

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPT OF ONENESS IN ṚGVEDIC UPANIṢADS

The Muktikopaniṣad has mentioned a list of 108 Upaniṣads in which 10 Upaniṣads are declared as major Upaniṣads, where Saṃkarācārya, the great commentator has commented. Among the ten major Upaniṣads of different Vedas *Aitareya Upaniṣad* is the only principal Upaniṣad of *Ṛgveda* as mentioned by the same Upaniṣad.¹ In this chapter an endeavour has been made to explain the nature of oneness as revealed in the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* of the *Ṛgveda*.

Concept of Oneness in Aitareya Upaniṣad

The *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, which belongs to the *Ṛgveda* consists of three chapters. The fourth, fifth and sixth chapter of the second Āraṇyaka of *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* is called *Aitareya Upaniṣad*. The *Aitareya Upaniṣad* derives its name from ṛṣi Mahidāsa Aitareya, the son of Itarā. The *Aitareya Upaniṣad* begins with theosophical or isoteric doctrine which denotes the Supreme *Brahman*, the only and one Reality of this whole universe. The Upaniṣad tries to explore the *Ātman* or *Brahman* as the basic reality, the originator and Supreme Force of all the living and non-living objects.

The *Aitareya Upaniṣad* explains the Reality, which is the source of multifarious beings in the advaitic manner. This non-dualism or oneness is the main topic of discussion of the *Aitareya Upaniṣad*. In the very beginning of this Upaniṣad it is stated :

‘ātmā vā idameka evāgra āsīnnānyatkīmcana

miṣat sa īkṣata lokānnu sṛjā iti//²

1. MKU.,30
2. AU., I.1.1

Here the Upaniṣad states that in the very beginning of this world, before the multifarious creations, *Ātman* alone was there and from this *Ātman* all these different types of creations came forth. “The word *Ātman* is derived from the root ‘ana’ to pervade or from the root ‘ad’ to eat or from ‘at’ to move.”³ This *Ātman* which is nondual, omnipresent, almighty, omniscient, devoid of growth and decay, hunger and thirst, oldage and which is immortal and fearless was alone in the beginning of this world. This eternally pure-spirit is described in some of the Upaniṣads as *sat* or being as *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* announces that in the beginning of this universe *Ātman* alone existed here as *sat* without a second⁴. From this *Ātman* the different types of creations originate.⁵ In this regard the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* states :

‘ya eko jālavanīśata īśanībhiḥ sarvāmllokānīśata īśanībhiḥ/

ya evaika udbhave sambhave ca ya etadviduramṛtāste bhavanti//’⁶

[Trans : They become immortal who know this *Brahma* as ; the one without second; the Lord of the net in the form of the world; (who) rules over all; whose governing powers that are not different from Him; who controls all the worlds through His governing powers; who alone (without any help); is capable of making and expanding the creation.]⁷

The *Aitareya Upaniṣad* describes the *Ātman* as same with the *Brahman* and before the creation of this world this *Ātman* or *Brahman* appeared along with infinite knowledge and created all the living beings. *Ātman* is devoid of duality. It is single in past, present and future. Because it is the one and only object that existed before the origin of this universe. *Ātman* is without names and forms, i.e., He is one without a second. But, after the creation of the world, this single *Ātman* transmutes himself in

3. Date, V.H., UR., p.272

4. CU., VI 2.2

5. Ibid., VI.2.3

6. ŚU,III.1

7. Eng. Trans. from Aggarwal, Keshoram., KK., p.327

different beings. Therefore, though He is present as inner-self in all the existing beings, He is actually one and without any difference. The *Aitareya Upaniṣad* states :

‘*sa imāmllokānasṛjat ambho marīcīrmaramāpo ’do ’mbhaḥ pareṇa divaṃ dyauḥ
pratiṣṭhā ’ntarikṣaṃ marīcayaḥ pṛthivī maro yā adhasṭāttā āpaḥ*’⁸

[Trans : He created the world beyond heaven; intermediary region; mortal world and the world below the earth; the world beyond heaven and their support (*Dyuloka*); all these are known as *Ambhas*; intermediary region is *Marīci* ; the earth is *Mara* (mortal world); the worlds below the earth are said to be water.]⁹

Here in this *mantra*, the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* states that the *Ātman* creates the *Ambha*, *Marīci*, *Mara* and *Āpaḥ* (water) these four worlds. *Śruti* clearly says that the *Mahaḥ*, *Janaḥ*, *Tapaḥ* and *Satya lokaḥ*, which are situated beyond the heaven and are supported by *Dyulokaḥ* are known as *Ambhas*; below the *Ambha*, i.e., in the middle region where the sun, the moon and the stars are shining, is said to be the *Marīci*. Below the region of that *Marīci* stands our earth, the mortal world. Therefore, it also known as *Mara*, Three *lokas* and fourteen *bhuvanas* stand below our earth, which are known as *Āpaḥ*. All these are originated from the single entity, i.e., *Ātman*.

