

INTRODUCTION TO ORIENTAL CIVILIZATIONS

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the soma opens into a vision of heaven (vv. 7-11), where final immortality and the fulfillment of all desires is attained. By constructing verse 6 as an ellipsis and repeating its structure in the following verses, the poet has transformed the ritual space into the heavenly realm.

31. The son of Vivasvat is Yama, who was the first mortal, hence the first to die, and therefore king of the dead. Vivasvat is a name of the sun god.
32. This word is also a term for offerings made to the dead.
33. The precise meaning of Virāj is uncertain. Here it seems to represent a kind of cosmic source—perhaps the waters themselves—from which creation proceeds.
34. The verses (*ṛc*), the sacred chants (*sāma*), and the sacrificial formula (*yajus*) may refer to the three Vedas.
35. The Himalayas.
36. The Rasā is a stream that encompasses and marks the boundary of earth.
37. Literally, "the two arms." The unknown god possesses not only the four directions, but also the two sides, right and left.
38. The word literally refers to two battle lines, but here the two lines refer also to heaven and earth. According to other hymns, heaven and earth also once "quivered" before they were stabilized by Indra.
39. Prajāpati means "lord of creatures." In the later Veda, he becomes the primal father from which all the gods and other beings are engendered. He is also known as "Who?" (*Ka*), the unnamable, and the refrain in the first nine verses is later read as a statement, not a question.
40. That is, what stirred, moving back and forth, like breath or the wind? The verb form is ambiguous: it might also mean "What enclosed?"
41. Neither gods nor men existed.
42. The image is that of an egg—the "potential" is the yolk, "emptiness" the shell—which hatches through incubation.
43. Ambiguous: did thought give rise to desire, or desire to thought? *Retas* is literally "semen."
44. It is difficult to choose among the various possibilities of translation and interpretation of this verse. The sages' cord could be their limit, or the instrument with which they divide or measure above and below. The last two questions could also be read as statements: "There were powers of insemination, etc." The first two powers probably represent male and female forces, respectively, but the significance of "independence" and "offering" and their positions is obscure.
45. By some creator or whether it came about in some other way.
46. Or herbs.
47. An evil being or demon.
48. Presumably the exorcist strikes the tooth, jaw, etc., of the symbolic figure of a serpent with the tooth, jaw, etc., of, perhaps, a dead serpent.
49. The essence of Agni, which is scattered in various places, is, as it were, collected together and is again symbolically bestowed upon him as to make him full and complete.

Chapter 2

THE ULTIMATE REALITY IN THE UPANISHADS

Toward the end of the Brahmanic period, that is, c.600 B.C., a class of religious texts called *Āranyakas* ("forest books") appeared. The exact implication of this term is uncertain, but it seems probable that these works were recited by hermits living in the forests. The retirement to the forest prior to attaining religious salvation is usually considered the third prescribed stage (*āśrama*) in the life of the orthodox Hindu even as studenthood (*brahmacarya*) represented the first. The *Āranyakas* contain transitional material between the mythology and ritual of the *Samhitās* and *Brāhmanas*, on the one hand, and the philosophical speculations of the *Upanishads*, on the other. The ritual is given a symbolic meaning, and knowledge of this meaning becomes more important than the performance of the ritual itself. This principle then becomes the starting point of *Upanishadic* speculation.

Like the *Brāhmanas*, each *Upanishad* is attached to one of the four Vedic *Samhitās*. The *Upanishads* represent both the final stage in the development of Vedic religious thought and the last phase of Brahmanism. They are thus the end of the Veda (*vedānta*). Later philosophical schools of classical Hinduism that base their tenets on the authority of the *Upanishads* are therefore called *Vedānta*.

