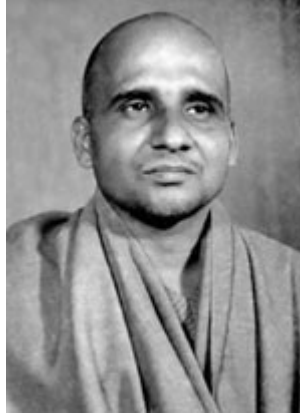




THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

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CHAPTER I

Third Brahmana

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE VITAL FORCE AMONG ALL FUNCTIONS

After having gone through the whole process of creation and given some idea of what are the constituents of this creation; how things in creation are related to one another; in short, what is the internal connection between the world and the individuals in their relationship with the Creator; now, some important conclusion is drawn on the basis of this doctrine of the creation of the universe, namely, the way in which forces work in the world.

We have heard it said that there are divine forces and undivine forces, or, to put in a more intelligible phrase, the integrating forces and the disintegrating forces. The integrating powers are called the Devas, and the disintegrating ones are called the Asuras, the gods and the demons, which we hear of in the Epics and the Puranas and the mythological stories of religion. There is supposed to be a constant battle going on between the gods and the demons, the divine and the undivine forces, a subject that is dealt with also in the sixteenth chapter of the Bhagavadgita, entitled 'Daivasura-sampad-vibhaga Yoga', or the Yoga of the conflict between the divine and the undivine forces. We have heard these words repeated many times - the divine and the undivine. But, what do they actually mean? How do we know what is divine and what is undivine? What is the characteristic of a divine force and what is the nature of an undivine force? This is explained in the following section of the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, by way of an allegorical anecdote, a story. There was a war going on between the children of

Prajapati, a conflict between the elders and the youngsters, one may say, the gods and the non-gods, the Devas and the Asuras.

1. dvaya ha prajapatyah devas casuras ca. tatah kaniyasa eva devah, jayasa asurah, ta esu lokeshv aspardhanta, te ha deva ucuh, hantashura yajna udgithenatyayameti.
2. te ha vacam ucuh, tvam na udgaya iti, tatheti: tebhya vag udagayat. you vaci bhogas tam devebhya agayat, yat kalyanam vadati tad atmane; te vidur, anena vai na udgatrathyasyantiti tam abhidrutya papmanavidhyan, sa yah sa papma yad evedam apratirupam vadati sa eva sa papma.
3. atha ha pranam ucuh, tvam na udgaya iti, tatheti: tebhya pranam udagayat. yah pranam bhogas tam devebhya agayat, yat kalyanam jighrati tad atmane; te vidur anena vai naudgatrathyasyantiti. tam abhidrutya papmanavidhyan, sa yah sa papma yad evedam apratirupam jighrati sa eva sa papma.
4. atha ha caksur ucuh, tvam na udgaya iti, tatheti: tebhya caksur udagayat. yas caksusi bhogas tam devebhya agayat, yat kalyanam pasyati tad atmane; te vidur anena vai na udgatrathyasyantiti. tam abhidrutya papmanavidhyan, sa yah sa papma yad evedam apratirupam pasyati, sa eva sa papma.
5. atha ha srotram ucuh, tvam na udgaya iti, tatheti: tebhya srotram udagayat. yah srotram bhogas tam devebhya agayat, yat kalyanam srnoti tad atmane; te vidur anena vai na udgatrathyasyantiti. tam abhidrutya papmanavidhyan; sa yah sa papma yad evedam apratirupam srnoti, sa eva sa papma.
6. atha ha mana ucuh, tvam na udgaya iti, tatheti: tebhya mana udagayat. yo manasi bhogas tam devebhya agayat, yat kalyanam samkalpayati tad atmane; te vidur anena vai na udgatrathyasyantiti. tam abhidrutya papmanavidhyan; sa yah sa papma yad evedam apratirupam samkalpayati, sa eva sa papma; evam u khalv eta devatah papmabhir upasrjan, evam enah papmanavidhyan.
7. atha hemam asanyam pranam ucuh, tvam na udgaya iti, tatheti: tebhya esa pranam udagayat; te vidur anena vai na udgatrathyasyantiti. tam abhidrutya papmanavitsan; sa yatha asmanam rtva losto vidhvamseta, evam haiva vidhvamsamana visvanco vinesuh, tato deva abhavan, parasurah; bhavaty atmana parasya dvisan bhratravyo bhavati ya evam veda.

