



THE CHHANDOGYA UPANISHAD

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

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The Celestial Region, the Atmosphere, the Earth, Man and Woman—these are the five stages of the Fire which becomes the object of meditation known as the Panchagni-Vidya. By the interconnection, combination and harmonious adjustment of the structure of these five levels of manifestation, birth takes place. This symbology of the birth of the individual through the Five Fires is applicable to the birth of every event and every form of expression in the world, whether it is what we call a living being or the manifestation of the other levels, such as the inorganic etc.—the physical, the superphysical, or otherwise. The theory is of the manifestation of anything, anywhere. There is a universal concatenation of causes and effects coming together from every side, like the rush of waters in the ocean, from every corner, in order to make the waves rise on its surface. The cooperation of the structure of the waters in the body of the ocean is necessary for the welling up of the waves, though this may be only a local effect whose ulterior causes are not visible to the naked eye. There is, thus, in the end, no such thing as a local event in this world. Every event is a universal event. So is the case with the birth of even a human individual. Every birth is a point of universal pressure.

The philosophy of this *vidya*, the Panchagni-Vidya, is that such is the meditation of these processes. We should not regard anything as a local event, local structure, local body, local individual. These do not exist; and the idea that they exist is the source of bondage. We are bound by our erroneous notions of things, not by the things themselves, but the wrong idea we have about their relationship mutually or to other things. We have notions about things based entirely on sense-perception, not on the intuitional insight into the background of the occurrence of events. What do the senses tell us? They can report exactly what they can abstract concretely in the form of bodies of perception from the vast reservoir of information. The reservoir, as a background, is unperceivable to the eyes, not even cognisable to the ordinary mind. But the meditation proposes to introduce a technique of envisaging the whole universe as responsible for the manifestation of everything, so that *everything is all things, and anything is everywhere*. There is no such thing as a particular individual or a particular body. This is the meditation which frees us from the bondage of attachment to particular things. If this meditation could be conducted effectively throughout

one's life, there would be a universal perception of everything. When you look at any particular object you will see the whole world in it, and not merely one person in front. There is no such thing as one person; that does not exist. The description of the causes with their effects, in these passages of the Upanishad, is therefore intended to take us above the level of ordinary sense-perception and open the gate of a new knowledge altogether, behind the visible effects which are the so-called objects of sensation, perception and cognition.

Bondage is due to the connection of our consciousness, or the soul, we may say, with the report of the senses, which is confirmed by the activity of the mind and the intellect. The mind, the intellect and the senses work together in collaboration in giving us a wrong idea about things. The first mistake is committed by the senses. The mind and the intellect only corroborate and confirm in a more synthesised manner this report of the senses. The report is wrong in the sense that it does not take into consideration the invisible factors involved in the production of an effect. The clouds do not gather in the sky suddenly. There are many causes which are beyond one's comprehension, which come together into action for the production of a single effect called the appearance of the clouds in the sky, and the fall of the rain, etc. So is the case with everything. So is the case with anything that happens anywhere in the world; so is the case with anything that appears as an effect or a person in the world; so is anything, whatever anyone can think of in one's mind this world.

These are the oblations symbolically offered in the sacrifice of meditation called the Panchagni-Vidya. This is a secret which the Kshatriyas knew and the Brahmanas did not know. King Pravahana Jaivali was reluctant to part with this knowledge because it was a guarded secret for him and for his community. And now he exposed this knowledge to the Brahmana known as Gautama who came to him as a student, and having explained in detail these mystical doctrines of meditation,—the Panchagni-Vidya,—he concluded by saying that the food oblation offered in the Fire of Man, which gets converted into the seed, is what rises up as the child by birth. This was one of the questions the king put to the boy who approached him in the court.

The first oblation is the universal vibration in the celestial heaven; that is the first sacrifice, and that is the first oblation. The second oblation is in the second sacrifice which is the reverberation of the vibrations in the celestial region felt in the lower regions of the atmosphere, as the fall of the rain. The grosser manifestations which are the events that take place in this world are the third oblation. The fourth sacrifice is of man himself, who is involved in this entire activity, who consumes the food of the world and energises himself and produces virility. The fifth oblation is woman whose union with man brings about the birth of a child. These are the Five Fires. These Fires are not to be regarded as individual events. This is the purpose of the *vidya* in the Upanishad. The Fires so-called are diviner manifestations of a cosmic character, and there is nothing local, physical, earthly or binding in any of these sacrifices. They are all processes of a vaster Nature in which the individual is integrally involved. The conception of the entire process should therefore be one of a Universal Occurrence, and by an extension of meaning, this is at once a description of events taking place in any

manner, apart from the particular ones mentioned specifically in these enunciations, in these passages.