The *Upanishads* cannot be regarded as presenting a consistent, homogeneous, or unified philosophical system, though there are certain doctrines held in common. Divergences of method, opinion, and conclusion are everywhere apparent even within a single *Upanishad*. It is for this reason that the *Upanishads* are considered speculative treatises. Another significant feature of the *Upanishads*, particularly the older ones, is that practically every basic idea expounded has its antecedent in earlier Vedic texts. What distinguishes the *Upanishads* is not so much their originality as their probing for new interpretations of the earlier Vedic concepts to obtain a more coherent view of the universe and man. Here the link between man

and the cosmos is, as we have said, no longer the ritual act, but a knowledge of the forces symbolically represented in the ritual. These allegorical and symbolic interpretations are characteristic of the Upanishads. They are developed by Upanishadic thinkers in two ways: (1) by setting up various levels of comprehension suited to different individual intellectual capacities, and (2) by identifying partly or by degrees two seemingly dissimilar elements and arriving at a type of equation that, though at first sight irrational, will on further analysis or introspection reveal a unity. This pursuit of a unifying principle suggests that the duality apparent in the world is to some extent or in some sense unreal. The macrocosm is viewed universally as an extension of Vedic mythological and ritualistic concepts, specifically *brahman*. As a parallel to this, the microcosmic nature of the human self or soul (*ātman*) is explained. From this results the most significant equation of the Upanishads: *brahman* = *ātman*. It is the transcendent knowledge of this essential identity that is the chief concern of the Upanishadic sages.

The Sacrificial Horse

The most elaborate and stupendous sacrifice described in the *Brāhmanas* is the horse-sacrifice (*āsvamedha*). It is an ancient rite that a king might undertake to increase his realm. In the following selection from perhaps the oldest of the Upanishads, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (Great Forest), the horse-sacrifice is given cosmological significance by equating various parts of the sacrificial horse with corresponding elements of the cosmos. To Upanishadic thinkers the real meaning of the horse-sacrifice was gained through a realization of the identity of the parts of this sacrifice and the universe. This type of mystical or transcendent knowledge is based on equations stressed by the word “verily” (*vai*) and is characteristic of the early Upanishads in particular. It should be noted that dawn, the sun, the wind, etc., besides being elements of the cosmos, were also deified natural forces in Vedic mythology and still retain their identity as such in the following passage.

[From *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1.1.1]

Dawn verily is the head of the sacrificial horse. The sun is his eye; the wind, his breath; the universal sacrificial fire [*agni-vaiśvānara*], his open mouth; the year is the body [*ātman*] of the sacrificial horse. The sky is his back; the atmosphere, his belly; the earth, his underbelly [?]; the directions, his flanks; the intermediate directions, his ribs; the seasons, his limbs; the months and half-months, his joints; days and nights, his feet; the stars, his bones; the

clouds, his flesh. Sand is the food in his stomach; rivers, his entrails; mountains, his liver and lungs; plants and trees, his hair; the rising sun, his forepart; the setting sun, his hindpart. When he yawns, then it lightnings; when he shakes himself, then it thunders; when he urinates, then it rains. Speech [*vāc*] is actually his neighing [*vāc*].

Sacrifices—Unsteady Boats on the Ocean of Life

Some later Upanishads represent a reaction to the glorification of the sacrifice. The teacher of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* quoted below seems to concede a place for sacrifice in man's life—by way of religious discipline; but he concludes that sacrifice is ineffectual as a means to the knowledge of the highest reality and to spiritual emancipation. On the other hand, as is suggested by the passage cited above, some earlier Upanishadic teachers substituted a kind of “spiritual” or “inner” sacrifice for the “material” or “external” sacrifice.

[From *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 1.2.1, 2, 7–13]

This is that truth. The sacrificial rites that the sages saw in the hymns are manifoldly spread forth in the three [Vedas]. Perform them constantly, O lovers of truth. This is your path to the world of good deeds.

When the flame flickers after the oblation fire has been kindled, then, between the offerings of the two portions of clarified butter one should proffer his principal oblations—an offering made with faith. . . .

Unsteady, indeed, are these boats in the form of sacrifices, eighteen in number, in which is prescribed only the inferior work. The fools who delight in this sacrificial ritual as the highest spiritual good go again and again through the cycle of old age and death.¹

Abiding in the midst of ignorance, wise only according to their own estimate, thinking themselves to be learned, but really obtuse, these fools go round in a circle like blind men led by one who is himself blind.

Abiding manifoldly in ignorance they, all the same, like immature children think to themselves: “We have accomplished our aim.” Since the performers of sacrificial ritual do not realize the truth because of passion, therefore, they, the wretched ones, sink down from heaven when the merit that qualified them for the higher world becomes exhausted.

