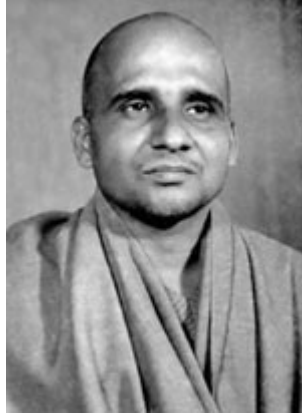




THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

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INTRODUCTION (Continued)

The knowledge proclaimed in the Upanishad is a science which deals with the removal of sorrow. Thus, it is a knowledge which is different in kind from the learning that we usually acquire or the knowledge that we gain in respect of the things of the world. It is not a science in the ordinary sense of the term. While there are sciences and arts of various kinds, all of which are important enough, and wonderful in their own way, they cannot remove sorrow from the human heart, root and branch. They contribute to the satisfaction of a particular individual, placed in a particular constitution, in a particular type of incarnation, but they do not go to the soul of the person concerned. In the sense of the science of the soul, the Upanishad is also called Atma-Vidya or Adhyatma-Vidya. It is different from other Vidyas or learnings like Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology etc., because all these latter pertain to objects of sense, the perceived world. Adhyatma-Vidya or the science of the Self pertains not so much to the object-world which is the field of the operation of the senses, as the Subject which is the ultimate conditioning principle of every perception of every kind. The objects that are perceived by the senses are conditioned by the processes of perception, and the very process of perception is determined by the nature of the perceiver, and so it is important that the nature of the perceiver is known directly; because when the perceiver is known, everything connected with the perceiver also is known. If, fortunately for us, the objects that are perceived are in some way determined wholly by the character of the perceiver, the knowledge of the Self would be the knowledge of the whole cosmos. Towards this end, the Upanishad takes us by hand, gradually.

The grief of the mind, the sorrow of the individual is not brought about by outer circumstances. This is a very important lesson we learn from the

Upanishad. We do not suffer by incidents that take place outside. We suffer on account of a maladjustment of our personality with the conditions of life, and the knowledge of this fact is supernatural and super-sensual. What has happened to us cannot be known by us, because it has happened to 'us' and not to somebody else. We cannot know what has happened to others because we cannot know what has happened to us, for who is to know our own selves? This is the crux of the whole matter, towards which the Upanishad is to take us.

The Upanishad, to reiterate, is the science of the Self, studied not for the sake of a diversion of the intellect or a satisfaction of the understanding, but for freedom of the spirit and removal of sorrow, utterly. The Adhyatma-Vidya about which we hear so much in fields of spiritual living is not 'a kind' of Vidya, just one of the branches of learning, but the Mother of all the branches of learning, including every other learning that can be conceived of in this world of sense, understanding and social living.

The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, particularly, attempts to explain the various processes of bondage and liberation. It tells us how we are bound and how we are to get free; and it goes to the very cause ultimate, of the bondage of the soul. Our bondage is not merely physical or social. It is a more deep-rooted condition which has been annoying us through centuries and through our repeated births and deaths. Anything that we do in the outer world does not seem to be an adequate remedy for this sorrow of ours, because the sorrow has not come from outside. We can have a bungalow to prevent us from suffering from rain and sun and wind; we can have daily food to eat; we can have very happy and friendly social relationships; but we can also die one day, even with all these facilities. Nobody can free us from this fear. This is the greatest sorrow of the human being, that he has apparently everything but there is some secret sorrow of his which can swallow up every other satisfaction - that death can catch hold of a person, and no one can save him then.

What is this dependence of the individual on a circumstance over which no one has control; and why does death come, why is that sorrow? Why is there any kind of inadequacy felt in life at all. This is the subject of analysis and study in the Upanishad, for the purpose of bringing to our own self a knowledge which is not a learning or information about things, but an enlightenment about our own self. It is again to be repeated that this enlightenment is not about any other person or object, but about our own self. It is an understanding of oneself, an enlightenment of oneself, an illumination of oneself; and when this illumination takes place, it is expected that everything connected with the self also gets illumined automatically.

