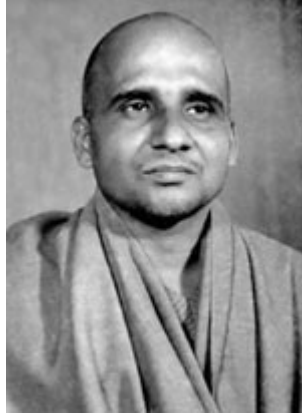




THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

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CHAPTER I

Third Brahmana

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE VITAL FORCE AMONG ALL FUNCTIONS

The principle of the Prana was considered by the powers of the different senses, as the one that is capable of overcoming Mrtyu, death, evil. This is the moral that we have been given out of this story which arose from the context of a conflict that seems to have arisen between the gods and their opponents.

8. te hocuh, kva nu so'bhud yo na ittham asakteti, ayam asye'ntar iti, so'yasya angirasah. anganam hi rasah.

The senses began to wonder, "What is this, who is this that has been able to enable us in overcoming the demons? Where is this power, what is this principle", was their question. The one that enabled the senses to overcome the principle of death was within themselves. The help did not come from outside. It was from within, and that principle, the Pranatva is designated Ayasya angirasa. The word Angirasa, is explained here. Anganam hi rasah: The essence of all the senses, the vital force – that is the principle which could not be overcome by death, because it was not specially affiliated to any particular limb of the body, and it was not connected particularly with any sense-organ. It was a uniform principle, impersonally operating throughout the system of the body, present in its manifested form as Prana, by the power of which, one is able to speak. It is operating in the mouth of a person – asye'ntar iti. And that functions through the act of speech. The vocal organ is only one of its functions, and it does not represent the whole of the Prana, it has many other aspects. But, the most

ostensible manifestation of it is what we call Prana, in ordinary language. But, it is only a symbol of a larger reservoir of Prana-Shakti, which is the Cosmic Sutra-Atman, or Hiranyagarbha, the connection with whom at once frees one from the fear of death. It is that from which death runs away in fear.

9. Sa va esa devata dur nama, duram by asya mrtyuh, duram ha va asman mrtyur bhavati ya evam veda.

This great principle is Maha-Prana, the Great Power, which is mystically designated in the Upanishad as dur, a peculiar nickname given to it. What is the meaning of dur? Duram ha va asman mrtyur bhavati: Mrtyu is dura or far from this. Therefore, it is called dur, destruction is removed from it. Death, evil, suffering, sorrow is far away from it. Therefore, it is called dur, mystically, symbolically, as a special designation of it.

Duram ha va asman mrtyur bhavati ya evam veda: One who has realisation of this fact will also be free from the fear of death. It is not merely a story which gives us a description of an event that took place some time ago, historically. There is a philosophical truth that is declared, an eternal fact, which applies to each and every person, every one, at any time, under any condition. Whoever comprehends the essential nature of this Prana will be free from fear. And, as it has been described earlier, death is either an outcome of an element present in the external structure of the senses and the mind, or it is equivalent to a peculiar thing which we cannot understand easily, and this peculiarity can be called transformation, or the urge within an individual to go out of itself into that which is not itself. This is desire. So, in one way, we may say that desire is death; and wherever there is death, there is desire; and wherever there is desire, there is death; and one dies only because of desire. Desire cannot be in the case of the one who has been endowed with this knowledge and experience, because the senses are freed from the evil of desire when they are affiliated to the Maha-Prana, Sutra-Atman, for, the principle of desire in the senses arises on account of their dissociation from the presiding deities, the gods, as we call them, in their activity towards objects outside.

The senses move towards objects, forgetting that they are superintended by higher deities, who are, in turn, controlled by the Supreme Virat, or Hiranyagarbha. The energy of the senses gets depleted in respect of objects of desire, due to a confusion in their structural pattern, a peculiar urge that arises in the senses on account of their pursuing reality only in the objects and not in that which is prior to them, namely, the superior divine principle. The element, the principle, the reality that is behind the senses is incapable of being observed by the senses. We see only what is outside, and not what is inside.