Completing the creation of the *lokas*, *Ātman* or *Brahman* again thought that there must have protecting power, i.e., deities for presiding the whole creation. That is why, *Ātman* or *Brahman* took out *Hiraṇyagarbha puruṣa* from the water and shaped him with essential limbs. It is very remarkable that here this *puruṣa*, who is none but the manifestation of *Brahmā*, is the first creation of the Supreme Creator. *Brahmā* created the *lokapālas* and *Prajāpati* for increasing the number of protectors for the protection of these multifarious creations.¹⁰ In this context we can quote the *Muṇḍaka*

8. AU., I.1.2

9. Eng Trans. from Aggarwal, Keshoram., KK., p.210

10. Aggarwal, Keshoram., KK., pp.210-211

Upaniṣadic view, '*brahmā devānām prathamah sambabhūva*',¹¹ i.e., *Brahmā* was the first creation among all the Gods.

For the fulfillment of bodily structure of that Hiraṇyagarbha *puruṣa*, the Supreme Spirit, i.e., *Ātman* started *tapas*. As a result of that penance at first the mouth of the Hiraṇyagarbha parted cracking like an egg. From the mouth came speech and from speech, came fire. Then produced two nostrils of that *puruṣa*, from nostrils originated the *prāṇa* and from *prāṇa* came Vāyu (the air). Then the eyes were separated out from which produced the seeing and from seeing the sun. Then distinguished out the ears of that *puruṣa*. From the ears came out the sense of hearing and from the organ of hearing came out the quarters of space. Then appeared the skin and from skin came hairs. From hair came out herbs and trees. After that produced the heart of that Hiraṇyagarbha *puruṣa*. From heart mind and from mind the moon originated. Then appeared navel and from navel came out *apāna-vāyu* (exhaling breath). From *apāna* came out death. Then issued the penis and semen and from semen came out water.

The second part of first *adhyāya* of *Aitareya Upaniṣad* begins with the following *mantra* :

*'tā etā devatāḥ sṛṣṭā asminmahatyaṛṇave prāpataṁstamaśanāyā
pipāsābhy-āmanvavārjat tā enamabruvannāyatanaṁ naḥ prajānīhi yasminpratiṣṭhitā
annamadāmeti//'*¹²

[Trans : Those gods (fire etc.,) created by Paramātmā fell into the great ocean in the shape of the world; they were made to feel hunger and thirst; they said to Him; provide some place to us, seated in which we may take food.]¹³

11. MU., I.1.1

12. AU., I. 2.1

13. Eng. Trans. from Aggarwal, Keshoram., KK., p.212

These deities created by Supreme *Brahman* for ruling the whole universe, fell into this vast ocean. Swami Gambhirananda says in this context - “The world which is like a vast ocean, that is filled with the water of sorrow arising from ignorance, desire, and action; that is infested with huge sea-animals in the form of acute disease, and age, and death; that has no beginning, end, and limit, and provides no resting place; that affords only momentary respite through the little joys arising from the contact of senses and objects.”¹⁴ These deities wanted an abode from the Supreme Creator for staying where they can take the food. After this request Supreme *Brahman* brought a cow for them, which is ignored by them saying that, that cow is certainly not sufficient for them so far as eating is concerned. Then Supreme Creator (*Brahman*) again brought a horse for them but they again rejected it. Finally, the Supreme *Brahman* made a human body for them and they became happy to see it and said that it is a fine residing place for them. They thought that they would happily live in it and all their demands would be fulfilled. Therefore, human body is the best creation of Supreme *Brahman* and it is difficult to achieve that. Then the Supreme *Brahman* asked them to enter into their respective abode and they did so.

