



Chandogya Upanishad

The Story of Svetaketu

I

1. There lived once Svetaketu. To him his father, Uddâlaka, said: “Svetaketu, go to school; for there is none belonging to our race, darling, who, not having studied (the Veda), is, as it were, a Brahmana by birth only.”

2. Having begun his apprenticeship with a teacher when he was twelve years of age, Svetaketu returned to his father, when he was twenty-four, having then studied all the Vedas,—conceited, considering himself well-read, and stern.

3. His father said to him: “Svetaketu, as you are so conceited, considering yourself so well-read, and so stern, my dear, have you ever asked for that instruction by which we hear what cannot be heard, by which we perceive what cannot be perceived, by which we know what cannot be known?”

4. “What is that instruction, Sir?” he asked.

The father replied: “My dear, as by one clod of clay all that is made of clay is known, the difference being only a name, arising from speech, but the truth being that all is clay;

5. “And as, my dear, by one nugget of gold all that is made of gold is known, the difference being only a name, arising from speech, but the truth being that all is gold?

6. “And as, my dear, by one pair of nail-scissors all that is made of iron is known, the difference being only a name, arising from speech, but the truth being that all is iron—thus, my dear, is that instruction.”

7. The son said: “Surely my venerable teachers did not know that. For if they had known it, why should they not have told it me? Do you, Sir, therefore tell me that.”

“Be it so,” said the father.

II

1. “In the beginning, there was that only which is, one only, without a second. Others say, in the beginning there was that only which is not, one only, without a second; and from that which is not, that which is was born.

2. “But how could it be thus, my dear?” the father continued. “How could that which is, be born of that which is not? No, my dear, only that which is, was in the beginning, one only, without a second.

3. “It thought, may I be many, may I grow forth. It sent forth fire. That fire thought, may I be many, may I grow forth. It sent forth water. And therefore whenever anybody anywhere is hot and perspires, water is produced on him from fire alone.

4. “Water thought, may I be many, may I grow forth. It sent forth food. Therefore whenever it rains anywhere, most food is then produced. From water alone is eatable food produced.

III

1. “Of all living things there are indeed three origins only, that which springs from an egg, that which springs from a living being, and that which springs from a germ.

2. “That Being (i. e. that which had produced fire, water, and earth) thought, let me now enter those three beings (fire, water, earth) with this living Self, and let me then reveal names and forms.

3. “Then that Being having said, Let me make each of these three tripartite (so that fire, water, and earth should each have itself for its principal ingredient, besides an admixture of the other two) entered into those three beings with this living self only, and revealed names and forms.

4. “He made each of these tripartite; and how these three beings become each of them tripartite, that learn from me now, my child!”...

VIII

1. Uddalaka said to his son Svetaketu: “Learn from me the true nature of sleep. When a man sleeps here, then, my dear son, he becomes united with the True, he is gone to his own (Self). Therefore they say he sleeps, because he is gone to his own.

2. “As a bird when tied by a string flies first in every direction, and finding no rest anywhere, settles down at last on the very place where it is fastened, exactly in the same manner, my son, that mind (the living Self in the mind), after flying in every direction, and finding no rest anywhere, settles down on breath; for indeed, my son, mind is fastened to breath.

3. “Learn from me, my son, what are hunger and thirst. When a man is thus said to be hungry, water digests what has been eaten by him. Therefore as they speak of a cow-leader, a horse-leader, a man-leader, so they call water (which digests food and causes hunger) food-leader. Thus by food digested, my son, know the body to be brought forth, for this body could not be without a root cause.

4. “And where could its root be except in food? And in the same manner, my son, as

food too is an offshoot, seek after its root, viz. water. And as water too is an offshoot, seek after its root, viz. fire. And as fire too is an offshoot, seek after its root, viz. the True. Yes, all these creatures, my son, have their root in the True, they dwell in the True, they rest in the True.

5. “When a man is thus said to be thirsty, fire carries away what has been drunk by him. Therefore as they speak of a cow-leader, of a horse-leader, of a man-leader, so they call fire a water-leader. Thus by water digested, my son, know the body to be brought forth: this body) could not be without a root cause.

6. “And where could its root be except in water? As water is an offshoot, seek after its root, viz. fire. As fire is an offshoot, seek after its root, viz. the True. Yes, all these creatures, O son, have their root in the True, they dwell in the True, they rest in the True. And how these three beings, fire, water, earth, O son, when they reach man, become each of them tripartite....When a man departs from hence, his speech is merged in his mind, his mind in his breath, his breath in heat, heat in the Highest Being.

7. “Now that which is that subtle essence (the root of all), in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self,

“Please, Sir, inform me still more,” said the son.

“Be it so, my child,” the father replied.

IX

1. “As the bees, my son, make honey by collecting the juices of distant trees, and reduce the juice into one form,

2. “And as these juices have no discrimination, so that they might say, I am the juice of this tree or that, in the same manner, my son, all these creatures, when they have become merged in the True (either in deep sleep or in death), know not that they are merged in the True.

