

# Upanishadic Meditation

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Most of you know about our Upanishadic tradition and our religion called Sanàtana Dharma which is based on the Vedas. The Vedas have four parts—the Samhitàs, the Bràhmanas, the àranyakas and the Upanishads. The Upanishads are in the end portion of the Vedas. They are therefore called Vedanta. Sometimes I visualize Vedanta standing on the tripod. We called it Prasthànatraya. The first leg of the tripod is the Upanishads or revealed Truth. The second is the Gità or the practical truth. And the third is the Brahmasutras or the reasoned truth. The Upanishads are called apaurusheya, that is, not man-made. The Brihadàranyaka Upanishad says that this revealed knowledge came automatically from Brahmà, the Creator. It has no beginning and no end.

Secondly, I shall tell you that this Upanishadic knowledge is always new. It never becomes old. You see a movie several times, you will be tired. But you will never get tired if you read the Upanishads again and again. One of my friends was telling me the other day about Swami Vishuddhananda, the eighth President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Revered Maharaj said one day to someone: ‘Today is a memorable day in my life. This is my 50th reading of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Every time I read it I find something new.’ So is the Upanishad—always new because Truth never becomes old. Two thousand years ago Jesus said: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. The saying is still true. It will never lose its validity. So is the Upanishad. I have read the creative writings of Rabindranath, Sharatchandra and Bankimchandra, the doyens of Bengali literature, so many times and I must say I enjoyed reading them. But the Upanishads belong to a different category, they are matchless. The more I read the Upanishads, the more I am overwhelmed by their beautiful thoughts and loftiest ideas. I always find something new in them.

Once I went to give a lecture in St. Louis University which is a Catholic university. There I found students carrying big volumes of books. I asked one of them: ‘Can you tell me what is in those books? I would like to know in one sentence.’ ‘Faith’, answered one girl. ‘Faith? Tell me where does it come from?’ I asked. She could not answer. Then I said, ‘Faith comes from experience. I can know whether you are a good person or not only through experience.’

Similarly, the Upanishadic mantras which we read came from the experiences of our rishis. Mantras had been revealed to them, the rishis did not create the mantras—‘Rishayo mantradrasthàro na tu vedasya kartàrah’.

I sometimes tell the devotees in the West that behind us there is a Vedantic tradition of five thousand years. We are very very rich in this respect. We had a galaxy of great teachers of Vedanta amongst us and that our spiritual heritage is really deep and universal as it is based on transcendental experience or aparoksha anubhuti. Our rishis had attained the Truth by following three methods, namely shruti, yukti, and anubhava. Shruti is scriptures and in Hinduism it means the Vedas. But different religions have their different scriptures—Quran, Bible and the Vedanta scriptures are all different. What is preached by one scripture may be rejected by another. So our rishis, while accepting the authority of the Vedas, had recourse to the second method also, that is, yukti, or reason. But then, lower reason can be counteracted by higher reason. So they followed, along with the earlier two, a third method, ie anubhava or experience—direct, firsthand transcendental experience. They gave the highest value to such experience because it cannot be refuted as in the case of reasoning. If I tell you sugar tastes sour or bitter, will you accept my words? You would not because sugar tastes sweet. Therefore anubhuti

cannot be refuted. The Upanishads that contain the experiences of the sages are like that. They embody the gems of infallible transcendental Truth which is verifiable. When you read The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, you will find that every word of him is true. Do you know why? Because, as Sri Ramakrishna himself said, ‘The Mother of the Universe would never let me utter a single word that is untrue’.

### Hindu concept of truth

What is the Hindu concept of Truth? The Naiyāikas define truth as trikāla abādhitam nityam. Truth is that which remains true all the time—in the past, present and future. Show me one thing in this world which does not change. You cannot because this world or jagat is continuously changing. Change is its very nature. The word jagat comes from the root gam, ie to go. Nothing in this world remains static. We are changing every moment—our bodies, our mind, everything! But the Truth never changes—It is unchanging. That is the characteristic of the Upanishadic truth. I remember once a Jewish lady told me: ‘Swami, your job must be the easiest in this world.’ I said, ‘What do you mean?’ She said, ‘Your job is to give advice which is free and cheap.’ Then I asked, ‘What is the most difficult job in the world?’ ‘To know the Self’, she answered. That is what our Upanishads teach. They say—*atmānam viddhi*—know thyself.

