

Are the Upanishads only Means to the Knowledge of the Atman

From: sophia & ira schepetin <stadri@a...>

Date: Fri Nov 23, 2001 3:23 am

Subject: Are the Upanishads the only means to the knowledge of Atman?

Dear Sri Gummuluru Murthy,

When you state that according to Shankara ' there is no other source of knowledge for revealing the Non-dual Atman other than the Upanishads' you have accurately portrayed Shankaras' position. However when you put forth the view that

" ultimately for Atmavidya, Upanishads cannot be treated as requisite either. It is Mannana, Nidhidhyasana which leads to Atmavidya, not the Upanishads." it appears as though you have gone against Shankaras position and adopted a viewpoint similar to that of an Ancient school of Vedantins which held that Brahman is subservient to an injunction of meditation.(Dhyana Niyoga Vadins) These thinkers insisted upon meditation as the primary teaching of the Upanishads,and that no indepentant entity (Atman) in itself could be the subject matter of the Upanishadic teaching, as it would serve no purpose. Shankara portrays this school of Vedantins in his Sutra Bhashya 1-1-4,as follows:

"If it were only a statement about a thing, which formed no part of an injunction or duty, it would be altogether ineffective, inasmuch as there would be nothing to be taken up or rejected by the seeker of truth, very much like the statements such as 'the earth consists of seven islands', 'There goes the king' "

Hence this school maintained that mere Sravana or study and interpretation of the Vedantic Texts would be of no avail, and that is why after enjoining Sravana (listening), the Sruti enjoins Mannana and Nididhyasanana (reflection and meditation). So this school concluded that the Upanishads are a means of right knowledge of Brahman only insofar as Brahman is the object of an injunction of meditation.

Shankara's tradition is of course opposed to this view, for it is a sustained effort to show how all Upanishadic texts purport to reveal the Non-dual Atman, and that this Knowledge is not available to any other means of knoweldge(pramana) other than the Upanishads.

From: Gummuluru Murthy <gmurthy@m...>

Date: Thu Dec 6, 2001 7:43 pm

Subject: Re: [advaitin] Are the Upanishads the only means to the knowledge of Atman?

namaste shri Sophia and ira Schepetin,

My apologies for the late response as I was busy with the University matters.

Thanks for a very thought-provoking comment. Let me respond to this from my very limited knowledge. I quoted your mail in full to keep the continuity of thought and also would like to quote reference to my earlier post to which your post is a response.

QUOTE

On Thu, 15 Nov 2001, Gummuluru Murthy wrote:

> [...]

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> The disease can be eradicated by Knowledge alone and not by
> action. May be I am biased here, but the Knowledge of Atman,
> brahmavidyA, is contained only in the upanishads.

>

namaste.

The above portion of my post seems to have caused some concern. The purpose of my original post is to separate the disease and the symptom and my above statement is only a minor part of that post. I was trying to show in that post that treatment of the disease is more important than looking at a cure for the symptoms.

Somehow, that point seems to have been lost in the latter statement quoted above.

Now, with regard to statement quoted above, that is not a wrong statement. The only source of our Knowledge is the upanishads. There might have been many bhAShyA-s, many prakaraNa granthA-s, many modern-day interpretations or new books. But they all derive their knowledge from the upanishads.

shri shankara says in His famous debate with ManDana Mishra that the Knowledge contained in the upanishads is not there in any other source. If it is there, and if that Knowledge can be derived from that other source, then the upanishads will be considered redundant which they are not, shri shankara says.

Ultimately for AtmavidyA, upanishads cannot be treated as requisite either. It is manana, nidhidhyAsana which leads to AtmavidyA, not the upanishads.

shri RamaNa, who has not studied the upanishads, says that He must have in His previous lives gone through what the sages have visualized and presented their visualization as upanishads.

Further, upanishads are not to be treated as textbooks in print, but as sound recordings of the visualization of Atman. It is only because of our present-day preoccupation with reading format of knowledge- acquisition that we equate upanishads to books to be read. Upanishads are teachings of AtmavidyA by a guru to the disciples in oral form. If we accept that, there is no difficulty in saying the upanishads as the ultimate Knowledge.

Regards
Gummuluru Murthy

UNQUOTE

I think the earlier references are necessary to keep the continuity of thought as my late response might have disrupted that continuity. Yes, shri shankara says clearly that upanishads are the only source for the revelation of the non-dual Atman.

