



THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

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CHAPTER IV

First Brahmana

INADEQUATE DEFINITIONS OF BRAHMAN

1. *janako ha vaideha asam cakre. atha ha yajnavalkya avavraja. tam hovaca: yajnavalkya, kim artham acarih, pasun icchan, anvantan-iti. ubhayam eva, samrad iti hovaca.*

It appears, after some time, Yajnavalkya again comes to the court of King Janaka. This is the beginning of the fourth chapter. *Janako ha vaideha asam cakre*: Janaka was seated in his court, in his assembly, giving audience to people. *Atha ha yajnavalkya avavraja*: Yajnavalkya came there. Yajnavalkya having come, was received with great honour, naturally, by the King. *Tam hovaca: yajnavalkya, kim artham acarih*: "Yajnavalkya, great Master; how is it that you have come now?" This was the question of King Janaka. Emperor Janaka asks: "How is it that you have come? What can I do for you? Do you want more cows or you want more arguments? What is the purpose of your coming?" *Pasun icchan, anvantan-iti*: "Do you want more cattle, is that for which you have come now, or do you want to argue further?" "For both, my dear friend." Yajnavalkya said: "I have come for both." Yajnavalkya was a very interesting person. *Ubhayam eva, samrad iti hovaca*: "I have come for both purposes - your cows as well as arguments."

2. *yat te kas cid abravat tat srnavameti. abravim me jitva sailinih, vag vai brahmeti. yatha matrman pitrman acaryavan bruyat, tatha. tat sailinir*

abravit: vag vai brahmeti, avadato hi kim syad iti. abravit tu te tasyayatanam pratistham. na me'bravid iti. eka-pad va etat, samrat, iti. sa vai no bruhi, yajnavalkya. vag evayatanam, akasah pratistha, prajnyate enad upasita. ka prajnata, yajnavalkya. vag eva, samrat, iti hovaca. vaca vai, samrat, bandhuh prajnyate; rg-vedo yajur-vedah, sama-vedo' tharvangirasa, itihisah, puranam, vidya upanisadah, slokah, sutrany anuvyakhyanani, vyakhyananistam hutam asitam payitam, ayam ca lokah, paras ca lokah, sarvani ca bhutani vacaiva, samrat, prajnyante; vag vai, samrat, paramam brahma; nainarn vag jahati, sarvany enam bhutany abhiksaranti, devo bhutva devan apyeti, ya evam vidvan etad upaste. hasty-rsabham sahasram dadami, iti hovaca janako vaidehah. sa hovaca yajnavalkyah, pita me' manyata, nananusisya hareteti.

Now, Yajnavalkya and Janaka have a discussion. There is a conversation between Janaka and Yajnavalkya. Naturally, Janaka wanted to gather more and more wisdom from Sage Yajnavalkya. So, he said to him: "Tell me something, teach me about Brahman." And Yajnavalkya said: "First of all let me know what you already know? Have you heard anything from anyone up to this time? If anyone has taught you anything already (about Brahman), let me know what it is. Then, further on, if there is a necessity, I will speak to you. *Yat te kas cid abravit tat srnavameti*: Whatever anyone might have told you, let me hear it." Then Janaka speaks. *Abravin me jitva sailinih, vag vai brahmeti*: "I had a Guru, a teacher by the name of Jitva Sailini. He told me, he instructed me saying that speech is Brahman. This is what I have learnt, and I have been meditating in this manner on the principle of speech as the Supreme Being. *Yatha matrman pitrman acaryavan bruyat, tatha. tat sailinir abravit*. And he taught with great affection. Just as a mother would speak or a father would speak or a respectable teacher would speak, so did this man speak to me with great love, and told me that speech is Brahman." Then Yajnavalkya says: "This is only one-fourth of Brahman. It is not the whole. So your meditation is fractional, incomplete, inadequate, and therefore irrelevant. You have not understood three-fourths of it. You have understood only one-fourth, and therefore you are thinking that speech is Brahman." "O, please tell me the other three-fourths." *Ayatanam pratistham*: "Its foundation and its abode and its essential nature was not told to you by your teacher. Has he told you these?" "No; he has not told me," Janaka said, "I do not know the abode of speech; I do not know its support; and I do not know its essence, also. So, its abode, its support and its essence - these are the remaining three-quarters, whereas in its own form as speech, it is only one-fourth of Brahman. I know the one-fourth; the other three-fourths, I do not know. Please tell me what it is."

