

ॐ। पूर्णमिदं पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते।
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः।

*Om. Pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam pūrṇātpūrṇamudacyate;
Pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate.
Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ —*

Om. That (*Brahman*) is infinite, and this (universe) is infinite. The infinite proceeds from the infinite. (Then) taking the infinitude of the infinite (universe), it remains as the infinite (*Brahman*) alone.
Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!

INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the Upaniṣads in the Age of Science

This evening we begin the study of the most important Upaniṣad, the *Bṛhadāranyaka*. Unlike the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the Upaniṣads take us to a very high plane of thinking, feeling and experience. To that extent it does not directly deal with our day-to-day problems like the *Gītā* does. That is why the *Gītā* is called the practical Vedanta, and the basis of that practical Vedanta is what we get in the Upaniṣads. *Brahma-vidyā* deals with the Supreme Truth, and its consequence is the supreme welfare of man. In the *Gītā* we studied the consequence, the impact of this thought on life and activity. Now we go to the source of this thought itself, and that is this great philosophy of Vedanta which Kṛṣṇa expounded in the *Gītā*. This is the main theme of the Upaniṣads, and this particular Upaniṣad is supremely significant.

Śrī Śaṅkarācārya's commentary on this Upaniṣad is a masterpiece of thought and language. During the course of this study I shall try my best to share with you some of those great passages from this Upaniṣad and Śrī Śaṅkara's scintillating comments thereon. It will not be very attractive in the beginning because the Upaniṣad contains the mythology of the previous portions. However, after a few sections we reach a new dimension of thought, and from then onwards it is simply fascinating and intellectually stimulating. The Upaniṣads took up this great challenge of human knowledge ages ago, and today we are living in a world of advanced scientific knowledge. This knowledge of the world in which

we live is also accepted in the Upaniṣads, but the Upaniṣads go one step further and ask: What is the nature of the human mind that knows this world? What is this human being as a subject and not merely as an object amidst objects?

We study the world as an object. We use the word 'thing' to refer to an object in this world. Chairs, tables, trees and plants are all things. The sun, the moon and the stars are all things. We study these things, and that is the first study. We call this the knowledge of sensory data, data brought by the senses from the world outside. That is the first field of knowledge for the human beings. For a newborn baby, the first challenge comes from the world around it, the world that impinges upon the baby's mind through the five sense organs. The baby is puzzled. 'What is this world into which I have been cast!' It is filled with wonder. That is why we say that knowledge begins with wonder. With wonder the child gradually begins its great strides in knowledge. That knowledge relates to sense data, what the senses report to the child. A baby does not know much, but a scientist knows a lot, and all the various sciences give us much more knowledge of the external sensory world than any ordinary human mind can. That is the first study. That is accepted in the Upaniṣads. That is why today's state of advancement made in the field of scientific knowledge is just the fittest setting for studying the Upaniṣads because they take this investigation one step further. What is this world? We found its answer through science. We call it the physical science. Science is not conditioned by the word 'physical'. Science is only knowledge, verified and verifiable knowledge dealing with experience. But when we add the word physical, we limit science to a particular field of investigation dealing only with sensory data. We process what the senses reveal, and from that we produce scientific knowledge. That is beautiful! But let us never forget that knowledge is not exhausted by the adjective 'physical' being attached to science, and today our scientists also have to

constantly keep this in view. Usually we say that adjective qualifies a noun. Actually it limits the scope of the noun. The concept 'man' is unlimited, but when we say 'black man' or 'white man', we limit the concept 'man'. Similarly, science becomes limited by adding the word 'physical' to it. This physical science is called *bhautikaśāstra* in Sanskrit. *Bhautika* means what we get through senses. We classify and analyse them, put questions and get answers, and thereby we get a whole range of physical science. That is wonderful! But is this the whole of experience? Certainly not. We study objects in physical science. But what about the SUBJECT, the mind that studies, the OBSERVER that observes? Can't we turn our searchlight a little in that direction?

That was the great challenge taken up by the Upaniṣads ages ago, and that is the challenge today on the frontier of science in the western world. Scientists have achieved much knowledge of the external world, and at this point, in spite of their tremendous achievements in the objective field, they have started feeling also the gentle vibrations coming from an another field of enquiry — the field of the observer. What is this man as the subject, as the knower? What a wonderful concept it is! In the last four-hundred years of western science not a single thought was given to the investigation of the subject. It was always object, object and object! That is why the concentrated attacks on the problem of what the external world is has produced just a drop, and the successive drops of scientific knowledge are the speciality of this modern age. But the latest feature of this modern age is the second dimension of knowledge concerning the observer slowly coming on the horizon of that very physical science which till now dealt only with the observed. Today the question is: What is the scientist as an observer?

