

Solving the Human Problem¹

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The word Upaniṣad means self-knowledge. The *phala*, the result of this knowledge is desirable. In fact it is the most desired. Self-knowledge is *śreyas*, that which is absolutely good. It is an ultimate achievement gaining which, one can say, there is nothing more to achieve. Any kind of achievement cannot give a person lasting happiness or security. But in the gain of self-knowledge, wherein a life of becoming has found its culmination, all achievements are happily accomplished. This is what we call *śreyas*.

Preyas is another end which is what we generally seek.

The Kāthopaniṣad² presents the nature of the choice available to a human being in the two words, *śreyas* and *preyas*. It looks as though these two ends, *śreyas* and *preyas*, are open to a human being. This is like having to decide which road to take when you are at a crossroad in a new place and you have a destination in view.

Once in India, another Swami and I were driving with a few others to some place. We reached a point where the road bifurcated. We had to reach our destination at noon to attend a meeting. The Swami instructed the driver, ‘Go this way,’ and the driver took that road. The driver did not know the route. The choice was made because the road was very nice, newly laid and completely empty. We drove about 50 miles and when we found no sign of any milestone, we stopped the car. We consulted someone who said, ‘You have to go back 50 miles!’ Since we did not want to go back, we asked ‘Is there any other way?’ He said ‘Yes, there is; but you have to drive an

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² śreyaśca preyaśca manuṣyametaṣtau samparītya vivinakti dhīraḥ
śreyo hi dhīro’bhi preyaśo vṛṇīte preyo mando yogakṣemād vṛṇīte. (KaU 1.2.2)

additional 50 miles'. We chose that route because we did not want to accept defeat and ended up at our destination at 6 pm instead of at noon! We missed our lunch and went late to the meeting. All this happened because the road looked good. This is *preyas*.

The whole basis of choice was the appearances of the roads; one road, the *preyas* road, seemed to be good and the other, the *śreyas* road, did not seem to be impressive. The *preyas* road looked very beautiful, was lined with flowers, and seemed very inviting, very welcoming and very enticing. The *śreyas* road did not look inviting or welcoming; it seemed to be forlorn and less traveled.

When one has to choose, one needs to have a basis for the choice. One does not choose something just because it is good looking or enticing. What is the basis of one's choice? *Tau samparītya vīvinakti dhīraḥ*.

Dhīraḥ means a *viveki*, a person who discerns, who is able to sift and see what is worthwhile, who is serious and who wants to do something which is meaningful. Such a person chooses *śreyas*.

One chooses *preyas* due to *yoga-kṣema*³. One wants to accomplish what one does not have. Yoga, in this context, is getting what one does not have. The means of accomplishing it is also called yoga. *Kṣema* is protecting what one already has.

The word yoga has three roots, *yuj samādhau*, *yuja samyame* and *yujir yoge*. All three roots are used to derive the word 'yoga' but their meanings are different. The first root is *yuj samādhau*, to concentrate the mind. This meaning is used by Patanjali in his work on the *yoga-śāstra*. The second meaning, *yuja samyame*, is also used in the *yoga-śāstra*, and is often used in the Bhagavad Gītā and elsewhere in the sense of thought resolution, resolution of the subject-object division. The other meaning occurs in the sense of any form of discipline.

³ *Aprāptasya prāpakam yogah. Prāptasya rakṣanam kṣemah.* (source? I think it is in Sankara's Gīta-bhāṣya, perhaps on the yoga-kṣema verse, but I don't have my book with me. Can someone check it?)

The third meaning, *yujir yoge*, is used in the sense of connection; when two things come together. The seeker and the sought come together when the sought is gained. The cessation of seeking is called *yoga*. When you have something to be sought, naturally you become a seeker. You employ a certain means to achieve that. Both the *sādhana*, the means employed, and the *sādhya*, the end achieved, are called *yoga*. The word *yoga* in the third sense is often used also in the *Gītā* and other works. Though the root ‘yuj’ is the same, the grammatical development of the three meanings of the word *yoga* is entirely different.

