



THE CHHANDOGYA UPANISHAD

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There was a *brahmacharin* who was a great meditator on the *Samvarga*, a practicant who worshipped this great deity, into the knowledge of which Raikva initiated King Janasruti. This *brahmacharin*, who was a disciplined student of this *vidya*, a great meditator and a seeker who felt that he had practically identified with the deity on account of the depth of his meditation, one day went about begging for food. He happened to go to the abode of two renowned persons. At the time of his approach, they were just being served their meal. So he asked for food from those two persons who were sitting for their meal, but they turned a deaf ear to this man's asking. No food was given. They kept quiet as if nothing was happening. This is an anecdote once again introducing us into another aspect of the same Samvarga-Vidya.

Atha ha saunakam ca kapeyam abhipratarinam ca kaksasenim parivisyamanau brahmacari bibhikse, tasma u ha na dadatuh.

The Upanishad says that two great men, Saunaka and Abhipratarin, were about to sit for their meal, and a celibate student who was practising meditation in the Samvarga-Vidya approached them and begged for food. They would not give food to this person who asked for alms. Now, observing that he was not being given food and these great men were about to ignore his very presence altogether, the *brahmacharin* made the following statement in their presence.

Sa hovaca: mahatmanas-caturro deva ekah kah sa jagara bhuvanasya gopah, tam kapeya nabhipasyanti martyah abhipratarin bahudha vasantam. yasmai va etad-annam, tasma etan-na dattam iti.

The *brahmacharin* said: "You, gentlemen, great ones, who are about to take your lunch here, Saunaka and Abhipratarin, please listen to what I am saying. There is one great god who swallows up four others. Who is this god? He is the protector of all the worlds. No one beholds the presence of this great god. O Saunaka and Abhipratarin, you two great ones do not realise that all the food of this world belongs to this god, and it is to this god that you have refused food."

This is literally what the *brahmacharin* said. Here, something else seems to be in his mind when he made the statement. He was a great meditator, no doubt, and a meditator in an advanced stage. He was practically identical with the deity on which he meditated. He had in him the power of the deity, and to a large extent, he could do whatever the deity can do. Now this deity is the Universal Being, the great *Samvarga*. And when the worshipper who had through meditation identified himself with the deity asked for food, it was as if God himself was asking for food. It is as if the deity was asking for alms.

“The entire food of all creation belongs to that Deity only, and when It is asking for the food which belongs to It by right, you great men do not give it! So you understand the consequences of your action. You have done a great offence in ignoring my presence. You did not at all listen to what I am saying. You have not given me the food I asked for and you are keeping quiet as if nothing is happening. Now be prepared for the consequences of this ignorance on your part in regard to this great Deity,” said the *brahmacharin*.

By this the *brahmacharin* meant that he himself was the deity manifest there in an embodied form. So it was a kind of threat he administered to the two persons who were about to take food by themselves without giving it to him who had asked for the same. Well, the consequences were serious, no doubt, if what he said was correct. They would be finished if the deity was wrath with them. This was, of course, the intention behind the enigmatic remark made in a threatening way by the *brahmacharin* who was refused food. After the *brahmacharin* spoke like this, Saunaka, one of the two who were seated there, got up.

*Tad u ha saunakah kapeyah pratimanvanah pratyeyaya atma
devanam janita prajanam, hiranya-damstro babhaso' nasurih
mahantam asya mahimanam ahuh, anadya-mano yad-anannam
atti iti vai vayam brahmacharin nedam upasmahe, dattasmai
bhiksamiti.*

Saunaka approached the *brahmacharin* and replied: “You are saying that food has been refused to the great deity, the all-pervading one. Listen to what I have to say on this. You are speaking like this because you are under the impression that you are a meditator on the *Samvarga* and that we know nothing about it. You made a remark that we are ignorant of the presence of this great god to whom all the food belongs. Then what is it that we are meditating on? I will tell you. There is a great Soul, the Self of all beings, the source and essence of all the gods, the creator, the progenitor of all things. He is the one who eats through the mouth of knowledge itself. It is not an ordinary mouth with physical teeth and physical tongue. He has teeth which are shining with the lustre of knowledge. It is the essence of knowledge which is the essence of His being and He swallows all things. He is a great devourer. There is nothing in creation which He cannot devour. Everything is food for him and He consumes it through his own being, not through any external instrument. He is the wisest of all existences. His glory is great indeed. He cannot be eaten or swallowed by anybody, or not even affected in the least by anyone, or contacted and contaminated by any other in any manner whatsoever. But to Him everything is food. He eats non-food also, not

only the ordinary food. The eaters themselves are eaten up by Him. This is what we are meditating upon.” Having made this remark he told his servants, “Please give this boy food.”

This conversation conceals something very interesting. Its meaning is very hard to comprehend. We can however follow the interpreters and the commentators and make out, to some extent, the sense implied in this conversation. The implication of this discourse between the two parties seems to be that from the point of view of the *brahmacharin* it was wrong on the part of the other two persons to ignore his presence altogether and pay no heed to his request for food, especially as it was well-known that he was no ordinary person, having attuned himself to the cosmic deity. That was his point of view. The point of view of the others who retorted in reply seems to be that they were not so ignorant as he imagined them to be. But, what is the point in refusing food to him? There must be some reason behind it. There is a meaning which we have to read into the words of the scripture to understand the reason. What we are told is that they merely wanted to test the *brahmacharin* to find out his depth of knowledge and the stuff out of which he was made. So they gave a reply which suggested that they possessed a knowledge, perhaps comparatively superior to his own knowledge.

