*.

*bhoomiraaponalo vaayuh kham mano buddhireva cha
ahamkaara iteeyam me bhinnaa prakritirashtadhaa // 7.4 //*

Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, reason and ego - such is the eightfold division of My nature.

*apareyamitastwanyaam prakritim viddhi me paraam
jeevabhootaam mahaabaaho yayedam dhaaryate jagat // 7.5 //*

O Mighty Armed, this is my lower nature. But different from it, you know My higher nature, the indwelling spirit by which the universe is sustained.

*etadyoneeni bhootaani sarvaaneetyupadhaaraya
aham kritsnasya jagatah prabhavah pralayastathaa // 7.6 //*

Know these two - My higher and lower natures - form the womb of all beings. Therefore, I am the origin and dissolution of the whole Universe.

*mattah parataram naanyat kinchidasti dhananjaya
mayi sarvamidam protam sootre maniganaa iva // 7.7 //*

There exists nothing whatsoever higher than Me, O Dhananjaya. All this is strung on Me, as a row of gems on a thread.

Prakriti (nature) creates many creatures like itself which are governed by three Gunas - *sattva, rajas and tamas* - called red, white and black in this Mantra. The Mantra says that an ignorant person feels drawn towards this sense world and he enjoys it. Another individual, however, is clever and discriminative. He knows the ephemeral nature of this sense world on the basis of his previous experience and therefore rejects it.

The Mantra says Nature is *ajam* i.e., unborn, without beginning. It is the combination of three *Gunas* which gives rise to the diversities in the world. But in the final analysis if

one goes beyond all these diversities he will find that behind the diverse names and forms there is only One i.e., Brahman. This knowledge destroys ignorance.

The difference between knowledge and ignorance is further explained in the next two Mantras which we find in the Mundaka Upanishad also. [M.U. 3:1:1] [M.U. 3:1:2] (Note: For a detailed exposition on the Mundaka Upanishad the reader may refer to the author's article entitled 'MundakaUpanishad:LoseYour Identity and Attain Salvation' appearing under the category 'Vedas and Upanishads' in this website).

Mantra 6

*dvā suparṇā sayujā sakhāyā samānaṃ vṛkṣaṃ pariśasvajāte /
tayor anyahṛpippalaṃ svādv atty anaśnann anyo abhicākaśīti // 4.6 //*

Like two birds of golden plumage, inseparable companions, are perched on a branch of the same tree. One of them tastes the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree; the other, tasting neither, calmly looks on.

Mantra 7

*samāne vṛkṣe puruṣo nimagno anīśayā śocati muhyamānaḥ /
juṣṭaṃ yadā paśyaty anyam īśaṃ asya mahimānam iti vītaśokaḥ // 4.7 //*

On the same tree, the individual self (jiva), deluded by forgetfulness of his identity with the divine Self, bewildered by his ego, grieves and is sad. But when he recognizes the other as the Lord worshipped by all and His glory, he becomes free from grief.

These Mantras give us the spiritual discipline and the ethical virtues which enable the aspirant to attain the knowledge of the Para Brahman, Supreme Self, highlighting the end-results of this knowledge.

The three words in relation to the two birds or the two Selves viz., 'suparna', 'sayuja', and 'sakhaya' are significant. Suparna means intimately related, the idea being that the individual Self and the Cosmic Self exist in an eternal relation. Sayuja means to be in a state of perpetual union. Another meaning of sayuja is being in the same place—that is the two Selves are inseparable, are ever present to one another. The third expression, sakhaya, means that the two Selves have the identical name or designation, and exist in an identical manner. Sakhaya also means companionship and friendship, indicating the deep personal relationship between the Jivatman and Paramatman. The selfsame tree is the body i.e. the cosmos.

The form of every sentient being has two indwellers—the two Selves just like the two birds. However, they do not have the same experience of the tree. The individual self, the jiva, tastes the fruit of the tree in the form of the inner and outer senses, and according to the quality of that experience is made happy, unhappy, contented, discontented—and so

forth. The individual thus undergoes experience sometimes laughing and some times weeping, immersed in thought and bewildered by his own helplessness.

The Supreme Self, on the other hand, tasting neither [sweet or bitter experiences], calmly observes. God also experiences because He is an indweller of all and is aware of all that the individual spirit experiences, yet, He looks on without eating—without being affected or conditioned by such experiences. But He does know exactly the effect and conditioning that accrues to the individual Self. He is experiencing right along with us, but unlike us is not pulled into a mistaken identity with the body-mind and its experiences.

We are drowned, submerged, in the deadly ocean of samsara, of continual birth, death, pain and pleasure. Sankara points out that the individual self is overwhelmed with confusion because it cannot understand what is really happening to it, and why. Just like a piece of driftwood on the heaving sea, it is lifted up and down, thrown onto the shore and then pulled out to sea again. So it grieves at its helplessness and hopelessness.

All is changed, though, when the individual sees, right in the core of his being, the very God he has been hitherto worshipping as separate from himself. Experiencing within his own being the presence and the glory of God—and thereby realizing that glory as his own—the individual becomes liberated from sorrow.

“In Mantra 6, the cause of sorrow is traced to the sense of helplessness induced in us when we are lost in the objective world. In Mantra 7, freedom from sorrow is traced to our getting beyond object-thinking and establishing contact with real being”.
Dr.S.Radhakrishnan.

Mantra 8

*ṛco akṣare paramē vyoman yasmin devā adhi viśve niṣedhuḥ /
yas tan na veda kim ṛcā kariṣyati ya it tad vidus ta ime samāstate // 4.8 //*

For the one who does not know Him, in whom all gods are rested, who is the Indestructible abode of all the Vedas, what will be the use of the Vedas? Only those who know Him attain bliss.

This Mantra shows the Sage lamenting about and expressing anguish and pity on those who do not know the Imperishable Brahman. The Sage wonders for what use the Vedas would be to a person who does not know the characteristics of Brahman. The Vedas are all based on Brahman, which is like space and never changing. All the gods (planets, elements etc) rest in Brahman. If a person knows nothing about Brahman but only performs rituals and rites what will he gain? On the other hand, those who know Brahman, as it were, live with the conviction that they are one with Brahman and attain Bliss.

We must interpret this Mantra with utmost care. The Upanishad does not say “do not adore the Perishable or do not perform rituals and rites”. It only says of what use these adorations of the Perishable when the Imperishable which is the substratum of all the manifestation is not known? These symbols or shadows have their own place but only after knowing the substance. The symbol is the Form even as the substance is the Formless. The Form derives its meaning and significance only from the Formless. It is the Formless which gives life to the Form. But people worship the Form without knowing the Formless and so their prayers and adoration are more in the nature of ceremonial routine and drudgery. The Form is *maya* or illusion which has no intrinsic value or existence - it exists because of the Formless. The Formless is the *mayin*, the producer of *maya*, illusion.

Mantra 9

*chandāṁsi yajñāḥ kratavo vratāni bhūtaṁ bhavyaṁ yac ca vedā vadanti /
asmān māyī sṛjate viśvam etat tasmīc cānyo māyayā saṁmiruddhaḥ // 4.9 //*

The sacred verses (chandas), the offerings (yajna), the sacrifices (kratu), the penances (vrata), the past, the future and all that the Vedas declare, have been produced from the imperishable Brahman. Brahman projects the universe through the power of Its maya. Again, in that universe Brahman as the jiva is entangled through maya.

