

3. Brahman is the source of all knowledge

Sastra yonithwaath

The scriptures are expressions of the truth acquired by sages while delving into the Reality. The words emanated from the inhalations and exhalations of the divine Breath. They were heard from no embodied entity; they did not arise out of anyone's imagination. Hence, they are described as impersonal (*a-pourusheya*) and eternal. From whom did they originate? From *Brahman* alone.

Veda means knowledge; it always "is". It has no beginning, no end. It is referred to as "without end (*an-antha*)", for it is sound —sacred, sustaining, salutary sound. It is experienceable only; it cannot be limited or communicated. So, it is a marvel, an unprecedented phase of personal experience for each one. Since *Brahman* is the source of such knowledge, it is extolled as All-knowing, All-mighty, and All-pervading.

The Vedas, originating in Brahman, reveal It

"*Brahman* is the source of the scriptures and is therefore all-knowing." This aphorism conveys the meaning that the *Vedic* scriptures have to be resorted to in order to know *Brahman*, that only they can reveal *Brahman*, and that all *Vedas* lead people to the same knowledge. Also, the scriptures derive their validity through *Brahman* and their value from *Brahman*, for *Brahman* is the very source of the illumination they contain and confer. Only the Omniscient One can be the source of the *Vedas*. Only the scriptures can liberate people, through the illumination named knowledge. They regulate one's life and foster it, guarding it from grief. The *Vedas* offer comforting counsel; they deal with people affectionately and lead them forward, for they are received through venerable personages who attained the highest knowledge, *Brahman*.

Brahman can't be comprehended by means of proofs or arguments. It is beyond reason and calculation, unmeasurable, indefinable. It cannot be pronounced as being such or so, for this reason or that. It is immeasurable by time and space. The scriptures are the proof.

The usual proofs for truth are direct perception (*pratyaksha*) and inferential perception (*anumaana*). But *Brahman* cannot be cognized by these two means. The sages experienced it and expressed it in the scriptures. The Word (*abda*) is the firmest proof.

The Vedas teach constant thought of God

"*Sastra* (scripture)" means that which brings to memory what has been forgotten. *Brahman* is the very selfness of every person. The scriptural directives or counselors direct and counsel everyone. People yield to delusion and become one with the darkness caused by false values and attachment to the unreal, the "me" and "mine". But scripture is the mother; she does not give up. She persists and pursues; she reminds people of their goal in order to ensure that they will be saved.

Hence, the above aphorism declares that the scriptures are to be considered as the cause of the awareness of

the incomprehensible, immeasurable, inexpressible *Brahman*. The scriptures are numberless, and a lifetime is too short. Aspirants are plenty; doubts and hesitations are numerous; steadfastness is meager. As a result, no one can claim full mastery.

Of course, one need not drink the entire ocean to know its taste; one drop on the tongue is enough. Similarly, it is impossible to understand all the contents of the scriptures. But it is enough to grasp the important lesson that is elaborated and put it into practice. This lesson is: constant thought of God.

Prahlada's unflinching faith in God

When Prahlada's father, Hiranyakasipu, drew him near and fondly asked the boy to repeat what he had learned from his teacher. Prahlada replied, "I learned the secret essence of all learning." The father was glad and asked him, "Tell me the essential thing that you have mastered." Prahlada said, "Father! He who illumines everything, He who finally absorbs everything with Himself, is the ONE, Narayana. Having Him always in mind and experiencing the bliss thereof awards fulfillment to all." The boy uttered the name Narayana, which the father abhorred! He didn't stop with that. "Father! You conquered the entire world, but you failed to conquer your senses. How then can you receive grace from Narayana? These material skills and worldly achievements are hollow possessions. The knowledge and experience of the ONE (*Brahma-vidya*), that alone is to be pursued."

Bliss is the core of five vital sheaths

It is an arduous process for people to become aware of the ONE that is their core. People are of the essence of food. The gross body is the product of the food consumed. But in people there is a subtler force, an inner vibration named vital air (*prana*). The mind (*manas*) within is subtler still, and deeper and subtlet than the mind is the intellect (*vijnana*). Beyond the intellect, people have in them the subtlest sheath of spiritual bliss (*ananda*). When people delve into this spiritual bliss region, they can experience the reality, the *Brahman*, the ONE. That awareness is indeed the most desirable.

In the *Brighu* section of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, which comes after the Bliss-of-*Brahman* section, is the story of Brighu, son of Varuna. While teaching Brighu the *Brahman* phenomenon, Varuna says, "Son! *Brahman* cannot be seen through the eyes. Know that *Brahman* is that which enables the eyes to see and the ears to hear. He can be known only through extreme yearning in a cleansed mind and concentrated thought. No other means can help."

He added, "Dear Brighu! Know that everything in the universe originates from *Brahman*, exists in *Brahman*, unfolds through *Brahman*, and merges in *Brahman* alone. Discover it yourself through concentrated spiritual practice." The father gave him only these indications, before directing him to enter upon spiritual exercises that would ultimately reveal the truth.

With full faith in the words of his father, Brighu engaged in concentrated spiritual practice. The process of self-control and self-inquiry raised his consciousness, and he believed what he understood at that stage as *Brahman* and decided that food was *Brahman*! When he declared what he had come to know, his father, Varuna, told him that his answer was not right.

So, Brighu continued the spiritual practices and found out that vital air (*prana*) was *Brahman*, since without vital air, other things are vain. Vital air causes life, promotes life, and puts an end to life. But his father also pro-

nounced this inference wrong and sent him again for further spiritual practice.

In this manner, Brighu had a third period of austerity when he came upon mind (*manas*) as *Brahman*, and later a fourth, when he revised that conclusion and believed that it was spiritual wisdom (*vijnana*). At last, after undergoing a fifth course of spiritual practices, he became aware that spiritual bliss (*ananda*) was *Brahman*. He stayed in the bliss of that awareness and never more proceeded to his father. The father sought Brighu and congratulated him, who had cast the world away from his memory. He said “Son! You have merged in that vision.”

Spiritual bliss is Brahman signified by Om

One starts life as a creature of food (*anna*), but one has to march on to the goal of an embodiment of spiritual bliss (*ananda*). Not humanity alone, but every living being starts on food and yearns to reach the peak of spiritual bliss. All efforts, all undertakings are directed to the acquisition of spiritual bliss. All are born in spiritual bliss, will live for it, and will die in order to attain it. The *Taithiriya Upanishad* elucidates spiritual bliss as the urge for birth, growth, decay, and death.

However, how can *Brahman* be spiritual bliss (*ananda*)? It is said, “*Om*, the one imperishable letter, is *Brahman* (*Om ithyekaaksharam Brahman*).” The cosmos is composed fully of the *Om* (*pranava*). It is also said, “This *Atma* is *Brahman*.” Therefore, *Atma*, *Brahman*, and *Om* are all indistinguishably the same. Knowledge of *Brahman* teaches that the Self in each living being, the *Atma*, is *Brahman* itself, and no less. The *Brahma Sutras* reveal that the outer universe (which has *Brahman* as the base) and the inner universe are identical and cannot be differentiated.