



THE CHHANDOGYA UPANISHAD

Swami Krishnananda

PART-II

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Towards the end of the section dealing with the Vaishvanara Vidya, it was told that the food that is consumed by the Knower reaches all the world, and all the senses are satisfied. Every form of the manifestation of *prana* is also satisfied. The deities of the senses are correspondingly satisfied. In short, the whole creation stands immensely satisfied by the satisfaction of this Knower of the Vaishvanara and the performer of the Agnihotra Sacrifice with such a knowledge.

But how is it possible that the satisfaction of one individual soul causes the satisfaction of many other souls? How can all creation be happy through the happiness of one individual soul? If this is to be possible at all, one condition has to be fulfilled, and that is, that there cannot be many souls. If souls are manifold, Atmans are multitudinous in number, then the satisfaction of one cannot be equivalent to the happiness the other. The fact that, according to the Upanishad, the knowledge of the Vaishvanara Atman can identify one with all creation should imply that there is only one Atman and not many. The subject is carried on in the sixth chapter of the Upanishad by way of an explication of how it is that there is only one being in spite of the apparent diversities, varieties and forms of creation.

To explain this matter, we are introduced into the interesting analogical explanations in the subsequent chapter of the Upanishad in the context of the great instruction given by Sage Uddalaka Aruni to his son Svetaketu. His son, having been instructed properly in the arts and the sciences and the temporal branches of learning, could not answer the question of the father as what can be known, by the knowledge of which unheard of things could be heard, unthought of things could be thought and understood things could be understood. This was something beyond the capacity of the grasp of the student, and he pleaded ignorance. The father gave an example, a comparison as it were to point out how it is practicable for one to have knowledge of everything by the knowledge of one thing.

The illustrations are simple enough. Just as all the modifications or forms of clay, for instance, can be known by an insight into the substance of all these forms, namely clay itself, all the varieties of shapes which clay takes do not affect the knowledge of the essential nature of these forms of clay. By knowing the inner structural essence of iron we can know the nature of everything that is made up of iron. We can know also the nature of everything that is made of gold by merely knowing the essential structure of an ingot of gold, so is this great instruction, my dear boy, says the father.

Now, this is only an introduction to the great subject. What is this analogy, and in what context does it stand? In the same way as the vessels, etc. made of clay can be known by the knowledge of clay, so everything in the world can be known by a knowledge of 'That' which is the substance of the whole universe. It is implied hereby that the whole world is made up of one substance. There is One Being and it willed, as it were, it manifested itself into forms, and we have these great *mahabhutas*, as they are called, the elements, which are the immediate expressions, temporally, in the form of creation of this Absolute Being which is Pure *Sat*. The great teacher, Uddalaka, points out that fire, water and earth are principally the relevant manifestations of this Great Being with which we are primarily connected in life, and the understanding of these elements in their essential nature would be an image of everything which is a manifestation of these elements. But these elements themselves are not manifold as they appear. They are expressions of another being which is single, undivided and Supremely Absolute.

Three elements: fire, water and earth—enter into the constitution of everything that is created externally in the world and also internally in the human body, etc. He compares the internal structures of bodies to the strands, as it were, of a composite substance which is constituted of three different items. We have colours, for instance, which impinge upon our eyes, by which process we are able to have an awareness of an object outside us. These colours, which are referred to in this Upanishad here in this context are perhaps not the secondary characters of objects that we hear of in Western thought. They are something quite different from secondary characters. In Western thought, especially in the systems of John Locke, Berkeley and Hume, we will find distinctions drawn between primary qualities and secondary qualities. The secondary qualities are the colours etc., the sensory qualities by which we are able to recognise the presence of an object. The primary qualities are extension, etc. which are supposed to be embedded in the body itself independent of the secondary qualities.