The bondage of the self is intrinsically involved in the structure of the individual. We bring sorrow with us even when our birth takes place; and it is often said that we bring our death also together with our birth. The meaning is that all experiences - joys, sorrows, including our last moment of life - all these are a fructification of circumstances with which we are born from the mother's

womb. We are born under certain conditions, and they are the seeds of what will follow later, so that the entire life of ours may be said to be an unfoldment of that which is present in a seed-form at the time of our birth. We do not pass through newer and newer experiences unexpectedly, as it were, but they are all expected things only. Every experience in life is expected, as a corollary is expected from a theorem in mathematics. It follows; it has to naturally follow, logically, from the principle enunciated. Likewise, the experiences of life are natural phenomena that follow logically from the circumstances under which we are born. And these circumstances which seem to be powerful enough to condition our future are again the consequence of certain antecedents, and so on. There is, thus, a vicious circle, as it were, in which we are caught up, so that we cannot know which is the cause and which is the effect of any event or experience.

This vicious circle of suffering is Samsara, the sorrow of the soul, and it cannot free itself from this sorrow by merely undergoing experiences through births and deaths, because the experiences in life, the sorrows and the joys, whatever they be, are powers which come out automatically from the nature of individual existence, and unless this character of existence as the individual is studied, its sorrow cannot be diagnosed, or eradicated.

The knowledge that is of the Upanishad is thus inseparable from the 'being' of the self. This is the characteristic difference of the Upanishadic wisdom, the Adhyatma-Vidya. It is not a knowledge that one acquires 'about' a thing, but it is knowledge which is inseparable from the very 'being' of him who owns this knowledge. It is knowledge of Reality, *Satta-Samanya*, as it is sometimes called - General Existence. Knowledge of Existence itself is the knowledge announced in the Upanishad. It is not knowledge of any person, an object or the structural pattern of anything. It is a knowledge of 'being'. It is a Consciousness of Existence which is going to be the freedom of the spirit. It is in this sense, perhaps, that we call the ultimate Reality as *Satchidananda* - Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. It is a Consciousness of ultimate Existence which is at once Freedom and Bliss. It is not a definition of any person or individual form. The nature of *Satchidananda* about which we have heard so much, is not a definition of any particular condition of life. It is not also a description of the happiness of the human mind. It is not a future condition that we are going to enter. It is a description of Eternity itself where 'being' and 'knowledge of being' become one and the same, where there are no sufferings, obviously. We cannot separate our own consciousness from the consciousness of our 'being', for instance. We *are*, and we are also *aware* that we *are*. Our awareness that we *are* cannot be isolated from the fact of our 'being'. Our 'being' and the knowledge of our 'being' are inseparable, so that 'knowledge' is 'being'. This is the type of knowledge that the Upanishad promises to give us. It is, thus, something unique. Towards this end the Upanishad, the Brhadaranyaka, girds up its loins.

In the beginning, there is an attempt to describe the *Asvamedha* Sacrifice by identifying the consecrated horse with the universe as a whole. The creation of the universe may be compared to a sacrifice which is symbolically performed by a

ceremony through rituals; and when it is contemplated it becomes an attunement of consciousness with the ultimate nature of creation. This, in outline, is the description of the process of creation. The forms, names and phenomena which we see and pass through, are a reversal of the nature of Reality, a reflection, as it were, of the Original through some medium, so that we see everything topsy-turvy and never as it really is. This is a fact which escapes our notice often, that we can see a thing and yet it can be upside down in all the features presented to the perceiving senses. Though we may be seeing the object, we may not visualise it properly. Thus, any achievement in this world of sense-perceptions may not be regarded as an ultimate acquisition, even as a collection of many reflections in a basket is not equal to the acquirement of anything substantially.

The description of the creative process, afforded in the Upanishad, in its First Chapter, is very grand and comprehensive. The exposition has some resemblance to the Purusha-Sukta of the Veda, where the Cosmic Sacrifice, which is creation, is said to evolve gradually, stage by stage, and touch every aspect of the universe, animate as well as inanimate. Not only the animate and inanimate existences, but also social organisations and human activities - all these are comprehended in this process of manifestation we call creation.

We have, then, a very pertinent point expounded of a similar nature where the character of sense-perception is described, in the analysis of which we are interestingly told that there is a complete reversal of the order of Reality in all types of sense-perception. The cart is put before the horse whenever we see anything with our eyes, so that we are in a world of confusion, misunderstanding, and, therefore, necessarily, sorrow. Where the understanding is insufficient, sorrow has to come automatically. The senses do not perceive the world correctly. This is what is made out subsequent to the description of the creation of the universe, and this description is symbolic in its nature, like a story which goes, but its essence is simple enough to understand; that, as we see our face in a mirror, where the right is seen as left and the left as right, the thing is not contacted in its reality. There is a right and left reversal, as it were, in the perception of things, and the object which we cognise or perceive is really not in its proper context or position in the scheme of things. We are wrongly apprehending it as an object 'outside', while what has really happened in perception is something different. The object of sense-perception is the Ultimate Subject really, and we erroneously regard it as an 'object'. How it is the Subject, and how it is not the object, we shall see when we study this section as we come to it. The objects of perception are really subjects, says the Upanishad, and this is the mistake that we make - the non-recognition of subjectivity even in what is regarded as an object.