The contemplation on Hiranyagarbha, which is the subject of this discourse in the Upanishad here, is the art of transmuting, completely, the energy of the senses into cosmic principles, whereby every sense operates, or is made to operate, in terms of its context in the Cosmic Form, where death cannot enter;

and therefore it is said that one who has this realisation, one who has this understanding, one who has this knowledge, will be free from death. He will not have the sufferings, consequent upon desire for objects.

10. Sa va esa davataitasam devatanam papmanam mrtyum apahatya, yatrasam disam antah, tad asam pamano vinyadadhat, tasman na janam iyat, net papmanam mrtyvm anvavayaniti.

This, again, is a passage very symbolic. Its literal meaning is that this Prana, the moment it took up the charge of the senses, the moment the senses surrendered themselves to this Prana, the evil of the senses was driven out of the kingdom of reality. Evil was exterminated; it was asked to quit the kingdom of truth; and it was driven to the farthest corner of a distance. And, the Upanishad tells us not to go to that place where the evil has been driven. That is, outside the realm of reality, do not move, because within the realm of reality, desire cannot function, evil cannot be, death cannot operate. And, inasmuch as evil has been driven out of the kingdom of reality, do not desire to go out of this kingdom into that corner of the realm where the evil has been dispersed or thrown off, which means that the senses should not perform the forbidden act of supererogating to themselves the function which does not really belong to them, but which really belongs to a higher reality, due to whose presence alone are they able to function at all. The mistake committed by every individual is the forgetfulness of the role that is played by forces which are transcendent, and that is the reason why there is the element of egoism predominating in the individual. It is like one taking hold of the property of another and driving the owner out by saying, 'I am the owner'. The tenants are the senses; the owner is the deity of each sense. But the tenants have taken hold of the entire organisation and administration of the realm which really belongs to the deities.

The deities, again, are subtle individuals, and they, too, have to function in the context of another superior existence. In the Kena Upanishad we are told that even the gods can go wrong, as human beings can. And, in the story that is given in the Kena Upanishad, we are instructed that even the gods had the pride of having won victory over the demons, not knowing that they were helped by another power of which they had no knowledge, of which they had no vision at all.

So, the Mantra, here cited, tells us that evil is there where reality is not; and where reality is, evil cannot be. So, the clinging of the senses to unreal phantoms is the cause of the evil operating through them, and, thus, desire is nothing but desire for the unreal. It cannot be a desire for the real. If it is a desire for the real, it cannot bind. So, go not to that realm where the unreal rules in suzerainty, but be within the realm of reality; which means to say that outside reality, nothing can be. And so, all desire is a phantasmagoria that arises in the mind for things which do not exist.

11. sa va esa devataitasam devatanam papmanam mrtyum apahatya athaina mrtyum atyavahat.

Gone above the fear of death are the senses when they took refuge in the Maha-Prana. The Hiranyagarbha-Prana is the overcoming principle of death, where death is consumed. Mrtyu, or death is like a condiment to this great All-consumer, says the Katha Upanishad. Death consumes all, but this Being consumes death itself. That enabled the senses to overcome death, that is, to free themselves from desire for things. What happened to them when they were free from desire? What was the condition of the senses and the deities thereof when they were freed from the principle of death? One by one, each sense-organ is described in the following Mantras.

12. Sa vai vacam eva prathamam atyavahat, sa yada mrtyum atyamucyata, so'gnir abhavat, so' yam agnih parena mrtyum atikranto dipyate.
13. atha pranam atyavahat, sa yada mrtyum atyamucyata, sa vayur abhavat. so'yam vayuh parena mrtyum atikrantah pavate.
14. atha caksur atyavahat, tad yada mrtyum atyamucyata, sa adityo'bhavat, so'sav adityah parena mrtyum atikrantas tapati.
15. atha srotram atyavahat, tad yada mrtyum atyamucyata, ta diso'bhavan, ta ima disah parena mrtyum atikrantah.