The fifth oblation is the immediate cause of the rise of the effect in the form of the baby that lies in the womb of the mother. Here, the womb of the mother need not necessarily mean the human mother, though the description is human, to serve as a sample of the illustration. Any cause which gives birth to an effect is the mother that produces the child. Now, in the case of the human being particularly, the child lies in the womb for some months, say nine or ten months. It sees the light of day and begins to see things through the senses. It begins to work in the world as an individual, so-called. Then it lives in the world for so long as it is permitted to live by the momentum of its actions of previous lives.

There is a determining factor of the span of life of an individual even when it is in the womb of the mother. It cannot be increased or decreased; it is set for ever by the particular force of the *apurva*, mentioned earlier, which becomes responsible for the birth of an individual. There are causes and causes. All of them join together and pass a resolution, as it were, in their meeting, as to how long an individual should live. That is determined by the character of the cumulative effect of the actions known as the *apurva*, part of which alone is allowed to manifest itself as what we call *prarabdha-karma* (force which has already fructified into experience). The *prarabdha* is the cause of everything that we experience in this life, the length of life, the nature of the experiences through which we pass, the circumstances into which we are born, etc. All our pleasures and pains, including length of life, are determined by the actions we performed earlier, portions of which are allotted for experience in this particular life, that portion being called the *prarabdha-karma*.

Just because a person is born into this world, it does not mean that he is dissociated from the prior causes, ultimately. The causes catch hold of the effects at every level. They can never be freed from connection with their causes. Even when there is a descent into the lowest level, the connection with the higher levels is not snapped. It is always there. We may be said to be aberrant from the realm of God in a sense. We have cut ourselves off from the Universal Being, due to which we are supposed to be bound souls, but it does not really mean that we have severed our connection with God. Our connection still is maintained with everything; with other beings, with Nature, and with God. What has happened is that we are unconscious of this existing connection. The connection can never be broken; it is a perpetual relationship. If it had been temporary, it would not be reinstated once again. It is always there, but we are completely oblivious of the presence of this relation. Such is what happens at the birth of an individual who is completely ignorant of what has happened. Causes and causes, perhaps thousands and thousands in number, have joined together through the various levels of manifestation for the birth of this child, all of which is not known to this child. It knows nothing except the little locality where it is born, and all other aspects of its birth in this particular world are forgotten at one stroke due to the association of consciousness with the body in a very intensified manner. The intensity with which the consciousness gets tied up to the body is such that there is a complete obliteration of the memory of past lives, a total ignorance of

everything that happened in the earlier incarnations, and there is an attachment to this particular body only, as if that is the only reality,—as if there was nothing before, and there is nothing going to be in the future also! Unfortunate situation, indeed, is this, that nothing is known about the past and nothing is going to be known about the future. The entire chain is forgotten. Only a single link is caught hold of, and consciousness is bound hard to this particular link, and this is the earthly, the physical life of the individual.

When the span of life is finished, there is what we call the death of the body, the extrication of the *prana* from the individual embodiment. And these Fires take the individual to the destination to which it is bound after death. Again, these Fires are there in action; they are never absent at any time. Wherever you go, the law of the country works; you cannot escape the arms of the law. Just because you have moved away a hundred miles, it does not mean that you are free from its operation. Likewise is the operation of the Five Fires. Wherever you go, they are there, because, without them nothing can take place. The Five Fires are nothing but the five degrees of the manifestation of universal law. So, how can you escape it? Wherever you are, in whatever realm, in any form of birth whatsoever, these laws operate, and they catch hold of you, and condition you to certain limited forms of life.

In the same way as one was pushed into manifestation into this particular life, one is put out of existence here, and then taken through the same process of manifestation into other realms. The process is the same, because the Five Fires work everywhere in all the realms of being.

Those who know the secret of this Panchagni-Vidya, those who know the doctrine of the Five Fires, those who conduct their lives through meditation in this manner, are liberated from the bondage of *karma*. They pass through the stages of ascent leading to the higher regions of life, ultimately landing in *Brahma-loka*, or the realm of the Creator, for the purpose of ultimate liberation, or salvation; otherwise, there is return, once again, by way of reincarnation, or rebirth. If you are not to be reborn into this world of suffering, you cannot live like an animal, thinking like an animal, living like an animal, seeing like an animal and living a conditioned existence in the same way as animals live in the jungle. Ignorance of law is no excuse. You shall be punished with the rod of the inexorable law for any ignorance of its requirements, and ignorance is nothing but the inability to visualise the connection that obtains between us and the various causes of our manifestation throughout the universe. Since no one can claim to have such knowledge, it appears that everyone is bound to reincarnate in some form. This is the pitiable consequence of the ignorance of the *jiva*, the individual, to which reference will be made towards the end of this section. But those who are fortunate enough to be awakened to the fact of this divine connection of human life and meditate in this manner through the Panchagni-Vidya,—they shall be taken to the higher regions by diviner forces, through the Northern Path, or the *uttarayana-marga*, the path of light.