Regarding sacrifice and merit as most important, the deluded ones do not know of any other higher spiritual good. Having enjoyed themselves only

for a time on top of the heaven won by good deeds [sacrifice, etc.] they reenter this world or a still lower one.

Those who practice penance [*tapas*] and faith in the forest, the tranquil ones, the knowers of truth, living the life of wandering mendicancy—they depart, freed from passion, through the door of the sun, to where dwells, verily, that immortal Purusha, the imperishable Soul [*ātman*].

Having scrutinized the worlds won by sacrificial rites, a brāhman should arrive at nothing but disgust. The world that was not made is not won by what is done [i.e., by sacrifice]. For the sake of that knowledge he should go with sacrificial fuel in hand as a student, in all humility to a preceptor [*guru*] who is well versed in the [Vedic] scriptures and also firm in the realization of Brahman.

Unto him who has approached him in proper form, whose mind is tranquil, who has attained peace, does the knowing teacher teach, in its very truth, that knowledge about Brahman by means of which one knows the imperishable Purusha, the only Reality.

The Five Sheaths

In this passage an attempt is made to analyze man on five levels—proceeding from the grosser forms to the subtler, and therefore more real, forms. The “real” man transcends the physical, vital, mental, and intellectual aspects and has to be identified with the innermost, beatific aspect. It is in the end suggested that the real self of man is identical with Brahman, the ultimate principle, the absolute, which is his *raison d’être*.

[From *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2.1–6 *passim*]

From this Self [*ātman*], verily, space arose; from space, wind; from wind, fire; from fire, water; from water, the earth; from the earth, herbs; from herbs, food; from food, man [*puruṣa*]. This man here, verily, consists of the essence of food. Of him possessing the physical body made up of food, this, indeed, is the head; this, the right side; this, the left side; this, the body [*ātman*]; this, the lower part, the foundation. . . . From food, verily, are produced whatsoever creatures dwell on the earth. Moreover, by food alone do they live. And then also into it do they pass at the end. . . . Verily, different from and within this body which consists of the essence of food is the body which consists of breath. The former body is filled with the latter.

The latter body also is of the shape of man. Because the former one is of the shape of man this latter body is [also] of the shape of man. Of him possessing the body consisting of breath, the out-breath is head; the diffused breath, the right side; the in-breath, the left side; space, the body; the earth, the lower part, the foundation. . . . Verily, different from and within this body which consists of vital breaths is the body which consists of mind. The former body is filled with the latter. The latter body is also of the shape of man. . . . Verily, different from and within this body which consists of mind is the body which consists of intellectuality [or consciousness]. The former body is filled with the latter. That one also is of the shape of man. . . . Verily, different from and within this body which consists of intellectuality [or consciousness] is the body which consists of bliss.² The former body is filled with the latter. The latter body also is of the shape of man. . . . As to that, there is also this verse: “Nonexistent [*asat*], verily, does one become if he knows [believes] that Brahman is nonexistent.³ If one knows that Brahman exists, such a one people thereby know as existent.”

The Real Self

In this parable, the real, essential Self is successively identified with the bodily self, the dream self, and the self in deep sleep, and it is suggested that all these three teachings are quite inadequate, for in none of the three conditions, namely, of wakefulness, of dream, and of deep sleep, can the nature of Self be said to conform to the description given in the very first sentence of this passage. The real Self is neither body nor mind nor a complete negation of consciousness. The Self is certainly conscious, but of nothing else but itself. It is pure self-consciousness as such and it is in this condition that it is identical with the highest reality.

