



THE CHHANDOGYA UPANISHAD

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

DISCOURSE-16 (6 JULY 1977)

COURSE AFTER DEATH

In connection with a description of the passage of the soul after the death of the body, we are introduced into a new subject, that of the existence of certain psychic nerve currents inside us, known as the *nadis*. There are certain *nadis* in our bodies which exist very subtly in the astral layer of our personality and control not only the entire physiological system but also our minds and breathing process—the entire personality. Those who are versed in the science of *hatha-yoga* will know very well the importance of these *nadis*.

*Atha ya eta hrdayasya nadyastah pingalasyanimnas-tisthanti,
suklasya nilasya pitasya lohitasyeti. asau va adityah pingalah esa
suklah, esa nilah, esa pitah, esa lohithah.*

These nerve currents are supposed to be filled with certain subtle juices which are referred to here as *animna*, very subtle exudation which controls the humours of the body. The point that the Upanishad makes out particularly here is that there is a tremendous connection between the sun and these nerves.

It is not that the sun is spatially very far from us. We have a false notion that the stars in the heaven and the sun in the sky are very far and that they have no connection at all with us here on earth. This intervening space which is the apparent cause for this seeming disconnection is not empty. It is a vital fluid. The ordinary physical notion of the commonplace astronomers that space is not organically connected with the individual has to be given up. In fact, higher aspects of astronomy going into the realm of astrology will tell us that space is not a disconnecting element. If it is, there would be no influence of the planets upon us. They exert a tremendous influence, not merely in a mechanical manner as the law of gravitation does, but in a very, very living and organic manner.

This subtle substance in the nerve currents is of different colours. It may be brownish-yellow, or white, or blue, or yellow proper, or red. These are the types specially mentioned here, though there can be many other permutations and combinations of these colours because we cannot actually count the number of

these nerve currents in the system. There are several thousands of *nadis*, but the principal among them are hundred and one in number. It is believed from the standpoint of this section of the Upanishad that the colours of these nerve currents inside us are due to the influence of the sun upon us. Variegated influences are exerted upon us in respect of the constitution of our personality by the rays of the sun. Even after the sun sets at night, it continues to influence us. The influence of the sun does not cease merely because it is midnight. It is a tremendous influence exerted upon the whole earth. Night and day make no difference for this. When the effect of the sun through its rays has an impact upon the bile in our system, these juices become brownish yellow in colour. When there is phlegmatic element mixed with this bile, it is supposed to be whitish in colour. When the wind element also is included within it, that means to say when the wind humour is a little more predominant, it assumes a blue colour. When there is an equal distribution of the phlegmatic matter and the bile element it becomes yellow, while the reddish element is due to the preponderance of the red corpuscles in the blood influencing these juices in the system.

Now, the idea is that the colours of these juices in the nerves are imported, as it were, from the colours in the sun. They are the reflections, as it were, of the sun's rays experienced by us through our own nervous system. So the Upanishad says that these colours are in the sun and they are in the *nadis*. But what about the causes thereof? These colours—brownish yellow, or white, or blue, or actual yellow, or red—are the colours of the sun's internal structure. We know the sun's rays have colours, and these are responsible for the colours of the juices which flow in the nerve currents.

*Tad-yatha mahapatha atata ubhau gramau gacchatimam camum
ca, evam evaita adityasya rasmaya ubhau lokau gacchantimam
camum ca, amusmad-adityat pratayante ta asu uadisu srptah,
abhyo nadibhyah pratayante te'musmin aditye srptah.*

Just as a national highway passing through villages connects one section of villages on one side to another section on the other side, even so the sun's rays seem to be travelling throughout space like highways, as it were, emanating from the sun, touching the heavens on one side and influencing the individuals and the whole earth on the other side. These rays of the sun are like passages or highways in the entire space. They touch this world and also the other world. They enter even the minutest thing in this world, like X-rays penetrating through objects, and we are not excluded from the influence of these subtle rays of the sun. They penetrate through the nerves inside us, they get refracted back into space and return to the sun, so that they convey a message to the sun, as it were, as to what our predicament is here.

Thus we see there is a real living connection between the sun and ourselves here. The rays are like messengers coming from the sun, conveying to us the message from the sun and taking our message from here and conveying it back to the sun, like postmen. This kind of work the rays of the sun perform much more effectively and vitally than the postal department does! The sun there and ourselves here belong to one family, an undivided family. So, we are like brothers.

