

The Philosophy of Meditation: With Special Reference to *Taittirīya* and *Māndukya Upaniśad*

Dr. Aditya Kumar Gupta

Assistant Professor, Dept. Of Philosophy,
Faculty of Arts, University of Delhi
E-mail: adityagitam@yahoo.com

Abstract—Meditation is that stage when we reach in thoughtless condition. It is the stage of being witness to physical and mental activities. Meditation is the unique contribution of India to the whole world. It comes out of India's philosophical tradition where soul and mind are not the same substances. Here, consciousness and thought process are not the same. The central question which has been discussed philosophically here is, 'Who am I?'. The real nature of human being is not his capacity of rationality; rather his identity is associated with consciousness. Meditation is the stay in such undisturbed consciousness. Different Indian Philosophers have tried to discover the ways by which we can reach to that stage. *Taittirīya Upaniśad* talks about five sheaths (*Panċa Kośas*) and meditation is the stage when we transcend these five sheaths and stay in undisturbed consciousness. *Māndukya Upaniśad* describes three stages, of consciousness- waking, Dream and Sleep. Meditation is the stage when transcend these stages and stay in fourth i.e. *Turiya*. Similarly *Yoga Sūtra* takes us, through its eight-fold steps, to *samādhi* stage which is again formless consciousness. The present article is an attempt to present a philosophy behind meditation. Here, the main focus of study is *Taittirīya Upaniśad* and *Māndukya Upaniśad*.

Keywords: Meditation, *Panċa Kośas*, *Taittirīya Upaniśad*, *Māndukya Upaniśad*, *Turiya*. Consciousness, *Nirvāna Śatakam*

People have developed many misconceptions regarding meditation. Some take it to be purely religious and non-scientific in nature, consequently taking meditation as out dated. Some people take it to be merely a union of soul and God whereas some others get confused between concentration and meditation. For them, meditation is just focusing mind on some religious or secular object. Due to such misconceptions, meditation ceases to become the part and parcel of a common man's modern lifestyle. Modern researches claim meditation can not only be the most effective tool for peace of human mind but can also be a perfect cure

for many diseases of human body. Meditation has a basic philosophy behind them that is quite scientific in nature. Despite being discovered in India, meditation and yoga transcend any regional or religious boundaries.

Meditation has a proper philosophy behind it. Without understanding such philosophical base, meditation can never be understood rightly. In fact, due to this philosophy, meditation and meditation techniques could be developed only in India. Western tradition takes mind and soul as the same entity i.e. thinking and conscious substances are not different. Human being has been identified as thinking substance. 'I think, therefore I Am'¹ was the declaration made by Descartes and such idea became the fashion for whole western philosophy after him. But if human being is thinking substance, he will always remain involved in thought process. And in such situation, meditation i.e. stage of conscious thought less-ness would be impossible.

Indian seers, despite having variations of schools, developed a common philosophy about human being. Here they were all, except *Cārvāka*, agreed on one point that thinking and conscious substances are not same i.e. Mind and Soul are not the same. Some have taken them as two different substances², whereas for others both are different stages of Consciousness³. *Buddhism*, on the other hand, takes both mind and so-called soul momentary thereby denying substance-hood to both. Meditation would be possible when we are able to discriminate between our true nature and that which is not the part of essential identity.

¹ Descartes, Rene, *Cogito Ergo Sum*, in *Discourse on the Method*

² Nyāya-Vaisesika

³ Advaita

Taittirīya Upaniṣad gives us the *Pancha Kośas Viveka*, to help discriminate between the self & the not-self. There are five layers of our personality on the self.. We need to identify each of these properly, so that we can see them in right perspective, and thus negate our notion that these layers are our real self, and thus this very viveka helps us to realise our true nature. Here, our nature has been revealed as *Panćakośātītaḥ* i.e. which transcends five sheaths, which are only accidental.

