

Brahmagyan, Mother Of All Knowledge

By KANTA RAMCHANDANI

THE *Mundaka Upanishad* expounds the very essence of *Brahmagyan*. The teaching of this Upanishad is referred to as Brahmagyan or Paravidya, the knowledge that brings us "that knowing which everything else is known".

What is the nature of this unchangeable Brahman? He cannot be seen, cannot be sensed. Yet he is the Absolute — from whom everything comes. Like the spokes of a wheel that radiate from the hub, all creation radiates from Him. To reach the central hub and know that all spokes radiate from it, the mind is the instrument. One has only to turn the consciousness away from the objective world, contact with which contaminates the mind. The infinite is the breath of one's breath. Since He has no specific form, He cannot be indicated by words, nor can His mystery be penetrated by the other senses. He can be known only by an intellect that has been cleansed of all attachment, hatred, egoism and the sense of possession. The Atma is imminent in the senses, as butter in milk. The worldly consciousness is soaked in sensory desires — when the pool in the heart becomes clear, the Atma shines in its pristine splendour. The sages see Him and that is the supreme knowledge.

Just as a spider evolves out of itself a web, so too the universe originates from Brahman. Again it is said that every soul is a spark of the Infinite fire. But the Infinite is indivisible; therefore what is meant is that each soul is actually the Infinite Brahman — they are reflections of Brahman. Everyone and everything is the Atman: the Self, the ever-blessed. It is the name, the form, the body which are material. If you take away these the whole universe is one.

The Upanishad speaks of two types of activities — Ishta and Poorta. Rites and rituals are called Ishta and Poorta refers to activities like making roads and building hospitals. Men who perform these Karmas get what they desire and go to heaven, but sooner or later they have to re-experience the cycle of birth and death. The cycle ceases only when the disciple realises that the true aim is the knowledge of Brahman by which he can know the one who never

changes and who is the truth. He then realises that the only knowledge that is of any value is to know that all worldly knowledge and activity is deceptive.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* goes on to tell us what becomes of a person who has realised God: "All doubts vanish for ever, and all the crookedness of the heart is made straight, all bondages vanish, and the results of actions fly when He is seen who is nearest of near, and the farthest of the far". Realisation alone is the soul of religion. Everyone can perform sacrifices, rituals or good works, but very few have this yearning for realisation. This intense longing for realising God or Self is real spirituality.

The entire Vedantic philosophy is contained in the following story in the *Mundaka Upanishad*. Two birds are perched on the same tree, one on the top and the other below. The bird on top is calm and majestic, while the one below is eating sweet and bitter fruits by turn and hopping from branch to branch. After a time when it has eaten a very bitter fruit the second bird looks up at the first bird who eats neither sweet nor bitter fruits but is calm and collected.

Yearning to be like that, the second bird hops up a little way towards the first. But soon, forgetting all about his yearning, he once again begins to eat the fruits. This goes on till he reaches close to the bird on top. He sees the reflection of light from the first bird's beautiful plumage playing around his own body, which slowly begins to melt away. He now understands that he was only the reflection of the higher — in essence he himself was the upper bird all the time, who is God. He exclaims, "It is my own glory that I called God and this 'little I' was all hallucination — it never existed". So we are in reality one with God, but the reflection makes us seem many. The reflection must vanish if we are to identify ourselves with our true Divine nature.

Like the lower bird which found that it was the upper bird all the time, we too will find that we are the Self — and the rest was but a dream. We have to remember all the time *Om Tat Sat*, that "Brahman alone is true, and I am Brahman".



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