Most undivided families have division among the members and the undividedness is only an imagination. Really the members of the family are divided. But here the connection is not mere imagination. It is a real interconnection of vital forces in us with the sun and with everything between the sun and ourselves. So we can imagine what integral connection we have really with the atmosphere and the heavens and the stellar system, in spite of our apparently being here as if separated and disconnected. This disconnection is a misconception in our minds.

*Tad-yatraitat suptah samastah samprasannah svapnam na
vijñati asu tada nadisu srpto bhavati tam na kascana papma
sprsati, tejasa hi tada sampanno bhavati.*

It is these nerve currents that are responsible for the withdrawal of the mind into itself in deep sleep. What we call deep sleep, the composure of the mind, the withdrawal of the mind from all sense activity and the retiring from all dream experience also, where one knows nothing—that experience is brought about by the travel of the various rays of the mind through these nerve currents to the centre of the heart. There the mind then lies sleeping and inactive, doing nothing and knowing nothing. So these *nadis* have some part to play even in the activity called psychic sleep. In the state of deep sleep we are overpowered by a supernal light.

There are various opinions as to what happens in deep sleep. They differ one from the other. One of the theories is that we fall asleep on account of the fatigue of the senses which results in the exhaustion of the mind searching for happiness in the world. The other doctrine is that the bilious element in our system gets roused up due to the activity of the sun's rays during the day and they make us fatigued in a different way altogether, compelling us to fall asleep. The third theory is that when the mind goes back to its source, it is overwhelmed by the light of the Atman. This getting blinded by that light is in a way equal to seeing nothing. It is seeing darkness, as it were, as perhaps when we gaze at the sun for a long time we see not the brilliance of the sun any more but only pitch darkness. This is a very mystical doctrine of sleep which tells us that we are confronted by the brilliance of the Atman when we go to sleep. And, therefore, on account of there being nothing to see, objectiveness being withdrawn completely, we fall into a mood of so-called unconsciousness, merely because there is nothing for the senses to do and there is nothing for the mind to think. So when there is nothing to sense and nothing to think, what is our condition? It is a falling back into an oblivion of all kinds of experiences.

*Atha yatraitad-abalimanam nito bhavati, tam abhita asina ahuh
janasi mam, janarsi mam, iti, sa yavad asmaccharirad-
anutkranto bhavati, tavaj-janati.*

Now we are introduced to the principal subject of this section. The other points mentioned in connection with these nerves are introductory to the main point which is the theme of the section, namely the departure of the soul after death.

When a person becomes weak due to old age and is awaiting impending death, people get anxious about his condition. They sit round him thinking that he is about to leave this world. And then they query, “Do you recognise us?”, “Do you know I am your father?”, “I am so-and-so related to you, do you recognise me?”, “Do you know I am your son?”, and so on. He is able to reply to these people in a sensible manner as long as the *pranas* do not depart from the body and as long as the mind is capable of working in a normal fashion in respect of the body. But when the mind is compelled by the *pranas* to withdraw itself into its source, no sensation, no thought, no recognition remains whatsoever. Then what happens to that person?

*Atha yatraitad-asmaccharirad-utkramati, athaitair-eva
rasmibhir-urdhvam akramate, sa om iti va ha ut va miyate sa
yavat ksipyen manah, tavad-adityam gacchati, etad-vai khalu
loka-dvaram vidusam prapadanam, nirodho'vidusam.*

The very same rays of the sun, about which we have discussed in the earlier *mantras* in this section, with which we have such an intimate connection, become the passage of the soul for its ascent into the higher regions. These rays of the sun are the roads or the paths, as it were, for the soul when it rises upwards after the departure from this body. This description is in connection with the death of a purified person who is expected to attain liberation by progressive stages, called by the name *kramamukti*, gradual liberation. Such a person chants Om at the time of death. Everyone will not chant Om at this crucial moment. Those who are accustomed to such a practice throughout life, who have led a very disciplined life of spiritual contemplation throughout their career on earth, will be able to recollect this practice at the time of passing, when usually the mind gets confounded due to the action of natural forces.

