



THE CHHANDOGYA UPANISHAD

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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.

Thirty-two years had already passed and again another thirty-two years had to be lived with Prajapati under severe discipline, self-control and aspiration. After the second thirty-two years of disciplined life at the abode of Prajapati, Indra was given fresh instructions.

“What is reflected in the eye or reflected in the water may not be the Atman for the reason you have already mentioned,” said Prajapati. “Now I introduce you into a greater reality which is unaffected by the conditions of the physical body. That has to be regarded as the Atman because if the doubt is that the Atman about which instruction has been received is affected by physical character, then naturally that which is not so affected should be regarded as the Atman.” In the next section, Indra is introduced into an experience which is not conditioned by the characters of the physical body.

THE DREAM SELF

Ya esa svapne mahiyamanas-carati esa atma, iti hovaca, etad-

*amrtam abhayam, etad-brahmeti. sa ha santa-hrdayah
pravavraja; sa haprapyaiva devan etadbhaynm dadarsa; tad-
yadyapidam sariram andham bhavati, anandhah sa bhavati, yadi
sramam asramah, naivaiso'sya dosena dusyati.*

Prajapati now said, "That which you see in the state of dream is the Atman. That is Brahman about which I am going to speak to you. That Being which rejoices and is happy in the state of dream is the Atman, which is fearless and which is immortal. This is the Reality about which I have spoken earlier and into which you seek initiation."

Well, to some extent there was satisfaction of Indra's doubts. The physical body does not affect the conditions in dream. "Yes, this must be so," he thought, and went back, cool, calm and composed in heart. But he was blessed with the capacity to ratiocinate and investigate into what he was told. On the way, before he reached his palace in heaven, he again had a doubt.

"How, could this be?" he thought within himself. "That which is in dream is the Atman? Can it be like that? Yes, if the body is blind, the dream person need not be blind. And if the bodily individual has any other defect such as crippleness, etc., this defect does not affect the dreaming individual. Perhaps even if the physical body is amputated, a limb cut off or affected very seriously, the dreaming individual is not so affected."

*Navadhenasya hanyate, nasya sramyena sramah, ghnanti
tvevainam, vicchadayantivapriyavetteva bhavati, api roditiva,
naham atra bhogyam pasyamiti.*

Now Indra had another doubt. Even if it be that the dreamer is not affected by the defects of the physical body, there is some other defect in dream. One is not always perfect in dream. The point whether the physical body affected the dream body or not is irrelevant. What is pertinent here is that the dreaming individual has the same problems as the waking individual. There is the same pleasure and pain dependent on unreliable factors both in the waking and dreaming body. One feels as if one is chased or driven away or being killed even in dream. One feels sorrow and grief and passes through unpleasant experiences in dream also. Can this then be the Atman? Naturally, it cannot be, because it is not perfect. It is affected by the same changes which the waking body is subjected to. One cries, weeps and sobs when one has painful experiences in dream also. This dreaming Atman is no good. This was the trend of thought which Indra had in his mind when he was halfway to his city in the heavens.

*Sa samit-panih punar-eyaya. tam ha prajapatir-uvaca,
maghavan yuc-chanta-hrdayah pravrajih, kim icchan punar-
agama iti. sa hovaca, tad-yady-apidam, bhagavah, sariram
andham bhavati, anandhah sa bhavati, yadi sramam asramah,
naivaiso'sya dosena dusyati.*

*Na vadhenasya hanyate nasya sramyena sramo ghnanti
tvevainam vicchadayanti ivapriyavetteva bhavati api
redativanahamatra ityevam evaisa maghavan iti hovacha etam*

*tveva te bhuyo'anuvyakhyasyami vasaparani dva-trimsatam
varsani iti sa haparani dva-trimsatam varsanyuvasa tasmai
hovaca.*

Again with sacred firewood, Indra approached Prajapati as a humble disciple. Prajapati queried, "This is the third time. You went away satisfied, O Indra. Now again you have come. What is wrong?"