Then we have, as the Upanishad proceeds, the subsequent outcome of this principal exposition in the First Chapter, namely, the Second Chapter, where we are not told anything new. It is only an elaboration of the principle which is precisely stated in the earlier one. As a matter of fact, the main content of the Upanishad is in the First, the Third and the Fourth Chapters. The Second is a

secondary elaboration, and the Fifth and the Sixth are like an appendix and are not of much importance from the point of view of philosophical study, though they are very significant in one's practice of higher meditations. The central portion of the Upanishad is in the First, Third and the Fourth Chapters, which contain the peak of human thought, and offer an exposition of the highest philosophy the human mind has ever conceived. The discussions that take place in the court of King Janaka, under the leadership of Sage Yajnavalkya, touch upon almost every subject relevant in spiritual life, all following a graduated technique of development of thought from the lower to the higher until the highest Universal is reached. The outward is described first, the inward afterwards, and the Universal finally. This is the system followed in this Upanishad, especially in the central portion, the Third and the Fourth Chapters. This is precisely the way in which we have to approach things. The outward, the inward and the ultimate follow logically in the course of study. Though from the point of view of the evolutionary process or the chronological order of the descent of the individual from the Universal, we may say that the outward is the last and the inward is the intermediary link, the Universal being the first, yet, in our studies we would profitably go from the lower to the higher. We should not jump from the higher to the lower, because the higher is not known to us when the lower is not transcended. The lower can be seen and apprehended in a certain way, to the extent it has become the content of one's direct consciousness. So it is better to follow the inductive method of logic, in some sense, so that we proceed from more acquainted things towards less acquainted things, from particulars to generals, from the visible to the invisible, from the sense-world to the rational realm and then to the spiritual field. This is the methodology of the Upanishad, the Brhadaranyaka, particularly, in the central portion; and it concludes with the grandest proclamation ever made, in the conversation between Yajnavalkya and his consort Maitreyi, known as the Maitreyi-Vidya, popularly, where a staggering description of the Reality is given to us. Perhaps, the discourses of Yajnavalkya are incomparable in literary beauty combined with profundity of thought.

This is to give a bare outline of how thoughts are developed in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad. We shall take up the study of the First Chapter in its proper order and consider, as the tradition goes, the meaning of the invocatory verse: *Om! Purnamadah purnamidam purnat purnamudacyate; purnasya purnamaddya purnameva-avasisyate*: 'That is Infinite, this is Infinite; from the Infinite does proceed the Infinite. On removing the Infinite from the Infinite, the Infinite alone remains. This is the chant of invocation which is recited at the beginning of this Upanishad. It is also chanted at the end of the study. This is the tradition. And this Mantra, this chant, occurs in the Upanishad itself, a very interesting piece, which rounds up and piles infinities over infinities in a little recitation. Infinity plus Infinity is Infinity. It does not mean, then, two Infinities. Infinity minus Infinity is Infinity only; it does not mean zero. And Infinity divided by Infinity is Infinity, again. There is no mathematics of the empirical type or the geometry of space-time in the Infinite realm. The Infinite is incapable of mathematical calculation, and therefore incapable of logical understanding, because mathematics and logic are inter-related - they are sister sciences. The

