

Chapter IX. Chandogya Upanishad

Work, worship, and wisdom

This *Upanishad* is incorporated in the *Sama-veda*. It has eight sections. The first five deal with various forms of contemplative worship (*upasanās*) to approach the Ideal, and the last three explain the manner of acquisition of true knowledge. Purity of consciousness is the essential prerequisite for worship. Single-minded concentration is essential for knowledge of *Brahman* (*Brahma-jnana*). These can be obtained by dedicated work (*karma*) and worship; thus is knowledge of *Brahman* won. That is why, in the scriptures, work is described first, worship next, and spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) last.

The first chapter of the *Chandogya* details the contemplative practices that form part of the *Sama-veda*. The second describes the entire ritual of chanting sacred verses. The third presents the contemplation (*upasana*) of the Sun (Surya) known as *Madhu-vidya*, the *Gayatri* contemplation, and the science of devotion. The fourth teaches the science of absorption (*Samvarga-vidya*) and the sixteen-phased science of *Brahman* (*Brahma-vidya*). The fifth elaborates on the three sciences (*vidyas*), vital air (*prana*), the five sacred fires, and the omnipresent Self (*Vaiswanara*).

Being or “is-ness” is the universal quality of all objects

Uddalaka taught his son Swethakethu knowledge that, if known, would make all things known. The knowledge of mud and of gold will give knowledge of all pots and pans, as well as of all bracelets and necklaces. Mud and gold are the truth; their modifications and transformations are temporary, mere name-forms. So too, the world, like the pot and the bracelet, is just an effect, and the cause is Being or “is-ness” (*sat*). Is-ness is common to all objects; the pot “is”, the bracelet “is”. Is-ness becomes manifest through association with the pots and pans, the bracelets and necklaces. Is-ness may not be apparent to gross intelligences, for it needs subtlety to realise it. The rosy colour manifested in the rose “is”, even in the absence of the flower; it becomes apparent only when it “adheres” to the rose. It is not apparent when such attachment is nonexistent.

Similarly, the “is-ness” that is the universal character of all objects persists even in the absence of objects. Prior to creation, there was only just this is-ness. There was no void then —this is-ness was everywhere! When the “is” was reflected in primal activity (*maya*), it resulted in the Lord (Iswara), who partook of that activity to manifest as the universe with the three elements of fire, earth, and wind. All creation is but the permutation and combination of these three.

By knowing Atma, you will know all

Uddalaka’s lineage is steeped in the study of the *Vedas*, so it is famed as a noble high-born family. But Swethakethu, his son, was wasting precious years after his thread-investing ceremony (*upanayana*) in idleness, without using them for *Vedic* study. This caused Uddalaka concern, for one who is born as a *brahmin* but neglects the study of the *Vedas* does not deserve that appellation. Such a one can be called only “one who has relatives who are *brahmins*”! So, Uddalaka took Swethakethu to task and forced him to go to a teacher. There, by the ex-

ercise of his superior intelligence, Swethakethu mastered the four *Vedas* and their meanings before he was 24. He returned proud and pompous, swelling with egotism, declaring that no one was equal to him in scholarship and righteousness.

In order to prick his pride, Uddalaka asked him one day, “You have become so haughty that you have no equal in learning and virtue. Well, did you seek from your teacher the message that reveals the Absolute, the lesson that only practice of the scriptures (*sastras*) can impart, the message that when heard makes you hear all things that are heard, that when imagined makes you imagine all things imagined? Did you learn that? That message would have shown you the *Atma*, which is the fulfillment of all study and scholarship.”

The body decays and dies, but not the Self

The *Atma* is the base of individuals like Swethakethu. The pure consciousness becomes apparently limited in a variety of individuals. In deep sleep, the variety disappears, and each individual lapses back into this “is-ness”. Then, all the manifold activities and experiences, like, “I am Ranga,” “I am Ganga,” “I am father,” and “I am son,” are destroyed. The sweetness and fragrance of many flowers are collected and fused into one uniformly sweet honey, where all the manifold individualities are destroyed.

The river names *Ganga, Krishna, Indus* are all lost when these rivers enter the sea. Thereafter, they are called “the sea”. The individual soul (*jivi*), who is eternal and immortal, is born again and again as a transitory mortal; the soul continues to accumulate activity, prompted by inherited impulses, and the activity produces consequences, which must be shouldered and suffered. The body decays and dies, not the individualised soul. The seed of the banyan tree will sprout even if it is trampled upon. The salt placed in water is recognisable by the taste, even though it cannot be grasped!

The individual soul, befogged by ignorance (*a-jnana*), is unable to recognise its reality. Discrimination will reveal the truth. A millionaire is kidnapped and left alone in the jungle, but he discovers the way out and returns to his home. So also, the individual soul is restored to its millions! Once the individual reaches its real status, it is free from all the change and chance that is involved in the flow (*samsara*) of time and space, of name and form. If the individual doesn’t reach that status, then, like the happy sleeper who wakes into the confusion of the day, it will be born into the world of decay and death.

Discover omnipresent Brahman in the heart lotus!

Brahman is described as one without a second. All this visible world is denoted as the form of *Brahman* (*Thath-swarupa*); *Brahman* can be realised by worship of the limited, qualified Divinity, just as Sathyakama and others did. The path of contemplation of *Brahman* is also called the path of the spinal nerve current. The Omnipresent *Brahman* can be enclosed and discovered in the firmament of the heart! It is the capital of that kingdom. Since He is seated there, the heart is called the house of *Brahman* (*Brahma-vesma*). That firmament cannot, of course, limit or set boundaries to the illimitable *Brahman*!

