

Being and Wellbeing In Upanishadic Literature

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Besides the intricate metaphysical theories about self, classical Indian thinking focuses on the nature, possibility and relationship of our being with the inter-subjective world, and spiritual meaning of 'wellbeing'.

The distinct feature of the philosophical traditions of Indian thinking is its spiritual openness, by which I mean, not just a liberal philosophy, but the facility to integrate new experience and new understanding into an evolving scheme of ideas all leading and pointing to self-exploration. The ideal of spiritual living is given foremost importance. It is not to say that moral and epistemological theories, ethical guidelines and practices are less important in these traditions. But it is to suggest that all such theories and discussions are addressed from a spiritual platform where a discussion on the nature of wellbeing, the world of experiences and the relationship between them becomes the final goal of philosophical pursuit.

There are four major aspects of 'wellbeing' such as (i) unconditional love and non-dual, non-hierarchical experience, (ii) fearlessness and inner stability due to self-knowledge, (iii) the discipline of mind and integrated, harmonious living, and, (iv) empathy, and ability to communicate, discussed in diverse fashions, in and through the Upanishadic literature. Through a variety of patterns woven by the dialogue partners, object of inquiry, method of inquiry, and even guidelines for inquiry, what is presented side by side is an unavoidable connection between being and wellbeing, a total response to the nature both inside and outside.

This paper attempts to trace the concept of being and wellbeing in the Upanishadic and pre-Upanishadic period by an analysis of the Samhitas, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and the Upanishads.

Saṁvāda-transforming dialogues

The teacher-pupil relationship has a significant place in ancient and classical Indian philosophy from the point of view of pedagogy, character building, psychotherapy, and mainly in setting spiritual standards for the processes devised for formulating concepts and ideas, and building theories. Hence primarily the dialogue, Saṁvāda, is meant to lead to transforming experiences, in the process of which attempts are made jointly by the taught and the teacher to:

- (i) ascertain what is true knowledge,
- (ii) to understand new ideas, and,
- (iii) to understand the nature of the inquirer herself.

The third feature of Saṁvāda underlies the central concern of Indian thinking which also implies the method of defining, imparting and discovering a value for knowledge relating to the psyche of the person who does the teaching and the one who is taught. Through the structure and specificity of Indian metaphysics and epistemology is built a facility to develop a pedagogy fostering an integral development of not only the student but also the teacher. This is interesting because the hierarchy of teacher as the giver and the student as the receiver is often checked by the practice of teaching which adopts two methods which cannot be classified under monologic transference. The practice of dialoguing—Saṁvāda—and maintaining two distinct styles of argumentation while presenting a position—*purvapaksa* *uttarapaksa*—makes the Indian tradition a living one. These two practices also consider the cognitive and emotive development of the people involved while indicating an interactive socio-cultural context.

Saṁvāda plays a central role in understanding Indian philosophy as well as Indian psychology. Saṁvāda has references not only to logical and epistemological methods but also to states of mind which are important in the discussion about the primal nature of

self. Hence, the discussions on metaphysical and ontological issues are always interrelated to understanding ethical, axiological, aesthetic and spiritual issues. There is a constant attempt to reconcile and integrate different experiences, and the existence of contradictions so as to generate worldviews based on an understanding of life with answers for fundamental questions about self-identity, nature of world, creation, purpose of life, nature of knowledge, value systems etc.

The pre-Upanishadic literature initiates the first expression of dialogue in the form of prayers and hymns. As we come to the Upanishadic literature, Saṁvāda takes a distinct shape, with dialogues between the old sage and the young student, father and son, sage and king, sage and god, death and young boy, husband and wife, to list a few instances. The nature of Saṁvāda also takes different forms such as formal debate, argumentation, instruction, loving sharing and discussion.

Apart from the content of the dialogue, the process of dialogue plays an important role in contributing to the wellbeing of the partners involved. It gives total and one-time attention to how world views are formed, how mental and physical discipline are significant to conceive an idea, how way of living is connected with the self-identity of the inquirer.

Being and consciousness in the pre-Upanishadic literature

Beyond the relative experiences but revealing through each and every experience is the one unifying principle of consciousness, which is the experienter's Self. This is the epitome of the teaching conveyed by the Vedic sages and the Upanishadic seers through a vast corpus of sacred literature. The phenomenon of a continuing identity in all experiences, holding all experiences together in different states, the mind-body relationship, the nature of the individual, his relationship with the world etc. have always been subjects demanding a deep probe. In this

context the Upanishadic Rishi puts forth the theory of encompassing consciousness and the identity of consciousness and the Self. Through this theory the Rishi presents a new discipline of psycho-ontology. He presents a psychology which explains and forms the basis of existence and values for living. Thus we have the profound Upanishadic statements like *aham brahmasmi*, 'I am the most encompassing', and *anandaṁ brahma*, 'the most encompassing is bliss'.

One of the earliest documents not only of the Indian mind but also of the mind of the entire human race is the Veda. The Ṛg Veda deities represent the possibilities of infinite human relationships with the fundamental truth of man's existence namely consciousness. The Vedic people were able to connect their daily life with natural forces through a complex relationship which was influenced by awe, fear, praise and trust, as we see presented in a poetic fashion in the hymns. The Vedic people lived a comprehensive life full of feelings, urges, passions and joys. To them the external nature was not a rival to their inner aspirations, but a medium for free expression.