Añnamaya kośa is the first 'layer' of our personality where we all slip, and erroneously take it to be our Self. This layer of our personality is made up of Anna Rasa, and it grows because of this Anna Rasa, and in the end it goes back into this Anna Rasa alone. Anna Rasa means that 'essence' of our food, which the body retains & assimilates. While it is made up of inert matter it, and later goes back into mud again, yet it grows. It is living, it feels & responds. It has the capacity to reproduce. It is only when we take up this physical body that our lives start, and when we drop this body we 'die'.

While it is a fact that the *sthoola sharira*, which is made of & by the food we eat is a very important part of our personality, and we need to take proper care of it, yet to take it as 'I' is an error. We pay an unimaginable price of this error by imposing the limitations of this body on our Self, and take its limitations as our own limitations. As the very 'I' is erroneously & baselessly taken as limited, so the innings of our life thereafter starts with a sense of limitation, which no one of us likes. Subsequently the goal of our life is to shake off this deep sense of limitation within. There are ample reasons for us to believe this fact that we are not this physical body. It is an 'object' of our consciousness. We as a 'subject' objectify our body, so we are naturally something different from it. We all know that subject is always different from object. Secondly when a person dies, the body remains here and we say that the person is dead & gone. Something, which was present in a body a short time ago is no more. So it is evident that there is some 'I' which is different from this body. It alone takes up this body, and the body exists till that 'I' resides in & manifests from it. At this stage we need not jump to any conclusions about what the nature of real 'I' will or should be. At this stage we just need to keep aside our various errors. Negating the errors progressively unveils the Self. Once we have kept aside all errors, then it will

be very easy to know that which is not transitory or limited. That which always is, that which is not taken up & left, that which is not an 'object', but exists as a knower of all objects; it alone can be called as the 'subject, or 'I – the '*ātmā*'.

The manifestation of the error of taking our self as the *Añnamaya kośa* is in the form of experiences & perceptions like: I am fat or thin, I am white or black, I am young or old, I am man or a women, I am healthy or sick, I was born & will die etc. All these statements refer only to various aspects of this layer of our personality, which is made up of Anna. In other words, when we realize the truth of our self as something other than this *Añnamaya kośa*, then none of these things are thereafter associated with 'I'. They may remain a fact at a particular level of our personality, but will not be seen as 'my' definition, and this makes all the difference. Knowledge of the truth of our self gives us an altogether new identity, a new birth & life. The various social & other problems connected with us being young & old, white & black, man or women etc attain unmanageable proportions & complexities only because of our erroneous association with this particular layer of our personality, and become petty things if we are not these things, but something which is a common denominator of all.

The lesson we learn from knowing that the *Añnamaya* is a *kośa*, is that we are prompted to re-define our relationship with our body. It is extremely necessary that we drop this error that 'I am this body' before we enter the portals of the realization of our true Self. In fact this negation is the very process of Self-Knowledge.

The inert *Añnamaya kośa* is sustained & energized by a layer or level in our personality, which is an Energy Layer. The word *Prāna* when roughly translated means energy. We can visualize the existence of a energy-providing layer for all our physical activities. Every bit of physical activity requires energy. We are constantly acting & busy at some level, either body, sense organs or mind. Every activity requires lots of energy. It is indeed astounding that every person has as though access to infinite amount of energy, and that also without paying any bills for it. There are conscious activities, and there are unconscious activities. Conscious activities may have rest periods, but unconscious activities are continuous.

Our breathing, heart beats, circulation, digestion etc all carry on almost continuously. Sometimes we do feel exhausted & drained, but nevertheless the flow of energy is always there - no disruption in power supply here. This astounding physiological system, which gives us energy backup is the *Prānamaya Kośas*.

