

# MICRO-MACROCOSMIC RELATIONSHIPS IN THE *CHĀNDOGYA UPANIṢAD*

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## General Introduction

The word *upaniṣad* which came to mean a class of texts at the end of the Veda, is often translated as "secret doctrine" or similar, but it came to assume this meaning because it originally meant "connection, correspondence, equivalence, homology". Recent researches on the Upaniṣads by indologists such as Louis Renou, Paul Thieme, Harry Falk, upto Patrick Olivelle, have discovered this original meaning and hence central theme of the Upaniṣads.

The Vedic *ṛṣis* were in search of the connection or bond, *bandhu*, relating the ritual, cosmic and spiritual or human powers. Only a knowledge of the connections and relations within the universe could enable them to effectively perform their sacrifices. Basically, there were three spheres, which were thus interrelated: the sphere of the cosmos (*adhibhūta*), the sphere of sacrifice (*adhiyajña*) and the sphere of the gods (*adhidaiva*), as well as the human/bodily sphere (*adhyātma*). Since the cosmic powers were governed by, if not identical with the gods, *adhibhūta* and *adhidaiva* would mostly coincide. *Adhyātma* which originally was related to the human body, only gradually assumed the meaning of spiritual sphere in the Upaniṣads, following the semantic development of *ātman* which first meant the body, and later only the innermost core of Self of Man. These spheres were part of a whole web of interrelationships which made for an understanding of the universe and of man in connection with the divine powers. Understanding these cosmic relations was part of a secret knowledge which also meant power, a power to deal with these cosmic realities in ritual.

On this general background we have to understand the Upaniṣads, and specially the early Upaniṣads such as **Chāndogya**, which constitutes a link between the Vedic ideas and the specific, so-called esoteric ideas of the Upaniṣads. Obviously, the link are the Brāhmaṇas (and Āraṇyakas), where we find usages of the word *upaniṣad* in the sense of "connection, relationship, equation." For example in the **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** there is a teaching of an *upaniṣad* which is summarized in the equations "Agni is Vāyu, Agni is the Sun, Agni is the year" (X.4.5.1). Wherever connections or equations are established, they are often called *upaniṣad*.<sup>1</sup> Renou has shown that the word *nidāna* is also used in the Brāhmaṇas in the sense of "a connection on the basis of identity between two things belonging to different levels."<sup>2</sup>



To discover, know and establish connections and correspondences between different spheres is for the Vedic, Brahmanic and Upanisadic *ṛṣis* not only the content, but it is also a method of knowledge, which is used consciously and systematically. It proceeds from knowing these realities in their own sphere, e.g. in the cosmos, in the body, or in ritual, connecting them among each other, and finally discovering and hence realizing experientially their identity. The equation *ātman - brahman* is but the last step in this process of knowledge. But before reaching that point of identity, the Upaniṣads themselves go through a variety of interrelations and homologies. The micro-macrocosmic relations are the most common, but not the only kind of such connections.

Patrick Olivelle, following Renou, has equally emphasized the meaning of *upaniṣad* as "connection or equivalence, but he adds that "In addition, the term implies hierarchy; the Upanisadic connections are hierarchically arranged, and the quest is to discover the reality that stands at the summit of this hierarchically interconnected universe. It is, however, assumed that such connections are always hidden."<sup>3</sup>

Another linguistic indication of this tendency of the Upaniṣads to co-relate and connect different realities meditatively is the frequent use of the verb *upās-*, which is mostly translated as "to venerate", to meditate upon something as something else. Such a meditation connects the person who thus meditates with the realities which he recognizes as correspondences or homologies. We shall see examples for all these usages and meanings in the **Chāndogya**.

There are several bases for establishing such equivalences. One of the strongest and most lasting influences on all later speculations on such correspondences is the **Puruṣa Sūkta** (RV X.90). Some homologies are based on similarities (e.g. wind and breath), and another method to arrive at these equivalents are "etymological" connections and other connections based on language, as for example the number of syllables of a metre.

We may look at one example of the use of the term *upaniṣad* in the **Chāndogya** itself:

*dugdhe'smai vāgdoham yo vāco dohaḥ. annavānannādo bhavati. Ya etāmevaṁ sāmnamupaniṣadam vedopaniṣadam veda.*<sup>4</sup>

"When a man knows these hidden connections (*upaniṣad*) of the Sāman chants--speech will yield for him the milk which is the very milk of speech, and he will come to own and to eat his own food--he who knows this *upaniṣad*."