Indra mentioned once again all his doubts. "This dreaming individual is no good at all," said he. "The dreaming person can be sorry, can be affected in a serious manner like the waking one and he has even the experience of destruction, death, etc. What is the good of this Atman? This is my doubt. Please teach me the real Atman."

"Another thirty-two years you stay here, leading a life of discipline. Let me see then if I can tell you something more about the Atman," said Prajapati. This is the third time that he was asked to live a life of self-control. Indra must have been a tenacious person, no doubt, to stay like this for the sake of the great knowledge which he sought, by the acquisition of which he aspired for mastery over all the worlds and fulfilment of every kind of desire. So he, according to the injunction of Prajapati, stayed there, the latter's abode, for another thirty-two years, leading a life of intense discipline, austerity and *tapascharya*. After these thirty-two years, Prajapati instructed Indra again.

THE SELF IN DEEP SLEEP

*Tad-yatraitat suptah samastah samprasannah svapnam na
vijanati esa atmeti hovaca, etad-amrtam abhayam etad-brahmeti.
sa ha santa-hridayah pravavraja, sa haprapyaiva devan eta-
bhayam dadarsa, naha khalvayam evam sampraty-atmanam
janati, ayam aham asmi iti no evemani bhutani vinasam evapito
bhavati naham atra bhogyam pasyamiti.*

"Now, I will tell you something different. I will point out the Atman which is not affected by the physical body, nor conditioned by the sorrows of dream, and which is blessed in its own state. What is that? He who is in the deep sleep state, that is the Atman. This is the immortal, this is the fearless, this is the Atman. Which one? That which is in the state of deep sleep," said Prajapati.

Now, that which is in the state of deep sleep has no experience of sorrow of any kind. It does not feel that it is affected by anything. It has no grief. It does not feel that it dies. So in a sense it is all right. The sleeping state is a state of freedom from all the turmoils of both the physical and psychic life in the waking and the dreaming states.

Listening to these instructions of Prajapati, Indra was satisfied for the time being. So, he left Prajapati's abode and went back home thinking that he had known the Atman. But, on the way he again had doubts. He did not reach home. He had great fear.

“What sort of Atman is this that is in sleep? It is as if it is not there at all! It is a zero, an annihilation, a negation of all things! This Atman is a darkness which knows neither its own self nor others. What kind of thing is this sleep? Neither it knows that it is, nor does it know that anything else is. It is like complete annihilation, as it were. How could self-annihilation be the Atman? This kind of Atman is no good. That which does not know its own Self! What sort of Atman is this?” With these doubts, Indra again went back to Prajapati.

*Sa samit-panih punar-eyaya. tam ha prajapatir-uvaca,
maghavan, yacchanta-hrdayah pravrajih, kim icchan punar-
agama iti. sa hovaca, naha khalv-ayam, bhagavah, evam
sampraty-atmanam janati, ayam ahamasmiti, no evemani
bhutani, vinasam evapito bhavati, naham atra bhogyam
pasyamiti.*

With sacred fuel in hand, Indra came to Prajapati as a disciple once again to learn the truth about the Atman. Prajapati asked, “O Indra, why have you come back again? You went away satisfied after receiving my instruction.” Indra replied, “This Atman in deep sleep that you spoke to me about does not know anything at all. It is an ignorant Atman. This is a state of apparent self-annihilation. I cannot believe that this is the immortal Atman, by knowing which one becomes the lord of all the worlds and fulfils all desires, and about which you made a proclamation in your court. Kindly teach me about that Atman.”