Now, coming to the other expression in my previous post ".. ultimately for Atmavidya, Upanishads cannot be treated as requisite either. It is manana, nidhidhyasana which leads to Atmavidya, not the Upanishads..." You say in this I have gone against shri shankara's position and adopted a viewpoint similar to that of an Ancient school of Vedantins which held that Brahman is subservient to an injunction of meditation (Dhyana Niyoga Vadins).

I am not aware of this school of thought (dhyAna niyoga vAdins). But, my view of upanishads is not what you say is their view, for the following reasons.

1. I do not believe that brahman is subservient to an injunction of meditation. Meditation is an action (although mental) and Atma vidyA is not a product or output of action. This was stated by shri shankara many times (VivekacUDAmNi, upadeshasahasrI). Thus, Brahman (or knowledge of brahman) cannot be subservient to meditation.

2. nidhidhyAsana is not really dhyAnam. Meditation is not the correct english translation, either. I would leave it to learned members to suggest the proper word for nidhidhyAsana.

3. shri shankara says in VivekacUDAmāNi that a guru can only point the direction in which the disciple has to "go" . The sAdhaka, the disciple has to do the hard job for AtmavidyA. The guru is not going to do it. It is the sAdhaka who has to do the realization. Thus, it is appropriately called AtmavidyA. A guru's teaching is nothing but the upanishads. And in that way, I made the statement quoted above in my previous post.

4. Further, I was also alluding to the fact that just studying the upanishads without the purity of heart will not lead to Self-realization, but only to intellectual knowledge.

5. Further, if the dhyAna niyoga vAdins are correct in their interpretation of upanishads (their interpretation stated by you), then it will invalidate kaTha up. 1.ii.23 (This Self cannot be attained by instruction, nor by intellectual power, nor even through much hearing. He (the Self) is to be attained only by the one whom the (Self) chooses. To such a one, the Self reveals his (Its) own nature.

Thus, the Self (AtmavidyA) cannot be an object or an injunction of meditation.. It is to evolve from inside us, by Itself on its own choosing.

Thus, my understanding of upanishads, which I gleaned from the study of the bhAShyA-s, I hope, is consistent with shri shankara's teachings.

Regards
Gummuluru Murthy

From: sophia & ira schepetin <stadri@a...>

Date: Sat Dec 8, 2001 10:54 pm

Subject: Re: [advaitin] Are the Upanishads the only means to the knowledge of Atman?

Namaste Sri Gummuluru Murthy,

Thank you for your well thought out reply. I am very happy to see that you end your response with the hope that your understanding of the Upanishads is in

accordance with Sri Shankaracharyas' Bhashyas. Because it is in the light of those Bhashyas that I would like to make a few observations with regard to the five points which you put forth. I hope this will be of interest to the other members of the group in as much as this site is primarily dedicated to the

study and discussion of 'SHANKARA'S' Advaita Vedanta. You begin your reply by acknowledging that Shankaras position is that ' the only means (pramana) for the knowledge of Atman is the Upanishads'. You then seem to suggest that this is not in conflict with your assertion that ultimately "It is Mannana and Nidhidhyasana which leads to Atmavidya, not the Upanishads." and that the 5 points that you mention somehow reconciles this apparent conflict. That this is not the case can be understood by an examination of these 5 points themselves.

1) You agree that the knowledge of Brahman is not subservient to any injunction of meditation and that meditation is an action, and like every other action, it is dependent on an agent (kartru tantra) and that the result of that action can never be the Knowledge of Brahman This view is in perfect harmony with Sri Shankaras commentaries. (It should be noted that in taking this view Shankara was also refuting two other interpreters of the Upanishads who both held that by merely understanding the teaching of the Upanishads the final Knowledge of Brahman would not be attained and therefore put forth the doctrines that a) Actions alone could produce the knowledge of Brahman (Karmavadins) as well as b) those who held that only a combination of Actions (Karmas) and Knowledge (KarmaJnanasamuchyavadins) would alone produce the desired result.).