invocatory chant tells that the Infinite alone is; and all this creation that has come from the Infinite is also Infinite. It is a wonder how the Infinite can come from the Infinite. That process of coming, also, is Infinite; and if this Infinite that is this creation is supposed to be the outcome of the Infinite which is the cause, and if we suppose, in a human fashion, that the Infinite has been taken away from the Infinite by way of creation, the answer is that what remains after creation, also, is the Infinite. This is another way of saying that there is no creation at all, but we cannot be told this truth suddenly, since we see creation with our eyes. So, by a process of *reductio ad absurdum*, as we have it in geometry, the conclusion is arrived at that the Infinite cannot move and does not move, and therefore there is no evolution or involution within it. The perception of the evolutionary process and the act of creation is relative to the condition of the individual, which fact cannot be enquired into unless one transcends individuality. The difficulty of knowing this secret lies in that the effect cannot know the cause. The enquiry into the Infinite is like trying to climb on one's own shoulders, which cannot be done, because the enquirer into the Infinite is an effect or, at least, stands in the position of an effect. The effect is conditioned by many factors, and unless these factors are known, that which transcends the factors cannot also be known. We cannot go behind the veil which covers our eyes, the veil of conditioned perception. The Infinite, the Reality, cannot be visualised by the apparatus of human understanding, because of the conditioning categories limiting human understanding. Mathematical and logical understanding are conditioned by the assumption of a three-dimensional space and a one-dimensional time. We cannot escape these hypotheses. Space is three-dimensional; it cannot be one-dimensional. And time moves in a linear fashion from past to future. This is how we think, and we cannot think in any other way, whether or not this is the only possible way of thinking. These limitations of thought prevent us from knowing what is the Infinite. Therefore, it is only an appropriate symbol that can explain what has really happened, not logic. Ultimately, all mystical expositions are symbolic; they are not just logical, and cannot be conveyed by argument, but they can be communicated in some way by image, art and story, and such media which touch the soul better than logic or mathematics. Thus, in this symbolic fashion, the chant tells us that the Infinite rolls within itself, and this rolling process also is the Infinite itself, like the ocean rumbling within itself, and even the rumbling is the ocean alone. So, the Infinite is, and everything is said when we say this, and nothing more can be said - *Purnamadah, purnamidam*: Know it as 'That which is', and say not anything more. Any attribute or adjective that we add to it is only going to diminish its connotation and not add to its glory. Say that 'It is', and enough is it. Such is the Infinite. The Infinite *was*, the Infinite *is*, and the Infinite *shall be*; nothing else can ever be.

Om Santih Santih Santih - 'Om! Peace, Peace, Peace'. We always recite this peace chant three times, indicating that there should be peace in the three realms, or in three ways, or freedom from the three sources of trouble. We have three principal kinds of trouble, and all these three are to cease and peace is to prevail. We have trouble from within; trouble from without; and trouble from above. This threefold problem is known as *Tapatraya*. If there is a heavy flood, or

there is an earthquake, a thunderbolt, or a destruction of this kind caused by factors beyond human range, such catastrophe is referred to as supernatural - *Adhidaivika-Tapa*. When troubles come from outside, as those from animals, reptiles, wicked persons, etc., they are known as *Adhibhautika-Tapa*. When troubles come from inside, such as illness, sorrow born of mental confusion, and the like, they go by the name, *Adhyatmika-Tapa*. They merely appear to be three, from outside. There is a threefold appearance of a single problem, and it cannot be solved by any amount of intellectual logic, because it is ingrained in the very being of the individual. May the Vidya, the Wisdom of the Upanishad bring peace by causing the cessation of this threefold sorrow. May there be Peace everywhere.

The Upanishad proper begins with the contemplation of the sacrifice, *Asvamedha*. The Veda, in the hymn called the Purusha-Sukta, contemplates the Universe as a vast Sacrifice of God. Creation is an 'othering' or self-alienation of the Absolute, as it were. Here is a symbolic concept of the Original Sacrifice. The Purusha, the Supreme Being, became an 'other' to Himself in the act of the manifestation of the Universe. But, the Supreme was 'as if' an 'other', but not truly, for He, nevertheless remained as the Absolute, Self-Conscious Being, and He knew Himself as 'I-am'. Even in the Biblical parlance we have the description of God as 'I-am-That-I-am'. One cannot say anything else about God. 'I-Am' is the highest description of God, but the Absolute is supposed to be transcendent even to this condition of 'I-amness' of the Universal Nature, because the state of 'I-am' is Self-consciousness, though it is Universal. So, in the phraseology of the Vedanta, a distinction is drawn between this Universal 'I-am' condition and the Absolute as it is, the distinction between Brahman and Ishvara, spoken of in this philosophy.

