



THE CHHANDOGYA UPANISHAD

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The Upanishad, in its exposition of the Panchagni-Vidya, takes the standpoint of the wider background that operates behind every event in the phenomena of natural processes. Things are not what they seem; there is a deeper significance behind every visible process or activity in Nature. This is the esoteric side, or the invisible aspect of the visible phase of our practical existence. It is not that events suddenly emerge out into visibility, as if by magic, and that something happens at one stroke. Take the case of thunder, for instance. We do not know how the thunder has burst forth from the clouds. There is an immediate rainfall, there is wind blowing cyclonically. The rain stops and suddenly it is hot, after it became suddenly cold when it rained with winds. These are natural phenomena from our point of view, but they are supernatural mysteries to the vision of the Upanishad. There is nothing merely exoteric in the sense of a crass material event in the world. Events take place first in the highest heaven, and then their presence is felt gradually in greater and greater density as they come down to the level of more and more grossness and perceptibility and tangibility, as is the case with a disease. The illness does not manifest itself suddenly in the physical body. It happens inside first. Its seed is sown within. There is some kind of event that is taking place in the depths of our personality, and in the recesses of the world. This impulse is manifest outside as some occurrence.

The cause of a particular event which is ordinarily regarded as normal, physical, personal, social, visible, tangible, etc., this particular thing, has a transcendent secret behind it. This is the great point made out in the Panchagni-Vidya.

The birth of a human being in this world does not take place in this world alone, exclusively. It takes place in the highest regions first. One is born first in the higher levels in certain degrees of expression, and the impact of this birth is felt in the lower levels until it becomes visible to the physical eye on this mortal earth. Then we say that a child is born, someone has come, there is a rebirth, and so on. But this someone has not come suddenly from the skies. There has been a complicated interior process preceding, which always manages to escape the notice of ordinary vision. This is the case not only with the birth of a human being, but it is so with the coming of every event in the world. The Panchagni-

Vidya is not an elucidation of a single phenomenon merely, namely, the organic birth of a human individual in the mother's womb. This is only an instance which is to be extended to phenomena of every kind comprehended in the whole of Nature. There is a total activity, in a subtle form, taking place prior to the apparently individual expression of it in the form of experience and perception.

The king, Pravahana Jaivali, in his mode of instruction, speaks to Gautama, the sage, initiating him into this mystery of the Panchagni-Vidya.

"The Yonder World, O Gautama, is indeed the Fire. Here, the Sun is the fuel; the Light-rays are the smoke; the Day is the flame; the Moon is the coals; the Stars are the sparks. In this Fire, the gods offer faith. From this oblation arises King Soma."

The activity of the celestial region may be compared to a sacrifice. It would be surprising to a novice, no doubt, that the Upanishad should regard anything and everything as a sacrifice. If we understand the intention behind these analogies, we would be able to realise that nothing could be a greater comparison for life than the concept of sacrifice, because the principle of sacrifice, or *yajna*, is the essence of all creative processes. And the principle is applicable to every type of creativity, whether physical, social, aesthetic, or, for the matter of that, any other aspect of life. The principle of sacrifice is that of the recognition of the higher values operating behind and transcendent to the ordinary activity of the visible world or the functions of human beings. There is a comprehensiveness of approach in the understanding of the principle of sacrifice. Every part of the sacrifice is as important as any other part, and every part of the sacrifice subserves a purpose transcendent to it, as is the case with the operation of a huge machine or a working medium in a factory. No part of the machine works for itself; it has a transcendent purpose. Look at the limbs of a human body. No organ of the body works for its own sake; it has a purpose beyond itself, and this purpose is an output in the case of a machine and an intention in the case of an organic body. So is the case with the parts of a sacrifice, and especially so when the sacrifice is identified with the creative process of the universe. Everything is interconnected, interlinked in an organic manner, so that everything becomes as important as the other.

This concept of comprehensiveness is the secret of the meditation that is the Panchagni-Vidya. If this interrelatedness of the parts of the sacrifice is lost sight of, it ceases to be a meditation. As a matter of fact, any meditation is the attempt of the mind to bring all the parts of the psychic organ into a single focus of organic action. Just as there is a connectedness of the parts of a sacrifice performed outwardly as a ritual, there is this harmony in the inner sacrifice performed through what we call meditation. The Panchagni-Vidya is a meditation,—it is not an outward ritualistic sacrifice; it is a contemplation by the mind in which it harnesses every aspect of its force for the purpose of envisaging the reality that is transcendent to the visible parts of this inner sacrifice.