The whole world proceeds from the imperishable Brahman. The actual creator is Isvara, the Personal God, who is acting through his power of *maya*, *daivatma-sakti* (saguna Brahman). Brahman is the material and efficient cause of the universe. Whatever objects are there prescribed in the Vedas - the *chandas*, *yajnas*, *kratus*, various vows etc., the past, present and future - are all derived from Paramatman, the sole controller of Prakriti by His own power of *maya*. In this web of the world, Brahman as all *jivas* is tied up through the *maya* power of Paramatman Himself. When the *jiva* realizes its real nature as Paramatman (Brahman) it is freed from this entanglement.

Mantra 10

*māyāṁ tu prakṛtiṁ vidyān māyinaṁ tu mahēśvaraṁ /
tasyāvayavabhūtais tu vyāptaṁ sarvaṁ idaṁ jagat // 4.10 //*

Know, then, that prakriti or nature is maya (illusion) and that Great Lord (Mahesvara) is the mayin (the illusion-maker). The whole universe is filled with objects which are parts of His being.

The Great Lord has been described here as *Mayin* and His power as *Maya*. *Mayin* is the Lord of *Maya*. *Maya* and *Prakriti* are the same. Explanations of the terms *maya* and *mayin* were already dealt with under the Mantra 8. The whole manifested world consists only of the parts - the whole is Unmanifest. The whole is the creator - the creation consists only in the parts. The whole is in the parts and yet the whole cannot be found by

collecting the parts together. As the Supreme brings forth the whole universe by His own power of maya, He is not in any way affected by it unlike others who are subject to its sway. The mystery lies in the whole and cannot be discovered by bringing the parts together. Quantity cannot be a source of comprehension of the quality of things and beings. Then how can we find this quality of things? The answer is given in the Mantra 18 which follows.

SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Mantra 11

*yo yoniṁ-yonim adhitiṣṭhaty eko yasminn idaṁ saṁ ca vi caiti sarvam /
tam īśānaṁ varadaṁ devam īḍyaṁ nicāyyemāṁ śāntim atyantam eti // 4.11 //*

By truly realizing Him who is non-dual, who presides over the source of everything, and in whom this whole world comes together at the time of creation and dissolves at the time of dissolution - by truly realizing Him who is the Lord, the bestower of blessings, the Adorable God, one attains the supreme peace.

The Paramatman is the single presiding deity of each and every source of origin of things and beings. He is the Supreme Lord of all causes in the world. He is the causeless cause. Under His supervision and arrangement these causes result in effects. The whole universe merges in Him and comes out of Him in various forms during the cycles of dissolution and creation respectively. When the *jiva* comes to know this Super Controller, the bestower of the boons, and the only one worthy of praises, he attains the ultimate emancipation, the eternal Supreme Peace. Bhagavad Gita calls this as *shashwato shaanti*, eternal peace (9.31) and *paraa shaanti*, Supreme Peace (18.62). Sankara says that this peace attained with the help of knowledge is like the peace we experience after a sound dreamless sleep.

Mantra 12

*yo devānāṁ prabhavaś codbhavaś ca viśvādhiko rudro maharṣiḥ /
hiraṇyagarbhaṁ paśyata jāyamānaṁ sa no buddhyā śubhayā saṁyunaktu // 4.12 //*

He, the source of the gods and the bestower of their powers, the Support of the universe, Rudra the omniscient, who at the beginning gave birth to Hiranyagarbha-may He endow us with clear intellect!

(This is a repetition of the Mantra in Chapter 3.4)

This is a prayer to Rudra for obtaining a pure, auspicious and subtle intellect so that one can realize Brahman. Rudra is described as *maharshi*- the omniscient seer, the creator of lesser cosmic powers such as Agni, Vayu etc., the sustainer of the universe and the creator of *hiranyagarbha* - Cosmic seed at the beginning of creation (Brahman).

Mantra 13

*yo devānām adhipo yasmiṁ lokā adhiśritāḥ /
ya īše asya dvipadaś catuṣpadaḥ kasmāi devāya haviṣā vidhema // 4.13 //*

He who is the Lord of all the gods, in whom the worlds find their support, who rules over all two-footed and four-footed beings - let us serve that God, radiant and blissful, with an oblation.

This is a prayer to the Lord, Brahman, offering all respects to Him.

Mantra 14

*sūkṣmātisūkṣmaṁ kalilasya madhye viśvasya sraṣṭāram anekarūpaṁ /
viśvasyaikaṁ pariveṣṭitāraṁ jñātvā śivaṁ śāntim atyantam eti // 4.14 //*

By realizing Him who is subtler than the subtlest who dwells in the midst of the chaos, who is the Creator of all things and is endowed with many forms, who is the non-dual Pervader of the universe and all good - by realizing Him one attains the supreme peace.

When the unity behind diversity is realized, we know the inner being of everyone and we then attain absolute peace and blessedness (*santam atyantam*). This is an echo of the Mantra 3.7 of this Upanishad which we studied earlier as under.

*tataḥ paraṁ brahma paraṁ bṛhantaṁ yathānikāyaṁ sarvabhūteṣu gūḍhaṁ /
viśvasyaikaṁ pariveṣṭitāram īśaṁ taṁ jñātvāmṛtā bhavanti // 3.7 //*

The Supreme Lord is higher than Virat, beyond Hiranyagarbha. He is vast and is hidden in the bodies of all living beings. By knowing Him, who alone pervades the universe, men become immortal.

Mantra 15

*sa eva kāle bhuvanasya goptā viśvādhipaḥ sarvabhūteṣu gūḍhaḥ /
yasmin yuktā brahmarṣayo devatāś ca tam evaṁ jñātvā mṛtyupāśāṁś chinatti // 4.15 //*

It is He who, in proper time, becomes the protector of the universe, the Lord of all, hidden in all things, and in whom the sages and the deities are united. Verily, by knowing Him thus one cuts asunder the fetters of death.

The Supreme Lord who is being described continuously, preserves the existence of universe and is hidden as indweller in all beings. All the sages keep themselves engaged in meditating upon him. This way by knowing that Supreme God, one cuts all ties causing birth and death. He never comes under the bondage of Prakriti and gets emancipated.

Mantra 16

*ghṛtāt paraṃ maṇḍam ivātisūkṣmaṃ jñātvā śivaṃ sarvabhūteṣu gūḍhaṃ /
viśvasyaikaṃ pariveṣṭītāraṃ jñātvā devaṃ mucyate sarvapāśaiḥ // 4.16 //*

By knowing Him, the auspicious, hidden in all beings, like the film that rises to the surface of clarified butter, the sole Pervader of the universe, the God, one is released from all fetters.

The aspirant becomes free forever from all bondages by knowing the Lord who is subtle as a film on the clarified butter and who is supreme good for all, who is hidden in all beings and surrounding the entire world.

Mantra 17

*eṣa devo viśvakarmā mahātmā sadā janānāṃ hṛdaye saṃmiviṣṭaḥ /
hṛdā manīṣā manasābhikṣpto ya etad vidur amṛtās te bhavanti // 4.17 //*

The creator of the world; great souled, the Supreme Lord, always seated in the heart of every one; he manifests himself by meditating through heart, intellect and mind; They who know Him become immortal.

We have seen earlier under Mantra 3.13 in this Upanishad as under.

*aṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo 'ntarātmā sadā janānāṃ hṛdaye saṃmiviṣṭaḥ /
hṛdā manīṣā manasābhikṣpto ya etad vidur amṛtās te bhavanti // 3.13 //*

The Purusha, no bigger than a thumb, is the inner Self, ever seated in the heart of man. He is known by the mind, which controls knowledge and is perceived in the heart. They who know Him become immortal.

The omnipresent and omnipotent Supreme Lord, the sole creator of the world is always seated in everyone's heart. He is revealed through meditation. Those who know this secret become free.

Mantra 18

*yadātamas tan na divā na rātrir na san na cāśac chiva eva kevalaḥ /
tad akṣaraṃ tat savitur vareṇyaṃ prajñā ca tasmāt prasṛtā purāṇī // 4.18 //*

When there is complete absence of the darkness of ignorance, then what is experienced is neither day nor night; neither existence or non-existence; only one pure Siva (the auspicious) is there; that is indestructible; that is adorable light of even sun-god; from that this ancient wisdom proceeded all over the world.

“The characterization of the Supreme which transcends the duality of subject and object can only be negative and cannot be a field of clear definition and demonstration”. - Dr.S.Radhakrishnan.

Thus the Supreme can be known only by those whose intellect abides in the heart. Intellect is impersonal and objective, while the heart is always warm and intimate. Mere intellect is cool as snow and mere heart is fleeting like vapor. When these two come together, man can unlock the secrets of life and understand the mysteries of *jiva, jagat and jagadisvara*. Sankara’s famous ‘*Nirvana Shatkam*’ is a fine exposition of this aspect. The seeker realizes that he is *chidananda rupah sivoham sivoham* (I am of the nature of Pure Consciousness - Bliss Absolute, I am Siva, I am (verily) Siva). This Mantra says ‘*siva eva kevalah*’, there is only one pure Siva (the auspicious),

Mantra 19

*nainam ūrdhvaṃ na tiryāñcaṃ na madhye parijagrabhat /
na tasya pratimā asti yasya nāma mahad yaśaḥ // 4.19 //*

No one can catch hold of Him either from above, or across, or in the middle. There is no likeness of Him. His name is Great Glory (Mahad Yasah).

That Paramatman who has been described in various ways in the previous Mantras cannot be caught hold of or cannot be grasped in whatever manner one may try because He is entirely beyond grasp. When Sastras talk of knowing Him it only means realizing Him through personal experience. Such a realized soul too cannot express Him through words because mind and speech cannot reach there. This Upanishad in chapter 6 and the Mundaka and Katha Upanishads say “Him the sun does not illumine, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor the lightning–nor, verily, fires kindled upon the earth. He is the one light that gives light to all. He shining, everything shines”. He is absolutely different from physical objects which can be understood or grasped. His name is *Mahad yasah* (far beyond and above everything) and His fame is spread all over. He is without a match and none can equal Him. To say anything about Him is to limit the unlimited. Even then, this Upanishad emphasizes the personal aspect of the transcendent God. He is *siva* to whom we turn in prayer and praise.

Mantra 20

*na saṃdṛṣe tiṣṭhati rūpam asya na cakṣuṣā paśyati kaścanainaṃ /
hṛdā hṛdisthaṃ manasā ya enam evaṃ vidur amṛtās te bhavanti // 4.20 //*

His form is not an object of vision; no one beholds Him with the eyes. They who, through pure intellect and the Knowledge of Unity based upon reflection, realize Him as abiding in the heart become immortal.

The form of Parabrahman cannot appear before eyes. Nobody can visualize Him physically. Those who experience Him through meditation become immortal - free from birth and death forever.

Mantra 21

*ajāta ity evaṃ kaścīd bhīruḥ prapadyate /
rudra yat dakṣiṇaṃ mukham tena māṃ pāhi nityam // 4.21 //*

It is because you are birthless, that some rare souls, frightened by birth and death, take refuge in you. O Rudra, may your benign face protect me for ever!

This Mantra brings about the attitude of Bhakti or devotion. Rudra, the God of destruction, is unborn so it is His nature to free others from birth and death. Some aspirants who are afraid of birth and death and desirous of freedom from the wheel of the world take refuge in Him, realizing this fact. The aspirant seeks protection from this worldly cycle and freedom from fear through the gracious face and compassion of Siva.

Mantra 22

*mā nas toke tanaye mā na āyusi mā no goṣu mā no aśveṣu rīriṣaḥ /
vīrān mā no rudra bhāmito vadhīr haviṣmantaḥ sadam it tvā havāmahe // 4.22 //*

O Rudra, in your anger, please do not destroy our children and grand-children. Do not destroy our lives; do not destroy our cows or horses; do not destroy our strong servants. For we invoke you always, with oblations, for our protection.

This Mantra presents a contrasting picture of the trend of the discussions. So far, the prayer has been for Knowledge. Now this prayer is of mundane variety seeking personal blessing and advantage from the Supreme implying the idea of dualism. The idea behind this is that so long we live in this relative plane of life, we can reach non-dualism through dualism alone. Hence prayers and worship lead to wisdom, *Brahma Jnana*. This is the peculiarity of the teachings of this Upanishad.

Iti Svetasvataropaniṣhadi chaturtho'dhyayah ||
HERE ENDS THE FOURTH CHAPTER OF THE SVETASVATARA UPANISHAD

Svetasvatara Upanishad - Chapter 5

The One Immanent God

T.N.Sethumadhavan

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is devoted to the discussion of the nature of *That* (Para Brahman) in the Mahavakya “That Thou Art” which was started in the previous chapter which specially dealt with the nature of “*Thou*”.

THE TEXT

Mantra 1

*dve akṣare brahmapare tv anante vidyāvidye nihite yatra gūḍhe /
kṣaraṃ tv avidyā hy amṛtaṃ tu vidyā vidyāvidye īśate yas tu so 'nyaḥ // 5.1 //*

In the Immutable, infinite Supreme Brahman remain hidden the two: knowledge and ignorance. Ignorance leads to worldliness and knowledge, to Immortality. Brahman, who controls both knowledge and ignorance, is different from both.

Knowledge and ignorance both remain concealed in Para Brahman. Ignorance is the cause of birth and death while knowledge leads to immortality. These opposites are controlled by Brahman, who therefore, is different and apart from them. He is without any attributes. The Mantra says Brahman is *ananta*, without end, without beginning or concluding. He is unlimited by time, space or other factors.

Brahman is the source of knowledge and ignorance. Brahman is *akshaya*, never perishable or subject to modification. He is unchanging and unchangeable. Brahman is higher than the first manifest which is called *Hiranyagarbha* (also as Brahma, Prajapati), the *Saguna Brahman*. As *Saguna Brahman* manifests from *Nirguna Brahman* the latter is higher than the former, the first manifest.

As Brahman is the Lord of everything, He is said to control knowledge and ignorance, both belonging to Maya, the power of Brahman himself. Maya of ignorance entangles a person in the phenomenal world, while Maya of knowledge brings him Liberation. Knowledge means spiritual pursuits by means of which the seeker attains Liberation. The one and the many are both contained in the Supreme. The knowledge of the *One* is *vidya*; the knowledge of the *Many* detached from the One is *avidya*.- Dr.S.Radhakrishnan. As Sri Ramakrishna puts it “the thorn of ignorance which has entered the flesh is to be removed through the use of the thorn of knowledge and thereafter both the thorns have to be thrown out”.