*Evam evaisa, maghavan, iti hovaca, etam tveva te
bhuyo’nuvyakhyasyami, no evanyatraitasmat, vasaparani panca
varsaniti, sa haparani panca varsany-uvaca, tanyeva-satam
sampeduh, etat tad-yad-ahuh eka-satam ha vai varsani
maghavan prajapatau brahmacaryam uvaca. tasmai hovaca.*

“Another five years of discipline is necessary. So stay here for another five years,” said Prajapati. According to the advice of the great master, he lived there again for five years with intense discipline, and sought initiation again. So, one hundred and one years of *tapas* did Indra perform in the abode of Prajapati for the sake of this Supreme Knowledge. Even now people say: “Indra, such a powerful person with such a brilliant intellect, had to live a life of tremendous austerity for one hundred and one years for the sake of this Atman knowledge!”

What to speak of other ordinary people! How much discipline is necessary! How much preparation is called for! And what intense austerity has to precede this seeking of knowledge from a teacher! This shows the need for the requisite preparation for the reception of this knowledge. It cannot come easily. After these preparations on the part of Indra and his having completed one hundred and one years of tremendous *tapas*, Prajapati instructed about the final truth about the Atman.

THE SELF AS SPIRIT

*Maghavan, martyam va idam sariram attam mrtyuna tad-
asyamrtasyasarirasyatmano’dhistanam, atto vai sasarirah,*

*priyapriyabhyam, na vai sasarirasya satah priyapriyayor-
apahatirasti, asariram vava santam na priyapriye sprsatah.*

Prajapati said, "O Indra, please listen to me. This body is perishable. It is enveloped and overwhelmed by death from every side. How could this be the Atman?"

The physical body is subject to death and transformation, a matter known to everyone. So is the state of the psychic individuality also. The mind is not in any way better than the body in that it is equally finite, limited, and conditioned in the same way as the body is. The limitation of personality in space and time and exclusiveness of oneself from other individuals are similar, whether it be the case of the physical body or the psychic personality. So this individuality is subject to death. Anything that is visible, individual, particular, or finite cannot be the Atman. Neither the body nor the mind can be the Atman. Neither the waking individual, nor the dreaming individual, nor the experiencer of deep sleep can be the Atman. Sleep is a causal condition which engenders the experiences of the mind through dream and waking. It is a potential food which contains the seed of life in the form of these experiences in dream and waking. Hence, being the mother of this phenomenal experience here, it cannot be regarded as being out of touch with phenomenality.

The Atman is neither an individual conscious of itself as a person, nor is it an unconscious entity. It is something quite different. It is not personality consciousness; it is also not non-consciousness. Then what sort of consciousness can it be? Can you even imagine what sort of awareness it is, where one is not aware of one's individuality, nor is one not unaware of anything? Such awareness is the Atman about which we have to know. It is not the body because it is characterised by change, transformation and death.

No one can escape death as long as he has a body. This body is nothing but a vehicle for the manifestation of the immortal, bodiless Atman. This body manifests one degree of the Reality of the Atman. That is true. In that sense, it is a receptacle, as it were, of this consciousness which is the Atman. The immortal is capable of manifesting its existence through the functions of the body, but it is not identical with the body. This physical experience, the mortal life that we are living here, is incompatible with the immortal life of the Atman. But it is the vehicle in the sense that it has characters in itself by which we can proceed to the nature of the Atman gradually by the logical process of induction. Though it is the vehicle, it is not identical with it.

Anyone who has a body, whatever that body be, physical or psychic, cannot escape being conditioned by the vicissitudes of pleasure and pain. There is no use exulting in pleasure, because it is not going to be there permanently. There is always the undercurrent of future sorrow even at the time of the experience of the present so-called happiness. It is a transitory wind only that is blowing in the form of happiness in this world. So is the case with the sorrow of life. No one can escape the clutches of pleasure and pain as long as one lives in this finite body. No one can be free as long as one has a body. Freedom is a chimera as long as there is bodily individuality. One has to pass through these ruts of pleasure and

pain, these transitory experiences of life as long as one is content to be in this body. The body we are speaking of is not necessarily this body here on earth. It may be any body of any realm of existence. It may be even a body in paradise. That also is subject to destruction, because it is also in space and time, though of a different order. It is, after all, characterised by finitude. And what is finitude? It is the consciousness of something being outside one's self and of something limiting one's own being. This is the fate of everyone who has a body and no one who has a body can be free at any time, in any manner whatsoever.

