

Sadhanas
from
ब्रह्मसिद्धि



Swami Shantananda puri

SADHANAS
from
KENOPANISHAD

Swami Shantananda Puri

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Sadhanas from Kenopanishad

- a simple commentary on Kenopanishad
by H.H. Sri Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj

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Samarpana

This book is dedicated
with veneration to

the Lotus Feet of my Revered Guru
Swami Purushottamandaji Maharaj
of Vasishta Guha,
Himalayas

who inspired me to write this book

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INTRODUCTION

The Kenopanishad forms part of the Talvakara ascension (ninth chapter) of the Sama Veda. The Upanishad starts with the word 'Kena' (केन) i.e. 'by whom' and hence its name has been kept as Kenopanishad. The earlier chapters deal with various karmas (ritualistic) and upasanas (worship) of Prana (vital energy) ; the conditioned Brahman is also called as Prana. This Upanishad deals with the knowledge of the Pure and unconditioned Brahman (Suddha Brahman). In interpreting it, the author has closely followed the commentary by Adi Sankara.

Each of the four Vedas consists of three parts -

1. **Samhita** - collection of various mantras used in our prescribed karmas (from birth

to death including marriage) and various types of yagas (fire sacrifices).

2. **Brahmana** – a commentary on Samhitas pointing out, *inter alia*, on which occasion and how a mantra is to be chanted etc.
3. **Aranyaka** – of which Upanishads form a part.

In each Veda there had been numerous sakhas (ascensions) of the Samhita. Sama Veda alone had thousand ascensions (sahasra sakhah khalu Sāma) and barely two or three only are available today. The same thing holds good for other Vedas too. Persons specialized in Atharva Veda are not available at all in the entire India. Some years back a few of such specialists were found in some part of Orissa.

While there are more than 180 Upanishads which have so far been found, there are ten principal Upanishads (and also one more called Svetasvatara) for which Adi Sankara has written elucidative commentaries (Bhashyas).

Kenopanishad is one of those which had the distinction that Sankara had written two Bhashyas, word wise ((Pada Bhashya) and sentence-wise (Vākya Bhashya) as a whole. The idea to write on this text itself came as a result of the author reading a book containing the lectures of Swami Sri Akhandanandaji Maharaj of Brindavan on Kenopanishad, which were superb and hence his ideas have been adopted too in many places. This text was mainly written to please myself and also to keep me (the author) engaged in order to prevent my mind from going round my body, the major portion of which lies shattered and in constant pain due to broken bones of hip and the degenerated vertebrae but to keep it fixed on the Supreme Lord. If it is found to be of any use or value to some of the readers, they are welcome to it. May Lord's blessings be on all of us.

Hari Om Tat Sat

- Swami Shantananda Puri



Part - I

Oneness of Self and the Brahman

Kenopanishad is one of the ten main secret doctrines (Principal Upanishads) and belongs to Sama Veda. This starts with a direct method for Self-realisation as it deals with the ultimate truth – unconditional and pure Brahman (the Supreme Being). Naturally, it requires a subtle and perspicacious intellect with an intense volcanic longing for the goal to understand this. This text should be read again and again repeatedly several times before some understanding begins to dawn on us. These Upanishads are not simple theories or hypotheses but are a record of the actual but indescribable experiences or revelations to the extent they could be put into words. In fact, in the Bhrigu valli of the Taithiriya Upanishad, when Bhrigu (a famous Maharshi in later years) approaches his father Varuna for teaching him

about Brahman, he is told that Brahman can be realized only by intense and one-pointed concentration and constant inquiry (तपसा ब्रह्म विजिज्ञासस्व).

The first and second parts deal with the Brahman as to how he is the same as the Self (I). It is an explanation of the Mega Statement (Mahavakya) – “the Brahman is verily the Self” (अयमात्मा ब्रह्म).

There are four main Mahavakyas in the Vedas and according to Vedanta unless one has heard atleast one of them in his lifetime one cannot hope to get liberation (moksha).

At the outset, a disciple asks his Guru “Venerable Sir, on whose desire and propelled by whom (Kena) does the mind think of an object? Impelled by whom does the Prana (vital energy known as vital elan) function? Impelled by whom do the five senses of perception like the eye and the ear and the five senses of action like the hand, feet and tongue (speech) do their respective activities?

This is a beautiful question which directly relates to the Atman (Self) and which can emanate only from a sadhak (practitioner) given to introspection and enquiry. Just like the question 'Who am I?' this very first hymn posing a question can be used effectively for meditation with an one-pointed concentration.

The question seems to be superfluous or unnecessary. Anybody knows that there is a living energy called 'Self' or 'I' inside the body-mind complex known also as individual soul (Jivatma or Jiva) which actually sees through the eyes, smells through the nose etc., and makes the mind, senses etc., function. The senses are only the instruments activated by the 'I'. I think of any object and the mind works. By my desire, the eyes see and the mind functions. But sometimes unwanted thoughts creep into my mind even when I have not desired for them - say, while sitting in meditation. This indicates that there must be another party who controls and impels the mind, but not known to us. It is

this unknown entity that the disciple wants to investigate. The purpose of the Vedas (whose part is Upanishads) is only to tell us about the final entity about whom we are unable to know anything from the existing means of authenticity like direct perception, inference etc.

प्रत्यक्षानुमानाभ्यां यस्तूपायो न विद्यते ।
एनं विदन्ति वेदेन तस्माद्वेदस्य वेदता ॥

(Pratyakshanumanabhyam yastoopāyo na vidyate enam vidanti vedena tasmāt vedasya vedata)

It is only through the highest knowledge and that knowledge alone that liberation has to be attained (ज्ञानादेव कैवल्यं) as proclaimed in the Vedas. No amount of any action (karma) can achieve it. All the knowledge like physics, chemistry etc., taught in educational institutions are known through our senses and mind and they all relate to the outside world only as our senses have been created for going outwards and

not inwards (पराञ्छिखानि व्यतृणत् स्वयंभूः - Swetaswataropanishad). For getting that ultimate transcendental knowledge of the one reality called Brahman, the only means is resorting to the Vedas (Upanishads). The entire purpose of the Vedas is finally to affirm the oneness of the individual soul (Atman) and the Brahman - Supreme Being (Totality). In that case, who is the one who propels, desires and leads our senses towards the knowledge of the various objects? The Atman, being the Brahman, and the only real entity, nothing exists apart from Him. He has no activities or functions. So long as we suffer from an illusion that 'I am the body', it looks as if the Atman is seeing through the eyes, hearing with the ears etc. So, in the ultimate truth, as nothing is separate from the Atman (Absolute Self), the entire functioning of the individual mind, senses etc., is a pure illusion and the question of who desires or who propels them to do their respective functions will not arise. There is no individuality also as only one

Totality exists. All the questions are rendered sterile. This is going to be told by the Guru in a progressive manner.

The Guru starts answering in a poetic manner :
“Yes, there is one behind it all. He is the ear of the ears, the mind of the mind, the speech of the speech, the Prana (vital energy) of the Prana.”¹

Before proceeding further, I would like to clarify certain matters. Among the foreigners in general as also some of the Hindus (beginners) too there is a little confusion about two distinct words Brahman and Brahmā, especially as the word Brahman is also written as Brahmā (not Brahma as in the second word) in Sanskrit. The former Brahma (Brahman, which is the root of that word) represents the only and the highest reality and it is a word in neuter gender (neither

¹ श्रोत्रस्य श्रोत्रं मनसो मनो
यद्वाचो ह वाचं स उ प्राणस्य प्राणः ।
चक्षुषश्चक्षुरतिमुच्य धीराः
प्रेत्यास्माल्लोकादमृता भवन्ति ॥२॥ (I - 2 Kena)

masculine nor feminine) while Brahma is in masculine gender and represents the four - faced creator who came out of the lotus from the navel of Lord Vishnu (as per mythology). In this text, we will be referring to Brahman as He.