I may summarize this general introduction to our theme in the words of Brereton<sup>5</sup>:



Each Upanisadic teaching creates an integrative vision, a view of the whole which draws together the separate elements of the world and of human experience and compresses them into a single form. To one who has this larger vision of things, the world is not a set of diverse and disorganized objects and living beings, but rather forms a totality with a distinct shape and character.

### Correspondences in the Chândogya Upaniṣad

I may mention at the outset that there will be some overlapping with other papers presented at this Seminar, but they are unavoidable, since the general method of the Upaniṣad is precisely one that proceeds by way of such correspondences in various fields. But I do not consider this type of repetition as useless, rather they can lead to a deeper understanding of the text from various angles.

A clear indication of establishing correspondences is when the text itself declares:

*Ityadhyātmam | athādhyātmam*  
*Athādhidaivam | adhidaivatam*  
etc.

The first such equivalences are related to the *udgītha*. The verb used to connect the *udgītha* with the human (*adhyātma*) and cosmic (*adhidaivam*) realities is obviously *upās-*, "to venerate, to meditate upon" the *udgītha* as:

Breath, speech, eye, ear, mind  
at the human level.

And

Sun, wind, fire etc. at the cosmic/divine level.

Every connection is justified or explained also by means of "etymological" connections:

What follows is with respect to the divine sphere. One should venerate the High Chant as the sun up there that gives warmth. As it rises (*udyan*), it sings the High Chant (*udgāyati*) for the creatures. As it rises, it dispels darkness and fear. Anyone who knows this is sure to become a man who dispels fear and darkness. As it rises, it dispels darkness.

This breath in here and that sun up there are exactly the same. This is warm, and so is that. People call this sound (*svara*), and they call that shine (*svara*) and shining back (*pratyāsvara*). Therefore, one should venerate the High Chant as both this here and that up there.<sup>6</sup>

Here it is clear that not only the meaning of the two realities is connected "etymologically", and they have an internal homology, but their qualities enter the person "who knows (it, i.e. the connection) thus", *ya evam veda*. Like in the case of the



connection of the *udgītha* with *prāṇa* and *sūrya*, their qualities of rising (*ud*) and dispelling darkness and fear are possessed by the man who knows.

The famous expression *ya evam veda sa eva bhavati* and similar clearly indicates that this knowledge of the connections is an effective, a transforming knowledge. And for the Upaniṣads, any other knowledge would be futile:

*Yadeva vidyayā karoti śraddhayopaniṣadā tadeva vīryavattaram bhavati*

Only what is performed with knowledge, with faith, and with an awareness of the hidden connections (*upaniṣad*) becomes truly potent.<sup>7</sup>

In connection with the *udgītha*, the relationship between *ṛk* and *sāman* is expressed in cosmic as well as personal terms (I.6), from which we get the following correspondences:

earth - fire  
atmosphere - wind  
heaven - sun  
lunar mansions - moon  
bright and dark sides of the sun.  
The cosmic realities correspond to:  
Speech - breath  
eye - *ātman*  
ear - mind  
bright and dark parts of the eye.

These correspondences are not yet systematic and fixed as in later texts. What is important, is the relation/identity between the golden *puruṣa* in the sun (I.6.6) and the *puruṣa* seen in the eye (I.7.5): "This person down here has exactly the same appearance as that person up there in the sun..."

This early passage offers a clue to the identification of the dying man with the golden *puruṣa* in the sun of Īśa 16, and the saving knowledge of the *puruṣa* of the colour of the sun in *Śvetāśvatara* (III.8):

*vedāhametaṁ puruṣaṁ mahāntamādityavarṇaṁ tamasaḥ parastāt.  
tameva viditvāti mṛtyumeti na anyāḥ panthā vidyate 'yanāya*

I know this mighty Person (Puruṣa)  
Of the color of the sun, beyond darkness.  
Only by knowing Him does one pass over death.  
There is no other path for going there.

The knower of the identity of the two *puruṣas* in the **Chāndogya** "rules over the world, below the sun and over the desires of men..." (I.7.7). The "fruit" of this knowledge is still this-worldly (in later terms: *bhoga*), whereas the same knowledge of



the *puruṣa* leads beyond, to an overcoming of death (*mokṣa*) in the *Īśa* and *Śvetāśvatara*.

As I have said in the introduction, the *Ṛgvedic puruṣa* is the key to most of these correspondences, but the Upanisadic *puruṣa* goes beyond the micro-macrocosmic relationships established by the *puruṣa*-cosmogony. If the *Ṛgveda* was concerned with the origins, the Upaniṣads are concerned with the final goal, liberating knowledge. In both, the *puruṣa* serves as the model. And the extreme expression of the end of the *Īśa Upaniṣad*: *yo 'sau puruṣaḥ so 'ham asmi*, is not only the key to the latter, but it has influenced all the later theistic spiritualities where the *mantra so 'ham* plays a central role.

