



THE CHHANDOGYA UPANISHAD

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“What is this other way? Please instruct me about this,” asks the boy. How is it possible for us to get an insight into this Reality present in all particular forms? Neither one’s own intellect nor the senses will be of any use here. The senses are used to a kind of contact with externals, and whatever is not an external cannot become an object of their perception. Whatever is outside, that alone the senses can perceive, and this Being we are speaking of is not outside and, therefore, It cannot be an object of the senses. Nor can the mind conceive the Being, because the function of the mind is principally a synthesis of the perceptions of the senses, an organisation of these sensations and perceptions. It introduces a kind of coordination and method into the chaotic mass of perceptions of the senses. The mind does not see something which is not seen by the senses. It is only introducing a logical sequence and coherence into the mass of sensations. We are not in any way better off by employing the mind or the intellect as a means of cognition or perception. What the mind does, what the intellect does, is merely a corroboration and confirmation of what senses tell us. And if the senses are of no use, the mind and intellect also are of no use. The only importance that you can attach to the function of the mind or intellect is that it has a peculiar capacity to reflect an inferential presence of a higher reality, due to the fact that it is less distracted than the senses and that it has an integrating power which is absent in the senses on account of their isolated activities. Now, the mind which is endowed with this special power which is ordinarily not visible, has to be employed for the purpose of gaining an insight into Reality by means of guidance received from a master.

To this subject Uddalaka, the sage, reverts by means of an illustration. Take for instance, there is a person who has been waylaid by robbers, blindfolded, handcuffed, legs tied together, dragged into a wilderness and thrown into a pit somewhere in an unknown place. He has been taken a long distance away from his house. He does not know where he has been taken, because his eyes have been covered by a patch of cloth. He only knows that he has been removed to a distant place. He is in a state of despair. The only thing that he can do under that condition is to cry for help. His intellect will not help him there, his mind will not help him, his sense of sight has failed. Under such conditions, the only help can

be from another who has sight. A person with eyes who can see the way can come, help, and guide him. There is no other way out. Even so, every one of us has lost sight of Reality. Every one of us has been spiritually blindfolded. Everyone is in complete spiritual darkness. And there is sorrow, as a consequence thereof. What is the way out?

THE NEED FOR A GURU

*Yatha, saumya, purusham gandharebhyo'bhinaddhak-sham aniya
tam tato'tijane visrjet, sa yatha tatra prangva udangva
atharangva pratyangva pradhmayita'bhinaddhaksha
anito'bhinaddhaksho virsrstah.*

*Tasya yathabhinahanam pramuchya prabruyat, etam disam
gandharah, etam disam vrajeti, sa gramad-gramam prcchan
pandito medhavi gandharan evopasampadyeta evam
evehacharyavan purusho veda, tasya tavadeva chiram yavan na
vimokshye, atha sampatsya iti.*

Someone was living in a country called Gandhara, and was attacked by robbers on the way. He was tied up. His eyes were covered and he was taken to a long distance and left in a thick forest infested with tigers, wild beasts, etc. The person was crying, "I have lost my way. I do not know where I am. Will anybody come and help me? Does anybody hear my voice? Is there anyone near me?" That was all he could do. Then, there was one good Samaritan passing by that way and he untied all the knots with which the person was bound. He removed the bandages from the eyes and said to him, "Oh, you have come to this place. Where are you coming from?" The poor man replied, "I come from Gandhara. Now I do not know where it is. Which is the way to that place?" Then the kind one said, "You proceed from this place in that direction and you will see a big tree there. Then you turn to the right and walk for about two miles. Then you will see a village. From there you move towards the east and there you will see a signpost. Now proceed slowly and you can safely reach your place."