Yogis who are turned away from the objective world can attain the supreme *Brahman* (*Parabrahman*), with its splendour of realised knowledge, in the pure clear sky of their hearts. The worlds are fixed as the spokes of the wheel in the hub of *Brahman*. Decline, decay, and death do not affect It. Since that supreme Entity can achieve whatever It decides on, It is called True Desire (*Sathyakama*) and True Resolve (*Sathyasankalpa*).

What exactly is the supreme *Brahman*? We can know it by one test. *Brahman* is That which remains after everything is negated as “Not this, Not that (*Nethi, Nethi*)”.

This is The Truth that all aspirants seek. Attaining It, they get the status of emperors and can travel wherever they like. The wise one who is established in the pure Reality sees all desires that dawn in the heart as expressions of that Truth only.

The journey of the soul after death

The *Atma* transcends all the worlds. It is uncontaminated. One who is aware of only the *Atma* is ever in bliss. The student (*brahma-charya*) stage is an important step for attaining *Atmic* wisdom. Holy rituals, fasts, and other vows are equally helpful. The solar energy surges through the countless nerves of the body; the senses merge in the mind at the moment of death; the individual (*jivi*) who has realised that it was all this, while limited by the mind, then escapes into the lotus of the heart space (*hridaya-akasa*) through the nerves. At last, on point of death, the individual soul moves out of the spinal column into the solar rays and from there to the realm of the Sun (*Surya-loka*) itself. The journey doesn't end there. It reaches out into the realm of *Brahman* (*Brahma-loka*).

But the individual who is caught in the mire of ignorance (*a-jnana*), who is identified with the mind and its vagaries, escapes through the ear or eye or other senses and falls into worlds where activities (*karmas*) rule. The feeling of content and joy one gets in deep sleep is the result of wisdom (*jnana*) persisting in the individual.

Expand your consciousness for liberation

The individualised consciousness (*chittha*) is the source and support of resolution. All resolutions, decisions, and plans are products of the consciousness; they are of its form; they originate there; they are registered there. That is why, when death overtakes a scholar of all scriptures (*sastras*), the scholar becomes but the equal of ordinary people and has the same fate as the ignorant person (*a-jnani*). The consciousness has to be saturated with *Brahmic* endeavour; only then will it be an instrument of liberation, freed from the shackles of resolve (*sankalpa*). The mind, etc., cannot free itself, as the consciousness can.

The consciousness discriminates between resolutions; it tests them as duty and not-duty and justifies with proper reasons the classification it has made. Once this selection is made, the word utters it, the name signifies it. The special sound-forms or *mantras* incorporate the resolutions, accepted as duty, by the purified consciousness; the rites become one with the *mantras*. There can be no proper action without consciousness.

Next, about meditation (*dhyana*), which is superior to individual consciousness. Meditation is the fixing of the intellect (*buddhi*) on the Divine, when it transcends such inferior helps as images, idols, and saligrams (naturally formed linga stones). In meditation, all agitations cease, all modifications are unnoticed. On account of the effect of the quality of inertia (*thamoguna*), and even of the passionate quality (*rajoguna*), all created things—like the waters, hills, mountains, stars, planets, and people with the spark of the Divine in them—are agitation-bound, change-bound.

Spiritual knowledge (*vijnana*)—knowledge based on experience steeped in the scriptures (*sastras*)—is better than meditation. Spiritual knowledge is attained by meditation, so it is more valuable than meditation.

Superior to spiritual knowledge is strength, fortitude, vigour. It illumines the objective world, it sharpens the

intuition (*prathibha*). Intuition is the power by which you can sense the consciousness in all knowledge objects.

Now, there is one thing superior even to intuition: food, sustenance. It is the support of life. Deprived of it for ten days, one becomes powerless to grasp anything. It is life that makes possible study, service of teachers, listening to their teachings, cogitation over what is taught, and the earning of illumination (*tejas*).

Illumination is higher than intuition or food. Illumination is fire, heat, and light. Illumination creates water, and water produces food. Illumination can make even wind lighter. It shines as lightning and sounds as thunder.

Ether (*akasa*) is superior to illumination, remember. It is through ether that sounds are transmitted and heard. Love and play are products of ether. Seeds sprout on account of ether or space.

Now consider this. Memory (*smarana*) is superior to ether. Without it, all experience is meaningless, all knowledge is waste, all effort is purposeless. Nothing can be experienced without the help of memory. Objects like the ether will be unrecognised in its absence. It can be said that memory creates the ether and other objects.

To experience Reality, give up identification of the Self with the body

Thus analysing the value and relative importance of objects and powers, people must give up identification of spiritual Self with the physical body and recognise their true Reality. One who does this rises to the height of the noblest of people, laughing, playing, and moving without regard to the needs or comforts of the body. One who is body-bound is caught in worldly existence (*samsara*); for the one who is free from that bondage, their own true nature is the field of activity. Wind, lightning, and thunder have no permanent existence. When the rainy season comes, they appear in the sky and get merged in it. So too, the particularised individual (*jivi*) appears as separate for a time against the background of *Brahman* and gets merged in It at last.

This eight-section *Upanishad* teaches the series of evolved objects from *Hiranyagarbha*, *Kasyapa-Prajapati*, Manu, and human beings. This lineage and the lessons to ennoble it are vital for mankind. It has to be learned by children and students, from parents and teachers.