The *archiradi-marga*, or the *devayana*, the Northern Path of the gods, of the celestials, the path of the liberation of the spirit from the bondage of *samsara*, is

being described. Those who meditate like this, those who live the spiritual life of knowledge, those who have an insight into the secret mentioned here in this Upanishad, those who practise austerity (*tapas*), endowed with the great faith (*shraddha*) in the efficacy of this knowledge, they rise to the realm of the divine *Agni*, or the deity of fire, on departing from this world. They are carried to a higher realm by the deity of the flame, or fire, and from there they are taken up to the still higher realm of the deity of the day. There, again, the matter does not end; they go higher up to the realm of the deity which superintends over the bright half of the lunar month. From there, again, they go higher up into the realm of the deity of the six months during which the sun moves to the north. Then they go higher up to the deity which superintends over the entire year. Then, further, they go to the sun, which is a very important halting place, as it is said, in the passage of the soul to liberation. Then the soul goes higher up into the more subtle regions of experience and enjoyment of a divine a nature, comparable to cool lunar radiance. Then comes the realm which the Upanishad calls the flash of lightning represented by its deity. This is not the lightning that we see in the sky, but the flash of the lightning of the knowledge of Reality. We are on the borderland of the Creator, as it were. There the light flashes and then the individuality is about to drop. Effort ceases there and some other law begins to take the soul by hand. A superhuman force begins to work there, an *amanava-purusha*, a superhuman being comes there. Someone comes and recognises you, “Lo, the exiled has come, the prodigal son has returned.” Such is the joy of the gods when this exiled being returns after years and years of suffering. The superhuman being catches hold of you by the hand and leads you along the path of light, higher and higher, until you are taken to the realm of the Creator Himself, the *Brahma-loka*. This is the path of light; this is the path of freedom; this is the path of liberation.

But, if people are unable to live such a spiritual life, cannot live a life of meditation like this, have no knowledge whatsoever of the higher truths of life, then, though they have done yet some good deeds in this world, they are good persons, very charitable, very philanthropic, very serviceful, have done a lot of social welfare work of public utility, with the virtues which are highly praised in the scriptures, and have accumulated the merits of what are known as *ishta* and *purta*, i.e., performing great sacrifices and philanthropic deeds of various types,—such good people who have accumulated merit by means of virtue here they do not go along the path of light. Rather, they go along the Southern Path of return. This is called the path of smoke, or *dhuma-marga*, *dakshina-patha*, or the Southern movements which is, again, presided over by divinities. From the deity of the smoke there is a rise of the soul to the deity of the night; then to the deity of the dark half of the lunar month; then to the deity of the six months during which the sun moves to the south. Then what happens? It does not go to the realm of that deity which superintends over the year. Especially, this mention is made here, and this is something mystical and peculiar. Why do they not go there? One thing is missed there. This is the departing place of the two paths. For some distance they go together; afterwards they depart, one goes to the North, another goes to the South. The juncture is the deity of the year which is not touched by the soul that goes to the southern regions.

From there, the soul goes to the world of the fathers, not to the sun. Then, from there it goes to the realm of space, *akasa*; and from there to the moon, *Chandra-loka*. In *Chandra-loka*, it is supposed to enjoy the privileges of the gods, yet like a visa-holder, not being a citizen of that region, and so it is subject to return. It is subservient to the gods who are gods by birth. The gods that are gods right from the time of creation are superior to the gods that have become such temporarily on account of the virtuous deeds performed in this life. So, when the meritorious deeds are exhausted, the soul returns. It cannot live there permanently. It is subservient, being a celestial of an inferior category. The soul, here, is not for the citizenship of this world, though it has got all the privileges of enjoyment and living. You can have the same boarding, same lodging, and everything, but no privileges or rights! This is because of the fact that you are temporarily raised to the status of a celestial on account of the good acts that you have performed. But when the momentum of the acts finishes there, then what happens? You are, once again, the poor man that you were; you come back in the same way as you went. And so, even when you go there you are not on par with the gods who were there right from the time of creation. On account of this fact, it is said that the soul there is like a food, as it were, to the gods; it is eaten by them, which means to say, it is subservient to them and they are superior to it. As long as you are permitted to live in the celestial region by the momentum of the good deeds that you performed in this world, so long you live there. Then you come back through the same path you went. You will be hurried back. The soul comes back to the space through which it rose up; then it comes down to the realm of air, with which it gets identified very subtly. Then it comes down to the levels of smoke, the clouds and the rain. And one knows the whole process.