The Cosmic Sacrifice of the Purusha-Sukta is an indication to us of the way in which a ritual can become a spiritual meditation, or a spiritual meditation itself can be interpreted as a magnificent ritual. The Brahmanas of the Veda, ritual-ridden as they have been, are brought to a point of contemplative apotheosis in the Aranyakas and the Upanishads, and here it is that every kind of action is identified with a form of sacrifice, and action made a part of inward contemplation, so that action becomes a process of thought, rather than a movement of the limbs of the body. Every activity is a psychological function; it is not just a physical process. This is what we have to understand when we convert action into a contemplation. The originally Existent Being thought an Idea, a Being inseparable from Consciousness. The Purusha-Sukta tells us that God became all the Cosmos (*Purusha evedam sarvam*), and the created beings contemplated God as the Original Sacrifice. (*Yajnena yajnam-ayajanta devah*) - by Sacrifice did the celestials contemplate the Sacrifice. This is, in some way, an anticipation of a subsequent enunciation of a similar process in the Bhagavadgita, when it says that the Absolute is the Supreme Sacrifice, contemplated universally, as also performed individually in the spirit of divine participation (*Brahmarpanam brahma havih, brahmagnau brahmana hutam, brahmaiva tena gantavyam brahmakarma samdhina*).

The act, the process and the end towards which the action is directed are all single in their essence, and they are not even a tripartite or a threefold process. It is a single development of Being which is impartite. This contemplation which was originally initiated in the Purusha-Sukta, as the Cosmic Sacrifice, may be said to be the Mother of all other concepts of sacrifice, or Yajna in the Indian tradition, or perhaps any other tradition of this type. The offering up of oneself is the core of the Sacrifice, and, thus, the highest Sacrifice is supposed to be self-sacrifice, not the sacrifice of outward material or anything that one 'possesses'. The offering of what we *have* is a lower sacrifice in comparison with the sacrifice of what we *are*. This is the *Jnana-Yajna*, or the knowledge-sacrifice that is spoken of in the Bhagavadgita and such other scriptures. The Purusha-Sukta is, therefore, a contemplation of a Jnana-Yajna as if performed by God Himself in the act of creation or a universal Self-alienation.

A similar contemplation is envisaged in the beginning of the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, where the *Asvamedha* Sacrifice is made an occasion for a spiritual contemplation. The *Asva*, or the horse, consecrated in the sacrifice, is identified with Prajapati, or the Creator of the Universe, the Virat or the Hiranyagarbha of the later Vedanta. And in the very description that we find in the commencement of the Upanishad, the details of the parts of the horse are identified with the details of the Universe outside, so that here is a purely symbolic contemplation. The ritual becomes a Cosmic Act, and the horse of the *Asvamedha* Sacrifice is the Prajapati of the Veda. The Creator is the object of contemplation. In the beginning, this contemplation is religious in the sense that there is an 'externalisation' of the Idea of Prajapati, as a transcendent Creator of the Universe, but later it becomes wholly spiritual, where the meditator identifies himself with Prajapati, the All-Being, the Creator, so that the *Upasana* (worship) becomes a Self-contemplation, *Adhyatma-Vidya*, once again.

The Upanishad takes us from ritualistic concepts to religious adorations, and then to spiritual visualisations. There is, again, a gradual ascent of thought, from the outward to the inward, and from the inward to the Universal. We withdraw from the outward mode of behaviour to the inward psychological factors which determine these external modes of behaviour, and then we contemplate the Being that is precedent even to psychological behaviour. What we do outside is determined by what we think in our minds, and what we think in our minds is conditioned by what we *are* in our true selves. So, there is a process of the rise of contemplative action from the outer realm of name, form and action to the inward thought-processes of the individual, and to thought-process in general, leading to 'being', not merely to the individual's apparent being, but to the Being of all beings; which the Upanishad would describe as *Satyasya Satyam*, or the Truth of all truths.

The Upanishads do not regard anything as absolutely untrue. Everything is true, but relatively so. There is a passage from the lower truth to the higher truth. The Upanishads have a strange way of envisaging things. The True alone prevails everywhere. Truth alone succeeds - *Satyameva jayate* - not untruth, because

untruth is not. Therefore, the rise is from a lesser wholeness of truth to the larger wholeness which is above it. Actually, we reach, in the end, the Ultimate Wholeness which is Brahman, the Absolute. And also, simultaneously, it is an ascent of the soul from one condition of joy to another condition of joy. We do not rise from sorrow to joy, because sorrow is a misconceived tendency to happiness. It is a misplaced form of being which comes to us as a grief or agony. Just as untruth is *not*, sorrow also is *not*, because they are misplaced values, and when they are placed in their proper contexts, they look beautiful. As totally ugly things do not exist in the world, absolute sorrow also does not exist. An ugly thing is a misplaced value, again. When a thing is not properly placed, it looks ugly. When the very same thing is placed where it ought to be, it becomes the beautiful, so that perfection is the *Dharma* (law) of the Upanishad gospel, and it sees perfection everywhere. The enlightenment of consciousness to this Perfect Being is the entire process of Upanishad wisdom.