

PODCAST 208: FORM TO FORMLESS

Om Sri Sai Ram

Prasanthi Sandesh welcomes you to Episode 208.

Well, all *Upanishads* are a likeness of the *Brahman*, the ultimate Reality. "So, absorbed in the *Brahman*, may I realise the *dharma*, the natural and the eternal law of the universe!"

This prayer is found in *Kaivalya Upanishad*. The prayer is: all *Upanishads* are a likeness of the *Brahman*. All *Upanishads* are a likeness of the *Brahman*.

Well, two things have been said in just these few words.

Indian wisdom has always held a pluralistic viewpoint. It is anti-singular. This pluralistic viewpoint is the understanding that it is a mistake to believe that only you are right. It would have been more appropriate for the sage to say that the *Kaivalya Upanishad* is the likeness of the *Brahman*, meaning that this particular *Upanishad* is the likeness of the *Brahman*. But the sage says that **all** *Upanishads* are a likeness of the *Brahman*, unconditionally.

The word '*Upanishad*' does not mean only the books that we call *Upanishads*. *Upanishad* means 'mystery'. It means the mysterious keys which open the door to the Divine. So, when the sage says that all *Upanishads* are a likeness of the *Brahman*, he's saying that all parts of mystery -- all words, all scriptures which open the door to the Divine, all are a likeness of the *Brahman*. And it is interesting when he says that scriptures, words, mysteries and paths can themselves be divine.

There are two things here which are worth understanding. The *Brahman* is formless. It has no form. It has no shape. We cannot conceptualise it. We cannot draw a line around it or give any definition to it. The *Brahman*, as such, is formless. Existence, as such, is formless. The mystics have tried to draw lines around the formless, although this is not possible. And even if it were possible to draw lines, they could never solve the ultimate mystery. But through these lines and forms, the people who can only understand lines and definitions can be helped to move towards the formless.

The mystics have given a form only for those who cannot understand the formless directly, so that they can grasp it in their hands, and from that form they can slowly be led on in their journey towards the formless. Only by giving them some form can they slowly be led away from all forms.

We give a toy to a small child to play with, and then he falls in love with the toy. Without that toy the child cannot sleep at night. And if he wakes up in the middle of the night and does not find the toy, he will become as restless as a lover separated from his beloved. Yet the day will soon come when the toy will be left there, lying in some corner of the house.

But one interesting thing is that although the toy will be lying in the corner, the love that the child has experienced through that toy will continue. The love relationship that was formed with the toy, the contact that happened, the realisation and the experiences that the child had, the door to love which was opened, will remain with him. Tomorrow the toy will be forgotten in some corner, but whenever this person loves anybody, remember that the contribution of the toy will also be there in his love.

However, it can also happen that this child will grow physically, but will remain a child mentally. He may start loving someone and then start crying for that person in the same way that he once cried for his lost toy. He'll have completely forgotten that once he cried so much for his toy, but yet he left it behind, never remembering it again.

The child has forgotten about the toy now. But if the child grows internally, not just physically but psychologically too, if he matures within, then he will forget all about the grown-up outer toys also. However, the contact and nourishment that he has received from all his grown-up toys will deeply enrich his inner world. His love will one day grow into devotion. And one day, when his love becomes devotion and rises towards the Divine, he will forget the lovers, the toys of his childhood, and the childhood that helped him to reach to this state. But still, the contribution of these experiences will be there in his devotion.

Even devotion is not fulfilled until the devotee himself has become the Divine. Kindly note this point. Even the devotion is not fulfilled until the devotee himself has become the Divine. One day the last toy, the Divine, will also drop away. Then only the love which is left behind from all his experiences will remain. All toys will drop away, but what the toys have helped him to experience will remain with him. All forms will disappear, but the formless love will go on slowly growing. Love goes on accumulating, and a day will come when the devotee has become pure love. Even the lover will disappear. On that day, the devotee has become the Divine.