Vag evayatanam, akasah pratistha, prajnyate enad upasita. ka prajnata, yajnavalkya. vag eva samrat, iti hovaca. vaca vai, samrat, bandhuh prajnyate, rg-vedo yajur-vedah, sama-vedo' tharvangirasa, itihisah, puranam, vidya upanisadah, slokah, sutrany anuvyakhyanani, vyakhyananistam hutam asitam payitam, ayam ca lokah, paras ca lokah, sarvani ca bhutani vacaiva samrat, prajnyante; vag vai, samrat, paramam

brahma; nainam vag jahati, sarvany enam bhutany abhiksaranti, devo bhutva devan apyeti, ya evam vidvan etad upaste. hasty-rsabham sahasram dadami, iti hovaca janako vaidehah sa hovaca yajnavalkyah, pita me'manyata, nananusisya hareteti: Janaka having expressed his inability to mention the other three-fourths of the principle of speech, Yajnavalkya says: "Fire is one-fourth; consciousness is one-fourth; and the universal ether is one-fourth." And speech, of course, is one-fourth. All these four put together make one whole. The speech that is referred to here is only a form of expression. It is made possible on account of the operation of the consciousness inside. If the consciousness is not there, there would be no speech. And it is not merely consciousness that is responsible; there is something intermediary between speech and consciousness. Consciousness does not directly act upon the principle of speech. There is a controlling medium which is referred to, here, as the cosmic ether. We do not know what actually it means. Some say it is *Hiranyagarbha*; some say it is *Ishvara*, or the Causal *Prakriti*. That is, there is a determining factor which individualises speech and makes it possible for any person to express words in a given manner. Consciousness is general force like the power-house, for instance. Now the power-house has no particular affiliation to any vehicle of expression. You can express electricity through an electric train or through a frigidaire or through a heater etc. The power-house is not concerned with how its power is being used. It is just a generator. Likewise, consciousness is the ultimate support, no doubt, but how it is conducted in a particular form, in a particular instrument of speaking, language etc., that is determined by the structural pattern of what is here referred to as cosmic ether. That is perhaps *Hiranyagarbha* Himself; it cannot be anything else. And, *akasih pratistha*, ether is the *Pratistha* or the support; consciousness is the ultimate essence, and speech is the form which the principle takes in its individual embodiment - *vag evayatanam, akasih pratistha. Prajnety enad upasita:* "And Agni is the deity." This is another principle which cannot be ignored. This deity is controlling and superintending the principle of speech.

Agni as the 'deity of speech, consciousness as the ultimate essence, cosmic ether as the determining factor, and speech as the form - these four are to come together in order that speech may be made possible. And it is ultimately consciousness of course, because it is this that is the embodiment of all learning which the speech expresses in the form of sacred lore - the Rg Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, Atharva Veda, Itihasa, Purana, and anything that is scriptural, anything that you can call the holy word. The holy word is an expression of sacred speech. And so, all scriptural lore, of any type whatsoever, is an expression of speech. If you can know the essence of speech in this manner, then speech will not desert you at any time, which means to say, your speech will become true. Whatever you utter will become true only if your speech is connected to the causes. If the causes are disconnected from the form of speech, if you utter words without any connection with the causes, the principle of Agni and further causes etc., then the words will not materialise. The speech becomes true, the principle of speech does not desert you; what you do, what you speak becomes meaningful, and it immediately expresses itself in the form of a result if this truth about

speech is known by you. Such a person is not separated from the worthiness of speech - *nainam vag jahati*.

