

A Glimpse into the *Ishopanishad*

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Every Upanishad begins with a *shānti* *mantra* or a peace chant. In the *Ishāvāsyaopanishad* or *Ishopanishad* which comes under the *Shukla Yajurveda*, there is also a peace chant. It is,

*Om purnamadah purnamidam purnāt
purnamudacyate;
Purnasya purnamādāya purnamevā-
vashishyate*

—‘Om, That Brahman is infinite. This phenomenal world is also infinite. But “this” is only a projection of “That”. [Nevertheless,] if “this” is taken away, “That” remains infinite as before.’

I will use the word Brahman, God, and *Ātman* interchangeably and synonymously. That transcendental Brahman is full, infinite—*Puramadah*. This immanent universe is also infinite—*purnamidam*. *Purnāt purnamudacyate*—from the transcendental Brahman this world has emanated. *Purnasya purnamādāya*—from the transcendental Brahman, if the relative Brahman, ie the phenomenal world, is taken away, *Purnamevāvashishyate*—what remains is the infinite. This is a very enigmatic verse.

This Upanishad is the shortest of all the Upanishads. Though it consists of only 18 verses, it contains many riddles. For instance, if you speak logically, thousand minus thousand is zero, ten thousand minus ten thousand is zero, but here the Upanishad says, infinite minus infinite remains infinite. It is not zero. According to mathematics, infinite minus infinite is indeterminate. We do not know how much it is.

The nearest example of the infinite would be an ocean. Ocean is infinite [which actually is not]. Anyway, if you take out thousand buckets of water from the ocean, what remains is not the ocean minus thousand buckets, but the ocean itself. So here also, from the infinite transcendental Brahman this immanent universe has emanated and what remains is still infinite. ‘*Pādo’sya vishvā bhūtāni tripādasyāmritam divi*’, says the *Prushasuktam*. It means, ‘His One Foot has become all these (visible) worlds, and His Three Feet rest in the immortal world of the Transcendence’. That is to say, only a part of It has become manifest, the major part remains transcendental.

Now let us read the first verse of the *Ishopanishad*:

*Ishāvāsyamidam sarvam yatkinca jagatyām
jagat;
Tena tyaktena bhunjithā mā gridhah kasya
sviddhanam.*

The verse says that everything in this world is subject to change, yet everything is covered by the Lord. Practise renunciation and be strong in the consciousness of the Self. Do not run after anyone’s wealth. This whole universe is to be enveloped or covered by God.

Swami Vivekananda gave a lecture on 28 October, 1897, in London. It was on *Kathopanishad*. His lectures on 26th and 27th were on the *Ishopanishad* and the *Kenopanishad* respectively. Unfortunately, while the *Kenopanishad* lecture is not

available, Swamiji has not mentioned the name of the *Ishopanishad* anywhere. Nevertheless, throughout his lecture titled ‘See God in Everything’ he has given a free translation of the *Ishopanishad*, without mentioning the technical terms. Swamiji has exhorted us in this lecture to see God in everything. The first verse says, ‘*jagatyām jagat*’. The root of the Sanskrit word ‘*jagat*’ is ‘*gam*’, which means ‘to move’. In other words, this world is ephemeral, transient, temporary; always, it keeps on changing. That is the only thing certain in this world that everything changes. So in this ephemeral world the only thing we have to do is to see God in everything because the only unchanging thing is the Lord. So this is the first part of the *Ishopanishad* that gives straightaway the *siddhānta*, its incontrovertible statement—‘See God in Everything’—‘*ishāvāsyamidam sarvam*’. This again is the tradition of the Upanishads. If you go to the *Kenopanishad*, you find that it begins with the following verse:

*Keneshitam patati preshitam manah
kena prānah prathamah praiti yuktah;
Keneshitām vācam imām vadanti
cakshuh shrotram ka u devo yunakti*

—‘By whose will is the mind drawn towards its objects? Who makes the vital breath, the first sign of life, function? Ordained by whom do people utter words? Which god directs the eye, the ear, [and other organs]?’

