

Aitareya Upanishad
Transliterated Sanskrit Text

Free Translation

&

Brief Explanation

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**Aitareya Upanishad:
Origin of the Universe & Man
(Part-1)
T.N.Sethumadhavan**

Preamble

Aitareya Upanishad is a common ground for philosophy and physics. It contains the *mahavakya*, the great aphorism “*prajnanam brahma*”, Consciousness is Brahman. Aitareya Upanishad identifies Consciousness as the First Cause of creation. This is forerunner of ‘Unified Field Theory’ or a ‘Theory of Everything’ which the modern physicists are trying to discover although the modern science does not recognize Consciousness as a factor in creation of the universe.

One of the oldest pastimes of man is to run the search engine of his contemplative and analytical faculties to find out the final answer to the riddle of creation of the universe. This question is not merely academic but it also assumes the colors of religion, philosophy, science and poetry.

We have answers to this enigma in every religion. We have scientific theories throwing up endless ever changing conclusions, the most path-breaking of which is Charles Darwin’s “Origin of Species” followed by Stephen Hawking and others. We have philosophers’ speculations and poetic imaginations. But the mystery of creation remains as much unfathomed and unsolved today as in the Vedic days. For a detailed analysis of the subject the reader may refer to my article entitled “Mystery of Creation - Some Vedantic Concepts” under the category ‘Vedanta’ available in this Website.

VEDIC PERSPECTIVE ON CREATION

Creation is interpreted in the Vedas as a developmental course rather than as bringing into being something not hitherto existent. It was considered as an ongoing-process and not an event. The Purusha Sukta of Rig Veda paints a picture of the ideal Primeval Being existing before any phenomenal existence. He is conceived as a cosmic person with a thousand heads, eyes and feet, who filled the whole universe and extended beyond it. The world form is only a fragment of this divine reality. The first principle which is called Purusha manifested as the whole world by his Tapas.

This view gets crystallized into the later Upanishadic doctrine that the spirit or Atman in man (at microcosm) is the same as the spirit which is the cause of the world which goes by the name Brahman or Paramatman (at macrocosm). These theories are discussed in elaborate details in the following Upanishads Viz., *Prasna, Aitareya, Mundaka, Taittiriya, Katha, Chandogya, Svetasvatara, Brhadaranyaka, Maitri, Paingala Upanishads* besides the Bhagavad Gita and Yoga Vasishtha. Among the latter Acharyas the contributions made by Gaudapada, and Adi Sankara to these thoughts are colossal.

A brief quotation from the article "Cosmology in Vedanta" by Swami Tathagatananda published by Vedanta Society of New York given below brings out lucidly the perspectives of both Vedanta and modern science on this subject.

Quote--"A perceptive reader will find many striking similarities between the latest findings of Astrophysics and ancient Indian cosmological ideas, of which Swamiji (Vivekananda) says: ". . . you will find how wonderfully they are in accordance with the latest discoveries of modern science; and where there is disharmony, you will find that it is modern science which lacks and not they."

Einstein writes that "cosmic expansion may be simply a temporary condition which will be followed at some future epoch of cosmic time by a period of contraction. The universe in this picture is a pulsating balloon in which cycles of expansion and contraction succeed each other through eternity."

The modern astrophysicist, Stephen Hawking, writes: "At the big bang itself, the universe is thought to have had zero size, and so to have been infinitely hot . . . The whole history of science has been the gradual realization that events do not happen in an arbitrary manner, but they reflect a certain underlying order, which may or may not be divinely inspired."

The Vedas also state that creation is ongoing: what has been in the past is being repeated in the new cycle. Stephen Hawking writes, "Thus, when we see the universe, we are seeing it as it was in the past." He further writes, "But how did he [God] choose the initial state or configuration of the universe? One possible answer is to say that God chose the initial configuration of the universe for reasons that we cannot hope to know."

It is perhaps enough for the modern mind to know how great is the similarity. Vedanta does not support the "big bang" theory and its mechanistic materialism. We have merely cited certain common ideas to be found in both.

Brahman is the ultimate Reality. Brahman is impersonal-personal God. Impersonal God may be called the static aspect and personal God may be called the dynamic aspect of Brahman. The static aspect *Anid Avatam* - as Rg-Veda puts it, "It existed without any movement." Brahman is truth, Consciousness and Infinitude. Knowledge, will and action are inherent in Brahman. God projects the universe by animating His *prakriti* (maya).

Astrophysics and Advaita Vedanta agree on certain points. Advaita Vedanta upholds the notion of the pulsating or oscillating universe. Creation is followed by dissolution and this process will continue ad infinitum. Science used the term "big bang" for the starting point of creation and "big crunch" for the dissolution of the universe.

The "cosmic egg" of Vedanta, which is like a point, is called singularity in astrophysics. The background material of the scientist cannot be accepted as the source of creation. That is the biggest difference between the two systems. Science is still exploring and

remains inconclusive but Vedanta has given the final verdict, which is unassailable. Unless there is one changeless Reality, change cannot be perceived at all”.--Unquote

We will now attempt to study the *Aitareya Upanishad* in detail. (We have already covered in full the study of the *Prasna and Svetasvatara Upanishads* and briefly the *Mundaka Upanishad* in this website).

