

Marta Kudelska

# Why Is There I Rather Than It?

Ontology of the Subject in the Upaniṣads

**Polish Contemporary Philosophy  
and Philosophical Humanities**

Edited by Jan Hartman

Volume 21



**PETER LANG**

The book explores one of the most important problems in Indian philosophical thought: the subject in its particular relation to the world. In what sense does the subject exist? How does it constitute the world? The analysis hinges on Sanskrit sources, mainly the Upaniṣads. However, it goes beyond the question of the subject. The book discusses the concept of how the subject establishes the world, which – in this cognitive perspective – becomes simultaneously recognised and deformed. Overcoming these deformations becomes a specific soteriological path.

**Marta Kudelska** is a professor of philosophy and translator of Sanskrit philosophical texts. Her research interests revolve around fundamental metaphysical questions posed since ancient times in the philosophical thought of India, particularly within the Brahmanical tradition. In her research, she also deals with interreligious and cross-cultural dialogue and the reception of classical thought in the formation of contemporary social and cultural attitudes.

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**PETER LANG**



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*In order to experience truth and falsehood,  
The great self takes on duality –  
The great self takes on duality. (Maitrī 7.11.)*



## Preface to the English edition

This book was originally published in Polish ten years ago. Nowadays, such a time span is considered long enough to almost invalidate the presented analyses and conclusions. I hope that this book does not fall into such a category. First of all, the texts upon which I base my analyses have existed for over two thousand years. This does not mean that they are dead; they were, and still are, analysed and interpreted. They also constitute a starting point for presenting new ideas and opinions. I try to follow the source text as closely as possible, but the final interpretation is always authorial, since both the composition of the book and the selection of passages, which support the presented theses, are largely arbitrary. And this is exactly what this book is: an authorial analysis of the Upaniṣadic texts.

Having researched the Upaniṣads for several decades now, I can say – to paraphrase a very popular saying of today – that if a certain philosophical concept is not presented, or at least portended in the Upaniṣads, it does not exist at all. I know that not everyone shares my research perspective, but, as has been accepted in India since antiquity, ultimately everyone pursues their own path and finds the most important answers to their questions independently. Those most important to me I found in the ancient Indian texts and I share my interpretations of them with the reader.

Although the Polish edition was published more than ten years ago, I believe that the presented interpretations are still viable. Moreover, if I were to write this book today, it would be even more authorial. Therefore, in the current edition, all the essential content remains the same. While preparing the English edition, however, I decided not to translate the source texts myself, but instead to refer to the existing translations by recognised specialists and native users of English.

Any translation that is not strictly philological (although even then) retains its original distinctiveness. This is especially true when comparing translations into different languages – the structure of a given language may facilitate or hinder the precise rendering of certain wordings. Indeed, this was the biggest challenge I faced while working on this book. The greatest difficulties arose when the selected English translation of the source text did not fully correspond to the analyses carried out in the commentary. In Polish, I conducted my research based on the original text, which may also be subject to various interpretations. In such cases, the commentary was slightly modified in order to maintain the consistency of the argument.

At this point, I would like to acknowledge the people who contributed significantly to the final version of this book. First of all, the translator, Marta Bregiel-Pant, and the editor, Professor Halina Marlewicz: they are virtually co-authors of this version, with any shortcomings remaining entirely on my part. I would also like to thank Steve Jones for making sure that this book is as smooth to read as possible. They all helped me rework certain passages to make them more specific. Still I kept – sometimes despite suggestions – all my authorial interpretations. For everything, once again, thank you.

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# 1. Introduction

The title of this book: “Why is there *I* rather than *it*?” brings to mind obvious associations with Leibniz’s famous question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” However, the analysis presented in this book aspires to be more than just a commentary to this sentence. Rather, we shall turn to Indian philosophers in order to show that assumed the existence of an absolute reality – *sat* – as the concept of sufficient reason.<sup>1</sup> We will focus primarily on excerpts from the classic Upaniṣads, interpreted from the perspective of Advaita Vedānta, the doctrine of “non-duality.” According to the school’s interpretation, only the absolute being – *sat* – exists, while the empirical reality, as being only its representation, is considered to have a lower ontological status. The *sat* dimension is an extra-empirical one that cannot be adequately defined or categorised. The most common technical terms used in the philosophical language of the Hindus for the absolute being are *ātman* (when we assume the subjective perspective) and *brahman* (when we assume the perspective of describing reality in its omnipotent totality). According to Advaita, there is a complete identity between *ātman* and *brahman*, so one can say it represents a radical monism. Therefore, there is no ontological – or, more precisely, metaphysical<sup>2</sup> – difference between the absolute and the empirical dimension; rather, it is an epistemic valuation. As we will try to show, the absolute being is not only a pure, complete existence and consciousness but also a principle of subjectivity. Indian thinkers attributed the status of existence only to the subjective reality and considered the empirical reality to be active and existent not because of itself, but because of the existence

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- 1 “So far we have been speaking simply as *natural scientists*; now we must rise to *meta-physics* and make use of the great, but not commonly used, *principle* that *nothing takes place without a sufficient reason*; in other words, that nothing occurs for which it would be impossible for someone who has enough knowledge of things to give a reason adequate to determine why the thing is as it is and not otherwise. This principle having been stated, the first question which we have a right to ask will be, ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’ For nothing is simpler and easier than something. Further, assuming that things must exist, it must be possible to give a reason *why they should exist as they do* and not otherwise.” G.W. Leibniz, *The Principles of Nature and of Grace, Based on Reason, Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. and trans. L. E. Loemker, 2nd ed., D. Reidel, Dordrecht 1969, pp. 638–9.
  - 2 W. Stróżewski provides an excellent analysis of the concepts of metaphysics/ontology in his book *Ontologia*, Aureus, Znak, Kraków 2003, pp. 19–23.

of the subject.<sup>3</sup> That is why the subject, whose essence – according to Advaita – is extra-empirical, is a sufficient reason justifying the experience, and thus the existence, of the presented reality.<sup>4</sup> By the nature of things, we perceive empirical reality in its objective dimension, which, therefore, assumes the existence of a subject. Elucidation of this statement will be one of the main points of focus for the following chapters of the book.

Another idea which we would like to illustrate with the *śruti* texts interpreted from the perspective of Advaita Vedānta is the conviction of an entirely *nirguṇic* character of the absolute being. No attributes (*guṇa*) belong *per essentiam* to the absolute; the description of its reality is entirely apophatic. In the philosophical sense, all representations experienced as independent, empirical entities, are merely forms, or reflections existing only because of that which is unconditional. In the religious context, these subtle characters are mostly attributed with divine status, and they are experienced by worshippers as identical to the supreme being, and are worshipped as God (*Īśvara, Puruṣa*). According to the earliest Upaniṣads and their Advaita commentary, all theistic interpretations<sup>5</sup> are

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- 3 “Thus the sense commonly expressed in speaking of being is reversed. The being which is first for us is second in itself; i.e., it is what it is, only in ‘relation’ to the first. <But it is> not as though there were a blind regularity such that the *ordo et connexio rerum* necessarily conformed to the *ordo et connexio idearum*. Reality, the reality of the physical thing taken singly and the reality of the whole world, lacks self-sufficiency in virtue of its essence (in our strict sense of the word). Reality is not in itself something absolute which becomes tied secondarily to something else; rather, in the absolute sense, it is nothing at all; it has no ‘absolute essence’ whatever; it has the essentiality of something which, of necessity, is *only* intentional, *only* an object of consciousness, something presented [*Vorstelliges*] in the manner peculiar to consciousness, something apparent ‘as apparent.’” E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten, Boston, Martinus Nijhof Publishers 1983, Vol. I, II.50.94, p. 112.
- 4 “The question ‘Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?’ is first in rank for us as the broadest, as the deepest, and finally as the most originary question. The question is the broadest in scope. It comes to a halt at no being of any kind whatsoever. The question embraces all that is, and that means not only what is now present at hand in the broadest sense, but also what has previously been and what will be in the future. The domain of this question is limited only by what simply is not and never is: by Nothing.” M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. G. Fried, R. Polt, Yale University Press 2000, p. 2.
- 5 With regard to the philosophical concepts developed in India, we describe them using categories created within the European cultural circle. This entails numerous misunderstandings. The majority of what leads to misrepresentations is due to the

secondary, because the supreme reality is beyond any judgment or personification. But although the transcendental dimension is extra-empirical, it does not mean that it does not exist. On the contrary, it is the only one to be pronounced as existing in an absolute sense – *sat*.

In order to present the above-mentioned problems in a coherent way, we will devote most of this book to the analysis of how the concept of the subject is constructed in the classical Upaniṣads. This will allow us to show which concepts refer to the subject as the principle of subjectivity, which are its most fundamental representations, and which ones play – especially as the philosophical debate in India develops – an increasingly well-defined role of cognitive instruments. In addition to the hermeneutical analysis of excerpts from the Upaniṣads, where we shall attempt to discuss some passages through cross-references to others, we will also address the commentaries, especially those belonging to the earliest Advaita Vedānta tradition, namely those of Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara. The analysis of the concept of the subject will be presented in the context of anthropological, metaphysical and sometimes also existential considerations. An exploration of the thus outlined subject of inquiry, especially concerning classical Indian thought, is impossible without references to cosmological concepts. Therefore, before we proceed to present and, wherever possible, organise various notions related to the concept of subject in the Upaniṣads, we will first analyse the hymn of the 10th mandala of the Ṛgveda, the Nāsadiya Sūkta (*Hymn of Creation*) which is fundamental to any further deliberations.

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use of the term “theism.” As we know, in our cultural circle this is a term derived from the Greek word *theos*. In the Christian interpretation, which in this respect has had a great influence on the entire European philosophical thought, *theos* is understood as God the Creator, who through *creatio ex nihilo* called the world into existence. Thus God is identical with an absolute being. In this sense, the concept of God does not exist in the systems that emerged in the Indian Subcontinent. Usually it is assumed that reality is eternal, and some Creator or Manager is merely its guardian or guarantor of rights. That is why the notion of the absolute is not synonymous with God, but with the non-determined dimension of reality, understood as its principle. This, however, does not mean that these systems rejected the notion of transcendence as an object of mystical experience. But this experience is non-theistic in the sense that it presupposes the existence of a “higher” level, which is the principle and the source of everything that is perceived as existing. Only in this context do we use the term “theism” with regard to the philosophical concepts of India. At this point, it can be noted that in the philosophical-religious texts of India there is the term *deva* – “deity,” “luminous,” which originates from the same Indo-European core as *theos*. *Devas*, however, are commonly presented as emanations or representations of the absolute being.

We will be referring both to the earliest Vedic texts, as well as to their classical commentaries that established the Advaita Vedānta school. These texts are approximately 1,500 years apart. The analysis of the already fully conscious philosophical assumptions of Advaita is carried out based on the canonical Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad (4th–3rd century BC) and its classic commentary by Gaudapada (6th century AD) included in his work Māṇḍūkya Kārikā. It is Gaudapada's work that initiates the Brahmanical philosophical school of Advaita Vedānta, "non-duality." It represents a particular kind of monism that declares only the absolute dimension of reality (*ātman*) as existing – *sat*. At the same time, the empirical world is described as *sat* (existing) as well as *asat* (non-existent) and *anirvacanīya* (non-predicable in any category). As we shall see, the fundamental challenge that arises is how to explain the relationship between the absolute, unconditioned, unchanging eternal being (analogous to the Parmenides' being) and the world of multiplicity, variability and diversity that is perceived in experience. In the Advaita school, which, like any other Indian system, is ultimately a soteriology, the main focus is on the analysis of the cognitive act itself. This is due to the erroneous imposition of the objective reality onto the subjective one that the empirical world emerges, which results in a burdensome entanglement in *saṃsāra*. Liberation (*mokṣa*) is understood as a result of direct recognition, as an insight into the true and, therefore, genuine nature of reality.

Only pure consciousness – *sat* – can be said to truly exist. However, we cannot claim that its manifestations or correlates do not exist, because they emerge from it; their sensibility is conditioned by the self-contained being, so they both "exist and do not exist." In this way, we do not prejudge their metaphysical character, but we describe them with regard to the very process of cognition. After the reduction, pure awareness remains as a residuum, while the real world itself practically disappears out of sight, and only the meanings of the world, the meanings of things remain. We will be seeking such solutions in the texts of *śruti*, in the Upaniṣads.

All the Brahmanical *darśanas*, while constructing the framework of their philosophical systems, refer to concepts either already formed or not yet fully presented in the canon of *śruti*. This theory is an openly adopted assumption within the Indian tradition, verified during critical philosophical research. But, as it is commonly known, the conclusions of individual schools often differ radically as far as ontological assumptions are concerned, although they often refer to the same texts or even the same passages. Therefore, it will be extremely important to thoroughly examine the texts of the *śruti*, mainly the Upaniṣads, as the culmination and summary of the considerations contained in the Vedic canon.

The subsequent chapters will explore the understanding and application of various concepts referring to the subject of consciousness which is active and responsible for both the migration in *saṃsāra* as well as being an instrument of liberation. Some of the deliberations will refer to the totally understood subject, while other terms will indicate a subject limited to certain functions, certain spheres of activity or certain attitudes that do not manifest themselves at all levels of consciousness.

Based on these considerations, we shall also try to demonstrate the primordially of the notion of subject in relation to the object in cosmogonic, metaphysical, epistemic and, of course, soteriological order. All questions, being an impulse for such analyses, can only arise in a human being understood as a seeking subject, and being fully justified by the individual. All statements included in the Indian texts are based on introspective experience, on the study of conditions of behaviour and perception of reality, which is present in the meditation procedures of a given practitioner. When describing the procedures for reaching the source and principle of reality, and the cognitive subject, the Upaniṣads often resort to a method that we may call “pre-phenomenological.” For it turns out that subsequent levels of reduction apply to an object which ultimately appears to be a pure subject – *ātman*. The object in question happens to be what is the most basic in the researched subject, i.e. consciousness – one from which consecutive noemata emerge, and which by its nature and at its source is directed only at oneself. The process of cognition of this consciousness is a process of self-recognition. By studying the conditions for the manifestation of the world, we discover the conditions of our own being, which turns out to be a conscious and self-conscious one. Investigating, experiencing is, therefore, a certain way or a model of life. The experiencing subject is constituted through experience while its originality is established through final, unmediated experience. At this point, we may recall Edmund Husserl’s statement found in the first volume of *Ideas* that the constitution of the subject, in this case *ātman*, the cognitive subject, contains all descriptions of consciousness.

This implies that the subsequent stages of the world’s manifestation are constituted by a conscious subject. The subject intentionally directs itself towards its own constructs, at the same time pointing out that the intention of recognising, and also to some extent to constitute, is contained in its deeper layer. In doing so, consciousness, during the search for its “core,” repeatedly moves in circles until it gradually reaches the point where the subject, or consciousness, is intentionally directed at itself only. In the cosmogonic system, we begin with the principle of subjectivity, to finally recognise in the soteriological sequence the existence of pure subject only, one whose name is “I.” The presented reality, which one might

refer to as “it,” is no longer the subject of experience. Therefore, there is “I” rather than “it.” And only *sat*, understood as the principal of subjectivity and consciousness, exists in an absolute way.

Numerous conversations with our colleagues, friends and students have assisted us greatly in writing this book. Without them we might have missed many topics, whose analysis became an integral part of this work. Thank you all very much. But above all, we would like to thank Professor Beata Szymańska. Without our long conversations on philosophy, and without her support, this book could not have been written at all. Thank you, Beata.

## 2. *Nāsadiya Sūkta* – the hymn of creation

The keystone of *śruti*, i.e. of the Vedic Revelation, is a collection of 1028 hymns of the Ṛgveda, assembled in ten circles – *maṇḍala*. The hymns included in the most recent of them, the 10th *maṇḍala*, are particularly important to the entire Indian philosophy that followed. To a great extent, these hymns are dedicated primarily to the presentation of various cosmogonic and cosmological concepts. At a first glance these concepts may not seem to be fully consistent, although none of them actually supports the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*, so popular in the circle of European philosophy (especially that which stems from Christian thought). Usually they point to some existence or element, some *arche*, from which the empirical world emerged. It may be water, fiery heat (10.190), wind (10.168), non-existence (10.72), Golden Egg – *Hiraṇyagarbha* (10.121), or divine speech – *Vāc* (10. 125). The most famous cosmological hymns are the “Hymn of the Pre-man” – *Puruṣasūkta* (10.90) and the “Hymn of Creation” – *Nāsadiya Sūkta* (10.129). *Puruṣasūkta* depicts the creation of the world out of the *puruṣa* – the Macro-Anthropos, who sacrifices oneself to oneself. As a result of this sacrifice, the whole world is created, with the already formed, and thus divine order.<sup>6</sup> This chapter is devoted to the analysis of the *Nāsadiya* hymn.

The hymns, as well as the entire canon of *śruti*, were considered by the Indian tradition to be of an authoritative character. Their infallibility was supposed to stem, *inter alia*, from the fact that they were not attributed to a human author. Their eternal content, as tradition has it, had been “seen” by inspired wise men – *ṛṣi* – and only then was it handed down and sung in a language accessible not only to the prophets.

For the majority of Indian thought, represented both by thinkers interested more in philosophical concerns as well as those focused on religious and theological considerations, the message of the hymns was an absolute foundation. The development of all later ideas can be seen as a direct reference, discussion, or commentary on the concepts already presented in the collections of hymns – *saṃhitas*. This is how the overlapping of successive parts of the *śruti* as well as further elaboration on their content in the subsequent *darśanas* – systematic syntheses of Brahmanical philosophy – should be interpreted.

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6 A more detailed analysis of *Puruṣasūkta* was included in the book: M. Kudelska, *Karman i dharma, wizja świata w filozoficznej myśli Indii*, WUJ, Kraków 2003.

There are numerous translations and interpretations of *Nāsadiya*. For the English edition of this book we used the work of Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton, which of all the translations known to us corresponds to the greatest extent with our interpretation of the original. In our opinion, the crucial idea of the hymn is the differentiation between two dimensions of reality represented by two different verbs, more precisely, the transition from the state of existence (*sat*) to the state of being (*bhava*). Thus, the first dimension of reality (not in the sense of a temporal order, but in the absolute, original sense) will always be conveyed by the linguistic forms stemming from the root *as* – “to exist.” These might be substantival participles, for example *sat* – “existing,” or verbs, usually *āsīt* – “came to exist”; sometimes there is also a participle further specified by an active form of a verb, thanks to which the paradigm is strengthened. The term *bhava* denoting the second dimension of reality, is derived from the root *bhū* – “to be,” “to exist in the world,” and is in a way a conventional term. Generally, *bhava* refers to the reality that reveals its representational, objective and continually dynamic character. The discussion of detailed relationships between *sat* and *bhava* dimensions will be the subject of virtually all analyses and commentaries presented in this book. Due to the nature of these considerations, the following analysis will refer in more detail to the first stanzas of the hymn. When quoting fragments of the analysed works, we will use recognised English translations, which shall be marked in the footnotes. However, all our analyses and interpretations are based on the original texts, which is why the comments under the quoted fragment or verse may sometimes differ. Each time we seek to justify it. This is also true in the case of the analysed hymn.

*nāsad āsīn no sad āsīd tadānim*  
*nāsīd rajo no vyomā paro yat*  
*kim āvarīvaḥ kuha kasya śarmann*  
*ambhaḥ kim āsīd gahanaṃ gabhīram. (1)*

The non-existent did not exist, nor did the existent exist at that time. There existed neither the airy space nor heaven beyond. What moved back and forth? From where and in whose protection? Did water exist, a deep depth?<sup>7</sup> The crucial phrase in this hymn is: *na asat āsīt na u sat āsīt tadānim* – “then neither the non-existent nor the existent existed.” It is important to note how precise the language of the original is. *Sat* is understood as the state of existence

7 The Rigveda, The Earliest Religious Poetry of India, OXFORD University Press 2014, Volume III, pp. 1607–1609. Free access: Academia.edu.

and *asat* as the state of non-existence. However, both the existent and the non-existent are described as what has come into existence – *āsīt*. All three terms: *sat*, *asat*, and *āsīt* are derivatives from the same root: *as* – to exist. We interpret them as denoting the same dimension of reality. This scheme will be continued in the Upaniṣads, where this classic formula which is already present here (*idam agre āsīt*) is further developed; in particular the term *idam* (“it”) will be further specified – *sat* and *asat* are substituted for it in the hymn.

The first stanza is the most crucial, indicating some kind of primary, original state. It is difficult to tell whether it is a pre-creative state, or rather a state of existence in its full potentiality to both manifest itself and to remain in a non-manifested state. This is indicated by an apparent contradiction in the use of the two terms: *sat* – existent and *asat* – non-existent, disambiguated by the verbal form (*na*) *āsīt*. It can be interpreted in this way that both the existing or cognisable and the non-existent or non-cognisable did not manifest itself, i.e. did not exist as manifested, identifiable into categories, cognisable as a result of cognitive acts. This is a very strong philosophical proposition indicating that the primordial state has a potential for both manifestation and non-manifestation. This can be treated only as a metaphor, but it seems that there is a very deep philosophical reflection behind it. It is pointed out that we cannot only say about the original state that its existence escapes cognition and categorisation; nor can we responsibly claim that defining it as a state of non-existence, non-manifestation is fully adequate. Therefore, the nature of the primordial state cannot be conveyed by any assertoric statements. No phrase pronouncing the state of existence of the primeval being determines its veracity. We cannot legitimately declare about this dimension of reality either that it exists or that it does not exist. Neither that it exists as manifested nor that it exists as not manifested. Using the language of metaphysical categories, we cannot adequately declare anything about this state, but we can only indicate from an epistemic level how that which is ultimately non-predicable is encountered and experienced.

In all later Brahmanical thought, which dates back to the times of the hymn in question, the metaphysical and epistemic categories overlap and are often expressed in the same terms. The term *sat* denotes both the existing and the true; while the term *asat* denotes both the non-existent and the untrue. It is difficult to judge to what extent this procedure was intended in the initial state of developing ideas. But it seems that the lack of distinction between metaphysical and epistemic levels – which in the earliest texts seems deliberate – has led to the greatest aporias in Indian philosophical reflection and the majority of its misinterpretations.

Indian philosophical thought (much more so in the Buddhist tradition) considers the nature of reality from the perspective of how and to what extent it is adequately given in experience. Therefore, the original questions, as well as the attempts to answer them begin with the epistemic level. That which we can adjudicate using epistemic categories and make valid judgments about, can only be true in so far as it concerns the description of how a given reality is revealed in a cognitive act. However, the cognitive act – to be explored in more detail further in the book – is mediated through categories. Cognition of a reality which is mediated does not give access to the absolute reality. This claim, still intuitive on the Samhita level, will become a clearly articulated and precise thesis, especially for the Advaita Vedānta school. The terms, which are legitimate categories on the epistemic level, begin as if to live their own lives; in a sense, they become absolute and thus start being treated as concerning the metaphysical dimension. It is precisely the failure to notice this shift and the inaccurate use of appropriate terms and categories that leads to the most fundamental aporias and the greatest misinterpretations. We will elaborate on the subject in the following chapters. In any case, this mechanism of transfer, which seems typical for Indian thought, is sometimes also encountered in European systems. In the Indian tradition, it has been present from the very beginning, because from the very beginning the classical texts use the same terms, at times denoting an epistemic description and at times a metaphysical dimension.

This is what we encounter in the *Nāsadiya* hymn. From the first stanza we conclude that it is impossible to describe the nature of the primeval being with adequate categories. This primordial state – expressed here with the terms *sat* and *asat* – refers to a concept known from European philosophy as *arche*. This principle should be interpreted similarly to ancient Greek thought, as referring both to the nature of the primordial being, to its source and principle, and to the whole reality.<sup>8</sup> In the later Greek philosophy, after the Pre-Socratics, these different understandings of the *arche* were already discerned and the principle

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8 “In the age of the first and definitive unfolding of Western philosophy among the Greeks, when questioning about beings as such and as a whole received its true inception, beings were called *phusis*. This fundamental Greek word for beings is usually translated as ‘nature.’ We use the Latin translation *natura*, which really means ‘to be born.’ But with this Latin translation, the originary content of the Greek word *phusis* is already thrust aside, the authentic philosophical naming force of the Greek word is destroyed. (. . .) But now we leap over this whole process of deformation and decline, and we seek to win back intact the naming force of language and words; (. . .) According to the dictionary, *phuein* means to grow, to make grow. (. . .) This emerging and standing-out-in-itself-from itself may not be taken as just one process among others that we observe in beings. ***Physis is Being itself, by virtue of which beings***

was not always considered the same as reality. In classical Indian thought, all these meanings still overlapped and the concept of *brahman* was particularly interpreted thus.

Therefore, according to the cosmogonic scheme adopted here, all the concepts that refer to the level defined by derivatives of the root *as* denote the *arche*,<sup>9</sup> understood here mainly as a principle and source. In the second line of the stanza, we read that there was no expanse – *rajas*, or any dimension of reality above it. At first glance it seems that both terms: *rajas* and *vyomā* refer to the same form of reality. Indeed, it probably is, on the one hand, a reference to metaphorical images of some primaeval space, an indication that this original reality cannot be classified even in the most general spatial categories. On the other hand, however, an attempt to describe it with two terms may suggest that some categories are potentially already included in the most primaeval dimension. Very interesting reflections on the very concept of *rajas* are presented by Joanna Jurewicz.<sup>10</sup> However, the etymology of this concept should not be forgotten. *Rajas* comes from the root *rañj* – to tint, to lighten, to redden, to blush, to cause an impulse, a movement. In later thought, it was a technical term introduced by the Sāṃkhya system to describe a *guṇa* responsible for movement, dynamics and differentiation. If we look at the complexity of the term *rajas* itself, we will immediately see the complexity of the reality it denotes – its essence is dynamics and categorisation.

The phrase *parame vyoman* appears in this hymn for the second time in the last stanza, but this time in a narrower sense. Here, it seems to refer to some unspecified empty expanse, which may encompass everything. However, the statement that this primaeval state exists neither as *rajas* nor as *parame vyoma* very clearly reveals the author's intention to highlight that we are unable to adequately point to individual dimensions of reality – it is not that some manifested and non-manifested world exists. But neither can one determine whether there exists an empty expanse or an organised space.

In the third line, we find a phrase *kim āvarīvaḥ* – “what” or “whether” it covered. The pronoun *kim* cannot be unambiguously translated, which is why we do not know whether the question is about “what” (then the process of covering

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**first become and remain observable.”** [highlights M.K.], M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp. 14 ff.

9 The distinction between the concepts of the *arche* and *aitia* are used in a classic Aristotelian sense.

10 J. Jurewicz, *Kosmogonia Rygwedy. Myśl i metafora*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, Warszawa 2001, pp. 25 ff.

or obscuring would be settled), or if we read the question as “if” (then even the nature of this process is unclear, doubtful). The inability to provide a univocal answer to this question also results from the suspension of judgement regarding the nature of this reality which was revealed in the preceding phrases. *Āvarīvaḥ* comes from the verb *āvṛ* – to cover, to surround, to separate, to restrain, to hide. Later, from that root there were philosophical concepts created which denote the represented world as covering the absolute reality because of its inexplicable inner dynamics.

In this context, naturally, associations with the term *māyā* are brought to mind. *Māyā* comes from the root *mā* – to measure, to differentiate; it denotes constant processes of separating, covering, concealing certain forms of reality, while at the same time projecting other aspects of it. The term plays a crucial role in the Advaita philosophy and points to the inexplicable character of reality which, through some not entirely explicable but eternal process, obscures the absolute dimension.

Further questions posed by the author of the hymn are – compared to the former fundamental metaphysical questions – relatively more detailed. They seem to be asked from the level of a self-accepting subject – questioning, puzzled, doubtful, existing at the represented level but expressing its great confusion. For us the question: “in whose keeping?” feels like a dramatic call, almost a supplication for some lawmaker, some creator and a guarantor of the laws, someone who could explain to us beforehand how we should behave, somebody to whom one can always resort when in doubt. The fact that such a being, or at least a set of strictly specified and clearly defined laws, exists grants a sense of security; otherwise the person who seeks answers is left to his or her own devices. In the question, there is even a hint of fear if such a being exists at all, and if there is any dimension of reality other than the one from which these doubts are raised. More details on the nature of such existential fear may be found in the chapter on *manas*.

Subsequently, a question is posed whether the represented state has its origins in some “waters.” The term *ambhas* is used here, a relatively rare word for waters, which are usually referred to as *āpas*. However, using this particular word might point to two complementary intuitions. On the one hand, we are referred to the element of water which in its nature is the most amorphous, almost elusive form. And precisely because of that indeterminacy it can take various forms. On the other hand, using the term *ambhas*, which might be connected to the word *ambā* – “mother” – indicates the creative, bearing, life-giving character of the waters. Let us now return to the phrase “in whose keeping?” Immediately afterwards, a question is posed as to whether the origin existed in the form of

an unspecified female energy, depicted as life-giving waters. Admittedly, the waters are shown as dangerous or mysterious – this is how the “depth” could be explained – but nonetheless the seeker gets something to hold on to, something to rely on.

*na mṛtyur āsīd amṛtam na tarhi  
na rātryā ahna āsīt praketaḥ  
ānīd avātaḥ svadhayā tad ekam  
tasmād dhānyam na paraḥ kiṃ canāsa (2).*

Death did not exist nor deathlessness then. There existed no sign of night nor of day. That One breathed without wind by its independent will. There existed nothing else beyond that.

If we consistently adhere to the *idam agre āsīt* scheme, we must assume that the second stanza also describes the nature of the primordial being, since the verbs *āsīt* and *āsa* are present there. The absence of a category of death and immortality seems very obvious. This is, on the one hand, a reference to the absence of time categories determined by birth and death. On the other hand, however, it is also a lack of distinction between earthly existence and some dimension of the after-life. Such a formulation may indicate that the distinction between transcendent and immanent realities present in the European tradition is not adequate for the philosophical reflections by various Brahmanical monisms, particularly the school of Advaita. In the Upaniṣads, *ātman* is often said to be both inside (*antar*) and outside (*bahis*) of each creature, which can be interpreted in this way that *ātman* is both transcendent and immanent. Perhaps it is already here that the later deliberations originate, that regarding the absolute reality called *ātman* one cannot say either that it is liberation or enslavement, because these are all categories describing a given order from the level of the presented world, while this reality is neither this, nor that – *neti, neti*.

It seems, however, that this stanza is primarily about indicating the absence of time categories, while in the previous stanza the absence of expanse and skies shows the lack of spatial categories. There is no distinctive mark (*praketa*) between what is bright – the day, and what is dark, obscured or covered – the night. Once again, the absolute potentiality of the nature of primeval being is indicated, which is unknowable because it exceeds the cognitive act itself. The nature of the cognitive act distinguishes between the one who recognises and what is being recognised or not recognised. To perform such an act, the category of difference is needed, a separation between what is cognisable, which is the object of the act itself and is bright, from what is “removed” in the dynamic act, and therefore remains beyond the light of cognition. The word *praketa* refers us

directly to the cognitive act, because it means “that which manifests itself,” “that which is visible, distinguishable,” and later indicates both the very act of perception, knowledge, and the distinctive mark.

Let us now proceed to the two subsequent verses of the hymn. Here, the first positive descriptions appear. Reality we describe is called *tad ekam* – “the one.” This term summarises all the previous considerations that the whole reality, manifested and not manifested, conditional and unconditional, knowable and unknowable, is an all-encompassing Unity. Apart from it, there is nothing else; it anticipates and transcends all the later categories that are to emerge from it.

The paradox and the full potentiality of the said *tad ekam*, is further specified by successive terms denoting this highly contradictory absolute being. “The One breathed” – *ānīd*. The word *ānīd* comes from the root *an*, from which stem some of the most meaningful concepts of Indian philosophy, such as: *prāṇa* – the life-giving breath, or *ātman* – the supraréality of subjective nature. So, it is explicitly stated that pan-reality is alive. Reality is not an idle matter requiring a conscious creator to bring it to life. The process of breathing is later identified with the realm of consciousness – *cit*. In this way, reality is not only alive but also conscious. The breathing process is described as *avātam* – “windless,” “without breath.” It is not the common act of breathing known to us from daily experience; again, there is an indication of transcending the conventional categories recognised on the level of reality in which the description is being made. The absoluteness of this reality is in a way correlated with its paradoxical character, indicating that all assertoric sentences are not adequate to describe it. This does not mean, however, that there is a dimension of reality which exceeds a level that defies description. Therefore, we cannot say that the absolute being is only a transcendental dimension because it exceeds even this type of category.

For the absolute being to exceed all kinds of categories, it must be equipped with the ability to do so. In the text of the hymn this enabling force is expressed by the term *svadhā*. The word *svadhā* means “its own (*sva*) power, position, capability.” It is therefore an immanent force that can manifest itself as creative power. It is equally important that, thanks to *svadhā*, the absolute being may manifest itself, but it does not have to. In this way, the term *svadhā* could be understood as will, but if it is a feature inherent to the absolute, then it too must be absolute. Therefore, *svadhā* seems to be freedom, the capacity to manifest oneself, to display the full paradoxes of the absolute nature, but if it is fully free, it also has a possibility to negate and transcend this negation. Through its power of manifestation, *svadhā* provides the capacity for cognition. It seems relevant that the term *svadhā* is feminine. (The opposition between masculine and feminine concepts will be discussed in the following chapters.) *Svadhā* is the power responsible

for the first attempts to positively define the nature of the absolute being. Thus, from the point of view of the absolute's nature, *svadhā* is its internal power, but from the viewpoint of the description of this nature, it is the first term referring directly to the epistemic dimension. *Svadhā* is not some kind of external power, but belongs to the dimension of absolute reality. This is indicated by the last phrase of the second stanza, where it is said that apart from “this One” – *tad ekam*, with its inherent *svadhā* – nothing else existed. A verb derived from the root *as* is used here, which indicates that we are still talking about the dimension of *arche*. What seems extremely important at this point of the analysis is that if *svadhā* is will, power of manifestation, cognition – and everything takes place within *tad ekam* – then this primordial cognitive process can only be understood as a self-cognitive process.

*tama āsīt tamasā gūlham agre  
 apraketaṃ salilaṃ sarvam ā idam  
 tuchyenābhv apihitaṃ yad āsīt  
 tapasas tan mahinājāyaitaikam. (3)*

Darkness existed, hidden by darkness, in the beginning. All this was a signless ocean. What existed as a thing coming into being, concealed by emptiness—that One was born by the power of heat.

In its initial words, this stanza continues the earlier considerations concerning the description of the primordial being, since the *idam agre āsīt* scheme is replicated here. The word “darkness” – *tamas* appears here, further defined by the phrase *tamasā gūlham* – “covered with darkness,” “hidden beyond darkness.” The darkness is compared to fathomless water in which nothing could be distinguished; the term *praketa* appears again – a sign, a particularity, a distinctive mark. This phrase can be interpreted in two ways. The first, and most obvious, is understanding the concept of *tamas* as lack of light, knowledge and cognition. But the said *tamas* is covered with *tamas*, darkness conceals darkness. This indicates lack of cognition, and since everything takes place within the original Oneness, it is actually a lack of self-cognition. It is compared to fathomless dark water, amorphous lightless mass. At this point, one can again state that the lack of cognition is equivalent to the lack of self-recognition, self-definition. We will return to what this statement might possibly mean in our later deliberations.

Another possible interpretation of *tamas* will be discussed after presenting the cosmological scheme of the Upaniṣads. The term *tamas* within the phrase *idam agre āsīt* occurs only once in the canon and also in a later text, namely the Maitrī Upaniṣad.

This third stanza of the hymn is crucial for the discussed cosmogonic scheme. In this very stanza we can see a transition from the dimension of reality denoted by the derivatives of the verbal root  $\sqrt{as}$ , “to exist,” to the reality denoted by the derivatives of the root  $\sqrt{bhū}$  (“to become”) and other verbal roots depicting dynamic aspect of reality allowing cognitive categorisation. This primordial, undifferentiated unity begins to show signs of potential differentiation. There is an anticipation that something is about to arise. That which is to be created –  $\bar{a}bhū$ , that is to manifest itself, to be recognisable and to recognise – is still in the state of existence:  $\bar{a}sīt$ , that is, it still belongs to the primordial dimension. Potential dynamics and change are inherent to the nature of primordial existence and if we cannot adequately define it, because we perceive it as an undifferentiated unity, it only proves that it is impossible to recognise its nature, but does not determine the essence of the being itself.

The dimension of reality, existing as unknowable by any categories, is everything – *sarvam idam*. If the author of the hymn tries to make judgments regarding this non-manifested dimension, he uses paradoxical phrases which indicate the potential for manifestation and differentiation. What is to come into being is expressed by the term  $\bar{a}bhū$ . The term can be interpreted in two ways, on the one hand as  $\bar{a}bhū$  – “this which is to be,” “this which is to be created,” and on the other hand as  $\bar{a}bhū$  – “this which has not yet been created.” It seems that one might risk an interpretation that not only do these two contradictory meanings not exclude one another, but are indeed complementary. Notably, the term comes from the root  $\sqrt{bhū}$  which is a key word denoting the area of being, becoming, acting. It is a reality defined within space-time relations. One of the interpretations of the word  $\bar{a}bhū/u$  is oriented towards the future, while the other one predicates about the past. Given its content, we understand the term  $\bar{a}sīt$ , although formally past tense, as indicating existence first of all, but also as referring to the state exceeding time categories. It is not absolute present, understood momentarily, but rather absolute existence, which is nevertheless predicated as past, in a sense forgotten at the level of  $\sqrt{bhū}$ , but ideal and existing as a model and reference point for all deliberations. And in this very stanza we have a combination of words derived from these two verbal roots, for we can read it as this: in the absolute, existing reality it is possible to distinguish something, a “dimension,” a “category,” a “particle” of this which has a potential to manifest itself, emerge and disappear. In the later Upaniṣads, the images denoting the process of creation and disappearance of the world, are described with phrases referring to such intuitions (see Māṇḍūkya). An indication that this process is still in its potentiality, that it has not moved to the actualisation stage, may be the use of the term *tuchyena* – “due to emptiness.” Nothing has manifested itself in a clear way yet, which means the

transformations are not apparent and hence seem empty. Empty in the sense of “darkness covered with darkness” – *tama tamasā gūlham*, which we most generally interpret as lack of the light of cognition, but also of differentiation, because no special marks can be distinguished – *apraketam*.

In the last line of the discussed stanza we already have a clear description of the first stage of cosmogony. This which existed as darkness, but which potentially contained the light of differentiation or cognition, is called *tad ekam* and this “one was born” – *ajāyata*. The word *ajāyata* clearly refers us to the realm of emerging – *bhava*. Now, the subsequent stages will refer to the emergence of subsequent manifestations or to the process of transformation of unity, defined by the term *tad ekam*. Interpreting the above verses in the terms of Vedānta schools one could say that the primordial absolute state is of a *nirguṇic* nature and remains beyond any predication. The relationship between the absolute level and the manifested level is referred to as *vivarta*, and this which is presented as a result of this imposition, which emerged due to it, is referred to as the (actual) transformation – *pariṇāma*. The factor causing the transition from one stage to another is *tapas* – heat, glowing, brightening, incandescence.

In various later trends of Indian tradition, the concept of *tapas* corresponds to a fiery heat which is produced by ascetic fervour and which, due to its inherent firepower, transforms the cognitive subject during meditation. Originally, *tapas* refers us to the heat of the first cosmogonic sacrifice, as a result of which the world manifests itself. Later, *tapas* becomes the main factor in the yogic procedure, in which the adept transforming, subjugating and harmonising himself, recreates and restores balance in the macrocosm reflecting the microcosm. And it is precisely as a result of the power (*mahina*) of heat that this One, which is an all-encompassing but already in a paradoxical sense a defined unity, is born. The birth of the One, which emerges through the incandescence of *tapas*, can in the light of later texts be interpreted as a cognitive act. The very process of cognition may be an opening to both *mokṣa* as well as wandering in *saṃsāra*. This opening stems from the very nature of the cognitive act, which, as we know, can be both true and thus liberating, as well as erroneous and leading to the experience of a world of multiplicity, existence and action. The One, like the primordial being, contains within itself the same paradoxes and contradictions. And as we cannot adequately determine the nature of the primordial being, similarly we cannot determine the character of the presented world in a logical way which does not lead to any contradictions. So too, perhaps also from the same perspective, should one explain the term “non-predicable” – *anirvacanīya*, which is one of the basic attributes of the empirical world.

*kāmas tad agre sam avartatādhi  
manaso retahī prathamam yad āsīt  
sato bandhum asati nir avindan  
hṛdi pratiśyā kavayo maṇiṣā (4)*

Then, in the beginning, from thought there evolved desire, which existed as the primal semen.

Searching in their hearts through inspired thought, poets found the connection of the existent in the non-existent.

While discussing the hymn we focus mostly on the reconstruction of the presented philosophical concepts. However, we should not forget the specific language of the hymn. *Nāsadiya Sūkta*, although it carries rich philosophical content, remains a beautiful poetic hymn, whose deep philosophical deliberations sometimes take the form of metaphors or images referring us to intuition. Some concepts, strictly defined in the later systems, were not so precisely applied in the discussed text.

The above remark applies first of all to the term *manas*. As we know, this is precisely defined in the *darśanas*. In Sāṃkhya, as one of the *tattvas*, it plays a role of an internal sense, which coordinates and synthesises the activities of the external senses. It is understood slightly differently in Yoga, where it is one of the *modi* of *śittā* (the internal cognitive organ), similarly in Advaita Vedānta, where it is one of the *modi* of *antaḥkaraṇa* (the internal organ). It is also clearly defined in the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika schools, where it functions as an intermediary between the all-permeating *ātman* and other entities. And, as we know, in all these *darśanas* other categories are also assumed to be responsible for cognition and experience, such as *buddhi* (the intellect), *cittā* or *ahaṃkāra* (the acting self). The term *manas* comes from the root  $\sqrt{man}$  – to think, to suppose – and in this hymn refers to the broadly understood realm of thinking, cognition, and awareness. Such a wide field of thinking might also include an undefined cognitive impulse, a reaction to it, doubt, judgement, cognition and clarification. Indeed, that is how we interpret *manas* in this hymn. Similarly, the term *maṇiṣā* will refer to both thoughts and wisdom, concepts and ideas. It is worth mentioning here that although the term *manas* is generally associated with cognition, in the *darśanas* it is separated from the pure subject whose basis, and sometimes the only characteristic, is consciousness; this subject is usually referred to as *ātman* or *puruṣa*.

The word *kāma* denotes desire, the primary impulse of manifestation, action or generally speaking – being. This impulse appears at the very beginning (*agre*) and initiates the first motion or movement. Movement is possible because – thanks to the fervour of asceticism, understood as a process responsible for

self-identifying and cognitive procedures – space for activity appears. When the primordial One (*ekam*) “which existed as a thing coming into being” (*ābhū*) emerged from its realm, it surrounded a certain space. Thus, it created or rather outlined space for the development of activity. Desire *sam avartata* – “pervaded,” “surrounded,” “covered” a certain *tad* – “it,” which will be explained in the further part of the stanza. The word *sam avartata* is an imperfectum form from the root *√vrt* prefixed with *sam*, related to the root from which the word *āvarīvaḥ* present in the first stanza stems. The word *āvarīvaḥ* appeared already in the question “what covered it?,” this primordial state existing as both *sat* and *asat*. As much as the first stanza did not determine how to interpret *kim*, whether as “what” or “whether,” in the fourth stanza we may already assume that there was something that concealed the possibility of recognising the nature of the non-manifested being. Let us recall that from the same root stems i.e. the word *saṃvṛtti*, which in monistic systems denotes the dimension of the presented reality “superimposed” on the absolute dimension.

The third stanza features a description of the transition from the dimension of *sat* to *bhava*. And again in the fourth stanza we have a definition of this primordial dimension, because it is said that it existed as “the first seed of thought” – *manaso retaḥ prathamam*. It is clearly added here that reality has the nature of consciousness; this is what the first stanza of the hymn refers to. And in the fourth stanza we already have the seed of thought, some category distinguished as a result of processes leading to self-determination and self-cognition.

If we consider this hymn a description of reality manifesting itself as a result of an act of self-cognition, we can distinguish the categories performing the functions of the subject and the object of cognition. The above lines spoke of darkness covering darkness, or of the potential of existence – *ābhū* – covering the unity – *ekam*. In this stanza, the juxtaposition of the object and the subject of cognition is already clearer, because it is “illuminated” by the power of the heat – *tapas*. Thus, desire embraces, delineates, or defines what is the first seed of thought. In the previous stanza it was *ābhū* that was responsible for the covering mechanism, here it is *kāma*; previously it was defined by the enigmatic *tad ekam*, here it is specified by *manaso retaḥ*.

Here ends the description of the image of the absolute, as a reality existing beyond precise cognitive categories. The subsequent passages try to describe the process of reality manifesting itself from the perspective of the cognitive subject, operating in the domain of the presented reality. The first to discover that truth were the poets – *kavi*. These are the inspired sages who do not refer to the discursive reason in cognition, but instead try to reach the truth in an unmediated way. This kind of cognition or rather experience will become a model for all later

Indian thinkers. We are already in the domain of the manifested reality, so we can talk about places, spaces and categories not only in a conventional, metaphorical way. The place where this act of uninterrupted cognition takes place is the heart. This phrase repeatedly appears in the Upaniṣads, it is said that the abode of *ātman* is *hṛdayākāśa* – space of the heart. It is widely known that in India, it is the heart that is perceived as the center of cognition, experiencing and feeling. This conviction, common to the entire Indian tradition, can already be found in the hymns.<sup>11</sup> Here too there is a distinction, so rigorously observed in all the *darśanas* – although it is clear that their understanding of cognitive procedures will vary depending on the ontological assumptions made: the separation of the cognitive subject, usually called *ātman* from the cognitive powers, which in the *Nāsadiya* are denoted by the term *manas*. *Manas* is only a tool, a primordial intermediary, a principle of all tools of cognition, but also of concealing and limiting. *Manas* as a properly used tool, as in the case of the poets, can lead to the realisation of true cognition.

At this point, the terms *sat* and *asat*, with which the hymn begins, should be more closely analysed. Initially, we put forward a thesis that both these terms should, from a metaphysical perspective, be understood in a positive way. We do not understand the term *asat* as indicating absolute non-existence, but rather as an indication that the absolute is therefore an absolute, that it can exist both in a non-manifested form (*asat*), and in a manifested form (*sat*). It can also come into existence (*ābhū*) and exist as *bhava*. From the epistemic perspective, it emphasises the impossibility of knowing the absolute being, but neither is this impossibility of knowing absolute, since the *sat/asat* is available to the liberating cognition. Such an understanding of *asat* will be directly confirmed by the Chāndogya Upaniṣad and by a number of subsequent commentaries, because the principle of *ex nihilo nihil fit* will be indisputably accepted by all the *darśanas*. If these terms were to be interpreted in the spirit of the Advaita Vedānta, *sat* would denote the absolute level, whereas the domain of the manifested world is both *sat*, because it is conditioned by this highest level, and *asat*, because it is not directly *sat*. It is *anirvacanīya* because we predicate about it using tools that belong to the category of *manas*, i.e. with the use of both defining and limiting categories. In the *Nāsadiya*, these three concepts – *sat*, *asat*, *anirvacanīya* – do

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11 This conviction is nowadays shared by the representatives of cognitive psychology: “Emotions, feelings and biological regulation all play a role in human reason. The lowly orders of our organism are in the loop of high reason.” A.R. Damasio, *Descartes’ error*, Avon Books 1995, p. xiii.

not appear together yet, although, as we can see, the hymn anticipates the *nirguṇic* way of predicating. Simplifying to some extent, we can say that the term *asat*, more than *sat*, refers to the world presented to itself as a result of the primary act of self-cognition. Then the phrase that the poets had found the connection – *bandhu* – of existence in the non-existent can be read in such a way that, although we try to reach the absolute reality, we start the process and then also describe it from the perspective of the presented reality. As Muṇḍaka Up. 2.2.8. puts it, “there are two brahmans, pronounced from the point of view of higher knowledge and lower knowledge; and true cognition is when brahman is perceived in both the higher and the lower.” (It is not as strong a *nirguṇic* interpretation as, for instance, Gauḍapāda).

At this point, we should also pay attention to the word *bandhu*, which will become a technical term. In the Brāhmaṇas it means a relationship of equivalence between the individual elements of the micro- and macrocosm, i.e. eye/sun, breath/wind, which as a result of a ritual act should be discovered and harmonised. And as we know, in the Āraṇyakas the procedure of harmonising through the appropriate *bandhu* takes the form of an internalised ritual act. Later, in the Upaniṣads, through the act of *upāsanā* it will take the form of a meditative act, leading to the act of self-recognition and ultimately to the recognition of the nature of the absolute. Thus, even in such a seemingly technical detail, the *Nāsadiya* hymn anticipates the later concepts.

*tiraścīno vitato raśmir eṣām  
adhaḥ svid āsīd upari svid āsīt  
retodhā āsan mahimāna āsan  
svadhā avastāt prayatiḥ parastāt. (5)*

Their cord was stretched across: Did something exist below it? Did something exist above?

There existed placers of semen and there existed greatneses. There was independent will below, offering above.

The word *raśmi* is usually translated as a rope, but also as reins necessary to drive a chariot. Here comes to mind a comparison with the famous hymn on time from the Atharvaveda, namely the *Kālasūkta* (19.53, 54).<sup>12</sup> In this hymn,

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12 Prolific, thousand-eyed, and undecaying, a horse with seven reins Time bears us onward. Sages inspired with holy knowledge mount him: his chariot wheels are all the worlds of creatures. (1)

This Time hath seven rolling wheels and seven naves immortality is the chariot's axle.

This Time brings hitherward all worlds about us: as primal Deity is he entreated.

(2) *Hymns of the Atharva Veda*, trans. Ralph T.H. Griffith, 1895, at sacred-texts.com.

time is compared to a steed pulling a symbolically constructed chariot of seven rays, traversing the sky. According to the commentary of Sāyaṇa, the number of seven rays or reins refers us to the image of a steed with reins tied to its mouth, neck and hooves. Sāyaṇa explains that this gives a number of six, which refers to six seasons of the year, each consisting of two months; in total we have twelve months. This is a direct calculation of the lunar year. The thirteenth lunar month is an extra month and it is also the seventh ray. In this way, the lunar calendar is correlated to the solar calendar. According to this interpretation, time has clearly distinguishable divisions; this applies to the world of the moon. In the later Indian thought it will be clearly stated that the transition from the earthly world to the underworld, which can already be understood as final liberation, leads through the world of the moon, the realm of reality, which is the domain of the mind, and thus also of the perception of all differences and divisions. The absolute dimension is symbolised as the domain of the sun. Thus, the term *raśmi*, also here in the *Nāsadiya*, indicates the relationship between this which is manifested and this which is not manifested, between what is accessible to cognition and what exceeds cognitive capability.<sup>13</sup>

The term *vitata* – “stretched,” in a very clear way denotes the category of space. In this context, we encounter the terms indicating the relations of up/down. Two pairs of factors are presented here: *retodhās/mahimānas* – sperm donors/forces and *prayatis/svadhā* – impulse/strength which points to the interdependence of male and female elements. The relation between these factors, which has already been mentioned, is consistent with the cosmogonic considerations very common to Samhitas. At this point it is worth recalling the *Puruṣasūkta* and the mutual relations between *puruṣa* and *virāj*. Referring also to the passages from other Samhitas, we can see here a presentation of a cosmogonic concept in the form of a metaphor, in an activity where action is depicted as a female factor located at the bottom, often directly associated with earth, and aspiration or impulse – later directly correlated with the factor of consciousness – is placed at the level of the heaven or skies.

If we consistently interpret the verb *as* as denoting the state of real existence, it would mean that male and female elements already exist in a latent, non-manifested form in the very structure of absolute being. In this stanza, the poets who, as a result of their unmediated experience, found in this which is non-existent a connection with this which exists, pose a question whether what

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13 For more on time in Indian thought, see e.g.: “Przekraczanie czasu w hinduizmie,” in: *Tajemnica czasu i religie*, ed. Izabela Trzcińska, Wydawnictwo Aureus, Kraków 2005.

they put in the form of metaphors and images, refers to the indication of factors that pre-exist or exist in the absolute dimension. If we positively respond to this, then we can also say that here we have an example of an actual transformation – *pariṇāma* – of an absolute reality into the manifested world. Discussions on *vivarta* and *pariṇāma* were vigorous in various Vedānta schools, and certain conclusions were eventually found by later Vedāntists.

*ko addhā veda ka iha pra vocat  
kuta ājātā kuta iyaṃ viṣṭiḥ  
arvāg devā asya visarjanena  
āthā ko veda yata ābabhūva (6)*

Who really knows? Who shall here proclaim it? – from where was it born, from where this creation?

The gods are on this side of the creation of this (world). So then who does know from where it came to be?

There are as many interpretations of the final two stanzas as there are interpretations of the entire hymn. Do they ascertain the impossibility of making an adequate statement about the nature of the unmanifested being or is it rather a form of *brahmavidyā* – a very interesting comment on the subject may be found by the reader in the above-mentioned *Kosmogonia Rygwedy* by Joanna Jurewicz.<sup>14</sup> From the point of view of our deliberations, these differing interpretations – when we assume the mixing of metaphysical and epistemic levels – do not exclude each other, and in some places are even complementary.

What seems very important at this point is the explicit formulation that the mystery of creation, which is presented “here” – *iha*, specifically on earth, in the most literal level of presented reality – is expected to be clarified. This reality is also learned through the senses, and as *darśanas* specify, all cognition begins with cognition through the senses – *indriya*. However, in the Upaniṣads, as Aitareya very clearly explains, the concepts of *devatā* and *indriya* have already been identified. What, in the mythological sense, are called deities most often understood as personifications of forces of nature, their role in the process of cosmogonic act of self-knowledge is taken over by the senses. This is why, in our opinion, the sixth stanza should be understood such that with the help of the senses, it is impossible to perform an act of true cognition that is not mediated by anything. The deities – *deva* – and, in other words, the senses – *indriya* – are not adequate tools to provide an insight into the nature of reality. They appeared, emerged in successive stages, quite “removed” from the source reality; that is

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14 Jurewicz J., *Kosmogonia Rygwedy. Myśl i metafora*, pp. 37 ff.

why it is said that the gods appeared “after,” namely after creation. And after all the question about the beginning arises – *iha* – “here,” on Earth. These tools are a category distant from the source, a distant intermediary, and therefore there is no question whether the absolute and unconditional reality exists, since every experience tells us about it, but the question of “how was that which we perceive born” – *ājāta*, “how did it come into being” – *ābabhūva*.

Here we should also pay attention to the word *viṣṣṭiḥ* – “the creation.” The hymn clearly indicates that the creation, i.e. all created, manifested beings, which in themselves are a mystery, are at quite a distant stage of the cosmological process; they are the result of earlier procedures. This is the interpretation adopted by Advaita; Patañjali’s *Yogasūtras* will be quite similar to such an approach. In the latter, the *Īśvara* understood as the god of yogis, as a result of a self-recognition procedure, ultimately turns out to be only *vṛtti* – a phenomenon of consciousness, a phenomenon that must be restrained.

*īyaṃ viṣṣṭir yata ābabhūva  
yadī vā dadhe yadī vā na  
yo asyādhyakṣaḥ parame vyoman  
so aṅga veda yadī vā na veda (7)*

This creation – from where it came to be, if it was produced or if not –  
he who is the overseer of this (world) in the furthest heaven, he surely knows. Or if he  
does not know?

