



“You Are That”

Chandogya Upanishad

Om! There lived a boy named Svetaketu Aruni. One day his father said to him, “Svetaketu, go live the life of a student of sacred knowledge. There is no one in our family who hasn’t studied the sacred Vedas and remains a Brahmin by family connections alone.”

Having become a pupil by the age of twelve and having studied all the Vedas, Svetaketu returned home at the age of twenty-four, conceited and very proud of his abilities. His father said to him, “Svetaketu, since you are now so conceited and presume yourself learned, did you think to ask for that teaching whereby the not-heard has become heard, the not-thought has become thought, and the not-comprehended has become comprehended?”

“What is that teaching, father?” asked Svetaketu.

“My son, just as by knowing one lump of clay, all that is made of clay can become known, since any difference that arises is merely a matter of speech, while the clay alone is reality. And just as by knowing one piece of gold, all that is made from gold can become known, since any difference that arises is merely a matter of speech, while gold alone is the reality. And just as by knowing any individual thing made of iron, all that is made of iron can become known, since any difference that arises is merely a matter of speech, while the iron alone is reality.”

“Surely those venerable teachers of mine did not know this,” said Svetaketu, “For if they had known this, why would they not have mentioned this to me? Please sir, tell it to me.”

“So be it,” said his father.

“These rivers, my son, flow eastward towards the east and westward towards the west. They go from ocean to ocean. Merging, they become the ocean itself. And those rivers when they merge with the ocean do not know that they are this or that river.

“In the same way, my son, all these creatures, though they have come forth from Being, do not know that they have come forth from Being. Whatever a creature may be here—whether a lion, or a wolf, or a boar, or a worm, or a fly, or a gnat, or a mosquito—that they become.

“That Being is the subtle essence that is the source of this great universe. That is Reality. That is the Self. You are That, Svetaketu.”

“Please give me further instruction, father.”

“So be it, my son,” he replied.

“Bring me a fruit from that banyan tree.”

“Here it is, sir.”

“Break it.”

“It is broken, sir.”

“What do you see there?”

“These extremely small seeds, sir.”

“Break one of them.”

“It is broken, sir.”

“What do you see there?”

“Nothing at all, sir.”

Then his father said to Svetaketu, “That subtle essence which you do not perceive there— from that very essence comes this great banyan tree. Believe me, my son, a subtle essence is the source of this great universe. That is Reality. That is the Self. You are That, Svetaketu.”

“Please give me further instruction, father.”

“So be it, my son,” he replied.

“Place this salt in water and then come see me in the morning.”

Svetaketu did as he was told. His father said to him, “My son, bring me the salt which you placed in the water last night.” Svetaketu looked for it, but could not find it, for of course it was completely dissolved.

“Take a sip of water from the side,” said his father. “How is it?”

“It is salt.”

“Take a sip from the middle,” he said. “How is it?”

“It is salt.”

“Take a sip from that end,” he said. “How is it?”

“It is salt.”

“Throw it away and come to me,” his father said.

Svetaketu did as he was told, saying, “That salt, though unperceived, was there all the time.”

Then his father said to Svetaketu, “In the same way, you do not perceive Being here; but it is indeed here. Believe me, my son, a subtle essence is the source of this great universe. That is Reality. That is the Self. You are That, Svetaketu.”

“Please give me further instruction, father.”

“So be it, my son,” he replied.

Chandogya Upanishad 6.1, 10, 12, 13. Trans. by A.J. Grunthaler.

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