Earliest signs

Earliest signs of a psychological inquiry into the first principle can be noted in expressions like, "Who has seen that the boneless bears the bony when being born first? Where may be the breath, the blood, the soul of the earth? Who would approach the wise to make this enquiry?"¹ "In the beginning there arose the Golden Child (*hiraṇya-garbha*); as soon as born, he alone was the Lord of all that is. He established the earth and this heaven: Who is the God to whom, we shall offer sacrifice?"² "Unsupported, unattached spread out downwards—turned—how is that he does not fall down? By what power of his does he move? Who has seen [that]? Erected as the pillar of Heaven he protects the firmament."³ In these verses a psychological and epistemological distinction is made for the first time. The psychological distinction made is between the manifest and the unmanifest

nature of reality and their relation to the person who is in an awesome state of mind. And, the epistemological distinction made is between the direct and indirect knowledge. These verses also initiate a psychological inquiry into the nature of reality.

Speech and mind

The initial attempt to connect the natural world and the psychophysical person was made by relating physical powers and psychic faculties to the portfolio of various deities.

Among the deities goddess *vac* is of psychological importance. *Vac* is the Vedic term referring to both speech and speech-consciousness. The hymn to *vac* says that all actions and powers are grounded in speech. It is the primordial energy out of which all existence originates and subsists. At the same time it goes beyond the heavens and the earth. Speech is also recognised as the first expression of truth when the hymn says, "When I partake a portion of this speech, the first products of truth come to me."⁴ *Dirghatamas* proceeds, "From her (*vac*) flows the oceans; through her exist the four regions; from her flows the ground (*akSara*) of the Veda; on her the entire universe stands."⁵ But three verses later, he reminds us that only the manifested forms of speech can be known and the deepest levels remain hidden. He further adds that prayer is the highest heaven in which speech dwells. We find many Vedic hymns in the form of prayers. Through prayer—the fundamental mode of speech-consciousness—the attempt made is for the individual mind to resonate with the cosmic mind.

The *yajña* performances are based on the psychology of speech-consciousness. Though the liturgical knowing-acting of sacrificial celebration, the limitations of ordinary existence and grounding of ordinary existence in more fundamental levels of consciousness is recognised and experienced. Thus the Vedic sage offers his oblations unto, "He who gives breath, he who gives strength, whose command all the bright gods revere, whose

shadow is immortality, whose shadow is death. . .".⁶ The Vedic concept of ṛta also is a result of the recognition of a comprehensive and unifying principle. Vedic sages recognise ṛta as the rhythm behind the structuring of the dynamic aspects of the universe.

A more comprehensive nature of reality is admitted when in later Samhitas and Brahmanas, the superior nature of mind to speech is recognised. In a dialogue between the Speech and the Mind, Prajapati is made to describe speech as "Thou art the messenger of mind, for what one thinks of in the mind, one utters in speech."⁷ In a developed version Taittiriya Samhita recognises the limitations of both speech and mind in defining the first comprehensive principle which is inclusive of speech and mind but not exhausted by them. It says, "Finite are the hymns, finite the chants, finite the ritual formulae, to what constitute Brahman however there is no end."⁸

In Śatapatha Brahmana, we find an analysis of sleep consciousness where the superiority of prana is recognised. The verse says, "And when he is asleep he does not, by means of them, know of anything whatever, nor does he form any resolution with his mind, or distinguish the taste of food with (the channel of) his speech, or distinguish any smell with (the channel of) his breath, neither does he with his eye, nor with his ear, for those (vital airs) have taken possession of him."⁹

Śatapatha Brahmana thereafter gives a negative description of the first principle as apurvam and aparavat – of which there is nothing earlier and after. "This Brahman has nothing before it and after it."¹⁰ In a later verse it adds, "It is this that the Rishi saw when he said, I praise what hath been and what will be, the Great Brahman, the one akSara; for indeed, all the gods, all kings pass into that akSara. . .".¹¹ It is ekam and purnam. It is the One principle which is given various names by the poets. Here we find the fundamental thought of the Upanishads already hidden in a germinal form.

Principles of knowledge

We find the earliest analysis of cognition in Śatapatha Brahmana where the universe is depicted as coextensive with the universal principles of name and form. "These, indeed, are the two great manifestations of the Brahman; and verily, he who knows these two great manifestations of [existence] Brahman becomes himself a great manifestation. One of these two is the greater namely Form; for whatever is Name is indeed Form; and verily, he who knows the greater of these two, becomes greater than he who wishes to surpass in greatness."¹² Objects are cognised with the help of name and form. Name comes from speech and form from mind. It is by mind that one knows form. The Brahmana also says that one who understands this, understands the universe comprehensively. In a similar context Atharva Veda says that the indescribable is the ground of all names and forms, the support of the whole creation. The same text in another verse describes this indescribable as "Desireless, self-possessed, immortal, self-proved, ever full of Bliss, inferior to none, ever young and everlasting is he, the soul of this universe, through his knowledge alone can one spurn death."¹³

The nature of the individual's mind is a subject dealt in detail in the Upanishads. The earlier Brahmanas and Samhitas give a prologue to the Upanishadic psychology of the individual. Śatapatha Brahmana notes, "Let him meditate upon the 'true Brahman'. Now, man here, indeed, is possessed of understanding, and according to how great his understanding is when he departs this world, so does he, on passing away, enter yonder world. Let him meditate on the Self, which is made up of intelligence, and endowed with a body of spirit. . . that Self of the spirit (breath) is my self. . .".¹⁴ Apart from the words kratu, manas and samkalpah denoting the psychological faculties, used in this verse, manas appears in the verses "Let us know each other's mind"¹⁵ and "Let our mind be the same."¹⁶ These verses also imply that the sages did have a

notion of the relationship between not only the individual mind and the cosmic mind but also the intersubjective relationship—between one mind and another mind. Śatapatha Brahmaṇa further says that “One becomes, what one meditates on.”¹⁷ Here we find the Vedic insight on the much discussed theme of knowing and being.