[From *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 8.7–12 *passim*]

“The Self [*ātman*] who is free from evil, free from old age, free from death, free from grief, free from hunger, free from thirst, whose desire is the Real [*satya*, or truth], whose intention is the Real—he should be sought after, he should be desired to be comprehended. He obtains all worlds and all desires, who, having found out that Self, knows him.” Thus, indeed, did the god Prajāpati speak. Verily, the gods and the demons both heard this. They said among themselves: “Aha! Let us seek after that Self—the Self, having sought after whom one obtains all worlds and all desires.” Then Indra from among the gods went forth unto Prajāpati, and Virochana from

among the demons. Indeed, without communicating with each other, those two came into the presence of Prajāpati with sacrificial fuel in hand [i.e., as students willing to serve their preceptor]. For thirty-two years the two lived under Prajāpati the disciplined life of a student of sacred knowledge [*brahmacarya*]. Then Prajāpati asked them: "Desiring what, have you lived the disciplined life of a student of sacred knowledge under me?" They said: "The Self, who is free from evil, free from old age, free from death, free from grief, free from hunger, free from thirst, whose desire is the Real, whose intention is the Real—he should be sought after, he should be desired to be comprehended. He obtains all worlds and all desires, who, having found out that Self, knows him." These, people declare to be the venerable master's words. Desiring him [the Self] have we lived the student's life under you." Prajāpati said to them: "That Purusha who is seen in the eye—he is the Self [*ātman*]," said he. "That is the immortal, the fearless; that is Brahman." "But this one, Sir, who is perceived in water and in a mirror—who is he?" Prajāpati replied: "The same one, indeed, is perceived in all these." "Having looked at yourself in a pan of water, whatever you do not comprehend of the Self, tell that to me," said Prajāpati. They looked at themselves in the pan of water. Prajāpati asked them: "What do you see?" They replied: "We see here, Sir, our own selves in entirety, the very reproduction of our forms, as it were, correct to the hairs and nails." Then Prajāpati said to them: "Having become well ornamented, well dressed, and refined, look at yourselves in a pan of water." Having become well ornamented, well dressed, and refined, they looked at themselves in a pan of water. Thereupon Prajāpati asked them: "What do you see?" They replied: "Just as we ourselves here are, Sir, well ornamented, well dressed, and refined. . . ." "That is the Self," said he. "That is the immortal, the fearless; that is Brahman." Then they went away with a tranquil heart. Having looked at them, Prajāpati said to himself: "They are going away without having realized, without having found out the Self. Whosoever will accept this doctrine as final, be they gods or demons, they shall perish." Then Virochana, verily, with a tranquil heart, went to the demons and declared to them that doctrine, namely: One's self [one's bodily self]⁴ alone is to be made happy here; one's self is to be served. Making oneself alone happy here, serving oneself, does one obtain both worlds, this world and the one beyond. Therefore, here, even now, they say of one who is not a giver, who has no faith, who does not offer sacrifices, that he is, indeed, a demon; for this is the doctrine of the demons. They adorn the body of the deceased

with perfumes, flowers, etc., which they have begged, with dress and with ornaments, for they think they will thereby win the yonder world.

But then Indra, even before reaching the gods, saw this danger: "Just as, indeed, the bodily self becomes well ornamented when this body is well ornamented, well dressed when this body is well dressed, and refined when this body is refined, even so that one becomes blind when this body is blind, lame when this body is lame, and maimed when this body is maimed. The bodily Self, verily, perishes immediately after the perishing of this body. I see no good in this." With sacrificial fuel in hand, he again came back to Prajāpati. [Indra states his objection to Prajāpati, who admits its truth and asks him to live as a student under him for another thirty-two years.] Indra lived a student's life under Prajāpati for another thirty-two years. Then, Prajāpati said to him: "He who moves about happy in a dream—he is Self," said he. "That is the immortal, the fearless; that is Brahman." Thereupon, with a tranquil heart, Indra went away.

But then, even before reaching the gods, he saw this danger: "Now, even though this body is blind, the Self in the dream condition does not become blind; even though this body is lame, he does not become lame; indeed, he does not suffer any defect through the defect of this body. He is not slain with the slaying of this body. He does not become lame with the lameness of this body. Nevertheless, they, as it were, kill him; they, as it were, unclot him. He, as it were, becomes the experiencer of what is not agreeable; he, as it were, even weeps. I see no good in this." [Again Indra returns to Prajāpati with his objection. The latter admits its truth but asks Indra to be his student for another thirty-two years.] Then Prajāpati said to him: "Now, when one is sound asleep, composed, serene, and knows no dream—that is the Self," said he. "That is the immortal, the fearless; that is Brahman." Thereupon, with a tranquil heart, Indra went away.