Taittirīya Upaniśad tells us that this 'layer' of our personality is almost like 'ātmā' of the *Annamaya Kośas*. It is because of this *Prāna* that we live. The moment *Prāna* leaves the body, all activities come to a halt, and we have to start thinking of the last rites of this lifeless physical body. No wonder an individual is commonly called as *Prānī* in sanskrit and hindi languages. So important is the place of *Prāna*. We also see that if we regulate our *Prāna* properly then many physical ailments come to an end.

However much important this *Kośas* is, it is only a *Kośas*, not our real self. The most evident logic against this *Kośas* is that it is 'inert'. It is not something conscious. *Prāna* neither has intelligence or feelings.. A conscious entity can stop it, regulate it, or redirect it. *Prāna* is directly connected with our mind. The moment mind gets tensed your prānic activity too gets hyper. Deeper breathing, increased heart beats etc. Mind, which appears to be a conscious entity is its master. So we must know *Prānamaya Kośa* as just one of the layers of your personality.

Taittirīya Upaniśad reveals that the 'ātmā' of *Prānamaya Kośas* is the *Manomaya Kośas*. Our *Prāna*, the vital energy, which takes care of the energy backup for all our physical, physiological & mental activities is sustained and thus is directly affected by our mind. Ramana Maharshi in one of his teaching says that mind & *Prāna* are like two branches of one tree, both connected together below. We can see this direct correlation of mind & *Prāna*, when we see the increased pulse & breathing rate the moment the mind gets anxiety ridden. If however, we can keep our mind pleasant & cool, then the physiological activities too get positively affected. What exactly is this *Manomaya Kośa*?

Manomaya Kośa is that layer of our personality, which is called as mind. We have what is called as an *Antahkarana* (inner instrument). This broadly has two parts - the mind and the intellect. The former constitutes the *manomaya Kośas*, while the latter is called as the

Vijñānamaya Kośa. Mind is basically the thoughts layer of our personality. They could be any thoughts. Thoughts prompted by memories, conditionings of likes or dislikes, various emotions or even wisdom. Thought is that because of which we are 'conscious of something'. This awareness of something or anything is a thought, and in the mind we have thoughts of various things continuously flowing. Thoughts which are as per our likes invoke positive feelings, while thoughts pertaining to our dislikes invoke negative emotions. Those who do not know how these thoughts come about are continuously buffeted by the various thoughts. They are helplessly caught up in their moods. Not knowing their secret & genesis they even arrogate their good & bad moods and experiences to destiny, or even to the whims & fancies of God.

The Upaniśad reveals that the self of manomaya is the *Vijñānamaya*. *Vijñānamaya* includes our intellect and also the Gyana Indriya's (the equipments of perception). This level is basically that of knowledge. Yes, we are being told that all thoughts are product and reflection of our 'knowledge'. Knowledge is our understanding, our appreciation of the fundamentals of life. The very fact we all have a self-identity, reveals that all of us have some understanding about ourselves, it doesn't matter, whether it is right or wrong, but it is there. The fact that we have desires, shows that we have certain fundamental understanding about the real source of joy & happiness, the reality of things outside etc. Every thought has at its root, certain presumptions, which exist in our unconscious mind. We may have got these as impressions from outside, but the fact we choose to accept certain things reveals our nature & level of understanding.

The *Vijñānamaya Kośa* is obviously these conclusions & presumptions which sustain our thoughts, and the moments some basic premise changes, we see how drastically the person changes too. *Buddhi* or intellect is an intelligent equipment. We can reflect & deliberate on any thought. We can objectify thoughts, go deep into the presumptions sustaining thoughts and even quieten all thoughts effortlessly. This is our *Vijñānamaya Kośa*. However, there is something beyond *buddhi* too, which this *buddhi* alone has to 'see', and that is our *Ānādamaya Kośa*.