Yoga is gaining what one does not have but wants to have, and it goes along with *kṣema*, keeping whatever one has and wants to retain. There is a concern that one may lose what one has. This is called *viyoga*, loss or disassociation from what one has. Every *samīyoga*, association, has a *viyoga* at the end. Therefore every achievement is to be protected from forces so that *viyoga* does not occur.

Everything, including one’s own room has entropy. One puts everything in order, and after two days it is all in disorder. This is entropy, moving from order to disorder. The hot water cools down because there is entropy. One has to reheat it again to get back the temperature. Even if it is money, one has to protect it from money itself. This is a very interesting thing: one has to protect money with money, because money has this intrinsic problem of entropy. It has a value today, and after sometime its value goes down. Money too ages and one has to fight against inflation so that its ability to buy does not go down. This is called *kṣema*.

Preyas means both *yoga* and *kṣema*. Whatever one has—whether money, home, or relationship—one wants to retain it. When does one stop? One wants *yoga* because one has to achieve something. Then after achieving it, one has to retain it. Or, one wants to get rid of things that one had acquired because they are no longer desirable.

One finds that it was a wrong decision to acquire it in the first place. In the United States, people have a great creative method of getting rid of whatever small or big things they do not want. This is known as a garage sale. People in the neighborhood come to the garage sale and buy things that someone else is getting rid of. The people in the neighborhood always oblige each other. But what happens at the end is that the junk of the neighborhood remains in the neighborhood; it never moves away. There seems to be some love between the people and the junk. I know one instance in which a woman put in a garage sale the gift she got from a friend at Christmas the previous year. The friend came to the garage sale and was appalled to find the gifted item; but then she bought it. I was sure she was going to gift the item to somebody else, but perhaps in another neighborhood this time.

What does this all reveal? The nature of *preyas* is like that. With great avidity you go in for something. After getting that something, it is all over. After a few days you grow out of the new hobby, or you get tired of it, and you want something else. The problem is not in what you are doing. There is nothing wrong with what you are doing. The problem is 'I' am not at home with 'myself'. When I am not at home with myself, anything I do becomes monotonous after some time, because I am monotonous myself. I have a self-monotony. I cannot handle myself. Even after starting this new hobby, I am still the same. After getting rid of the hobby, also, I will remain the same. What is the use? I am the same no matter what I do.

First, I get rid of a relationship; I am the same. Then, I need a relationship and therefore, I go back to the same person. Then again I have the same problem and this continues. One girl said to me, 'Swamiji, I get easily tired of whatever I do. Therefore, I am afraid of getting married, because I might get tired of it'.

The problem is not what one does; it has nothing to do with things. This is *viveka*, discerning that behind this there is some other

problem. It has something to do with oneself. One cannot stand oneself, and one has to face oneself, always. Thus, one becomes a constant murmurer. Therefore the problem does not lie with anything external, but with oneself because oneself is the problem. The mind is never a problem; it is just an instrument, a means. The mind-fixers will come and tell you, 'Your mind is the problem'. The mind cannot be sad and frustrated; it cannot loathe itself. It has no complex. The body also is not dissatisfied with itself; it can even afford to have a few more kilos. If one eats a few more donuts every day, the body will put on weight. It thinks it is important to store all these things for the wintry day, for the starving day in the future, even though one has enough for three incarnations. The blessed body is so programmed that it will never stop storing. The body has no complex whatsoever.

I am the person who has to be fixed up. I have a self-view which is not acceptable to me. Such a self-view is the cause of the tiredness and the self-loathing. The problem of self-esteem and self-image is 'I' centered.

