

THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

The Upaniṣad means a source of secret and sacred knowledge. Of the several Upaniṣads, ten are considered as principle Upaniṣads; popularly known as ‘Daśopaniṣads’. The Upaniṣads are the perennial sources of spiritual knowledge.

The central theme of the Upaniṣads is to declare one independent supreme God and His eight-fold functions like creation, sustenance etc. of the real world. **‘Sarve- Veda- Yatpada- Mamananti’; ‘Rgādyā Aparā-Vidyā Yadā Viṣṇoh Na Vācakā II Ta Eva Paramāvidyā Yadā Viṣṇostu Vācakah’.** (Ah. Up. Bh.); all Vedas impart the knowledge of Parabrahman or Lord Viṣṇu.

Among the Ācāryas of the three schools of Vedānta, Sri Shankaracharya has written Bhasyas on the said ten Upaniṣads. Sri Rāmānujacārya has discussed the key passages of the Upaniṣads in his Vedartha Sangraha. Sri Rangarāmānuja of the same school has written commentaries on the ten Upaniṣads. Sri Madhvacārya has also written Bhāṣyas on the same ten Upaniṣads.

Amongst the principle Upaniṣads, Chāndogya Upaniṣad has got a significant place. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad belongs to Sāmaveda. It is a part of Chāndogya Brāhmaṇa. Lord Hari is the deity (Devatā) of this Upaniṣad. Lord Hayagrīva and Rāmādevī are the sages (Ṛṣis). Since all the contents are in prose, there is no need to search for Chandas (metre).

In the first five Chapters of Upaniṣad important Upāsanas (spiritual practices) like Udgīthopāsana, Sāmopāsana, Madhu-Vidyā, Samvarga-Vidyā, Prāṇa-Vidyā, Pancāgni-Vidyā and Vaiśvānara-Vidyā are discussed. In the later three chapters dialogues between Uddalaka and Śvetaketu, Nārada and Santakumāra, Prajāpati and Indra, Virocana occurs.

Every topic discussed here has an interesting background. All discussions are in the form of dialogue which is quite instructive, illustrative and illuminating.

The ‘Pancāgni-Vidyā’ referred in the fifth chapter of this Upaniṣad deals with the journey of life after death. This branch of knowledge is called ‘Eschatology’.

It starts with Śvetaketu, the son of Āriṇi, going to the kingdom of Pancāla and attended the assembly there as a scholar. King Pravahaṇa the son of Jibila asked him ‘Young boy, has your father instructed you?’ Śvetaketu replied ‘Yes indeed, Sir’. Then King Pravahaṇa asked him the following five questions:

Q-1: Do you know to which place men go after death from here?

Śvetaketu replied ‘No Sir’.

Q-2: Do you know how they return?

Śvetaketu replied ‘No Sir’.

Q-3: Do you know the places that come in the routes of Devayāna and Pitṛyāna?

Śvetaketu replied 'No Sir'.

Q-4: Do you know how the other world never becomes full?

Śvetaketu replied 'No Sir'.

Q-5: Do you know how the souls (Jeevas) offered in the fifth oblation are born as men and women?

Śvetaketu replied 'No Sir'.

King Pravahana sarcastically remarked to Śvetaketu, 'If you cannot answer these questions how can you claim that you have been instructed?' With that Śvetaketu felt disappointed and returned to his place.

After returning home, Śvetaketu approached his father. He reported with a sense of disgust that King Pravahana asked him five questions and he could not answer even one out of them.' Without teaching all these, I was told that I was not instructed' said Śvetaketu. His father Gautama said 'You have stated them to me now. I did not know even one of them. Had I known them, could I have not instructed you?'

Gautama went to the kingdom of Pancāla and met King Pravahana. He honourably received him. Next day morning Gautama approached the King with some presents. The King said 'Oh, Gautama you may ask for the wealth that is used by men'. Gautama told the King 'Let the wealth that is meant for men are with you only. Tell me the answers to those five questions which you asked my son'.