How much time does the soul take to jump into the sun? It takes as much time as the mind will take to go to any place. That means it does not take much time. The so-called distance of 93 million miles between the sun up there and the individual here on this earth makes no difference to the soul. It does not take any time at all to reach the sun. Such is the quickness of its action. The soul is taken to the sun at such speed through the passage of the rays. The moment it thinks, it is there. So quickly it is taken there.

This sun is the glorious passage to *Brahma-loka*, the realm of the Creator. This is the entrance to the glorious immortal abode of Brahma. And also it is the halting and checking place, as it were, for the unknowing persons. Those who do not carry an ‘accepted passport’ are turned back from the sun. Everyone cannot go there. The knowers go there and the unknowers return. The latter will not even be allowed to touch that spot. So the sun is the check-post where there is a filtering of souls, as it were. The purified ones are allowed to go beyond and the unpurified ones are kicked back to the earth. He is an entrance to the region of Brahma to the purified ones and also a closed door to those who are unprepared for this ascent.

In this connection there is a verse, says the Upanishad.

Tad esa slokah:

*satam caika ca hrdayasya nadyah
tasam murdhanam abhinihsrtaika,
tayordhvam ayan amrtatvam eti
visvannya utkramane bhavanti,
utkramane bhavanti.*

One hundred and one are the principal nerve currents in this body. One among these hundred and one moves vertically, as it were, towards the crown of the head. This is usually called the *sushumna-nadi* in Yogic language. If our *prana* and minds can travel through this central nerve current called the *sushumna* and up through the crown of the head, we attain immortality. And this is *kramamukti*, gradual liberation.

But if the *pranas* depart not by this central nerve through the crown of the head but through other orifices in the body, then there is rebirth. It may be in this world or it may be in some other lower world, according to the particular passage which the *pranas* seek at the time of exit. No liberation is possible unless the movement is through *sushumna-nadi*. So here one part of the discussion of this important subject of the Atman in the heart is concluded.

PRAJAPATI'S INSTRUCTION TO INDRA CONCERNING THE REAL SELF

Now we are introduced into another important aspect of this subject, namely, the stages of consciousness. You may call these the stages of the realisation of the Atman which manifests itself through the conditions known as waking, dream and deep sleep, a subject which is elaborately discussed in the Mandukya Upanishad. Here also, it is discussed in an equally important and interesting manner by means of an anecdote which is very famous in the Upanishads.

On one occasion, Prajapati made an announcement. He was in his assembly hall. He loudly proclaimed a great truth in the presence of all people. All could hear what he spoke. And what did he speak? What was the announcement he made that is mentioned here?

*Ya atma apahata-papma vijaro vimrtyur-visoko viji-
ghatso'pipasah satya-kamah satya-samkalpah, so-nvestavyah, sa
vijijnasitavyah sa sarvamsca lokan apnoti sarvamsca kaman,
yas-tam atmanam anuvidya vijanati iti ha prajapatir-uvaca.*

This was the proclamation made by Prajapati in an open assembly. "This Atman is free from every kind of evil. It is unaffected by old age or decay of any kind. It has no connection with death. It is free from mortality. Death cannot touch it. It is immortal. It is free from every kind of grief, turmoil or trouble we see in this life. It has no hunger and no thirst. These do not affect It in any manner. Its will is truthful. Its wishes are immediately materialised. All the desires arising from here are immediately fulfilled without any limit of space or time. This Atman is to be investigated into. This Atman is to be known. Whoever investigates into this

Atman and knows the nature of this Atman attains all the worlds and fulfils all desires. This is the great benefit accruing to the knowers of the Atman.”

Thus did Prajapati make an announcement. Loudly was it told, and everyone heard what was said. Well, the meaning is very clear. It does not require much explanation. What is the content of this proclamation is well-known. It excited the curiosity of many who heard it. The gods and the demons both heard this proclamation made in that celestial assembly.

The gods hurried back to their homes and held a conference among themselves with Indra as their chief. They said, “Brahma has told us such an interesting thing! Whoever knows the Atman has mastery over all the worlds and has the capacity to fulfil every wish or desire. We must know this Atman. Some of us should be deputed for getting training in the school of Brahma. We must get initiated into this mystery of the Atman.” The gods chose Indra, their chief, as the proper deputy and sent him to Brahma. They said to him, “Go and have training under Brahma and know this Atman, because he has already made an announcement, that if we know It such wonderful results would follow.”

