

The Vision of the Lord

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The opening mantra of Īśāvāsyopaniṣad says:

īśā vāsyam idam sarvam yatkiñca jagatyām jagat

All this, whatever is created in the world, is to be covered by the Lord. *Idam* means “this”, whatever can be objectified. *Jagat* means that which is subject to change. Whatever there is in the creation of names and forms is to be covered by the Lord.

We should first understand the word “Lord” and the term “to be covered.” Lord means the ruler, the one who rules the creation. Taittirīyopaniṣad describes the Lord as the one fearing whom the Wind blows, the Sun rises, Fire runs as do Indra and Death. Does this mean that the Lord is like a stern master fearing whom such mighty ones as Indra and Fire function? No. This Lord is not like the local masters who have to use force to make things work. He rules effortlessly. Just as an individual, Devadatta, is effortlessly the lord of all his reflections—when Devadatta lifts a hand, all his reflected images lift their hands—so also, the Lord, rules the whole creation by His mere presence. He is the very substratum of creation. It is only by the conditioning of *māyā*, His creative power, that He even gains the designation Lord. In reality, He is the limitless *Brahman* which abides in its own fullness.

Now, what is the meaning of the term “to be covered?” Whatever there is is to be covered by the Lord. Does the Upaniṣad ask us to do

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something? Are we to cover the creation with the Lord, like we cover the body with a cloth? No. It is more like covering a cloth with cotton or covering an ornament with gold. Covering here means “seeing”. Seeing the cotton in the clothes; seeing the gold in the ornaments. Thus the statement of the Upaniṣad means, “See the Lord, the limitless in the entire creation”.

Is it necessary to bring about some intrinsic change in the creation to see the Lord there? If He is already there, should I not see Him? If not, how can I see Him? It is not possible for anyone to see something that is not there. Even if a respectable person holds a flower in his hands and asks me to see an elephant there, I cannot do that. And if indeed there is an elephant there, I need not be asked to see it. I would naturally see it. What kind of seeing does the Upaniṣad want us to do? It is like the seeing of the wood in the elephant. What appears to be a big menacing elephant from a distance is in reality a wooden elephant. Superimposing the elephant upon the wood, I am afraid of going near it. So “seeing” here is removing the superimposition. This world of names and forms is taken by us to be a limited and varied creation in which there are divisions such as subject and object, good and bad, right and wrong, mine and yours. It is an inert creation where the limitless Lord is nowhere to be seen. Hence the Upaniṣad asks us to see the One, Limitless Lord, where we presently see a diverse, limited creation, the source of conflict and sorrow.

How do I see the One in the diversity of names and forms? It can only be through an appreciation of the essential nature of all the objects. Every object is different from every other object in as much as it possesses a form and a corresponding name that distinguish it from other objects. So there is duality, diversity from the standpoint of names and forms. But there is

something common in all objects too. Every object exists, i.e., every object enjoys existence. And when we reduce any given form to its components to see the fundamental building block, we find the finest particle resolves into simple existence, awareness, completeness. And that is the essence of every object. The name and form are merely a garb through which the essence, i.e., existence – awareness – fullness expresses itself. This essence, which is nothing but *Brahman*, is the limitlessness that we are trying to contact whenever we contact the objects. We have to give up our preoccupation with our garb, the names and forms, to appreciate the Lord, *Brahman*, which is the substratum, the underlying thread that informs the entire creation. All this is indeed *Brahman*.

Is *Brahman* to be appreciated in the objects? When we give up our fascination or preoccupation with names and forms we find our attention is turned from objects to the subject, “I”. The existence-awareness-fullness is not away from me. I always am. In the stages such as childhood, youth, etc., in the states such as waking, dream, etc., in the moods such as happiness, sorrow, etc., the “I” always is. The stages, states, and moods are replaced but the “I” is never replaced. So “I” is indeed the existence that connects every experience. Again, I am always an awareful being. What I am aware of changes with time, place, etc., but that I am aware never changes. And “I” is always full because it is always dear to me regardless of the situation. So “I” is indeed the existence-awareness-fullness. It is *Brahman*. *Ayam ātmā brahma*, this self is indeed *Brahman*. So seeing the Lord everywhere means seeing the self as *Brahman*. The world is always seen as a reflection of the self and so, when I see myself as *Brahman*, the whole creation is seen as *Brahman*.

If I already am *Brahman*, why is it that I do not find myself to be an adequate, complete being? The reason is that the inadequacy is habitually superimposed by me upon myself. I take myself to be an incomplete being and am always grieving, except for those moments when I forget myself. This lack or incompleteness is not natural. What is natural to me is fullness. A piece of sandalwood when it remains in contact with water for a long time starts smelling. This smell is not natural to the sandalwood. When the sandalwood is rubbed against a stone, with the help of water, the natural fragrance manifests. Similarly, by *vicāra* or inquiry, conducted in accordance with the scriptures and the help of a competent teacher, the false notions of smallness and division drop off, and the natural fullness shines forth. I am grieving because I do not know my own glory. All the grief disappears when I see the fallacy of all the complexes I entertain about myself and see the full and complete being that I am. Then I discover that I am full, the content of everything. I am full whether I am with the creation or not. Fullness alone is; everything else is false. This is the teaching of the *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad* and that is the vision of the Lord.

This teaching of the *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad* is the vision of all the other *Upaniṣads* as well.