



## **THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD**

**SWAMI KRISHNANANDA**

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**CHAPTER I**

**Third Brahmana**

### **THE SUPERIORITY OF THE VITAL FORCE AMONG ALL FUNCTIONS**

26. tasya haitasya samno yah suvarnam veda, bhavati hasya suvarnam, tasya vai svara eva suvarnam, bhavati hasya suvarnam, ya evam etat samnah suvarnam veda.
27. tasya haitasya samno yah pratistham veda, prati ha tisthati, tasya vai vag eva pratistha vaci hi khalv esa etat pranah pratisthito giyate, anna ity u haika ahuh.

In connection with the meditation on the Sama, and the harmony between the Prana and speech, it was said that the intonation in the chant of the Veda, which is Sama, is very important, because the way in which it is chanted or sung has direct connection with the meaning that is conveyed or the objective that is intended by means of the recitation. It is said further, in the following passages, that the correct pronunciation also is important, in addition to the intonation. The letters, the words, the phrases, have to be pronounced in a proper manner, with the correct accent at the proper places, in addition to, or together with the method of chant. This is the resting place or establishment of the Prana. By this, one gets established in the power that is Sama, which is, again, the unity between the Prana and the power of speech, or to carry the meaning further to its broader or more general sense, the harmony between the Prana and all the senses, so that one gets totally integrated in personality by the meditation on the Sama. One who knows this, obtains a resting place.

Now, a very important chant is explained, which is called the Pavamana Abhyaroha. The Abhyaroha, here, means the 'elevated holy chant'. It is all-purifying, and that is why it is called Pavamana.

28.athatah pavamananam evabhyarohah, sa vai khalu prastota sama prastauti, sa yatra prastuyat, tad etani japed: 'asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, mrtyor mamrtam gamaya' iti, sa yad aha, asato ma sad gamaya iti, mrtyur va asat, sad amrtam, mrtyor mamrtam gamaya, amrtam ma kurv ity evaitad aha; tamaso ma jyotir gamaya iti, mrtyur vai tamah, jyotir amrtam, mrtyor ma amrtam gamaya, amrtam kurv ity evaitad aha; mrtyor mamrtam gamaya iti, natra tirohitam ivasti. atha yanitarani stotrani, tesv atmane'nnadyam agayet; tasmad u tesu varam vrnita, yam kamam kamayeta, tam, sa esa evam-vid udgatatmane va yajamanaya va yam kamam kamayate, tam agayati; taddhaital loka-jid eva; na haivalokyataya asasti, ya evam etat sama veda.

The Udgatr, known as the presiding intelligence over the chant of the Sama, sings the Abhyaroha, the holy and edifying recitations of the Sama, and recites the Mantra repeatedly in order to produce the required effect. "*Asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, mrtyor mamrtam gamaya*": These are the three Pavamana-Mantras, the purifying chants, and their recitation is given in the concluding portion of this Brahman. These three recitations are supposed to be equivalent to meditation, and they bring about the intended result, namely, the rise of the mortal to the immortal, and everything that is connected with this process. We are familiar with this chant, but the Upanishad takes up its discussion in the context of the Sama and the Prana Vidya of this Brahman, and tells us that these are highly purifying recitations. They are Pavamana-Abhyaroha.

What is the meaning of this chant which is recited in this manner? It is a prayer, a *Japa*, as well as an invocation. "*Asato ma sad gamaya*: From the non-existent, from the unreal, from the apparent, lead me to the other side of it, the Existent, the Real, the Noumenon." Here, the Upanishad tells, also, what the meaning is. What we call death is itself the unreal; and what is other than death, the immortal, is the Real. So, to be led from the unreal to the Real is the same as to move from death to immortality. These words have special meanings with highly philosophical connotations. The world in which we are living is the world of death. It is called Mrtyuloka, the realm of dying, and therefore it is equated with the world of unreality. It is a world of appearances, and the prayer is: "May we be led from this phenomenal world of appearances to the realm of Reality." That which appears to be real, and yet, is not real – that is the *Asat*.