What is that which compels the *buddhi* to plan, conclude, & discern. Obviously there is some motivation. That which motivates the *buddhi* is our final *Kośas* - the *Ānañdamaya Kośa*. Motivation indicates drive. It reveals something for which we live & exist. It is something, which prompts all faculties to work & be active. Therefore everyone should be clear about their motivation. Clearer & stronger the motivation better is the output of work. The buck of all desires & essence of motivation is in seeking happiness. This is indeed the basic motivation, this alone drives everyone for doing whatever one does. Attainment of a state of deep fulfilment. There is no greater fruit of any of our action than our satisfaction. Money fulfils our needs and brings happiness, name gives happiness, sensual gratification is for this alone, and so on. The desire for happiness alone motivates us to think, enjoy & act. That level of existence wherein we are experiencing happiness is called by the Upaniṣads as '*Ānañdamaya Kośa*'.

Ānañdamaya Kośa is the '*ātmā*' of *Vijñānamaya Kośa*. It alone sustains the latter. Desire for *ānanda* alone motivates the latter. So deep down in our *buddhi* is this realm of 'joy'. It apparently appears that this is the summum bonum of our life, the ultimate which we can dream of, that we have everything we cherish & dream of. However, Upaniṣads say that this is not the ultimate, because however much we 'experience' *ānanda*, we basically still remain a seeker & are still in bondage. It is this 'desire' to experience *ānanda*, and having experienced *ānanda*, the desire to 'hold on' to all that which gives us *ānanda* is indicative of the continuity of our insufficiency. Desire of experience of *ānanda* indicates a lacking self, and as long as that exists no matter how much we experience *ānanda*, we shall continue to live in lack & limitation. So awakening in *Ānañdamaya Kośas*, or the realm of 'experience' of *ānanda* is not the ultimate state. Experience of some ecstatic *ānanda* is not moksha either, it is still the realm of bondage, we are still in ignorance. The final step is the realization that 'I am that'. I am of the nature of bliss. One who has this knowledge is free, he or she alone is liberated, rest will continue to live in the realm of an '*ātmā*', in the *pancha-Kośas*. It is this direct realization, which is the subject matter of Self-Knowledge, i.e. Vedānta.

Taittirīya Upaniṣad reveals, that our real self, the '*ātmā*' is *PanchaKośas* vyatariktah, i.e. that which transcends the five *Kośas*'. Transcendence is not that which exists in a realm beyond the five *Kośas*, but that which even though pervades these five layers of existence exists independent of these five *Kośas*. While the *Kośas*' are dependent for their existence on this timeless divinity, the self is independent of these. Starting from *Annamaya Kośa* the five *Kośas* are progressively subtler, so as we progress to identify & discover each of these *Kośas* we simultaneously make our minds subtler too. The Self is the subtlest of all these, so the appreciation of these five *Kośas* also becomes a means to prepare our minds for the ultimate realization. *Pancha Kośas Viveka* is a one of the finest journey to the ethereal, divine and transcendental realm. It is the valid means of realization revealed by the Upaniṣads themselves for the one, non-dual divinity.

Śankara, when asked 'who are you?' by sage Govinda Bhagawatpād, replies about his real nature *via negativa*. He says, 'I am neither the mind, nor the Intellect, Neither ego nor Chitta, neither ears nor the tongue, neither nose nor the eyes, neither the sky nor the Earth, neither the fire nor the Air, I am, in fact, Pure consciousness-blissful and eternal...Neither the *Prāna* nor Five vital airs, neither seven elements nor five *Kośas*, Neither the speech, nor hands, neither feel nor organs of excretion...I am, indeed, pure consciousness, eternal blissful'⁴. This reply of Śankara, explains the real nature of reality and prepares the ground for meditation.