Similar was the reaction of the *asuras*, the demons. They also heard this. They went back to their world and then held a conference. They said, “This Atman is a very wonderful thing and we must know this Atman.” So they deputed their chief, Virochana, for the purpose. They told him, “You go to Brahma and have training in this wisdom of the Atman, so that we too will be benefited by this knowledge as was proclaimed.” This was the outcome of this announcement.

*Taddhobhaye devasura anubudhire te hocuh, hanta tam atmanam
anvicchama, yam atmanam anvisya sarvams-ca lokan apnoti
sarvams-ca kaman iti, indro haiva devanam abhipravavraja
virochano'suranam tam hasamividanaveva samit-pani
prajapatissakasam ajagmatuh.*

Both Indra and Virochana met each other, perhaps on the way, but one did not speak to the other about the purpose for which he was travelling. Each one was keeping the idea as a secret. Indra and Virochana are deadly enemies. They did not say anything to each other as they were very much preoccupied with the objective for which they were travelling. So, both went to Brahma's place and approached him as humble disciples with the sacred offering of *samit*. And having gone there, it does not appear that they said anything. From what the Upanishad says, it appears that they stayed there for thirty-two years without saying anything, observing austerity, controlling their senses and living a very disciplined life. They lived in the abode of Brahma, having said nothing either between themselves or to Brahma himself.

*Tau ha dvatrisatam varsani brahmacaryam usatuh tau ha
prajapitir-uvaca, kim icchantav-avastam iti. tau hocatuh, ya
atma-apahatapapma vijaro vimrtyur-visoko vijighatso'pipasah
satya-kamah satya-samkalpah so'n vestavyah sa vijijnasitavyah,
sa sarvams-ca lokam apnoti sarvams-ca kaman, yas-tam
atmanam anuvidya vijanati iti bhagavato vaco vedayante, tam*

icchantavavastam iti.

Then after thirty-two years of this kind of living there, Brahma seems to have observed their stay and asked them: “What is the matter with you? Why are you staying here for so many years observing self-discipline? What do you want?” Then both of them said the same thing, “We are here for some purpose.” “What is that purpose?” queried Prajapati. They replied, “O Great Lord, we have heard your great proclamation. You made an announcement that the knower of the Atman fulfils all desires, has mastery over all the worlds and is unaffected by pains of any kind. In search of the knowledge of the Atman have we come here. This is the purpose of our visit, and for this reason it is that we have been living here for thirty-two years observing austerity.” “Oh, that is very good,” said Prajapati. And inasmuch as they had already undergone some discipline, Brahma did not ask them to undergo any further vow or any other formality. He immediately started giving initiation: “You want to know the Atman? Here is this knowledge.” He gave a very pithy and precise instruction which could be interpreted this way or that way. It was like the statement—“The Greeks the Romans shall conquer.” No one knows what the exact meaning of the statement is. It may mean that Romans shall conquer the Greeks, or the Greeks shall conquer the Romans. Prajapati’s instruction was enigmatic.

*Tau ha prajapatir-uvaca, ya eso'ksini puruso drsyata esa atmeti
hovaca, etad-amrtam abhayam etad-brahmeti, atha yo'yam
bhagavah apsu parikhyayate yascayam adarse katama esa iti esa
u evaisu sarvesu antesu parikhyayate iti hovaca.*

“That Being which you see in your eye is the Atman,” said Prajapati. It was a very strange statement indeed. This was all the instruction. There was no further explanation whatsoever. He is right in what he said, but it can be very easily misconstrued. “That *Purusha*, the Being that you see in your eyes, that is the Atman. Are you satisfied? I have given you an initiation. This is the immortal, this is the abode of fearlessness, this is the Absolute.”

Immediately the whole instruction was misconstrued by both the disciples, just as any one of us would have done. They at once came to the same conclusion regarding the reflection seen in the eye. We know what is seen in the eye. A body is reflected. What can be reflected in the eye except a body? “Oh, I see, this is the Atman. What is reflected in the eye is the Atman”—thus concluded both Indra and Virochana. “Then, what is reflected in water, is that the Atman?” they asked. “That which is reflected in the mirror, is that also Atman?” They were so happy that the Atman is so easy to reach. So they want to get this instruction confirmed by asking, “Which is the Atman, that seen as reflected in the water or that seen as reflected in the mirror? Is that also the Atman? Is it true? Is it so?” They queried Brahma, and his answer was very simple. He said, “It is seen in every kind of reflection.” “Well, is it in the water?” they again asked. “Yes, in water also. It is reflected everywhere,” he replied.