It means, impelled by what do the sense organs do their respective functions? That is the question. Then, the same Upanishad declares:

*Shrotrasya shrotram manaso mano yad
vāco ha vācam sa u prānasya prānah;
Cakshushah cakshuhratimucya dhirāh
pretyāsmāllōkādāmrītā bhavanti.*

—‘It [Brahman] is the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind, the Speech of the speech, the Breath of the breath, and the Eye of the

eye. Therefore the wise men, giving up the notion that they are associated with these organs, depart from this world [i.e., renounce this world] and become immortal.’

So, you see, how slowly and gradually the Upanishad takes us to the concept of the *Ātman*. Same with the *Kathopanishad*. It does not straightaway talk about the *Ātman*. First, there is a story of Nachiketā going to Yama, the Lord of death. Since Yama was not there at his residence, young Nachiketā had to wait there for three days. Then Yama came back and repented that he could not receive his honourable guest. To atone for his lapse, he asked Nachiketā to seek from him three boons. The first boon Nachiketā asked was a worldly one. He said, see that when I go back to my father, he should not be angry with me and he may recognize me. The second boon he asked was how to get to one of the heavens by doing some *yajnas* (sacrifices). The third was about the *Ātman*. He said: What happens to us when we die? Some people say we exist and some say we don’t. What really happens?

Thus slowly the idea of *Ātman* is unfolded as you go chapter after chapter in the *Kathopanishad* and the *Kenopanishad*.

In the beginning of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* you will find that the basic *vidyās* have been taught. Then it slowly goes to *pancakoshas* or the five sheaths—*annamaya*, *prānamaya*, *manomaya*, *vijnānamaya* and *ānandamaya kosha*—and explains the nature of each one and finally, how one becomes one with God after crossing each one of the sheaths. He feels he is one with the whole universe and starts singing in ecstatic joy. But that is all at the end of the Upanishad.

Special feature of the *Ishopanishad*

But here, in the *Ishopanishad*, strangely, the first part of the *shloka* itself is the

siddhānta vākya which asks us to see God in everything. It does not introduce the absolute Truth slowly at the end of the last chapter. No, it does not do that. The Truth is given straightaway. That is because this is the first of the Upanishads. The gist of the entire Vedānta is to see God in everything. That is why it tells us ‘*Ishāvāsyamidam sarvam*’—‘Everything is covered by the Lord’.

Then in the second half of the first verse, the Upanishad says, ‘*Tena tyaktena bhunjithā*.’ *Bhunjithā* means ‘to enjoy this world’. How do we enjoy this world? Generally, people think that we can enjoy this world by indulging in sense pleasures. But the Upanishad says, ‘Enjoy this world through giving up the pleasures of this world’—‘*Tena tyaktena*’. Enjoy this world through renunciation because real enjoyment comes only when we give up. That is freedom *from* the senses. When we indulge in pleasures, it is freedom *of* the senses. Here the Upanishad tells us to give up the freedom of the senses, and practise freedom from the senses.

Renunciation means a controlled and disciplined life which only a human being can live. Only a human being is gifted with the power of discrimination between what is real and what is unreal, what is permanent and what is transitory. Real bliss comes from the soul whereas sense pleasure comes through the senses. So there is a great difference between pleasures and bliss, joy and what we call *ānanda*.

Sri Ramakrishna refers to three kinds of *ānanda* or joy, namely *vishayānanda*, *bhajanānanda* and *brahmānanda*. *Brahmānanda* is the bliss of the soul. *Vishayānanda* is the sense pleasure. So by giving up sense pleasures we enjoy the happiness of God, the bliss of God. What is that bliss of God? It tells later on.

One of the corollaries of seeing God in

everything and everybody is that we cannot hate anyone. Then we have love for everyone, affection for everyone. And this love expresses itself in the form of spontaneous service to everyone. So here we see the value of renunciation (*tena tyaktena*) and service to human beings.

Swami Vivekananda said, renunciation and service are the twin national ideals of India. You have to mark the words—‘national ideals’. He did not say that it is the ideal of a sannyasin, it is the ideal of a spiritual man, or it is the ideal of a particular group of people. It is the ideal of everyone in our country—the national ideal. Swamiji said: Renunciation and service are the national ideals of India. Intensify her in these channels and the rest will take care of themselves. We do not have to solve the social problems one by one.