2) When you say that Nidhidhyasana is not really meditation (dhyana- which you correctly identify above as a action and therefore dependent on an agent), you have correctly stated Shankaras view. However you leave unexplained what exactly Nidhidhyasana is if it not an action to be performed. According to Sankara Sravana (listening to the Upanishadic teaching) Manana(reflecting on the Upanishadic teaching) and Nidhidhyasana (contemplating on the Upanishadic teaching) are the three direct means to the Knowledge of Brahman. They are not actions that are dependent on an agent (kartru tantra) but they are dependent on the thing to be known (vastu tantra). Shankara repeatedly makes clear this distinction between Meditations (which are Kartru tantra Sadhanas- ie: actions dependent on an agent) and Sravana, Manana and Nidhidhyasana, (which are Vastu Tantra Sadhanas- Sadhanas that are dependent on the thing to be known) throughout his Bhasyas. One example is as follows:" While Dhyana (meditation)...is mental, yet it can be done, not done or done in some other way; for it depends on the will of the person: But Knowledge is born out of some means of knowledge (pramana) and objectifies the thing just as it is; hence, knowledge cannot be done, not done, or done in some other way. For it is solely dependent on its object and NOT on any injunction or the will of a person Shankara clearly states in his Sutra Bhasya (SB 4-1-2-) that for the fully qualified student Sravana itself is sufficient for the knowledge of Brahman, for those not fully qualified, and who can not therefore attain the knowledge of Brahman merely from listening to the Upanishadic teaching, then mannana and nidhidhyasana is recommended for

that same purpose. It is not the case-- as you seem to imply by stating "it is Nidhidhyasana which leads to Atmavidya, not the Upanishads."-- that you first get the knowledge of Brahman from listening (sravana) to the Upanishads and then after gaining that knowledge you then have to do manana and nidhidhyasana -(as though after the Knowledge of Brahman there could be any agent left to do any further sadhanas) . But rather, just like Sravana, Manana and Nidhidhyasana are for the purpose of attaining the Knowledge of Brahman that is only taught in the Upanishads. To quote Shankara: "Again, as for the contention that because Manana and Nidhidhyasana is seen to be enjoined subsequent to Sravana, Brahman must therefore be subservient to an injunction, we reply 'NO'. For Manana and Nidhidhyasana are also for the purpose of attaining Knowledge. To explain : If

Brahman already known (by means of sravana) were to be used for some other purpose (such as the subsequent undertaking of Manana and Nidhidhyasana) , then, perhaps it might be considered to be subservient to an injunction. But it is not so, for, Manana and Nidhidhyasana are also intended for the Knowledge of Brahman, just like Sravana." (Sutra Bhashya 1-1-4). (The biggest fallacy that can be made is to identify this Nidhidhyasana with the Kartru sadhana of attaining the Nirvikalpa Samadhi state of the Yoga Sutras, a mistake that almost all modern Vedantins have made and which many posters on this thread wrongly take to be a correct interpretation of Shankaras Vedanta! But that's a subject for future discussions).

3) You quote Vivekachudamani to show that even according to Shankara, the Guru can only point the way, and that it is upto the student to "go". I assume that by

providing this quote you are implying that the Guru can only tell the student what to do and that then the student, has to 'do' it. There are just two short points I would like to raise with regards to this issue. First, I think that in any serious discussion of Shankaras' teachings, it is better to draw upon Shankara's Universally accepted works IE: the Prastana TrayaBhashya, rather than to the many hundreds of Prakarana Grantas (independent works) that have been falsely ascribed to Shankara, and which more often than not contain doctrines diametrically opposed to the viewpoint of Sri Shankara as expounded in his commentaries on the Upanishads, the Gita and the Brahma Sutras. Because Vivekachudamani contains the teachings that 1) the direct experience of Brahman cannot be had without the attainment of Nirvikalpa Smadhi, 2) that the Knowledge of Brahman must be repeated after its arising so as to make it strong, 3) that the knowledge arising out of the understanding of the Vedantic sentences is only indirect, and 4) that the meanings of the words Avidya (Ignorance) and Maya (illusion) are identical, (all of which are teachings directly opposed to the Bhashya) we can be confident that the author

of the Vivekachudamani was not the same author who wrote the commentaries on the PrastanaTraya. Secondly, while it is absolutely true that

the Guru can only point out the way (by teaching the Upanishadic texts which reveal Brahman's true nature) and that for the teaching to be fruitful it must culminate in the direct experience of the student, we must not interpret this to imply that after hearing the teaching, the student then has something to do, for Shakara clearly states "That texts regarding Brahman are self-complete by teaching the nature of a thing, and do not urge one to engage himself in any action, has been established after a long discussion on the Samanvaya-Sutra." (Sutra Bhashya 3-2-21) and again "Texts like 'He is to be seen, to be heard, to be reflected upon, to be contemplated on' in the context

of the Knowledge of Brahman, are solely meant for directing the seekers mind towards reality, and are not predominantly meant to enjoin the Knowledge of Brahman as though it were something that had to be done." (Sutra Bhashya 3-2-21)