Sarvany enam bhutany abhiksaranti: Because of a cosmic affiliation established by the individual of these meditations on the fourfold aspect of speech, he becomes a friend of all creatures, because somehow or the other the cosmic ether and consciousness are present in everyone. So, your meditation in respect of these principles is an indirect meditation on everybody. So every being becomes friendly with you. It is not that speech alone will be materialised and become successful in your case, but in addition everyone becomes friendly with you, everyone takes care of you, and you shall be connected in a friendly manner with all creation. *Devo bhutva devan apyeti*: He becomes a celestial and is elevated to a resplendent region after the passing away of this body. *Ya evam vidvan etad upaste*: One who knows this. But it is difficult to know this. You cannot easily connect everything like this when you speak or even when you think.

“Yajnavalkya! You have told me a great truth. I am so happy. I never knew this before.” King Janaka is deeply impressed and he says: “Here I give you one bull as big as an elephant, and I give you one thousand cows. Please teach me further.” Yajnavalkya says: “I cannot take this bull and these cows until I teach you fully, because my father was of the opinion that one should not accept gifts from disciples unless they are fully taught. I have taught you only a little. So, how will I take these cows and the bull which is as big as an elephant?” “So teach me further,” says King Janaka - *hasty-rsabham sahasram dadami, iti hovaca janako vaidehah. sa hovaca yajnavalkyah, pita me'manyata, nananusisya hareteti*.

3. *yad eva te kas cid abravat tat srnavameti. abravim ma udankah saulbayanah, prano vai brahmeti: yatha matrman pitrman acaryavan bruyat, tatha tat saulbayano'bravit, prano vai brahmeti, apranato hi kim syad iti. abravat tu te tasyayatanam pratistham. na me'bravid iti. eka-pad va etat, samrad, iti. sa vai no bruhi, yajnavalkya, prana evayatanam, akasah pratistha, priyam ity enad upasita, ka priyata, yajnavalkya, prana eva, samrad, iti hovaca pranasya vai, samrat, kamayayajyam yajayati, apratigrhyasya pratigrhanti, api tatra vadhasankam bhavati, yam disam eti, pranasyaiva, samrat, kamaya, prano vai, samrat, paramam brahma, nainam prano jahati sarvany enam bhutany abhiksaranti, devo bhutva devan apyeti, ya evam vidvan etad upaste. hastyrsabham sahasram dadami, iti hovaca, janako vaidehah. sa hovaca yajnavalkyah, pita me' manyata nananusisya hareteti.*

Then Yajnavalkya says: “Well, I have told you something about speech. Now you want me to teach you further, but if you know anything else, let me know. If anybody might have told you about anything else, tell me. Then I shall teach you further” - *yad eva te kas cid abravat tat srnavameti. Abravim ma udankah saulbayanah, prano vai brahmeti*: Janaka seemed to have many teachers.

“Udanka Saulbayana, another teacher, told me that *Prana* is the Supreme Being. I am meditating ever since on *Prana* as Brahman. Is it all right?” “No,” says Yajnavalkya. “This is only one foot, one quarter again. The other three-quarters, you do not know. Do you know the other three-quarters - the support, the abode - the essence of *Prana*? Did your teacher tell you about all the things in connection with *Prana* when he initiated you into the mysteries of *Prana*?” Janaka says: “I have not been told anything of this sort. I do not know the essence or the deity or the support of *Prana*. I only know, *Prana* is Brahman. I meditate like that.” “This is not proper,” says Yajnavalkya. “It is incomplete, because, *Prana evayatanam, akasah pratistha, priyam ity enad updsita*, when you contemplate *Prana* as Brahman, you have to connect it with the other factors, also, with which it is associated.”

Here, *Prana* means the principle of life. The essence of life is self-love. Nobody can say what life means. It is something which cannot be explained. If I ask you, what is life, you cannot easily answer. So Yajnavalkya says: “Tentatively I may tell you that life is nothing but love of self.” That is life. Everyone loves one’s own self. And the love evinced for the preservation of oneself is the principle of life. That is one aspect of *Prana*. The other aspect is that it is also controlled by the cosmic ether, *Hiranyagarbha* which is the general controlling principle of every other function. So, that also is to be brought into the picture when you meditate on *Prana* as Brahman. And, of course, the speciality of *Prana* is that it is an individual manifestation of this Cosmic *Sutra-Atman*. The deity of *Prana* is *Vayu* (air). *Prana* is the form taken by *Vayu* in a particular individual. The cosmic ether is its determining factor. And intense affection, which is identical with one’s own being, is its essence. So, what is *Prana*? The individual is the actual function of *Prana* that is technically, our personality. That is a form taken by it. *Vayu* is the deity; *Akasa*, or cosmic ether is its determining factor, support; and love is its essence. Life and love are identical.