During Swamiji’s time many leaders tried to solve the problems of child marriage, widow re-marriage, prohibition of *Sati* and caste system. But Swamiji said he was not a social reformer. He did not believe in superficial social reforms. He said, only by following the ideal of renunciation and service everything else will take care of itself and problems of the country will be solved.

Since Swamiji pointed out this national ideals it does not mean everyone must take *sannyāsa* or anything of the sort. Renunciation actually means giving up our petty egos, our selfishness, our trivial lives, and expanding our consciousness by serving others irrespective of our professions.

Then the *Ishopanishad* says, ‘*mā gridhah kasya sviddhanam*’. This is the second part of the first verse. *Mā gridhah* means ‘do not desire, do not covet anybody’s wealth’—*kasya sviddhanam*. Do not covet, do not snatch away anybody’s wealth.

The Upanishads and our Hindu

scriptures are not against earning wealth, but it should be in accordance with *dharma* or righteousness. The *Mahābhārata* says, by following the principles of *dharma* one should earn wealth and fulfil the desires. Fulfilment of desires in this world is not prohibited in these scriptures. Sri Krishna says in the *Gītā* (7.11):

*Balam balavatām cāham
kāma-rāga-vivarjitam;
Dharm'āviruddho bhuteshu
kāmo'smi Bharata'rshabha.*

—‘In the strong I am strength uncorrupted by desire and attachment, and in living beings I am desire not contrary to virtue.’

Sri Krishna says He is not against the desire in human beings, but such desires which are not against *dharma*. Now, each one has his own *dharma*. A sannyasin has his *dharma*. A householder has his *dharma*. A teacher has his *dharma*. A lawyer has his *dharma*. If we practise without flouting *dharma*, then whatever we earn is all right. However much we earn is all right. Whatever we enjoy here that is also all right. So here the Upanishad says: Do not covet anybody’s wealth but earn by ethical means.

Then the second verse of the *Ishopanishad* is,

*Kurvanneveha karmāni jīvivishecchatam
samāh;
Evam tvayi nānyatheto'sti na karma lipyate
nare.*

—‘A man may wish to live for a hundred years, performing his duties as prescribed by the scriptures. O man, if you do your duties in this way, then the results of whatever you do will not cling to you. There is no other way.’

Jīvivishet means one may desire to live. This Vedanta is not a negative philosophy that I must give up this body to reach God to get *mukti*. No. One should desire to live not for one or two days, or years, but *shatam*

samāh, a hundred years. Why? Because this life is precious. And *kurvanneveha karmāni*—doing works like this in an ethical way, in a *dharmic* way, and following the principles of renunciation and service as a national ideal. Doing like this, you live for one hundred years. Our scriptures say that our lifespan is a hundred years. That is the Vedic standard. If a person lives a healthy life, physically, mentally, and spiritually, he can live for a hundred years. But if he is undernourished or if he lives in poor sanitary conditions, or if he lives a faulty life, a selfish and thoroughly worldly life, then the span of life will be shortened accordingly. The lifespan of Indians during our pre-independent days had been much less. Now it is slowly increasing with hygienic conditions and better nourishment etc.

Here you may ask: If you live a very perfect life you should live a hundred years. But why then Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda passed away at fifty and forty years? The answer is that they had the boon of *icchāmṛityu*—that is, they had the power to give up their gross body whenever they wished. So, they do not come under this general law. Swami Vivekananda said: I have given a message enough for the next 1500 years. Imagine! Within a lifespan of 40 years he gave the message to mankind for 1500 years! And still Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda are living in our hearts. Swamiji prophesied that even after giving up his body, his words will continue to inspire all. So we find his words are still acting throughout the world. So they do not come under this general law of 100 years of lifespan.

Now, here two ideas stand out. One is, we have to live a full life of 100 years. Second, we have to live a life of enthusiasm, joy and fulfilment, not a sort of negative life. We must take deep interest in life and its

affairs. At the same time we have to work without expecting any personal gain from our actions. When work is performed in this way, it does not bind us—*na karma lipyate nara*. Rather it releases us from the bondage of desires.

The question that comes now is that why should we live a hundred years? Because it is only in a human body that we can strive to attain God-realization, we cannot attain God even if we go to heavenly worlds. The heavenly worlds are meant only for exhausting our good *karmas*. When all our good *karmas* are exhausted we have to come back again to this earth.