But then, even before reaching the gods, he saw this danger: "Assuredly, this Self in the deep sleep condition does not, indeed, now know himself in the form: 'I am he'; nor indeed does he know these things here. He, as it were, becomes one who has gone to annihilation. I see no good in this." [Indra once more returns to Prajāpati, who promises to tell him the final truth after another five years of studenthood.] Indra lived a student's life under Prajāpati for another five years. The total number of these years thus came to one hundred and one; thus it is that people say that, verily, for one hundred and one years Maghavan [Indra, the Rewarder] lived under Prajāpati the disciplined life of a student of sacred knowledge. Then Prajā-

pati said to him: "O Maghavan, mortal, indeed, is this body; it is taken over by death. But it is the basis of that deathless, bodiless Self. Verily, the Self, when embodied, is taken over by pleasure and pain. Verily, there is no freedom from pleasure and pain for one who is associated with the body. The wind is bodiless; cloud, lightning, thunder—these are bodiless. Now as these, having risen up from yonder space and having reached the highest light, appear each with its own form, even so this serene Self, having risen up from this body and having reached the highest light, appears with its own form. That Self is the Supreme Person [*uttama puruṣa*].

The Essential Reality Underlying the World

Looking "outward," the Upanishadic thinker comes to the realization that this world is merely a bundle of fleeting names and forms, that there is only one permanent reality underlying this manifold phenomenal world, and that, in the ultimate analysis, that reality (elsewhere called Brahman, but here *sat*, i.e., being, essence) is identical with the essential reality in human personality, namely, the Self (*ātman*).

[From *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 6.1-3, 12-14, *passim*]

There, verily, was Shvetaketu, the son of Uddālaka Āruni. To him his father said: "O Shvetaketu, live the disciplined life of a student of sacred knowledge [*brahmacarya*]. No one, indeed, my dear, belonging to our family, is unlearned in the Veda and remains a brāhman only by family connections." He [Shvetaketu], then, having approached a teacher at the age of twelve and having studied all the Vedas, returned at the age of twenty-four, conceited, thinking himself to be learned, stiff. To him his father said: "O Shvetaketu, since, my dear, you are now conceited, think yourself to be learned, and have become stiff, did you also ask for that instruction whereby what has been unheard becomes heard, what has been unthought of becomes thought of, what has been uncomprehended becomes comprehended?" "Of what sort, indeed, Sir, is that instruction?" asked Shvetaketu. "Just as, my dear, through the comprehension of one lump of clay all that is made of clay would become comprehended—for the modification is occasioned only on account of a convention of speech,⁵ it is only a name, whereas clay as such alone is the reality. Just as, my dear, through the comprehension of one ingot of iron all that is made of iron would become comprehended—for the modification is occasioned only on account of a

convention of speech, it is only a name, whereas iron as such alone is the reality. . . . So, my dear, is that instruction." "Now, verily, those venerable teachers did not know this; for, if they had known it, why would they not have told me?" said Shvetaketu. "Nevertheless, may the venerable sir tell it to me." "So be it, my dear," said he.

"In the beginning, my dear, this world was just being [*sat*], one only, without a second. Some people, no doubt, say: 'In the beginning, verily, this world was just nonbeing [*asat*], one only, without a second; from that nonbeing, being was produced.'⁶ But how, indeed, my dear, could it be so?" said he. "How could being be produced from nonbeing? On the contrary, my dear, in the beginning this world was being alone,⁷ one only, without a second. Being thought to itself: 'May I be many; may I procreate.' It produced fire. That fire thought to itself: 'May I be many, may I procreate.' It produced water. Therefore, whenever a person grieves or perspires, then it is from fire [heat] alone that water is produced. That water thought to itself: 'May I be many; may I procreate.' It produced food. Therefore, whenever it rains, then there is abundant food; it is from water alone that food for eating is produced. . . . That divinity⁸ [Being] thought to itself: 'Well, having entered into these three divinities [fire, water, and food] by means of this living Self, let me develop names and forms.'⁹ Let me make each one of them tripartite.' That divinity, accordingly, having entered into those three divinities by means of this living Self, developed names and forms. . . . It made each one of them tripartite. . . ."

