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The inner self and its powers

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Abstract

Our human organism is not a small, superficial surface being fluttering in the fringe. Upanishad seers of ancient India perceived a deeper and inner being behind our outer surface personality. And whatever powers we have in our outer self have their source in this inner being. There is an inner mind behind our outer mind, an similarly, an inner Life, Speech, Sense behind our outer life, speech and sense whatever powers, energy or consciousness we have in outer self derives its light and power from the inner self. This article examines the nature of the powers of this inner self based on the insights of Kena Upanishad.

Keywords: Inner self, mind behind, life behind life, sense behind sense

Introduction

From the point of view of yogic psychology Kena Upanishad is one of the most important vedantic classics which requires detailed study. In this Upanishad we find a truly scientific and psychological approach to the spiritual path. This Vedantic classic begins its enquiry with a momentous question. "By whom missioned falls the mind shot to its mark. By whom impelled is this word that men speak? What God set eye and ear to their workings?"¹ And the Upanishad sets out to answer these question in a few pregnant and luminous verses which form one of the most profound expositions of the deeper spiritual psychology of man. This article is a brief review of the psychological insights revealed in this ancient text.

That Which Truly knows

Before coming to the core of this Vedantic classic, we must keep in mind that most of the Upanishads, especially the Kena, is given to seekers who are fairly advanced on the spiritual path and not to the novice who knows nothing of the path. So it is assumed that the student or seeker knows that the ordinary psychological being of man- made of his mind, speech, life-forces and the senses- is not the whole of man. The seeker to whom the Kena is addressing is someone who has passed through the initial stages of intellectual preparation and discipline and arrived at some form of a settled mental insight into a higher Reality beyond the ordinary conscious mentality. With such a seeker in front, the Sage of the Kena Upanishad proceeds to enlighten him further on the relation of his ordinary conscious mentality to the unknown Reality beyond and the discipline by which this knowledge can be converted into a realisation. And the sage begins his teaching by answering the original question, in the following verses:

"That which is hearing of our hearing, mind of our mind, speech of our speech, that too is life of our life-breath and sight of our sight. The wise are released beyond and they pass from this world and become immortal."

"There sight travels not, nor speech, nor the mind. We know it not nor can distinguish how one should teach it: for It is other than the known; It is there above the unknown. It is so we have heard from men of old who declared to that to our understanding"^[2].

There is something beyond and inaccessible to our mind, life and senses but which is at the same time the source and the light and energy and the truth of them. This is the Spirit and Self, the Atman of the Vedanta. This Atman is the supreme subject; it is the light and energy by which the eyes see and ear hear, the speech utter, the life-force move, flow and circulate and the mind think.

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These psychological faculties of man cannot comprehend the Spirit. But the Spirit comprehends them all because it is the inmost subjective Self of them. Life comprehends Matter but matter does not comprehend life; mind comprehends both life and matter but matter and life do not comprehend mind; and the Spirit comprehends matter, life and mind but matter, life and mind do not comprehend the Spirit. And the Upanishad stresses that the Spirit is not only beyond the known world comprehended by mind and senses of the conscious self of man but also beyond the subtle unknown worlds beyond or behind the known, which the ordinary psychological faculties of man do not comprehend. But these subtle worlds can be known through subtler faculties of the inner subliminal being of man. These are the world we sometime enter into during our dreams. And those who have developed the inner life can enter into these worlds consciously and can know sense and study these worlds as objectively as a scientist study the material world. Our subliminal being has an inner sense by which these subtler worlds unknown to the ordinary consciousness becomes perceptible to the adept who has developed these higher faculties. These are the worlds of the mystic, occultist and the psychic who see and hear unearthly visions and sounds. But the Kena Upanishad says that the Atman or Self is beyond even these subtle worlds beyond the worlds known by the senses.

The Indian (and eastern) spiritual tradition in general did not give much importance to seeing visions and hearing sounds. For anything which can be seen objectively by the inner or outer vision cannot be the highest Self or God who is the ultimate and inmost point and ground of our subjectivity. The self is the supreme Light which sees through our visionary organs, gross or subtle and therefore cannot be something which can be seen. The highest spiritual illumination is a experiential and not a visionary knowledge. It is an inner revealing Luminosity which is felt rather than seen in the very essence of our being and which brings increasing clarity, understanding and self-awareness and consciousness to every part of our being.