BRAHMAN DESCRIBED

Mantra 2

*yo yoniṃ yonim adhitiṣṭhaty eko viśvāni rūpāṇi yonīś ca sarvāḥ /
ṛṣiṃ prasūtaṃ kapilaṃ yas tam agre jñānair bibharti jāyamānaṃ ca paśyēt // 5.2 //*

He, the non-dual Brahman, who rules over every position; who controls all forms and all sources; who, in the beginning, filled with knowledge the omniscient Hiranyagarbha, His own creation, whom He beheld when He (Hiranyagarbha) was produced-He is other than both knowledge and ignorance.

The non-dual Brahman is within all forms i.e. physical, elemental and intangible objects such as earth, water, air, sun, sense-organs, and mind. They form His body. He (Brahman) controls them as their inmost Ruler and immortal Self. He is filled with all knowledge of the past, present and future, Dharma, detachment and the various other virtues. He produces the first manifestation which is called Hiranyagarbha in the relative universe. Hiranyagarbha or Brahma is the intermediary between the Supreme Self and the created world. He is the world-soul.

Mantra 3

*ekaikaṃ jālaṃ bahudhā vikurvann asmin kṣetre saṃharaty eṣa devaḥ /
bhūyaḥ sṛṣṭvā patayas tathēśaḥ sarvādhipatyaṃ kurute mahātmā // 5.3 //*

At the time of the creation the Lord spreads out individual nets in various ways and then at the time of the cosmic dissolution withdraws them into the great prakriti. Again the all-pervading Deity creates the aggregates of body and senses, both individual and collective and their controllers also and thus exercises His overlordship.

This Mantra describes the process of the cycle of creation and dissolution. At the beginning of the cycle the Lord (Saguna Brahman) projects from His *Maya or prakriti*, various aggregates of body, mind, senses and *prana*. These aggregates which are the bodies of human, sub-human, and super-human creatures are fashioned according to their actions and thoughts in the previous cycle. These bodies are called net because they entrap the Purusha or the soul (Brahman associated with the body) and entangle him in the world. This Purusha is the diversified aspects of Brahman, identified with and limited by diverse material bodies. This identification is the result of Maya. But Brahman itself, unaffected by Maya, is the super-controller.

At the time of the cosmic dissolution the bodies merge in the great *prakriti*. They are projected again at the beginning of the next cycle. The first form that is projected at the beginning of the cycle is the undifferentiated aggregate which is called *Hiranyagarbha*. Then other individual forms come into existence - super-humans, humans and sub-humans and they go back to Brahman at the end of the cycle to re-appear again. . Thus this wheel goes on and on.

Mantra 4

*sarvā diśa ūrdhvam adhaś ca tiryak prakāśayan bhrājate yad vānaḍvān /
evaṃ sa devo bhagavān vareṇyo yonisvabhāvān adhitiṣṭhaty ekaḥ // 5.4 //*

As the sun, illuminating all the regions, above, below, and across shines, so too, That One God, glorious, adorable, rules over whatever creatures are born from a womb, who by themselves possess the nature of a cause.

The phrase whatever creatures are born from a womb means the sources of world-existence like the five elements (fire, water, air, earth and space) over which that one god, the Supreme Self, Brahman rules. These elements are said to be the cause for further evolution of creatures in the world. What the Mantra implies is that these so called causes of the world are not in themselves causes; they operate as causes only because the Bhagavan works through them.

Mantra 5

*yac ca svabhāvaṃ pacati viśvayoniḥ pācyāṃś ca sarvān pariṇāmayed yaḥ /
sarvam etad viśvam adhitiṣṭhaty eko guṇāṃś ca sarvān viniyojayed yaḥ // 5.5 //*

He who is the cause of all and who enables all things to function according to their nature; who brings to maturity all that can be ripened; who, being non-dual, rules over the whole universe and engages the gunas in their respective functions.

Brahman is the uncaused cause. He is the primal cause of the universe. He brings out his own nature in the form of all great elements and their powers to cause the world. That is to say, at the end of the cycle whatever powers the phenomenal elements were having disappear and such powers are brought back by him at the commencement of the next cycle from which the manifest world evolves further. Through the interaction of the three gunas, the manifest world of different forms, names and functions carries on its schedule in a systematic way. In this way Brahman alone organizes the whole universe and rules over it.

Mantra 6

*tad vedaguhyopaniṣatsu gūḍhaṃ tad brahmā vedate brahmayoniṃ /
ye pūrvaṃ devā ṛṣayaś ca tad vidus te tanmayā amṛtā vai babhūvuḥ // 5.6 //*

That which is hidden in the Upanishads, the secret part of the Vedas, Brahma knows that as the source of the Vedas. The gods and seers of olden times who knew that became Brahman and attained Immortality.

The subject of Cosmic Self, Brahman, taught in the Upanishads is very esoteric and constitutes the very essence of the Vedas. Hence it is called hidden. The source of the Vedas is Brahman. Brahma i.e. Hiranyagarbha knows that Brahman. The gods and other

ancient sages know Him (Brahman) as their own Self and by this knowledge they became immortal.

Brahma is the Hiranyagarbha, the first manifestation of Brahman. He first acquired this knowledge of the Ultimate Reality and then he passed it on to the ancient gods and then to the sages. From that knowledge they became one with Brahman which is termed as attaining immortality.

THE INDIVIDUAL SOUL, JIVA

Mantra 7

*guṇānvayo yaḥ phalakarmakartā kṛtasya tasyaiva sa copabhoktā /
sa viśvarūpas triguṇas trivartmā prāṇādhipaḥ saṁcarati svakarmabhiḥ // 5.7 //*

Endowed with gunas, the jiva performs action, seeking its fruit; and again, it reaps the fruit of what it has done. Assuming all forms and led by the three gunas, the jiva, ruler of the pranas, roams about following the three paths, according to its deeds.

Now the discussion is about the *Jivatma*, the individual soul, which acts bound by its *gunas*. The *Jivatma*, innately bound by three gunas, *sattva, rajas and tamas*, performs actions in this world and reaps the consequences of such actions. In order to experience the fruit of the actions, the *jivatama* appears as different forms in different species and wherever it goes the three *gunas* are always associated with it.

After death he moves along the three paths viz., *Devayana, Pitruyana*, and the cycle of birth and death according to the merits of his actions during his life time. This *jivatma* is the Lord of vital forces in the body and until it is emancipated, goes on moving around the wheel of the world, manifesting in different species in different walks of life, goaded by his past actions.

Mantra 8

*aṅguṣṭhamātro ravitulyarūpaḥ saṁkalpāhaṁkārasamanvito yaḥ /
buddher guṇenātmaguṇena caiva ārāgramātro hy avaro 'pi dṛṣṭaḥ // 5.8 //*

Of the size of a thumb, but brilliant, like the sun, the jiva possesses both volition and egoism. It is endowed with the qualities of both buddhi and Atman. Therefore it is seen as another entity (as different from Brahman) and as small as the point of a needle.

The jiva is in reality none other than the non-dual Lord, Its various phenomenal characteristics, such as desire, volition (will of its own) and egoism, are illusory superimpositions due to *avidya*.