"Bring hither a fig from there." "Here it is, sir." "Break it." "It is broken, sir." "What do you see there?" "These extremely fine seeds, sir." "Of these, please break one." "It is broken, sir." "What do you see there?" "Nothing at all, sir." Then he said, to Shvetaketu: "Verily, my dear, that subtle essence which you do not perceive—from that very essence, indeed, my dear, does this great fig tree thus arise. Believe me, my dear, that which is the subtle essence—this whole world has that essence for its Self; that is the Real [*satya*, truth]; that is the Self; that [subtle essence] art thou, Shvetaketu."¹⁰ "Still further may the venerable sir instruct me." "So be it, my dear," said he.

"Having put this salt in the water, come to me in the morning." He did so. Then the father said to him: "That salt which you put in the water last evening—please bring it hither." Although he looked for it, he did not find it, for it was completely dissolved. "Please take a sip of water from this end," said the father. "How is it?" "Salt." "Take a sip from the middle,"

said he. "How is it?" "Salt." "Take a sip from that end," said he. "How is it?" "Salt." "Throw it away and come to me." Shvetaketu did so thinking to himself: "That salt, though unperceived, still persists in the water." Then Āruni said to him: "Verily, my dear, you do not perceive Being in this world; but it is, indeed, here only: That which is the subtle essence—this whole world has that essence for its Self. That is the Real. That is the Self. That art thou, Shvetaketu." "Still further may the venerable sir instruct me." "So be it, my dear," said he.

"Just as, my dear, having led away a person from Gandhāra¹¹ with his eyes bandaged, one might then abandon him in a place where there are no human beings; and as that person would there drift about toward the east or the north or the south: 'I have been led away here with my eyes bandaged, I have been abandoned here with my eyes bandaged'; then as, having released his bandage, one might tell him: 'In that direction lies Gandhāra; go in that direction.' Thereupon he, becoming wise and sensible, would, by asking his way from village to village, certainly reach Gandhāra. Even so does one who has a teacher here know: 'I shall remain here [in this phenomenal world] only as long as I shall not be released from the bonds of ignorance. Then I shall reach my home.' "

NOTES

1. That is, they are reborn again and again in the phenomenal world. The doctrine of transmigration or reincarnation was probably unknown to the brāhman ritualists, but in the Upanishads man's salvation from this cycle of rebirths became a matter of great concern. It is suggested that the Vedic sacrifices could bring only a temporary respite in the abode of a god, not permanent release from the cycle.
2. Each succeeding body is within the preceding one and is, therefore, subtler and more real than it. The body of bliss is the most internal body. Bliss, accordingly, is the true nature of man.
3. Man has, indeed, no existence apart from Brahman. For a man to say that Brahman is nonexistent is a contradiction.
4. Ātman can refer to one's bodily self as well as the Supreme Self.
5. The various objects made of clay, such as plate and pitcher, are essentially nothing but clay. But, for the sake of convenience, different names are, by convention, assigned to the different shapes or modifications which that clay is made to assume. Within the world of the objects made of clay, clay alone is essential, whereas the different names and forms of those objects are only incidental. This is the doctrine of extreme nominalism.

6. As in *Rg Veda*, 10.72.

7. Compare *Rg Veda*, 10.129, above.

8. Being, which has been referred to in an impersonal manner so far, is now spoken of as a personalized divinity with a view to indicating that pure, essential "Being." As such, it is in no way connected with the process of creation—this latter being only the result of nominalism.

9. Being penetrates into fire, water, and food as their life-force and thereby invests them with the capacity further to function in the process of creation, thus helping the evolution of the phenomenal world, which is in reality only a bundle of names and forms.

10. In this statement, which is repeated a number of times in this chapter of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, the following important points have been made: *sat* or Being, which is the cause of this gross world, is itself subtle and imperceptible. It is Being that constitutes the true Self (*ātman*) or life-force of this world. In other words, without Being the world cannot exist. The only absolute reality, therefore, is Being. This Being is identical with the Self (*ātman*), which is the essential reality in human personality. There is, thus, one single essential reality underlying man and the world.

11. The western limit of Indian civilization.