The second idea conveyed by the Upanishad is that the psychological faculties of man – his life-force, senses, speech and mind – are the limited and partial expression of some corresponding powers of the divine Self. The Self is not a powerless and bodiless nude abstraction but a living conscious being containing within itself the highest truth and law of all that we are and all that is in the Universe.

The Power Behind our Powers

Our mind is a partial and limited expression of the superconscious creative self-awareness of the Spirit; our life-force is a partial and limited self-expression of the super life or the super conscious Force of the Spirit; Our senses are a partial and limited self-expression of a super sense of the Spirit; Our Speech is a limited and partial self-expression of the creative super word of the Spirit. Each of the psychological faculties in man derive their light and energy and the truth and law of their functioning from the corresponding powers of the super conscious Self, Atman.

Our human Mind, in the vedantic conception is not the source of knowledge. Mind can only reflect analyse, organise knowledge but does not possess or create knowledge. True knowledge belongs to a consciousness beyond Mind, which is the plane of Vignana or supermind where the truth of self and world are self-revealed to the Spirit by identity. Human mind is only a partial, limited and delegated operation of

the Super mind. Mind doesn't possess knowledge but tries to arrive at some constructed form of knowledge by thought, emotion, imagination or intuition. But super mind possess knowledge in its inherent essence by an integral identity-or in other words by becoming one with the essence and truth as well as the outer process and form of things – and reveals or brings out and expresses this knowledge by various means.

Similarly the life-force or the Prana is not the source of life; it is not an independent and self-directed force; it is guided and directed by a force greater than itself and of which it is a limited and partial expression in the human being This greater force behind Prana is the Chit-shakthi of the Tantras or Devathmasakthi of the Upanishads, the consciousness – force of the divine Being. This eternal Force inherent in the Self-existent swayambu, vibrates in the original ether of its being and breathes out the eternal word which gives birth to the worlds. This blissful vibration flowing in space and time is the essence and sap of life. And the speech we utter is only the grossest outer form of this creative Word, OM.

In a similar way our outer senses by which we comprehend the world is only the expression of a supramental Sense of the Spirit by which the divine being possesses and enjoys his own creative play, his leela.

These psychological faculties of the eternal Being of man do not comprehend or express the innermost Reality, Atman, of his being but the Atman comprehends or expresses through them something of itself. This is the truth which is conveyed in the following verses of the Kena Upanishads:

“That which is unexpressed by the word, that by which the word is expressed, know that to be the Brahman and not this which men follow after here.

That which thinks not by the mind, that by which the mind is thought, know that to be the Brahman and not this which men follow after here.

That which sees not with the eye that by which one sees the eye's seeing, know that to be the Brahman and not this which men follow after here.

That which hears not with the ear that by which the ear's hearing is heard, know that to be Brahman and not this which men follow after here ^[3].

That which breathes not with the breath that by which the life-breath is led forward in its path, know that to be the Brahman and not this which men follow after here”.

The central message here is that there is an inner being behind the external surface personality made of the mind, life-force and the senses. The external being does not know this inner being but the inner being knows the outer being. It is by the light and power of the inner being the faculties of the outer persona function and do their work. The sage of the Kena Upanishad counsels men to live in the consciousness of the inner being and not in the outer personality which follows after the objects of desire. But as we have said already there are two layers of the inner being, the subliminal self just behind the surface self and inmost spiritual self behind or above the subliminal. The subliminal has all the faculties of the outer self but they are subtler and freer with a greater capacity for knowledge, feeling and action. But the inner being which Kena Upanishad describes is not this subliminal self but the inmost spiritual Self which is the ultimate source and light of our psychological being.

In the inward movement in yoga the seeker may have to pass through the subtle and subliminal worlds. The Tanthric Yoga makes a systematic effort to explore these subliminal self and the inner worlds and harness their faculties and powers for self-perfection. But the vedantic tradition in general gave much less importance to this “occult” dimensions of Yoga and emphasised on an exclusive concentration on the highest Self.

References

1. Kena Upanishad. I-1 From Sri Aurobindo's translations in Upanishads, Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo, 12:237.
2. Ibid. Kena Upanishad, I-2.
3. Ibid, Kena Upanishad, I-3-8.