



THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

DISCOURSE-11 (15 FEBRUARY 1977)

CHAPTER I

Fourth Brahmana (contd.)

Here is the intention of the Upanishad in making a distinction between Divine Knowledge and ordinary knowledge. It is Divine Knowledge that liberates, while the knowledge of objects is binding. What is the characteristic of Divine Knowledge as distinguished from ordinary knowledge? This was the point of discussion in our earlier study, and the whole section deals with this subject.

The knowledge of God does not mean someone's knowledge of the existence or character of God. It means, rather, the knowledge that God possesses, not the knowledge which someone else possesses regarding God. It is the knowledge which is the endowment of God Himself. That is Divine Knowledge, and it is this knowledge that is liberating, as nothing else can liberate the soul. We have been told that Adhyatma-Vidya, or Brahma-Vidya is the science of liberation. It liberates by the very fact of its presence, and not by any other process that takes place in the rise of that knowledge than just its existence. It is something like the luminosity of the sun. The mere presence of the sun is every kind of activity of the sun. Likewise is this knowledge which is Divine Knowledge. Inasmuch as we are not accustomed to this type of thinking which is called for in the assessment of the real meaning of Divine Knowledge, we are likely to commit the mistake of introducing human logic into the structure of Divine Realisation.

It has to be pointed out that Divine Knowledge is not logical acumen. It is not a conclusion drawn by means of induction or deduction. It is not a product of argument, or any kind of rational process. It is also not dependent upon an object outside it, which is a very important factor that distinguishes Divine Knowledge

from ordinary learning. While the knowledge that we have can have no significance if there is no object or content outside it, Divine Knowledge does not require any other content. It is itself its content. The object of knowledge is not necessarily an external factor that determines the value or the depth of that Knowledge, but the very nature of that Knowledge is such that it does not stand in need of an object outside it. This is a peculiarity in it with which the human mind is not accustomed, and therefore, the methodology of human psychology cannot be applied here, and even the farthest stretch of our imagination cannot comprehend the nature of Divine Knowledge. All the philosophies, whether of the East or of the West, have been racking their brains in trying to understand the nature of Knowledge, the nature of Truth. The character of Truth is an important subject in any philosophical enquiry, and we can, to a large extent, assess the value of a philosophical system from the definition of Truth that it furnishes. Each school of philosophy has its own definition of Truth, and from that definition we often gather the extent of the depth of that philosophy. We give logical definitions, and we have no other way of defining things. We give a characteristic of knowledge which is acceptable to the logical idiosyncracies of the human mind, which need not be true, ultimately. This is so, because it is subject to sublation. Human understanding is a process of knowing which will change its nature in accordance with the nature of its object. It is not eternal knowledge. We may call it secular or temporal knowledge. Not all this knowledge of ours is going to free us from bondage.

What is bondage? It is dependence of some kind, a hanging on of the subject on some kind of object, whether physical or conceptual. It may be an imaginary object, or it may be a really existent material object; yet it is some object on which the knowledge hangs, and without which it seems to have no worth. This dependence of knowledge on a particular object outside becomes a binding factor. So, our minds are bound by objects of sense. The objects outside us, the contents of our individualistic knowledge, become the sources of our bondage and sorrow. They do not illuminate us. We are under a misapprehension when we think that the content of our knowledge is an illuminating factor. We are very learned when we have a lot of content in our acumen. Not so is the truth. It is going to be a bondage, because it is a content which has not got absorbed into the structure of knowledge. The 'being' of knowledge, the essence of knowledge is outside the 'being' of the object, and, therefore, knowledge hangs on the object as if it is a leaning staff. Thus, it has no worth of its own; it has no intrinsic value. All the knowledge that human beings may be said to possess is bereft of a final intrinsic worth. It has an extrinsic value in the sense that it is related to objects, and so it is relative knowledge, not Absolute Being.

Absolute Knowledge is that which can stand on its own, and it does not need any other support from outside. That knowledge is God-Knowledge. This is what is known as Divine Knowledge. And the Upanishad tells us that such was the knowledge with which God was endowed, and is always endowed, and may be supposed to have been the essence of God's Being prior to the manifestation of the universe. When the universe was not there before it was created, there were

no space, time and objects. God was, and He knew something even when the universe was not there. What was it that He knew when the objects of the universe did not exist? *He knew only Himself*. The Absolute knew Itself alone. This is the answer of the Upanishad – *tad atmanam evavet*. And what sort of knowledge was it, that knowledge of the Self? *I am the All*: – This Selfhood of God, which was the content of His knowledge, was an Allness of Being; it was comprehensive reality, so that it did not exclude anything. Here is the standing difference between individual knowledge and Absolute Knowledge. The knowledge which the individual has in respect of himself, as ‘I am’, is a knowledge which one may have of himself, but that stands opposed to an object that is outside. Here is a knowledge of the Universal *I-am*, which does not stand opposed to an object, but gets absorbed into the object, and here the object is united with the Supreme Subject.