Speech was freed from the evil of death, first of all. Then, what happened to speech? It ceased to be a mere instrument as speech. The principle of speech is not merely an organ to express words in language, as it is ordinarily in human beings. It assumed its original form. Fire is the deity of the organ of speech, and Fire is the causative principle of speech, and speech is the effect of the principle of Fire in individuals. Speech is subject to the principle of Fire, as an effect of the function of Fire. But the original condition of speech is something quite different. What we call speech, or the principle of speech, is something like a reflection of the true form of speech. We observed how an object can appear topsy-turvy when it is reflected, as when we stand on the bank of a river and look at our body. The top looks as the bottom; the head is lowermost in the reflection. The highest principle has become the lowest principle in the individual. Speech, in the Virat, is the highest principle, superior to the principle of Fire, whereas in the individual it is an effect. It is far below the principle of Fire, here. Fire (Agni) is the Devata, the deity, the presiding principle over the sense of speech in the individual, so that Fire stands above the senses as a cause. But in the Virat, it is an effect of the principle of speech. From the mouth of the Virat, Fire came, says the Aitareya Upanishad, and certain other passages in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad.

When we contemplate the Universal Subjectivity of things, the sense-organs become causes rather than effects, not as they are now in our individual cases.

What this contemplation means, is a hard thing to grasp. But, once it is grasped, all fear vanishes in a moment, because fear is due to dependence on things, and independence is assumed the moment this art of transmuting individual consciousness to the Universal Reality is gained. That is real meditation, in the light of the Upanishad. And this contemplation, this meditation on Hiranyagarbha, which is actually the subject of this chapter, and which is the reason behind the purification of the senses and their overcoming death, completely converts the effect into the cause, so that speech becomes Fire, the effect becomes the cause, and Fire finds its proper place in the Being of Reality. It does not move about like a servant wanted by nobody, but it becomes an organic part, or limb, of the Universal Being, who is the Virat, just as the mouth or the principle of speech in the individual is an organic part of the individual body. The Cosmic Body becomes the abode of the cosmic principle of speech which is prior to the operation of creation, during which process the Fire principle is supposed to have emanated from the mouth of the Virat. Thus, what happened when the principle of speech was freed from the principle of death? The moment speech was freed from the evil of death, it became the Fire principle, not the fire that is used in the kitchen for cooking the food, but the original, subtle *Satya*, or reality behind fire, the deity of fire, Agni-Devata, who is the mouth of the Virat, as stated in the scripture. This fire shines in the realm of reality in its own pristine glory. And, if we read the Puranas and Epics, we shall find that whenever the Virat-Purusha is described, Fire is mentioned there as coming out of His mouth. When Sri Krishna opened up His Cosmic Form in the court of the Kauravas, it is said that the mouth opened, and Fire came out from His mouth. And, in the Upanishad, also, we find references to this fact.

This sort of freedom from death was achieved by every sense and they all became the deity, rather than the effect. The eye became Sun, and the Sun assumed his location in the Virat, and so on every sense-organ is thus described as having regained its original status. They got over their limitations. They were reinstated in their original forms – smell, taste, hearing and touch became their own deities. The object does not any more control the activity and the existence of the individual subject, as it is the case ordinarily. Individuals, we people, are all dependent on the objects of sense. We are helplessly driven to objects on account of the fact that we live in a world of diversity, multiplicity and the separation of one thing from another thing. That element of separation has been completely mastered here in this deep technique of meditation, and all the senses including the mind became integrated in the body of the Virat, while they were all scattered in different directions, disintegrated in the organism of the individual. While the mind, in our case, moves towards objects outside, thus depleting its energy, disintegrating itself, gets integrated in the Virat, moving back to its source, so that it becomes one with the great source of energy.

16. atha mano'tyavahat, tad yada mrtyum atya-mucyata, sa candrama abhavat, so' sau candrah parena mrtyum atikranto bhati, evam ha va enam esa devata mrtyum ativahati, ya evam veda.

The Divine Prana carried the mind, too, beyond death, and then the mind became the moon, and the moon got fixed in the mind of the Virat. Even as the mind and the senses are freed from the evil of death, you and I and everyone also can be freed from the evil of death, says the Upanishad. It is a moral applicable to all, provided we follow the course followed by the senses. What did they do? They surrendered themselves to the Cosmic, and the element of Cosmic Reality took hold of them by the hand and governed them through and through, and there was no fear. If any one knows this art, follows this technique and lives a life in consonance with this principle, that individual also will cease to be an individual caught in the meshes of death, and shall become a principle of reality, identical with that which truly is, and not moving as a transitory link in the process of becoming in this world of death.

