



THE CHHANDOGYA UPANISHAD

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PART-I

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I shall give you a brief survey of the entire gamut we have covered up to this time, merely for the purpose of recapitulation. You know that we started with the study of Panchagni Vidya. If you carefully glance through these chapters of the Upanishad, particularly from the fifth onwards till the end, you will see a gradational ascent of thought as is seen in the curriculum of textbooks in a school or a college, where our mind is gradually taken from the external, to the internal and the Universal Reality, commencing with the actions which a person is capable of in a spiritual sense. The intention is to take the mind of the student to more generalised forms of reality where observances, disciplines, actions etc., cease to be such and assume a new form altogether, getting commensurate with wider realities. For this purpose we are given various types of comparison and anecdotes, driving home into our minds the highest purpose of meditation on Brahman, or the Absolute.

The Panchagni Vidya is the meditation on the five fires; namely, the entire creation of the five elements which are to be considered symbolically as fires in meditation. The concept of sacrifice and fire is peculiar to the Vedas, the Brahmanas and also to the Upanishads in many places. Every worship and every type of meditation is regarded as a kind of sacrifice—*yajna*, and the cosmic phenomena are required here to be contemplated as performances of a cosmic sacrifice. The heavens, which are the progenitors of all vibrations and the creators of every force, invisibly though, giving rise to the further manifestations in the form of the five elements: sky, air, fire, water and earth—are to be considered as stages or altars in the performance of a cosmic *yajna*—five types of sacrifice, called the Panchagni. These five objects, the five elements, or the five stages of cosmic descent are the objects of the senses of the individual; and finally we will see that from the cosmic level we are brought down to the individual level and told how individuals are born—how birth takes place at all, wherein in whose context we are given an interesting blend of the universal principles and the individual functions. From the heavens we come to the atmosphere, the sky and then we come to the rain, then we come to the earth, then we come to the human

individual, and then to the distinction between the male and the female which has an important role to play in the production of a child.

These are mystical admonitions given to us for the purpose of meditation on the more rarified forms of these phenomena which look like the five elements outside and the individual inside—external objects outside and senses inside—but with a corresponding connection between the two. The senses and the external objects are constituted ultimately of a common substance, beautifully pointed out in one of the verses of the Bhagavadgita: *Gunah guneshu varatante*—The senses operate upon the objects, not unnecessarily, not by force, not in a fantastic manner, but in a natural way, spontaneously, because the senses and the objects outside are constituted of the same substance. Cosmically they appear to be objects, internally they appear to the functions or the sensory media of the individual. We are to contemplate 'sense perception' itself as a sacrifice, and everything that is implied in a sensory activity, everything that is comprehended within the phenomenon of our consciousness of relation between ourselves and the cosmos outside—all this is a difficult thing to imagine in the mind, but such an imagination is the subject of meditation through the concept of the Panchagni.

Interestingly enough we are told towards the end of the discussion of the Panchagni Vidya, that if we succeed in the practise of this meditation, in the manner prescribed, we will go to *Brahma-loka* through the northern path. Everyone sees the world, everyone sees the sun shining in the sky, we see the rain falling, we know that we are treading on the earth, we know that we are a man or a woman, that we are capable of producing children etc.. This is a prosaic way of looking at things, this is a gross way of interpreting the phenomena which have an internal meaning that does not become explicit to the ordinary senses of perception or the mind which cognises. We are ignorant of the inner secrets behind the operation of these phenomena outwardly as the five elements and inwardly as the sense organs through our individualities. We are ignorant to the core, we know nothing about how things happen outside and also why things happen inside. What is the connection between the outside and the inside? We know nothing, we have got a gross, distorted notion about these things on account of which we are bound to *samsara*—the thralldom of earthly existence.

The purpose of this teaching called the Panchagni Vidya is to give us the meaning behind these phenomena. There is something organic about us in relation to the world outside, and even the simplest prosaic acts of our senses and the crass physical acts of our body in relation to the physical objects of sense outside have great meaning inside—there is a spirituality at the depth of all things. We are neither a body projecting the senses in a whimsical manner for the purpose of the satisfaction of the senses, nor is it true that there is a world outside, independent of us, which acts in its own way in an erratic manner, irrespective of our needs and demands. Whatever happens outside and whatever happens inside, whatever the need be that we feel through our sense organs and whatever is the performance of nature in the way we observe through the senses—this is a cosmic movement. It is not that something is happening outside, independent of connection with us, nor is it true that we are doing something independent of everything that is outside. We are ignorant of the secret of these happenings. This

ignorance is to be lifted by the practise of this meditation—namely, the contemplation of the universal implications hidden behind the so called outer phenomena of nature and the apparent inner activities of the senses. If this universal concept could be entertained in the mind during meditation or throughout one's life, then our destiny is *Brahma-loka*; the superior reality is going to be our destination and we will proceed to this great god Brahma through the Northern Path, the path of light—otherwise we will be reborn. So this is an outline of the deeper meaning of the Panchagni Vidya. If this meditation is not going to be a success, if I am not for it and you are not for it and nobody can think of it and understand it or practise it, then we are doomed to rebirth.