Introduction to the Aitareya Upanishad

The Aitareya Upanishad belongs to the *Aitareya Aranyaka* and is a part of the Rig Veda. This Upanishad consists of 3 chapters; the first chapter has 3 sections and the remaining two chapters do not have any sections. In the earlier portions of the *Aranyaka* rituals for the attainment of oneness with *Saguna Brahman* and their interpretations are dealt with. It is the purpose of the Upanishad to lead the mind of the ritualist away from the outer ceremonies to their inner meaning. Sankara points out that there are three classes of men who wish to acquire wisdom. The highest consist of those who have turned away from the world, whose minds are freed and collected, who are eager for freedom. For such seekers this Upanishad is intended. (The other two classes of people are those who want to become free gradually and those who care only for worldly possessions).

The first chapter describes the creation. It provides an allegorical description of the creation of the universe - as also of man - from Consciousness. It uses the word ‘Brahman’ for universal Consciousness and ‘Atman’ for individual Consciousness. These two words embrace all possible concepts about God and all known names of God without any contradiction whatsoever.

Atman alone exists as the sole Reality prior to the creation of all names and forms of the phenomenal world and during their continuance and after their dissolution as well. It projects the created objects through its wondrous powers of *maya*. The creation is the spontaneous act of the Creator who is not impelled by any desire or necessity. It is the projection of creator’s thoughts.

The stages of creation are as follows: the different worlds, the *Virat*(representing the totality of the physical bodies)► ►the deities or Devas (who control the various organs) ►►the elements►►the individual bodies►►and the food by which these bodies are sustained. After creation the Creator enters into the bodies as their living self. Thus is projected the universe of diversity. Next the Upanishad deals with the refutation (*apavada*) of this universe in order to arrive at the Knowledge of Atman.

THE TEXT

atha aitareyopaniShadi prathamAdhyAye prathamaH khaNDaH

Chapter I - Section 1

The Creation of the Cosmic Person

PEACE INVOCATION

*va~n me manasi pratishthita mano me vachi pratishthitamaviravirma edhi ..
vedasya ma anisthah shrutam me ma prahasiranenadhitenahoratan
sa.ndadhamyrita.n vadishyami satya.n vadishyami .. tanmamavatu
tadvaktaramavatvavatu mamavatu vaktaramavatu vaktaram.h ..
om shantih shantih shantih*

May my speech be fixed in my mind, may my mind be fixed in my speech!
O self-luminous Brahman, reveal yourself to me.
O mind and speech enable me to grasp the truth which the scriptures teach.
Let me not forget what I learnt. Let me study day and night.
May I think truth? May I speak truth?
May truth protect me? May truth protect the teacher?
Protect me. Protect the teacher. Protect the teacher.
Aum. Peace! Peace! Peace!

Mantra 1

*om atma va idameka evagra asinnanyatki.nchana mishat.h . sa ikshata
lokannu srija iti .. 1..*

In the beginning all this verily was Atman (Absolute Self) only, one and without a second. There was nothing else that winked. He (Atman) willed Himself: "Let Me now create the worlds".

It is the common experience that change can take place only upon a changeless base. The moving waters of a river should have a motionless river-bed. The moving train must have a rigid ground to move upon. Similarly, the world around us is ever changing and the continuity of change gives us the illusion of permanency to it. For this phenomenon of continuous change, we must have a changeless, permanent factor and all our scriptures are an enquiry into the existence and nature of that permanent Absolute Factor. This Upanishad is one such enquiry. In this Mantra the master says that 'in the beginning' i.e., before the manifested creation came into existence 'Self alone existed'. It is just like telling in a cloth shop that before all the varieties of fabrics came into being all those were nothing but cotton. In the same way we are told that before the manifested world got projected, it was all Consciousness alone, all pervading and eternal.

We must note here that the sage has deliberately used the word Atman and not Brahman. This can be explained by means of the example of foam. Prior to its manifestation foam was being called as water and after its manifestation it is called both as water and foam. The idea is that before the creation of the pluralistic world of objects, names and forms all that remained was the Self (Atman –individual Consciousness) which is nothing other than Brahman(Universal Consciousness) for there is no difference between pot space and universal outer space.

The Mantra adds that there was no other active principle or entity at that time in the Supreme. This means that the Supreme did not create the world of plurality out of some material cause that already existed like a potter making a pot out of clay that already existed. In the creation of the world the Supreme himself is the material and efficient cause. It also indicates that creation is a misinterpreted super-imposition upon the truth as the appearance of a snake on the rope is available to the disillusioned and confused person only. This is called *adhyaropa* in Vedanta.

How did the creation take place? He thought I shall indeed create the worlds. At the end of the cycle, the totality of beings living at that time remains in the form of vasanas or mental impressions. In the beginning of the next cycle, these vasanas are projected by the Supreme (who for this purpose is called Isvara) according to the quality of their past actions to seek out their fulfillment in the objective world to appear. The point to keep in mind is that although the creation is the will of Brahman, the resultant product is not based on His arbitrary whims and fancies but on the nature of past actions by the created persons.

Thus the story of creation in Aitareya Upanishad starts when there was nothing other than Consciousness, also called Atman, This One and Absolute Consciousness willed to create a world of multiplicity and relativity. Creation is a consequence of that Will Power, 'Tapas'.