The problem is that one has to live with oneself, and is not that one has to live with one's mind. The sense of 'I' has a problem, and it has nothing to do with one's mind. One should not make one's mind a whipping boy for one's dissatisfaction, or a guinea pig for all kinds of experiments. One cannot escape from oneself, but one can escape from one's mind. One can divert the mind. That is what we generally do. One can incapacitate the mind by drugs, by alcohol, by some kind of technique. But this is only bypassing the problem, for the mind is not the problem; there is only one problem and it is centered on 'I'. What is the problem in accepting this problem? Thank God, there is only one problem; at least one can address it. If there are many problems, it will be difficult. Therefore the *preyas* road—achieving name, power, money, etc.,—is all fine, and perhaps it is necessary for

someone, but the problem of becoming is not solved. The *upaniṣad* provides the solution to this problem.

Upaniṣad means self-knowledge. Here the main word is 'sad', from the verbal root *sad*. Most Sanskrit words originate from a verbal root. The root itself cannot be used; it needs to undergo a grammatical transformation to become a verb or a noun, for which suffixes are added. These suffixes are either seen in the word, or they convert the root into a word and disappear. The suffix that is used to convert the root 'sad' is called a zero-suffix. It comes, does the job and disappears. It is like the agency suffix 'er' in English added to the verb cook. The one who cooks is not a cook-er' but a cook; the 'er' disappears. It is a zero-suffix. Similarly here, the elided 'kṛip' agency suffix converts the root 'sad' to the word 'sad' indicating verbal activity. The root 'sad' has three meanings: *viśaraṇa*, *gati* and *avasādana*, in the senses of disintegrating, reaching and destroying respectively. All three meanings are used in the word *upaniṣad*, which is Vedānta.

The word 'upaniṣad' has two prefixes 'upa' and 'ni'. *Upa* means what is nearest. You are the nearest. Nearest is not the word; it pertains to the self because you cannot go any further, in terms of nearness. Everything else is objectified by you. The one who objectifies, the self, the subject 'I' is the nearest. About the 'I' there is so much confusion. Therefore the subject matter of the whole *upaniṣad* is the subject 'I', myself alone.

The prefix 'ni' denotes definiteness. *Upani* means a well ascertained knowledge of the self, without vagueness or doubt, which does not leave anything to be desired. What does the self-knowledge do? The three meanings of the verbal root 'sad', *viśaraṇa-gati-avasādana*, reveal its action.

This self-knowledge causes disintegration of all the *anarthas*, the things that one does not want to have. But does it mean that they

may get integrated again? No, *avasādayati*, all the *anarthas* get disintegrated along with their roots. The self-knowledge puts an end to all those things that one does not want to have. But this may still leave one wanting, as one may not have all that one wants. No, this knowledge *brahma gamayati*, makes one own up oneself as Brahman. Brahman means limitless. One gains freedom from a sense of limitation. The sense of limitation, which is due to ignorance, is removed by self-knowledge. The ultimate end is gained. One is not limited by the problems of *yoga* and *kṣema*. One becomes a *kṛta-kṛtyah*, fulfilled person. One is secure and there is nothing more to be accomplished.

Everyone has a list of items in terms of what one has to accomplish. There are a few items to accomplish after retirement, also, when one thinks one has more time. One makes the resolve, 'I am going to really apply myself to doing this after retirement.' There are also items not yet spelt out, but which are lurking in the subconscious and which will surface later. The list has a knack of lengthening like the tail of Hanumānji. It is the truth of the nature of this list; it is endless. But gaining self-knowledge, the table is turned. Most of the items in the list get ticked off. Many of them will disappear for good. Some of them may remain but one can pursue them happily. One needs no comforting from outside. On the contrary, one becomes a source of comfort and strength to everybody. One does not need a support system, but one provides strength for others. The becoming life comes to an end, in the sense that one does not need to become. This fulfilment is not by becoming, but by understanding; one sees that one does not need to become. The self does not require to become anything, much less can it become. That which cannot and that which need not become is the self. Therefore *upaniṣad*, self-knowledge is the ultimate end to be achieved.