*Asat* does not mean non-existence like the horns of a human being. Here, the unreal is not of that category, because if a thing is totally nonexistent, it will not be seen, and the question of rising from it does not arise. The rise of the consciousness from one state to another becomes necessitated on account of there being an element of the real reflected in the apparent. The world of

unreality is capable of being taken for reality, and therefore one gets involved in it. Certain characters of reality are visible in the world of unreality, and so there is a mix-up of two attributes. The appearance, as we call it, is not a total non-existence. It is a confusion, a kind of muddled thinking. That is the appearance. The muddle arises on account of mixing up, or juxtaposing, or superimposing, attributes belonging to different categories, or realms, by way of mutual association, i.e., the attribution of the character of one to the other. The famous analogy given to us in the Vedanta scriptures is that there is what is known as *Adhyasa*, or the reading of the meaning of reality in that which is transient, and conversely, the transposing of characters of transiency and becoming to the being which is real. This happens every day in our practical life. We live as persons who are standing examples of this mix-up of attributes. Our individualities, our bodily personalities are immediately available example of this confusion of thought, where the real and the unreal are mixed up, and we drift from one condition to another on account of not being able to judge what is what in our own cases. We have feelings which are combinations of two aspects – the real and the unreal, the *Sat* and the *Asat*. We have a confidence that we are existing. We never feel that we are non-existent, not also that we are a moving flow, or we are apparent, or we are in a condition of process. We are told that this world is in a state of perpetual motion, but we never have any such feelings in our lives. We live in a world of motion and transition from one condition to another, but, in our own lives, we feel that we are perpetual. There is a strong feeling in regard to ourselves that we are steady beings and that there is a continuity of consciousness of our being, right from birth to death. This feeling of continuity of existence in our own selves is due to our attributing the character of reality to ourselves, because that which is, the Pure Being, is somehow made to get reflected in our own conditioned personalities. The sense of 'I', the feeling of 'being' and the certitude that we have in respect of our existence is due to the reality that is present in us. But, there is something more in us, apart from this feeling of mere 'being'. We do not merely feel that we exist. We always feel that we are limited; we are inadequate; we are poverty-stricken; we are impotent; we are grief-ridden, and we have anxieties and insecurities of every type conceivable. This peculiar other side of the feeling that is associated, side by side, with the feeling of certainty, existence; being etc., is the quality of appearance.

The conditioned form which is embodiment, the body, has one character; and the unconditioned reality has another one altogether. We bring the two together and create a personality, so that there is what is called a transient personality which 'appears' to be. The being of the personality is the reflection of reality in the personality, whereas the transiency is its real nature. We are conscious of a current, as it were, which flows, which never is steady, but the consciousness of continuity, even in the transitory process of the current of a river, is due to the consciousness being different from the process. We have two elements in us – sometimes, theologically, we say, the god and the demon principle – the *Deva* and the *Asura*. We have both elements in us, the higher and the lower, the eternal and the temporal. The eternal speaks and infuses meaning into the values of life, to which we cling so ardently, and create in our life a hope for the future, of a

better condition. We always expect something better. We never imagine that the world will be worse. It will be better than today, we think. This positivity present in our life, and the confidence we have that we shall live tomorrow, though there is no certainty about it, is the reflection of reality in us. Who tells you that you will live tomorrow? But you have a confidence that you will be alive. This is due to the presence of an eternity, masquerading in our own personalities, invisible, and yet present. But yet, there is insecurity. We have a suspicion that our apprehensions may not be true, and so we sleep restlessly and unhappily. We have in us happiness and unhappiness mixed up. That is due to the *Sat* and *Asat* elements combined in us, appearance and reality, both working together, side by side, swinging us on either side, in different forms, and under different occasions.

So, the prayer here is, “Let us rise above this turmoil of transiency of life, and move to the real which is indicated faintly in our own personal lives and in the manifestations that are in front of us.” The rise is the process of the ascent of the soul to the Absolute. Thus, the prayer is: – “*Asato ma sad gamaya*: – Lead me from the unreal to the real, from the apparent to the Absolute, so that we shall be steadfast in that which is free from entanglement in appearances – space, time, and causal relations.” And this is at once a prayer for further light in the process of this ascent. When we rise from the unreal to the real, we also become enlightened, much more than we are today. It is not merely ‘being’ that is transmuted, but also ‘consciousness’, side by side. The rise from inadequate ‘being’ to adequate ‘Being’, from the lower type of ‘being’ to the higher type of ‘Being’, is at the same time, simultaneously, a rise from lower understanding to higher understanding, where consciousness expands as ‘being’ expands.