The philosophy of Atman is stated here in brevity in the form of a *sutra*. Later on, by the demonstration that names and forms are mere illusory superimpositions (*adhyaropa*) and then by their refutation (*apavada*) will be shown the unreal nature of phenomena and the sole reality of Atman.

Mantra 2

*sa ima.n llokanasrijata . ambho marichirmapo.ado.ambhah parena diva.n
dyauh pratishtha.antariksham marichayah ..
prithivi maro ya adhastatta apah .. 2..*

He created these worlds: Ambhah, the world of water-bearing clouds, Marichi, the world of the solar rays, Mara, the world of mortals and Ap, the world of waters. Yon is Ambhah, above heaven; heaven is its support. The Marichis are the interspace. Mara is the earth. What is underneath is Ap.

It should be kept in mind that at the very outset, He created the five rudimentary elements. First there emerged four fields for the functioning of the universe. Those have been identified here as 1. The ocean beyond the heavens (Ambaha) supported by Heavens, 2. The region of light (Marichi), 3. The region of death in the form of earth (Mara) and 4. Primeval waters supporting the earth (Apah).

Mantra 3

*sa ikshateme nu loka lokapalannu srija iti .. so.adbhya eva purusha.n
samuddhrityamurchayat.h .. 3..*

He bethought Himself: "Here now are the worlds. Let Me now create world-guardians." Right from the waters He drew forth the Person in the form of a lump and gave Him a shape.

He then reflected "here are the worlds, let me now create guardians of the worlds to protect it". He then, like a potter, who first takes a lump of clay in his hands and then gradually gives it a shape, gave a shape to the person in the form of a lump which is called Virat, the gross form of the Cosmic Person (Purusha) of whom all the tangible physical objects are parts.

Mantra 4

*tamabhyatapatasyabhitaptasya mukha.n nirabhidyata yatha.andam
mukhadvagvacho.agnirnasike nirabhidyeta.n nasikabhyam pranah ..
pranadvayurakshini nirabhidyetaamakshibhya.n chakshushchakshusha
adityah karnau nirabhidyeta.n karnabhya.n shrotra.n
shrotraddishastva~nirabhidyata tvacho lomani lomabhya oshadhivanaspatayo
hridaya.n nirabhidyata hridayanmano manasashchandrama nabhirnirabhidyata
nabhya apano.apanamrityuh
shishna.n nirabhidyata shishnadreto retasa apah .. 4..*

**He brooded over Him. From Him, so brooded over,
the mouth was separated out, as with an egg; from the mouth, the organ of speech;
from speech, fire, the controlling deity of the organ.
Then the nostrils were separated out; from the nostrils, the organ of breath; from
breath, air, the controlling deity of the organ.
Then the eyes were separated out; from the eyes, the organ of sight; from sight, the
sun, the controlling deity of the organ.
Then the ears were separated out; from the ears, the organ of hearing; from
hearing, the quarters of space, the controlling deity of the organ.
Then the skin was separated out; from the skin, hairs, the organ of touch; from the
hairs, plants and trees, air the controlling deity of the organs.
Then the heart was separated out; from the heart, the organ of the mind;
from the mind, the moon, the controlling deity of the organ.
Then the navel was separated out; from the navel, the organ of the apana;
from the apana, Death, Varuna, the controlling deity of the organ.
Then the virile member was separated out; from the virile member, semen, the
organ of generation; from the semen, the waters, the controlling deity of the organ.**

He brooded over the lump, intending to give it the shape of a man. It will be seen from the stags of evolution of man as described above that the visible instruments are formed first, next the subtle organ which is the real instrument of perception and last the

controlling deity which animates each organ. The controlling deity is the guardian of the respective organ.

The process of creation described here is analogous to the development of embryo in an egg or foetus in the womb. The microcosm of man and macrocosm of cosmos follow an identical pattern.

ityaitareyopanishadi prathamadhyaye prathamah khandah
End of Chapter I - Section 1

atha aitareyopanishadi prathamadhyaye dvitiyah khandah
Chapter I - Section 2
Cosmic Powers in the Human Body

Mantra 1

ta eta devatah srishta asminmahatyarnave prapatan.h
. tamashanapipasabhyamanvavarjat.h . ta
enamabruvannayatana.n nah prajanihi yasminpratishthita annamadameti .. 1..

These deities, thus created, fell into this great ocean. He, the Creator, subjected the Person (Virat in the form of a lump) to hunger and thirst. They (the deities) said to Him (the Creator): "Find out for us an abode wherein being established we may eat food."

From now on the word ‘Creator’ is being used in place of ‘Atman’. The first-born Purusha, from whom the instruments of perception and deities were separated out was subjected to hunger and thirst. We have to understand that as the Purusha was afflicted with hunger and thirst, His offspring, the deities, were also subjected to them. The deities then asked for an abode where they could live and grow. This allegory emphasizes the basic fact of life that desires, want and their fulfillment are applicable to the whole of creation and none is immune to them.

Sankara’s commentary here is highly illuminating and hence it is quoted in full as follows. “The created Beings fell into the Great Ocean i.e., *samsara* or the phenomenal world where the great water-currents consist of miseries created by ignorance, desire, and action and which is filled with vicious crocodiles in the shape of painful diseases, senility and death. Without beginning or end, shoreless and without bottom, it affords relief in the form of the fleeting joy produced from the contact of the senses with their objects. Alas, this ocean is full of high waves of hundreds of evils lashed by the wind of the intense longing of the senses for their objects and it roars with the deafening noise of the anguish and cries arising from its numerous hells.