Another point is that Brahman cannot be described in words as it has no form nor any qualities . So, there is no term in the vocabulary of any language to describe it. So, in many places we have to use the language of ignorance, which falls far short of the actuality but it is the nearest approach possible. It is a matter of direct and immediate (without any medium) experience (aparoksha) and cannot be couched in words.

Now, reverting to the topic of the answer given by the Guru, the one who is behind the desire and the one activating the senses, prana etc., is the real entity who makes the ear hear, the eyes to see, and the Prana behind the Prana. Let us analyze what we mean by saying that the eye sees or the ear hears etc.

Each object has several aspects or qualities and we have no means of obtaining a comprehensive knowledge of all those aspects. We have been endowed with senses each of which has specialized in grasping or comprehending to a limited extent the knowledge of only one aspect of the object. The eyes enable us to determine its colour – red, blue, orange etc., and whether it is lean or fat, tall or short, solid or liquid etc., the nose is able to tell us as to how it smells – whether it is stinking or has an exciting scent about it. So when we say ‘the eye of the eye’, ‘the ear of the ear’ we mean that entity which gives the power to the eye or to the ear for acquiring the knowledge in which it has specialized. In other words, it is the light of knowledge in whose light the eye sees, the ear hears etc., which is behind the activities of the various parts of the body-mind complex. It is again a relative and limited knowledge that we get as it depends on various factors. For instance, the Atman (Self) feels joy or pleasure or sorrows

or miseries on seeing or experiencing some objects. Our mind has been conditioned to like certain objects and to dislike certain others. As my 'I' (Atma) has identified itself with the mind, it is able to feel the joy or sorrow from an object or an event. But the same object, say, sugar may give joy to one man while it may give sorrow to another who does not like it. Hence this knowledge is unreliable and limited. 'The eyes can see only up to some distance and the powers are limited. Similarly, the ears cannot hear ultrasound' i.e., sound beyond certain decibels. When the mind is purified and rid of all its conditioning, the pure Atman remains actionless. The pure Atman is the same as the Brahman (the totality). The electricity inside an individual bulb, when all the resistance in the bulb is removed, is the same as the totality (the electricity from the generator). A wave in an ocean thinks that it rises to a great height because of its own power. It is the power of the totality - the ocean - which makes each wave

rise. There is no wave apart from the ocean. The wave is verily the ocean.

So long as the electricity inside the bulb has identified itself with the bulb (a container), it thinks that it is giving the light. An 'I' has developed which attributes the doership of shedding the light to itself. Similarly when I say that I am seeing with my eyes, the false doership is assumed by 'I' - the Atman who has identified itself with the body and naturally reaps the consequences of the action of the body - either joy or sorrow. So, the 'doership' does not belong to the power of knowledge which the Atman bestows on the senses but to the false 'I' created when the Atman identifies with the various bodies and considers itself as separate entities in separate bodies. So, no action ever takes place. How can one ask a question as to who started the action? There is only one Reality and the multiplicity is an illusion. When we put water in twenty jars and keep them open in the moonlight, we see twenty moons - one in each

jar. The multiplicity is not a fact. There is only one moon but the illusion of 'many' is created.

Where is that one Reality? It is 'you'. You are that (तत् त्वम् असि). Find out who you are. How to seek that 'I' or 'you?' The Guru, in his immense compassion, indicated briefly the method by which the pure Atman (or Brahman) is to be realized. You are that Atman and nothing new is to be got from elsewhere. Nothing is given and nothing is taken. It is a silent revelation of what exists. The various pyrotechnics and Saktipat (where the Guru is supposed to transfer his powers) and the psychedelic experiences which some claim have nothing to do with liberation or enlightenment. It is an entertainment and not enlightenment. The final goal is not an experience, but a non-experience where all experiences cease. Experience is a reaction which takes place when we encounter an object or an event. When all objects disappear, no action takes place and you alone remain. How can there be any experience? A unique peace alone

remains. This 'peace' is also 'not' an experience, but the name of that final state. Even the word 'state' is a misnomer but it cannot be helped.

The Guru now devises a path to seek the 'Atman' in a logical manner. The illusion of multiplicity is due to our identification with the body-mind complex. As a result of the multiplicity and the conditioning of the mind, we begin to have attachment for some persons who are related to the body like the son, wife etc. We begin to hate some others. We develop likes and dislikes towards objects. When we get things which we like we feel happy and we become miserable and feel unhappy when we get things which we hate. So the first point is that we should get ourselves released from our close contact with the various objects in this world (जित संग दोषाः). Even if we refrain from the contact of objects by the senses, because of the recurring memories of the past experiences, the longing for the objects may continue. The next

step is to divorce ourselves from the mind and the senses. We have to disown them. If I can see a book lying on the table, I am only the seer and I cannot be the book. Hence, we have to affirm² again and again to ourselves that "I am not the mind, intellect, ego or the mind stuff (Chitta), I am not the ears or the tongue, nor am I the nose or the eyes. I am not the space of the earth. I am not the fire element nor the air. I am all Consciousness and Bliss. I am Lord Siva, the 'Supreme Reality'. The world and God are two opposite ends. In order to realize God, one has to leave the world thoroughly, leave off the objects which look to be individual entities and separate from each other. Catch hold of the one who is continuing in everything (sootre mani ganā iva). Take our own case. Our external features and personality have been changing

² मनोबुद्ध्यहंकार चित्तानि नाहं न च श्रोत्रजिह्वे न च घ्राण नेत्रे
न च व्योम भूमि र्न तेजो न वायुः चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहं शिवोऽम्

(By Adi Sankara)

beyond recognition in the various stages of our life. I had a chubby face when I was a child. In my old age my eyes are sunken, I have become thin and lean and wrinkles have come up. I have been called by the same name. What is it that never changed when the entire body underwent transformation? It is my existence – my ‘amness’. It is the awareness of my existence (Sat and chit).

The next question is as to who are fit to go on this path by releasing themselves from all worldly entanglements.

It is only the ‘dheeras’, those who have immense patience, perseverance and the courage to overcome all the temptations of the world and are immune to all the trials and tribulations by controlling their mind and the senses, who will succeed in this path. It is told in Purusha Sookta (a part of the Vedas) “Tasya dheerah parijananti yonim” – “It is only the brave ones who are finally able to understand their source.” One should have the patience and perseverance to

continue one's sadhana (practice) for a million years, if need be, but one should have that zeal and enthusiasm all the time as if one is going to have realization in another five minutes. It is also emphasized in Kathopansihad that the Atman cannot be attained by those who lack the strength of mind (Naayamātma balaheenena labhyah).

What do we gain by releasing ourselves and getting out of this world which is full of limitations? We all want happiness. Our main unhappiness lies in the Democles' sword of impending death when we have to part from all our possessions and all our near and dear ones. To be born in this world is a sorrow. To have old age which is mostly full of diseases and sufferings is also a sorrow. We face sufferings and miseries in our married life too. Finally, the greatest of all sorrows is our death.³ Secondly,

³ जन्म दुःखं जरा दुःखं जाया दुःखं पुनः पुनः।
अन्तकाले महादुःखं तस्माज्जाग्रत जाग्रत ॥

we are all limited in our scope – by time, by space and other objects. Time limits our life and fixes it between birth and death. We would like to be immortal – to live forever without any limitations. Again we can be only at one place at any particular time. We cannot be at many places simultaneously. Thus we are limited by space. As each object is different from another, I cannot become another object. This is limitation by objects. By getting rid of our association with the objects of the world, we cheat death and get out of the limitations imposed in this life. We become immortal. We are no more subject to the cycles of birth and death. Actually, we do not become immortal as we have always been immortal. We only get out of the illusion of birth and death. It is a realization. Here again we use the language of ignorance for the facility of understanding it. This second hymn is impregnated with the entire philosophy in brief and the sadhana involved. This alone is sufficient to inspire us and take us to the final goal. This can also be used for daily meditation.

