

The Urban Well

The Mercy Seminar 2023, Term 1

Reading 1.1

The Mundaka Upanishad

PART I

[1]

1 From infinite Godhead came forth Brahma,
First among gods, from whom sprang the cosmos.
Brahma gave the vision of the Godhead,
The true source of wisdom that life demands,

2 To his eldest son, Atharva, who gave it
To Angi. In turn Angi gave it
To Satyavaha. In this tradition
Satyavaha gave it to Angiras.

3 A great householder named Shaunaka once came
To Angiras and reverently asked:
“What is that by knowing which all is known?”

4 He replied: “The illumined sages say
Knowledge is twofold, higher and lower.

5 The study of the Vedas, linguistics,
Rituals, astronomy, and all the arts
Can be called lower knowledge. The higher
Is that which leads to Self-realization.

6 “The eye cannot see it; mind cannot grasp it.
The deathless Self has neither caste nor race,
Neither eyes nor ears nor hands nor feet.
Sages say this Self is infinite in the great
And in the small, everlasting and changeless,
The source of life.

7 “As the web issues out of the spider
And is withdrawn, as plants sprout from the earth,
As hair grows from the body, even so,

The sages say, this universe springs from
The deathless Self, the source of life.

8 “The deathless Self meditated upon
Himself and projected the universe
As evolutionary energy.
From this energy developed life, mind,
The elements, and the world of karma,
Which is enchained by cause and effect.

9 “The deathless Self sees all, knows all. From him
Springs Brahma, who embodies the process
Of evolution into name and form
By which the One appears to be many.”

[2]

1 The rituals and the sacrifices described
In the Vedas deal with lower knowledge.
The sages ignored these rituals
And went in search of higher knowledge.

2–5 Look at these rituals: When the fire is lit,
Pour butter into the fire in two spots;
Then place the offering between these two.
These oblations will take the worshipper

6 On the sun’s rays to the world of Brahma,
Where he can have his fill of enjoyment.

7 Such rituals are unsafe rafts for crossing
The sea of *samsara*, of birth and death.
Doomed to shipwreck are those who try to cross
The sea of *samsara* on these poor rafts.

8 Ignorant of their ignorance, yet wise
In their own esteem, these deluded men
Proud of their vain learning go round and round
Like the blind led by the blind.

9–10 Living in darkness, immature, unaware
Of any higher good or goal, they fall
Again and again into the sea.

11 But those who are pure in heart, who practice
Meditation and conquer their senses

And passions, shall attain the immortal Self,
Source of all light and source of all life.

12 Action prompted by pleasure or profit
Cannot help anyone to cross this sea.
Seek a teacher who has realized the Self.

13 To a student whose heart is full of love,
Who has conquered his senses and passions,
The teacher will reveal the Lord of Love.

PART II

[1]

1 Imperishable is the Lord of Love.
As from a blazing fire thousands of sparks
Leap forth, so millions of beings arise
From the Lord of Love and return to him.

2 The Lord of Love is above name and form.
He is present in all and transcends all.
Unborn, without body and without mind,
From him comes every body and mind.

3 He is the source of space, air, fire, water,
And the earth that holds us all.

4 Fire is his head, the sun and moon his eyes,
The heavens his ears, the scriptures his voice,
The air his breath, the universe his heart,
And the earth his footrest. The Lord of Love
Is the innermost Self of all.

5 From him comes the fire that burns in the sun;
From the sky lit by sun and moon comes rain;
From rain comes food, from food the sexual seed;
All finally come from the Lord of Love.

6 From him come the scriptures, chants, and prayers,
Religious rites and sacrificial gifts;
From him come work, time, and givers of gifts,
And all things under the sun and moon.

7 From him come the gods of the natural world,
Men, beasts, and birds, and food to nourish them;
From him come all spiritual disciplines,
Meditation, truth, faith, and purity.

8 From him come the seven organs of sense,
 Seven hot desires and their sevenfold objects,
 And the seven levels of consciousness
 In the cavern of the heart.

9 From him come all the seas and the mountains,
 The rivers and the plants that support life.
 As the innermost Self of all, he dwells
 Within the cavern of the heart.

10 The Lord of Love is the one Self of all.
 He is detached work, spiritual wisdom,
 And immortality. Realize the Self
 Hidden in the heart, and cut asunder
 The knot of ignorance here and now.

[2]

1 Bright but hidden, the Self dwells in the heart.
 Everything that moves, breathes, opens, and closes
 Lives in the Self. He is the source of love
 And may be known through love but not through thought.
 He is the goal of life. Attain this goal!

2 The shining Self dwells hidden in the heart.
 Everything in the cosmos, great and small,
 Lives in the Self. He is the source of life,
 Truth beyond the transience of this world.
 He is the goal of life. Attain this goal!