The King was perplexed. He was initially hesitant to part with the Vidyā which was hitherto to strictly remain with Kṣatriyas. He told Gautama to stay with him for sometime before parting with the Pancāgni-Vidyā. He further informed him that the Vidyā which you have sought from me was with Kṣatriyas and not with the Brāhmanas. That is why there has been the rule of Kṣatriyas in the world.

The brief of Pancāgni-Vidyā imparted by King Pravahana to Gautama is as follows:

He narrated the Vidyā in the form of five sacrifices (Yajnas) that take place at (1) Aditya Loka (2) Parjanya Loka (3) Bhū Loka (4) Puruṣa (Human male) (5) Stree (Human Female). In each five principle forms of God, namely Nārāyana, Vāsudeva, Sankrṣana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha respectively carry on the principle functions. In each sacrifice five essential constituents are to be present viz., Samit, Dhūma, Arci, Angāra and Vishpulinga. These are symbolical elements and not the conventional ones.

The souls are transformed from one Loka (region) to another. In each Loka different deities take the full responsibility of the souls till all the souls are again born through the combined effort of male and female (Mithuni Sṛṣṭi). This is the cycle of life.

In order to explain the journey of life Pravahana begins his explanation with the beginning of life. i.e., 'Pancamyā-māhuto Āpah Puruṣa Vacaso Bhavanti', meaning from the fifth oblation

offered by the Gods, Puruṣa (human male/female) is born. Let us think that a woman gives birth to a child, and the individual is born. He or she lives a full life as per the gift of one's age.

Chāndogya Upaniṣad or as a matter of fact all Upaniṣads, suggest a number of spiritual practices (Upāśanas) to realise Brahman and attain salvation. Also they lay down certain code of conduct regarding virtues and vices, adoptables and avoidables. During the life time, one might devote one's life time to gain the knowledge of Brahman and adopt the prescribed ways (Upāśanas) to realise Him. Let us suppose some set of people realise Parabrahman or becomes a Brahmajnāni. Some other set of people making no effort to realise Parabrahman, devote time only in doing good work to the society, like building free shelters, building tanks, distributing food and clothing to the poor etc.

Of the above two sets of people, after death, the former set of people (if the Prārabdha Karma is over) are led by the deities through the **Devayana or Arciradi route**. The latter sets of people, after death, are led by the deities through **Pitṛyāna or Dhūmādi route**.

The people who are taken through Devyāna will not return to the life cycle. The latter set of people taken through Pitṛyāna will return back to the life cycle.

‘Ekayā Yātyanāvṛttim Anyayāvartate Punah’ says Gītā.

King Pravahaṇa describes the return path which is called Pancāgni Vidya.

The Devayana or Arciradi path: A Brahma-Jnāni soul (after death) is taken by the deities through various regions or Lokas; for every Loka there is a governing deity:- Agni-Jyothi (they are sons of Agni) – Arcir Loka, Ahar Loka, Śuklapakṣa Loka, Uttarāyaṇa Loka, Samvatsara Loka, Āditya Loka, Candra Loka, Vidyut Loka: from there Vayu will take them to four headed Brahman in Styā Loka. Along with Brahman, they reach Parabrahman at the end of Kalpa.

The Pitṛyāna or Dhūmādi path: A Yogi, dedicated to Karma, (after death) is taken by the deities (after they stay in Heaven) through: Dhūma Loka, Rātri Loka, Kṛṣṇapakṣa Loka, Dakṣiṇāyana Loka, Pitṛ Loka, Ākāśa (Vināyaka) Loka, Chandra Loka. Chandra Loka is the destination for those who are expected to return. They stay there for sometime as determined by the deities. When their return time approaches, the Devas perform five Yajnas at five places; viz., Dyuloka, Parjanya Loka, Bhu Loka, Purusha (male) and Stree (female). This is called the Pancāgni Vidya. This looks simple but is a fairly complicated process.

Due to this state of affairs and because of the circulating population, there seems to be no stagnation. Hence, the said Lokas never get filled up.

The details of Pancāgni Vidya or five Yajnas: King Pravahaṇa conveyed to Gautama regarding the journey of life from Dyū Loka till one is born again from the mother's womb. These five major events which the Upaniṣat narrates as five sacrifices are called Pancāgni Vidya.

