



English translation of Prasna Upanishad

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English translation of
Prasna Upanishad

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Prasna Upanishad

Question I

1

Om. Sukesa, the Son of Bharadvaja and Satyakama, the son of Sibi and Sauryayani, belonging to the family of Garga and Kausalya, the son of Asvala and Vaidarbhi, belonging to the family of Bhrigu and Kahandhi, the Son of Katya—all these, devoted to Brahman and firm in Brahman and seeking the Supreme Brahman, approached, fuel in hand, the venerable Pippalada with the thought that he would tell them everything about Brahman.

2

The rishi said to them: Stay with me a year more, practising austerities, chastity and faith. Then you may ask questions according to your desire. If we know we shall tell you all.

3

Then Kabandhi, the son of Katya, came to him and asked: Sir, whence are these creatures born?

4

To him the teacher said: Prajapati, the Creator, was desirous of progeny. He performed austerities and having performed austerities, created the pair, the moon (rayi) and the sun (prana). He said to Himself: "These two should produce creatures for Me in manifold ways."

5

The sun is, indeed, prana, life; the moon is rayi, food. Food is, indeed, all this—what has form and what is formless. Therefore everything having form is, indeed, food.

6

Now the sun, when it rises, enters the eastern quarter and thereby enfolds the living beings of the east in its rays. And when it illuminates the southern, the western, the northern, the lower, the upper and the intermediate quarters—when it illuminates everything—it thus enfolds all living beings in its rays.

7–8

That sun rises every day—the sun, which is the soul of all creatures, the soul of all forms, which is life and fire. This has been described by the following rik:

The wise know him who is in all forms, full of rays, all-knowing, non-dual, the support of all life, the eye of all beings, the giver of heat. There rises the sun, the thousand-rayed, existing in a hundred forms, the life of all creatures.

9

The year, verily, is Prajapati and there are two paths thereof: the Southern and the Northern. Those who perform sacrifices and engage in pious actions, as duties to be done, win only the World of the Moon; verily they return hither again. Therefore the rishis who desire off-spring travel by the Southern Path. This Path of the Fathers is rayi, food.

10

But those who seek the Self through austerity, chastity, faith and knowledge travel by the Northern Path and win the Sun. The Sun, verily, is the support of all lives. He is immortal and fearless; He is the final goal. Thence they do not return. This path is blocked for the ignorant. Concerning it there is the following verse:

11

Some call Him the father with five feet and with twelve forms, the giver of rain and the dweller in the region above the sky. Others, again, say that the world is fixed in the omniscient Sun, endowed with seven wheels and six spokes.

12

The month, verily, is Prajapati. Its dark half, verily, is food, rayi; its bright half, the eater, prana. Therefore some rishis perform sacrifice in the bright half, some in the other half.

13

Day and night, verily, are Prajapati. Of these, day is the eater, prana and night, the food, rayi. Those who join in sexual enjoyment by day verily dissipate life; but to join in sexual enjoyment by night is, verily, chastity.

14

Food, verily, is Prajapati. From that comes semen; from semen are all these creatures born.

15

Those, therefore, who practise this rule of Prajapati beget a pair. But Brahmaloaka belongs to those who observe austerity and chastity and in whom truth is firmly established.

16

The stainless World of Brahma belongs to those in whom there is no crookedness, no falsehood, no deception.

Question II

1

Then Vaidarbhi, belonging to the family of Bhrigu, asked him: Sir, how many gods support the body of the created being? How many of these manifest their power through it? And which one, furthermore, is paramount?

2

To the disciple he said: Space, akasa, verily is that god—the wind, fire, water, earth, speech, mind, eye and ear, as well. These, having manifested their glory, said boastfully: "We support this body and uphold it."

3

To them prana, the chiefmost said: "Do not fall into delusion. I alone, dividing myself into five parts, support this body and uphold it." But they were incredulous.

4

Prana, out of pride, rose upward, as it were, from the body. Now, when it rose upward all the others rose upward also and when it settled down they all settled down with it. As bees go out when their queen goes out and return when she returns, even so did speech, mind, eye and ear. They, being satisfied, praised prana.

5

It burns as fire, it is the sun, it is the rain; it is Indra, it is the wind, it is the earth, it is food. It is the luminous god. It is being and non-being; it is immortality.

6

As spokes in the hub of a wheel, all are fixed in prana, including the Rig-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sama-Veda, the kshattriyas and the brahmins.