I remember a story. Once Brahmā, the Creator, thought that He should give everything to His children and He gave. But then instantaneously He thought that if He gave everything His children would never come to Him. So He decided to keep one thing in His control. Do you know, what did He keep to himself? Shānti (peace), ānanda (bliss) and mukti (liberation). These are apparently three different words but mean the same thing. If you have no freedom, you have no bliss and no peace. However, Brahmā faced a problem. ‘Where to keep this vital thing’, he wondered. Having found no solution, He convened a meeting of the gods and sought their opinion. Someone suggested that it should be buried under the ocean. Brahmā said, ‘You do not know my American children. They will go to the bottom of the ocean with the help of a submarine and grab it.’ Someone then said, ‘O Creator, put it in outer space.’ Brahmā smiled and said, ‘Oh! They will go in their space shuttle and get it.’ A third one said, ‘Then, put it under ground.’ ‘Oh! They will dynamite and unearth it’, exclaimed Brahmā. After a pause He said, ‘I have found a way out. I shall put peace or bliss or liberation inside the human heart.’

We find this truth in the Upanishads. Swami Vivekananda therefore says again and again that vain is your search for God in temples, churches and mosques—It is all inside you. In a letter to Mary Hale he writes to the effect that he searched, searched and searched but could not find Him. At last he found Him within himself. In one of his poems Tagore also depicts this human predicament with the help of the simile of a musk-deer that frantically looks here and there for the source of the strong aroma that comes from his own musk. Swamiji therefore said that: I searched and searched like a musk-deer here and there. But finally I found it is all within me!

Do you know what struck me most when I first started studying Vedānta fifty years ago? It was a verse that says that this world is like a cobra. It has spread its big hood and under the shadow of its hood we are comfortably sleeping, as it were, without thinking that a single bite of the dangerous cobra can finish our life any moment. So uncertain is our life! The goal of all religions therefore is the complete annihilation of sorrows, miseries and sufferings. Being threatened by three kinds of miseries all the time, the question arose in human mind—‘Is there any way out from this misery?’ So we find in the Chāndogya Upanishad (7.1.3), sage Nārada goes to Sanat Kumar and prays: ‘So’ham bhagavo mantravit eva asmi na ātmavit shrutam hi eva me bhagavat drishebhyah tarati shokam ātmavit iti

so'ham bhagavah shocàmi tam mà bhagavàn shokasya paràm tàrayatu iti. . . .'

That is, 'Sir, I know only the word meaning; I do not know the Self. I have also heard from people like you that one who knows the Self overcomes sorrow. Revered Sir, I am suffering from sorrow; please take me across [the ocean] of sorrow.'

So you see, the Upanishad is wonderful because it deals with truth that is scientific. Vedanta is therefore an absolutely scientific religion. When we study science we do not accept statements just because those statements have been made by Newton or Einstein. Truth must be examined, verified and analysed. Likewise, the test of the Upanishadic truth is aparoksha anubhuti or transcendental experience.

### Universality

Next, we find that the Upanishadic or Vedantic truth is universal. If you want to form a new religion you need three things. First, you need a Personal God; second, a prophet; third, a book. Without these three there cannot be any religion. Without God, without Jesus, without Bible, there can be no Christianity. Without Allah, Muhammad, and Koran, Islam is inconceivable. Without Buddha and the Tripitaka, there is no

Buddhism. But Vedantic Upanishad does not depend upon any particular book or any prophet or any kind of Personal God. Vedantic God is Sat-Chit-ânanda—Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute, the Supreme Reality.

Once a person came to our Vedanta Society at Santa Barbara and asked one of our nuns: 'Who is the prophet of this organization?' She replied that it is a non-prophet organization. The questioner understood perhaps that ours is a non-profit organization, for In America, you know, a non-profit organization gets tax-exemption!

