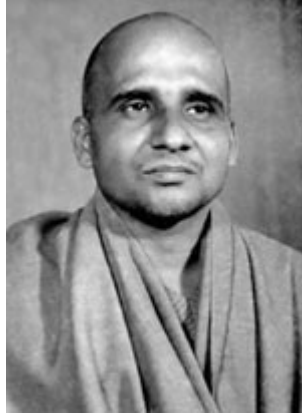




THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

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CHAPTER V

Tenth Brahmana

THE COURSE AFTER DEATH

Those who practise meditation on any kind of symbol, those who are engaged in meditation which is connected with some form, even if it be a largely extended form, reach up to salvation through stages. This gradual ascent of the soul to final emancipation is called the process of *Krama-Mukti*. In mystical circles two ways of the attainment of salvation are recognised - the gradual one and the immediate one. Under certain circumstances, due to the intensity of the force of meditation, one may attain immediate liberation at one stroke, like the sudden awakening from sleep into the world or reality. This sort of immediate awakening is called *Sadya-Mukti*, awakening, or emancipation at once, an entering into spaceless and timeless eternity by being suddenly shaken up from the perceptual consciousness of the temporal world. Such an immediate experience of final liberation is hard to obtain and it is not given to those who are accustomed to ordinary types of meditations. But, what happens to those who are engaged in meditation throughout their lives, on some form or the other, intently concentrating upon their *Ishta-Devata* or even *Saguna Brahman*, the Absolute with a conceptual form attached to it? Because of the form, because of the peculiar relationship of the mind concentrating upon the form with the form on which it concentrates, because of the interference of the space and time between the meditating mind and the object of meditation, irrespective of the quality of the object or the immensity of the object of meditation, because of this reason there is a passage in space and time. This rise of the soul to final emancipation

through a passage is called *Krama-Mukti* - gradual ascent. So, here in this section of the Upanishad we have a mention of the various stages through which the soul passes in its gradual ascent to the Absolute. More detailed passages occur in the Chhandogya Upanishad and in another place in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, but here it is a very succinct and precise statement.

When the soul leaves the body, having been absorbed in meditation throughout life, what happens to it? Here we are not speaking of the ordinary souls of people who are bound with their desires to the mortal world. Here the subject is the status of that soul after death, which has been spiritually inclined and absorbed in spiritual meditation throughout life. What happens to such a soul? Such a soul, after it casts off the body, reaches a step that is immediately above the physical world. Here, very symbolic language is used by the Upanishads, symbolic in the sense that the names or epithets of the various stages represent not merely the grammatical meaning or the geographical meaning of the names given, but the deities superintending over these stages. A particular deity, a particular divine force takes possession of this soul and through these ascents the soul confronts various divinities who become its friends on account of the meditation that it has practised in life.

We are told that the immediate ascent is to the deity of the flame or fire which is subtler than the physical plane. The human mind cannot conceive how many degrees of Reality there are. We cannot understand what these stages actually mean. No one has seen these stages and the language also is such that the intention of the Upanishad cannot be easily intelligible. Commentators have always been a failure with passages of this kind. We have such a description in the eighth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita also, where two paths are described - the Northern path and the Southern path. Now, the ascent to the Absolute through these graduated stages is through the Northern path, the *Archaradi-Marga*, or the *Uttarayana-Marga*. The deity of fire which is identified with flame takes possession of the soul. The physical realm is transcended and the soul becomes lustrous. The physical body, having been cast off, the soul assumes a new body of an ethereal character. A subtle body is there no doubt, but it is not the physical body. The *Sukshma Sarira*, or the body that is characterised by mere mind, *Prana* and senses, remains even after the physical body is cast off. As there is a gradual ascent from the lower to the higher, there is also a gradual effectuation of the transparency of this body. The soul's body becomes more and more pellucid, more and more transparent, more and more capable of reflecting Reality in itself which it was most incapable of doing while in the physical plane. The physical life is opaque to the influence of Reality. The existence of Reality is completely outside the purview of the existence of the individual in the physical world. For instance, we are apparently not influenced by the existence of other people outside. We have an intensity of feeling of personality, so that we are tied down to the reality of the body alone. But, this is not the case during the ascent. There is an increasing feeling of Reality outside oneself as the ascent continues. So, from the physical realm there is the ascent to the realm of fire. *Archi* is the word used in the Upanishad. *Archi* means flame, a luminous fire. Having been purified by