The first principle

The ‘first principle’ which belongs to the last phase of Vedic cosmogony is not considered as a person but more as a psychic principle. The whole world is a sacrifice and the Gods perform their function through sacrifice. The concept of sacrifice leads to the analysis of the relation between the creator and the created. This analysis is elaborately done in the Purushasūkta and the Nasadiyasūkta. As far as the inquiry on the nature of consciousness is concerned, these hymns demand a careful study.

In the first verse of Purushasūkta reality is depicted as the virat Purusha or cosmic person, pervading the whole universe but as still beyond it. “Purusha is all this world, what has been and what shall be.”¹⁸ The Vedic poet conjures a vast picture pointing out the extensive existence of Purusha with thousands of eyes and legs. The Purushasūkta speaks of an eternal sacrifice which sustains the whole world. The world is the one single being of incomparable vastness and immensity enlivened by the Purusha. Vēdas interpret creation as the manifestation of the first principle, rather than the becoming of something not hither to existent. “Verily, in the beginning this (universe) was, as it were. Neither non-existent nor existent, in the beginning this (universe), indeed, as it were, existed and did not exist: there was then only that Mind.”¹⁹ The Nasadiyasūkta explains the universe as evolving out of the primary principle. In the first verse kama or desire is identified as the creative energy. But the last two verses, with a sceptical note exclaims “ko vēdah”²⁰ – who knows? – from where the creation came, for only one who was before

creation can really know that. The hymn marks the boundaries of a conceptual categorisation in terms of cause and effect and the limitation of causal theories to understand something which is prior to conceptual, dualistic thinking. It simply says that wholeness which can only be pointed as ‘That one’ is the ground of all existence – sat – and non-existence – asat. The mystery of creation can never be discovered conceptually. The only solution as given by the Upanishads is to know the nature of the inquirer herself who is amazed by causal mechanisms.

Mind in Vajasanēya Samhita and Aitarēya Āraṇyaka

When in Purushasūkta and Nasadiyasūkta, reality is named as Purusha and tad ēkam, the Vajasanēya Samhita comes with a distinctive description of manaḥ. Though the Samhita uses the word manaḥ, it is to be noted that it is not in the sense of mental faculty, but as an integrating principle of consciousness. We find the step towards arriving at an integrating principle.

Consciousness illumines both one who is awake and one who is asleep (walking and sleep states), but is also beyond it. “May that mind of mine be of auspicious resolve, which is divine; which goes out afar when I am awake, and which similarly comes back when I am asleep; that which goes far and wide, and is the light of lights.”²¹ The introductory verse also gives a theory of perception when it says that in the waking state, consciousness goes out far—dūram udaiti—to the world of objects and remains in ourselves during sleep. Manaḥ is described as the power helping one in doing sacrifices and other duties.

It is the unique—apūrvaṁ—and sacred thing in the heart—antaḥ. It is the inner core of all beings. Consciousness is also expressed as the tripartite mental faculty like intelligence (prajñanam), feeling (cētas) and resolution (dhṛtiḥ). Thus it is experienced as cognition, affection and conation. Consciousness is the eternal—amṛtam—, light and life breath in all

beings, without which nothing is accomplished. The fourth verse describes consciousness as the eternal principle and hence holding in it together the past, present and future. Here the transcendent and the immanent nature of consciousness is recognised. Consciousness is conceived as the unifying principle of a non-conceptual nature which brings about the continuity of experiences. It is the basis—*otaṁ*—of all thoughts—*cittaṁ sarvaṁ*. The sixth verse gives an analogy of the charioteer. “May that mind of mine be of auspicious resolve, which leads and controls men; just as a good charioteer does the horses with his reins; that which residing in the heart of men is the swiftest and free from decay.”²² Consciousness controls men, like a charioteer who leads and controls his horses. Consciousness resides in the heart—*hṛdipratiṣṭaṁ*—but also ramifies by going out swiftly—*javiṣṭaṁ*—and it never decays—*ajīrṇaṁ*. By referring to heart as the seat of consciousness, the intimacy of consciousness with the Self is underlined. The sole reality of consciousness is specified when it is said that it alone goes out swiftly. All the six verses of the Samhita end with the refrain ‘may my mind be of auspicious resolve, which is of the nature of this consciousness’. The world *manaḥ* is not referred to as a mental faculty but as the Self. The prayer is made for the abidance of the mind in its real nature.

Aitarēya Āraṇyaka in its initial chapters brings the concept of *ukta* as the essence and the symbol of the universe. *Ukta* etymologically signifies that from which things arise, and therefore where things do depart. And later in the Āraṇyaka, *ukta* is replaced by *atman*. Ātman is that from which the five-fold *ukta* (the five elements) arise and resolve. As an advancement toward the *atman* concept, the second Āraṇyaka emphasises consciousness and intelligence. From the fourth *adhyaya* of the second Āraṇyaka begins the Aitarēya Upanishad which gives a remarkable analysis of the mental faculties and consciousness.

