

# **VAISHVANARA VIDYA**

*by*

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## **PUBLISHERS' NOTE**

The Vaishvanara Vidya is the famous doctrine of the Cosmic Meditation described in the Fifth Chapter of the Chhandogya Upanishad. It is preceded by an enunciation of another process of meditation known as the Panchagni Vidya. Though the two sections form independent themes and one can be studied and practised without reference to the other, it is in fact held by exponents of the Upanishads that the Vaishvanara Vidya is the panacea prescribed for the ills of life consequent upon the transmigratory process to which individuals are subject, a theme which is the central point that issues from a consideration of the Panchagni Vidya. This work consists of the lectures delivered by the author on this subject, and herein are reproduced these expositions dilating upon the two doctrines mentioned.

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## THE PANCHAGNI VIDYA

The Upanishads are mainly meditations intended to act as correctives to the binding effects that are produced by the phenomena of natural processes. While what we call a natural process subjects us to its own laws, these laws can be overcome and their imposition upon the individual can be counteracted by techniques of meditation. The philosophy of the Upanishads is that it is an ignorance of the way in which the Universe works that binds the individual to samsara—the series of births and deaths. Our sorrows are, in a way, created by our own selves, because they follow as a consequence of our not abiding by the law of the universe. The affirmation of a reality independent of what really is, is called the ego. That is the centre of personality. This affirmation of individuality, jivatva, personality, or something separate from the organic structure of creation, is the cause of the sorrow or the suffering of the jiva, the individual manifested due to the affirmation of the ego. Births and deaths are the punishments, as it were, meted out to the individual in order that it may be reformed in the field of experience of the world for the purpose of enabling it to return to the normal state of consciousness which is universality of being, of which it is deprived at present due to the ignorance of its connection with the universe and a false notion that it has about its own self that it has an independence of its own.

The sections of the Chhandogya Upanishad, which we are going to study, are a gradational ascent of knowledge for the purpose of meditations which lift us above the phenomena of ordinary experience, such as birth and death and bondage of every kind, and point to the methods of transcending all sorrow, whatever be its nature, and regaining the originality of being. The various sections that follow are a systematic teaching on what we may call Adhyatma-Vidya, or Atma-Vidya, a knowledge of the ultimate Self, which is the only remedy for the malady of empirical existence.

This section which we are about to commence, is a treatise on a particular method of meditation called Panchagni-Vidya, the knowledge of the Five Fires, by which the Upanishad means the various processes of manifestation, or, we may say, evolution, it being one's bondage and the way in which the cycle of transmigration revolves. There is a coming and going, descending and ascending in this samsara-chakra, or the revolving wheel of bondage. How it happens, and how one can be free from it, what are the methods to be employed for the purpose of freeing oneself from the clutches of this involuntary law that imposes itself upon us and binds us to its own mandate so that we do not seem to have any say in the matter of births and deaths or even the experiences that we have to pass through—these are our themes. The law of the universe is so vastly spread in its magnitude that it weighs heavy upon us when it is not followed. This question of the bondage of the soul brought about by its own ignorance, and the various remedies therefore, are discussed in the various sections.

While the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is more transcendent in its approach and provides techniques of meditation which are mostly above the reaches of the ordinary mind, the Chhandogya Upanishad takes us along the path of ordinary experience, and then, finally, lifts us above into the empyrean of supreme transcendence. Often, scholars have held the opinion that the Brihadaranyaka is aprapancha in its view and the Chhandogya is saprapancha, which means to say that the Brihadaranyaka concerns itself with the

ultimate Absolute and every solution is from the point of view of the Absolute only. So, it has taken the final step in setting about finding a remedy for the problems of life, while the normal man has also been taken into consideration in the Chhandogya, though the ultimate aim is the same, here also. Thus, the Brihadaranyaka and the Chhandogya form, in a way, complementary aspects of a single study.

## **THE COURSE OF THE SOUL AFTER DEATH**

The Panchagni-Vidya, to which reference has been made, is a particular type of knowledge, or meditation, which is introduced to know the inner meaning of the common phenomenon of birth and death. What we experience in normal life is only the effect of certain causes which are invisible to the eyes. We see people being born and people dying, but we do not know why people are born and why people die. The causes are unknown to us. What is it that compels a person to be born and what is it that forces him to die? We know very well, we have no say in either of these ways. We cannot say this or that in respect of these processes. Nor is there any adequate knowledge of the secret of one's own experiences. Birth, death and the experiences in life are apparently effects produced upon us by causes of which we seem to have no knowledge. The Upanishad, in these meditations, tries to introduce us into a new type of knowledge which is the solution to the sorrows that are incumbent upon being subject to the laws of this natural phenomenon.

In this connection, the Upanishad commences with a story. There was a student named Svetaketu who was the son of sage Uddalaka. This student was well-read and finely educated. He was so confident about his knowledge that he used to parade his learning and calibre in the midst of all learned people, have discussions in courts of kings etc., and was very reputed for his great educational gift. This boy went, by chance, to the court of the king called Pravahana Jaivali, a noble emperor. The moment the boy arrived at the court, the king received him with respect, and after offering him the requisite hospitality becoming of a Brahmin boy well-versed in the Vedas and all the branches of learning, the king put a question to the boy.

“Are you well educated? Have you studied? Is your education complete? Has your father instructed you?” The boy said, “Yes, my education is over, and I am well-read.”

Then the king put some questions. “Naturally, you are a well-informed person so as to be able to answer any pose. You are proficient in every branch of learning.” That the boy professed to be, that he would be able to answer any question. Then the king posed five questions.

The first question was: “Do you know where people go after they depart from this world? When people die, where do they go? Do you know the answer to this question, my dear boy?” The boy said, “I do not know. I cannot answer this question.” Then the king asked another question, “Do you know wherefrom people come when they are reborn into this world?” The boy said, “I do not know this also.” “Do you know, have you any idea of the paths along which the soul ascends, the paths being known as the devayana and the pitriyana? Do you know the difference between these two paths? Why is the one distinct from the other?” The boy said, “I do not know the answer to this

question also.”

Then the fourth question: “Why is it that the yonder world is not filled with people and overflowing? Always, the world is able to contain people and it is never flooded with them. What is the reason for this?” “This, also, I do not know.” Now the fifth question: “Do you know what are the five oblations that are offered and how the fifth oblation as liquid becomes a human being?” “This, too, I do not know,” said the boy.

Then, the king said, “Why did you say that you are instructed and well-read? How is it possible for one to regard oneself as properly educated if one cannot answer even these questions? What made you think that you are educated? What is it that your father taught you if he has not told you these things?” The boy was humbled, his pride vanished, he began to realise that there are things which he could not understand. His education was not complete. This was the first time that he was taken aback from the conviction that he knew everything.

Though the king asked him to stay, he ran in agony back to his father. He did not stay in the palace, and in the intensity of discomfiture he rushed to the father and cried out, “How is it that you told me once that I have been instructed and well-educated, and that I have been informed in every branch of learning? This is what you told me one day. You told me that there is nothing more for me to learn, that I have completed my education.” The father replied, “Yes, what about it?” “No,” retorted the boy. “It is not like that. This fellow of a king put me some questions and I could not answer even one. Not properly educating me, you merely told me that I am accomplished.” “What are the questions?” the father asked. The boy repeated all the five questions. “These are the five questions that were put to me by the king. Now, what is the answer to these questions?” he asked the father. The father said, “If I knew the answers to these questions, naturally I would have taught them to you. I myself do not know what these mean. I have taught you what I knew, and these are things which are beyond myself, also. I have never heard of these things. So, how is it possible for me to give a reply to this query? Let us both go as students before the king. This is the only alternative left to us. We can learn this knowledge from the king himself. We have to go as humble students.” The boy said, “You yourself may go, I am not coming.” He was so ashamed that he would not like to show his face before the king, again. And so, the father went; the boy did not go.

The father humbly went to the court of the king. The king, of course, received the great Brahmin with high honour, with great respect and showed the required hospitality. Gautama stayed in the palace, for the night. The next morning, when the king came to the court, in the assembly, to give audience, the Brahmin also went there. The king said: “Revered one, ask for anything which is of this world; any material gain, any amount of wealth, whatever you need for your maintenance. Ask for it, and I am ready to give it to you. Anything that pertains to this world, anything that is human, anything that is material—ask for such a boon and I shall give it as a gift.” The Brahmin replied: “By God’s grace I have enough of material wealth. I do not need anything of this world. You may keep this wealth for yourself. I do not require this wealth, but do give me the reply to the questions you put before my son. I have come to you for knowledge, not for wealth, not for any material gift which you are so kindly offering to me and which I do not need. But I want the wisdom of the questions which you posed before my son, and which he could not answer.”

The king was perplexed; he was disturbed in his mind when the Brahmin spoke thus. He did not know what to say, because it is difficult suddenly to impart knowledge to a person the moment he asks for it. That is the procedure of any teacher. This is the position of the imparting of knowledge. Also, Kshatriyas do not seek Brahmins to be their pupils. That was the ancient custom. The king was a Kshatriya and now the student here is a Brahmin. Brahmins teach Kshatriyas; Kshatriyas do not teach Brahmins. So, under those circumstances, the king did not know what to tell this Brahmin. He was a little bit concerned in his mind and was not sure as to what to tell him.

What the king could tell the Brahmin then was just this: "You stay here for some time. We shall think about it." It is believed that he was asked to stay, perhaps, for a year. That is what the tradition makes out. The Brahmin stayed there as a preparatory austerity for the reception of this knowledge. Thereafter, the king said one day: "You ask me to give you the knowledge of the things which have been set apart as a secret by the Kshatriyas up to this time. It has never gone to the circle of Brahmins till today. But, now the time has come for it to go out of the circle of Kshatriyas, because you have come to me as a student and you want this knowledge. Till now, because of this secret of knowledge which the kings held, they were predominant everywhere. They could rule over everybody due to the power that they wielded by this knowledge, and now you want to get this secret out of me." Anyhow, the king was ready, he was not reluctant; he was prepared to share this knowledge with the Brahmin, the elderly man who came as a humble student in the ordinary tradition of obedience and humility. And to him the king spoke the great truth.

Now comes the actual answer which follows in respect of every one of the questions which the king put to the boy. These answers which the king gives are certain meditations. They are processes of the attunement of the mind to higher levels of being. They are called vidyas because they are specific types of knowledge. Vidya also means a meditation, a contemplation. A higher knowledge is called vidya, something distinct from ordinary knowledge, scientific or artistic knowledge, and the like.

The superiority of the knowledge arises on account of the fact of its being more inclusive in its character than all the other known branches of learning. Every form of learning in this world is isolated in the sense that it bears no connection to the other branches of learning. A person who is proficient in one branch need not be proficient in another, and, therefore, there is a limitedness of such knowledge. Our knowledge is finite; it is not all-comprehensive. Whatever be the education of a person, he cannot become all-knowing. There is something which he does not know, which keeps him subject to laws of which he has no knowledge. What binds us is the ignorance of something which exists somewhere, but about which we have no information whatsoever. Wherever there is ignorance, there is also bondage in respect of that subject or that circumstance. When we have knowledge of a thing, we are not bound to that thing, we have a control over that thing. The greater is the knowledge that we have about anything, the greater also is the capacity we have in making it subservient to our own selves. But, the more is the ignorance we have about a thing, the more are we subservient to its laws. The world binds us; the law of gravitation limits us; the law of Nature restricts us, because we do not have an adequate knowledge of these laws. We do not know how they operate and why it is that we have been made subject to these laws. What is wrong with us? We do not know this, though we know that there is something fundamentally wrong with every

one of us, on account of which the whole world keeps us in subjection. We are under the thumb of every law in the world. The reason is that we are apparently outside the realm of the operation of this law. We are like exiles cast out into the winds, and the law set around our necks, as it were, compels us to follow its dictates. We cannot overcome the law of gravitation, to give only one instance. We are slaves of this law. We can fall down and we can break our legs; we can get drowned; we can be burnt; anything can happen to us. Our very life on earth is based on and is decided by that law. But this happens on account of certain patent limitations in our life. There is some sort of a finitude in our own bodies and the entire personality of ours. Our fate is the same in respect of any law that operates anywhere. We cannot think things which are not purely sensory or physical; we cannot visualise things which are super-physical; we cannot understand any aspect of reality which is not in space, which is not in time and which is not casually related. And outside the realm of our own organic personality, we cannot have a real knowledge. We are finites, we are bound, we are limited in every way.

The processes of birth and death, again, are to be explained from this point of view. There is some law which works in some peculiar manner on account of which we are compelled to follow this course known as transmigration. Is anyone prepared to die? But we have no say in the matter. We will die one day or the other. But why should we die? Who tells you that you must die? No one knows this. And if somebody is born, well, it is doubtful if anyone is born due to the personal wish of anyone. There is some force working behind. So is the case with every kind of experience through which we pass. We do not know what will happen to us tomorrow. So much is our ignorance, so that it appears that we are utterly humiliated beings, shamefaced in every way, ignorant to the core and completely subject to the law of forces of which we have absolutely no knowledge.