contact with the deity of fire, or *Agni*, it rises still further and goes to the deity of the day. Every day is presided over by a particular force. That is why we have the difference of different days. Each day is different from the other on account of a particular influence exerted upon it by certain natural forces. These forces are divine in their nature. They are super-physical. So, from the deity of flame the soul goes to the deity of the day, and from the deity of the day it rises to the deity which presides over the bright half of the lunar fortnight. A lunar month consists of two halves - the bright and the dark. The bright half is superintended over by a particular deity, and that deity here takes possession of the soul. This is the stage to which it reaches after the day is transcended. Then the soul goes up further to the deity which presides over the six months during which the sun goes to the North. This is what is called *Uttarayana* in the traditional language. In Indian tradition the Northern course of the sun has always been regarded as very sacred for reasons highly mystical. And even such great Masters like Bhishma of the great Mahabharata have waited for the coming of the sun to the North before discarding the body. The deity that presides over the half of the year during which the sun moves to the North takes possession of the soul further on. Then the soul goes up to the realm of the deity which presides over the entire year. There are sixty years in a particular cycle according to calculations, astronomically made. Each year has a particular name, just as there are names for particular days - Sunday, Monday etc. The deity that presides over the year is responsible for the purification of the soul further on after it ascends from the lower level. Then the soul is supposed to go up to the realm of the wind, or *Vayu*. The atmosphere itself takes possession of it. It becomes a citizen of a larger area, not merely of a limited locality. Then it goes up to the sun. The sun is regarded as a very important halting place of the soul in its passage to the Supreme Being during the Northern movement, or by the *Archaradi-Marga*. Then there is a movement further to a realm which is designated as moon, in the language of the Upanishad. Here, commentators differ in their opinion as to what is this moon. Evidently, it cannot be the moon that we see with our eyes because that cannot be supposed to be superior to the sun or transcending the sun. So, some teachers think that it is a more blissful intermediary condition, very cool like that of the moon.

The stages beyond the sun are very hard to describe. They are something most unthinkable. They have nothing to do with this world practically and they are not characterised by any kind of experience usually available in this world. Up to the region of the sun we may be said to be in the temporal realm. Beyond that it is non-temporal and something unusual. Then the Upanishad says, there is a flash, the realm of lightning, not this physical lightning evidently. May be the light of the Supreme Being Himself, the light of Brahman flashes. Just as there are lightning flashes in the sky during the monsoons which indicate the movement of electricity in their atmosphere, likewise we are given an indication of our approach to Brahman as if we are on the borderland of the Absolute. The flashes of light of a supernatural nature the soul is supposed to behold. Beyond that, what happens to the soul? This is a great mystery, says the Upanishad itself. Evidently, the gravitational pull exerted by its own existence is inadequate for the purpose of further ascent. The ocean pushes even the river back a number of

miles when the force of the waves is too much, too intense. The gravitational pull of the rocket of the soul which moves of its own accord, with its own energy is now inadequate. So, at this level of lightning some supernal help comes to its aid. A super-human being comes, *Purusho-Amanavah*, says the Upanishad. Someone who cannot be called human comes there and takes the soul by the hand onwards. It is guided by another force altogether, not the force of its own personality or its own understanding. There are people who think that this superior being is the Guru who comes there, the Guru who has initiated you, who has taught you, who has shown you the path and who has taken care of you spiritually. He is not dead even after the physical body is cast off. His soul visualises the course of the soul of the disciple and He comes there in His subtle form and takes the disciple's soul by the hand, as it were, and directs it onwards. There are others who think that it is God Himself coming in one form. Well; it makes no difference to us whether it is God or Guru, because the Guru is a form of God only, as far as the spiritual life is concerned. Then it goes up further to the realm of the Cosmic Waters whose deity is designated as *Varuna*, not of the ordinary waters, but of the Cosmic Waters. The soul becomes cosmic and universal in its nature. It sheds its personality, its individuality and then goes to the Supreme stage of *Virat* where it becomes practically absorbed into universality. Then it reaches the Absolute.