But there lies in the ocean, a raft of knowledge, in which are stored the provisions of many goodly virtues, such as truthfulness, integrity, charity, compassion, non-violence,

control of the body, restraint of the mind, and determination and also a track in the form of holy company and renunciation, which leads to the shore of Liberation”.

The gods or cosmic divinities also belong to the phenomenal world. Therefore, the attainment of oneness with them, as a result of practice of meditation and rituals cannot destroy the miseries of samsara. This being so, the aspirant seeking liberation from the phenomenal suffering, should realize the Supreme Brahman as his own self and the self of all beings. There is no other way to emancipation.

Mantra 2-3

*tabhyo gamanayatta abruvanna vai no.ayamalamiti .
tabhyo.ashvamanayatta abruvanna vai no.ayamalamiti .. 2..
tabhyah purushamanayatta abruvan.h sukritam bateti purusho vava sukritam.h .
ta abridayathayatanam pravishateti .. 3..*

He brought them a cow. They said: "But this is not enough for us." He brought them a horse. They said: "This, too, is not enough for us." He brought them a person. The deities said: "Ah, this is well done, indeed." Therefore a person is verily something well done. He said to the deities: "Now enter your respective abodes."

The allegory continues. The Creator offered the cosmic powers a cow, a horse and finally a man as an abode for them to live in. The deities rejected the cow and the horse but chose the man as a masterpiece. Being satisfied as their residence, they entered into the man through his various sense organs. The choice of man as residence signifies the superiority of human birth whose body can be made use of as a vehicle for performing good and noble actions including realization of God. No other body can give such variety of options.

Mantra 4

*agnirvagbhutva mukham pravishadvayuh prano bhutva nasike
pravishadadityashchakshurbhutva.akshini pravishaddishah
shrotram bhutva karnau pravishannoshadhivanaspatayo lomani bhutva
tvachampravisha.nshchandrama mano bhutva hridayam pravishanmrityurapano
bhutva nabhim pravishadapo reto bhutva shishnam pravishan.h .. 4..*

The deity fire became the organ of speech and entered the mouth. Air became breath and entered the nostrils. The sun became sight and entered the eyes; the quarters of space became hearing and entered the ears. Plants and trees, the deity of air, became hairs and entered the skin. The moon became the mind and entered the heart. Death became the apana and entered the navel. The waters became semen and entered the virile member.

Now the Upanishad illustrates the details of cosmic powers which reside in human body and empower his various organs of perception and action. These are tabulated as under.

ORGAN	FUNCTION	PRESIDING DEITY
Mouth	Speech	Fire
Nostrils	Smell	Air
Eyes	Sight	Sun
Ears	Hearing	Space
Skin	Hair (touch)	Plants
Heart	Mind	Moon
Navel	Out-breath	Death
Generative Organ	Seed (Procreation)	Water

Mantra 5

*tamashanayapipase abrutamavabhyamabhiprajanihiti te abridayetasveva
va.n devatasvabhajamyetasu bhaginniyau karomiti . tasmadyasyai kasyai
cha devatayai havigri.rhyate bhaginyavevasyamashanayapipase
bhavatah .. 5..*

Hunger and thirst said to the Creator: "For the two of us find an abode also." He said to them: "I assign the two of you to these deities; I make you co-sharers with them." Therefore to whatsoever deity an oblation is made, hunger and thirst became sharers in it.

Seeing other deities occupy their allotted places in man, hunger and thirst also demanded their own abode for themselves. Instead of assigning them an independent abode, the Creator asked them to share the abode with all the other deities. This signifies that desires afflict all the senses and that hunger and thirst are mere sensations which cannot subsist independently without their supporting sense organs; for example mere hunger cannot eat food unless it takes the help of the mouth to eat.

ityaitareyopanishadi prathamadhyaye dvitiyah khandah
End of Chapter I - Section 2

**Aitareya Upanishad:
Origin of the Universe & Man
(Part-2)
T.N.Sethumadhavan**

***atha aitareyopaniShadi prathamAdhyAye tRitIyaH khaNDaH*
Chapter I - Section 3
Descent of Consciousness in Man**

Preamble

After creating the fields for the functioning of the universe and the human beings which were both empowered by the cosmic forces, the third step in the creative process is said to be the creation of food. This is the reason why even today we consider food, clothing and shelter as the fundamental necessities of human beings to sustain life. The interesting allegory relating to this process is described in this section of the Upanishad.

Different senses urged by hunger and thirst run after food to catch it like a cat running after a mouse. None of them could succeed in their attempt as otherwise it would have resulted in a competition among the senses for the fulfillment of their desires. Finally food was caught by the out-breath called *Apana* which is one of the five forms of life-breath. It regulates the digestive system.

The incident of senses running after food made Consciousness to think about the need to have a unifying force in the body. So Consciousness or Atman itself entered the body from the suture in the skull. This point of entry called *Vidriti* is considered to be the door of bliss. The soul passing through this at the time of death attains progressive liberation.

