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Isavasyopanishad [Upanishad Vahini]

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ISAVASYOPANISHAD

The Lord, intent on the regeneration of the world, communicated Vedas through *Hiranya-garbha.* Then, Hiranyagarbha, in turn, passed them on to His Ten *Manasaputhras* (Sons born out of the mind) including Athri and Marichi. From them, the Vedas spread among humanity, handed down from one generation to another. As time passed, ages accumulated and continents moved. Some Vedas got lost, or were neglected as too difficult for comprehension and only Four have survived into modern times. These Four were taught by Vedavyasa, the greatest among the exponents of the Vedas, to his disciples in the *Dwapara Yuga* (The era in which the Divine and the demoniac elements were in the same kingdom).

When Vyasa was thus expounding the Vedas, engaged in spreading the sacred scripture, one disciple of his, Yajnavalkya by name, incurred his wrath and as a punishment, he had to regurgitate the Yajur Veda that he had already learned, into the custody of his *guru* and leave the place to take refuge in *Suryadeva*, the treasure-house of the Vedas. Just then, the *Rishis* who revere the Vedas, flew into the place in the shape of Thiththiri birds and ate up the regurgitated Yajur Veda. That particular section of the Veda is called "Thaithiriyam."

Meanwhile, Suryadeva was pleased with the devotion and steadfastness of the unfortunate Yajnavalkya. He assumed the form of a *Vaji* or Horse and blessed the sage with renewed knowledge of the Yajur Veda. The sections thus taught by the Vaji came to be called 'Vajasaneyi.' The Yajur Veda as promoted by Vedavyasa is called Krishnayajur Veda and that handed down by Yajnavalkya as the Suklayajur Veda.

In these, the first few chapters are Manthras connected with the *Karma Kanda* and the last few sections deal with *Jnana Kanda*. The Isavasya Upanishad is concerned with this Jnana Kanda. Since the opening manthra of this Upanishad starts with the words, 'Isavasyam,' the Upanishad is called by that name.

Isavaasyamidam sarvam yathkinchajagathyaam jagath

Thena thyakthena bhunjethaah, maa gridhah kasya swiddhanam.

"All things of this world are transitory, the evanescent, are enveloped by the Lord who is the real Reality of each. Therefore, they have to be used with reverent renunciation, without covetousness or greed for they belong to the Lord and not to any one person." This is what this *sloka* means.

That is to say, the Universe is the Immanence of the Lord, His Form, His Body. It is wrong to take the Universe and Its Lord as different. It is a delusion, a product of the imagination of man. Just as your image under the water is not different from you, the Universe (which is His Image produced on your Ignorance) is the same as He.

So long as man has this delusion, he cannot visualise the Reality immanent in him. On the other hand, he will slide into wrong thoughts, words and deeds. A piece of sandalwood if kept in water will produce a bad smell; but, if it is taken out and rubbed into paste, the former perfume will return. When the authority of the Vedas and Sastras is respected and when discrimination is sharpened on the practice of *Dharma Karmas*, the evil smell of wrong and wickedness will vanish and the pure innate perfume of the Atma will emerge. Then, the duality

of doer and enjoyer will disappear. Then, you reach the stage called *Sarvakarmasanyas*, the withdrawal from all activity. In this Upanishad, this type of *Sanyasa* is described as the pathway to Liberation or Moksha.

The Sanyasa which involves the destruction of the three urges (for a mate, for progeny and for wealth) is very difficult to attain without purity of the *chiththa* or mind.

In this Upanishad, the means for getting this is declared in the second manthra. That is to say, carry out the *Agni-hothra*, etc. prescribed in the Sastras, believe that for liberation one has to be actively engaged in such work and get convinced that no sin can cling so long as one is so engaged. Work without the desire for the fruit thereof slowly cleanses impurities like the crucible of the goldsmith. The pure mind is Jnana. It is the consummation of detachment.

If you are able to divest yourselves of desire when you are doing work, no impurity can touch you. You know the "Chilliginji" seeds when dropped into muddy water have the power of separating the dirt and depositing it at the bottom. The seeds too sink to the bottom and slip out of sight! In the same way, those who are adepts in doing Karma without attachment will have their minds perfectly cleansed and the results of their acts will lose effectiveness and sink to the bottom.