17. athatmane'nnadyam agayat, yadd hi kim cannam adyate, anenaiva tad adyate, iha pratitishati.

Whatever is done in this body is done by the Prana. For instance, the absorption of the food that is drawn in by the sense-organs into the organism is done by the Prana. It is by the Prana that the senses draw food into the system, and it is the Prana that digests the food, absorbs it into the organism. If the eyes see anything, it is the Prana that sees. If the nose smells, it is the Prana that smells. If the ears hear, it is the Prana that hears. If anything happens, it is done by the Prana. It is the support of the senses and their activities, and it is supported by these activities and principles. There is a mutual dependence of the senses and the Prana. The Prana-Sakti within and the activities without are interconnected, that is, the subjective force which we call vitality and the objective element that we call the food outside – these two are interconnected in the Body of the Virat. One is dependent on the other. Therefore, we cannot say, which is what in this interconnected realm of Universality.

Now, the anecdote continues. The senses feel highly exhilarated with the victory that they have won over the demoniacal elements. Then they tell the Prana, “Wonderful is the victory that we have gained on account of you. Great is your achievement, indeed.”

18. to deva abruvan, etavad va idam sarvam yad annam, tad atmana agasih, anu no'sminn anna abhajasveti, te vai ma'bhisamvisateti; tatheti: tam samantam parinyavisanta, tasmad yad adanenannam atti, tenaitas trpyanti; evam ha va enam sva abhisamvisanti, bharta svanam sresthah, pura eta bhavaty annado'dhipatih, ya evam veda; ya u haivamvidam svesu pratipratir bubhusati, na haivalam bharyebhyo bhavati; atha ya evaitam anubhavati, yo vaitam anu bharyan bubhursati, sa haivalam bharyebhyo bhavati.

The Devas, the gods who have been freed from death proclaim to the Prana. What did they say? “All this food is yours. Whatever is within us is your presence, and whatever is of any meaning in us, is the meaning that is yours. May we also

be able to partake of your food and your glory. Share with us the food that you consume. Let us also take food with you. Let us sit beside you, and partake of your energy, become connected with you as friends, not as isolated individuals as we have been upto this time.” The Prana said, “Sit beside me,” that is, be in consonance with me. “Then I shall feed you.” If the senses are in consonance with the Prana, the Prana will feed the senses, but if they are dissonant, naturally the energy will not flow to the senses. This fact decided, they became one with it in organic connection. If the Prana is satisfied, every sense is satisfied. If the vital force inside is happy, every part of the body is happy. The mind also is happy, the intellect is happy. The whole being is happy.

Here is a long passage which means that this fruit, this result accrues to anyone who connects oneself with this Prana, in the manner in which the senses connected themselves with the Prana. He becomes the lord of all; he becomes a master; he becomes the source of dependence for others; he becomes the best; he becomes the foremost among people; he is never in want of anything. Everything shall come to him, as everything automatically comes to the Prana, unasked. One who is in union with this Prana is the lord of all in the sense that everything belongs to him, and his wish shall instantaneously be fulfilled. No one can contend with this person who has this knowledge. The person who vies with a person with this knowledge will not succeed. This is what the Upanishad means. If you try to compete, in any manner, with one who has this knowledge, you will not succeed. But, you will succeed if you follow his precepts and live in consonance with his methods of living and his way of understanding, that is, no one can stand against his wisdom, and no one can even stand in the presence of this individual, who is endowed with this wisdom. But one who follows him becomes victorious, as he who is endowed with this knowledge is himself victorious.

19. So' yasya angirasah, anganam hi rasah, prano va anganam rasah, prano hi va anganam rasah, tasmad yasmat kasmac cangat prana utkramati, tad eve tat susyati; esa hi va anganam rasah.