Now, the Panchagni-Vidya is a kind of remedy prescribed by way of a meditation which is regarded as a great secret by the Upanishadic teachers. Even if you hear it being expounded once, you will not be able to understand much out of it. It does not mean that you will get out of the law of Nature merely by listening to what the king appeared to have said, because they are secrets bound up with one's own personal life. To us, they are only theoretical information like the existence of a fourth dimension etc. as propounded by physics. You may hear it a hundred times, but you are not going to enter it for reasons obvious. Likewise is this Panchagni-Vidya, or even the greater still Vaishvanara-Vidya, which will follow. They will remain as a mere doctrine and exposition. To the Upanishads, knowledge is the same as being. It is practice. A thing that you live in your own personal life is true knowledge, and apart from the fact that it has to be a part of your being, it is also to be comprehensive. It should not exclude any reality or any aspect of manifestation. These two conditions have to be fulfilled. Neither can we be confident that some aspect of reality is not excluded from our purview, nor are we sure that this knowledge can become a part of our vitals. So, they will remain a mere theorem in the books. However, we can have an outline of the knowledge which the great king imparted to the circle of Brahmins by way of this initiation called the knowledge of the Panchagni-Vidya.

As I mentioned, vidya means knowledge, meditation, a comprehensive insight into the nature of the reality behind any phenomenon. Now, what are these phenomena? The insight into which the Upanishad here leads us is the phenomenon of the descent of

souls from the other regions into this world and the phenomenon of the ascent of souls from this region to the higher ones—how souls descend and how souls ascend. When we consider these processes as mere events among many others, they exert a binding influence upon us. You know people are born; you know people die. This much of knowledge we do have. And, perhaps, we have also a knowledge that certain actions that we perform are responsible for our births and deaths and our experiences in life. The good that we do brings good experiences, the pleasant ones; and the bad ones produce contrary results. This much of information we have gathered by study, hearing etc. But this is not the knowledge that will liberate us.

The Five Fires, called the Panchagnis, mentioned here, are not actually fires in the physical sense. They are meditational techniques. The Fire, here, is symbolic of a sacrifice which one performs through contemplation. How are these sacrifices performed visibly with the traditional sense of rituals? There is a sacrificial ground; there is a sacred altar in which the holy oblations are offered through the instrumentality of the sacred fire. There is the blazing fire flaming forth from the altar in the holy atmosphere of the sacrifice. And there is a substance that is offered, the sacrament. And certain ideas are entertained in the mind of the yajamana or the performer of the sacrifice, which are conveyed through the recitation of certain mantras. The mantras that are chanted or recited, in the performance of the yajna, or the sacrifice, are the sacred intentions of the performer expressed in language. This is the methodology of the performance of a sacrifice usually. The offerings are made to certain deities. The invocation of a particular celestial, a god, or a deity is the intention behind the performance of the sacrifice. Now, the Upanishad here tells us that the whole universal activity of creation may be conceived as such a kind of sacrifice—yajna.

If we are unable to conceive the internal connection and the pros and cons and the relative relationships involved in a particular process of creation, we would not be free from the law of subjection to these forces which are responsible for this creation. Again, unless we have a practical living knowledge of the various factors that are involved in the process of manifestation, or creation, we cannot be free from the law of manifestation. Births and deaths are parts of the universal process. What we call the universal process of manifestation is inclusive of every event that takes place anywhere, in any manner, including the experiences through which we are passing here in life.

The point that the Upanishad would make out is that no event or no experience can be isolated from other experiences. Just as every performance or every item of ritual in a sacrifice is connected to every other item, the whole yajna, or the sacrifice is a single comprehensive act of which the various items are only parts internally connected, the whole universal manifestation is a single process. It is a continuity throughout from beginning to end, and births and deaths and other phenomenal experiences are not isolated factors. They are connected to ultimate causes. If we can contemplate the internal connection that obtains between the effects that are visible with the causes that are invisible, then we would be free from the clutches, or the harassments, of these laws which are operating outside us.

There are various stages of manifestation. Here, a specific type of manifestation is under consideration for the purpose of meditation. How the birth of an individual takes place, how a child is born, is the actual question on hand. We are so ignorant that we think that

the child is born from the womb of the mother. We know only that much, but this is the least type of knowledge that one can have about the birth of a child. The child is not pushed out of the womb of the mother, as if by magic. It is a tremendous process that takes place throughout the cosmos. All the officials of the government of the universe are active in the production of a single child's career. The whole universe vibrates with action even if a single baby is to be born somewhere in the corner of a house. It is not a private phenomenon of a little child coming out unknown somewhere in a nook and corner of the world, as people ignorantly behold or believe. The whole universe feels the presence and the birth of a single child anywhere. So what produces a child is not the father or the mother. It is the whole cosmos that produces the child. The universe is the parent of this little baby. It may be a human baby, a subhuman one or a superhuman form. Whatever be the character of that child, even if it may be an inorganic production, an atom, or an electron, or the composition of a molecule, the birth of it is regarded as the birth of a child, and it is made possible by the operation of cosmic factors. The whole universe is our father; the entire universe is our mother; the universe is the parent. That is the cause, and even if a little liquid is jetted from a pore we would realise that, ultimately, it has some connection with the universal cause of all causes, by a chain of relations.

The Upanishad tells us this secret of cosmic interconnectedness and involution of factors which are unknown to the senses and unthinkable to the mind. There is no such thing as a private act in this world. There is also no such thing as 'my' child and 'your' child. If this secret is known, no one will say, "It is my son, my daughter." It is neither yours nor anybody's. It belongs to that from where it has come. And from where has it come? It has come from every cell of the universe. It has not come from the seminal essence of the father or the mother, as it is believed. It is the quintessence of every particle of the whole of Nature, so that the cosmos is reflected in every body. That is why we say the brahmanda is in the pindanda—the macrocosm is in the microcosm. The cosmos is reverberating and is reflected in the little baby. How, then, can you say that it is your child? It is the child of the universe, which is to take care of it; and it shall withdraw it when it is to be summoned back; it projects it when it is to be sent out for reasons which are known to the universal law alone. Here is the philosophical background of the vidya, called Panchagni-Vidya.

The Upanishad, in its exposition of the Panchagni-Vidya, takes the standpoint of the wider background that operates behind every event in the phenomena of natural processes. Things are not what they seem; there is a deeper significance behind every visible process or activity in Nature. This is the esoteric side, or the invisible aspect of the visible phase of our practical existence. It is not that events suddenly emerge out into visibility, as if by magic, and that something happens at one stroke. Take the case of thunder, for instance. We do not know how the thunder has burst forth from the clouds. There is an immediate rainfall, there is wind blowing cyclonically. The rain stops and suddenly it is hot, after it became suddenly cold when it rained with winds. These are natural phenomena from our point of view, but they are supernatural mysteries to the vision of the Upanishad. There is nothing merely exoteric in the sense of a crass material event in the world. Events take place first in the highest heaven, and then their presence is felt gradually in greater and greater density as they come down to the level of more and more grossness and perceptibility and tangibility, as is the case with a disease. The

illness does not manifest itself suddenly in the physical body. It happens inside first. Its seed is sown within. There is some kind of event that is taking place in the depths of our personality, and in the recesses of the world. This impulse is manifest outside as some occurrence.

The cause of a particular event which is ordinarily regarded as normal, physical, personal, social, visible, tangible, etc., this particular thing, has a transcendent secret behind it. This is the great point made out in the Panchagni-Vidya.

The birth of a human being in this world does not take place in this world alone, exclusively. It takes place in the highest regions first. One is born first in the higher levels in certain degrees of expression, and the impact of this birth is felt in the lower levels until it becomes visible to the physical eye on this mortal earth. Then we say that a child is born, someone has come, there is a rebirth, and so on. But this someone has not come suddenly from the skies. There has been a complicated interior process preceding, which always manages to escape the notice of ordinary vision. This is the case not only with the birth of a human being, but it is so with the coming of every event in the world. The Panchagni-Vidya is not an elucidation of a single phenomenon merely, namely, the organic birth of a human individual in the mother's womb. This is only an instance which is to be extended to phenomena of every kind comprehended in the whole of Nature. There is a total activity, in a subtle form, taking place prior to the apparently individual expression of it in the form of experience and perception.

The king, Pravahana Jaivali, in his mode of instruction, speaks to Gautama, the sage, initiating him into this mystery of the Panchagni-Vidya.

“The Yonder World, O Gautama, is indeed the Fire. Here, the Sun is the fuel; the Light-rays are the smoke; the Day is the flame; the Moon is the coals; the Stars are the sparks. In this Fire, the gods offer faith. From this oblation arises King Soma.”

The activity of the celestial region may be compared to a sacrifice. It would be surprising to a novice, no doubt, that the Upanishad should regard anything and everything as a sacrifice. If we understand the intention behind these analogies, we would be able to realise that nothing could be a greater comparison for life than the concept of sacrifice, because the principle of sacrifice, or yajna, is the essence of all creative processes. And the principle is applicable to every type of creativity, whether physical, social, aesthetic, or, for the matter of that, any other aspect of life. The principle of sacrifice is that of the recognition of the higher values operating behind and transcendent to the ordinary activity of the visible world or the functions of human beings. There is a comprehensiveness of approach in the understanding of the principle of sacrifice. Every part of the sacrifice is as important as any other part, and every part of the sacrifice subserves a purpose transcendent to it, as is the case with the operation of a huge machine or a working medium in a factory. No part of the machine works for itself; it has a transcendent purpose. Look at the limbs of a human body. No organ of the body works for its own sake; it has a purpose beyond itself, and this purpose is an output in the case of a machine and an intention in the case of an organic body. So is the case with the parts of a sacrifice, and especially so when the sacrifice is identified with the creative process of the universe. Everything is interconnected, interlinked in an organic manner, so that everything becomes as important as the other.

This concept of comprehensiveness is the secret of the meditation that is the Panchagni-Vidya. If this interrelatedness of the parts of the sacrifice is lost sight of, it ceases to be a meditation. As a matter of fact, any meditation is the attempt of the mind to bring all the parts of the psychic organ into a single focus of organic action. Just as there is a connectedness of the parts of a sacrifice performed outwardly as a ritual, there is this harmony in the inner sacrifice performed through what we call meditation. The Panchagni-Vidya is a meditation—it is not an outward ritualistic sacrifice; it is a contemplation by the mind in which it harnesses every aspect of its force for the purpose of envisaging the reality that is transcendent to the visible parts of this inner sacrifice.

The Upanishad tells us, here, that the first vibration propelling any kind of activity or event in this world takes place not in this world alone, but in a higher realm. The cause has to be churned first in order that the effect may feel the impact of that stir in the cause. Now, the cause is not merely a single factor. There is a chain of factors involved in the conception of the cause. If, for the purpose of our study, we may say A is the effect that is physically felt by us in this world, it has a cause which is B, impelling this effect to manifest itself in that particular manner in the physical world. But, this B which is the cause of A has another cause behind it, which is C. So, we may say, that B is the cause of A, or we may say, C is the cause of A because it is the cause of B also. But, this C has another cause behind it, and that is D. So, while D is the cause of C and B, and through these, of A, we may also say that it is the cause of the last effect also. Thus, the first cause is the real cause which pushes itself downwards to lower levels of reality, until they express themselves in space and time. This expressed form in space and time alone is known by us, seen by us, felt by us and experienced by us.

We are likely to mistake this visible effect for everything, and then it is that we are either pleased with the manifestation of an effect or we are displeased with it. Sometimes we say, “It is raining cats and dogs; it is horrible.” And we say, “It is terrible, it is so hot; it is awful, it is blowing so hard.” What we like or what we do not like are only the various reactions that our personalities produce or evoke in respect of impersonal causes of phenomena which have nothing to do with the pleasures or the pains of individuals.

The Upanishad takes us, for the purpose of the explanation of a small event in this world, to the highest heaven and tells us that the universe finds the cause of the lowest event in this lofty realm, in an invisible region, which is called the “Yonder World” in the words of the Teacher. For the purpose of understanding what the “Yonder World” means, we may take it to be the celestial region, regions which are super-physical, beyond even the astral realm, which are the causes of what we observe in the atmospheric region. We know very well that every phenomenon in this world is, to a large extent, controlled by the sun shining in the sky. This does not require much of an explanation. Sometimes it looks that even our very existence itself is regulated by the presence of the sun. Our life and activity here has a cause, and we may say that the sun is the cause of life on earth. But, who is the cause of the sun? The sun is also an effect of certain factors—we may call them astronomical or designate them by any other name which are precedent to the formation of the sun. Astronomers tell us that stars, of which the sun is supposed to be one, are formed out of the condensation of nebular dust, forming what we call the Milky Way, which form themselves into rotating and flaming masses. But why should they form themselves into such masses is beyond our understanding. They must have causes beyond. What is the cause behind the formation

or the curdling of the nebular dust as the Milky Way and into the formation we know as the stars, like the sun, etc? There has to be, naturally, some vibration behind. That vibration is precedent and anterior to what we call the manifestation of even the causal condition of this world. Prior to all this, something else must be there, and prior to that, again, another thing, and so on, so that even our insignificant life in this world, in this physical body, can be said to be completely controlled by factors which are transcendent, beyond the sun and the moon and the stars, and where we go in this manner of tracing our cause back, we cannot know. We have to reach levels which are thoroughly imperceptible to the eyes and unthinkable to the mind. This is the point driven home into the mind of Gautama by Pravahana Jaivali in the context of the explanation of the Panchagni-Vidya.