So by this, what is understood is that secondary qualities are not the essential nature of the object—the primary are the qualities, really. They are inherent in the object. But the colours spoken of in the Upanishad cannot be identified with the secondary qualities of this system. To our knowledge it appears that these colours mentioned in the Upanishad—redness, whiteness, blackness, constituting the essences of fire, water and earth—are certain emanations from bodies which reveal the presence of constituents, which are again nothing but fire, water and

earth. These emanations are responsible for our cognisance of the object in a threefold manner. So what Uddalaka intends to point out is that the perception of the threefold colour in an object is an indication of the presence of three elements in that object, so that the object is made up of these three elements only and there is no variety of objects. The millions of things that we see in this world are not really millions in number. They are only three—fire, water and earth. The redness that we see in an object is indicative of the presence of the fire element there, the whiteness refers to the water principle and the blackness to the earth principle, so that everything organic as well as inorganic is constituted of these three elements only—fire, water and earth—and there is nothing more in these objects.

But these three elements themselves are not independent bodies. They are a threefold expression or manifestation of Pure Being, so that it is clear now that the whole of creation is one single Being. The manifold objects are the three elements, and the three elements are one Being. Thus it is that the whole universe in its manifoldness and variety and colourful pageantry is nothing of the kind as it appears to our eyes. It is a single Absolute Existence which apparently is revealed to us through the senses as if it is manifold.

This is to prove the existence of one absolute reality in the outer cosmos. A similar argument can be applied to the individual body also. This body of ours is also constituted of these elements. Principles of fire, water and earth are in the food that we take and the physical embodiment that we are. The physical body is nothing but these three elements—fire, water and earth. If everything in the world is made up of these three elements, why not this body of our own self? Everything is included there. The food that we take, the water that we drink, etc. are constituted of only these three elements—fire, water and earth. By chemical processes of absorption into the system, by various methods of permutation and combination, the foods that we eat and the liquids that we drink get converted into the substances of the physiological system, and what we are individually in this physical embodiment is nothing but the modification of these three elements. If the substances which are derived from these three elements are withdrawn from our body, we will vanish into nothing like, a cloth vanishing when all the threads are pulled out from it. So it is not true that we have an independent existence. Just as outer things do not exist independently of the three principal elements, so also this internal body. The whole system of ours is constituted of the food that we take, including the mind itself, the *prana* and the physical body. All these are constituted essentially of these elements—fire, water and earth.

In order to bring out the truth that even the mind is subject to the condition of the manifestation of these elements, the father asked the son to fast for fifteen days, by which process of fasting what was discovered was that the powers of the mind got diminished. The mind could not perform the function of thinking, willing, remembering, etc. But inasmuch as he was asked to drink water though he did not take food, his life was not cut off because the life principle, *prana*, is the essence of water. Water of course he drank; food he did not take. So on account of the absence of the food which he did not take into the system, there

was diminution of the capacity of the mind, and when he was asked to recite the Vedas, chant the scriptures, he could not do anything of the kind. He could only breathe because the *prana* was there on account of the intake of this water. The father instructed the student. “There are sixteen parts in an individual. The sixteenth part is still there on account of which you are there, you are existing, you are living, you are breathing, and you are alive. But fifteen parts have been withdrawn on account of your fasting for fifteen days.” There is this outcome of this instruction, that the mind is constituted of the finest essence of the food that we take, and the *prana* is constituted of the finest essence of the liquids that we drink, and the bone-stuff in the body is constituted of the fire element in the food that we take. We need not go into the details of this analysis because we have already studied it in the course of our proceeding with the subject of this chapter.

The point is that the outer world, as well as the inner world, are both dependent upon these three elements—fire, water and earth—which are the derivatives of the Absolute Being. So the whole world outside including myself, yourself—the subjects as well as the objects of the world—all these are one Being only. So this is an indirect answer to the great question that we posed in the very beginning itself—how is it possible for the whole creation to be satisfied by one person performing the Agnihotra sacrifice with the knowledge of the Vaishvanara?

