

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsopanishad

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(Upanishads, which have been aptly called the Himalayas of the soul, aim at revealing to the aspirant the nature of the Ultimate Reality and the means to attain It. Sri Ramakrishna was a living Upanishad who stressed that the only purpose of human life is God-realization, that God can be communed with, and the prime requisite for attaining Him is Vyakulata or eager anguish. Swami Harshananda, head of Ramakrishna Math, Allahabad, has formulated the principal teachings of the Great Master in the form of Upanishadic Mantras with a free translation in English and brief comments on the significance of these aphorisms.)

Introduction

Upanishads are the basic scriptures of many of the Indian philosophical systems. Though there are a good number of Upanishads that go by different names and with different types of teachings, Hindu tradition has always considered them—from the doctrinal point of view at least—as one unit.

The word 'Upanishad' has been interpreted as the secret and sacred teaching that a disciple has received while sitting near (*upa* = near) his spiritual preceptor at his feet (*ni* = below), which teaching destroys his ignorance, loosens his bonds and leads him to the highest Truth (*sad* = to destroy, to loosen, to lead to).

Since our modern times are characterized by a craze for stylish abbreviations (e.g. UNO, NAM or DNA) a similar interpretation may be attempted here: Upanishad is that scripture which is like sweet drinking water (*U* = *Udaka* = water) for one who is awfully thirsty in this desert of a world, which helps one, like an axe (*PA* = *Parasu* = axe), to cut down the tree of transmigration, which gives the shelter of a sweet home (*NI* = *Nilaya* = home) to the tired traveller of worldly life and ultimately destroys (*SAD* = to destroy) his primeval ignorance.

The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna fit in very well with all these definitions or interpretations.

Hence they have been designated as 'Upanishad' here and presented in a systematic manner.

Peace Chant

ॐ सह नावतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु । सहवीर्यं
करवावहे ॥ तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु मा
विद्विषावहे ॥ ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

'May He protect us both (the teacher and the disciple) together (by revealing knowledge). May He protect us both (by vouchsafing the results of knowledge). May we attain vigour together. Let what we study be invigorating. May we not cavil at each other.'

Om! Peace! Peace! Peace!

Special Feature

॥ अथ श्रीरामकृष्णपरमहंसोपनिषदं व्याख्या-
स्यामः ॥

॥ सैऽषाऽपरोक्षानुभवरूढा साधन-

प्रधाना च ॥ १ ॥

1. Now, we shall expound the *Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsopanishad*. That this (Upanishad) is rooted in direct spiritual experience and is heavily oriented towards Sadhana or spiritual practice.

Comments

This then is its special feature. Sri Ramakrishna taught out of the fulness of direct

spiritual experience obtained mainly through *vyākulatā* or intense longing to see God. He did not undergo the orthodox or traditional modes of spiritual practices before his first vision of the Divine Mother. He practised them abundantly later, just to confirm the highest mystic experience he had already got. Since his 'mouth speaketh out of the fulness of the heart' his teachings are refreshingly simple and immensely practicable.

Twofold Brahman

॥ निर्गुणं निराकारं च परं ब्रह्म । तदेव भक्त-
जनानां शीतलभक्तेः प्रभावात् सगुणः साकारः
परमेश्वरो भवति हिममिव जलात् शैत्यात् । स
एव परमेश्वरो निखिल-जगदन्तर्यामी च ॥ २ ॥

2. The Supreme Brahman is without attributes or form. The same becomes the Supreme Lord (or God) with form and attributes due to the cooling effect of the devotees, even as ice forms itself out of water due to intense cold. This very Supreme Lord is also the indwelling Spirit of the whole world.

Comments

Advaita Vedanta of the orthodox variety posits two aspects of Brahman, the Nirguna and the Saguna, the latter being considered as inferior to the former. Obviously Sri Ramakrishna does not subscribe to this view. It is the *same* Brahman, whether it is Saguna or Nirguna. The way of description of the Saguna evolving out of the Nirguna is unique. Incidentally, it should be noted that the devotees of God have been given an equally important place as that of the men of knowledge, in the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna

Aspects of Saguna Brahman

राम-कृष्ण-शिव-विष्णु-गण्ड-अल्ला-इत्यादि-विवि-
धनामभिर्निर्दिष्टं परं तत्त्वमपि स एव । स एव
लक्ष्मी-दुर्गा-काली-सरस्वतीत्यादि देवीनाम-
भिरपि निर्दिश्यते ॥ ३ ॥

3. He verily is the Supreme Principle that is designated by various names such as Rama, Krishna, Siva, Vishnu, God and Allah. It is He again who is alluded to by the various names of goddesses such as Lakshmi, Durga, Kali, Sarasvati and so on.