Agni transmuted himself into the form of speech and entered into the mouth of that *puruṣa*. As the form of the sense of smell Vāyu entered into the nostrils. Surya (sun) also entered in the eyes as the sense of sight. Disaḥ (Directions) entered into the ears as the sense of hearing. The herbs and trees penetrated into the skin as the form of hair of that *puruṣa*. As the shape of mind the moon penetrated into the heart. Death becoming *apāna* entered into the navel. Water also entered into the penis in the form of semen. After completion of this procedure, *Ātman* himself entered into that *puruṣa* through the head. Rohit Mehta states that, “The entry of the Spirit into the body

14. Gambhirananda, Swami., E.U.P., (Vol.II), p.26

through the head has many layers of meanings. It denotes the role of the brain as the co-ordinating factor in the whole functional realm of the body. The specialized centres of the body function with a wholeness because of the Brain. Without this co-ordinating factor the different functions of the body would pull in different directions. And so the presence of the Spirit in the Body is a unifying force, giving to the bodily organism a cohesion, a harmony, a synthesis.”¹⁵

When the creation of *lokas* and *lokapālas* was completed, the Supreme *Brahman* also created food for them and accordingly they also learnt to consume that food. The Upaniṣad says :

‘so’po’bhyatapattābhyo’bhitaptābhyo mūrtirajāyata/
yā vai sā mūrtira-jāyatā’nnam vai tat//’¹⁶

[Trans : He then heated the waters (all the five elements) ; from those heated elements came a solid object; that solid object was decidedly food.]¹⁷

Elaborating the journey of human beings from tangible to intangible or manifest to unmanifest (*Brahman*) the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* advocates three births of man in its first part of second *adhyaṅya*.¹⁸ These three births are referred to as born in the seed of the father, in the womb of the mother and the body of the child. These three are related to the three states of consciousness. These three states are *jāgarita* or the waking, the *svapna* or the dream and *susupti* or the deep sleep. The birth in the seed of the father is called the waking state, the birth in the womb of the mother is the dream state and the birth in the body of the child is known as deep sleep, there lies innocence and tranquility, which is free from any kind of disturbance. This state is connected to the understanding of the *Brahman*, the unmanifest. The Upaniṣad

15. Mehta, Rohit., TCU., p.214

16. AU., I.3.2

17. Eng. Trans. from Aggarwal, Keshoram., KK., p.216

18. Mehta, Rohit., TCU., p.215

declares that deep-sleep is a condition of wisdom or *prajñāna*. The *Aitareya Upaniṣad* utters that when one attains wisdom, he is able to know the real nature of *Brahman*. This has been referred to in one of the *mahāvākyas* of the Upaniṣad like – ‘*vijñānam brahma*,’ i.e., *Brahman* is wisdom. Here the Upaniṣad speaks about the reference of Vāmadeva who became free from circle of birth and death. The Upaniṣad has stated the freedom of Vāmadeva in the following manner :

‘*garbhe nu sannanveṣāma vedamaḥam devānām janimāni viśvā/
śataṁ mā pura āyasīrarakṣannadhah śyeno jivasā niradīyamiti
garbha evaitacchayāno vāmadeva evamuvāca*’¹⁹

[Trans : While I was in the womb, I knew all the births of the gods. A hundred strongholds made of steel guarded me. I burst out of it, with the swiftness of a hawk. Vāmadeva spoke this verse even when he was lying in the womb.]²⁰

The freedom of the spirit, i.e., the spiritual freedom comes suddenly in the state of deep-sleep. In this state one can communicate with the spirit that is unmanifest, one knows the immortality of the spirit. One knows the things that lie beyond birth and death. After experiencing these three states of birth, i.e., consciousness – knows the immortality of the spirit. In the third and the last section of this Upaniṣad the following questions regarding the nature of the *Ātman* has been included :

‘*ko ’yamātmēti vayamupāsmāhe katarah sa ātmā yena
vā paśyati yena vā śṛṇoti yena vā gandhānājighrati yena
vā vācam vyākaroti yena vā svādu cāsvādu ca vijānāti*’²¹

[Trans : Who is this whom we worship as the self ? Which of the two is that self ? (Is it that) whereby one sees, or whereby one hears, or whereby one smells scents, or

19. AU., II.1.5

20. Eng. Trans. from Radhakrishnan, S., TPU., p.522

21. AU., III.1 .1

whereby one utters speech, or whereby one knows what is sweet and what is not sweet ?]²²

The two aspects of the *Brahman - Brahman* in itself and *Brahman* in the universe have been emphasized in the whole Upaniṣadic discussions. *Brahman* in itself is the *Brahman* unmanifest without any attributes. *Brahman* in the universe means *Brahman*, who manifests itself in various forms. The two aspects of *Brahman* have been mentioned in the above mentioned *mantra*. But it is very remarkable that the two aspects of *Brahman* does not mean here Brahman's dualism. Because manifest (*sākāra*) and unmanifest (*nirākāra*) is the same *Brahman*, which is one and devoid of duality.