As in the previous stanza, questions continue to be asked regarding the cause or reason for the creation of the world in which we live and which we experience. In this hymn we can distinguish two parts. The first stanzas of the hymn are a very subtle metaphysical analysis of the mystery of cosmogony, whereas stanzas six and seven primarily concern the mystery of creation and of the world. Actually, this hymn could also be interpreted starting from the last two strophes, from questions asked by a specific questioning subject.

Questions are asked here about both the source and the beginning of the created world. In the subsequent line there is an ambiguous verb *dadhe* – stemming from the verbal root  $\sqrt{dhā}$ , to arrange, to render, to organise. The question formulated with it refers not so much to the creator as to whether there exists any guarantor of order in the world experienced and whether there are any “top-down” laws at all. The author of the hymn claims that there is a higher being, someone who is watching everything from above. But is the one who sees and who may know the answers – although there is also some uncertainty here – responsible for this world, or is he just a spectator who learns from a wider perspective?

It is difficult to sum up unambiguously what conclusions can be drawn from the analysed hymn, especially as its final words suspend the possibility of a positive answer. But what is most relevant here is to underline the extraordinary importance of the cognitive process. The world emerges as a result of the cosmogonic act of self-recognition of the absolute. It would therefore follow that the most fundamental nature of the absolute is consciousness, expressed in the later texts by the term *cit*. This thesis will become the basis of Brahmanical metaphysics – without consciousness there is no manifestation of reality. But paradoxically, this act of self-recognition requires the cognitive subject (and it is irrelevant whether it is a universal or an individual subject) to look at himself as if from the outside, to use categories and cognitive tools. However, these categories indicate only certain aspects, and so they do not cover the whole. It would become the greatest challenge for the most important Brahmanical *darśanas* to explain the nature of this tension between the will to self-recognise, or self-determine, and the cognitive processes that will become mediators, and thus limitations. The world is the result of an act of self-recognition, and so its nature can only be discovered through a cognitive act. This is yet another leading thesis.

The next chapter provides an insight into how these motifs – outlined in *Nāsadiya Sūkta* – are further developed and in a sense commented on in the Upaniṣads.



### 3. Cosmogony of the Upaniṣads<sup>15</sup>

The Upaniṣads, like all ancient esoteric texts, generate various layers of meaning. As shown by the later history of Indian philosophy, the multitude and diversity of threads presented in the Upaniṣads can serve a better interpretation and corroboration of a range of thoughts and theories. However, in order to get as close as possible to an objective presentation of a given issue, we have chosen to adopt a methodological model that shows consistency. The cosmology of the Upaniṣads, starting from the interpretation of the earliest cosmological thread they contain, will be presented i.e. from the initial stanzas of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. An explanation of the passage will be provided along the consecutive cosmological schemes appearing both in this and other Upaniṣads.

In the beginning there was nothing here at all.<sup>16</sup> Death alone covered this completely, as did hunger; for what is hunger but death? Then death made up his mind: 'Let me equip myself with a body (*ātman*). So he undertook a liturgical recitation (*arc*), and as he was engaged in liturgical recitation water sprang from him. And he thought: 'While I was engaged in liturgical recitation (*arc*) water (*ka*) sprang from me.' This is what gave the name to and discloses the true nature of recitation (*arka*). Water undoubtedly springs for him who knows the name and nature of recitation in this way. So, recitation is water. Then the foam that had gathered on the water solidified and became the earth. Death toiled upon her. When he had become worn out by toil and hot from exertion, his heat – his essence – turned into fire.

He divided this body (*ātman*) of his into three – one third became the sun and another the wind. He is also breath divided into three. His head is the eastern quarter, and his

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15 To write this chapter we used the findings from earlier studies, results of which were published in: *The Cosmological Scheme of the Upanishads*, Wydawnictwo Aureus, Kraków 2000.

16 As mentioned in the introduction to the English edition, this philosophical analysis was carried out based on the original Sanskrit text. In the book, initially published in Polish, the author provided Polish translations of all the original passages, which allowed to maintain consistency between the original and translated texts as well as their interpretation. One of the key starting points for this philosophical analysis is to emphasise the difference in the functioning of the original phrases containing derivatives from the roots *as* and *bhu*. Not all the well-established English translations used in this edition take this crucial distinction into account. Thus, there might be minor inconsistencies between the quoted English passages and the authorial commentary to it. Therefore, relevant excerpts from the original Sanskrit texts are provided throughout the book, which are the starting point for the conducted analyses.

two forequarters are the south-east and the north-east. His tail is the west, and his two hindquarters are the south-west and the north-west. His flanks are the south and the north. His back is the sky; his abdomen is the intermediate region; and his chest is this earth. He stands firm in the waters. A man who knows this will stand firm wherever he may go.

Then death had this desire: 'Would that a second body (*ātman*) were born for me!' So, by means of his mind, he copulated with speech, death copulated with hunger. Then the semen he emitted became the year. The year simply did not exist before this. He carried him for as long as a year, at the end of which he gave birth to him. As he was born, death opened its mouth to swallow him. He cried out, '*Bhāṇ!*' That is what became speech.

Death reflected: 'If I kill him, I will only reduce my supply of food.' So, with that speech and that body (*ātman*) he gave birth to this whole world, to everything that is here – Ṛgvedic verses, Yajurvedic formulas, Sāmavedic chants, metres, sacrifices, people, and animals. He began to eat whatever he gave birth to. 'He eats (*ad*) all' – it is this that gave the name to and discloses the true nature of Aditi. When someone comes to know the name and nature of Aditi in this way, he becomes the eater of his whole world, and the whole world here becomes his food.

Then death had this desire: 'Let me make an offering once more, this time with a bigger sacrifice.' So he strenuously toiled and fiercely exerted himself. When he had become worn out by toil and hot with exertion, his splendour – his vigour – departed from him. Now, splendour – vigour – consists of the vital breaths. So, when his vital breaths had departed, his corpse began to bloat. His mind, however, still remained within his corpse.

Then he had this desire: 'I wish that this corpse of mine would become fit to be sacrificed so I could get myself a living body (*ātman*)!' Then that corpse became a horse. 'Because it bloated (*aśvat*) it became fit to be sacrificed (*medhya*)' – that is what gave the name to and disclosed the true nature of the horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*). Only a man who knows the horse sacrifice in this way truly understands it.

Death believed that the horse was not to be confined in any way. At the end of one year, he immolated it as a sacrifice to himself, while he assigned the other animals to the gods. That is why people, when they immolate the horse consecrated to Prajāpati, regard it as an offering to all the gods.

The sun that shines up there, clearly, is a horse sacrifice; the year is its body (*ātman*). The fire that burns down here is the ritual fire; these worlds are its body. Now, there are these two: the horse sacrifice and the ritual fire (*arka*). Yet, they constitute in reality a single deity – they are simply death. [Whoever knows this] averts repeated death – death is unable to seize him, death becomes his very body (*ātman*), and he becomes one of these deities.<sup>17 18</sup>

17 English translations of all the Upaniṣads, except for the Maitrī Upaniṣad, are quoted after Patrick Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996.

18 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.2.1–7: *naiveha kiṃ canāgra āsīt mṛtyunaivedam āvṛtam āsīt aśanayāyayā aśanāyā hi mṛtyuḥ tan mano'kurutātmanvī syām iti so'rcann acarat tasyārcata āpo'jāyanta arcate vai me kam abhūd iti tad evārkasyārkatvam kaṃ ha vā*

The above passage from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka shall serve us as a starting point for an attempt to reconstruct the cosmological scheme of the Upaniṣads. The first words state that “In the beginning there was nothing here at all.” Let us see how other passages of the scriptures describe this state:

‘In the beginning, son, this world was simply what is existent – one only, without a second. Now, on this point some do say: “In the beginning this world was simply what is non-existent – one only, without a second. And from what is non-existent was born what is existent.”

‘But, son, how can that possibly be?’ he continued. ‘How can what is existent be born from what is non-existent? On the contrary, son, in the beginning this world was simply what is existent – one only, without a second.’<sup>19</sup>

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*asmai bhavati ya evam etad arkasyārkatvaṃ veda. [1] āpo vā arkaḥ tad yad apāṃ śara āsīt tatsamahanyata sā pṛthivy abhavat tasyām aśrāmyat tasya śrāntasya taptasya tejoraso niravartatāgnih. [2] sa tredhātmanaṃ vyakurutādityaṃ tṛtīyam vāyuyṃ tṛtīyam sa eṣa prāṇas tredhāvihitaḥ tasya prācī dik śīrośau cāsau cermau athāsyā pratīcī dik pucchaṃ asau cāsau ca sakthyau dakṣiṇā codicī ca pārśve dyauḥ pṛṣṭham antarikṣam udaram iyam uraḥ sa eṣo’psu pratiṣṭhitaḥ yatra kva caiti tadeva pratitiṣṭhaty evaṃ vidvān. [3] so’kāmāyata dvitīyo ya ātmā jāyeteṭi sa manasā vācaṃ mithunaṃ samabhadra aśanāyā mṛtyuḥ tad yad reta āsīt sa saṃvatsaro’bhavat na ha purā tataḥ samvatsara āsa tam etāvantaṃ kalam abibhar yāvān saṃvatsaraḥ tam etāvataḥ kālasya parastād asṛjata taṃ jātam abhivyādāt sa bhān akarot saiva vāg abhavat. [4] sa aikṣata yadi vā iyamam abhimaṃsyē kaniyo’naṃ kariṣya iti sa tayā vācā tenātmanedaṃ sarvam asṛjata yad idaṃ kiṃca – ṛco yajūṃṣi sāmāni chandāṃsi yajñān prajāḥ paśūn sa yadyad evāṣṛjata tattad attum adhriyata sarvam vā attīti tad aditer adititvam sarvasyaitasyāttā bhavati sarvam asyānnaṃ bhavati ya evam etad aditer adititvam veda. [5] so’kāmāyata bhūyasā yajñena bhūyo yajeyeti so’śrāmyat sa tapo’tapyata tasya śrāntasya tapyasya yaśo vīryam udakrāmat prānā vai yaśo vīryam. tat prāṇeṣūtkrānteṣu śarīraṃ śvayitum adhriyata tasya śarīra eva mana āsīt. [6] so’kāmāyata medhyaṃ ma idaṃ syāt ātmanvy anena syām iti tato’śvaḥ samabhadra yad aśvat tan medhyam abhūd iti tad evāśvamedhasyāśvamedhatvam eṣa ha vā aśvamedhaṃ veda ya enam evaṃ veda tam anavarudhyaivāmanyata taṃ saṃvatsarasya parastād ātmana ālabhata paśūn devatābhyaḥ pratyauhat tasmāt sarvadevatyaṃ prokṣitaṃ prājāpatyam ālabhante eṣa ha vā aśvamedho ya eṣa tapati tasya samvatsara ātmā ayam gñir arkaḥ tasyeme lokā ātmanaḥ tāv etāv arkāśvamedhau so punar ekaiva devatā bhavati mṛtyur eva apa punarmṛtyuyṃ jayati naināṃ mṛtyur āpnoti mṛtyur asyātmā bhavati etāsāṃ devatānām eko bhavati.[7]*

- 19 Chāndogya Up. 6.2.1–2 *sad eva somyedam agra āsīd ekaṃ evādvitīyam tad dhaika āhur asad evedam agra āsīd ekaṃ evādvitīyaṃ tasmād asataḥ saj jāyata. kutas tu khalu somyaivaṃ syād iti hovāca katham asataḥ saj jāyeteṭi sat tv eva somyedam agra āsīd ekaṃ evādvitīyam.*

In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, Āruṇi, the famous sage also known from other *śruti* texts, explains to his son Śvetaketu that *sat* (“the existing one”) *eva* (“only”) *idam* (“this one”) *agre* (“in the beginning”) *āsīt* (“was”) [“only the existing one (*śad eva*) [. . .] was at the beginning” (*agra āsīt*)]. *Sat* is a derivative of the root √*as*, “to exist.” The word *sat* should simply be understood that this initial dimension of the existing one was there. Further on, other particular attributes are provided. This existing one – *sat* – was *ekam advitīyam*, i.e. “one, without a second.” This initial being was the only element, the only *arché*, the only principle of the whole world appearing at later stages in various forms. Āruṇi then mentions that some theories known to him claim that in the beginning *idam* or “it” was *asat ekam advitīyam*, namely “non-existent, one, without a second,” but he immediately retorts that “how can what is existent be born from what is non-existent?.” It is a very clear polemic with the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*. For ancient Hindus, the concept of creating anything out of nothing seemed illogical, even absurd. Besides, even in the later *dārśana*, some key metaphysical theses were proved by adopting the thesis of *ex nihilo nihil fit* as an axiom. For example, in the Sāṃkhya school, this is how the existence of the non-manifested – *avyakta* – form of *prakṛti* was proved: we experience only various manifestations of *prakṛti*, we cannot perceive its original form, *mūla*, because it is beyond our cognitive apparatus, *antaḥkaraṇa*. Manifestations as variables cannot exist on their own, but neither could they originate from nothing. In this way, the existence of a subtler form of objective reality is proved. This is the consequence of the approach so clearly outlined already in the Upaniṣads.

However, the concept of *asat* functioned alongside the concept of *sat*, an example of which we have already seen in the discussed hymn of the Ṛgveda. The text of *Nāsadiya Sūkta* did not elaborate per se on the relationship between these concepts, but a specific commentary on the matter can be found in the Upaniṣads. So let us take a look at those passages which define the initial state as *asat*.

‘*Brahman* is the sun’ – that is the rule of substitution. Here is a further explanation of it. In the beginning the world was simply what is non-existing; and what is existing was that. It then developed and formed into an egg. It lay there for a full year and then it hatched, splitting in two, one half becoming silver and the other half gold.<sup>20</sup>  
In the beginning this world was the non-existent,

20 Chāndogya Up. 3.19.1: *ādityo brahmety ādeśas tasyopavyākhyānam asad evedam agra āsīt tat sad āsīt tat samabhavat tadāṇḍaṃ niravartata tat saṃvatsarasya mātrām aśayata tan nirabhidyata te āṇḍakapāle rajataṃ ca suvarṇaṃ cābhavatām.*

and from it arose the existent.  
 By itself it made a body (*ātman*) for itself;  
 therefore it is called 'well-made.'<sup>21</sup>

Chāndogya says that in the beginning “this” – *idam* – existed in the state of *asat*. This *asat* came into existence as *sat*. The verb “existed,” “came into existence” – *āsīt* – is expressed through a derivative of the same root *as*, from which the word *sat* originates. It means that initially the transition from *asat* into *sat* took place within the same structure of being. It is highlighted through the verbal form *āsīt*, referring us back to *Nāsadīya*. Subsequently this being, already existing as *sat*, became. The key passage for our deliberations occurs here: the transition from the domain denoted by *as* to the domain denoted by *bhū*. The word *samabhavat* is used here, a derivative from the root  $\sqrt{bhū}$  – “to become,” “to emerge.” And as the root *as* implies a primarily static or more constant state, the root *bhū* denotes a dynamic one. And then *sat*, previously existing as *asat*, once it had become, it turned itself into an egg.

We find a similar description in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad. In the beginning “this” existed – *āsīt* – as non-existent *asat*. Out of it, this which is existent – *sat* – was born – *ajāyata*. This which was born made itself, its soul and its body – *ātmānam svayam akuruta*. As mentioned previously, the realm of the world presented is expressed with different verbs. We consider *bhū* to be a technical term. In this passage the verb referring to this dimension of reality is *ajāyata* – was born. All these terms point to relationships: something arises from something else, something is born from something else, something is created out of something else, someone gets divided, something emerges (e.g. as a result of heating up – *tap*). Only *sat* exists by itself and thanks to itself, so only the domain of *sat* denotes the absolute dimension.

As we know, the term *ātman* is semantically very rich. It is usually assumed that it comes from the root *an* – “to breathe,” in which case *ātman* would mean – “that which breathes.” Grammatically, it is also possible to consider it a derivative of *at* – “to move,” combined with a suffix *man*, meaning the one possessing the quality denoted by the root. In this case, *ātman* means the one who has movement within him, to whom movement is assigned. And precisely by understanding *ātman* as that which breathes, this term began to be used to define the breathing soul, the individual soul, or in some places, more universally, the spirit. In addition, *ātman* in the singular was and still is used as a reflexive pronoun for

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21 Taittirīya Up. 2.7. *asad vā idam agra āsīt tato vai sad ajāyata tad ātmānam svayam akuruta tasmāt tat sukṛtam ucayata iti.*

all three persons and all three genders. Thus, it becomes clear how ambiguous a term it is, all the more so since emphasising one of its meanings does not exclude the others.

Let us now return to the Taittirīya Upaniṣad (2.7.). Understanding *ātman* as a pronoun here, we will read that passage as: “it” created itself. But, of course, other translations like: “it” created the soul, “it” created the *ātman*, “it” created the body cannot be excluded. After the sequence of *asat* transiting into *sat*, the term *ātman* appears. Here it is further specified by the word *sukṛtam* – “well made.” This brings to mind a passage from the Aitareya Upaniṣad, where the deities demanded food from the creator and a place for their residence. They reject a horse and a cow as insufficient, but accept a man, saying that only he is good enough for them, being *sukṛta* – “well made.”<sup>22</sup>

The concept of *ātman* as an *arché*, as the starting point for cosmogonic sequences is postulated by the Aitareya Upaniṣad. It says<sup>23</sup> that “this” – *idam*, in the very beginning existed only as *ātman*. This sole existence of *ātman* was indicated by the word *ekam* – “one,” similarly as in the earlier passages, where *ekam* referred both to *sat* and *asat*. Further the text explains that “there was no other being at all that blinked an eye” – *nānyat kiñcana miṣat*. The verb *miṣat* used in other places means “nothing appeared,” “nothing was visible before the eyes.” The Taittirīya Upaniṣad, on the other hand, takes *ātman* as the starting point for subsequent emanations, the first of them being the skies. In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.1,<sup>24</sup> we encounter a very interesting description of *ātman* as *puruṣavidha*, namely as *ātman* in a form of *puruṣa*, a person. Further analysis of this stanza can be found in the chapters dedicated to the concepts of *aham* and *puruṣa*. In one of the passages, we encounter *arché* defined by two different terms, with a clear indication that between them they are identical.

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- 22 Once these deities were created, they fell into this vast ocean here. It afflicted him with hunger and thirst. Those deities then said to him: ‘Find us a dwelling in which we can establish ourselves and eat food.’ So he brought a cow up to them, but they said: ‘That’s totally inadequate for us.’ Then he brought a horse up to them, but they said: ‘That’s totally inadequate for us.’ Finally, he brought a man up to them, and they exclaimed: ‘Now, this is well made!’ for man is indeed well made. (Aitareya Up. 1.2.1–3)
- 23 In the beginning this world was the self (*ātman*), one alone, and there was no other being at all that blinked an eye. He thought to himself: ‘Let me create the words.’ (Aitareya 1.1.)
- 24 In the beginning this world was just a single body (*ātman*) shaped like a man. He looked around and saw nothing but himself. The first thing he said was, ‘Here I am!’ and from that the name ‘I’ came into being. (Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.4.1)

The Upaniṣadic wise men, who referred to *arché* as *ātman*, pointed to the same dimension of reality as those who referred to it as *puruṣa*. The Upaniṣads, by probing who we were, where we came from and as a result of what we existed, asked both about what they understood as an equivalent of *arché*, about the initial, yet still existing structure of the universe, as well as about *aitia* – the initial point of the cosmic cycle. In this case *ātman* would denote *arché*, while *puruṣa* would be both *arché* and *aitia*.

In the next sentence of this passage, *puruṣa* acquires anthropomorphic features. We are told that while looking around, the spirit saw nothing but *ātman*, (again one could attribute different meanings to the word), that is: nothing but himself, or nothing but his soul. It is emphasised here that in the beginning this being existed as a unity, but the very fact of ascribing it the attribute of perception or the lack of it implies the presence of consciousness. This state of perception results in the utterance of the first words: “He – sa – is me.” And so emerges the first emanate, the name “I,” which is like a state of self-awareness. This passage also provides a very interesting etymology of the word *puruṣa* which is specific to the Upaniṣads. *Puruṣa* is understood as the one who *pūrva* – “earlier,” namely before the moment of *agre* – “the beginning of the cosmic cycle,” had burnt – *uṣ* – all the sinful worlds. The Upaniṣads adopt the theory of cosmic cycles, which repeatedly appear and disappear. At the very beginning, the worlds manifest themselves in order to be incinerated at the end of the cycle. In the light of this concept, *arché* appears as a structure common to all cycles, while *aitia* is rather an individual form for each subsequent cycle. The entity that acts as *aitia* is the first manifestation of the basic structure and the one that is responsible for the end of the given eon. Thus, whenever we talk about the origins of the universe in Upaniṣadic thought, we always mean the beginning of the cosmic cycle, in this case our cycle, the cycle we live in.

In the beginning this world was only *brahman*, and it knew only itself (*ātman*), thinking: ‘I am *brahman*.’ As a result it became the Whole. Among the gods, likewise, whosoever realized this, only they became the Whole. It was the same also among the seers and among humans. (. . .) If a man knows ‘I am *brahman*’ in this way, he becomes this whole world.<sup>25</sup>

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25 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.4.10: *brahma vā idam agra āsīt tad ātmānam evāvet aha brahmāsmīti tasmāt tat sarvam abhavat tad yo yo devānām pratyabudhyata sa eva tad abhavat tatharṣṇīnām tathā manuṣyānām (...)* ya eva veda ahaṃ brahmāsmīti sa idam sarvam bhavati.

The above passage assumes *brahman* as the initial point. The word *brahman* is a derivative of the root – *bṛh*, namely “to grow great,” “to increase,” “to get bigger,” “to expand,” which means *brahman* equals growth, development, manifestation, inner strength causing growth and development of the entire universe and everything that it contains. In the Vedic hymns the word *brahman* (differently accentuated) signified the power of the recited sacrificial formulas. It was seen as the magical power of speech, which was manifested by the Vedas. Therefore, it is treated as an archetypal word, a sacred one with creative powers. *Brahman* as a sacred word is sometimes used in opposition to the human word – *vāc*. In the Upaniṣads, the concept of *brahman* extends into the concept of the primordial being, the highest reality, the creative being, from which everything originates in order to then vanish into it. It is at the same time immanent and transcendent, it is outside the universe, as well as in every manifestation of it. In stating that “*brahman* is *ātman*,” *brahman* designates the basic element of the macrocosm or an objective aspect of the universe, while *ātman* refers to the dimension of reality determined from the perspective of the subject.

In the above-mentioned excerpt from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, it is said that “it” at first existed as *brahman*. It is a construction identical to those we encountered earlier, only that instead of *ātman*, *sat* or *asat* the word *brahman* is used. And then “it,” namely *brahman*, recognises *ātman*, i.e. himself. As a result of this self-recognition, it utters the words: “I am *brahman*.” Earlier we read that “He is me.” And as a result of the act of self-cognition, self-naming, everything emerges (the use of the derivative of the verb  $\sqrt{bhū}$ ). Previously we saw that the transition happened from *sat* – “existent,” to *bhava* – “emerging.” The Upaniṣad further develops the theme of self-awareness, claiming that everyone, be it a prophet, a god or a human being, by becoming conscious, self-aware, through such an act of cognition becomes identical with *brahman*.

In another passage from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.11,<sup>26</sup> which begins identically to the previous one (namely that “it” first existed as *brahman*) it is said that *brahman* was one – *ekam* – and further that because of its existence as one – *ekam*, *sat* did not manifest itself. Therefore it created a magnificent form; here first of all *kṣātra* is mentioned – the ruling power, imperiousness. The

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26 In the beginning, the world was only *brahman*, only one. Because it was only one, *brahman* had not fully developed. It then created the ruling power, a form superior to and surpassing itself, that is, the ruling powers among the gods (. . .).

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 5.4.<sup>27</sup> teaches us that this which is, remains the same as that which existed, and that this very being is the reality, the truth and the essence – *satyam*. And *satyam* is *brahman*, which means *brahman* is the kind of being, who not only initiated the creation of the universe, but still remains the same, unchanged.

The world there is full;  
 The world here is full;  
 Fullness from fullness proceeds.  
 After taking fully from the full,  
 It still remains completely full.  
 ‘*Brahman* is space. The primeval one is space. Space is windy.’<sup>28</sup>

Such a concept of emergence or creation of the world, where the primordial being, despite the act of manifestation or creation, remains unchanged in its structure, is presented among others in the above passage from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, which is at the same time an invocation to the Īśā Upaniṣad. This text poetically presents the process of manifestation of the primeval being. That which is “there,” outside the world, is fullness; it is the same as that which is here in this world, because the structure is fullness – *pūrṇam*. From the initial state emerges the world, which also has a structure of fullness, while the initial state still remains fullness. Even adding, as we read, the manifested world to the absolute dimension does not create any new quality, because there is no form more complete than fullness itself.

Already in the same text a commentary on such an image of fullness is provided. It says that the expanse, (the word *kham* appears here, which in the context of many passages not only from the Upaniṣads, is synonymous with the word *ākāśa* – skies), is *brahman*. He is that which is eternal, ancient – *purāṇam* – and that which blows, which contains wind – *vāyu*, and *vāyu*, after all, is the cosmic equivalent of *prāṇa*, the breath of life. Again, one is tempted to distinguish between *arché* and *aitia*. *Arché* would be *brahman*, and *aitia* would stand for the skies, which is the original, eternal breath.

27 Clearly, that is itself, and that was just this, namely, the real (*satyam*) itself. ‘*Brahman*’ is the real (*satyam*)’ – a man who knows this immense and first-born divine being in this manner conquers these worlds.

28 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 5.1: *pūrṇamadahī pūrṇamidaṇī pūrṇātṭpūrṇamudacyate pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate, om khaṇī brahma khaṇī purāṇam vāyur khamiti.*

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 5.5.1<sup>29</sup> says that, at the very beginning, “it” existed as waters – *āpas*. Then the waters created this which is real – *satyam*, and *satyam* equals *brahman*. It is the only time in the presented Upaniṣads that waters are assumed as the starting point. Of course, waters appear very frequently, but only as another manifestation of the absolute being. In the passage from Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.2.1–7 cited at the beginning of the chapter, the waters are referred to as – *arka* – “ray,” “shine.” Thus, by interpreting this passage through the previous one, we observe that the primary state has light, brightness within it. Waters are by nature amorphous, shapeless, yet fertile (in many ancient cultures reference was made to fetal waters or to the life-giving power of water in nature); they are a perfect example for describing the primeval being as something indefinite, without form, but manifesting itself in various, already more defined shapes. And this is probably how this passage should be understood: the initial being is not manifested, because it has no specific form, it contains an element of light and gives rise to specific creatures. This luminosity is mentioned in the brother verses of this passage, where it is said that what was created out of waters – *brahman* – is the same as the sun.

As from a well-stoked fire sparks fly by the thousands,  
all looking just like it,  
So from the imperishable issue diverse things,  
and into it, my friend, they return.<sup>30</sup>

‘This is the imperishable, Gārgi, which sees but cannot be seen; which hears but cannot be heard; which thinks but cannot be thought of; which perceives but cannot be perceived. Besides this imperishable, there is no one that sees, no one that hears, no one that thinks, and no one that perceives.

‘On this very imperishable, Gārgi, space is woven back and forth.<sup>31</sup>

In the above excerpts from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Muṇḍaka Upaniṣads, we can find further definitions of the primeval being; it is called *akṣara*, namely this which is unchangeable and enduring. While responding to Gārgi’s questions regarding the specific cause for creation of the universe (*aitia*), Yājñavalkya

29 In the beginning only the waters were here. Those waters created the real (*satyam*), the real created *brahman*, that is, Prajāpati, and Prajāpati created the gods. The gods venerated only the real (*satyam*), which word is made up of three syllables – *sa*, *ti* and *yam*. *Sa* is one syllable, *ti* is another, and *yam* is the third. The first and the last syllables constitute the real, while the middle syllable is unreal. So the unreal is trapped on both sides by the real and becomes completely united with the real. The unreal does not injure a man who knows this.

30 Muṇḍaka Up. 2.1: *yathā sudiptāt pāvakād visphulingāḥ sahasraśaḥ prabhavante sarūpāḥ tathākṣarād vidadhāḥ somya bhāvāḥ prajāyante tatra caivāpi yanti.*

31 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 3.8.11.: *tad vā etad akṣaram gārgy adṛṣtam draṣṭṛāsrutam śrotamatam manṭravijñātam viñātṛ nānyad ato’sti draṣṭṛ nānyad ato’sti śrotṛ nānyad*

names the skies *ākāśa*. Asked further, he explains that the skies are spread out in what the knowers of *brahman* call “unrevealed.” It is a state of being beyond any perception, here referred to as “*nirguna brahman*,” i.e. without any attributes, or as a being which is the basis for the existence and creation of the world. Also Muṇḍaka defines this original state of being using the term *akṣara*. Such definition of *arché* appears in the context of the theory of emanation; numerous passages show that having emanated the world from itself, the primeval being does not change its structure. It is further said that above this which exists as *akṣara* there is a higher form, a form of *puruṣa*, a person. And *puruṣa*, as has already been said, is, according to many Upaniṣadic fragments, equivalent to *ātman*, or rather to what manifests itself as *ātman*. Out of *puruṣa* the life-giving breath – *prāṇa* – is created, as well as the mind, the senses; subsequently the whole manifested dimension of the world is developed.

At that time, this world was without real distinctions; it was distinguished simply in terms of name and visible appearance – ‘He is so and so by name and has this sort of an appearance.’ So even today this world is distinguished simply in terms of name and visible appearance, as when we say, ‘He is so and so by name and has this sort of an appearance.’<sup>32</sup>

The last excerpt discussed here again comes from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka. It says that “it” – *idam* – at that time – *tarhi* – existed as *avyākṛtam* – undifferentiated. The word *tarhi* denotes mythical time. This which is undifferentiated, has been differentiated through the name and shape, *nāmarūpa*. In Sanskrit literature, the term *nāmarūpa* means individuality, individual being. As Maryla Falk shows in her dissertation, the concept of a contingent world as *nāmarūpa* stems from an indigenously mythical background.

This trend has its origins in the analysis of psychological facts, and on the basis of the fundamental equation of the self and the universe, crystallises itself in parallel, precisely corresponding macrocosmic and microcosmic constructions, whose characteristic feature is the inseparability of the myth and speculation. The term *nāma-rūpa* assumes an ideology according to which at the beginning of everything, before the creation of manifold reality, all “shapes” were just one shape, namely, the transcendental shape of the All-Man (*puruṣa*), and all “names” were only one name, namely the unspoken cosmic Word (*Vāc*). [. . .]

The existence of *nāma-rūpa* was thus caused by two subsequent divisions: the separation of two aspects of the universal being and their dismembering. This cosmogonic depiction of the primeval event in microcosmogony, which is one of the main topics of

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*atoṣṭi mantṛ nānyad atoṣṭi vijñātṛ etasmin nu khalv akṣare gārgy ākāśa otaś ca protaś ceti.*

- 32 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.4.7.: *tad dhedaṃ tarhy avyākṛtam āsīt tan nāmarūpābhyām eva vyākriyāta asau nāmāyam idaṃ rūpa iti tad idam apy etarhi nāmarūpābhyām eva vyākriyāta asau nāmāyam idaṃ rūpa iti.*

the speculations in the Upaniṣads, is matched by the differentiation of the *ātman-puruṣa* in its vital functions (*prāṇa*). This differentiation is at the same time a concealment, an act of making invisible: in an ordinary, conscious human being *ātman* is invisible because it is not one whole (*asarva*), but rather it is broken down into multiple sensory and organic functions. Whereas in a strictly defined state of clairvoyance, in which the “immobilised” *prāṇas* merge into a unity, *ātman*, reborn in the assembly of its parts, “emerges and realises itself in its own shape (*svena rupena*),” i.e. in the universally one and only, complete Shape of the “highest *puruṣa*.”

Similarly, *Vāc* is hidden and made invisible in a given reality, inaccessible to ordinary human consciousness: the true names of things are clandestine, and only the “visionary” or “inspired poet” might discover them; they contain the essential and active power of the things named: by realising them the “visionary” absorbs their powers, their beings, and thus extends his own being. The magnitude of a man’s existence corresponds to the magnitude of his knowledge; “knowing everything, he becomes the universe:” in this way, he realises the universal being, the all-encompassing being within him.<sup>33</sup>

Having analysed these few explanatory passages, let us now focus on the interpretation of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.2.1 quoted at the beginning of this chapter, which reads: “In the beginning there was nothing here at all” – *na eva iha kiṃcana agra āsīt*. It now seems clear that this passage, although very general and avoiding specific definitions, or precisely because of its generality and succinctness, generates the most layers of meaning. It is an indication of the primeval state of being, as implied by the word *agre* – “in the beginning.” Next, the verbal form “existed” – *āsīt* – appears, the same one that denoted the states of being explained as *asat*, *sat*, *ātman*, *brahman*, *satyam*, *puruṣa*, *pūrṇam*, *akṣara*, *āpas*. It is the characteristics of the primeval state of existence. From the analysis of the concept of *asat* and its transformation into *sat*, it concludes that the expression “nothing” – *na kiṃcana* – does not indicate non-existence, but rather a non-manifested state. This, among others, is indicated by the statements that *brahman* being one did not manifest itself (*avyakta*) and that at the very beginning it existed as undifferentiated (*avyakṛtam*). Thus, it is an indication that the absolute being is beyond recognition defined within the categories of a cognitive act, but it still remains the principle of the existence of everything else, of the whole cognisable and non-cognisable reality.

What attributes do the Upaniṣadic sages ascribe to the nature of this initial non-manifested state? They indicate that it is *sat*, i.e. existence, and *asat*, i.e. existence in a non-manifested form, because it is *avyakta* and *avyakṛtam*. This initial

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33 M. Falk, “Namarupa i dharmarupa,” in: St. Schayer, *O filozofowaniu Hindusów*, pp. 531–536.

being is *ātman*, the principle of subjectivity defined as the soul, the foundation of the life-giving breath, as well as ourselves, i.e. the most basic spiritual element of a human being. It is also *brahman*, namely the basic element of the macrocosm, that which grows, the source and principle of reality. It is *satyam*, truth, reality, essence, because it is the same as it was. It is completeness – *pūrṇam*, and contains all potential beings, which is symbolised by waters – *āpas*. It is also that which is unchangeable and enduring – *akṣara*. But it is also said that it existed *ekam advitīyam*, i.e. one, without a second, that is, all subsequent manifestations of creation will trace their origin back to it, because no other reason for emergence occurred.

We shall now proceed to the analysis of the next passage, which says that “it” – *idam*, the initial state – existed as “covered with death.” Death is defined here as a desire to eat, as hunger. (No similar texts can be found anywhere else in the Upaniṣads). When desire appears as a creative impulse, it is expressed with the verb  $\sqrt{kām}$ , and a sentence with this verb occurs in the later parts of this passage. Therefore, we would understand this sentence as a definition of the initial state, all the more so because it appears in a grammatical construction identical to the one that defines the state of the primordial being. *Mṛtyunā eva idam āvṛtam āsīt* – “it existed covered with death.” This “covering with death” is inherent to the structure of the non-manifested being itself, and it belongs to the realm of the absolute.

The attribute of covering with death manifests itself as a desire to eat, a desire for food, as hunger – *āsanāyā*. It would appear that the non-manifested being, before its manifestation, before the first creative impulse appears, is burdened with some kind of hunger. The concept of food is already indicated here – *anna* – and it is discussed in detail in the subsequent stages of manifestation or development of being. Further on, it is said that “it” made (*akuruta*) the mind – *manas*. First of all, the author comments on the word “it” – *tad*, referring to *idam*, or the primeval state; a neuter gender is used here. And almost all descriptions of the primeval being are neuter. Also, a typical transition is marked here. The primeval being is indefinite, which is usually expressed by a neuter pronoun. Manifestation or representation, which is a transition into the state of being – *bhava* – means self-definition, categorisation. Very often a symbol of this first metaphysical category is the use of the masculine pronoun, never a feminine one. The creation of the mind brings anthropomorphic features to the primeval being. The next sentence reads: “may I have *ātman*” (soul, spirit, self) – *ātmanvī syām*. And it is only in the subsequent statements that a specific subject appears: “he” – *sa*. In other Upaniṣads, this transition from *tad* to *sa* happens spontaneously, automatically. Here, in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, the process is more complex and we soon find out

why. In some systems of Indian philosophy we encounter a theory that the whole world that appears to us as reality is in fact only a product of our minds, but in order to avoid radical subjectivism, it is said that the world was first formed within the mind of the creator. This is the concept highlighted here.

The replacement of *tad* (neuter) with *sa* (masculine) seems to happen automatically in other Upaniṣads. In Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.4.17., after the initial state had been determined: “In the beginning this world was only the self (*ātman*), only one,” immediately in the next verse *sa* appears. An identical situation can be found in the Aitareya. In Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.4.1., it is said that “In the beginning this world was just a single body (*ātman*), shaped like a man” and already the following sentences present it as an anthropomorphic being. In Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.4.10. this which initially existed as *brahman*, recognised itself and used the word *aham* – “I.” Taittirīya describes the emergence of the manifested state (*sat*) from the non-manifested state (*asat*) saying that it is the primeval existence who, while creating oneself, one’s soul, *ātman*, manifests itself already in a defined form and as far as the previous descriptions referred to *tad*, the next ones’ subject is *sa* – “he.” Furthermore, in Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.4.7. it is said that after the primeval undistinguished being had been distinguished by assigning individuality, i.e. name and form, it penetrates the created beings no longer as “it” – *tad*, but as “he,” *sa*. We should not treat the “emergence” of the mind and the formulation of the principle of subjectivity (*ātman*) as the first emanates, the first creatures, but rather as a kind of change. In this way, a certain tension becomes apparent, which is within the very structure of the absolute preparing to be created. The being first manifests itself to oneself – a thought appears within it, which brings the awareness of its own existence. The self-recognition of the being (and there is no other metaphysical possibility, since being is one), results in the creation of the “I.” The notion of “I” or “I am” is related to the earlier emergence of the mind as an instrument of perception. It is, however subtle, but still a kind of distinction between the subject and the object, i.e. the disruption of the original unity. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

As Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.4.10. has it, that which existed at the very beginning as *brahman*, while recognising oneself, uttered the first sentence: “I am *brahman*.” It was this act of self-awareness, the emergence of consciousness directed outwardly, that initiated the development of the world. It seems that the will to know oneself is already inherent in the structure of the primeval being; as long as it is non-manifested, it does not disturb unity, but having manifested itself, it results in the creation of the cognitive subject and the object of cognition. In the same Upaniṣad (1.4.1.), *ātman* in the form of *puruṣa*, existing alone at the very beginning because there was nobody else but him, utters the words: “I am.” Again, an

analogous situation: the utterance of the words themselves, which takes the form of an act of cognition, causes a differentiation between the subject and the object. Pronouncing the original word, giving a name, is identical to a cognitive act.

It is important to note here the very important role of both the thought and the word. As we already mentioned, this willingness to self-discover belongs to the nature of the absolute existence. By manifesting itself to oneself, the being creates the mind; the function of the mind is to create thoughts and images, but the act of creating the world occurs when this thought is expressed in the form of words. It is the word that has the creative power, it plays the role of *aitia*, the cause for the creation of the universe.

The Muṇḍaka and Chāndogya Upaniṣads define this primeval being with the term *akṣara* – the unchangeable, the enduring. The word *akṣara* also means “syllable” and, above all, the sacred syllable *Om*, a sacred sound that possesses creative power and aids all creatures to return to their primordial source. The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad shows that *Om* is *brahman* containing three states: the state of wakefulness, the state of dreams and the state of deep sleep. However, above these three states sits a fourth one, although not manifested, which is the principle and basis of the remaining three, most likely its manifestations. The word *brahman* itself, as we know, is also a sacred word. Thus, the word is in the nature of the primeval being, which is *brahman* and *akṣara*.

Therefore, uttering the word is the first creative impulse; the word already potentially contained in the primeval being, by manifesting itself, gives an impulse to the manifestation of the world. The entire ancient Indian philosophy shows how vital the word is. To use a shorthand, one may say that as much as the European culture growing out of Greek and Jewish roots built its philosophical systems within a mathematical and logical paradigm, the Indian culture was based on a paradigm of grammar. This emphasises the primary role of the word, which manifests itself in all rituals. It is the sacred word that activates and directs the sacrifice. In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka we read that with the utterance of the first “I am” everything emerged, and further in this passage it is clearly stated that this recognition makes the primeval being aware that he is the creator. By realising this fact and by ascertaining it through the utterance, he becomes the creator. The same applies to everyone who knows it, whether it is a god or a man, he is endowed with the same power. (Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.4.5.) This concept lies at the heart of sacrifice, where the sacrificer takes part in the ever-renewing act of creating the world through the pronouncement of the sacred words. The word is more important than the person himself. As Yājñavalkya, the inspired poet of

Bṛhadāraṇyaka puts it, after a man dies, only his name remains, the holy word given to things.

However, while discussing the word, it is impossible not to mention the importance of silence. However silence, not pronouncing words, is on the one hand an opposition to human words, but on the other hand, if the sacred word *brahman* remains in opposition to *vāc* (“the human speech,” “the language”), silence will not be contradictory to the sacred word. We saw that the word is potentially contained in the nature of the primeval being and that this is the state before creation. Perhaps then, the vows of silence, the claim that *brahman* is really beyond any judgment, are connected to the conviction that the best answer to what *brahman* may be is precisely silence. Silence understood in this way refers to the most primordial state, to the state before creation. Uttering words participates in the great creation of the world. The world is created by the sacred syllable *Om* – *akṣara*. By uttering *Om*, a man frees himself from the world, but like in *Om*, as taught in the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, there are three states of consciousness, three levels of manifestation and existence, and their basis is the fourth state (non-manifested and unspoken), similarly silence is not only a liberation from the world being created now and created already, but even more, it is entering this non-manifested state from before creation.

So, returning to the analysis of the initial verses of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, we have now reached the place where the primeval being upon creating the mind and recognising itself utters its own name as the first words. Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.4.1. shows that saying words causes him fear. Suddenly something begins to manifest itself; the original unity still persists, but the process of its violation has already begun. But soon this different state gets recognised, there is already the possibility of judgement, because the mind works. After all, I am one all the time, this manifestation takes place within me. There is a subject and an object, but they are the same, because, as the text says, this primeval being perceived itself, perceived *ātman*. While being one, continues the Upaniṣad, there is no fear, because fear arises from something else. So being one is a state without fear. It is *ānanda* – bliss, as in many places *brahman* is referred to when it becomes the subtlest object of knowledge: *brahman* is *ānanda*.

Such a personified being, endowed with a mind, wandered praying (Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.2.1.). The word occurring in the passage: “praying” – *arcan* – is expressed with a derivative from the root  $\sqrt{arc}$ , which means: to pray, to worship, to pay tribute, to sing, as well as to shine, to glow. And so this being went wandering, it came out of its original state, it began to manifest itself, spreading a luminous song, a luminous, bright prayer. And this is probably the image

conveyed by the statement of the Upaniṣads, which describes *brahman* as the sun, saying that just as sparks burst from the fire, as rays beam out of the sun, so everything arises from the primeval being. From this passage, we conclude yet another description of the nature of primeval being as containing light, radiance, brightness.

This is where cosmogony (understood as the definition of the state of primeval being) ends. The subsequent parts of the text deal with strictly cosmological motifs, describing the ways in which the presented world manifests itself, emerges or forms itself. On the basis of the passages discussed above, what can we say about the nature of primordial existence as the starting point of the world? The scriptures on the basis of which we studied the themes of cosmogony are poetic texts written by sages who, after all, were prophets, visionaries or artists. The language they used, the language of the Upaniṣads, is a language dominated by symbols and metaphors. It seems to be the only possible way of speaking about such subtle levels of reality. That is why an attempt is made here to describe the state of being which is beyond any judgment, the state preceding any category, word, definition. The use of metaphors is meant to emphasise that all the given descriptions should not be taken literally. They are to serve as guidelines, as intuitions guiding each individual towards an independent understanding of the absolute rather than a definite description of the nature of being.

Similar issues are at stake in every cosmogony. Be it mythological, religious or philosophical, cosmogonic concepts essentially raise the same questions. What is the purpose of creating the world? Was there any creator, or was it rather a self-contained process? Is the creation or emergence of the world a result of will, or rather a necessity resulting from the nature of being? It seems that these problems cannot be resolved unequivocally. Indeed, do the will and necessity categories not refer primarily to man? Are we allowed to extrapolate these categories to the absolute state? But even if one were to consider them only metaphorically, it still would not solve the problem entirely. This chapter demonstrates that this is not actually a question of a multitude of cosmogonic threads, but assuming the scheme discussed above, there are rather different ways of looking at a single image of cosmogony. Several variants suggest that the being manifests itself, because it inevitably stems from its nature. *Kāma* – desire, and therefore will – manifests itself only after the process of violating the primordial unity has already begun. But in other places this impersonal primeval being, to which we refer as “it,” is identified with *puruṣa*, and *puruṣa* as man implies all anthropomorphic connections with the presence of will/desire to begin with.

So, can we state anything positive about this initial state? Let us once again summarise our analyses conducted on the basis of the earliest Upaniṣads. Subsequently we will examine how this image of primordial cosmogony was commented in one of the final Upaniṣads, the Maitrī.

The absolute being in its initial state – *agre*, is described as devoid of individual attributes, hence neutral designations such as “it” – *idam*. This being, which is in the primeval state, is entitled to the state of existence – *sat*. This is the most basic category, the most elementary attribute. One can say about this being that it is existence – *sat* – and *asat*, i.e. existence in a non-manifested, non-differentiated form, because its existence, as some fragments emphasise, is both *avyakta* and *avyakṛta*. It also exists as one – *ekam* – without the second – *advitīyam*. In the school of Advaita, these descriptions indicate a stronger metaphysical thesis than the classical monism, since only the reality beyond any category can be attributed with complete existence. The initial being is *ātman*, the principle of subjectivity, the breath, the most basic spiritual element of a human. It is also *brahman*, this which grows, develops and expands, the basic element of the macrocosm. It is *satyam*, namely the truth, reality and essence, but also the foundation of any cognitive acts. It is fullness, *pūrṇam*; all potential beings are included in it, which is symbolised by water – *āpas*. It is also *akṣara* – the unchanging, eternal and enduring. This initial state exists as covered with death. The attribute of being covered with death manifests itself as a desire for food. What keeps us in *saṃsāra*, that is, in the pursuit of death, is permanent desire, a pursuit of satisfying one’s hunger, broadly understood as craving to exist, to experience, to be content. The more we strive to satisfy this hunger, the more we immerse ourselves in *saṃsāra*. This may be the reason for manifesting oneself, for creating, in order to fulfil, complete, fill the void. Everything happens through radiance, glow, light, because the nature of the primeval being is luminous. The following chapters capture the subtle difference between radiance and the source of radiance, between light itself and its appearance. In this context, the Vedāntic texts use the term *prakāśa*, which implies that the being defines itself, recognises itself and therefore there is no need for any external tool to illuminate the act of cognition and the cognitive subject itself.

The above considerations present us with the structure of the primeval being. It can be concluded that this “structure” has an atemporal character, as indicated by the subsequent parts of the text, showing that time as a year – *saṃvatsara* – appears at later stages of the transformation, or manifestation of being. We also find a statement that the primary state exists in some mythical time – *tarhi*. However, the problem of space is omitted, or at least it is not directly addressed. So, here perhaps the Maitrī Upaniṣad will come to our aid.

In reference to the above considerations, we assume that the basic cosmogonic structure is expressed by the scheme: *idam agre āsīt*. In the Maitrī Upaniṣad there are three passages referring to this scheme, namely: 5.2., 6.6., 6.17. We will briefly analyse all of them.

In the beginning this was darkness (*tamas*). Later, that was moved by something else, and became unbalanced. That is the form of passion (*rajas*). Passion was moved and became unbalanced. That is the form of darkness. Purity (*sattva*) was moved. From purity flowed the essence. That is the portion consisting solely of consciousness, which is the field-knower in each person, Prajāpati, whose characteristics are will, determination and conceit.<sup>34 35</sup>

In the above excerpt, we read: “in the beginning it existed only as darkness” – *tamo vā idam agra āsīd ekam*. The initial scheme is defined as *tamas*. This term designates not only an unspecified darkness, as in the earlier Upaniṣads, but as the following sentence of this passage reveals, it means one of three *guṇas*. In this context, *tamas* is an inertial principle of chaos, darkness, meaning a lack of distinctions and consciousness, a state of inertia. This dimension of reality resides in something supreme – *tat pare syāt*. It is a reference to some primordial space. It is not any specific space, but a kind of principle of space, implying the order of both the sacred and the profane.<sup>36</sup> All the more so because in the light of this passage, the *param* serves as the creative principle. Because, as the text goes on to say, the state of initial dark stillness was moved, awakened to action and to manifest itself by the supreme – *tat pareṇa īritam*. And that which existed – *āsīt* – only as darkness – *ekam tamas* – entered the state of distinguishing, separating individual parts from an inertial whole. The first form that was separated from the whole was *rajas*. Subsequently, *rajas* entered the state of separation and distinguished itself from the next form: *sattva*. This is a clear reference to the theory of the three *guṇas* of the Sāṃkhya system.

34 English translations of the excerpts from the Maitrī Upaniṣad quoted after *The Upaniṣads*, trans. V.J. Roebuck, Penguin Books, London 2003.

35 Maitrī Up. 5.2.: *tamo vā idam agra āsīd ekam tat pare syāt tat tat pareṇitam viṣamatvam prayāti etad rūpaṃ vai rajas tad rajaḥ khaly īritam viṣamatvam prayāti etad vai sattvasya rūpaṃ tat sattvam everitam rasaḥ samprāsravat so'ṃśo'yaṃ yas cetāmātraḥ pratipuruṣaḥ kṣetrajñāḥ saṃkalpādhyavasāyābhimānaliṅgaḥ prajāpatir viśveti*.

36 Here comes to mind a comparison with Plato's *Timaeus*, in which the concept of space – *chora* – appears: “And the third type is space, which exists always and cannot be destroyed. It provides a fixed state for all things that come to be. It is itself apprehended by a kind of bastard reasoning that does not involve sense perception, and it is hardly even an object of conviction. We look at it as in a dream when we say that everything that exists must of necessity be somewhere, in some place and occupying some space, and that that which doesn't exist somewhere, whether on earth or in heaven,

The primeval nature – *prakṛti* – consists of three *guṇas*, which in the state of *avyakta* remain in a dynamic equilibrium. When this equilibrium is broken, *prakṛti* moves to the state of *vyakta* and then further elements emerge, which are the objects of experience for a conscious subject – *puruṣa*. The reason for this motion, which in consequence binds *puruṣa* in *samsāra*, is not precisely explained in the classical Sāṃkhya. The Maitrī Upaniṣad does not entirely follow the classical Sāṃkhya scheme either; for example, Sāṃkhya is dualistic and Maitrī is monistic. What matters to us here is the clear reference to the three *guṇas*. The sequence might also be interesting, perhaps surprising at first glance, but after a closer analysis in the light of other Maitrī passages, consistent with the entire scheme. According to classical Sāṃkhya, the *guṇa* of *sattva* is the subtlest, the closest to the consciousness of the *puruṣa*. In the discussed cosmogonic scheme it appears as the third. So first of all there is *tamas* – the principle of inertia, darkness, lack of consciousness. Then *rajas* appears – the principle of movement, energy, change, all kinds of distinctions, tones and emotions. Finally, *sattva* emerges – the principle of reality, manifestation, illumination, brightening.

The scheme of manifestation and formation of the visible world is continued in the text. Once set in motion, *sattva* extracts from itself the essence – *rasa*. At the beginning of this passage, the force which set the initial state in motion is defined. It is *param*, “the supreme,” the principle of space itself. In the following repetitions of the term “moved” – *īritam* – the mover is not mentioned, so we assume that either it is still the same first impulse, or it all moves already with the force of inertia resulting from the first impulse, which in the entire structure is no longer a significant difference. Successively, after separating the essence – *rasa* – the one who experiences, who recognises – *kṣetrajña* – appears. He becomes aware, endowed with consciousness, or even with the principle of

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doesn't exist at all. (. . .) [Let this, then, be a summary of the account I would offer, as computed by my “vote.”] There are being, space, and becoming, three distinct things which existed even before the universe came to be. (highlighted by MK.)

*Plato: Complete Works, Timaeus*, 52d, pp. 1225 ff. This is Giovanni reale describes the concept of *chora*: “The *chora* is referred to as necessity because it is a lack of order contrary to reason (47e–48a); however, it is not an absolute negation of rationality, since it contains not only the traces of the decomposed forms of the four elements and their corresponding characteristics, but also, generally speaking, ‘in a blind way participates in what can be grasped by reason’ (51a), that is, in the world of ideas, and thus constitutes a positive ability to accept that which is rational. The *chora* is an eternal principle, existing prior to the universe.” G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytniej*, Vol. V, p. 46, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2002.

consciousness – *cetāmātram*. Without precisely analysing the successive steps, we arrive at the moment when the entire world has been created. The Lord of Creatures, *adhipati*, is called *ātman*, defined as both existing “inwards” and “outwards” – *ātmāntarbahīś ca*. Using European categories, one may say that both its transcendent and immanent nature has been indicated.

To summarise this passage in the light of our deliberations, we can see that the principle of space – *param* – plays the role of the primary creative impulse. It transcends both the order of the sacred which, as evidenced by analysing other fragments of the Upaniṣads, is a direction towards the inside, as well as the order of the profane which will be a way leading out of itself and into the world.

Now this was unuttered. Truth, Prajāpati, after raising heat, uttered ‘BHŪḤ, BHUVAḤ, SVAḤ.’ This is the coarsest body of Prajāpati, the world-body.<sup>37</sup>

The word “unuttered” – *avyāhṛtam* – recalls those earlier fragments of the Upaniṣads which show that the primary creative impulse was the utterance of a word. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka pointed out that the pronouncement of the original statement “I am” resulted from the act of self-recognition, which per se implied a split into subject and object, and thus a departure from the initial unity. This theme is complemented by a passage from Maitrī 6.22., where the primeval being – *brahman* – is defined as being both a sound – *śabda*, and without a sound – *aśabda*. *Brahman* “without a sound” is a higher, more primary form. As the text itself says: “The soundless is revealed through sound” – *śabdena eva aśabdāṃ aviṣkriyate*.

Let us now return to Maitrī 6.6. Here, we encounter a scheme well known from the earlier Upaniṣads showing the Lord of the Creatures – *Prajāpati* – who undertakes asceticism in order to perform a creative act. It is also worth noting that here *Prajāpati* is called *satyam*. As a result of asceticism, he utters three sounds: *bhūḥ*, *bhuvaḥ*, *svaḥ*. They are called the coarse body of *Prajāpati* – *sthaviṣṭhā tanū*, which is the form of the world – *lokavatī*. A coarse body means an external form perceived through sensory perception. It is clarified in the next sentence, which says: “for the great element of a person depends on the eye. For this element moves by eye.” Thus, we learn about the creation of the world from its subtlest forms, which are symbolised by sacred sounds, to its most external form experienced as coarse matter.

37 Maitrī Up. 6.6.: *athāvāhṛtam vā idam āsīt sa satyam prajāpatis tapas taptvā`nuyāharad bhūr bhuvaḥ svar iti eṣāivāsya prajāpateḥ sthaviṣṭhā tanūr yā lokavatīti*.