So, these four principles have to be brought together in communion when you contemplate *Prana*. If you can do this, then of course you will have no fear. You know how much love people have for their own *Prana* or life. They risk even their lives for the sake of the love that they have for themselves. And, if you can contemplate *Prana* in this manner, *Prana* will not desert you. You will be a master of it; you will receive energy from it; and you will be supported by it - *nainam prano jahati*.

Sarvany enam bhutany abhiksaranti: For the reason cosmic ether is also a factor in the meditation on *Prana*, and because it is a uniform feature in any other individual also, every being becomes friendly with you when you meditate on *Prana* as being determined by the cosmic ether. And then, of course the same result follows. *Devo bhutva devan apyeti, ya evam vidvan etad upaste*: One who knows this attains to brilliant regions after passing away from this body.

Janaka is again highly pleased. “I give you a bull as big as an elephant and one thousand cows,” he says. Then Yajnavalkya says: “I cannot accept these cows,

cannot take this bull unless I instruct you properly and fully” - *hasty-rsabham sahasram dadami, iti hovaca, janako vaidehah. sa hovaca yajnavalkyah, pita me'manyata nananusisya hareteti.* “Then please instruct me fully.”

4. yad eva te kas cid abravat tat srnavameti. abravim me barkur varsnah caksur vai brahmeti: yatha matrman pitrman acaryavan bruyat, tatha tad varsno' bravit. caksur vai brahmeti, apasyato hi kim syad iti. abravat tu te tasyayatanam pratistham. na me' bravid iti. eka-pad va etad, samrad iti. sa vai no bruhi, yajnavalkya. caksur evayatanam, akasah pratistha; satyam iti etad upasita. ka satyata, yajnavalkya. caksur eva, samrad, iti hovaca, caksusa vai, samrat, pasyantam ahuh; adraksir iti, sa aha; adraksam iti tat satyam bhavati. caksur vai, samrat, paramam brahma. nainam caksur jahati, sarvany enam bhutany abhiksaranti, devo bhutva devan apyeti, ya evam vidvan etad upaste. hasty-rsabham sahasram dadami, iti hovaca janako vaidehah. sa hovaca yajnavalkyah. pita me' manyata, nananusisya hareteti.

Yajnavalkya, for a third time, says: “If you know anything else taught by anyone else about the Supreme Being, let me know so that I can speak to you further.” Then Janaka says: “I know something which was taught to me by another Master called Barku Varsna - *yad eva te kas cid abravat tat srnavameti. abravim me barkur varsnah. Caksur vai brahmeti:* I have been told by this Master that the eye is Brahman. So, I meditate on eye as Brahman.” “Well; that is very good,” says Yajnavalkya, “but do you know its essence, its support, its deity?” “O, I do not know its deity; I do not know its support; I do not know its essence.” “Then it is only one-fourth knowledge of it. It is not complete. So your meditation is inadequate.” “What is the other three-fourths? Please let me know.” *Caksur evayatanam, akasah pratistha; satyam iti etad upasita. ka satyata, yajnavalkya. caksur eva, samrat, iti hovaca, caksusa vai, samrat, pasyantam ahuh; adraksir iti, sa aha; adraksam iti tat satyam bhavati. caksur vai, samrat, paramam brahma. nainam caksur jahati, sarvany enam bhutany abhiksaranti, devo bhutva devan apyeti, ya evam vidvan etad upaste. hasty-rsabham sahasram dadami, iti hovaca janako vaidehah. sa hovaca yajnavalkyah. pita me' manyata, nananusisya hareteti:* “The deity of the eye is the sun. The cosmic determining factor of the eye also is the same ether, and the act of perception is the form taken by the eye. The sun is the deity, and truth is its essence,” says Yajnavalkya. Here the word ‘truth’ is interpreted in two ways. Some say, the ultimate truth of the eye is the *Virat* Himself, because our eyes are connected to the sun, it being the presiding deity of the eye, but the sun himself has come from the eye of *Virat*. *Caksuh suryo ajayata,* says the *Purusha-Sukta*. So, the eye of the *Virat-Purusha* is the ultimate reality of even our own eyes through the medium of the sun. Thus, Satya, or ultimate truth is the essence of the eye. That is one meaning. The other meaning given here is that, when you perceive a thing directly with the eye, that you regard as the truth. If someone says something, you ask; “Is it true? Have you seen it with your eyes?” If you see it with your eyes, it is felt to be true. If we hear it merely, it is not sometimes considered so true. So,