Sri Krishna says in the *Gītā* (9.21):

*Te tam bhuktvā svargalokam vishālam
kshine punye martyalokam vishanti;
Evam trayi-dharmam anuprapannā
gatāgatam kāmakāmā labhante.*

—‘Having enjoyed the varied felicities of heaven for a long time, they come back to the world of human beings when their asset of meritorious deeds is exhausted. Thus, being desire-ridden, the followers of the Vedic sacrificial rites stagnate in *samsāra*, the repetitive state of going and coming.’

So it is clear that when the merits of all our *karmas* are exhausted, we have to come back to this world and again start doing *sādhanā*, because liberation is possible on this earth and only in this human body. Therefore, we have to live for 100 years. That is why Sri Ramakrishna says, the purpose of human birth is to realize God. When you live a full life you will have more time for your spiritual practice (*sādhanā*). As we go towards God what you call bliss or *ānanda* starts unfolding in our lives. That is the bliss of the Ātman.

Intensity and magnitude of joy

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* (II.VIII.1-4) gives us a hint of how much joy with which we can live in this world. It is a beautiful

visionary picture. It says, imagine a youth having six qualities. What are these six qualities? The first is *sādhu yuvā*—a young man of good character. The second is, *adhyāyakah*—he is highly educated and has creative intelligence. Third is *āshishthah*, he has a commanding personality and is optimistic about life. Fourth is *dridhishtah*, which means he has a firm mind, a disciplined will and is purposeful in life and actions. Fifth is *balishthah*, that is, he has a strong and healthy body. Sixth is, *sarvā vittasya purnā syāt*—he has the wealth of the entire world. So, imagine the joy of a youth who has these characteristics or these qualities. Ordinarily, what more do we want in this world? But the Upanishad says, let us take this as one unit of happiness—‘*sah mānushah eka ānandah*’. Then it goes on to say that the joy of *manushya-gandharvas*, who are living in a particular heaven, is hundred such units. Then the next category of gods whose *ānanda* is still higher. It is another hundred units multiplied by hundred. Then comes the next category. So it goes on like this one after another. And in each category there is higher and higher bliss. Ultimately, the joy of the person who lives in *Brahmaloka* is hundred times more than the joy of *Virāt*, mathematically, it is hundred to the power of eleven, ie, 100¹¹. That is what the *Taittiriya Upanishad* says.

But then there is also a tragedy. Sri Krishna says in the *Gītā* (8.16):

*Ābrahma-bhuvanālokāh
punar-āvartino ’rjuna;
Mām upetya tu kaunteya
punarjanma na vidyate.*

—‘All the worlds from the realm of Brahmā down to the earth are subject to re-birth. But, O Arjuna, one who has attained to Me is never reborn.’

That is to say, Krishna says, when his *karma* is exhausted he has to come back to

this world. His joy is then over. But parallelly a person, who is living on this earth and who is pure, who has mastery over his senses and who gradually goes on doing *sādhanā* and advances towards God, the bliss is unfolded in him when he reaches the highest state; on this earth itself he enjoys the happiness equivalent to the joy of a person who goes to *brahmaloka*. And this bliss, this joy does not go away from him. It remains with him. To attain that type of happiness you have to do spiritual practice (*sādhanā*). It is a life of great fulfilment, joy and achievement and not a life of frustration or depression.

Now comes the third *shloka* of the *Ishopanishad*. It says:

*Asuryā nāma te lokā
andhena tamasāvritāh;
Tāmste pretyābhigacchanti
ye ke cātmahano janāh.*

—‘There are worlds known to be sunless and fit for demons. They are enveloped in darkness, such as what the blind [ie, those devoid of Self-knowledge] experience. Those people who have neglected the attainment of Self-knowledge and have thus committed suicide, as it were, are doomed to enter those worlds after death.’

‘*Ātmahano*’ means those who do not strive to attain Self-knowledge and thus commit spiritual suicide. As a result, they enter into the world of the *asuras* or demons—‘*asuryā nāma te lokā*’. This world need not be outside; we find this world around us. We find the *asuras*, we find the terrorists, we find all sorts of wicked people. Everything is going on in this world itself. Such people enter into the demonic world and are enveloped in blinding darkness—*tamasāvritāh*.