In the olden days, there was a queen named Madalasa. When she used to swing the hammock to make her new born child sleep she used to sing a lullaby⁴ of high spiritual significance thus: “Oh child, you are pure and awake, you are bereft of the illusion of this world. Shake off this illusion of this world and wake up from this sleep of delusion.” When the children grew up to be boys, they got disgusted with the world and went away to the forests in order to live a life of spirituality and austerity. How lucky they were to possess such a mother!

It has been declared that Atman is the eye of the eye, but the question arises whether the Atman is capable of being seen by the eye or not. Ultimately, Atman is the only seer and the witness of all. This being the case, Atman which is the subject cannot be seen by any object. Atman is the only cogniser and nothing exists

⁴ शुद्धोऽसि बुद्धोऽसि निरंजनोऽसि संसार माया परिवर्जितोसि ।
संसारमायां त्यज मोहनिद्रां, मदालसा वाक्यमुवाच पुत्रम् ॥

apart from the Self (Atman). A microscope cannot see itself. Hence, Atman is such a unique entity which cannot be directly perceived by a sense of cognition or conceived by the mind. It transcends all the senses and the mind too. How can the limited hope to measure the infinite and unlimited as the Atman is verily the Brahman, the all pervasive and the only reality. It is not possible to know the Brahman as any knowledge pre-supposes a knower and an object to be known. Brahman is the only subject and no object is apart from it. It is not also possible to describe the nature of Brahman and instruct a disciple. How then can we know about the Brahman? Whatever we know about Brahman, it has been learnt by hearing from our ancestors and predecessors. It has come through tradition.

Normally, an object can be described by its function or qualities or species or genus or its relationship with other objects. We say, that this is a grinding machine or he is a musician. We may say that he is brownish in colour or

possesses a beard and a mustache. We say, this is a cow or a serpent. We may say that a person is the son of a famous painter, say Picasso. Here is Brahman which is unique and in which no activity takes place (Nishkriyah). It is second to none and there is nobody else like Brahman. It is in the Brahman's light that the eyes shine and function, the speech (tongue) and the mind gets activated. Naturally, neither the senses of cognition nor the mind has the power to reveal the Brahman who lends light to them all. This Brahman has been revealed to us only from the tradition of succession of those unparalleled masters or Gurus who had themselves realised the Brahman as their own self by the process of negation of everything else.

Then how is that Brahman?⁵ Is it known to us just like a chair or a table or unknown but a matter of belief like hell and heaven?

⁵ अन्यदेव तद्विदितादथो अविदितादधि ।
इतिशुश्रुम पूर्वेषां ये नस्तद्व्याचक्षिरे ॥ (I-4 Kena)

If a chair or a table is known, it is because we have its description, its location is known and also the time when it existed. Brahman does not exist in time and space. On the contrary, the time and space, their presence as also absence is revealed by the light of the Brahman. So we cannot say that Brahman is known. Nor can we say that it is absolutely unknown as it is our own self. It is 'I'.

Whichever object comes within the perceptual purview of the senses, mind or intellect, whatever is cognized by the senses, mind or intellect is considered as 'known'. Similarly, we know that we exist. It is an immediate knowledge which has not come to us through any medium of senses etc. It is called as 'Sakshi Bhasya' - revealed by the eternal witness. This knowledge also comes under the category of 'known'. 'Known' denotes a thing which is an object of knowledge. It is always limited. Whatever object has a name and a form in this world and is considered as separate and distinct

from the other objects is called 'manifest'. The primordial nature (Prakriti) is the material cause out of which all these objects are created or manifested. It is called as un-manifest and also as nescience (avidyā). This Prakriti is unknown to us. We are aware of two categories of objects – known and unknown. The Upanishad tells us that Brahman belongs to a unique category which is neither known or unknown as both (known and unknown) are revealed in the light of the Brahman who is, therefore, beyond them. The Brahman is beyond experience and non-experience, beyond known and unknown, beyond perception and non-perception, beyond cause and effect and beyond manifest and un-manifest. He is such a unique thing and has no parallel. One cannot understand Him except through Vedanta (non-dual philosophy). He is the substratum of all without any limitation by time, space and objects. All other objects are revealed in His light. He is the knower of both known and unknown. He is your own Self. The

Self is not different in each person. There is only one Consciousness and one Self. Schrodinger, one of the scientists, of the recent times, has written something like ‘Consciousness is always in singular. It has no plural.’ This Self is verily the Brahman, the totality – the Supreme Being. The entire purpose of Mahavakyas and the Upanishads is only to emphasize the oneness of the Atman and Brahman.

Adi Sankara has given another meaning also, with an example. Atman is of the form of experiential knowledge (Vijnana), which throws light on all. If there is a lighted torch with which we can see other things, there is no necessity for a second torch to see the first one. So, no other knowledge is required to know the Brahman or Atman which is Vijnana. In that sense Brahman is unknown – not revealed by any other knowledge which is separate from the Atman (i.e. self-effulgent – स्वयंप्रकाशः)

To know is knowledge (Jnana) and 'not known' means ignorance (Ajnana). Coolness is the nature of water. Due to keeping on fire, heat is super-imposed on the water. Similarly, when we think that the body is Atman, the qualities of the body are super-imposed on the Atman. Another example is the Sun. Because it looks that the Sun disappears and rises again, night and day are super-imposed even though the Sun is always shining. In the same way, the Atman or Brahman is always shining but the doer-ship of knowledge (known) and of ignorance (not known) – both are super-imposed. The pure Brahman is beyond both. That which is known is manifest (व्यक्त) as an object. All the objects are considered to have come out of the primordial nature (Prakriti) which is called unmanifest (अव्यक्त). Hence all that is known is the effect and the unknown (unmanifest) is the cause. Atman has always been there as the Self and there is no cause and effect in it. It is beyond cause and effect. As it is the Self, the question of accepting

it or rejecting it does not arise. Further, as no other thing exists apart from the Self, who is there to accept it or reject it ? Who is there to know it or not to know it ?

By declining that Atman cannot be called as known and unknown, it has been raised to the level of universality from the narrow individuality. Atman is declared as Brahman itself – the ultimate reality. Here a doubt arises in the mind of the disciple. How can Atman become the Brahman ? Atman is the term used for the entity who, by doing various actions (Karma) prescribed in the Vedas and by doing worship (Upasana) of various gods like Vishnu, Siva, Ganesa etc., strives either to reach heaven (Svarga) or the colonies of the gods like Vaikuntha or Kailasa and be with their respective gods. The gods like Vishnu, Siva etc., should be the Brahman and not the Atman. The Atman which worships these various gods should be different from the gods worshipped by it. This is contrary to what is normally

believed by people. The gods which are worshipped and known to us should be the Brahman, the highest reality. In order to clarify this doubt, the next hymn is introduced.

In this connection, before we proceed further to clarify this doubt, certain related issues are first discussed below:

Do Advaita philosophy and Adi Sankara in particular, accept the existence of gods like Siva, Vishnu, Divine Mother etc., and how do they relate to the Supreme Brahman? The same Adi Sankara has written hymns on all the various gods including Lakshmi, River goddesses like Narmada, Ganga etc. How does it all reconcile with the unconditioned and pure Brahman without attributes (Nirguna and Nirvikara)?

