



## THE CHHANDOGYA UPANISHAD

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Now, in this concluding passage of the Upanishad, we are given the advice that for the sake of this Knowledge one has to dedicate the whole of one's life in a highly disciplined manner. This vocation, if you would like to call it, is not going to be one among the many other activities in life. It is a whole-souled aspiration, and so it calls for an application of every faculty of ours in a completely dedicated manner. What we usually call the four stages of life, the *asramas*—*brahmacharya*, (celibate student's life), *garhasthya* (married householder's life), *vanaprastha* (life of an anchorite), and *sannyasa* (monkhood)—are hinted at in this passage as the requisite process through which one passes for the maturity of one's mind. And at the same time, a caution also is administered that the whole of one's life has to be lived in such a way that it is a preparation for the spiritual goal. There is often a misconception that the spiritual part of one's life is *sannyasa* alone and the earlier three stages are not. This is what is refuted by all the Upanishads. All the stages of life right from *brahmacharya* onwards are preparations for spiritual life. Rather, all of them are necessary stages in one's ascent to the spiritual goal. It is not that the spiritual life commences only from *sannyasa* abruptly, as it were, and the earlier three stages are disconnected entirely from the spiritual goal. The whole of one's life from birth to death is a spiritual preparation. There is nothing but the Atman, the Spirit in life, and, therefore, no activity can be entirely secular, in the sense of its being bereft of the awareness of God's presence, as one's goal of life. In India particularly we have what are called *samskaras*, the various ceremonies symbolic of the affiliation of every stage of one's life to the spiritual goal. There is no such thing as an unspiritual aspect of life, whether it be *brahmacharya*, *grahasthya*, or *vanaprastha*. This is a very important advice by which we are told that the whole life of a person, whoever be that person, is an entirely dedicated schooling, as it were, a period of training for the purpose of the final achievement of Liberation. There is no part of life which can be squandered or wasted, or completely cut off from this consciousness of the ideal of one's life.

Even childhood has to be associated by proper means. The moment consciousness becomes self-conscious even in a youngster, the traditional method is to be followed. He gets admitted into the *gurukula* of the *acharya*, the

Guru. The sacred training ground is called the *gurukula*, the abode of the Guru, the atmosphere of a spiritual teacher. There one studies the Vedas. The Vedas are not studied as we are accustomed to study them these days. It is not merely a parrot-like chant of the words of the Vedas without knowing what they mean. Study of the Vedas is imbibing of knowledge, not merely a committing to memory of the words contained therein. And the Veda does not mean merely a book or a particular scripture. *Ananta Vedah*—“Vedas are endless” says an old adage. The Veda is a name given to the repository of all comprehensive knowledge which in turn has various stages and aspects of approach. Very few people have time enough to comprehend everything that is in the Veda. Most often they are introduced into certain *sakhas*, sections only, and even all those sections cannot be studied. Even if all those sections are taught, everything that is contained in them cannot be absorbed into one’s mind. However, this study of the Veda is a very necessary stage of training.

There is another important advice here which is likely to miss the attention of ordinary people. The study under a preceptor should be done during the period of time which one has, apart from the time one spends for the service of the Guru. The student will not be studying from morning till evening sitting with a book, completely ignoring his duty of serving the Guru. Study is secondary and is to be undergone only at other times, the time of recess, as it were, which is at his disposal after he has completed his daily duties to his Guru.

Having undergone this training for the required period under a Guru, one usually enters the household life. The life of a householder should not be one of distracted secular activity. It is not the opposite of *sannyasa*, as people generally think. It is like *brahmacharya*, one of the steps leading to *sannyasa*, and at the same time, is the most mature part of one’s life. There is a manifoldness of duty enjoined upon the householder. His difficulties are many and, therefore, the training that he undergoes in that period is more effective, and is a greater preparation, as it were, than in any other stages. Having settled in a proper household after his period of training under a Guru is over, one should find time to be seated in a holy or sacred place and continue the study in order not to forget study, because it is the art of keeping the mind impressed with the consciousness of the goal of life. Else one will forget everything. Though one may have studied something in the earlier days, one may forget everything and the mind may get rusted. *Svadhyaya* is a necessary perpetual training for everyone, which is not actually the process of acquiring new knowledge, but a way of keeping the mind aware always of what it has studied, and the way of applying this knowledge in practice to attain the great goal. So *svadhyaya* is a permanent requisite. Always you have to be studying these great texts lest you may forget your goal. A householder has of, course, virtuous children or virtuous disciples who will receive this knowledge from him. Under him they undergo this kind of training. Thus he fulfils his obligation as a householder for the required period.