In this descent of the celestial realm which has to be contemplated, or meditated upon, as a sacrifice, there are certain parts or limbs. The world, which is called the celestial realm, is itself the sacred fire into which oblations are offered. This is how the meditation is to be conducted. The fuel, which ignites the fire and causes the flames to rise up in this sacrifice, is the sun. As smoke rises from the fire in a sacrifice, we contemplate the rising or the emanation of the rays from the sun, symbolically. As the flames shine, so is the shining of the daytime due to the fire of the sun in the sacrifice. We may compare the embers, remaining after the flames subside in a sacrifice, to the moon who is something like the subsidence of the flames of the light of the sun, or we may even say, the comparison is made because moonlight arises generally when the sun's flames subside. Compare the stars to the sparks which are ejected from the flames of the fire, because they are scattered, as it were, in the sky. Now, this is a sacrificial mode of contemplation on the higher regions of the cosmos.

A mystery in this connection is mentioned here. What is our connection with these higher regions of the world? The higher regions are, in fact, not unconnected with us. The shining of the sun or the moon, the twinkling of the stars, or the blowing of the wind—all these phenomena are vitally connected with our own life here. They are not just something taking place somewhere erratically, as if they have nothing to do with anyone. Our life is related to every phenomenon outside, and vice versa. While our way of living has something to do with the activity of the world outside, our life is also dependent on that activity. There is a mutual dependence between the outer world and the inner life of the individual. Our thoughts influence the atmosphere. Many a time we must have heard people saying, "These days people are very bad; so there is no rainfall." What is the connection between rainfall and the goodness or the badness of people? Practically, it is difficult to understand the connection, but the connection becomes obvious and patent when we realise that thoughts and modes of living are vibrations that we set up around us. It is not some isolated activity taking place within our heads. When we think, we do not privately think inside our skulls; it is a vibration that we create in us. And the vibration of a person is not confined merely to the physical body; it emanates like an aura to a certain distance from the body of the person. The distance to which the aura goes depends upon the intensity of the aura, or the intensity of the thoughts, or the force of the vibration. This is the principle behind the advice that we must have the company of good people and not of bad people, etc., because vibrations interact. We can be influenced by the atmosphere around us. There is a vibration that is generated within every person whenever a thought occurs. Whenever we think

something, whenever we feel something deeply, even when we speak something, there is a vibration generated because we do not speak without thinking. There is a thought behind every action or speech. Naturally, if we take into consideration the cumulative effect of the vibrations produced by all the individuals in the world, we can also contemplate the effect of the vibrations they produce. They disturb the whole atmosphere; they create a magnetic field in the atmospheric realm. And the total effect of the psychic influences set up by the individuals in the world naturally influences the conditions of the manifestation of natural forces. We can obstruct their movement; we can impede their activity; we can interfere with their natural way of working, and so on.

Based on this concept of the relationship of our life with the activity of Nature outside, the Upanishad tells us that our actions are like an oblation offered in a sacrifice. Our activities are not mere impotent movements of the physical body or the limbs; they are effective interferences in the way of Nature. When we pour ghee or charu into the flaming fire in a sacrifice, we are naturally modifying the nature of the burning of the fire. Much depends on what we pour into it. If we throw mud into it, well, something, indeed, happens to the fire. If we pour ghee into it, something else happens. So, likewise, is the activity of the human being or, for the matter of that, any other being. The interference by a human activity in the working of Nature is an important point to consider in the performance of the sacrifice. If we coordinate ourselves and cooperate with the activity of Nature, it becomes a yajna, but if we interfere with it and adversely affect its normal function, it will also set up a reaction of a similar character. Then, we would be the losers.

Every action produces an effect, called apurva, that occurs in the process of the thought that underlies it. Actions are not merely unconnected physical movements of the body; they are vibrations, as we have observed. Every vibration impinges upon its atmosphere. It has an effect produced in the environment, and this subtle effect that the action produces, invisible to the eyes though, is called the apurva. It is something newly produced; it is not already there. So, this newly produced effect, the consequence of an action that we perform, is the apurva. Now, this apurva, or the effect of our actions, has something to do with us. We are the causes. As we are the causes of this apurva, or the effect of the actions, we would be the reapers of the fruit of these actions. So the apurva, or the result of the actions, becomes the determining factor of what would happen to us even after we depart from this world. Sometimes its effect is felt in this very life. If our actions are very intense, either good or bad, the results are experienced in this life itself; if they are mild, they materialise in a later life. We offer our actions as oblations in this sacrifice of natural phenomena.

In this universal sacrifice of which the celestial region is the fire and the sun is the fuel, etc., as mentioned above, we also contribute a part; we play an important role, and that is the performance of the actions. There is a grand effect that is produced out of the performance of this sacrifice. Generally, a yajna, or a sacrifice is supposed to be an invocation of a god, or a deity. When we say, Indraya svaha, we mean that we invoke Indra. Reciting Suryaya svaha, Agnaye svaha, etc., we offer oblations calling the attention of these particular deities in some manner. In this sacrifice of our actions, in this life, which we offer into the great fire of the world itself, naturally, an invocation is made. We call out certain effects, we elicit certain reactions and we invite certain

experiences when we perform actions. So, our actions in this world are exactly like the offering of oblations in a sacrifice for the purpose of invoking a god, or a deity. We are inviting something, invoking something, calling the attention of something for the purpose of experiencing it when we perform an action. If the action is properly conducted it is in harmony with the natural setup of the whole sacrifice, and then the god is seen, and then we are blessed with a new type of body which is indicated here by the word soma-*raja*, a body which is nectarine in character, not merely the physical body made of the elements of earth, water, fire etc., but a body which is fit enough to experience the delights of the higher world, which are invoked into action by the performance of the deeds. This is how a person performing virtuous acts, holy deeds and charities, etc. in this world rises up to the higher world after death, and experiences the consequences of the actions until the time when the momentum of these actions is exhausted, even as we thrive well in this world financially as long as our bank balance is sound, but when it is exhausted we become paupers. We come back and we have to work hard again to fill the bank balance, so that we may enjoy life afterwards.

Something like this happens in the case of our actions. Every action has a beginning and an end; it is temporal, it has a destructible body, it is not eternal. Because it has a beginning, it must have an end. So the character of the actions, the nature of the actions, the intensity of the actions determines the extent of the consequences thereof, and when we, thus, go to the higher realm and come back, there is what we call rebirth.

The whole point of this description in the context of the Panchagni-Vidya is to tell us how births take place; what are the stages of the descent of the soul into the physical embodiment which it puts on when it comes to this world. The whole of this description is symbolic; it is very difficult to understand it with a casual reading. The teaching is not to be taken literally in a purely grammatical sense, word by word, in its outer meaning. It is highly esoteric in its technique, and the point made out is that the higher realms are activated by the consequences produced by our actions here, and those consequences of actions themselves become the causes of our descent, later, in the reverse order.

“Parjanya is, indeed, the Fire, O Gautama. Of that, the Wind is the fuel, the Cloud is the smoke, the Lightning is the flame, the Thunderbolt is the embers, and the rumblings of Thunder are the sparks.

“Into this Fire, the gods offer the oblation of King Soma. Out of that oblation, arises rain.”

The next stage of the descent is a realm which is symbolically represented here as the world of Parjanya, or the god of rain. The rain-god represents the region below, grosser than the higher regions or the heavens, or the “Yonder World” mentioned earlier. That gets stirred into activity, further on. That, again, is to be contemplated upon as a sacrifice. When rain falls, it is not merely some isolated event that takes place, somewhere. Rainfall is not an unconnected activity; it is also a universal phenomenon. Many factors go to play their roles in the production of rain. There is a vibration in the higher realm first, and, as mentioned, these vibrations are, to some extent, influenced by our own deeds here. So, whether there is a good rainfall or not has something to do with how we live in this world. This is also an interesting thing for us to understand. It is not merely something erratic that is taking place, unconcerned with what we are doing here. The lower realms, which are concerned with the production of rain, are also to be

contemplated upon as a sacrifice. Every stage of development is a sacrifice—it is a meditation. Every process of descent, and every process of ascent is a meditation for the Upanishad.

The principle of rainfall, we may call it the rain-god, Parjanya, is the fire in the sacrifice. The fire is stirred into action by vayu, the wind that blows. We consider the wind as the fuel which ignites the fire of this sacrifice. When there is such a stimulation taking place in the atmosphere, clouds are formed. As smoke rises from the fire of a sacrifice, as an effect of the flaming force of the fire, the clouds, abhram, forming themselves into a thick layer are the effect of this internal activity of the atmosphere by the action of the wind etc. in a particular direction. The clouds are the smoke of this sacrifice. The brilliance of the flames in this sacrifice is the flashing forth of the lightning, vidyut, through the clouds. We know how bright the flames are in a sacrificial altar. We have to contemplate here, in the context of rainfall, the flashing of the lightning as the blazing of the brilliance of the flames of the fire. The clap of the thunders may be compared to the embers remaining after the subsidence of the flames in a sacrifice. The rumblings of the clouds after a heavy rain, the slowed or mellowed down sounds we hear later on in various directions, are the sparks, as it were, of this fire. We hear a little sound coming from all the quarters, or the horizons in the sky, when the rain stops and the clouds are slowly scudding. This is a contemplation that we can effect in our own minds. This is a spiritual meditation because the region of rainfall is stirred into action by the vibrations that take place earlier in a higher plane. Rain is the cause of all foodstuff. That point is being mentioned now for the intended purpose.

In this fire, the contemplative sacrifice of rainfall, gods offer the oblation of their action. The bhuta-sukshma, as they are called, or the subtle elementary potencies, are the Soma-rajā, or King Soma, mentioned here. These are all difficult terms to translate and more difficult to understand. They have a highly esoteric meaning; they are not exactly as they appear on the surface. The subtle potencies which our actions produced get mixed up with the elemental potencies called tanmatras—shabda (sound), sparsa (touch), rupa (colour), rasa (taste), gandha (smell). And then it is that we get involved in the higher realms; we get vitally connected with our actions for reasons obvious, and our actions are related to the consequences they produce—apurva. The apurva gets mixed up with the elemental subtle forces called tanmatras, and so we are involved in the tanmatras in this manner. Then it is that we are taken up to the higher realm by the rocket-like force exerted by our actions which takes us up into the higher realm after we depart from this world. These actions, these effects of actions, these vibrations that these consequences of actions produce, are a great drama indeed that takes place in the heaven. There is a cycle, as it were, a wheel rotating in the form of give-and-take between the gods in the heaven and the human beings here. We give something and we are given back something. Nature gives us what we give to it in the form of our own deeds in this world. We do not get what we do not deserve, and we cannot get, also, what we have not given actually. What we have given, what we have deserved, what we have parted with in the form of a sacrifice, that is given back to us, with compound interest sometimes, according to the law of Nature. On account of this cyclic activity of Nature, in which the individuals get involved through their actions, there is rainfall. So, we can imagine how rains occur.

The event does not happen independently somewhere in the sky. We are also connected

with that action of Nature which is called the fall of rain, or even the absence of rain. Unless there is a harmonious give-and-take understanding between us and Nature, Nature will not give anything to us. If we are too greedy, miserly and selfish, well, everything will be withheld from us. The earth will withdraw her forces. And in the Puranas we are told that the earth, which is compared to a sacred cow, withdraws her milk and does not allow men to drink a drop of the milk of her giving, when they are so selfish, self-centred and absolutely averse to the virtue of giving or sharing with others. It is then that we notice an adverse action in the field of Nature. And then there is drought; there is poverty; there is catastrophe; sometimes there can be cataclysm also, as the case may be. So, the rainfall, which is the cause of the production of food in this world, is not a chance action taking place in Nature, but one of the important links in the cyclic chain of give-and-take, or coordination and cooperation between the individuals and the whole of Nature.

“The Earth is, indeed, the Fire, O Gautama. Of that, the Year is the fuel, the Sky is the smoke, the Night is the flame, the Quarters are the embers, the Intermediary Quarters are the sparks.

“Into this Fire, the gods offer the oblation of rain. Out of that oblation, arises food.”