The gods wanted to overcome the demons. The great exponent Acharya Sankara tell us that the gods are always less in number, the demons are more in number, by which he means that people who follow their natural inclinations are more in number than those who are able to subdue the natural impulses. These urges of nature are designated as divine and undivine, from the way in which they

work, and the purpose for which they work. And, the battle between the two forces was waged with the intention on either side for victory. The gods did not depend entirely on the strength of their arms, but wanted to take the help of a superior power, and that power is the power of a chant, a Mantra, or a vibration, a magical influence, we may say, a weapon which they wanted to employ against the Asuras. The Devas conferred among themselves, and concluded: "We shall employ a Mantra-Astra, a weapon which is driven, not by any material element, but by mere thought, viz., the Udgitha, the Divine Vital Power." We have heard of Astras, or divine weapons, such as Brahmastra, Narayanastra, Pasupatastra, etc. These are not physical weapons, but certain superphysical vibrations, like homeopathic potencies which cannot be seen with the eyes, but work vigorously. These weapons can be discharged even through a small, tiny material instrument. The weapon which is mystical, here contemplated to be employed by the Devas, was the Udgitha-Saman, a Mantra of the Sama-Veda which is called the Udgitha. "We chant, recite, and generate energy, so that we may overcome the Asuras, the demons."

Now, who will do the chant? The gods are the presiding deities over the senses, as far as the individuals are concerned. We have the gods in the cosmos, and gods in our own physical organism. The cosmical counterpart of the sensory powers in the individual are what are called the gods in the heavens. The macrocosmos and the microcosmos are correlated organically. The powers that are supermundane, which work as divinities in the heavens, as we hear of, spoken in the scriptures, are the superintending principles over the sense-organs. The god of the eyes, for example, is the Sun, Surya. The Sun is the god of the eyes, and likewise, we have gods or presiding principles, divinities, superior energies, presiding over every sense-organ and activity, including the psychological functions. The presiding deity of the eyes is Surya, of the nose are Asvini Kumaras, of the ears are the Dig-Devatas, of the taste principle is Varuna, of the touch principle is Vayu, and there are Agni, Indra, Vishnu, Prajapati, Mrtyu, presiding over the organs of action, the Moon presiding over the mind, Brahma over the intellect, Rudra over the ego, and Vishnu over the sub-conscious and the subliminal psychological layers.

All these gods conferred together to work up an energy, or a force, to counteract the Asura energy. They wanted to chant the Mantra in order that the energy may be acquired. The chanting of the Mantra, here, does not merely mean a verbal recitation through the mouth, or a hearing of it through the ears, a fact which is made out by the story itself. What is actually meant by the chant of the Mantra is a setting in tune of oneself with the Powers that are invoked by the Mantra. If this attunement of the microcosmic with the macrocosmic is not affected, the Mantra does not work; it cannot produce effect. This is what actually happened when the chant of the Saman was wrongly recited. The speech principle was asked to chant the Saman, that is the Udgitha. The gods asked the speech: "You chant the Veda, the Saman, the Udgitha", and the speech rose up into action and chanted the Saman. The gods were very much pleased that the Saman chanting was being recited by the speech, and that they were going to

have more energy, and shall overcome the Asuras. But the Asuras came to know of this fact. The demons understood: “Oh, they are going to chant something, so that we may be overcome. We shall defeat their purpose.” And what did the Asuras, the demons, do? They attacked the speech, afflicted the speech with evil, so that the Saman may be spoilt. The evil with which the Asuras affected the speech is the wrong utterances which the speech expresses occasionally. We speak good things, and also not good things. That we are capable of speaking something not good and useful and beneficial shows that the Asuras also are working in us, not merely the gods. We can speak what is beneficial; we can also speak what is not beneficial. We are capable of doing both. We can do some good through the speech; we can do a great harm also through the speech. Why is the speech affected with this capacity to do harm? That is the result of the speech being attacked by the Asuras - the evil effect. The chant is defeated. The gods could not achieve their purpose.