Let us take a closer look at what the sacred sounds – *vyahṛti* – are. In the Vedic ritual, after uttering *Om*, the priest pronounces them twice a day during his daily sacrifices. The sound *bhūh* means earth, *svah* denotes heaven, and *bhuvah* means the expanse. In this way, that which in the beginning existed as one and unuttered, after pronouncing it, immediately created a spatial situation. It is connected both to the three worlds and to the form of sensual perception, to the three dimensions. It should also be noted that number three symbolises multiplicity, which refers us to the image of the presented world as dynamic and full of variability.

In the beginning, all this was *brahman*, one, infinite (...) infinite upward and downward, infinite on every side. (...) the supreme self is inconceivable either across, downward or upward, immeasurable, unborn, unguessable, unthinkable. He has space as his self. In the universal dissolution, he is the one awake. From space he awakens this, which is pure consciousness. By this it is born, and in it it meets its end. It is the radiant form of this that gives heat in the sun, and the brighter light that is in a smokeless fire (...)<sup>38</sup>

In the above passage, we encounter an extended form of our fundamental, primary cosmogonic scheme: “In the beginning all this was *brahman*, one, infinite” – *brahma ha vā idam agra āsīt eko'nantas*. The following words explain the terms: *ekam* – one and *anantam* – infinite. In the formerly analysed passages, the primordial unity was understood as a lack of any differentiations or specifications, while the discussed fragment understands it as a lack of distinctions, especially spatial ones. All directions are listed and it is said that the primeval existence is infinite in all of them. Intermediate directions: diagonal, downward and upward – have not been formed – *na kalpante*. It is further stated that the supreme being – *paramātman* is also called *ākāśātman*, i.e. the one whose soul is the expanse, who itself is the expanse.

The text continues that this being, who was alone, remained vigilant, awake. He was the one who was aware of the entire period of dissolution – *kṛtsnakṣaya*. This is a clear reference to the cyclicity of the worlds, to the disappearance of the world during a given *kalpa* and to its emergence at the beginning of the next

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38 Maitrī Up. 6.17.: *brahma ha vā idam agra āsīt eko'nantaḥ (...) ūrdhvañ cā`vāñ ca sarvato`nantaḥ (...) anūhya eṣa paramātmā`parimito`jo`tarko`cintya eṣa ākāśātmā evaiṣa kṛtsnakṣaya eko jāgartiti etasmād ākāśād eṣa khalv idam cetāmātram bodhayati, anenaiva cedam dhyāyate asmin ca pratyastam yāti asyaitad bhāsvaram rūpam yad amuṣminn āditye tapati agnat cādhūmake yaj jyotiś citrataram.*

period. It would be worth recalling here the fragment from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, where the term *puruṣa* is understood as the one who had previously burnt the worlds. The Maitrī further explains that out of the expanse – *akāśa* – the supreme being called into existence a new reality, whose measure is consciousness – *cetāmātram*. In the light of this sentence, the expanse – *akāśa* – is understood as a primary cosmogonic substance.

Comparing the above passage to the Maitrī 5.2., we notice that they both complement one scheme. In the very beginning, some unity exists. It can be understood as *brahman*, namely something that can grow or swell. However, the unity in the primary state is dormant, it is darkness – *tamas*, a lack of consciousness, in a sense. The initial state exists in what cannot be called space, but rather its seed, a principle of space. In one of the passages a cosmogonic process is presented, in which it is “the supreme space” – *pareṇa* – which sets the initial unity in motion. Another excerpt shows the process of the universe’s manifestation as an awakening of the world resting in space. Thus, in both passages we see space as a factor contributing to the manifestation or formation of the world. It is space understood as power, potency, the principle of manifestation of reality.

In both fragments, the creation of the world is understood as a transition from a state of sleep, lack of consciousness, to a state of consciousness. That is why the order of *guṇas* leads from *tamas* through *rajas* to *sattva*, which provides the preconditions for the formation of conscious souls. Section 6.17 shows cosmogony as an awakening – *bodhayati* – of the world from the expanse; the awoken world becomes the seed of consciousness – *cetāmātram*.

Let us now return to the very beginning of our deliberations, when we searched Maitrī for the explanation of the cosmogonic themes from the earlier Upaniṣads. As we can see, the scheme adopted – *idam agre āsīt* is confirmed. The problem of space is much more prominent in the later text.

All ancient philosophical systems are organised according to two orders of space, the order of the sacred and of the profane. The world we live in, which is *saṃsāra* governed by the karmic law, is the world of the profane. The primordial cosmogonic situation has always been located in the world of the sacred. These two are treated as two orders, as if two separate spaces. Ancient systems indicated ways and means of crossing the world of the profane in order to return to the world of the sacred. The sacrificial ritual was of paramount importance in this respect. While performing a sacrifice, which seems to begin in the space of the profane, one transits into a different dimension of reality, into the reality

of the sacred. Very often, the sacrifice was intended to reconstruct the original cosmogonic act. This is why the search for a principle of space in the original cosmogonic act is so important.

Having analysed all the above excerpts and obviously referring to the entire canon of the Upaniṣads, we notice that the spatial orders of the sacred and the profane were very clearly separated. The sacrificial ritual, which was to replicate the original creative act, established sacred space with the use of special means. Even the language itself clearly separated the two orders. The primeval expanse from which the world or the space understood as an *arché* was awoken is referred to as *ākāśa*. On the other hand, when it comes to organised space, space oriented according to the directions of the world or regions of the sky, then the term *diś* is used – the side of the world, the region of the world. The term *ākāśa* also appears in the Indian tradition in the context of a symbolic inner space of the heart – *hṛdayakāśa*. The inner space of the heart is understood as the residence of *ātman*, the foundation of the microcosm, a place where one frees oneself from *saṃsāra* and surpasses the level of the profane. Thus, the return to the original state, the return of the soul to its source already takes place at the level of sacred space.

Comparing the notion of space and that of time from the cosmogonic perspective, we see a clear correlation between them. The primary state is neither temporally nor spatially oriented. The concept of time and space appears at the level of the manifested world. However, the principle of both time and space is contained in the state of being, which is defined as an undifferentiated unity. Having analysed the Maitrī Upaniṣad, one could say that some primordial principle of space, transcending both the order of the sacred and the profane, called *param*, serves as an impulse, the creative principle. Thus, existing in some, even completely undefined spatial situation, it seems to be inseparable from all levels of existence, whether in a manifested or non-manifested state.

The cosmogonic scheme of the classical Upaniṣads reconstructed in this chapter, will become the groundwork for our further deliberations. As discussed, it is in some way an extension or commentary on the *Nāsadiya Sūkta*. What remains is to demonstrate the tension between the two dimensions of reality, between the domain denoted by *sat*, or pure existence, and the domain of *bhava*, referring to the presented reality. This is analogous to the relationship between the very principle of subjectivity – *ātman*, and its various manifestations, often taking the form of very subtle cognitive subjects. Given that according to the interpretation of the Advaita Vedānta,

on whose perspective all analyses in this book are based, only the domain of *sat* exists in an absolute sense. This section will demonstrate that there is “I” rather than “it”; namely, only *ātman* exists, while its various forms take on the status of empirical beings, which are not real in the absolute sense.<sup>39</sup>

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39 “Thus it becomes clear that, in spite of all our assuredly well-founded statements about the real being of the *human* Ego and its conscious mental processes, *in* the world and about everything in the way of “psychophysical” interconnections pertaining to them — that, in spite of all that, consciousness considered in its “purity” must be held to be a *self-contained complex of being*, a complex of *absolute being* into which nothing can penetrate and out of which nothing can slip, to which nothing is spatiotemporally external and which cannot be within any spatiotemporally complex, which cannot be affected by any physical thing and cannot exercise causation upon any physical thing — it being presupposed that causality has the normal sense of causality pertaining to Nature as a relationship of dependence between realities. On the other hand, the whole *spatiotemporal world*, which includes human being and the human Ego as subordinate single realities is, *according to its sense, a merely intentional being*, thus one has the merely secondary sense of a being *for* a consciousness. It is a being posited by consciousness in its experiences which, of essential necessity, can be determined and intuited only as something identical belonging to motivated multiplicities of appearances: *beyond that it is nothing.*” E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten, Vol. I, II.49.93, p. 112.



## 4. *Māṇḍūkya-kārika* – translation of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad and the commentary of Gauḍapāda

Soteriology in the light of the earliest Upaniṣads and later Advaita is based on a very strong assumption that it is ignorance of the true nature of reality that causes *saṃsāra*, and that attaining knowledge automatically removes the veil and the true reality shines forth in its own splendour. This moment is compared to a flash of lightning. We often refer here to the metaphor of a sudden realisation that what we are looking at is just a rope and not a snake – in this moment the whole view of reality changes dramatically. Our previous actions, taken due to a mistaken assessment, were considered real and caused their karmic consequences, which can also be assessed in terms of their duration in time. However, the very fact of recognition being point in time brings about an immediate change of perspective. The reality that we perceive and our own perception of ourselves – for we belong to this reality after all – is radically different from the reality before the moment of recognition; but it is still actually the same reality. So what has changed? Practically, it is the perception of reality that has shifted. Does this mean that the image of reality depends on the cognitive perspective, on the state of awareness of its nature? It seems that the answer to this question is yes. But if at the moment of recognition that it is only a rope and not a snake, i.e. at the very moment of becoming aware of it the reality changes, then is it that there exists a close correlation between the states of consciousness and the images of reality? Even more precisely, not only images, but the fully structured and functioning reality at a given level. Is it possible to conclude from this that a given state of consciousness calls a given state of reality into being? A strong “yes” to the question thus presented leads directly to solipsism. But there is no doubt that there is a close correlation between the states of consciousness and the states of reality. Nor is it possible to determine which of them is the cause and which the effect. If we attribute A to one of them and B to the other, we can certainly say that if there is A, then there is B as well. The relationship between them is in fact an unsolved puzzle of various philosophical systems. A very similar problem emerged in contemporary physics, where the observer’s role in measurements is called into question.

Further problems may arise here. If we say that there is a correlation between the states of consciousness and the states of reality, we assume, first of all,

that there is a correspondence between them. In other words, a mental event somehow influences or even shapes the corresponding construct of reality. This is based on the assumption that there are some particular laws that are valid only in a given dimension. However, at the same time we assume that from an absolute point of view, reality is actually one, and that we can only speak of different degrees of both consciousness and reality as its representations and not as distinctly different levels. So it is assumed that all phenomena are somehow connected, even if we are not able to correctly define how. And then the following problem arises: if an event occurs in a given dimension, does it affect phenomena in other dimensions? If we were to assume that, while each dimension is governed by its own laws, although all of them are somehow interlinked, then we could take this influence for granted. But this is not the case. Let us use a simple example from everyday experience. Someone receives some tragic news on the death of a very close person. At this moment for them the entire world, the whole surrounding reality becomes completely different. They have to change all their plans, abandon their hopes and aspirations connected to this person. Sometimes they have to radically re-construct their life. The moment this message reached their consciousness, it transformed everything in their life. Immediately afterwards, we learn that this fact, which took place in a given dimension of reality, in a given place and at a given time, actually occurred some time ago. However, the moment when everything changed was not when this tragic incident happened, but when it reached their consciousness. Therefore, it is the awareness, which happens in mental time, that seems to be crucial. The question of consciousness seems to be increasingly important. It turns out to be not only one of the elements of reality, but definitely one that is exceptional. And when we assume that consciousness is by nature homogeneous and simple and that there is only one consciousness that exists, then how will we explain the different dimensions of reality?

Such matters, as well as the inseparable problem of the conscious observer and the very nature of consciousness, have been widely discussed in various schools of Indian philosophy, both Brahmanical and Buddhist. Advaita and Vijñānavāda schools dealt with this problem the most. In both of them the concept of three different aspects or dimensions of reality appears, which – despite external similarities – are in many points significantly diverse, because they are based on fundamentally different ontological assumptions. This problem becomes crucial for the first cohesive text of the Advaita Vedānta tradition, namely for the work of Gauḍapāda.

Gauḍapāda is thought to be the teacher of Govinda, who in turn was the teacher of Śaṅkara. According to the latest research, the time of Śaṅkara's life dates back

approximately to the 8th century, which means Gauḍapāda must have been active in the 7th century. The suffix *pāda* in his name is a honorificum, while Gauḍa might indicate a resident of north Bengal. Apparently, this is all we know about him. Tradition has it that Gauḍapāda was a disciple of Śuka, but this does not explain much, since all that we know about the philosopher named Śuka is that he was a mythical figure and was mentioned by the epics. Gauḍapāda is credited with several works, most of which are known from references in commentaries, but undoubtedly the most famous and the one exerting the greatest influence on the development of the whole later Vedānta is his work Gauḍapādīya-kārika. It is also called Māṇḍūkya-kārika, although its commentary on the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad only constitutes its first chapter. Śaṅkara calls the work Āgama-Śāstra, which indicates that he recognised the work's absolute authority.

Māṇḍūkya-kārika was often conveyed in the form of either only the first part or the entire book of four chapters. In the later centuries, it would happen that each of the parts was presented separately and regarded as a separate Upaniṣad, accompanied by an appropriate commentary. For non-Advaitic Vedānta philosophers, Rāmānuja and Madhvācārya, the first part, commenting on the Upaniṣad, had the rank of a *śruti* text. However, it played its greatest role in the Advaita Vedānta tradition, with practically all the philosophers of this school referring to this work or commenting on it. Many of the key Advaita philosophical texts had already been developed at this stage. Clarifying the assumptions of Advaita, precisely on the basis of this text, will enable us in the following chapters to comment on particular Upaniṣadic concepts. For, as we have already mentioned, it is the methodological assumption of this book to analyse the concepts referring to various functions of an operating subject or a cognitive organ, described by the classical Upaniṣads, precisely from the perspective of Advaita Vedānta.

According to the basic assumptions of these Brahmanical *darśanas*, which refer directly to *śrutis*, the orthodox philosophical systems are constructed according to a fairly uniform pattern. The starting point for all deliberations is the acceptance of one of the key sentences revealed in the *śrutis*. For the Advaita Vedānta, this will be mainly the Upaniṣads and the truth revealed in them, that *ātman* remains in close relationship to brahman, that only *ātman-brahman* is a reality – sat, and that its nature is simple and non-dual – *ekam advitīyam*. These sentences were considered revealed truths since they were not authored by any human being (*apauruṣeya*). As a result, they cannot be falsified, for no human can question the revealed truths; therefore they are never accepted only as hypotheses to be proved. Those sentences, even though they refer to absolute

truth (*paramārtha*) are expressed from the perspective, or perhaps more in the language of, or in the categories of, relative truth. It is from the perspective of relative truth that we experience the reality that we know from the *śruti* to be simple, non-complex; and we experience it as a world of multiplicity, whose conditions of existence we are not able to fully and adequately explain. And the basic challenge and content of the Brahmanical *darśanas* is the explanation how that which is non-complex, existing – sat, is experienced as multiplicity, diversity, being – *bhava*. All three groups of elements constructing every Brahmanical *darśana* are present here. The truth is what has been revealed. The way of experiencing reality is described from the perspective of empirical reality. And what is most important – in the context of the soteriological perspective, which is a point of reference for all the Upaniṣadic deliberations – the way in which the absolute truth can be fulfilled.

This is precisely how Gauḍapāda's work is constructed. In the first part, Gauḍapāda comments on the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, while the following chapters are an elaboration on his thoughts, without referring directly to *śruti*. The Māṇḍūkya itself, although it belongs to the group of main Upaniṣads, differs from the other texts of the collection mainly because of its language. It is very succinct and more closely resembles the language of the later *sūtras* than the earlier Upaniṣads, often full of repetitions and metaphors. It is considered to be the youngest text of the canon and is dated even at the turn of the era. In the first two stanzas of the *śruti* text, all the terms which are to characterise the dimension of absolute reality appear. Subsequently, there is a description of the dimensions of reality as they are given in experience. The successive dimensions of reality are closely correlated with the states of consciousness. The second part of the Upaniṣads shows how what we know is true should be implemented. We will now proceed to a detailed analysis of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad along with Gauḍapāda's commentary.

*aum ity etad akṣaram idam sarvam. tasyopavyākhyānam. bhūtaṃ bhava bhaviṣyad iti sarvam omkāra eva. yac cānyat trikālātītaṃ tad apy omkāra eva.*

Aum! This imperishable world is all this. Of this [is offered] an explanation. That which has been, is happening and is to be – all that verily is aum! And that other which is beyond past, present and future – that too is aum. (Māṇḍūkya 1.)

The following terms are equated in this stanza: *om̐* = *akṣara* = *idam sarvam* = *Omkāra*. The expression “all this” (*idam sarvam*) can be understood in the following way: reality is both the non-manifested, unconditioned, beyond the three times, and the manifested beings, whose main characteristic is that

they are named and pronounced. In the introduction to his commentary on Māṇḍūkya, Śaṅkara writes:

And the word *aum* is *ātman* itself, for it is its name [the name and the named being one]. For this reason, the reason that the name and the named are one, phenomenal appearances of the self, breath and the like, too, have no being apart from their names, names that are but modifications of the word *aum*. This is borne out by such *śruti* texts as the following: Modifications originate in speech; they are mere names (Chāndogya 6.1.4.); All this creation of Brahman is held together by the thread of speech and the string the names; all this exists in names.' Since all phenomena are one with their names and since names are but appearances of *aum* therefore does the text declare 'Aum! This imperishable word is all this. . .'

In the above commentary there is an indication of how to speak about the nature of the absolute being. But this is not only a simple theoretical definition, but also an announcement of how this truth about reality can be individually implemented. The term *upavyākhyānam* means: "explanation," "clear utterance." It seems to announce an explanation of how meditation on *Oṃ* might become a means, or a tool to recognise brahman; it seems that it is an announcement of a technical explanation. The phrase "beyond the three times" refers us to the image of reality as both transcendent and immanent. But it also has its own "technical" aspect, indicating that a proper utterance of the *Oṃ* mantra as well as the performance of appropriate meditation procedures results in achieving liberation, i.e. also in liberating oneself from time constraints.

Towards the end of the commentary on this stanza, Śaṅkara further highlights the identity of the name and the named one. If the named were presented as ontologically dependent on the name, then the named could be taken as name only in a secondary sense. The Upaniṣad therefore, emphasises the identity of the name and the named. Its purpose in doing this is to make one realise that the name and the named can be dissolved simultaneously through a single effort and Brahman realised as a consequence of this dissolution, Brahman that is different from either.

Therefore, *idam sarvam* would correspond to the concept of macrocosm; it encompasses all verbal occurrences, all sounds, all presented phenomena, as well as all events. Phenomena are not any different from words (names) and names are not different from *Oṃ*. Brahman is achieved through names as a name, when brahman is understood as *Oṃ*. The name and this which is named cannot be separated.

*sarvam hy etad brahma. ayam ātmā brahma, so'yam ātmā catuṣpāt.*

All this verily is Brahman. This self is Brahman. That self has four quarters. (Māṇḍūkya 2.)

The previous stanza pointed to the absolute, which in the technical language of the *darśanas* is called brahman. The second stanza contains a *mahāvākyam*, which indicates the relationship between brahman and *ātman* – according to Advaita, this is an identity relationship. There is also a transition to the description of reality from *ātman*'s point of view, i.e. taking the position of the subject, the principle of consciousness.

There is an extension of the sequence of equivalence here: *sarvam* = *brahman* = *ātman*. The introduction of the term *ātman* indicates that a new relationship has been introduced; the subject – and this is what *ātman* is in the broadest sense – is presented with a specific reality. This reality is indicated as true and concrete, as can be understood from a repetition of the pronoun *ayam* – “this here”; it is a classic procedure known also from other Upaniṣadic “great sayings,” the concreteness of the situation is traditionally, as we read in many commentaries, symbolised by the movement of the hand directed towards the heart, considered to be the “dwelling” of *ātman*. In this one stanza, there are two *mahāvākyas*. Achieving a goal as it was defined in the first stanza will be possible when we refer all definitions of reality to the cognitive *ātman*, to the only being which is capable of carrying out the cognitive and self-exploratory process. Here, *ātman* is a symbol of an entity manifested in the form of a human being; *ātman* is a principle of being a human as a conscious and self-conscious entity. The realisation and discovery of the harmony and fullness of reality (*pūrṇam* = *ātman*), although it is populated by beings, is possible only in a human. Only a human being is in possession of advanced self-awareness and self-reflection, and is the only one who raises questions of transcendental nature. Transition to the anthropomorphic approach to reality is shown through the introduction of the personal pronoun *sa* – “he.” As already mentioned in the previous chapter while discussing the cosmogonic scheme of the Upaniṣads, it is a rather frequent technique. It can take forms such as: absolute → *puruṣa*, *ātman* → *puruṣavidha*, *tad* → *sa*. The personal pronoun, albeit very general, is already a definition, a clarification and at the same time a constitution of the subject's self-awareness. But as we know from many passages of *śruti*, this state of self-awareness can lead to the original imposition – *adhyasa* – which results in a cognitive error.

*jāgrīta-sthāno bahiḥ prajāṇaḥ saptāṅga ekonaviṃśatimukhaḥ sthūlabhug vaiśvānaraḥ  
prathamah padaḥ.*

With the waking state as the sphere of this manifestation, with consciousness oriented outwards, of seven limbs and nineteen mouths is Vaiśvānara – the Man Universal – sufferer-enjoyer of gross things, the first quarter. (Māṇḍūkya 3.)

The word Vaiśvānara indicates universal human being. It denotes the dimension of reality whose structure, way of experiencing and functioning within it belong in a general manner to all creatures. Universal laws – regardless how differently described from various philosophical points of view – operate here: those of cause and effect, of spatial and temporal limitations as well as any other laws that make us call the surrounding and empirically experienced reality “cosmos” rather than “chaos.” The concept of Vaiśvānara refers us to Chāndogya 5.18.2., where the term appears in a ritual context:

Now, of this self here, the one common to all men – the brightly shining is the head; the dazzling is the eye; what follows diverse paths is the breath; the ample is the trunk; wealth is the bladder; the earth is the feet; the sacrificial enclosure is the stomach; the sacred grass is the body hair; the householder’s fire is the heart; the southern fire is the mind; and the offertorial fire is the mouth.

If we were to indicate the elements constituting the dimension of reality referred to as Vaiśvānara and define them in the terms of Sāṃkhya, we would say that it contains all twenty-five tattvas, including the non-subtle elements – *mahābhūta*. The consciousness of a person functioning in this dimension is oriented precisely towards those tattvas which are then experienced as fundamentally different from the cognitive subject. Such a consciousness directed outwardly is a product of ignorance. Ignorance at this level not only obscures the true nature of reality, but also repeatedly projects its new and erroneous representations.

In his commentary, Śāṅkara explains the nineteen mouths. They are five cognitive tools – *buddhīndriya*, five tools of action – *karmendriya*, five life breaths – *prāṇa*, and *manas*, *buddhi*, *ahaṅkāra*, *citta*. They are called faces or mouths – *mukha* – because their role is mouth-like, understood as a gateway of perception. All these limbs and mouths constitute Vaiśvānara – or as we could say – human as a species which is able not only to experience, but also evaluate every worldly phenomenon.

*svapna-sthāno’ntaḥprajñāḥ saptāṅga ekonaviṃśatimukhaḥ pravivikta bhuk taijasa dviṭīyaḥ pādaḥ.*

With dream state as the sphere of its manifestation, with consciousness oriented inwards, of seven limbs and nineteen mouths is Taijasa, the Luminous, enjoyer-sufferer of [consciousness] unrelated [to objects], the second quarter. (Māṇḍūkya 4.)

In this dimension of reality certain phenomena are experienced, whose form does not result directly from external impulses, but from the mind itself – at this level, *mahābhūta* do not operate. This is why the concept of time as *citta-kāla* is mentioned here, because the rules of time and space are limited to a given *citta*. These experiences differ from the first state, said to be *dvaya-kāla* – the temporal

dimension of the second. The term *dvaya-kāla* indicates that all phenomena are experienced and evaluated from the perspective of the temporal and spatial constraints of two times (two states of consciousness) as well as different observers. But if one assumes that every external state of consciousness is conditioned by a subtler level, i.e. Taijasa determines Vaiśvānara, then the problem arises as to which of them is the cause and which is the effect. After all, the impressions from the level of waking – sometimes explained as karmic traces – which somehow shape the impressions in our dreams, are, according to this pattern, less subtle. It is impossible to indicate simple relations of cause and effect, which is why the Advaita thinkers claim their nature is inexpressible.

yatra supto na kañcana kāmam kāmāyate na kañcana svapnam paśyati tat suṣuptam.  
*suṣuptasthāna ekībhūtaḥ prajñānaghana evānandamayo hy ānandabhuk cetomukhaḥ  
 prājñas ṛtīyaḥ pādah.*

Where the sleeper desires no desire whatsoever, sees no dreams whatsoever, that is sleep, deep and sound. That is the sphere of the manifestation of the Prājña, the enlightened, the third quarter – of that has become one, is just consciousness enmassed, full of and enjoyer of bliss, with consciousness for its face. (Māṇḍūkya 5.)

The third state of consciousness, the state of deep sleep, called *suṣupti*, is discussed here. It is called *prājña* – consciousness, because it is *prajñānaghana* – mass, a reservoir of consciousness; the projecting function of consciousness is no longer present here. The subject, which we can still talk about in this state, does not project any external representations, because it does not operate under the influence of the basic cognitive impulse, which is desire – *kāma*. *Kāma* should be understood very broadly here, as an indigenous impulse leading to cognition or experience, even if it concerns a very subtle object. The senses of cognition and the senses of action no longer work here, and the gates of perception – *mukha* – is the mind itself – *cetomukha*, understood not so much as a special tool of activity, but as a principle of all mental functions, directed only at oneself. The term *cetomukha* can also be understood as a gate of consciousness of two preceding states, which is why we say that its projecting power remains “dormant.” But also the opposite direction can be seen here, the “involution” of the functions of the mind into the latent form of the preceding states.

It is also said about this state that it is *ekībhūta* – “uniform.” The Upaniṣad does not refer to this state with a simpler word – *ekam* – “one,” and this seems intentional. In the preceding two chapters we discussed in more detail the basic cosmological scheme in reference to the Nāsadiya Sūkta and the earliest Upaniṣads. It showed that the absolute reality is defined by reference to the root as – “to exist,” while the presented reality is referred to with the root *bhū* – “to

be.” The term *ekībhūta* indicates that it is still the presented dimension of reality that is being discussed; although it is indistinguishable in its mass of consciousness, it is not yet pure existence. This interpretation is confirmed among others by the following terms: *ānandamaya* – “made out of bliss” and *ānandabhuk* – “perceiving, experiencing that which is blissful.” We do not mention here the deliberations over the concept of ānanda within the Advaita itself: whether it belongs to brahman per essentiam or per accidens. What is important here is that the text clearly indicates that the third state is not a pure one of bliss, but a state in which the bliss of a certain object is being experienced. Although this object can be very subtle, it is nonetheless experienced as a separate one. The suffix *maya* means “made of something,” and it speaks of the material and not of the simple, uniform principle of existence. It is even more strongly indicated by the suffix *bhuj* – “eating,” “experiencing.” Experience always has its object, so once again there is a differentiation between the subject and the object. Besides our considerations, we might ponder whether there are additional descriptions of ecstatic states presented here.

*eṣa sarveśvara eṣa sarvajña eṣo'ntaryāmyeṣa yoniḥ sarvasya prabhavāpyayau hi bhūtānām.*

This is the lord of all, this is the knower of all, this is the inner controller. This is the source of all, verily the beginning of beings and their end. (Māṇḍūkya 6.)

This stanza describes the same state of consciousness as the previous one, so we should regard the concepts presented here as complementary to the above image. We are aware that we refer to a very subtle state of consciousness, which, although undistinguishable in its nature, is still a “reservoir of consciousness” – *prājñaghana*, so it is not consciousness in absolute terms. Although *māyā* does not project new phenomena here, it still retains its function of covering up the true nature of reality. And bearing in mind that we remain in the realm of ignorance, we should now interpret the following concepts. The “Lord of all” is *sarvā+Īśvara*. *Īśvara* – the Lord, the ruler; it is not an equivalent of God the Creator as in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Neither the text of the Upaniṣads nor the commentaries by Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara identify it with pure, *nirguṇic brahman*. *Nirguṇa brahman* corresponds to the state of *turiya*, while the realm of *Īśvara* is the third state of consciousness – *prājña*. In the state of *prājña*, *māyā* is activated, the cosmic illusion of no beginning, the source of the universal cognitive error. *Īśvara* is the Lord and Ruler of the entire presented world, including deities and devas. The *Īśvara* who manifests itself as the ruler of the world is also called *sarvajña* – “the one who knows everything,” or the one who also knows the three times, namely the mechanisms of functioning or happening of the world. He is not only the guardian of the universal laws considered objective, but

also the inner ruler – *antaryāmin*; in this context we can say that he guarantees the meaningfulness of human existence. We can consider him to be both a transcendent and immanent being.

The next concept defining the state of *Prājña* is “the origin and the dissolution of everything” – *sarvasya prabhavāpyayau hi bhūtanām*. In this state, emergence and dissolution of the worlds occurs interchangeably; it is movement, dynamics, the matrix (*mātra*) of *saṃsāra*. The concept of cause-effect relations is widely discussed within the Brahmanical Darśana. The schools of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika adopted the doctrine of *asatkāryavāda* claiming that the effect is essentially separate from the cause. Sāṃkhya and Yoga philosophical traditions explained the world through *satkāryavāda*, where the effect is immanently inherent to the cause, which is why we can talk only about the manifestation of the cause (speaking of emerging) or about its disappearance. Advaita, in turn, propagated the doctrine of “no-origination” – *ajātivāda*. The absolute being – sat – has no beginning and remains unchanged. Additionally, the entire world of variability is beginningless and subject to the eternal processes of acting and being – bhava. In the context of discussing this dimension of reality, we can discern some distinctive, though never fully explicable beginning, but it will only be the emergence of the empirical being, and not an absolute beginning of existence. This is a concept that is in line with the earliest Upaniṣads and the hymn of Nāsadiya, and contrary to the later – largely saguṇic – Upaniṣads, where brahman is identified with *Īśvara*. In the *nirguṇic* concepts discussed here, brahman exists, while *Īśvara* – very subtly but still – is. Therefore, the term yoni, “the source,” can be understood as follows: the state of consciousness, pertaining to *Īśvara*, is the source of the manifestation of the world.

The word *eṣa* – “this one” is a pronoun denoting an object closest to the speaker. Here, the Upaniṣad reminds us that it is not only a purely theoretical text but that it is also supposed to assist the reader in their meditative practice leading to ultimate emancipation. In the mystical texts, the pronoun *eṣa* will indicate the relationship between the soul and the divinity. Although the fifth and sixth stanzas refer to the description of the same state of consciousness, which is reality, they are treated as separate. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the fifth stanza describes the state of *prājña* from the perspective of the individual subject – *jīva*, while the sixth stanza adopts the universal perspective, that of *Īśvara*. In this case, the pronoun *eṣa*, as a link between these two perspectives, can be interpreted as indicating identity between *jīva* and *Īśvara*. As subsequent chapters of this book shall explore, in the state of *prājña* there is no fully defined empirical subject – *jīva* – but one of its forms, which takes the form of a witness – *sākṣin*. For if we consistently interpret *eṣa* as an indication of what is the closest,

then it cannot concern feelings, emotions, or even thoughts, since they are, as everything else, governed by *Īśvara*. Therefore, in the *prājña* state there is a “less active” witness, who only observes all feelings, thoughts and actions.

*atraitē ślokā bhavanti.*

With regard to this are these verses (Gauḍapāda kārīkā)

The word *atra* – “here,” refers to this very object we are considering.

*bahiḥprajñō vibhur viśvo hy antaḥprajñas tu taijasaḥ*

*ghanaprajñas tathā prājña eka eva tridhā smṛtaḥ.*

As outward oriented consciousness, the all-pervasive is *viśva*, as inward oriented consciousness it is *taijasa*, as enmassed consciousness it is *prājña*. It is but one that is thought of in these three ways (GK 1).

Gauḍapāda does not comment on the first two stanzas of the Upaniṣad, but immediately goes on to discuss the states of consciousness. It should be noted that the term *vaiśvanāra* is used in the *śruti*, whereas here the term *viśva* appears. Actually, these may be used as synonyms, because they both indicate a common, universal level, except that *vaiśvanāra* also has ritual connotations, and *viśva* abstains from those.

In his commentary, Śaṅkara explains:

There is the fact that the *ātman*, the self, has three states [and not just one]. There is the further fact to take into account: I remember that it was I that slept, I that dreamt and it is I that am now awake. These two facts show that the self is not any of these three states: it transcends them. They also show that the *ātman* is one [is not an individuality; it is not the case that each individual has his own separate self]. These facts also show that the *ātman* remains unstained and untouched by these three states.

*Ātman* manifests itself in three states. In the first two, persistence of the soul is ensured by memory – *smṛti*. In the state of dreams, memory is interrupted. In deep sleep, memory itself seems to be absent, although there is a recollection of the state occurring. The Vedānta school developed a method of comparing the reality of particular states of consciousness. The state of dreaming is experienced as real until the moment of awakening. Then from the perspective of being awake (*bādhā*) the full reality of dreams is denied. Similarly, the state of being awake, as claimed by the Vedāntists, is experienced as real until the absolute reality – *ātman* – is recognised. And although the reality of dreams is denied from the level of wakefulness, and the reality of wakefulness is denied from the level of *ātman*, the existence of the conscious subject is never challenged. The most general analysis shows how useful, even indispensable a sensual body is in the context of soteriological procedures. In the states of dreams and deep sleep,

consciousness, or “conscious action,” does not depend on the body. Only an analysis of these two states from the position of wakefulness shows identification with the whole psycho-mental-physical complex. In the third state even the sense of individuality disappears.

*dakṣiṇākṣimukhe viśvo manasy antas tu taijasaḥ,  
ākāśe ca hṛdi prājñas tridhā dehe vyavasthitaḥ.*

The right eye is the mukha, the revelator, of the viśva; therein does it dwell to shine forth. In the mind within abides the taijasa. In the space in the heart lies the prājña. In three ways thus in the body does he dwell (GK 2).

In his commentary, Śaṅkara refers to Bṛhadāraṇyaka 4.2.2–3., where we read:

Clearly, the true name of the person in the right eye is Indha. Even though he is really Indha, people cryptically call him ‘Indra,’ because gods in some ways love the cryptic and despise the plain. What looks like a person in the left eye, on the other hand, is his wife Virāj. Their meeting place is the space within the heart, their food is the red lump in the heart, and their garment is the mesh-like substance within the heart. The path along which they travel is the vein that goes up from the heart. The veins called Hitā that are located in the heart are as fine as a hair split a thousandfold. Alongside them, the sap flows continuously. In some way, therefore, this person eats food that is more refined than does the bodily self (*ātman*).

Gauḍapāda’s replacement of the word *vaiśvanāra* with the word *viśva* in the first *kārikā* might suggest that he will analyse the *śruti* text, referring only to the meditation practice, which exceeds the ritualistic context. The second *kārikā*, as well as the cited passage from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, legitimises this assumption. In technical language, Gauḍapāda conveys the poetic image of the Upaniṣad. Regarding *viśva*, which is universal and common to all, we can say that it is all-pervasive – *vibhu*. Although it is all-pervasive, from the point of view of a yoga adept it is possible to point to a place privileged by practice. The state of calmness in meditation, sitting with eyes closed is the state in which *viśva* merges with *taijasa*. And when all mental states penetrate into the space of the heart, they merge with *prājña*. This state is experienced as the sum of consciousness.

The mind operates as perception and memory. In the state of wakefulness, the perceived object is both learned – *pratyakṣa* – and recognised, recalled, judged – *smṛti*. The name is a sign, an evidence, a memory symbol. When we name a given object, we recognise it as such. The past constitutes the present through names.

One of the greatest problems of all monistic systems, both those which identify the absolute with God (on Indian ground, this will be the assumption that brahman is identical with *Īśvara*), and those which speak about a *nirguṇic* absolute, is the question of the origin of evil in the world. If God or the absolute is

perfect, and he is either the Creator or at least the guarantor of the world, so then who or what is responsible for the imperfection of the world, for pain and suffering? In Christianity, the question was: *unde malum?* As we know, no system has developed a coherent, fully satisfactory answer to this question.

This problem was equally widely discussed within the Indian philosophical systems. In those which adopted the concept of the world's beginninglessness, the contamination (*kleśa*) is interpreted as equally beginningless as the broadly understood karmic dispositions (*saṃskāra*), or the entire dimension of *saṃsāra*. In this case, we can talk both about the beginningless inclination towards ignorance entangling in *saṃsāra*, and the knowledge leading to liberation. This solution caused further issues. In this context, let us take a closer look at two philosophical positions that have considered this problem mainly by referring to the analysis of consciousness and cognitive acts.

The Buddhist school of *Yogācāra*, is also known as *cittamātra*, since it claims that everything is only a measure, a correlate of consciousness. Other names for this school are: *vijñānavāda* – only *vijñāna*, consciousness exists, and *vijñaptimātra* – everything exists only as a representation. All the above-mentioned names point to the nature of consciousness as the focal point of this school. It adopted the concept of a reservoir, an ocean of consciousness – *ālayavijñāna*. *Ālayavijñāna* is considered to be the cause of all phenomena that have the same nature as consciousness itself. The cause triggers certain effects, which have the nature of the manifested consciousness. The manifested consciousness has the nature of both cause and effect; it exists as mind and as object of consciousnesses. These manifestations appear as different representations of the empirical world.

The problem here, of course, is the nature of the *ālayavijñāna* itself. As Buddhist critics of this system claim, the Mādhyamaka school in particular, *ālayavijñāna* was nothing but an introduction of the Brahmanical concept of the absolute to Buddhism. Without embarking on a discussion aimed at rejecting these allegations from the point of view of philosophical criticism, we can definitely speak of *ālayavijñāna* as an absolute dimension, in the sense that it conditions and permeates the entire reality. This eighth dimension of consciousness is described in the same way as the perfect, absolute being. And if it determines everything, including other dimensions of reality, perceived as imperfect and characterised by suffering – *duḥkha* – then are the tendencies to these impurities and soils somehow already embedded in the absolute dimension? This was a great challenge for *Yogācāra*. It became crucial especially as the system developed and started taking on some devotional shades and *ālayavijñāna* began to be

understood as buddhatā and identified with the nature of Buddha. At this point the problem could sound similar to medieval Christian reasoning, in which the “heretics” dared to blame God for creating an imperfect world. In some branches of Tibetan Buddhism, attempts have been made to solve this problem by adopting an additional ninth consciousness, not contaminated by anything – *amalavijñāna*. But it seems that, despite repeated efforts, it was more of a postponement than a solution to the problem. It seems – from the point of view of our deliberations – that the greatest philosophical challenge to the system was not so much the transition between *ālayavijñāna* and *kliṣṭamanovijñāna* (universal, but already contaminated consciousness), as the explanation of the very nature of the ocean of consciousness. As a matter of fact, *ālayavijñāna* is never, from the point of view of metaphysical analysis, interpreted as a being transcendent to the experienced reality.

Another kind of challenge is faced by the monistic Brahmanical systems. Here, too, very generally, for the sake of comparison only, let us recall the basic assumptions of Advaita. As we know, Advaita as an orthodox Brahmanical *darśana* adopts as its *śruti* the concept of sat as an absolute, invariable, eternal being, existing through itself only. The absolute world is pronounced as sat *asat anirvacanīya*, and the perception of it as real occurs because of *māyā* – the beginningless, cosmic ignorance. In this school of Vedānta, the absolute level is considered transcendent to the presented reality. In the *śruti*, its nature is already strictly defined; therefore, the characteristics of this dimension of reality do not need to be further specified. The greatest mystery or interpretation challenge is to explain how this which is one, constant and undifferentiated, can manifest itself as multiplicity and diversity. One of the oldest Upaniṣadic interpretations or attempts to clarify this issue is to point to the process of cognition and self-definition of the absolute being.

The primeval cognitive act – as evidenced by many fragments of *śruti* – often takes the form of the utterance of the first word self-defining the most fundamental nature of the absolute. The analysis of the sentence *aham asmi* – “I am” – shows that although the subject is the same as the object, the relationship between them is already indicated. *Asmi* comes from the same root (*as*) as *sat* – “existing,” therefore it belongs to the same dimension of reality. *Aham* seems to be the most primordial form or representation, which – taking into account its grammatical structure – is already included in *asmi* (more on this subject in a separate chapter.) The very process of self-determination is equivalent to the activation of *manas*, whose nature is cognition, and which leads to the initiation of memory processes. And this is where the key question arises: do these structures, which become active, or reveal themselves in this primordial, actually cosmogonic

moment, have any beginning? Advaita's answer will be strongly negative. This is connected to its adoption of the *ajātivāda* doctrine – the beginninglessness of the world, and therefore the beginninglessness of *saṃskāras* – the dispositions to form all structures, including those contaminated, leading to the erroneous recognition of reality. This is where another question arises, to which virtually no system provides a satisfactory answer. Are these *saṃskāras* located anywhere? Are they conditioned by anything? Usually one avoids answering these by resorting to the statement that the question itself belongs to the realm of *māyā*. And since the very nature of illusion, ignorance (*māyā*, *avidyā*) is impossible to determine, it is impossible to give a fully adequate answer to this type of question.

All such questions are typical of and appear in the broadly understood mental organ, which is the mind – *manas*. The function of the mind – and this will be explained in more detail in the next chapter – is to operate in the three times. When the phenomena of the state of wakefulness are consciously recalled, they are automatically recalled as past. They cannot be recognised as constitutive of the present in the current phenomena. The only way to make them present is through imaginative visualisation. And when one visualises them intensely, the temporal traits indicating the past character of these phenomena become less and less evident. The memory of them transforms into an image; when the temporal traits of the past disappear, the temporal traits of the present manifest themselves. Thus, the world of the state of wakefulness functions both as a state of memory, a world of perception of memory and a world of disappearance of the past. All these impressions, which characterise the three states, are embedded in the mind in the form of subtle traces of cognitive processes, described in Indian thought as *saṃskāras* – the marks of memory of everything that has been known and experienced.

Is it at all possible to perceive the world without the memory of its past? And if it is, what kind of world would it be? It seems that any conscious perception requires a reference to the past. The temporal traits characterising the past and the present penetrate the phenomenon itself; cognition and recognition become one. Conscious perception is a perception embedded in a context, and there is no context without reference to the past. In the Indian tradition, such a state outside any context and without any elements is not complete reality. Only *avyakta* corresponds to it – the non-manifested state, whose symbol is *Ṁ*, the last sound of the *Om* mantra, i.e. the third state, where the consciousness leans neither into the past nor into the future.

Three states of consciousness can be experienced in a state of wakefulness; when a person becomes one with the world, he becomes *viśva* – everything. Aitareya Upaniṣad puts it metaphorically in this way that only a human being is

able to contain all the worlds within him. Such an interpretation also allows us to explain why the process of cosmogenesis which is a correlate of the process of self-realisation, does not stop at the earlier, ultimately deeper states of consciousness when it begins to develop. Once initiated, this process continues until the “construction,” or emergence of the world, up to the level of the so-called material world. It follows that the complete process of self-cognition, in order to be finally transcended, i.e. fulfilled, must concern all (*viśva*) forms of reality. And when everything becomes one mass of consciousness, there is no “before,” there is no “after,” there is only “now” – this is the third state. When the mind focuses only on breath, it becomes a pure witness, all thoughts are poured into the mind, all senses drown in it. That which is breath to the physical self, that is *avyakta* to the yogi.

*viśvo his sthūlabhuṃ nityaṃ taijasaḥ praviviktabhuk  
ānandabhuk tathā prājñas tridhā bhogaṃ nibodhata.*

The All ever enjoys the gross, the Luminous enjoys the unrelated and bliss it is that enjoys prājña, the knower. Know ye thus enjoyables of these three kinds (GK 3).

*sthūlaṃ tarpayate viśvaṃ praviviktaṃ tu taijasam,  
ānandaś ca tathā prājñaṃ tridhā tṛptiṃ nibodhata.*

The gross satisfies the All, the unrelated satisfies the Luminous, and bliss satisfies prājña, the knower. Know ye thus satisfaction of these three kinds (GK 4).

*triṣu dhāmasu yad bhojyaṃ bhoktā yaś ca prakirtitaḥ,  
vedaitad ubhayaṃ yas tu sa bhuñjāno na lipyate.*

Enjoying the enjoyables three he will not be tainted who knows who in these abodes is the enjoyer and what has been termed as ‘enjoyable’ (GK 5)

There is only one object of experience that takes on a triple form: (1) gross material, (2) non-relational consciousness and (3) bliss, with the corresponding states of wakefulness, dreaming and deep sleep. And there is also one cognitive subject, taking the form of a *viśva*, *taijasa* and *prājña*. Realising that it is I who sleeps, who dreams, and that a witness in one state cannot be distinguished from a witness in another state, makes it possible to see the identity of the three experiencing subjects. This was pointed out already in the first *kārikā*. He who knows that the one who experiences and the object of experience can take different forms in three states will not be tainted even if he enjoys the pleasures of the three states. Acknowledgement that all sensations are the sensations of one experiencing subject provides relief from any contamination. The object does not affect the subject in any way, nor does it reduce or increase it. When fire burns all the fuel, it returns to its original form. The amount of the fuel burnt does not increase or decrease the flame.

In the expression: *Etad ubhayam* – “these two,” a distinction is made between the experiencing subject and this which is experienced. Gauḍapāda’s text, as well as Śaṅkara’s commentary, explicitly states that all processes belong to an individually perceived experiencing subject; therefore, the *ātman*, understood as the very principle of subjectivity, is not definitively bound by anything. At the same time, the continuity of the empirical subject, defined as a single experiencing subject – *bhoktr* – is maintained through the recognition based on memory present in all three states of experiences such as: I experience pleasure, I act, I remember, I suffered. All these experiences are based on the formula: *aham asmi* – “I am.” We learn from Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.4.1 that *aham* leads to individualisation, while *asmi* is sat – the very existence which is the domain of the *ātman*. And when *aham* disappears, which led to all representations, the object of clinging disappears and there is no longer basis for any attachment.

In his commentary, Śaṅkara recalls the classic metaphor of fire and fuel. After fire has consumed fuel, it disappears, but not completely. It just remains in its non-manifested (*avyakta*) form. Similarly, a witness disappears when there is nothing more to experience. By devouring fuel, fire finally devours itself; it is fuel that gives it the ability to manifest itself. Fuel is the world, fire is the witness. The world is the basis of being for the witness; maybe in this context the metaphor of “the eater of what there is to eat” found in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.2.5 should be interpreted. Then the “reflection” of the manifested being becomes more intelligible, that it should not eat everything it creates, because it will run out of food (fuel).

In the light of the above analysis, it seems that Gauḍapāda’s commentary does not bring anything new to the content of the Upaniṣad itself; in fact, it seems to merely repeat the same message. But this repetition emphasises that the relationship between the cognitive subject and the object of cognition are strictly adequate to each state. Every dimension of reality is governed by its own laws. At the level of *viśva*, the experiencing subject always (*nityam*) experiences gross material objects – *mahābhūta*, and does not experience bliss – *ānanda*, just as the experiencing subject at the *prājña* level experiences neither gross nor subtle objects. It is a prelude to a very precise examination of particular dimensions of reality according to the rules that apply to them. On the one hand, we have the appropriateness of relations, but on the other hand, from the point of view of a pure subject, they are incidental, variable; this – according to the *śruti*’s definition of sat – indicates that they are not real. In this way, whoever is aware of that is not bound by them in the absolute sense.

*prabhavaḥ sarvabhāvānāṃ satām iti viniścayaḥ  
sarvam janayati prāṇas ceto'ṃśū puruṣaḥ pṛthak.*

A beginning is there to all that has come to be, all that is. This indeed is a conviction clear with sages. Breath is the creator of all that has come to be and the person of the other – of ceto'ṃśu-s, of emanations of consciousness (GK 6).

Cetas means “luminosity,” “consciousness,” while *aṃśū* means “fibre,” “thread,” “ray.” In older texts, the expression *ceto'ṃśū* was associated with the lunar deity, Soma. By using such terminology, Gauḍapāda refers to metaphors very often found in *śruti*, where the emergence of the represented world was compared to sunbeams or sparks gushing out of fire. In this *kārikā*, the emergence or creation of the worlds is explained as referring to both the individual and the universal level. In the microcosmic dimension, it is the breath – *prāṇa* – which is the factor responsible for initiating and sustaining life processes; breath is the vital force that determines everything at the level of representation. In the dimension of the macrocosm the role of the Creator is assigned to *puruṣa* and it is he who becomes the governor of all conscious (*cetas*) beings. The rays of consciousness emerge from the *puruṣa*, just like sunbeams, they are the modi of recognising the *puruṣa*, whose nature is consciousness. We can also recall here the image of the sun reflected in water; these reflections are interpreted as taking the form of *viśva*, *taijasa*, and *prājña* in the individual bodies of deities, animals and other beings. A very similar image is present in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 2.1.20.:

As a spider sends forth its thread, and as tiny sparks spring forth from a fire, so indeed do all the vital functions (*prāṇa*), all the worlds, all the gods, and all beings spring from this self (*ātman*). Its hidden name (*upaniṣad*) is: ‘The real behind the real’, for the real consists of the vital functions, and the self is the real behind the vital functions.

Prabhava is the formation, the birth in appropriate forms composed of a name and a shape created by ignorance; it is the emergence of specific phenomena. A formation understood in this way concerns all beings functioning in all three states, and therefore includes all modi of *viśva*, *taijasa*, and *prājña*. By naming these beings as sat, Gauḍapāda indicates their essential character, except that it is not an absolute existence, but an existence on that basis, on that substrate on which they are superimposed. The sixth stanza of the Māṇḍūkya says that *prājña* is the source of the world of phenomena and in this sense it creates beings that are a kind of reflection of reality and are real as long as the view of the existence of the given substrate is maintained.

Śāṅkara explains this mechanism by referring to the classical metaphor of the world as a rope mistaken for a serpent. Wandering in the dark forest, we notice something long that is moving. Our first association is with a snake. We can react to this situation in many different ways. We usually run away. When

after some time we happen to be in the same place, for example on a bright morning, we notice that what frightened us was not a snake, but a rope. But where is the snake? We cannot say that it disappeared, because it was never really there in the first place. But everything we did at night wandering in the forest and running away from the “rope-snake” was real. If we hurt someone while running away, we have to face real consequences. Although from the perspective of knowing that it was a rope and not a serpent, and seeing the cause of our behaviour as unrealistic, the effects of acting under its influence are very real. According to this metaphor, the rope is brahman and the snake is the empirical world. When we recognise the nature of brahman, the world we earlier considered real will no longer cause us any real consequences. However, we also cannot state that everything that happened because of the wrong belief, because of mistakenly considering the rope to be a snake, had been unreal. The object has not changed. In the right circumstances it was recognised correctly. Identically, the reality of brahman gets recognised when the right circumstances occur; it is the conditions, not the reality itself that changes.

We cannot say that the world is absolutely non-existent because brahman, who is above it, who exceeds all empirical relationships, is grasped through a real cognitive act that was initiated in the dimension of the presented reality. If the consequence is to be true, then there must also be a true cause. This world results from sat in the same way as the snake is embedded in the rope. One sees a snake and such things that are created by ignorance and which grow out of the seed of *māyā*, manifesting themselves as a rope, existing as a rope which constitutes the basis. No one could see a “rope-snake” if there was no substrate, no basis on which the erroneous imposition could take place. And it is precisely as a result of introspection that the life breath – *prāṇa* – is experienced as the basis, the substrate of all beings, as the causal body.

What is the causal body – *kāraṇaśarīra*?

This which cannot be pronounced – *anirvācyāna*, which has no beginning,

This whose form is ignorance – *avidyā*,

Although it is itself the cause of two bodies, it remains unaware of its own respective nature,

The recognition of whom does not depend on the senses, this is the causal body  
(*Tattvabodha*)

An attempt to answer the question regarding the nature of the world is connected to the search for its origins. We encounter a cause-and-effect chain that we cannot fully grasp. And when we finally discover the primary cause, we realise that it is not fully real, that it is just an erroneous superimposition on the given

substrate. And as we recall the rope-serpent comparison, we see that false cognition results from triggering emotions, in particular cases fear or anxiety. These are the emotions that blind the mind, and only when the emotions are rejected can any object be analysed.

*Avidyā* encompasses the forms of thoughts, while *māyā* includes the content of thoughts. *Māyā* is equivalent to *nāmarūpa* established by *avidyā*. *Avidyā* is responsible for the mechanism of imposing the unreal on the real and vice versa. The unreal includes names and forms, while the real is the basis on which they are imposed. That is why *māyā* and *avidyā* are inseparable. Names and forms are superimposed on the basis, which in turn gets confused with them. *Avidyā* may be considered to be a creator of *māyā*, because all interpreted phenomena, all names and forms are framed, structured, in relation to this which is being interpreted. And it is *avidyā* that is the cause for the functioning of individual souls – *jīva*, i.e. individual cognitive entities that describe, interpret and explore the world. The structure of the world that expresses one's way of looking at things is *avidyā*, and all the phenomena manifested in this structure, the whole world context has the nature of *māyā*.

In the state of *avyakta*, the distinction between the structure and the content disappears. What remains is bare existence, the parts are one with the whole. There is no distinction, no awareness of difference, which may seem like a lack of consciousness. But after exiting this state, a yogi has a memory, and is aware that everything was pure sat, pure existence. However, it is not yet pure brahman; it is *avyakta*, that which is not manifested, but still objectified.

*vibhūtiṃ prasavaṃ tvanye manyante sṛṣṭicintakāḥ  
svapna-māyā-sarūpeti sṛṣṭir anyair vikalpitā.*

Others, given to theories about creation, think of it as the overflow of the Lord. Still others imagine it is like dream and magic (GK 7).

The term *vibhūti* means “overflowing,” “overfilling,” “excess,” which results from the power of a Creator. In this *kārikā*, Gauḍapāda evokes various functioning concepts of creation. The first concept refers to the actual transformation of *Īśvara* into the world – *pariṇāma*. The second one is the reference to the *vivarta* model, explaining the status of the presented world as a result of an erroneous superimposition of phenomena on reality – here two ontological dimensions can be distinguished. In Śaṅkara's commentary there is a reference to Bṛhadāraṇyaka 2.5.19., where Indra through his power (*māyā*) manifests this which is simple, as manifold. In this *kārikā*, *māyā* can be interpreted in two ways. In the first part (the term does not appear literally, but it appears in the referenced Upaniṣad) *māyā* is the real strength, the power of *Īśvara* (Indra) – it is an older understanding of

this notion. In the second line *māyā* is compared to something unreal, to dream, magic, or illusion. If we interpret *māyā* as something unreal, it is interesting to compare it with a dream – *svapna*. In the Vedānta literature, however, the level of *svapna* is a dimension of reality – albeit an empirical one – while the levels of fantasy and illusion are not considered real.

*icchāmātraṃ prabho sṛṣṭir iti sṛṣṭau viniścītāḥ,  
kālāt prasūtiṃ bhūtānaṃ manyante kālacintakāḥ.*

Some are convinced they know the secret of creation. They find it as the mere will of the all-pervasive. Others, preoccupied with time, to time alone trace the birth of creatures all (GK 8).