The Upanishad tells us, here, that the first vibration propelling any kind of activity or event in this world takes place not in this world alone, but in a higher realm. The cause has to be churned first in order that the effect may feel the

impact of that stir in the cause. Now, the cause is not merely a single factor. There is a chain of factors involved in the conception of the cause. If, for the purpose of our study, we may say A is the effect that is physically felt by us in this world, it has a cause which is B, impelling this effect to manifest itself in that particular manner in the physical world. But, this B which is the cause of A has another cause behind it, which is C. So, we may say, that B is the cause of A, or we may say, C is the cause of A because it is the cause of B also. But, this C has another cause behind it, and that is D. So, while D is the cause of C and B, and through these, of A, we may also say that it is the cause of the last effect also. Thus, the first cause is the real cause which pushes itself downwards to lower levels of reality, until they express themselves in space and time. This expressed form in space and time alone is known by us, seen by us, felt by us and experienced by us.

We are likely to mistake this visible effect for everything, and then it is that we are either pleased with the manifestation of an effect or we are displeased with it. Sometimes we say, "It is raining cats and dogs; it is horrible." And we say, "It is terrible, it is so hot; it is awful, it is blowing so hard." What we like or what we do not like are only the various reactions that our personalities produce or evoke in respect of impersonal causes of phenomena which have nothing to do with the pleasures or the pains of individuals.

The Upanishad takes us, for the purpose of the explanation of a small event in this world, to the highest heaven and tells us that the universe finds the cause of the lowest event in this lofty realm, in an invisible region, which is called the "Yonder World" in the words of the Teacher. For the purpose of understanding what the "Yonder World" means, we may take it to be the celestial region, regions which are super-physical, beyond even the astral realm, which are the causes of what we observe in the atmospheric region. We know very well that every phenomenon in this world is, to a large extent, controlled by the sun shining in the sky. This does not require much of an explanation. Sometimes it looks that even our very existence itself is regulated by the presence of the sun. Our life and activity here has a cause, and we may say that the sun is the cause of life on earth. But, who is the cause of the sun? The sun is also an effect of certain factors,—we may call them astronomical or designate them by any other name which are precedent to the formation of the sun. Astronomers tell us that stars, of which the sun is supposed to be one, are formed out of the condensation of nebular dust, forming what we call the Milky Way, which form themselves into rotating and flaming masses. But why should they form themselves into such masses is beyond our understanding. They must have causes beyond. What is the cause behind the formation or the curdling of the nebular dust as the Milky Way and into the formation we know as the stars, like the sun, etc? There has to be, naturally, some vibration behind. That vibration is precedent and anterior to what we call the manifestation of even the causal condition of this world. Prior to all this, something else must be there, and prior to that, again, another thing, and so on, so that even our insignificant life in this world, in this physical body, can be said to be completely controlled by factors which are transcendent, beyond the sun and the moon and the stars, and where we go in this manner of tracing our cause back, we cannot know. We have to reach levels which are thoroughly

imperceptible to the eyes and unthinkable to the mind. This is the point driven home into the mind of Gautama by Pravahana Jaivali in the context of the explanation of the Panchagni-Vidya.

In this descent of the celestial realm which has to be contemplated, or meditated upon, as a sacrifice, there are certain parts or limbs. The world, which is called the celestial realm, is itself the sacred fire into which oblations are offered. This is how the meditation is to be conducted. The fuel, which ignites the fire and causes the flames to rise up in this sacrifice, is the sun. As smoke rises from the fire in a sacrifice, we contemplate the rising or the emanation of the rays from the sun, symbolically. As the flames shine, so is the shining of the daytime due to the fire of the sun in the sacrifice. We may compare the embers, remaining after the flames subside in a sacrifice, to the moon who is something like the subsidence of the flames of the light of the sun, or we may even say, the comparison is made because moonlight arises generally when the sun's flames subside. Compare the stars to the sparks which are ejected from the flames of the fire, because they are scattered, as it were, in the sky. Now, this is a sacrificial mode of contemplation on the higher regions of the cosmos.