Rain falls on this earth. The earth, as the fire, is itself an object of meditation. We contemplate the whole earth as the fire in another stage of the Cosmic Sacrifice. The earth is a sacrificial fire. The productive capacity of the earth depends upon another factor, viz., the cyclic changes produced by the process of time. The time factor has an important part to play here. What we call time, of course, for the purpose of our understanding, may be compared to the effect produced by the rotation of the earth on its axis and the revolution of the earth round the sun, and the effect that the sun produces, consequently, upon the earth. This is the essence of time for us, and this is what is called the samvatsara, or the year in popular style. The year is the time factor involved in the capacity of the earth to produce foodstuff. And because it is the inciting factor in the production of foodstuff in the world, it is called samit, or fuel, for it is what causes the blazing of the fire of the sacrifice. How do we contemplate, then? Just as smoke rises up from the fire, we contemplate the whole sky as if it is a dome that is rising from the earth. When we look up, it appears as if the sky is rising dome-like above the earth, and we may contemplate as if it is a smoke rising from the fire of the earth. And, as flames rise from the fire in a sacrifice, the fire is the cause of the rise of the flame, the particular phenomenon called night—we may include the day also together with it because the two are the obverse and the reverse of the same coin—is the result of a particular activity of the earth. We know why there is night and why there is day. This happens because the earth does something. Inasmuch as earth is the cause of the event called night and day, even as the fire is the cause of the rising of the flame, in this contemplation we are to regard the night and day phenomena as the flame of the fire in the sacrifice. The quarters are the embers, because they are calm and quiet, undisturbed as it were, by the movements that take place in the world. When we look at the horizon, we feel a sense of calmness, as if the earth is not touching it. So, it is the subsidence of activity, like the embers after the flame subsides. Like sparks from the fire, which move in different directions, we have the intermediary quarters of the heavens which are in different directions, which are to be contemplated as if they are sparks in the sacrifice. The intermediary quarters are of lesser importance and, therefore, they are called the

sparks.

Here, on this earth, rain falls by the activity of the gods. The gods are the presiding deities of the senses. There is connection between our sense-activity and the gods in heaven. In this offering of the great sacrifice, contemplatively conceived here by this process of the fall of rain, there is a productivity created in the earth and foodstuffs are produced, for another purpose, which will be mentioned further on.

The Celestial Region, the Atmosphere, the Earth, Man and Woman—these are the five stages of the Fire which becomes the object of meditation known as the Panchagni-Vidya. By the interconnection, combination and harmonious adjustment of the structure of these five levels of manifestation, birth takes place. This symbology of the birth of the individual through the Five Fires is applicable to the birth of every event and every form of expression in the world, whether it is what we call a living being or the manifestation of the other levels, such as the inorganic etc.—the physical, the superphysical, or otherwise. The theory is of the manifestation of anything, anywhere. There is a universal concatenation of causes and effects coming together from every side, like the rush of waters in the ocean, from every corner, in order to make the waves rise on its surface. The cooperation of the structure of the waters in the body of the ocean is necessary for the welling up of the waves, though this may be only a local effect whose ulterior causes are not visible to the naked eye. There is, thus, in the end, no such thing as a local event in this world. Every event is a universal event. So is the case with the birth of even a human individual. Every birth is a point of universal pressure.

The philosophy of this vidya, the Panchagni-Vidya, is that such is the meditation of these processes. We should not regard anything as a local event, local structure, local body, local individual. These do not exist; and the idea that they exist is the source of bondage. We are bound by our erroneous notions of things, not by the things themselves, but the wrong idea we have about their relationship mutually or to other things. We have notions about things based entirely on sense-perception, not on the intuitional insight into the background of the occurrence of events. What do the senses tell us? They can report exactly what they can abstract concretely in the form of bodies of perception from the vast reservoir of information. The reservoir, as a background, is unperceivable to the eyes, not even cognisable to the ordinary mind. But the meditation proposes to introduce a technique of envisaging the whole universe as responsible for the manifestation of everything, so that everything is all things, and anything is everywhere. There is no such thing as a particular individual or a particular body. This is the meditation which frees us from the bondage of attachment to particular things. If this meditation could be conducted effectively throughout one's life, there would be a universal perception of everything. When you look at any particular object you will see the whole world in it, and not merely one person in front. There is no such thing as one person; that does not exist. The description of the causes with their effects, in these passages of the Upanishad, is therefore intended to take us above the level of ordinary sense-perception and open the gate of a new knowledge altogether, behind the visible effects which are the so-called objects of sensation, perception and cognition.

Bondage is due to the connection of our consciousness, or the soul, we may say, with the report of the senses, which is confirmed by the activity of the mind and the intellect. The mind, the intellect and the senses work together in collaboration in giving us a wrong

idea about things. The first mistake is committed by the senses. The mind and the intellect only corroborate and confirm in a more synthesised manner this report of the senses. The report is wrong in the sense that it does not take into consideration the invisible factors involved in the production of an effect. The clouds do not gather in the sky suddenly. There are many causes which are beyond one's comprehension, which come together into action for the production of a single effect called the appearance of the clouds in the sky, and the fall of the rain, etc. So is the case with everything. So is the case with anything that happens anywhere in the world; so is the case with anything that appears as an effect or a person in the world; so is anything, whatever anyone can think of in one's mind this world.

These are the oblations symbolically offered in the sacrifice of meditation called the Panchagni-Vidya. This is a secret which the Kshatriyas knew and the Brahmanas did not know. King Pravahana Jaivali was reluctant to part with this knowledge because it was a guarded secret for him and for his community. And now he exposed this knowledge to the Brahmana known as Gautama who came to him as a student, and having explained in detail these mystical doctrines of meditation—the Panchagni-Vidya—he concluded by saying that the food oblation offered in the Fire of Man, which gets converted into the seed, is what rises up as the child by birth. This was one of the questions the king put to the boy who approached him in the court.

The first oblation is the universal vibration in the celestial heaven; that is the first sacrifice, and that is the first oblation. The second oblation is in the second sacrifice which is the reverberation of the vibrations in the celestial region felt in the lower regions of the atmosphere, as the fall of the rain. The grosser manifestations which are the events that take place in this world are the third oblation. The fourth sacrifice is of man himself, who is involved in this entire activity, who consumes the food of the world and energises himself and produces virility. The fifth oblation is woman whose union with man brings about the birth of a child. These are the Five Fires. These Fires are not to be regarded as individual events. This is the purpose of the vidya in the Upanishad. The Fires so-called are diviner manifestations of a cosmic character, and there is nothing local, physical, earthly or binding in any of these sacrifices. They are all processes of a vaster Nature in which the individual is integrally involved. The conception of the entire process should therefore be one of a Universal Occurrence, and by an extension of meaning, this is at once a description of events taking place in any manner, apart from the particular ones mentioned specifically in these enunciations, in these passages.

The fifth oblation is the immediate cause of the rise of the effect in the form of the baby that lies in the womb of the mother. Here, the womb of the mother need not necessarily mean the human mother, though the description is human, to serve as a sample of the illustration. Any cause which gives birth to an effect is the mother that produces the child. Now, in the case of the human being particularly, the child lies in the womb for some months, say nine or ten months. It sees the light of day and begins to see things through the senses. It begins to work in the world as an individual, so-called. Then it lives in the world for so long as it is permitted to live by the momentum of its actions of previous lives.

There is a determining factor of the span of life of an individual even when it is in the

womb of the mother. It cannot be increased or decreased; it is set for ever by the particular force of the apurva, mentioned earlier, which becomes responsible for the birth of an individual. There are causes and causes. All of them join together and pass a resolution, as it were, in their meeting, as to how long an individual should live. That is determined by the character of the cumulative effect of the actions known as the apurva, part of which alone is allowed to manifest itself as what we call prarabdha-karma (force which has already fructified into experience). The prarabdha is the cause of everything that we experience in this life, the length of life, the nature of the experiences through which we pass, the circumstances into which we are born, etc. All our pleasures and pains, including length of life, are determined by the actions we performed earlier, portions of which are allotted for experience in this particular life, that portion being called the prarabdha-karma.

Just because a person is born into this world, it does not mean that he is dissociated from the prior causes, ultimately. The causes catch hold of the effects at every level. They can never be freed from connection with their causes. Even when there is a descent into the lowest level, the connection with the higher levels is not snapped. It is always there. We may be said to be aberrant from the realm of God in a sense. We have cut ourselves off from the Universal Being, due to which we are supposed to be bound souls, but it does not really mean that we have severed our connection with God. Our connection still is maintained with everything; with other beings, with Nature, and with God. What has happened is that we are unconscious of this existing connection. The connection can never be broken; it is a perpetual relationship. If it had been temporary, it would not be reinstated once again. It is always there, but we are completely oblivious of the presence of this relation. Such is what happens at the birth of an individual who is completely ignorant of what has happened. Causes and causes, perhaps thousands and thousands in number, have joined together through the various levels of manifestation for the birth of this child, all of which is not known to this child. It knows nothing except the little locality where it is born, and all other aspects of its birth in this particular world are forgotten at one stroke due to the association of consciousness with the body in a very intensified manner. The intensity with which the consciousness gets tied up to the body is such that there is a complete obliteration of the memory of past lives, a total ignorance of everything that happened in the earlier incarnations, and there is an attachment to this particular body only, as if that is the only reality—as if there was nothing before, and there is nothing going to be in the future also! Unfortunate situation, indeed, is this, that nothing is known about the past and nothing is going to be known about the future. The entire chain is forgotten. Only a single link is caught hold of, and consciousness is bound hard to this particular link, and this is the earthly, the physical life of the individual.

When the span of life is finished, there is what we call the death of the body, the extrication of the prana from the individual embodiment. And these Fires take the individual to the destination to which it is bound after death. Again, these Fires are there in action; they are never absent at any time. Wherever you go, the law of the country works; you cannot escape the arms of the law. Just because you have moved away a hundred miles, it does not mean that you are free from its operation. Likewise is the operation of the Five Fires. Wherever you go, they are there, because, without them nothing can take place. The Five Fires are nothing but the five degrees of the

manifestation of universal law. So, how can you escape it? Wherever you are, in whatever realm, in any form of birth whatsoever, these laws operate, and they catch hold of you, and condition you to certain limited forms of life.

In the same way as one was pushed into manifestation into this particular life, one is put out of existence here, and then taken through the same process of manifestation into other realms. The process is the same, because the Five Fires work everywhere in all the realms of being.

Those who know the secret of this Panchagni-Vidya, those who know the doctrine of the Five Fires, those who conduct their lives through meditation in this manner, are liberated from the bondage of karma. They pass through the stages of ascent leading to the higher regions of life, ultimately landing in Brahma-loka, or the realm of the Creator, for the purpose of ultimate liberation, or salvation; otherwise, there is return, once again, by way of reincarnation, or rebirth. If you are not to be reborn into this world of suffering, you cannot live like an animal, thinking like an animal, living like an animal, seeing like an animal and living a conditioned existence in the same way as animals live in the jungle. Ignorance of law is no excuse. You shall be punished with the rod of the inexorable law for any ignorance of its requirements, and ignorance is nothing but the inability to visualise the connection that obtains between us and the various causes of our manifestation throughout the universe. Since no one can claim to have such knowledge, it appears that everyone is bound to reincarnate in some form. This is the pitiable consequence of the ignorance of the jiva, the individual, to which reference will be made towards the end of this section. But those who are fortunate enough to be awakened to the fact of this divine connection of human life and meditate in this manner through the Panchagni-Vidya—they shall be taken to the higher regions by diviner forces, through the Northern Path, or the uttarayana-marga, the path of light.

The archiradi-marga, or the devayana, the Northern Path of the gods, of the celestials, the path of the liberation of the spirit from the bondage of samsara, is being described. Those who meditate like this, those who live the spiritual life of knowledge, those who have an insight into the secret mentioned here in this Upanishad, those who practise austerity (tapas), endowed with the great faith (shraddha) in the efficacy of this knowledge, they rise to the realm of the divine Agni, or the deity of fire, on departing from this world. They are carried to a higher realm by the deity of the flame, or fire, and from there they are taken up to the still higher realm of the deity of the day. There, again, the matter does not end; they go higher up to the realm of the deity which superintends over the bright half of the lunar month. From there, again, they go higher up into the realm of the deity of the six months during which the sun moves to the north. Then they go higher up to the deity which superintends over the entire year. Then, further, they go to the sun, which is a very important halting place, as it is said, in the passage of the soul to liberation. Then the soul goes higher up into the more subtle regions of experience and enjoyment of a divine nature, comparable to cool lunar radiance. Then comes the realm which the Upanishad calls the flash of lightning represented by its deity. This is not the lightning that we see in the sky, but the flash of the lightning of the knowledge of Reality. We are on the borderland of the Creator, as it were. There the light flashes and then the individuality is about to drop. Effort ceases there and some other law begins to take the soul by hand. A superhuman force begins to work there, an amanava-purusha, a superhuman being comes there. Someone comes

and recognises you, “Lo, the exiled has come, the prodigal son has returned.” Such is the joy of the gods when this exiled being returns after years and years of suffering. The superhuman being catches hold of you by the hand and leads you along the path of light, higher and higher, until you are taken to the realm of the Creator Himself, the Brahma-loka. This is the path of light; this is the path of freedom; this is the path of liberation.