The *Brahmaṇas* and Āraṇyakas have a prominent place in Indian psychology. They

attempt to explain the multitudinous potencies of human mind. With the background of a psychological explanation they bring the concept of One comprehensive principle, which is named variously. In these descriptions we find an approach to the concept of the absolute as including and transcending all differences. Being and consciousness in the Upanisads

A very important concept in Vedic hymns is that of one reality—*ekam sat*—which includes the variety of existence. The concept of the One principle is clarified and metaphysically shown as pure consciousness in Upanishads and is ontologically proved as the Self. In contrast to the objectivistic-reductionistic trend which, to a large extent, prevails in contemporary analytical philosophy and cognitive psychology, Upanishadic psychology insists upon the orientation towards subjectivity. With the emphasis on the foundation of thoughts namely consciousness, the Upanishads form the basis of the psychological principles developed in later systems of Indian philosophy.

Consciousness, the Encompassing and the Ultimate Reality

The word used in the Upanishads to indicate the supreme reality, which is unchangeable and eternal is *Brahman*. Śaṅkarācārya derives the word *Brahman* from the root *bṛhati* which could be translated as ‘to exceed’, *atisayana*, and means by it eternity and purity. The same definition can be given to consciousness also. From the form in which it is presented, *Maṇḍukya Upanishad* is one of the latest among the Upanishads which presents pure consciousness as an immaculate notion, unmixed with sectarian views. The system is complete and described using terms which indicate the absence of any uncertainty. Consciousness is “not that which cognises the internal (objects), not that which cognises the external (objects), not that which cognises both of them, not a mass of cognition, not cognitive, not non-cognitive. [It is] unseen,

incapable of being spoken of, ungraspable, without any distinct marks, unthinkable, unnameable, the essence of the knowledge of the one Self, that into which the world is resolved, the peaceful, the benign, the non-dual, such, they think, is the fourth quarter. It is the Self; it is to be known."²³ Consciousness is not that which knows the external objects during the waking state. It is not that which knows the internal objects during dream state. Knowership cannot be attributed to it. At the same time it is not ignorance. Śaṅkaracarya explains *naprajñāṁ* as *acaitanyapratiṣeṭa*.

Consciousness is that in which the whole world resolves, since it is not qualified by the experiences in the waking, dream and deep sleep states. Consciousness is *santam* since it is *avikriyam*—without any modifications. The prime nature of consciousness is that it is the invariable factor in all experiences. The Self is to be known as this consciousness.

The culminating point of the discoveries of Rishis, lies in the inclusion of all experiences in consciousness, but maintaining it as beyond and untouched by these. In various terms and expressions, we find this nature of consciousness, depicted in the length and breadth of the Upanishadic literature. The peace invocation in *Bṛadarānyaka Upanishad* describes the unmanifest Brahman (God) and the manifest Brahman (world) as whole. From the unmanifest Brahman comes the manifest Brahman. And retaining the wholeness of the world, the Whole (Unmanifest Brahman) ever remains. Śaṅkaracarya in his *bhaṣya* to this verse, says, *yat svarūpaṁ, pūrṇatvaṁ, paramatmabhavaṁ*. Neither the immanence of consciousness lowers it nor its transcendence alienates it from the world. Consciousness is *pūrṇam*—mere fullness.

By distinguishing the conceptualisation of consciousness from the nature of its existence what is indicated again and again is (i) the experiencer is pure consciousness, and, (ii) individuated experiences are run in and through by pure consciousness. In *Caṇḍogya*

Upanishad, Prajapati emphasises the nature of the Self as consciousness. It is unaffected by the changes of experience, but runs in and through the differences. The Self is not an abstract formal principle, but an active universal consciousness. Consciousness is both functionalistic and activistic. It is the sole reality.

Is this consciousness established on something else? In *Caṇḍogya Upanishad*, Narada asks Sanatkumara, 'On what is Bhūman established?' and Sanatkumara answers, 'It can only be established on its own greatness or not even on greatness'. Bharadvaja adds onto this statement in *Arṣeya Upanishad*, "That light which shines ...incessantly... suffusing everything,...when near it looks far away, when far away it looks near: None can transcend its greatness."²⁴ Consciousness is self-sufficient, self-explaining and self-supporting.

There is nothing exterior on which it depends. Hence it is "the Real, Knowledge and the Infinite"²⁵—*satyaṁ jñānaṁ anantaṁ*. Therefore if a person knows consciousness as not existing, he becomes as it were, himself non-existing; if a person knows consciousness as existing, then it is known that he exists. It is "by which the unheard becomes heard, the unperceivable becomes perceived, the unknowable becomes known."²⁶ *Yajñavalkya* describes consciousness as a given fact of all experiences and as the innermost Self which is the imperishable—*akṣaraṁ*. Consciousness is the very principle of knowledge, in the light of which everything else is illumined. *Yama* rhetorically asks in *Katha Upanishad*, 'what else remains here?'—'*kimatra pariśyatē?*'—and answers, 'This is verily that'.