Then comes the stage of *vanaprastha*. Here he withdraws his senses. All the activities get centered in the Self when the senses are withdrawn. Instead of external activity, there is now internal activity. A psychological function replaces all the physical duties such as sacrifices, the *panchamahayajnas*. The various

services that he was rendering outwardly in the world previously now become the responsibilities of his life in an internal world of self-control and withdrawal of the senses.

The great vow of the *sannyasin* is *ahimsa*, that he would never harm anyone. He is the embodiment of the great fearlessness that he extends to all living beings. No one will be afraid of seeing a *sannyasin*, for he will not do any harm or anything bad, as his heart has expanded beyond the limits of his own body and his family. The term *anyatra tirthebhyah* here used with reference to *ahimsa* means that it would be difficult to extend this obligation of non-injury in an unconditional manner on account of the fact that we live in a world. Various interpretations have been offered for this particular phrase. The usual meaning would be the sacrificial injunctions of the Brahmanas of the Vedas that the committing of *himsa* is forbidden everywhere except in prescribed places or prescribed occasions. The more generous interpretation of it, as is offered by many commentators, is that the prescribed occasions are those times or periods of activity when you are likely to commit some kind of harm to creatures inadvertently, as it were. It is not possible to live a life of such an extreme type of *ahimsa* on account of our not being aware many a time as to what we are doing. Of course the intention is not that you should consciously do any harm. Unconsciously harm is done. This is done particularly by the householders because of their living in a house having a kitchen with a fire place, a water place, a grinding place, a broom, etc., where insects, flies and the like are likely to be crushed and killed inadvertently. Various other occasions also are there in life which cannot be recounted here when you are likely to cause unconsciously harm to living beings. These of course are excluded, if they are unconsciously done. But they can be expiated by the intense *sadhana* which the *sannyasin* is expected to perform in the purely internal spiritual life that he lives full of proper meditation.

The whole of one's life should be lived like this. The moment one becomes conscious of the goal of one's life, then it is up to one to see that one's every activity is somehow or other reconciled with this goal. One should not do any incompatible thing against one's own conscience and against the purpose that one has on hand. Thus it is that it is necessary to have one's entire life transformed into a spiritual art and complete dedication.

Often it is said that the last thought is the determining factor of one's future fate. The last thought that may come to the mind at the time of death is the fruit of this tree of the long life that one has lived in this world. We know very well that the fruit cannot be different from the nature of the tree. So, the last thought cannot be something quite contrary to or different from the various impressions produced in the mind by the continuous thoughts that it was entertaining throughout life. And if one has to have this spiritual ideal maintained in one's consciousness at the time of departing, then it has to be maintained as a discipline throughout one's life.

Thus one reaches the great abode of the Creator, *Brahma-loka*, from whence there is no return. Once we go there, we will not come back. This is very frightening to many people. They interject: "We don't come back! Is it like

entering into a lion's den!" We need not enter into this subject, because it looks very funny that after studying the whole Upanishad we have an uncanny fear that God will swallow us and we will have no occasion to come back. The question of coming back does not arise because we become one with the universal Reality. This going and coming are only ways of speaking in this phenomenal world. What happens is actually a union of consciousness with the All-Being, the Absolute.

Here concludes the Chhandogya Upanishad. Before concluding the study of this Upanishad, I shall take up two sections from the earlier portions, which we shall study under Appendices I and II. They are called the Sandilya-Vidya and the Samvarga-Vidya.

### **SANDILYA-VIDYA**

Sandilya, the great Rishi, had this revelation of the Supreme Being. *Vidya* is a meditation, an art of thinking on the Supreme goal. This meditation begins with the proclamation of the all-comprehensiveness of Brahman: "*Sarvam khalvidam brahma*—All this is verily Brahman." This *vidya* is contained in Section 14 of Chapter Three of the Upanishad.