7

As Prajapati thou movest about in the womb; it is thou, indeed, who art born again. To thee, O Prana, creatures bring offerings, to thee who dwellest in the body with the organs.

8

Thou art the chief bearer of oblations to the gods and the first offering to the departed fathers; thou art the true activities of the rishis, of the Atharvangiras.

9

Indra thou art, O Prana and Rudra, too, in prowess. Thou art the Protector. Thou movest in the sky; thou art the sun, the lord of lights.

10

When, O Prana, thou showerest down rain, these creatures of thine are delighted, thinking there will be as much food as they desire.

11

Thou art vratya, O Prana and the Ekarshi Fire that devours the butter. Thou art the Supreme Lord of all. We are the givers of the butter that thou consumest, O Matarisva! Thou art our father.

12

That form of thine which abides in speech, which abides in the ear, which abides in the eye and which pervades the mind, make propitious. Go not away!

13

All that exists here is under the control of prana and also what exists in heaven. Protect us as a mother her sons; bestow upon us prosperity and wisdom.

Question III

1

Then Kausalya, the son of Asvala, asked Pippalada: Sir, whence is this prana born? How does it come into this body? How does it abide in the body after it has divided itself? How

does it depart? How does it support the external and how the internal?

2

To him the teacher replied: You are asking difficult questions; you must be exceedingly devoted to Brahman. Therefore I will answer you.

3

This prana is born of Atman. As a shadow is cast by a person, so this prana is, by Atman. Through the activity of the mind it comes into this body.

4

As an emperor commands his officials, saying; "Rule these villages or those," so this prana employs the other pranas, each in its separate place.

5

Prana engages apana in the organs of excretion and generation; he himself moves through the mouth and nose and dwells in the eye and ear. In the middle is samana; it distributes equally what has been offered as food in the fire in the stomach. From this prana fire arise the seven flames.

6

The atman dwells in the heart, where there are one hundred and one arteries (nadi); for each of these there are one hundred branches and for each of these branches, again, there are seventy-two thousand subsidiary vessels. Vyana moves in these.

7

And then udana, ascending upward through one of them, conducts the departing soul to the virtuous world, for its virtuous deeds; to the sinful world, for its sinful deeds; and to the world of men, for both.

8

The sun, verily, is the external prana; for it rises, favouring the prana in the eye. The deity that exists in the earth controls the apana of man. The space, akasa, between heaven and earth is samana. The air is vyana.

9

Fire, verily, is udana; therefore he whose fire has been extinguished goes out for rebirth, with the senses absorbed in the mind.

10

Whatever one's thinking, with that one enters into prana. Prana joined with fire, together with the soul, leads to whatever world has been fashioned by thought.

11

The wise man who thus knows prana does not lose his offspring and becomes immortal. As to this there is the following verse:

12

He who knows the origin of prana, its entry, its place, its fivefold distribution, its internal aspect and also its external, obtains immortality; yea, he obtains immortality.

Question IV

1

Next Sauryayani, belonging to the family of Garga, asked: Sir, what are they that sleep in man and what are they that remain awake in him? Which deity is it that sees dreams? Whose is the happiness? In whom, again, are all these gathered together?

2

To him Pippalada replied: O Gargya, as the rays of the sun, when it sets, are gathered in that luminous orb and again go forth when it rises, even so, verily, all these—the objects and the senses—become one in the superior god, the mind. Therefore at that time a man hears not, sees not, smells not, tastes not, touches not, speaks not, grasps not, enjoys not, emits not and does not move about. He sleeps—that is what people say.

3

The prana fires remain awake in this city. Apana is the Garhapatya Fire and vyana, the Anvaharyapachana Fire. And prana is the Ahavaniya Fire, so called from being taken—since it is taken from the Garhapatya Fire.

4

Samana is so called because it distributes equally the two oblations, namely, the out-breathing and the in-breathing; it is the priest. The mind, verily, is the sacrificer. Udana is the fruit of the sacrifice, because it leads the sacrificer every day, in deep sleep, to Brahman.

5

There, in dreams, that god, the mind, experiences glory. Whatever has been seen he sees again; whatever has been heard he hears again; whatever has been experienced in different countries and quarters, he experiences again. Whatever has been seen or not seen, heard or not heard and whatever is real or not real—he sees it all. He sees all, himself being all.