The Advaita does recognize all these gods who are all included in the term 'Isvara'. They are as true as we all are. Brahman is the chairman of this institution called the world and under him

are the Directors who are members of a Board of Directors called - 'Isvara'. The Chairman, being the sole proprietor is changeless while the Directors are all dismissed and made to disappear like the Jivas whenever there is a great deluge. Brahma, Vishnu, Indra are all names of posts like Director, Manager etc. Brahma is Director Production, Vishnu is Director Maintenance and Siva is the Director Disposals (destruction) etc. The ultimate authority is the Brahman who had created these gods covered by the term 'Isvara' in the same way as he created us, the various Jivas. He appointed Maya, His power, as the personal secretary to the Isvara and she cannot be dismissed by the Isvara who has to work with her for the welfare of the entire world. This Maya has also been put in charge of the mankind etc., and all the Jivas are under the control of Maya while Isvara works along with Maya. Maya is the delusory power of the Supreme Lord. These gods, though endowed with imagined forms really form a

link between the Supreme Being and the Jivas and they help and guide Jivas who worship (Upasana) them.

As regards whether the ultimate God has form or not, the one who conceives of the Brahman with form or conceives of Him without form is You. So you are the knower of 'form' and 'formlessness' and you are beyond both. You are that Brahman.

When once the Brahman is realized, everything else – the Jiva, the world and the various gods – all dissolve and disappear. Brahman alone IS. The one who was dreaming and drowned under an illusion is no longer there. Who is left to come and tell us 'I have realized the Brahman!'

The next four hymns of this first part go towards explaining⁶ the nature of the 'indescribable' Brahman in a negative way as to how what

⁶ यच्चक्षुषा न पश्यति येन चक्षूंषि पश्यति ।
तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते ॥ (I-7 Kena)

people generally worship as various gods is not the Supreme Reality or Brahman.

It has already been told that the Atman cannot become an object of the eye and cannot be seen by the eye. Atman is something beyond the reach of all the senses and neither the mind nor the speech can go anywhere near it. It can neither be conceived by the mind nor can it be described in words. There are people who claim to have seen Siva, Vishnu etc., but nobody can ever claim to have seen the Brahman. The one who journeys to see the Brahman is dissolved and never returns. As Ramakrishna Paramhansa has put it, a salt doll which goes into the deep ocean to measure its depth never returns. So, Brahman is beyond the reach of the senses, mind, speech etc. The gods whom we normally worship (Isvara) cannot be the Supreme Brahman.

Brahman is that whom no amount of words or speech will be able to reveal but on the contrary it is that power which endows speech with the

capacity for revealing the meaning behind the words. Each word conveys a meaning to us. Wherefrom this capability for conveying a meaning has come? It has come from the Supreme Reality called Brahman. Already, in an earlier hymn it has been asserted by saying that Brahman is the eye of the eye, ear of the ear etc., that Brahman is not an object which can be grasped by our senses like the eye etc. Now the same thing is again confirmed, but it also enjoins on us that Brahman alone is worth seeking for and thus turns us away from worshipping other gods and also from any other efforts to attain any other goal. By speech we do not mean what we talk in the waking state. It is also that with which a Jiva talks while in dream (सा वाक् यया स्वप्नेषु भाषते). That power of speech is the pure consciousness which is inside every letter of the alphabet, and which perhaps only a rare knower of the Brahman knows (या वाक् पुरुषेषु सा घोषेषु प्रतिष्ठिता कश्चित्तां वेद ब्राह्मणः). The fact that each letter of the alphabet (in Sanskrit) is an energy capsule

has been explained in the annexure to my earlier book 'Living Happily Forever'. Sureshwaracharya, one of the prime disciples of Adi Sankara has also written a lot about the unimaginable power of the sound. The word Brahman means the one who is the biggest and it is in the form of our own Self. It is also called Bhooma, the infinite. We use the words - speech of the speech, the eye of the eye, mind of the mind, the doer, the experiencer (Bhokta), the knower, the controller, having the form of bliss and consciousness etc., only because of the limitations imposed by external adjuncts (Upadhi) like our senses etc., but they are all meant to indicate, after negating the adjuncts, that unconditioned, supreme, the indescribable, pure and undifferentiated Brahman alone is worth knowing. These hymns are meant to explain that the gods whom we worship as separate from us (the Self), being non-self, are not the Brahman, the supreme reality but our own Self or Atman is verily the Brahman.

Brahman is all consciousness (Chaitanya). Consciousness means to be aware of one's own existence. Brahman is all consciousness. There cannot be an existence which is separate from consciousness. Nobody can say that 'I do not exist'. Consciousness cannot be there unless there is existence. Sat (existence) and Chit (consciousness) are inseparable. Such a pure existence as that which is not insentient (Jada) which is not an object which can be seen, which is changeless, not dependent on anything else, not separate from the seer, which is all consciousness is the Brahman. All objects known to us are limited by time, space and other objects - divided piecemeal from one another. The one that is indivisible, not limited or divided by time, space etc., the one that cannot be described in words because of there being no action in it, there being no qualities and not being related to anything else, the substratum for the existence or non-existence of other objects, the one which reveals in its light the

existence or its absence of other objects is called Brahman in the scriptures. As Ramakrishna Paramahansa puts it Brahman is the only thing which has remained unpolluted by words. The mind as also the speech are not capable of going anywhere near it.

तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते (Kena) That 'I (Self) is alone the Brahman and not 'this one' whom the people 'worship'. Here late Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj of Brindavan has explained beautifully.

This effulgent Self, this Self consciousness – know this as Brahman. It is not restricted by places, does not involve any cause and effect, such a one is the real form of the Supreme Being. Those other gods whom we worship as Brahman, the ultimate reality, having been imagined by the mind are smaller than the mind. These gods are revealed through our senses, whom we commonly worship. Even the Samadhi stage (super- consciousness) and sleep

are not seen through any senses but are only revealed through the eternal witness.

Where then should we seek this Brahman? There are only two things – one is myself (Aham), the other is this – Idam i.e. this entire world including our body, mind and the senses. We are trying to seek the Brahman in the objects of the world. The one who sees this world is I. If 'I' am not there, there is no world – nothing else. There will be no 'idam' at all.

This 'idam' consists of numerous objects which appear and disappear. As the 'idam' is dependent on 'I', it has to be smaller or inferior to 'I'. 'I' is the substratum for the imagination of this world or any other world like Kailas or Vaikuntha. These worlds (idam) appear and die before us. How can Brahman be in those imagined worlds? If you have to search for Brahman the Supreme Reality, seek him in 'I' which is the base for this world. Who is this 'I' is the next question. It is not the body, senses,

mind or Prana (vital energy). No, the one who is the witness of the body, the senses, the mind etc., the one who sits behind the speech and whose power is responsible for activating the speech – that Supreme Consciousness is the real 'I' and is the Brahman (Aham Brahmasmi). There are four Mahavakyas (Mega Statements) in the Scriptures and they reveal this final truth. Again one should not feel that Vedanta derides the upasana or worship of gods. The worship or the upasana does purify the mind and guides us to go further. In Scriptures, there is both Karma Kanda (rituals) and Upasana Kanda also, before it goes to Jnana Kanda. Vedanta or the Jnana Kanda of the Scriptures warns us not to mistake the steps for the goal and tells for those who are extremely competent and mature a direct approach to the goal.