What we call hunger, what we call thirst, what we call even the process of dying is nothing but a peculiar operation of these elements inside. This again is an interesting fact that is brought out by Uddalaka Aruni in his instruction to the son. When we feel hungry, what happens is that the solid food that we have taken is dissolved by the water principle—it is withdrawn into itself. Because of the absorption of the items of food into the water principle in us, we feel hungry. And when we are thirsty, even the water principle is withdrawn into the fire principle. So heat is there, but there is dryness in the whole system—there is dehydration on account of absence of water because it has all been sucked by the fire principle inside, which again is responsible for the hunger because it dissolves all the foodstuff that we take—so hunger and thirst are caused in this manner.

Incidentally, this is also a hint as to how we gradually withdraw ourselves into internal values and realms of existence when we are about to die and also when we are about to reach the Ultimate Reality. There is some sort of resemblance between the process of dying and the process of Self-realisation, though there is a tremendous difference between the two in other respects. When a person is about to die or vanish from this earthly existence, what happens is that the senses are withdrawn into the mind. Seeing, speaking, etc. become impossible when the sense powers get withdrawn into the mind, and a dying person may be able to think but he cannot speak, he cannot see, etc. That is the first step or first stage in the absorption of the outer principles into the inner. Then after sometime, he also cannot think; the mind stops functioning when it is absorbed into the *prana*, wherein in that condition we can see him breathing. He is alive but he cannot think, he cannot speak, he cannot see, he cannot hear—all the powers have gone, but life is there. Death takes place when even this *prana* is withdrawn into the

fire-principle and the fire-principle gets dissolved as it were in the highest deity—*Para devata*. A few minutes later we will find that even the breathing is indistinguishable. We cannot know whether he is breathing or not. The breath stops practically, but some sort of warmth is felt in the body and the warmth also goes out after some time, everything is cold, then we say that the person is dead. The Supreme Being has withdrawn into Himself the powers which He had manifested from His own Being, in the process of creation. The reverse process takes place in death to the one that took place at the time of manifestation or creation. The Being expresses Itself as fire, fire becomes water, water becomes earth and from these elements, individuals are formed. Then the *prana*, the mind and the senses begin to operate in respect of objects of sense outside—this is creation. But in dissolution, in absorption, in death, what happens is the reverse of the entire process; the senses go back to the mind, the mind goes to the *prana*, the *prana* to the fire-principle, and fire goes to the Supreme Being.

Now, this is a crucial point in the whole discussion. There is an unconscious withdrawal taking place at the time of death, but there is a conscious transcendent in the practise of yoga. When we practise yoga or *samadhi*, pass through the gradations of Self-realisation or the realisation of the Absolute, what happens to us is the same thing that happens to us at the time of death, but in a different way altogether. In the process of dying, we did not know what was happening—we were benumbed completely in all the senses and the capacities and the faculties. It was as if we were given a blow, a clout on the head and we forgot everything. But here a consciousness travel takes place in the levels of consciousness, in greater and greater degrees of magnitude and expansion. When the Pure Being is reached, whether it is consciously or unconsciously, diversities are completely dissolved in That Being; there is no variety of any kind.

How is it that one Supreme Being, which is undivided in its essence and constitution, apparently becomes this variety is explained by various analogies by the great father. The various essences of the flower which honey-bees suck are converted into a jelly-like substance called honey, and in this menstuum of the honey in which all the pollens and essences of flowers are mixed in a particular manner, the diversity of the flower essences are not seen. In the honey, there is no individual consciousness or particularised distinction of the various essences sucked by the bees from the flowers, which are variegated in their forms. Likewise is the state of Pure Being, where everything is blended into a single amalgam of complete absoluteness, and the essences of all the individualities are converted into a single essence, as flowers in their essences become honey. Also, rivers enter the ocean; there are many rivers, one different from the other—but when it is a question of entering into the ocean, it is a question of losing name and form. Likewise is the state of Pure Being into which we enter and our distinctions vanish. Our names and forms and particular individualities are absorbed into a single essence of that Pure Being.