Because of the knowledge of God being equivalent to the ‘Being’ of all things, God’s Being was the ‘Being’ of all things. He was All, because His knowledge was All. His omniscience was also omnipresence. The presence of God is itself the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of God is the presence of God. They are not two different things. Existence and Consciousness are identical in the case of God. *Sat* and *Chit* are identical in the Absolute. The Being and the Awareness of Being are the same, and such was the Knowledge that God had, and therefore, He became everything. He was all things.

Whoever was the individual, celestial or otherwise, who related himself to this Knowledge, he became the All. It is not that God has the prerogative of this Knowledge, and no one else can have it. For this ‘anyone else’ cannot be outside God’s Being. Everyone can have this knowledge which God had, and God has, provided one gets attuned to the Being of God. Because, outside God there can be no ‘another’. The attunement of our ‘being’ with God’s Being is the criterion of our God-knowledge, and when we stand outside God, naturally, we become puppets in the hands of fate and nature, and then we are bound by these strings that control our activities, thoughts, feelings, etc. All the gods who rose upto this level of awakening had the same experience as God had. So is the case with even human beings, not merely celestials. The Upanishad says: be not afraid that only gods are fit to have this knowledge. Even you can attain to this knowledge. *Sa eva tad abhavat, tatha rsinam, tatha manusyanam*: Not only gods, celestials, but sages and perfected beings and also ordinary human beings are fit for that knowledge when they are so raised and united. No one is debarred from having this entry into the Absolute. There is, however, a qualification which has to be acquired before this entry into the domain of Divine Existence. That qualification is simple and not complicated, and it is that you have to be in tune with the Being of God. There should not be any gulf or gap between your ‘being’ and God-Being.

If that could be fulfilled, you may be anyone, anything, existing at any place, under any condition. And then, at once, you get flooded with the Being of God. This happened to a great master of ancient times, called Vamadeva, to which reference is made in the Rg Veda, *Aham manur abhavam suryas ca*, is a Mantra,

the beginning of a Sukta, a hymn in the Rg Veda, and the Upanishad points to that Mantra of the Veda, and says: Rishi Vamadeva had this knowledge, and having this knowledge, having awakened himself to this Divine Status, Vamadeva began to proclaim his experience even in the womb of his mother. He had not even come out of the womb of the mother. He was inside the womb only, when suddenly there was a flash inside the womb, and he began to realise his Cosmic Existence. That is, his *Prarabdha* was exhausted the moment he entered the womb. He had only that much of *Karma* as to compel him to take birth in the womb. The moment he entered, the force thereof got exhausted, and he had the Consciousness of Universal Existence. So, at once, he began to explain, or rather exclaim the feelings of his, as mentioned in the Rg Veda Mantra, which is reiterated here, 'I was once the sun, shining in the sky', felt Vamadeva within the womb. 'I am not a small baby inside. I was the shining sun; I was the Manu, the progenitor of this world. I was the sage *Kakshivan*. I was many things. Through all these species and forms of existence I have passed to come to this experience. There was the bursting of the bubble, and his individuality broke to pieces. His consciousness entered the Being of the Universal, and, then, he ejaculated in this manner, 'I am the All'. This is the experience recorded in the Upanishad, with reference to Vamadeva, the great Master.

Even today this experience can be had, not merely in ancient times, during the time of Vamadeva. Even this day it can be attained, provided the conditions are fulfilled, and the conditions have been mentioned. Even the gods cannot prevent such a Knower from attaining this supreme state. Nobody can oppose him from having this realisation. One need not be afraid that there can be some obstacle here. No obstacle can be there when this is the aspiration. Not even the celestials can be obstacles. Why? Because when one has this knowledge, he become the Self of the gods themselves, who are likely to put the obstacles. Such a one becomes the Self of the enemy himself. How can the enemy attack him? So, when one becomes the Soul of that which is likely to put an obstacle, how can any obstacle come? He is the Soul of the object itself. He has no fear because he becomes the Soul of even the cause of fear.