Asariro vayuh, abhram, vidyut, stanayitnur-asariranyetani. tad-yathaitany-amusmad-akasad samatthaya param jyotir-upasampadya svena rupenabhinispadyante.

But these difficulties do not arise when the body vanishes and when one experiences a bodiless existence. It is impossible to conceive what bodiless existence is. It is beyond the conception of the mind because of the fact that the mind is only a handmaid of bodily experiences. It simply accepts what the body wants, what the body clamours for and what the senses speak. Whatever the mind thinks is only in terms of the body. So how can the mind imagine what is bodiless? It has to stand on its own head, as it were, which is impossible. So, the injunction of Prajapati that the bodiless existence is free from the vicissitudes of pleasure and pain cannot easily be made intelligible to the mind that is affected by the cognitions of bodily existence.

But here is the truth. The Atman is bodiless. That does not mean that it is an ethereal abstraction. The doubt in the mind that is likely to arise that freedom from the body may be some ethereal abstraction is due to the misconceptions arising consequent upon the habits of the mind. The Atman is not an abstraction from the physical existence. What the Atman is, the mind cannot think, for the simple reason that we are used to imagining that physical bodies are substantives which have qualities and characters inhering in them. In our present condition we can never for a moment think that the substantive can be other than a physical body. Whatever we think is physical only. Even if we close our eyes and imagine something non-physical with the stretch of our imagination, it cannot be non-physical because it will be located in space and time. That which is located in space and time is physical. This is the very meaning of physicality. There is no such thing as non-physical thinking and, therefore, the Atman cannot be thought of by the mind. That is the reason also why we cannot imagine what this bodiless existence means.

The bodiless existence of the Atman is not the divesting of Reality in any manner whatsoever. It is complete freedom and not the negation of anything. It is like the gaining of health from a condition of disease. It is an impersonality of state, an impersonality of condition, an impersonality of experience, and an impersonality of being. The so-called body or the physical atmosphere is a finitisation of this impersonal being. Can we say, to give only a very gross intelligible example, that a lump of ice which is finite in its bodily being is in any way superior to the causes out of which it has come into existence? The ice is nothing but a solidified form of water. Water is more general in its formation than this limited form of ice. But

even water has a cause behind it, hydrogen and oxygen, and we cannot say that the water is superior to its cause in any manner whatsoever. Can you say that water vapour is inferior to the manifestation that is called water or ice? But even these gases, hydrogen and oxygen, are not ultimate causes. They are again manifestations chemically of something superior or more subtle in character, more unthinkable. Merely because something is unthinkable it does not become a non-real existence. The more is the capacity of our mind to conceive causes, the more will we be able to understand the nature of the Atman. Why it looks abstracted is because it is generalised and is universal.

Space is, in a sense, an impersonal existence. It has no finite form in the sense of a body that we can see with our physical eyes. But it cannot be said, even physically speaking, that space or ether is divested of the realities of the physical earth, fire, air or water. We are told that the contents of the earth can be withdrawn by way of sublimation into the causes thereof, so that they become liquids and gases which can all be absorbed into ether, which in turn is not a negation of physical substances but a very ethereal impersonal existence of everything that we call physical. Some such thing happens when we enter into the consciousness of the impersonal Atman. Because of this impersonality of Being, it cannot be affected by anything, because anything which can affect something else has to be other than that which it affects, and other than that (the Atman) nothing is.