But, if people are unable to live such a spiritual life, cannot live a life of meditation like this, have no knowledge whatsoever of the higher truths of life, then, though they have done yet some good deeds in this world, they are good persons, very charitable, very philanthropic, very serviceful, have done a lot of social welfare work of public utility, with the virtues which are highly praised in the scriptures, and have accumulated the merits of what are known as ishta and purta, i.e., performing great sacrifices and philanthropic deeds of various types— such good people who have accumulated merit by means of virtue here they do not go along the path of light. Rather, they go along the Southern Path of return. This is called the path of smoke, or dhuma-marga, dakshinapatha, or the Southern movements which is, again, presided over by divinities. From the deity of the smoke there is a rise of the soul to the deity of the night; then to the deity of the dark half of the lunar month; then to the deity of the six months during which the sun moves to the south. Then what happens? It does not go to the realm of that deity which superintends over the year. Especially, this mention is made here, and this is something mystical and peculiar. Why do they not go there? One thing is missed there. This is the departing place of the two paths. For some distance they go together; afterwards they depart, one goes to the North, another goes to the South. The juncture is the deity of the year which is not touched by the soul that goes to the southern regions.

From there, the soul goes to the world of the fathers, not to the sun. Then, from there it goes to the realm of space, akasa; and from there to the moon, Chandra-loka. In Chandra-loka, it is supposed to enjoy the privileges of the gods, yet like a visa-holder, not being a citizen of that region, and so it is subject to return. It is subservient to the gods who are gods by birth. The gods that are gods right from the time of creation are superior to the gods that have become such temporarily on account of the virtuous deeds performed in this life. So, when the meritorious deeds are exhausted, the soul returns. It cannot live there permanently. It is subservient, being a celestial of an inferior category. The soul, here, is not for the citizenship of this world, though it has got all the privileges of enjoyment and living. You can have the same boarding, same lodging, and everything, but no privileges or rights! This is because of the fact that you are temporarily raised to the status of a celestial on account of the good acts that you have performed. But when the momentum of the acts finishes there, then what happens? You are, once again, the poor man that you were; you come back in the same way as you went. And so, even when you go there you are not on par with the gods who were there right from the time of creation. On account of this fact, it is said that the soul there is like a food, as it were, to the gods; it is eaten by them, which means to say, it is subservient to them and they are superior to it. As long as you are permitted to live in the celestial region by the momentum of the good deeds that you performed in this world, so long you live there. Then you come back through the same path you went. You will be hurried back. The soul comes back to the space through which it rose up; then it comes down to the realm of air, with which it gets identified very subtly. Then it comes down to the levels of smoke, the clouds and the rain. And one knows the whole process.

These souls which are to return to the mortal world get identified in a subtle manner by their subtle bodies through these natural phenomena, viz., space, air, cloud, rain and foodstuff, even up to the grains like sesamum and barley, beans, rice and wheat, herbs, plants and trees, etc. It is very difficult to understand how they get mixed up with these things. In a very subtle form, these souls are supposed to get identified with these natural things. And they get into the body of the individual through the foodstuff with which they have been identified. Then the same process of birth takes place. The individual soul has come from the above, after finishing its career of enjoyment due to the performance of good deeds here. The soul gets identified in every manner, in every way characteristically, with the particular level through which it has to pass. It is difficult to get out of this existence, says the Upanishad (Ato vai khalu durnishprapataram). Once it enters into these lower levels of grain, foodstuff, etc., one cannot say what will happen to it afterwards. Perhaps God knows what happens; ordinarily this secret cannot be known. It is a very complicated situation. Where will the soul be driven, in what direction, into the womb of which mother, for what type of experience, no one can say. The way of action and reaction is difficult to understand. The descended soul gets identified with these levels; it becomes one with the father, one with the mother, one with the social life into which it is born. And then it begins to say: "This is my mother; this is my father; this is my house; this is my property." It forgets everything that happened earlier. It really belongs to wider regions; it has many friends in the other realms of being—it is a citizen of a vaster world, but it has forgotten all this like a foolish individual, an idiot of the first water. It begins to identify itself with a little locality, a small house, a village, or even a thatched hut, and says: "This is my property." And it has no connection with anything else. Very pitiable existence indeed, says the Upanishad. What happens then?

People who have done good deeds are born in favourable circumstances. This is the law of karma. The happiness, the freedom and the satisfaction that one experiences in life are due to some good deeds performed earlier, especially unselfish charitable deeds. The more you give, the more also will you receive. This is the law of action and reaction. You cannot get what you have not given. You cannot expect happiness here if you have not given happiness to others in an earlier life. If you are a greedy person, a miser who has grabbed the happiness of others and enjoyed everything for your own self and put others to grief and sorrow—that would be your fate also in this world. You would be a sufferer. You may be a poverty-stricken individual, and you may be a pauper having nothing, as the result of your selfish deeds in the previous lives. You have grabbed things from others, and therefore you are deprived of things in this life. But if you have been charitable, broad-minded, good-hearted and amiable, philanthropic, serviceful, that would be the same experience you will have in this life also. You would be given back the same thing that you have given to others. If you have given joy to others, joy will be given to you here. If you have given sorrow to others, sorrow will be given to you. So, the type of birth you take in this world, and the conditions of your existence here are all determined by what you did in your earlier existences. You may even be born as an animal, says the Upanishad, if the karma is very bad. This is what happens to the individual when it takes birth in a particular world, or in this world. Thus is, therefore, the cycle or the rotation of the wheel of samsara, the going up and coming down in the circle of transmigration. There is only one path moving along which there is no coming back. That is the devayana-marga mentioned above. The other path brings the soul

back.

There is another kind of birth, says the Upanishad, which is not connected either with the Northern Path or the Southern Path. It is the birth of small creatures like insects, such as flies, gnats. They live for a few hours and pass away. In the rainy season you will see moths and small insects rising up from the damp earth and then dying that very day, sometimes even in a few hours. This is another kind of birth. Hard is life, indeed! Their life is so short, of such an insignificant duration that one may say that they are born and then dead. When you are seeing them being born, they are dead also at the same time. So short is the life of these creatures. This is the third way of being born and living, other than the life which we live through the Northern and the Southern Paths. Why is this world not filled up with people, and why is this other world also not filled up by people even if many people die here? The answer is given here that there is a cycle or rotation of people. They go from this realm to that realm, from that realm to this realm, so that no world is completely filled to the brim or overflowing.

“One should get disgusted with this life,” says the Upanishad. You must be having enough of this life. Who wants to live like this, in this manner, where you are subjected to the law over which you have no control and regarding which you have no say whatsoever, where you are always a sufferer, always in a state of liability, and you do not know what will happen to you the next moment. Is this a life worth living? This is not life, but a form of unbelievably torturous mortality. Oh, what a life is of this world!

Ignorance breeds further troubles in the form of likes and dislikes, selfish actions and their consequences which bring about a birth of this kind, and eventually sorrow. In this connection it is said, in conclusion, that those who live a life of spiritual meditation are not affected by this law. This is a solacing conclusion that the Upanishad gives. You are affected by the law when you cannot understand the law. A person who knows what law is cannot be harmed by law. This is the case with any kind of law, whether it is governmental law or the law of electricity or the law of social life or the law of the spirit. It is ignorance of the way in which law works that binds us to the operation of the law. If we are thoroughly conversant with the intricacies of the working of the law, naturally we will abide by that law. And why should we be bound by it or harassed by it, or punished by it? We do not know how the law works. The whole difficulty is here. So, we cannot even abide by it. How can one abide by a law of which one has no knowledge? So, ignorance is the real trouble; every other trouble is subsidiary and an offshoot of it. One who knows this truth of the universe, is free from every sin and trouble.

Now, here, the words “one who knows this” signify something that occurs again and again in the Upanishad. We should repeatedly mention here that “one who knows this” does not mean one who has read the Upanishad, or one who has read it and understood what it says. No, not like that. Here, in the case of the Upanishad, knowledge means ‘life’ itself. It is ‘living’; it is the extent to which this knowledge has become part of one’s life. This is the knowledge that we are speaking of here in the Upanishad. Knowledge is being; this is the central philosophy of the Upanishad. This we cannot forget, when we study the Upanishad. Knowledge is life; knowledge is being, knowledge is existence; knowledge is what you are. So, what you are determines what you shall be in the future. And, if yours is a life of knowledge in the sense mentioned here, if you are an embodiment of this wisdom, if you are scintillating with the brilliance of this

understanding, even here as a part of your own vital existence, if this knowledge is what you yourself are made of, if this knowledge is the very substance of your life, not merely an intellectual information, then you are free from the bondage of action. Then these laws of the world will not act upon you, because these laws are nothing but the expression of knowledge which is the nature of the ultimate Reality, finally. So, to the extent you are identified with the character of Reality, to that extent you are free from the law of karma, or action. Karma is the name we give to the way in which the law of Reality acts upon all particulars or individuals, reacts upon everyone and everything, when one is in a state of ignorance. To the extent of the percentage of the law of which you are ignorant, to that extent you are bound. And to the extent you are aware of it and live it, and are able to abide by it, to that extent you are also free.

So, one who knows these Five Fires is free. It is difficult to know these Fires unless we live a life of meditation. Your whole life should be one of meditation. Perpetually, we must be seeing things in this light only. Our meditation should not mean merely a little act of half-an-hour's closing of the eyes and thinking something ethereal. It is a way of living throughout. When you see a thing, you see only in this way; when you speak, you speak from this point of view; when you think, this is at the background of your thought. So, you cease to be an ordinary human being when you live a life of this Upanishad. You are conditioned by this great knowledge, and it becomes, therefore, a liberator of your soul. Even if you are in the midst of atmospheres which are otherwise not desirable, you shall be free from contamination, says the Upanishad, because no such things as the undesirable exist for such a person. The knower becomes coextensive with the way in which Nature works in all its ways. And everything is Nature working in some way, the desirable as well as the undesirable, as we may call it. We become commensurate with the way in which Nature works in every way because of the meditation conducted in this manner. Thus, we cannot be harmed by any atmosphere, by anyone or by anything that is around us. On the other hand, perhaps, we may be able to influence positively the atmosphere in which we are living. "One who knows this," reaches the higher realms reached only by meritorious deeds; "ya evam veda"; yea, "One who knows this."

This section, dealing with the Panchagni-Vidya, is partly a description of a lofty type of meditation, so that we may live in this world without being bound by the laws of the world, and after death go to higher regions for the liberation of the spirit, ultimately. Partly, also, it is a light thrown on the fact of the misery of life. There is a side of things apart from the fact that there is a comical aspect involved in every working of Nature. Life is sorrow; life is full of misery. It is full of grief and pain, because one is living in a state of ignorance. The Upanishad on the one hand extols the greatness and the glory of knowledge which leads to the liberation of the soul, and on the other hand tells us how hard the laws will descend upon us and put us to the subjection of their mandate and requirements, and what sorrow will come upon us, what would be the unhappy state to which the soul would be subjected if it is deprived of this knowledge and lives merely a life of utter ignorance.

## **VAISHVANARA, THE UNIVERSAL SELF**

In the course of the study of the Panchagni-Vidya, it has been incidentally pointed out that there is great sorrow in life if it is attended with ignorance. Ignorance is the cause of suffering because it breeds erroneous action towards motives which are wrongly directed. This is the cause for the transmigratory cycle of the soul, which can be put an end to only by proper meditation on the inward structure of the Universe in its essential nature, and not as it appears to the senses in ordinary life. The birth and death of an individual, the process of reincarnation, the impulsion to action propelled by desires and the compulsion to restrain the consciousness within the four walls of one's own body—all these are aspects of the bondage of the individual. Life is an essence of bondage, a prison-house, as it were, because of a very complicated type of nescience, or ignorance, which has enmeshed the phenomenal existence of the jiva, the individual. There must be some remedy for this state of affairs. Is there not a way of freedom? Are we to suffer only in this manner, subjected to the law of transmigration, conditioned by the law of cause and effect, and having to pass through the ordeal of this life in which no factors there seem to be over which we have either any control or of which we have any knowledge? With a view to expound a doctrine of freedom, or the liberation of the spirit from the bondage of samsara, the Upanishad embarks upon a new subject subsequent to the exposition of the Panchagni-Vidya. The new section will be confined to the elucidation of the renowned meditation known as Vaishvanara-Vidya. In this context we are introduced to an anecdote, or a precedent story.