3. “Whatever these creatures are here, whether a lion, or a wolf, or a boar, or a worm, or a midge, or a gnat, or a mosquito, that they become again and again.

4. “Now that which is that subtle essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and you, O Svetaketu, are that.”

“Please, Sir, inform me still more,” said the son.

“Be it so, my child,” the father replied.

X

1. “These rivers, my son, run, the eastern toward the east, the western toward the west. They go from sea to sea. They become indeed sea. And as those rivers, when they are in the sea, do not know, I am this or that river,

2. “In the same manner, my son, all these creatures, when they have come back from the True, know not that they have come back from the True. Whatever these

creatures are here, whether a lion, or a wolf, or a boar, or a worm, or a midge, or a gnat, or a mosquito, that they become again and again.

3. "That which is that subtle essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and you, O Svetaketu, are that."

"Please, Sir, inform me still more," said the son.

"Be it so, my child," the father replied.

XI

1. "If someone were to strike at the root of this large tree here, it would bleed, but live. If he were to strike at its stem, it would bleed, but live. If he were to strike at its top, it would bleed, but live. Pervaded by the living Self that tree stands firm, drinking in its nourishment and rejoicing;

2. "But if the life (the living Self) leaves one of its branches, that branch withers; if it leaves a second, that branch withers; if it leaves a third, that branch withers. If it leaves the whole tree, the whole tree withers. In exactly the same manner, my son, know this." Thus he spoke:

3. "This body indeed withers and dies when the living Self has left it; the living Self dies not. That which is that subtle essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and you, O Svetaketu, are that."

"Please, Sir, inform me still more," said the son.

"Be it so, my child," the father replied.

XII

1. "Fetch me from thence a fruit of the Nyagrodha tree."

"Here is one, Sir."

"Break it."

"It is broken, Sir."

"What do you see there?"

"These seeds, almost infinitesimal."

"Break one of them."

"It is broken, Sir."

"What do you see there?"

"Not anything, Sir."

2. The father said: "My son, that subtle essence which you do not perceive there, of that very essence this great Nyagrodha tree exists.

3. "Believe it, my son. That which is the subtle essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and you, O Svetaketu, are that."

"Please, Sir, inform me still more," said the son.

"Be it so, my child," the father replied.

XIII

1. “Place this salt in water, and then wait on me in the morning.” The son did as he was commanded. The father said to him: “Bring me the salt, which you placed in the water last night.” The son having looked for it, found it not, for, of course, it was melted.

2. The father said: “Taste it from the surface of the water. How is it?”

The son replied: “It is salt.”

“Taste it from the middle. How is it?”

The son replied: “It is salt.”

“Taste it from the bottom. How is it?”

The son replied “It is salt.”

The father said, “Throw it away and then wait for me.”

He did so, but salt exists for ever.

Then the father said: “Here also, in this body, forsooth, you do not perceive the True, my son; but there indeed it is.

3. “That which is the subtle essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and you, O Svetaketu, are that.”

“Please, Sir, inform me still more,” said the son.

“Be it so, my child,” the father replied.

XIV

1. “As one might lead a person with his eyes covered away from the Gandharas, and leave him then in a place where there are no human beings; and as that person would turn towards the east, or the north, or the west, and shout, ‘I have been brought here with my eyes covered, I have been left here with my eyes covered.’

2. “And as thereupon someone might loose his bandage and say to him, ‘Go in that direction, it is Gandhara, go in that direction;’ and as thereupon, having been informed and being able to judge for himself, he would by asking his way from village to village arrive at last at Gandhara—in exactly the same manner does a man, who meets with a teacher to inform him, obtain the true knowledge. For him there is only delay so long as he is not delivered from the body; then he will be perfect.

3. “That which is the subtle essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and you, O Svetaketu, are that.”

“Please, Sir, inform me still more,” said the son.

“Be it so, my child,” the father replied.

XV

1. “If a man is ill, his relatives assemble round him and ask: ‘Do you know me? Do

you know me?’ Now as long as his speech is not merged in his mind, his mind in breath, breath in heat, heat in the Highest Being, he knows them.

2. “But when his speech is merged in his mind, his mind in breath, breath in heat (fire), heat in the Highest Being, then he knows them not.

“That which is the subtile essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and you, O Svetaketu, are that.”

“Please, Sir, inform me still more,” said the son.

“Be it so, my child,” the father replied.

XVI

1. “My child, they bring a man hither whom they have taken by the hand, and they say: ‘He has taken something, he has committed a theft.’ When he denies, they say, ‘Heat the hatchet for him.’ If he committed the theft, then he makes himself to be what he is not. Then the false-minded, having covered his true Self by a falsehood, grasps the heated hatchet—he is burnt, and he is killed.

2. “But if he did not commit the theft, then he makes himself to be what he is. Then the true-minded, having covered his true Self by truth, grasps the heated hatchet—he is not burnt, and he is delivered.

“As that truthful man is not burnt, thus has all that exists its self in That. It is the True. It is the Self, and you, O Svetaketu, are that.”

“Chandogya Upanishad.” *Sacred Books of the East*. Volume 1. Trans. Max Muller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1881.

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