The gods, then, thought and decided: “Somebody else has to chant; the speech is defeated; it is not chanting properly; it is uttering wrong things; it blabbers; it flounders.” Then they asked the other organs to chant, one by one. The eye was asked to chant. The speech is not able to do what is required. So the eye, the principle of seeing, was requested by the gods: “You will chant the Saman for us.” The eye rose up into action and then started chanting. The Asuras understood this also. They attacked the eye with evil. So, we can see good things and also not good things with the eye. We can see the same object in two ways. We can visualise an object in two manners: in a manner that is conducive to proper judgment, and in a manner which is not proper judgment. The eye is capable of doing both, and that weakness of the eye to see wrong, evil, and misjudging things, is the result of the Asuras affecting it. Thus, the eye also could not do this work. Then, the gods told the ear: “Will you chant? The speech has found itself incapable, because the Asuras attacked it. Ear, can you chant?” The ear said: “Yes, I can.” And it chanted. The Asuras understood that the ear is chanting. So, they attacked the ear with evil. Then what happened? The ear can hear both good and bad. We can receive good things and bad things through the ear. The ear is an open door; it is never closed. Anything can enter through it, and the capacity of the ear to receive what is not proper, what is not right, what is not good, is the result of the demons attacking it. Likewise, every organ was affected. We can taste good and bad; we can smell good and bad; we can hear good and bad; and touch good and bad. The gods requested the mind, and it, too, got affected with the habit of thinking what is improper. Then, what is the alternative? What is to be done now? The Devas had no way of escape. “Everywhere the Asuras are attacking us, from all sides. We cannot even chant the Mantra; they are spoiling everything.”

Then they asked the internal unifying Prana-Sakti, ultimately: “Can you chant the Saman Mantra, Udgitha, for us? All the sense-organs have failed. Even the mind could not chant.” When the mind was asked to chant, the Asuras attacked the mind. So they say, the mind can think right things and also wrong things. All thoughts are not really correct thoughts. So, everything went a fiasco; it was not

successful. There was something which the gods could think of as the medium or the instrument for the chant of the Saman, namely the Prana. The Prana does not belong to any sense-organ. It is a single force that works through the entire system, and without this element, principle, or vitality, which is the Prana, no sense-organ can function - the eye cannot see, the ear cannot hear, etc. So, it is an impersonal unifying force. The total power of the organism, we may say - that is what is indicated by the word, Prana here. And the Prana was requested by the gods: "Will you chant the Saman, Udgitha, for us?" "Yes." And the Vital Energy started chanting, and the Asuras wanted to attack it. "Oh, we see; this Vital Energy is chanting the Mantra; we shall attack." When the Asuras attacked the Prana, what happened? They could not overcome the Prana. They were thrown back and broken to pieces, and flung in all directions, as a clod of earth would be rendered to dust when it is struck against a rock, says the Upanishad. A little ball of dry earth, if thrown against a hard rock, will break to pieces. The rock will not be affected; the ball will go to pieces. The Asuras went to pieces when they hit this inner Sakti, the Power, the Prana. Then, there was success for the gods, and the gods assumed their original positions which they had lost on account of their being subjected to the evil of the Asuras. The gods became what they were. One who knows thus becomes himself, and his enemies are crushed. This is a very interesting narrative. But, here is not merely a story; it is a cosmic phenomenon explained in an analogical language.

The Devas and the Asuras are two tendencies, and not substances. The tendency to unification is the divine principle and the urge to diversification is the demoniacal principle. The sense-organs are incapable; they were defeated by the Asuras, which means to say, that the sense-organs cannot work up this unifying activity which is intended for regaining the original position of the deities of the senses. As mentioned earlier, the mistake that happened during the process of individual creation is a reversal of the subject and the object, placing them in wrong positions. In the Aitareya Upanishad, we have a more clear exposition of this descending process. The Cosmic Being manifested Himself as all things, down to the five elements - Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether - which we regard as objects of sense. The five elements are the objects of our senses, but they were the last evolutes in the process of Divine manifestation. They were, therefore, part of the Cosmic Being who was the Universal Subject; and whoever knows this; also, remains the Universal Subject as inseparable from this All-Being, Vaisvanara, or Virat. The five elements stand in the position of the subject, to the isolated individuals; and they are not their objects. The mouth of the Virat is supposed to be the location of the Fire principle. For instance, Speech is the effect of the Fire principle. While in the cosmic realm, Fire is the effect of the Cosmic Principle, of Speech, identified with the Virat Himself, the Fire principle becomes an object for individuals, so that human speech is controlled by the Fire principle, as it is not the case in Virat where Speech is the controller of Fire. The Organs which are attributed to the Virat are causes, rather than effects. And, in our case, they become effects, like reflections. The evil which we are speaking of here, the Asuras or the demons, are the tendencies to regard the Universal Subject as an object, and the desire of the individualised subject to run after the