Today's physical science cannot brush aside this challenging question chiefly for two reasons: One is theoretical, and the other is practical. Theoretically, the study of

physical science itself takes us to that dimension of the observer. In nuclear science, the observer plays a great part according to several nuclear scientists, because the very act of observation alters the nuclear phenomenon. If it is so, what is this new factor called the observer? A science should take all the factors into consideration. At the macroscopic level the observer plays no part in altering the external phenomena, but as soon as we go to the nuclear dimension, something strange happens. The very act of observation destroys the significance of the observed data! That is something wonderful. Therefore, the need to throw the searchlight on the observer was felt by many scientists, and chiefly among them were John Archibald Wheeler, one of the great nuclear scientists who was in Texas, and Arthur Stanley Eddington. What is this observer? What is his or her nature? We study this world revealed by the senses, but the observer who studies this world is also a subject of observation, a subject of enquiry and study. What shall we do with it? This is just the beginning of a slight interest in man as the subject, as the observer, as the self. We have simply eliminated this subject from the time of Descartes of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. We have been studying only the object and have reached wonderful conclusions thereby. But the fascinating part of the mystery of modern science today is not the mystery of object, but the mystery of the subject. Theoretically we cannot, therefore, avoid this question anymore, say the nuclear scientists today.

Practically also we cannot avoid it. That is the another great conclusion. As a result of these scientific discoveries and technological inventions, the whole world has been altered. One doesn't know where one belongs to. Human being has become an object like any other object conditioned by the natural forces. Man has lost his peace and integrity as a human being. A question, therefore, confronts us: What has happened to us in the midst of all these scientific achievements? Today we have many books coming from

the pen of great Western writers raising the question: Are we heading towards a catastrophe, are we going to destroy this planet? Environmental problems have become serious assuming great proportions. The questions relating to human extinction have come up and today man asks: What is that in man which can avert this disaster and make him strong, steady and peaceful in spite of all the various pressures coming upon him from modern technological developments? This is a practical question, and now we cannot postpone this subject any longer.

It is in this context that we can see the greatness and originality of the great sages of the Upaniṣads. They gave to humanity a science of a different field of experience. That field of experience is nothing but today's modern science taken one step ahead over to the realm of a new datum hitherto not investigated by it i.e. the SELF. The non-self is the object, and the self is the subject. Today's scientists are therefore fond of these Upaniṣads, for therein they find a profound investigation into this datum. We do not call it merely a religious book unless we use the word religion in its correct sense. A few dos and don'ts, dogmas and creeds does not make for religion. We don't get such things in the Upaniṣads. It is a real scientific investigation into a realm where the ordinary sense organs cannot go. The ordinary mind subject to these sense organs also cannot go to that realm. A new training of mind is needed to probe into that field. For any scientific research, the training of mind is essential. We call it training in scientific methods, scientific attitude, and scientific approach. That training is needed for a physical scientist. That same training carried a little further is equally needed for research in this field of inner experience too. This is also a science — a science of That which slowly impinges upon us at the sensory level coming from beyond that level.

The sensory level feels the pinch of some other energy impinging upon it from beyond. What is that other energy?

Is there such an energy? Nobody takes anything for granted. In the Upaniṣads also nothing is taken for granted. We do feel some energy impinging upon us at the sensory level. We want to know what it is. That is the way research is done in the field of science as well. Some of the planets were discovered in the beginning itself. Some others had not been discovered then. Even in early astronomy, many knew about Jupiter and Saturn but not the minor planets like Neptune and Mercury. We had not known the planets like Pluto in the far outer ring of the solar system. The discovery of every one of these unknown planets was made possible by studying the effect of the energy of these undiscovered planets on the motion of known planets. A new force was noticed acting upon the known planets. All known forces could not account for that particular deviation. Then the astronomers theoretically concluded that somewhere in certain part of space there must be another planet. With that influence, they explained the behaviour of the known planets. That theoretical deduction was the beginning. The next step was the sending of a satellite with a telescope. Thus they discovered planets lying even beyond the outer stretches of the solar system. This is what we see in science today.