4) Your fourth point is absolutely correct and in accordance with Shankara's teachings. Only the 'pure of heart' or, in other words, only the qualified student can get the direct experience of Brahman from the Upanishadic teaching. But let us not conclude from this that if the student is not qualified to get the direct experience of Brahman merely from listening to the Upanishads alone (sravana), that he somehow could still get that direct experience of Brahman by the practice of Nidhidhyasana. Only the qualified student can reap the fruit of the Upanishadic teaching by means of Sravana, Manana or Nidhidhyasana. And a corollary of this is that without the Upanishadic teaching there is no such thing as Sravana, Manana or Nidhidhyasana!

5) Of course the 'Dhyaniyogavadins' were wrong. But when you quote the Katha

Upanishad 1-2-23, and conclude from this verse that 'Atmavidya has to evolve from inside us, by itself, of its (the Self's) own choosing'. This can be interpreted to mean

that independently of the Upanishadic teaching, the knowledge of Brahman can arise

if the Self chooses you. That this is not the meaning of the Mantra can be seen by the context in which it appears as well as Shakara's commentary on it. Shankara clearly describes this verse as meaning what he has already said in Katha Bhashya 1-2-20 that "only to the 'desireless man', one whose mind has been withdrawn from all outer objects, seen or unseen, to him alone, the Self, whose means of knowledge are Sravana, Manana, Nidhidhyasana, he see that Glory of the Self, i.e. he directly realizes the Self as 'I Am He' and thereby becomes free of sorrow." and again

on Katha Bhashya 1-2-23. "" The meaning is that to a desireless man who seeks

the Self alone, (the Self as revealed in the Upanishads) that Self becomes know of its own accord" And thus it does not mean that Independent of the Upanishads if the 'Self chooses' you, you will then get the Knowledge of the

Self.. Shankaras summary of the next Mantra, Katha Bhasaya 1-2-24 makes this point even stronger. "But for the man who has desisted from bad conduct, as also free from the lure of the sense, whose mind has become concentrated, and is also free from anxiety about the results of concentration, AND HAS A GURU, he can attain the aforesaid Self through Knowledge. this is the Idea."

In summary, according to Shankaras interpretation of the Scriptures, the Upanishadic teaching itself is the Only Means of Knowledge (Antya Pramana) for Brahman, and the Sravana, Manana, and Nidhidhasana are the three direct ways by which one can get the direct immediate experience of the Non Dual Brahman. All other disciplines such as desirelessness, humility, non-violence, speaking truth, etc.(see Gita 13-7-11) are for the purpose of getting the qualifications so as to be able to pursue the direct means to the Knowledge of the Self. I await the comments of all who are interested in this subject matter.
Hari Om

From: "Kuntimaddi Sadananda" <k_sadananda@h...>

Date: Mon Dec 10, 2001 4:54 am

Subject: Re: [advaitin] Are the Upanishads the only means to the knowledge of Atman?

Sophia and Ira Schepetin

I must say I am immensely enjoying this discussion. I wish I have lot more free time now, to discuss the issues you have addressed. In my notes on brahmasuutra -in connection to the fourth sutra I did discuss some of shankara's views related to dhyana - particularly the mananam and nidhidhyaasana. In response to vrittikaara's puurvapaksha, shankara discusses the role of Shravana, manana and nidhidhyaasana. Shravana is definitely not a purusha tantra but vastu tantra. mananam and nidhidhyaasana, as I understand, are purusha tantra since they involve mental activity. Hence knowledge, which is not purusha tantra comes from Shravana only. Mananam is to remove the obstacles - involving sanshaya - or doubts about the reality - and nidhidhyasana involves removal of the impurities of the mind due to habitual thinking or vasana-s that block the dawning of the knowledge. - nidhidhyaasitavyaH - tavyaH as vidhi dhaatu has been interpreted as the purusha tantra - that one has to do. This is for those seekers who do not have all the prerequisites since shravana has not done its job. I gave the example of replacing the dead bulb. when bulb is replaced and if the line is already live, it glows instantly once one makes a contact. But if the life is switched off, replacing the bulb (shravana is not a waste), even though the bulb is not glowing. all one has to do now is turn the switch and turn-up the dimmer (that is the mind and intellect) so that full current

flows and light up the bulb that is already connected. One does not need to reconnect the bulb.