'Upasana' means to concentrate continuously our thoughts on one object or thing through something else. Naturally, the one whom we think of or worship is different from me the

worshipper. Who is the one who sees the worshipper and worshipped? This witness of both is the Brahman and that is 'I', the Self. That which is separate from the Self cannot be plenary (Poorna) and 'all-comprehensive' i.e., the Brahman. That which is separate from the Self which is all conscious (Chaitanya) has to be insentient (Jada) and this non-self (Anātman) cannot be the Brahman.

After talking about speech, the Upanishad takes the example of the mind. Mind can only think of things which have been perceived by our senses once atleast in the past. The senses may function without the mind but the mind is dependent on the senses for its functioning. For instance, our ears may be hearing the music from the transistor or the eyes may be looking at a person but the mind may be thinking of what my grandson may be doing in America. The mind is, therefore, unaware of what the senses are doing at that moment. The mind is capable of thinking of the past grasped through the

senses or be imagining the future based on the past. It cannot think of the Brahman whom none of the senses like the eye, tongue (speech) etc., can catch. The one who witnesses⁷ the mind and is aware of the mind is 'I' the Atman - Brahman. So, the one whom the mind cannot conceive of, but the one who gives the power to the mind to enable it to function is the Brahman.

Brahman is not a thing conceived by the mind nor He is the mind. Brahman is the witness of the mind and all the objects thought of by the mind. Who is that witness? It is 'I'. This witness is not the witness of my body alone or of my senses or the mind. I am not the witness of this universe alone. I am not the witness of the Maya and Avidya alone. I am also the witness of my individuality as the Jiva and the Isvara both of whom were imagined in that Pure consciousness. I am also the witness of all that

⁷ यन्मनसा न मनुते येनाहुर्मनो मतम् ।
तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते ॥ (I-6 Kena)

imagination. I am different from that imagination also. I am myself that 'Brahman Consciousness', which is second to none, bereft of all differentiation and not limited by space, time or object. This is the purport of this entire Upanishad as explained by Sri Akhandanandji Maharaj of Brindavan in his book on Kenopanishad (collection of his lectures).

What has been told for the speech and the mind applies *mutatis mutandis* to the eyes, the ear and Prana too. There are some special features regarding the eyes. The Upanishad says : "Yacchakshushā na pasyate yena chakshoomshi pasyati" - the one which is not seen by the eye but which sees the eyes. In Sanskrit, there being a dual number apart from a plural, chakshoomshi means more than two eyes (chakshushee is dual) i.e. any number of eyes. This use of plural has a special significance. The eye or the sight here does not mean the gross eye alone.

We look at some people with an eye of hate, while at others with all love. We look at some with anger and on some with jealousy. Thus the eye-sight differs from occasion to occasion and from object to object. Thus the eye changes from time to time. This cannot be the Brahman nor can it see the Brahman. This can also be extended to 'various points of view' which are also referred to as sights. The one who looks at all violation of moral laws (Adharma) as a rightful deed (Dharma) will always be coloured with his view point. The view points or sights of one who is greedy, of one who leads a saintly life, of a dacoit etc., will all be different. Thus there are different eyes and hence the plural 'eyes' has been used. Thus, the eyes are always subject to changes while the witness who sees them all is the changeless Brahman.

Last comes Prana, the vital energy, it is carried by the breath. The breath which is exhaled after absorbing the vital energy is called Prana and the breath which is inhaled and which goes out

through the anus is called Apāna. The breath which goes out comes back while the apana which goes down never comes back. The prana is the energy which keeps the body alive. The day the breath which is exhaled does not come back, the body dies. Even this prana gets its power from the Brahman. It is told in the Vedas ⁸ - "In case this Akasa (the infinite called chidakasa) did not exist who will remain alive in bliss and who will be able to do the inhalation and exhalation of breath?"

Adi Sankara has also quoted while explaining hymn no 2 a beautiful Vedic hymn ⁹ - the one who sends the Prana upwards and takes the apana downwards is seated in between them in a short form (Vamana) whom all the gods worship." This idea has been expanded and

⁸ को होवान्यात्कः प्राण्याद्यदेष आकाश आनन्दो न स्यात् (2-7 Taittiriya)

⁹ ऊर्ध्वं प्राण मुन्नयत्यपानं प्रत्यगस्यति
मध्ये वामनमासीनं विश्वेदेवा उपासते (5-3 Kathopanishad)

described in a figurative way in the Srimad Bhagavata (8th Skandha). Vamana is the Supreme Reality which assumes a small human form and goes to the King Bali and begs for three feet of land. It is the Vāmana who begs from the Jiva - "Please surrender your body, mind and speech (vak) to me and be one with me." The moment the desire is granted, he becomes the all -pervasive Trivikrama and takes away his wealth of both the worlds and finally smashes his ego with his feet (which was surrendered along with the body). Thus the individual Jiva found itself as universal and the inheritor of infinite wealth and Power. This Vamana is the Brahman whom the eyes cannot see, the speech cannot reach, the mind cannot conceive of and who lends them all and the Prana the power to function in their respective fields. The one whom we worship separately as a god, as apart from the Self can never be the Brahman. This ultimate truth which is our own Self (Atman) also called Brahman cannot be seen through our eyes, heard through our ears or conceived through the mind.

It cannot be learnt from any source other than the scriptures or from the Guru who expounds these Scriptures after Self-realization.

Again the Chhandogya Upanishad warns that we should not fall into the trap of considering the I or Self to mean this body as King Virochana believed, while Indra his companion went again and again to the Prajapati for further clarification. That is why the Kenopanishad has mentioned the more important parts of the body like the eye, the ear and the speech (tongue) and affirmed that Brahman is the one beyond their purview but the one who endows them with the power to do their respective functions.

If we can understand the implications of the Brahman by reading this Upanishad again and again and realize, it is well and good. If not, these can form a sadhana by constant meditation on these hymns which will result progressively in enlightenment.

Part - II

Brahman is Inexpressible

It has already been told in Part I that the Brahman is beyond both known and unknown. Still, a disciple, after hearing the hymns in part I may say – “Ah, now I have understood very well what Brahman is.” This is only ego and not enlightenment. Brahman cannot be made as an object of understanding. He is the witness of both knowledge and ignorance. Brahman is your own Self and is thus the knower. How can He become the object of His knowledge? It is like saying that the fire burnt itself. We can say ‘I know the pot, I know the mat’ but we cannot reduce the Brahman, the seer (drashta) and the knower (Vijnata) to the level of a pot or a mat. “Vijnātaramare kena vijāneeyat” – by what means can the knower be known – Brhad Aranyak Upanishad. It is true that Atman (Self) is the Brahman. If once you have

the ego that 'I have understood the Brahman', you are established in your ego and not in Brahman. The Upanishad says¹⁰ that in such a case you have only known something very small and limited and not the Brahman.

Brahman is not something from outside which you can either take or leave it. It being your own self, you have no choice of either taking it or leaving it. You are stuck up with it. The one who claims to know the Brahman has to be somebody separate from the Brahman just as a man who sees a cat is separate from the cat.

The master further adds "not only that the Brahman you claim to know is something small and limited. Even if the gods were to speak of the Brahman they know, it is also equally false, small and limited. Brahman is something to be contemplated on."

¹⁰ यदि मन्यसे सुवेदेति दहरमेवापि नूनम् । (II-1 Kena)

When somebody says 'I know the pot' this is the process which takes place. The eyes see the form of the pot and pass it on to the mind. The mind takes the form of the pot. In other words it is a continuous thought in the form of a pot (ghatākāra vritti). The thought explodes the outer shell of ignorance (because of which the pot was not known earlier). In that process, this Vritti (thought) in the form of a pot also dies like a suicide bomber who has killed himself while killing the enemy with the explosion of a bomb wound round his body. The same process is followed in Upasana for Self-Realization where the Brahmakara vritti (thought in the form of the Brahman) explodes the enveloping ignorance around the Brahman and dies out itself in the process revealing only the Brahman. This happens after a long period of contemplation. To say 'I know the Brahman very well' is an idea, a vritti or a thought of the mind based on ego.