The symbolism of numbers plays an important role in these correspondences, as for example the number five which pervades all the different spheres. Ultimately these correspondences of groups of five lead to the system of the *tattvas* which consists mostly of groups of five (25 in *Sāṃkhya*, 36 in the *Āgamas*).

The *Sāman* chant consists of five parts: *hīṅkāra*, *prastāva*, *udgītha*, *pratihāra* and *nidhana*. These five are correlated to a number of realities grouped into five, such as: the worlds (*lokas*, II.2.1), consisting of earth, fire, atmosphere, sun and sky, the rain (II.3), the waters (II.4), the seasons (II.5), five animals (II.6), the five *prāṇas* (II.7). Obviously, it is not only a question of establishing equivalents, but each such correlation yields a particular result, to mention only one example: If one venerates or meditate upon (*upāsita*) five types of water as the five parts of the *Sāman* chant: "He perishes not in water, he becomes rich in water, who knowing this thus, reverences a fivefold *Sāman* in all waters." (II.4.2, tr. Hume).

There are other correspondences with the sevenfold *Sāman*, as for example the seven divisions of the day or of the sun (II.9), where each division is connected with a class of beings. This sevenfold *Sāman* is to be meditated upon (*upāsita*) as leading beyond death (*atimṛtyu*, II.10.1), and this is precisely the final goal of all such meditations on the interrelatedness. Only a vision of the totality can lead beyond death.

Further analogies of the fivefold *Sāman* relate to: the senses (mind, speech eye, ear, breath, II.11.1), the five phases of fire (II.12), sexual intercourse (II.13), the five divisions of the sun during the day (II.14), again rain (II.15), seasons (II.16), etc. The final conclusion of all these equivalence is the identification with the whole, the totality:

*sa ya evametatsāma sarvasminprotam veda sarvaṃ ha bhavati  
yāni pañcadhā trīṇi trīṇi tebhyo na jyāyaḥ param anyad asti,  
yastadveda sa veda sarvaṃ sarvā diśo balimasmai haranti.  
sarvaṃ asmi ityupāsita. tadvrataṃ tad vratam.*

(Chānd. II.21.2-3)



When in this manner a man knows this Sāman woven upon the Whole—he becomes the Whole. There is nothing better, nothing higher than the fivefold set of threes.

A man who knows that knows the Whole; all quarters bring tribute to him.

He should venerate this Sāman with the thought, "I am the Whole!"—that is his basic rule. (tr. P. Olivelle)

One symbol which has been used by both; the **Bṛhadāraṇyaka** and the **Chāndogya** to illustrate the sweet unity of all things is honey, *madhu*. The *madhuvidyā* of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka is well-known. To quote only one verse:

*iyam̐ pṛthivī sarveṣāṃ bhūtānām̐ madhu. asyai pṛthivyai sarvāṇi  
bhūtāni madhu. Yaścāyamasyām̐ pṛthivyām̐ tejomayo 'mṛtamayaḥ  
puruṣo yaścāyamadhyātmām̐ śarīrastejomayo 'mṛtamayaḥ  
puruṣo 'yameva sa yo 'yamātmā. idamamṛtamidaṃ brahmedaṃ  
sarvam.* (BrUp II.5.1)

The earth is the honey of all beings, and all beings are the honey of this earth. The radiant and immortal person on the earth and, in the case of the *ātman*, the radiant and immortal person residing in the body—they are both one's self (*ātman*). It is the immortal, it is Brahman, it is the Whole.

In the **Chāndogya** we find the equivalences between the elements for making honey with the parts of the cosmic Sun and with the four Vedas and the Upaniṣads (III.1-5). *Madhu* is nectar (*amṛta*) and it is the essence of the flowers (*rasa*), hence:

*te vā ete rasāmām̐ rasāḥ. vedā hi rasāḥ. teṣāmete rasāḥ. tāni vā  
etāny amṛtānām̐ amṛtāni. vedā hy amṛtāḥ. teṣām etāny amṛtāni.* (Chānd. III.5.4)

These, clearly, are the very essence of the essences, for the essences are the Vedas, and these are their essence. These are, moreover, the immortal nectar of nectars, for the nectars are the Vedas, and these are their nectar. (tr. Olivelle)

The philosophical explanation of the honey symbolism is found in the famous teaching to Śvetaketu:

*yathā somya madhu madhukṛo nistiṣṭhanti nānātyayānām̐  
vṛkṣānām̐ rasānsamavahāramekatām̐ rasam̐ gamayanti.  
te yathā tatra na vivekaṃ labhante 'muṣyāhaṃ vṛkṣasya  
raso 'smyamuṣyāhaṃ vṛkṣasya raso 'smīti. Evameva khalu*



*somyemāḥ sarvāḥ prajāḥ sati sampadya na viduḥ sati sampadyāmaha iti.*

*sa ya eṣo'ṇimaitadātmīyamidaṁ sarvam. tatsatyam. sa ātmā. tattvamasi Śvetaketo iti.* (Chānd. VI.9.1-2.4).

Now, I take the bees, son. They prepare the honey by gathering nectar from a variety of trees and by reducing that nectar to a homogeneous whole. In that state the nectar from each different tree is not able to differentiate: 'I am the nectar of that tree', and 'I am the nectar of this tree'. In exactly the same way, son, when all these creatures merge into the existent, they are not aware that 'We are merging into the existent.'

The finest essence here that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is the truth; that is the self (*ātman*).

The symbolism of honey serves at least two meanings: one is the unity out of diversity. Many bees collect nectar from various flowers, but ultimately they are all collected into one honey. The second is the joyfulness, beauty and sweetness of that very unity. Similarly, the correspondences between various realities, disparate as they may appear, ultimately lead to a feeling of unity, of wholeness, of totality (*sarvam*). But it is not merely a matter of stating these relationships, but to relate them by creative meditation (*upāsanā*, which may correspond to *bhāvanā* in Tāntric spirituality, that is a meditation which produces the result, which leads to a transformation).

That the *puruṣa* serves as a model for all these relationships is confirmed by a quotation from the **Puruṣasūkta** (cf. CU III.12.5) in the context of the following correspondences:

Gāyatrī-earth-body-heart (III.12.1-4). And these equivalences culminate in one of the most important meditations of the **Chāndogya**, what is called *daharavidyā* in its full form in VIII.1.1-6. Its earlier version reads:

*yadvai tadbrahmetidaṁ vāva tadyo 'yaṁ bahirdhā puruṣādākāśaḥ. yo vai sa bahirdhā puruṣādākāśaḥ. ayam vāva sa yo 'yamantarhrdaya ākāśaḥ, tadetatpūrṇamapravartī. Pūrṇamapravartinīṁ śrīyaṁ labhate ya evaṁ veda.*

( III.12.7-9)

And take what people call "*brahman*" - clearly, it is nothing but this space here outside a person. And this space here outside a person - clearly, it is the same as this space here within a person. And this space here within a person - clearly, it is the same as this space here within the heart; it is full and non-depleting. Anyone who knows this obtains full and non-depleting prosperity. (tr. Olivelle)



If the Vedic ideal of wholeness which is reflected in the earlier section of the **Chândogya** was more of a cosmic and human nature, here we find a step further to interiorisation: Brahman is found in the space within the heart, and there alone is fullness (*pūrṇam*). The system of correspondences does not end there, for the heart has five openings for the deities (*devasuṣayaḥ*) which are called the five *brahmapuruṣas*, the doorkeepers of heaven (*svargasya lokasya dvārapālaḥ*). These are the relationships:

Eastern opening - *prāṇa* - eye - sun  
Southern opening - *vyāna* - ear - moon  
Western opening - *apāna* - speech - fire  
Northern opening - *samāna* - mind - rain  
Upper opening - *udāna* - wind - space (III.13.1-5).

Thus the openings of the heart are related to the five *prāṇas*, *indriyas* and cosmic elements. The statement about the light that shines above everything, in the highest of the high worlds, being the same as the light within the human person (III.13.7) sounds like a new, mystical discovery. It leads on to a meditation on the *ātman*.

This self (*ātman*) of mine that lies deep within my heart - it is made of mind; the vital functions (*prāṇa*) are its physical form; luminous is its appearance; the real is its intention; space is its essence (*ātman*); it contains all actions, all desires, all smells and all tastes; it has captured this whole world; it neither speaks nor pays any heed.

This self (*ātman*) of mine that lies deep within my heart - it is smaller than a grain of rice or barley, smaller than a mustard seed, smaller than a millet grain or a millet kernel; but it is larger than the earth, larger than the intermediate region, larger than the sky, larger even than all these worlds put together. (III.14.2-3).