Out of the eighteen manthras in this Upanishad only the first two deal directly with the problem of Liberation and its solution. The other sixteen elaborate this solution and serve as commentaries thereon.

The Atma never undergoes any modification, yet it is faster than the mind! That is the mystery and the miracle. It appears to experience all states, but it has no growth, decline or change. Though it is everywhere it is not perceivable by the senses. It is because of its underlying existence and ever-present immanence that all growth, all activities, all changes take place. Cause and effect act and react on account of the Basic stratum of the Atmic reality. Why, the very word, "Isa" carries this meaning. The Atma is near and far, inside and outside, still and moving. He who knows this truth is worthy of the name, *Jnani*.

The ignorant can never grasp the fact of Atmic immanence. Those who are conscious can see things and can feel their presence near them. Those who have lost awareness will search for the lost jewels though they actually wear them at the moment. Though one may know all things, he conceives the Atma as existing in some unapproachable, unreachable place on account of loss of consciousness. But the Jnani, who is aware, sees the Atma in all beings and all beings as Atma. He sees all beings as the same and perceives no distinction or

difference. So he saves himself from duality.

The Isavasya makes this great Truth clear to all. The Jnani who has tasted that vision will not be agitated by the blows of fortune or the enticements of the senses. He sees all beings as himself, having his own innate identity. He is free from bondage, from Dharma and Adharma, and the needs and urges of the body. He is '*Swayamprakasa*' (Self-luminous). So, the *Jiva-rupa* is not his genuine form, no, not even the gross and the subtle bodies called the *Sthula* (gross) and the *Sukshma* (subtle) *sariras* (bodies).

That is why in the first manthra of the Isavasya, the Jnana Nishta characterised by the absence of craving of any sort is expounded. This is the primary *Vedartha*; but those who have cravings will find it difficult to get stabilised in that Nishta or state of mind. For such, the second manthra prescribes a secondary means, the *Karma Nishta* (steady pursuit of good deeds). The rest of the manthras elaborate and support these two nishtas (disciplines)—based on Jnana and Karma. Karma Nishta has desire and delusion as the cardinal urges. Jnana Nishta has *Vairagya*, the conviction that the world is not Atma, that is to say, not true, and therefore, it is profitless to have any dealings with it. Such an attitude to Vairagya is the gateway to Jnana Nishta. From the third to the eighth manthra, the real nature of the Atma is depicted, through

the condemnation of the *Avidya* (ignorance) which prevents the understanding of the Atma.

Thus the Isavasya teaches the lesson of renunciation through the first manthra and the lesson of "liberating activity" through Karma devoid of *Raga* (passion, attachment) and *Dwesha* (anger, hate, repulsion) in the second manthra. In the fourth and fifth manthra, it speaks of *Atmathatwa* (Faith in the Lord) and later of the fruits of the knowledge of that Atmathatwa. In the ninth manthra, the path of progressive liberation or *Karmamukthi* (useful for those who are too weak to follow the path of total renunciation but who are adepts in acts that are conducive to moral development and inner purification) is laid down. This is the path which co-ordinates all Karma on the principle of Upasana (worship or contemplation of God). Those who are engaged in acts contrary to *Vidya* (Knowledge) are full of *Ajnana* (Ignorance), it says. Those who confine themselves to the study and practice of divine forms are even worse, for their desire is for powers and skills. Vidya leads to *Deva Loka*; Karma leads to *Pithr Loka*, it is said. So the Jnana that results in *Atma sakshathkara* or Self-realisation is something quite distinct from these. No attempt to co-ordinate the two can succeed.

Of course, one should not engage in anything opposed to the Sastras; and all actions are classed as

Avidya, in the ultimate analysis. At best, Karma can help only to cleanse the mind and the Upasana of Gods can lead to single-mindedness. The Upasana has to rise to the level of the worship of the Cosmic Divinity, the *Hiranyagarbha*. It has to ripen and develop into *Jivanmukthi* (Liberated soul), before the end of this life.

The *Devatha-Jnana* and the Karma Nishta have both to be complementary and co-ordinated. Then, one can escape the round of birth and death and become Divine.