Who are these people who slay the *Ātman*? They are persons who neglect God, who neglect their own divine nature. So if we do not struggle to realize God, it means

we are gradually committing spiritual suicide. If we do not go up, we invariably go down. So we have to keep on trying to go upward towards God. The Upanishad sounds a warning here that if you do not go towards God you will go to the *asura loka*.

There is a Greek story where a person is condemned to live in a dark cave which is closed by a huge rock. As he could not come out of the cave, he had to stay there for a long time. Then, maybe after several decades he comes out. And when he comes out he sees the scorching sun. As he cannot bear the light of the sun, he cries out ‘I cannot bear this bright light of the sun; I want to go back to the cave.’ So he goes back to the cave again. So people who are utterly worldly commit spiritual suicide by living an *āsūric* life.

Then the characteristics of the *Ātman* is described in the fourth verse.

*Anejadekam manaso javiyo nainaddevā
āpnuvanpurvamarshat;
Taddhāvato ’nyānatyeti tishthat tasminnapo
mātarishvā dadhāti.*

—‘Brahman is one without a second. It never moves, yet it goes faster than the mind. It is always ahead; the sense organs can never catch up with it. It is still, yet it defeats all in a race. By its power, the Lord who dwells in space upholds water and everything else in the phenomenal world.’

Anejad, that is, the immobile *Ātman* does not move. It is *ekam*. It is one and the same in everybody irrespective of who they are. *Manaso javiyo*—it is faster than the mind. *Nainaddevā āpnuvanpurvamarshat*. *Devās* mean gods. But it also means the senses. Both the meanings are applied here. It goes faster than all the gods. Before you go to any place it (*Ātman*) is already there. Whichever heaven you go to meet the gods, it is already there. All this means Brahman or *Ātman* is everywhere. It is all-pervading. ‘*Taddhāvato ’nyānatyeti*’. Others who

usually move very fast are also defeated by *Ātman* in the race. Then, ‘*tasminnapo mātarishvā dadhāti*’—by His mere presence the cosmic energy is enabled to sustain the activities of all living beings.

The next verse (5) says,

*Tadejati tannaijati taddure tadvantike;
Tadantarasya sarvasya tadu sarvasyāsya
bāhyatah.*

—‘That [Brahman] moves, and it does not move. It is far off, and it is also nearby. That [Brahman] is inside of this, and is also its outside.’

At first this verse says, *Ātman* moves—‘*Tadejati*’. Then again in the very next word it says, ‘*tannaijati*’—it does not move. ‘*Taddure*’—very far away from us. ‘*Tadvantike*’—it is very near. It looks like contradictions. ‘*Tadantarasya sarvasya*’—it is inside everything. At the same time, it is outside everything—‘*sarvasyāsya bāhyatah*’. So, rationally you cannot explain this. These are called logical paradoxes. In fact, in the higher and subtler stages of life we enter into certain regions which cannot be explained or analysed logically. An English poet said, take a flower in the palm of your hand and try to analyse it. But if you go on analysing at deeper and deeper levels, the flower merges into infinity. It is true of everything.

Swami Vivekananda also said that physics in the higher state merges into metaphysics. It is also true if you take the example of our own life. Suppose I ask someone: ‘Who are you?’ He answers, ‘I am so and so. My height is so much. And complexion is this. I belong to this community. I speak this language.’ This is how we explain ourselves, our identity. But is that all? There is something else which you discover when you go to the subtler realms. It is just not the gross body. There is something behind that.

We are a mass of emotions. We are a bundle of mental waves. We cannot see them as they work in the subtler region. My height I can see. The language I speak I can hear. But the emotions I *feel* because the mental waves are subtle. I cannot see these waves. As we go on analysing further we understand what we are, that we have a spiritual identity. We are divine. We are infinite. We are immortal. We are the embodiments of immeasurable bliss. Swami Vivekananda said, we are the heirs of ‘Immortal Bliss’. So everything merges into infinity as you carry on the analysis.

This is called a logical paradox. When we say two plus three is five, it is logic. But how do you get two is a logical paradox. Nobody knows how we got two.