This Mantra describes the *jiva* as :

Angushtamatrah - as small as a thumb; *Ravitulya rupah* - as bright as the sun; *Sankalpa-ahankara samanvitah* - distinguished by a will of its own (volition) and a sense of ego; *Buddheh gunena atmagunena cha* - also by an intellect and a sense of having a body; *Aragramatrah* - as fine as a point of a needle; *Aparah* - as separate from the Cosmic Self, Paramatman, Brahman.

Knowers of *jivatman* have seen *jivatma* in this way. The idea is that *jivatma* is the subtlest. The size of *jiva* described here is just for explanation. Bhagvad Gita says (15.10)

*utkraamantam sthitam vaapi bhunjaanam vaa gunaanvitam
vimoodhaa naanupashyanti pashyanti jnaanachakshushah //*

The deluded do not see Him who departs, stays and enjoys, united with the Gunas; but they who possess the eye of knowledge behold Him.

The Self is visible to the eye of knowledge only. Though the Self is the nearest and comes most easily within the range of their consciousness in a variety of functions, still the ignorant and deluded do not see Him because of their complete subservience to the sense-objects. But those who are with intuitive vision could see the Self. Those with the inner eye of knowledge behold the Self as entirely distinct from the body.

Mantra 9

*vālāgrāśatabhāgasya śatadhā kalpitasya ca /
bhāgo jīvaḥ sa vijñeyaḥ sa cānantyāya kalpate // 5.9 //*

Know the embodied soul to be a part of the hundredth part of the point of a hair divided a hundred times; and yet it is infinite.

The subtlety of *jivatma* is again elaborated here. It is described as smaller than the billionth part of the end of hair. This is just a simile and not to be taken literally. In spite of being so subtle, *jivatma* is pervasive in any gross object. In a nutshell, the implication is that although Paramatman (Cosmic Self) is permeating the entire universe, when it is associated with the physical bodies, it gets individualized and feels itself separate from the Cosmic Self.

Mantra 10

*naiva strī na pumān eṣa na caivāyaṃ napuṃsakaḥ /
yad yac charīram ādatte tena tena sa yujyate // 5.10 //*

It is not female, it is not male, nor is it neuter. whatever body it takes, with that it becomes united.

Jivatma in reality is neither male nor female nor neuter. Whatever body jivatma adopts, the gender of that body becomes its gender. Jivatma is undifferentiated and devoid of all attributes.

Mantra 11

*saṁkalpanasparśanadr̥ṣṭīmohair grāsāmbuvr̥ṣṭyā cātmavivṛddhijanma /
karmānugāny anukramena dehī sthāneṣu rūpāṇy abhisaṁprapadyate // 5.11 //*

By means of desires, contact, attachment and delusion, the embodied soul assumes, successively, diverse forms in various places, according to its deeds, just as the body grows when food and drink are poured into it.

First there arises a desire for an object and then the sense organs come in contact with it, next the jiva grows attached to the objects and lastly it falls a victim to the delusion created by attachment. Thus it performs various deeds, righteous and unrighteous, and as a result assumes different kinds of bodies, one after the other.

Mantra 12

*sthūlāni sūkṣmāṇi bahūni caiva rūpāṇi dehī svaguṇair vṛṇoti /
kriyāguṇair ātmaguṇaiś ca teṣāṁ saṁyogahetur aparo 'pi dr̥ṣṭaḥ // 5.12 //*

The embodied soul, by means of good and evil deeds committed by itself, assumes many forms, coarse and fine. By virtue of its actions and also of such characteristics of the mind as knowledge and desire, it assumes another body for the enjoyment of suitable objects.

The individual self assumes various gross and subtle forms, from those of insects to gods, according to its past work and mental qualities (gunas). The subtle tendencies created by the individual soul's actions in its previous life are the cause of its union with its present body.

LIBERATION THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE ONE GOD

Mantra 13

*anādyanantaṁ kalilasya madhye viśvasya sraṣṭāram anekarūpaṁ /
viśvasyaikaṁ pariveṣṭitāraṁ jñātvā devaṁ mucyate sarvapāśaiḥ // 5.13 //*

He who knows the Lord, who is without beginning or end, who stands in the midst of the chaos of the world, who is the Creator of all things and is endowed with many forms-he who knows the radiant Deity, the sole Pervader of the universe, is released from all his fetters.

Sankara comments as under:

“The jiva under the weight of avidya, desire, action, and its result, is drowned in the ocean of the world, identifying itself with the body and becomes individualized, and in the course of its wandering assumes many births - human, sub-human and super-human. At a certain stage, by chance it performs righteous actions and feels inclined towards the spiritual life. Then gradually it becomes free of attachment, passions and other vices and realizes the transitory nature of the world. Consequently it cultivates dispassion for all enjoyments, here or hereafter and practices the moral and spiritual disciplines prescribed by the Vedantic teachers. And in the end it attains Self-Knowledge and become liberated from the bondage of the world”.

Mantra 14

*bhāvagrāhyam anīḍākhyam bhāvābhāvakaram śivam /
kalāsargakaram devam ye vidus te jahus tanum // 5.14 //*

Those who know Him who can be realized by the pure heart, who is called incorporeal, who is the cause of creation and destruction, who is all good and the creator of the sixteen parts - those who know the luminous Lord are freed from embodiment.

This Mantra concludes the chapter by recapitulating how to attain *Moksha*. The Supreme Lord, Himself without a support, is the cause of creation, preservation and dissolution. He can be known by the pure in heart. Through knowledge of Him one attains Liberation. Creator of sixteen parts means the creator of embodied beings (Ref. Prasna Upanishad 6.4). Thus the knower of the Self is not born again in the world of ignorance.

Iti Svetasvatropanishadi panchamo'dhyayah ||
HERE ENDS THE FIFTH CHAPTER OF THE SVETASVATARA UPANISHAD

Svetasvatara Upanishad - Chapter 6
The One God and the Cosmic Process
T.N.Sethumadhavan

INTRODUCTION

Bhagavad Gita (2.29) says

*aashcharyavat pashyati kashchid enam aashcharyavad vadati tathaiva chaanyah
aashcharyavacchainam anyah shrinoti shrutwaapyenam veda na chaiva kaschit //*

Some look on the Self as a wonder; some speak of It as a wonder; some hear of It as a wonder; still others, though hearing, do not understand It at all.

The Self is incomprehensible because it is not known by the ordinary means of knowledge. Though the knowledge of the Self is freely accessible to all mankind, it is attained only by a very few who are willing to pay the price in the form of self-discipline, steadfastness and non-attachment. Though the truth is open to all, many do not feel any urge to seek. Of those who have the urge, many suffer from doubt and vacillation. Even if they do not have doubts, many are scared away by difficulties. Only a few rare souls succeed in braving the perils and reaching the goal.

Although it is difficult to comprehend the idea of the Self, if one starts the practice of listening (*sravanam*), continuous reflection (*mananam*) and long contemplation (*nidhidhyasan*) it is possible to realize the Self in him.

THE TEXT

Mantra 1

*svabhāvam eke kavayo vadanti kālaṃ tathānye parimuhyamānāḥ/
devasyaiṣa mahimā tu loke yenedaṃ bhrāmyate brahmacakram // 6.1 //*

Some learned men speak of the inherent nature of things and some speak of time, as the cause of the universe. They all, indeed, are deluded. It is the greatness of the self-luminous Lord that causes the Wheel of Brahman to revolve.