Consciousness pervades the whole body. However by way of illustration, it is stated that It has three abodes and three states of existence. It is stated to reside in the eyes during waking state, in the mind during dream state and in the heart during deep sleep state.

Having descended in man, Consciousness (Atman) looked around to see if there were any other principles different from it. It saw the same Atman or Self in all beings. It realized that this Atman manifested as Cosmic Person (Purusha) was in fact all-pervading Brahman. The Self in man is nothing but Cosmic Consciousness. It is called *Idandra* - or *Indra* as a mark of respect. This narration signifies the realization by individual Self that the same Brahman, Cosmic Consciousness, pervades in all beings.

The Text

CREATION OF FOOD BY THE SUPREME SELF

sa IkShateme nu lokAshcha lokapAlAshchAnnamebhyaH sRijA iti .. 1..

He bethought Himself: "Here now are the worlds and the world-guardians. Let Me create food for them."

After creation of these gods, the Supreme Self thought It should create food for them because hunger and thirst are co-existent with them.

*so.apo.abhyatapattAbhyo.abhitaptAbhyo mUrtirajAyata .
yA vai sA mUrtirajAyatAnna.n vai tat.h .. 2..*

He brooded over the waters. From the waters, thus brooded over, there emerged a condensed form. The form that so emerged is indeed food.

The Lord intensely meditated over the five elements from which there emerged a form as food which include cereals, animals and other living and non-living beings.

EATER OF THE FOOD

*tadenatsRiShTaM parA~NtyajighA.nsattadvAchA.ajighRikShat.h
tannAshaknodvAchA grahItum.h .
sa yaddhainadvAchA.agrahaiShyadabhivyAhRitya haivAnnamatrapsyat.h .. 3..*

The food so created wished to flee away. He sought to grasp it with speech. But He was not able to grasp it with speech. If, indeed, He has grasped it with speech, one would then have been satisfied by merely uttering the word food.

In order to quench the hunger and thirst of the worlds, gross food was created. That food thought that they would eat it away and to escape from the eater, it started running away. Then *jivatma* in the form of human being tried to catch hold of it by speech but failed to grasp it by speech. At that time if that *Purusha* could hold the food by speech, now the men also could feel satiated by simply uttering the word food but it does not happen like that.

In the following Mantras from 4 to 9, similar examples of different organs of the body trying to catch the food are given and it was concluded that none could catch them.

*tatprANenAjighRikShat.h tannAshaknotprANena grahItu.n sa
yaddhainatprANenAgrahaiShyadabhiprANya
haivAnnamatrapsyat.h .. 4..*

The Creator sought to grasp it with the breath. But He was not able to grasp it with the breath. If, indeed, He had grasped it with the breath, one would then have been satisfied by merely smelling food.

*tachchakShuShA.ajighRikShat.h tannAshaknochchakShuShA grahItu/n sa
yaddhainachchakShuShA.agrahaiShyaddRiShTvA haivAnamatrapsyat.h .. 5..*

He sought to grasp it with the eye. But He was not able to grasp it with the eye. If, indeed, He had grasped it with the eye, one would then have been satisfied by merely seeing food.

*tachChrotreNAjighRikShat.h tannAshaknochChrotreNa grahItu.n sa
yaddhainachChroteNAgrahaiShyachChrutvA haivAnnamatrapasyat.h .. 6..*

He sought to grasp it with the ear. But He was not able to grasp it with the ear. If, indeed, He had grasped it with the ear, one would then have been satisfied by merely hearing of food.

*tattvachA.ajighRikShat.h tannAshaknottvachA grahItu.n sa
yaddhainattvachA.agrahaiShyat.h spRiShTvA haivAnnamatrapasyat.h .. 7..*

He sought to grasp it with the skin. But He was not able to grasp it with the skin. If, indeed, He had grasped it with the skin, one would then have been satisfied by merely touching food.

*tanmanasA.ajighRikShat.h tannAshaknonmanasA grahItu.n sa
yaddhainanmanasA.agrahaiShyaddhyAtvA haivAnnamatrapasyat.h .. 8..*

He sought to grasp it with the mind. But He was not able to grasp it with the mind. If, indeed, He had grasped it with the mind, one would then have been satisfied by merely thinking of food.

*tachChishnnenAjighRikShat.h tannAshaknochChishnena grahItu.n sa
yaddhainachChishnnenAgrahaiShyadvitsRijya haivAnamatrapasyat.h .. 9..*

He sought to grasp it with the sexual organ. But He was not able to grasp it with the sexual organ. If, indeed, He had grasped it with that organ, one would then have been satisfied by merely having sex.

WHO THEN SUCCEEDS?

*tadapAnenAjighRikShat.h tadAvayat.h saiSho.annasya graho
yadvAyuranAyuvA.r eSha yadvAyuH .. 10..*

He sought to grasp it with the apana and He grasped it. This grasper of food is what vayu, air or prana is. This vayu is what lives on food.

Lastly, the *Purusha* tried to grasp th food with *Apana* through the gate of mouth. It is with the help of *apana* the food eaten gets circulated through out the body. *Apana* is a part of the five-fold *Prana*.