A very short instruction! And both were very happy. The disciples felt that they had known the Atman. Actually the teacher must have felt pity for the ignorance of these disciples who immediately misunderstood the whole teaching and

thought the physical body could be the Atman, because that alone can be reflected in this manner. What else can be reflected if not an external object!

THE BODILY SELF

Uda-sarava atmanam aveksya yad-atmano na vijanithah, tan me prabrutam iti, tau hoda-sarave'veksamcakrate, tau ha prajapatir-uvaca kim pasyatha iti; tau hocatuh, sarvan evedam avam, bhagavah, atmanam pasyava, a lomabhya a nakhebhyah pratirupam iti.

Now Brahma said, "Please go and look at yourselves in a pan of water and see what is there; if you cannot understand anything about the Atman, then let me know." They went and saw themselves in a pan of water. Then Brahma asked them, "What do you see?" They immediately gave the answer: "Up to the hair and the nails, everything that we are, we see exactly reflected in this water. This is what we see. We see ourselves as we are."

Tau ha prajapatir-uvaca, sadhv-alankrtau suvasanau pariskrtau bhutvoda-sarave'veksetham iti, tau ha sadhvalankrtau suvasanau pariskrtau bhutvoda-sarave'veksam-cakrate, tau ha prajapatir-uvaca, kim pasyatha iti.

Tau hocatuh yathaivedamavam bhagavah sadhvalankrtau suvasanau pariskrtau sva evam evemau bhagavah sadhvalankrtau suvasanau pariskrtau itiyesa atmeti hovaca etadamrtam abhayam etat brahma iti tau ha santa-hrdayau pravavrajatuh.

Then Brahma said, "This is the Atman." Now what Brahma said was highly significant. But the mystery behind the instruction was so deep that it was again grossly misunderstood by the disciples. Whatever we see is God—this is generally what we say. It is a true statement, no doubt. But it is also an untrue statement. The untrue aspect of it can simply take us astray. But the true aspect of it will, of course, liberate us from bondage. So is the instruction of Brahma. "What you see in your eyes is the Atman. What you see in the reflection is the Atman. This is the Atman, this is the fearless abode, this is the Absolute." So they were told about what they saw as their reflection. Happy and composed in heart, both the students went back thinking that they have known the Atman.

Tau hanviksya prajapatir-uvaca, anupalabhyatmanam ananuvitya vrajatah, yatara etad-upanisado bhavisyanti deva va asurva va, te parabhavisyantiti, sa ha santahrdaya eva virocana'suran jagama, tebhyo haitam upanisadam provaca, atmaiveha mahayyah atma paricaryah, atmanam eveha mahayan atmanam paricarannubhau lokavavapnotimam camum ceti.

When they had gone out of sight, Prajapati thought, "What a pity! These students have understood nothing from me. They have mistaken my teaching completely. They are thinking that their own body is the Atman, and if any one is to consider

this body as the Atman and regard it as the ultimate Reality, and teach others a doctrine that this material body is the Atman, it will not succeed. Those who follow this doctrine are going to be defeated everywhere.”

Virochana went to the demons and said, “I have received initiation. Now I know what the Atman is, by which you can control all the worlds and fulfil all your desires. This body itself, what we see here, is the Atman. This is what Prajapati told us. This body is to be adorned beautifully and taken care of well. It is to be tended well, because it is the Reality. There is nothing more real than this body. It is to be protected by any manner available. It is the knowledge of this Reality, this Atman, this physical embodiment that will help us in fulfilling all our desires. The body is an instrument for the fulfilment of desires and it is through the instrumentality of this body that you have to control all the worlds.” This is the doctrine of the crass materialist and the sensualist that the demons learnt from Virochana. This became the doctrine of the *asuras*.