There were five wise people learned in sacred lore, all great meditators, performers of sacrifices, but who could not come to a conclusion in regard to the final destination of their meditations. These great men are named here. Prachinasala Aupamanyava, Satyayajna Paulushi, Indradyumna Bhallaveya, Jana Sarkarakshya, Budila Asvatarasvi; these are the great men. They were all lofty meditators according to their own techniques, but they had doubts in their minds, because in the course of their meditations, in spite of the fact that they discovered a palpable result of a magnificent nature, there was something lurking in their minds, pointing to a defect in their meditations. And they could not know what was the defect. So, they conferred among themselves: "What is Atman? What is Brahman? What is the difficulty with us? Can you enlighten me?" Each one was questioning the others: "What is the proper course? Is there a possibility of bringing about a harmony among our meditations?" Each one was meditating in a particular manner, and each one was a great person with grand results following from the meditation. In spite of these happy consequences of their meditations, they had different techniques altogether, one not agreeing with the other. And they had a suspicion in their minds, "Why is it that there is no agreement among ourselves? There must be some peculiar point which escapes our notice. We all meditate on the Atman, the highest Reality of things, as the Self of beings, the Supreme Absolute which is Brahman. In spite of this endeavour of ours, there seems to be something irreconcilable among our methods of meditation." And then they conferred among themselves, but could not come to a conclusion.

Then they thought, "Well, in our locality is another great man. Why do we not go to him? Perhaps he knows this secret of the Vaishvanara-Atman. He is Aruni Uddalaka,

the great sage of Upanishad fame. Let us go to him." "Well," they said, "this is a good idea, we shall all go to this great man and put our questions to him if he can enlighten us and tell us what is the difficulty with us, what are the defects in our meditations, and what would be the proper procedure." So, they all went to him in a group, to raise a query on this subject.

But it was a surprise for Uddalaka to see all these great men coming in a mass to his cottage. They were not ordinary persons. So, he thought within himself, "Why are all these people coming? There must be some great point about it. Evidently they want to put some difficult question to me in regard to the highest Reality. Because they themselves are great men, and when they are all coming together to me, it definitely implies that they want to discuss with me the nature of the ultimate Reality, and I may not be able to answer their questions. Why should I risk my presence in the midst of these great men? So, when they come I shall direct them to somebody else, who, perhaps, will be in a position to answer all the questions." Thus he surmised within his mind that there must be some difficulty, and that he might not be able to swallow any poor show put before them if he attempted to answer their questions. So even before they arrived, he had been thinking like this. "They will certainly put questions to me. They are great learned people and renowned for their large sacrifices. I cannot say that I know everything. There are many things which I myself cannot understand. So, why should I put myself in this predicament of answering questions which I may not be able to understand? I shall direct them to another."

The king of that country was a very great soul. He was known as Ashvapati. He was a highly spiritual adept, a great meditator on the Principle called the Vaishvanara. His kingdom was well-administered. He was an ideal ruler. He was very much revered like a parent in the whole kingdom. There was every virtue embodied in his personality. Uddalaka Aruni said: "O great men! I know why you have come. I am also in the same boat as you are. I have also doubts of my own. I do also meditate as you are all doing, and I have also some difficulties in spite of the fact I have been meditating for years together. Why not we all go together to the great emperor Ashvapati who is a master-meditator and a great adept in that supreme technique of meditation called Vaishvanara-Vidya?" They all, including Uddalaka, went to the king's palace and presented themselves before him.

When Brahmanas go to a king, naturally they go for some wealth. That is the usual tradition. The king thought that these people had come expecting some gift. He received them with great respect and honour, made them seated, and, lest they should not accept the gift that he offered to them, he said in his own humble way: "I follow the path of virtue. There is no defect in the administration of my country. I follow the path of simplicity and goodness. And here I am ready to offer you anything that you need by way of gift, if you have come for that." He received each person separately with due honour. He garlanded them, gave them water to drink and enquired how they were, etc. He was good enough to give them a proper lodging in the palace.

The next morning, when he got up and went to his audience, these great men came there, and the first thing that the king spoke was: "There is no thief in my kingdom. There is no miser in my country, no one who is greedy, no one who drinks, no one who does not perform the daily oblations and libations prescribed as duty or sacrifice, no one

uneducated or unlearned, and also no one unrestrained in behaviour. And, I am going to perform a sacrifice. I shall offer you as much gift by way of wealth as I shall be offering to the ritviks, or the performers of the sacrifice. I hope you will be satisfied." All this the king was saying even before these people said anything, under the impression that they had come for wealth, gold, silver, etc. "So, you stay here in my palace for some time until I prepare myself for the performance of this sacrifice, where I shall engage you also."

These great men said: "Well, you are so kind, but there is a different purpose with which we have come to you. We have not come for money; we have not come for wealth. Whatever be the purpose for which a person has come, that he must express. That is his duty. He should not speak something else, nor should he be eager to receive things quite different from that for which he has come. So, our purpose is something else, quite different from what you are speaking of or thinking in your mind." "What is that?" The king was surprised. "What is it that these people are asking," pondered the king.

"We have heard that you are in possession of a great knowledge, the knowledge of the Supreme Being, about which we have great doubts and concerning which we have not come to any conclusion among ourselves. We have come as students begging for this knowledge that you possess, the wisdom-meditation on the Vaishvanara-Atman, which we do not know. This is the purpose for which we have come—not for wealth, not for money, nor for gifts."

Naturally, the king was taken aback that this should be the purpose for which they had come. Anyhow, he seems to have been a very generous-hearted person. He said: "You may come tomorrow morning and see me."

The seekers were very great people, perhaps elder in age to the king himself, not ordinary persons, but they humbled themselves before this mighty knowledge which the king possessed; and approached the king with offerings of samit (sacred firewood) according to ancient tradition, the offering with which students used to approach the preceptor. They did not regard themselves as Brahmanas or panditas superior to the Kshatriyas. They went as students of higher knowledge to the great master that the king was.

Now, the king made a special exception to the rule in the case of these great people. Generally, knowledge is not imparted like that, so suddenly. It is not that someone comes today and receives initiation tomorrow. There is a great tradition of discipline. Sometimes it is imposed upon the students for years together. But, here, an exception to the rule was made by the king in the light of the fact that these students were not ordinary men. They were well-prepared already; they were Brahmanas, great meditators, religious people, and entirely devoted to spiritual life. They were not ordinary, raw brahmacharins approaching a Guru for knowledge. So, the king did not impose this discipline of staying with the Guru for a long time, serving him, etc. He simply accepted them as students at once, merely on their declaring themselves as students: "We have come as students." "Well, I accept you as students." Without any kind of formality of discipline and the like, he spoke to them directly.

## **THE HEAVEN AS THE HEAD OF THE UNIVERSAL SELF**

The king questioned them one by one, "What is it that you are meditating upon already?"

Why is it that you are in difficulty?” Now, each one was asked this question. The first question to be put was to the first among them. “Aupamanyava, which Atman are you meditating upon? You are certainly meditating on the Atman. It is a great surprise. How is it that everyone is meditating on the Atman and, yet, one differs from the other in the technique? What is the sort of Atman, or the kind of Atman that you are thinking of in your mind?” “I meditate on Heaven as the Supreme Being, Your Highness. That is the symbol I take for fixing my attention of consciousness. I consider the highest region of Heaven as the final symbol for my meditation. I regard it as the Absolute. I do not think anything else in my mind. I exclusively devote my attention to it, because I regard it as the All. Therefore, I consider it as the Atman. So, this is how I meditate. But I have no peace of mind. There is something wrong with this technique, and for that purpose I have come to you.”

The king replied: “You are a very honest student of meditation, no doubt, and you have been reverentially pursuing this technique of meditation. Heaven is, of course, a part of the great Vaishvanara, the Universal Being, which you are meditating upon. Inasmuch as what you are meditating upon is part of the Supreme Reality, great benefits are being showered upon you as a result of this meditation. You have abundance of wealth in your house. You perform large sacrifices without end, and you have no difficulty in receiving guests and feeding them, etc. You press the soma juice in your house daily, which means to say, you perform yajna, sacrifice every day. This is the result of your meditation. You have plenty of food in your house; there is no lack of it. You see everything delightful everywhere. You are a happy person. Whoever else also meditates like this, as you are doing, will receive the same benefits. He will be well-renowned, he will have plenty of every kind, he will be a very happy and amiable person, and he will be friendly with all people. There will be nothing lacking in his house. He will be spiritually resplendent. This is what will happen to any person who meditates like this, as you are doing, on the Vaishvanara-Atman. And this is your case also. But, there is a great mistake in your meditation. This is only a part of the whole Reality. This is the head, as it were, of Reality, the topmost region of the Vaishvanara, the crown, the head of the Universal Being, as it were, and it is this on which you are meditating. Inasmuch as you have mistaken a part for the whole, you have considered the head for the whole body, because you have made this mistake in your meditation, your head would have fallen, one day or the other; some great calamity would have befallen you if you had not come to me now, at the proper time, for rectification.” It is like a good doctor saying, “It is a good thing that you have come to me. This is a very advanced case.” Likewise, the king said, “It is a good thing you came to me at the proper time; otherwise some catastrophe would have come upon you due to this error in your meditation. You have mistaken the head for the whole body. Well, let it be. Now, be quiet.”

## **THE SUN AS THE EYE OF THE UNIVERSAL SELF**

Now, the king puts another question to the other sage: “Satyayajna Paulushi, what is the Atman that you are meditating upon?” “I meditate on the Sun, Your Highness, the most brilliant object conceivable. It is the Supreme Being for me. I regard the Sun, surya, as the symbol of the Absolute. That is the Atman on which I am meditating.” The king said: “Satyayajna, you meditate on the Sun as the Supreme Atman. Well, this is a part of the Vaishvanara’s Body. Because it is a part of this Great Being, and you meditate upon it as

if it is the all, you have in your own life certain characteristics of the Sun. There is brilliance in your outlook; there is plenty in your family; and there is a sort of completeness in your life, as the Sun himself is a complete being in himself. There is material glory in your house, and your mind is satisfied. You have a very happy mind; and you have many other things in your family—gold, silver, servants, rich food, and such other things. All this is the result of your meditation on the repository of the immensity of wealth which is the Sun himself. And, whoever meditates as you are meditating, also will enjoy the same fruits of immensity and magnificence in his life. He will have plenty of food to eat, and plenty of everything. He will be resplendent with the knowledge accruing from this meditation which is brahmavarchas; yes, whoever meditates thus. But the mistake that you are making in your meditation is that the Sun is the eye, as it were, of the cosmic body of Vaishvanara. It is not the whole of Reality. If you had not come to me, you would have become blind due to this error in your meditation, mistaking the eye of the Virat for the whole of Virat.”

### **AIR AS THE BREATH OF THE UNIVERSAL SELF**

Now, the king asks the third person the same question: “Indradyumna Bhallaveya, What is it that you are meditating upon? What is your Atman, regarding which you have difficulties?” “I meditate upon the Cosmic Air that blows, as the all-pervading Reality, Your Highness.” The king said: “Well, so far, so good. As this, the Supreme Being, Vaishvanara, is all-pervading, so is this Air also all-pervading. You have taken this all-pervading Air which moves everywhere as the symbol of Reality. Very good. Due to this meditation on the widespread Air, vayu, which is moving everywhere, in every direction, coming from every side, as the Ultimate Being, tributes and offerings come to you from every side. Respect and honour come to you unasked. Your glory is moving everywhere, as the Air is moving everywhere. Plenty of vehicles you have, lines of chariots follow you. And you are also plentiful in every respect, in food, wealth, etc. So is the glory of everyone who meditates like this.” He repeats the glories of such meditation in the same way as he mentioned to the other persons. “This is a wonderful meditation, but there is a defect in this meditation. Air is only the vital breath, as it were, of the Vaishvanara-Atman. You have mistaken it for the whole. You would have had great trouble if you had not come to me. Your vital air would have left you if you had not come to me as you have rightly done.”

### **SPACE AS THE BODY OF THE UNIVERSAL SELF**

Jana Sarkarakshya, the other great man was questioned: “What is the Atman you are meditating upon?” “I meditate on the all-pervading Space, Your Highness.” This is also a symbol for meditation. Space is all-pervading. When one cannot think of anything that is all-pervading, what else can one think except Space? Space is a good symbol for meditation, indeed. The king said: “Space is extensive in every respect. You meditate upon it as the ultimate Reality, and so you have extensiveness of everything as a consequence of this meditation. You have plenty of everything in your house—wealth and dear ones. You are glory-incarnate at home and in your community. Everything blessed is with you due to this meditation on extensiveness. So is the glory of anyone who thus meditates. But, this is not the correct meditation; there is an error in this

meditation also, because the Space that you are thinking of as the Cosmic Reality, is really the body, as it were, and not the whole, of Vaishvanara. If you had not come to me, what would have happened to you? Some catastrophe, like paralysis of the trunk, or something of that kind, would have befallen you. Your meditation would have failed you completely." All these meditations are wonderful things, but they are also dangerous things. This follows from what the king is telling to these great men.