*Māndukya Upaniṣad*⁵, which is perhaps the most important of all the Vedāntic texts from the point of view of Vedāntic *meditation*. The *Māndukya Upaniṣad* is an analysis of the states of consciousness because the Vedāntic meditation of the Upaniṣads is mainly a meditation on consciousness. Consciousness is the Supreme Being, *prajñānam brahma*, and, therefore, a study of consciousness is imperative in a meditation on consciousness. The bound soul is a state of consciousness, the liberated soul is also a state of

⁴ मनो बुद्ध्यहंकारचित्तानि नाहम् न च श्रोत्र जिह्वे न च घ्राण नेत्रे
न च व्योम भूमिर् न तेजो न वायुः चिदानन्द रूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥
न च प्राण संज्ञो न वै पञ्चवायुः न वा सप्तधातुर् न वा पञ्चकोशः
न वाक्पाणिपादौ न चोपस्थपायू चिदानन्द रूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥

⁵ A Lecture by Swami Krishnananda, on JAN 14TH 1973

consciousness, and meditation is a condition of consciousness. The whole of the Upaniṣadic teaching is, therefore, a huge essay on consciousness.

Entering into a study of the states of consciousness, the *Māndukya Upaniṣad* gives us a beautiful exposition of at least three of the strata of consciousness, which we generally call the waking, the dream and the sleep states. These states are states of consciousness, the condition through which our essential being passes in respect of its object. There are no states for consciousness. It is eternal. But yet it appears to have states when it sets itself in opposition to its object. The three states mentioned here are really three states of conflict of consciousness with its object. If the consciousness is not set in opposition to its object, there would be no states at all. But there are objects of consciousness, and it is these objects that create a series of states. The difference in the states of consciousness is due to the difference in the kind of object that is presented to consciousness in the different states. When the objects change in their relationships and intensity, the consciousness also seems to change.

The waking consciousness, the condition in which we are at present, is that state of consciousness where it is in relation to physical objects. The confrontation of consciousness in the waking condition is with physical things, the physical universe. We are struggling to find a proper relationship of our consciousness with the world outside. The activities of life, all the enterprises of whatever kind in which we may engage ourselves in the waking condition, are a struggle of consciousness to recognise a balance between itself and the object. This is waking life. We are busy throughout the day in various professions and fields merely to bring about a balance of our consciousness with the outside world, in which we do not succeed. Whatever be our effort in bringing about this equilibrium of ourselves with the world, we remain a failure. No man has established a balance between himself and the world, but yet this is the aim behind the activities of the world. And when the mind is tired of this effort at striking a balance between itself and the world outside, it withdraws itself due to sheer fatigue and the inability of the bodily condition to maintain this period of tension for a long time. Then we fall back into an internal struggle similar to our struggle with the external world. This is called dream. The

condition of dream is that in which consciousness is in a state of tension similar to the one in waking, except that the objects in dream are psychic while in waking they are physical.

The struggle continues, but with imagined objects. There is very little difference between the waking and dreaming conditions as far as the efforts and struggle of consciousness are concerned, and pain and pleasure are concerned. Irrespective of the fact that there is a difference between physical and psychic objects as they appear in waking and dream, as far as the experience himself is concerned, there is very little difference. The sorrows and joys of our waking life can come to us also in dream, and consciousness may not find itself in a different situation.

But the purpose of consciousness is to cease, to put an end to all tension with the objects, in which effort it has not succeeded in the waking condition and it is not going to succeed in the dreaming condition either. Merely because we only contemplate objects in the mind instead of actually confronting them physically, it does not mean that the mind has ceased from its efforts. What gives pain, inconvenience and discomfort is struggle of every kind. Consciousness falls back into a condition of inactivity in sleep where, though it is not in a state of harmony with its objects, at least it is unconscious of the disharmony that is there.