6

When the jiva is overcome by light he sees no dreams; at that time, in this body, arises this happiness.

7–8

As a bird goes to a tree to roost, even so, O friend, all this rests in the Supreme Atman: Earth and its subtle counterpart, water and its subtle counterpart, fire and its subtle counterpart, air and its subtle counterpart, akasa and its subtle counterpart, the eye and what can be seen, the ear and what can be heard, the nose and what can be smelt, the taste and what can be tasted, the skin and what can be touched, the organ of speech and what can be spoken, the hands and what can be grasped, the organ of generation and what can be enjoyed, the organ of excretion and what can be excreted, the feet and what is their

destination, the mind (manas) and what can be thought, the intellect (buddhi) and what can be comprehended, the ego (ahamkara) and the object of egoism, the memory (chitta) and its object, knowledge (tejah) and its object, prana and what is to be supported.

9

He, verily, it is who sees, feels, hears, smells, tastes, thinks and knows. He is the doer, the intelligent self, the purusha. He is established in the Highest, the imperishable Atman.

10

He who knows that imperishable Being, bright, without shadow, without body, without colour, verily attains the Supreme, the undecaying Purusha, O my good friend, he who knows Atman becomes all-knowing, becomes all. About it there is the following verse:

11

He, O friend, who knows that imperishable Being wherein rests the intelligent self, together with the gods, the pranas and the elements—he becomes all-knowing and enters into all.

Question V

1

Then Satyakama, the son of Sibi, asked Pippalada; Sir, if among men someone should here meditate on the syllable AUM until death, which world, verily, would he win thereby?

2

He replied: O Satyakama, the syllable AUM is the Supreme Brahman and also the other Brahman. Therefore he who knows it attains, with its support, the one or the other.

3

If he meditates on one letter (matra), then, being enlightened by that alone, he quickly comes back to earth after death. The rik verses lead him to the world of men. By practising austerity, chastity and faith he enjoys greatness.

4

If, again, he meditates on the second letter, he attains the mind and is led up by the yajur verses to the intermediate space, to the Plane of the Moon. Having enjoyed greatness in the Plane of the Moon, he returns hither again.

5

Again, he who meditates on the Highest Person through this syllable AUM consisting of three letters, becomes united with the effulgent Sun. As a snake is freed from its skin, even so he is freed from sin.

6

The three letters of AUM, if employed separately, are mortal; but when joined together in meditation on the total Reality and used properly on the activities of the external, internal and intermediate states, the knower trembles not.

7

The wise man, meditating on AUM, attains this world by means of the rik verses; the intermediate world by means of the yajur verses; and that which is known to the seers by means of the sama verses. And also through the syllable AUM he realises that which is tranquil, free from decay, death and fear and which is the Highest.

Question VI

1

Then Sukesa, the son of Bharadvaja, said to Pippalada: Sir, Hiranyabha, the prince of Kosala, once came to me and asked this question: "O son of Bharadvaja, do you know the Person with sixteen parts?" I said to the prince: "I do not know Him; if I knew Him, why should I not tell you? Surely he who speaks what is not true withers away to the very root; therefore I should not speak untruth." Then he silently mounted his chariot and went away. Now I ask you: Where does that Person dwell?

2

Pippalada said to him: That Person—He from whom these sixteen parts arise—is verily here within the body.

3

The Purusha reflected: "What is it by whose departure I shall depart and by whose staying I shall stay?"

4

He created prana; from prana faith, space, air, fire, water, earth, the organs, mind, food; from food virility, austerity, the Vedic hymns, sacrifice, the worlds; and in the worlds He created names.

5

As these flowing rivers, bound for the ocean, disappear into the ocean after having reached it, their names and forms being destroyed and are called simply the ocean—even so, these sixteen parts of the seer, whose goal is the Purusha, disappear into the Purusha after having reached Him, their names and forms being destroyed and are called simply the Purusha. He becomes free of parts and immortal. On this there is the following verse:

6

Know Him, the Purusha, who alone is to be known and in whom the parts rest firm, like the spokes in the nave of a wheel, that death may not affect you.

7

Pippalada said to them: Thus far, indeed, I know the Supreme Brahman; there is nothing higher than this.

8

And they, worshipping him, said: Thou, indeed, art our father—thou who hast taken us across our ignorance to the other shore.

Adoration to the supreme rishis! Adoration to the supreme rishis!

-- Prasna Upanishad --