This great master principle in us, which is Prana, is the essence of all the limbs of the body, and therefore he is called Angirasah. Prana is the essence of the limbs of the body, of all the senses, and, so, he is called Angirasah. If Prana departs from any part of the body, that part dries up immediately. There is no vitality in that part of the body from which Prana is withdrawn. So, life is Prana; Prana is life.

20. esa a eva brhaspatih, vag vai brhati tasya esa patih, tasmad a brhaspatih.

This Prana which is Angirasa, is also Brhaspati. Why? Speech is Brhati, and the lord of Brhati, or the Pati of Brhati, is Brhaspati. Therefore, Prana is Brhaspati as it is the lord of speech. Here, speech means the entire sacred lore, including the Vedic wisdom, symbolised here by what is known as the Brhati, or metre of the sacred Mantra. The Brhati is the longest Mantra in the Veda, and

therefore, Brhati is regarded as symbolising the principle of speech itself, not merely one word that we utter or a language that we speak, but the entire operation of the vocal organ in any manner whatsoever, and that is possible only because of the function of the Prana, as the lord thereof. Prana is, thus, regarded as Brhaspati.

21. esa u eva brahmanas-patih, vag vai brahma, tasya esa patih, tasmad u brahmanas-patih.

Prana is also Brahmanas-pati. Why? The Vedas are the ultimate reach of the principle of speech which is known as Brahma. The lord of it is Prana. Therefore it is called Brahmanas-pati.

A Eulogy of the Chant on Breath

22. esa u eva sama, vag vai sama, esa sa camasceti, tat samnah samatvam; yad veva samah plusina, samo masakena, samo nagenā, sama ebhis tribhir lokaih, samo'nena sarvena, tasmad veva sama, asnute samnah sayujyam salokatam, ya evam etat sama veda.

Brhati stands for the Rig-Veda, and Brahma stands for the Yajur-Veda, and the third one is Sama mentioned here. The speech and the Prana are regarded here as *Sa* and *Ma*. The union of them is Sama, the harmony of the system. This equalising Prana which is the harmonising principle between the speech and the whole body inside is subtly present equally in all beings. This Prana is not only in human beings. It is everywhere. This is what the Mantra says here. It is in a very minute creature like the white ant or the honeybee. It is in a mosquito. It is in an elephant. It is in all the three worlds, and the whole cosmos. It is equally present in the smaller and the larger, and it is an impersonal, invisible something.

It is not the breath that we speak of as the Prana here. It is invisible to even the subtlest operation of the senses. It cannot be conceived of even by the mind. It is the principle behind personalities, individuals and social bodies. We know what a principle is. A principle can never be seen with the eyes. It is manifest sometimes as a concept. The concept of universality, for instance, is supposed to be the highest of principles. But, we cannot see universality anywhere. Nobody can open the eyes and look at it, but it is there. Every one knows that it exists, but no one can see where it is. We know that universality must exist. It is the general principle operating behind individuals. But the general principle can be conceived as manifest, tentatively, in a particular form, through the mind of an individual, or a group of individuals, but cannot be identified with any object of sense. Inasmuch as it is a principle, it is present everywhere, in every form. For example, the principle of money is present in a dollar; it is in a pound; it is in a rupee; and so on. But, rupee is different from pound; pound is different from dollar. Yet, the money principle is universally present in all these formations. It is the value that is called the universal principle, and the form that it takes is immaterial. The essence of it is the same. The principle of administration, for

instance, cannot be seen with the eyes; the principle of organisation cannot be seen with the eyes; the principle of government cannot be seen with the eyes; the principle of beauty cannot be seen with the eyes. Every principle is invisible, but these are the ruling, guiding principles in life. These so-called invisibles are the realities, and the visibles are not the realities. Again, for example, the currency note is not the reality; the value behind it is the reality. And similarly, the beauty of an object is invisible. It is not the shape of the object that is beautiful. It is something else that is vital and internally connected, in the shape of it, with the mind within that is called beauty. And so are all things.