But, a warning is given here at the same time, by the Upanishad. If you are not cautious, you may get bound. What is that caution that you have to exercise? It is impossible, humanly, to think in the way you are expected to think by the Upanishad; that is the difficulty. You have been given a recipe. If this recipe could be swallowed, if this prescription could be understood, if you can think in this manner, as prescribed in this Upanishad, there would be no difficulty, of course; but you cannot think like this. That is all your difficulty. Though you are able to appreciate the significance of this teaching, it cannot enter into your heart; it cannot be absorbed by the mind; it cannot become a part of your nature, because it requires years of practice for the purpose of assimilating this understanding into the feeling of oneself. We have passed years and ages in wrong thinking. We do not know how many aeons have passed in such thought, and now, suddenly we have come to an awakened state of appreciating the value of this teaching, and that is a great blessing, indeed. We should regard ourselves as thrice-blessed, but

that is not enough. That understanding has not yet become a part of our existence, being, nature, habit. It has always tried to maintain its existence on our skin, on our surface. It has not become a part of our flesh and bones and marrow. Until that takes place, this knowledge will remain an outside foreigner. It will not come inside us, and it will not help us. That is the caution. And so, the Upanishad says; if you regard this God as an outside Deity, then you are like an animal bound to a peg for sacrifice, and you are a victim. Why are you a victim in this world? Because you regard your benefactor as one outside you. Who is your benefactor? It is God Himself, and you consider Him as an outsider, and therefore, He is your bondage. So is the case with anyone, who worships any deity or source of support as outside oneself.

When you pray to God, worship God, adore God, conceive God in your mind, you have already created a gulf between you and Him. You have there an unbridgeable difference between the object that you pray to, and yourself. The gulf is wide. This gulf is to be bridged. Until this is done, there cannot be any communication. It is something like an electric current that cannot pass even if there is a little difference of distance in the nature of the contact of the conducting element, and so, even if there is a little psychological distance between you and the Supreme Being, there cannot be then a real contact. And when the contact is not there, even if the distance is very little, it is as if there is a long distance. Therefore, the distance has to be abolished. The moment this distance is created, there is a fear coming from all sides. When the distance is removed, fear also goes with it, at once. And whoever conceives of various deities, various gods, various ideals and various objectives and aims of life, such a person is pitiable indeed, because there are no such many divinities, many ideals and many objectives in life. Whatever be your pursuit in life, it is a single pursuit in the end. All these roads which we are treading in this life, through the different avenues of activity, are really processes of the soul's journey for union with God. If this point is not remembered, there could be an unfortunate diversity in the objective of life, and it will look as if one has no connection with the other, while there is all connection between one and everything else. Every approach is an approach to the One, and it is necessary, at the very outset, to clear the cobwebs of confusion in the minds of people by enlightening them in the true relationship of the various ideals that appear to be diverse outwardly. They are interconnected. The ideals and pursuits in human life are various methods or means adopted by individuals according to their own mental patterns, but the aims are not different. So, you are not, in fact, worshipping many gods, but if you think that there are really many gods, then you will not reach the real God. If you think that God is somewhere, and you are here, well, you will always be here, and He will be there. There will be no connection between the two. Such a person knows nothing. He is illogical, and no knowledge is there. Like an animal is he. What knowledge has an animal?

The Upanishad says: a person who has no knowledge, and is ignorant, is like a victim of the celestials. He worships gods, various deities for propitiating them for selfish purposes, and he becomes a food of these gods. They control him,

catch hold of him, as animals are caught. And these ignorant individuals who do not know the truth of things, but hang on individual deities, and become victims thereof, are naturally prevented by these deities from going above. Just as a Master of cattle does not want his cattle to be lost, says the Upanishad, these deities do not want you to reach the higher level; they do not want you to go above them, and so they always keep you under control, and, tell you, 'this much is enough, not more'. As you do not wish to lose even one animal, if it is yours, naturally, the celestials who are propitiated as deities keep you under subjection in a similar manner. And, why should they allow you to go above them? They are very selfish.

The celestials put obstacles upon you. You have heard it mentioned in the Epics and the Puranas, that when you practice meditation, do *Tapas* (austerity), the celestials will come with obstacles. They do not want you to go above them. They, always, keep you down by tempting you into diverse ideals which are other than the one that you are aspiring for. And, therefore, the commentator of this passage discretely adds a line, 'it is better that you propitiate these gods first, and not suddenly try to go to the heights by rejecting them, because they will trouble you if they are not appeased. So, go slowly; do not go to the skies immediately'. This is the caution.