1. Yajna (sacrifice) in Dyu Loka:

God Nārāyana present in Dyuloka is called Agni (Sacrificial Fire).

His five forms are symbolically denoted as: Āditya is called Samit; Raśmi is called Dhūma; Ahan is called Arci; Candra is Angāra, Nakṣtra (stars) is called Visphulinga. This is symbolic Yajna.

Here the Gods offer the Jīvas as sacrificial offerings to Agni i.e. Nārāyana. From Agni, Gods take the Jīvas to Candra. Here one God hands over the Jīvas to another God to perform next Yajna.

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2. Yajna in Parjanya Loka:

Lord Vāsudeva is present in Parjanya. **Parjanya** is called **Agni**.

His five forms are symbolically denoted as: Vāyu is called *Samit*, Abra (Clouds) is called *Dhūma*; Vidyut is called *Arci*; Aśini (lightning) is called *Angāra*; Hraduni (thunder of clouds) is called *Visphulinga*.

The Gods offer Jīvas as sacrificial offerings to Parjanya Agni i.e., Vāsudeva. From there God takes the Jīvas to Vriṣṭi (rains).

3. Yajna in Bhū Loka:

Lord Sankarṣaṇa is present in Prithvi. Prithvi is called Agni.

His various forms are: *Samvatsara* is called *Samit*; *Ākāśa* is called *Dhūma*; *Ratri* is called *Arci*; *Dik* (direction) is called *Angāra*; *Avāntara-dik* (corner directions) are called *Vishpulinga*.

The Gods offer Jīvas as sacrificial offerings to God Sankarṣaṇa with His five forms. The Gods take Jīvas from Prithvi to Anna (food).

4. Yajna in Puruṣa (Human Male):

God Pradyumna is present in Puruṣa. Puruṣa is called Agni.

His various forms are: Vak (speech) is called Samit; Prāṇa is called Dhūma; Jihva (tongue) is called Arci; Cakṣu (eyes) is called Angāra; stotra is called Vishpulinga. The Gods offer Jīvas as sacrificial offerings to God Sankarṣaṇa. The Gods take the Jīvas from Anna to Retas (semen).

5. Yajna in Yoṣa (Human Female):

God Aniruddha is present in Yoṣa. Yoṣa is called Agni.

His various other forms are: Upastha is called Samit; Upamantra is called Dhūma; Yoni is called Arci; Antah-kṛiti is called Angāra; Abhinandana is called Vishpulinga. The Gods offer Jīvas as sacrificial offerings to God Aniruddha. The Gods take the Jīvas from Retas to Garbha (womb).

The foetus enclosed in the membrane remains inside for ten months or until the time to be born. Thus the Jīvas offered in fifth oblation are born as men and women. This signifies the beginning of birth and death cycle.

Thus the birth-death journey upwards to temporary destination and then return through the path of the return journey as described above. This is the birth and death cycle of life. He who knows this Pancāgni-Vidya will be absolved of his sins even if he happens to be in the company of major sinners. Such people purify themselves and purify others too.

In our school and college days we studied certain branches of modern science concerning life viz., Biology, Zoology, Cytology, Physiology, Medical Science, Psychology and so on. But none of them deal with journey of life after death. The limitation being the means of acquisition of valid knowledge; i.e., epistemology. The modern science has only two such means; namely sense perception and inference. Through these means alone the journey of life after death cannot be comprehended. Being too subtle, life's exit from the body cannot be detected however minutely one might observe. Similarly there are occasional re-entry of life in the body after declaring clinically dead. Even that cannot be observed.

In India everyone knows this aspect only through the scriptural evidence and not by perception or inference. Almost all the scriptures unequivocally declare that the so called soul or life or Jīvātman or consciousness is essentially eternal in nature and generally subjected to birth and death cycles. For life to be meaningful several codes of conduct and spiritual practices have been laid down to get rid of from the bondage. Our present life casts a shadow on our future life.

This being an important aspect needs proper attention. Everyone needs to know this aspect at one time or the other; viz., what is going to happen to us after death? Where are we going? Whether we return to this world? How do we return? What are the routes of journey both upwards and downwards? All these aspects are worthy of everyone's attention.

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