Svetasvatara Upanishad discusses the same idea of the Gita as stated above in this Mantra. At the beginning in Chapter 1.2 this same question was raised and many answers like the nature of things, time etc., were proposed and rejected. After meditation it was concluded that it was Brahman by His own power, *daivatma sakti*, by His own maya, created this universe.

Here again the Upanishad goes back to the same question and states that some scholars say the root cause of the world is its inherent nature of things or the natural potency of its objects and some others opine it is the element of time that is the cause of this world. But all of them are wrong. The universe is not a self-creating, self-evolving, self-destroying entity. It is lifeless and inert. Brahman is the ultimate cause of the world process which has been described as *Brahmachakra*, the Wheel of Brahman in Chapter 1.4.

GREATNESS OF THE LORD

Mantra 2

*yenāvṛtaṃ nityam idaṃ hi sarvaṃ jñāḥ kālakālo guṇī sarvavidyaḥ /
teneśitaṃ karma vivartate ha pṛthivyāptejo'nilakhāni cintyam // 6.2 //*

He by whom the whole universe is constantly pervaded, who is the knowledge itself, the Author of time who is sinless and omniscient, at whose command the work which is called earth, water, fire, air and akasa appears as the universe, on Him the wise should reflect upon.

The Lord is described as He who

- Pervades the entire universe
- Is the very stuff of consciousness
- Is the controller of time, the destroyer of all material entities
- Is endowed with three gunas because of His association with maya power
- Is all-knowing and
- Appears as the five elements (in the sense the five elements are super-imposed on Him) because of which He seems to be the universe which remains under His control.

The idea is that we should remember that Brahman is behind this universe and accordingly fix our mind on that reality and meditate.

Mantra 3

*tat karma kṛtvā vinivartya bhūyas tattvasya tattvena sametya yogam /
ekena dvābhyāṃ tribhir aṣṭabhir vā kālena caivātmaguṇaiś ca sūkṣmaiḥ // 6.3 //*

The yogi who first performs actions and then turns away from them and who practises one, two, three, or eight disciplines, unites one principle with another principle and with the help of virtues cultivated by the self and of subtle tendencies attains Liberation in course of time.

The nature of Perfect Knowledge and the disciplines required to be practiced for achieving it are now discussed.

The seeker, referred to here as the Yogi, performs all his actions as offerings to the Lord thus making his heart pure. When a man performs his duties, regarding himself as an instrument of the Lord and surrendering all the fruits to Him, he is said to renounce all his duties or the sense of duty drops away from him. Thus he becomes entitled to the life of a sanyasi fully understanding that the idea of duty is the result of attachment.

The one, two, three or eight duties referred to in the Mantra mean service to the Guru, love of God, *sravana*, *manana*, *nidhidhyasana* of scriptures and *ashtanga yoga* stipulated in Patanjali Yoga sutras. Uniting one principle with another principle means

understanding and experiencing the essence of the *mahavakya* “*Tatvam Asi*’. The aspirant who practices these disciplines and who cultivates virtues like charity, purity, desirelessness, freedom from malice etc., attains liberation or *kaivalya*.

Mantra 4

*ārabhya karmāṇi guṇānvitāni bhāvāṃś ca sarvān viniyojayed yaḥ /
teṣāṃ abhāve kṛtakarmanāśaḥ karmakṣaye yāti sa tattvato 'nyaḥ // 6.4 //*

He who attains purity of heart by performing actions as an offering to the Lord and merges prakriti and all its effects in Brahman, realizes his true Self and thereby transcends phenomena. In the absence of maya, both collective and individual, all his past actions are destroyed. After the destruction of the prarabdha karma he attains final Liberation.

This Mantra can be divided into two sections for a better understanding. The first section reads as “He who attains purity of heart by performing actions as an offering to the Lord and merges prakriti and all its effects in Brahman, realizes his true Self and thereby transcends phenomena”.

This is the concept of Karmayoga as taught in the Bhagavad Gita 9.27 and 28 and 5.10 and 11. A man should perform his duties regarding himself as the God’s instrument and surrendering the results to Him. Thus the impurities of his heart are destroyed and he is qualified for the higher disciplines of meditation and Samadhi. Such a man of meditation sees the universe in Brahman. How? In Vedanta, the effect is merely a name and it has no existence independent of the cause, which alone is real. For instance, a pot is made out of clay. The pot is therefore the effect and the clay is the cause. What makes the pot different is its shape and name; yet it is not something other than clay. It is just clay in a different form and hence the real thing is clay only. What the Mantra says is that a wise man sees the effect in the cause which is referred to as merging of prakriti and its effects in Brahman that is to say for him the universe is non-different from Brahman, the causeless cause.

The second section reads “In the absence of maya, both collective and individual, all his past actions are destroyed. After the destruction of the prarabdha karma he attains final Liberation”.

The notion of non-duality i.e., action, actor and results belongs to the realm of maya. When maya is destroyed the vasanas created by past actions or karma and the resultant bondages are also destroyed (Bhagavad Gita 4.37). In Vedanta everybody has to reap the consequences of his past actions. The results of those actions which have already begun to bear their fruit (i.e. the cause for the present birth itself) must anyway have to be undergone. This is called *prarabdha karma*. When this karma which is bearing fruit gets completely exhausted the wise man, who has gone beyond maya or prakriti, attains liberation or *mukti* or freedom from the cycle of births and deaths.

Mantra 5

*ādiḥ sa saṁyoganimittahetuḥ paras trikālād akalo 'pi dr̥ṣṭaḥ /
taṁ viśvarūpaṁ bhavabhūtam īdyaṁ devaṁ svacittastham upāsya pūrvam // 6.5 //*

The Great Lord is the beginning, the cause which unites the soul with the body; He is above the three kinds of time and is seen to be without parts. After having worshipped that adorable God dwelling in the heart, who is of many forms and is the true source of all things, man attains final Liberation.

An attempt to describe Brahman, the Lord continues in these Mantras, however much such efforts are futile. He is the primal cause of all beings and things. The soul through avidya, becomes united with the body and the Lord is the cause of such avidya, which manifests as both good and evil. Attachment to good and evil is the cause of the embodiment. Thus the Lord, Brahman, is responsible for the good as well as the evil activities.

He is beyond the three times - past, present and future. We cannot specify when he existed or when he will exist because he always exists, above time. He is without parts means that he is not made up of something. He is not a composite object just like bones, tissues, blood etc which make up our bodies. Brahman is without such parts and he is undifferentiated.

He is of many forms because he is everything. He is the cause of existence. All things exist because he exists and without him nothing can exist. All forms are his forms.

The mantra advises that that the seeker should meditate on Paramatman who is within his own heart when he will realize that there is no more “He’ and ‘I’. His own identity merges with that of object of meditation and he becomes completely dissolved, as it were, in Brahman. He no longer exists. There is only Brahman.

Mantra 6

*sa vṛkṣakālākṛtibhiḥ paro 'nyo yasmāt prapañcaḥ parivartate 'yaṁ /
dharmāvahaṁ pāpanudaṁ bhageśaṁ jñātvātmastham amṛtaṁ viśvadhāma // 6.6 //*

He from whom this universe proceeds is higher and other than all forms of the Tree of the World and of time. When one knows Him who is the indweller, the bringer of good, the destroyer of evil, the Lord of powers, the immortal support of all, one attains final Liberation.