Rebirth—the process of transmigration—is a necessary corollary of the subjection of the individual to the forces of nature; a subjection that is an automatic outcome of one's imagination that one is small compared to the world outside, and the world is larger in its power, and the notion that the world has no connection whatsoever with us, that we are puppets, driven to dance by strings that are operated by some other forces outside. This slavish mentality of ours is the cause of our transmigration. In other words, our ignorance of the true nature of things is the cause of rebirth and we cannot escape the sorrows of life and the pain of rebirth. As long as we cannot think like this, we are unfit for such meditation, etc.

From this subject we are taken to the grander subject of Vaishvanara Vidya, which is the subject of the concluding portion of the fifth chapter of the Upanishad. This is one of the magnificent messages that the Upanishad gives us—if we can understand what it means, our hair will stand on end. If *samsara* is a bondage, if birth and death are to be avoided, if our aim is God-realisation or knowledge of the Absolute, what are we supposed to do? We must have knowledge of the One. This 'One' is designated in this section as the Vaishvanara, and in this connection we are introduced to the story of the six great men going to Ashvapati Kaikeya for initiation into the mystery of Vaishvanara Vidya. They were all accosted—what they were meditating on, etc. In essence what they told was that they were meditating on the five elements—earth, water, fire, air, ether and heaven, so six persons gave six kinds of reply. They meditated on the five elements and heaven, all which process the great master Ashvapati Kaikeya pointed out to be defective for two reasons.

This is the defect of every meditation, your meditation, my meditation, everybody's—not merely theirs; a defect which has to be carefully obviated by effort of thought and exercise of will. The mistake in the meditations of these learned men was that they considered their object of meditation outside them. The whole point driven into our minds by the Panchagni Vidya doctrine is that our sorrow is merely because there are things outside us, and even in our meditation if we commit the same mistake of imagining that there are things outside, and even our God or our deity is outside, then principally we are subject to the same domination by the deity or the external force as is the case with everybody else. So one of the mistakes is that we conceive the deity outside us, which is not a fact. The object is not disorganised in such a way as to be unconnected with us—it is organically connected with us. There is a vital

relationship between the object and the subject. If the deity is completely outside, how could we have any blessing from the deity? What sort of grace can come from God if He is completely transcendent and unrelated to us? There must be a vital connection between the God that we meditate upon and ourselves. This mistake of imagining that it is not so is an error in meditation.

The other mistake was that they localised object. One said it is the earth, another said it is heaven, the third said it is water, the fourth said it is something else. Now, the Great Reality, which alone is capable of absolving us from all sin and sorrow, is not any particular thing that is here or there. A thing which is here or there is finite, and we are finite in the same way. We are located in some place, and if our God is also going to be located in the same way that we are, that God is going to be another individual like us—maybe more magnified physically, but that makes no difference. Anything that is finite, located in space and time, is perishable; and a perishable cause will produce only a perishable result. So we cannot expect infinite blessing from a finite deity. The deity becomes finite the moment we concede this God or deity, the object of our meditation, as being in some place, in the Garden of Eden or in *Swargaloka*, *Vaikuntha*, or *Kailasa* or anywhere. If our God is in one place only and not in another place, that God is not going to give us salvation. So our mistake is in imagining that God is in one place and not everywhere. The other mistake is to think that the God is outside. So Ashvapati Kaikeya told these gentlemen, “My friends, all these meditations of yours are very good as far as they go, but you have committed a blunder, an essential mistake and these are the two mistakes.

The Atman whom we are seeking, whose knowledge we want, on which we want to meditate, is Vaishvanara and not a single item of reality inside the body of an individual. All-pervading is the Atman, that is why it is called Vaishvanara. It is the ‘Cosmic Man’—*Vishvanara*. There is only one ‘Man’ in the whole universe, and that Man is called Vaishvanara; there is One Person and that Person is Purushottama, the Supreme Being. It is not true that there are many things in this world and not true that there are many objects or persons in this world. All these so-called objects or individuals are comprehended in this Single Being called Vaishvanara. Because of the fact that this being is Vaishvanara, all comprehensive, we cannot regard it as outside us. The moment it becomes outside, it cannot be everywhere—we understand the mistake. Because it is everywhere, it is the Self of all—this point also we should not forget. It is a feat of imagination to think like this that an All-comprehensive Being can be the Self of everyone, such that we cannot isolate this Being from our own being because it is the Atman of us. We cannot isolate this Being from the being of others also, because it is Vaishvanara.

One who meditates like this is a blessed soul and whatever that person thinks, materialises itself, and whatever that person consumes, eats, is the food given to all beings. It is Pranagnihotra mentioned in this section of the Upanishad. Agnihotra is a sacrifice that is performed by people, oblations offered in sacred fires. Now this oblation need not necessarily be offered in an external fire if we have got this knowledge. The five *pranas* into which or for the satisfaction of which we consume food every day or drink water etc, this performance of ours

daily, is itself a great *yajna*. In case we are able to conceive of our being as 'Cosmic Being', then our satisfaction is the whole universe's satisfaction and there is nothing which can encounter us, oppose us or face us, because nothing is there outside us. The whole universe becomes friendly in respect of this person. Such a person has no enemy, and things gravitate around this person as planets gravitate around the sun. As in the words of the Upanishad itself, "Children sit around their mother for food, thinking, 'When will our mother bring food, here is our sustenance,' so will all beings crave for the glory, sustenance and satisfaction of this great soul who is a meditator on the great Vaishvanara Atman."