object, for 'contact' with it. The gods have lost their position. They are no more angels in heaven. We hear in the Puranas, stories being told, that the celestials were driven away from heaven by the demons and they lost their position; they ran away; they did not know where to stand, and rushed to God for help. When the forces of desire in terms of external objects begin to operate in an intense manner, the position of the Universal Subject gets converted into that of an object, and then the gods are driven from the heaven. When the Subject is driven from its location and transformed into an object, what is really happening is that the angels are driven from heaven and the Asura has taken that position. The demon is ruling the kingdom of paradise. The idea is this: the god who is the subjective angel has become a fallen egoistic subject, under the spell of evil influences. This travesty can be obviated only if the evil element in the senses is removed. The eye, the ear, the nose, speech, etc. can regain their original position, as they had in the being of the Virat, if the tendencies to diversification and movement towards objects are obviated by the operation of the Prana. It was the Prana whom evil, the Asuras, could not attack. Everything could be affected. The eye and the ear and all the sense-organs were afflicted by the Asuras, i.e., every organ is a diversifying principle. It is not a unifying power. No sense-organ is characterised by unification or the power of meeting. Every sense has an urge to move in the direction of its own particular object. The ear has its own object, sound; the eye has the object, colour; the nose has the object, smell; the tongue has the object, taste; and the skin has its object, touch. They can never have a unifying capacity. But the Prana is a unifying force. This Prana, here, is represented by Hiranyagarbha in the cosmos. So, this section in the Upanishad really deals with Prana-Vidya, or meditation on the Cosmic Prana, Hiranyagarbha, for the purpose of which the senses have to be turned back to their own sources, and not allowed to move towards objects, which is the disease that they have contracted on account of their being afflicted by what is called the Asura.

The centrifugal tendency is the Asura; the centripetal one is the divine aspiration. The disintegrating impulse, i.e., the movement towards further and further grosser form of objectivity, is the devilish element in the senses, and the divine element is that by which they can turn back upon their own source and contemplate their inner connectedness with the other divinities. The Prana mentioned here is not merely the breathing principle or the breath, so-called. Some people translate Prana as breath; but it is not just that. It is the energy, a subtle force, a vitality, that which keeps the whole body in unison. If we can feel a sensation of unity in the whole body, it is because of the harmonious movement of the Prana in the whole system. Really, the body is not one whole; it is made up of parts; every cell is different from every other cell; every limb is different from every other limb. But, inspite of this diversification we are a whole. We have the heart, we have the lungs, we have the spleen, we have the liver, and intestines, the hands and the feet, and the limbs and the organs, one different from the other, constituted of minute organism called cells. But, how is it that, with all this diversity we are able to feel a singleness of unity in ourselves? We are a whole, an indivisible completeness. This is due to the Prana which is the immediate

manifestation of the Atma-Sakti within us. Ultimately, it is the Atman which is responsible for the sense of unity within us. It is indivisible, and everything which reflects this indivisibility in some percentage may be regarded as a manifestation of the Atman. The Prana-Sakti is regarded as an immediate expression of Atma-Sakti within us, and correspondingly in the cosmos, we may say, Hiranyagarbha is the reflection of the Absolute Brahman.

Such a meditation is to be practised if the senses are to be controlled, and if the divinities are to regain their positions, i.e., if we are not to stand in the need of moving towards objects of sense for our satisfaction, and the objects have to come to us of their own accord. When this is achieved, things will not be objects. They will stand in the position of our own kith and kin. They become part of our larger dimension, which they really are, but which consciousness we have forsaken on account of the subjection of the senses to the Asura principle, the urge for diversification.

Thus, this section of the Upanishad is a continuation of the history of creation which was narrated to us in the earlier section. The Prana is the only unifying principle within us, not the sense-organs. The contemplator on the Prana becomes indomitable at once. This is one of the things that the Upanishad tells us. We achieve and get endowed with a power which cannot be confronted by anybody. A contemplator on the Hiranyagarbha Prana is a powerful being. Nobody can stand before that person.

In the Chhandogya Upanishad also, we have a very interesting anecdote, concerning the force that is generated around a person who devotes himself to meditation on the Hiranyagarbha Prana. There was a simple person who was very poor, but a meditator on the Cosmic Prana, Hiranyagarbha, and he was begging for food, asking for alms, moving from place to place. One day, he went to a Yajnasala, a sacrificial ground, where Brahmanas were performing rituals of various kinds. This gentleman thought that he will get some charity in that sacrificial ground. So, he went there, and found those people busy performing the rites. They were offering sacred ghee to the consecrated fire. And he said, "I am hungry; give me some food." No one paid any attention. They did not even look at him. They were busy performing the sacrifice. He asked a second time, and third time, "Give me food; I am hungry." And nobody cared; they did not talk. Then he uttered thus: "Do you know whom you are refusing food; you are refusing food to the Cosmic Prana." The very word was sufficient to shake their whole person. They rose up, "Come; come, please sit, take food," said they all in great fear.