Chandogya Upanishad and *Katha Upanishad* further describe consciousness as the One, the Infinite (*bhūma*) and the Bliss. It is the eternal amidst the transient, One amidst the many and the principle of intelligence. It is the infinite. "Infinite is Bliss."²⁷ And "to the wise who perceive him as abiding in

the soul, to them is eternal Bliss.”²⁸ On this description of consciousness as bliss, Gispert-Sauch makes an interesting remark: “From the highest peak of the integration of being, therefore, when one has achieved the perfect unity in which the totality is possessed, and all pluralism of dispersion is excluded, there flows the experience of the blissful character of existence.”²⁹

Consciousness and Transcendence which is beside me

The mind-body relation and consciousness-matter relation are the two problems found eternally evasive in the orient and occident. The debates between the realist and the idealist, and the behaviourist and the centralist look for a complete theory. The attempt to explain everything in terms of ideas has taken the idealist to a state, where she is unable to explain the world in which she lives. The attempt of the behaviourist to reduce everything to neurological stimuli and responses, condemn herself to a situation of retrogressive evolution, experiential stagnation and self-negation. When questions like ‘what is the nature of the world?’, ‘what is the nature of its basis?’, ‘what is the relation between the world and the individual?’, remain perturbing the human mind, the Upanishads come with life-transforming answers. A theorisation which is based on rigid distinctions and hierarchical classifications might qualify the Upanishadic concept of reality as pantheism, which strikes at the root of all distinctions. This is not a justifiable criticism. The Upanishads do not speak of a unitary principle, which is opposed to the multiplicity of creation. The ‘transcendence’ which the Upanishads highlight never signifies an aloofness or exclusion. The Upanishadic ideas of immanence and transcendence, creation and creator can be understood only through the principle of consciousness.

The Rishis expound consciousness as the ultimate reality, and identifies it with the Self.

At the same time, the Upanishadic seer gives a substantial explanation for the world. In the attempt to explain world as the heart-throb of consciousness, numerous doctrines on creation are enumerated. But the goal aimed by this doctrinisation is not the analysis of the world in parts, but the integral realisation of the Self as consciousness, which is the warp and woof of the world. Thus the very categorisation in terms of causality is cut asunder by the Rishi. The Upanishadic Rishi considers any doctrine on creation or causality as a myth to explain the mystery. It is important to understand at this juncture that causal theory by itself is limited since the very postulation of it is based on a dualistic assumption of a split reality – of origin and effect. ‘What is the original’ is not necessarily an appropriate inquiry, according to Upanishads, to understand the complexity of reality and possibility of human experiences.

The uncertainty on the origin of the world will remain till the Self is realised as consciousness, as the One behind the many. It is consciousness that which illumines all experiences and cognitions coming through the psychic faculties. It is described as *jyōtiSamjyoti*. The world is meaningful only if it is seen in the light of its underlying substratum. *Brhadaraṇyaka Upanishad* therefore describes consciousness as *satyasya satyaṁ*. *Muṇḍaka Upanishad* says in personified terms, “He who is all knowing, One, the allwise whose is this greatness the earth.”³⁰ “Brahman, indeed, is this universe. It is the greatest.”³¹

The problem of the co-existence of plurality and unity is explained by Upanishadic psychology from two apparently contradictory angles. The non-existence of anything else before creation is maintained, along with the description of the unmanifest and manifest states of reality. And this apparent contradiction is introduced as a puzzle by the Rishi, not only to quiet the mind but also help ourselves abide on the sole reality of consciousness.³² It also reminds us that it will not be a successful attempt if we try understanding creation using concepts which

are the resultant of the process of creation. From the first angle of explanation, that is the non-existence of anything prior to creation, we can find references like “there was nothing what so ever here in the beginning”³³, “non existence verily was this (world) in the beginning”³⁴, “in the beginning this (world) was non-existent.”³⁵ All these references are made to emphasise the inclusive and unitary existence of the Self, which is of the nature of consciousness. The Upanishads annul any independent existence of duality. It says “na iha nanasti kincana”³⁶, “vacarāmbhaṇaṁ vikāro namadhēyaṁ.”³⁷

From the second angle of creation and creator, Aitareya Upanishad speaks of the creator’s entrance into the body by the opening in the skull—vidriti. Brādarāyaṇa Upanishad adds that the creator entered up to the very tip of the nails. This anupravesa has for its object, “to become everything that there is” and for “assigning names into the objects and the evolution of their functions.”³⁸ Taittirīya Upanishad says, “Having entered it, He became both the actual (sat) and the beyond (tyat), the defined and the undefined, both the founded and the non-founded, the intelligent and the non-intelligent, the real and the untrue. As the real He became whatever there is here.”³⁹ Muṇḍaka Upanishad also gives a unitary description of reality as in the Puruṣasūkta, when it says that the fire is his head, wind is his breath, moon and sun his eyes, he is the Inner spirit which dwells in things.

Again the Upanishads give metaphors like spinning of the web by the spider, the production of notes from musical instruments etc. It is the intimate relationship, tadatmya, or oneness between consciousness and its creative power that is conveyed, through these similes. Consciousness is not only the operative cause but also the material cause. It is not only the energising power but also the very substance of the universe. Taittirīya Upanishad describes consciousness as, “that, verily from which these beings are born, that,

by which, when born they live, that unto which, when departing they enter.”⁴⁰

Something so close to me, but evading

Is the glory of consciousness confined to the spatio-temporal world? Muṇḍaka Upanishad answers that its glory is something which not only transcends the world but also is very intimate to oneself.

Consciousness manifests the mind and thoughts, the psychic and vital energy functions in and through it. On this unitive explanation of consciousness and world, Caṇḍogya Upanishad comes with the cosmological picture of consciousness as tajjalan. Saṁkarācārya in his bhaṣya to this verse, summarises consciousness as that from which matter (world) comes, in which matter dwells and finally that unto which it is resolved. From consciousness (tad) has the world arisen (jan). Therefore it is called taj-ja. And also it disappears (li) in the very same consciousness. It is absorbed into the essence of consciousness. Therefore consciousness is tal-la. It is consciousness which the world at the time of its origin breaths (an) lives and moves. Therefore in the three time scales of past, present and future, matter (world) is not separate from the essential consciousness. And the simple reason is that there is nothing which is outside and beyond consciousness. The attempt of the Upanishadic Rishi is to show the continuity of human life with that of universe. It is the sambhūti or the holistic vision which he speaks about.