The Master, with all compassion advises the disciple to contemplate on what all he has heard

about the Brahman. To hear the expositions of a Guru is much more effective and beneficial than any reading of an Upanishad. The term used by the Guru is 'Vichara'. In Sanskrit, it means contemplation or inquiry. Actually, the term vichara is derived as "viruddhah charah"- opposite or reverse movement. When you see a flower, do not be simply lost in its beauty. Contemplate on the reverse path as to who is looking at the flower. The answer is 'I'. Now you contemplate on who is that 'I'. This is the movement in reverse or opposite direction. This is the real inquiry or 'vichara'.

The disciple comes back after 'vichara' and tells his Guru:

"I do not think that I have known Brahman very well (as it cannot be an object of my knowledge, being the knower itself). So I do not know the Brahman and in a way I do know it also. Among us the disciples, the one who says "it is not that I do not know Brahman, I do know it" and the one

who knows it in this way is the one who really knows it.

On hearing the first part of the disciples' answer, the Guru tested him by being the 'Devils advocate' and tried to shake him off his conclusion. He told the disciple "you are making two statements which are contrary to each other. Either you know or you do not know; it cannot be both together. If you think you know, why don't you affirm as before that you know very well?" This was to test whether the knowledge of the disciple was deep and unshakable. The disciple is firm. The Guru has only said earlier that Brahman is different from the known as well as the unknown. He is the witness of both the states and is beyond them. Known means the effect and unknown means the cause. Known means knowledge and unknown means ignorance. The Brahman is far different from both. Brahman is the witness as also the sub-stratum (adhishtana) of all known space, time and objects. He cannot be known. He is not dependent on

anything else. He can be directly experienced (without any medium). He cannot be perceived like the pot and mat. Nor is He absolutely unknown and unperceivable (paroksha) like heaven or hell. He is your own Self who is self-effulgent, not limited by time, ever immortal, a plenary Brahman (poorna) not limited by space or other objects and is all consciousness alone.

The Upanishad has completed its instructions and as a conclusion it winds up and re-states what is told earlier.

The one who has concluded that Brahman is not an object for the intellect (Anatman) and hence he is unknown is a real knower of Brahman who knows Brahman absolutely. On the contrary the one who has come to the conclusion that Brahman is an object of intellect and hence He is known to him in fact has no knowledge of Brahman.

Brahman is unknown to those who claim to know Him and is known to those who do not claim to

know Him. This is explained by Adi Sankara more or less in the following manner:

The person who has known the Brahman not as an object of his intellect but as his own very Self, he alone knows. When once he gets the experiential (as opposed to theoretical) knowledge, he sees everywhere his Brahman - Atman alone and thus has no duty to perform. He has the right knowledge. All others possess wrong knowledge. The ignorant people only can say "I know the Brahman." He has a wrong knowledge as Brahman has been declared to be 'different from the known'. So, he does not know Brahman at all. They are people who consider the body, the senses and the intellect as their own Self and cannot distinguish between Brahman and the external limiting adjuncts (Upadhis). They are not aware that Brahman is bereft of knowledge and ignorance. He is of the form of eternal consciousness, actionless, immortal, un-decaying and immutable. The

ignorant people consider Brahman as revealed as an object of their mind or intellect and thus as well-known. When once we conclude that Brahman is unknown to those who claim to know him, it means that Brahman is absolutely not capable of being known. If so, what is the difference between the worldly people and the so called knowers of Brahman? How can the Brahman be known at all?

The penultimate hymn is introduced in clarification of this point.¹¹ The answer is contained in one word “pratibodhaviditam”. According to Adi Sankara it has two meanings. The first meaning of pratibodha is “every knowledge”. Bodha means the various knowledges which are grasped by the buddhi or intellect. All these become also the object for the Atman. This witness of all the Jnana (knowledge)

¹¹ प्रतिबोधविदितं मतममृतत्वं हि विन्दते ।

आत्मना विन्दते वीर्यं विद्यया विन्दतेऽमृतम् ॥ (II-4 Kena)

is of the form of the power of awareness and can be seen in the various jnana in a common way. There is no other way for knowing this innermost Atman. At the time he is seen or understood as their inner witness of every knowledge which comes within the purview of the intellect (buddhi), the Atman is understood. At one time, the buddhi will get the knowledge of a pot, another second of an elephant etc., and thus the objects of knowledge will be different but there will be no change in the witness Atman. Atman is a witness bereft of growth or decay, eternal, pure and the only one who continues in an indivisible manner in all the beings. This is one way of getting up from the sleep of ignorance.

Another meaning of 'Pratibodha' is to be awakened from sleep. We have all been sleeping for births dreaming various worlds and various lives involving attachments, hatred etc., identifying ourselves with the dream body with consequent sufferings and tribulations, believing all the while that the world and the life involving

a cycle of repeated births and deaths is the only reality. It is a compassionate Guru who wakes up his disciple – “Come on, get up, Oh individual soul (Jiva), get rid of this dream. This life is a second dream. You are that Brahman who is the only reality and nothing exists apart from Him. You are immortal as the Brahman – Self. Birth and death are all illusions of a dream taking place in you. In the infinite Brahman, there is neither time nor space. Time and space have been created as appearances by Maya in order to enliven your dream.”¹² Thus awakened by the Guru, the illusion of the worldly life disappears and the disciple sees himself on getting up as pure Atman who is the same as Brahman, who is second to

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- ¹² (a). माया कल्पित देश काल कलना वैचित्य चिद्रीकृतम् ।
(3-Dakshinamurthy Stotra)
- (b). साक्षात् तत्त्वमसीति वेद वचसा यो बोधयत्याश्रितान्
(4-Dakshinamurthy Stotra)
- (c). यः साक्षात्कुरुते प्रबोधसमये स्वात्मानमेवाद्भ्यं
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्री दक्षिणामूर्तये
(2-Dakshinamurthy Stotra)

none. This is 'Pratibodha viditam'. This second interpretation appeals to me as it is also confirmed by hymn no. 3 of Part I of this Upanishad, where the source has been given as the earlier Gurus who had expounded on the Brahman. In my (author's) life too, I had read a number of books of western and Buddhist scholars, all the Scriptures (Sruit, Smrti, Puranas etc.,) but what all I have learnt so far was only through the grace of my Guru to whom I am always indebted. No doubt I had no opportunity of sitting at my Guru's feet for a length of time and learning much from him, but his own life taught me a lot and his grace has always been pushing me up.

In the first interpretation, it has been explained by Sankara that Atman is the doer of the action called 'acquiring the different knowledge', just as when the branches of a tree shake, we infer its doer as the wind. We infer the doer from the sign of the form of the action of knowing. Hence it is called 'Pratibodha viditam'.

Now the same hymn recounts the main benefit derived from this realization called 'Atma Jnanam' (Self-knowledge). From this Jnanam one gets immortality. This will also indicate that any wrong knowledge will lead us to death. Does it mean that immortality is produced by Atmajnanam?