*sa IkShata katha.n nvidaM madRite syAditi sa IkShata katareNa prapadyA iti .
sa IkShata yadi vAchA.abhivyAhRita.n yadi prANenAbhiprANita.n yadi
chakShuShA dRiShTa.n yadi shrotreNa shruta.n*

*yadi tvachA spRiShTa.n yadi manasA dhyAta.n yadyapAnenAbhyapAnita.n
yadi shishnena visRiShTamatha ko.ahamiti .. 11..*

He bethought Himself: "How could this exist without Me?" Then He said to Himself: "Which way shall I enter it?" he said to Himself further: "If speech is uttered by the organ of speech, if smelling is done by the breath, seeing by the eyes, hearing by the ears, touching by the skin, thinking by the mind, eating by the apana and the emission of semen by the sex organ, then who am I?"

The Supreme Self found itself in an unusual paradoxical position. It thought that if every other organ of the body does its assigned job, then what is there left for it? It would become unemployed. What is its importance then and what is its use? So it started thinking through which way it should enter the body and assert itself? The idea is how anything else can function without the presence of the Supreme Self. Just as a palatial house has no meaning without the existence of the householder to live in it, the beautiful human body has no meaning without its Indweller, the Supreme Self, the Atman.

*sa etameva sImAna.n vidaryaitayA dvArA prApadyata . saiShA vidRitirnAma
dvAstadetannA.andanam.h .
tasya traya AvasathAstrayaH svapnA ayamAvasatho.ayamAvasatho.ayamAvasatha
iti .. 12..*

So, piercing the skull, the Lord entered through that door. That door is known as the vidriti, the cleft. This is the place of bliss. Atman, thus embodied, has three abodes, three conditions of sleep. The three abodes are the eye, the mind and the heart. The three conditions of sleep are waking, dream and deep sleep.

*sa jAto bhUtAnyabhivyaikhyat.h kimihAnyA.n vAvadiShaditi .sa etameva
puruShaM brahma tatamamapashyat.h . idamadarshanamitI .. 13..*

Having been born as the jiva, He realised the elements as one with Himself. What else here would one desire to speak about? He perceived this very person as the all-pervading Brahman. He said: "Ah, I have seen It." (*Idam dra - This (I) saw*)

Thus born, He looked around upon other living beings. He wondered if He knew anyone else. But He saw the same *Purusha* pervading in all as Brahman and then He said 'Oh, I have seen this'.

*tasmAdidandro nAmedandro ha vai nAma . tamidandra.n santami.ndra
ityAchakShate parokSheNa .
parokShapriyA iva hi devAH parokShapriyA iva hi devAH .. 14..*

Therefore He is called Idandra. Idandra, indeed is His name. Him who is Idandra they call indirectly Indra. For the gods appear to be fond of cryptic epithets; yea, the gods appear to be fond of cryptic epithets (*paroksha priyaahi iva devah*).

Therefore he is called Idandra. Idandra is verily His name. Though His name is Idandra, He is called Indra for the gods are fond of being called by indirect names.

The idea is that if by seeing the wonderful appearance of the world a person cultivates faith and believes in the existence of the Lord as maker of this universe and if he becomes eager to know and attain Him, depends upon Him in entirety, and makes sincere efforts, and then we can surely know Him. Knowledge and attainment of the Lord are possible only through human body and not through any other body. Hence the opportunity of Self-realization available in the human birth should not be allowed to go waste.

ityaitareyopaniShadi prathamAdhyAye tRitIyaH khaNDaH
End of Chapter I - Section 3

atha aitaropaniShadi dviIyodhyAyaH
Chapter II

The Three Births of the Self

Preamble

In this Chapter II the creation of human body is described in order to inculcate a sense of dispassion by showing the impermanence of the body. Creation continues through procreation. A man is born, he gives birth to a son and he takes rebirth after death. This signifies that a person has really three births. The procreative fluid of a father is said to be the essence of his Self. The mother looks after it during pregnancy as her own Self. After birth, the parents nourish the child so that he can be their substitute for performance of pious deeds. Hence the importance of natal care and oneness of the father and the son are emphasized.

The central theme of creation in Chapter I was the presence of Self in all of us. However, we remain ignorant of its presence due to our preoccupation with desires of the senses. In this Chapter the example of sage Vamadeva, who realized the Self even while he was in the womb, is given. He thereby became immortal after the death of his body. The Upanishad says that the worldly desires are like iron cages preventing the soul from making itself free. Only a Self-realized person like Vamadeva can come out of this stronghold.

The Text

[The sage orders pregnant women to leave for some time].

*OM puruShe ha vA ayamAdito garbho bhavati yadetadretaH
.tadetatsarvebhyo.a~NgebhyastejaH saMbhUtamAtmanyeva.a.atmAnaM bibharti
tadyadA striyA.n si~nchatyathainajjanayati tadasya prathama.n janma .. I..*

This person (Jiva) is, at first, the germ in a man. That which is the semen is here called the germ. This semen is the vigor drawn from all the limbs. The man holds this essence of his Self in his own body. When he pours the semen into a woman, he procreates himself. This, indeed, is the first birth of the embodied soul.

This Jiva in the male body of his father first becomes semen. This semen is the vigor extracted and transformed from all the limbs. First the father holds and nourishes it in his own body and rears it which is not different from him. When he injects this in mother's body he procreates himself in the form of a foetus. This is his first birth.