These souls which are to return to the mortal world get identified in a subtle manner by their subtle bodies through these natural phenomena, viz., space, air, cloud, rain and foodstuff, even up to the grains like sesamum and barley, beans, rice and wheat, herbs, plants and trees, etc. It is very difficult to understand how they get mixed up with these things. In a very subtle form, these souls are supposed to get identified with these natural things. And they get into the body of the individual through the foodstuff with which they have been identified. Then the same process of birth takes place. The individual soul has come from the above, after finishing its career of enjoyment due to the performance of good deeds here. The soul gets identified in every manner, in every way characteristically, with the particular level through which it has to pass. It is difficult to get out of this existence, says the Upanishad (*Ato vai khalu durnishprapataram*). Once it enters into these lower levels of grain, foodstuff, etc., one cannot say what will happen to it afterwards. Perhaps God knows what happens; ordinarily this secret cannot be known. It is a very complicated situation. Where will the soul be driven, in what direction, into the womb of which mother, for what type of experience, no one can say. The way of action and reaction is difficult to understand. The descended soul gets identified with these levels; it becomes one with the father, one with the mother, one with the social life into which it is born. And then it begins to say: "This is my mother; this is my father; this is my house; this is my property." It forgets everything that happened earlier. It really belongs to wider regions; it has many friends in the other realms

of being,—it is a citizen of a vaster world, but it has forgotten all this like a foolish individual, an idiot of the first water. It begins to identify itself with a little locality, a small house, a village, or even a thatched hut, and says: “This is my property.” And it has no connection with anything else. Very pitiable existence indeed, says the Upanishad. What happens then?

People who have done good deeds are born in favourable circumstances. This is the law of *karma*. The happiness, the freedom and the satisfaction that one experiences in life are due to some good deeds performed earlier, especially unselfish charitable deeds. The more you give, the more also will you receive. This is the law of action and reaction. You cannot get what you have not given. You cannot expect happiness here if you have not given happiness to others in an earlier life. If you are a greedy person, a miser who has grabbed the happiness of others and enjoyed everything for your own self and put others to grief and sorrow,—that would be your fate also in this world. You would be a sufferer. You may be a poverty-stricken individual, and you may be a pauper having nothing, as the result of your selfish deeds in the previous lives. You have grabbed things from others, and therefore you are deprived of things in this life. But if you have been charitable, broad-minded, good-hearted and amiable, philanthropic, serviceful, that would be the same experience you will have in this life also. You would be given back the same thing that you have given to others. If you have given joy to others, joy will be given to you here. If you have given sorrow to others, sorrow will be given to you. So, the type of birth you take in this world, and the conditions of your existence here are all determined by what you did in your earlier existences. You may even be born as an animal, says the Upanishad, if the *karma* is very bad. This is what happens to the individual when it takes birth in a particular world, or in this world. Thus is, therefore, the cycle or the rotation of the wheel of *samsara*, the going up and coming down in the circle of transmigration. There is only one path moving along which there is no coming back. That is the *devayana-marga* mentioned above. The other path brings the soul back.

There is another kind of birth, says the Upanishad, which is not connected either with the Northern Path or the Southern Path. It is the birth of small creatures like insects, such as flies, gnats. They live for a few hours and pass away. In the rainy season you will see moths and small insects rising up from the damp earth and then dying that very day, sometimes even in a few hours. This is another kind of birth. Hard is life, indeed! Their life is so short, of such an insignificant duration that one may say that they are born and then dead. When you are seeing them being born, they are dead also at the same time. So short is the life of these creatures. This is the third way of being born and living, other than the life which we live through the Northern and the Southern Paths. Why is this world not filled up with people, and why is this other world also not filled up by people even if many people die here? The answer is given here that there is a cycle or rotation of people. They go from this realm to that realm, from that realm to this realm, so that no world is completely filled to the brim or overflowing.

“One should get disgusted with this life,” says the Upanishad. You must be having enough of this life. Who wants to live like this, in this manner, where you are

subjected to the law over which you have no control and regarding which you have no say whatsoever, where you are always a sufferer, always in a state of liability, and you do not know what will happen to you the next moment. Is this a life worth living? This is not life, but a form of unbelievably torturous mortality. Oh, what a life is of this world!