This is an analogy to describe the condition of people in this world. We have been exiled from our 'home' and cast into the wilderness by the robbers of the senses and we cannot see things properly as they really are. We do not know from where we have come. We have lost our way. And the apparatus of our senses are not going to help us. The mind has been confounded. The only way is to ask for help, and just as a person with sight can help a person without sight and can point out the way to the destination which he has to reach, so is the blindfolded soul in this wilderness of life to take the guidance of a person with spiritual eyesight, who can visualise the presence of the great Reality which is the destination of everyone. Such a person with eyes which can see the truth of things as they are is called an *acharya*, a spiritual master. He is the preceptor, he is the Guru. There is no way of escape from this muddle of life except through the guidance of a preceptor, because a preceptor, a Guru, is one who has undergone these experiences of life. He has seen the tortures of existence, the sufferings, the winding path and the dismal ways through which one has to go. He knows from where one has come

and how one can revert to that place again. Through the indications given by the master, the disciple has to proceed gradually.

In the analogy, the good Samaritan told the blindfolded man how he could go back to his house step by step by the winding path with the help of various objects which served as signposts. Even so, are the scriptures signposts on the way. The instructions of the Guru are the indications on the path. We are told that from this predicament in which we are now, the next step would be like this. Naturally, we cannot reach our destination at one stroke. It is perhaps several miles away, hundreds of miles far. This means that we have to put forth much effort. So we go three miles from here and we find a road that diverts itself to the right. We go along that. Then we find a huge banyan tree there. From there, we again turn to our left. Then we go another ten miles along the same path, and find a village there. Then we take rest and from there we move towards the western direction, and so on and so forth. These represent the higher and higher levels of consciousness to which we have to rise up, overcoming the various obstructions on the spiritual path. Thus are we instructed by the master.

We have fallen from the ancient, pristine existence by a tortuous process of descent. It is not a sudden drop, as drops of water from the sky fall on the earth. It is a winding process through various kinds of curves and turns through which Consciousness has got itself entangled and has come to this present pitiable condition of earth-consciousness, body-consciousness, object-consciousness, and a total absence of universal consciousness. To go back to that original state, it is not possible to take a jet plane and fly straight. It is not a straight movement. It is also a very winding process. We cannot see beyond a certain distance. This is the difficulty of the path. We cannot have a set of binoculars and see everything direct till the last point is reached. There appears to be a blind alley, as they say, and we cannot see anything further. We will see what is beyond a particular spot only after reaching that spot. Several such spots have to be passed. So it is pointless on the part of any enthusiastic seeker to know the nature of the Absolute at one stroke. In the case of a traveller whose destination is far away, he has to move a certain distance first. He has to move by various methods. He may go in a car. Sometimes he may fly. Yet at other times he may have to walk. For, everywhere, every kind of vehicle will not be available. Likewise is the method that has to be adopted in the practice of *sadhana*. The same method will not work always. It is not a same, single, stereotyped routine that we practise right from the beginning till the end. After a certain point or a certain limit is reached, the method of *sadhana* may have to be changed, the speed may have to be accelerated and a different type of guidance may have to be required. As is the case with an ordinary journey, as is the case with medical treatment, so is the case with education, whether it be secular or spiritual. There are stages of approach, and you will not be told everything at one stroke. There is also no use explaining that, because the mind cannot grasp all the intricacies at once.

So the point is, that just as the blindfolded man received instructions from the good Samaritan, so the blindfolded soul has to receive guidance from a spiritual master. And as the person in the illustration was intent only on reaching home and was not interested in mere sightseeing, (otherwise he would go hither and

thither and miss the way again), so is the soul to be intent upon its destination, and should not waste its time in sightseeing in this world. The master will tell the seeker, "This is the way." On the way he may see many things. He should not be interested in those things. They are experiences through which every one has to pass. When one goes to Delhi, one will see many towns on the way, but one is not interested in those towns. One is interested in Delhi, the destination only. Notwithstanding the fact that one passes through various towns, cities, villages and halting places, they give no respite because one's mind is not there. So is the case with the ascent of the soul to the Supreme Being. Many experiences have to be passed through by the seeker and he will have many visions, many things which will be more wonderful than the things that he sees in this world. But he has no interest in them, because they are only halting places, passing phenomena. And as was the case with the blindfolded man who was intent only on rushing back home and not seeing places on the way, so should be the interest of a spiritual seeker to return to the 'source', passing through tentative experiences in which he should not get engrossed. He should not get lodged in the halting places on the way. Thus the soul can reach back to its grand goal, its destination.