Vedantic religion is universal because the Truth it professes is impersonal. Insulin was invented by a Jewish gentleman, but it is used all over the world. In that sense, Vedanta is also universal. The Truth it preaches can be tested and experienced by anyone belonging to any country.

Then the greatness of the Upanishads lies in the fact, Swami Vivekananda says, that they do not speak about sin. The Chândogya Upanishad (8.1.5) says, 'esah àtmà apahatapàpmà vijaro vimrityuh vishokah vijighatsah satyakàmah satyasankalpah' and so on. That is to say, 'This àtman is free from all sins and old age; It is deathless, free from hunger, thirst and bereavement and always committed to Truth.' Christianity was shaken for the first time when Darwin propounded his theory of evolution. It received the second shock when Swamiji declared at the Parliament of Religions that it is sin to call man sinners; it is a standing libel on human nature. Therefore, in the style and voice of the Upanishadic seers he addressed his audience as 'the children of immortal Bliss'.

To attain this Bliss, according to the Upanishads, is the goal of human life. The Chândogya Upanishad therefore proclaims 'Yah vai bhumaà tat sukham na alpe sukham asti bhumaiva sukham.' (7.23.1) Bliss is only in the Infinite, not in the finite.

### Meditation

Now I shall talk to you about meditation—meditation on some of the invaluable thoughts contained in the Upanishads. But before I do that, let me state briefly what Shankaracharya said about the meaning

of the word ‘Upanishad’ in his commentary on the Katha Upanishad. ‘Upa’ means near or sàmipya; ‘ni’ means definitely; and ‘sad’ has three connotations. The first meaning is destruction. That is, it destroys ignorance. The second meaning is gati or pràpti. That is, it helps us to attain the highest Reality. And lastly, it means visharana—that is, it loosens our bondage, the bondage of the cycle of birth and death. That is all about the meaning of the term ‘Upanishad’.

Now about meditation. Thousands of years ago our rishis or sages had explored the whole spectrum of human life and tried to find out the correct answer to such questions as ‘Who am I? What is this world? Where did I come from? What is the goal or purpose of human life? What is life and what is death? What is âtman? What is Brahman? What is Màya? What is freedom and what is bondage?’ These questions are universal and all religions more or less answer these questions. Nevertheless, the Upanishads are unique in many ways. The first characteristic that makes them so distinct from other scriptures is the principle of unity in diversity. This you will not find elsewhere. In the Mundaka Upanishad (1.1.3), Shaunaka, a very progressive householder asks sage Angirà, ‘Kasmin nu bhagavah vijnàte sarvam idam vijnàtam bhavati iti’—‘Oh lord, what is that by knowing which everything can be known?’

You see, two pages of the book of our life are missing. We do not know where do we come from and we do not know where shall we go after what we call death. The Upanishads give these answers. The purpose of the scripture is to enlighten us about the unknown and the Upanishads exactly do that. Even when we read the Garbhopenishad we come to know about our state before we are born and how an embryo develops every month and also what happens after the so-called death. So we know so many things from the Upanishads. They solve various problems of our life. They tell us how to practise Vedanta. This practice requires the observance of four external disciplines or sàdhanacatushtaya and three internal disciplines. The external disciplines include nityànitya vastu viveka, iha amutra phala-bhoga-viràga, shatsampatti and mumukshatvam. In other words, the first discipline signifies an effort to discriminate between the real and the unreal. Viveka means discrimination. Then the second discipline stands for vairàgya or renunciation. The third, shatsampatti or six treasures stand for such qualities as calmness, self-control, self-settledness, forbearance, concentration and faith. The fourth implies an intense longing for liberation. Lastly, the three internal disciplines are shravana, manana and nididhyàsana.