This Upaniṣad says that when the spirit enters into the body the process of manifestation of the *Brahman* begins. With the entry of the spirit the co-ordination of all the bodily functions also starts. The scientists accept two main factors of evolution – one is factor from below and the other is the factor from above. They say that the factors from below are not sufficient enough to explain some of the problems and mysteries of evolutionary process. Then there comes the necessity of the factors from above. This may be applied in the phenomenon like biological mutations. This mysterious event in the story of evolution may be explained by some factors from above or from unknown. This factor from above is responsible for the entry of the spirit in the body. This factor from above serves like a magnet so that different parts that come under the domain of the magnetic field are naturally attracted to the magnet. The same thing happens when the spirit enters into the body. The different and specialised functions become connected and there comes a co-ordination in the bodily functions. In this process of evolution, specialisation denotes factors from

22. Eng. Trans. from Mahadevan, T.M.P., U., pp.118-119

below and co-ordination indicates the factors from above. When factors from above comes, the process of co-ordination happens automatically. This is what has been mentioned as the *Brahman* in the universe in the *Aitareya Upaniṣad*.²³

The *Aitareya Upaniṣad* has mentioned co-ordination of both the physical and psychological functions. The *Brahman* as a unifying force has a magnetic influence over different parts either at the physical or at the psychological level. The Upaniṣad says that the spirit is not only that by which one sees, hears, smells, touches and tastes. The function of the mind and heart is also controlled by that spirit. This spirit works as a magnet and different functions of the mind come into a pattern of co-ordination. The reference of this fact is found in the following *mantra* of the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* :

*‘yadetadhṛdayaṃ manaścaitat / sañjñānamājñānaṃ vijñānaṃ prajñānaṃ medhā
dṛṣṭirdhṛtirmatirmanīṣā jūtiḥ smṛtiḥ saṃkalpaḥ kraturasuḥ kāmo vaśa iti
sarvāṅyevaitāni prajñānasya nāmadheyāni bhavanti//’²⁴*

[Trans : That which is heart, this mind, that is consciousness; perception, discrimination, intelligence, wisdom, insight, steadfastness, thought, thoughtfulness, impulse, memory, conception, purpose, life, desire, control, all these, indeed, are names of intelligence.]²⁵

The above mentioned *mantra* gives a complete statement of the functions of the mind - the composite process known as thought emotion. Here we find a perfect analysis of the functions of the mind. These functions show the differentiation of the mind in its functional aspect and in specialisation. Mind has its specialised agency for performing a specific work. The co-ordination of these functions forms an intelligible pattern. There may be several functions of the mind such as – conception or

23. Mehta, Rohit., TCU., pp.216-217

24. AU., III.1.2

25. Eng. Trans. from Radhakrishnan, S., TPU., p.523

saṁkalpa, thought or *mati* and thoughtfulness or *manīṣa*, consciousness or *saṁjñāna*, perception or *ajñāna* and discrimination or *vijñāna*, steadfastness or *dhṛti*, impulse or *juti*, and memory or *smṛti*, purpose or *kratu*, life or *asu*, desire or *kāma* and will or *vaśa* and finally intelligence or *prajñāna*, wisdom or *medhā* and insight or *dṛṣṭi*. After examining these groups, one may identify the functions of the mind as thought, awareness, continuity, imagination and intelligence.²⁶

The first function of the mind, i.e., thought denotes the forming of concepts and giving a shape to the logical structures of thought. Through awareness, the second function of the mind, it discriminates between good and bad, between true and false and between the beautiful and ugly. Minds continuity through memory and impulse or mind's instincts come under its third function. Then by its fourth function, the mind generates through imagination, energy for the maintenance of a continuity of that which it has declared as good, true or beautiful. The last function, i.e., insight or intelligence coordinates all the functions of mind. When the mind is guided by insight, intelligence or wisdom then its thinking becomes clear and its discrimination becomes proper. Its field of continuity becomes free from conflicts and it can supply sufficient energy to deal effectively with every situation of life. Thus probably it can be said that when the mind accepts the guidance of intelligence and insight, each and every functions of the mind discharge their duties rightly or properly.²⁷