How is it possible that such a vast universe proceeds from one Undistinguishable Substance that is so subtle? How can such a subtle essence become the cause of

this gross universe? It is unthinkable indeed. The father says, “How is it possible for such a huge banyan tree to come from such a tiny seed of that particular tree?” A little seed of the huge *peepul* or banyan contains some liquid-like, jelly-like something, whose essence is invisible to the naked eye, very tiny indeed, but it has become the mother of this huge structure we call the banyan tree. Such is the way in which the Subtle Being, the Pure-Existence-Absolute manifests Itself as this vast cosmos. And there is nothing in the whole of the huge tree, except what is in the essence—it pervades every branch, every leaf, every flower and every fruit. Very strange indeed, how big is this tree and how little is this essence, but it is this essence that has magnified itself into this form, and the whole of this tree in its manifold structure is constituted of nothing but what this essence is. Through and through, warp and woof is this essence pervading the whole tree. So is this vast universe pervaded by the Absolute Being, all the varieties, living and non-living apparently, are all indwelt by this Supreme Absolute and there is nothing anywhere except the presence of That Being.

Other analogies which the father trotted out are also to the same effect—that though this Absolute *Satta* or Being is all-in-all in Itself, it is invisible to the eyes and unthinkable to the mind. It is not really unknowable. It can be known by certain means. How is it possible? For that, the father resorts to an experiment. The student was asked to bring some salt and dissolve the salt in water. It was kept in water; it dissolved itself automatically, overnight. But the next day the salt could not be seen. Now, we cannot see the presence of salt in water but, thereby, we cannot deny the existence of salt in water. So, a thing can be there even it is not seen. How do we know that it is there? By tasting. So there are means of knowing the presence of a thing other than seeing, for instance. Likewise, there is a means of knowing the presence of this Absolute Pure Being other than the activities of the senses or the ordinary functions of the mind and the intellect. How can we know that this Absolute exists? Not by seeing, not by raking our brains through the sensory faculties, but through another novel method altogether.

This again is illustrated by another example. Suppose a poor man is caught hold of by some robbers, and he is blindfolded, dragged from his place and thrown into some jungle, and left there in the pit. The robbers go away taking everything that he had. This poor man, with his hands and feet tied and eyes covered by cloth, knows nothing about where he is and he cries out, “I am suffering, is there anybody to help me?” Some good man comes and he unties his knots and removes the bandage from the eyes, and tells that poor fellow the direction in which he has to move for reaching his home; and then gradually, stage by stage, passing through every village on the way, he reaches his destination. Likewise is the fate of this individual *jiva*; it is caught over by the robbers of the senses. They are driven out. All these *jivas* have been driven out by these robbers and they are thrown in this wilderness of *samsara*. The eye of intuition has been covered, there is no insight into the nature of reality, we cannot do anything, we are helpless completely, and we cry in sorrow, “Is there anyone to help us?”—and that

is the Guru, who comes and unties the knots of our hearts. The *granthis* of the heart are broken, and he opens our eyes and points the way to the destination that we have to reach. “You’ve come from this way in this direction, you have been brought in this manner, and you’ve to go back in this way.” Just as a person who is intent on reaching his home after having had this unfortunate experience does not take interest in sightseeing, etc. on the way, but is intent only on rushing back to his house, so is the seeking spirit not interested in the attractions of sense and the various visions and sounds that may come on the way of his passage, but is eager to reach back to his own native place, home, as instructed by the great master, who is the Guru. *Acharavaan purusho veda*—knowledge does not come by reading books, not merely by one’s own effort; it comes by a vital, living knowledge that we gain by instruction received from a Guru, and after that we are veritably free. There is the appearance of bondage only as long as the body is there, the *prarabdha* continues. When the *prarabdha* is exhausted, the *karmas* are experienced, the body drops and one reaches one’s home.