The Lord is described as the One other than the tree of the world and of time. As in the Bhagavad Gita (15.1), here also the world is compared to a tree which means that which does not exist permanently. Within the Lord the world keeps going in and coming out. He supports virtue and destroys vice, the source of all and the supporter of the world. He is

immortal and the inmost Self of all. If one knows Him as his own Self he attains liberation.

Mantra 7

*tam īśvarāṅgāṃ paramaṃ maheśvaraṃ taṃ devatānāṃ paramaṃ ca daivataṃ /
patiṃ patināṃ paramaṃ parastād vidāma devaṃ bhuvaneśam īḍyam // 6.7 //*

We know Him who is the Supreme Lord of lords, the Supreme Deity of deities, the Ruler of rulers; who is higher than the imperishable prakriti and is the self-luminous, adorable Lord of the world.

All these adjectives are used to emphasize the uniqueness of Brahman. He is the supreme among all gods. He is self-luminous and the God of all gods, the Ruler of all the rulers. He is higher than Brahma. He rules the world and is the sole object of worship in the world. He is to be known as our own self.

Mantra 8

*na tasya kāryaṃ karaṇaṃ ca vidyate na tatsamaś cābhyadhikaś ca dṛśyate /
parāsya śaktir vividhaiva śrūyate svābhāvikī jñānabalakriyā ca // 6.8 //*

He is without a body or organs; none like unto Him is seen, or better than He. The Vedas speak of His exalted power, which is innate and capable of producing diverse effects and also of His omniscience and might.

The Lord has no body or organs. None is His equal and none is His superior either. He possesses all powers of knowledge and action which are natural to Him. This has been confirmed by the scriptures.

Mantra 9

*na tasya kaścit patir asti loke na ceśitā naiva ca tasya liṅgaṃ /
sa kāraṇaṃ karaṇādhipādhipo na cāsya kaścij janitā na cādhipaḥ // 6.9 //*

He has no master in the world, no ruler, nor is there even a sign of Him by which He can be inferred. He is the cause, the Lord of the lord of the organs; and He is without progenitor or controller.

There is none in this world who is His master or who governs Him and there is nothing by which He can be identified. He is the cause of all. He is also the Lord of the jiva who is the lord of all the sense-organs. None is His creator and none is His controller.

Mantra 10

*yas tantunābha iva tantubhiḥ pradhānajaiḥ svabhāvataḥ /
deva ekaḥ svam āvṛṇōti sa no dadhād brahmāpyayam // 6.10 //*

May the non-dual Lord, who, by the power of His maya, covered Himself, like a spider, with threads drawn from primal matter, merge us in Brahman!

As a spider hides itself by its own web, the Lord hides Himself effortlessly within the projections of his maya such as names, forms and actions. May He kindly unite us with Brahman?

Mantra 11

*eko devaḥ sarvabhūteṣu gūḍhaḥ sarvavyāpī sarvabhūtāntarātmā /
karmādhyakṣaḥ sarvabhūtādhivāsaḥ sākṣī cetā kevalo nirguṇas ca // 6.11 //*

The non-dual and resplendent Lord is hidden in all beings. All-pervading, the inmost Self of all creatures, the impeller to actions, abiding in all things, He is the Witness, the Animator and the Absolute, free from gunas.

He is the one without a second, yet he is hidden in every being. He is all pervasive, the Self of all. He gives to all beings the fruits of their actions, and he is the support of all. He is the witness, bestower of consciousness, without attributes and unconditioned.

Bhagvad Gita says

*upadrashtaanumantaa cha bhartaa bhoktaa maheshwarah
paramaatmeti chaapyukto dehe'smin purushah parah // 13.23 //*

The Supreme Purusha in this body is also called the Witness, the Approver, the Supporter, the Experiencer, the Sovereign Lord and the Supreme Self.

Mantra 12

*eko vaśī niṣkriyāṇāṃ bahūṇāṃ ekaṃ bījaṃ bahudhā yaḥ karoti /
tam ātmasthaṃ ye 'nupaśyanti dhīrās teṣāṃ sukhaṃ śāśvataṃ netareṣāṃ // 6.12 //*

There is a non-dual Ruler of the actionless many; He makes the one seed manifold. Eternal happiness belongs to the wise, who perceive Him within themselves-and not to others.

He is non-dual; he controls everything and makes one seed to breed many seeds. Wise people see such a Lord in themselves and attain liberation but not others.

Mantra 13

*nityo nityānāṃ cetanaś cetanānām eko bahūnāṃ yo vidadhāti kāmān /
tat kāraṇaṃ sāṃkhyayogādhigamyaṃ jñātvā devaṃ mucyate sarvapāśaiḥ // 6.13 //*

He is the Eternal among the eternal, the Conscious among the conscious and though non-dual, fulfils the desires of many. He who has known Him, the luminous Lord, the Great Cause, to be realized by Knowledge (Samkhya) and yoga, is freed from all fetters.

The Lord gives eternity to all the eternal, consciousness to those who are conscious. He is alone, yet he is able to fulfill the wishes of all. You realize him only through knowledge and when you have this realization, you become free from ignorance.

Mantra 14

*na tatra sūryo bhāti na candratārakaṃ nemā vidyuto bhānti kuto 'yam agniḥ /
tam eva bhāntam anubhāti sarvaṃ tasya bhāsā sarvam idaṃ vibhāti // 6.14 //*

The sun does not shine there, nor the moon and the stars, nor these lightnings-much less this fire. He shining, everything shines after Him. By his light all this is lighted.

The sun, moon and the other luminous things derive their light from Brahman and without Brahman they cannot give any light. Brahman is the source and goal of everything.

This Mantra occurs in Kathopanishad (2.2.15), Mundaka Upanishad (2.2.10) and Bhagavad Gita (15.6).

Mantra 15

*eko haṃso bhuvanasyāsya madhye sa evāgniḥ salile saṃmiviṣṭaḥ /
tam eva viditvāti mṛtyum eti nānyaḥ panthā vidyate 'yanāya // 6.15 //*

In this universe the Swan, the Supreme Self alone exists. It is He who, as fire, abides in the water. Only by knowing Him does one pass over death, there is no other way to reach the Supreme Goal.

The supreme Self, Brahman, is referred to as the swan which means the destroyer of ignorance. Brahman is fire because the supreme Self consumes ignorance as fire burns wood. If one knows his own Self he knows Brahman and he knows everything.

Water refers to the body because the element of water predominates in it. It also refers to pure heart in which the ego is subdued. The Supreme Self reflected in the pure heart destroys ignorance and its effects.

The Mantra says that the only way to transcend death and realize immortality is to know that Brahman is one's own self that is to say knowing that one's own self and the supreme Self are identical.

The body is made of flesh and it will be destroyed one day. But you are the Supreme spirit and nothing can destroy you. When you have this conviction you conquer death. But this conviction can come only with through knowledge. There is no other path; there is no other way to escape the unceasing round of births and deaths.

Mantra 16

*sa viśvakṛd viśvavid ātmayonir jñāḥ kālakālo guṇī sarvavidyāḥ /
pradhānakṣetrajñapatir guṇeśaḥ saṁsāramokṣasthitibandhahetuḥ // 6.16 //*

He who is the support of both the unmanifested prakriti and the jiva, who is the Lord of the three gunas and who is the cause of bondage, existence and Liberation from samsara, is verily the Creator of the universe, the Knower, the inmost Self of all things and their Source-the omniscient Lord, the Author of time, the Possessor of virtues, the Knower of everything.