So, this seems to be the implication of the great injunction of Prajapati. Indra might understand it or not, but this is the fact. Prajapati gave some examples to make Indra understand this impersonal nature of the Atman. Air has no body. It is not affected by pleasure and pain. In a sense it is bodiless, because it is not located in some particular place. It is not attached to any particular body. It has free movement. The lightning in the sky is also of an impersonal character to some extent. The clouds are also of an impersonal character to some extent. The thunder is also of an impersonal character. These clouds will vanish into space. They get absorbed into space. Wind also ceases and gets identified with space when it is heated up by the light of the sun. These movements of wind, the falling of water as rain and every phenomenon that we see in the atmosphere—all these are capable of being lost in space ultimately, under certain given conditions. They go to their sources. They arise from their cause and they go back to their cause. Space is the ultimate cause of every physical element. By space we do not mean emptiness, but a most subtle impersonal state of physical existence. So, everything goes back to its cause, which is the universal ether, and everything arises from that universal ether. Even so is the case with all this creation which has arisen, as it were, from this universal Atman and it goes back to this universal Atman.

*Evam evaisa samprasado'smac-charirat samutthaya param
jyotir-upasampadya svena rupenabhinispadyate, sa uttamah
purusah, sa tatra paryeti, jaksat kridan ramamanah sribhir-va
yanair-va jnatibhir-va nopajanam smarannidam sariram, sa
yatha prayogya acarane yuktah, evam evayam asmin sarire
prano yuktah.*

Just as finite objects appear to get lost in the impersonal causes from where they have come, even so this being, having risen from its bodily existence, attains to the immortal state, shining in nature, as the pure consciousness which it originally was. This is the most serene condition of one's own Self. We cannot say we are serene or composed merely because there are no sounds and there are no contacts. Serenity or composure is real freedom, the experience of which is free from every kind of sorrow or limitedness in the states of waking, dream and sleep. One has to rise above these three states, the physical, the subtle and the causal conditions, which are limitations of the Atman. The three states—waking, dream and sleep—are the three conditions to which the consciousness of the Atman is apparently attached, and due to which one appears to be an individual. One has to rise up from these limited embodiments. From the waking physical experience, from the limitations of even the mind which works in dream, and from the limitations of deep sleep, one has to rise up. Then it is that one becomes the true Being.

True Being is not unconscious. It is not a cause, nor is it the subtle manifest condition. It is not also a physical body. It is supreme luminosity, *param jyoti*. It is the Light of all lights. It is not a light like the light of the sun, but it is self-luminous Being. It is a Light which does not need illumination from something else other than itself. It is self-luminous in the sense that it illumines itself. This does not mean that it is ignorant of the existence of others. It is the Self of all beings. It is not the self of one person or two persons, of one individual or a group of individuals. The word 'self' is an abused term; so is the term 'Atman' due to the limitations of language. We are always accustomed to use the term 'self' in respect of individuals as 'myself', 'yourself', 'himself', 'herself', 'itself', etc. It is not in this sense that the word 'self' is used here. It is not this self or that self we are referring to. It is the Selfhood which is the true Being of everything that is.

So, Self-luminosity does not mean the luminosity of any particular self in the sense of a body, because we have already made it clear that the Self is not a body. To bring it once again in association with a body for the purpose of the interpretation of the meaning of the Self would be a travesty of affairs. Self-luminosity is Universal luminosity. It is not luminosity of an individual. Why is it Universal luminosity? Because, it is the Self of everything in the universe. It is the Selfhood of everything that is anywhere. So it is a comprehensive luminosity of universal Selfhood.

“O Indra, such is your true Being into which you seek initiation. This is the true serenity and composure of the Self. You have to stand by your own right. You have to assume your real status. This is freedom, this is called *atma-svarajya*, the freedom of the Self,” said Prajapati.

We are not in our own status. We do not enjoy our status when we are in the physical body. We know very well how much slavery is there in bodily individuality. The conditions of the body which are the outcome of the way in which the physical laws of nature work are limiting us. We are very sorry and very unhappy in this world, indeed. We are not secure, on account of our subjection to the body and its laws in the waking state. Nor are we happy in the dreaming state,

merely because we have a mind alone, because the mind is a slave of the body in all its cognitions. So, that too is not going to be our guide and support. What is the good of this sleeping condition? It is as good as annihilation, as Indra himself has pointed out. So, none of these states through which we pass can be of any value for us. We are nothing in all the three states,—waking, dream and deep sleep. We are just nobodies or we are like puppets drifting about, but controlled by strings operated by ‘somebody’ whose existence we cannot understand. The true status is freedom from all kinds of external subjection to every kind of law outside. And, this can be attained only when the so-called outsideness or externality ceases to exist. As long as there is outsideness, its law will operate. Thus, there is no freedom except in a state of universality. There is no freedom as long as there is body.