So, this is the gradual ascent of the soul, stage by stage, through *Karma-Mukti*.

1. yada vai puruso'smal lokat praiti, sa vayum agacchati; tasmai sa tatra vijihite yatha rathacakrasya kham; tena sa urdhva akramate, sa adityam agacchati; tasmai sa tatra vijihite yatha lambarasya kham; tena sa urdhva akramate, sa candramasam agacchati, tasmai sa tatra vijihite yatha dundubheh kham; tena sa, urdhva akramate, sa lokam agacchaty asokam ahimam; tasmin vasati sasvatih samah.

Here, the passage is short. It mentions only a few of the stages, not all those that I mentioned to you just now. 'When the soul leaves this world it reaches the wind', it says. And the wind-god releases the soul from the clutches of the atmosphere. The force of this earth is relaxed and it does not pull you any more downward, as it used to do earlier. As if there is a hole in the atmosphere through which one can pass, the soul visualises a passage. Highly symbolic language is this, again. As large a hole as the size of a wheel of a chariot, is the hole which the soul visualises in the atmosphere, and it passes through it to the realm of the wind. Thence it goes to the region of the sun who also allows passage which passage in turn is as wide in diameter as that of a kettle-drum. The sun is very large. Many people cannot reach it. He will obstruct the ascent of the soul further, but he allows the movement of the soul onwards if it has practised meditation, especially on the *Vaisvanara* as has been indicated in the earlier section. Then it goes upto the realm of the moon, to which we made reference just now, by a passage which is as wide in diameter as that of a big drum. *Sa urdhva akramate, sa lokam agacchaty asokam ahimam; tasmin vasati sasvatih samah*: 'A

sorrowless world is reached where the physical laws do not operate'. Neither the ordinary psychological laws which bring about sorrow to the mind operate there, nor does any other law pertaining to this world. Such is the blessedness which the departed soul obtains by practice of meditation on the *Vaisvanara* which is the context of the subject on hand. This particular section on meditation whose object is *Vaisvanara* is here concluded.

There are other kinds of symbols through which one can practise meditation. Many of these symbolic suggestions given in the Upanishad look fantastic to people who are not used to appreciate the relationship between the physical world and the higher world. Why do we use symbols for descriptions? Because transcendental truths are not visible objects, and so they cannot be explained through a language which is useful only to describe objects of sense. If I ask you to describe what is fourth dimension, what language can be used? No scientist will be able to explain in available language what is fourth dimension. He will only say, it is fourth dimension. It is impossible to describe it because it is not of the nature of anything that we can think of in this world. There is no such thing as four-dimensional to our mind because everything here in this world is three-dimensional only. So, whatever be the stretch of your imagination, that thing called fourth dimension will be outside the ken of your knowledge. How will you meditate upon it if I ask you to contemplate that realm? Inasmuch as language is impotent here, symbols are used. It is something like this, something like that - this is what is called a symbol. So is the utility of symbols in meditation.

Eleventh Brahmana

THE SUPREME AUSTERITIES

1. etad vai paramam tapo yad vyahitas tapyate; paramam haiva lokam jayati, ya evam veda; etad vai paramam tapo yam pretam aranyam haranti; paramam haiva lokam jayati, ya evam veda etad vai paramam tapo yam pretam agnav abhyadadhati. paramam haiva lokam jayati, ya evam veda.

If one is sick, one need not grieve, says the Upanishad. The Upanishads do not want grief of any kind. They are accustomed to a life of exuberance, joy and positivity. What you call sorrow or grief is a condition into which the mind enters when it cannot adjust itself with that condition. After all, pain or sorrow of any kind is nothing but a conscious experience of an irreconcilable position. If it can be reconciled, it is not sorrowful. But our physical and mental states are such, unfortunately for us, that they cannot reconcile themselves with anything and everything in this world. So, when certain things impinge on us, physically or psychologically, when we are forced to undergo experiences of conditions which cannot be reconciled with our physical or mental states, then it is called pain. Now, merely because something is painful or sorrow-giving, it need not mean that it is an undesirable object. It only means that we cannot reconcile ourselves with it. I cannot adjust myself to the condition's demanded by the presence of

that thing which is immediate to me. Therefore it causes pain to me. It does not mean that it will cause pain to everybody. To me it causes pain. The particular environment in which I am living, the particular atmosphere in which I have to continue my life in this world, the particular object or person in front of me is irreconcilable for reasons of my own, and therefore, it causes pain. But the Upanishad tells us, this is not the correct attitude to things. Even if you have high fever, you are supposed to understand why the fever has come. You are not supposed to cry and shed tears. So, that itself is a meditation - the understanding of the nature of sorrow and an attempt on the part of the meditating mind to reconcile itself with it through understanding.