Swami Vivekananda was fond of quoting from *Alice in Wonderland*. We cannot comprehend the story because it does not follow the rigorous law of cause and effect. In one instance in the story we find Alice and the queen are running hand in hand very fast, so fast that they seem to float in the air. Yet, when Alice stops after a long time, she is surprised to find that both of them are still at the same place where from they started. So here, there is no logic. That is why Swamiji liked it. Swamiji himself was beyond logic.

In modern physics also we come across particles like photons. And when you go to measure that photon and quantify it, it becomes a wave. And when you go to measure the wave it becomes a particle. So we do not really know whether it is a wave or a particle. So simply we have used the term wavicle to suggest that it is neither a wave nor a particle.

So everything merges into some sort of a mystery when we try to understand it. That is why this verse says—*Ātman* is near, *Ātman* is far; it moves, again it does not move, it is one, it is many. What all this

means is that *Ātman* is omnipresent. It is present everywhere. Wherever you go it is there.

Now the next two verses are very interesting. These verses talk about the oneness of the universe. This is the message we need very much today, for in today's world we see so much of divisions, so much of differences. When we talk about unity, people generally mean unity of their country, integration of different states in a country. Seen from this perspective, America is for the Americans, Britain is for the Britons, Australia is for the Australians. But Vedanta does not speak like that. Vedanta says *sarvātman bhavah*—realize that you are *Ātman*. As *Ātman* you are present in everybody, everywhere, wherever you are; whichever country you visit, you are present. *Ātman* is beyond time, place, circumstances, gender and so on. The implication is that we are all one. We find this message only in the Upanishads and nowhere else.

The sixth and seventh verse spell out this unitive truth:

*Yastu sarvāni bhutāni
ātmanyevānupashyati;
Sarvabhuteshu cātmānam tato na
vijugupsate.*

—‘He who sees everything in himself and himself in everything never hates anything.’

And the seventh verse is the following:

*Yasmīnsarvāni bhutāni
ātmaivābhudvijānatah;
Tatra ko mohah kah shoka
ekatvamanupashyatah.*

—‘When a person knows that he himself has become everything and he knows the oneness of things, how can he hate or love anything?’

These are the most wonderful verses not only in the *Ishopanishad* but also in the entire Upanishadic literature. ‘*Yastu sarvāni*

bhutāni’—when you see the *Ātman* in everyone and everywhere (or from the point of devotion, when you see God everywhere and in everything), you cannot hate anybody—‘*tato na vijugupsate*’—you are not jealous of anybody. On the contrary, you have love and affection for everyone which expresses itself in service to human beings. That is what Swamiji called *ātmanomokshārtham jagaddhitāya ca*. It means, realize yourself in everybody and serve. It is just not work. It is worship. When you are able to see the same *Ātman* in everybody, the seventh verse points out, ‘*tatra ko mohah*’—what delusion can you have of this world? In ignorance we tend to suffer from so many delusions, such as ‘This is my caste, this is my religion, this is my family’. But when the unitive knowledge of *Ātman* dawns on us, we get rid of these delusions.

When a child is born, he does not know even the father. The mother has to tell him ‘This is your father.’ And the child believes everything. Mother says, ‘This is your uncle, this is your grandmother, this is your grandfather. These are your relatives. And these are the neighbours, these people belong to your caste. You have to move with these people.’ The ideas of lower caste and higher caste—all these we implant in the mind of the child. The child is a clean slate. As a result, the child's mind becomes narrower and narrower. But look at the story of Queen Madālasā who put her child on the cradle and sang, ‘*Suddhosi buddhosi niranjanosi, samsāra māyā parivār jītosī; . . . Na janma mrityor tat sat sva rupa*’. That is ‘You are forever pure, you are forever true and the dream of this world can never touch you. So give up your attachment and give up your confusion and fly to that space that is beyond all illusion.’ It is wonderful! You are pure. You are *shuddha*. You are *buddha*. You are awakened. You are *niranjana*, you

are taintless. You cross the world of transmigration, the *māyā*, the world. As a result of this teaching the child became a great *jnāni*, a sage. Madālasā reared up the second and the third child in the same way. Then the king got frightened and asked her, 'If you do like this, who will rule my kingdom?' Then Madālasā stopped training her fourth child in the same manner.

Why I am telling this is that when *sarvātmabhāva* or the feeling of oneness comes, there can be no delusion—'*tatra ko mohah*'. The delusion that I belong to this family, these are my people, these are my enemies—nothing will be there. Where can there be sorrow when you see the same *Ātman* in all?