*tatstriyA AtmabhUya.n gachChati yathA svama~Nga.n tathA . tasmAdenA.n na hinasti .
sA.asyaitamAtmAnamatra gataM bhAvayati .. 2..*

That semen becomes one with the woman-just like a limb of her own. That is why it does not hurt her. She nourishes this self of his that has come into her.

The semen injected into the body of a mother gets assimilated with her body and becomes an indivisible part of her; hence she does not feel hurt or burdensome during pregnancy. The lady nourishes that foetus as the Self of her husband.

*sA bhAvayitrI bhAvayitavyA bhavati . ta.n strI garbha bibharti . so.agra
eva kumAra.n janmano.agre.adhibhAvayati .
sa yatkumAra.n janmano.agre.adhibhAvayatyAtmAnameva tadbhAvayatyeSha.n
lokAnA.n santatyA .
eva.n santatA hIme lokAstadasya dvitIya.n janma .. 3..*

She, being the nourisher of the child , should be nourished. The woman nourishes the embryo. Immediately after its birth the father nourishes the child. Nourishing the child from birth onward, he thus nourishes himself for the continuation of these worlds. For thus alone are these worlds perpetuated. This is one's second birth.

The pregnant woman who holds the foetus should therefore be taken care of well by every member of the family. While the mother protects the unborn child in her womb, the father takes care of the child after delivery till it gets fully grown up and becomes a sound person in the society. This act on his part is for maintaining the continuity of the race. This coming out of the womb and taking birth as a child is his second birth.

*so.asyAyamAtmA puNyebhyaH karmabhyaH pratidhIyate . athAsyAyAmitara AtmA
kRitakRityo vayogataH praiti .
sa itaH prayanneva punarjAyate tadasya tRitIya.n janma .. 4..*

The child who is the father's own Self is made his substitute for performing virtuous deeds. Then the Self of the father, having accomplished his duties and reached his age departs. So departing hence, he is born again. This is the third birth.

The father himself becomes the son in the manner explained in the above Mantras. When the son comes of age, the father entrusts him with all the family duties and responsibilities and feels free from parental debt. After this, the life span of the father gets shortened and he departs from the earth. Then according to his karma he is reborn again somewhere else in another womb. This is his third birth. This way the chain of birth and death continues so long as the man does not consider this chain as a bondage and torture and till he does not make effort to get released from it during his birth in the human form. Therefore the Upanishad stresses the need to try utmost to break this chain. Such examples are given in the next two Mantras.

*taduktamRiShiNA garbhe nu sannanveShAmavedamaha.n devAnA.n janimAni
vishvA shataM mA pura AyasIrarakShannadhaH shyeno javasA niradIyamiti
. garbha evaitachChayAno vAmadeva evamuvAcha .. 5..*

About this a rishi has said: "While still lying in the womb, I came to know all the births of the gods. A hundred strongholds, as if made of iron, confined me, yet I burst through them all swiftly, like a hawk." Vamadeva spoke, in this way, even while lying in the womb.

Sage Vamadeva, even while he was in his mother's womb, obtained the real knowledge. Thus he said at that very stage, "O, what an amazing thing that while living in the womb itself I came to know the reality about these gods i.e. inner senses and their several births. In other words, I knew that it is the inner sense and *indriyas* which are subjected to birth and death and not the Atman. Before I realized this secret I had to pass through several bodily cages hard like iron. I had such a strong identity with them that it was very difficult for me to get rid of them. Now, like a hawk, by applying the full strength of knowledge I broke all the fetters and became detached and free. I have no relation with the body and understood that I am not the body".

*sa eva.n vidvAnasmAchCharIrabhedAdUrdhva utkramyAmuShmin.h svasge loke
sarvAn.h kAmAnAptvA.amRitaH samabhavat.h samabhavat.h .. 6..*

Thus endowed with Knowledge, he, becoming one with the Supreme Self and soaring aloft on the dissolution of the body, obtained all desires in the heavenly world and became immortal-yea, became immortal.

In this way Sage Vamadeva knew the secret of transmigration while he was in the womb itself. He knew that while a man feels himself identified with the body, he cannot escape the cycles of birth and death. Vamadeva coming through life rose up high from the mundane level and reached the Supreme abode of the Lord. There he found himself with no desires that were to be fulfilled and became immortal. He got released for ever from the wheel of birth and death.

[The sage tells the pregnant women to come back to their seats].

ityaitaropaniShadi dvitIyodhyAyaH

End of Chapter II

atha aitaropaniShadi tRitIyodhyAyaH
Chapter III

Consciousness is Supreme Oneness

Preamble

It all started with Consciousness, *Atman*. Atman projected the universe and entered into it thereafter. When it looked around, it found that everything is pervaded by it. As Atman is Brahman, Brahman is nothing but Consciousness – *prjnanam brahma*. This is the *Mahavakya* or the Great Saying of this Upanishad contained in 3.1.3.

This chapter begins with a question as to what should be meditated upon as Atman. It says that this sort of doubt has no relevance because everything that exists – mind, senses, cosmic powers, living beings and material objects - has Consciousness as its fundamental basis as well as its inner power.

The text concludes that the whole universe is guided by Consciousness. So Consciousness must be the Ultimate Reality, the Transcendental Power, the Absolute Truth, and the Supreme God. Thus the importance of the Aitareya Upanishad lies in its statement that Consciousness is Brahman, the Absolute – *Prajnanam Brahma* as well as for the concept of three births of the man.