Etad vai paramam tapo yad vyahitas tapyate: 'When you are suffering due to fever or illness, contemplate on the condition of illness'. What is the meaning of illness? Something which I do not like. A physical condition mostly which is tormenting my mind - that is illness. Why is the mind tormented when my body is ill? Because the mind requires of the body certain given conditions only. It does not require other conditions. There is an agreement or a pact signed, as it were, between the mind and the body. We have to adjust ourselves in this manner - I give this; you give that. That is called a pact or an agreement. That pact has to be followed by the body as well as the mind. Then there is psycho-physical health. But if the mind revolts against the body, there would be insanity, and if the body revolts against the mind, there is what is called *Vyadi*, or illness. You do not want any kind of revolt. Now, the Upanishad does not talk of mental revolution because then the question of meditation does not arise. It is taken for granted that the mind is sane and it can understand things, but the body is not reconciling itself with the condition of the mind. It is in a state which we call ill-health. Ill-health is itself an object of meditation. When you have temperature, you contemplate on temperature itself. Naturally it is difficult because it is painful. You are undergoing a *Tapas*, says the Upanishad. A *Tapas* is a heat that is generated by intensity of thought, and fever is a great heat produced in the body. Now, this heat itself becomes an object of meditation. How is it an object of meditation? You will be laughing at the Upanishad. How is it possible? It is not a deity; it is not a god; it is not going to help you in any manner, you think. It is going to help us in the manner of an understanding because, as I hinted earlier, the incompatibility of physical illness with the present mental state is the cause of pain, and the mind is supposed to understand the nature or the reason behind this incompatibility. Why is there this incompatibility between the condition of the body and the mind? Because the mind cannot adjust itself with the condition of the body. When you are dipped into the cold waters of the *Ganga* in winter, you know what you feel. You shiver to death. You may actually die if you are placed inside the water for one hour. But why do not the fish feel the cold? They are inside the water and they are so happy. How are they so happy? Because the condition of the body of the fish is compatible with the condition of the water of the *Ganga*. That is all. There is no incompatibility. But our body is irreconcilable with that condition. So, it is a kind of maladjustment of personality with the outer atmosphere and the outer conditions prevailing, that is called ill-health and any kind of sorrow or pain, for the matter of that. So, let the mind contemplate on the

possibility of a reconcilability or a compatibility with everything. That is one kind of *Tapas*.

The Upanishad tells us further that you can also contemplate the condition of your being carried to the cremation ground. You have not yet been taken like that; but just imagine that you are still on the death bed, and that you will be carried to the cremation ground in procession. Can you imagine this condition? 'Yes, I am gone, here I am on the stretcher, people are weeping, some are happy, perhaps, they carry me, and to the cremation ground do I go'. Contemplate like this. Then the sorrow of death also will be averted. You are deliberately contemplating the practicability, the possibility of going to the cremation ground and being burnt there.

When you are carried to the forest or the jungle to be buried there or to the cremation ground, a very uncomfortable experience is of course capable of being entertained in the mind. Nobody wishes to undergo that experience of falling ill, of being taken to the jungle for being buried or on a stretcher to the cremation ground to be burnt there. Who would like such an experience? But every experience is an experience. It has to be taken philosophically and scientifically. You will lose nothing by being buried; lose nothing by having an illness; you will lose nothing by going to the cremation ground. It looks like a horror on account of incompatibility again, an inadjustability of the mind with conditions outside. The whole point of the meditation here is that the mind should be able to contemplate a reconcilability of itself with any and every condition. In other words, it is a symbolic hint at meditation on universality.