In what way was it superior? This superiority is only suggestive and it is not openly stated. *Samvarga* is cosmic as well as individual, as it has been told in the earlier *mantras*. As the cosmic counterpart it is *Vayu*, and as it functions in the individual it is *prana*. Now, the four great ones who were swallowed up by the god, as the *brahmacharin* pointed out, are the other lesser deities—the fire, the sun, the moon and the water who are all comprehended in the being of *Vayu*, *Hiranyagarbha*, the Supreme Reality. In the individual aspect also He is devourer of four things that are inferior to the *prana*, namely eye, ear, mind and speech. It is possible for such a meditator to have a mistaken notion that the cosmic is different in some way or other from the individual, or at least that there is a line of demarcation between the universal and the particular. In spite of the fact that the two are one, there seems to be a suggested difference between the outer and the inner, *vayu* and *prana*. But in the meditation that Saunaka and his friend practised, this difference seems to be obliterated completely, because they seem to be contemplating on that Being who has not this suggested difference between the outer and the inner, the cosmic and the individual, but is one single Reality. This can be the implication of the reply given by Saunaka to the *brahmacharin*.

“Well, anyway we have tested you. You are a good boy; take food.” This seems to be the final conclusion of Saunaka who told the servant to give him food. Or, it may be that there is no such implied meaning. Their intention might not be to suggest that there is some defect in the meditation of the *brahmacharin*. Perhaps it was merely a kind of examination that they conducted in respect of him. Whatever it is, the whole section is a glorification of *Samvarga-Vidya* and also a *phalasruti*, making out that the exalted effect of this meditation is identity with the deity. One becomes possessed of the same power as is possessed by the deity. He becomes self-confident, and whatever is subject to the domain of the deity is

subject to the rule and will of this meditator also. He becomes a superior person in every manner as the deity itself is. This is in the form of a sequel, a glorifying conclusion of the section dealing with Samvarga-Vidya In this Upanishad.

*Tasma u ha daduh, te va ete pancanye pancanye dasa santastat
krtam, tasmāt sarvesu dikṣv-annam eva dasa krtam, saisa virad-
arṇnadi, tayedam sarvam dr̥stam, sarvam asyodam dr̥stam
bhavati, annado bhavati, ya evam veda, ya evam veda.*

So they gave him food. Now follows a very complicated passage. It is peculiarly archaic, as many of the *mantras* in the Vedas and the Upanishads are. I give you merely the literal translation of what it is. This five and the other five make ten. This is the enigmatic meaning of this sentence. This is called the *kṛita*. Therefore, food comes from all the ten directions. The *Virat* is the eater of everything. Whatever it sees, it eats. The food itself is the eater of food. This is the effect that follows in respect of anyone who knows this secret.

Now, what do we make out of this? We cannot make out any sense if we read it literally like that. But it has a significant mystical meaning. The five are the eater and five are the eaten. The eater is *Vayu* cosmically, the absorber, the supreme deity into which everything enters. The other four are the articles of diet for this supreme deity. According to some it is fire, sun, moon and water. If we do not want it to be so complicated, we may say that they are the four elements—ether, fire, water and earth which are absorbed into this Supreme Absorber. Inwardly the *prana* is the eater, and the food is the sense-organs, speech, eye, ear and mind. So the four items which are regarded as food or which are the eaten, together with the eater, constitute the five. The five in the macrocosm and the five in the microcosm make ten. And this is the *kṛita*.

Here, *kṛita* is another difficult word. As we said earlier, it is the name of a cast of dice in a game. There are numbers inscribed on this cast and they are four, three, two and one. Now if you add up these numbers, four, three, two and one, they make ten. So it is said that even as all the numbers together on the dice make number ten, likewise, outwardly and inwardly, this deity together with the stuff that is eaten by it constitutes ten.

Another very interesting word that is mentioned here is *virat*. In the Veda, *virat* is a metre which has ten letters. So there is a comparison introduced here between the metre *virat* having ten letters, and the number ten which has association with the deity as the eater of food and the eaten, and also the total number in the *kṛita*, the dice cast which is ten. Or, in a more general way, it means *Virat*, the cosmic Person, is the All-Being, the most comprehensive Reality to which everything is food. In the *Virat* you cannot say which is the eater and which is the eaten. There is no object-subject difference in the *Virat*. Food flows from all directions to the *Virat* and in the form of the *Virat*. The *Virat* is the name that we give to the all-comprehensive Reality where subject-object distinction cannot be made, as it is no more. The seer and the seen are indistinguishable. There is no difference between the eater and the eaten. The eaten itself is the eater, and the eater is the eaten. We can look at it either way. Whatever perceives is the stuff that is eaten, and whatever is eaten is also that

which perceives. One who knows this mystery also becomes like this. What is this mystery will be clear to anyone who has read and understood these passages.

Here we conclude the Samvarga-Vidya with which we also conclude our study of the Chhandogya Upanishad. We have covered practically every essential point in the prominent sections of the Chhandogya Upanishad.