A mystery in this connection is mentioned here. What is our connection with these higher regions of the world? The higher regions are, in fact, not unconnected with us. The shining of the sun or the moon, the twinkling of the stars, or the blowing of the wind—all these phenomena are vitally connected with our own life here. They are not just something taking place somewhere erratically, as if they have nothing to do with anyone. Our life is related to every phenomenon outside, and vice versa. While our way of living has something to do with the activity of the world outside, our life is also dependent on that activity. There is a mutual dependence between the outer world and the inner life of the individual. Our thoughts influence the atmosphere. Many a time we must have heard people saying, "These days people are very bad; so there is no rainfall." What is the connection between rainfall and the goodness or the badness of people? Practically, it is difficult to understand the connection, but the connection becomes obvious and patent when we realise that thoughts and modes of living are vibrations that we set up around us. It is not some isolated activity taking place within our heads. When we think, we do not privately think inside our skulls; it is a vibration that we create in us. And the vibration of a person is not confined merely to the physical body; it emanates like an aura to a certain distance from the body of the person. The distance to which the aura goes depends upon the intensity of the aura, or the intensity of the thoughts, or the force of the vibration. This is the principle behind the advice that we must have the company of good people and not of bad people, etc., because vibrations interact. We can be influenced by the atmosphere around us. There is a vibration that is generated within every person whenever a thought occurs. Whenever we think something, whenever we feel something deeply, even when we speak something, there is a vibration generated because we do not speak without thinking. There is a thought behind every action or speech. Naturally, if we take into consideration the cumulative effect of the vibrations produced by all the individuals in the world, we can also contemplate the effect of the vibrations they

produce. They disturb the whole atmosphere; they create a magnetic field in the atmospheric realm. And the total effect of the psychic influences set up by the individuals in the world naturally influences the conditions of the manifestation of natural forces. We can obstruct their movement; we can impede their activity; we can interfere with their natural way of working, and so on.

Based on this concept of the relationship of our life with the activity of Nature outside, the Upanishad tells us that our actions are like an oblation offered in a sacrifice. Our activities are not mere impotent movements of the physical body or the limbs; they are effective interferences in the way of Nature. When we pour *ghee* or *charu* into the flaming fire in a sacrifice, we are naturally modifying the nature of the burning of the fire. Much depends on what we pour into it. If we throw mud into it, well, something, indeed, happens to the fire. If we pour *ghee* into it, something else happens. So, likewise, is the activity of the human being or, for the matter of that, any other being. The interference by a human activity in the working of Nature is an important point to consider in the performance of the sacrifice. If we coordinate ourselves and cooperate with the activity of Nature, it becomes a *yajna*, but if we interfere with it and adversely affect its normal function, it will also set up a reaction of a similar character. Then, we would be the losers.

Every action produces an effect, called *apurva*, that occurs in the process of the thought that underlies it. Actions are not merely unconnected physical movements of the body; they are vibrations, as we have observed. Every vibration impinges upon its atmosphere. It has an effect produced in the environment, and this subtle effect that the action produces, invisible to the eyes though, is called the *apurva*. It is something newly produced; it is not already there. So, this newly produced effect, the consequence of an action that we perform, is the *apurva*. Now, this *apurva*, or the effect of our actions, has something to do with us. We are the causes. As we are the causes of this *apurva*, or the effect of the actions, we would be the reapers of the fruit of these actions. So the *apurva*, or the result of the actions, becomes the determining factor of what would happen to us even after we depart from this world. Sometimes its effect is felt in this very life. If our actions are very intense, either good or bad, the results are experienced in this life itself; if they are mild, they materialise in a later life. We offer our actions as oblations in this sacrifice of natural phenomena.

In this universal sacrifice of which the celestial region is the fire and the sun is the fuel, etc., as mentioned above, we also contribute a part; we play an important role, and that is the performance of the actions. There is a grand effect that is produced out of the performance of this sacrifice. Generally, a *yajna*, or a sacrifice is supposed to be an invocation of a god, or a deity. When we say, *Indraya svaha*, we mean that we invoke Indra. Reciting *Suryaya svaha*, *Agnaye svaha*, etc., we offer oblations calling the attention of these particular deities in some manner. In this sacrifice of our actions, in this life, which we offer into the great fire of the world itself, naturally, an invocation is made. We call out certain effects, we elicit certain reactions and we invite certain experiences when we perform actions. So, our actions in this world are exactly like the offering of oblations in a sacrifice for the purpose of invoking a god, or a deity. We are

inviting something, invoking something, calling the attention of something for the purpose of experiencing it when we perform an action. If the action is properly conducted it is in harmony with the natural setup of the whole sacrifice, and then the god is seen, and then we are blessed with a new type of body which is indicated here by the word *soma-raja*, a body which is nectarine in character, not merely the physical body made of the elements of earth, water, fire etc., but a body which is fit enough to experience the delights of the higher world, which are invoked into action by the performance of the deeds. This is how a person performing virtuous acts, holy deeds and charities, etc. in this world rises up to the higher world after death, and experiences the consequences of the actions until the time when the momentum of these actions is exhausted, even as we thrive well in this world financially as long as our bank balance is sound, but when it is exhausted we become paupers. We come back and we have to work hard again to fill the bank balance, so that we may enjoy life afterwards.