Among all these disciplines the chore is renunciation. You must learn how to give up. But in America the word renunciation is a taboo. They think it reflects a negative attitude. One day Christopher Isherwood, the famous writer, said to me, ‘Swami, don’t try renunciation. Try some other words such as dispassion, detachment, non-attachment. We can absorb these words. But renunciation is very shocking to us. They think it is negative.’ I tell them renunciation is nothing to fear about. It is actually giving up smaller things for achieving the greatest. If somebody gives you a beautiful house in a posh locality of Washington, will you not be ready to give away a slum house in New York ghetto? You will, and that is called renunciation. I then make some jokes and tell them: ‘Look I renounced one mother and a few brothers and sisters and now I have hundreds of mothers, brothers and sisters all over the world. That is the net profit of renunciation!’

So then, first is discrimination. Second is renunciation. And the third is shatsampatti or six treasures such as shama, dama, uparati, titikshà, samàdhàna and shraddhà or self-discipline. Fourth is a burning desire for liberation or mumukshatvam. These are four external disciplines or sàdhana catushtaya. Next come shravana, manana and nididhyàsana. These are the internal disciplines. Shravana means hearing, manana means reflecting and nididhyàsana means meditation. Till you go to sleep, till you die, constantly hear about Vedanta and the truth embedded in it. If we go on doing this ceaselessly Truth

will reveal Itself.

We generally meditate according to the instructions given by our Gurus. Guru says, first meditate on the Guru on the crown of the head and visualize him. Next, you are asked to meditate on the Ishta or your Chosen Deity in the lotus of your heart cakra. Then you dissolve your Guru into your Ishta and start meditation. Sri Ramakrishna talks about various kinds of meditation and says, ‘Those who think of Me, they get My qualities just as children inherit the wealth of their parents. They will verily inherit My wealth.’ What is the wealth of Sri Ramakrishna? Jnàna (knowledge), viveka (discrimination), variàgya (dispassion) kshamà (forgiveness), bhakti (devotion) and prema (intense love). The more we shall meditate on Sri Ramakrishna, the more we shall acquire this wealth.

Remember the hard days which Swamiji (then Narendranath) was passing through and his family was starving. He could not get even an ordinary job and finally he came to Sri Ramakrishna who sent him to goddess Kàli to pray. You know the story. But what did Narendra pray for? He prayed for five things—knowledge, discrimination, renunciation, devotion, and uninterrupted God-vision. Indeed, these are the things we should pray for. In America sometimes they pray to God for a parking place! ‘Lord, may I get a good parking space!’ Here in India, people go to the Shiva temple at Tarakeswar or temples in other places to pray for all sorts of worldly things. These are prayers of course, but selfish prayers.

Now about non-dualistic meditation. Sri Ramakrishna taught his disciples how to meditate on the formless God. One day he took Sri M. to the reservoir of Mati Seal and said, ‘Look at the fish. Meditating on the formless God is like swimming joyfully like these fish, in the Ocean of Bliss and Consciousness.’

I was in the San Diego zoo where I found a huge killer whale kept in a small tank for training. The tank was so small that the whale could not move! I got tremendous pain when I saw the whale and thought: what else is bondage? Our predicament is also the same. We are free but we think we are bound, as if the cage of flesh and bone has bound the Infinite. Sri Ramakrishna used to say—‘panchabhuter phànde brahma pare kànde’, ‘The immutable Brahman cries, as it were, caught in the trap of the body made of five elements’! Swami Turiyananda used to walk in the Central Park in New York and chant a shloka that says, ‘nirgachhati jagatjàlât pinjaràdiva keshari’. That is, ‘O Lion! break, break this cage of the world and be free!’ In other words, he used to constantly remind himself that he was the Infinite àtman, and not merely a psychophysical organism. That is one kind of Upanishadic meditation.

In this connection, let me tell you about a few Upanishads that contain profound ideas on which also we can meditate. First is the Isha Upanishad. The first verse of this Upanishad says,

Ishàvàsyaamidam sarvam yatkincha jagatyàm jagat;

Tena tyaktena bhunjithà mà gridhah kasya sviddhanam.