*Tasmad-apyadyehadadanam asraddhadhanam ayajama-nam
ahuh, asuro bateti; asuranam hyesopaniset pretasya sariram
bhiksaya vasanenalankareneti samskurvanti, etena hyamum
lokam jesyanto manyante.*

To this day people generally say, “Here is a demon” when a person has no charitable nature. He who has no faith in the super-physical realms, who never worships deities above this world, who never performs sacrifices of any kind, who is intensely selfish, self-centred and body-centred, is generally called a demon in common language. “Here is a demon,” they say. This is the doctrine of the *asuras*. Those people who think that the body is very valuable adorn even a corpse. They decorate it beautifully. They cover it with silk, gold, etc., and keep it as if it is very valuable, falsely thinking that it is the true self of man. People are there even now who think that the body has a tremendous value, and even after its death they cannot afford to think that its value is completely gone. This was the conclusion that Virochana arrived at, and all the *asuras* were taught this philosophy. This demoniacal doctrine was proclaimed as a consequence of the initiation that Virochana received from Brahma in respect of the Atman. This is the fate of Virochana and his followers.

Now what happened to Indra? Did he also follow the same doctrine? Poor man! He did not reach home at all. Halfway itself he had doubts in the mind. He thought, “How could this body be the Atman? That cannot be, because if what is reflected in water or reflected anywhere, which is nothing but this body, is the Atman, then the Atman would be affected by every kind of defect to which the body is subject. So there would be a defective Atman. This Atman cannot then be called immortal. This body is subject to death. When this body goes, the Atman also will go, if the body is the Atman. Where then comes fearlessness and immortality and *brahmatva* mentioned by the Creator? There seems to be some mistake in my understanding of this teaching.” So he had these doubts and he did not go to the gods to communicate this knowledge. Instead, he returned immediately to Prajapati.

INDRA FEELS THE INADEQUACY OF THE PHYSICAL THEORY

Atha hendro'prapyaiva devan etad-bhayam dadarsa, yathaiva khalvayam asmin sarire sadhvalankrte sadhvalankrto bhavati, suvasane suvasanah, pariskrte pariskrtah, evam evayam asmin andhe'ndho bhavati, srame sramah, parivrkne parivrknah, asyaiva sarirasya nasam anu esa nasyati, naham atra bhogyam pasyamiti.

Indra had great sorrow and fear in his heart. He thought within himself, "If I am well-dressed, the Atman is also well-dressed. If the body is blind, the Atman is blind. If the body is crippled, the Atman also is crippled. Finally when the body dies, the Atman also will die. Well, this follows as a consequence of taking this body as the Atman. So it is a destructible Atman into which I have been initiated? This is no good. I shall go back to the great master once again and clarify this position."

Sa samit panih punar-eyaya tam ha prajapatir-uvaca, maghavan yacchanta-hridayah pravrajih sardham virocanena, kim icchan punar-agama iti. sa hovaca yathaiva khalv-ayam, bhagavah asmin sarire sadhv-alankrte sadhv-alankrto bhavati, suvasane sruvasanah pariskrte pariskrtah evam evayam asmin andhe'ndho bhavati, srame sramah, parivrkno parivrknah, asyaiva sarirasya nasam anv-esa nasyati, naham atra bhogyam pasyamiti.

Evam evaisa maghavan iti hovaca etam tveva te bhuyo anuvyakhyaami vasaparani dva-trimsatam varsani iti sa haparani dva-trimsatam varsani upasa tasmai hovaca.

Again with humble offering, Indra went to Brahma with discomfiture and doubts. His doubts were that the Atman cannot be the visible body or anything visible whatsoever, because everything that is visible is physical in nature and is characterised by the defects of everything that is physical. Prajapati questioned Indra regarding his doubts. "You went satisfied, and now what makes you come back?" "Great master," replied Indra, "how can we regard this body as the Atman when it is subject to these defects? If this body is blind, the Atman will become blind. If the body is diseased, the Atman would have disease. If the body dies, the Atman will die! So what kind of Atman is this? For these reasons, the reflection cannot be the Atman. I have great doubts. I have come to you for clarification. Perhaps I have misconstrued your teaching. I am having knowledge of a perishable Atman. What is the truth about this matter? Please initiate me further."

"Well, I shall speak to you again, but live here a life of austerity for another thirty-two years. Afterwards I shall speak to you," said Brahma.