Comments

This is not only an echo but also an extension of the Rig Vedic dictum: *ekam sad, viprā babudhā vadanti*, 'Truth is One, sages call It by various names.' The various deities of the Hindu pantheon are all different forms or aspects of the same Paramesvara or Supreme Lord, even as the various dolls made of chocolate are all chocolate only and taste sweet. This should dispel all misgivings that Hinduism is a polytheistic religion.

Concept of Sakti (Goddess)

व्यवहारदशायां यत्र पुरुषोऽज्ञो द्वैतमिव पश्यति
तदा कात्यादिदेव्यः परस्यैव ब्रह्मणः शक्तय
इति मन्तव्यम् । दाहिका शक्तिर्यथाऽग्नेः ।
वस्तुतस्तु तयोरत्यन्तमभेदः एव ॥ ४ ॥

4. In practical life, where a person, due to ignorance of (the Truth) sees as it were the world of duality, then, (in that state) he should understand that the goddesses like Kali and others, are all—like the burning power of fire—powers of the Supreme Brahman. In reality there is absolutely no difference between them.

Comments

What baffles one, who is not conversant with the Hindu philosophical systems based on the Vedas, is not only the apparent polytheism of the Hindus but also their worship of God in male-female pairs.

Ultimately the entire universe of multiplicity is nothing but Brahman. So, it is basically one substance, one power. If multiplicity is being perceived, it is because of ignorance, technically called 'Ajnana', 'Avidya', or 'Maya'. As long as this state of ignorance lasts and one sees duality as a matter of course, one naturally conceives of God also

from that angle. Since such concepts proceed from the seen to the unseen or from the known to the unknown, the unseen or the unknown being conceived in the light of the seen and the known, it is but natural that the concept of a God and His Sakti or female counterpart has evolved in the human society over the centuries. Lest this duality be considered permanent, Sri Ramakrishna time and again, has pointed out the basic oneness between the Deity and His Sakti using such similes as fire and its burning power, milk and its whiteness, snake at rest and snake in motion and so on.

Goal of Life

॥ परमेश्वरदर्शनमेव मानवजीवनस्य चरमोद्देशः
तथैव मुक्तेः साध्यत्वात् । परमेश्वरस्तु द्रष्टुं
स्प्रष्टुं च शक्यः । तेन सहालापोऽपि साध्यः ।
सर्वे धर्माः समानास्तमेव गमयन्ति च ॥ ५ ॥

5. Realize that the Supreme Lord is the ultimate goal of human life, because it is thus that a person can attain liberation. The Supreme Lord, however, can be seen, can be touched. It is even possible to talk to Him. All religions are equal and it is Him that they reveal.

Comments

The Hindu value system puts forward four goals for human life and calls them 'Purusharathas' (ends to be sought for by man). They are: *dharma* (virtue), *artha* (wealth and possessions), *kāma* (pleasures of the flesh) and *mokṣa* (final beatitude). Though wealth and pleasure have been given the status of a goal of life, as a concession to human weaknesses, it is Moksha that is the real or ultimate goal of life. Moksha or liberation from transmigration can best be attained, according to Sri Ramakrishna, by devotion to Personal God, the Supreme Lord of the universe. This God is not an airy being nor a mere conjecture of mythology. He is *real* and can be seen in the highest states of mystical experiences. Not only that, one can even talk to Him, even touch him! Hundreds of mystics all over the world,

throughout human history, have vouched for this.

It is this God that all religions talk about or preach, though the language and the modes of teaching naturally differ. Consequently all religions are equal in the final analysis. They are equal in another sense also: anyone who follows his religion sincerely gets the same ultimate mystic experience which is ineffable. Sri Ramakrishna discovered this by direct experience after following these diverse paths himself.