You can meditate on this verse. What is the idea that it conveys? It says, cover everything with God-consciousness. Nobody is your enemy, nobody is your friend. All are gods in different forms. This mantra is so beautiful! It asks us to enjoy through renunciation. Do you know, what does renunciation mean? It actually means that we must have a great outlook. If we have a great outlook our mind will not dwell on petty things of life. The moment the focus of your attention is on Brahman, lower things will drop off automatically.

The Skandopanishad says:

Deho devàlayah prokta: sa jivah kevalah Shivah

That is, this very human body is the tabernacle of Shiva or God. But look, how practical Sri Ramakrishna is in this respect! He says that tiger is god, lion is god; they are all gods, but do not hug them. Just salute them from a distance. He urges us to have a strong common sense. Anyway, what is the result of this meditation? Isha Upanishad says:

Yasminsarvāni bhutāni ātmaivābhud vijānatah;  
Tatra ko mohah kah shoka ekatvamanupashyatah. (7)

What a beautiful message and what a beautiful result we get from this meditation! The earlier verse (6) says, ‘sarvabhuteshu chātmānam tato na vijugupsate.’ That is, ‘He who sees everything in himself and himself in everything never hates anything or anybody.’ There is then no mohah or attachment and no shokah or sorrow. The moment you experience this ātman, this Self, you are free from all these binding elements. This we learn from the Upanishads.

In 1977 I was in Benares. I was very fond of a Swami. He taught me how to practise Vedanta and many other things. His name was Swami Dhireshananda, a real Vedantin. One day he asked, showing me a necklace made of pearls, ‘Who is holding the pearls?’ Then he himself said, ‘Either there must be a thread or a chain. If you watch minutely you will see that between the two pearls there is something that keeps the two together. That thread or chain is ātman. That is Brahman. That is Consciousness.’

I tell you frankly, there are many things which are not in the books. You have to live with such people to know such things and I learnt many things from them. When my mind is disturbed I take a walk. Do you know what I do then? I repeat mentally the following verse of the Katha Upanishad: ‘Parānci khāni vyatrinat svayambhu tasmāt parām pashyati na antarātman / kah cit dhirah pratyagātmanam aikshat āvrittacakshuh amritatvam icchan’ // (2.1.1). That is my meditation. The verse says that God created these senses with outgoing tendencies. There are only a few who are āvrittacakshuh, who close their eyes and shut the senses in order to behold the Self or ātman within. The ātman is within you—that is the message of this mantra. We find this word dhirā in the Kumārasambhavam of Kālidasa. What a beautiful poetic word is this dhirāh. All around there is turmoil and restlessness. But if you can keep your mind unperturbed, then only you are a dhira, a person of steady wisdom. This idea we find also in the last part of the second chapter of the Bhagavad-Gitā.

The way to perfection

All human beings are trying in one way or the other to get perfection, but they do not know how to attain it. And here again the Katha Upanishad teaches us how to be perfect. It says, ‘Na aviratah dushcaritāt na ashāntah na asamāhitah / na ashāntamānasah vā api prajñānena enam āpnuyāt’ // (1.2.24). What a beautiful mantra! That is very important. He, who has not first turned away from wickedness and subdued his senses and whose mind is not at peace or tranquil, cannot attain the ātman. It is realized only through the knowledge of the Reality.

Then we find another wonderful mantra in the Chāndogya Upanishad called daharavidyā that tells us how to go inside the source of Bliss, the source of peace. The verse runs as follows: ‘atha yadidamasmin brahmapure daharam pundarikam veshma daharo’sminnantarākāshastasmin-yadantastadanveshtavyam tadvāva vijijnāsitavyamiti’. (8.1) Sometimes I repeat this verse when my mind is restless during meditation and it helps. The verse says that there is in the city of Brahman an abode—a small lotus of the heart. Within it there is a small ākāsha or space. One must search within

this space and earnestly desire to know what is there. That is what one should try to understand. Then Sri Ramakrishna's words come to my mind. He says, if there is any fibre in the thread, it will not pass through the eye of a needle. You will have to squeeze it with a little moisture. Then it will go.