What is the way? The way is the *acharya*, the Guru, the teacher, the master, the preceptor. There is no other way. "So only a person who has a proper preceptor can realise the Truth," says this Upanishad. No one else can reach this Truth by any effort of the mind, the intellect or the senses. No amount of scientific analysis, no amount of study of the scriptures alone will be of any use. It requires direct guidance from one who has personal experience. Such a person is the *acharya*, the preceptor who knows what Truth is. He is a blessed person who has such a guide with him. Then he will have to live in this world only as long as this body lasts. Afterwards, he will have no bondage. As long as he is tied up to this bodily individuality, as long as the *prarabdha-karma* which he has to experience remains, so long he will have to remain. The *sanchita-karmas* are destroyed by knowledge. The *agami-karmas* do not exist for that person, but the *prarabdha-karma* continues. The *prarabdha* is a name that we give to those cumulative effects of action which have given rise to this physical body, this individuality of ours, in which we have to pass our life here and undergo experiences of various types. When we are in a position to complete this course of change through this body, then we are about to enter that borderland of freedom. We have to be bound to this world, to this life, only as long as this body is there. The moment this body is cast off we are free, because there is nothing else to bind us. All our *karmas* have been destroyed by meditation and by the actions performed in this life. They are not going to bind us because they are not selfish actions. They are not motivated by bodily individuality. They are propelled by knowledge of a higher truth, and therefore, the actions of the present life after the rise of knowledge, the *agami-karmas*, will not bind us. Nor are we going to be influenced by the *sanchita-karmas*, results of past actions. They too have been burnt up by knowledge. The only thing that remains is *prarabdha*. When that is gone, every type of bondage is gone—*Tavad eva chiram vavanna vimokshye, atha sampatsya iti*. Then we attain to the great Being. This Being is the truth of all things.

Sa ya esho'nima aitam atmyam idam sarvam, tat satyam, sa atma, tat-tvam-asi, svetaketo, iti; bhuya eva ma, bhagavan vijnapayatv-iti; tatha, saumya, iti hovacha.

After the above instructions, Uddalaka says: "O Svetaketu, do you understand what I am telling you? This great but most subtle essence of all the worlds is the Truth, the Atman, the Supreme Reality within you, and you are That." "Explain to me further, O master," says the boy.

Now, what is the difference between a person who has consciously attained realisation and another who is unconsciously thrown into it as in sleep or death? Why does not one attain realisation after death, if casting off the body is the only criterion of liberation? The Upanishad here tells us that when one casts off the body, one attains liberation. Then why should not everyone attain liberation when they go to deep sleep or die, if the body alone is the bondage? There is a difference between one with knowledge and one in deep sleep without knowledge. Notwithstanding the fact that both these persons cast off their body one day or the other and both have been thrown into Reality, what is the difference? This again is explained by another example. This chapter is full of analogies.

THE ORDER OF MERGING

Purusam, saumya, utopatapinam jnatayah paryupasate, janasi mam, janasi mam iti; tasya yavan na van manasi sampadyate, manah prane, pranah tejasi, tejah parasyam devatayam tavaj-janati.

When a person is very sick and is about to depart from this world, people sit around him. His relatives gather around him and ask him, "Do you recognise us?" "Do you know who I am sitting here?" If the senses are active, naturally, he would recognise them; but if the senses have been withdrawn into the mind, then he can only think but cannot speak. He can only have memory of his relations, but he cannot see them gathered or seated in front of him. What happens at the time of death is that there is a gradual withdrawal of the functions of the various organs in the system. The physical senses are activated by certain forces which impel us towards perception. When the purpose of bodily existence in this world is finished, then there is no work for the senses. When one is alive, the senses act in a particular manner on account of *prarabdha-karma* that they are expected to execute in this span of life. When that is over, this body is of no use for the purpose of experience here. Then the senses understand that they cannot do anything through this body. They want to drop this instrument. So they withdraw themselves. Then the physical body cannot any more become a location of these functions of the senses. What are these senses? They are the energies propelled by the mind. It is the mind itself projecting its tentacles through the orifices of the body called the sense organs and the motor organs. So, when the functions of an individual in a particular body is over by the exhaustion of *prarabdha-karma*, the senses are withdrawn into the mind. Then the dying person can think but cannot see. He cannot speak. No organ will function. He is practically dead. He will be lying on his bed without life, as it were, yet life is there.