Gauḍapāda proceeds to discuss various cosmological concepts. In this *kārikā*, yet another concept of the Creator is presented. Earlier this was rather an autonomous act of creation, yet here the concept of will and desire appears – *icchā*. In the earlier concept, the act of creation could be interpreted as a necessary one, resulting from the nature of existence. This is where the idea of will comes into play, which can be interpreted as meaning that the text also evokes the concept of a “voluntary” creative act. It is interesting in this context that the term “Prabhu” is used to describe the Creator. The word *prabhu* means “all-pervasive;” this may suggest the inexhaustibility of the willpower. One may then wonder if this means that such a process was not considered a one-time event, but a continuous one. Therefore, the volitional impulse itself should be interpreted as perennial. We think that such an understanding of will reveals its similarities to *māyā*, which is perennial, but not eternal, because it ceases to operate when liberation is achieved. “Preoccupied with time” (*kāla*) is a reference to astrologers, fortune-tellers. Astrology has been a very popular and respected branch of knowledge since the earliest times. Without reading the appropriate predictive signs, no undertakings, especially the most important ones, were attempted.

*bhogārtham sṛṣṭir ity anye kṛīḍārtham iti cāpare,  
devasyaīṣa svabhāvō'yam āptakāmasya kā spṛhā?*

Some spy in creation the Lord's delight, some see in it his happy play. But the shining one has his desires ever fulfilled; what shall he do with desire [with delight and with play]? Creation, of course, is there; such indeed is his being, such indeed his nature (GK 9).

The text continues to review a number of concepts. It mentions the idea that some Creator, in the Indian tradition technically referred to as *Īśvara*, creates the world as a field or object of his experience. Not too far from that is the concept of the creation process as a game – *kṛīḍā* – or playful frolic – *līlā*. These are concepts in which the entire created world, as well as man, are treated instrumentally by

the Creator, which stands in a certain opposition to the anthropic character of the earliest Upaniṣads. But these theories can also be interpreted in such a way that the Creator is driven by the desire to experience or play, and is therefore subject to certain impulses. According to Indian tradition, giving in to any desires, emotions or feelings means that we remain under their control – this applies not only to people but also to gods. All these are bonds causing a state of enslavement, so the Creator, so characterised, cannot be considered an absolute Creator, since acting under the influence of impulses he is limited by them. Such a Creator cannot be simply called sat – pure existence. Gauḍapāda, however, does not accept these ideas; he only quotes them to immediately reject them.

According to the interpretation of the earliest Upaniṣads and Gauḍapāda, the world is a representation of the absolute by virtue of its own nature – *svabhāva*. As shall be discussed in the following chapters, this original representation is a result of a self-cognitive act, and the foremost object of cognition takes the form of undifferentiated light. The luminous form appears to be the source intermediary of the recognition of the absolute's essence. Gauḍapāda points to this luminosity when speaking about the nature of the ever-shining – *deva*. If it is assumed that the existence of the represented world is conditioned by the absolute being, then this absolute being cannot be limited by anything, cannot lack anything, nor can it desire anything, because one desires things that one does not have. Thus Gauḍapāda cannot accept the concept of creation as a result of desire to experience or play. Therefore, he poses the question: how could anything be desired by god, who by definition is everything? How can the absolute Creator crave anything? Craving, lust, or desire, has been rendered here by the term *sṛhā*. This word has more negative connotations than *kāma*. *Sṛhā* is not desire for love, it is desire resulting even from envy or jealousy. The use of the word *sṛhā*, and not *kāma*, may indicate that according to the vision of the earliest Upaniṣads to which Advaita refers, Īśvara's desire to create is treated pejoratively, unlike in the later theistic interpretations.

There is a problem of interpretation in this *kārikā*. The term *svabhāva* can be read in two ways, and both are grammatically correct. According to one explanation, we can read that “his nature” refers to the fact that the pursuit of experiencing or playing belongs to the deva. The second interpretation however, indicates that it results from the deva's nature that all his desires are fulfilled. Only the second interpretation is consistent with Advaita. But then the question of how a desireless being may desire anything (as put in the Maitrī), seems to be a rejection of all cosmological concepts mentioned by Gauḍapāda in *kārikās* 7, 8, and 9.

nāntaḥprajñam na bahiḥprajñam nobhayataḥ prajñam na prajñānaghanam na prajñam nāprajñam. adṛṣtam avyavahāryam agrāhyam alakṣaṇam acintyam avyapadeśyam ekātamaḥpratyayasāraṁ prapañcōpaśamaṁ śāntaṁ śivam advaitam caturthaṁ manyate sa ātmā sa vijñeyah.

The *turiya* knows neither the internal nor the external nor both; it is not a mass of consciousness, neither is it cognitive nor non-cognitive. Unseen is it, non-empirical and ungraspable, without distinctive marks, unthinkable and unspeakable, the essence of the thought of the one self; it is that in which the world comes to cease – the peaceful, the benign, the nondual. Such they think is the fourth quarter. He is the *ātman*, the self; he alone is to be known. (Māṇḍūkya 7.)

To the earlier equations: *ātman* = *brahman* = *sarvam* = *Om*, the term *čaturtha* (*turiya*) is added, which is defined as: *amātra*, *avyavahārya*, *prapañca-upaśama*, *śiva*, *advaita*. The term *mātra* – “measure” – means expressing something with any means related to order and classification. Its negation, the term *amātra* indicates that we are dealing with a simple and indivisible reality, not composed of any parts. The word *mātra* comes from the root *mā* – “to measure;” from the same root originates one of the key concepts of Advaita – *māyā*. Thus, the absolute reality is beyond representation, manifestation and display, beyond organisation which is typical for *saṁsāra*. In the earlier stanzas of the Upaniṣad we find the characteristics of particular states of consciousness – reality. It regarded the manifestations resulting from the overlapping of an erroneous grasp on reality with the real one; this concept is called *vivarta*. So *turiya* is an absolutely basic state, in which no representations are distinguished, and which is not subject to the mechanism of cognitive error – *māyā*, *avidyā*.

The term *vyavahārya* indicates an action consistent with common practice or custom. These activities stem from precisely defined tasks and rules, and their universality is generally “recognisable” and “verifiable.” The term denotes the empirical aspect of reality. Therefore, the *turiya* state, which is its opposition, remains beyond the common cognition and universal knowledge. The recognition of this state is impossible from the perspective of everyday experience.

An interesting formulation is *prapañca-upaśama*. The term *prapañca* means “development,” “manifestation,” the process of “happening” of the world; it indicates the nature of the world given to us in experience. For Gauḍapāda, it is synonymous with the term *dvaita* – duality, i.e. plurality and diversity. *Upaśama* means “calming down,” “soothing,” “appeasement.” Then the state of *turiya* should be understood as appeasement, almost disappearance of the presented world. Calming down is the cessation of becoming, i.e. the emergence of new presented worlds. The mechanism of creation and disappearance of worlds is the dimension of *prājñā*; *turiya* exceeds this dimension. The level of *prapañca* is the

order regulated by *Īśvara*. The cessation of becoming makes the role of *Īśvara* superfluous. In this way, *Īśvara* too, like all other phenomena, disappears in the state of *turiya*.

Although according to the Upaniṣads and Gauḍapāda's commentary *ātman* in the state of *turiya* is impossible to describe using any positive categories, it is not an absolute nothingness either. The previous three states, in order to manifest themselves, must have some substrate, just as the illusion of the snake does not arise in nothingness, but on the substrate of the rope. And in this context the term *śiva* appears here, which should be translated according to etymology as: "gentle," "favourable," "auspicious." This so clearly positive statement indicates that *turiya* should not be understood negatively, although all previous statements belong to the trend of apophatic metaphysics. Thus, although it is a *nirguṇic* reality, it does not mean it is "empty." The term *śiva* is supposed to indicate that in the fourth state there is no suffering. As Chāndogya 7.1.8. puts it, "a knower of *ātman* transcends sadness."

In his commentary, Śaṅkara analyses the terms which indicate that *turiya* is not a state of awareness of something. *Na antahprajña* – "not an inward consciousness": the *taijasa* level – a state analogous to dreams – is rejected, negated. Also, through the phrase: *na bahiḥprajña* – "not an outward consciousness" – the level of *viśva* is negated, a state analogous to reality, to the empirical, most common objective reality. And by the expression: *na ubhayatahprajña* – "is not the two of them," not only the sum of these two states is negated, but also the state of transition between the dream and the state of wakefulness. *Na prajñānaghana* – "not the sum of consciousness"; the sum is understood here as a reservoir, as an undifferentiated mass. Deep sleep – *suṣupti*, the state of latent consciousness, where everything becomes indistinguishable – is negated here. *Na prajña* – "not simple consciousness," is interpreted here as negating the state of realising everything simultaneously. *Na aprajña* – "lack of consciousness" – the state of lack of cognition is negated here. As we can see, a very subtle analysis of all possible definitions of consciousness of something, i.e. object-oriented consciousness, was given here. *Turiya*, however, is a pure principle of subjectivity, which can never become an object, and therefore cannot be defined by any objective categories. Let us recall here the famous passage from Bṛhadāraṇyaka (4.3.30–32.), which is crucial for the formation of the Advaita system:

Nor does he perceive anything here; but although he does not perceive, he is quite capable of perceiving, for it is impossible for the perceiver to lose his capacity to perceive, for it is indestructible. But there is no second reality here that he could perceive as something distinct and separate from himself.

When there is some other thing, then the one can see the other, the one can smell the other, the one can taste the other, the one can speak to the other, the one can hear the other, the one can think of the other, the one can touch the other, and the one can perceive the other.

‘He becomes the one ocean, he becomes the sole seer! This, Your Majesty, is the world of brahman.’

Therefore, as the last description of *turiya*, which is a kind of summary of all, the term *advaita* – “non-duality” appears. The term *advaita*, as we know, expresses the key assumption of this system, that only the reality of *ātman-brahman* exists and that only *brahman* is sat. It is – as one can clearly see from the Upaniṣads – a much stronger formulation than the thesis of classical monism, because monism may assume the existence of one substance, one material or one element, which, after all, may undergo certain transformations. *Brahman-ātman* in the Advaita system is a simple reality; in the absolute state it remains unchanged in its domain. And in this way, the term *turiya* should be understood as different from the remaining three states of reality.

The objection raised here by Advaita’s opponent concerns the nature of a cognitive act. Fundamentally, the dispute concerned whether the cognitive act is illuminated by some external tools or not. The nature of consciousness was discussed, whether it is self-effulgent and by itself illuminates that which it recognises, or whether it requires any external factor. The acceptance of an external factor would indicate that there is some other dimension of reality in addition to the one in which the actions are carried out. Such a solution is unacceptable to Advaita, as it would contradict the fact that all reality is being exhausted in the state of *turiya*. Therefore, the rejection of this allegation refers to the fact that *ātman* in the *turiya* state is self-effulgent – *prākāśa* – and does not require illumination by any external tools of cognition.

On the basis of this text it is possible to reconstruct *bādha* – negation – as a method of argumentation so typical to Advaita. Our experience of dreaming is true until it is negated by the state of wakefulness. Similarly, empirical reality and all dimensions of the reality of consciousness are true until the glow of liberating cognition lets us experience the absolute reality. Only the absolute reality is *abadhita* – one that cannot be negated by anything, since, as *śruti* texts teach us, it is itself the condition for everything.

*nivṛtteḥ sarvaduḥkhānām iśānaḥ prabhur avyayaḥ,  
advaitaḥ sarvabhāvānām devas turyo vibhuḥ smṛtaḥ.*

The fourth one is the ordainer of the end of every suffering, the Lord that deviates not from himself. The nondual being of beings do they remember him, and the shining one, the fourth and all-pervasive (GK 10).

*Nivṛtti* stands for “development,” “fulfilment,” “completion.” The root *vṛt* means: “to rotate,” “to spin,” “to move.” In this way, it denotes the dimension of the presented reality and indicates its dynamic character. The incessant dynamics obscures the nature of reality, which results in the entanglement in *saṃsāra*, experiencing suffering and pain – *duḥkha*. Discontinuation of all these processes results among others in not experiencing *duḥkha* anymore. In this way, the *kārikā* comments on the Upaniṣadic word *śānta*, as the soothing of all sorrows.

Although the state of *turiya* is *advaita*, i.e. above all categories, it is possible to achieve it through unmediated experience. In the description of this experience, there are words used to indicate its power, originality and grandeur. And in this context, the figure of the Governor – *Ísana* – appears. He is defined similarly to the God of theistic systems, as powerful – *prabhu*, all-pervading – *vibhu*, bright, luminous – *deva*; it is he who brings an end to suffering. *Ísana* is also referred to as *advaita* and *turya*, i.e. differentiated from the other three states. Then *duḥkha* demonstrates its basic character; it is nothing more than clinging to the other three states. The word *smṛta* is commonly translated as “considered as.” But if we read it according to etymology as “remembered,” “reminded,” then we can interpret the text of the *kārikā* as an account of a mystical vision. An unmediated experience of absolute reality is described as an experience of omnipotent, all-pervading, luminous phenomena of consciousness.

*Turiya* is the substrate of all phenomena of consciousness, all cognitive acts, both true and erroneous. All contradictory processes – *bādha* – which negate the reality of the conditioned dimensions of consciousness, must negate the basic act that it is me (*aham*) who recognises, that is, they must negate the empirical subject of cognition. In the end, there remains pure, unconditional reality which is no longer subject to any process of negation or confirmation.

*kāryakāraṇabaddhau tāviṣyete viśvataijasaḥ  
prājñāḥ kāraṇabaddhas tu dvau tau turye na sidhyataḥ.*

*Viśva* and *taijasa* are acknowledged to be bound to cause and to effect. But *prājña* is bound to cause alone. In *turiya* obtains neither cause nor effect (GK 11).

This *kārikā* explains the cause and effect relationship between different states of consciousness. Is the state of dreams conditioned by experience acquired in the state of wakefulness or vice versa? Or is the relationship reflexive? And if it is, then do these states condition each other or is the state of dreaming and wakefulness conditioned by some other cause? *Kārya* is the result, *kāraṇa* is the cause. Both terms are derived from the root *kṛ* – “to do.” The description of the cause-effect relationship, by using terminology from the same verb root, indicates the homogeneity of this relationship. In the Advaita school, it is considered to mean

that there is ultimately no ontological difference between the cause and the effect. But it is an observation from the level of absolute reality, absolute truth. From the level of relative truth, we distinguish the state of wakefulness from the state of dreaming and deep sleep. The *kārikā* explains the nature of these states precisely from the level of the empirical world. The first two states are states of mutual relations between cause and effect. The causal state is the state of not capturing reality, while the state of effect is the state of mistaking reality. *Prājña* is the cognitive subject itself. And it is the state of non-recognition, lack of knowledge of reality, therefore it must be negated. The dreaming subject is *prājña*.

*nātmānaṃ na parāṃś caiva na satyaṃ nāpi cāṅṅtam,  
prājñāḥ kiñcana saṃvetti turyaṃ tat sarvadṛk sadā.*

Prājña knows nothing, neither itself nor the other, neither truth nor falsehood, but the turya, the fourth, is all-seeing, ever and always (GK 12).

Prājña is a description of the subject dreaming in the state of *suṣṭipti*. The term *saṃvetti* – “learns,” “apprehends” – is used to describe the cognitive act. In this state, neither oneself, *ātman*, nor anything else that is different from it, is apprehended; that is, neither the truth is recognised – *satyam* (a reference to absolute reality), nor the falsehood – *anṛtam* (a reference to presented reality). The lack of any cognition also means the lack of liberating cognition. Explaining the term *sarvadṛk* – “all-seeing” – Śaṅkara quotes Bṛhadāraṇyaka 4.3.23:

Now, he does not see anything here; but although he does not see, he is quite capable of seeing, for it is impossible for the seer to lose his capacity to see, for it is indestructible. But there is no second reality here that he could see as something distinct and separate from himself.

According to Gaudapāda, we can talk about cognitive acts in the states of *viśva* and *taijasa*, because they capture something external to them, even though the source of these cognitive acts is ignorance. There are no cognitive acts in *prājña*, which is why we say that it is bound by darkness – the lack of ability to recognise. An analysis of the earliest Upaniṣads shows that the first sentence *aham asmī*, uttered by the self-presenting absolute being, is not so much a primary cognitive act as an “emergence” of tools enabling all acts of cognition and action. But even the tools themselves are categories, and categories are restrictions, obscurations. They introduce a mediation between the pure principle of subjectivity and the insight into the essence of reality.

*dvaitasyāgrahaṇaṃ tulyam ubhayoḥ prājñaturyayoḥ  
bījanidrāyutaḥ prājñāḥ sā ca turye na vidyate.*

Prājña is asleep to duality and turya is innocent of it. Like a seed does this sleep of prājña sprout into duality. In turya obtains not this sleep, this seed of duality (GK 13).

The previous *kārikā* juxtaposed *prājñā* with the states of *viśva* and *taijasa*. The common features of the state of wakefulness and dreaming in opposition to the state of deep sleep were pointed out, although in the 13th *kārikā* the common features of *prājñā* and *turiya* are mentioned first. But what can be regarded as common in opposition to the two previous states, is not essentially identical. Here, the common features (*tulya*) of *prājñā* and *turiya* are mentioned first, and on account of these features the above states are contrasted with the dimensions of wakefulness and dreams. What is common is the failure to capture the dual character of reality. This lack of dual cognition is essentially different. In *turiya*, it is a proper insight – *anubhava*, in *prājñā* it is the lack of proper recognition. This lack, or failure to grasp reality as it is, is the seed of sleep. And the state of sleep, as we know, is the domain of ignorance. At this point, the state of sleep should be understood as encompassing the states of wakefulness, dreaming and deep sleep.

Again, it seems that *prājñā* is the potential cognitive act, it is not directed towards external objects, but only towards itself. Therefore, it can lead to non-mediated true cognition – *sat*, but also to an erroneous cognition – *dvaita*. The state caused by the utterance of the sentence *aham asmi* takes the form of *nāmarūpa*, which becomes a seed – *bīja* – of all dualities that are as unreal as a dream – *nidrā*.

*svapnanidrāyutāv ādyau prājñās tv asvapnanidrayā  
na nidrām naiva ca svapnam turye paśyanti niścitāḥ.*

The first two, *viśva* and *taijasa*, are afflicted with dream and sleep; *prājñā* is afflicted with sleep alone, sleep without dream. But those who know truth for certain perceive in the Fourth neither sleep nor dream (GK 14).

Svapna, a state of sleep with dreams, is made up of false images, or misperceptions, like perceiving a snake in a rope. *Nidrā*, the state of deep sleep, is symbolised by darkness, which denotes the lack of perception. Gauḍapāda repeats the same ideas which are already present in the Upaniṣad, but uses different terminology. Instead of *kāraṇa* – “cause” – he uses the word *nidrā* – “sleep” (deep), and instead of *kārya* – “effect” he uses the word *svapna* – sleep (with dreams).

*anyathā grhṇataḥ svapno nidrā tattvam ajānataḥ  
viparyāse tayohḥ kṣiṇe turiyaṃ padam aśnute.*

He who sees truth otherwise than it is, is a victim of dream; he who knows it not is lost in sleep. When the sleeper sheds off his sleep, a delusion, and the dreamer sheds off his dream, equally a delusion, then is attained the state of *turiya*, the Fourth (GK 15).

*Anyathā* is a false recognition of something which is not present in the given place, like the act of recognising a snake in a rope. This type of cognitive error applies to both state of wakefulness and dreaming. Therefore, *svapna* denotes

both the dimension of *viśva* and *taijasa*. *Tattvam ajānata* – “not recognising the true reality”; is a state of consciousness, or rather a kind of inability to capture reality, which occurs in the first three states. *Viparyāsa* refers both to erroneous cognition and to the lack of proper cognition.

All these three acts, three mechanisms: *anyathā*, *tattvam ajānata*, *viparyāsa* are burdened with error – *avidyā*, which, however, takes on different forms. Original ignorance is associated with the dimension of *nidrā*, and therefore it was previously specified by the term *bīja* – “seed” – to indicate that deep sleep is the cause – *kāraṇa* – of all potential cognitive errors. *Svapna*, in turn, is called the result because the erroneous perception is a result of the lack of recognition of reality. So deep sleep is the cause, and dream is the result. These three states are the three different states of the mind, which eventually settle on *turiya*. In the state of *viśva*, consciousness is directed outwards, in *taijasa* inwards, and in the state of *prājñā* it is the undifferentiated consciousness directed towards oneself, as shown by the phrase *aham asmi*. All three states are called *baddha* – “bound,” “conditioned,” and *yuta* – covered, veiled by ignorance.

The word *aśnute* – “attains” – which appears in this *kārikā*, should be interpreted as in the earliest Upaniṣads, i.e. metaphorically. For there is no indication that something new was attained that had not been owned before, but rather that one is recovering the state of *turiya*. For, as the prophets had repeatedly said and the Advaita thinkers repeated after them, one cannot achieve something that is intrinsically one’s own essence.

While comparing the 11th, 14th and 15th *kārikā*, we establish the following scheme:

*kāraṇa* = *nidrā* = *tattvam ajānataḥ*  
*kārya* = *svapna* = *anyathā gñnataḥ*.

The cause is connected with the dimension of *prājñā* – the deep sleep symbolised by darkness. The power of ignorance – *māyā*, *avidyā* – does not design the phenomena of reality; it only masks it, so in this state there is no recognition of reality. As a result of this ignorance, various mechanisms of cognitive errors appear which falsely capture the given phenomena. These mechanisms function both in the state of wakefulness and in the state of sleep with dreams. Among others, it is due to the similarity of these processes that Gauḍapāda likens the state of wakefulness to the state of sleep.

*anādimāyayā supto yadā jīvaḥ prabudhyate*  
*ajam anidram asvapnam advaitaṃ budhyate tadā.*

He who lives, lives ever asleep under the spell of *māyā*, the illusion beginningless. When [the spell is broken and] he comes to be awake, he perceives that which sleeps not, dreams not – the unborn, the nondual (GK 16).

The term *jīva* denotes an individual soul; it is defined as *supta* – “dreaming” – and it is distinguished both in the states of *viśva* and *taijasa*. Anādimāyā – the beginningless *māyā* – has two functions: the lack of recognition and erroneous recognition. It is responsible for the emergence of all phenomena that are expressed in sentences: “I am a father,” “I am a son,” “It is mine,” “I am rich,” “I feel joy.” In his commentary, Śaṅkara emphasises the great role of a teacher who, by pointing to the error, revealing the identity of *ātman* and *jīva*, and uttering the tat *tvām asi*, leads the student to a direct insight. The teacher shows what a pure subject is and that it is different from the nature of both cause and effect. Since *turiya* is *anidrā* and *asvapna*, it is also free from experiencing any phenomena, as well as from misunderstanding them.

According to Gauḍapāda, ignorance conceals the true nature of reality and obscures it with unreal phenomena which it itself projects. Obscuring is more primary than projecting. Gauḍapāda equals these two mechanisms. Śaṅkara, in turn, distinguishes the form of *avidyā* from *māyā*. For him, as we know, *avidyā* is the overlapping of the unreal and the real, while *māyā* is names – *nāma* – and forms – *rūpa*. Thus, *avidyā* are acts, while *māyā* is the content of those acts. Gauḍapāda, however, claims that they are indistinguishable in the state of deep sleep, which is why he fundamentally equals them.

For the first time Gauḍapāda uses the term *aja* – unborn – to describe the state of *turiya*. This term is used in: Bṛhadāraṇyaka 4.4.20., 4.4.22., 4.4.24–25., Muṇḍaka. 2.12., Kauṣītaki 1.2.18., 2.2.1., Bhagavadgītā 2.21., 4.6., 7.25., 10.3.

As just singular must one behold it –  
immeasurable and immovable.

The self is spotless and beyond space,  
unborn, immense, immovable.

Describing *turiya* as unborn – *aya* – causes the following problems. If *turiya* is unborn, unchanging, then it cannot enter the state of *bhava* – “becoming,” and therefore change, death and birth. If *turiya* is unborn and not subject to any changes, how can we talk about the creation of the world? How can anything arise from one if this One is absolutely unchanging? In fact, Gauḍapāda’s answer is that this cannot be logically explained. Also, the Upaniṣad claims it cannot be proved. But the lack of a logical explanation does not imply the denial of the empirical experience of the world. However, this world can only be accepted as present in experience, as an object, a phenomenon.

Based on how Gauḍapāda lists the various concepts of creation and rejects them as impossible to logically justify and reconcile with the theses of *śruti*, it can be assumed that the main challenge comes from the interpretation of two Upaniṣadic concepts: *advaita* and *prapañcōpaśama*. The subsequent *kārikā* attempts to explain them.

*prapañco yadi vidyeta nivarteta na saṁśayaḥ  
māyāmātram idaṁ dvaitaṁ paramārthataḥ.*

If world appearance were really there, it would, no doubt, cease to be. But this duality is a mere appearance; it is, in every truth, the nondual itself (GK 17.)

The word *vidyate* comes from the root *vid* and is translated as: “there, where it is” and “if it exists.” If someone claims that the empirical world exists in reality, then the above thesis can be refuted by demonstrating that the state of *turiya* is the ultimate negation of any reality. However, Gauḍapāda does not refer to the two true dimensions of reality, but to the absolute reality – *advaita* – and he differentiates it from the reality superimposed, which may be compared to illusion. The world exists in the same way as the impression of a snake in a rope, but it remains only an impression – in reality the snake does not exist. If the statement of the *śruti* is true, that existence can only be attributed to the state of *turiya*, then reality described as *prapañca* must cease to manifest. And thus from the level of absolute truth – *parāmārtha*, the state of being does not exist.

*vikalpo vinivarteta kalpito yadi kenacit,  
upadeśād ayaṁ vādo jñāte dvaitam na vidyate.*

False thoughts would indeed cease to be if someone really imagined them. For instruction alone discourse is resorted to. Not that duality survives the dawn of wisdom (GK 18).

Vikalpa is an image, which is, from the definitive perspective, an erroneous cognition. The expression *ayaṁ vāda* – “this type of sentence” – is used when the person explaining and the one to whom it is being explained are marked. In this way, the metaphorical character of the *kārikā*’s first sentence is indicated.

Gauḍapāda states that this which has a beginning must also have an end, and this in itself means that it is not real. The same applies to imaginary things. If something is perceived as imaginary, then upon recognising that it is only imaginary, it disappears and ceases to be real. Various metaphors are used to explain this mechanism, although they cannot precisely describe it, but only indicate how the truth regarding the unreal status of images can be personally experienced. The word *kenacit* – “somebody,” “anybody” – may refer not only to the individual soul – *jīva* – but also to *Īśvara*.

True cognition belongs only to the state of *turīya*, while erroneous cognition is typical for the dimension of *prapañca*. The same applies to the language. And here the problem arises: how could this which is unreal lead to what is real? For this purpose, Advaita usually applies the method of doubt, negation and gradual rejection of what is not absolute reality. At this point, Gauḍapāda evokes the successive stanzas of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad. These verses not only explain the successive states of consciousness (like the previous ones), but also point to the procedure of how to realise the truth. Let us pay attention to the approach, in this context, towards the language.

*so'yaṃ ātmādhyakṣaram oikāro'dhimātram;  
pādā mātrā mātrās ca pādā akāra ukāro makāra iti.*

When considered in terms of a word, its name, this self verily is aum. The word has letters for its constituents [as the self has quarters]. The letters verily are the quarters of the self; the quarters verily are the letters. The letters are a, u, m. (Māṇḍūkya 8).

In the previous stanza of the *kārikā* it was said that the word, the statement is a metaphor which indicates and facilitates the recognition of truth in the personal experience. It is a description of the given reality with basic words. However, the absolute reality, as *śruti* has it and as Gauḍapāda emphasises in his commentary, cannot limit itself to words only.

*jāgaritasthāno vaiśvānaro'kāraḥ prathamā mātrāpter  
ādimmattvād vāpnoti ha vai sarvān kāmān ādīś ca bhavati ya eva veda.*

Vaiśvānara, whose sphere is the waking state, is the letter a, the first quarter, either because it pervades the world as a pervades the entire speech or because it is the first. He who knows this obtains, verily, all desires and becomes, verily, the first. (Māṇḍūkya 9).

It is not a metaphor here that everything is penetrated by the vowel a. Sanskrit is a semisyllabic language and each syllable contains a short a. Therefore, a permeates the entire alphabet. A is identified with *vaiśvanāra*. *Vaiśvanāra* can be understood as the first, because from that level the entire soteriological procedure begins.

If, however, we refer to the orthodox Brahmanical belief constructed in the Brahmanas, regarding the world-creating powers of the word, we will notice that the sound a permeates the entire universe. A is also the first letter of the alphabet, and the utterance of a initiates the process of naming and hence presenting the world. A seems to be the first impulse for the emergence of the realm of being. Similar role, in various images to which *śruti* refers, is performed by desire – *kāma*. *Kāma* is understood here as the most basic cosmogonic factor responsible for the manifestation of the world.

In his commentary on the work of Śaṅkara, Gambhirananda explains that *ātman* in its “gross” (“gross material”) individual body is identical to *ātman* in its “gross” cosmic body called *vaiśvānara* or *virāj*. Similarly, *taijasa* is identical to *hiranyagarbha*, and *prājña* to *avyakta*. In fact they are one, the difference is only in the sphere of manifestation.

*svapnasthānaḥ taijasa ukāro dvitīyā mātrotkarṣād ubhayatvād votkarṣati ha vai jñāna-santatiṃ samānaś ca bhavati nāsyābrahmavit kule bhavati ya eva veda.*

Taijasa, whose sphere is dream, is the second letter u, because it is exalted and because it is intermediate. He who knows this, swells the current of jñāna, knowledge that is abiding in the object, and becomes equal to all. No a-brahmavit, non-knower of the absolute, is ever born in his family. (Māṇḍūkya 10).

Similarly to taijasa surpassing viśva, u surpasses a. And just as taijasa forms the sphere between viśva and *prājña*, the same way in the word aum u lies between a and m. It is a central position, therefore a position of balance.

*suṣuptasthānaḥ prājño makāras tṛtīyā mātrā miter apīter vā minoti ha vā idaṃ sarvam apītis ca bhavati ya evaṃ veda.*

Prajña, whose sphere is sleep, is m, the third letter of aum, either through the root miti, measuring, or through apīti, absorption. He who knows this, measures this all and absorbs this all. (Māṇḍūkya 11).

The Sanskrit word for “measuring,” “measure,” “construct” stems from the root *mā*, the same which the word *māyā* comes from. On the one hand, *māyā* is responsible for measuring, structuring the world. On the other hand, in the state of *prājña*, the activity of projecting phenomena disappears. Still, the interpretation of this stanza is purely linguistic and concerns meditative practice. When the aum mantra is repeated in meditation, the earlier sounds permeate the m and merge into one sound with it. As later descriptions of this kind of yogic procedure demonstrate, *kuṇḍalinī* reaches the trikuṇḍī point, the region above the sixth cakra – *ājñācakra*. One then enters a state of not uttering, of lack of words, a state of silence. Now, Gauḍapāda will interpret the above three stanzas of the Upaniṣad.

*viśvasyāt vavivakṣāyām ādisāmānyam utkaṣam,  
mātrāsampratīpattau syād āptisāmānyam eva ca.*

That *viśva* comes first [among the three states] and also a [among the three letters of *aum*] is reason enough why one would speak of the two in terms of identity. In the cognition of the letter [the cognition that *viśva* is the letter a] will be implicit the cognition that *viśva* is all-pervasive. This similarity between *viśva* and a is also evident enough (GK 19.)

This *kārikā* speaks both about the vision, and inference. The word *sāmānya* means “identity,” “sameness.”

*taijasasyotvavijñāna utkarṣo dṛśyate sphuṭam,  
mātrāsampratipattau syād ubhayatvaṃ tathāvidham.*

When taijasa is known as u, its exaltation is quite in evidence. In the cognition of the letter is also quite in evidence its twofoldness (GK 20.)

The previous stanza spoke about recognising identity between macrocosm and its respective sound in meditation. It mentioned that one desires to announce its identity, by expressing it in words. Taijasa regards a subtler meditative state, therefore there is no expression in words here, no verbalisation; it is an act of seeing and recognising. Taijasa is permeated by *viśva*, just the way m is permeated by a + u, therefore one may say it is in the middle and it is twofold. There are no more disadvantages related to the empirical experience here. It is a state of exaltation, splendour, ecstasy. A state of *udgītha*, where the human and the world permeate *nāda*, the sacred word.

*makārabhāve prājñasya mānasāmānyam utkaṣam,  
mātrāsampratipattau tu layasāmānyam eva ca.*

The similarity of prājña and m as measures is one determining factor in thinking prājña as m. This is evident enough. And in cognising the letter [in cognising prājña as the mute into which the vowel sounds a and u come to get absorbed] is in evidence their similarity as absorbers (GK 21.)

*triṣu dhāmasu yat tulyaṃ sāmānyaṃ vetti niścitaḥ,  
sa pūjyaḥ sarvabhūtānāṃ vandyas caiva mahāmuniḥ.*

Great sage is he, venerable and adorable by all that have come to be, who knows for certain what is common to these states three and what is similar (GK 22).

The similarities between the given quarters (pāda) of *ātman-brahman* and the given sounds of the ultimately soundless Aum were described and explained in the previous *kārikās*. Here, additionally, a very clear parallel of the transformation of reality through meditation is indicated.

*akāro nayate vivat ukāras cāpi taijasam,  
makāras ca punaḥ prājñaṃ nāmātre vidyate gatih.*

A will lead him to viśva, to taijasa will lead him u. And to prājña will lead him m. To the not-lettered [Fourth] no going is there, no reaching (GK 23.)

It seems that the sound m, which – according to the text – is permeated by all others, is in the cosmological order a primary, seed (*bīja*) mantra, which in turn is the source of manifestation and being for the empirical world. The second part of the *kārikā* presents a very important thesis of Advaita. The first three states have both the beginning and the end, and therefore some structures can

be distinguished, together with the mechanisms describing and organising them. That is why we may indicate certain procedures, which lead to the transformation of phenomena functioning within a given limited dimension. In this sense, we can, for example, speak about yoga as a procedure of transforming consciousness, and define which actions limit the functions of the gross body, which concern those of the subtle body, and which deal with the internal organ itself – *citta*. Accordingly, only in that sense may we talk about achieving particular goals with the use of suitable means. At the same time, however, *turiya* is unlimited, all-pervasive, with no beginning and no end, and therefore it cannot come into existence nor cease to exist, because it is pure existence itself. And this is why there is no path leading to it. Because how can one reach something that always existed?

*amātraś caturtho'vyavahāryaḥ prapañcopaśamaḥ śivōdvaita evam onkāra  
ātmaiva samviśaty ātmanātmānaṃ ya evaṃ veda.*

The not-lettered aum is *turiya*, the fourth one, the inarticulable, the coming to rest of world-appearance, the benign and nondual. Thus aum is the self itself. Through the self itself shall he enter the self who knows this. (Māṇḍūkya 12).

This stanza repeats many expressions from the seventh stanza. It keeps mostly those formulations which regard the description of introspective experience. The term *avyavahārya* – “unverifiable” – refers to the description beyond the empirical relations formulated in the categories of *nāmarūpa*. In this context, the term *prapañcopaśama* – “cessation of becoming” – describes the experience of the discontinuation of being, i.e. the final exit from the level of *bhava* into pure existence – *sat*. We notice here an indication of a complete change of cognitive perspective. There are no more returns to the earlier states. If we adopt the concept of “liberated life” – *jīvanmūkta* – then having experienced the state of *turiya*, the yogi always considers all other states of consciousness as not entirely real. This kind of cognition is momentary, just like after a long period of confusion we momentarily recognise the object as rope rather than a serpent. Although for a bystander reality remains unchanged, the one who recognises reality for what it is, will see it differently. For the one who saw the truth, nothing could ever look the same way as it did before this experience.

*onkāraṃ pādaśo vidyāt pādā mātrā na saṃśayaḥ,  
onkāraṃ pādaśo jñātvā na kiñcid api cintayet.*

Aum should be known quarter by quarter, for no doubt is there that quarters are the letters and the letters the quarters. And having known aum quarter by quarter, let not man think of anything whatever (GK 24).

The word *pāda* literally means foot. It refers both to a physical foot, as well as to a foot used as a measure. In the latter case it means one fourth, a quarter. It is a

very common term used in metric measures; in this case it means a specific verse or line in a regular stanza. The ambiguity of this term is evident in the discussed *kārikā*. Individual *pādas* refer both to the subsequent states, as well as the successive sounds. Also, a very detailed, meticulous analysis is given here. The last sentence clearly underlines that, as a result of absolute recognition, everything is recognised. Why ponder and analyse specific phenomena of reality when its absolute dimension is fully recognised?

*yūñjīta praṇave cetaḥ praṇavo brahmanirbhayam,  
praṇave nityayuktasya na bhayaṃ vidyate kvacit.*

Let man mingle his mind with the roaring thunder, with the reverberating aum that is Brahman the fearless itself. For him who lives ever intent on the thunder there shall be no fear anywhere (GK 25.)

We encounter the terms stemming from the root *yuj* (“to yoke,” “to tame,” “to restrain,” “to harmonise”) twice here; it is from this root, of course, that the word *yoga* comes, the name of the meditative procedure aimed at the ultimate transformation of consciousness and attainment of liberation. This *kārikā* refers to technically understood yogic procedure. The mind – the broadly understood intellectual realm, which we may also call empirical consciousness (*cetas*) – is supposed to reach the state where it becomes equally undistracted and harmonised (*yukta*), just as the syllable *aum* after the specific sounds become indistinguishable. We can notice here the parallelism of the simultaneous transformation of the subject, the object and the tools of cognition. In parallel, all the components of the cognitive act reach increasingly subtle levels, becoming more and more homogenous and non-differentiated.

Interestingly, the word *bhaya* – “fear” – appears in this *kārikā*. As the analysis of numerous śruti texts show us (e.g. Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Taittirīya 2.9.), fear appears to be the primary equipment of any existential being. We will elaborate on this subject in the chapter dedicated to *manas*.

*praṇavo hy aparaṇi brahma praṇavaś ca paraḥ smṛtaḥ,  
ap ūrvo'nadtaro'bāhyo'naparaḥ praṇavo'vyayaḥ.*

The thundering word is lower Brahman, the thundering word they remember as the supreme Brahman. The thunder has no before, no after, neither inside [or the other] nor outside; the Thunder is undecaying, is immortal (GK 26.)

Considering these are the words of Gauḍapāda, the founder of Advaita, the total non-duality, this *kārikā* poses basic problems of interpretation. In order to explain this in more detail, let us quote two passages from the Upaniṣads:

When one sees him –  
 both the high and the low;  
 The knot of one's heart is cut,  
 all doubts are dispelled;  
 and his works come to an end.

There are two brahmans to be named: sound and the soundless. The soundless is revealed through sound. The sound is OM. By it one goes out upward and finds cessation in the soundless. This is the bourn, this is immortality, this is union and also ultimate bliss.

Śruti uses beautiful, metaphorical language. Both the old Muṇḍaka and the significantly younger Maitrī describe the state of ultimate emancipation. In the Muṇḍaka, the real insight occurs when one perceives the final nature of reality, both in the higher, absolute and *nirguṇic* dimension – *para* – as well as in its represented, lower form – *apara*. Admittedly, one dimension is seemingly valued higher, since it is called *para*, although it does not mean the represented reality is strongly debased. In the Maitrī Upaniṣad, there is already a clear valuation; similarly for Gauḍapāda. The absolute dimension is attributed only to the absolute reality, which is beyond any judgement, beyond the word – *aśabda*. However, the difference between the Maitrī Upaniṣad and Gauḍapāda's text should be mentioned here. The Upaniṣad speaks about the path leading to liberation, i.e. about achieving a goal, about a process. This path is symbolised by meditation with the use of the OM mantra. Gauḍapāda on the other hand, claims that we cannot talk about a path, since one cannot attain whatever one is in one's essence. Maitrī however, is much closer to the interpretation of Gauḍapāda. Although the latter claims that there is no path leading to Advaita, he also calls the highest state *praṇava* or OM.

But already the second line of the *kārikā*, referring to the description of the higher, absolute dimension, is in line with the spirit of the entire text. The attributes typical to Advaita are named, e.g. *apūrva* – “without a cause,” “not preceded by anything,” *avyaya* – “indestructible,” “remaining constantly the same within its realm,” *anapara* – “without this which comes later,” meaning “producing no results.” The expressions *apūrva* and *anapara* suggest that the concept of *vivarta* (“superimposition”) is presented here, and not the concept of *parinama* – the real transformation. Only in case of the real transformation may we determine the relation between two dimensions in the categories of cause and effect. And as we saw in case of the previous *kārikās*, Gauḍapāda claims that the nature of the cause and effect relations cannot be coherently and logically explained. Therefore, we do not refer to *parinama* but *vivarta* – an erroneous superimposition of the objective reality over the subjective one. Let us now look

at the subsequent definitions of the *turīya* state. Anantara – “without this which is within,” “not directed inwards”; *abāhya* – “without this which is external,” “not directed outwards.” Both descriptions appear also in the Upaniṣad. We may analyse whether they correspond to the concepts of immanence and transcendence in the European philosophical systems. Such an interpretation might be corroborated by the descriptions of the state of *prājña*, where *Īśvara* is supposed to be both external, beyond the souls or *jīvas* i.e. transcendent to them, and all-pervasive when it comes to creatures and phenomena of reality, i.e. immanent to them. The *turīya* state, however, transcends *prājña* – and that also in – as we may say – both the categories of transcendence and immanence.

*sarvasya praṇavo hy ādir madhyam antastathaiva ca,  
evaṃ hi praṇavaṃ jñātvā vyaśnute tadanantaram.*

The roaring thunder is the beginning of all, the middle of all and the end of all. The very moment he knows thus that roar, that thunder, man verily attains that, becomes that roar, that thunder (GK 27.)

A certain contradiction occurs here between this and the previous *kārikā*. The 27th *kārikā* summed up the entire concept of the earlier argument claiming that the *praṇava* involves the empirical level, whose reality only continues to be until it is recognised, i.e. until it is negated by the recognition of the absolute reality. This passage, change of perspective is momentary. Upon it, the yogi becomes everything; therefore, there are no longer any parts, directions, sides, causes nor effects which point to fragmentation and relations. However, when we return to the previous *kārikā*, it indicates that there is no ontological dualism between the absolute and empirical level.

*praṇavaṃ hiśvaraṃ vidyāt sarvasyahṛdi samsthitam,  
sarva-vyāpinam-oṅkāraṃ matvā dhīro na ocali.*

Praṇava verily is the Lord residing in every heart. Let man know this. When the wise man knows the all reverberate with aum, he will have left all his grieving far behind (GK 28.)

We have to remember that the heart – *hṛdāya* – is the abode of not only cognitive, but also sensual and emotional acts. The basic functions of such understood cognitive apparatus are memory and perception.

*amātro'nanta-mātraś ca dvaitasyopaśamaḥ śivalḥ,  
oṅkāro vidīto yena sa munir nataro janaḥ.*

That man alone is a muni, a sage, and no one else, who knows the not-lettered aum, the infinite lettered aum, that cessation of duality, that auspicious (GK 29.)

Oṃ may be experienced as a syllable in which we can distinguish certain sounds, but also as only one sound. The state of *turiya* is symbolised by Oṃ experienced homogeneously, not measured by the sounds represented by letters. In this very *nirguṇic* stanza, a positive term appears: *śiva* – auspiciousness. Yet again, the text presents the idea that despite the fact that this reality exceeds all categories – here described as exceeding all measures (*amātra*) – it is not a state of nothingness. Achieving this state is possible for a sage. In the text, the word used is *muni* – “the taciturn.” Muni is a sage who discovered the truth about reality by himself and did not adopt it from the scriptures. Whatever is silence, not uttered in words, is beyond measure – *amātra*. And this is the message of Advaita: a liberating insight is attained as a result of personally accomplished knowledge.



## 5. *Ātman* – the absolute being as the source and principle of reality

The concept of *ātman* is central to classical Indian thought. It was formed during the entire codification period of the Upaniṣad canon. The word already appears in the earlier layers of *śruti*, and therefore the understanding of the term is not entirely clear. It is usually assumed that it is a derivative from the root *an* – “to breathe,” in which case *ātman* would mean “that which breathes.” From the same core also comes the word *prāṇa* – life-giving breath, the principle of life.<sup>40</sup> It was precisely because *ātman* means “that which breathes,” the term began to be applied to the breathing soul, the individual soul and, universally, the spirit. *Ātman* in its singular form is as a reflexive pronoun for all three persons and all three grammatical genders, and it seems that it is the primary meaning of the word. At first a reflexive pronoun, it was later made abstract and – as we would like to present it – began to denote one’s own soul, and subsequently the soul in general, in order to finally indicate the principle of reality in its subjective aspect, to designate the principle of subjectivity. In his commentary on Kaṭha 4.1., Śankara quotes the etymology of the word *ātman* presented in the *Līṅga Purāṇa*. It refers to *ātman* as all permeating – *ā-pnoti*, all absorbing – *ā-datte*, experiencing the objects of this world – *atti*, and always existing – *san-tataḥ*.<sup>41</sup> We can actually say that the very concept of *ātman* and the explanation of what dimension – or dimensions – of reality it designates is the main topic of the Upaniṣads. Therefore, in this chapter we will not analyse all the passages in which this word appears, as it would imply commenting on the entire canon, but only selected contexts allowing us to show how the concept was formed.

The term *ātman* designates the *principium* of reality – both its source and its principle – mainly in the universal, but also in the individual aspect. In the classical texts of the Vedānta, these two aspects are distinguished – in this case *ātman* designates that which is universal, while what is individual is usually conveyed by the term *jīva*. The latter is a technical term commonly used in the literature of later *darśanas*; in the Upaniṣadic canon we encounter it only a few

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40 It is grammatically possible to assume it is a derivative from *at* – “to move,” followed by the suffix *man*, meaning: “having a feature determined by the root,” in this case, *ātman* would mean “that which has movement, which is active.”

41 *Līṅga Purāṇa* 1.70.69, quoted after: Som Raj Gupta, *The Word Speaks to the Faustian Man*, Vol. I, p. 305.

times. Upaniṣadic texts use a number of different terms denoting the subject, often compounds defining the concept of *ātman* to indicate its various functions, already operating at the level of presented reality.

In the oldest layers of *śruti* the concepts of *ātman* and *prāṇa* overlap. In the period of the *Brāhmaṇas*, attempts were made to find relations between individual elements of the macro- and microcosm. For example, the relations between the sun and the eye or between wind and breath were pointed out. The sun was understood as a symbol of luminous, fiery elements. So one element, for example the sun, was enough to encompass all the elements of a given class. Such an element, which indicated both itself and other elements belonging to the class, was called *bandhu*. After the relationships between the individual elements of the macro- and microcosm were established, a concept broad enough in scope, with broad enough *bandhu* was sought, that it could encompass, for example, the functions of all the senses. In this sense, *prāṇa* – the life-giving breath – was first indicated as a condition for the functioning of all the senses, to later show that even *prāṇa* is conditioned by a still more fundamental principle. This principle began to be called *ātman*, sometimes with an additional definition. In the Upaniṣads the description of this process appears in several places; let us quote one of these passages, the most concise one:

Once these deities, each arguing for its own pre-eminence, departed from this body. When that happened, the body lay there like a log, without breathing, and withered.

Then speech entered the body, but, although it spoke with its speech, it still remained there lying prostrate.

After that, sight entered the body, but, although it spoke with its speech and saw with its sight, it still remained there lying prostrate.

After that, hearing entered the body, but, although it spoke with its speech, saw with its sight, and heard with its hearing, it still remained there lying prostrate.

After that, the mind entered the body, but, although it spoke with its speech, saw with its sight, heard with its hearing, and thought with its mind, it still remained there lying prostrate.

Finally, the breath entered the body, and straightway it got up.

After all these deities had recognized the pre-eminence of breath and united themselves with that very breath, which is the selfconsisting of intelligence, they all departed together from this body, and, entering the wind and with space as their self (*ātman*) went to heaven.

In exactly the same way, a person who knows this, after he has recognized the pre-eminence of breath and united himself with that very breath, which is the self-consisting of intelligence, departs from this body accompanied by all these, and, entering the wind and with space as their self, goes to heaven. He goes to where these gods are. And because these gods are immortal, upon reaching there a man who knows this becomes immortal. (Kauṣītaki 2.13.)

This passage not only indicates the advantage of *prāṇa* over the other senses – deities – but also emphasises that its importance is attributed to it actually being an *ātman* of wisdom; *prāṇa* is *prajñātman*. We can see here a clear transition from the ritualistically oriented era of the *Brāhmaṇas*, where the main emphasis was placed on the descriptions of the mechanisms according to which the world functions, to the fundamental message of the Upaniṣads in which the knowledge of these mechanisms becomes the most important. Therefore the main characteristic of *ātman* is *prājñā* – wisdom. In many places of the Upaniṣads, it is explicitly said that the entire reality emerges from *ātman*, including of course the life-giving breath as the core of a living being:

The lifebreath here arises from the self (*ātman*).  
 As this shadow here, upon a man,  
 So this mind is stretched upon lifebreath;  
 And it enters by a path created by the mind<sup>42</sup>

Let us focus on the rituals for a while. In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (1.3.1–28), we find a parable on how the deities (*deva*) and demons (*asura*) fight for control over the world. The deities decide to defeat their opponents with a ritual chant – *udgītha*. They call upon each sense in turn to worship them with a chant. But these activities are constantly interrupted by demons who do not allow this ritual to reach its full perfection. After speech, smell, the eyes, the ears, sight and the mind fail, breath comes into play and precisely because it knows how to act, it defeats the demons. This knowledge is the knowledge of *ātman*: “When someone knows this, he himself will prosper, while a rival who hates him will come to ruin.” Many passages of *śruti* point to the difference between the ritualism of the *Brāhmaṇas* and the knowledge of the Upaniṣads. The Brahmanical priests, while performing sacrificial ceremonies, focused on certain parts of reality, without seeing its entirety and the principle that determines it. The condition and the source of everything turns out to be *ātman*. In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad (5.11–24) we find another story of the great Brahmanical priests arriving at Aśvapati Kaikeya, asking for an explanation of the nature of *ātman* and *brahman*. They ask: *ko na ātmā kiṃ brahma* – “who is our *ātman*, what is *brahman*?” Having completed all the formal ceremonies of accepting them as students, Aśvapati asks each of them what they worship as *ātman*. The answers include: the sky, sun, wind, waters and earth. After hearing all the explanations, Aśvapati clarifies that

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42 Praśna Up. 3.3.: *ātmana eṣa prāṇo jāyate, yathaiṣā puruṣe chāyaitasminn etad ātataṃ manokṛtenāyaty asmiñ śarīre.*

each of them worships only part of reality without realising that in this way they adore the pan-reality called *ātman vaiśvānara* – “*ātman* common to all.” What is crucial to this story is that even if one performs certain activities in a correct manner, but one does not know their full meaning, they do not bring all the expected results.

If someone were to offer the daily fire sacrifice without knowing this, it would be as if he had removed the burning embers and made his offering on the ashes. If, on the other hand, someone were to offer the daily fire sacrifice with this knowledge, that offering of his is made within all the worlds, all the beings, and all the selves.

When someone offers the daily fire sacrifice with this knowledge, all the bad things in him are burnt up like the tip of a reed stuck into a fire.<sup>43</sup>

This passage not only points to the importance of knowledge, but also emphasises the individual responsibility of the one who performs a given activity, even if it is set in a ritualistic context. The general principle of sacrifices during the Brāhmaṇa period was that only Brahmin priests could perform them. Representatives of other *varṇa*, especially the Kṣatriya who were obliged to carry out ritual acts, had to delegate them to those entitled to perform them. Therefore, in addition to the person(s) performing the sacrificial ceremony, the patron also played an active role in it. A properly celebrated Vedic sacrifice was *sukṛta* when it was an exact replica of the original ritual. The merit of such a sacrifice was not earned by the sacrificer, but by the person in whose intention it was performed. It was therefore a kind of transfer of merit, and no strict individual responsibility for the good or bad performance of a given activity was recognised. During the Upaniṣadic period, the situation began to change. The subject is defined, it is *ātman*, who, acting intentionally, receives a reward or punishment for his actions. And then everyone who performs a given action while knowing its meaning, performs it properly. The priest sacrificer is expected not only to have the knowledge and skill to execute the ritual in detail, but also the understanding of its secret meaning:

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43 Chāndogya Up. 5.24: *sa ya idam avidvān agnihotraṃ juhōti yathāṅgārān apohya bhasmani juhuyāt tādṛk tat syāt.*

*atha ya etodevaṃ vidvān agnihotraṃ juhōti tasya sarveṣu lokeṣu sarveṣu bhūteṣu sarveṣv ātmasu hutam bhavati.*

*tad yatheṣīkātūlam agnau protam pradūyetaivaṃ hāsya sarve pāpmanaḥ pradūyante ya etad evaṃ vidvān agninahotraṃ juhōti.*

An Udgātṛ priest who has this knowledge is able to procure by his singing whatever he desires, either for himself or for the patron of the sacrifice. Now this is true world conquest.<sup>44</sup>

This broadening of the meaning and operation of the Vedic sacrifice, which can be observed in successive layers of the *śruti* texts, is confirmed by one of the latest Upaniṣads of the canon – Maitrī. The perfect Vedic sacrifice – *sukṛta* – becomes complete and flawless when it is known that the condition of everything, including the ritual, is *ātman*.

The fire-building of the ancients was a sacrifice of *brahman*; so, after building the fires, the patron of the sacrifice should meditate on the self. Then the sacrifice becomes full and complete. Who is the one that should be meditated upon? The one called 'breath.'<sup>45</sup>

The formation of the idea of *ātman* generally consisted of two levels. One of them pointed to *ātman* as the source and principle of everything, including the understanding of the objective aspect of reality; then the term is actually fully interchangeable with the term *brahman*.

As a spider sends forth its thread, and as tiny sparks spring forth from a fire, so indeed do all the vital functions (*prāṇa*), all the worlds, all the gods, and all beings spring from this self (*ātman*).<sup>46</sup>

The understanding of *ātman* as a universal principle has been, from the time of the Upaniṣads, completely self-evident in all of the Brahmanical thought, and the passages of the Upaniṣads that define it as such do not require additional commentary. Much more ambiguity is present in those passages which focus on *ātman* as the principle of subjectivity. And here the problem of how to distinguish the very principle of subjectivity from the individual experiential subject arises. However, one may also ask how a transition is made from the term *ātman* being treated primarily as a pronoun, to its indication of the universal principle of subjectivity. In a very pictorial way, this transition is shown by a beautiful parable found in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. We will analyse a longer fragment in more

44 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.3.28: *sa eṣa evaṇivid udgātātmane vā yajamānāya vā yaṃ kāmam kāmāyate tam āgāyati.*

45 Maitrī Up. 1.1.: *brahma-yajño vā eṣa yat pūrveṣāṃ cayanam, tasmād yajamānas citvaitān agnīn ātmānam abhidhyāyet, sa pūrṇaḥ khalu vā addhāvikalāḥ sampadyate yajñāḥ, kaḥ so'bhidhyeyo'yaṃ yaḥ prāṇākhyāḥ.*

46 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 2.1.20.: *sa yathorṇanābhīstantunoccaret yathāgneḥ kṣudrā viṣphuliṅgā vyuccaranti evamevāsmādātmanaḥ sarve prāṇāḥ sarve lokāḥ sarve devāḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni vyuccaranti.*

detail in the further part of this chapter. Apart from examining the very concept of *ātman*, we would like to draw your attention to the method of describing and approaching the principle of reality, which was used by the Upaniṣadic bard. The procedure of rejecting the external dimensions of reality, designated by the same term – *ātman*, to reach the level conditioning everything else, in some aspects resembles the phenomenological method. Of course, Husserl himself would be outraged at such a statement, but certain comparisons may well be justified, as we will attempt to demonstrate.