Here all the correspondences are integrated in the interiorized vision of the *ātman*, the smallest, most interior, as well as the largest, of cosmic dimensions. Knowing that one becomes *Brahman* after death. (III.14.4)

As Patrick Olivelle remarked, there is a hierarchy in these correspondences, and clearly the highest level is reached with the inner space within the heart and the cosmic space outside.

As said in the beginning, the relationships are not only micro-macrocosmic, but they are very much related with the sacrificial realities. Correspondences between the sacrificial fire and the cosmic realities are also found in the conversation between Pravāhaṇa Jaivali and Gautama Aruṇi, father of Śvetaketu (V.4-9).



The method of **Chândogya** as contained in the instruction of Nārada by Sanatkumāra is precisely one of a hierarchical ascent (VII.1.4-26), culminating in the *ātman* (I am not discussing this chapter since it will be discussed in other papers). And in the instruction of Prajāpati to Indra (VIII.3-12) the hierarchical ascent is taught in relation to the different identifications of the *ātman*. No doubt the ultimate correspondence is found in the identity of *brahman* with *ātman* (VIII.14).

## Conclusion

To conclude, the aim of establishing relationships and equivalences between cosmic, ritual, bodily and spiritual realities is to attain a state of wholeness, of fullness and totality. The method of the **Chândogya** is an inclusive one, i.e. no aspect of life and reality is excluded from the highest experience of unity, everything is included by way of establishing and contemplating upon all possible relationships, and ultimately to place them in a hierarchical order of ascent. Apart from the basic concepts *ātman* and *brahman*, the highest of such equivalences leading to identity is that between inner and outer space - *ākāśa*.

I want to make another connection at the end of this reflection on the **Chândogya**: coming back to the Vedic-Upanisadic concern to discover connections that bind together the cosmos, man and the divine or spiritual world, I would like to extend this general method and insight to two other influential schools of Indian thought and spiritual practice: Buddhism and Hindu Tantra.

Louis Renou has shown convincingly that the Buddhist idea of *pratītyasamutpāda* or "dependent origination" is but another way to see the interconnectedness of all things in this universe.<sup>8</sup> This is used to demonstrate the relativity of everything, but the English word "relativity" derives from "relation" and relatedness, and hence it is not to be understood as simply negative. Things are relative because they are related, interconnected. And this idea is not far from the Upanisadic interrelatedness of the micro- and macrocosm--leaving aside the philosophical interpretations attached to both schools, Buddhism and Vedānta, which move in opposite directions.

The second example where I see a lot of correspondence is the idea of *sarvaṁ sarvātmakaṁ*,<sup>9</sup> "everything is connected with everything else", or "everything is connected with the totality". What the Upanisadic interrelationships and the Tantric *sarvātmakatva* have in common is the total interrelatedness of all things, from the earth to Śiva, speaking in terms of the *tattvas*. In Tantra, especially in Kashmir Śaivism, the basis is the nature of pure consciousness (*samvit*) which contains and reflects the entire reality. To quote from Abhinavagupta's **Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa**:



In the nature of consciousness, the omnifariousness of everything (*sarvasarvātmakatā*) is always present. That highest Divinity, viz. *parā*, though consisting of the highest stage of non-differentiation is teeming with endless variety, containing within herself as she does the *parāparā* expansion of *paśysnti* etc. The maxim 'that which is not there may be elsewhere' will not hold good in her case. Seize (mentally) that goddess, viz. consciousness, known as the initial ever-creative activity of I-feeling, void of even a trace of the foul stain of limitation.

Whatever mobile and immobile objects there are—all these abide in the venerable, divine, supreme consciousness of Bhairava. (tr. Jaideva Singh, p. 91)

The aim of the Upaniṣads as well as of Tantra is to attain a state of wholeness, of integration, of total being, even though their languages may be different. But the difference has been mostly overemphasized, overlooking the striking similarities.

I may conclude by relating the insights of the Upaniṣads to our present time which is so much in need of a holistic vision and life-style, in need of an integration of the cosmic, the human and the divine. The **Chāndogya Upaniṣad**, in spite of its archaic language, has a liberating message, if we can interpret it in our present-day context.

### References

1. Cp for this theme: Louis Renou, "Connexion" en vedique, "cause" en bouddhique, in: *L'Inde fondamentale*, pp. 149-153.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
3. Patrick Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads*, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998, p.24.
4. Chānd. I.13.4.
5. J. Brereton, "The Upaniṣads", in: *Approaches to the Asian Classics*, ed. by W.t. de Bary and I. Bloom, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 118.
6. Chānd. I.3.1-2.
7. *Ibid.* .1.
8. Cp. *op.cit.* p. 152.
9. *Yogasūtra Vyāsa Bhāṣya* III.14.