As long as the mind is not withdrawn into a higher reality in him, he can think. Otherwise, even thinking is not possible. At the last moment, when a person is just about to pass away, thinking stops. Not only speech and senses stop their activities, even the mind stops its functions and he cannot think. If you speak to that person, he will not reply. He will not react. He will not give any indication of having heard your sound. That is the condition where not only the senses are withdrawn into the mind, but the mind also is withdrawn into the *pranas*. There is only breathing, neither thinking nor sensing. Then people say the person is still alive. He breathes. Some bring cotton and keep it near the nostrils to see if he is alive. If the cotton moves it means he is alive, otherwise he is gone.

So the first stage of withdrawal is the absorption of the senses into the mind. The second stage of withdrawal is the absorption of the mind into the *prana* wherein the breathing process continues, life exists, but there is no thinking and there is no sensation. Then what happens? The breath also gets withdrawn into the fire principle which is what we call the heat in the system. As long as there is heat in the system, you say there is the element of life. If the heat also has gone, the whole body becomes cold and limbs are chill. Then we lose all hope; it is finished. *Prana* is also withdrawn into the fire principle. *Vang-manasi sampadyate, manah prane, pranah tejasi*—so, when senses are gone, mind is there; when the mind has gone, the *prana* is there; when the *prana* has gone, mere heat or fire is there. Fire or heat is the last thing which is in a person on the verge of leaving this world and entering the other world. When the heat also is withdrawn into the Supreme Being—*tejah parasyam devatayam*—then there is no consciousness and there is no bodily life.

Individual life gets extinguished by a gradual process of absorption of the external functions into the internal ones until they are withdrawn finally into the General Reality, *Samanya Satta*, in all things. The person enters into a state like that of deep sleep. He does not know what has happened to him. He cannot know that he is dying. That is unconsciousness. There is a sudden shift of emphasis from one level of being to another. One cannot know that one has fallen asleep. However much one may be trying one's best to keep a watch on the process of going to sleep, one will not know it. One is suddenly in it. That is all. Either you are not sleeping or you are sleeping. You cannot be just midway between the two. Likewise with a person when he enters into this Generality of Being where he becomes totally unconscious of particularities and has lost contact with this world of externality. This happens at the time of the withdrawal of the individual soul into the Supreme Soul in the process of Liberation, and also at the time of death. So, from the point of view of the external occurrences of the various phenomena of withdrawal, death and Liberation are identical. What happens to a person when dying, happens also to a person in Liberation. But there is a great difference. The difference is obvious. It needs no explanation. The person is not cast into the wilderness or thrown into an oblivion when he enters the higher stages of conscious expansion. On the other hand, there is unconscious and compulsive pushing back of the functions into their sources at the time of death. In death there is no transcendence. There is only automatic withdrawal. But, in the process of Self-realisation there is transcendence, so that there is no coming

back. When you have outgrown a particular level of experience, you do not come back to it. But, if you have been forced to wrench yourself from a particular experience, the desire for that experience still lingers and you will have to come back to complete your experience.

*Atha yada'sya vanmanasi sampadyate, manah prane,
pranastejasi, tejah parasyam devatayam, atha na janati.*

*Sa ya eso'nima aitad atmyam idam sarvam, tat satyam, sa atma
tat-tvam-asi, svetaketo, iti; bhuya eva ma bhagavan vijnapayatv
iti; tatha, saumya, iti hovaca.*

When a person dies he knows nothing because he enters the Being of all beings, though unconsciously. This Being consciously realised in the supreme 'experience' we call God-realisation or Self-realisation, and into which one is cast unconsciously at the time of death and sleep, is the ultimate Reality. This is the essence and this is the Self of all. "Thou art That, O Svetaketu," thus instructs Uddalaka once more. "My dear father, explain further," says Svetaketu.