Brain as an instrument of the mind works as the unifying factor of the body. Again intelligence is the unifying factor of the mind and mind controls the functions of the body. So, it is the intelligence that controls the mind, which again controls all the bodily functions. When mind is not guided by the intelligence then there occurs

26. Mehta, Rohit, TCU., pp.217-218

27. Ibid., p.218

disintegration of the mind and disease in the body.²⁸ According to the *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, *Brahman* in the universe is intelligence or *prajñāna*. The entire teaching of the Upaniṣad is briefly suggested in the following *mantra* :

*‘eṣa brahmaiṣa indra eṣa prajāpatirete sarve devā imāni ca pañca mahābhūtāni
pṛthivī vāyurākāśa āpo jyotīṣṭīyetānīmāni ca kṣudramiśrāṇīva/bījānītarāṇi cetarāṇi
cāṇḍajāni ca jārujāni ca svedajāni coḍbhijjāni cāśvā gāvaḥ puruṣā hastino
yatkiṁcedaṁ prāṇi jaṅgamaṁ ca patatri ca yacca sthāvaram sarvaṁ tatprajñānetram
prajñāne praṭiṣṭhitam prajñānetro lokaḥ prajñā pratisthā prajñānam brahma//’²⁹*

Here the Upaniṣad states that this Self or *Brahman*, which is the Supreme Force of this universe is intelligence or *prajñā*. Because everything is controlled by the intelligence or *prajñā*. He is Indra, Prajāpati, and all the gods. The five elements – earth, air, ether, water and light, the subtle beings, those who are born from eggs, wombs, earth, horses, cattle, men, elephants and all the creatures are guided by this single entity. All exist in that single entity and all are established in that single entity.

The *Aitareya Upaniṣad* says that everything is guided by this intelligence. When man denies the guidance of the intelligence, it causes sorrow and misery in the world. Man refuses to take the guidance of the intelligence because of the acquired characteristics of the mind. The desire of the mind sometimes comes into conflict with the purpose towards which intelligence directs. The mind builds a thick cloud of dust and the light of intelligence lies hidden behind that cloud. When the dust raised by the mind settles down and the mind ceases to raise fresh dust then only vision of intelligence guides the human beings. Through this vision of intelligence human beings visualise *Brahman* in the universe. When the intellect is illumined by the light of intelligence, a man can experience the Supreme Bliss. Then he realises that he is

28. Mehta, Rohit, TCU., p. 219

29. AU., III.1.3

beyond the limit of time and space. He becomes free and experiences the existence of the *Brahman* everywhere in this world. He realises the intrinsic freedom from the very beginning to the end of the journey of the soul.³⁰

According to *Aitareya Upaniṣad* *tapas* is the main power to achieve everything. One can attain *Brahman* through it. Because, the Supreme *Brahman* also creates this whole universe and all protecting deities through the *tapas* or *austerity*. Again no one can deny it that *tapas* or penance can be the source of the realisation of *Parama Brahman* because Upaniṣads have already declared this truth repeatedly.³¹

The *Aitareya Upaniṣad* gives importance on the practice of truth or *satya* because through the truth or *satya* one can achieve all things and through this path one can achieve the Highest Reality. The teaching of this Upaniṣad motivates people to cultivate the qualities like kindness, sympathy and other social values, which bring unity and brotherhood among the people. Thus, the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* teaches *prema* or love, universal brotherhood and oneness through the one reality of this entire universe. Because, in the very beginning the one and only *Brahman* existed in this whole world and from Him comes all. The *Ātman* which protects us and which is hidden in the heart of every living being is one and without any duality. Therefore, all human beings existing in this world are one and without any difference. All are equal and same irrespective of caste, colour and religion.

In this way, *Aitareya Upaniṣad* brings out the message of equality and love through the concept of one Supreme Force, i.e., *Ātman*. Again it is stated in the same Upaniṣad that the existence of the same *Ātman* is found in the son and in father and in this way the Upaniṣad has announced that the same *Ātman* exists in the heart of each

30. Mehta, Rohit., TCU., pp.219-220

31. MU., I.1.8

and every creatures. Thus, it brings the message of universal love and compassion through the concept of oneness of the soul.

According to *Aitareya Upaniṣad* we should think other people also who are thirsty and hungry and suffering from poverty. Because through kindness and humanity one can get immortality, not by the enjoyment of material pleasures, which ultimately bring sorrows and sufferings in our life. The Upaniṣad suggests that we should think others also as our own self, because in reality there is no difference among us as the same Supreme Soul is present in the souls of each and every human being of this world.