No, we are always the Atman whose nature is immortality. To have remained as mortals is a dream continued from beginning-less time. The day we realize ourselves as Brahman, the ever existent and only reality, we get out of the illusion of birth and death and realize our immortality. The Atmajnanam which is called Brahma Vidya (learning) dispels our wrong knowledge of the Anatman (identification with the body-mind complex), and as a result becomes the cause of our natural immortality being revealed. This is why it is told that this Vidya has the power or capacity to dispel the darkness of ignorance. This capacity (veeryam) is indestructible (Amrta). The avidya or ignorance is annihilated by Brahma

Vidya (learning of Brahman) and there is nothing which can affect this Vidya. The effect of ignorance is terrific. Our life of ignorance (which we take to be real) is full of sorrow and suffering due to birth, old age, death and diseases etc. In this connection, the last hymn ¹³ ends with detailing the benefit of this knowledge of the Self. This is an oft-quoted hymn.

Before going to the last hymn, let us look at the wonderful contribution by late Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj of Brindavan regarding the terms “Atmana vindate veeryam” in the previous hymn. ‘Atmana’ has been translated by him as “by the effort of oneself”. It has a great significance. Many are likely to be deluded into thinking that ‘Brahmajnana’ is an easy commodity to get, where one has only to hear from a Guru and read some Scriptures. It requires a lot of strength (mental and physical) – (veeryam) which

¹³ इह चेदवेदीदथ सत्यमस्ति
न चेदिहावेदीन्महती विनष्टिः । (II-5 Kena)

has to be acquired through self effort. No doubt the process of Brahma jnana takes far less time than that taken for picking a flower from the tree, as Ramakrishna Paramhansa has put it. But to reach that stage requires a lot of strength to do intense sadhna - "naayamatma balaheenena labhyah" - "this Atman cannot be obtained by anybody lacking in strength" says Kathopanishad. The various efforts we have to put in are - Viveka (discrimination), Vairagya (dispassion), Sama (control of mind), Dama (control of senses), Uparati (withdrawal from objects in a natural way), Titiksha (forbearance), Sraddha (faith), Samadhana (one pointed concentration of the mind) and Mumukshatva (an intense desire for liberation). These are the bahiranga sadhanas (external practices) we have to do. No doubt everything starts with satsang (company of holy men). Then the internal practices (antaranga sadhanas) are Sravana (hearing), Manana (repeated contemplation) and Nididhyasana (to sit absorbed with a one-pointed mind). All these

things have been elucidated in detail in texts like 'Viveka Choodamani' of Adi Sankara. One should not think that the Supreme Knowledge is something which one can get for the asking. One has to put in a lot of effort, which requires good strength.

Another important thing for the readers is not to be deluded into thinking that Advaita Philosophy is the only way to reach our goal of absolute happiness. Rituals, going to temples and worship of gods, going on pilgrimages to holy places, doing pooja (worship) to gods at home, doing havans (fire sacrifices), doing japa and prayers have all got their respective roles in making us reach our goals. We have no quarrel with any scriptures but they are all interpreted in various ways by various scholar saints. As Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa has put it "As many paths so many minds". Adi Sankara who was the founder of the Advaita Philosophy is supposed to have composed the following hymn while at Kasi (Varanasi):

“Oh Lord Viswanatha, I have come by foot all the way from Kaladi (Kerala) to the Holy Kasi to have your darshan (vision). Thus, I have transgressed or exploded my own philosophy, where I hold the Supreme Reality to be omnipresent (everywhere). I have also expounded that the Supreme Lord is beyond words and mind but I have sung hymns on you and meditated before you. Thus I have not myself adhered to my philosophy. Please forgive me Lord for these three transgressions. ¹⁴

Hinduism is a highly catholic generous culture. Whatever may be the path, we have to abandon our ego and surrender ourselves to the supreme force called Brahman, Siva, Brahma or Raja Rajeshwari, the divine mother. The divinity has not been confined by us to the gods alone.

¹⁴ यात्रा कृता सर्वगता हता ते
ध्यानेन चेतः परता हता ते ।
स्तुन्यानया वाक्परता हता ते
क्षन्तव्यमेतत् त्रयमेव शम्भो – (Attributed to Adi Sankara)

We consider a stone statue as divine, a river like Ganga as divine, and a tree like peepal as divine. Even the weapons like the discus (Sudarshan Chakra), the mace (gadā) etc., of Lord Vishnu have been endowed with a divinity of their own. Every part of the human body is supposed to be a divinity – for e.g., the god presiding over our speech is the fire god (Agni), presiding over our hands is Indra, presiding over the nostrils is the Asvini Devatas. Everywhere around us we recognize the divinity. At every step we bow down with reverence and humility and pray. Is this not an effective way of erasing our ego? Even when we clip the leaves of Tulsi plant (Basil), we pray to it and seek its permission. When we take bath in the water inside the bathroom in our residence in London, we infuse the water with the divinity of all the holy rivers and bathe.¹⁵

¹⁵ नर्मदे सिन्धु कावेरि गोदावरि सरस्वति
गंगे च यमुने चैव जलेस्मिन् सन्निधिं कुरु

There are people, even today, who follow these traditions and exude an atmosphere of purity and holiness around them. Such traditions have been extolled and the glories of Puranas (considered as myths by the modern world) confirmed by such authorities like H.H. Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, the Pontiff (Sankaracharya) of Kanchi Kamkoti Mutt who left his body in 1994. Under the term Isvara, all the gods have been given recognition even by the Advaita (non-dualistic) philosophy. What purpose do they serve, if not to guide us to our goal? It is not that Hinduism alone is the only uplifter of mankind. It cannot be that Christianity cannot lead the Christians to their goal, when the majority of the world and especially, the Europe are Christians. At one time Buddhism was very popular in India, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Japan, China etc. It is our unshakable faith and sincerity which work irrespective of whether we realize gods or the Brahman through Hindu gods or the Jehovah of the Jews etc. Unfortunately, the

Buddhists of yore, Jains, our own earlier Gurus like Adi Sankara, and some of the various sects like Dvaitins, Advaitins, Visishtadvaitins or Krishna proponents or Rama proponents have all given importance to condemning (khandana) the ideas or beliefs of other sects vehemently as much as in establishing or extolling their own beliefs. That was the way by which they disseminated knowledge in those days. Each one is entitled to glorify his own philosophy or religion or belief. Every sect holds that argument and logic (tarka) can prove anything depending on the sharpness of intellect and scholarship of the persons and so tarka is not a reliable way of proving but at the same time they argue out in detail how logical their own philosophy or religion is. The paths to the infinite are infinite and tolerance of all religions is a must.

The last hymn stresses the need for the realization of the Brahman. In this birth itself, when we have been endowed with intellect, if we do not try to release ourselves from all the bondages, it is a

very great loss. It is not only a waste of this birth but we will be subject to entanglement in the unending cycle of birth and death with all the sorrows and sufferings. One has to search for the changeless among all the beings of the world and separate that truth. In other words, a person has to obtain that ultimate truth of the Self by analyzing all the beings and finding that it is finally He himself who is in all the beings. "By thinking of that without a body residing among the bodies, of the one who is changeless among those who are always changing their state and of that entity which is the greatest and all - pervasive Self (Atman), a courageous person gets released from all sorrows."¹⁶ A man of discrimination whose attachment to all the external objects, after getting rid of this world (having died) which consists of non-self objects like his own body becomes immortal i.e. he becomes the Brahman.

¹⁶ अशरीरं शरीरेष्वनवस्थेष्ववस्थितम् ।

महान्तं विभुमात्मानं मत्वा धीरो न शोचति ॥ (222 कठोपनिषद्)

Immortality is not something which has been newly produced. It is only that the illusion of having been mortal is wiped off. We are always of nitya, suddha, buddha, mukta - (Eternal, Pure, Awakened and Liberated) nature. We are the sons of immortality (amrtasya putrāh).

Part - III

The Story of Yaksha

This part contains a parable-like story. One purpose of the story is to emphasize that a lot of effort is required to acquire the knowledge of the Self and one has to strive hard for it.