However, when making such comparisons one should also point out the difference between the Upaniṣads and the works of Husserl. First of all, they are based on a radically different main methodological assumption. According to Husserl, one approaches consciousness as a phenomenological residuum without defining the point of arrival; at the beginning of the journey its destination is not defined. At the same time in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, it is Indra, led by Prajāpati, who possesses all the knowledge on the subject, that reaches the dimension of primary reality, because it was Prajāpati who provided the definition of the reality that really exists. While Husserl calls for examination without any preliminary assumptions, in the Upaniṣads, as well as in all the Brahmanical *darśana*, and especially in Advaita, this assumption, namely the existence of only *sat*, pure consciousness, is adopted openly: the point of arrival is clearly defined at the very beginning of the process and determines the entire examination process. Despite these differences, however, there is a great similarity in the very method of examining phenomena experienced by consciousness.

To begin with, let us just outline in a few words the context of the conversation we are discussing. The lord of all creatures – Prajāpati – described the highest reality, which is the source of the entire universe and the goal of all human aspirations and actions:

‘The self (*ātman*) that is free from evils, free from old age and death, free from sorrow, free from hunger and thirst; the self whose desires and intentions are real – that is the self that you should try to discover, that is the self that you should seek to perceive. When someone discovers that self and perceives it, he obtains all the worlds, and all his desires are fulfilled.’ So said Prajāpati.<sup>47</sup>

Everyone heard these words, therefore both gods and demons, still fighting for the primacy over the world, sent their representatives to be taught by Prajāpati.

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47 Chāndogya Up. 8.7.1.: *ya ātmāpahatapāpmā vijaro vimṛtyur viśoko vijighatso’pipāśaḥ satyakāmaḥ satyasaṃkalpaḥ so’nveṣṭvyaḥ sa vijajñāsītavyaḥ. sa sarvāṃś ca lokān āpnoti sarvāṃś ca kāmān yas tam ātmānam anuvidya vijānātīti ha prajāpatir uvāca.*

Here the text takes the form of a mythical story. The audience was intrigued by the part of the speech that dealt with the possibility of defeating the opponent, and thus ruling the world. Therefore, Indra, the envoy of the gods, and Virocana, the representative of the demons, lived in their master's house for thirty-two years, expecting to be taught. When the initial stage of learning was over, Prajāpati gave the first explanation. It satisfied Virocana, but Indra, initially pleased, immediately returned asking for a more detailed explanation. After another thirty-two years, the situation repeated, and he returned to stay for the next thirty-two years. The next time, however, the envoy of the gods spent only five years with Prajāpati and finally received in-depth instruction.

As we are about to present, more important than the theoretical knowledge that Indra received after 101 years of learning is the description of the path, the methods that lead to acquiring knowledge and its personal experience. For Prajāpati, in his “announcement,” described what is gained through the knowledge itself, but did not publicly announce how to obtain it.

What conclusions can be drawn from the initial definition of reality which, according to Prajāpati, should be the goal of every individual? Ātman is defined here as pure consciousness. As we learn from the analysis of the above text and other passages of the Upaniṣads, *ātman-brahman* is not only described as a conscious being, but is pure consciousness. Consciousness, as pure subjectivity – *ātman* – is also a pure, self-contained, authentic being – *brahman*. Therefore, it is the basis of that which recognises, as well as the basis of that which is being recognised. Here we will see how this reality manifests itself through successive layers of consciousness. The first level of explanation of what *ātman* is was presented by Prajāpati after the first thirty-two years of learning.

‘This person that one sees here in the eye – that is the self (*ātman*); that is the immortal; that is the one free from fear; that is *brahman*.’

‘But then, sir, who is the one that’s seen here in the water and here in the mirror?’

‘It is the same one who is seen in all these surfaces,’ replied Prajāpati.<sup>48</sup>

‘Look at yourselves (*ātman*) in a pan of water. And let me know if there is anything you do not perceive about yourselves.’ So they looked into a pan of water. Prajāpati asked them: ‘What do you see?’

And they replied: ‘Sir, we see here our entire body (*ātman*), a perfect likeness down to the very hairs of the body, down to the finger nails.’

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48 Chāndogya Up. 8.7.4.: *ya eṣo’kṣiṇi puruṣo dṛśyata eṣa ātmeti hovācītaḥ amṛtam abhayam etad brahmety atha yo’yaṃ bhagavo’psu parikhyāyate yaś cāyam ādarśe katama eṣa iti eṣa u evaiṣu sarveṣvanteṣu parikhyāyata iti hovāca.*

Prajāpati told them then: ‘Adorn yourself beautifully, dress well, and spruce yourself up, and then look into a pan of water.’ Prajāpati asked them: ‘What do you see?’

And they replied: ‘Sir, as the two of us are beautifully adorned, well dressed, and all spruced up, in exactly the same way are these, sir, beautifully adorned, well dressed, and all spruced up.’

‘That is the self (*ātman*); that is immortal; that is the one free from fear; that is *brahman*,’ Prajāpati told them. And the two of them left with contented hearts.<sup>49</sup>

The text is a play on words. The word *ātman* functions here both as a basic element of the microcosm and as a pronoun indicating “self.” We also see here those uses of the term, which sometimes designate the psychophysical entirety of the cognitive subject, hence including his body. Furthermore, the word *puruṣa* works ambiguously. It means a man, in the common sense a male, as well as a basic cosmogonic existence. As a result of *puruṣa* splitting (as the Vedic hymns teach us) and sacrificing himself to himself, the whole perceived world emerged. Referring to the ambiguity of these terms, Prajāpati explains to his disciples that the *ātman* they are looking for is themselves. Depending on whether they are beautifully adorned or not, their reflection (being themselves) will or will not be beautifully adorned. That which is reflected is the world, the empirical reality, which is primarily correlated with the states of wakefulness and perception through the senses. In his first teachings, Prajāpati limits cognition to sensual cognition only. And a reflection understood in this way can be pleasant or unpleasant for the recipient.<sup>50</sup> This explanation satisfies Virocana, the representative of the demons,

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49 Chāndogya Up. 8.8.1–3.: *udaśarāva ātmānam avekṣya yad ātmano na vijānīthas tan me prabrūtam iti tau hodaśarāve’vekṣāṃ cakrāte tau ha prajāpatir uvāca kiṃ paśyatha iti tau hocatuḥ sarvam evedam āvāṃ bhagava ātmānaṃ paśyāva ā lomabhyaḥ ā nakhebhyaḥ patirūpam iti.*

*tau ha prajāpatir uvāca sādhhvalaṅkṛtau suvasanau suvasanāu pariṣkṛtau bhūtvoidaśarāve’vekṣethām iti tau ha sādhhvalaṅkṛtau suvasanau pariṣkṛtau bhūtvoidaśarāve’vekṣāṃ cakrāte tau ha prajāpatir uvāca kiṃ paśyatha iti.*

*tau hocatur yathaivedam āvāṃ bhagavaḥ sādhhvalaṅkṛtau suvasanau pariṣkṛtau sva evam evemau bhagavaḥ sādhhvalaṅkṛtau suvasanau pariṣkṛtāv ity eṣa ātmeti hovācaitad amṛtam abhayam etad brahmeti tau ha śāntaḥṛdayau pravavrajatuḥ.*

50 “The whole *spatiotemporal* world, which includes human being and the human Ego as subordinate single realities is, according to its sense, a merely intentional being, thus one has the merely secondary sense of a being for a consciousness. It is a being posited by consciousness in its experiences which, of essential necessity, can be determined and intuited only as something identical belonging to motivated multiplicities of appearances: *beyond that it is nothing.*” E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure*

but Indra, on his way home, notices some inaccuracies and challenges in such a description of the world. Can a reality such as *ātman-brahman*, by definition an unchanging, self-contained, pure consciousness, be true if its image can be so easily influenced by secondary factors such as external appearance? He decides to return to Prajāpati.

Indra clarifies that Prajāpati's explanation does not satisfy him because it does not correspond to his initial description of *ātman-brahman* as an autonomous reality. It follows from the definition that the reality "autonomous in being" is an unchangeable reality, where all terms are immanent to its nature. Therefore, one should look for unconditioned reality, reducible only to itself. What we perceive, ourselves, our whole environment, that is, what we call the real world, can very easily be changing from one time to another. The reality given in experience, and that too in experience limited to sensory perception, depends on things as incidental as clothing, adornment or a different point of view. It cannot be *ātman* itself, pure consciousness, but some kind of equivalent of a particular kind of consciousness, a noema, if we wanted to use Husserl's terminology.

Such an approach suits Virocana, who symbolises not only the unaware, but also those who do not even strive to acquire true knowledge of reality. For him, what is presented to the consciousness, the phenomenon itself, grows to the rank of an autonomous being. And at the same time, without verifying the reality of this noema, he considers it the only real being. Indra approaches this problem differently. On the one hand, he does not settle the question of whether this particular type of consciousness is real, and this question is suspended in a sense, or put in parentheses. Instead, he asks about the conditions of its manifestation. He seeks further and deeper. Two people approach the same situation with two different attitudes. Virocana accepts as truth what he naturally, and "thoughtlessly," experiences. Indra begins with an analysis of the same experience, but after a while he reviews it critically and turns to absolute, pure consciousness.<sup>51</sup>

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*phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten, Vol. I, II.49.93, p. 112.

51 A *peculiar kind of apprehending or experiencing*, a peculiar kind of "apperception," effects the production of this so-called "annexation," this reification [*Realisierung*] of consciousness. Regardless of that whereof this apperception consists, or of what particular kind of demonstration it may demand, this much is obvious: Consciousness itself, in these apperceptive involvements or in this psychophysical relationship to something corporeal, loses none of its own essence and can take up into itself nothing alien to its essence; indeed, that would be a countersense. Corporeal being is essentially a being which appears, which becomes presented by virtue of sensuous adumbration. Consciousness is perceived as part of Nature [*naturhaft apperzierte Bewußtsein*], the

Indra noticed that Prajāpati's first explanation concerns only the image, the manifestation of an absolute being, and not itself, and therefore he returned for further teachings. After the next thirty-two years he received the following answer:

‘The one who goes happily about in a dream – that is the self; that is the immortal; that is the one free from fear; that is *brahman*.’

Indra then left, his heart content. But even before he had reached the gods, he saw this danger: ‘It is true that this self does not become blind when this body becomes blind, or lame when the body becomes lame. This self is clearly unaffected by the faults of the body – it is not killed when this body is slain or rendered lame when this body becomes lame. Nevertheless, people do in a way kill it and chase after it; it does in a way experience unpleasant things; and in a way it even cries. I see nothing worthwhile in this.’<sup>52</sup>

Indra, while searching for the fulfilment of *ātman-brahman* experience, keeps his gaze permanently fixed on the sphere of consciousness and examines what is immanent to consciousness. Firstly, he systematically analyses the nature of successive phenomena of consciousness. Then he contrasts the results of these analyses with the definition of *ātman-brahman* which he obtained at the very beginning from Prajāpati. The second step in Chāndogya seems like a modification of the first. In dreams, the impressions come from consciousness, but they are mere traces of experience from a natural attitude and are analysed in a similar manner as before. In the “natural” attitude, we are dealing with acts that are alternately directed immanently, inwardly and transcendently, taking the form of “independent” figures. This distinction applies to the first two levels in Chāndogya, although it is most obvious in the first instance. And from the initial

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stream of consciousness given as a stream of human or brute consciousness, naturally does not become, by means of that apperception, something which appears by virtue of adumbration.” E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten, Vol. I, II.53.104, p. 125; “Let us make clear to ourselves how consciousness, so to speak, can enter into the real world, how that which in itself is absolute can relinquish its immanence and take on the characteristic of transcendence.” E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*, Vol. I, II.53.103, p. 124.

- 52 Chāndogya Up. 8 10.1–2.: *ya eṣa svapne mahīyamānaś caratyēṣa ātmeti hovācītaḍ amṛtam abhayam etad brahmeti sa ha śāntaḥḍdayaḥ pravavrāja sa hāprāpyaiva devān etad bhayaṇḍ dadarśa tad yady apīdaṃ śarīram andhaṃ bhavaty anandhaḥ sa bhavati yadi srāmam asrāmo naivaiṣoṣya doṣeṇa duṣyati.*

*na vadhenāsyā hanyate nāsyā srāmyeṇa srāmo ghnanti tv evainaṇ vicchādayantīvāpriyavetteva bhaty api roditīva nāham atra bhogyaṇḍ paśyāmīti.*

definition it follows that ultimately what is transcendent becomes immanent. Indra searches for a level of reality which would condition all activity, while remaining unchanged. He returns once again and after another thirty-two years receives such explanation:

‘When one is fast asleep, totally collected and serene, and sees no dreams – that is the self; that is the immortal; that is the one free from fear; that is *brahman*.’

Indra then left, his heart content. But even before he had reached the gods, he saw this danger: ‘But this self as just explained, you see, does not perceive itself fully as, “I am this”; it does not even know any of these beings here. It has become completely annihilated. I see nothing worthwhile in this.’<sup>53</sup>

In his search for the experience of *ātman-brahman*, Indra penetrates the ever deeper layers of the absolute reality which manifests itself. Permeating deeper and deeper into the very essence of reality, he simultaneously reaches the essence of himself. The cognitive procedure understood in this way becomes a method of self-cognition. This results very clearly from the Upaniṣads, because precisely in these texts, for the first time in the Indian tradition, it is clearly shown that *ātman* is after all “the self;” learning about *ātman* is learning about yourself, your deepest essence. By rejecting the subsequent levels of the world’s manifestation, and this, after all, means the subsequent levels of the manifestation of consciousness, we reach the inside, our inner space. The Upaniṣads define it as the deepest space within the heart, this which is the most hidden and which allows everything to manifest itself. Consciousness exists in its own space; it establishes itself. According to the Upaniṣads, the nature of the *ātman-brahman* consciousness which is the basic element of both the macro- and the microcosm, is intentionality. According to Husserl, it becomes an autonomous world with its own characteristics and qualities. If its nature is intentionality, then it must be directed either at the correlates of its own experience or at itself. And when we analyse consciousness in this way, then the third state about which we only know that it occurred and that the natural features of consciousness disappear within, seems to Indra to be nothing, emptiness.

What could emptiness mean in this context? This is not the *śūnyatā* of the Buddhist *Madhyamaka* system, which is the ultimate way of judging reality,

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53 Chāndogya Up. 8. 11.1.: *tad yatrāitāt suptāḥ samastāḥ samprasannaḥ svapnaḥ na vijānāty eṣa ātmeti hovācāitād amṛtam abhayam etad brahmeti sa ha śāntaḥṛdayaḥ pravavrāja sa hāprāpyaiva devān etad bhayaḥ dadarśa nāha khalv ayam evaṁ saṁpraty ātmānaḥ jānāty ayam ahaṁ asmīti no evemāni bhūtāni vināśam evāpīto bhavati nāham atra bhogyaḥ paśyāmīti.*

since Indra does not remain at this level and by saying that he cannot find “anything good” in this state either, he returns to Prajāpati. The third state, identified here as the state of deep sleep, is only a memory of the fact that it occurred. Having woken up, there is not much more to say about it other than it happened, that one slept well or badly, but it contains no impressions. Upon awakening, i.e. upon breaking this state, there is only the memory of the past. So, on the one hand, there is a strongly emphasised continuity of consciousness, but there is only an impression of the past.

In the discussed Upaniṣad, there is a clear evaluation of the individual layers through which awareness is manifested. The first three, after Indra’s thorough examination of their essence, turn out to be “nothing good,” i.e. not self-contained, because they are conditioned at a deeper level. The deepest level is by its nature an eternal “now,” an eternal, unconditioned present. Whereas the consciousness of the third level is intentionally directed only at the memory of this noema, and thus deprived of something, it is empty into the eternal present.<sup>54</sup> It is a kind of a retention modification, and not an original presenting consciousness.

*Ātman* exists on every level, but sometimes it is “soiled” or “overshadowed” by its manifestations. Similarly, the “Self” seems to be constantly or even necessarily present.<sup>55</sup> The third state, though devoid of the “soiling,” seems empty to Indra, which does not constitute its absolute value. Indra searches for a state in which the properties of an authentic existence are immanently vested. These are not supposed to be correlates of consciousness, manifesting themselves first as things and then as impressions and memories.<sup>56</sup>

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54 “By this we do not mean to say that memorial consciousness has no competence of its own: only that it is not a “seeing” consciousness.” E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*, Vol. I, IV.136.282, p. 326.

55 “Instead, the Ego belongs to each coming and going mental process; its “regard” is directed “through” each actional cogito to the objective something.” E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*, Vol. I, II.57.109, p. 132.

56 “In itself every mental process is a flux of becoming, is what it is in a *generation originaliter* of an invariant essential type; it is a continuous flow of retentions and protentions mediated by a flowing phase of originality itself in which there is consciousness of the living now of the mental process in contradistinction to its “before” and “after.” E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*, Vol. I, III.78.149, p. 179.

For the fourth time Indra goes to Prajāpati to experience this originality. This time, having studied for only five years, he receives the following explanation:

‘This body, Maghavan, is mortal; it is in the grip of death. So, it is the abode of this immortal and non-bodily self. One who has a body is in the grip of joy and sorrow, and there is no freedom from joy and sorrow for one who has a body. Joy and sorrow, however, do not affect one who has no body.

‘The wind is without a body, and so are the rain-cloud, lightning and thunder. These are without bodies. Now, as these, after they rise up from the space up above and reach the highest light, emerge in their own true appearance, in the very same way, this deeply serene one, after he rises up from this body and reaches the highest light, emerges in his own true appearance. He is the highest person. He roams about there, laughing, playing and enjoying himself with women, carriages, or relatives, without remembering the appendage that is this body.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, the fourth state of consciousness is presented by the discussed Upaniṣad in a positive way. Both in Chāndogya and in the previously mentioned Māṇḍūkya, we find an analysis of the four states of consciousness and the correlated states of reality. The difference between the texts of these two Upaniṣads actually refers to the definition of the fourth state, namely the state of *turiya*. Māṇḍūkya’s interpretation is radically *nirguṇic*, this trend being continued by Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara. In the text of Chāndogya, there are terms defining the state of *turiya* that are also acceptable to the *saguṇic* Vedānta schools. After all, it is described as not only unchangeable in its essence, eternal, immortal, full of luminous energy, and truthfulness, but also bliss.<sup>58</sup> And we know that

57 Chāndogya Up. 8. 12.1–3: *maghavan martyaṃ vā idaṃ śarīram ātmaṃ mṛtyunā tad asyā mṛtasyāśarīrasyātmanoḍhiṣṭhānam ātto vai saśarīraḥ priyāpriyābhyaṃ na vai saśarīrasya sataḥ priyāpriyayor apahatir asty aśarīraṃ vāva santaṃ na priyāpriye spṛśataḥ.*

*aśarīro vāyur abhayaṃ Vidyut stanayitnur aśarīrāny enāni tad yathaitāny amuṣmāḍ ākāśāt samutthāya paraṃ jyotir upasampadya svena rūpeṇābhiniṣpadyante.*

*evam evaiṣa samprasādoṣmāc charīrāt samsutthāya paraṃ jyotir upasampadya svena rūpeṇābhiniṣpadyate sa uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ sa tatra paryeti jakṣat kriḍan ramamāṇaḥ strībhir vā yānair vā jñātibhir vā nopajanaṃ smarann idaṃ śarītaṃ sa yathā prayogyā ācaraṇe yukta evam evāyam asmiñ charīre prāṇo yuktaḥ.*

58 “The realm of transcendental consciousness as the realm of what is, in a determined sense, “absolute” being, has been provided to us by the phenomenological reduction. It is the primal category of all being (or, in our terminology, the primal region), the one in which all other regions of being are rooted, to which, according to their *essence*, they are relative and on which they are therefore all essentially dependent.” E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*, Vol. I, III.76.142, p. 171.

the different understanding of the status of bliss – *ānanada* – was, among other things, the subject of debate among the Vedāntins. In Chāndogya, Indra searches for the reality through experience of which he is to achieve all the worlds and the fulfilment of all desires, that is, a state of bliss. By examining the successive layers of manifestation of reality, he reaches the very source. Such an understanding of the *turiya* state is consistent with the entire text of this Upaniṣad.

On the basis of Chāndogya we traced the formation of the term *ātman*. But we have also made a phenomenological study of the “object,” of the designation of this concept. We began our deliberations in this part of the chapter by formulating a definition, what is the purpose of our considerations and what descriptions are assigned to it by definition. These descriptions have brought us to the specifics of the object under examination. *Ātman* is both consciousness and reason, cognition and pure subject. The pure “I” that can manifest itself at the different levels of consciousness. If this is what makes everything possible, then it must be the condition for the world to manifest itself, and therefore it will be a residuum of consciousness, a primeval, pure consciousness. And from the entire reading of the Upaniṣads we know that *ātman* is *brahman*, that is, the *principium* of subjectivity is identical to the *principium* of objectivity.

The whole process, so beautifully described in Chāndogya, which is at the same time a process of self-cognition, shows that, by grasping the source consciousness, we learn what makes the subsequent correlates manifest or emerge from it, presenting themselves as different levels of reality. So by learning the exact mechanisms of the world’s manifestation, we can control these mechanisms and thus conquer the worlds. This message becomes not only one of the main messages of the Upaniṣads, but it is actually adopted by all Brahmanical thought. At all levels of reality manifesting itself there exists *ātman*, a self-conscious, “alert” I, “(...) which, within its stream of mental processes, continuously affects consciousness in the specific form of the cogito. (. . .). It is of the essence of a waking Ego’s stream of mental processes that the continuously unbroken chain of cogitationes is continually surrounded by a medium of non-actionality which is always ready to change into the mode of actionality.”<sup>59</sup>

The above analysed passage from Chāndogya illustrates one of the ways in which the concept of *ātman* is shaped in the Upaniṣads. From understanding the term as a pronoun indicating and designating a particular psychophysical subject, there has been a shift to understanding it as a *principium* of reality, as a universal dimension. What remains unresolved – only in terms of terminology – is

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59 Ibid., Vol. I, II.35.64, pp. 72 ff.

the problem of distinguishing the very principle of subjectivity from a particular subject. The same term was used to describe these two dimensions.

‘This intelligent self, namely the Person – who is really the one who sees, feels, hears, smells, tastes, thinks, understands, and acts – rests on the highest, that is, the imperishable self.’<sup>60</sup>

One way to distinguish these dimensions is to define the absolute dimension as *parātman* – the highest *ātman*. The term *parātman* means (among many other derived meanings) something higher, more magnificent, but also something different. Especially the latter term points to something different than that which is given in experience. And in this way, we can read the oppositions: *parabrahman* – *aparabrahman* (higher and lower *brahman*), *parārtha* – *samvṛtti*, *vyavahāra* (the highest reality and the presented or empirical reality) as distinguishing the absolute level, inaccessible to experience, from the dimension of empirical, objective reality. The compound *parātman* should be understood similarly. At the level of presented reality, the ways in which *ātman* operates are indicated; the specific use of given functions distinguishes individual subjects from each other. The operating subject uses the external senses in his activity, and is therefore called *vijñānātman* – the cognitive one, the one whose nature is cognition. Also, the term *puruṣa*, appears here, which Śaṅkara<sup>61</sup> in his commentary explains as this which fills – *pūrṇatvāt* – the entire body; its immanent character is indicated here. Thus, the analysis of this short fragment shows that *ātman* is both transcendent – *para* – and immanent – *puruṣa*.

In the so-called middle-period, Upaniṣads, which include the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, the transcendent as well as the immanent character is also attributed to the *puruṣa* and then, similarly to *ātman*, the *puruṣa* is at the same time the source of everything and it manifests itself in every conscious embodiment. This shall be elaborated in a separate chapter, but let us point out a few characteristic descriptions here:

But those in the wilderness, calm and wise,  
 who live a life of penance and faith,  
 as they beg their food;  
 Through the sun’s door they go, spotless,  
 to where that immortal Person is,

60 Praśna Up. 4.9.: *eṣa hi draṣṭā spraṣṭā śrotā ghrātā rasayitā mantā boddhā kartā vijñānātamaṁ puruṣaḥ sa pare’kṣara ātmani sampratiṣṭhate.*

61 Som Raj Gupta, *The Word Speaks to the Faustian Man*, Vol. I, p. 408.

that immutable self.<sup>62</sup>  
 That Person, indeed, is divine,  
 he has no visible form;  
 He is both within and without,  
 unborn, without breath or mind;  
 He is radiant, and farther than  
 the farthest imperishable.  
 From him issue breath and mind,  
 and all the organs,  
 wind, fire, water, and space.  
 And the earth that bears everything.  
 (. . .) he is, indeed,  
 the inmost self of every being.<sup>63</sup>

As we will see in one of the following chapters, *puruṣa* is the most primeval manifestation of *ātman*. In *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (1.4.1.), we read that *ātman* exists in an absolute state in a form of *puruṣa: ātmā puruṣavidha*. In the above quoted *Muṇḍaka*, this absolute character of *ātman-puruṣa* is indicated by such terms as *amṛta* – immortal, or *avyaya* – imperishable. In the following stanzas, paradoxical descriptions appear, pointing to a *nirguṇic* nature, impossible to be positively and adequately described in any category. *Divya* means divine, but at the same time, luminous; *amūrta* – without form, but at the same time being the basis and condition of each representation; *sabāhyābhyantaro* – existing inside but also exceeding the immanent character of existence. That is why it is also called *antarātman* – the inner *ātman*. A more common, parallel term, as we will see later, which emphasises this immanent character is *antaryāmin*, residing within. The absolute dimension is in this case denoted by the term *ātman* and the principle of individual awareness by the term *antarātman*. Although *ātman* as immanent permeates the whole reality and each of its manifestations, when the Upaniṣadic bards want to point to one distinguished place – especially with regard to meditation procedures – they mention the space within the heart: *hṛdayākāśa*.

62 *Muṇḍaka* 1.2.11: *tapaḥśraddhe ye hy upavasanty aranye śāntā vidvāṁso bhaiḥśyacaryāṁ carantaḥ, sūryadvāreṇa te virajāḥ prayānti yatrāmṛtaḥ sa puruṣo hy avyayātmā*.

63 *Muṇḍaka* Up. 2.1. 2–4: *divyo hy amūrtaḥ puruṣaḥ sabāhyābhyantaro hy ajaḥ, aprāṇo hy amanāḥ śubhro hy akṣarāt parataḥ paraḥ*.

*etasmā jāyate prāṇo manaḥ sarvendriyāṇi ca, khaṁ vāyur jyotir āpaḥ pṛthivī viśvasya dhārīṇī*.

*hy eṣa sarvabhūtāntarātmā*.

This absolute being, of which it is said that it is not only conscious, but is the very principle of consciousness, as well as the source of life, is described here as *aprāṇa* – without breath, without life-giving breath, as well as *amanā* – without mind. On the one hand, these terms correspond to the method of declaring *ātman* as *neti, neti*; on the other hand, they emphasise that the very principle of consciousness and cognition are something higher than their empirical representations.

Many other passages from the Upaniṣads point to this immanent character of *ātman*, which is then experienced as an individual acting subject. Bṛhadāraṇyaka (3.4.1.) uses in this context the term *ātmā sarvantara* – “*ātman* within everything.” Also in Bṛhadāraṇyaka (4.3.35.) the phrase *śarīra ātman* – “*ātman* incarnate” is used to describe *ātman* limited by psychophysical form. In this context, it refers to the embodied *ātman*, which functions as an individual migrating subject. A more complete description of the nature of *ātman* as a conscious migrating subject is presented by Muṇḍaka 2.2.7:

Who knows all, who observes all,  
to whom belongs all greatness on earth –  
He is this self in the divine fort of *brahman*,  
having a secure footing in the sky.  
Consisting of thought, controller of body and breaths;  
he has a secure footing in food,  
after having settled in the heart.  
By perceiving him the wise see  
what becomes visible as the immortal  
in the form of bliss.<sup>64</sup>

The basic attribute of the conscious migrating subject are its cognitive abilities, as indicated by the term *manomaya* – “made of the mind.” All its functions are subordinated to this, including the management of the breath, which is the basis of life and vital forces. Life functions are supported by food – *anna*. As a result of meditation procedures, *ātman* is seen as being located in the heart. As the Upaniṣad puts it, the one who recognises that all cognitive functions, all activity is due to *ātman*, and the *ātman* itself remains unchanged in its essence, recognises the true nature of reality. The tone of this part of the Upaniṣad is strictly *nirguṇic*, the being recognised as real is described as having a form of

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64 Muṇḍaka 2.2.7: *yaḥ sarvajñāḥ sarvavid yasyaiṣa mahimā bhuvī, divye brahmapure hy eṣa vyomny ātmā pratiṣṭhitaḥ. manomayaḥ prāṇasarīranetā pratiṣṭhotō'ne hṛdayaṃ sannidhāya, tad vijñānena paripaś anti dhīrā ānandarūpam amṛtaṃ yad vibhāti.*

bliss – *ānandarūpa* – and not being bliss itself. The identification of the form of bliss – *ānandamaya* – with bliss itself – *ānanda* – is typical of the *sagunīc*, theistic movements. Not recognising the *ātman* itself, but reducing it to its function is not due to its non-existence, but to the subtlety of its essence.

By thought is this subtle self to be known,  
into which breath has entered in five ways;  
By the senses is laced thèntire thought of people,  
in which, when it is pure, this self becomes disclosed.<sup>65</sup>

The Upaniṣads describe in great detail the procedures of clearing the empirical subject of any impurities and limitations which interfere with the proper insight and prevent recognition of reality. The main feature of a migrating subject who is repeatedly entangled in *saṃsāra* is desire – *kāma*, *rāga*. Desire has been recognised as a source factor initiating all actions and obscuring the cognitive abilities of the mind. It was believed that every deed (*karman*), even a virtuous one, leads to the accumulation of a karmic deposit, and thus sustains an arduous incarnation. The earliest Upaniṣads consistently postulate that only the path of cognition – *jñānamārga* – leads to liberation. Therefore, the basic recommendation is to practice the desirelessness – *niṣkāmamārga*, *vairāgya*. Many excerpts illustrate this thesis. Let us quote one of the earliest:

‘Clearly, this self is *brahman* – this self that is made of perception, made of mind, made of sight, made of breath, made of hearing, made of earth, made of water, made of wind, made of space, made of light and the lightless, made of desire and the desireless, made of anger and the angerless, made of the righteous and the unrighteous; this self that is made of everything. (. . .) What a man turns out to be depends on how he acts and on how he conducts himself. If his actions are good, he will turn into something good. If his actions are bad, he will turn into something bad. A man turns into something good by good action and into something bad by bad action. (. . .)

A man who’s attached goes with his action,  
to that very place to which  
his mind and character cling.  
Reaching the end of his action,  
of whatever he has done in this world –  
From that world he returns  
back to this world,  
back to action.

‘That is the course of a man who desires.

65 Muṇḍaka Uṇ. 3.1.9: *eṣo’nur ātmā cetasā veditavyo yasmin prāṇaḥ pañcadhā saṃviveśa, prāṇaiś citta sarvam otam prajānāṃ yasmin viśuddhe vibhavaty eṣa ātmā.*

‘Now, a man who does not desire – who is without desires, who is freed from desires, whose desires are fulfilled, whose only desire is his self – his vital functions (*prāṇa*) do not depart. *Brahman* he is, and to *brahman* he goes.’<sup>66</sup>

A consistent adoption of such characteristics of the subject ultimately results in a *nirguṇic* way of judging about the very principle of subjectivity, about *ātman*. All our feelings, emotions, cognitive acts, actions, as well as objects of these actions, are initiated by desire. “If a person truly perceives the self, knowing ‘I am he’; What possibly could he want, Whom possibly could he love, that he should worry about his body?” (Bṛhadāraṇyaka 4.4.12.). When the main impulse for their operation disappears, there is no room neither for action nor for the results. The individualising characteristics of the subject disappear, and *ātman* as the principle of subjectivity shines out in its universal, unconditional and unlimited domain. Then it cannot be declared otherwise than *neti, neti* – “not –, not –.”

‘About this self (*ātman*), one can only say “not –, not –.” He is ungraspable, for he cannot be grasped. He is undecaying, for he is not subject to decay. He has nothing sticking to him, for he does not stick to anything. He is not bound; yet he neither trembles in fear nor suffers injury.

‘Look – by what means can one perceive the perceiver?’<sup>67</sup>

An absolute being, called *ātman*, is beyond experience which is categorised, and therefore it cannot be adequately judged in any way. According to the assumptions of many philosophical stands, that which cannot be experienced and the existence of which cannot be proved does not actually exist. The stance of Vedānta, which accepts the main thesis of the *śruti*, is radically different. The fact that we cannot prove the existence of a given reality using the categories we have developed does not prove its non-existence, but rather the limitation of the tools employed to capture it. That which undoubtedly exists is the absolute reality of *ātman-brahman*. It does not require any proof, because – as Advaitins

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66 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 4.4.5–6: *sa vā ayam ātmā brahma vijñānamayo manomayaḥ prāṇamaya cakṣurmayāḥ śrotramayaḥ pṛthivīmaya āpōmayo vayumaya ākāśamayasa tejomayo’tejomayaḥ kāmamayo’kamayaḥ krodhamayo’dharmamayaḥ (...)* *yathākārī yathācārī tathā bhavati – sādhuḥkārī sādhubhavati, pāpakārī pāpo bhavati, puṇyaḥ puṇyena karmaṇā bhavati, pāpaḥ pāpena (...)* *tadeva saktāḥ saha karmaṇaiti liṅgaṃ mano yatra niṣaktamasya, prāpyāntaḥ karmaṇastasya yatkiñcheha karotyayam, tasmāllokātpunairayasmai lokāya karmaṇe. iti nu kāmamayānaḥ, athākāmamayānaḥ – yo’kāmo niṣkāma āptakāma ātmakāmo na tasya prāṇā utkrāmanti brahmaiva sanbrahmāpyeti.*

67 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 4.5.15.: *sa eṣa neti nety ātmā, agrhyo na hi gṛhyate, aśīryo na hi śīryate, asaṅgo na hi sajyate, asito na vyathate, na riṣyati, vijñātāram are kena vijānīyāt.*

put it – every thought, every act proves that there exists a conscious in its essence condition, a substrate of all our actions. What actually needs to be explained and clarified are the laws which govern the presented world. In the Brahmanical tradition, especially in the schools of Sāṃkhya and Advaita, it was assumed that experiential reality is by its nature an object. And objects exist for something, that is, there must be a subject – ultimately it is the very principle of subjectivity – that justifies the existence of that which it is directed at. And it is *ātman*, as the principle of subjectivity, that determines the presented reality with its absolute existence. That is why the Upaniṣads describe *ātman* as the source and principle of all experiential reality.

‘Who is this self (*ātman*)?’ – this is how we venerate.

Which of these is the self? Is it that by which one sees? Or hears? Or smells odours? Or utters speech? Or distinguishes between what is tasty and what is not? Is it the heart and the mind? Is it awareness? Perception? Discernment? Cognition? Wisdom? Insight? Steadfastness? Thought? Reflection? Drive? Memory? Intention? Purpose? Will? Love? Desire? But these are various designations of cognition.

It is *brahman*; it is Indra; it is Prajāpati; it is all the gods. It is these five immense beings – earth, wind, space, the waters, and the lights; it is these beings, as well as those that are some sort of mixture of trivial beings, living beings of various sorts – those born from eggs, from wombs, from sweat, and from sprouts. It is horses, cattle, men, and elephants. It is everything that has life – those that move, those that fly, and those that are stationary. Knowledge is the eye of all that, and on knowledge it is founded. Knowledge is the eye of the world, and knowledge, the foundation. *Brahman* is knowing.<sup>68</sup>

Thus, *ātman* is both that which remains unchanged in its essence and which exists in all its forms. It is both transcendent – the condition and source of all reality – and immanent – then experienced as a principle of subjectivity. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the Upaniṣadic bards attempted, by using appropriate terms, to indicate when they refer to *ātman* as a universal reality and when they refer to one of its forms. In his commentary to Bṛhadāraṇyaka,<sup>69</sup>

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68 Aitareya Up. 3.1–3: *ko’yam ātmeti vayam upāsmahe, katarah sa ātmā yena vā paśyati yena vā śṛṇoti yena vā gandhān ājighrati yena vā vācaṃ vyākroti yena vā svādu cāsvādu ca vijānāti.*

*yad etad dhṛḍyaṃ manaś caitat, samjñānam ājñānaṃ vijñānaṃ prajñānaṃ madhā dṛṣṭir dhṛtir matir mañiṣā jūtiḥ smṛtiḥ sanikalpaḥ kratur asuḥ kāmo vaśa iti sarvāṅy evaitāni prajñānasya namadheyāni bhavanti (...) sarvam tat prajñānetram, prajñāne pratiṣṭhitam, prajñānetro lokaḥ prajñā pratiṣṭhā prajñānaṃ brahma.*

69 Hajime Nakamura, *A History of Early Vedānta Philosophy*, Part Two, Motilal Banarsidass Delhi 2004, p. 140.

Śankara presents his theory of eight states (*aṣṭāvasthā*) in which the absolute reality (of which it is said *ātman*, *brahman*) either exists or manifests itself. These are: *brahman*, *antaryāmin* – the inner governor, *kṣetrajña* – expert in the field, the term in other commentaries used interchangeably with: *sākṣin* – spectator, *daiva* – deity, luminous, *sūtra* – thread, *virāj* – force that brings reality to the state of being, *jāti* – corresponds to the concept of species, class and *piṇḍa* designates an individual subject. These are terms that set a certain order of emanation, proceeding from the very principle of reality to its most external representations. Some of these terms will be discussed in the following chapters. But there will also be a number of others; all of them will refer to concepts that designate the functions of the operating subject or the technically understood cognitive apparatus. For what is primarily the subject of this publication is not so much a discussion of all levels of represented reality as an attempt to explain the relationship between the principle of subjectivity, that is, pure existence, and its representations. As will be demonstrated, most of these terms will be correlated with the third state of consciousness-reality: the state of deep sleep.



## 6. *Aham* – the universal “I,” the primordial form of an absolute being

In the first chapter of this book, while discussing the cosmogonic scheme presented in the *Nāsadiya Sūkta* hymn, we referred to the distinction between two dimensions of reality, by describing them with the derivatives of two different verbal roots. The absolute dimension is denoted by the root *as* – “to exist” – while the objective reality is conveyed by the root *bhū* – “to become,” “to be.” As the Upaniṣadic cosmogonic scheme exemplifies, the latter dimension can also be described by other verbs, such as: “to create,” “to create by practicing asceticism” or “to multiply.” However, the absolute being is always referred to as *sat* – “existing” (derived from *as*). Among the passages from the Upaniṣads that attempt to capture the moment of transition from one dimension to the other, we shall first of all quote what we consider the most crucial stanza from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.4.1:

In the beginning this world was just a single body (*ātman*) shaped like a man. He looked around and saw nothing but himself. The first thing he said was, ‘Here I am!’ and from that the name ‘I’ came into being. Therefore, even today when you call someone, he first says, ‘It’s I’ and then states whatever other name he may have. That first being received the name ‘man’ (*puruṣa*), because ahead (*pūrva*) of all this he burnt up (*uṣ*) all evils.<sup>70</sup>

We will try to demonstrate that the *aham asmi* formula is fundamental to all considerations in this book. In Sanskrit, it is enough to say *asmi* (“am”), since the personal pronoun is indicated by the grammatical ending of the conjugated verb. Can we therefore consider the use of the pronoun only an emphasis on content or meaning, and not an emergence of a new quality? The answer to this question, as we will try to demonstrate now, cannot be unambiguous; in fact, this entire book is an attempt to provide this answer.

The word *asmi*, is a derivative of the root *as* and it denotes a dimension of reality, technically referred to as *sat*. As we consider this passage important, we shall now present a more detailed analysis of it, with reference to the

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70 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.4.1: *ātmaivedam agra āsīt puruṣavidhaḥ so’nuvikṣya nānyad ātmano’pasyat so’ham asmīty agre vyāharat tato’hamnābhavat, tasmād apy etarhy āmanvito’ham ayam ity evāgra uktvāthānyan nāma prabrūte yad asya bhavati, sa yat pūrvo’smāt sarvasmāt sarvān pāpmana auṣat tasmāt puruṣaḥ, oṣati ha vai sa taṃ yo’smāt pūrvo bubhūṣati ya evaṃ veda.*

original. It begins with the key phrase for the entire cosmological scheme of the Upaniṣads: *ātmā eva idam agre āsit* – “this indeed came into existence at the very beginning as *ātman*.” This original entity, denoted by the term *ātman*, is further defined by the term *puruṣavidha* – “in the form of *puruṣa*, or person.” This compound may also be interpreted as: “having the form of *puruṣa*” or “*puruṣa*-like.” What is important is that the absolute takes a form, or rather manifests itself in a certain form, which, according to the interpretation of the earliest Advaita, as presented by Gauḍapāda or Śaṅkara, is in a way a very subtle, but nevertheless a transition from the *nirguṇic* to *saguṇic* level of the absolute reality. The definition of *ātman* as *puruṣavidha* can be found also in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad (2.2–5):

From food, surely, are they born;  
all creatures that live on earth.  
On food alone, once born, they live;  
and into food in the end they pass. (...)  
'It is eaten and it eats beings.'  
Therefore it is called 'food.'

Different from and lying within this man formed from the essence of food is the self (*ātman*) consisting of lifebreath, which suffuses that man completely. Now, he has the appearance of a man; so, corresponding to his manlike appearance, the self which consists of lifebreath assumes a manlike appearance. (...)

Lifebreath—gods breathe along with it

as do men and beasts.  
For lifebreath is the life of beings,  
so it's called 'all life.' (...)

Different from and lying within this self which consists of breath is the self (*ātman*) consisting of mind, which suffuses this other self completely. Now, he has the appearance of a man; so, corresponding to his manlike appearance, the self which consists of mind assumes a manlike appearance. (...)

Different from and lying within this self which consists of mind is the self (*ātman*) consisting of perception, which suffuses this other self completely. Now, he has the appearance of a man; so, corresponding to his manlike appearance, the self which consists of perception assumes a manlike appearance. (...)

Different from and lying within this self which consists of perception is the self (*ātman*) consisting of bliss, which suffuses this other self completely. Now, he

has the appearance of a man; so, corresponding to his manlike appearance, the self which consists of bliss assumes a manlike appearance.<sup>71</sup>

The phrase: *sa vā eṣa puruṣavidha eva tasya puruṣavidhatām anvayam puruṣavidhaḥ*, (“Now, he has the appearance of a man; so, corresponding to his manlike appearance, the self consisting of mind assumes a manlike appearance”), appears in each of the quoted stanzas. This entire passage presents the so-called concept of *pañcakośa* – the five sheaths of *brahman-ātman*. They are as follows: *annamayakośa* (“the sheath of food”), *prāṇamayakośa* (“the sheath of breath” or “breath of life”), *manomayakośa* (“the sheath of the mind”), *vijñānamayakośa* (“the sheath of recognition”) and *ānandamayakośa* (“the sheath of bliss”). They are presented from the most external (*anna* denotes the physical, gross material form), to increasingly subtle levels. However, none of them, not even the last (*ānandamaya*) is an absolute being or pure bliss, but rather something composed of bliss, as the suffix *maya* indicates. Similarly, the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad attributes the same quality to the third state, that of *prājñā*. Thus, the absolute being – *ātman* as *puruṣavidha* – manifests itself in many forms that – in their order of emergence as well as concealment – form the structure of the presented world.

By confronting these two passages in which the term *puruṣavidha* appears, we shall find a coherent concept. In both fragments we find the term *ātman*, which denotes the absolute dimension of reality, and which in some form (*vidha*) is an object of experience. In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, this form is understood very generally; it seems rather like an opportunity for self-cognition or self-determination of *ātman*. The Taittirīya speaks about various forms that make up the orderly structure of reality already presented. However, in both cases it is a form in which the absolute presents itself to itself, as well as in subsequent sequences, to forms already emerged from it.

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71 Taittirīya Up. 2.2–5.: *annād vai prajāḥ prajāyante. yāḥ kāśca pṛthivīm śrītāḥ, atho annenaiva jīvanti, athainad api yanty antataḥ (. . .) adyate’ṭti ca bhūtāni. tasmād annam tad ucyata iti. tasmād vā etasmād annarasamayād anyo’ntara ātmā prāṇamayaḥ. Tenaiṣa pūrṇaḥ. Sa vā eṣa puruṣavidhatām anvayaṃ puruṣavidhaḥ. (...) prāṇam devā anu prāṇanti, manuṣyāḥ paśavaś ca ye. prāṇo hi bhūtānām āyuh. tasmāt sarvāyusaṃ ucyate (...) tasmādvā estasmāt prāṇamayād anyo’ntara ātmā manomayaḥ. Tenaiṣa pūrṇaḥ. Sa vā eṣa puruṣavidha eva. tasya puruṣavidhatām anvayaṃ puriṣavidhaḥ. (...) tasmād vā etasmān manomayād anyo’ntara ātmā vijñānamayas tenaiṣa pūrṇaḥ. Sa vā eṣa puriṣavidha eva. (...) tasmād vā etasmād vijñānamayād anyo’ntara ātmānandamayaḥ. Tenaiṣa pūrṇaḥ. Sa vā eṣa puruṣavidha eva. tasya puruṣavidhatām anvayaṃ puruṣavidhaḥ.*

Let us now return to Bṛhadāraṇyaka, to trace the mechanism of the original self-presentation of the absolute. It is important to note that the original state of existence (*idam āsīt*) is denoted both by the term *ātman* and its definition as *puruṣavidha*. What exists as *ātman* exists also as the subtlest form of the absolute – *puruṣavidha*. It can be interpreted in this way that the ability to manifest itself is inherent to the very nature of the absolute. There is definitely no external impulse.

Let us recall at this point, the later system of the Śaiva tantra.<sup>72</sup> It is a monistic system that accepts the existence of an eternal absolute or pure consciousness (*cit*), which is called the Supreme Śiva – *paramaśiva*. This absolute being is in essence identical to the *nirguna brahman* of the Upaniṣads. Tantra indicates the dynamic character of this absolute and claims that it has, by its very nature, two *modi*, whose alternating eternal relationship is responsible for the manifestation of the world. One of these *modi* is male energy or consciousness (*cit*) and the other is female energy (*śakti*) which has the ability to illuminate and which is a ground for self-cognition of consciousness. When the harmony between these two forms of the absolute is disturbed, the process of world manifestation takes place. One can say that the Upaniṣads anticipate subsequent interpretation. Thus, the state of absolute existence was an eternal game, or rather a tension between existence as a pure subject and an impulse to know what that subject is. However, it should not be forgotten that by referring both terms to one verb *āsīt*, absolute harmony prevails.

The Upaniṣad continues to use metaphorical language. The absolute being, in which there is some potential form (*vidha*), i.e., the possibility of being presented – looks around. It performs a conscious act of cognition. Still, at all times (the notion of time is, of course, a contractual one) it remains in a state of subjective-objective tension, which is simultaneously a state of perfect balance. Therefore, the only thing it can establish is that it sees nothing other than itself – *ātmānam*. At this point, the first manifestation occurs, which is crucial for the other Upaniṣads as well. This manifestation is connected to self-defining, confirming one’s own existence through the utterance of the phrase *aham asmi* – “I am.” As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the sense of the first person pronoun (*aham*) is grammatically contained in the form of the verb *asmi*. The relationship between the words *asmi/aham* is analogous to the relationship

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72 The main collection of early tantras was probably composed between 400 and 800 A.D. In the 10th century, Abhinavagupta combined the great synthesis of philosophical tantric concepts into the Trika system.

between the terms *ātman/puruṣavidha*. *Aham* is the first manifestation of the *sat (asmi)* dimension of reality, when it comes to the perspective of an introspective self-cognition process. *Puruṣavidha* is the most primaevial form of manifestation for the absolute predicated with the term *ātman*, when we consider the perspective of describing these manifestations as objects. Although there is “tension” between these concepts (the text distinguishes them very subtly), nevertheless, it is clear that both *asmi* and *ātman* remain unaffected in the realm of *sat*, while the potential to function in the realm of *bhava* remains there for *aham* and *puruṣavidha*.

He (*saḥ*) – is the masculine pronoun, indicating a subtle form of specification (*vidha*), when the subject looks at himself and describes himself. As the text puts it, as a result of this original cognitive act the name (*nāman*) came into being (*bhū*) – *tatas aham nāmābhavat*. In Sanskrit literature the term *nāmarūpa* (“name and shape”) is a technical description of an individual being, a clear indication of a transition to the manifested reality experienced as diverse. This passage itself contains some interesting inspirations, such as those which consider the word as having world-creating power, very creatively developed later by all Brahmanical thought.

*Ātman* presents itself to itself after the act of self-cognition, which means that it performed this act by looking at itself in its own self. It looks at its reflection, which is at the same time itself and its representation. It is the motif of metaphorical catoptrics, well-known from the earliest times, in strictly religious and cosmological but also philosophical texts, where the original reflection becomes the first impulse to establish the structure of the presented world. Here, similarly to other cultures, the reflection has a lower ontological status than what it reflects.<sup>73</sup> This is precisely the primary tension between *sat* and *bhava*.

As Tomasz Sikora demonstrates in his book, the metaphor of the mirror was known in virtually all shamanistic, Indian, Jewish and Greek traditions. One motif in all the traditions is common: what is reflected, has a lower ontological status than what is being reflected. The reality that is being reflected is in some way an absolute reality and in many systems it is considered to be a transcendental dimension. The reality that is reflected is the reality presented, often described as not fully perfect, and as the texts of the Brahmanical tradition define it, it is characterised by arduousness and suffering – *duḥkha*. In this context, the ontological conclusions resulting from the message of the Buddha as presented

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73 Tomasz Sikora, *Euoi, Studia z symbolizmu i metaforyzacji katoptrycznej*, Zakład Wydawniczy „NOMOS,” Kraków, 2004.

in the form of the Four Noble Truths appear to be “revolutionary.” The law of dependent formation should then be interpreted directly as stating that apart from the phenomena that arise and function in mutual dependence, **nothing**, no transcendent reality exists. In later Chinese Buddhism of the huayan school, this was presented as a metaphor of a mirror room. The world, the manifested reality is compared to a room built of mirrors. Walls, ceiling and floor are all made of mirrors. A phenomenon that is seen in one of the mirrors is at the same time a phenomenon reflected in all others. It is impossible to distinguish between what is reflected and what it reflects. All phenomena arise and fade away at the same time. Apart from this wall of mirrors absolutely nothing exists; there is no *sat*. The whole reality is limited to the relations of mutual creation and disappearance, everything is/happens (*bhava*). This is why Nāgārjuna says that *asti = bhavati*, existence equals being. If we look at Buddhist philosophy in this way, we notice its undoubtedly innovative character. The ontological assumptions of all the orthodox Brahmanical systems (although they vary in other respects) are very different. This fundamental distinction must be borne in mind when making far-reaching comparisons between the detailed concepts of various Indian philosophical schools.

Let us now return to the analysis of the Upaniṣads. *Aham asmi* follows the act in which *ātman* looks around and sees nothing else but its own reflection. This is the original act of perception, *pratyakṣa*, because it is *ātman* (*salī*) who looks – *paśyati*. At this level of the manifested reality, the Upaniṣads indicate not so much a conscious distinction between the subject and the object, but the possibility of constructing cognitive acts; it is not so much the cognitive act itself as an openness to perform such acts. The distinction between *aham* and *asmi*, although highly conscious, is already a form of ignorance – *avidyā* – because the original *avidyā* is, after all, an act of self-cognition, self-acceptance or identification with one’s own manifestation – *aham*. It is this source superimposition (*adhyāsa*) of the object (*aham*) onto the subject (*asmi*) that is the main theme of the entire Advaita tradition.

Another key issue arising from this passage is the foundation of the whole structure of describing reality. We should note that the ascertainment of existence (*sat*) is primary; only later does the act of cognition or realisation – *jñā* – emerge. This is quite the opposite of Descartes, who begins with *cogito* and arrives at *sum*.<sup>74</sup> The entire tradition of Vedānta starts from accepting the existence (*sat*) of an absolute reality, about which we can only say that it is *cit* – pure

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74 T.W. Organ, *The Self in Indian Philosophy*, Oxford 1992.: “Vedāntic *ātma*vidyā started with *sum*, not with a Cartesian *cogito*. For the Vedāntist, both Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita, it is better to postulate ‘I am’ and to conclude ‘therefore I think’ than to postulate ‘I

consciousness, or using the later technical term *jñātatā* – “knownness,” the very principle of cognition. The adoption of this thesis is based on two different approaches. The first, rarely adopted in the European philosophical tradition, is a reference to experience, to the subtlest acts of introspection, whose results, often in a form of metaphors, are reported and communicated according to generally accepted procedures.

In India, the value of such experience is taken very seriously. One could even say that without acts involving the direct experience of reality and their testimony, most of the systems would not have developed. Of course, from a contemporary scientific point of view, they are so unreliable that they are not subject to empirical verification. But it can also be viewed from a different perspective. Each fundamental text for a given *darśana* has an author attributed to it. It is much more appropriate to speak not so much about the authors, but about codifiers who have tried to confront and structure the accounts of the experiences of hundreds, if not thousands, of people into a relatively coherent whole. Thus can we read these texts: as a result of experience and description of the same phenomena of reality, or to be more precise, the same states of consciousness as correlates of the relevant dimensions of reality. Later commentators, some of whom also have similar experience, will not so much prove that the reality thus given to them in introspection exists – this is beyond any discussion – but rather try to explain the nature of this reality. They will also try to understand the mechanisms of its manifestation in experience.

However, there is also another method that does not quite reject the value of these experiences but, in a sense, puts them in a methodological bracket. It is already a purely rational assumption that without accepting the existence of an unconditional basis, it is not possible to logically explain how all representations operate.

At that time this world was without real distinctions; it was distinguished simply in terms of name and visible appearance—‘He is so and so by name and has this sort of an appearance.’ So even today this world is distinguished simply in terms of name and visible appearance, as when we say, ‘He is so and so by name and has this sort of an appearance.’

Penetrating this body up to the very nailtips, he remains there like a razor within a case or a termite within a termite-hill. People do not see him, for he is incomplete as he comes to be called breath when he is breathing, speech when he is speaking, sight when

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think’ and to conclude ‘therefore I am.’” The Vedāntic philosophers believed that it was the nature of the Self, not the reality of the Self, which needed to be proved. The Self must seek itself in order to find *what* it is, not *that* is” (p. 104).

he is seeing, hearing when he is hearing, and mind when he is thinking. These are only the names of his various activities. A man who considers him to be any one of these does not understand him, for he is incomplete within any one of these. One should consider them as simply his self (*ātman*), for in it all these become one. This same self (*ātman*) is the trail to this entire world, for by following it one comes to know this entire world, just as by following their tracks one finds [the cattle]. Whoever knows this finds fame and glory.<sup>75</sup>

As we can see, a belief is involved here, or rather an unproven premise that the objective reality is always secondary to the subjective one. An object must always be for someone. And it is obvious that the reality given to us in the representation is an object. Such a methodological assumption was the basis for the development of not only various Vedānta philosophical traditions, but also schools of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, although the latter are based not only on methodological but also ontological dualism. Buddhism considers the assumption unjustified, but the polemics between these traditions, in this very context, is the subject of entirely different research and deliberations.