Next we find in the Mundaka Upanishad the following verse:

‘Pranavo dhanuh sharo hi àtmà brahma tallakshyam ucyate; apramattena veddhavyam sharavat tanmayah bhavet.’ (2.2.4) It means ‘Om is the bow and the individual soul is the arrow. Brahman is the target of the soul. Hit it without any mistake.’

I remember I gave this lecture in Hollywood temple and do you know what happened? Next Sunday a man came with a bow in his hand and gave that to me saying, ‘Swami, this is for you.’ I said, ‘Yes, thank you very much.’ Sometimes, you know, the Westerners take the words very literally! One day I said that in Kaliyuga if one cries for one day and night one will get the vision of God. One actress heard the lecture. She went back home and began to weep and weep and then fell asleep. Then one day she appeared and said, ‘Swami, you asked me to cry and I cried accordingly. But how is it that Sri Ramakrishna didn't come?’ I asked, ‘How many hours did you cry?’ She replied, ‘Swami, five or maybe six hours and then I fell asleep’. I said, ‘Thakur asked us to weep twenty-four hours. You will have to weep more.’

So you see, how literally these people sometimes take things there! So when I tell my students to cry for God, they feel they should shed tears immediately. One day one student asked, ‘Swami, shall I put some chilli powder in my eyes?’ I said, ‘Please don't; your eyes will be damaged and I would be sued!’

Anyway, in ancient times there were no guns and no missiles. So the Upanishad gave the simile of the bow and arrow. Next you may meditate on a verse that is found in the Brihadàranyaka Upanishad. The verse says: ‘. . .yo anyatratmanah sarvam vededam brahmedam kshatramime lokà ime devà imàni bhutànìdam sarvam yadayam àtmà.’ (2.4.6) This verse says that the àtman includes everything in the universe—the Bràhmins, the Kshatriyas, the lokas, the Devas, in short, everything. The sense of separateness blocks our Self-knowledge. This reminds me of an incident. One day, while Swami Vivekananda was talking to Madame Calve, the famous opera singer, the latter said, ‘O Swami, I love my individuality.’ Swamiji said immediately, ‘Individuality! You are not yet an individual!’ Then illustrating his remark he said, “One day some raindrops fell on the ocean and became bubbles. As those bubbles kept floating on the surface of the ocean, the ocean said, ‘Hey, be one with me’. A bubble said, ‘Oh, no! I must maintain my bubble-individuality.’ The ocean smiled and said, ‘Ah! millions of bubbles have become one with me and you want to retain your bubble-individuality!’” Similarly, we too want to protect our bubble-individuality by all means. The irony is that whether we know it or not, we are all Brahman. God is within us. Then what is it that stands in the way of our experiencing God? Ego, ego, ego—ahamkàra. It is the one wall which is between the Infinite and finite. I remember one Jewish student asked me: ‘Swami, I have a little problem with my ego.’ I said, ‘Do you really have an ego?’ She said, ‘Yes, I have a little ego.’ I asked, ‘Are you the Miss Universe?’ ‘No, Swami’. ‘Do you have a PhD degree?’ ‘No Swami’. ‘Then what do you have? You can become proud if you have learning, if you have money, if you have beauty. But you say you don't have any of these things.’ Then she said, ‘You are right, Swami.’ You see, still we become so egoistic!

In the Mundaka Upanishad there is a mantra that inspires us very much. The mantra runs as follows:

‘Dvā suparnā sayujā sakhāyā

samānam vriksham parishasvajāte /  
Tayoh anyah pippalam svādu atti  
anashnan anyah abhicākashiti //’ (3.1.1)

The purport of this verse is that in this tree-body of ours the paramātman and jivātman are the two birds living on its branches. One bird, the paramātman, sits atop the tree and is at peace looking down calmly. But the other bird, the jivātman, sits on the lower branches and is restless. Sometimes it eats bitter fruit, sometimes sweet, and yet again a bitter one. Then it sees the bird on top and marvels at its calmness. It tries to climb high and in this manner climbs higher and higher till it reaches the crest of the tree where the paramātman is. On reaching there, it finds that the paramātman and jivātman are the same. They are one. Swamiji said this verse is the quintessence of Vedanta.