Similarly, if there is an influence of the subject on the behaviour of a nuclear phenomenon, we must search for it. It is somewhere there in the experience itself. The word EXPERIENCE is a vast word in Vedantic terminology. Physical experience is just one aspect of it. Many other dimensions are there. That alone is a science which studies experience. If we study something imaginary, that is not science. The Upaniṣads study experience in its other dimension, the dimension of the self, just as we study in physical science the dimension of non-self. These are all specific, clear-cut terminologies and concepts both in the Upaniṣads and in modern thought. Take for example the two words used by the Upaniṣads: *Parāk prakṛti* and *pratyak prakṛti*. *Parāk prakṛti*

is the external phenomena studied by the physical science. *Prakṛti* means nature, and *parāk* means external, things that the senses reveal. Therefore, *parāk prakṛti* means external nature. The other is *pratyak*, meaning internal — the finger pointing to one's self. Somewhere within this physical frame of ours is the centre of that experience. Therefore, *pratyak prakṛti* is the self-phenomenon or the observer studied by the philosophy of Vedānta. Both *parāk* and *pratyak* are *prakṛti* — *prakṛti* with two dimensions. Both are studied, and both these studies are scientific. Physical sciences study the *parāk prakṛti*, and Vedānta deals with the *pratyak prakṛti*, and the former does not conflict with the latter. Chemistry does not conflict with physics but adds something to it. So also is the case with botany, zoology, etc. We are adding something more and not entering into a conflict. It is so with all sciences. We call them departments of science. They are not the whole of science.

Modern scientists who are strongly materialistic find it difficult to accept these ideas. They are glued only to those realities that the senses reveal. We call them materialists. That materials exist, we can understand, but here is a philosophy called materialism where knowledge is confined only to the external world, to whatever comes out of sensory observation alone! One word coined recently from the nineteenth century onwards to deal with this sensory limitation of scientific knowledge is Positivism. We call such a science a Positivistic Science. An attitude with which we study only things revealed by the senses without taking into view anything else is called a positivistic attitude. Many scientists do not want to break away from this attitude, and at the same time, many others are challenging that kind of limitation of science to positivism. Science in general is wider in scope than science merely dealing with matter. In fact, nobody has seen matter as atomic or subatomic particles. Not a single scientist has ever really seen matter. We just use a particular term to deal with what we study. It

is merely a symbol, but to build a philosophy on it is most dangerous. The dangers are already emerging. Protests against such a science come from the scientists themselves! I remember, I was addressing an audience in the University of Fiji in their capital city some years ago while I was on a tour there. After the lecture wherein I referred to these ideas, there were questions from the audience. One questioner was a Russian. At that time Russia was a Marxist country. He said: 'I don't accept all these new ideas. I believe in the scientists of the nineteenth century. I am a staunch materialist and I cling to it.' Everybody wondered how this Swami would answer him. Quite a serious challenge it was! I merely said: 'I will give you an example given by Sir Arthur Eddington, the great astronomer and physicist of England who passed away some years ago.' He [Eddington] had said (*The Philosophy of Physical Science*, p. 16):

Let us suppose that an ichthyologist is exploring the life of the ocean. He casts a net into the water and brings up a fishy assortment. Surveying his catch, he proceeds, in the usual manner of a scientist, to systematize what it reveals. He arrives at two generalizations:

- 1) No sea-creature is less than two inches long.
- 2) All sea-creatures have gills.

These are both true of his catch, and he assumes tentatively that they will remain true however often he repeats it... His generalization is perfectly true of the class of creatures he is talking about — a selected class perhaps; but he would not be interested in making generalizations about any other class.

Then Eddington adds further: 'Whatever he has said about his catch is perfectly correct, but what about the catch itself? If we improve that hole in the net, make it smaller and smaller, we would have got more varieties. But our scientific method does not allow us to do that, and so we get only this much and we conclude. Therefore, I [Eddington] don't consider that physical science constitutes the

whole world of knowledge.' Eddington had remarked thus. This answer to the Russian's question was welcomed with a loud applause. Yes, that is the limitation of physical science. We may be satisfied with the explanation of a thing given by physical science, but from the true point of view, there are many things unsaid in it.

On the other hand, when we come to the Upaniṣads, we come to that *terra incognita* of experience, that unrecognized part of experience known as the self. Today both psychology and neurology are attacking this aspect of the problem seriously. As students of Vedānta, we want them to continue their investigation and search for that elusive reality called mind. In experience, neurology has gone up to the brain. They have studied the brain, and they have studied the living brain too. Doctors used to study formerly the dead brains. Now they study the living brains. There has been a great advancement in this area, and all these studies are directed towards understanding human behaviour. How does the nervous system function in the human being? That study is going on now. Along with it, let's ask one question: What is the nature of the human being coming out of this study? Is he entirely a piece of machine, merely a thing among things? Is there anything unique in this human system? By studying this physical body they want to resolve the mystery behind the physical body. Today's neurology is attacking this problem with tremendous effort, and also with some success.

Up to the end of the last century, there was in psychology a system known as Behaviourism. Behaviouristic Psychology is purely a physical psychology. One may as well call it physiology, and that was the understanding of the time. Through the study and manipulation of behaviour, they tried to understand the human being. That was called Behaviouristic Psychology, and Prof. John Broadus Watson was the great pioneer of this school. Watsonian Behaviourism became the dominant psychology in the United States

during the 1920s and 1930s. He had carried on further research and was satisfied that human being is a machine which could be handled and made to function in a particular way, and, unfortunately, American education began to be influenced by this Behaviouristic Psychology of the human being. Parents were frightened at the thought of their children being treated as 'things', only to be manipulated by this great professor.