### **WATER AS THE LOWER BELLY OF THE UNIVERSAL SELF**

Budila Asvatarasvi, the other hero, was questioned: "What is it that you are meditating upon?" "I meditate on Water, Your Highness." There are people who meditate on the ocean as a symbol of Brahman, just as there are people who contemplate Space as such a symbol. "I contemplate Water as symbolic of Reality (the ocean perhaps), as an endless expanse. This is my Atman." The king said: "This meditation is good so far as it goes, on account of which you are endowed with plenty of every kind. Water is the source of foodstuff and wealth and strength. It is the cause of the abundance of foodstuff especially in your house. And so is the case with anyone who thus meditates. But, this is also a defective form of meditation because it is the lower belly, as it were, of the cosmic Vaishvanara. It is just the watery element of the whole cosmic embodiment. It is one of the constituents of the Universal body; it is not the entire structure in its totality. If you had not come to me, you would have had a physical illness of this part of the body which is abundant with water. Your body would have failed or some such thing would have taken place, and you would have perished as a consequence of this defective meditation."

### **THE EARTH AS THE FEET OF THE UNIVERSAL SELF**

Then the king puts the question to Uddalaka Aruni himself: "What is it that you are meditating upon?" Uddalaka said: "I meditate upon the Earth in its comprehensiveness as Reality, Your Highness." The king said: "This is all right, and so you have great virtue following from this meditation. You enjoy and see what is dear. As the Earth is the foundation of all things, you are well-founded in life. And so shall be anyone who meditates as you do. But, the Earth is only the footstool of the Vaishvanara-Atman, as it were. The Earth is like the feet of the Universal Self. It is the feet of the Atman because it is the lowest degree among the manifestations of Reality. If you had not come to me, something untoward would have happened to your feet. They would have withered away. Then you would have gone on crutches."

## **THE SELF AS THE UNIVERSAL WHOLE**

This is what the king said in answer to the representations made by all the six great men. "My dear friends," spoke the king: "All of you are very sincere in your meditations, and honest, indeed. Because of your honesty and sincerity and tenacity in meditation, you enjoy plenty of everything in your houses and in your families and within yourselves. But you do not know that you have committed errors in your meditations. Ultimately, some trouble would have come to you as a consequence. It is good that you all came to me. In the beginning, everything looks all right even in an erroneous meditation, but afterwards some difficulty arises which cannot be rectified even by the best of medicines. So, what is it that we have to now? We have understood where we stand. Well, you have all made two mistakes, to put the whole thing precisely. You have considered some parts of the whole as the whole. You have mistaken the finite for the Infinite. Nothing that you are thinking in your minds can be the whole, because the mind is accustomed to think only finite objects. Whatever be our concept of expanse in regard to the particular object on which you are meditating, it is still finite. This is one error. The other mistake that you are making that you think of the Atman as an object, as if it is outside. You say, it is Space, it is Water, it is the Sun, it is the Earth, and so on. Well, it is all very beautiful. But, it is 'outside you'! How can non-Atman be the Atman?"

"And what do you mean by the Atman? How can the Atman be outside you? Your own Self is external to you? What a concept! You have really committed a blunder in conceiving your own Self as a non-Self. The Self cannot be outside itself; it cannot be an object of itself; it cannot think itself; meditate upon itself as another; it cannot be other than itself. The first point, then, is that a finite thing cannot be regarded as the Infinite. The other thing is that an external thing cannot be regarded as the Self. You have committed both these mistakes. You are having the knowledge of this Great Being, little by little, part by part, as in the story of the blind men and the elephant. Each blind man was touching a part of the elephant's body and regarding it as something specific. The man never knew for a moment that he was touching a part of the elephant. Likewise, you are not aware of the fact that what you think as the Absolute is, in fact, relative. What you think as the All, is only a part. Therefore, you are well-to-do people, indeed, on account of the meditations, but there is also the defect that I have pointed out. One can have glory in this world, have renown, have plenty, and look all right in the eyes of people, even if there is a fundamental defect spiritually. And that cannot be known by mere observation from outside.

"There is no need to pour water and put manure on every leaf of the tree if you want to tend a tree. You have to water the root, that is sufficient. If you want to take care of a huge tree, what do you do? Do you go to the top of the tree and count every leaf and sprinkle manure over it, one by one, water every leaf, every flower, every fruit? No. You concern yourself with the root of the tree, and then you see there is an efflorescence of every part of the tree, automatically. Whatever you have obtained through these discrete forms of meditation, you can obtain at one stroke by a total meditation, which is the meditation on the Vaishvanara-Atman. The root of the Reality is missed by your consciousness. Whoever can conceive in his mind the true Vaishvanara as that which extends from the earth to the heavens, from the heavens to the earth, from the topmost

level of manifestation down to the lowest level, missing no link whatsoever, visualises the Whole. If you can see through your mind this extensiveness of manifestation from the highest to the lowest, at once, without missing any part, which means to say, if you can be comprehensive in a universal way in your envisagement of the form of Reality, and if it can be the Atman, the Self at the same time, then what is it that you lack? This is the Vaishvanara-Atman, the All-Self. Whoever can meditate in this manner becomes the Self of every being all at once. One becomes the Self of all the worlds; he becomes the Self of anything that can be anywhere, and he becomes the possessor of the glory of anything that exists anywhere, in any realm, in any form, under any circumstance. This is the secret I let out to you, if you can contemplate in this manner. This is a Herculean feat, because the mind cannot think like this. If you slip from the grasp of your mind when you think like this, you will find that the mind falls back upon its old groove of thinking in terms of particulars and externalisation of objects. Who can contemplate the object as non-externalised? Not any human being. But this is what you are supposed to do. All these parts which you have mentioned are various limbs of the Cosmic Body. You have to bring them together and conceive the Whole, at once, in your consciousness. Do not say, 'This is the sun, this is space, this is water,' and all that. Do not think like this. Let all these be thought together, immediately, in their comprehensiveness, without missing any one whatsoever, by feeling oneness with Earth, Water, Sun, Air, Space, Heaven, and everything."

Now, having described the cosmic aspect of the Vaishvanara-Atman as the Supreme Object of meditation, the Upanishad introduces us to an immediate consequence that follows from such meditation. The meditator cannot stand outside this Great Object of meditation. This is very clear. Because of the comprehensiveness of the Object, the Universality of the Vaishvanara-Atman, the meditator has already undergone a transmutation of personality, entered into the bosom of Reality. And whatever one does, then, becomes an action of the Vaishvanara-Atman. This is a very serious consequence that follows from an intense meditation in this manner. Whatever I think becomes the Thought of the Vaishvanara-Atman. Whatever I speak becomes an expression of the Vaishvanara-Atman, and whatever I do becomes Its action. And, then, my actions become a Cosmic Sacrifice, just as the gods thought creation a Universal Sacrifice, as we have it in the Purusha-Sukta. One cannot make a distinction between God's thought and a human being's thought when one meditates in this way. What God thinks and man thinks will then be identical. Thus, the daily activity proceeding from the personality of an individual, in the case of a meditator in the manner mentioned, would be a Cosmic Sacrifice. This is called Prana-agnihotra, the sacred oblation at the Universal Altar of the Fire of the Absolute.

The fact of the organic connection of the individual with the Vaishvanara implies that there are cosmical aspects operating even in the individual, just as everything that is in the ocean is also in the wave, notwithstanding the difference between the crest called the wave and the body which is the ocean. The essential harmony between the individual and the Universal becomes patent when a spiritual investigation is conducted into the essence of the structure of both the individual and the cosmic. So, the meditation by the individual on the cosmic, or the Vaishvanara, means the establishment of an inner coordination and the effectuation of the qualitative non-difference between the meditating principle and the object that is meditated upon. If every function that is

going on in the individual is ultimately inseparable from the nature and operation of the Universal, meditation is just the awareness of this fact. There is nothing more to be done in meditation than to raise the consciousness to the fact of this inseparability between cosmic functions and individual functions. Such simple acts as eating, drinking, breathing and working become universally significant. They are not private deeds or individual affairs as they are taken to be. The Upanishad, here, takes us above the ordinary concept of human action and the nature of the individual and abolishes the absurd notion that we entertain usually, namely, that there are such things as individuals, ultimately. The meditation that is prescribed here is of various kinds. One of the specific methods mentioned is that there should be an invocation of universal significance, even during the performance of individual actions.

The specific action that is taken up for discussion here is, what is called in the language of the sacred lore, Prana-agnihotra, or the sacrificial offering to the Universal Fire. The food that we take every day is a holy oblation to the All-pervading Vital Fire. This meditation is Prana-agnihotra. Agnihotra is the consecrated offering into the sacred Fire. Ritualistically or exoterically conceived, this means the daily performance of the yajna, or sacrifice, by a householder. The Upanishad makes out that this agnihotra is perpetually taking place in our own bodies, of which we have to be conscious in our meditation. The external sacrifice ceases to be external any more. Viewing everything from the point of view of the All-inclusive Vaishvanara, the externality of an action ceases forever. There is no such thing as external action, because everything that we regard as external is internal to the Vaishvanara. Hence, even the outward sacrifice, the speech that we utter and the work that we do, etc., outwardly, in the world, cease to be a personal or social affair. They become a spiritual worship, a divine contemplation. The three fires which the householders exoterically worship in their houses are called garhapatya, anvaharyapachana and ahavaniya. These three sacrifices are internally constituted in the individual, in the act of this meditation. The Upanishad tells us that we have to perform a contemplative sacrifice construing the external ritual as an activity that is going on within ourselves. These fires are within the body of the Virat, the Vaishvanara Himself. And, inasmuch as we are inseparable from Vaishvanara, these fires are inside our own Self. So, when we offer food into the mouth, it is not an animal act that we are performing for the satisfaction of the bodily organism, but an ultimate impulse that is arising from the Universal Reality. Hunger is not merely a function of the stomach. It is not the alimentary canal functioning in the body merely. It is something wider than what we are, indicating that we are related to something vaster than what we seem to be from our points of view. In religious language, in scriptural parlance, Vaishvanara is the word used to describe the Ultimate Reality, and also for the fire that digests food. The internal fire that is responsible for the conversion of food into chyle etc., that which is responsible for the absorption of the elements of diet into our system, this inward heat is Vaishvanara. It is not the physical body alone that is working in digestion, because the physical body is visible even in a corpse but there is no such heat there. What has happened to the heat? That heat is not the heat of the physical fire; it is not the heat of any conglomeration of chemical elements in the body. The Upanishad identifies this heat, which is the living force in us, with the Ultimate Reality, called here Vaishvanara, or the Universal Fire, which consumes everything. The five pranas are the external agents of the performance of any action. They are the ambassadors, as it were, of the Ultimate Being. The food that we eat is digested by the action of the pranas. We

have five pranas, and so, when taking food, religious people utter mantras saying, “This is to the prana, this is to the apana,” etc. This is not merely a ritual unconsciously performed as a routine, but a religious worship. It is a meditation, and we are supposed to be conscious of what we are doing when we consume food. The process of Prana-agnihotra mentioned here is the act of introducing a universal significance into what are apparently individual functions.

The three fires are inside the Universal Being, Vaishvanara. And, again, to repeat, this threefold fire is in us as inseparable from the Vaishvanara. So, when we take a morsel of food what are we to contemplate?

## **PRANA**

The five pranas are like the five tongues of a flaming fire. It is one single force that is working as five different vital energies. So, each tongue of the fire, each flame, is satisfied by the offering of a particular oblation, as it is done in the external sacrifice. Pranaya svaha, is the invocation, which means to say, “May the prana be satisfied.” This is to be inwardly recited while eating the first morsel. Here, it is not merely an utterance that is emphasised, but an inward feeling in the real meditation. As every river is connected to the ocean, every prana is connected to the Cosmic Force. Thus, through the prana, we touch the cosmic border and invoke the Universal Being. In this meditation there is an attempt at universal satisfaction, and not merely some individual’s pleasure, in the acts of eating, drinking, etc. When the prana is satisfied, the Upanishad says, due to an inward connection, the eyes are satisfied. We feel happy. When we eat food and have a square meal, we feel a satisfaction opening up from the eyes. When the prana is satisfied, the eyes are satisfied. When the eyes are satisfied, the Sun is satisfied, because he is the deity of the eyes. When the Sun is satisfied, the whole atmosphere is satisfied, because he is the presiding deity of the entire atmosphere. If the atmosphere is satisfied, whatever is the support of both the atmosphere and the Sun, is also satisfied, i.e., heaven itself is satisfied, even with the little act of taking food that we perform in a meditative fashion. Then what happens? Then, immediately, there is a reaction produced from the sources which we touch by this act of meditation. The reaction comes in the form of a vibration of happiness, the glow, as it were, from the different quarters of heaven. And, if the quarters of heaven are happy, the winds are happy, the Sun is happy, the whole atmosphere is happy, we are happy, with wealth, lustre, glory, plenty and power, because Vaishvanara is satisfied.