Existence beyond death

The Upanishadic eschatology adds a feather to modern eschatological studies by introducing the key concept of immortality. The Rishis define the state of immortality as the realisation of the Self, and mortality as being ignorant of it. Kena Upanishad says that man attains energy and vigour through consciousness and immortality through the knowledge of the Self as consciousness. Isa Upanishad adds that Self-knowledge rids one

of all sorrow and error. Not to attempt to win it is tantamount to suicide, and a life of blind darkness forever. Verily self-knowledge is immortality.

Is immortality a post-mortem phenomenon? Kena Upanishad and Katha Upanishad answers otherwise. "If here (a person) knows it, then there is truth, and if here he knows it not, there is great loss. Hence, seeing or (seeking) (the Real) in all beings, wise men become immortal on departing from this world."⁴¹ The phrase 'departing from this world' in this verse implies not the physical death, but the psychological death. It is the death of the false notion of separateness. If so who suffers from physical death? Katha Upanishad reminds, "whoever perceives anything like manyness he goes from death to death."⁴² The same Upanishad says that by realising the Self as eternal and immutable, one is liberated from death. And this realisation has to occur, in the very present life, while the body lasts. No future life is to be relied upon. Thus as per the Upanishadic eschatology, jivanmukti, liberation while alive, is the real immortality.

It selfdom speaks of videhamukti, liberation after death. Liberation from death is immortality. And liberation is knowing the Self as never born.

Again, mortality is conjured by the feeling of the 'other', something separate from consciousness. And immortality is seeing everything as the throb of consciousness. Candogya Upanishad remarks that, where one does not see the other, does not hear the other, does not understand the other, that is the Infinite. But where one sees the other, hears the other, understands the other, that is small. What is fullness is immortal and what is small is mortal. The same Upanishad says, "In the beginning...this being was alone, one only without a second."⁴³ Any sense of duality creates fear, the extreme of fear being fear of death. Brādarānyaka Upanishad says that primeval self feared as he was alone. But on finding out that since there is nothing other

than him whom he should fear, he became fearless. "It is from a second that fear arises."⁴⁴ Hence in the words of Katha Upanishad, the dhīra—the fearless—looks inwards, desirous of immortality. The nature of this inward vision is the realisation," the self, indeed is all this."⁴⁵ Thus according to the Upanishadic eschatology, liberation is enjoying the continuity of one's existence with the universe, knowing the Self as infinite consciousness.

Epistemology of Consciousness

Self-knowledge is the key concept in the Upanishads and is closely connected with wellbeing. We find the frequently occurring refrain, 'yo evam veda'—'he who knows thus'. The remarkable note in Upanishadic psychology is the concept of the Self as the pure subject, which never becomes an object. It is endowed with all psychological faculties, usually attributed, to mind in modern psychology. When in the West, mind is considered to be the seat of psychological faculties, Upanishadic philosophers lower mind itself to a psychological faculty. Consciousness is that which is beyond mind and its functions. Upanishads give clear and distinct description for mind and its functions, its relation to the individual and the nature of Self-knowledge.

What my mind does

The Upanishads refer to manas as the coordinating factor which governs the five organs of perception and five organs of action. It is ascribed of material origin. It also accounts for buddhi as the intellect, the organ of discrimination, ahaṁkāra as the organ of personal ego and citta as the sub-conscious mind. In the Aitareya Upanishad a distinction is drawn between consciousness as the real knower and mind as just a sense organ. The various functions which can be classified under the three categories of cognition, affection and conation are enumerated with much precision. "Perception, discrimination, intelligence, wisdom, insight, steadfastness, thought, thoughtfulness, impulse, memory

conception, purpose, life, desire, control"⁴⁶—all these are identified as the operative names of consciousness. A further point of psychological interest is the analysis of the cognitive act based on the knower (prajña), intellect (prajña) and cognition (prajñana).

Do these mental functions have any independent existence? According to Aitareya Upanishad all mental processes are only the many names of consciousness. Brhadaranyaka Upanishad says, "when breathing he is called the vital force, when speaking voice, when seeing the eye, when hearing the ear, when thinking the mind; these are merely the names of his acts."⁴⁷ Consciousness appears in various forms through which it manifests, but also transcends it.

Kena Upanishad starts with the psychological inquiry as to what must be regarded as being behind the psychophysical functions, namely thinking, breathing, speech, vision and action. Why is that the mind is able to think? Who regulates the vital breath? How is that the mouth, eye and ear enable us to speak, see and hear? Are the sense organs autonomous or is there an entity which lies at the back of these? To these queries the Rishis reply that it is consciousness which is behind all the mental functions. But the sense organs or the mind cannot know it. Consciousness is beyond not only merely what is known, but also even beyond what is unknown. It is beyond the reach of knowledge as well as ignorance.

Consciousness is beyond logical structures

Two major reasons can be cited for contending consciousness as beyond any conceptual reasoning.

- i. Logical concepts work only in the spatio-temporal framework of mind.
- ii. Consciousness is the innermost subject, which illumines everything and hence cannot be objectified.

Substantiating the first reason Taittiriya Upanishad and Kena Upanishad say,

"whence words return along with the mind, not attaining it"⁴⁸, "there the eye cannot go, nor can speech reach."⁴⁹ Consciousness is not an object to be grasped by tarka, because it is the subtlest (anupramāṇat). Hence it is said in Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, "you cannot see the seer of seeing, you cannot hear the hearer of hearing, you cannot think of the thinker of thinking, you cannot understand the understander of understanding."⁵⁰ You can only be it.