When Sri Ramakrishna's nephew Akshay died, he laughed because he saw the soul moving from one room to another, as it were. '*Kah shoka*'? How can there be any sorrow? '*ekatvamanupashyatah*'. When you see oneness everywhere, unity everywhere, you cannot have hatred. How can there be delusion then? How can there be misery? There cannot be. Your mind will then become so broad that you will only have love for everybody.

But Swami Vivekananda gives here a warning, saying it is easier said than done because when somebody comes and scolds me, I get angry immediately. So the ideal is very great.

Swami Vivekananda here tells a story. One deer was standing near a lake and saw its reflection. Then its fawn came. It said to the fawn: Look how beautiful I am. How strong I am! You look at my face in the water.

And then a dog barked from a distance. When the deer heard the bark of the dog it got frightened and started running. When it reached a safe place it stopped. Then the fawn asked, 'A little while ago you have been telling me that you are powerful, strong

and beautiful. But what happened? One dog barked and you came away running!' Then the deer replied, 'I want to be strong. But what can I do? When the dog comes I get frightened.'

Similarly, Swamiji says, you want to see God in everything. Well. But when somebody scolds you or something happens to you, immediately you lose your temper. This should not be; we should not give up the ideal, for the ideal is great. If we cannot reach that ideal right now, we should not give it up. We should go on practising more and more until we become perfect. We should not lower the ideal just because it is difficult. In this context Swamiji says that if a man with an ideal makes a thousand mistakes, man without an ideal will make fifty thousand mistakes. So it is better to have an ideal.

How to see God in everybody

Swamiji gives one clue how to see God in everybody. He says, first see God in the people you like. In the next stage, see God in those who are neither friends nor enemies. Finally, see God in the so-called enemies. You have to expand yourself steadily. It does not happen in one day.

Sri Ramakrishna gives an example. There was an old lady who used to come to Sri Ramakrishna. He told her to do *japam*, and think of God all the time. She tried but could not. She said she was not able to concentrate on God. Then Sri Ramakrishna asked whom did she love. Then the old lady replied that she had a goat in her house and she loved it. Then Sri Ramakrishna said: You worship that goat as God. You try to see God in that goat.

So she practised it and within a short time she could fix her mind on God because God is in everything. That is why Sri Ramakrishna felt a terrible pain when somebody was walking on the grass. He felt

his oneness even with that grass. There are many such examples. The same thing happened in the life of the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda who felt their oneness with the whole world—not once, twice, but many times.

Once a disciple of Sarada Devi went to the village market and was carrying a big load. The load was too heavy for him to walk. So he started gasping for breath. Then after sometime he felt as if the load had been lightened. Meanwhile, in the Mother's house, at the same time, her disciples found that she was gasping for breath. What happened actually was that she took the suffering of the disciple on herself. When the disciple returned the Mother scolded him and asked why he had not hired a porter.

When Mathur Babu's wife, Jagadamba, was seriously ill, Mathur came to Dakshineswar and prayed to Sri Ramakrishna for her recovery. Sri Ramakrishna then, out of pity, took the illness on himself. Jagadamba got cured but Sri Ramakrishna suffered. So, look how they could see oneness in everything. The Upanishadic verses are not merely academic; these are practical verses the truth of which has been revalidated by the Holy Trio even in our times. The *Nārada Bhaktisutra* (69) says, 'tirthi-kurvanti tirthāni su-karmī-kurvanti karmāni sacchāstri-kurvanti shāstrāni.' That is, the saints' association makes holy places holy, work auspicious, and the scriptures authoritative. Great saints like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Holy Mother came and they have revalidated the scriptures in our age. Otherwise we could question the validity and relevance of scriptures that originated several thousand years ago to our life. But through their lives they have proved that these scriptures have absolute relevance even today. We can realize this truth when

we practise a little bit the ideal of oneness with others, cultivate a little love for others forgetting all narrow considerations, such as caste, creed etc. When the Ramakrishna Mission does relief work, we do not see whether the person receiving the benefit is a Hindu, Muslim or a Christian; we see the divine soul in everybody and serve all. A person is poor, suffering, and we help them. That is not done by many other organizations.