Four mahāvākyas

There are four mahāvākyas or great mantras in the four Vedas. In the Rig-Veda, we find prajñānam brahma; in the Yajurveda, there is aham brahmāsmi; in the Sāma-Veda, we find tatvamasi; and in the Atharva-Veda, there is ayamātma brahma. So when you say ‘aham brahmāsmi’, ‘I am Brahman’—that is fine. But when you open your eyes and see someone, you say ‘tatvamasi’, ‘You are That’, ie you are Brahman too. Not only I am Brahman, you are also Brahman. This is something new. When you are Brahman and I am also Brahman, there should not be any kind of friction between us. This is anubhuti or realization. This realization of oneness can solve all problems—religious problems, family problems, all problems of human life.

Once I asked my teacher, Swami Bodhatmanandaji, ‘Maharaj, is Shankara’s experience and Buddha’s experience different? Buddha talks about nirvāna and Shankara talks about mukti.’ Bodhatmanandaji said, ‘Not at all. How? Listen, young man. Imagine, here is a boat. It goes into the deep ocean. Suppose Buddha and Shankara both are in the boat. Buddha looks upward and says—sarvam shunyam shunyam—all is void. Shankara looks down, sees the ocean, and says—sarvam purnam purnam—all is full. Buddha sees the negative side and Shankara sees the positive side. Both are in the same boat, at the same place, and both of them have the same experience. Only one saw one side and the other saw the other side.’

Next comes Vedantic experience. There are two kinds of experience. One is svasamvedya or self-revealed direct experience. And the other is parasamvedya, that depends on the experience of some other person, maybe an illumined soul. In ancient times even the kings used to talk about Brahman or God. In the court of king Janaka, sage Yājñavalkya went and said. ‘O king, let me hear what you have heard from other teachers about Brahman.’ Janaka replied that he had six teachers who told him that Brahman is speech, eyes, ears, prāna, mind and heart. Then Yājñavalkya asked the king to take up all the six aspects and meditate on Brahman. This conversation you find in the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad. The words there are so poetic! ‘prajñā iti enat upāsīt’, ‘satyam iti enat upāsīt’, ‘sthitirityenadupāsīt’ (4.1.2-7) etc. These verses have tremendous power, wisdom and bliss. You know, Sanskrit words are so profound in meaning! Swamiji therefore said Sanskrit and prestige go together. Sanskrit language helps to know our culture.

Another interesting thing we find in the Upanishads is that they speak about the Truth of all truths—satyasya satyam. What does it mean? Suppose I am hungry which is true. Suppose I have headache which is also true. But these truths are not the Absolute Truth. They are relative truths that do not last eternally. But that Truth which never changes is the Truth of all truths, the Truth that existed in the past, exists at present, and will exist in future. That eternal Truth is Brahman. That is God.

Sometimes I meditate on this mantra found in the Taittiriya Upanishad that declares: ‘ânanda brahmeti vyajānāt /ânandādhyeva khalvimāni bhutāni jāyante / ânandena jātāni jivanti / ânandam prayantyaabhisamvishantiti.’ (3.6.1) The verse says that all these beings originate from Bliss, sustained by Bliss, and they move and merge in Bliss which is Brahman. So you see, we are born to enjoy Bliss, but we feel miserable. We get married to enjoy bliss. We want husband, wife, children, money, car—everything for bliss. Bliss is the guiding force. But the tragedy is that you cannot buy this Bliss. I remember a peace conference that took place in St. Louis. I was also invited there. Patricia Rice, a newspaper columnist whom I knew, asked me: ‘Swami, why are you going there?’ I said, ‘Because we need peace. You can’t buy peace from the grocer.’ She said, ‘Swami, wait, let me write down what you said.’ And do you know what happened? I was on the front page of the newspaper next morning!