tentatively, the perception of the eye is regarded as sociably acceptable truth, apart from the fact that it is a metaphysical truth, namely, the eye of *Virat*.

“One who knows this secret of perception through the eye, connected with the sun and the cosmic ether and the truthfulness, or the truth that is involved in it, is never ‘deserted’ by the eye.” You can act powerfully even by a mere look. And for the same reason as mentioned earlier, all beings become friendly with this person. He, having departed from this body, attains to brilliant regions later on.

“Yajnavalkya, this is wonderful. I am immensely happy,” says King Janaka. “I give you a bull as big as an elephant and a thousand cows as a reward for the instruction I have received from you.” But Yajnavalkya says: “I have instructed you partially; I will not take the gift.” “Then please tell me more,” requests Janaka.

5. yad eva te kas cid abravat, tat srnavameti, abravim me gardhabhivipito bharadvajah: srotram vai brahmeti. yatha matrman pitrman acaryavan bruyat, tatha tad bharadvajo’ bravat. srotram vai brahmeti, asrnvato hi kim syad iti. abravat tu te tasyayatanam pratistham. na me’ bravid iti. eka-pad va etat, samrad, iti. sa vai no bruhi, yajnavalkya, srotram evayatanam, akasah pratistha, ananta ity enad upasita. ka anantata, yajnavalkya. disa eva, samrad, iti hovaca. tasmad vai, samrad, api yam kam ca disam gacchati, naivasya antam gacchati, ananta hi disah di’so vai, samrat, srotram. srotram vai samrat, paramam brahma nainam srotram jahati, sarvany enam bhutany abhiksaranti, devo bhutva devan apyeti, ya evam vidvan etad upaste. hasty-rsabham sahasram dadami iti. hovaca janako vaidehah, sa hovaca yajnavalkyah, pita me’manyata, nananusisyah hareteti.

Then Yajnavalkya says: “Tell me what you already know.” This is a very interesting part of the conversation between Guru and disciple. *Yad eva te kas cid abravat, tat srnavameti, abravim me gardhabhivipito bharadvajah: srotram vai brahmeti*: “Another Master, another teacher of mine, Gardhabhivipita Bharadvaja, told me that ear is Brahman. So I consider any function of the ear as identical with reality. It is almighty.” “Well; that is good,” says Yajnavalkya. “Do you know its essence and its support and its deity? Has your teacher told you about it?” “The teacher has not told me anything about it. So please tell me the three-fourths left off.” Then Yajnavalkya says: “The quarters, or the Dig-devatas, or the deities of the different directions are the deity of the ear.” Ear itself or the act of hearing is the form taken by it. The cosmic ether, or the Akasa mentioned already, is the determining factor. *Ananta ity enad upasita*: “You must contemplate this ear as infinite.” This is because the ear is connected with space from which sounds come and impinge upon the ear drum. And inasmuch as space is the ultimate resort of the principle of hearing, the character of space should also be taken into consideration in meditation. What is the character of space? Unlimitedness. You do not know the end of space - it is *ananta*. *Ananta* means endless. *Ka anantata*: “What is the meaning of endlessness? Why do you say like that?” *Enad disa eva, samrad, iti hovaca. tasmad vai, samrad, api yam*

kam ca disam gacchati naivasya antam gacchati: “If you go on moving in any direction, you will never come to an end of it. So space is endless, infinite in extent. Such infinitude is the ultimate refuge of the very act of hearing.” Therefore, contemplate on the act of hearing as presided over by the deities of the quarters and supported by the cosmic ether and the fact of its being endless. If this could be done, meditation becomes complete. Then your hearing becomes adequate. Whatever you hear will not become indistinct. You can hear even the subtlest sounds and know the meaning of whatever you hear. That means to say, “the principle of hearing does not desert you.” All beings, for the same reason mentioned, become friendly with you. You become resplendent after passing from this body and attain to the celestial regions.