Ignorance breeds further troubles in the form of likes and dislikes, selfish actions and their consequences which bring about a birth of this kind, and eventually sorrow. In this connection it is said, in conclusion, that those who live a life of spiritual meditation are not affected by this law. This is a solacing conclusion that the Upanishad gives. You are affected by the law when you cannot understand the law. A person who knows what law is cannot be harmed by law. This is the case with any kind of law, whether it is governmental law or the law of electricity or the law of social life or the law of the spirit. It is ignorance of the way in which law works that binds us to the operation of the law. If we are thoroughly conversant with the intricacies of the working of the law, naturally we will abide by that law. And why should we be bound by it or harassed by it, or punished by it? We do not know how the law works. The whole difficulty is here. So, we cannot even abide by it. How can one abide by a law of which one has no knowledge? So, ignorance is the real trouble; every other trouble is subsidiary and an offshoot of it. One who knows this truth of the universe, is free from every sin and trouble.

Now, here, the words “one who knows this” signify something that occurs again and again in the Upanishad. We should repeatedly mention here that “one who knows this” does not mean one who has read the Upanishad, or one who has read it and understood what it says. No, not like that. Here, in the case of the Upanishad, knowledge means ‘life’ itself. It is ‘living’; it is the extent to which this knowledge has become part of one’s life. This is the knowledge that we are speaking of here in the Upanishad. *Knowledge is being*; this is the central philosophy of the Upanishad. This we cannot forget, when we study the Upanishad. *Knowledge is life; knowledge is being, knowledge is existence; knowledge is what you are*. So, what you are determines what you shall be in the future. And, if yours is a life of knowledge in the sense mentioned here, if you are an embodiment of this wisdom, if you are scintillating with the brilliance of this understanding, even here as a part of your own vital existence, if this knowledge is what you yourself are made of, if this knowledge is the very substance of your life, not merely an intellectual information, then you are free from the bondage of action. Then these laws of the world will not act upon you, because these laws are nothing but the expression of knowledge which is the nature of the ultimate Reality, finally. So, to the extent you are identified with the character of Reality, to that extent you are free from the law of *karma*, or action. *Karma* is the name we give to the way in which the law of Reality acts upon all particulars or individuals, reacts upon everyone and everything, when one is in a state of ignorance. To the extent of the percentage of the law of which you are ignorant, to that extent you are bound. And to the extent you are aware of it and live it, and are able to abide by it, to that extent you are also free.

So, one who knows these Five Fires is free. It is difficult to know these Fires unless we live a life of meditation. Your whole life should be one of meditation.

Perpetually, we must be seeing things in this light only. Our meditation should not mean merely a little act of half-an-hour's closing of the eyes and thinking something ethereal. It is a way of living throughout. When you see a thing, you see only in this way; when you speak, you speak from this point of view; when you think, this is at the background of your thought. So, you cease to be an ordinary human being when you live a life of this Upanishad. You are conditioned by this great knowledge, and it becomes, therefore, a liberator of your soul. Even if you are in the midst of atmospheres which are otherwise not desirable, you shall be free from contamination, says the Upanishad, because no such things as the undesirable exist for such a person. The knower becomes coextensive with the way in which Nature works in all its ways. And everything is Nature working in some way, the desirable as well as the undesirable, as we may call it. We become commensurate with the way in which Nature works in every way because of the meditation conducted in this manner. Thus, we cannot be harmed by any atmosphere, by anyone or by anything that is around us. On the other hand, perhaps, we may be able to influence positively the atmosphere in which we are living. "One who knows this," reaches the higher realms reached only by meritorious deeds; *"ya evam veda"*; yea, "One who knows this."

This section, dealing with the Panchagni-Vidya, is partly a description of a lofty type of meditation, so that we may live in this world without being bound by the laws of the world, and after death go to higher regions for the liberation of the spirit, ultimately. Partly, also, it is a light thrown on the fact of the misery of life. There is a side of things apart from the fact that there is a cosmical aspect involved in every working of Nature. Life is sorrow; life is full of misery. It is full of grief and pain, because one is living in a state of ignorance. The Upanishad on the one hand extols the greatness and the glory of knowledge which leads to the liberation of the soul, and on the other hand tells us how hard the laws will descend upon us and put us to the subjection of their mandate and requirements, and what sorrow will come upon us, what would be the unhappy state to which the soul would be subjected if it is deprived of this knowledge and lives merely a life of utter ignorance.