Now the teaching is about to conclude with one more example. In ancient times, there was a system of finding out who was the thief. The method was to gather all the suspected ones and bring them to the court of the king, and under the order of the king, a heated axe would be brought and they would be asked to touch it. The principle is that a culprit will be burnt by touching the heated axe, whereas one who is innocent will not be burnt. There is a similarity of touching in either case, but there is the dissimilarity of being burnt or not burnt. This is an example that Svetaketu is told by his father Uddalaka, to make a distinction between the realised soul and the ignorant soul.

ILLUSTRATION OF THE ORDEAL

*Purusam, saumya, uta hasta-grahitam anayanti apaharsit
steyam akarsit parasum asmai tapata iti; sa yadi tasya karta
bhavati, tata evanrtam atmanam kurute, so 'nrtaabhisandho
'nrtenatmanam antardhaya parasum taptam pratigrhanti, sa
dahyate' tha hanyate.*

*Atha yadi tasyakarta bahvati, tata eva satyam atmanam kurute,
sa satyabhisandhah satyenatmanam antardhaya parasum
taptam pratigrhanti, sa na dahyate atha mucyate.*

The servants of the king catch hold of a man and say, "Here is the culprit, here is the thief, here is the robber, heat the axe for him." If a person who has told a lie is asked to touch the heated axe, naturally, the fault will be made visible outside by the burning of the hands, and then he is punished by the consequences of his actions. But, if a person who has not committed any fault, who is only suspected, is brought to the court, then when he touches the axe he is not burnt, and he is released. So is the case with the soul that is really bound or not bound. Being in the body or not being in the body is not the criterion. Just as touching the axe is common to both the suspected one and the guilty one, but the consequences are different, so is the case with people who have knowledge and no knowledge. In spite of the fact that both are in the body and both pass through the same stages

of ascent from the grosser to the subtle, the man without knowledge is bound, while the one with knowledge is liberated. The realised soul may be in the body as long as the *prarabdha* continues, just as a bound soul is in the body. But the difference is that the bodily presence or existence affects the bound soul, while it does not affect the mind of the liberated soul. That condition in which the soul resides in the body with knowledge is called *jivanmukti*, liberation while living. The body is there, but it does not affect the consciousness. The mind has the power to bear the pains brought about by the existence of the body. The exhilarations coming through the contact of the body with the objects of sense desired for and liked, and the pains coming due to contact of the senses with objects disliked and hated—neither of them affect the soul that is liberated.

There are some teachers who give another example, the example of a coconut inside a shell. They say, the coconut that is raw sticks to the shell. That is the condition of the bound soul. Consciousness sticks to the shell of this body. But in the case of the liberated soul, it is inside the body, no doubt, but is not sticking to the body, even as the dry coconut is not touching the shell. It makes a sound inside if we shake it. It is detached from the shell, though it is there tentatively. Even so, consciousness is not confined to the body, even though it is inside.

In spite of the fact that the senses are withdrawn into the mind, the mind is withdrawn into the *prana*, the *prana* into the fire or heat in the system, and heat into the Supreme Being, in both cases, in the case of the liberated, it is a gradual transcendence and a conscious process of ascent. When one consciously moves in a particular direction towards one's destination, one knows what is happening, what one is moving through, what are the stages one has crossed, what is the distance still ahead, etc. When one knows the distance that has yet to be covered, one is not fatigued on the way, because one is aware of how much one has already covered. One is fully conscious of every stage of the travel or journey. But, suppose one does not know what the distance is, how much one has covered, how much is left and whether the direction towards which one marches is correct or not. One then feels much fatigued. In addition to all this, suppose one is blindfolded; then we know what the suffering of that man is. This is the difference between a liberated one while living in the body and the one that is unliberated and caught in the body. This is the difference between self-transcendence in liberation and compulsive withdrawal of the senses in death. This is the difference between death and Self-realisation. This is also the difference between sleep and Self-realisation. The desires of the mind are not destroyed in sleep, and therefore there is return to the waking or dreaming state after sleep. The desires of the mind are not destroyed even in death, and therefore, there is reincarnation after death. But the desires of the mind are destroyed in Self-realisation, and therefore, there is no return.