Today this is the situation in one aspect of psychology and neurology. At the same time, various neurologists, especially those from the Montreal Neurological Institute and some in England and other places, study also the other aspects. As stated earlier, they study the living brain. They talk to the patients while operating on the brain. Imagine the condition: As the brain feels no pain, we may cut it open and study it, and at the same time talk to the patient by communication. Through that study, Wilder Penfield, one of the great neurologists who passed away six or seven years ago, came to the conclusion that to deal with the human being merely as a machine doesn't help us to understand the various phenomena coming out of this study. We need to posit something more than the brain. Behind the brain that is visible and tangible, there is something intangible and subtle. We cannot explain behaviour merely based on the physical or mechanical brain. Something non-mechanical and superior to it also must be taken into account. That is called MIND. Now mind is not a thing that can be observed by the physical senses. It is beyond sensory observation. This was the conclusion of the great neurologist who brought about a revolution in modern neurology, Sir Charles Sherrington of England. He said (Sherrington's Gifford Lectures on *Man on His Nature*, p. 266, Penguin edition, 1951):

Mind, for anything perception can compass, goes therefore in our special world more ghostly than a ghost. Invisible,

intangible, it is a thing not even of outline; it is not a 'thing'. It remains without sensual confirmation, and it remains without it for ever.

Mark the language. We can never see the mind with our sensory system. Not only today, even ten thousand years later, with all the technological refinements we bring about in the mean time, the mind will elude us. Yet we cannot do without the mind to explain these subtle phenomena taking place in the nervous system of the human being. That's why Penfield's analysis is just the beginning of a profound dimension for the modern physical science dealing with non-physical aspects of experience. We can watch for further developments. At the same time, let us go into that science developed in India ages ago in the Upaniṣads and take help from it to understand this higher dimension of human nature.

Parāk we have accepted, but *pratyak* is yet a question mark. Is there such a dimension? Whenever we begin to ask this question, we come to the Upaniṣads straightaway. Nowhere else do we get the answer to this question. 'Nowhere else' is the language used by Śaṅkara in his commentary to a passage of this Upaniṣad. Therein Yājñavalkya asks Śākalya to tell him about the nature of that Being taught in the Upaniṣads (3. 9. 26): *Aupaniṣadam puruṣam pṛcchāmi*, 'I am asking about the *puruṣa* taught in the Upaniṣads'. Yājñavalkya refers to that Being as *aupaniṣadam puruṣam* — the *puruṣa* or the Being as taught in the Upaniṣads. *Puruṣa* is the general word for the human being. How can we know the true nature of this *puruṣa*? Śaṅkara makes a significant comment there (3. 9. 26): *Upaniṣadsu eva vijñeyo, na anya pramāṇa gamya*, 'This *puruṣa* is known only from the Upaniṣads and through no other means of knowledge'. We find this subject investigated and studied only in the Upaniṣads and nowhere else. We can search for this subject in any part of the world and in any literature.

We shall never find it as serious a science as here in the Upaniṣads. In other sciences we hear about mechanizing of the human nature, but here it is something else. And this Upaniṣadic science of human nature can face any questioning and challenge. In fact, science is science because we can question, verify, and also negate its conclusions. One of the scientific writers today tells us: Verification is not the test of scientific truth but the capacity to withstand falsification is the real test of scientific truth. I try to falsify what you say, and if I don't succeed, what you hold is true. That is the language used today by a great scientist writing about the veracity of scientific conclusions. These wonderful Upaniṣads are there with a similar aim.

This makes the study of these Upaniṣads, the subject matter of which no sensory system can understand or cope with, a matter of supreme interest to men and women in this modern period. It was great in ancient times, and it is even more relevant today, because we have now come to the summit of physical knowledge. Looking from this summit of physical knowledge we see emptiness all around. We then begin to question: Is this all? Is there nothing beyond? Is everything mechanical, physical and pre-determined? Is there anything else which is non-physical, non-mechanical and free? In these questions we have come to a special state of mind called the enquiring mind, and then we turn to the Upaniṣads and begin to feel, yes, there seems to be something, and let us try to find it out. It is this attitude that very much finds acceptance today in many great scientific thinkers. Their books contain statements from the Upaniṣads on the way to expounding that profound dimension of man as the observer.

