

APARAVIDYĀ AND PARAVIDYĀ
- The Lesser and Greater Mysteries* -

«From that man's purpose according to the Scriptures; that is it [according] to Bādarāyaṇa»

[*Brahmasūtra*, III, iv, 1]

«For this reason, indeed, in primordial times enlightened Sages did not aspire to prosperity: “What could we possibly obtain from a progeny, us who have realized the ātman and possess this world?” Having stopped desiring a progeny, prosperity, and this world, they started living like mendicants».

[*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*: IV, iv, 22]

«...the expressions¹ are completely connected [to the *vidyā*]²».

«Thus, it doesn't regard the starting of fire, etc.».

Although some tales in the *Upaniṣad* may seem to suggest that their aim is the fulfillment of ritual practices... [indeed it's not the case as] these tales are connected in a unitary way with meditation and aim at creating attention in anticipation of *vidyā*. For this reason, it is not necessary to start the sacrificial fire. Meditating on *Brahman* is sufficient to achieve supreme realization.

... The *Vedānta* assumes that the being has “fallen into this existential plane” as a result of identifying with the object (Narcissus' myth), that is for an act of *avidyā* (the being [looks] at itself for what it is not because it identified with its “appearance”).

... Realizing one's true nature is [consequently] being profoundly aware of oneself as ultimate Reality. Rituality, purification, devotion, etc. are extremely important in time and space, but “to cross the abyss” one must *know oneself, comprehend oneself, be oneself*. At times, however, failure in one's *sādhana* may also derive from having neglected basic aspects of the *sādhana*. The Divine Plato talks about ἀνάμνησις (remembrance)...

[In addition, the *Brahmasūtra*, with a specific reference to rituality, states:]

«...for the *Śruti* [there is an obligation] with regard to [religious rules], as [in the case] of the horse».

* From *Brahmasūtra*, Translation from the Sanskrit, and commentary, by Raphael (*Āśram Vidyā Order*), booh therd. Edizioni Āśram Vidyā. 2005. Roma. [Italian Edition].

¹ Or scriptural instructions that concern rite etc.

² Meditation, Contemplation that leads to Realization. Square parentheses are ours

[It is extremely important to underline that]... the *Vedānta*, without excluding, or opposing rituality and religious obligations, remarks that the ultimate purpose is always the achievement of supreme Reality. Thus, ritual sacrifices, religious rules, and all that is prescribed by the *Śruti* must be experienced not only by those who are predisposed to such things, but also by those who are inclined toward the path of knowledge. As said in the *sūtra*, a horse is used to draw a carriage not to plow a field because to do that other animals can be used. Similarly, rites, observances, etc. are also used to prepare and propitiate meditation as they correctly predispose the mind...

Rituality by itself doesn't lead to supreme Reality; likewise, knowledge by itself does not lead to that Reality, unless one is strongly inclined toward a cognitive vision of *noetic* or *buddhic* nature.

In sum, from a Western perspective, the problem can be framed as it follows: there are Lesser Mysteries and Greater Mysteries. The Lesser Mysteries concern the entire preparatory path to the Greater Mysteries. These latter concern those who have developed a noetic mind that is essentially metaphysical.

A correct metaphysical realization integrates the Lesser Mysteries so as to avoid pure mental dianoetic learning.

...[Thus] the *Vedānta* assumes that the being is oblivious of its true nature due to *avidyā*. [To comprehend correctly], we must distinguish [therefore] between two moments in the process of obscuring what we are (*avidyā*): the creative mental act (of any ideal nature, e.g., religious, literary, etc.); the assimilation of oneself to the creation-effect of that act (*vikṣepa śakti* and *āvaraṇa śakti*).

It is this second phase especially that generates imprisonment and suffering. It is from it that the true drama of the being arises with all the consequences, even tragic ones, that it brings about...

A metaphysical path takes to the dissolution of all polarities... Thus, the Knower, having integrated and “comprehended” all manifested beings, none being excluded, realizes oneself as authentic Master of Love-Wisdom (*nirvikalpa samādhi*)...

«Indeed “what is accomplished through knowledge” [means] this».

[*sūtra* 18, book IV].

«Only sacrifice that is performed with knowledge, faith and intelligence is most effective»³.

...According to this *sūtra* and the *Upaniṣad*, *Brahman* can be realized through various “operative means” and paths; thus, through knowledge alone, study of the *Veda*, as well as through sacrifices, etc. it is possible to reintegrate oneself with *Brahman*. It can be said ...that if the means, regardless of what it is, is only viewed as a means to be ferried to the other bank, it may be valid for realization. If the intent of *agnihotra* (offering to *Agni*) is taken as offering to the supreme Reality, thus *Agni* becomes symbol of that Reality, such intent can be valid and resolute. If knowledge becomes just a cultural element, it will not bear the aspired fruits. If, on the contrary, the aim is the fruit, that is *Brahman*, then that fruit is realized... Thus, the intent is always to resolve *avidyā* which the *Veda-Upaniṣad* view as the beginning of the “fall”.

³ *Chāndogya Up.* I, i, 10.

Three paths can, for example, be independently followed to realize the supreme *Brahman*: *Jñāna mārga*, *Parabhakti mārga* and *Yoga-darśana mārga*.

The first one realizes the Supreme through *nirvikalpa samādhi*; the second one through *saṁśakti-samādhi* (complete fusion with the unqualified unity); the third one through *nirbija samādhi*.

Although each of them follows its own way, all three fuse and unite in the “Great Silence”, Reality without second, without name.

All scriptures, and what derives from them, are and exist because there is *Brahman* which, although it is beyond any specification, is the foundation of all.

It could be asked:

Why that “fall”?

Because the being is free to fall or not to fall, to think or not to think, to think and identify with his thoughts or not to identify. The being is free to express through various undefined vital expressions, it can move up and down through the various existential levels as this is part of its nature.

In the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* it is written:

«Thus, that who knows, having reached mental quiet (*śama*), sensorial self-control (*dama*), inner self-attention (*uparati*), persevering patience (*titikṣā*), and having immersed himself in self-meditation (*samādhāna*)⁴, that certainly knows the *ātman* in his own body, he sees totality as *ātman*»⁵.

Both Eastern and Western metaphysics aim at freeing man from that dualistic conflict of which he deliberately fell prisoner. Egyptian Tradition, as well the Orphic one, and the subsequent initiatory schools (Pythagoras, Parmenides, Plato, Plotinus, etc.) have always confronted the conflicted being with this problem: the assimilation with God. It's not important whether the problem be ontological or super-ontological, but it is important that the problem be postulated. This is also the scope of religions: to save the being... And because all beings are potentially what they are, sooner or later, in a given time and space, they must confront such existential problem [although realization does not depend on time or space].

It is not important that in order to achieve this aim we use knowledge, rituality, good deeds, etc. because each being, depending on its qualifications, will find its own way to move toward this goal.

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⁴ Cfr. Śaṅkara, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, sūtra* 18-30. Aurea Vidyā, New York. 2006.

⁵ *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*: IV, iv, 23