11. brahma va idam agra asit, ekam eva, tad ekam san na vyabhavat. tac chreyo rupam atyasrjata ksatram, yany etani devatra ksatrani, indro varunah somo rudrah parjanya yamo mrtyur isana iti tasmad ksarat param nasti, tasmad brahmanah ksatriyam adhastad upasate rajasuye, ksatra eva tad yaso dadhati; saisa ksatrasya yonir yad brahma. tasmad yady api raja paramatam, gacchati, brahmaivantata upanisrayati svam yonim. ya u enam hinasti, svam sa yonim rchhati, sa papiyan bhavati, yatha sreyamsam himsitva.

Now, the story of creation continues. Creation is really threefold – cosmic, individual and social. We have been given an idea of the nature of cosmic creation, and also the creation of the individual. Cosmic creation is the manifestation of the universe in its primordial nature. The five elements, for instance – Ether, Air, Fire, Water, Earth – may be regarded as cosmic objects of creation. They have no individuality of their own; they have no personality-consciousness. But, then, comes individual creation, that is, the distinction of 'I', 'you', etc. The individuals begin to manifest themselves as isolated beings, and, in addition to the cosmic physical creation of Isvara, here we have psychic individuals manifesting themselves – we call them the Jivas. The mind begins to operate as the differentiating principle in individuals, though, physically speaking, we cannot draw a distinction between one individual and the other. Physically, what is the difference between one person and another person? We will find nothing special biologically or chemically. If we examine the body of an individual, we will see that they are all made up of the same substance, so that whether it is 'A', 'B', 'C', or 'X', 'Y', 'Z', it would make no difference to them as humans. But why is this difference, then? We see that this person is different

from that person. And it is to be attributed to psychic differences. The minds are different, not the bodies. When the minds are different, it looks as if the individuals are different. Thus is individual creation.

Now comes social creation which is something peculiar. What is society? We say, that we live in human society. What do we mean by human society? Many people sitting together may be said to be a society. But what is this 'many people'? Many people are many individuals. Many individuals are considered a society. What is the difference between individual existence and social existence if society is nothing but individuals grouped together? There is a difference, yet. And it is a very subtle difference. This is a vast subject of psychology, and essentially it suggests that the mind of the individual projects itself into another in a special way when it thinks in a social manner, apart from its individual ways of thinking. Our individual way of thinking is different from our social way of thinking, though it is the same mind that thinks both ways. The social atmosphere calls for a particular adjustment of the individual mind in respect of the existence and needs of other individuals, other than the one that thinks. Here is the reason for the assumption that there is an atmosphere called society, independent of, or, at least, different from the individual's own personal atmosphere. Inasmuch as there is such a thing as society, a situation which arises on account of the existence of various individuals of different characters, mentally, there comes about a need for bringing about a harmony in society, for, otherwise, there would be conflict and warfare, the law of the jungle would operate everywhere.

The principle of co-ordination, administration, harmony and justice has to be explained. For that purpose, the atmosphere of society is brought into the picture, by the Upanishad. The intention of the Upanishad is to tell us what is *Dharma*; – what is law, ultimately. But before we try to explain the meaning of law or rule, or regulation of any kind, we would do well to know how came this need at all. Why should there be law at all? Law becomes a necessity since it is the means of regulating irreconcilable individuals. Disharmonious units have to be brought together and made a complete whole. That principle which brings about this harmony is called law. We call it *Dharma* in the various degrees of its active working.

While the society of individuals may be said to be constituted of all living beings created in the entire cosmos, it can be classified into certain groups, and these groups are conceived in accordance with the predominant psychic characters of individuals. We have various features in our own individual minds, but all these multiple features of the mind can be classified into four important features under which all others can be subsumed. The spiritual aspiration is a novel occupation in the mind, and it is a very predominant feature. Sometimes, it is visible dominantly; at other times it is not visible so markedly; but, nevertheless, it is present everywhere. That is one aspect. The other feature of the human mind is the desire to control, dominate, rule and keep others under subjection. This is also an important requirement in the human mind. It does not want something else or someone else to go above it and put it down in any

manner. There is, again, a desire to be given due justice. Whether it comes forth or not, there is the desire that it must be there; and if it does not come forth, there is also a desire to see that it is made to function. And the necessity to keep irreconcilable impulses in people under subjection of a law or rule is also a very important human requisition. The absence of such legal regulation may stir up the lower instincts in man, and cause mutual harm and destruction. There is, further, the longing for material needs. Economic values are very important in life. As are all other values, so is this a very important value, also. We depend on material values in a pronounced manner, all which is well-known to us. Economic and commercial values go together. The fourth feature of the mind is the urge to put forth effort, to work, to labour, so that, an effect, or product be produced out of this labour, because, unless one works, nothing comes out. We work for certain ideals and to introduce some kind of change in the present state of affairs. Human society stands on man-power as its feet, has commerce as its thighs, administration as its arms, and knowledge as its brain. Philosophers, whether in the East or the West, have tried to classify human society into these groups. These groups have been called Varna, or characterisations of human society, in accordance with the capacities and aptitudes of people who are so grouped for the integration and solidarity of society.