Prajapati said: “This is the great truth, O Indra. This is the Atman. Now do you understand what the Atman is? This is the Supreme Person, if you would call It a person.” It is not a person actually. We call it a person only by way of expression, explanation for the purpose of helping the understanding of the immature mind. It is the Supreme Being. That is how we translate the term *Uttama-purusha*, occurring here. Superior to the transitory *purushas*, we have the universal *Purusha*. The word *Uttama-purusha* occurs in the Bhagavad-Gita also in its fifteenth chapter, where we are told that there are two *purushas*, the *kshara* and the *akshara*, and that there is the third, the supreme one, the *Purushottama* or the *Uttama-purusha*, which means to say that there is something transcending both the perishable universe and the imperishable, immanent consciousness.

These descriptions pertain to the life of spiritual freedom, sometimes called *Jivanmukti*. In the usual language of the Vedanta philosophy, there is that state known as *Jivanmukti* which means spiritual Liberation even when the body is there apparently. There are umpteen descriptions of what *Jivanmukti* is, and there is limitation in all these descriptions. It is held by people that the so-called existence of the body of the *Jivanmukta* is there from the point of view of others who see him and not from his own point of view. This is one way of looking at it. We cannot say whether he himself is aware of the body or not. But others see it. So, as long as others see the existence and the movement of the body of that individual, that individual is supposed to be a *Mukta* with a body. That is why he is called *Jivanmukta*.

Others are of opinion that he may also be aware of his own physical existence in a different way altogether from what we feel in respect of our own bodies. The consciousness of the existence of the body is not necessarily an evil, provided it is experienced in the proper perspective. It is the ignorance that is the cause of bondage and not merely the existence of this thing or that thing. The mere presence of the body will not be a bondage provided it is known in its reality.

This again is a very difficult thing to grasp. What is it to know a thing in reality? No one can explain these things unless one goes to this state personally. And no one can understand it also unless one enters this state. It is usually held that one experiences in this condition of *Jivanmukti* a tremendous freedom of attainment and achievement. What sort of freedom is it? It is not a freedom to do anything

that one likes in the sense of a license given to an immature individual. It is a freedom that comes, on account of a knowledge of the depths of everything, not only a knowledge in the sense of an ordinary accumulation of facts by logical knowledge, but an insight into the nature of Reality by identity of being.

To understand as to what the behaviour of this person would be in respect of others, we have only to imagine for the time being what would be our attitude towards a thing in respect of which we have established identity of existence. It is well nigh impossible to conceive it, as long as we have not experienced it, but by a stretch of imagination we can, to some extent, feel what that state could be. How do we feel in respect of the thing with which we are one? What is our attitude towards it? Well, it is neither one of attachment nor one of repulsion, neither one of like nor one of dislike, but a feeling of complete mastery over it. This is the characterisation of that state where one is in identity with everything and yet is not attached to anything or repulsed by anything. The freedom that one experiences in the state of *Jivanmukti* is, therefore, one of complete mastery born of identity of being, and not a mastery in the sense of control of one person by another person as we see in this world. It is not the exercise of power by one person in respect of another. It is an exuberance of the abundance of power which is inseparable from the universality of Being. Ultimately power is one with Being itself. So, this is something very enigmatic, very difficult to grasp ordinarily. It is nothing but the difficulty in explaining God himself. It is God-being that we are describing when we speak of *Jivanmukti*, an embodiment so called which becomes the vehicle of God-experience in this world itself. Such is *Jivanmukti* about which Prajapati is speaking in these passages.