Paths to Perfection

॥ अपि तु मायाजघनिकाच्छन्नः सः सुखेन
द्रष्टुं न लभ्यः । कामकाञ्चनकामनैव माया ।
तदपगमे सः स्वयमेवाविर्भवति मेघापायेऽशु-
मानव । ज्ञानमिश्रितभक्तिश्च मायानाशोपायः ।
स एव सर्वमित्यतो दीन-दरिद्र-रोगी-अज्ञादीनां
नारायणदृष्ट्या सेवापि अद्यतनकालेऽनुत्त-
मोपायश्चित्तशुद्धिद्वारा तं साक्षात्कर्तुं ॥ ६ ॥

6. But, being veiled by the screen of Maya, He is not easily beheld. Lust and lucre, are themselves Maya. When that disappears, He automatically reveals Himself, even as the sun reveals himself when the clouds (hiding him) depart. Devotion associated with knowledge, is the means of dispelling Maya. Since God is all, service to the downtrodden, the poor, the sick and the ignorant, by seeing Him in them, is also an excellent path suited to these days, to realize Him through purity of mind.

Comments

It is true that God is our inmost Self. And yet, we cannot easily behold Him. Why? Because the screen of Maya is hiding Him. Suppose a person is standing very near to us; but if he is covering his face with a towel, we cannot see him. Similarly, Maya acts like a screen hiding the face of the Lord from us.

What is this Maya? Sri Ramakrishna says that lust for the flesh and thirst for the lucre is itself Maya. Vedanta says that Maya hides the real nature of God and makes Him appear

as this attractive world. This world of temptations, in the ultimate analysis, is nothing but 'woman and gold' as Sri Ramakrishna puts it. The *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* (verse 15) describes this world as *hiranmaya-pātra* or a golden disc, hiding the face of Truth. Hence, for all practical purpose, this world of lust and lucre is Maya. Once this Maya is set aside or transcended, God, the inner Self, automatically reveals Himself.

For dispelling this Maya two well-known Sadhanas or modes of spiritual disciplines have been prescribed in our scriptures: Jnana and Bhakti. In the path of Jnana or knowledge, the spiritual aspirant is strongly advised to eschew all actions, since actions are rooted in a sense of duality, are motivated by desires and bind through their results. Not only that, he is expected to deny even his own body and mind and assert that he is the pure spirit! On the other hand, in the path of Bhakti or devotion to God, the aspirant has to surrender himself to God who alone can and will, dispel his Maya and give him salvation (*vide Gita 7.14*).

Thus, these two paths, stressing self-effort on the one hand and divine grace on the other, seem to be diametrically opposed to each other. Of course, one may try to resolve this enigma by arguing that they are meant for different types of aspirants. Even then, due to immaturity, one following the path of Jnana may become a dry egoist, whereas the other, following the path of Bhakti may degenerate into a sentimentalist or a hysteric. Sensing this danger, Sri Ramakrishna has advocated what he calls '*jñāna-miśritā bhakti*' or devotion tempered with knowledge. Nama-japa or repetition of the divine name, Vyakulata or intense longing to see Him are the most important elements of Bhakti which he strongly recommended. Vichara or discrimination that God alone is real and the world is not because of its transient nature, Vairagya or detachment towards all objects of the world with the idea that they belong to God—these are the elements of Jnana

which he enjoined upon the aspirants with equal vigour. This balanced combination of Jnana and Bhakti is the best means of dispelling Maya.

Sri Ramakrishna has also added a new dimension to the philosophy of Sadhana or spiritual discipline by propounding the doctrine of Seva (service) to the Jiva (the individual soul) with the attitude of serving Siva (God). If the same Brahman or Atman or God exists in the hearts of all beings, then, serving the down-trodden, the poor, the afflicted with the feeling that one is serving the Lord in them, raises the act of service from a merely social undertaking out of compassion, into a spiritual act of Sadhana. Here again, seeing the Universal Self is a part of Jnana and serving with feeling is a part of Bhakti. This type of Sadhana suits the modern temperament admirably.

Be Free

॥ कथञ्चित् तं ज्ञात्वा दृष्ट्वा स्पृष्ट्वा भवबन्ध-
नाद्धि मुक्ता भवत । विमुक्ता भवतेत्युपनिषत् ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥ ७ ॥

7. Somehow, having known Him, seen Him and touched Him, be free from the shackles of transmigratory existence! Be free! This is the Upanishad (the sacred esoteric teaching)!

Comments

According to the Hindu religious works, a living being gets birth in a human body after passing through 84,00,000 births in different kinds of wombs of different species. Hence, human birth is considered a rare privilege. Cherishing the desire for liberation from transmigration is rarer still since an overwhelming majority of human beings are interested only in sense pleasures. Securing the company and spiritual guidance of an enlightened soul is the rarest opportunity in life. Hence those who have secured all these three blessings should leave no stone unturned till the *summum bonum* of life reached.

OM! PEACE! PEACE! PEACE!