Wonderful! This is a four-fold meditation on the principle of hearing. Then again Janaka says: “I will give you a gift of a bull and a thousand cows.” Again Yajnavalkya refuses to accept the gift, saying the teaching is not complete. “The instruction is still pending. I have given you only some knowledge; whole knowledge, I have not given. So I will not accept the gift till everything is told.” “Then please tell me more,” says Janaka.

6. yad eva kas cid abravat tat srnavameti. abravim satyakamo jabalah, mano vai brahmeti: yatha matrman pitrman acaryavan bruyat, tatha taj jabalo'bravit, mano vai brahmeti, amanasa hi kim syad iti. abravit tu te tasyayatanam pratistham. na me'bravid iti. eka-pad va etat samrad iti. sa vai no bruhi, yajnavalkya. mana evayatanam, akasah pratistha, ananda ity enad upasita, ka anandata, yajnavalkya. mana eva, samrad, iti hovaca, manasa vai, samrat. striyam abhicharyate, tasyam pratirupah putro jayate, sa anandah, mano vai samrat, paraman brahma. nainam mano jahati, sarvany enam bhutany abhiksaranti, devo bhutva devan apyeti, ya evam vidvan etad upaste. hastysabham sahasram dadami, iti hovaca janako vaidehah. sa hovaca yajnavalkyah, pita me'manyata nananusisya hareteti.

Then again Yajnavalkya asks: “What do you already know? Tell me.” “What I already know is something more. I have been told by Satyakama Jabala that mind is Brahman.” Now this is a more difficult thing to conceive than other things. *Yad eva kas cid abravat tat srnavameti abravim satyakamo jabalah, mano vai brahmeti:* “As a mother speaks or a father speaks or a guru, or a teacher speaks, so affectionately did he teach me that mind is the principle of Brahman.” “But that is only a fourth part of it. What is its essence, its support and its deity?” “I do not know,” says Janaka. Then Yajnavalkya says: “I shall tell you the other three-fourths left out of this principle on which you are meditating - the deity, the determining factor and the essence. The deity of the mind is *Candra*, or Moon. *Mana evayatanam, akasah pratistha, ananda ity enad upasita:* It is a source of happiness.” It is through the mind that you experience any kind of joy, any satisfaction. Even sensory happiness is a mental happiness ultimately. It is the mind that rejoices over any kind of satisfaction come through the senses or any other avenue. So, if happiness can be associated with mind together with the deity of the mind and its support which is the cosmic ether, that would be a

complete meditation. It is through the mind that one asks for happiness. And it is the lack of the principle of happiness in meditation that detracts people from proceeding further in meditation. Meditation sometimes becomes unhappy. It becomes a burden and tiring because you do not connect the object of meditation with happiness. Happiness is somewhere else and the meditation that is done is somewhere else. Inasmuch as the mind is the experiencer of all happiness, and it is the reaction of the mind in respect of anything that is the cause of happiness, it is necessary to bring the principle of happiness into the picture of meditation on the mind, especially, together with the contemplation of the deity thereof, and the cosmic principle of which it is a part. If these could be brought together, then your meditation would be complete, and you will be able to control the mind. The mind cannot be controlled if it is regarded as belonging to an isolated individual. If it is 'your' mind or 'my' mind merely, then it cannot be controlled. It can be controlled only when it is visualised in its internal relationship with other minds also, which is the point made out by saying that it is determined by the cosmic ether and the principle of *Ananda* or bliss which is Brahman itself.

Here, Janaka is again immensely pleased, offers a gift, and Yajnavalkya refuses the gift for the same reason as before. The conversation goes on in a greater and greater intensity of form, until the most astonishing truth of spirituality is taught by Yajnavalkya to which point the Upanishad proceeds step by step.