Even in the early western thought, there have been thinkers who have given hints to this profound dimension. I often quote a passage from Blaise Pascal, the mathematician mystic of the eighteenth century France. In an article on *The Poetry of Pure Science* contributed to the London journal

Mirror, nuclear scientist Prince Louis de Broglie had quoted that passage from Pascal. Pascal says:

In space, the universe engulfs me and reduces me to a pinpoint.

Anybody can understand this statement. Physically speaking, we are not even a speck of dust in the vast immensity of this universe. Even the earth is only a speck. That is the first sentence. The second sentence is wonderful:

But through thought, I understand that universe.

Through thought I am able to understand that vast universe which reduces me to a mere pinpoint physically! Man as the knower is a profound dimension that cannot be equated only with the physical body. That is one of the beautiful utterances of his. Then Louis de Broglie, after quoting Pascal, makes a comment:

In that sublime pun lies the poetry of pure science, and its high intellectual worth.

Herein is a wonderful hint, a suggestion coming from that comment, and scientists themselves have not yet probed further into it. There is something profound, and that is a mystery. Let us not rush to the conclusion that there's nothing except what we see with our five senses. That was the warning given at that time. Sir Arthur Eddington also similarly observed while giving a talk on the BBC a few decades ago. He asked this question: 'What is the truth about ourselves?', and proceeded to answer:

We may be inclined to various answers: We are a bit of a star gone wrong.

That's the first answer: *A bit of star gone wrong!* What does that mean? An astronomer will tell us today that millions of years ago a star came near our sun. Through its gravitational pull the sun threw off great quantities of star-

dust. These went on whirling round the sun and eventually became planets, and in one such planet called earth life appeared and evolved for millions of years producing you and me in the process. Therefore, what are we? *A bit of a star gone wrong!* A beautiful answer according to the nineteenth-century astronomy. Now the second answer is the one given by the Newtonian physics, which was accepted up to the nineteenth-century:

We are complicated physical machinery — puppets that strut and talk and laugh and die as the hand of time turns the handle beneath.

According to this second answer: *We are just a mechanical something.* After giving these two answers, finally Eddington says:

But let us remember that there is one elementary inescapable answer: *We are that which asks the question.*

We are the subject, and not the object. We are asking the question. What a wonderful hint we find enshrined here about the human being as the questioner! Nothing questions in the world. The table, the chairs or the sun do not question. We the human beings question. That shows there is a new dimension in us. Presently we don't know anything about it, but it is worth investigating.

In this way, several scientists are probing into this subject. If long ago the Upaniṣads wonderfully did this work of probing into the man as the subject, it is worth studying how they did it, what methods they followed, and what fruits came out of that study. Modern science began in the West, but it is international today. Science and knowledge have no boundary. There is no English science or French science, German science or American science. It is just science. For the purpose of study we may say that an American scientist discovered something and give him a Nobel Prize for that discovery, but science itself is not

conditioned by any geographical, racial or other limitations. It is just knowledge, universal in scope. Five-thousand years ago the ancient sages of India produced a similar science dealing with this profound *pratyak* dimension of nature exactly with the same universal concepts, terminologies, and relevance of the modern type. Wherever there are human beings, this subject matter finds relevance there. That was the beginning of Indian culture. The philosophy of the Upaniṣads gave a philosophical basis to the development of culture in India. The Upaniṣads have continued to be its great stimulus and support all these several thousands of years. Today it is extending its blessings to the rest of the world as well. A combined universal science — the universal physical science and the universal non-physical science — finds expression in this modern period. Therein lies the greatness of these Upaniṣads. When we study them, we feel how contemporary their teachings are.

The question is: Why is truth contemporary though uttered five-thousand years ago? The answer is: Because it is Truth. Truth never gets old. Two plus two is four today as it was five-thousand years ago. East or West, a truth is always a truth because we can rediscover and check it for ourselves. A dogma cannot be so exposed to verification. A dogma is a one-man show. Truth is not a one-man show. What is here is there too. With regard to a truth, one person's observation is exactly the same as another person's. We study the composition of water and call it H_2O . Chemistry tells us this. Anywhere in the universe the composition of water is the same. Similarly, the Upaniṣadic science deals with the realm above the sensory level posing us the challenge to test it for ourselves. It tells us the Truth. We can test and verify it. With that challenge the Upaniṣad presents its conclusions to humanity. Just imagine the tremendous intellectual and spiritual dimension of those great personalities who discovered these truths. These personalities are nowhere present in these books. We do

not come across any mention of what their life was like, or who their parents were, etc. We find no such things mentioned there. Just a name of a person is mentioned as telling us the truth. The truth is what we get and not the person. That's why it is not a dogma. It is a truth. We call it a truth because we can test and verify it, and even question it. Even scientists today tell us that we can check, verify, or even falsify, if we can, the modern scientific truths. If they withstand all these, they are truths. Similarly, in the world of the inner nature of man, the same challenge is posed by the Upaniṣads. We have to seek and understand for ourselves and not accept anything just because a book says it is so, or just because it was uttered by so and so person. Take it for its true worth. Check and verify it yourself. That is the language of the Upaniṣads.