Something like this happens in the case of our actions. Every action has a beginning and an end; it is temporal, it has a destructible body, it is not eternal. Because it has a beginning, it must have an end. So the character of the actions, the nature of the actions, the intensity of the actions determines the extent of the consequences thereof, and when we, thus, go to the higher realm and come back, there is what we call rebirth.

The whole point of this description in the context of the Panchagni-Vidya is to tell us how births take place; what are the stages of the descent of the soul into the physical embodiment which it puts on when it comes to this world. The whole of this description is symbolic; it is very difficult to understand it with a casual reading. The teaching is not to be taken literally in a purely grammatical sense, word by word, in its outer meaning. It is highly esoteric in its technique, and the point made out is that the higher realms are activated by the consequences produced by our actions here, and those consequences of actions themselves become the causes of our descent, later, in the reverse order.

“Parjanya is, indeed, the Fire, O Gautama. Of that, the Wind is the fuel, the Cloud is the smoke, the Lightning is the flame, the Thunderbolt is the embers, and the rumblings of Thunder are the sparks.

“Into this Fire, the gods offer the oblation of King Soma. Out of that oblation, arises rain.”

The next stage of the descent is a realm which is symbolically represented here as the world of *Parjanya*, or the god of rain. The rain-god represents the region below, grosser than the higher regions or the heavens, or the “Yonder World” mentioned earlier. That gets stirred into activity, further on. That, again, is to be contemplated upon as a sacrifice. When rain falls, it is not merely some isolated event that takes place, somewhere. Rainfall is not an unconnected activity; it is also a universal phenomenon. Many factors go to play their roles in the production of rain. There is a vibration in the higher realm first, and, as mentioned, these vibrations are, to some extent, influenced by our own deeds here. So, whether there is a good rainfall or not has something to do with how we live in this world. This is also an interesting thing for us to understand. It is not

merely something erratic that is taking place, unconcerned with what we are doing here. The lower realms, which are concerned with the production of rain, are also to be contemplated upon as a sacrifice. Every stage of development is a sacrifice,—it is a meditation. Every process of descent, and every process of ascent is a meditation for the Upanishad.

The principle of rainfall, we may call it the rain-god, *Parjanya*, is the fire in the sacrifice. The fire is stirred into action by *vayu*, the wind that blows. We consider the wind as the fuel which ignites the fire of this sacrifice. When there is such a stimulation taking place in the atmosphere, clouds are formed. As smoke rises from the fire of a sacrifice, as an effect of the flaming force of the fire, the clouds, *abhram*, forming themselves into a thick layer are the effect of this internal activity of the atmosphere by the action of the wind etc. in a particular direction. The clouds are the smoke of this sacrifice. The brilliance of the flames in this sacrifice is the flashing forth of the lightning, *vidyut*, through the clouds. We know how bright the flames are in a sacrificial altar. We have to contemplate here, in the context of rainfall, the flashing of the lightning as the blazing of the brilliance of the flames of the fire. The clap of the thunders may be compared to the embers remaining after the subsidence of the flames in a sacrifice. The rumblings of the clouds after a heavy rain, the slowed or mellowed down sounds we hear later on in various directions, are the sparks, as it were, of this fire. We hear a little sound coming from all the quarters, or the horizons in the sky, when the rain stops and the clouds are slowly scudding. This is a contemplation that we can effect in our own minds. This is a spiritual meditation because the region of rainfall is stirred into action by the vibrations that take place earlier in a higher plane. Rain is the cause of all foodstuff. That point is being mentioned now for the intended purpose.