The Text

*OM ko.ayamAtmeti vayamupAsmahe kataraH sa AtmA . yena vA pashyati yena
vA shRiNoti yena vA ga.ndhAnAjighrati yena vA vAcha.n vyAkaroti yena
vA svAdu chAsvAdu cha vijAnAti .. 1..*

Who is He upon whom we meditate thinking: "This is the Self"? Which one is the Self? Is it He by whom one sees form, by whom one hears sound and by whom one tastes the sweet and the unsweet?

The purport of the Mantra is with whose co-operation the man visualizes all objects through his eyes; hears sounds through the ears; smells through the nostrils; speaks through the speech organ; distinguishes the tasty from the non-tasty through the tongue? Who is that Atma to be worshipped?

*yadetaddhRidayaM manashchaitat.h . sa.nj~nAnamAj~nAna.n vij~nAnaM
praj~nAnaM medhA
dRiShTidhRi.rtimatirmanIShA jUtIH smRitiH sa.nkalpaH kraturasuH kAmo
vasha iti .
sarvANyevaitAni praj~nAnasya nAmadheyAni bhava.nti .. 2..*

Is it the heart (intellect) and the mind? It is consciousness, lordship, knowledge, wisdom, retentive power of mind, sense knowledge, steadfastness, though,

thoughtfulness, sorrow, memory, concepts, purpose, life, desire, longing: all these are but various names of Consciousness (Prajnanam).

The question raised was answered by concluding that Consciousness is that Atma which has to be meditated upon. This entity – Consciousness – has several names as stated in the Mantra.

*eSha brahmaiSha indra eSha prajApatirete sarve devA imAni cha
pa~nchamahAbhUtAni pRithivI vAyurAkAsha Apo
jyotI.nShItyetAnImAni cha kShudramishrANiva .
bIjAnItarANi chetarANi chANDajAni cha jArujAni cha svedajAni chodbhijjAni
chAshvA gAvaH puruShA hastino yatki~nchedaM prANi ja~Ngama.n cha patatri
cha yachcha sthAvara.n sarva.n tatpraj~nAnetraM praj~nAne pratiShThitaM
praj~nAnetro lokaH praj~nA pratiShThA praj~nAnaM brahma .. 3..*

He is Brahma, He is Indra, He is Prajapati; He is all these gods; He is the five great elements—earth, air, akasa, water, light; He is all these small creatures and the others which are mixed; He is the origin—those born of an egg, of a womb, of sweat and of a sprout; He is horses, cows, human beings, elephants—whatever breathes here, whether moving on legs or flying in the air or unmoving. All this is guided by Consciousness, is supported by Consciousness. The basis of the universe is Consciousness. Consciousness is Brahman (*Prajnanam Brahma*).

Having so thought they came to the conclusion that Brahman himself is the creator of all and it is He who provided multifaceted powers to all. He is alone worthy of being worshipped by everybody. He himself is *Brahma, Indra* and *Prajapati*. The gods such as Indra, the five elements and creatures born of egg, uterus, sweat, and erupting from the earth, horses, kine, elephants, and humans- all collectively referred to as world, moving and non-moving creatures, all derive power from Brahman who is the Knowledge itself. Only due to His power all are capable of functioning and they all are seated in Him alone. The entire universe is sentient or animated only due to this Supreme Power who is their base. He is the *Paramatman*, Consciousness, and Knowledge who alone is to be worshipped. That Consciousness is Brahman who is described in several ways by different thinkers as it is conceived in their minds. This is the *Mahavakya* (Great Saying) of this Upanishad.

*sa etena prAj~nenA.a.atmanA.asmAllokAdutkramyAmuShminsvarge loke sarvAn.h
kAmAnAptvA.amRitaH samabhavat.h samabhavat.h .. 4..*

He, having realized oneness with Pure Consciousness, soared from this world and having obtained all desires in yonder heavenly world, became immortal-yea, became immortal.

The Upanishad concludes with an assertion that the one who has this knowledge (that the substratum of everything in the universe is Brahman) transcends beyond this world after

death and reaches the Supreme Abode of beatitude. He joins the Supreme Absolute and attains everlasting bliss. He becomes immortal – gets rid of the cycles of birth and death.

ityaitaropaniShadi tRitIyodhyAyaH

End of Chapter III

*OM vA~N me manasi pratiShThitA mano me vAchi pratiShThitamAvirAvIrma
edhi vedasya ma ANIsthaH shrutaM me mA prahAsIranenAdhItenAhorAtrAn.h
sa.ndadhAmyRita.n vadiShyAmi satya.n vadiShyAmi tanmAmavatu
tadvaktAramavatvavatu mAmavatu vaktAramavatu vaktAram.h ..*

OM shAntiH shAntiH shAntiH.

The Peace Chant

May my speech be fixed in my mind, may my mind be fixed in my speech!

O self-luminous Brahman, reveal yourself to me.

O mind and speech enable me to grasp the truth which the scriptures teach.

Let me not forget what I learnt. Let me study day and night.

May I think truth? May I speak truth?

May truth protect me? May truth protect the teacher?

Protect me. Protect the teacher. Protect the teacher.

Aum. Peace! Peace! Peace!

End of Aitareya Upanishad

26th October, 2011

Deepavali