Now, such statements we find plenty in the Upaniṣads. Their teachings are not a set of dogmas and creeds. These come later in the *smṛtis*. Let us take *Manusmṛti* for example. Therein we find some truths, and therein we find also some dogmas, some opinions according to Manu's own liking. We call them *smṛti*. *Smṛti* is a typical word in Sanskrit. Based on the Upaniṣads, some persons of high character and calibre framed laws and regulations to control and discipline human life. These are called *smṛtis*. These *smṛtis* laying down laws and regulations are not meant to be checked and verified. They are to be obeyed, for it is meant for our good. When they do not suit our contemporary society, some one comes and changes them. Then another *smṛti* comes. So many *smṛtis* have come and gone because they go on changing according to the needs of time. But *Śruti* is eternal because they contain truths that are universal, which can be experienced, checked and verified by any and every person.

Thus, we have these two types of truths in Indian thought. One is *śruti* that is eternal and universal, and the other is *smṛti* which is temporary and regional in expression.

Śruti is therefore called *sanātana dharma*, the eternal *dharma*. *Smṛti* is called *yuga dharma*, the *dharma* for a particular age and for a particular people. *Sanātana dharma* and *yuga dharma* exist side by side, and it is accepted in all our literature that if there is a conflict between *śruti* and *smṛti*, *smṛti* will have to go and *śruti* will remain. What a wonderful idea! *Śruti smṛti virodhe tu śrutireva gariyasi*, 'When there is a conflict between *śruti* and *smṛti*, *śruti* alone will remain' — that is the statement. Truth alone will remain and not the dogma. Dogma is thrown away. What bold thinkers these sages were! This wonderful idea has been the strength of India's culture and its experiment.

Where do we find such courage in any world literature? We had thinkers with tremendous courage and fearlessness. When we have truth with us, we become fearless. When we have only dogmas and creeds, we need to hide them, never allowing anyone to probe, because the whole thing falls apart on questioning. That is the difficulty. All religions contain a bit of high truth and a good deal of dogma and creed based upon individual preferences. We do not criticize them. We need them, but let us never subordinate the truth aspect of our religion to the creedal and dogma aspect. Let the *smṛti* be subordinated to *śruti*, says India. We don't say there is no need for *smṛti*. Anytime we can create a new *smṛti*. The American Constitution is like a *smṛti* which conditions human life in America. The Indian Constitution is also a *smṛti* conditioning our society, and we can alter it when required. We are amending it all the time, and it is perfectly right to do so because it is meant only for temporary applications. But *śruti* is perennial and universal. It is truth. We cannot alter it under any circumstance. Water is cold and fire is hot. It is a universal truth about the nature of water and fire. We cannot alter it. Similarly, the Upaniṣads tell us the truth with respect to human nature. If one person discovers his or her true nature, everyone can discover the same truth.

Thus, we have these two wonderful concepts: *Sanātana dharma* and *yuga dharma*, *śruti* and *smṛti*. But the most important thing is that *śruti* is dominant in Indian culture and not *smṛti*. In no other society do we find *śruti* dominant. High teachings about the truths of spiritual life are dominant only in India. At other places, *smṛti* dominates. That is why the followers of other religions become rigid. Adherence only to *smṛti* makes for rigidity. But adherence to *śruti* along with flexibility in *smṛti* makes for a continuous progress as experienced by India. We can go on investigating the same truth because truth is ever fresh. It is ever aging, but also ever with the freshness of something anew. They are ancient truths which are eternally new. Today's human beings also experience the same truth experienced ages ago.

India thus developed its culture based upon the supreme vision of the Vedic sages who accepted both the departments of science — one dealing with the external world within the sensory reach, and the other dealing with the internal world lying beyond the sensory level. This classification is given in the Upaniṣads itself. In the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, a student goes to a teacher and humbly asks (1. 1. 3): 'Sir, what is that one thing knowing which everything becomes known?' And the teacher proceeds to answer (*ibid*, 1. 1. 4): *Dve vidye veditavye, iti ha sma yat brahmavidō vadanti*, 'There are two sciences to be acquired by every human being. Thus have the great sages told us who know the ultimate truth.' The two sciences are: *Parā ca eva aparā ca*, 'One is called *parā-vidyā*, and the other, *aparā-vidyā*'. *Parā-vidyā* is higher science, and *aparā-vidyā* is ordinary science. Ordinary science is called physical science, and the higher science is that which is called in today's language the science of spirituality dealing with what lies above the sensory level. That is what is stated in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*.