So, the point is that the principle of universality is what is called here, Prana, that is, Hiranyagarbha, or Virat, that is God, ultimately; and He cannot be seen with the eyes, as one cannot see a principle, as one cannot see universality. Forms do not exist, shapes do not exist, individuals do not exist, in the end. They are only vehicles to tentatively convey the meaning or value which is universal, which is the principle, and which is equally present in all, irrespective of the passage of time – past, present and future – and spatial distinction. It is everywhere, in all the three worlds it is, right from an ant upto the Cosmic Being.

In all the Upanishads, we will find a passage ending with ‘ya evam veda’ – one who knows this. Knowledge is regarded as the highest possession. One who knows this, gets everything. It is strange that knowledge should be ‘being’, but this is the truth made out in all the Upanishads. In the branches of learning we find that learning is not ‘being’. We may learn many things, but we will not be possessors of the things connected with that learning. An engineer who knows how to build a house may not own a house. He may have no house at all, but he has the knowledge of building a house. In such instances, knowledge is different from the ‘being’ of the object connected with knowledge. But, this knowledge is not like that. The knowledge that is propounded in the Upanishad is identical with the ‘being’ of the object that is connected with that knowledge, and therefore the Upanishad says that one who knows this, becomes that, obtains that, is that – *ya evam veda*.

23. Esa u va udgithah; prano va ut; pranena hidam sarvam uttabdham; vag eva githa, ucca githa ceti, sa udgithah.

This Prana is the propeller (ut) of speech (githa). Hence, Prana is the Udgitha Chant, together with the speech. The two form one whole.

24. taddhapi brahmadattas caikitaneyo rajanam bhaksayann uvaca, ayam tyasya raja murdhanam vipatayatata, yad ito'yasya angiraso' nyenodagayad iti, vaca ca hy eva sa pranena codagayad iti.

This is a peculiar way of the Upanishad that, whenever it explains a profound, a mystical or secret doctrine through an analogy or an image, it expounds it by other comparatives. Here is one instance of the glorification of the Prana. There was a great man called Brahmadatta, the great grandson of Cikitana, who drank

the Soma juice in the Soma sacrifice, and declared in this manner: “This Maha-Prana, the Supreme Prana, is the one that chanted the Udgitha; it is the one that freed all the senses from death; if anyone else be declared as the cause of freedom from death, and if Ayasya Angirasa chanted the Udgitha through any other means, may such a proclaimer’s head fall.” This is a kind of vow that he takes, an imprecation that he casts by saying in a confident manner that nothing can free one from the fear of death, nothing can free one from the fear of sorrow, except this universal principle that has been sung throughout in these passages of the Upanishad.

25. tasya haitasya samno yah svam veda, bhavati hasya svam; tasya vai svara eva svam; tasmad artvijyam karisyan vaci svaram iccheta; taya vaca svara-sampannayartvijyam kuryat; tasmad yajne svaravantam didrksanta eva; atho yasya svam bhavati; bhavati hasya svam, ya evam etat samnah, svam veda.

The Sama Mantra is told here again in the context of the glorification of the Udgitha. One who chants Sama in the manner it was chanted by the Prana for the freedom of the senses from death, becomes self-possessed, becomes master of one self and, here, in the Sama, the technique of becoming adept in the chanting of the Udgitha, or the svaram of the Sama, i.e., the intonation of the Mantra, is stated. Emphasis is laid on the method of chanting the Sama, or rather, any Mantra of the Veda. The Veda is distinct from the other scriptures in the sense that intonation is very important in its recitation, and the power of the Sama depends upon the way in which it is chanted. It is not merely the word that is important, but also the modulation of the voice. The intonation, or the rich voice in the recitation of the chant is itself the glory of the Sama. What is the glory of Saman? Svara, the intonation, is the glory, and, therefore, whoever is well-equipped with this art of properly chanting the Saman is desired in all Sama-Yajnas which are called Sama-Yagas. And the performers of the Sama-Yagas always look for one who has a clear capacity to intonate the Mantras of the Sama, so that he can unify himself with the spirit, with the forces which are the deities of Sama-Mantras, and all glory comes to him also, who knows this art. So, the glory of the Veda, the glory of the Omkara, Pranava which is the Udgitha, the glory of the Prana, and the glory that is attended here with the Veda chant – all these are described concisely in this passage of this Brahmana.