The rope is the support of the illusory snake erroneously super imposed upon it. Further, it is the reality of the rope that makes the snake appear to be real. It is the same with the unmanifested *prakriti* (*avyakta*) and the *jiva*, both of which are erroneously superimposed upon Brahman. Without the substratum of Brahman neither would appear as real.

Ignorance about the Lord brings about the illusion of creation, and the non-discriminating person becomes entangled in the world. Knowledge of the Lord liberates one from it.

Mantra 17

*sa tanmayo hy amṛta īśasaṁsthō jñāḥ sarvago bhuvanasyāśya goptā /
sa īśe asya jagato nityam eva nānyo hetur vidyata īśanāya // 6.17 //*

He who constantly rules the world is verily the cause of bondage and Liberation. Established in His own glory, He is the Immortal, the Embodiment of Consciousness, and the omnipresent Protector of the universe. There is no one else able to rule it.

Sankara says that Brahman is *samsara-moksha-stithi-bandha-hetuḥ karanam*- that is Brahman is responsible for our existence, bondage and liberation.

Many epithets and adjectives have been used in this Mantra, as elsewhere, to describe Brahman; yet they are all completely inadequate. Brahman is beyond thought, beyond speech. Unless some words are used we just cannot even conceive Brahman.

Mantra 18

*yo brahmāṇaṁ vidadhāti pūrvaṁ yo vai vedāṁś ca prahiṇoti tasmai /
taṁ ha devam ātmabuddhiprakāśaṁ mumukṣur vai śaraṇam ahaṁ prapadye // 6.18 //*

Seeking Liberation, I take refuge in the Lord, the revealer of Self-Knowledge, who in the beginning created Brahma and delivered the Vedas to Him.

Because the Lord alone is the cause of a man's bondage and liberation, the aspirant should take refuge in Him with heart and soul. At the beginning of the cycle, the first tangible manifestation of the attributeless Brahman in the relative universe is Brahma. Brahma is therefore the personified totality of the entire created objects.

The teachings of the Vedas come through a succession of illumined teachers. At the end of the cycle when the whole universe goes back to the undifferentiated state, there remains no teacher to preserve and transmit the Vedas. The Vedic knowledge remains then merged in Brahman. At the beginning of the new cycle, the Lord creates Brahma and reveals the Vedas to him. Brahma in turn transmits the Vedic knowledge to a qualified teacher. Thus, a new line of teachers comes into existence for the preservation and propagation of the Vedic lore.

The seeker of liberation takes refuge in that luminous Lord who reveals Self-knowledge to the mind.

Mantra 19 - 20

*niṣkalaṁ niṣkriyaṁ śāntaṁ niravadyaṁ nirañjanam /
amṛtasya paraṁ setuṁ dagdhendhanam ivānalam // 6.19 //*

*yadā carmavad ākāśaṁ veṣṭayīṣyanti mānavāḥ /
tadā devam avijñāya duḥkhasyānto bhaviṣyati // 6.20 //*

When men shall roll up space as if it were a piece of hide, then there will be an end of misery without one's cultivating the Knowledge of the Lord, who is without parts, without actions, tranquil, blameless, unattached, the supreme bridge to Immortality, and like a fire that has consumed all its fuel.

This is a beautiful way of explaining a difficult topic. The Mantra says that just as it is never possible to roll up the *akasa* (sky) as a piece of leather (like a piece of suit-length cloth) so it is utterly impossible to put an end to miseries of the world without the knowledge of the Lord. Only when something impossible happens will misery cease without one's realizing God in one's heart.

That God has been described in various terms. Brahman is free from the slightest trace of phenomenality. It is like blazing charcoal which burns radiantly after the wood is consumed.

Bhagavad Gita says

*naadatte kasyachit paapam na chaiva sukritam vibhuh
ajnaanenaavritam jnaanam tena muhyanti jantavah // 5.15 //*

Nor does the all-pervading Spirit take on the merit or demerit of any. Knowledge is enveloped in ignorance and hence beings get deluded.

*jnaanena tu tadajnaanam yeshaam naashitamaatmanah
teshaam aadityavajjnaanam prakaashayati tatparam // 5.16 //*

But to those whose ignorance is destroyed by the Knowledge of the Self, that knowledge, like the Sun, reveals the Supreme (Brahman).

*tadbuddhayas tadaatmaanas tannishthaas tatparaayanaah
gacchantyapunaraavritim jnaana nirdhoota kalmashaah // 5.17 //*

Fixing their minds on Him, at one with Him, abiding in Him, realizing Him alone as the Supreme Goal, they reach a state, from which there is no return, their sins having been destroyed by their Knowledge.

Mantra 21

*tapaḥprabhāvād devaprasādāt brahma ha śvetāśvataro 'tha vidvān /
atyāśramibhyaḥ paramaṁ pavitraṁ provāca samyag ṛṣisaṅghajuṣṭam // 6.21 //*

Through the power of austerity and through the grace of the Lord, the sage Svetasvatara realised Brahman and proclaimed the highly sacred Knowledge, supremely cherished by the company of seers, to sannyasins of the most advanced stage.

The Vedic teachings have been transmitted through a succession of teachers. When aspirants devoting themselves to the pursuit of knowledge of Brahman and who have practiced the proper spiritual disciplines such as control of the senses and the concentration of mind, follow these teachings, through the grace of God, they attain liberation.

The Mantra says that sage Svetasvatara attained Self-Knowledge, by the power of his austerities and by the grace of the Lord and then he passed on this knowledge to monks who have renounced the world.

Mantra 22

*vedānte paramaṁ guhyaṁ purākalpe pracoditam /
nāpraśāntāya dātavyaṁ nāputrāyāśiṣyāya vā punaḥ // 6.22 //*

The profound mystery in the Vedanta was taught in the previous cycle. It should not be given to one whose passions have not been subdued, or to one who is not a son or a disciple.

The Upanishads teach the profound secret that is Knowledge of Brahman which shows the way to final liberation. This sacred knowledge was to be imparted only to them whose minds are under control or to the son or a disciple, but even to them it is not taught if they are not endowed with inner calmness.

The idea is if this knowledge is imparted to people whose minds are not under control it will lead to all misinterpretations with disastrous consequences.

Mantra 23

*yasya deve parā bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau /
tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ prakāśante mahātmanaḥ prakāśante mahātmanaḥ // 6.23 //*

If these truths have been told to a high-minded person who feels the highest devotion for God and for his guru as for God, and then they will surely shine forth as inner experiences - then, indeed, they will shine forth.

The Upanishad teachings taught by a Guru bear fruit only for those aspirants who cherish devotion to the Lord and the teacher. It is God who teaches the disciple through an illumined human teacher.

As a man whose clothes are under fire wants nothing but soaking himself in water or a hungry man wants nothing but a morsel of food, so a noble-minded aspirant, afflicted with the miseries of phenomenal existence, seeks nothing but the grace of the Guru, without which the Knowledge of Brahman is indeed hard to attain.

Iti Svetasvatāropanishadi sasto 'dhyayah ||
HERE ENDS THE SIXTH CHAPTER OF THE SVETASVATARA UPANISHAD

The Peace Chant

Om. That is full; this is full. This fullness has been projected from that fullness. When this fullness merges in that fullness, all that remains is fullness.

Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!

HERE ENDS THE SVETASVATARA UPANISHAD

6th October, 2011
Vijaya Dasami