*Sarvam khalvidam brahma, tajjalaniti santa upasita, atha khalu  
kratumayah puruso yatha-kratur-asmin-loke puruso bhavati  
tathetah pretya bhavati, sa kratum kurvita.*

This is a very famous passage in the Upanishad. This is how we have to meditate, calmly, quietly and peacefully. We have to meditate that everything comes from That, everything is sustained in That, and everything returns to That. That which is the origination, the sustenance and the dissolution of all things is this Brahman. Inasmuch as it is the cause of all things, naturally, every effect in the form of this creation is contained there. We too are effects of creation. So, we too are contained in it. There is a great justification in the assertion that everything is the Supreme Being. Logically and naturally, when the effects are all contained in the cause, one should be able to appreciate the all-comprehensiveness of the ultimate cause. This cause only is, inasmuch as no effect can be separated from the cause. There is an undifferentiated relationship between the effect and the cause. There is no gap between the one and the other. We are, therefore, not isolated from the cause. There is no vital cut or gulf between this universe of effect and its cause which is Brahman. This means to say that even now we are vitally connected with the Absolute. We are maintaining even at this moment an organic relationship. The difficult part of this meditation is that we ourselves, as thinkers, are associated vitally and organically with the Supreme Being on whom we have to meditate. We cannot think like this. For, the mind refuses to think. We can think something outside us and we can think of the whole universe practically, but we cannot think something in which we ourselves are involved, because there it is that the mind finds itself incapable of functioning. There is no such thing as mind thinking itself.

Aristotle said that God is thought thinking itself. It is very difficult to understand what it means. How can thought think itself? It always thinks something else. So, Brahman cannot be thought by the mind, and yet this is the injunction of the

Upanishad. The highest kind of meditation is *sarvam khalvidam brahma*. All this manifestation which you see in the form of individuality, whether organic or inorganic, visible or invisible, wherever it be, is That. Nothing but That is.

Again to reiterate, the most difficult thing to swallow here is that we ourselves are a part of That. The meditator is part of that which is meditated on. How is one to even think? It requires a tremendous psychological preparation and an extraordinary type of purity of mind to appreciate what this instruction is. This is not an ordinary type of meditation. It is most extraordinary in the sense that you are contemplating yourself, as it were, and not something or somebody else. That is implied in the statement that everything is included in That, not excluding oneself who meditates.

Thus should you meditate: “*Sarvam khalvidam brahma*—all this verily is the Supreme Absolute Brahman.” How do you contemplate Brahman? The whole universe—you can imagine what the universe could be—has come from That. It has not come from That as something different from That. The very substance of this creation is the substance of the Absolute. That is one aspect of the matter. The other aspect is that there is no disconnection between the effect and the cause. So you can imagine how hard it is to entertain this thought. Everything is That because of the effect being non-disassociated from the cause. It is connected with the cause. It is sustained, even now at the time of the apparent creation, in That only and it will go back to That. So there is no place for anything to exist except That. Also, there is nothing other than That. Thus, one should meditate.

The word *kratuh* has several meanings. It means an effort of the will, an action of the mind, a determination of the understanding and a meditation that you practise. All this meaning is comprehended by the word *kratuh*. The whole of one's life is nothing but a determination or willing in this manner. Throughout our life we will in some way or other. The individual is an embodiment of action performed through his will. And whatever we will, that we become, because of the intensity of the will. As we affirm, so we experience and that we become. Our experiences are nothing but our affirmations through will. We have affirmed something very intensely in our previous lives, and the reward of those affirmations is the present series of experiences we are passing through here. So this is a caution, again administered to us. Inasmuch as whatever we think intensely and continuously, and that we are going to become, what should we think throughout our life if we want to become Brahman? We want to become the Absolute Itself. What should be the kind of thought that we should entertain? What should be the type of affirmation that we should make? How should our will work? This need not be explained further, because it is obvious. Therefore, my dear readers, spend your time in absorption of your thought in Brahman. This should be your meditation throughout your life. The Upanishad gives some further details as to how we should conduct this meditation in our life.

*Mano-mayah prana-sariro bha-rupah satya-samkalpa akasatma  
sarva-karma sarva-kamah sarva-gandhah sarva-rasah sarvam  
idam abhyatto'vakyanadarah.*

The whole mental world is permeated by this Being. The light of the mind, the light of understanding, the light of intelligence is the light of Brahman. It appears to be embodied through these *pranas* and the body. They are a vehicle, an embodiment to particularise this infinite consciousness. And as I have mentioned already, even these as effects are not different from consciousness, the cause. So, this mental body or vital body of ours is not to be regarded as distinct from the Absolute. They are only occasions for the meditation on Brahman. From the particular we have to go to the universal. Though the particular is limited in comparison with the expanse of the universal, qualitatively it cannot be different from the universal. Just as from a drop you can know the ocean, from the particular we can reach the universal. Thus is the meditation. It is effulgence in its nature and light is its character. It is the glory of consciousness that is effulgence.