Your comments on VivekachuuDamani are well taken.

Hari OM!
Sadananda

From: sophia & ira schepetin <stadri@a...>

Date: Tue Dec 11, 2001 3:46 am

Subject: Re: [advaitin] Are the Upanishads the only means to the knowledge of Atman?

Dear Sri Sadanandaji,
Shankara has devoted his entire Bhasya on the Samamvayaadhikaranam(1-1-4) to ward off all sorts of efforts to connect Brahma-Jijnasa with any type of Vidhi or Niyoga (injunction). He states repeatedly:

"No reason can be adduced to suppose that such a Brahman or its knowledge, can be connected with ANY SORT OF ACTION" (Sutra BH.1-1-4)

" That texts regarding Brahman are self-complete by teaching the nature of a thing, and do not urge one to engage in any action, has been established.." (Sutra 3-2-23)

"Therefore we conclude that since Brahman cannot be possibly known through the Shastra as subservient to an injunction of meditation, Brahman is only independently known through the Shastra, the valid means of its knowledge, inasmuch as the Vedanta texts purport to teach it exclusively. And it is on this supposition alone that the Sutra "Then therefore the inquiry into Brahman" dealing with it, can be justified " (i.e.: If the texts such as 'to be seen' , 'to be reflected upon', 'to be contemplated upon' were true injunctions then then there would have be no need for Badyaranas' Brahma Sutras, because we already had Jamanis' Sutras that has dealt with all Vedic injunctions, -purusha tantra sadhanas. And thus Manana and Nidhidhyasana are NOT Purusha Tantra).

"As for the contention that Manana and Nidhidhyasana are enjoined...we reply "No".

For Manana and Nidhiyasana are also (just like Sravava) intended for Direct Experience." (SBh. 1-1-4) If Manana and Nidhidhyasana were Purusha Tantra Sadhanas, ('an action dependent on the will of a person') Shankara could never claim that they lead to Direct Experience.

And finally, when you state that because the word Nidhidhyasitavya has the

suffix 'tavya ('to be done') this shows that Nidhidhyasana is a Purusha Tantra Sadhana, you ,in all fairness, should see that the same suffix is applied to Drastavya(to be seen), and srotavya (to be heard about), and that they should also be considered Purusha Tantra, but you have yourself admitted that this is not the case with regard to Sravana. This very same subject, of determining exactly what is the true intention of the Scripture when it makes use of suffixes like 'Tavya"(to be done) in connection with words like 'Nidhidhyitavya', has been clearly dealt with by Shankara:

"As for the 'idea of fire' with regard to the well known fire, it is not dependent on an injunction, NOR IS IT DEPENDENT ON A PERSONS WILL (PURUSA TANTRA). Forms of verbs ending in 'lin'(Grammatical forms ending in the potential mood-meaning one should 'do' something such as , 'should be seen', ' should be contemplated on') become blunt like a keen edged razor applied to a stone. For, the object, (Brahman) can neither be shunned nor taken up."

the purvapakshin objects:

"For what purpose then are passages like "Atman alone, my dear, should be seen, should be heard about, should be reflected upon, should be contemplated upon." if they are not true injunctions but only 'seeming injunctions'."

Shankara replies:

"We answer- 'For the purpose of turning one's back on the objects of natural proclivity.. and causing him to set up a continuous stream of thought towards the inner Self ".(so that it can be known as it is, and not to undertake any action).

In summary: According to Sri Shankaracharya, Sravana, Manana, and Nidhidhyasana are all Vastu tantra Sadhanas. For the 'Uttama Adhikari' (The most Qualified student) Sravana is quite sufficient for the Knowledge of Brahman. For those others unable to understand the meaning of such Upanishadic sentences as 'That Thou Art' , by merely hearing them once, then the repetition of Sravana, as well as Manana and Nidhidhyasana should be undertaken. And more specifically, Nidhidhyasana is the Vastru Tantra Sadhana (also know by other names such as Dhyana Yoga in Gita 6th chapter, Mano Nigraha Yoga in Gaudapadas' Karikas and Adhyatma Yoga in the Katha Upanishad) which is a special kind of concentrated contemplation upon Atman which culminates in the Direct Experience of the Universal Self. It has nothing to do with the creative Imagination of Kartru Tantra Sadhanas ordinarily known by the names of Upasana, Bhavana, Cintina etc. NOR to the Patanjala Yoga intended for the suppression of the modifications of the mind as a prelude to attaining the state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi!

Hari Om