There are other verses in the *Ishopanishad*—some of which are enigmatic. For example, verse 9 says those who are following *avidyā*, ignorance, they grope in darkness, those who practise *vidyā* they grope into deeper darkness. This is so enigmatic that there are more than 100 commentaries on this verse.

Then the next verse (10) says *vidyā* leads us to one way and *avidyā* to another way. Then it says that we are to combine in our life both (worship of gods and goddesses) *vidyā* and *avidyā* (*Agnihotra* and other sacrifices).

Similarly, the concepts of *sambhuti* and *asambhuti* (12). These are also enigmatic. *Sambhuti* is the manifested world that we see around us. The verse says, those who worship *asambhuti*, the unmanifested state of the world, they go into a blinding darkness; but those who worship the manifested world in this life, they are going into deeper darkness.

Commenting on these enigmatic verses, Swami Vivekananda says that *avidyā* means a life of luxury. Those who are living a life of sense pleasures and luxury enter into darkness. That we have already seen. They go to *asuraloka*, steeped in worldliness. And those who practise *vidyā* they enter as if into greater darkness. What is the meaning? Swamiji says, actually they are not entering into a deeper darkness, but they do not understand the real meaning of '*vidyā*'.

Swamiji interprets *vidyā* as a person who does not live a worldly life, at the same time he lives a life of self-mortification. But there is no proper seeking of God. There is no proper search after Truth. He lives only a life of self-mortification. He goes away into a forest and becomes a heartless, self-centred, insensitive person. Such a person enters into greater darkness. Therefore you will have to combine both of them. *Vidyā* leads us one way, *avidyā* leads us another way. We should strike a balance between the two extremes—neither too much of self-mortification, nor too much of self-indulgence.

The *Gītā* (6.17) says,

*Yukt'āhāra-vihārasya
yuktā-ceshtasya karmasu;
Yukta-svapn'āvabodhasya
yogo bhavati duhkha-hā.*

—‘For one who is temperate in food and recreation, who is detached and self-restrained in work, who is regulated in sleep and in vigil—Yoga brings about cessation of the travail of *samsāra*.’

Sri Krishna says, moderation in sleep, eating and in all our habits leads to happiness. Too much of extreme self-mortification is bad and too much of indulgence in sense pleasures is also bad. It is also same as regards to *sambhuti* and *asambhuti*. A person who lives a worldly, ignorant life enters into darkness. And a person who lives in this world without searching for anything higher, he too enters into a greater darkness.

Let us explain this point a little. The man who is wicked, engrossed in gross worldly matters, has at least some amount of energy in him. That is why he chooses a wicked path. The terrorists, for example. They have some purpose in life. They want

to do something bad to the world. They are scheming where shall they go, bomb, and kill innocent people. The terrorist is ready to give up his own life for the sake of destroying others. He has at least a conviction in the power of his evil will. Thus he is surrendering to the power of darkness. But a person who is simply goody-goody may be one who is good for nothing. He does not have any bad habit. He is otherwise a good man, but out of that apparent goodness no good happens to the world. He has no conviction in the power of goodness.

Swami Ranganathanandaji used to say there is a static piety and there is a dynamic spirituality. Static piety is simply I am static. Vivekananda said, a wall never tells a lie. A cow never makes a mistake. But a cow remains always a cow. A wall remains always a wall. But man is not so. He may commit mistakes, he may lie, but he has the capacity to reform himself.

There is a book called *Siddhartha* written by Hermann Hesse, a German author. It is a story of two friends. One was a monk. Another was a worldly fellow. At one point they left each other. After forty years they met again. It was found that the monk has remained the same—a good fellow. But he has not progressed at all. Conversely, the wicked fellow, who earlier went into the worldly ways, has acquired lot of experiences of sorrow and sufferings. And through these all, he realized the truth of the world. That is why Swami Vivekananda made a very revolutionary statement. He said, be wicked if you must. It is better to be wicked than to be passively good. But, if you are actively good, you can help hundreds of people to be good. Your good actions will help everybody to live in joy. So that type of dynamic goodness is what the Upanishad preaches to us. ■

* This is the synopsis of a lecture, Swami Abhiramananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, delivered at the Institute on 7 December, 2017.