Whatever is willed through this consciousness is materialised at once—*satya-samkalpah*. This is what we studied in the last chapter of this Upanishad.

The Self of this Being is as vast as space. It is not a limited individual self. The whole space itself is the Self—*akaratma*. As vast as space is, so wide is this Self which is Brahman. It is, therefore, all-comprehensive.

All actions are its actions—*sarvakarma*. It performs everything. Whatever I do, whatever you do, whatever anyone does, whatever happens anywhere in all the levels of creation—all these are activities of that Being. It is the fingers of God working through all these phenomena of nature. All the ways in which the mind thinks are the ways He thinks.

*Sarvakamah*—all the wishes in your mind, all the desires, are the desires of the Self ultimately in some way or other. Every kind of desire, whatever the nature of the desire be, is nothing but a movement of consciousness towards universality in some way or other. This subject is discussed in some detail in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, which describes how every desire is universal desire ultimately. Anything that you smell through the nose is again an activity of That Being only—*sarva-gandhah*. This again has been mentioned earlier, in the last chapter of the Upanishad. The objects as well as the means of cognition are both Itsself only appearing objectively on one side in one aspect, and subjectively in another. All the tastes, anything that you contact through the organ of taste, is nothing but Its activity—*sarva-rasah*.

Everything is enveloped by That—*sarvam-idam-abhyattah*. What further can we speak of It? It is enveloping all—*isavasyam idam sarvam* as the Isavasya Upanishad puts it. Inside and outside It is there as the *antaryamin*. It does not speak, but It can convey Its message and It is free from agitation and eagerness—*avaki anadarah*. It has no desires in the ordinary sense. It is not eager to grasp things, grab things and have things, because It is all things. This is not merely a teaching giving some information, but it is instruction about meditation, the way in which a mind has to be organised in daily meditation so that it may not wander from place to place and may not think of many things. The many things do not exist. What will the mind think when it knows this truth!

*Esa ma atmantar-hrdaye'niyan vriher-va, yavad-va, sarsapad-va, syamakad-va, syamaka-tandulad-va, esa ma atmantar-hrdaye jyayan prthivyah, jyayan antarikasajjayan divah, jyayan ebhyo lokebhyah.*

This great Being, the Supreme Brahman is in one's own heart as fine and subtle as one can conceive of. It is the subtlest. It is most subtle even among those that we regard as very subtle in this world. Subtler than a grain of rice or paddy, subtler than a grain of millet, subtler than the kernel of this grain, so small, subtler than a mustard seed is this great Being who is seated in one's heart. But does it mean it is as small as a mustard seed? No, it is at the same time as vast as the whole of creation. So, objectively also it has to be contemplated, in the same way as we contemplate it subjectively as our own deepest Self inseparable from the whole cosmos. This little thing referred to as one's own Self here is bigger than this vast earth. It is not merely as fine as a millet seed, but also vaster than this whole earth, and this entire atmosphere. It is vaster than all the worlds, not merely this one atmosphere. It is larger than even the sky and the heavens. It is vaster than all the fourteen worlds of creation which cannot comprehend its magnitude. So vast is its objectivity and magnitude, being infinite in its expanse, and yet it is in me, in you, and in every one of us, as if it is so little like a small flame of light.

This symbology is given only for the purpose of contemplation, because it has to be taught to us that it is not merely an infinite expanse outside us, unconnected with us as a transcendent something, but is identical with our own Being also. The Upanishads are never tired of hammering this idea into us that the Supreme Being is both objectively infinite and subjectively the Self of everyone. This is the principal meditation of almost every part of any Upanishad. It is the vast infinitude, incomprehensible to the mind, and yet nothing can be so near to us as That. It is so distant as the distant horizons themselves because of its infinitude and vastness, and yet so near as to be well nigh inseparable from us because it is the Atman itself.

*Sarva-karma sarva-kamah sarva-gandhah, sarva-rasah, sarvam idam abhyatto'vakyanadarah, easa ma atmantar-hrdaye etad-brahma, etam itah pretyabhisambhavitasmī iti yasya syat addha na vicikitsasti iti ha smaha sandilyah, sandilyah.*

Sandilya, who was a great sage, proclaims this great knowledge: "This great Being whose actions are all actions, whose desires are all desires, whose functions are all functions through the senses, is inside me and It is that which is inside everything."