However, at this stage, we must differentiate between *samādhi* and sleep. While in *samādhi* we have a consciousness of harmony, in sleep there is an unconsciousness of disharmony. Quite different and opposite they are, though they look alike. The difference is as between the joy of a wise man and the joy of a fool. Both are happy people. A stupid idiot is happy and a genius also is happy, but the difference is very obvious. The negative condition into which we enter in sleep is a defeatist position of consciousness where it has struggled but failed in its attempt. So the Upaniṣad tells us all these three states are phenomenal. They are states to be traversed through, transcended, and the real nature of consciousness cannot be recognised or seen in waking, dream or sleep. Sleep is, actually speaking, the mischief maker. The real ringleader we will find in the deep sleep state. The potentiality for suffering is there in a covered form even in the state of deep sleep, like a tree existing in a seed, and it will sprout up into activities,

into actual pain and pleasure experiences, when we have the dream and the waking conditions.

So the three states – waking, dream and sleep – are only temporal efforts at the bringing about of a cessation of disharmony between consciousness and objects, now struggling, now turning back, and then completely forgetting the trouble itself by exhaustion. It is like a warrior going to the battlefield, fighting, getting tired and dreaming of the battle in his home, having returned from the battlefield unable to conquer the enemy, and then unable to even bear this suffering, going to sleep as if everything is okay, but waking again only to realise the fact that the battle is going on and he has yet to face it. The whole of the *samsara chakra*, the cycle of births and deaths, pains and joys of life, is a series, a circular movement, as it were, of the effort of consciousness to free itself completely from the clutches of objective confrontation. So we are no better whether we are in waking, dream or sleep. We are equally fools in all three states.

Meditation is the stay in fourth state of consciousness, called *Turiya*. This fourth state of consciousness is not really a fourth mathematically or arithmetically. It is fourth in the sense that it is not any one of the three mentioned already. It is universal consciousness, and therefore, we cannot call it the fourth. But because it is not any of these three, we categorise it as the fourth one, *Turiya*, for our own convenience. In the waking condition we are externally conscious, in the dream condition internally conscious, in the sleeping condition absolutely unconscious, and in the *Turiya* we are super-conscious. External consciousness, internal consciousness, unconsciousness and super-consciousness are the states through which we have to pass.

Super-consciousness, sometimes called the supramental state, the *Turiya*, is inclusive of all that is in the three other states of consciousness. Whatever was there of worth and meaning in the condition of waking, dream or sleep is to be found in the *Turiya* also, only freed from the tension of it. The *Turiya* is the goal of life. It is described as, 'That is known as the fourth quarter: neither inward-turned nor outward-turned consciousness, nor the two together; not an indifferently mass of consciousness; neither knowing, nor unknowing; invisible, ineffable, intangible, devoid of

characteristics, inconceivable, indefinable, its sole essence being the consciousness of its own Self; the coming to rest of all relative existence; utterly quiet; peaceful; blissful: without a second: this is the Ātman, the Self; this is to be realised'⁶ This is how the *Māndukya* describes the fourth state of consciousness. We are not aware of anything outside there, as we are seeing now in front of us so many things exist, nor are we seeing things inside as in dream. In that condition we are not externally aware of anything, nor internally aware of anything, nor are we unconscious. Then what are we? We are conscious. Conscious of what? Not of external things, not of internal things. Nobody can say what it is. *Prapañcōpaśamam*. The world ceases to exist there. It is dissolved like a sugar ball in water. The whole universe gets dissolved into it. *Prapañcōpaśamam, śāntam, śivam, advaitam, caturtham manyante, sa ātmā* – that is our Self, that is our essential nature. Our essential nature is not a struggle with objects, the persons and things in the world, nor is our essential nature a condition of sleep and reverie. The essential condition is universality of consciousness. This is the stage of Meditation.

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⁶ *nāntaḥ-prajñam, na bahiḥ prajñam, nobhayataḥ-prajñam, na prajñānā-ghanam, na prajñam, nāprajñam; adṛṣtam, avyavahārayam, agrāhyam, alakṣaṇam, acintyam, avyapadeśyam, ekātma-pratyaya-sāram, prapañcōpaśamam, śāntam, śivam, advaitam, caturtham manyante, sa ātmā, sa vijñeyah (Mand. 7).*

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