## **VYANA**

So is the case with every other morsel that we eat. The second morsel that we take in should be for the satisfaction of vyana, the other aspect of energy: Vyanaya svaha, “May vyana, the all-pervading force within me be satisfied,” vyana which is responsible for the movement of the blood-stream in the canals, etc. Thus, should one meditate with the next morsel of food. There are internal connections mentioned here, again, mystically. The ears are satisfied when the vyana is satisfied. If the ears are satisfied, everything that is around us in the form of the directions from which sounds come and impinge upon the ears is also satisfied, right up to the moon. Then, as a result, the whole atmosphere and all the directions are satisfied, and then all the causes thereof are also

satisfied at once. When the causes are satisfied, the meditator is filled with plenty, prosperity, power and glory, because Vaishvanara is satisfied.

### **APANANA**

Then the third morsel should be taken for the satisfaction of the apana: Apanaya svaha. When the apana is satisfied, speech is satisfied. When speech is satisfied, fire is satisfied, which is the superintending principle over speech. When fire is satisfied, that which is the source of fire, from which fire arises, the very earth is satisfied. If the earth is satisfied, we are also automatically satisfied. The meditator is filled with plenty and glory, because Vaishvanara is satisfied.

### **SAMANA**

The fourth offering, or the morsel, that we take, should be for the satisfaction of samana: Samanaya svaha. When the samana is satisfied, the mind is satisfied. The samana is the central operating force, and that immediately acts upon the mind. When the mind is satisfied, everything that is connected with the mind, the rain-god and the heavens, are satisfied. When the rain-god is satisfied, the lightnings are also satisfied, higher than the realm of the fall of rain. When the lightnings are satisfied, all things that are the support of all these phenomena are satisfied. Then the meditator is also satisfied and filled with power, plenty and glory, because Vaishvanara is satisfied.

### **UDANA**

Then, the fifth offering is for the satisfaction of udana: Udanaya svaha. When udana is satisfied, the tactile sense is satisfied. Thereby, its deity, Air, is satisfied. When Air is satisfied, its abode, Sky (Space) is satisfied. When this satisfaction is effected, everything in Air and Space also is satisfied. Then the meditator, with plenty of everything, is satisfied, because Vaishvanara is satisfied. Then nothing remains unsatisfied, because everything is comprehended here.

Thus, the Upanishad point of view is that a rightly conducted human activity, such as the one in the form of the intake of food, with a meditation on the universal implication of one's existence, will touch the corners of creation. And, the satisfaction of the individual, the performer of meditation of this kind, the performer of the Vaishvanara-Agnihotra-Vidya, shall be for the blessedness of all mankind, nay, the whole creation. That is why there is the tradition that the satisfaction that we bring to a person endowed with such knowledge is inclusive of the other lower satisfactions. This is the tradition behind the feeding of learned people, spiritual adepts, etc.; because they are not regarded as human beings in the ordinary sense. They are not consuming food merely for the satisfaction of their bodies. There is a satisfaction implied of other aspects, also, with which they are internally connected due to their knowledge, due to their life, due to their meditation. The man of meditation in this way thinks all things at one stroke of the effort of consciousness. Hence, everything is satisfied by his actions. Thus, there is this technique of Prana-agnihotra prescribed in this Upanishad in the case of a person who is a meditator on the Vaishvanara. The Prana-agnihotra is a religious performance of the one who practices the Vaishvanara-Vidya, one who meditates on the Cosmic Being.

## **THE NEED FOR KNOWLEDGE IS STRESSED**

There are people who perform sacrifices without this knowledge of the Vaishvanara. There are people who take food without knowing this spiritual implication of agnihotra. They are pouring oblations on ashes who perform the agnihotra sacrifice without the knowledge of its universal import. Where knowledge is absent, action cannot produce any beneficial result. So, there is no use merely performing havanas, yajnas, etc. without this vital knowledge. They will not produce the expected result. And so is the case with any kind of selfish action originating from one's own personality for the satisfaction of oneself alone. This will lead to bondage, because ignorance of one's inward connection with higher sources is a danger to oneself, and they will react upon the individual for this ignorance. This reaction is called karma, the reaction of action. What binds us in the form of apurvu, or karma, is the reaction produced by the universal, of which we are ignorant and which we ignore in our daily activities, as if it does not exist at all.

But if one performs any sacrifice, such as the agnihotra mentioned, with this knowledge, then, whatever one does is a universal action. It is for the good of everyone. And everyone's action becomes that person's action, just as the movement of any wave anywhere in the ocean is the ocean itself working. It is not somebody else working somewhere, hundreds of miles away. Anyone's action becomes my action; anyone's experience is my experience; and anyone's benefit is my benefit, if I am commensurate in inward being with the being of other people. This is the ultimate consequence of meditation on the Vaishvanara. That person, who thus meditates, ceases to be an individual for all practical purposes. Though he may appear to be an individual for a mere onlooker, inwardly he is not a person. And it is so because his feelings, his thoughts, his volitions, his consciousness—all these are tuned up to Reality of a transcendental nature, which are merely personal forms from the point of view for an outward look, but a universal inwardness from his own point of view. Therefore, his actions are the actions of everyone. They are universal performances. Whatever he does is offered to all the worlds, all persons, all beings, simultaneously.

All our sins are burnt and get reduced to ashes in a second, even as a tiny dry twig, or a piece of cotton, gets burnt when it is thrown into a flaming fire, if this meditation is practised. All the sins of the past, of lives and lives, get burnt, even as mountains of straw can be burnt by the striking of a single matchstick. Though it is a mountain, it is after all dry straw. It cannot stand the fire of the powers generated in this manner, because no action is an individual action now. How can there be sin when there is neither virtue nor the other side of it? No merit or demerit accrues from the action of such a person, no consequences follow, no result is evoked by these actions. The result of an action is the reaction set up by the action. And reactions are set up on account of nonconformity with the operation of supernatural laws. But, in this case, here, such nonconformity does not arise. One is always in conformity with the existence of every force in the world. No reactions are set up by any of his performance; and, so, there is no merit or demerit in his case, no sin exists for him, no virtue also exists in the case of this person who is a constant meditator on the Vaishvanara, a performer of Prana-agnihotra, in this manner. He may throw a little piece of bread to a dog, and it shall be offered to the Universal Reality at once, when he has this consciousness of the Vaishvanara in him. He may throw a little remnant of his food to an outcaste, and it shall be offered into the

Universal Reality forthwith. He may offer anything, even to the lowest of beings, it shall be consumed immediately by the Universal Reality, because of his identification with the All-Pervading Self, and, consequently, with that being, that person, that dog, that animal, that creature, whatever it is. Whatever he does anywhere is known to the Vaishvanara. Whatever he offers anywhere is offered to the Vaishvanara. He may offer anything to anyone, it will reach the Vaishvanara, because of his Self-identification with That Great Being. In this connection there is this saying, declares the Upanishad: "As hungry children sit round their mother, craving for food, so do all beings eagerly await the performance of the Prana-agnihotra by this sage who is universally conscious and exists as All-Being." Everyone loves such a person; every insect, every cat and dog will show regard to such a one. The whole universe will love him, who is tuned up in this manner, in perpetual meditation with the Vaishvanara. And everyone will be happy if he eats food, because his food is the food of all. His satisfaction is the satisfaction of all. And as is the mother to children, so is this person a sustainer of everybody in the world. His very existence is a blessing, his very being is an action, even as it is the case with God Himself.

Thus does this highly mystical discourse make out that the highest meditation is communion with the Vaishvanara. And if this is to be practiced by anyone, there would be nothing impossible for that person. And if this meditation can be practised effectively, there is nothing else for one to do in this world, because here is the final thing that one would be expected to do in life. This is the last dharma, or duty, on our part; this is the highest service one can perform. It is, thus, that this vidya transcends every other law, rule, or duty in this world. This is the Vaishvanara-Vidya propounded in the Chhandogya Upanishad.

## CONCLUSION

This is the secret of the knowledge of the Universal Being, designated as Vaishvanara. Its simple form of understanding is a transference of human attributes to the Divine Existence, and vice versa. In this meditation, one contemplates the Cosmos as one's body. Just as, for example, when one contemplates one's individual body, one simultaneously becomes conscious of the right eye, the left eye, the right hand, the left hand, the right leg, the left leg, the head, the heart, the stomach, and all the limbs of the body at one and the same time, and one does not regard the different limbs of the body as distinguished from one another in any manner, all limbs being only apparently different, but really connected to a single personality. So, in this meditation, the consciousness is to be transferred to the Universal Being. Instead of one contemplating oneself as the individual body, one contemplates oneself as the Universal Body. Instead of the right eye, there is the sun. Instead of the left eye, there is the moon. Instead of the feet there is the earth. Instead of the head, there is the heaven, and so on. The limbs of the Cosmic Person are identified with the cosmic elements, and vice versa, so that there is nothing in the Cosmos which does not form an organic part of the body of the Virat, or Vaishvanara. When you see the vast world before you, you behold a part of your own body. When you look at the sun, you behold your own eye. When you look above into the heavens, you are seeing your own head. When you see all people moving about, you behold the various parts of your own personality. The vast wind is your breath. All your actions are cosmic movements. Anything that moves, does so on account of your movement. Your breath is the Cosmic Vital Force. Your intelligence is the Cosmic Intelligence. Your existence is Cosmic Existence. Your happiness is Cosmic Bliss.

Creation does not consist merely of the few parts that are mentioned in the Upanishad, as limbs of the Vaishvanara, by way of illustration. There are many other things which may come to our minds when we contemplate. We can start our meditation with any set of forms that may occur to our minds. We may be sitting in our rooms, and the first things that attract our attention may be the objects spread out in the rooms. When we identify these objects with our body, we will find that there are also objects outside these rooms. And, likewise, we can slowly expand our consciousness to the whole earth, and, then, beyond the earth, to the solar and stellar regions, so that we reach as far as our minds can reach. Whatever our mind can think, becomes an object for the mind; and that object, again, should become a part of the meditator's body, cosmically. And, the moment the object that is conceived by the mind is identified with the Cosmic Body, the object ceases to agitate the mind any more, because that object is not any more outside; it becomes a part of the body of the meditator. When an object becomes a part of our own body, it no more annoys us because it is not an object at all. It is a subject. The object has become the Cosmic Subject, in the Vaishvanara meditation.

The vidya has its origin, actually, in the Rig-Veda, in a famous sukta, or hymn, called the Purusha-Sukta. The Purusha-Sukta of the Rig-Veda commences by saying that all the heads, all the eyes, and all the feet that we see in this world are the heads, eyes, and feet of the Virat-Purusha, or the Cosmic Being. With one head, the Virat nods in silence; with another face He smiles; with a third one He frowns; in one form, He sits; in another form, He moves; in one form, He is near; in another form, He is distant. So, all the

forms, whatever they be, and all the movements and actions, processes and relations, become parts of the Cosmic Body, with which the Consciousness should be identified simultaneously. When you think, you think all things at the same time, in all the ten directions, nay, in every way.

The Chhandogya Upanishad concludes this vidya by saying that one who meditates in this manner on the Universal Personality of Oneself as the Vaishvanara, becomes the Source of sustenance for all beings. Just as children sit round their mother, hungry, and asking for food, all beings in creation shall sit round this Person, craving for his blessings; and just as food consumed by this body sustains all the limbs of the body at once, this meditator, if he consumes food, shall immediately communicate his blessings to the whole Cosmos, for his Being is, verily, All-Being.

We may recall to our memory the famous story of Sri Krishna taking a particle of food from the hands of Draupadi, in the Kamyaka forest, when she called to Him for help, and with this little grain that He partook of, the whole universe was filled, and all people were satisfied, because Krishna stood there tuned up with the Universal Virat. So is also the case with any person who is in a position to meditate on the Virat, and assumes the position of the Virat. The whole Universe shall become friendly with this Person; all existence shall ask for sustenance and blessing from this Universal Being. This meditator is no more a human being; he is, veritably, God Himself. The meditator on Vaishvanara is in communion with the universe, with the very Self of all beings, attuned to the Supreme Being.

A question arises here: how could all creation be satisfied if just one person takes food? This is not possible unless there is only one Self everywhere. If my self and your self and the self of different persons and things are different, one from the other, it is not possible that the satisfaction of one self can be the satisfaction of another self. If there can be a single satisfaction for the whole universe, there should be only one Self in the whole universe, not many selves, 'I', 'you', 'he', etc. Is it true, there is only one Self in the whole universe or are there many selves? How are we to understand this doctrine that there is only a single Self, and whoever is attuned to this single Self is the Self of all? So, whatever that person does is the action of everybody. But, how are we to make out this truth that there is only one Self? To elucidate this point the next chapter is taken up which goes further into the subject of the Vaishvanara Himself, and analyses in detail the constituents of the universe and the individual, expatiates the fact that there cannot be many realities, many subjects, or many selves. There is one Self. Everywhere, wherever you go, whatever you touch is an encounter of yours in respect of a single Reality. Whatever the experience, you are travelling within the body of that single Self. Anything that you do is known to that Self; it has connection with that Self, so that every Self is one's self. Towards this subject the sixth chapter of the Upanishad is carried, and the chapter commences with an anecdote, a story, an occurrence, a description of a conversation between father and son, Uddalaka Aruni and his student, his son, Svetaketu.