In the Vedānta schools, it is assumed that the dimension of reality (*sat*) exists absolutely. In this tradition, the thesis does not usually require proof. It is presumed that only accepting an unconditioned absolute (*sat*) can be a starting point for explaining, or, as some contemporary Vedāntists say, to justify the empirical world. The methods of defining this absolutely primordial, unconditioned nature of being are becoming more and more precise, and thus more and more abstract, which translates into an apophatic or, in Indian terms, *nirguṇic* language of description. The representatives of Advaita Vedānta will no longer refer to this dimension of reality as a subject, because, after all, this concept assumes the existence of an object, but a pure principle of existence (*sat*). It cannot be claimed to be cognition, because it implies the existence of a cognitive act that is directed at a certain object. At best it can be called “knownness” – *jñātatā*; this form of *abstractum* becomes a technical term later. All other attributes, such as saying

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75 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.4.7.: *tad dhedaṃ tarhy avyākṛtam āsīt tan nāmarūpābhyām eva vyākriyatāsau nāmāyam idaṃrūpa iti. tad idam apy etarhi nāmarūpābhyām eva vyākriyata asau nāmāyam idaṃrūpa iti. sa eṣa iha praviṣṭa ā nakhāgrebhyo yathā kṣurāḥ kṣuradhāne’ vahitaḥ syād, viśvambharo vā viśvambharakulāye, taṃ na paśyanti. akṛtsno hi saḥ, prāṇann eva prāṇo nāma bhavati, vadan vāk, paśyaṃś cakṣuḥ, śṛṇvañ śrotraṃ, manvāno manaḥ, tāny asyaitāni karmanāmāny eva. sa yo’ta ekaikam upāste, na sa veda, akṛtsno hy eṣo’ta ekaikena bhavati ātmety evopāṣita, atra hi ete sarva ekam bhavanti. tad etad padanīyam asya sarvasya yad ayam ātmā, anena hy etat sarvam veda yathā ha vai padenānuvinded evam kīrtiṃ ślokaṃ vindate ya evaṃ veda.*

that *brahman* is the greatest, or that it is the cause of the world, are – especially within radical Advaita movements – considered to be attributes *per accidens*, and actually only *jñātatā* seems to be a way of judging *per essentiam*. But again, another very strong thesis emerges. If “knownness” belongs to the essence of the absolute, which of course indicates its originally conscious character, then it follows that in the nature of both the absolute being and every manifestation of it (of which the subtlest is the conscious subject) is the ability of self-cognition. It is assumed that there is no need for any external tools which, as if from another dimension, would enable self-knowledge, and so the nature of the absolute is also stated to be *prakāśa* – “luminous,” “illuminating,” i.e. self-illuminating.

This equation of *sat*, *jñātatā* and *prakāśa* concepts is specific to the Advaita tradition. Some Brahmanical schools argue whether the nature of absolute being is self-illuminating, and some (e.g. Vaiṣeṣika) will claim that even a very subtly understood “knownness” lies with the external organs. This concept ultimately led the schools of Nyāya and Vaiṣeṣika to adopt an ontologically pluralistic worldview.

Returning to the discussed Upaniṣad, we note that the absolute being is, by its very nature, open to cognition. It is this openness that leads to the cognitive act, which is *jñāna*. As Advaitins put it, the nature of the cognitive act is such that it can be both true, which leads to *mokṣa*, and erroneous, which results in entanglement in *saṃsāra*. It is discussed in Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.4.2:

That first being became afraid; therefore, one becomes afraid when one is alone. Then he thought to himself: ‘Of what should I be afraid, when there is no one but me?’ So his fear left him, for what was he going to be afraid of? One is, after all, afraid of another.<sup>76</sup>

The original act of self-cognition is identical to self-definition, i.e. perception of oneself through some form. But this form, on the one hand, defines, and on the other hand indicates what is cognizable and in this way distinguishes one thing from another. In the cognitive act, in focusing on a given phenomenon or a given form, the totality is lost. Therefore, any description is a kind of limitation. This original limitation results in a feeling of anxiety (compare the chapter on *manas*). Anxiety appears here as a basic characteristic, not so much of an existing being as of an existential one. But when the circumstances are properly recognised, this limiting feeling is removed. Reality shines forth (*prakāśa*) as it is, in its fullness and its non-duality. A very similar image appears in Bṛhadāraṇyaka 4.4.12–13.:

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76 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.4.2.: *so’bibhet, tasmād ekāki bibheti, sa hāyam iṅṣāṃ cakre, yan mad anyan nāsti kasmānu bibhemīti, tata evāśya bhayaṃ vīyāya kasmād hy abheśyat, dvitīyād vai bhayaṃ bhavati.*

If a person truly perceives the self,  
 knowing ‘I am he’;  
 What possibly could he want,  
 Whom possibly could he love,  
 that he should worry about his body?

The self has entered this body, this dense jumble.

If a man finds him,  
 Recognises him,  
 He’s the maker of everything–the author of all!  
 The world is his–he’s the world itself!<sup>77</sup>

The first sentence of the quoted passage is: *ātmanāṃ ced vijānīyād ayam asmi iti pūruṣaḥ*. The particle *ced* – “when,” “if” – indicates a very rare situation when *aham* (“I”) turns out to be identical with *ātman*. The absurdity and pointlessness of desire becomes evident; desire is the absence and *ātman* is the whole. Anxiety also disappears, of course, because anxiety is about something, that is, it must be grounded in an object. A true recognition of reality reveals the dimension of absolute subjectivity, of *ātman* directed only at itself. This experience results in an observation that the reality of *ātman* is a reality that exists at all times, or rather beyond time, although it is not given as such in its manifestation. *Ātman* is pure existence, so it cannot disappear, it cannot cease to exist. Only as a result of misidentifying the foundation itself with its manifestations does the essence of reality remain unrecognised. Furthermore, only what has a beginning, like fear or desire, can ever disappear.

He found no pleasure at all; so one finds no pleasure when one is alone. He wanted to have a companion. Now he was as large as a man and a woman in close embrace. So he split (*pat*) his body into two, giving rise to husband (*pati*) and wife (*patnī*). Surely this is why Yājñavalkya used to say: ‘The two of us are like two halves of a block.’ The space here, therefore, is completely filled by the woman.

He copulated with her, and from their union human beings were born.<sup>78</sup>

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77 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 4.4.12–13.: *ātmanāṃ ced vijānīyād ayam asmīti puruṣaḥ, kim icchan kasya kāmāya śarīram anu saṃjvaret.*

*yasyānūvittaḥ pratibuddha ātmāsmīn saṃdehye gahane praviṣṭaḥ, sa viśvakṛt sa hi sarvasya kartā tasya lokaḥ sa u loka eva.*

78 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.4.3.: *sa vai naiva reme, tasmād ekākī na ramate, sa dvitīyam aicchat, sa haitāvān āsa yathā strīpumāṃsāu sampariṣvaktāu, sa imam evātmānaṃ dvedhāpātayat, tataḥ patiś ca patnī cābhavatām, tasmāt idam ardhabgalam iva svaḥ,*

This stanza describes a situation when anxiety so strongly obscures the true recognition that the complete nature of reality eludes comprehension, and is replaced by desire, always associated with a sense of incompleteness. The basic nature of desire is presented here as the desire to experience, or actually to possess, what we do not have ourselves. Here, the Upaniṣad changes the language of a metaphor into the language of a myth, which results in a cosmological scheme.

For our deliberations, we shall look at another stanza from Bṛhadāraṇyaka (1.4.5.):

It then occurred to him: ‘I alone am the creation, for I created all this.’ From this ‘creation’ came into being. Anyone who knows this prospers in this creation of his.<sup>79</sup>

Here, we no longer have the *aham asmi* sequence, but the *aham sṛṣṭi* sequence – “I create,” “I continue the process of creation, or manifestation of the world.” This is the dimension of presented reality, of the reality that is – *bhava*.

At this point we move on to the subsequent ideas that will be developed by the Brahmanical philosophers. The act of manifestation of the world begins with naming (the self), with giving a name. The Upaniṣad links this act to the uttering of the word. It is an acknowledgement of the word’s world-forming power. Giving a name, whether on a mental or already verbalised level, calls given beings into reality. Based on such assumptions, a very rich tradition of the philosophy of language will develop, where the relationship between the name and the designate is understood as natural and not contractual.

Actually, on the basis of this one passage a complete analysis of the *aham asmi* formula can be performed. However, let us take a (less detailed) look at the other passages from the Upaniṣad in which this formula appears.

In the beginning this world was only *brahman*, and it knew only itself (*ātman*), thinking: ‘I am *brahman*.’ As a result, it became the Whole. Among the gods, likewise, whosoever realized this, only they became the Whole. It was the same also among the seers and among humans. (. . .) So when a man venerates another deity, thinking, ‘He is one, and I am another,’ he does not understand. As livestock is for men, so is he for the gods.<sup>80</sup>

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*iti ha smāha yājñavalkyaḥ, tasmād ayam ākāśaḥ striyā pūryata eva. tāṃ samabhavat, tato manuṣyā ajāyanta.*

79 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.4.5.: *so’ved ahaṃ vāva sṛṣṭir asmi ahaṃ hīdaṃ sarvam asṛkṣṭi, tataḥ sṛṣṭir abhavat, sṛṣṭyāṃ hāsyaitasyām bhavati ya evaṃ veda.*

80 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.4.10.: *brahma vā idam agra āsit, tad ātmānam evāvet, aham brahmāsmīti, tasmād tat sarvam abhavat, tadyo yo devānām pratyabudhyata, sa eva tad abhavat, tathā ṛṣīmām, tathā manuṣyāmām (. . .) atha yo anyām devatām upāste, anyo’sau anyo’ ham asmīti, na sa veda, yathā paśur evaṃ sa devānām.*

In the originally cosmogonic formula *idam agre āsīt*, the indefinite pronoun *idam* is replaced by the term *brahman*. Still, the whole structure resembles the one discussed earlier. The absolute being, originally undifferentiated and existing as *brahman*, performs an act of cognition, i.e. self-cognition, because it recognises itself (*ātmanam*). This is reflected in the utterance of the formula: *aham brahmāsmi*. As a result, everything (*sarvam*) was called into being (*abhavat*). Again, when the word *aham* refers to existence (*sat*) as a whole, then such an act leads to liberation, and when it refers only to its parts, and as a consequence to worshiping those parts, it perpetuates the original cognitive error – *adhyāsa*.

The face of truth is covered  
with a golden dish.  
Open it, O Pūṣan, for me,  
a man faithful to the truth.  
Open it, O Pūṣan, for me to see.

O Pūṣan, sole seer!

Yama! Sun! Son of Prajāpati!  
Spread out your rays!  
Drawn in your light!  
I see your fairest form.  
That person up there,  
I am he!<sup>81</sup>

The *Īśā Upaniṣad* presents the issues under discussion in beautiful, poetic language. The identification of the subtlest objective form with *puruṣa* occurs here. In the Indian tradition, this sentence is considered as one of the so-called *mahāvākya* – “important words” that indicate the relationship between *ātman* and *brahman*. In Advaita Vedānta, this relationship is interpreted as complete identification. In this passage, several concepts are demonstrated as identical: “he,” “this person” and “I.” *Yo’sāv asau puruṣaḥ so’ham asmi* – literally translated as “this one *puruṣa*, he am I.” Identifying oneself not with the whole reality, but with one of its named manifestations is an erroneous cognition. But when the reality shines forth in its full glory, it turns out to be an indivisible whole; it turns out to be pure existence (*sat*), recognised in real experience (*asmi*).

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81 *Īśā Up.* 15–16: *hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpīhitaṃ mukham, tat tvam pūṣann apāvṛṇu satyadharmāya dṛṣṭaye* ||15||

*puṣann ekarṣe yama sūrya prājāpatya vyūha raśmīn samūha tejaḥ, yat te rūpaṃ kalyāṇatamaṃ tat te paśyāmi yo’sāv asau puruṣaḥ so’ham asmi* ||16||

At this point, we shall take a look at the four most important *mahāvākyas*: *sa va ayam ātmā brahma* – “this self is *brahman*” (Bṛhadāraṇyaka 4.4.5), *aham brahma asmi* – “I am *brahman*” (Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.4.10), *so aham asmi* – “he am I” (Iśā 16), and *tat tvam asi* – “in that way are you”<sup>82</sup> (Chāndogya 6.8.7). Although there are many similar phrases in the Upaniṣads that indicate the relationship between the reality predicated by the terms *brahman* and *ātman*, which also serve as mantras in the meditation procedure, they do not all have the rank of *mahāvākyas*. The sentences quoted above are constructed according to an identical structure, which expresses the relation between the *principium* of reality and the pronoun indicating *tvam* – “you,” *ayam* – “this one” *aham* – “I” and *sa* – “he.” *Inter alia*, this shows the didactic nature of these phrases. **That** is how **you** are, **I** am *brahman*, **I** am. We note that the first manifestations of the absolute existence, analogous to *puruṣavidya*, are the names “I” – *aham*, or *tvam* – “you,” as referred by the master to his disciple. This is an indication of the original subjective-objective imposition. At first glance, it would seem that the phrase *ātmā asmi* should also belong among these expressions. However, this phrase does not appear in the Upaniṣads. As a matter of fact, all considerations in this book are aimed at demonstrating why. If the statement *ātmā asmi* was used, it would imply that *ātman* is not the absolute being identical to the invariable *sat*, but only its manifestation, its primary representation. *Ātman* however, is the pure principle of subjectivity, which could never be an object, because there is “I” rather than “it.”

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82 Joel Brereton, *Tat Tvam Asi in Context*, *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*, 1986, Vol. 136, pp. 98–109.



## 7. *Puruṣa* – the archetype of God

One of the most common Upaniṣadic terms defining the subject is the word *puruṣa*. It is semantically very rich and can be used in various contexts. Literally, it denotes a human being, a man, and quite often a macroanthropos – that is one group of meanings. The second, more diverse group refers to an individually manifested subject.

Let us start by discussing the term referring to the Upaniṣadic passages that denote a universal level of being. Immediately a fundamental question arises: is the universal level the highest, absolute one? Without accepting certain methodological assumptions, the answer to this question is ambiguous. If we refer to the text even older than the Upaniṣads, to the *Puruṣa Sūkta* hymn of Ṛgveda, then our answer should be affirmative.<sup>83</sup> After all, as a result of the *puruṣa*'s self-limitation, self-offering, a possibility arose for subsequent manifestations and, therefore, for the construction of the empirical reality. But if we limit ourselves to the earliest Upaniṣads and accept their cosmological scheme expressed by the *idam agre āsit* formula, as well as the two dimensions of reality, one denoted by *sat* and the other by *bhava*, the answer will be essentially negative, or at best in some rare passages, requiring further clarification. First of all, the term *puruṣa* itself does not appear as a substitute for the pronoun *idam*. *Puruṣa*, as we will elaborate further, refers to the dimension of reality denoted by the verbal root *bhū*.

In the Upaniṣads, the etymology of the word *puruṣa* is explained in a way typical for the poetics of these texts. The first of the interpretations can be found in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.1: “That first being received the name ‘man’ (*puruṣa*), because ahead (*pūrva*) of all this he burnt up (*uṣ*) all evils.” This idea can be interpreted by referring to the concept of the cause for manifestation, i.e. the creation of the world, available to our experience in the given forms. We must also refer here to the concept common to most of the Brahmanical *darśanas*, according to which the world is cyclic on the one hand, while being eternal on the other. It deems reality, in its absolute sense, to be perpetual. This reality exists absolutely (*sat*) and is usually called *brahman*. But its manifestations are also cyclic which is presented as alternating emergence and disappearance of worlds. The disappearance, referred to as *pralaya*, invokes the image of dissolution of

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83 We elaborated on it in *Karman i dharma, wizja świata w filozoficznej myśli Indii* [*Karman and dharma. A vision of the world in Indian philosophical thought*], WUJ 2003.

all forms, even the subtlest ones. These alternating periods of the emergence and disappearance of worlds are very long and are supposed to last for billions of years. Using here Aristotle's distinction between *arché* and *aitia*, one can say that *brahman* is *arché*, because it is ultimately beyond any form, and *puruṣa* is *aitia* when it takes the initial form for a given cycle, or more precisely, the ideal pattern of certain forms.

Yet another etymology, related to the context of a very ancient and mysterious ritual, is presented in a different passage from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka:

This is the same honey as Dadhyañc Ātharvaṇa communicated to the Aśvins. Seeing this, a seer declared:

He made a fort with two feet;

He made a fort with four feet.

He became a bird and entered the fort;

This very Person (*puruṣa*) is the fort-dweller (*puriśaya*) in all the forts. There is nothing that is not sheltered by him; there is nothing that is not secured by him.

This is the same honey as Dadhyañc Ātharvaṇa communicated to the Aśvins. Seeing this, a seer declared:

Of every form of every being,

the likeness he has assumed;

every form seeks to reveal him.

His steeds are yoked, all ten hundred;

Indra by his wizardry travels in many forms.

He alone is the steeds; he is the ten thousand, the many, the innumerable. This *brahman* is without a before and an after, without an inner and an outer. *Brahman* is this self (*ātman*) here which perceives everything.

That is the teaching.<sup>84</sup>

This self (*ātman*) is the honey of all beings, and all beings are the honey of this self. The radiant and immortal person in the self and the radiant and immortal person connected with the body (*ātman*) — they are both one's self. It is the immortal; it is *brahman*; it is the Whole.<sup>85</sup>

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84 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 2.5.18–19.: *idaṃ vai tan madhu dadhyaññ ātharvaṇośvibhyām uvāca, tadetad ṛṣiḥ paśyann avocat, puraś cakre dvipadaḥ puraś cakre catuṣpadaḥ puraḥ sa pakṣī bhūtvā puraḥ puruṣa āviśad iti, sa vā ayaṃ puruṣaḥ sarvāsu pūrṣu puriśayaḥ nainena kiṃcanānāvṛtam nainena kiṃcanāsaṃvṛtam.* (18) *idaṃ vai tan madhu dadhyaññ ātharvaṇośvibhyām uvāca, tad etad ṛṣiḥ paśyann avocat, rūpaṃrūpaṃ pratirūpo babhūva tad asya rūpaṃ praticakṣaṇāya, indro māyābhiḥ pururūpa iyate yuktā hy āsya harayaḥ satā daśeti, ayaṃ vai harayo'yaṃ vai daśa ca sahasrāṇi bahūni cānantāni ca tad etad brahmāpūrvam anaparam anantaram abāhyam ayaṃ ātmā brahma sarvānubhūḥ ityanuśāsanam* (19).

85 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 2.5.14.: *ayaṃ ātmā sarveṣāṃ bhūtānāṃ madhu asyātmanaḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni madhu yaś cāyam asminn ātmani tejomayo'mṛtamayaḥ puruṣaḥ yaś cāyam ātmā*

What is common to all the quoted passages is the indication of the very subtle, but still subjective nature of the being referred to as *puruṣa*. In the sequence of emerging elements of the universe, *puruṣa* is the subtlest form of *ātman-brahman*, and in the soteric procedure it is a luminous form leading to *mokṣa*. Such an interpretation can be supported by the analysis of a longer passage from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.4.1, where in the opening line we read: “In the beginning this world was just a single body (*ātman*) shaped like a man.” The word *puruṣa* is used, further specified by the word *vidha*. In this way, *ātman* would refer to *arché*, and *puruṣavidha* to *aitia*. (More on the subject of the *puruṣavidha* compound may be found in the chapter dedicated to *aham*). It is also relevant that the absolute being whose representation is *puruṣa*, creates a form of empirical world. In poetic language, this world is called *purāṣ* (“fortress”). It evokes associations with a compact structure, so the world is presented as an orderly universe. This universe is perceived as composed of equally orderly parts, of many different fortresses. The fact that they are not completely separated from each other, but function in mutual relations, is due to the fact that every fragment of reality is managed by the same *puruṣa*. The basic functions of *puruṣa* are described as covering and designing. This is very similar to the primary functions of *māyā* – the cosmic delusion, which also has the power to both design ever new phenomena and cover the true nature of reality. In this context, *puruṣa*, who, similarly to *māyā*, is the subtlest, as well as the eternal form of *ātman-brahman*, is responsible for emerging and designing the subsequent manifestations (fortresses) which, thus arising, conceal the total nature of reality.<sup>86</sup> Concluding this part of

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*tejomayo'mṛtamayaḥ puruṣo'ayam eva sa yo'yam ātmā idam amṛtam idaṃ brahmedaṃ sarvam.*

86 Compare: “So when its life was looking towards that it was unlimited, but after it had looked there it was limited, though that Good has no limit. For immediately by looking to something which is one the life is limited by it, and has in itself limit and bound and form; and the form was in that which was shaped, but the shaper was shapeless. (. . .) The life of Intellect, then, is all power, and the seeing which came from the Good is the power to become all things, and the Intellect which came to be is manifest as the very totality of things. But the Good sits enthroned upon them, not that it may have a base but that it may base the ‘Form’ of the first ‘Forms’, being formless itself. And in this way Intellect is to soul a light upon it, as that Good is a light upon Intellect; and when Intellect also defines and limits the soul it makes it rational by giving it a trace of what it has. Therefore Intellect too is a trace of that Good; but since Intellect is a Form and exists in extension and multiplicity, that Good is shapeless and formless; for this is how he makes forms. But if that was a form, Intellect would have been [only a derived] rational principle. But the first must be not in any way multiple: for its multiplicity

our deliberations on the term *puruṣa*, let us be reminded that all these considerations are conducted from the perspective of Advaita. The term designates the subtlest but nevertheless manifested form, or, speaking from the perspective of the object, the structure of the absolute being.

This subtlest form from the perspective of internal experience is described as the principle of the conscious subject, which is often very generally referred to as the soul. The soul, understood as a pure principle of subjectivity, is sometimes visualised in the Upaniṣads as a swan. The fact that the *puruṣa* who penetrates the fortresses he created is compared to a swan can be observed in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 4.3.12.:

Guarding by breath the lower nest,  
The immortal roams outside the nest;  
The immortal goes wherever he wants—  
The golden person!  
The single goose!<sup>87</sup>

Although a water bird, sometimes depicted as a goose, other times as a swan is the purest form of the conscious subject, it is still experiencing the *saṃsāric* reality. The Sanskrit term for it is *hamsa*. Later Indian thinkers, who, like the Kabbalists, loved all language games and attributed esoteric meaning to them, divided the word *hamsa* into two parts: *ham sa*. The word thus arranged plays the role of a mantra, repeated many times during meditation. When we reverse the order of the syllables, which happens automatically during continuous repetition, we get: *sa ham*. This was then read as: *saḥ aham, so'ham* – “this one is me,” which refers us to one of the *mahāvākyas*: “this here *puruṣa* in the sun is me.” The specifics and meaning of the *mahāvākya* we discuss in more detail in the chapter on *aham*. Uttering a given *mahāvākya* in an adequately altered state of consciousness is a sign of being on the path towards liberation. The appearance of a swan figure in the consciousness of a meditating person indicates that it is possible to transcend the manifested dimension of reality and achieve liberation. Therefore, the golden *puruṣa*, the single swan is a phenomenon which is a correlate of a very subtle level of consciousness. It is located between the absolute and the manifested dimension of reality.

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then would depend on another again before it.” Plotinus, *Ennead* VI. 7, trans. A.H. Armstrong, Harvard University Press, pp. 143–5.

87 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 4.3.12.: *prāṇena rakṣann avaram kulāyaṃ baḥiṣkulāyād amṛtaś caritvā, sa īyate'mṛto yatra kāmaṃ hiraṇmayah puruṣa ekahaṃsaḥ.*

In the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad we find a passage indicating the most important qualities of the *puruṣa*. It assigns him the highest attributes:

All this is simply that Person—  
rites, penance, prayer (*brahman*), the highest immortal.  
One who knows this, my friend, hidden within the cave,  
cuts the knot of ignorance in this world.<sup>88</sup>

Though manifest, it is lodged in the cave,

this vast abode named ‘Aged’  
In it are placed this whole world;  
In it are based what moves or breathes—  
what moves of breathes, what blinks the eye,  
what’s most desirable, beyond perception,  
what people desire most.<sup>89</sup>

These fragments can be interpreted as a kind of commentary to the *Puruṣa Sūkta*. Compared to the ideas expressed in the hymn, the much later Upaniṣad puts emphasis on the role of ethical actions. In his commentary, Śaṅkara reads the word *viśvam* (“*puruṣa* is all this”) as meaning “all the sacred deeds.” The sacred deeds are the deeds which do not carry any karmic debt, so they are a model for all action. The fortress of the world was built by the *puruṣa* based on such deeds. A proper action, one that sustains the primordial harmony of the world, acquires an ethical value; only such action makes it possible to recognise the truth, that is, it leads to true cognition and not to a mistaken subjective-objective superimposition. Ultimately, the *puruṣa*, who takes on the subtlest representational form of the absolute is:

As from a well-stoked fire sparks fly by the thousands,  
all looking just like it,  
So from the imperishable issue diverse things,  
and into it, my friend, they return.

That Person, indeed, is divine,

he has no visible form;  
He is both within and without,

88 Muṇḍaka Up. 2.1.10.: *puruṣa evedaṃ viśvaṃ karma tapo brahma parāmṛtam, etad yo veda nihitaṃ guhāyām so’vidyāgranthiṃ vikiratīha soṃya.*

89 Muṇḍaka Up. 2.2.1.: *āvih saṃnihitaṃ guhācaraṇi nāma mahatpadam atraitat samarpitam ejaṭ prāṇan nimiṣac ca yad etaj jānatha sad asad vareṇyam paraṃ vijñānād yad variṣṭhaṃ prajānām.*

unborn, without breath or mind;  
 He is radiant, and farther than  
 the farthest imperishable.<sup>90</sup>

*Puruṣa* is not an absolute being, but when visualised, he enables ultimate liberation. The Indian tradition lists many different forms visualised during meditation, but the subtle form of the *puruṣa* is considered to be one of the most effective. When accompanied by the repetition of a mantra, the original *Oṃ* mantra is used. *Oṃ* is also *akṣara* – a syllable – as well as that which is imperishable/unalterable. Therefore, ultimately it turns out that *puruṣa* is not separate from the reality of *ātman-brahman*, but identical with it. *Ātman* exists as *puruṣavidha*. The subtlest form of reality is no different from its essence.

The Upaniṣads show in great detail that the form of reality which emerges from the absolute, and which is its original representation, is experienced at the level of empirical reality as a multitude of distinct forms. Bṛhadāraṇyaka 2.1.2–14, for example, presents it in an exceptionally methodical way. As this passage is relatively long, we will only present its most important theses. The narrative situation of the instruction presented here is typical for the innovative interpretations of older Brahmanical content. The scholarly Brahmin Bālāki, visits king Ajātaśatru, a Kṣatriya known for his wisdom. Bālāki names various objects he worships, thus worshipping *brahman*. He gives all these objects the name *puruṣa*, but explains that he worships them, visualising them as being in different places. And so, one by one, he mentions the *puruṣa* that is in the sun, the *puruṣa* that is in the moon, in a lightning bolt, in the sky, in the wind, in the fire, in the water, in the mirror, in the sound, in different areas of the world, composed of shadows, in *ātman*. Each time, Ajātaśatru on the one hand explains to Bālāki the inadequacy of the description of *puruṣa*, who is uniform in his nature, but on the other hand, he indicates the benefits of even such a partially imagined object of worship. By visualising a specific form, concrete results are obtained. But since these are forms of worship experienced in the presented world, i.e. in the broadly understood *saṃsāric* world, the fruits of such activity are received in the same dimension of reality, the empirical one. For example, the one who worships *brahman* as a *puruṣa* in the moon ensures a constant flow of food and if he sees him as one who is in the regions of the world, he assures himself that his friends will

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90 Muṇḍaka Up. 2.1.1–2.: *yathā sudīptāt pāvakād viṣhulīṅgāḥ sahasraśaḥ prabhavante sarūpāḥ, tathākṣarād vividhāḥ somya bhāvāḥ prajāyante tatra caivāpi yanti, divyo hy amūrtaḥ puruṣaḥ sabāhyābhyantaro hy ajaḥ aprāṇo hy amanāḥ śubhro hy akṣarāt parataḥ paraḥ.*

never leave him. The whole passage shows that *puruṣa* is a model of some part of reality manifesting itself. When it functions as an object of worship, it may take the form of a personified being.

*Puruṣa* as the highest object of meditation may be visualised in many ways. Some of these patterns we encounter in the Upaniṣads. Let us look at Kaṭha 4.12–13:

A person the size of a thumb  
resides within the body (*ātman*);  
The lord of what was and what will be—  
from him he does not hide himself.

So, indeed, is that!

The person the size of a thumb  
is like a fire free of smoke;  
The lord of what was and what will be;  
the same today and tomorrow.

So, indeed, is that!<sup>91</sup>

*Puruṣa* is visualised here as being “the size of a thumb” – *aṅguṣṭhamātra*, and is defined as “being in the midst of *ātman*” (*madhya ātmani tiṣṭhati*), “like a fire free of smoke” (*jyotir ivādhūmaka*) which can be interpreted as “not covered by any manifestations.” It is the purest form of *ātman*. Such an interpretation is reinforced by comparing *puruṣa* to smokeless fire, to pure luminosity, illuminating everything with its own light. But this glow is not the *ātman* itself, but a light shining from it, as expressed in a beautiful song from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 5.15.1 and the Iśā 15–16:<sup>92</sup>

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91 Kaṭha Up. 4.12–13.: *aṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo madhya ātmani tiṣṭhati iśāno bhūta bhavyasya na tato vijugupsate, etad vai tat, aṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo jyotir ivādhūmakal iśāno bhūta bhavyasya sa evādyā sa u śvaḥ, etad vai tat.*

92 A comparison with the famous metaphor of a cave from Plato’s *Republic* comes to mind: “See human beings as though they were in an underground cave-like dwelling with its entrance, a long one, open to the light across the whole width of the cave. They are in it from childhood with their legs and necks in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around. Their light is from a fire burning far above and behind them. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a road above, along which see a wall (. . .) Then also see along this wall human beings carrying all sorts of artifacts, which project above the wall, and statues of men and other animals wrought from stone, wood, and every kind of material; as is to be expected, some of the carriers utter sounds while others are silent.”

“It’s a strange image,” he said, “and strange prisoners you’re telling of.”

The face of truth is covered  
with a golden dish.  
Open it, O Pūṣan, for me,  
a man faithful to the truth.  
Open it, O Pūṣan, for me to see.

O Pūṣan, sole seer!

Yama! Sun! Son of Prajāpati!  
Spread out your rays!  
Drawn in your light!  
I see your fairest form.  
That person up there,  
I am he!<sup>93</sup>

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“They’re like us,” I said. “For in the first place, do you suppose such men would have seen anything of themselves and one another other than the shadows cast by the fire on the side of the cave facing them?”

“How could they,” he said, “if they had been compelled to keep their heads motionless throughout life?”

“And what about the things that are carried by? Isn’t it the same with them?”

“Of course.”

“If they were able to discuss things with one another, don’t you believe they would hold that they are naming these things going by before them that they see?”

“Necessarily.”

“And what if the prison also had an echo from the side facing them? Whenever one of the men passing by happens to utter a sound do you suppose they would believe that anything other than the passing shadow was uttering the sound?” ( . . . ) “Then most certainly,” I said, “such men would hold that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things.” ( . . . ) Liken the domain revealed through sight to the prison home, and the light of the fire in it to the sun’s power; ( . . . ) In the knowable the last thing to be seen, and that with considerable effort, is the *idea* of the good; but once seen, it must be concluded that this is in fact the cause of all that is right and fair in everything – **in the visible it gave birth to light and its sovereign** [highlighted by M. K. – the word *sovereign* refers to the Greek word *kyrios* – the lord, the sovereign, the governor]; in the intelligible, itself sovereign, it provided truth and intelligence – and that the man who is going to act prudently in private or in public must see it.” Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. A. Bloom, 2d ed., Basic Books 1991, pp. 193–6.

93 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 5.15.1 and the Iśā Up. 15–16.: *hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpīhitaṃ mukham tat tvaṃ pūṣann apāvṛṇu satyadharmāya dīṣṭaye, pūṣann ekarṣe yama sūrya prajāpatya vyūha raśmīn samūha tejaḥ yat te rūpaṃ kalyāṇatamaṃ tat te paśyāmi yośāv asau puruṣaḥ so’ham asmi.*

The golden cover, the golden halo – *hiraṇmaya pātrq*– is the most wonderful form of an object of meditation, but it is still a distinguishable object in the cognitive act. *Ātman* is not only a glow, but also the source of the glow. When one penetrates beyond the rays into the source of this glow, the only way to describe this experience is to utter a sentence: *ya sa asau puruṣas sa aham asmi*. In the earlier passage from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.4.10, analysed in more detail in the chapter dedicated to the term *aham*, the Upaniṣad demonstrated the emergence of the following manifestations of reality from the cosmological perspective. There, *ātman*, existing as *puruṣavidha*, having uttered the phrase *aham asmi*, initiated the process of shaping the empirical reality. In this fragment of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka we see the reverse order, but here too two phrases are crucial. *Puruṣa*, whose essence is no longer obscured by anything, when experienced in his own nature, may be described by the words: I – *aham*, am – *asmi*, pure existence – *sat*. This luminous, golden aspect of *puruṣa*, as the subtlest object of meditation is confirmed by the Chāndogya 1.6.6.: “the golden person we see within the sun” – *hiraṇmayapuruṣa*, or as said in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 5.5.2.: “the same as that sun up there.” Such visualised *puruṣa* is a reflection of a pure soul, which is symbolised by a swan – *hiraṇmayapurūṣa ekahamisa*. Let us also note that this originally luminous form of *puruṣa* is indicated by a specific etymology of the word presented in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.4.1., where it is depicted as the one who earlier (*pūrva*) burned (*uṣ*) all the worlds. The process of burning means, after all, fire, flames and glow. The luminosity appears as the essence, the core of *puruṣa*’s nature.

Let us note at this point some of the images evoked by Plato. In this chapter, we want to show that only the reality described as *ātman* is *sat*, i.e. an absolute being, and *puruṣa* is its most primary, luminous figure. By being luminous, *puruṣa* illuminates the manifestations of reality which we experience as independent entities. Comparing Plato’s metaphor with the message of the Upaniṣad, on one level we have the radiant idea of Good, symbolised by the sun, and on the other *ātman*, often depicted with the same symbol. The light glowing from *puruṣa* rather than *ātman* itself, can be compared to the glow of flames. The sun is completely transcendent to reality, but it lends its light to fire. Between the sun and the wall, along which people are carrying various objects, a fire is burning. It is because of the illuminating glow of fire that the objects cast their shadow on the wall of the cave. The people and the objects they carry are responsible for the structure/form of the presented world. They seem to play the role of patterns or archetypes, determining with their shadows and voices the common, intersubjective world of the people chained inside the cave. In the language of the

Upaniṣads, the visual form of these objects, taking the form of a shadow, is called *rūpa*, and the sound that accompanies it and is associated with naming what you see, is *nāma*. In this way, we see that the objects which cast their shadow and echo on the wall of the cave, create individual, diverse objects – *nāmarūpa*.

The condition for all this is the idea of the good, which, as Plato says, “gives birth to light and its sovereign.” It is a very mysterious passage that usually escapes the attention of commentators. The question of light is quite evident – it is a fire that illuminates what might be considered to correspond to the patterns and norms of action, conduct and the entire structure of reality. So, our world is a world of shadows, taking on the forms created for us, which owes its existence to the light coming from the very source, from the idea of the good, from the absolute being. Plato’s “sovereign” seems to be a guardian of this whole theatre we call reality. We do not know of any equivalents to such a notion in any other Platonic texts. However, the image is consistent with the world presented in the Indian *śruti* texts and philosophical schools referring to them. Such a governor or guarantor of the world depicted in the Upaniṣads is *puruṣa*, sometimes referred to as *Īśvara*. According to Śaṅkara’s interpretation, *Īśvara*’s being is located between the absolute reality (*brahman*) and the world of individual souls. Because of its role and its luminous nature, *puruṣa* is often perceived and experienced as identical to *ātman*. According to Advaita’s interpretation, it is a subtle form of a cognitive error, but it is accepted by the *sagunīc* movements. In this context, the image of reality depicted by the cave metaphor closely matches the spirit of the *nirgunīc* Indian schools.

Let us now return to the analysis of the term *puruṣa*. When a visualised object is placed spatially, there is usually mention of the space within the heart – *antaḥ hṛdaya ākāśa* (Taittirīya 1.6.1.), he is eternally residing in the heart of beings – *sadā janānām hṛdaye sanniviśaḥ*. Very often it is visualised as being in the right eye:

Now, the person one sees within the eye—he, indeed, is the Ṛg verse, he is the Sāman chant, he is the recitation, he is the Yajus formula, he is the formulation of truth (*brahman*).

This person down here has exactly the same appearance as that person up there in the sun, and this person has the same two songs and the same name as he.<sup>94</sup>

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94 Chāndogya Up. 1.7.5.: *atha ya eṣo’ntarakṣiṇi puruṣo dīśyate saivarkatsāma tad ukthaṃ tad yajus tad brahma tasyaitasya tad eva rūpaṃ yad amuṣya rūpaṃ yāv amuṣya geṣṇau tau geṣṇau yan nāna tan nāma*.

The identity relationship is also indicated between visualisation at the level of the microcosm where *puruṣa* is located in the eye, and visualisation at the level of the macrocosm, where he is in the sun or in the halo of the sun. This is indicated even more clearly by the Chāndogya 4.11.1.: “I am the person one sees in the sun; so I am all those.” As a result of such an insight, we become aware of the identity relationship, which directly leads to liberation. This act is expressed by one of the *mahāvākya*: *ya eṣa āditye puruṣo dṛśyate so’ham asmi. ya eṣa āditye puruṣo dṛśyate so’ham asmi.*

Clearly, the true name of the person in the right eye is Indha. Even though he is really Indha, people cryptically call him ‘Indra,’ because gods in some ways love the cryptic and despise the plain. What looks like a person in the left eye, on the other hand, is his wife, Virāj. Their meeting place is the space within the heart, their food is the red lump in the heart, and their garment is the mesh-like substance within the heart. The path along which they travel is the vein that goes up from the heart. These veins called Hitā that are located in the heart are as fine as a hair split a thousandfold. Alongside them, the sap flows continuously (. . .).<sup>95</sup>

A similar fragment can also be found in Maitrī 7.11. In the right eye, a male being is visualised, which takes on a female form in the left eye. The right side, as in most ancient cultures, is more positively associated than the left. This is why a pure glow, a flame is visualised in the right pupil. Let us note that Virāj is not a separate being, but a form of *puruṣa*, a subtle form obscuring the original manifestation of the absolute. It is not as much a reflection of *ātman* itself as of its reflection. Virāj plays the role of *māyā*, the female cosmic power, obscuring the nature of reality. Everything takes place in the deepest space of the heart, which corresponds to the state of deep sleep. If we contrast this metaphor with Māṇḍūkya, a coherent picture emerges. According to Māṇḍūkya, in the state of *prājña* resides the *Īśvara*, who is responsible for the emergence of the subsequent dimensions of the empirical reality. This is correlated with *māyā* in its most original activity. The concept of *Īśvara* corresponds to *puruṣa*, while the concept of *māyā* relates to Virāj. The combination of *puruṣa*, who is by nature an inactive consciousness (*cit*), with the female power (*śakti*) creates *bindu*, a drop, which is

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95 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 4.2.2–3.: *indho ha vai nāmaiṣa yo’yaṃ dakṣiṇe’kṣaṇ puruṣaḥ taṃ vā etam indhaṃ santam indra ity ācakṣate parokṣeṇaiva parokṣapriyā iva hi devāḥ pratyakṣadviśaḥ. athaitad vāme’kṣaṇi puruṣarūpam eṣāsya patnī virāḥ tayor eṣa saṃstāvo ya eṣo’ntar hṛdaya ākāśaḥ athainayor etad annaṃ ya eṣo’ntar hṛdaye lohitapiṇḍaḥ athainayor etad prāvaraṇaṃ yad etad antarhṛdaye jālakam iva athainayor eṣā sṛtiḥ saṃcaraṇī yaiṣā hṛdayād ūrdhvā nāḍy uccarati yathā keśaḥ sahasradhā bhinna evam asyaitā hitā nāma nāyō’ntarhṛdaye pratiṣṭhitā bhavanti etābhir vā etad āsravad āsravati.*

a point symbolising all possibility and power, both of emerging new phenomena, i.e. worlds, and transcending them, through a meditative procedure, in order to achieve final liberation.

Although the word *puruṣa* itself means a human being or a man, the Upaniṣads clearly indicate that *puruṣa*, as an object of meditative visualisation, is not an ordinary person. The uniqueness of *puruṣa* understood in this way, is indicated by the adjective *amṛta* – immortal, in opposition to an ordinary man, a mortal:

(. . .) the radiant and immortal person residing in the physical body—they are both one’s self (*ātman*). It is the immortal; it is *brahman*; it is the Whole.<sup>96</sup>

The fact that the *puruṣa* discussed here is not an ordinary person is stated by the Chāndogya 5.10.2, where there is a phrase: *puruṣa amanava* – “*puruṣa* is not a man:”

Now, the people who know this, and the people here in the wilderness who venerate thus: “Austerity is faith”—they pass into the flame, from the flame into the day, from the day (. . .) from these months into the year, from the year into the sun, from the sun into the moon, and from the moon into lightning. Then a person who is not human—he leads them to *brahman*. This is the path leading to the gods.<sup>97</sup>

The earliest Vedic *śruti* texts preceding the Upaniṣads do not yet contain a fully developed concept of either *saṃsāra* or *mokṣa* – as the final liberation from the circle of incarnations – or the law of *karman* with its strong ethical quality, as the law ordering the structure of the presented world. The afterlife was a world of ideal, imagined forms, devoid of all the inconveniences of the earthly world, provided that appropriate rituals were performed, especially by the descendants for the intention of their ancestors. Human desire was to live forever in the afterlife, and the most feared was to die again after death (*punarmṛtyu*) and to dwell as a hungry spirit devoid of the sacrificial vows or even as a ghost. The model of perceiving the world changes in the Upaniṣads. The fully developed concept of *saṃsāra* includes life not only in the earthly but also extraterrestrial worlds. *Mokṣa* began to mean full liberation, not only from the reincarnations on earth,

96 Bṛhadāraṇyaka 2.5.1: *śārīras tejomayo’mṛtamayaḥ puruṣo’yam eva sa yo’yam ātmā idam amṛtam idaṃ brahmedam sarvam.*

97 Chāndogya Up. 5.10.1–2: *tad ya itthaṃ viduḥ ye ce me’raṇye śraddhā tapa ity upāsate te’rciṣam abhisambhavanty arciṣo’harahna (...) māsebhyaḥ saṃvatsaraṃ saṃvatsarād ādityam ādityāc candramasaṃ candramaso vidyutaṃ tatpuruṣo’mānavāḥ sa enān brahma gamayaty eṣa devayānaḥ panthā.*

but also going beyond the – albeit *saṃsāric* – existence in the heavens, governed by various gods, such as Indra or Brahma.

One of the transitional concepts between the model of a happy, posthumous existence in the hereafter, in one of the heavens (*svarga*), and the pursuit of full liberation (*mokṣa*) was the concept of two posthumous ways – *devayāna* and *pitryāna*. *Devayāna* is the path of the gods, also called *arcirmārga* – “the path of glow” – from which there is no return to *saṃsāra*. *Pitryāna*, also referred to as *dhūmamārga* – “the path of smoke” – is the direction of return to *saṃsāra* in an incarnation depending on the previously obtained karmic merit. The guide on the path of gods is *amanava puruṣa* – “*puruṣa* who is not a human.” Let us see how various elements of this elaborate metaphor describing the soul’s posthumous fate harmonise with all our previous considerations. At the beginning of this chapter we quoted a metaphor whereby the *puruṣa* who was liberating himself was compared to a fire without smoke. And here, too, the “*amanava puruṣa*” follows the path of glow and not the path of smoke.

So far, our reflections on the concept of *puruṣa*, conducted from the perspective of Advaita, began from the statement that the subtlest form of manifestation of an absolute being is *puruṣavidha*. Failure to recognise that this form is in fact *ātman*, and not anything different from it, leads to the emergence of successive forms. This is how the notion of *puruṣa* should be understood in this context, as the basis for the emergence of new worlds. The world and its entire structure emerge not from *ātman* itself, but from the form in which it manifests. The original form, which manifests itself in different ways, acts due to various impulses. The most powerful impulse is *kāma* – desire. This desire should be understood very broadly, as an almost instinctive impulse to manifest itself, to learn, to experience. This is what the verses from Bṛhadāraṇyaka 4.4.5–6 reveal:

Clearly, this self is *brahman*—this self that is made of perception, made of mind, made of sight, made of breath, made of hearing, made of earth, made of water, made of wind, made of space, made of light and the lightless, made of desire and the desireless, made of anger and the angerless, made of righteous and the unrighteous; this self that is made of everything. Hence there is this saying: “He’s made of this. He’s made of that.” What a man turns out to be depends on how he acts and how he conducts himself. If his actions are good, he will turn into something good. If his actions are bad, he will turn into something bad. A man turns into something good by good action and into something bad by bad action. And so people say: “A person here consists simply of desire.” A man resolves in accordance with his desire, acts in accordance with his resolve, and turns out to be in accordance with his action. On this point there is the following verse:

A man who’s attached goes with his action,  
to that very place to which  
his mind and character cling.

Reaching the end of his action,  
 of whatever he has done in this world—  
 From that world he returns  
 back to this world,  
 back to action.

That is the course of a man who desires.

Now, a man who does not desire—who is without desires, who is freed from desires, whose desires are fulfilled, whose only desire is his self—his vital functions (*prāṇa*) do not depart. *Brahman* he is, and to *brahman* he goes.<sup>98</sup>

*Puruṣa* is here referred to as *kāmamaya*, “made of desire.” Desire is the main impulse leading to the world of duality (*dvaita*). In the Maitrī Upaniṣad 2.5. it is stated that the one who is called *puruṣa*, although in fact beyond the cognitive act and vision, is recognised as the *primus motor – pracadayitā*. Let us note with what caution and precision this later Upaniṣad speaks: it does not refer to *puruṣa*, but to the reality that used to be called *puruṣa*. *Puruṣa* is a form of *sat*. *Sat* is pure consciousness, yet inactive, and *puruṣa* is action – *kriya*, *karman*, or even perfect action – *sukṛta*.

In Brahmanical literature, the term *sukṛta* is used to describe a perfect act, a perfect action; a ritual act that is a perfect reproduction of the original cosmogonic act. This is also the term used in the Aitareya Upaniṣad to name *puruṣa*. This Upaniṣad begins by stating that in the beginning there was only *ātman*: *idam agre ātmā āsīt*. It is, as has already been said many times in this book, a classic formula that denotes the state of non-manifested existence of the absolute being. The next sentence makes it clear that “nothing but it appeared.” Nothing manifested itself, there is no indication of even the subtlest form. As the first a thought appears; it is thought of manifesting oneself, of creating the worlds. The following sequences describe how particular manifestations structure the presented world. Here the scheme is quite similar to that of *Puruṣa Sūkta*. After

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98 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 4.4.5–6.: *sa vā ayam ātmā brahma vijñānamayo manomayaḥ prāṇmayaś cakṣurmayaḥ śrotramayaḥ pṛthivīmaya āpomayo vāyumaya ākāśamayaḥ tejomayo'tejomayaḥ kāmamayo'kāmamayaḥ krodhamayo'krodhamayo dharmamayo'dharmamayaḥ sarvamayaḥ tad yad etad idaṇimayōdomaya iti. yathākārī yathācārī tathā bhavati sādhuḥkārī sādhuḥ bhavati pāpakārī pāpo bhavati puṇyaḥ puṇyena karmanā bhavati pāpaḥ pāpena atho khalv āhuh kāmamaya evāyaṇ puruṣa iti sa yathākāmo bhavati tat kratuḥ bhavati yat kratuḥ bhavati tat karma kurute yat karma kurute tadabhisampadyate, tad eṣa śloko bhavati tad eva saktaḥ saha karmamaiti liṅgaṇ mano yatra niṣaktam asya prāpyāntaṇ karmaṇas tasya yat kiṅceha karoty ayam tasmāl lokāt punar aity asmai lokāya karmaṇe iti nu kāmamānaḥ athākāmamāno yo'kāmo niṣkāma āptakāma ātmakāmo na tasya prāṇā utkrāmanti brahmaiva san brahmāpyeti.*

the principles of the organisation of the cosmos emerge, the man – that is *puruṣa* made of these principles – is divided. Particular parts of macroanthropos correspond to particular elements of the world. This is a clear indication that it is the macrocosm that corresponds to the microcosm, and not the other way round. These principles, the elements that function both as deities (*devatā*), and the elements (*indriya*), begin to function as if independently.

Once these deities were created, they fell into this vast ocean here. It afflicted him with hunger and thirst. Those deities then said to him: ‘Find us a dwelling in which we can establish ourselves and eat food.’ So he brought a cow up to them, but they said: ‘That’s totally inadequate for us.’ Then he brought a horse up to them, but they said: ‘That’s totally inadequate for us.’ Finally he brought a man up to them, and they exclaimed: ‘Now, this is well made!’ for man is indeed well made.

Then he told them: ‘Enter, each into your respective dwelling.’<sup>99</sup>

Only a human (*puruṣa*) is “well done” (*sukṛta*). Only a human is able to accommodate all created worlds, all reality. In order for this reality to be a cosmos, and not chaos, it must be subject to a certain structuring. That is to say, for all actions to make sense, they must fit into a certain order. This order turns out to be an order due to the structure of *puruṣa*, the structure of a human. The empirical reality is a correlate of the subjective reality. The manifestations function due to the existence of the subject. As already written, the word *sukṛta* is a Vedic term referring to an ideal sacrifice, ideal in the sense that it is exactly, without any changes – be they defects or improvements – reproducing the original cosmogonic act. Thus, only a human being is able, because of its nature, to reproduce this primordial cosmogonic act; only a human being – as an ideal form, the first manifestation of the absolute is ultimately fully identical with pure existence – *sat*. The full sense of the absolute is only conveyed by *puruṣa*, while other forms are only partial. Therefore it is the visualisation of *puruṣa*, and not of other manifestations of absolute reality, that directly leads to liberation and enables transcendence of the subjective-objective dualism. There are many progressive meditation schemes presented in the Upaniṣads. To support the thesis that most meditation practices ultimately lead to the visualisation of *puruṣa*, let us quote certain passages:

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99 Aitareya Up. 1.2.1–3.: *tā etā devatāḥ sṛṣṭā asmin mahaty arṇave prāpataṃs tam aśanāyāpipāsābhyām anvavārjat tā enam abruvann āyatanaṃ naḥ prajānihi yasmin pratiṣṭhitā annam adāmeti, tābhyo gām ānayat tā abruvan nai vai no’yam alam iti tābhyo’śvam ānayat tā abruvan na vai no’yam alam iti, tābhyah puruṣam ānayat tā abruvan sukṛtaṃ bateti puruṣo vāva sukṛtam tā abravīd yathāyatanaṃ praviśateti.*

*Brahman*, you see, is this whole world. With inner tranquillity, one should venerate it as *jalān*.

Now, then, man is undoubtedly made of resolve. What a man becomes on departing from here after death is in accordance with his resolve in this world. So he should make this resolve:

‘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 (...)’<sup>100</sup>

A person the size of a thumb in the body (*ātman*),

always resides within the hearts of men;

One should draw him out of the body with determination,

like a reed from the grass sheath;

One should know him

as immortal and bright.

One should know him

as immortal and bright.<sup>101</sup>

The visualisation of *puruṣa*, the subtlest form of the absolute, ultimately leads to the experience, not mediated by anything, that reality is *neti, neti* – neither such, nor such, because it is *satyasya satyam* – the real behind the real, the truth of truth, the existence of the essence (Bṛhadāraṇyaka 2.3.6.) From these considerations, a very interesting thesis arises that the presented world is not so much a direct representation of the absolute, but a reflection of its subtlest form, its first manifestation. The same conclusion can also be reached on the basis of Plato’s text.

100 Chāndogya Up. 3.14.1–2.: *sarvam khalvidaṃ brahma tajjalān iti śānta upāsīta atha khalu kratumayaḥ puruṣo yathākraturasmiṃl loke puruṣo bhavati tathetaḥ pretya bhavati sa kratuṃ kurvīta, manomayaḥ prāṇaśarīro bhārūpaḥ satyasaṅkalpa ākāśātmā sarvakarmā sarvakāmaḥ sarvagandhaḥ sarvarasaḥ sarvam idam bhyātto’vākyanādar aḥ.*

101 Kaṭha Up. 6.17.: *aiṅṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣontarātmā sadā janānāṃ hṛdaye sanniviṣṭaḥ taṃ svāc charṣrāt pravṛthen muñjād iveṣṣkāṃ dhairyema taṃ vidyāc chukram amṛtam taṃ vidyāc chukram amṛtam iti.*

## 8. *Sākṣin* – the observer and the principle of subjectivity

The notion of the observer or witness (*sākṣin*) appears in the Upaniṣads, as well as in the Advaita system based on them, in reference to the level of deep sleep. The analysis of the texts demonstrates that the observer is the subtlest subject, retaining its distinctiveness and individuality in all three states. It seems that on the grounds of Advaita the act of pure vision, in many other systems identified with liberation itself, is not yet the highest state of consciousness. The judgements on the highest state are not made in the categories of a pure observer, but only in those of “subjectivity,” pure cognition, which is something even higher than the subtle subject of cognition.

One of the terms to define the cognitive subject in the Upaniṣads is *sākṣin*. Etymologically, the word comes from *sa* + *akṣa* – “the one who has eyes,” “the seeing one.” Analysis of the passages from the Upaniṣads presented below will demonstrate that this is not about an ordinary act of sensual perception, but about “seeing” correlated with a very subtle state of consciousness and eventually leading to liberation. The concept of a subject, referred to as *sākṣin*, indicates that it is not so much the act of understanding or recognition of the true nature of reality that leads to *mokṣa*, but a simple act of seeing, an act of insight into that nature – *anubhava*. In the soteriological sense, understanding ultimately turns out to be a very subtle, but still a tool. Such a statement is common to all the Vedānta schools. What will be analysed in this chapter is whether the state of *sākṣin* is synonymous with achieving final liberation, i.e. whether the two concepts – *sākṣin* and *ātman* – can be identified.

The term *sākṣin*, which in later Indian philosophical thought becomes a technical term, is only found in a few places in the Upaniṣads. In the same context, two other terms indicate this particular characteristic of the subject as seeing the world but neither engaging in it nor experiencing it, and thus achieving liberation: *paśya* (“the looking one”) and *draṣṭṛ* (“the one who sees”) from the verbal root *ḍṛś* (“to see”). The most famous image depicting this observer who sees, and who looks at the world, appears in two Upaniṣads (in almost identical versions), the Muṇḍaka 3.1.1.-5 and the Śvetāśvatara 4.6–7.:

Two birds, companions and friends,  
nestle on the very same tree.

One of them eats a tasty fig;  
the other, not eating, looks on.<sup>102</sup>

“The bird” is described as *suparṇa*, “having beautiful wings.” The description is used both for the sun and the moon, when they are shown as having beautiful rays. Applying this word to a bird emphasises that it is rather a metaphor and that these are not ordinary birds. In his commentary on this stanza, Śaṅkara<sup>103</sup> claims that the image refers to two beings situated in a beautiful form: to *Īśvara* as the governor, and to an individual soul as the governed one. Both the *Īśvara* and the individual soul reside in the same body, just like two birds on the same tree. In a way, they are also named the same, in a sense that they manifest themselves as results of the same cause, even though one of them plays the role of a governor and the other of the governed one. They exist within the same dimension of the presented world. And similarly, the way we see two birds in the same tree, we can perceive and experience the governor and the mortal soul within the same body.