Being and consciousness go together; they cannot be separated. Our consciousness is tied to our body, so that whatever we know is limited to this little body. We cannot go beyond. The consciousness of our ‘being’ is the same as consciousness of our body. There is nothing else in us. And the body is so limited, as we know very well. Hence, the expansion of ‘being’, or the dimension of our ‘being’ includes simultaneously consciousness, because ‘being’ and consciousness are one. This is indicated by the other prayer: – “*Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya*: Lead me from darkness to light.” This world is a world of darkness. It is not a world of light. The light that we see in this world is really a form of darkness, as we studied in an earlier portion of this Upanishad that all forms of life are forms of death only. They are not realities. The sunlight is not real light, because it is not intelligent. It is another intelligence that is responsible for apprehending the value of even sunlight. Mere sunlight cannot understand, because it is an object outside. Objects are inert, and it is the subject that is consciousness. Any object that is bereft of a relationship with the subject is equivalent to a darkness. It is lifeless. And so, the world of objects may be said to be a world of darkness, as it is the world of unreality. But, we have to rise to the realm of Light, the Light which stands by itself and shines as the infinite, the permanent, whether or not there are objects to shine upon.

Our understanding, today, is conditioned by the presence of objects. When objects are totally absent, we do not know what we will be aware of. Can we imagine a condition where there is nothing outside us to look at, to hear to come in contact with? What would be our mind; what would be the state of our understanding, at that time? We will be muddled completely. A person who is incapable of perceiving anything external cannot be regarded as sane. There will be a complete reversal of the function of consciousness at that time, because the individual mind, which is the individual consciousness, is accustomed to be healthy and alive only in connection with its objects. We are happy only in the midst of things, persons, objects, not independently. It is impossible to live absolutely independently because the mind is not accustomed to such a life. We like society because our life is tethered up to relationship outside, and from this we can draw the conclusion that our life is secondary; it is not primary. We are not living an independent life, not the original life; we are not true Existence. We are leaning upon a stalk which is outside us, and therefore unreliable. The objects of sense cannot be trusted completely. They pass like wind; they come and go; and, therefore, if our life is dependent on them, we go with them. That is why there is death for the individual who hangs upon the object which is subject to death. Hence, the world of so-called understanding, enlightenment, intelligence, is really a world of darkness, because it is not the self-sufficient, self-existent consciousness that is working, but a dependent form of mentation. So, the prayer is: "Let us be led above the related type of understanding to the unrelated Absolute Understanding, Absolute Intelligence," that is, "*tamaso ma jyotir gamaya.*" This is, at once, freedom from death, and attainment of immortality.

"*Mrtyor mamrtam gamaya:* Lead me from death to that which is immortal." The world is of mortality, and the prayer is to take us to the world of the Immortal. The world is mortal because everything is dying here; everything is perishable. It is seen now, and tomorrow it is not; like a bubble does it burst. We do not know what is now and what is the next moment. Such is the condition of things here. And how can we say that anything is real? Can anything be regarded as permanent? And that which is not permanent cannot be called real. So, there is nothing real in this world, and inasmuch as the unreals are the supports of our understanding, our understanding also is not real. Nothing is real in us; everything is a phantom. So, the prayer is for a total rise from this involved, insufficient, conditioned 'being' to the absolutely independent, unconditioned 'Being' which is simultaneously *Sat*, *Jyotir* and *Amrtam* – Existence, Light, Enlightenment, Consciousness, Omniscience and Immortality. No rebirth is possible there.

When the chant is taken up in the Yajna, by the Sama Veda *Udgatr*, he assumes a power and a capacity to bestow boons upon others. So, the section in this context tells us that when the *Udgatr*, in the Soma Yaga, chants these Mantras, the *Yajamana*, or the one who is responsible for the performance of the sacrifice may ask for boons, and they shall be granted. All that is required, the means and the end and the destination – all will come together at the same time. He becomes a Master of the worlds. He attains all that is meaningful and valuable

in all the three worlds. There is no fear that he may lose anything. Once he gains a thing, it shall be permanently with him, not like the things that one gains here, which can be lost tomorrow. Once he gains, it is a permanent gain, because it is the gain of the real, and not of an unreal something. With this we conclude the important section of the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, which is concerned with the Prana-Vidya, the methodology of contemplation on the Universal Prana through the individual Prana and the function of the senses, leading up to the chant mentioned just now – the Pavamana Abhyaroha.