Consciousness is the very principle which imparts meaning to all concepts and statements. Though it is unmoving, it is faster than the mind. Thus moving faster it is beyond the reach of senses. Ever steady it outstrips all that run. Thus it "is the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech, indeed of the speech, the breath of the breath, the eye of the eye."⁵¹

Consciousness is attempted to be given the best epistemological definition, when it is described as "prathibodhaviditam"⁵², by Kena Upanishad. Saṅkaracarya explains this description as bodham bodham prati viditam—which is known through every act of cognition. Every mental modification reveals the light of consciousness. Consciousness is co-inherent and co-existent in every piece of cognition. Consciousness is the witness of all states. It is sarva-pratyaya-darsi-cicchakthi-svarupa-matraḥ. Katha Upanishad describes it as the seer (vipascit), Prasna Upanishad, as the all-beholder (paridraStur) and Svetasvatara Upanishad, as the spectator (sakshi).

Owing to the self-revealing nature of consciousness, the Upanishads discourage any categorical definition of it. By the description of consciousness using paradoxical phrases the Rishi endeavours to show that it is in all, but also beyond everything. Attributes both in positive and negative terms are employed and finally all negated. It is not a logical acquaintance of consciousness that is aimed at by the Upanishads but a concrete experience of consciousness.

On this Upanishadic style, Deussen remarks, "The opposite predicates of nearness and

distance, of repose and movement are ascribed to Brahman in such a manner that they mutually cancel one another and serve only to illustrate the impossibility of conceiving Brahman by means of empirical definitions.”⁵³ According to Saṅkarācārya, consciousness is without any empirical attributes—sarvasaṃsārādharmavarjita.

Consciousness, mental discipline and pure reason

According to the Upanishads, if consciousness is misconceived as an object of knowledge it cannot be known. The Upanishad speaks of the self-luminous nature of consciousness. And this nature of consciousness is revealed not to the logical reason, but to a clear reason of sukṣmabuddhi. It is the reason which does not try to create something, but which comprehends which is already there. The Upanishad prays, “May the Supreme endow us with clear understanding.”⁵⁴ Katha Upanishad says that the Self reveals to a quiet and tranquil mind. In the words of Brhadārāṇyaka, “therefore...having become calm, self-controlled, withdrawn, patient and collected (one) sees the Self in his own self.”⁵⁵ The ‘self’ with which the verse ends denotes the mind.

In this context comes the Upanishadic idea of tapas. The meaning of tapas is not ‘self-torture’ as translated by Archibald Gough, but is the mental discipline. Rishis do not give a methodology to ‘capture’ the reality. The greatness of the Upanishadic concept of Self-knowledge is that it is vastutantrañāna and not Puruṣatantrañāna. It is the knowledge of the reality as it is. The goal of tapas is to allow the mental equipment to shine in its real nature. It is the mental-stillness that is meant by tapas.

In the Prasna Upanishad, Rishi Pippalada sends away the six inquirers for tapas, before any instruction. In Chandogya Upanishad, Satyakama-Jabala is asked to tend his teacher’s cattle, enabling himself to withstand the most difficult circumstances. Following the

injunction of progressive tapas, by Uddalaka, we see in Taittiriya, Bṛghu finally realising everything as his Self. In the Katha Upanishad, Naciketas is put to a test of patience for three days by Yama before he initiates a dialogue with him. The Maitri Upanishad even says that control of thought is liberation. “By freeing mind from sloth and distraction and making it motionless he become delivered from his mind (reaches mindlessness) then that is the supreme state...mind, in truth, is the cause of bondage and liberation for mankind.”⁵⁶ Tapas thus is not to be misinterpreted as mere ritualistic physical postures. Tapas in its truest sense is the mental competency required for Self-realisation.

Consciousness, me, you and our wellbeing

The Upanishads synthesise the knowledge of the within with the knowledge of the without in a total comprehension of reality. It gives an integral vision by which the discordant notes of experience are held in harmony. For the same reason it advocates the full and complete expression of personality through inter-subjective mechanisms.

In this regard Upanishadic psychology gives a clear analysis of the ‘person’ and his ‘persona’. The Upanishadic words Ātman and Puruṣa denote the person. Saṅkarācārya defines these words. Ātman is that which pervades all, the subject which knows, and illumines objects and that which remains immortal and always the same. Puruṣa is sarvapuruṣaṇa—that which fills everything. These two definitions imply consciousness. The person is therefore identified with consciousness.

The persona comprises of sense organs, mind and intellect. The Katha Upanishad says that sense objects are higher than the sense organs, the intellect is higher than the mind. And the unmanifest (avyakta) is higher than the intellect. Above all, Puruṣa is higher than the avyakta. There is nothing higher than Puruṣa.