The metaphor of a tree, reflecting the image of the entire presented reality, is very popular in the Indian tradition. Usually, it refers to the sacred *aśvattha* tree, described as having its roots upwards, i.e. emerging from some other, higher dimension; in the Brahmanical tradition, this reality is traditionally described with the term *brahman*. The branches and leaves grow into an image of the entire perceivable reality. The two birds are analogous elements of this reality. One of them, which is attached to a structured dimension of reality, eats specific fruit. It exists as an individual soul – *jīva*<sup>104</sup> – differentiating oneself from the others and having its own place in the tree and the fruit to fulfil given desires. The other bird does not consume any fruit, is not attached to any specific object of desire or leaning, remains as if on the side and has an equal view as well as distance to the entire tree, i.e. to the whole reality, while still part of it. The first bird does not grasp the tree as a whole, while the other perceives nothing but the tree. None of them notices that the tree grows out of something, that it has some support, that it is conditioned, established in another dimension of reality. Both the birds, both *jīva* and *Īśvara*, function in the sphere of ignorance – *avidyā*.

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102 Muṇḍaka Up. 3.1.1. and Śvetāśvatara Up. 4.6.: *dvā suparṇā sayujā sakhāyā samānaṃ vṛkṣaṃ pariśavajāte tayor anyahī pippalaṃ svādvatti anaśnann anyo abhicākaṣīti*.

103 Som Raj Gupta, *The Word Speaks to the Faustian Man*, Volume 2, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1995, pp. 95 ff.

104 We use here the term *jīva*, as a Vedāntic technical term denoting an individual subject; the earliest Upaniṣads often use different terms, as discussed in other chapters of this book.

This is how this image is explained by Śāṅkara. The presented world (*vyavahāra*) is made of three elements, three categories. *Prapañca* corresponds to the whole presented reality and is experienced as inanimate reality; in this metaphor it is symbolised by the tree. Another category is *jīva* – the individual soul. It is engaged in *saṃsāra* and through a continuous process of experiencing, represented by a bird eating fruit, becomes more and more entangled in it. The last one – the highest category in the dimension of the presented world – is *Īśvara*, a passive witness, whose activity is limited to being present, to control, to govern; this activity is limited to the very act of looking.

Here, a problem of a more general nature arises – the fundamental difference between the *jīva/jīvas* and *Īśvara*. Once again, it should be emphasised that this problem is considered only in the light of the *nirguṇic* Vedānta, and not the *saguṇic* concepts, in which *Īśvara* will ultimately be identified with *brahman*. An analysis of the text demonstrates that both *jīva* and *Īśvara* belong to the same dimension of reality, and so they do not differ in terms of metaphysical status. The state of liberation, *mokṣa*, transcends being both a soul and an *Īśvara*. This is how *Īśvara* is positioned, for example, by the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣads. To cast more light on this problem, reference will be made to yet another text, the *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali. It is known that Yoga's ontology is based on the dualistic Sāṃkhya, although both in Sāṃkhya-Yoga and in Advaita-Vedānta the ultimate absolute reality is pure cognition, pure consciousness (*sat cit*), and in this context it does not matter whether we refer to it as *puruṣa* or *ātman*.

We therefore quote *Yogasūtras*, because they provide a technical definition that distinguishes the individual soul, which in this system is referred to as *puruṣa*, from *Īśvara*. Patañjali dedicated several sutras to the concept of *Īśvara*:

Īśvara is a special *puruṣa* untouched by kleśa, karma, vipāka and āśaya. (Y.1.24)

In Him there is unexcelled the germ of Omniscience or – In him there is unexcelled Omniscience. (Y.1.25)

The guru even of the foremost (gods like Brahmā and others and sages like Aṅgiras and others) because of being unconditioned by time. (Y.1.26)<sup>105</sup>

*Īśvara* is referred to as a “special” (*viśeṣa*) kind of *puruṣa*. Such “specialness” does not mean that the first is absolutely liberated (which in Yoga is called *kevala*) and

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105 *Yogavārttika of Vijñānabhikṣu*, Text with English translation and critical notes along with the text and English translation of the *Pātañjala Yogasūtras* and *Vyāsabhāṣya* by T.S. Rukmani, Vol. I, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 2007, pp. 127, 147, 154 respectively.

the other one is not. This is stated clearly by Vjāsa in his commentary (3.55) to *Yogasūtras*:

When the sattva-intellect is cleansed of the dirt of rajas and tamas with the seeds in the form of afflictions burnt and becomes fit to know the difference of puruṣa (from itself) then it attains a purity equal to that of puruṣa, as it were; at that stage, the cessation of experience falsely attributed to the self, is purity of puruṣa. At this stage ‘kaivalya’ comes into being for one who has the powers (siddhis) or for one who does not have the powers, for one who has got knowledge born of discriminate-discernment or for one who does not have it. When discriminate-discernment is achieved in the case of one whose seed of afflictions is burnt, there is no need of anything else (for attaining kaivalya).

It has been stated earlier that through the purity of the sattva-intellect there arises, due to samādhi, various powers (siddhis) as well as discriminate-discernment. Whereas the truth is that misapprehension (adarśanam) is removed by discriminate-discernment. When that is removed there are no more afflictions (such as asmitā, raga &c.) In the absence of the afflictions there is absence of the fruition of karma. And in this stage the guṇas, having fulfilled their purpose, do not present themselves again as objects to be seen by puruṣa. That is self’s ‘kaivalya.’ Then the self shines by itself, is free from dirt and is isolated.<sup>106</sup>

Therefore, *Īśvara* is a pattern, an archetype, an ideal *puruṣa*. It presents itself in empirical awareness and since it is given in this dimension, it remains a phenomenon of consciousness, which must be ultimately restrained. By focusing on *Īśvara*, namely one’s own “I,” one achieves the state of *yoga* with awareness – *samprajñātasamādhi*, i.e. the state of *Īśvara*, the state of an observer or *sākṣin* from the *prājña* state described in the *Māṇḍūkya*. However, this is not yet a state of complete liberation, referred to as *kevala* by Yoga or *turiya* by the Upaniṣads. For individual beings, *Īśvara* is an idealised model to which one can compare oneself or identify oneself with. And who would not wish to be unlimited in time, immortal, not subjected to any handicaps, misfortunes or pain, commonly referred to as *duḥkha*. Such is *Īśvara*, unbound by any inconvenience. It is eternal, just as *māyā* is eternal – a cosmic illusion, with which it is correlated. There is a seed of omniscience in it, except that this omniscience is ultimately only meant to be a tool leading to a liberating cognition. Being unaffected by *kleśa* and karmic debt (which is what differentiates and structures the ultimately indistinguishable *puruṣas*), it is simple and uniform, and therefore it has since ancient times been the reference point for the subsequent generations of yogis.

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106 Ibid., Vol. III, p. 210.

These are not the successive *Īśvaras*, because it is impossible to multiply perfect, simple beings, but rather the same, one, immortal, eternal *Īśvara*. Therefore, what generally distinguishes *puruṣa* from *Īśvara* is its karmic limitation. *Puruṣa* frees oneself from *karman* and *Īśvara* is never bound by it.

Let us now return to the metaphor of two birds. The second bird, which, according to Śaṅkara, symbolises *Īśvara*, is focused on only one activity. It watches without getting involved. This may indicate that the act of seeing is typical for an observer (*sakṣin*, *draṣṭṛ*) and does not cause karmic consequences. Comparing those three texts: the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad (or the Śvetāśvatara), the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad and *Yogasūtras* with Vyāsa's commentary, we arrive at a very coherent structure. In the third state of consciousness, namely the deep sleep, described by the Māṇḍūkya as *prājñā* ("wisdom"), there appears an observer, a witness; in the metaphysical dimension it is identical to the concept of *Īśvara*. Also in the *Yogasūtras*, it is very clearly said that *īśvarapranidhāna* ("focusing on *Īśvara*"), might lead to the final liberation – *asaṃprajñātasamādhi*. Using the terminology of the Māṇḍūkya and adopted by Advaita, the state of *prājñā* is transcended by *turiya*.

Let us now continue the analysis of the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad. The above considerations referred to the verse 3.1.1. The matter seems to become more complicated when we approach the next two verses:

Stuck on the very same tree,  
one person grieves, deluded  
by her who is not the Lord;  
But when he sees the other,  
the contented Lord—and his majesty—  
his grief disappears.

When the seer sees that Person,  
the golden-colored, the creator, the Lord,  
as the womb of brahman;  
Then, shaking off the good and the bad,  
the wise man becomes spotless,  
and attains the highest identity.<sup>107</sup>

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107 Muṇḍaka Up. 3.1.2–3.: *samāne vṛkṣe puruṣo nimagno'nīśayā śocati muhyamānaḥ juṣṭaṃ yadā paśyaty anyam īśam asya mahimānam iti vītaśokaḥ, yadā paśyaḥ paśyate rukmavarṇaṃ kartāram īśaṃ puruṣaṃ brahmayonim tadā vidvān puṇyapāpe vidhūya nirañjanaḥ paramaṃ sāmīyam upaiti.*

The image already seems clear: there are two birds, one of them symbolises an individual soul, the other one *Īśvara*, and the tree itself is the *saṃsāric* reality – *prapañca*. But who in that case is *puruṣa* who is supposedly in the same tree? One may think that the only coherent solution to this problem and a reconciliation of these three verses is to adopt the following concept: all three verses above refer to a description of the same situation, as well as the same dimension of reality, except that in the first verse the text uses a poetic metaphor while the other two provide an analysis in language that is certainly not strictly technical, but tends towards more precise, detailed terms.

One of the common points for both methods of description is to refer to the same (*samana*) tree. Thus both situations concern the description of the *saṃsāric* reality. The term *puruṣa* does not relate to the definition of the absolute being. It occurs at the level of *māyā* or, to be precise and use Māṇḍūkya's terminology, at the level of the *prājña* state. In this passage of the Upaniṣad, the term *puruṣa* is used in a similar way to the *Yogasūtras*, where it involved the essence of an individual subject (in other texts, the terms *jīva* and *citta* appear in this context most often), as well as *Īśvara* understood as *puruṣa viśeṣa* – the only, special *puruṣa*. In the third stanza, this juxtaposition is illustrated by the terms *paśya* (the looking one, the seeing one, equivalent of *sākṣin*), and *Īśa* – the Lord, the Sovereign, the Governor. So here again we have an equivalent of the metaphor of two birds. As Śaṅkara writes in his commentary, one of them identifies itself with its body, while its mind is darkened (*muhyamāna*) by ignorance and therefore does not recognise its situation, which results in sadness. Here, it is expressed with the verb *śocati* (“is being sad”), but generally corresponds to the state of *duḥkha*. Here, *duḥkha* is understood as broadly, as in the later Buddhism, where it is simply a basic, inseparable attribute of *saṃsāra*. This state of immersion in sadness results from the fact that the *puruṣa*, who by its very nature is potentially free, gets caught up in impotence – *anīśayā*. *An-īśa* is a power who is not a Lord or Governor. The expression points to a female power, most probably an equivalent of a female cosmic power denoting *prakṛti*, who is different from the Governor and who appears to us as the cause of human ignorance.<sup>108</sup>

The fact that we can interpret the word *anīśā* as referring to the female cosmic power which, for example, in the language of Sāṃkhya is referred to as *prakṛti*, can be demonstrated by stanza 4.5. of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. Immediately after this stanza appears the metaphor of the two birds, which are the subject of our analysis.

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108 Patrick Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 399.

One unborn male [billy-goat], burning with passion, covers one unborn female [nanny-goat] coloured red, white, and black, and giving birth to numerous offspring with the same colours as hers, while another unborn male leaves her after he has finished enjoying her pleasures.<sup>109</sup>

The reference to the later Sāṃkhya terminology is clear; in fact, the Śvetāśvatara belongs to the group of the so-called proto Sāṃkhya-Yogic Upaniṣads. The three colours (the same comparison is found in the sixth book of the Chāndogya) represent three *guṇas*: *rajas*, *sattva* and *tamas*. The dynamic nature of *prakṛti* is emphasised here, which, by constantly transforming, creates various manifested forms – *vyakta*. The term “unborn” naturally refers to *puruṣa*. Already in this text, the later – and quite paradoxical indeed – thesis of Sāṃkhya, accepting a multitude of *puruṣas*, is anticipated. Paradoxical, since there is no ontological difference between the liberated *puruṣas*. They all are, primarily, pure consciousness – *cit*, i.e. we have a multiplication of conscious beings, while the object reality, in its most external form manifesting itself as material, is one, though inherently diverse. But let us return to our image: the same one *prakṛti* constantly operates, and whose activity is experienced differently by individual *puruṣas*.

The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, one of the latest in the canon, is traditionally considered to be a theistic text. There are many unusually beautiful fragments which poetically describe the Supreme Being, an object of worship and adoration. Acts of worship further the worshipper’s spiritual development and can lead to liberation, although obtaining *mokṣa* is ultimately an individual matter.

The one God who covers himself with things issuing from the primal source, from his own inherent nature, as a spider, with the threads—may he procure us dissolution in *brahman*.<sup>110</sup>

The changeless, among the changing, the intelligent, among intelligent beings, the one, who dispenses desires among the many—when a man knows that cause, which is to be comprehended through the application of Sāṃkhya, as God, he is freed from all fetters.<sup>111 112</sup>

109 Śvetāśvatara Up. 4.5: *ajām ekāṃ lohita śukla kṛṣṇām bahvīḥ prajāḥ sṛjamānāṃ sarūpāḥ ajo hy eko juṣamāṇo’nuśete jahāty enām bhuktābhogām ajo’nyaḥ*.

110 Śvetāśvatara Up. 6.10.: *yas tantunābha iva tantubhiḥ pradhānajaīḥ svabhāvataḥ deva ekaḥ svaṃ āvr̥ṇoti sa no dadhād brahmāpyayam*.

111 Śvetāśvatara Up. 6.13.: *nītyo nityānāṃ cetanaś cetanānām eko bahūnāṃ yo vidadhāti kāmān tat kāraṇaṃ sām̐khyayogād̐higamyam̐ jñātṵ devam̐ mucyate sarvapāśaiḥ*.

112 Let us refer to Plotinus here: “But when it has come to be in it and moves about it, it possesses the intelligible and thinks, but when it sees that god it at once lets everything go; it is as if someone went into a house richly decorated and so beautiful, and within it contemplated each and every one of the decorations and admired them before

As previously stated, the deliberations presented in this book deal with the concept of the subject in the Upaniṣads, as it is considered from the perspective of Advaita Vedānta. This analysis is mainly based on the framework of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, which is traditionally considered to contain *in nuce* all the key concepts included in the other texts of the canon. Gaudapada's commentary on the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad constitutes the first *stricte* philosophical text of Advaita. According to Māṇḍūkya's framework, in the state of consciousness correlated to the state of deep sleep, the individual subject takes on the form of *sākṣin*, a passive observer. Universally, this corresponds to *Īśvara*, being at the same time the cause of the world, its governor and – as an object of worship – an aid in obtaining liberation. Within this framework we refer to the Śvetāśvatara, since its text might broaden what are otherwise very technical descriptions of the *prāñña* state. It becomes possible thereby to reconcile the text of the *sagūṇic* Śvetāśvatara and the *nirgūṇic* Māṇḍūkya. Some selected verses from the Śvetāśvatara could actually inspire the formulations used in the Māṇḍūkya:

The one God hidden in all beings, pervading the universe, the inner self of all beings, the overseer of the work, dwelling in all beings, the witness, the spectator, alone, devoid of qualities.<sup>113</sup>

He who is one with him, immortal, abiding as the Lord, the knower, present everywhere, and the protector of this universe—he rules this living world eternally. There is no other cause to becoming the Lord.<sup>114</sup>

In this passage, the term *ekadeva* (“one god”) is used. The use of the word *deva* (“luminous”) indicates that the term does not need to be interpreted in terms of

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seeing the master of the house, but when he sees that master with delight, who is not of the nature of the images [in the house], but worthy of genuine contemplation, he dismisses those other things and thereafter looks at him alone, and then, as he looks and does not take his eyes away, by the continuity of his contemplation he no longer sees a sight, but mingles his seeing with what he contemplates, so that what was seen before has now become sight in him, and he forgets all other objects of contemplation. And perhaps the likeness would keep in conformity with the reality if it was not a mortal who encountered the one who was seeing the sights of the house but one of the gods, and one who did not appear visibly but filled the soul of the **beholder**.” [highlighted by the author] Plotinus, *Ennead* VI. 7, trans. A.H. Armstrong, Harvard University Press, pp. 195–7.

113 Śvetāśvatara Up. 6.11.: *eko devas sarvabhūteṣu gūḍhas sarvavyāpī sarva bhūtāntarātmā karmādhyakṣas sarvabhūtādhivāsas sākṣī cetā kevalo nirgūṇas ca.*

114 Śvetāśvatara Up. 6.17.: *sa tanmayo hy amṛtā īśasaṁsthō jñas sarvago bhuvanasyāsya goptā sa īśe asya jagato nityam eva nānyo hetur vidyate īśanāya.*

the highest, absolute being. *Devas* exist at the level of the heavens, but those are *saṃsāric* heavens, and *saṃsāra* is ultimately transcended by *mokṣa*. This one god conceals his own essence. The concept of *māyā*, as a covering, darkening force, is clearly marked here. Although the term *māyā* itself does not appear here, the term *pradhāna* plays this role – in Sāṃkhya meaning *prakṛti avyakta*, non-manifested *prakṛti*. Advaitic concepts claim that *māyā* generally has two functions: covering and projecting. Both of them operate in the first two manifested states of consciousness (only that *turiya* is *advaita*, i.e. absolutely unalloyed), on the one hand projecting different dimensions of reality while, on the other hand, concealing its real nature. From the perspective of the individual cognitive subject, in the state of *prājñā* only the covering function operates. There is no experience of the content of the cognitive acts, but also there is no full insight which could lead to *mokṣa*. But it is precisely this state, as the text teaches, that may lead to *brahman*. Let us quote another stanza:

The one controller of the many who are inactive, who makes the single seed manifold—the wise who perceive him as abiding within themselves (*ātman*), they alone, not others, enjoy eternal happiness.<sup>115</sup>

This stanza presents both an individual perspective (*jīva, sākṣin*) and a universal one (*ekadeva, īśvara*). Similar statements appear in the 5th and 6th stanza of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad. Analysing the stanzas of the Śvetāśvatara we can see how difficult it is to interpret classical Indian thought using philosophical categories developed within the European tradition. In our cultural circle, we use the category of transcendence when we want to indicate that the individual level is exceeded by the absolute, and the category of immanence when we point to the infiltration of individual beings by the universal, absolute dimension. Here both these categories refer to the third state of consciousness, to the above discussed state of *prājñā*. But how to determine that this particular state must be transcended in order to become *ātman-brahman*, in order to exist as a state known as *turiya*? At this point we are merely pointing to a question that requires further study.

The above concepts are also presented by the Maitrī Upaniṣad which, similarly to the Māṇḍūkya, belongs to the most recent texts of the *śruti* canon:

‘Poets declare him to be the self. As though under domination, as though overcome by the white and black fruits of actions, he wanders among bodies. But, because of his

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115 Śvetāśvatara Up. 6.12.: *eko vaśī niṣkriyāṇām bahūnām ekam bījam bahudhā yaḥ karoti tam ātmaṣṭhaṃ ye'nupaśyanti dhīrās teṣāṃ sukhaṃ śāśvataṃ netareṣāṃ.*

unmanifest nature, subtlety, invisibility and lack of possessiveness, he is without fixity, not an agent, though he seems and agent and fixed.

‘He is fixed like a watcher, pure, steadfast, unmoving, not prone to defilement, undistracted, without yearning. Remaining his own, experiencing the law (*ṛta*), he is fixed, hiding himself with a veil made of strands.’<sup>116</sup>

The descriptions that appear in this passage match the conclusions of the Śvetāśvatara. Maitrī is a syncretic text, very often quoting fragments of earlier Upaniṣads, and trying to reconcile their different, sometimes seemingly mutually exclusive, formulations. What we are interested in here is the term “observer/watcher,” which also appears in this passage, expressed by the word *prekṣaka*, “looking at something,” “observing.” It is an indication of the experiencing subject, which we define as a spectator, a witness, when we want to emphasise its subtlest nature or essence, and when being in this state can lead to liberation. The experiencing subject can be asserted in various terms, as it meanders through different states of consciousness. When aiming to indicate its existence in *prāñña*, the term “motionless observer” is used. *Sākṣin*, who is a subject in the state of *prāñña*, is pure observation, because it is not a projecting one, but a pure substance of cognition.

At this point, it may be concluded that the above fragment anticipates Advaita’s later distinction between *māyā* and *avidyā*, where *māyā* corresponds to the cosmic delusion and creates forms and structures of the not fully real world, while *avidyā* is responsible for individual human ignorance, which according to these forms performs individual acts. If we interpret the occurrence of the two *puruṣas* in this way, then one will correspond to the individual level and the other to the cosmic one, although it should be remembered that they both relate to the dimension of *samsāric* reality. That is why the *sākṣin*, as an inactive one, is a pure, non-projecting content of cognition.

Let us now return to the Muṇḍaka. Until the individual *puruṣa* or the individual subject receives a signal that, although it is now becoming more and more entangled in *samsāra*, a change in its situation is still possible, and its most basic attribute remains sadness. The first impulse causing a change in the view of reality is noticing (*paśyati*) someone other than oneself (*anya*). This “other,”

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116 Maitrī Up. 2.6–7: *sa vā eṣa ātmehośanti kavayaḥ sitāsitaīḥ karmaphalair anabhibhūta iva prati śarīreṣu caraty avyaktatvāt saukṣmyād adīṣyatvād agrāhyatvān nirmamatvac cānavasthośati kartā’kartairvāvasthaḥ sa vā eṣa śuddhaḥ sthīro’calas cālepyo’viagro nisprīhaḥ prekṣakavad avasthitaḥ svasthaś ca ṛtabhug guṇamayena paṭenātmānam antardhayāvasthitā ity avasthitā iti.*

referred to as the Lord (*īśa*), is not overwhelmed with impotence, but has the power to liberate itself from sadness. The concept of entering the path to liberation is mentioned here. The impulse may come from the individual *puruṣa* itself, or it may result from following a model, who is another (*anya*, *viśeṣa*) *puruṣa*, namely *Īśvara*, *Īśa*. It is an indication of the path that the Yoga adept (understood technically in the Indian tradition) is about to take. The *Upaniṣad* does not explain the subsequent steps, but in the first words of the third verse a description appears of a subject which – as confronted with other texts of the tradition – is already at the end of this road. The term *paśya* is used, meaning “the looking one,” which refers us to the notion of *sākṣin* and to the definition of the cognitive subject in the state of *prājñā*. As Śaṅkara writes in his commentary, the one who perceives the truth is called the seer. And the truth is that the brightness, the light of cognition is identical to *Īśa* or *Īśvara*.<sup>117</sup> *Īśvara* is called *karṭṛ* – the creator (but not the Creator) of the world. Let us quote a passage from the Māṇḍūkya:

He is the Lord of all; he is the knower of all; he is the inner controller; he is the womb of all—for he is the origin and the dissolution of beings.<sup>118</sup>

The starting point for this chapter is the metaphor of two birds, which is found, among others, in the Muṇḍaka. Most of the concepts of the Māṇḍūkya are also found in the Muṇḍaka, which contains additional descriptions. One very interesting term is *brahmayoni*, which can be translated both as “*brahman* being the source” as well as “*brahman*’s womb.” These two seemingly contradictory versions are explained in the Śaṅkara’s commentary. It follows that they are deliberately vague because they are meant to refer to both *brahman* understood as the absolute and the *brahman* understood as the source of the world.

Here a more general remark comes to mind, which represents a problem of all the systems which declare that the essence of an absolute being cannot be adequately asserted in any category. This applies, of course, to Advaita, but also to some Mahāyāna Buddhist schools. We will present here our own original interpretation of this problem, which is grounded in the classical texts.

Let us go back to the very beginning of Indian thought and to the already discussed hymn *Nāsadiya Sūkta*. The Vedic sages invested in it both the concept of *sat* – “existent” and *asat* – “non-existent” to describe the essence of the

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117 “The vision fills his eyes with light and does not make him see something else by it, but the light itself is what he sees.” Plotinus, *Ennead* VI. 7, trans. A.H. Armstrong, Harvard University Press, p. 201.

118 Māṇḍūkya Up. 6: *prabhavaḥ sarvabhāvānāṃ satām iti viniścayaḥ sarvaṃ janayati prāṇas cetomśun puruṣaḥ pṛthak*.

absolute, non-manifested being. The concepts then provide a comprehensive description in metaphysical terms. The same terms also indicate whether we truly experience this reality (*sat*), or whether our cognition is erroneous or false (*asat*). Again, the key to solving interpretation problems of the *śruti* texts, as well as systems referring to them is to establish whether at any given point the text refers to the nature of being, or rather to the way it is being experienced. This is a very difficult task, as the authors seem to be consciously mixing these orders, using vague, almost obscure language full of metaphors.

In this context, let us move on to an absolutely fundamental phrase from the *Hṛdayasūtra*, which is essential to the Mahāyāna Buddhism, stating that form is emptiness and emptiness is form – *rūpaṃ śūnyatā śūnyatā eva rūpaṃ*. If we try to interpret this phrase in the light of the earlier remarks, the notion of emptiness may indicate the absence of any absolutely adequate descriptions of the very nature of being. The form is the way in which reality is given to us in experience. About anything that is given in any representation, in even the subtlest cognitive act, we can state anything, without prejudging the reliability and value of that knowledge. In the concepts that give priority to the act of seeing, it will be the colour and shape, the glow, the light; in the theistic ones – the Divine Form, and where the act of hearing is considered primary, the sound, which can also be experienced as the Divine Word.

Let us now return to the Muṇḍaka 3.1.3. The observer (*paśya*), perceives the absolute being and makes judgement about it in the highest categories, given the dimension of the experiential reality. There is always a metaphor of light in this type of description, here the term *rukṃavarṇa* – the golden brightness. It is also referred to as *brahmayoni*, which indicates both the higher and the lower *saguṇa brahman*. Further in the same stanza we read that such an act of seeing leads directly to liberation because it has no karmic consequences. The seer (*paśya*) is also a knower (*vidvān*), meaning someone whose karmic burden has been completely exhausted. This sole act, although still an act (*karman*), does not result in a further entanglement in *saṃsāra*. Only then may the final liberation take place, which is described as an achievement of a complete, highest (*parama*) identity (*sāmya*). Other Upaniṣadic passages speak of such an act as the fusion of an individual soul free of all limitations (*upādhi*) with the absolute.

A very beautiful fragment, summarising our reflections on the concept of the “observer,” can be found in the Maitrī Upaniṣad. Here, the description is preceded by a meaningful metaphor of a bow and arrow, whose analysis will be presented in a separate chapter. Let us quote stanza 6.25:

When one's senses are hidden as if by sleep, then, unmastered, with completely pure mind one sees, as if in a dream, in a gap in the senses, the one who leads on out (*prāṇetṛ*) who is called the OM (*praṇava*), in the form of light, free from sleep, free from old age, free from death, and free from sorrow. Then one also becomes one who leads on out who is called OM, in the form of light<sup>119</sup>, free from sleep, free from old age, free from death, and free from sorrow.

Someone has said:

Since one joins or unites (*yuj-*)

In many ways

Breath and OM and all,

It is known as yoga.

Since it is the oneness of breath and mind

and senses too,

The renunciation of all becoming

Is named yoga.<sup>120</sup>

This passage confirms our line of interpretation that the concept of the “observer” should be considered within the description of the subject given in the act of meditation. There is a distinction between the state of dreams and the state of deep sleep. In the state of dreams, the senses of an advanced yoga adept are purified, but they remain active. Their diverse activity fades away in the next state, that of deep sleep, where it turns into a state of pure vision. An object perceived in this state is referred to as a guide named *Praṇava*, which is the name of the OM syllable, essential for all meditation schemes. OM appears to have a form of glow. Thus, the Upaniṣad equates the subtlest primary sound, which is an equivalent of *śabdabrahman*, with the most primary visualisation, taking the form of

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119 “But perhaps one should not say ‘will see’, but ‘was seen’, if one must speak of these as two, the seer and the seen, and not both as one – a bold statement. So then the seer does not see and does not distinguish and does not imagine two, but it is as if he had become someone else and he is not himself and does not count as his own there, but has come to belong to that and so is one, having joined, as it were, centre to centre. (. . .) This also is how we now speak of ‘another.’ For this reason the vision is hard to put into words. For how could one announce that as another when he did not see, there when he had the vision, another, but one with himself?” Plotinus, *Ennead* VI. 9, trans. A.H. Armstrong, Harvard University Press, p. 341.

120 Maitrī Up. 6.25: *athāntrāpy uktam: nidrevāntarhitendriyaḥ śuddhitamayā dhiyā swapna iva yaḥ paśyatindriyabilevivaśaḥ praṇavākhyam praṇetāram bhārūpam vīgatanidram vijaram vimṛtyum viśokaṃ ca sōpi praṇavākhyāḥ praṇetā bhārūpaḥ vīgata nidraḥ vijaraḥ vimṛtyur viśoko bhavati ity eva hy āha: eva prāṇam athonḥkmāt sarvam anekadhā yunakti yuñjate vāpi tasmād yoga iti smṛtaḥ ekatvam prāṇamanasor indriyāñṇāṃ tathaiva ca sarvabhāvaparityāgo yoga ity abhidhīyate.*

pure light. Let us note here that usually the *śruti* texts do not indicate the primacy of either the sense of seeing or the sense of hearing (understood, of course, at the subtlest levels) in the final soteriological procedure. However, in this context these two senses are distinguished from the others and it is they who, in their “thicker” external form, shape the individual subjects. This is indicated, *inter alia*, by the use of the term *nāmarūpa* to define individuality or individual, concrete subjects. *Nāma* means name, which is related to uttering and hearing, and *rūpa* denotes form, which leads us to colour-shape at subtler levels.

In the earlier stanzas a more detailed characteristic of the meditative structure is found:

Elsewhere it has been said:

There are two *brahman*s to be named: sound and the soundless. The soundless is revealed through sound. The sound is OM. By it one goes out upward and finds cessation in the soundless. This is the bourn, this is immortality, this is union and also ultimate bliss. (. . .)

Going beyond their separate characteristics, they meet their end in the supreme soundless unmanifest *brahman*. There they are without separate nature, indistinguishable, like different flavours combined into sweetness.<sup>121</sup>

The *nirguṇic* character of this Upaniṣad is obvious. It seems that many ontological inconsistencies may be due to adopting different frameworks for describing the manifested reality when considered from the perspective of a given operating subject. The situation becomes more complicated when different meditation procedures are combined. However, descriptions of given dimensions of reality, or procedures indicating their transformation, only concern the presented reality, which is ultimately *nirguṇic*. Maitrī clearly states that for technical reasons, these meditation procedures may vary in certain details, but at the very end there is an unrestricted absolute being. And when the whole procedure described in the previous stanzas 6.20–21 begins, the mind in the state of contemplation (*dhyānam antaḥ*) is directed both at external objects, which initially serve as supports and attention magnets, and at the highest goal. During the meditation procedure, cognition itself, which in this text is described as inherently devoid of any specific characteristics (*aviśeṣa*), by focusing on individual

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121 Maitrī Up. 6.22: *athānyatrāpy uktam: dve vā va brahmaṇī abhidhyeye śabdaś cāśabdaśca atha śabdenaivāśabdām āviṣkriyate atha tatra aum iti śabdo'nenordhvam utkrāntōaide nidhanam eti athāhāiṣā gatir etad amṛtam etat sāyujyatvam nirvṛtatvam tathā ceti taṃ pṛthag lakṣaṇam atītya pare'āide'vyakte brahmaṇy astam gatāḥ tatra te'pṛthagdharmaṇo'pṛthagvivekyā yathā sampannā madhutvaṃ nānārasā iti.*

objects, characterised by various specific characteristics (*lakṣana*), in a certain sense becomes similar to them as well as definite (*viśeṣa*). But if the meditation, when properly conducted, is aimed at the highest goal, then there is no longer any focus on a particular object. This state is called *aviśeṣa jñāna* – cognition without special characteristics, without properties. Pure cognition blends with a characterless object – *aviśeṣa vastu*. It is called “dissolution in the mind” – *mānase vilīne*. This is clearly a *nirguṇic* perspective: after all, there is no difference between the individual and universal soul. The mind dissolves; the tool of cognition that served the intended purpose disappears. Then there is no longer any difference between the observer and the *ātman*; this state in Maitri is described as *brahman* – the highest reality, devoid of any special characteristics: *aviśeṣa, nirguṇa*. There is no longer even a very subtle act of consciousness in which the subject of cognition could be distinguished from its object. This is pure consciousness, no longer directed at anything, as all directions have dissolved. This supreme being is cleared of any limitations and impurities. Such is also the process of cognition through consciousness and purification from consciousness understood as the cognitive processes presented by the Muṇḍaka 3.1.9:

By thought is this subtle self to be known,  
 into which breath has entered in five ways;  
 By the senses is laced th'entire thought of people,  
 in which, when it is pure, this self becomes disclosed.<sup>122</sup>

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122 Muṇḍaka Up. 3.1.9.: *eṣo'nur ātmā cetasā veditavyo yasmin prāṇaḥ pañcadhā saṃviveśa prāṇaiś cittaṃ sarvam otam prajānāṃ yasmin viśuddhe vibhavaty eṣa ātmā.*



## 9. *Antaryāmin* – the inner controller, the immanent nature of the absolute being

When describing the state of *prāṅjña* and indicating how to determine the phenomena occurring at this level of reality, we encounter the term *antaryāmin*, the “inner controller.” In the analysis of the concepts of *sākṣin*, in the Śvetāśvatara 6.11 (also the term *bhūtāntarātmā* – the inner *ātman* of every being can be found here), the immanent character of the absolute being is indicated. In the dimension of *māyā* and *Īśvara*, such an absolute being reveals and imposes the general laws and norms of the presented world. At the level of *avidyā*, *Īśvara* seemingly transcends *jīva* – the individual soul. The notion of *antaryāmin* seems to refer both to the cosmic and the individual dimension. A wider discussion of this concept can be found in one of the earliest Upaniṣads, the Bṛhadāraṇyaka (3.7.1–23).

The passage is quite long and the setting typical for the earliest Upaniṣads. Janaka, the King of Videha, known from the *śruti* texts as a great thinker and secret knowledge expert, invited the most distinguished Brahmins from the lands of Kuru and Pañcāla to a debate. This debate, which took the form of a theological and philosophical competition, aimed to identify the most outstanding teacher. A thousand cows were given as a prize to the winner, each of them additionally adorned with golden coins. None of the Brahmins dared to release the animals. Then the sage Yājñavalkya ordered the cows to be freed, thus declaring himself to be the wisest. To prove this and to collect the prize, he was called by the other participants to answer their questions. One by one, Yājñavalkya gives a comprehensive answer to each of the priests, and so we come to the seventh *brahmana*, where the question is asked by the great scholar Uddālaka Āruṇi, also known from the sixth book of Chāndogya. There he explains to his son Śvetaketu the doctrine regarding the identity of *ātman* and *brahman*, which he predicates in a form of *mahāvākya* – *tat tvam asi*).

‘Tell me, Kāpya—do you know the inner controller of this world and the next, as well as of all beings, who controls them from within?’ ‘That, my lord, I do not know,’ replied Patañcala Kāpya. He then told Patañcala Kāpya and the students there who were learning about the sacrifice: ‘Clearly, Kāpya, if a man knows what that string is and who that inner controller is—he knows *brahman*; he knows the worlds; he knows the gods; he knows the Vedas; he knows the spirits; he knows the self; he knows all.’

‘And I know it. So, if you drive away the cows meant for the Brahmins, Yājñavalkya, without knowing what that string is and who that inner controller is, your head will shatter apart!’

‘Gautama, I do know what that string is and who that inner controller is.’

‘Of course, anyone can say, ‘I know! I know!’ Tell us what precisely you know.’<sup>123</sup>

Yājñavalkya told him: ‘Clearly, Gautama, that string is the wind. It is on the string of wind, Gautama, that this world and the next, as well as all beings, are strung together. That is why people say of a dead man, ‘His bodily parts have come unstrung,’ for they are strung together, Gautama, on the string of wind.’

‘Quite right, Yājñavalkya. Now tell us who the inner controller is.’<sup>124</sup>

‘This self (*ātman*) of yours who is present within but is different from the earth, whom the earth does not know, whose body is the earth, and who controls the earth from within—he is the inner controller, the immortal.’<sup>125</sup>

The following verses about *antaryāmin* reveal that it is in the waters, in the fire, in the between-spaces, in the wind, in the heavens, in the sun, in the regions of the world, in the moon, in the stars, in the sky, in the darkness, in the glow, and in all the creatures – that is, in various phenomena from the macrocosm level. *Antaryāmin* resides also in the breath, in the word, in the eye, ear, mind, skin, consciousness and in the semen; in this way, it governs over all forms of the microcosm. In the beginning of this passage, *antaryāmin* is described as a string (*sūtra*), binding all manifestations of reality, and ultimately being *brahman-ātman*. A very similar concept is expressed in the Muṇḍaka 1.1.6.:

What cannot be seen, what cannot be grasped,  
without color, without sight or hearing,  
without hands or feet;  
What is eternal and all-pervading,

123 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 3.7.1.: *vettha nu tvaṃ kāpya tam antaryāmiṇaṃ ya imaṃ ca lokaṃ paraṃ ca lokaṃ sarvāṇi ca bhūtāni yo'ntaro yamayātīti, so'bravīt patañcalaḥ kāpyo, nāhaṃ taṃ bhagavan vedeti, so'bravīt patañcalaṃ kāpyaṃ yājñikāṃś ca, yo vai tatkāpya sūtraṃ vidyāt taṃ cāntaryāmiṇam iti sa brahmavit, sa lokavit, sa devavit, sa vedavit, sa bhūtavit, sa ātmavit, sa sarvavid iti, tebhyo'bravīt, tad ahaṃ veda, tac cettvaṃ yājñavalkya sūtram avidvāṃś taṃ cāntaryāmiṇaṃ brahmagavīr udajase, mūrdhā te vipatiṣyatīti, veda vā aha gautama tat sūtraṃ taṃ cāntaryāmiṇam iti, yo vā idaṃ kaścīd brūyad veda vedeti, yathā vettha tathā brūhīti.*

124 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 3.7.2.: *sa hovāca vāyurvai gautama tat sūtram, vāyunā vai gautama sūtreṇāyaṃ ca lokaḥ paraś ca lokaḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni saṃdṛbhdhāni bhavanti, tasmād vai gautama puruṣaṃ pretam āhur vyaśraṃśatāsyāṅgānīti, vāyunā hi gautama sūtreṇa saṃdṛbhdhāni bhavantīti, evaṃ evaitad yājñavalkya, antaryāmiṇaṃ brūhīti.*

125 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 3.7.3.: *yaḥ pṛthivyāṃ tiṣṭan pṛthivyā antaro yaṃ pṛthivī na veda yasya pṛthivī śarīraṃ yaḥ pṛthivīm antaro yamayaty eṣa ta ātmāntaryāmy amṛtaḥ.*

extremely minute, present everywhere—

That is the immutable, which the wise fully perceive.<sup>126</sup>

As discussed in more detail in the chapter dedicated to *sākṣin*, there is no definitive metaphysical difference between the *saguṇa* and the *nirguṇa brahman* – the key difference is related to the epistemic perspective. The absolute being is unpredictable in positive terms. When it becomes the object of the highest mystical vision, the visionaries/knowers perceive it primarily as the source of creation – *brahmayoni* (Muṇḍaka 3.1.3.). The description of what *antaryāmin* is, uses the progressive method, quite often found in the Upaniṣads. Subsequent phrases are repeated, which are the subject of analysis, as well as the subject of meditation. They manifest themselves in various atmospheric phenomena, in the elements, in the senses, and in the modes of action and cognition. Usually these elements (as in the doctrine of *bhumavidyā*) are arranged in a clearly hierarchical way. Also here in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, the whole passage ends with a formulation that fully anticipates the later language and judgement of Advaita.

In his commentary, Śaṅkara claims that the level of *antaryāmin* is related to the dimension of reality referred to in the *śruti* as *hiranyagarbha* – “the golden egg.” Using the language of Māṇḍūkya and the entire later Advaita, it is the level of *Īśvara*. *Antaryāmin* plays the role of a string (*sūtra*), which permeates both the universal and the individual phenomena of the basic dimension, and also seems to be the thread connecting the absolute and representational dimension. It is very important to note that the knowledge of the inner nature of the ruler is acquired as a result of instruction, and it is finally implemented individually, personally. It is, of course, a reference to the internal experience. The author of the text refers to the metaphor of wind (*vāyu*), the existence that binds all the dimensions, the higher world related to *parabrahman* and the lower world, related to *aparabrahman*. In Indian thought, wind is perceived as a subtle reality, which – similarly to *ākāśa* – sustains the other subtle and gross elements. Wind is also the existence which upholds and, as the Bṛhadāraṇyaka says, binds the senses, life forces and functions of the inner organ of cognition – *manas* and *buddhi*. It is a description of a subtle body, having its own individual karmic memory. Therefore, the wind is the basis of both the bond (entanglement in *saṃsāra*), and the resolution, which may lead to *mokṣa*.

When this string, which manifests itself as wind, is considered from the perspective of the individual experience, it is then called the inner controller.

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126 Muṇḍaka Up. 1.1.6.: *yat tad adreśyam agrāhyam agotram avarṇam acakṣuḥśrotraṃ tad apāñipādaṃ, nityam vibhūṃ sarvagataṃ susūkṣmaṃ tad avyayaṃ yad bhūtayoniṃ paripaśyanti dhīrāḥ.*

This self of yours who is present within but is different from the semen, whom the semen does not know, whose body is the semen, and who controls the semen from within—he is the inner controller, the immortal.

“He sees, but he cannot be seen; he hears, but he cannot be heard; he thinks, but he cannot be thought of; he perceives, but he cannot be perceived. Besides him, there is no one who sees, no one who hears, no one who thinks, and no one who perceives. It is this self of yours who is the inner controller, the immortal. All besides this is grief.”<sup>127</sup>

The last stanza describing *antaryāmin* states that it is present in the semen (*retas*), which emphasises the individual level given in experience and in the karmic memory. But when you ultimately see its true nature as *ātman*, it turns out that it cannot be adequately defined in any categories. One can only point to its inexpressible character – *neti, neti*. Although it is ultimately invisible, inaudible, unthinkable, incomprehensible through the categories of sensory functions, it is the basis and condition for them. The fullness of reality is only granted to this absolute, unconditional dimension of reality. Everything else is unreal, because it is a result of erroneous cognition.

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127 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 3.7.23.: *yo retasi tiṣṭhan retasoṅtaro yaṃ reto na veda yasya retaḥ śarīraṃ yo retoṅtaro yamayaty eṣa ta ātmāntaryāmy amṛtaḥ adṛṣṭo draṣṭāśrutaḥ śrotāmato mantāviñātō viñātā nānyo'toṣṭi draṣṭā nānyo'toṣṭi śrotā nānyo'toṣṭi mantā nānyo'toṣṭi vijñātā eṣa ta ātmāntaryāmy amṛtaḥ ato'nyad ārtam tato hoddālaka āruṇir upararāma.*

## 10. *Jīva* – the individual soul

The word *jīva* stems from the verbal root *jīv*, “to live,” “to stay alive,” “to sustain life.” This indicates the basic element of life identified with life-giving breath. In classical *darśana*, it is already a technical term which denotes the self, the individual subject. It is usually translated as “the soul.” How *jīva* is ultimately understood, whether as immortal only in the *samsāric* dimension or retaining its individuality also in the state of liberation, depends on the ontological assumptions of a given system. This term is first used in the Vedas (R̥gveda I 164.30). Considering how important the term is for all the Vedānta branches, it may be surprising that it appears only in a few places in the Upaniṣads.

The earliest understanding of this word, which simply denotes the one who possesses the element of life, is presented in the Chāndogya 8.3.2. Two terms are contrasted there: *jīvā* and *pretā* – “the living” and “the dead.” Thus, in this passage we find the most obvious meaning of the word *jīva*, as something to which we ascribe empirical life.<sup>128</sup>

In the same Upaniṣad we encounter the word *jīvātman* – “the living,” “the reviving,” “living atman.” This phrase is placed in a very interesting cosmological sequence. A father teaches a young Brahmin, his son Śvetaketu. The teachings precede the famous passage containing the well-known *mahāvākya tat tvam asi*, “You are such,” indicating the identity of *ātman* and *brahman*.

‘In the beginning, son, this world was simply what is existent—one only, without a second. Now, on this point some do say: “In the beginning this world was simply what is non-existent—one only, without a second. And from what is non-existent was born what is existent.”

‘But, son, how can that possibly be?’ he continued. ‘How can the existent be born from the non-existent? On the contrary, son, in the beginning this world was simply what is existent—one only, without a second.

‘And it thought to itself: “Let me become many. Let me propagate myself.” It emitted heat. The heat thought to itself: “Let me become many. Let me propagate myself.” It emitted water. Whenever it is hot, therefore, a man surely perspires; and thus it is from heat that water is produced. The water thought to itself: “Let me become many. Let me propagate myself.” It emitted food. Whenever it rains, therefore, food becomes abundant; and thus it is from water that foodstuffs are produced.

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128 “On the other hand, people who are close to him, whether they are alive or dead, as well as anything else that he desires but does not get—all that he finds by going there (...).”

“There are, as you can see, only three sources from which these creatures here originate: they are born from eggs, from living individuals, or from sprouts.

“Then that same deity thought to itself: “Come now, why don’t I establish the distinctions of name and appearance by entering these three deities here with this living self (*ātman*), and make each of them threefold.” So, that deity established the distinctions of name and appearance by entering these three deities here with this living self (*ātman*).<sup>129</sup>

The cosmological sequence of our interest here claims that: “In the beginning, son, this world was simply what is existent—one only, without a second” (*sadeva somyedam agra āsīd ekaṃ evādvitīyam*). The basic assumptions presented here, accepted unquestionably by Advaita, are that the absolute being exists (*sat*) as one (*ekam*), without the other (*advitīyam*). In this *sat*, there appears a thought, a desire, *aikṣata* (the root *ikṣ*, “to think,” is often interpreted as related to the root *icch*, “to desire”), to manifest itself, to emerge the worlds out of itself. These worlds are presented in a sequence from the subtlest to the most “material.” First of all, the heat (*tejas*) appears, then the water (*āpas*) and food (*anna*). The association with the three *guṇas*, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, is evident and most legitimate. It is also confirmed by the subsequent stanzas of the Upaniṣad. Coming back to the point of our considerations, these three existences emerged from *sat* to become the basis for all beings. However, the absolute being does not stop at this stage of creation. In the very beginning of this passage it is referred to as *sat*. When three subsequent existences emerge out of it, it is called “it” – *tad*, and when it reflects on its work, it takes the name *devatā* – “deity” (let us recall the source: *deva*, *devatā* come from the root *div* – “to shine,” “to glow,” “to be luminous”). As a *devatā*, it decides to give these indistinguishable beings (since at the very beginning they all seem to be just a combination of three elements) individual names,

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129 Chāndogya Up. 6.2.1–6.3.3.: *sad eva somyedamagra āsīd ekaṃ evādvitīyam tad dhaika āhur asad evedam agra āsīd ekaṃ evādvitīyaṃ tasmād asataḥ saj jāyata, kutas tu khalu somyaivṃ syād iti hovāca katham asataḥ saj jāyeteṣu sat tv eva somyedam agra āsīd ekaṃ evādvitīyam. tad aikṣata bahu syāṃ prajāyeyeti tat tejo 'sṛjata tat teja aikṣata bahu syāṃ prajāyeyeti tadapo'sṛjata tasmād yatra kva ca śocati svedate vā puruṣas tejasa eva tad adhy āpo jāyante. tā āpa aikṣanta bahyaḥ syāma prajāyemahīti ta annam asṛjanta tasmād yatra kva ca varṣati tadeva bhūyīṣṭham annaṃ bhavaty adbhya eva tad adhyannādhyāṃ jāyete. teṣāṃ khalv eṣāṃ bhūtānāṃ trīṇy eva bijāni bhavanti āṇḍajaṃ jīvajam udbhijjam iti, seyaṃ devataikṣata hantāham imās tistro devatā anena jīvenātmanānupraviśya nāmarūpe vyākaraṇāṇīti, tāsāṃ trivṛtaṃ trivṛtam ekaikāṇi karavāṇīti seyaṃ devatemās tistro devatā anenaiva jīvenātmanānupraviśya nāmarūpe vyākarot.*

*nāma*, and to provide them with concrete forms, *rūpa*. In order to do so, it enters them as a life-giving factor – *jīvātman*.

Interpretational difficulties arise here, seemingly impossible to resolve on the basis of this passage alone. The above fragment refers to a *sat* being, which is conscious and thinking, performing conscious reflections and acts. And after all, consciousness is the foundation, the very essence of life. The process of subsequent elements emerging from the absolute being is presented here. It is a process of transformation or emanation; under no circumstances can we talk about creating beings from any other “material” than *sat*. Everything that emerged from *sat*, the main three elements, as well as all the beings which are a combination of the earlier, have the nature of *sat*. There is no ontological difference between the nature of cause and effect. And here they seem to be devoid of life, if it is to be given by the *jīvātman* which enters them. It seems, therefore, that “life,” “aliveness” should be interpreted here as an element of vitality belonging to the empirical world, as a force that penetrates a given being, animates it and leaves it at the moment of death. It is the carrier of individual qualities which are recognised as *nāmarūpa*. *Jīva*, *nāma* and *rūpa* are not individual beings, they are supra-individual categories, which only in mutual combinations shape the individual, animated beings wandering in *saṃsāra* and subjected to the law of *karman*.

This interpretation seems to explain the first reference in this chapter to the term *jīva*, where it was said that at the moment of death a dying person sees both the living and the dead around them. *Jīva* and *jīvātman* belong to the *saṃsāric* dimension – in the light of these interpretations it is not a category that exists both in a state of bondage and liberation. This category, according to Vedānta, is *sat*. Let us look at the next passage, in which the term of interest occurs.

When a man perceives close at hand  
 this **living, honey-eating self**,  
 The lord of what was and what will be—  
 it does not seek to hide from him.  
 So, indeed, is that!<sup>130</sup>

In this Upaniṣad, the “living self,” *jīva*, is perceived as experiencing deeds, here reflected in the term *madhvada*, “honey-eating,” a frequent term indicating the one who experiences both happiness and suffering by consuming the fruits of their actions. Śaṅkara in his commentary<sup>131</sup> distinguishes between the living soul

130 Kaṭha Up. 4.5.: *ya imaṃ madhvadaṃ veda ātmānaṃ jīvam antikāt iśānaṃ bhūtabhavyasya no tato vijugupsate, etad vai tat.*

131 *The Word Speaks to the Faustian Man*, Vol. I, pp. 308 ff.

and the one experiencing deeds. *Jīva* is the one who sustains the breath of life and other elements shaping the earthly being, a term that applies to every living creature, whether – as Chāndogya says – it was born from an egg, a living creature, or semen. Whereas the “one experiencing deeds” is a being, whose actions are subject to evaluation and shape *karman* – we could call it an ethical subject. A clear indication of the subject as an individual one, distinguishable from others based on its karmic value, conditioned by the sum of good and bad deeds, appears in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad. It is worth noting that among the classic Upaniṣads the Kaṭha is the first to mention the fully formulated concept of *saṃsāra* and the migrating soul, shaping the journey through successive incarnations by virtue of the *karman* law understood explicitly as ethical law.<sup>132</sup> It is clearly stated in this passage that the liberating knowledge, also exceeding the conditions of time, is understood as the knowledge of the nature of *karman*. The next passage is the Maitrī 6.19:

When one who knows, restraining the outer mind and causing the objects of senses to enter the breath, rests without forming concepts... Since the life which is called the breath is produced from that which is not breath, it is the breath... One should maintain the breath in what is called the fourth state.<sup>133</sup>

The soul, *jīva*, is known as the life-giving breath, *prāṇasaṃjñaka*. Such understanding of the soul in the Maitrī is consistent with the previously quoted passages. It emphasises above all vitality, a force that revives and sustains all the functions that constitute an active subject, which in this form functions from birth to death. So it is becoming more and more common to understand *jīva* as simply a living being, as the text says, here on earth. It seems more puzzling that a soul claimed to be created “from what is breathless,” *aprāṇāt*. Naturally, this is an indication of some kind of a conditioning entity. It seems that it can be referred to the *sat* of Chāndogya as the principle of existence of both the animated and the inanimate, the living and the dead. Let us also recall at this point the hymn of *Nāsadiya*, which says: “That One breathed without wind by its independent will. There existed nothing else beyond that.” A similar distinction of the paradoxical reality of *sat*, which is an absolute potentiality, from *jīva* that takes on a name and form is also presented in this fragment. An absolute being

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132 More on the topic in: *Karman i dharma, wizja świata w filozoficznej myśli Indii*. [*Karman and dharma. A vision of the world in Indian philosophical thought*].

133 Maitrī Up. 6.19: *yadā vai bahir vidvān mano niyamyendriyārthān ca prāṇo niveṣayitvā niḥsaṃkalpas tatas tiṣṭhet aprāṇād iha yasmāt sambhūtaḥ prāṇasaṃjñako tasmāt prāṇo vai turyākhye dhārayet prāṇam*.

is beyond any temporal and spatial categories, which cannot be said of *jīva*. As previously quoted, the latter is composed of elements, i.e. the elements functioning and varying in time and space. According to the Chāndogya, these basic elements are fire, water and earth. A given soul is also assigned a specific individuality, *nāmarūpa*, having its own history. But it is also *jīva*, as indicated by the very source of the term, that is the basic vital element of a given active subject. All these traits are described by the Śvetāśvatara 5.7–12:

The one who, in association with the qualities, performs fruitful actions also enjoys the fruits of that very act. Displaying every form, endowed with the three qualities, and along three paths he roams about as the lord of vital breaths together with his own actions.

He is as large as a thumb and equal in appearance to the sun when he is equipped with the faculties of imagination and self-consciousness. But one sees also another no larger than the tip of an awl who is equipped only with the quality of intelligence and the quality of the body (*ātman*).

When the tip of a hair is split into a hundred parts, and one of those parts further into a hundred parts—the individual soul (*jīva*), on the one hand, is the size of one such part, and, on the other, it partakes of infinity.

It is neither a woman nor a man, nor even a hermaphrodite; it is ruled over by whichever body it obtains.

The birth and growth of the body (*ātman*) takes place through the offerings of intention, touch, and sight, and by means of food, drink, and impregnation; whereas the embodied self assumes successively in different situations the physical appearances that correspond to its actions.

