Attaining Immortality
Category : January/February 2001
Published by Anonymous on Jan. 02, 2001

FROM THE THE VEDAS

Attaining Immortality

Nikhilananda translates Yajnavalkya's discourse on the Self

Maitreyi, my dear," said Yajnavalkya, I am going to renounce this life. Let me make a final settlement between you and Katyayani."

Thereupon Maitreyi said, "Venerable Sir, if indeed the whole Earth, full of wealth, belonged to me, would I be immortal through that?" "No," replied Yajnavalkya, "your life would be just like that of people who have plenty. Of Immortality, however, there is no hope through wealth."

Then Maitreyi said: "What then should I do with that which would not make me immortal? Tell me, venerable sir, of that alone which you know to be the only means of attaining Immortality."

Yajnavalkya replied: "My dear, you have been my beloved even before, and now you say what is after my heart. Come, sit down; I will explain it to you. As I explain it, meditate on what I say."

Then Yajnavalkya said: "Verily, not for the sake of the husband, my dear, is the husband loved, but he is loved for the sake of the Self [which, in its true nature, is one with the Supreme Self.

"Verily, not for the sake of the wife, my dear, is the wife loved, but she is loved for the sake of the Self.

"Verily, not for the sake of the sons, my dear, are the sons

loved, but they are loved for the sake of the Self.

"Verily, not for the sake of wealth, my dear, is wealth loved, but it is loved for the sake of the Self.

"Verily, not for the sake of the brahmin, my dear, is the brahmin loved, but he is loved for the sake of the Self.

"Verily, not for the sake of the worlds, my dear, are the worlds loved, but they are loved for the sake of the Self.

"Verily, not for the sake of the Gods, my dear, are the Gods loved, but they are loved for the sake of the Self.

"Verily, not for the sake of the beings, my dear, are the beings loved, but they are loved for the sake of the Self.

"Verily, not for the sake of the All, my dear, is the All loved, but it is loved for the sake of the Self.

"Verily, my dear Maitreyi, it is the Self that should be realized, should be heard of, reflected on and meditated upon. By the realization of the Self, my dear, through hearing, reflection and meditation--all this is known.

"The Gods reject one who knows them as different from the Self. The beings reject one who knows them as different from the Self. The All rejects one who knows it as different from the Self. These worlds, these Gods, these beings, and this All--are that Self.

"As the various individual notes of a drum, when it is beaten, cannot be grasped by themselves, but are grasped only when the general note of the drum or the general sound produced by different kinds of strokes is grasped;

"And as the various individual notes of a vina, when it is played, cannot be grasped by themselves, but are grasped only when the general note of the vina or the general sound produced by different kinds of playing is grasped;

[Similarly, no particular objects are perceived in the waking and dream states apart from Pure Intelligence.]

"As from a fire kindled with wet fuel various kinds of smoke issue forth, even so, my dear, the Rig Veda, the Yajur

Veda, the Sama Veda, the Atharvangirasa, history (itihasa), mythology (purana), the arts (vidya), the Upanishads, verses (slokas), aphorisms (sutras), elucidations (anuvyakhyanas) and explanations (vyakhyanas) are like the breath of this infinite Reality. From this Supreme Self are all these, indeed, breathed forth.

"As a lump of salt dropped into water becomes dissolved in water and cannot be taken out again, but wherever we taste the water it tastes salty, even so, my dear, this great, endless, infinite Reality is Pure Intelligence alone. This Self comes out as a separate entity from these elements and with their destruction this separate existence also is destroyed. After attaining oneness, it has no more consciousness. This is what I say, my dear."

So said Yajnavalkya.

Then Maitreyi said: "Just here you have bewildered me, venerable Sir, by saying that after attaining oneness the Self has no more consciousness."

"For when there is duality, as it were, then one smells another, one sees another, one hears another, one speaks to another, one thinks of another, one knows another. But when everything has become the Self, then what should one smell and through what, what should one see and through what, what should one hear and through what, what should one speak and through what, what should one think and through what, what should one know and through what? Through what should one know That owing to which all this is known--through what, my dear, should one know the Knower?"

Shukla Yajur Veda

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.4.1-14

Swami Nikhilananda (1895-1973), was founder and spiritual leader of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York

from 1933 to his Maha Samadhi. His Upanishad translations in four volumes was completed in 1959.

The Vedas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, sruti, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1,200 bce), Bible New Testament (100 ce), Koran (630 ce) or Zend Avesta (600 bce). Four in number, Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, the Vedas include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6,000 bce.

Who Is a Hindu?

"Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are diverse; and the realization of the truth that the number of gods to be worshiped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of the Hindu religion." B.G. Tilak's definition of what makes one a basic Hindu, as quoted by India's Supreme Court. On July 2, 1995 the Court referred to it as an "adequate and satisfactory formula."