The cause of the birth of a body in the process of reincarnation is the presence of a desire for a particular experience. The *karmas* referred to as *sanchita* constitute the reservoir of the potencies of actions which emerge out one day or the other, as a plant emerges from a seed. The seed may be lying in dry soil waiting for the rain and suitable conditions or circumstances to sprout up. Even so are the *sanchita-karmas*, which are the seeds for future rebirths. The conditions suitable for the

sprouting have not yet come, because the *prarabdha-karma* prevents their manifestation. The pressure of the *prarabdha*, which is under the process of experience, does not allow the sprouting up of other *karmas* in the *sanchita* group, because of the weight of the former, and so they, the latter, lie in ambush waiting for an opportunity to rise up. When the *prarabdha* is over, which means to say the experiences which one has to undergo through this body are exhausted, then there is death. Then the next set of *karmas* comes up. That is the conditioning factor of the new birth. What one will become in the next life, in the next incarnation, will depend upon the nature of the next set of strong or important *karmas* lying in ambush in the reservoir of the *sanchita*. These are difficult things to understand, because one cannot know which *karma* comes up for maturation. Whether one action gives rise to one birth or two births, or whether two or three actions join together to give a birth, or many actions join together to give one birth, whether the *karmas* of this birth give rise to the next birth, or whether the *karmas* of some other previous birth come into action and give birth to the next body, all this cannot be understood by one who is not omniscient. But, the principle is this, that actions which are performed leave behind them a residue called *apurva* which becomes the content of the *sanchita* or the *anandamaya-kosa* within us. We carry them wherever we go, and these are not destroyed even if death takes place, because death is nothing but the exhaustion of a particular allotted portion of *karma* and not the entirety of it. But the *sanchita* is destroyed by the fire of knowledge in the case of a person who has attained Self-realisation. So there is no rebirth for him.

Thus the distinction is drawn between a person who ascends to the Reality consciously by self-transcendence and the other one who merely dies for taking another birth. This is, in essence, the teaching of Uddalaka to Svetaketu, in this section.

First, the sage starts by giving an explanation of the process of creation, how the objective universe is created from the Supreme Being, the *Sat*, and by means of the triplicated elements of fire, water and earth,—how everything in the world in all creation is constituted of these three elements only in spite of the variety of particulars. He then explains that inside the body also these very same principles work and that what the world outside is made of, of that this body also is made. Then he describes how the mind and the *pranas* are also influenced tremendously by the activity of these three elements—fire, water and earth—so that the external universe as well as the individual within are both constituted of the same elements, and that essentially they are indistinguishable. He has explained how this one Being is present both outwardly in the universe and also inwardly in the individual. Then he has told us that this Being is the goal of realisation of all individuals and that this Being is present subtly in every particular manifestation. He has also said that It is invisible to the eyes, because It is the Subject of all knowledge, that It is the all-pervasive principle, It is the subtlest essence and that It is the background of all existence, and therefore, the senses and the mind cannot perceive It. Ordinary knowledge, he has said, is inadequate here and It can be known only through the grace and guidance of one's own Guru or master; and when a knower lives in the world with this body

as other people live in this body, we draw a distinction between the former's way of living and conducting himself and the ordinary people's way of living. For all practical, outward purposes, the liberated man and the bound man look alike. One cannot know who is a *jivanmukta* and who is a bound one, for both speak in the same way, eat in the same way, live in the same way. The distinction is within. It is that the liberated one knows what he is, whereas in the other case he does not know what he really is. So, here is the distinction between knowledge and ignorance, and here is also the explanation of the path to liberation as propounded by Sage Uddalaka.