That's why the sage has said that all *Upanishads* are a likeness of the *Brahman*. They are not the *Brahman*, but the images of the *Brahman*. They are forms, they are forms, yes, line sketches to pass through. And one day, he will enter Space, which is free from all forms and from all lines and sketches.

These are boundaries of words, theories, scriptures, but within these boundaries many hints towards the boundless are hidden. One day, just like all toys disappear, all the *Upanishads* also disappear in the same way. All the scriptures fall away. If you become stuck with some scripture, know well that you have gone astray. The very purpose of the scripture is that one day they can be left behind. They are only indications, hints. It is useful to grasp them. But it is even more useful to let go of them.

There are two types of fools in the world. The ones who say, "If I have to let go of the scriptures, why follow them in the first place?" And the others who say, "If I have to follow them at first, then why let go of them?" But both are the same. The only difference between them is that one of them is doing a headstand! Otherwise, there's no essential difference between them.

So, for the ones who say, "Why follow the scriptures in the first place?" we won't follow them! This attitude is like a child who has never been given any toys, who has never experienced any love, who has been denied any idea whatsoever of the Divine. There will not be a time in his life when he will experience the Divine. The state of divineness is something for which he cannot hope. It will not be possible for him because all of his experiences are just experiences of the form.

The experiences themselves are formless. It is the ways by which we experience that has a form. The truth is formless. It is the hints towards the truth, the words, which have a form. The sage has said that all *Upanishads* are the likeness of the *Brahman*, as are all paths, all scriptures, and all mysteries. All the many hints that man has never stopped trying to know, they are all a likeness of the Divine.

They are all trying to give a certain form to the Divine, to the One to which no form can be given. And this happens not for the sake of the Divine, but for the sake of those who can understand only the forms. The images of the Divine are an effort to explain the inexplicable, to make it a little more accessible to the intellect and to the senses.

For example, a man is shut inside a prison. The sky is in the far away distance and he cannot fly. He can only see the sky through his small window. The window has bars on it and the piece of sky that he can see through them is crossed by bars. The sky that he can see is framed by the outline of the window. There is no frame in the actual sky, no bars, but the prisoner who is sitting inside the jail can see the sky only through that window.

If he has never been before in the open sky, he will say that the sky is two feet wide by four feet long because he is shut behind bars and surrounded by a frame that looks like the window. If he has never seen the open sky, then for him the sunrise would only happen in this little sky which is enclosed within the frame.

When the sun rises in the framed sky, he will say, "Now the sun is rising." Then too the sun would also set within this framed sky. That sunset will have no relationship whatsoever to the sunset which happens in the open sky. It'll be limited by that window. So, this man will say that for quite a while before sunrise and after sunset, there's light.

If sometimes a bird flies past his window he will be able to see it only within the frame of the window. He will say that birds are things that come and then immediately vanish.

Is this man's understanding completely wrong? No. His understanding is wrong, but it is not totally wrong. Then, is his understanding right? His understanding is right, but not completely right either. His understanding is limited and his mistake is also limited. His mistake is that he has imposed a frame on the open sky. His understanding is right in the context of the limited sky that he can see. But if he thinks that the sky is only as vast as what he can see, then he is making a big mistake.

The *Upanishads* are the images of the Divine. But if you take the *Upanishads* to be the Divine, you'll be making a big mistake. Then, you will be mistaking the window frame for the sky. If you take them as images, as reflections, then there'll be no possibility of this mistake happening. It will mean that you are aware that the Divine is formless, and that the form you are seeing is given by your eye. The form is created by your limitations. The form does not belong to the Divine. It has been given by you.

Thus, the *Sanathana Dharma* establishes *Sakara*, which is a form-full form of the Divine, which at the same time leads to *Nirakara*, the formless Divine. That's the reason why it is clearly said, clearly said, that all *Upanishads* are a likeness of the *Brahman*!

Thank you. We'll meet again.