## **Fourth Brahmana**

### **CREATION FROM THE UNIVERSAL SELF**

Passing on to the fourth Brahmana, we actually go to a different subject altogether. As a matter of fact, this fourth section is the most important portion in the first chapter. It is a grand description of the story of creation, right from the beginning up to the lowest level. And incidentally, a mention is made of the strata of Reality through which the descent takes place and also the degrees of Reality through which the ascent has to take place, reversely. So, in this sense, the fourth section, which is called the Purushavidha-Brahmana, is a quintessential teaching, of which everything else can be said to be a commentary, following it subsequently. The whole saga of creation is a grand dramatic event. This is described in this section. While it is a description of creation, it is a description of everybody – ‘you’, ‘I’ and all creatures – because we are all included in creation. It, incidentally, also points out the relationship that obtains among things, the duties which one has to perform in respect of another, and in regard to the Ultimate Truth, and so on all that is concomitant in the nature of the subject.

In the beginning, what was? This is the point from which the section begins. When creation was not there, what existed then? There was no world, there were no individuals, no persons, no activities, but something was. What was there?

1. atmaivedam agra asit purusavidhah, so’nuviksya nanyad atmano’pasyat, so’ham asmity agre vyaharat; tato’ham namabhavat, tasmad apy etarhy amantritah; aham ayam ity evagra uktva, athanyan nama prabrute yad asyabhavati, sa yat purvo’smat sarvasmat sarvan papmana ausat, tasmad purusah; osati ha vai sa tam, yo’ smat purvo bubhusati, ya evam veda.

The Supreme Self alone was. Nothing else existed. The Atman alone was, because the Atman was inclusive of all beings. It was the Self, as it is the Self, and it shall be the Self, of everyone, and of everything. It is the Being of all beings, *Satyasya Satyam*, as the Upanishad will tell us. That alone was, and one cannot conceive of anything else.

Now, Pure Being is inconceivable. When we try to conceive Pure Being, it looks like nothing, and hence we have to adopt a particular mode of thinking in

respect of the Being that is supposed to be responsible for creation, because creation implies the manifestation of a cause, and that is the production of an effect. The effect must have a cause. The cause must be related to the effect. The effect must be conversely related to the cause. So, the conception of a cause being inevitable when we assume that there is an effect, the whole story of creation seems to arise on account of our perception of the world.

When we perceive an effect, we have to infer a cause, and the question does not arise as to whether the world is there or not, because our senses tell us that the world is there. We do not ask a question to our own selves, 'Is the world there; does the world exist?' We do not put such a question, because it is taken for granted that the world is, merely on the stand that it is perceived. Inasmuch as we are wholly dependent upon sense-perception, and we regard the conclusion of sense-perception as entirely reliable and real, we are involved in it vitally, organically, completely, and we cannot be convinced of any other truth than our own conviction that the world is; and, so, by the inductive process of reasoning, we may say, we are taken to the essence of a cause of the effect that we perceive in the form of this world of manifestation; and the cause should have certain characters which are present in the effect, and the effect has nothing in it which is not in the cause.

Now, causation is a movement in space. It is a condition of creation. Space and time are essential for creation. So, we have to assume, together with the assumption of a cause, the principle of spatiality, temporality and causality. The ultimate cause must have had, potentially present in it, the principles of spatiality, temporality and causality. Space, time, causes – these elements are absolutely necessary for anything to be manifest. And, therefore, that which was prior to the process of creation, prior to the beginning of things, must have had these conditions of space, time and cause in itself.

Inasmuch as the Atman is the Absolute, and we cannot conceive of a relation of the Atman to space, time and cause, the Upanishad uses the word, *Purushavidha*, i.e., we have to regard this condition of ultimate causality, the ultimate cause as something equivalent to a Person. We regard God as the Supreme Person, because there is no alternative for us. The reason why we regard God as the Supreme Person is that we cannot conceive of a category of life which is superior to humanity. There are stages and degrees of life beyond the human level, of course, but they are only possibilities for us, and not actualities. The conception of a cause should have some connection with the actuality that, is in our minds. An infinite expanse of the highest, conceivable to the human mind is assumed as the cause of the manifestation of the world, the Supreme Person, *Purushavidha*.