I tell you another mantra from the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad (4.3.32) that says: ‘Eshā asya paramā gatih, eshā asya paramā sampat, asya eshah paramah lokah, asya eshah paramah ânandah, etasya eva ânandasya anyāni bhutāni matrām upajivanti.’ That is, in deep sleep (sushupti) state, the ātman becomes like transparent water—one without a second, a witness. This is the world of Brahman. This is the supreme attainment. This is the supreme glory, the supreme Bliss. The worldly creatures, who think they are different from Brahman, thrive on a particle of this Bliss. In another Vedanta scripture, Pancadashi, you also come across the word ânanda again and again, particularly in its last five chapters. So when I encounter suffering, I repeat the verses which say—‘If a man knows the Self as Bliss, then for whose sake will he suffer?’

In 1952-53, Swami Shraddhanandaji Maharaj was the Editor of the Udbodhan, the Bengali journal of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. I used to go there and bow to him. Once he said, ‘Why do you come? You take the dust and run away! Come here, memorize this verse and then go.’ I memorized it. What was the verse? It was from the Taittiriya Upanishad: ‘Rasah vai sah. Rasam hi eva ayam labdhvā ânandi bhavati. Kah hi eva anyāt kah prānyāt . . .’ (2.7) The verse says, Brahman is self-created. It is saturated with Bliss. Who could inhale and exhale if this Bliss did not exist in ākāsha, ie within the heart? Brahman verily is the rasah, of the nature of Bliss.

Many years later Swami Shraddhananda and myself sometimes used to sit in the garden of Santa Barbara. One day he said: ‘Today is very hot. Let me bring some breeze from San Francisco’. Then he chanted a mantra that says this whole universe is saturated with the sweetness of honey. But we do not feel it. We only encounter so much miseries, sufferings, disease and death! But look at Swami Vivekananda. He wrote a letter from Almora in 1897 in which he said that he, whose body is saturated with the fire of yoga, has no disease, old age and death. These are the ideas we get from the Upanishads, ideas that give us tremendous strength.

The next mantra is from the Shvetāshvatara Upanishad:

Svadeham aranim kritvā pranavam ca uttarānim /  
Dhyāna-mirmathan-abhyāsāt devam pashyēt nigurabat // (1.14)

That is, by making the body the lower piece of wood and Om (pranava) as the upper piece, through repeated practice of friction of meditation one experiences the luminous Self just like the fire in the wood. You see sesame seeds. Oil is there. But we do not see it. Similarly there is butter in the milk but we do not see it. You will have to churn the milk if you want to see butter. Likewise, sesame seeds have to be crushed in order to get oil. This churning or repeated practice is sādhanā. A devotional song composed by Mira Bai says, ‘sādhan karnā chāhiye manvā’—you need to do spiritual practices

ceaselessly. This is very important. I remember Swami Prabhavananda once went to Swami Turiyananda and requested him to teach Bhagavad-Gità. Swami Turiyananda said, 'My boy, come tomorrow.' Swami Prabhavananda went to Swami Turiyananda the next day with a copy of the Gità. Turiyanandaji said, 'My boy, take one verse of the Gità, memorize it, understand it, and practise it until you get perfection in that particular verse. Don't take the next verse until you achieve this. And this is my first and the last class on the Gità. You may go now.' So, you see, how important is repeated practice.

Finally I shall tell you an event that took place in the life of Tagore. In 1941 Tagore passed away in his 'Jorasanko' house. He had surgery and it was not successful. Nirmal Kumari Mahalanobis writes in her book that Amita Tagore, the poet's grand-daughter-in-law was dripping water in his mouth with the help of a tube. At the same time she was reciting in his ears 'Shàntam, Shivam, Advaitam'. It is from the Måndukya Upanishad: 'amàtrah caturthah avyavahàryah prapancopashamah shivah advaitah evam omkàrah àtmà eva. . .' (12) That is to say, there is no manifestation of màyà in the àtman. It is Pure Consciousness. Shàntam, It is calm; Shivam, all auspicious; Advaitam, non-dual. People thought Tagore was already dead. But as he listened to the mantra, he raised his hands and put them on his forehead and then he passed away.

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\* This article is based on the edited and abridged version of the lecture the Swami delivered at the Institute on 22 September 2007. Swami Chetanananda is the Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society, St. Louis, U. S. A.