The vibration of the meditator of the Cosmic Prana is a power which can influence anything and everything. The incapacity of the individual, the powerlessness, the impotency, that we feel, is due to the isolation of our individual Prana from the Cosmic Prana. The Cosmic Prana moves into us, it is within us, like the all-pervading space which is inside everything. The all-pervading space which is illimitable is inside this hall. The little space inside this hall is the same as the space that is outside and everywhere. In the same manner,

the Prana that is within us is the same as the Cosmic Prana called the Sutra-Atman, or Hiranyagarbha. But, due to arrogance, egoism, self-assertion, we began to appropriate for our own selves whatever is within our body as our own. We begin to say, “my mind, my Prana, my limbs, my organs, my senses”, etc. This ‘mineness’ in respect of properties and acquisitions, born out of the ‘I’ness of self-affirmation, is the cause of cutting oneself away from the inflow of the energy that is everywhere. And, therefore, we feel weak vitally and psychologically. The moment this bond is broken, the wall that separates us from the Cosmic Prana is lifted by a contemplation which is called the Udgitha Vidya, meditation on the Sutra-Atman. As long as this art of meditation on the Sutra-Atman is not learnt, we feel impotent in every respect. The contemplator on the Sutra-Atman is an all-powerful being.

The story is not merely a description of the powers of the Prana. It is a statement on the powers of everything that is within us. The Prana is the most forceful principle in the subtle body within us, but there are other principles, the sense-organs, for the eye, the ear, etc. They are also powerful if they are properly located. Any person can assume strength when placed in a proper position. But, if we put a person in the wrong place, even the powerful one becomes weak. So, the senses, like the Prana, should be placed in their proper positions. The mind also has to be placed in its proper context. When the mind becomes powerful, the senses also become powerful. One can convert things and bring about transformation by the operation of the mind and the senses, properly attuned to their sources. The whole meditation described here, in this context of Prana-Vidya, is the placing of the mind, the Prana and the senses in their proper places. What is the proper place? The eye must go back to the Sun. That is its proper place. It should not regard itself as isolated from its deity. Just as the soul cannot be separated from the body, the deity of an organ cannot be separated from the organ. The senses should not regard themselves as independent individuals working for their own purpose. They are only outer instruments of action for the divinities that are within. So, the contemplation of the divinity, Devata-Dhyana, is the attunement of the sense-powers with the divinity that is superintending over them. The divinity, again, has to be placed in its proper place. What is it? It is the limb of the Virat. Every god is a limb of the Cosmic Virat, and so, when the senses are placed in their identity with their divinity, and likewise, the divinity is placed in its proper place, in its identity with the Virat, the Virat begins to work in us at once. It is like putting on a switch, connecting our little lighting bulb with the power house, though far away from us. This is the art of meditation. The object which is usually regarded as external to the senses should not be regarded as such, because it is not really an object. From the point of view of its own location, it may be a subject. We know this very well. You are an object for me, because I see you, but you are a subject to your own self, and I may be an object for you. So, if I am a subject for myself, and you are a subject for yourself, and if every one and every thing is a subject from his own or her own or its own point of view, where is the object? The object does not exist. It is only an hallucination. There is only One Subject. Everywhere, there is subjectivity. Even in the minutest atom and electron, there is a subjectivity. A principle of the affirmation of self is

present in every little nook and corner of the universe. So, the affirmation of the subjectivity of things in their proper places, i.e., to regard all beings as limbs of the Virat, to regard everyone as a self, rather than an object, would be the highest meditation conceivable.

This is the greatest meditation that can be taught to anyone. It is great because it reaches the pinnacle of Reality. When we respect a person, that person begins to help us. If we disregard the person, no help can come from that person. To regard a person as an object is to insult that person, because that person is not an object. From that person's point of view, that person is a subject, with self-regard, self-esteem and value, and so is the case with everyone and everything. We shall be in a position to regard everyone and everything from the point of view of the location of his own or its own being as we locate our own being. The Selfhood of all things is the ultimate meditation. This state cannot be achieved easily. It is a hard and arduous technique, and for this purpose we are asked to go slowly, from the lower rungs to the higher ones in the order of creation. This is the principle laid out in a beautiful injunction in the Katha Upanishad, also.

Yacched van manasi prajnas tad yacchej jnana-atmani jnanam atmani
mahati niyacchet, tad yacchecchanta-atmani.

The senses have to be centered in the mind; the mind has to be centered in the intellect; the intellect has to be centered in the Cosmic Intellect; the Cosmic Intellect has to be centered in the Absolute. This is how we have to proceed, gradually.