This Supreme Being, whom we regard as the God of the creation of the world, became conscious of Himself. And what was He conscious of? Of Himself only, as 'I-Am-That-I-Am', as the Great 'I'. Since nothing was outside Him, there could not have been a consciousness of anything else besides Himself. The Supreme

Universal Self-Consciousness, which is identified with the concept of the Supreme Person, was conscious of Himself, or Itself, we may say, because it was neither male nor female, and knew nothing outside it, was not aware of anything external to it, because there was nothing outside it. It was Pure, Universal Self-Awareness – Atman.

'I-Am'. This was the Consciousness. He felt, as it were, 'I-Am', not also as 'you are', 'it is', etc. There was no 'you', 'he', 'she', or 'it', there. It was the Primordial 'I', not the ego-ridden bodily individual 'I', but pure, unadulterated Universal 'I'. And this Eternal 'I' is reflected in other empirical 'I's. The Supreme principle, therefore, is the principle of Self, which is designated here as the 'I', so that when reality is reflected in anything, it reflects as the 'I' principle there. The self-appropriating and self-arrogating attitude of the individual is the outcome of this element of 'I' asserting itself in all things, as coming through the grades of manifestation downwards from the eternal 'I', which is all-comprehensive. So, the eternal 'I' is felt even in an atom to assert itself as the 'I', as anyone of us also is capable of asserting himself as the 'I'. Nothing can be more valuable than the 'I' in a person. Nothing can be more dear than that, and nothing is worth-the-while conceiving except the principle of the 'I'. When the 'I' goes, everything else also goes. So, all the associations which we regard as meaningful in life are auxiliaries to the safety of this 'I'. We guard this 'I' with meticulous care. We love it immensely, and everything is loved because of this 'I'. We love the 'I' so much that everything is reflected there, in fullness. So, the Supreme 'I' asserted itself? – 'I-Am', and nothing else was.

Because it asserted itself as the '*Aham*', we call it 'I-AM'. It has no other name. That was the name of God, and that is the name of God. There is no other name, because God is Pure Self-Consciousness. This is the reason why, says the Upanishad, that even today people refer to themselves as 'I'. Who are you? It is 'I'. This is the answer one gives. If you knock at the door of someone's house and call out, "Who is there," the answer comes, "I," Afterwards one may say, 'my name is such-and-such', but in the beginning 'it is me'. What is this 'me'? Nobody knows what it is, but that is the 'you', and so you assert yourself as the 'me' or the 'I'. This feature of assertion as the 'I' or the 'me' in all individuals is due to the original assertion of the Absolute as the 'I'. That is felt in everyone of us.

This Supreme Person is called the *Purusha*. Why is He called the *Purusha*? What is the meaning of the word? *Purusha*, here, says the Upanishad, means someone who has burnt up the evil of external contact. That Consciousness burnt up all evil, and we are told here that the evil referred to is the evil of externality. There was no externality then, and there is no evil except externality. Everything is a part of that; everything is a manifestation of that. Whatever we call evil and undesirable in this world is the child of externality. When externality is not there, evil also cannot be there. And there was no externality in the One *Purusha*. The evil of contact with externality does not arise when everything was the Self alone. Inasmuch as it burnt up the externality and was conscious of Itself alone, to the exclusion of everything else, therefore it is called the *Purusha*. And so is the case



with anyone who knows this – *Ya evam veda*. Anyone can become like that, says the Upanishad, assuring us that we can also be like this *Purusha*, and destroy all evil. The evil of contact can cease when the desire for contact ceases. Desire for contact arises on account of belief in the reality of externals, and so it is an injunction to meditation on the Supreme Purusha, simultaneously.

Nobody can stand before that person who has this knowledge. As it was mentioned earlier, in another context, no one can compete with this person who has this knowledge of non-external Being. One who is established in this non-external Universality cannot be faced by any other person in the world. He becomes an indomitable power; He becomes a Supreme master; he becomes an authority; and he becomes a source of fear to others. He becomes energy incarnate. And this is purely because of the fact that this energy is not depleted through external contact. So, he is all-powerful. And no one can stand before him; no one can compete with him; no one can vie with him in any way. Such a person is fit for the ascent to the state of the *Purusha* whose manifestations, whose glories, whose effects are described in the subsequent narrations.