The Upanishad gives the rationality behind this social classification. It is not an unfortunate or unjust introduction of an unwanted element into the set-up of society, but a need felt for regulation in human society. For this purpose, this classification was made originally, right at the beginning of creation, and it does not exist just outwardly as if it is thrust by somebody from external sources. The classification obtains in the structure of the mind itself. There are various facets of the mind, and these sides of human nature are responsible for the creation of its external feature as the social groups. These forms or classes are called, *Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra*.

We are told in the Mahabharata and certain other scriptures that, during the golden age of creation, Krta-yuga, there were no such distinctions. They became necessary later on. No administration is necessary where law automatically functions without someone administering it with the strength of the rod of punishment. Originally, there was a uniform society. This is what we hear. This was a time when people lived like divine beings, or celestials. *Dharma* rules not by injecting fear into people, but by becoming a spontaneous impulsion in all individuals. Such *Dharma* was called *Hamsa*, or *Brahma-Dharma*. But that was not the conclusive state of affairs. There came a time when it became necessary to introduce regulation from outside, because external consciousness became more and more pronounced in people. The inward harmonising consciousness of *Dharma* got diluted as time passed in the process of history, and bodily consciousness, individuality-consciousness, or one may say, even selfishness, began to show its head, and the affirmation of individuals from their own points of view, naturally, created a circumstance where they had to be restrained by the introduction of a law. This restraining principle is the Kshatra, or the ruling power, which the Upanishad mentions here. The Upanishad tells us that

knowledge which is the endowment of the Brahmana was not in a position to control human society as time passed, when *Treta-Yuga* came, as we hear from the Puranas. In the *Krta-Yuga*, no such need was there, but in *Treta*, the Kshatra principle arose. And the Kshatriya is adored in the Rajasuya, for instance, as a deity, and even the Brahmana adores him as a need of human existence. Kshatra, or the king, is seated on a throne, on an elevated place, in the Rajasuya ceremony, and the Brahmana sits below him. Where the need for the Kshatra-Dharma is felt, it becomes as important as the Brahmana-Dharma. But, there is an interdependence of this truth, immediately the Upanishad is careful to add a proviso. It is not that one is superior to the other.

It is very important to remember, as the Upanishad cautiously adds here, that the ruling force is not all. It should not become a source of threat and tyranny to people. It should be based on knowledge. And, so, *Brahmavarchas* and the Brahmana's wisdom should be the guiding principle of Kshatriya's law. The rule of law should be guided by the wisdom of the very aim of human society in the end. It is not that one wants to exercise law, but because the need for it arises on account of the common aim of human society. Knowledge, wisdom, or understanding of the purpose of the operation of law is important, and it should precede the actual action of law. If knowledge is absent, and law merely operates with a blind force, it will be a devastating energy and would be like the possession of power without the knowledge as to how to use that power. One can imagine what consequences will follow if there is power, but no knowledge. Thus, knowledge and power should be together, because knowledge is the *Yoni*, the *abode* of power. The power of the *Kshatra* is rooted in the knowledge of *Brahma*.

Though, the Upanishad tells us, the Kshatra, or the ruling power, is superior as is made out, for instance, in the Rajasuya ceremony, or in the coronation ceremony, yet, the king or the administrative head takes advice from the Brahmana, and he will not act contrary to the advice that is thus given. So, knowledge becomes the guiding principle of the operation of action, because knowledge is the *Yoni*, the abode, or the seed of power and action. If one does not abide by the guidance of knowledge and goes ahead with the power of action, such a one would destroy himself and destroy others, too. That would be something like attacking one's own soul, or cause. The cause, or the source, of power is knowledge. Where knowledge is absent, power also is not. Power assumes significance and meaning only when it is backed up by knowledge. Hence, if one acts by the force of power contrary to the knowledge that is to be behind it, that power would destroy itself and be a source of threat and fear for others, also. Such is, naturally not the intention of the manifestation of Kshatra.

The Upanishad admonishes that knowledge and power should go together; and it will now tell us further that knowledge and power alone are not sufficient for a complete life. There are other aspects of life which have also to be harmonised in our social existence, for the purpose of individual integration, with the final aim of cosmic realisation and God-knowledge.