The reason why the Atman is called Brahman is because it is the Self of all. As the Self of each one, it is called the Atman. As the all-comprehensive Self, it is called Brahman. The doubt that may arise in the mind as to the localisation of the Atman is removed by the assertion that it is the Self of all. It is a contemplation on the all-pervading Self, the universal Self. Therefore, the Atman in one is the Brahman everywhere.

“This Brahman is what I am”—thus we should meditate. The moment we get up in the morning this thought should come to the mind. The progress of our life in spirituality can be judged from the first thought that occurs to the mind in the early morning when we get up. What is the first thought that comes to our mind the moment we wake up from sleep? That will give us an idea as to what we have been thinking throughout the day. The conscious mind remains suppressed and the impulses alone work in the deep sleep state, and these impulses will thrust up certain ideas the moment we get up. It may be something which is connected with this world or something which is related to our *sadhana*. It may be a thought of anxiety or it may be a thought of freedom. It may be a thought of anything, depending upon the thoughts during the waking state. From this we can have an idea, an inkling as to how we have been conducting our thoughts.

The Upanishad tells us that we have to meditate in this manner throughout the day. As much time as we can spare for this purpose, we must utilise. We have to grow gradually, stage by stage, to that state of Being, when we will be able to give all our time for meditation. Many a time we have difficulties in finding time for meditation, because of the vocations of life. So, in the earlier stages, the advice is that as much time as you can spare should be set apart for the purpose of meditation, even if it be only for half an hour or forty-five minutes, or even less than that because it is not easy for the mind of the neophyte to accept that everything that it thinks can somehow or other be reconciled with spirituality. It always regards the ordinary life of the body and the senses and social existence as different from spirituality. This is the habit of the mind, although it is not correct. This is what it believes. In the beginning, therefore, it is necessary to give some time to meditation conveniently, of course, not with great effort and hardship on oneself. The life of the spirit is not one of suffocation or stifling of the mind. It is a gradual growth of the mind spontaneously, like the growth of a baby into an adult without any kind of stifling of functions. We should give as much time as is conveniently possible, with satisfaction to the mind. Then the time has to be increased by reduction of external activities, sleep, and the unnecessary things that we do in life which are not actually essential. You may be going to a club or to a picture, or you may be having a chat with some friends. All these can be gradually curtailed, because they are not essential. Essentials alone should be maintained. And still later on, in a more advanced stage, we must learn the art of seeing no distinction between our ordinary life and spiritual life. That is what is actually expected of us as spiritual seekers.

There is no such thing as an unspiritual life, finally. This has been told to us again and again in the Upanishad. Things look unspiritual on account of our peculiar way of evaluation. The idea of ‘I-ness’ and ‘my-ness’ is the cause of this peculiar notion in the mind, of there being a distinction between the ordinary life and spiritual life. We should not however do things which we regard as wholly unspiritual, or irreconcilable with our ultimate aim. We should not do also that which is wholly irrelevant to our life. We should not have any kind of despondency or diffidence in our heart that the most part of our life is spent in unnecessary work. There is always some connection between our work and the spiritual purpose that we are having in our mind. But the wisdom lies in



understanding what this connection is. The connection is one of non-distinction. Though this connection is there, we are not able to keep its awareness. When this awareness arises we enter into a flood of an all-comprehensiveness of approach through every aspect of our life.

So meditation should be a continued practice. How long should we continue the meditation? We must continue until we attain Self-realisation or until we die, whichever is earlier. Whoever has such intense faith, as is mentioned here, shall get it. If we have intense faith we will get it. You should not have a shaking mood of the mind. There should not be any doubt or suspicion. “Am I fit for it?” “Will I get it?” “What is the good of it?”—this kind of doubt should not arise in the mind. “I must get it.” “I am doing the best possible thing.” “I am putting forth all my effort to the extent of my possibility.” “I am doing my duty.” Such a doubtless attitude should be maintained throughout life. If one has faith of this kind, one should certainly attain it. There is no doubt about it. This is what the whole Upanishad is teaching, which is compressed in this *vidya* called Sandilya-Vidya. Though it is very short, yet it contains everything.

The meaning of this *vidya*, meditation, is very profound. The more we think about it, the greater and deeper are the meanings that we will discover in it. And these meanings will be discovered as we go deeper and deeper into meditation. So here, we have got in the Sandilya-Vidya the whole subject of the Upanishad clinched, as it were, kept inside our fist for the purpose of daily habituation of the mind to spirituality and God-awareness.