The word *vidyā* in Sanskrit means science. Science doesn't mean titbits of this or that knowledge. It means

knowledge. We add to it adjectives and say verifiable or verified knowledge. Similar is the case with *vidyā*. This *vidyā* belongs to *aparā* and *parā* category, *aparā* being ordinary and *parā*, higher. *Aparā-vidyā* is at the sensory level, the ordinary level where we deal with objects which are known as *viṣaya* in Sanskrit. *Parā-vidyā* deals with the perceiver of the objects known as *viṣayī*. That is a new dimension above the sensory level. Both *viṣaya* and *viṣayī* together constitute the totality of human knowledge. These are the technical terms used in Vedānta. *Viṣaya* means object, and *viṣayī* means the seer of the object. There is nothing beyond *viṣaya* and *viṣayī*. Such a comprehensive understanding we find in the Upaniṣads.

Interestingly, in India this tremendous development of *parā-vidyā* was never against the *aparā-vidyā*. It was just a continuation of the *aparā-vidyā* itself. This fact we have to learn in our modern times. If we continue with our physical science, we must come to this higher science. The combination of both *parā-vidyā* and *aparā-vidyā* is known as *brahmavidyā*. *Brahman* stands for the totality of reality. What a wonderful concept! We combine *parā* and *aparā-vidyā*, make a synthesis of them, and what we get is *brahmavidyā*, the science of the total reality. This *brahmavidyā* is highly praised in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (1. 1. 1). The Guru taught the disciple *brahmavidyā*. That *brahmavidyā* is *sarva vidyā pratiṣṭhā*, 'the basis of every other science'. The totality of reality is the basis of every aspect of reality. Therefore, when we know *brahmavidyā*, we know everything. *Brahman* means totality.

Thus, *brahmavidyā* is the subject matter of the Upaniṣads. In the Upaniṣads we find that that *brahmavidyā* is also known as *adhyātmavidyā* or *ātmaavidyā*, the science of self. That is because *Brahman* is the Self of the universe, and the universe itself is the manifestation of *Brahman*. The self and the non-self, the external and the internal, become unified in *Brahman*. In the Upaniṣads we find the words *Brahman*

and *ātman* repeatedly used. *Brahman* deals with the totality of reality seen from outside, and *ātman* refers to the reality seen from inside, and the beautiful conclusion is: This *ātman* and that *Brahman* are one. The nature of *ātman* is pure consciousness, and the nature of *Brahman* also is pure consciousness. That is the subject we shall study in this *Byhad-āranyaka Upaniṣad*. Beautiful passages are there full of challenging statements, some of them looking very revolutionary. That is because this is a science having tremendous energy within it. We see a human being very energetic. Where does that energy come from? Does it come from the muscles, the ordinary mind, or from some deeper level? More the energy, the deeper the level it comes from. The surface level gives only ordinary energy. From the deeper levels come greater amount of energy. Consider the energy of a labourer and the energy coming in the form of a Jesus or a Ramakrishna. Both are energy, but coming from sources at different levels. The source is very deep, subtle, and extraordinary in the latter case, and very gross and ordinary in the former.

Thus, this *brahmavidyā* is that which includes all *vidyās*. Today philosophy is described in the western thought as the science of all sciences. That kind of true philosophy we don't get usually. In the name of philosophy we usually get only academic and speculative philosophy which expresses itself as: 'It may be this or may be that.' There is no definiteness in them. But when we come to this *brahma-vidyā*, we are in the presence of a profound science of total reality. We have to understand the significance of that wonderful situation in which the sages could think such brilliant thoughts taking in the whole ocean of knowledge. Romain Rolland, writing on Swami Vivekananda's life, says (*The Life of Vivekananda*, 15th impression, p. 262-63):

But it is a matter of indifference to the calm pride of him who deems himself the stronger whether Science accepts free Religion [Vedanta], in Vivekananda's sense of the term, or not:

for his Religion [Vedanta] accepts Science. It is vast enough to find a place at its table for all loyal seekers after truth.

It's worth noting here the way Romain Rolland expresses the greatness of Vedanta, that it includes all the sciences. Science cannot include Vedanta at present, but I am sure that physical science will at least look up and say: 'Yes, there is a higher science.' It will then point its finger towards it. Physical science will then say: 'I have told what I know. Now go ahead.' That state is coming to physical science in this twenty-first century. It has already started as a murmur. Today a scientist will say: 'I have told you what is available in my field of investigation, but it does not exhaust everything. There is something higher. Go ahead and find out.' Search for knowledge is continuous. It cannot stop at the physical level. In this way, there will be a place for this higher thinking based on the totality of vision given in this *brahmavidyā* or the Science of sciences.