In the Chandogya Upanishad, Sanatkumara gives instruction for progressive meditation

on Brahman. He gives the inclusive hierarchy of name, speech, mind, will, thought, contemplation and understanding. He who meditates on name (material knowledge) becomes independent so far as it goes. He who meditates on speech as consciousness goes so far as speech goes. Will, thought and contemplation can take one only up to the respective limits. Taittiriya Upanishad describes the individual as vested with kosa or sheaths. They are the annamaya or the physical body, the prāṇamaya or vital breath, manomaya or volition, vijñānamaya or knowledge body. Prasna Upanishad, Candogya Upanishad and Maitri Upanishad give systematic explanation for the waking, dream and deep sleep states. The waking state relates to the physical body and the gross objects. In the dream state, sense organs rest in the mind and the mind creates its own spatiotemporal world and subtle objects. During the deep sleep, mind also reposes and rejoices in the unconscious. Consciousness is not any of these states, but runs in and through it. Mandukya Upanishad names the self in these states as Vaisvanara, Taijasa and Prajna, and Consciousness as the fourth 'stateless state'. Consciousness is Turiya. Ranade describes turiya as the 'fourth dimension of psychology'. None of the states colour consciousness, but they work in the light of consciousness, and hence it is turiya. In Prasna Upanishad it is said that you are united with consciousness every day without being aware of it—ahar ahah brahma gamayati.

It is in the light of this psychology that the Upanishad speaks of an ontologised epistemology or the concrete, continuing and inclusive realisation of consciousness.

'Knowing is being' or the ontologised epistemology of Mahavakyas

In the West the major epistemological discussion is using descriptive analysis of the concept of knowledge with the help of epistemic concepts. In the Upanishads we find a holistic study about the connection

between knowledge and existence. There is no place for the split enterprise of epistemology and ontology, of knowing and being. The Upanishads, infact, is interested in how to be. Thus the student in Taittiriya Upanishad declares, 'aham annam...aham annadaḥ' – 'I am the eaten as well the eater'. Matter, breath, mind and intelligence are no more alienated existence for him. He realises himself as everything. He overcomes the false notion of finitude. In his infinitude, he recognises himself as consciousness-bliss, from which everything is born, in which everything lives and unto which everything departs.

The great statements

The psychological discoveries of the Upanishadic Rishi are epitomised in four great mystic statements, mahavakya, such as,

prajñanam brahma

—“Brahman is Consciousness”⁵⁷

ayam atma brahma

—“This Ātman is Brahman”⁵⁸

tattvamasi—“That Thou Art”⁵⁹

aham brahmasmi—“I am Brahman”⁶⁰

The Upanishads introduce the ideas of immanence and transcendence to establish the sole reality of consciousness. Ontologically it is the whole world, epistemologically taken it is intelligence and axiologically taken it is bliss. This sole reality cannot be other than the inclusive principle of consciousness. Hence to the teaching of the Rishi, 'tattvamasi', the student's response is his realisation as 'aham brahmasmi', and understanding the whole world as aham eva idam sarvosmi – 'It is I alone which is all this'.

Many philosophers consider the ontology of the Upanishads as the zenith of human wisdom. In the words of Barnett, “the sum of Upanishadic teaching is that Brahman, the cosmic force manifested as a universe to the thought, is in essence one with that same thought, with the Atman or self.”⁶¹ Zaehner regards that “the great achievement of Upanishads is the...Brahman Ātman

Synthesis, that is the identification of the individual soul with the ground of the universe.”⁶² Annie Besant summarises, “Brahma-vidya. . . is the central truth of the Upanishads. It is the identity in nature of the Universal and the Particular Self. . . such is the final truth, such the goal of all wisdom, of all devotion, of all right activity: That thou Art. Nothing less than that is the Wisdom of the Upanishads; nothing more than that—for more than that there is not. That is the last truth of all truths; that is the final experience of all experiences.”⁶³

Is there a gap between ‘knowing’ and ‘being’?

The Upanishads give no time lag between ‘knowing’ and ‘being’. It considers Self-knowledge as *saksat aparoksa* or immediate. The immediacy of knowledge surpasses all mediacy of senses. *Atmajñana* is being *Atman*. The knower and known coalesces in being. Hence the Upanishads give statements like “*brahma vid brahmaiva bhavati*”⁶⁴ and “*brahma vid apnoti param*.”⁶⁵ The act of knowing applies only for the removal of the false notion of separateness. *Samkaracarya* considers Self-knowledge as eternal, universal and necessary. It cannot be destroyed, though it may be obscured. The knowledge of the Self does not create emancipation, but is emancipation. The Upanishadic *moksa* hence is not a loss, but a recognition of the true nature of the Self. It is not having an idea of the Self, but the concrete experiencing of it. It is an experience of the present and not a prophecy of the future. The Upanishads describe it as seeing everything in oneself and oneself in everything. This vision is not a distinct knowledge but is a spontaneous being. It is the revelation of the whole in an instantaneity of moment.

Now, is this knowledge indispensable? The Upanishad cautions, that no calamity is greater than the absence of Self-knowledge, for it is the knowledge by which whatever is to be known is known. Thus in Upanishadic terms perfection is not an attainment of something

alien, of not embracing another. It is a state of mind. It is Self-abidance.

From the *Brahmaṇas* to the Upanishads we find a cosmology which, with more consistent analysis of creation reaches a psychology identifying the first principle with consciousness, which is the Self. This psychology cannot be criticised as agnosticism or solipsism as Jhonston and Deussen does. To describe the fountainhead of knowledge, that is consciousness as something unknowable can only be a perversion of metaphysical language, Ranade says, “Existence is not existence, if it does not mean selfconsciousness. Reality is not reality if it does not express throughout its structure the marks of pure selfconsciousness. Self-consciousness thus constitute the ultimate category of existence to the Upanishadic philosophers.”⁶⁶ A.L. Basham says in his book *The Wonder that was India*, “The great and saving knowledge by which the Upanishads claim to impart lies not in the mere recognition of the existence of Brahman, but in continual consciousness of it . . . Brahman is the human soul, is *Ātman*, the Self.”⁶⁷

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