3 Take the great bow of the sacred scriptures,
 Place on it the arrow of devotion;
 Then draw the bowstring of meditation
 And aim at the target, the Lord of Love.

4 The *mantra* is the bow, the aspirant
 Is the arrow, and the Lord the target.
 Now draw the bowstring of meditation,
 And hitting the target be one with him.

5 In his robe are woven heaven and earth,
 Mind and body. Realize him as the One
 Behind the many and stop all vain talk.
 He is the bridge from death to deathless life.

6 Where all the nerves meet like spokes in a wheel,
There he dwells, the One behind the many.
Meditate upon him in the *mantra*.
May he guide us from death to deathless life!

7 He knows everyone and sees everything.
It is his glory that fills the cosmos.
He resides in the city of the heart.

8 It is his power that moves body and mind.
May he guide us from death to deathless life!

9 When he is seen within us and without,
He sets right all doubts and dispels the pain
Of wrong actions committed in the past.

10 In the golden city of the heart dwells
The Lord of Love, without parts, without stain.
Know him as the radiant light of lights.

11 There shines not the sun, neither moon nor star,
Nor flash of lightning, nor fire lit on earth.
The Lord is the light reflected by all.
He shining, everything shines after him.

12 The Lord of Love is before and behind.
He extends to the right and to the left.
He extends above; he extends below.
There is no one here but the Lord of Love.
He alone is; in truth, he alone is.

PART III **[1]**

1 Like two golden birds perched on the selfsame tree,
Intimate friends, the ego and the Self
Dwell in the same body. The former eats
The sweet and sour fruits of the tree of life
While the latter looks on in detachment.

2 As long as we think we are the ego,
We feel attached and fall into sorrow.
But realize that you are the Self, the Lord
Of life, and you will be freed from sorrow.

3 When you realize that you are the Self,
Supreme source of light, supreme source of love,

You transcend the duality of life
And enter into the unitive state.

4 The Lord of Love shines in the hearts of all.
Seeing him in all creatures, the wise
Forget themselves in the service of all.
The Lord is their joy, the Lord is their rest;
Such as they are the lovers of the Lord.

5 By truth, meditation, and self-control
One can enter into this state of joy
And see the Self shining in a pure heart.

6 Truth is victorious, never untruth.
Truth is the way; truth is the goal of life,
Reached by sages who are free from self-will.

7 The effulgent Self, who is beyond thought,
Shines in the greatest, shines in the smallest,
Shines in the farthest, shines in the nearest,
Shines in the secret chamber of the heart.

8 Beyond the reach of the senses is he,
But not beyond the reach of a mind stilled
Through the practice of deep meditation.

9 Beyond the reach of words and works is he,
But not beyond the reach of a pure heart
Freed from the sway of the senses.

10 Sages are granted all the help they need
In everything they do to serve the Lord.
Let all those who seek their own fulfillment
Love and honor the illumined sage.

[2]

1 The wise have attained the unitive state,
And see only the resplendent Lord of Love.
Desiring nothing in the physical world,
They have become one with the Lord of Love.

2 Those who dwell on and long for sense-pleasure
Are born in a world of separateness.
But let them realize they are the Self
And all separateness will fall away.

3 Not through discourse, not through the intellect,
Not even through study of the scriptures
Can the Self be realized. The Self reveals
Himself to the one who longs for the Self.
Those who long for the Self with all their heart
Are chosen by the Self as his own.

4 Not by the weak, not by the unearnest,
Not by those who practice wrong disciplines
Can the Self be realized. The Self reveals
Himself as the Lord of Love to the one
Who practices right disciplines.

5 What the sages sought they have found at last.
No more questions have they to ask of life.
With self-will extinguished, they are at peace.
Seeing the Lord of Love in all around,
Serving the Lord of Love in all around,
They are united with him forever.

6 They have attained the summit of wisdom
By the steep path of renunciation.
They have attained to immortality
And are united with the Lord of Love.

7 When they leave the body, the vital force
Returns to the cosmic womb, but their work
Becomes a beneficial force in life
To bring others together in the Self.

8 The flowing river is lost in the sea;
The illumined sage is lost in the Self.
The flowing river has become the sea;
The illumined sage has become the Self.

9 Those who know the Self become the Self.
None in their family forgets the Self.
Freed from the fetters of separateness,
They attain to immortality.

10 Let this wisdom be taught only to those
Who obey the law of life's unity.
Let this wisdom be taught only to those
Who offer their lives to the Lord of Love.

11 This is the great truth taught in ancient times
By the sage Angiras to Shaunaka.
Let us adore the illumined sages!
Let us adore the illumined sages!
OM shanti shanti shanti

*May we hear only what is good for all.
May we see only what is good for all.
May we serve you, Lord of Love, all our life.
May we be used to spread your peace on earth.
OM shanti shanti shanti*