In this fire, the contemplative sacrifice of rainfall, gods offer the oblation of their action. The *bhuta-sukshma*, as they are called, or the subtle elementary potencies, are the *Soma-rajā*, or King Soma, mentioned here. These are all difficult terms to translate and more difficult to understand. They have a highly esoteric meaning; they are not exactly as they appear on the surface. The subtle potencies which our actions produced get mixed up with the elemental potencies called *tanmatras*,—*shabda* (sound), *sparsa* (touch), *rupa* (colour), *rasa* (taste), *gandha* (smell). And then it is that we get involved in the higher realms; we get vitally connected with our actions for reasons obvious, and our actions are related to the consequences they produce,—*apurva*. The *apurva* gets mixed up with the elemental subtle forces called *tanmatras*, and so we are involved in the *tanmatras* in this manner. Then it is that we are taken up to the higher realm by the rocket-like force exerted by our actions which takes us up into the higher realm after we depart from this world. These actions, these effects of actions, these vibrations that these consequences of actions produce, are a great drama indeed that takes place in the heaven. There is a cycle, as it were, a wheel rotating in the form of give-and-take between the gods in the heaven and the human beings here. We give something and we are given back something. Nature gives us what we give to it in the form of our own deeds in this world. We do not get what we do not deserve, and we cannot get, also, what we have not given actually.

What we have given, what we have deserved, what we have parted with in the form of a sacrifice, that is given back to us, with compound interest sometimes, according to the law of Nature. On account of this cyclic activity of Nature, in which the individuals get involved through their actions, there is rainfall. So, we can imagine how rains occur.

The event does not happen independently somewhere in the sky. We are also connected with that action of Nature which is called the fall of rain, or even the absence of rain. Unless there is a harmonious give-and-take understanding between us and Nature, Nature will not give anything to us. If we are too greedy, miserly and selfish, well, everything will be withheld from us. The earth will withdraw her forces. And in the Puranas we are told that the earth, which is compared to a sacred cow, withdraws her milk and does not allow men to drink a drop of the milk of her giving, when they are so selfish, self-centred and absolutely averse to the virtue of giving or sharing with others. It is then that we notice an adverse action in the field of Nature. And then there is drought; there is poverty; there is catastrophe; sometimes there can be cataclysm also, as the case may be. So, the rainfall, which is the cause of the production of food in this world, is not a chance action taking place in Nature, but one of the important links in the cyclic chain of give-and-take, or coordination and cooperation between the individuals and the whole of Nature.

“The Earth is, indeed, the Fire, O Gautama. Of that, the Year is the fuel, the Sky is the smoke, the Night is the flame, the Quarters are the embers, the Intermediary Quarters are the sparks.

“Into this Fire, the gods offer the oblation of rain. Out of that oblation, arises food.”

Rain falls on this earth. The earth, as the fire, is itself an object of meditation. We contemplate the whole earth as the fire in another stage of the Cosmic Sacrifice. The earth is a sacrificial fire. The productive capacity of the earth depends upon another factor, viz., the cyclic changes produced by the process of time. The time factor has an important part to play here. What we call time, of course, for the purpose of our understanding, may be compared to the effect produced by the rotation of the earth on its axis and the revolution of the earth round the sun, and the effect that the sun produces, consequently, upon the earth. This is the essence of time for us, and this is what is called the *samvatsara*, or the year in popular style. The year is the time factor involved in the capacity of the earth to produce foodstuff. And because it is the inciting factor in the production of foodstuff in the world, it is called *samit*, or fuel, for it is what causes the blazing of the fire of the sacrifice. How do we contemplate, then? Just as smoke rises up from the fire, we contemplate the whole sky as if it is a dome that is rising from the earth. When we look up, it appears as if the sky is rising dome-like above the earth, and we may contemplate as if it is a smoke rising from the fire of the earth. And, as flames rise from the fire in a sacrifice, the fire is the cause of the rise of the flame, the particular phenomenon called night—we may include the day also together with it because the two are the obverse and the reverse of the same coin,—is the result of a particular activity of the earth. We know why there is night and why

there is day. This happens because the earth does something. Inasmuch as earth is the cause of the event called night and day, even as the fire is the cause of the rising of the flame, in this contemplation we are to regard the night and day phenomena as the flame of the fire in the sacrifice. The quarters are the embers, because they are calm and quiet, undisturbed as it were, by the movements that take place in the world. When we look at the horizon, we feel a sense of calmness, as if the earth is not touching it. So, it is the subsidence of activity, like the embers after the flame subsides. Like sparks from the fire, which move in different directions, we have the intermediary quarters of the heavens which are in different directions, which are to be contemplated as if they are sparks in the sacrifice. The intermediary quarters are of lesser importance and, therefore, they are called the sparks.

Here, on this earth, rain falls by the activity of the gods. The gods are the presiding deities of the senses. There is connection between our sense-activity and the gods in heaven. In this offering of the great sacrifice, contemplatively conceived here by this process of the fall of rain, there is a productivity created in the earth and foodstuffs are produced, for another purpose, which will be mentioned further on.