So there is practically everything in this chapter, the sixth chapter. There is a cosmological theory of the development of the universe through the elements, all come from the One Being, which have become the macro-cosmos on one side and the micro-cosmos on the other side. The subject-object distinction is the cause of our suffering, and this sorrow of ours can be removed only by a gradual reversing of the process of creation. From the gross we go to the subtle, from the external, we go to the internal, from the lower we go to the higher, from the individual we go to the Universal. This is the great meditative technique which is hidden in the teachings of Uddalaka Aruni to his student, to his son, Svetaketu.

The same subject is carried forward in the seventh chapter also, in a different manner. Practically, we will find that there is a single intent behind all the teachings of the Upanishads—they are driving at a single point. Whatever be the Upanishads that we study and whatever be the section that we read, there is a single ringing tone behind every teaching—and that is the necessity on the part of a particular individual to recognise one’s own position in the scheme of creation, and to retrace one’s steps backwards, rearwards, to the cause from the effect, in which condition one finds oneself.

From the effect, we go to the cause. The cosmological doctrine of the Upanishads is simple enough. It has some resemblance to the Samkhya, and perhaps the Samkhya is the mother of the Vedanta philosophy in many respects. We are told in the sixth chapter of the Upanishad, in a very pithy way, there is One Being, the Absolute, which gradually becomes more and more dense, as it were, in its manifestations, into the form of these elements which we call ether, air, fire, water and earth. The technical philosophy of the Vedanta also tells us that it is not such an easy affair to explain this process because there is a gradual condensation of consciousness, as it were, in this universal gamut, which stages are generally called by the names *Ishvara*, *Hiranyagarbha* and *Virat*. These names are not specifically available in the Upanishads, but this is the later

Vedanta which gives a concrete shape, in a more systematised manner, to the process of creation which is diversely described in the various Upanishads.

We have the cosmic elements. These cosmic elements: *prithvi, jal, teja, vayu, akasa*—earth, water, fire, air, ether—are the sum and substance of everything. They have entered into every particular body, but they have entered into these bodies in a very peculiar manner. In the Srimad Bhagavata there is an interesting verse: *Yatha mahanti bhutani, bhuteshu uccavaceshanam, pravistani apravisttani tatha chesanapekshanam*—All the beings in this world have inside them these five elements. Now, we can say in one sense that these five elements have entered into these bodies, but they have really not entered into them. This can be made a little more explicit by another example. We can say that wood has entered into this table, wood has become the table and so the wood, which is the cause, has entered into this effect, which is the table—but it has really not entered, we know very well. There is no process of the wood entering into the table; it is just what it was. *Pravisthani apravisthani*: They have entered and yet not entered. So, in one sense we may say that the elements have entered into the particular bodies, but in another sense they have really not entered. Gold has entered into the ornament, but it has really not entered—it is just what it was.

So these particularised subjects that we are, or the objects that we see in the world, are the modifications of the five elements; but they are really not modifications—they are just the five elements only. On a careful analysis we will realise that the varieties of the world do not exist, just as the table does not exist. There is no such thing as the table, there is only wood. It is only a name that we have given. *Vacarambhanam vikaro nama-dheyam*—As Uddalaka mentioned to his son, this is only a way of speaking, an expression, a definition that we are giving, a designation that we are thinking in our mind, an appellation in our mind which is necessary for describing the object for purpose of practical convenience in life—but actually nothing has happened. The cause has not become the effect, the wood has not become the table, the gold has not become the ornament, the five elements have not become the bodies, the Absolute has not become the universe—it is just what it is. This is the ultimate fact of creation. But the process of creation has to be explained in a manner in which it is intelligible to our minds, in a way in which it is understood by our minds, in a way alone in which we can be taught. The whole story of creation is said to be not a chronological or historical description of a fact that took place once upon a time in ancient eras, but a methodological technique of instructing the individual how it can reach back to the Absolute, so that the whole theory of creation—the doctrine of manifestation—is one of instruction in meditation. The entire Upanishad is therefore an art of meditation described, and not a story being told to us or a history being narrated for the purpose of diversion.