Thus we have seen what the Upaniṣads deal with in general, and particularly this one. This *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* represents great seers and thinkers among both men and women. Women sages also are found in this Upaniṣad. We come across women of tremendous calibre challenging even great intellectual men of the time. This Upaniṣad has four such luminaries: Yājñavalkya, Janaka, Gārgī, and Maitreyī. The former two are masculine figures, and the latter two, feminine. Yājñavalkya is a brilliant mind, a seer. Janaka is an emperor and also a great philosopher. Gārgī is a brilliant woman-philosopher, a questioner, and a seeker of truth. Lastly comes Maitreyī, Yājñavalkya's wife, who is a great spiritual seeker. We come across these characters in this Upaniṣad. We do not know more about them. They are just there. But what is important is the subject they handled which is of universal significance, and that is why it is called a science.

And it is only in the context of the advanced scientific thought of today that we can see the tremendous power of thought and experience conveyed by this Upaniṣad. We have seen in brief the scientific background in which we study the external world to understand its nature. We have discovered great truths in this field. Yet, at the end of it all, this world stills remains a mystery. Over and above that mystery, a new mystery now begins to shine, the mystery of the human being as the observer. That was the great investigation taken up by the sages of the Upaniṣads a few thousand years ago, and their discoveries remain a tremendous heritage for all humanity and not only for us in India. One composite value which shines all the time in this great literature is STRENGTH, FEARLESSNESS and FREEDOM. It discusses how to make this human being strong, fearless and free. That fearlessness and freedom is our true nature. Only we don't know it. To quote Swami Vivekananda (*Cw.* Vol. 8, p. 267):

So I preach only the Upaniṣads. If you look, you will find that I have never quoted anything but the Upaniṣads. And of the Upaniṣads, it is only that one idea, strength. The quintessence of the Vedas and Vedanta and all lies in that one word.

Unfortunately, these ideas remained unknown during all these thousands of years. They were treated as *rahasya*, 'a secret', meant only for a few people. Today Swami Vivekananda comes and says (*Cw.* Vol. 3, p. 238):

And the Upaniṣads are the great mine of strength. Therein lies strength enough to invigorate the whole world; the whole world can be vivified, made strong, energized through them. They will call with trumpet voice upon the weak, the miserable, and the downtrodden of all races, all creeds, and all sects to stand on their feet and be free. Freedom, physical freedom, mental freedom, and spiritual freedom are the watchwords of the Upaniṣads.

In the Upaniṣads lie strength enough to invigorate the whole world. That is the message Swamiji gave in all his writings and lectures. The truth of the Upaniṣads shall not remain a mystery hereafter. Today it's gladdening to see people studying the Upaniṣads and the *Gitā*. Our people have been kept away from all these great ideas for a few thousand years. Women could not utter or read anything from the Vedas. All these discriminations were there in the past. But they have ended today. Now all are welcome to the highest thoughts available. Even one ounce of it is good for us, said Swami Vivekananda, and so did the *Gitā* ages ago. Imagine, even if twenty per cent of the people in India, especially our women, study the Upaniṣads and the *Gitā* and try to mould their lives according to their teachings, what height of greatness will be attained by the nation and the people through their influence! That is the future opening up before us today. The whole world is the audience for the Upaniṣads and the *Gitā* — the whole world — according to my repeated experiences in all parts of the world.

This Upaniṣad has a particular peace chant as is the case with other Upaniṣads and also the *Gitā*. Before concluding, let us briefly see what this wonderful peace chant says:

ॐ । पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते ।

पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ।

Om. Pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam pūrṇātpūrṇamudacyate;

Pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate.

Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ —

'Om. That (*Brahman*) is infinite, and this (universe) is infinite. The infinite proceeds from the infinite. (Then) taking the infinitude of the infinite (universe), it remains as the infinite (*Brahman*) alone. Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!'

Many modern scientists are fascinated by this wonderful verse dealing with the nature of infinity. *Pūrṇam adaḥ*, 'That Brahman is infinite'. *Pūrṇam idam*, 'This universe is infinite'. *Pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate*, 'From the infinite Brahman has come this infinite universe'. *Pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya*, 'Having taken the infinitude of this infinite universe', what remains? *Pūrṇam eva avaśiṣyate*, 'Pūrṇa or infinite alone remains'. There is no fraction in the *pūrṇa*. That is the language used in Vedānta. Brahman is *pūrṇam*. This universe has come from that *pūrṇam*, therefore this universe is *pūrṇam*. From that *pūrṇam*, this *pūrṇam* has come. Having taken out *pūrṇam* from the *pūrṇam*, *pūrṇam* alone remains. Many have tried to comprehend it. Mathematicians have tried to comprehend it. We can understand for ourselves what this wonderful verse means.