Secondly, this portion of the Upanishad is meant to remove our pride and to emphasize the need for acquiring by severe sadhana the six spiritual pre-requisites starting with the control of the mind (sama). One bereft of these sadhanas like sama, dama etc., and one full of pride, attachment and hatred etc., can never hope to get the knowledge of the Brahman, unless all those false perceptions are completely dispelled.

Thirdly, this is also meant to propel those who are not mature enough to acquire Brahma jnana direct, towards the worship of God with attributes like Siva, Vishnu, Divine Mother etc.,

as such worship has been indirectly earlier prohibited as “Nedam Yadidamupasate” in hymns 4 to 8 of Part I of this Upanishad. That prohibition was not an outright condemnation but its purpose was to direct one to the direct path, if one was fit for it. When the worship is done, it should be done with the belief that we worship only the Supreme Reality (Brahman) through the God with attributes. Now the story begins. Once, in a battle between the Asuras, who were a threat to the entire world and the various gods like Agni (fire god) and Vayu (wind god) headed by Indra, the latter got victory, by the glory of the Supreme Brahman. These gods thought that it was their own glory and power which brought them success in that battle. When the Brahman came to know of this attitude of the gods, out of compassion, He appeared before them in the form of a Yaksha, an effulgent form which was worthy of being worshipped i.e. which exuded such a purity as would command anybody’s reverence. The

object was to remove their pride and to bless the gods. The gods were non-plussed and wondered who this Yaksha was.

They sent Agni (fire god) to find out who this being was who looked so worthy of reverence, as Agni was the most effulgent among them. He went near the Yaksha and stood quiet with an inquiring look. The Yaksha asked him who he was and what was he capable of ? Agni answered that he was Agni who had also another name 'Jātaveda' and that he could burn anything, movable or immovable on this earth. The Yaksha placed a tiny blade of grass before the fire-god and asked him to burn it. The fire went to the blade of grass with all the strength it could muster but failed miserably to burn it. He was ashamed of his inability and returned to the gods saying that he could not find out who the Yaksha was.

Next, Vayu the wind god was sent on the same mission. When he approached the Yaksha, the

latter asked him who he was and where lay his special strength. Vayu answered that he was the wind god, Vayu, also called as 'Mātarisva' as he always moved in the space and that he could grasp and move anything on this earth. Again, a blade of grass was put before him and he was asked to grasp it. Vayu ran towards the blade of grass with all his might but to no purpose. He was not able to grasp that tiny piece. He also went back to the other gods humiliated and expressed his inability to find out who the Yaksha was. Finally, Indra, the king of gods himself went towards the Yaksha. The tiny blade of grass was kept before Agni and Vayu for this reason that on account of their inability to touch even that tiny object their self-pride had disappeared. When Indra came to the Yaksha, the latter ignored him and disappeared from sight, in order to humiliate him by not deigning to talk to him even and the main purpose was to smash his pride which had grown a lot as the king of gods. In the same

space where he disappeared, the Brahma Vidya (the knowledge of Brahman) who took a beautiful feminine form and who was none other than the power of Maya of the Brahman called also as Uma (known as Parvati) appeared before Indra. Indra inquired of her as to who that Yaksha was. Uma Devi clarified to Indra that he was Brahman Himself. "No doubt it was the Brahman, the controller of all (Ishvara) who actually gained victory for you in your battle with the demons (asuras). You got your glory because of Him and not because of your strength. It was a false and unjustifiable pride of you, the gods, to attribute that victory to yourselves." Then Indra got the knowledge that the success was all due to the will of the Brahman. As these three gods had the benefit of close contact with the Brahman and were the first to understand the glory of Brahman, they became more glorious than all the other gods and Indra excelled all gods as he was the first to know the Brahman and then instructed Agni and Vayu also.

Part - IV Uma's Advice - Methods of Upasana

Now the last part consists of some methods of Upasana (worshipful meditation) capable of purifying the mind and conducive to the final realization of the Brahman, as instructed by Goddess Uma (Brahma Vidya) to the gods. The Brahman who appeared before the gods as the Yaksha, just like a lightning with an unparalleled effulgence, disappeared in a moment before one could bat one's eyes. So, one may meditate on the Brahman thinking of him like the flash of lightning.

The mind is always on the move going somewhere. Even though Brahman being the subject, who sees all, cannot become the object of any mind, as the Brahman is ultimately revealed to the pure mind, one could meditate

on the mind as if it is always moving towards the Brahman. This is another type of Upasana. This is because the people of moderate intellect will not be able to contemplate on an unconditioned pure Brahman, that these upasanas have been devised.

A third method is to worship the Brahman as 'Tadvanam' which means the indwelling Atman of the entire group of all the beings in the world. This, being a special quality which can be attributed to the Brahman, can be used for meditational worship (Upasana).

These methods of Upasana might perhaps have had an appeal to the minds of people in the earlier days. In the modern days, in all my wide travel in India all my life, I have never come across anybody who had adopted such Upasanas. For those who are not mature enough for the direct contemplation on the Atman as the Brahman, Mantras, Japa (the initiation), formal elaborate or abridged puja with flowers, dhyan,

havan (fire sacrifices) are easily the favourites. Watching the breath, concentrating on the Omkara (sound of OM) or the sound of the Anahata from the heart, meditating on emptiness or on one's own existence (as 'I AM') or on 'Who am I?' also appeal to many people including people from outside India.

In conclusion, the Upanishad stresses on the importance of Tapasya (austerity) i.e. celibacy etc., dama (control of senses) and the various Karmas (rituals) prescribed in Scriptures which are indispensable for the purification of the mind, a sine-qua-non for any of the spiritual paths. These are the structural base for all sadhanas for God- realization or Self-realization. Unless the mind is purified thoroughly and is endowed with these and other qualities as prescribed in the 12th chapter of Srimad Bhagavad Gita, the right knowledge taught by the Vedas and the right perception will not result.

“May we all get enlightened and earn that permanent bliss in this very birth. May not Brahman reject us but accept us”

“मा मा ब्रह्म निराकरोदनिराकरणमस्त्वनिराकरणं मेस्तु
तदात्मनि निरते य उपनिषत्सु धर्मास्ते मयि सन्तु ते मयि सन्तु”

(Śānti Mantra - Kenopanished)

HARI OM TAT SAT



His Holiness Sri Shantananda Puri Maharaj of Vasishtha Guha (Himalayas), born in 1928, is a disciple of Paramapoojya Sri Swami Purushottamananda Puri Mahraj of Vasishtha Guha, Himalayas.

Swamiji is a scholar par excellence in vedic scriptures as well as in the Puranic texts. His deep Knowledge and lucid exposition of Srimad Bhagavatam, Bhagavad Gita and Ashtavakra Gita have made him a popular guide to spiritual aspirants. His simplicity, transparent deep faith in the Divine force and absolute surrender to the supreme have made him an ideal combination of Jnana, Bhakti and Vairagya.

Swamiji's prodigious learning and deep devotion to the tenets of Indian philosophy and culture have reflected themselves in all his works, which are practical guides for inner personal experience and to raise oneself to a higher level of being. His emphasis has always been on 'Practice, practice, practice'.

Kenopanishad is one of the principal upanishads which deals with, very succinctly in a direct manner, about the relationship of an individual with the Supreme being. This is short and concise showing a direct path of enquiry to realise the ultimate reality

In this book, Revered Swamiji has emphasised the sadhana aspect of meditating directly on the supreme Brahman in his inimitable simple and lucid style. He has tried to integrate meditation on both the nirakara and sakara aspects of Brahman.