The embodied self assumes numerous physical appearances, both large and small, in accordance with its qualities. One sees also another cause of their union in accordance with the qualities of the actions and the body (*ātman*).<sup>134</sup>

This is the most extensive fragment in the Upaniṣads, describing the individual soul – *jīva*. The Śvetāśvatara, similarly to the Katha, very often uses terms typical of later Sāṃkhya and Yoga. The empirical subject is characterised primarily by

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134 Śvetāśvatara Up. 5.7–12: *guṇānvayo yaḥ phalakarmakartā kṛtasya tasyaiva sa copabhoktā sa viśvarūpas triguṇas trivartmā prāṇādhipas sañcarati svakarmabhiḥ, aṅguṣṭhamātro ravitulyarūpas saṅkalpāhaṅkārasamanvito yaḥ buddher guṇenātmaguṇena caiva ārāgramātro 'py aparo'pi dṛṣṭaḥ, bālāgrasatabhāgasya śatadhā kalpitasya ca bhāgo jīvas sa vijñeyas sa cānantyāya kalpate, naiva strī na pumān eṣa na caivāyaṃ napuṃsakaḥ yad yac chariram ādatte tena tena sa rakṣyate, saṅkalpanasparśanadr̥ṣṭimohair grāsāmbuvṛṣṭyātmaivṛddhijanma karmānugāny anukrameṇa dehī sthāneṣu rūpāṇy abhi samprapadyate, sthūlāni sūkṣmāṇi bahūni caiva rūpāṇi dehī svaguṇair vṛṇoti kriyāguṇair ātmaguṇaiś ca teṣāṃ saṃyogahetur aparo'pi dṛṣṭaḥ.*

its actions, which it undertakes with the intention of experiencing their effects, *phalakarmakartā*, and is therefore called “the experiencing,” *bhoktā*. In the Kaṭha, the equivalent of this term was *madhvada*, “honey-eating.” In both fragments, it is primarily indicated that the moral value of the acts undertaken is responsible for the subsequent forms of incarnation. The reason why a given subject operates is that it is shaped by three *guṇas*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, whose nature, as *prakṛti* components, is activity. Depending on which *guṇa* is prevailing, a person chooses one of three directions. The Śvetāśvatara mentions them in 1.4: “that divides itself into three different paths; and whose delusion regarding the one springs from two causes.” Following the *dharma*, the right choices are made, positive karmic results are accumulated and in the subsequent incarnations increasingly pleasant forms of existence are taken. But even the most pleasant incarnation still remains in *saṃsāra*. The choice of *adharma* is the opposite direction, plunging into *saṃsāra* in less and less pleasant forms, and above all in ones increasingly less likely to achieve liberation whereas *mokṣa* is only achieved when the path of knowledge, *jñāna*, is chosen. Based on this passage, it can be considered evident that an individual subject has its own history measured not only from birth to death – as we could still interpret according to the first passage of Chāndogya – but determined through successive incarnations.

The migrating subject is visualised as the size of a thumb – *aṅguṣṭhamātra*; a similar metaphor appears in the Kaṭha 6.17: “A person the size of a thumb in the body (*ātman*).” This is quite a common metaphor encountered in descriptions of visualisation not only in Indian systems; an object visualised in meditation procedures is sometimes described as a small man or a dwarf. It manifests itself in the form of the sun – *ravi*; its luminosity or brightness indicates the subtlest form of manifestation of the absolute being. More on this subject is elaborated in other chapters of this book (*puruṣa*, *sākṣin*). The individual subject is an emanation of the absolute one, *ātman*, and is therefore perceived as lower, *apara*, the size of the tip of an awl. This lower rank is related, among other things, to the fact that it is subject to spatial constraints, although because of its subtle size it may not be available to ordinary sensory perception. But there is something even subtler and smaller than that subject – it is *jīva*, who is the manifestation of the absolute being, having its share in immortality and infinity – *ananta*.

It is *jīva* that is in its essence identical to *ātman*; it is their relationship that the famous *mahāvākya* speak of. Just like *ātman*, *jīva* is beyond any category. We can not speak about a female or male soul; these are all concretisations and limitations – *upādhi*. *Jīva*, as a direct representation of *ātman*, is limited in its subtlest form by the cognitive apparatus. In Yoga this apparatus is called *citta*, and in

Vedānta – *antaḥkaraṇa*. In the above passage, its basic functions are referred to as imagination, *saṃkalpa*, and self-consciousness – *ahaṃkāra*. Depending on the nature and value of the activities resulting from these functions, and depending on the degree of their confusion – *moha* – there are further limitations that overlap and take the form of a psychic organism and ultimately a coarse material body. None of these forms is accidental; they are conditioned by the karmic burden. Therefore, is not the subject in its deepest essence that chooses a given incarnation form, but the karmically shaped subject. A psychophysical organism thus formed, whose life functions are sustained by *jīva* as the governor of the life-giving breath, is called an incarnate entity – *dehin*. Each “layer” of these limitations is governed by its own laws. The internal cognitive apparatus is shaped primarily by the ideas and quality of the choices made on their basis. A formed psychic organism is shaped by given experiences and interactions with other objects. The body, perceived as physical, seems to be merely an emanation, a result of all the subtler acts of cognition, evaluation, and action.

We have presented all the passages of the Upaniṣads, in which the term *jīva* appears. The most complete description – and a very close one to that of Advaita Vedānta – can be found in the Śvetāśvatara. From these passages we can learn how this concept was developed. Let us now take a look at how the term *jīva* is presented by Gauḍapāda in the *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*.

*kalpayatyātmanā'tmānamātmā devaḥ svamāyayā  
sa eva budhyate bhedāniti vedāntaniścayaḥ* (2.12.)

It is the self, the shining one, that imagines, by means of its own *māyā*, the self through the self. That indeed cognizes phenomena. This is the established truth of Vedānta.

*jīvam kalpayate pūrvaṃ tato bhāvān pṛthagvidhān  
bāhyānādhyātmikaṃś caiva yathāvidyas tathā smṛtiḥ.* (2.16.)

First he sets up beings that live and then varied things, external and internal. As the soul knows so shall it remember.

*nākāśasya ghaṭākāśo vikārāvayavau yathā  
naivātmanaḥ sadā jīvo vikārāvayavau tathā* (3.7.)

One cannot really say that the ether of space has really and truly got transformed into jarether, that it has really got divided into parts because of the presence of the shape called the jar. Likewise, one cannot say of these dwellers in the world that they ever are transformations of the self or that they are its parts.

*rasādayo hi ye kośā vyākhyātāstaittiriyake*

*teṣāmātmā paro jīvaḥ khaṃ yathā saṃprakāśitaḥ* (3.11.)

The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* speaks of the five sheaths of the essence of food and the like. What lives as the self in them is the Supreme Self itself, the Self [we have]

revealed through the analogy of the ether of space. [Or according to another reading: the self as (we have) revealed.]

The above stanzas present the relationship between the individual soul, *jīva*, and the absolute being, *ātman* from the perspective of Advaita-Vedānta. In *kārikā* 3.7., the concept of *vivarta* is presented. In the *śruti* texts as well as the Vedānta schools quoting them, a very lively discussion took place regarding the relationship between the absolute dimension of reality and the empirical world. The *sagūṇic* concepts claimed that the empirical world, *prapañca*, is a real transformation of *brahman*, *pariṇāma*, and that there is no ontological difference between these dimensions of reality. The *nirgūṇic* concepts, or Advaita, do not accept such an interpretation, and claim that the world emerged from an erroneous superimposition or a cognitive error, *adhyāsa*, due to the eternal cosmic illusion, *māyā*. Therefore, a different metaphysical status is attributed to *ātman-brahman*, and another to the presented reality. Such a concept is called *vivarta* – “superimposition.” This justifies the perfection and invariability of the absolute and does not burden its essence with any imperfections, or directly with the evil belonging to the empirical world. In Gauḍapāda’s work, *vivarta* is explained by the metaphor of space – *ākāśa*. It shows that reality is one, unchangeable and indivisible, just like space. One cannot say that the space in the pot is different from the space outside of it; it is only the pot itself that is the limitation – *upādhi*. So when the pot is cracked, it becomes obvious that there existed and still exists only one space, just as when all the limitations overshadowing true insight are removed, the identity of *ātman* manifesting itself as *jīva* with *brahman* becomes obvious. This metaphor, according to Advaita, also solves the ethical dilemmas that have been discussed in all philosophical schools. The imperfections of the world that are experienced as suffering, *duḥkha*, do not belong to the absolute. They are experienced as flaws, stains, *kleśa*, as they settle on the walls of the pot, without affecting the space itself. And when the pot is shattered, it turns out that the space is impeccably clean, just as *ātman* is absolutely clean and uncontaminated once the veil of ignorance is removed.

This metaphor is further explained by the *kārikā* 3.11. It refers here to the Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.1–4 presenting the theory of five sheaths or shields, *kośa*, obscuring *brahman-ātman*. The most external of these is *annamayakośa* – the “food sheath,” at which level coarse material objects are experienced. The next one is *prāṇamayakośa* – the “sheath of breath” or of life-giving breath; the psychic organism corresponds to it. *Manomayakośa* – “the sheath of the mind,” is the cognitive organ, and *vijñānamayakośa* – “the sheath of consciousness,” corresponds to the essence of consciousness as intentional, e.g. always directed towards an object. The subtlest sheath surrounding but at the same time obscuring *ātman*

is the sheath of bliss – *ānandamayakośa*; it is not pure bliss, but takes its form, as the suffix *maya* (“made of something” and not essentially being something) indicates. These sheaths are the subsequent limitations – *upādhi*, but are not something external, but representations of *ātman* instead. They are in fact one, just as space is one, although it can be seen as clouds or other obscurities. As Śāṅkara states in his commentary,<sup>135</sup> they were created, or emerged, not by *ātman* itself, but by its power, *māyā*, and so their ontological status is no higher than the one we attribute to dreams or magic tricks.

The two *kārikās* of the second chapter explain how that which is unchangeable, simple and uniform is experienced as diverse and subordinate. It is said that the luminous *ātman* (*ātmā deva*) imagines itself. It is an indication of a very subtle but nevertheless subjective-objective relationship. The absolute being, *ātman*, taking on its luminous form, acquires the ability to emerge and project representations. The formulation *ātmā deva* resembles the phrase from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* 1.4.1, *ātmā puruṣavidha*, “*ātman* in a form of *puruṣa*.” A very important issue needs to be emphasised here. *Ātman* introduces itself as luminous – *deva*, or as taking a form of *puruṣa* – *puruṣavidha*. It is a relationship between a light source and the light that emerges from it. The subsequent images, taking the form of a diverse empirical world, emerge from these luminous rays.<sup>136</sup>

As taught by the *Upaniṣads*, *ātman*, because it is one (*ekam*), cannot perceive or imagine anything but itself. It becomes its own representation. The subject of cognition is still the same as its object, but we can already consider it a cognitive act. In the text this act of self-cognition of *ātman* is referred to as “imagining” – *saṅkalpa*, thus pointing to cognitive acts performed within a subtle state of mind. An image, a thought or an idea determines the objects shaped according to their pattern. The power that enables the process of self-cognition,

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135 *The Word Speaks to the Faustian Man*, Vol. 2, p. 346.

136 “This is that”—so they think, although

the highest bliss can't be described.  
 But how should I perceive it?  
 Does it shine?  
 Or does it radiate?  
 There the sun does not shine,  
 nor the moon and stars;  
 There lightning does not shine,  
 of this common fire need we speak!  
 Him alone, as he shines, do all things reflect;  
 this whole world radiates with his light. (Kaṭha 5.14–15)

and thus projecting as if “creating” worlds, is its own internal power – *svamāyā*. But this power is “activated” only when *ātman* becomes its own representation, always taking a luminous form. This interpretation is confirmed by numerous excerpts from the Upaniṣads, which are analysed in this book, among others, in the chapter on *puruṣa*. The subtlest form, often presented as *puruṣa*, or called *Īśvara*, dwells at the same ontic level as the cosmic illusion – *māyā*. As we learn from Gaudapada, it is this first representation, already functioning as a subject (*saḥ*), that recognises all projections as different from itself. According to the analysis, subsequent cognitive acts result from this first image; it does not matter whether they are objects inside the mind or experienced as external.

In kārikā 2.16, a certain hierarchy of emerging representations is presented. What is imagined and subsequently recognised as the first is *jīva*. The use of the word *pūrvam*, “the first,” indicates the appearance of temporal relations. All beings imagined and emerged in this way have a beginning and therefore an end, i.e. they are not unchangeable, absolute; this is already a dimension of the empirical world. It is only after the projection of *jīva*, an empirical subject, that subsequent objects, already recognisable by it, emerge, perceived as separate (*pr̥thak*) from each other. It is pointed out here that *jīva* always performs cognitive acts limited by ignorance, *avidyā*, that is, ignorance of the truth that reality is in fact one and simple. Ignorance is a significant part of the nature of *jīva*. The objects of these cognitive acts are experienced both as internal and external; they are even described as independently existing as a result of cognitive error. The identity of a given *jīva* is shaped by remembering, synthesising and judging the objects we learn. In this way, the empirical subjects are differentiated and so is their karmic inventory. This dimension of the subject, as an ethical one, is indicated by Śaṅkara in the first words of his commentary to this kārikā. The living soul, *jīva*, is subject to the law of cause and effect. Its actions are causes that bring a fruit in the form of experiencing joy and pain. It is the soul that imagines itself as independently acting, experiencing and suffering. Limited by ignorance, it does not recognise that in its deepest essence it is *ātman*, untouched by anything. This first image of creation as subject to cause and effect is, as Śaṅkara puts it, like imagining a piece of rope to be a snake. The creator – not called by a specific name here (in the earlier kārikā it is “he,” *saḥ*) – generates internal and external phenomena for the use of the soul, such as breathing, mind, senses, or objects of cognition corresponding to them. All these phenomena constitute the activities of the cognitive subjects, together with the corresponding cognitive tools and ways of capturing individual acts.

Further on, Śaṅkara explains how the given phenomena are imagined. The living subject, *jīva*, is itself an imaginary entity, but it is also equipped with the

ability to imagine different kinds of objects. The identity of a given *jīva* includes traces of the memory of everything it has learned and experienced. For example, it can perceive a given event as leading to another one, so that if it thinks about one, it always thinks about the other. These two events are embedded in the memory as interconnected, so when it recalls one, it automatically recalls the other. Then it connects them both in terms of cause and effect within the categories of causal law. In this way the products called cause and effect are created. That which is a product, an image, begins to be perceived by the soul as something real. And subsequently it begins to think about cause and effect; in this way it perceives all actions as resulting from certain causes and producing certain effects. It continues to imagine what circumstances might cause a given event, as well as the many different effects any action might produce. These images can be embedded in it as a memory of events that were experienced. And so the processes we call perceptions, images and reminders overlap in all possible combinations.

*Jīva* recognises all these acts as real, and every time it operates, it finds a cause that leads to a given effect. In its memory there is an awareness of the previous understanding of the relation between two events being confirmed. Again, memory leads to an awareness of the causal relationship between the two events. In this way internal and external phenomena are imagined, alternately each of them is defined in terms of cause and effect.

The term *jīva*, like almost every other presented in this book, is an example of how subsequent philosophical concepts develop. Even if there is a significant difference in the understanding and use of a given term from its first appearance to its technical application in classical texts, it does not lose its previous meanings, but merely expands its semantic field. *Jīva* originally denotes a very broadly defined animated being. Then it is distinguished from all living beings and subjected to ethically valued motivations. In the final parts of *śruti* and their commentaries, the term *jīva* is already a fully defined technical term denoting a subject responsible for shaping its empirical world.



# 11. Functions and roles of the cognitive organ

## 1. *Citta* – the internal cognitive organ

The term *citta* is a technical term in the Yoga school. It appears for the first time in the second sūtra of the first book as a key concept of the entire system: “restraining the phenomena of *citta*” is defined as Yoga itself (*yogaś cittavṛttinirodhaḥ*). The word comes from the verbal root √*cit*, meaning: “to perceive,” “to observe,” “to notice,” “to be aware of something,” “to understand” and “to think.” In a very generic way, *citta* refers to the organ of consciousness or to the realm of consciousness understood as active awareness. Its activity is interpreted as being directed towards “external” objects, as well as its own creations, phenomena perceived as different from oneself. It is a very important feature of *citta*, which is usually referred to as “consciousness.” However, it is not an absolute consciousness, but an empirical one. It is necessary to separate *citta*, inherently active and diverse, from the realm of absolute, simple, undifferentiated and ultimately self-directed consciousness. In the *Yoga Sūtras* the domain of *citta* includes both what we would call conscious cognitive acts and unconscious acts. We will return to a more comprehensive discussion of its structure in the classical period, but first let us look at how this concept and cognitive tool was formed in the times of Upaniṣads, because, as we shall see, many Upaniṣadic considerations would come to be adopted by the Yoga system.

The term *citta* is only used a few times in the Upaniṣads. The most important thread connecting all the passages is the clear distinction between *citta*, as a conscious subject wandering in *saṃsāra*, and an absolute being, referred to in these texts as *ātman*. A passage from Muṇḍaka 3.1.9 is exemplary in this respect:

By thought is this subtle self to be known,  
into which breath has entered in five ways;  
By the senses is laced thentire thought of people,  
in which, when it is pure, this self becomes disclosed.<sup>137</sup>

*Ātman* is called *aṇu* – “subtle.” The word also means “atom,” which denotes indivisibility. *Ātman* is not directly cognizable, the cognitive tool here is *cetas*, i.e.

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137 Muṇḍaka Up. 3.1.9: *eṣo’nur ātmā cetasā veditavyo yasmin prāṇaḥ pañcadhā saṃviveśa prāṇaiś cittaṃ sarvaṃ otam prajānāṃ yasmin vuśuddhe vibhavaty eṣa ātmā.*

*citta* in its dispositional sphere. Already in this text we encounter the later classical distinction between the terms *citta* and *cetas*. *Citta* is a broader concept, while *cetas* indicates its disposition to manifest that which prevails in *citta* at a given moment. *Cetas* is the disposition of the function of *citta* which activates the structure which is predominant in a given moment of migration. When a given *citta* is thrown by various *saṃskāras*, it is *cetas* that causes it to take on their forms (*rūpa*). This is how it will be later explained by Vyāsa in his commentary on the *Yoga Sūtras*:<sup>138</sup>

The word 'whose modifications are weakened' means 'whose thought process has come to an end.' 'Like a precious gem' is citing an example. Just as a (clear) crystal is tinged by the various colours of the object which is adjacent to it and shines taking on the colour of the adjacent object, similarly the mind, tinged by the object which is its support (and) having attained oneness with the object (*grāhyasamāpannam*) shines with the form of the object. Similarly, (the mind) tinged by a subtle object (and) having attained oneness with the subtle object, seems to have the form of the subtle object. Similarly, (the mind) tinged by the support of a gross object (and) having attained oneness with the form of the gross object seems to have the form of the gross object. Similarly, (the mind) tinged by particular objects of the world (like the various movable and immovable objects of the world) (and) having attained oneness with the particular object of the world seems to have the form of the particular object. (. . .)

Similarly, (the mind) tinged by the support of the 'puruṣa' as knower (*grahitṛpuruṣa*) (and) having attained oneness with the 'puruṣa' as knower, shines with the form of the 'puruṣa' as knower. Similarly, the mind tinged by the support of a liberated 'puruṣa' and having attained oneness with the liberated 'puruṣa' shines with the form of the liberated 'puruṣa.'

It is expressed in the Upaniṣads similarly, but more poetically. When *citta* is purified, it takes on the form of *sattva* cleared of the darkening *tamas* and the tinting *rajas*; *ātman* then manifests its pure nature. In this passage, not only is the domain of *citta* and *ātman* distinguished (in the *Yoga Sūtras*, the term *ātman* corresponds with the term *citi* or *puruṣa*), but also a certain dispositional domain of *citta* itself is indicated. *Ātman* or *citi* is a pure subject, and *citta* is an object, tool or instrument. The Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad 3.3. also points to the functional and ontological distinction between the terms *citta* and *prajñātman*. Thus, we can see that in the earlier Upaniṣads the field of pure consciousness was already distinguished from functional and empirical consciousness.

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138 *Yogavārttika of Vijñānabhikṣu*, Text with English translation and critical notes along with the text and English translation of the Pātañjala Yogasūtras and Vyāsabhāṣya by T.S. Rukmani, Vol. I, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 2007, pp. 206 ff.

Now, let us refer to one of the later Upaniṣads, but still canonical, the Maitrī. In excerpts 6.27. and 6.34. we have a very clear treatment of *citta* not as a pure subject, but merely as a tool. From the perspective of transforming consciousness and the whole yogic procedure, Maitrī tries to reconcile the methodological dualism of Sāṃkhya with the final interpretation of Advaita. The domain of *citta* is directly presented as a tool which, upon reaching its goal, disappears, as if being annihilated:

As fire, of fuel destitute,  
 Becomes extinct in its own source,  
 So thought by loss of activeness  
 Becomes extinct in its own source.  
 Becomes extinct in its own source,  
 Because the mind the Real seeks!  
 For one confused by things of sense,  
 There follow action's false controls.  
 Samsāra is just one's own thought;  
 With effort he should cleanse it, then.  
 What is one's thought, that he becomes;  
 This is the eternal mystery<sup>139</sup>

Maitrī 5.2. describes the functioning of *citta* in a highly technical way. Although the term does not appear here per se, the term *ceṭāmātra* corresponds to it. *Ceṭāmātra* is a measure of consciousness, a principium of consciousness that characterises each individual operating and cognitive subject, called *kṣetrajña* (“field knower,” “knower of reality”). These two terms denote *citta*.

That is the portion consisting solely of consciousness, which is the field-knower in each person, Prajāpati, whose characteristics are will, determination and conceit.<sup>140</sup>

Therefore, the most important functions of the subject are: *saṅkalpa*, *adhyavasāya* and *abhimāna*. *Saṅkalpa* is an image, in the Yoga system it corresponds to the function of *buddhi*. *Adhyavasāya* – “deliberation,” denotes the field of *manas*, while *abhimāna* means “self-loving.” These concepts refer us to *ahaṅkāra* in Sāṃkhya or *asmitā* in Yoga, and in this way we notice here not only a very

139 Maitrī Up. 6.34.: *yathā nirindhano vahniḥ svayonāv upaāmyate tathā vṛtti kṣayāc citta svayonāv upaśāmyate, svayonāv upaśāntasya manasaḥ satyakāmataḥ indriyārtha vimūḍhasyānṛtāḥ karmavaśānugāḥ, citta eva hi saṃsāram tat prayatnena śodhayet yac citta tanmayo bhavati guhyam etat sanātanam.*

140 Maitrī Up. 5.2.: *so'ṃśō'yaṃ yas ceṭāmātraḥ pratipurusaḥ kṣetrajñaḥ sakalpādhyavasāyābhimānalingaḥ.*

similar structure, but also the nomenclature which we know from the classical *darśanas*. Firstly, there is an absolute being, here referred to as *tat param* (“the highest”). Also, besides rather complicated ontological solutions, one can say that the perspective of the subject operating and migrating in *saṃsāra* is very similar to the one found in *Yoga*. At the level of the presented world, which corresponds to the realm of *prakṛti*, we observe the distinction between the subject endowed with consciousness (*kṣetrajña*) and the world it experiences (*kṣetra*). Essential for *kṣetrajña* is the domain of consciousness (*ceṭāmātra*), which defines the subject as conscious and responsible for its form of migration, both for its entanglement in *saṃsāra* and for its liberation. This subject is characterised by *buddhi*, *ahaṅkāra* and *manas*. All these terms, or their equivalents, appear in the Upaniṣads. The most frequent is the word *manas*. While analysing *citta*, it is necessary to refer to the notion of *manas*, since the Upaniṣads attribute some functions of the classically understood *citta* precisely to *manas*.

## 2. *Buddhi* – the illuminating power of empirical consciousness

The term *buddhi* is derived from the verbal root *budh* – “to awaken,” “to wake up,” “to regain consciousness,” “to observe,” “to perceive,” “to understand,” “to be aware.” Thus, it indicates all acts of realisation, understanding, as well as evaluation; in philosophical literature, it denotes the cognitive power associated with conscious reflection and judgement. As a technical term, it appears primarily in the systems of Sāṃkhya and *Yoga*, where it is the first manifested *tattva*. It corresponds to the concept of intellect:

Higher than the senses are their objects;  
Higher than sense objects is the mind;  
Higher than the mind is the intellect;  
Higher than the intellect is the immense self<sup>f41</sup>

In Sāṃkhya, *buddhi* is also called *mahat*, “the great,” which indicates, on the one hand, the priority and, on the other hand, the originality of all cognitive processes of which it is the basis. Just as all the *tattvas* emerged from a non-manifested *prakṛti*, it consists of three *guṇas* and is therefore able to produce various emanations. This explains why *buddhi*, which is one, gives impulse to so many different cognitive attitudes.

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141 Kaṭha Up. 3.10.: *indriyebhyaḥ parāhy arthā arthebhyas ca paraṃ manaḥ manasas tu parā buddhi buddher ātmā mahān paraḥ.*

The *buddhi* (“will” or “intellect”) is (characterized by) ascertainment or determination. Virtue, knowledge, non-attachment, and possession of power are *sāttvika* forms. Its *tāmasa* form is the opposite (of these four). (Sāṃkhyakārikā 23.)<sup>142</sup>  
 (This is done) because the *buddhi* produces (or brings about) every enjoyment of the *puruṣa*; and, moreover, (because the *buddhi*) distinguishes (*viśiṅṣti*) the subtle difference between the *pradhāna* and the *puruṣa*. and again it is *Buddhi* that exposes the subtle difference between Nature and Spirit. (Sāṃkhyakārikā 37.)<sup>143</sup>

The term does not appear in the earliest Upaniṣads belonging to the canon, but it is found primarily in the texts belonging to the group of so-called proto Sāṃkhya-Yogic Upaniṣads. Generally, we can distinguish two groups of passages that emphasise a given aspect of *buddhi*. One of them approaches *buddhi* very technically and in these contexts we encounter the emanative or soteric sequences that are actually identical to the later classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga systems. In another place, also pointing to the liberating function of *buddhi*, its illuminating and brightening nature is very clearly emphasised. Let us now look at some selected fragments:

Who, as the source and origin of gods and the ruler over them all, as the god Rudra, and as the great seer, in the beginning created Hiraṇyagarbha—may he furnish us with lucid intelligence.<sup>144</sup>

He is as large as a thumb and equal in appearance to the sun when he is equipped with the faculties of imagination and self-consciousness. But one sees also another no larger than the tip of an awl who is equipped only with the quality of intelligence and the quality of the body.<sup>145</sup>

As all the *tattvas* in the systems of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, *buddhi* consists of the three *guṇas*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Sattva*, as the subtlest of all, dominates *buddhi*, and so it is said about *buddhi* itself that it has a *sattvic* nature. It is also claimed to be the cause of the blissful experience (*ānanda*), to be light (*laghu*) and illuminating (*prakāśaka*). Due to its luminous nature, it is *sattva* who is responsible for brightening the darkness of erroneous perception and achieving liberating cognition. Neither Sāṃkhya nor Yoga sufficiently describe why a contact between *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* is made, and why, as a result, the latter gets bound by *prakṛti*

142 *Classical Sāṃkhya. An Interpretation of its History and Meaning*, Gerald James Larson, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, India, 1979, p. 263.

143 *Ibid.*, p. 267.

144 Śvetāśvatara Up. 3.4.: *yo devānāṃ prabhavaś codbhavaś ca viśvādhipo rudro maharṣiḥ hiraṇyagarbhaṃ janayāmāsa pūrvaṃ sa no buddhyā śubhayā samyunaktu.*

145 Śvetāśvatara Up. 5.8.: *aṅguṣṭhamātro ravitulyarūpas saṃkalpāhaṃkāra samanvito yaḥ buddher guṇenātmā guṇena caiva ārāgra mātro hy aparō'pi dṛṣṭaḥ.*

and entangled in *saṃsāra*. However, the mechanism itself is presented. In fact, nothing can be said about *puruṣa* except that it is *cit* – an absolute consciousness that shines with its inner light. The contact between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* occurs at the level of the subtlest *tattva*, i.e. *buddhi*. The latter in its *sattvic* form is like a mirror in which *puruṣa* sees itself and identifies with its reflection. This is how the wandering of *saṃsāra* begins. Due to the nature of the reflected subject and object, the reflection takes on a luminous form. At the same level, at the meeting point of the same *tattvas* in their luminous form, there occurs an act of cognition that distinguishes between light itself and its reflection, and the ultimate state of uniqueness (*kevala*) is reached, where, freed from even the subtlest actions of *prakṛti*, *puruṣa* remains in its own nature.

The seen is by nature bright, active and inert; its essence are the elements and the sense-organs; it exists for the fulfilment of the purpose of experience and liberation (of *puruṣa*).<sup>146</sup>

This luminous form, according to some passages, can take on a divine shape, usually called *Īśvara*, *puruṣa* in the Indian tradition or by another name; in the passage above it is Rudra. For a yoga adept, such a luminous figure can then become a guidance or a signpost leading to liberation, while itself an object of worship and a subject of liberation. For those who represent the theistic trend of yoga, this personalised, luminous form helps to achieve liberation. In the above quoted passage from *Śvetāśvatara*, a worshipper asks Rudra to help him see the truth and to grant him clear recognition: *sa no buddhyā śubhayā saṃyunaktu*. During the meditation procedure, he manifests himself as the size of a thumb – quite a frequent metaphorical figure. It is also visualised as a form of the sun, an equally frequent comparison, used in various systems of all cultures. Such an experience is also described by Vyasa in his commentary to Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras* (1.29.):

Whatever obstacles there are such as sickness &c., they disappear by devotion to *Īśvara*. He also obtains a perception of his true self. Just as *Īśvara* is a (special) *puruṣa*, pure, free from afflictions, isolated, without any change, similarly he (one who is devoted to *Īśvara*) sees this self also as a *puruṣa* who is the knower by reflection of the (modification of the) intellect.<sup>147</sup>

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146 *Yogavārttika of Vijñānabhikṣu*, Text with English translation and critical notes along with the text and English translation of the Pātañjala Yogasūtras and Vyāsabhāṣya by T.S. Rukmani, Vol. II, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 2007, p. 90.

147 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

Thus, in this Upaniṣad, the *buddhi's* function is primarily to provide insight into reality and in this way achieve liberation. In the Kaṭha and Maitrī Upaniṣad, *buddhi* is discussed using more technical language, in an entire, precisely elaborated emanation scheme. Maitrī 6.5. names three forms of thinking (*cetanavati*): the intellect (*buddhi*), the mind and the sense of self. These three forms of thinking correspond to the inner organ of cognition in Sāṃkhya, as well as the three modi of *citta* in Yoga. It is developed in the following passage of this Upaniṣad (6.10.), where the concept of *bhūtātman* and the concept of food (*anna*) are discussed. The relationship between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* is presented there as a relationship between a food-eater and food. Everything that is an object is food because it sustains the subject, understood as the experiencing, empirical subject, and not as the very principle of subjectivity. In this context, *buddhi* is the subtlest form of food:

So the enjoyer is the person, nature is the object of enjoyment, and resting in it he enjoys it. The food of nature, through the development of the distinction of the three strands, is the subtle body, which begins with the 'the great' and ends with 'the particularities'. In this way the fourteenfold path is explained: 'This world, known as joy, sorrow and delusion, has become food.' ( . . . )

Then it has the sweetnesses, intelligence etc.: they are called intelligence, resolution and conceit.<sup>148</sup>

In this passage, the most characteristic feature of *buddhi* is the determination – *adhyavasāya*. Determination can be understood as will, as an impulse initiating all acts of cognition and operation. Similarly the mechanism of cognition is presented in the classic *darśanas*. As a result of previous experiences, which take the form of *sanskaras*, *buddhi* sends a kind of signal to manifest and to act. This impulse is aimed at the cognition of objects – *viśaya*. These objects can either belong to the realm of elements – *mahābhūta*, or they can remain within the internal organ of cognition – *antaḥkaraṇa*. The results of interactions between

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148 Maitrī Up. 6.10.: *athāparam veditavyam uttaro vikāro'syātmayajñāsya yathānnam annādaś ceti asyopavyākhyānām puruṣaś cetā pradhānāntaḥsthaḥ sa eva bhoktā prakṛtam annam bhūiktā iti tasyāyam bhūtātma hy annam asya – kartā pradhānaḥ tasmāt triguṇam bhojyam bhoktā puruṣo'ntaḥsthaḥ atra dṛṣṭaṃ nāma pratyayam yasmāt bijasambhavā hi paśavas tasmād bijam bhojyam anenaiva pradhānasya bhojyatvaṃ vyākhyātam tasmād bhoktā puruṣo bhojyā prakṛtis tatstho bhūikta iti prakṛtam annam triguṇabhedapariṇamatvān mahadāyaṃ viśeṣāntaṃ liṅgam anenaiva caturdaśavidhasya mārgasya vyākhyā kṛtā bhavati sukhaduḥkhamohasaṃjama hy annambhūtam idaṃ jagat (...) tatra buddhyādīni svāduni bhavanty adhyavasāya saṃkalpābhimānā iti.*

the objects and the senses that get to know them are synthesised by *manas*, thus creating the impression of cognition of the objects external to *manas*. Then the object, constructed by the synthesising operation of *manas*, is “presented” to *ahaṃkāra*, who recognises it as known through its activity. The same object then reaches *buddhi*, who judges it, confronts it with other objects, or with a reminder of previous experiences related to that object. As a result of the given judgement regarding the object of cognition, the cognitive subject adopts an appropriate attitude; it either seeks to contact it again (*rāga*), or tries to avoid it – *dveṣa*. In this way, at the level of *buddhi*, the attitudes of the empirical subject towards the world are established and its future fate is determined. At this level, memory (*smṛti*) operates, which decides, *inter alia*, whether our cognitive acts signify progress in learning about reality; otherwise, the same phenomenon would be repeatedly experienced as new. Based on the analysis of *manas*, we will see that the classical functions of *buddhi* presented by the earliest *śruti* texts are attributed to *manas*, which is why the very term *buddhi* appears in the Upaniṣads in very few places.

In the Kaṭha Upaniṣad, we find a beautiful image comparing a man migrating in *saṃsāra* to a charioteer:

Know the self as a rider in a chariot,  
and the body, as simply the chariot.  
Know the intellect as the charioteer,  
and the mind, as simply the reins.<sup>149</sup>

When a man lacks understanding,

and his mind is never controlled;  
His senses do not obey him,  
as bad horses, a charioteer.

But when a man has understanding,

and his mind is ever controlled;  
His senses do obey him,  
as good horses, a charioteer.

When a man lacks understanding,

is unmindful and always impure;  
He does not reach that final step,

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149 Kaṭha Up. 3.3: *ātmanāṃ rathinaṃ viddhi śarīraṃ ratham eva tu buddhiṃ tu sārathiṃ viddhi manaḥ pragrahaṃ eva ca.*

but gets on the round of rebirth.

But when a man has understanding,

is mindful and always pure;  
He does reach that final step,  
from which he is not reborn again.<sup>150 151</sup>

Again here, *buddhi* is singled out from other *tattvas*. Precisely *buddhi*, one of whose basic functions is memory, and thus also karmic memory, is responsible for the destiny of the soul in *saṃsāra*. It is through the karmic disposition that a distinction is made between individual active subjects. Although *buddhi*, which is more of a category than an element of reality, is one (it is beyond *ahaṃkāra* or

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150 Kaṭha Up. 3.5–8: *yas tv avijñānavān bhavaty ayuktena manasā sadā tasyendriyāṇy avāśyāni duṣṭāśvā iva saratheḥ.*

*yas tu vijñānavān bhavati yuktena manasā sadā tasyendriyāṇi vaśyāni sadaśvā iva saratheḥ.*

*yas tv avijñānavān bhavaty amanaskaḥ sadāśuciḥ na sa tat padam āpnoti saṃsāraṃ cādhigacchati.*

*yas tu vijñānavān bhavati samanaskaḥ sadā śuciḥ sa tu tat padam āpnoti yasmā bhūyo na jāyate.*

151 “That, then, is enough about the soul’s immortality. Now here is what we must say about its structure. (. . .) Let us then liken the soul to the natural union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer. The gods have horses and charioteers that are themselves all good and come from good stock besides, while everyone else has a mixture. To begin with, our driver is in charge of a pair of horses; second, one of his horses is beautiful and good and from stock of the same sort, while the other is the opposite and has the opposite sort of bloodline. This means that chariot-driving in our case is inevitably a painfully difficult business. (. . .) So long as its wings are in perfect condition it flies high, and the entire universe is its dominion; but a soul that sheds its wings wanders until it lights on something solid, where it settles and takes on an earthly body, which then, owing to the power of this soul, seems to move itself. The whole combination of soul and body is called a living thing, or animal, and has the designation ‘mortal’ as well. (. . .) The gods’ chariots move easily, since they are balanced and well under control, but the other chariots barely make it. The heaviness of the bad horse drags its charioteer toward the earth and weighs him down if he has failed to train it well, and this causes the most extreme toil and struggle that a soul will face. But when the souls we call immortals reach the top, they move outward and take their stand on the high ridge of heaven, where its circular motion carries them around as they stand while they gaze upon what is outside heaven.” *Plato: Complete Works, Phaedrus*, ed. Cooper, John M., 1997, 246–247, pp. 524 ff.

*ahaṃkāras*), it consists of three *guṇas* and hence is a subject to modifications and is experienced as multiplicity. When *sattva* prevails in *buddhi*, the human being is considered wise and headed for *mokṣa*. But when his *buddhi* is impure and contaminated by various *kleśas*, it gravitates towards the manifested reality and is ever more entangled in *saṃsāra*. Therefore, the destiny of a given *puruṣa* caught up in the game of *prakṛti* depends on the quality and proper use of *buddhi*. In the Śvetāśvatara, the attention was drawn above all to the illuminating power of the *sattvic buddhi*, whereas in the Kaṭha it was the *buddhi*'s power over the remaining *tattvas* and, therefore, over the manifestations of reality. Kaṭha's power over all the other *tattvas* and therefore over the manifestations of reality. If *buddhi* adequately performs its task, it vanishes into the non-manifested *prakṛti*. *Puruṣa* remains free:

When the five perceptions are stilled,  
together with the mind,  
And not even reason bestirs itself;  
they call it the highest state.<sup>152</sup>

### 3. *Ahaṃkāra* – the acting self, the organ creating the empirical self

The term *ahaṃkāra* – “I act,” “the acting I,” is a technical term developed by the school of Sāṃkhya. It was later incorporated into the entire Brahmanical tradition as denoting the formation of an individual subject, where it is explained that all cognitive functions and life force operate by virtue of this organ. The relationship of *ahaṃkāra* to *ātman*, i.e. the experience of reality from the perspective of the “I” to the insight into its nature is presented by the Chāndogya Upaniṣad upon presenting the “doctrine of greatness” – *bhumavidyā*:

Plentitude, indeed, is below; plentitude is above; plentitude is in the west; plentitude is in the east; plentitude is in the south; and plentitude is in the north. Indeed, plentitude extends over this whole world.

‘Now, the substitution of the word “I” — “I am, indeed, below; I am above; I am in the west; I am in the east; I am in the south; and I am in the north. Indeed, I extend over this whole world.”

‘Next, the substitution of self — “The self, indeed, is below; the self is above; the self is in the west; the self is in the east; the self is in the south; and the self is in the north. Indeed, the self extends over this whole world.” (7.25.1–2).

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<sup>152</sup> Kaṭha Up. 6.10.: *yadāpañcāvatiṣṭhante jñānāni manasā saha buddhi ca na viceṣṭati tām āhuh paramāṃ gatim*.

When reality is recognised from the level of *ahaṃkāra*, the subject identifies itself with particular sections, specific structures of reality, often conceitedly assuming that they depend on it. The attachment to a certain fragment of reality causes the cognitive horizons to be limited to this very fragmented dimension of reality. And since all that is limited comes to an end, similarly the limited control of a given *ahaṃkāra* over the world experienced must come to an end, whereas from the perspective of *ātman* an unrestricted, unmediated insight into the nature of reality is achieved. Then there is no dependence on anything and this is what the Upaniṣad describe as absolute freedom.

The Maitrī Upaniṣad 6.5. lists the subsequent phenomena referred to as the forms of *ātman*. The “form” is expressed here with the word *tanū* – “body,” “display,” “manifestation,” “figure.” (Let us note here that it is a feminine word; more on the subject in the chapter on *manas*). In these sequences the term *ahaṃkāra* appears: the reason, the mind, the sense of “I” – these are the forms of thinking. *Buddhi*, *manas* and *ahaṃkāra* are called *cetanavati*, which is the realm of thinking, of conscious acting at the level of the presented world. At this point, the Upaniṣad clearly refers to the terminology developed by the schools of Sāṃkhya and Yoga. In Yoga, the empirical consciousness is referred to as *citta*, and its main functions are actually *buddhi*, *ahaṃkāra* and *manas*. While reading this passage from Maitrī we should notice one more thing: the description of the forms of *ātman* begins with a clarification of what Om̐ is:

‘What Om̐ is is its sound-body.’ (. . .)

[later on sequences of forms and manifestations are listed]

So by saying ‘Om̐’ these bodies come to be praised, worshipped and achieved. Someone has said, ‘Satyakāma, what the syllable Om̐ is is *brahman*, both the higher and the lower.’<sup>153</sup>

This excerpt presents the thesis – among the earlier Upaniṣad the most clearly expressed in Muṇḍaka – that reality is both *para* and *aparabrahman*. The difference between them is mainly related to the epistemic dimension. As a result of proper insight, not overshadowed by even the subtlest of forms, the subject and object of cognition become one; this state is *neti, neti*. When we make a judgement about it, we use the language of the category that fits the given form. It seems that ultimately, whether the judgement is made by the one who sees/knows, or it is he who refers to his vision, or maybe it is a description of

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153 Maitrī Up. 6.5.: *svanavaty eṣāsyah tanūḥ vā aum ity (. . .) eṣety ata aum ity uktenaitāḥ prastutā arcitā arpitā bhavantīti eva hy āhaitad vai satyakāma paraṃ cāparaṃ ca brahma yad aum ity etad akṣaram iti.*

something imagined, none of these accounts can be adequate per se. Each individual narrative is spoken from the perspective of *ahaṃkāra* – that is, from the perspective of the presented reality.

#### 4. *Manas* – the mind, the broadly defined cognitive-emotional domain

One of the most common terms indicating the conscious and cognitive functions of an active subject is *manas*. In none of the classical *darśanas* is *manas* considered as a pure subject or the principle of subjectivity, but rather as an instrument or a tool that enables the conscious subject to recognise reality, which in some systems is understood as a recognition of one's true nature. The concept of *manas* as a strictly specific tool (although "strictly" will be specified differently in individual schools depending on the adopted ontological assumptions) did not appear in the *śruti* texts as a concept already fully formed. The concept of *manas* was formed in several stages, as well as in several dimensions, but from the beginning it was treated in a distinctive way. Now let us take a look at some of the most important threads in the process of shaping the concept of *manas*.

As usual, etymology is a good starting point. The term *manas* stems from the verbal root  $\sqrt{\text{man}}$ , meaning "to believe," "to think." In the earliest Vedic texts, e.g. in the discussed Ṛgveda hymn, it refers to the broadly understood domain of thinking that includes both the mental sphere and the cognitive tools. It plays the role of a frontier, a caesura, as well as an intermediary between the realm of reality (*sat*), and the empirical world (*bhava*). In monistic systems, it is *manas* that, on the one hand, sets the boundary between what is simple, uncomplicated, real, and what is differentiated and categorised, and, on the other hand, enables this boundary to be crossed. It is distinguished both in the soteriological and cosmological order. In the cosmological order, as will be demonstrated, it covers, or obscures the realm of *sat*, while in the soteriological order, this tendency to cover – paradoxically – becomes an ability to discover the true nature of reality.

In the earliest Upaniṣads, the transition from the absolute, simple dimension of reality into what is diverse and versatile is presented metaphorically. The concept of *saṃsāra*, as migration through successive incarnations of the conscious subject, whose fate was determined by its karmic merit subject to ethical evaluation, was fully developed and presented only in the later Upaniṣads.<sup>154</sup> The

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154 For more detail see: *Karman i dharma. Wizja świata w filozoficznej myśli Indii*, Kraków 2003.

concept gradually transformed, as proved by the adoption of two post-mortem paths: Devayāna and Pitṛyāna. The former is called the path of the gods or the path of light (*arcīrmārga*); from this path there is no return to *saṃsāra*, only complete liberation – *mokṣa*. The latter, *dhūmamārga*, is the path of the ancestors, the path of smoke. It was not interpreted unambiguously, although it is said that the fruits of one's karmic deeds are received there and only then another incarnation takes place.<sup>155</sup>

When people depart from this world, it is to the moon that they all go. By means of their lifebreaths the moon swells up in the fortnight of waxing, and through the fortnight of waning it propels them to new birth. Now, the moon is the door to the heavenly world. It allows those who answer its question to pass. As to those who do not answer its question, after they have become rain, it rains them down here on earth, where they are born again in these various conditions—as a worm, an insect, a fish, a bird, a lion, a boar, a rhinoceros, a tiger, a man, or some other creature—each in accordance with his actions and his knowledge.<sup>156</sup>

The common point for these two paths and at the same time the point where they depart, is the domain of the moon – *candra*, (*Soma*) and the domain of the mind – *manas*. This correlation of the two domains, which correspond at the macro and microcosm levels, was presented by the Vedic wise men already in the era of the composition of hymns. This can be seen very clearly, for example, in the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, and among the older *Upaniṣads*, in *Aitareya*.

He incubated that man. From that man so incubated—  
 —a mouth was hatched like an egg; from the mouth sprang speech, and from speech, fire.  
 —a pair of nostrils was hatched; from the nostrils sprang breath, and from breath, the wind.  
 —a pair of eyes was hatched; from the eyes sprang sight, and from sight, the sun.  
 —a pair of ears was hatched; from the ears sprang hearing, and from hearing, the quarters.  
 —a skin was hatched; from the skin sprang the body hairs, and from the body hairs, plants and trees.

155 Other *Upaniṣads* describing the post-mortem paths are: *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* 6.2.16., *Chāndogya* 4.15.5., *Chāndogya* 5.10.1–10., *Praśna* 5.4. and *Kauṣītaki* 1.2.

156 *Kauṣītaki Up.* 1.2.: *ye vai ke cāsmāl lokāt prayanti candramasam eva te sarve gacchanti teṣāṃ prāṇaiḥ pūrvapakṣa āpyāyate tan apara pakṣeṇa prajanayati etad vai svargasya lokasya dvāram yac candramāḥ. tam yaḥ pratyāha tam atisṛjate atha ya enaṃ na pratyāhā tam iha vṛṣṭir bhūtvā varṣati. sa iha kiṭo vā pataṅgo vā matsyo vā śakunir vā siṃho vā varāho vā parasvān vā śārdūlo vā puruṣo vānyo vā teṣu teṣu sthāneṣu pratyājāyate yathā karma yathā vidyām.*

- a heart was hatched; from the heart sprang the mind, and from the mind, the moon.
- a navel was hatched; from the navel sprang the in-breath, and from the in-breath, death.
- a penis was hatched; from the penis sprang semen, and from semen, the waters.<sup>157</sup>

A very well-known sequence of successive elements of the macrocosm emerging from the corresponding elements of the microcosm is presented here. The most interesting for these considerations is the following sequence: the absolute being, taking the form of the creator of the worlds, separated the mind (*manas*) from the heart (*hṛdaya*), and from the mind came the moon (*candramā*). In Aitareya 1.4., the sequence regards the cosmological order, and in 2.4. it is reversed and describes the formation of the human being as a model cognitive subject, in its entire psychophysical complexity. An important conclusion is the metaphorical reference to the lunar world. More importantly in this context, the primary cognitive organ in an empirical psycho-physical subject is connected to the mind, which is not located in the brain, but in the heart. It is very significant, as demonstrated by later texts, since it seems to consider the mind not only as a purely “material,” mechanical tool of cognition, experiencing and acting (corresponding to the functions of the brain described by means of mechanistic operations), but rather as a centre of emotions, feelings, passions and volitional activity. All the complexity and emphasis of the fact that by the nature of creation the main cognitive centre is treated as a domain of feelings and emotions, will shape the specificity of traditional Indian systems. The cognitive subject is not only the ability to recognise and “calculate” action. It is also a tendency not to recognise or misrecognise as a result of darkening and confusion by emotions. The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 3.1.2. describes this state as: *muhyamāna* – the erring, clouded mind, and the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 3.2.7. as a mind controlled by the act of grasping desires (*kāma*):

The mind is a grasper, which is itself grasped by desire, the overgrasper; for one entertains desires by means of the mind.<sup>158</sup>

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157 Aitareya Up. 1.1.4.: *tam abhyataptat, tasyābhitaptasya mukhaṃ nirabhidayata yathāṇḍam, mukhād vāg vācoḅgnir nāsike nirabhidyetām, nasikābhyāṃ prāṇaḥ prāṇād vāyuh akṣiṇī nirabhidyetām, akṣibhyāṃ cakṣuḥ cakṣuṣa ādityaḥ, karṇau nirabhidyetām, karṇābhyāṃ śrotram śrotrād diśas tvaṃ nirabhidhyata, tvaco lomāni lomabhya ośadhivanaspatayo hṛdyaṃ nirabhidayata, hṛdayān manaḥ manasaḥ candramāḥ nābhīr nirabhidayata, nābhyaḥ apānaḥ apanān mṛtyuḥ śiśnaṃ nirabhidayata, śiśnād retāḥ retasa āpaḥ.*

158 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 3.2.7.: *mano vai grahaḥ sa kāmēnātigrāheṇa gṛhītaḥ manasā hi kāmān kāmāyate.*

Later, when a human being is presented as a subject who, as a result of meditation, acquires the capacity for liberation, it is *manas* – as a tool in connection with the heart – that is able to perform this role. In the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 3.13. it is said that *manas*, together with the heart (*hr̥daya*), shapes (*kṛp*) *puruṣa* as the subject of meditation. Also a further passage from this Upaniṣad (4.20.) expresses the same idea: “Those who know him thus with their hearts—him, who abides in their hearts—and with insight become immortal.” The entire complexity of *manas* shall be discussed in the further part of the chapter. Now, let us return to the correlation between *manas* and *candra*.

The correspondence between the moon and mind is depicted by both Vedic hymns and the earlier Upaniṣads, presenting a broadly defined monistic worldview. The greatest challenge for all the monistic systems is to explain how what is known to be homogenous may be experienced as multiplicity. The above texts, especially in the passages presented above, do not conclusively resolve that problem. Yet they clearly distinguish the moment of transition, both in the dimension of the macrocosm (moon) and the microcosm (mind). The realm of broadly defined *manas* – and it should be remembered that we are referring here to prephilosophical texts – seems to be responsible for the differentiation or separation of individual cognitive subjects experiencing themselves as separate.

The first conclusion here seems to be a truism: whether we acknowledge that the world is a unity or a multiplicity depends mainly on the cognitive subject and less on what is being cognised. The discussed texts clarify the thesis, claiming that the limit of diversity or multiplicity can be crossed by those who have properly recognised the nature of reality. The Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad 1.4. presents this idea in a beautiful, metaphorical way. On the *devayāna* or the path of gods, there is the Āra lake, which can only be crossed by the mind. But those who only possess common knowledge – that is, from the ultimate point of view, they lack the liberating knowledge – drown in it. Whereas the knowledgeable go on to cross the river Vijāra (“without old age”) again with their minds. In this way, they shake off the remains of their karmic burden and reach the state of immortality understood here as the state of no differentiation. What differentiates the inherently homogeneous conscious existence into individual cognitive subjects are the various choices that form individual karmic paths. Thus, *manas* appears to be a cognitive tool, which becomes what it reflects. When the true nature of reality is reflected in it, it leads to *mokṣa*, and when a cognitive error occurs, it entangles the soul in *saṃsāra*. In the Kauṣītaki 3.6., *manas* is referred to as *prajñā* (wisdom), because it reflects *ātman* as identical to *prajñā*. In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka

it is said that liberated from death, *manas* becomes the moon – also here mortality, subjection to death and rebirth seem to correspond to the principle of individualisation.

Then it carried the mind. And when the mind was freed from death, it became the moon. So, having gone beyond death, the moon now shines up there. In the same way, this deity carries beyond the reach of death anyone who knows this.<sup>159</sup>

It follows from the above considerations that one of the basic functions of the broadly understood cognitive apparatus to which the term *manas* refers in the earliest texts, is to capture, imagine, and thus shape reality. This type of function in the later *darśanas* is usually referred to as *saṃkalpa*, but such characterised operation of *manas* appears already in the Upaniṣads. The Muṇḍaka 3.1.10. presents it in a beautiful image:

Whatever world a man, whose being is purified,  
ponders with his mind,  
and whatever desires he covets;  
that very world, those very desires, he wins.  
A man who desires prosperity, therefore,  
should worship one who knows the self.<sup>160</sup>

The same basic function of *manas* is also pointed out by the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.3.6. Let us note another interesting motif that emerges from the above fragment. In later Indian systems, especially those with clear theistic tendencies, there is talk of various heavens, managed by individual deities, which the worshipper wishes to enter. But even when there is talk of heavenly worlds, they are never considered to be real, but always imagined by the devotees. This very concept goes back to the Upaniṣads. Returning to the function of *saṃkalpa*, in the classical *darśana*, where *manas* no longer refers to the broad organ of cognition but only to one of its *modi*, the technically understood term points to *buddhi*.

The role of *manas* as the main cognitive organ is manifested by its relation to other notions that played a major role in anthropological concepts of the Upaniṣads. Its distinguished position is emphasised by demonstrating its

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159 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.3.16.: *atha mano'tyavahat tad yadā mṛtyum atyamucyata sa candramā abhavat so'sau candrah pareṇa mṛtyum atikrānto bhāty evaṃ ha vā enam eṣā devatā mṛtyum ativahati ya evaṃ veda.*

160 Muṇḍaka Up. 3.1.10.: *yaṃ yaṃ lokaṃ manasā saṃvidhāti viśuddhasattvaḥ kāmāyate yāṃś ca kāmān, taṃ taṃ lokaṃ jayate tāṃś ca kāmāṃs tasmād ātmajñāṃ hy arcayed bhūtikāmaḥ.*

important function in the ritual. The passage from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 3.1.6 is very illustrious.<sup>161</sup> Other than the above-mentioned relations between the mind and the moon, there is a third element: *brahman*, the chief priest, who initiates and supervises the work of others. In this context the passage from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.2.6., presented in the chapter on cosmogony, should be interpreted: *tasya śārīra eva mana āsīt*, “His mind, however, still remained within his corpse.” In this stanza, the body has a ritualistic meaning. In the earliest Upaniṣads, the cosmological order is strictly superimposed on the soteriological one. This is very clearly demonstrated, among others, in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.2.1. It says: *tan mano’kuruta*, meaning “this (absolute being) created his mind,” as a tool of all actions. Only then could the thought appear: *ātmanvī syām*, “Let me equip myself with a body (*ātman*). The Upaniṣad further develops this idea. In the excerpt 1.2.4. this absolute being – already endowed with the ability to think and recognise – decides: *sa manasā vācam mithunam samabhavad aśanāyā mṛtyuḥ* (“by means of his mind, he copulated with speech, death copulated with hunger”). Thus *manas* appears to be a tool of action and of learning, which, in the soteriological order, translates mainly into meditation. It seems that the primary action is contemplation, especially contemplation of the universal reality. Only in the next stage does the year (*samvatsara*) emerge, understood as a category of life (*jāta*). The emergence of this category is the result of previous cognitive acts and actions, i.e. the basic functions of *manas*. It is also important to note how the functions of *manas*, understood both as a universal and individual mind, overlap. This may result, among other things, from the superimposition of cosmological and soteriological order, where the soteriological one is usually contemplated from an individual perspective. This function of *manas*, as a strictly technical meditation tool, will be revisited later.

Let us now quote excerpts from the Upaniṣad, which assigns specific features or functions to *manas*:

Desire, decision, doubt, faith and lack of faith, steadfastness and lack of steadfastness, shame, reflection, and fear—all these are simply the mind. (Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1.5.3.)

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161 “Yājñavalkya,” Aśvala said again, “tell me—when this intermediate region provides no support of any kind, how does the patron of a sacrifice climb up to heaven?” Yājñavalkya replied: “By means of the Brahman priest—that is, by means of the mind, by means of the moon. Clearly, the Brahman priest of the sacrifice is the mind. So this mind—it is that moon up there; it is the Brahman priest; it is freedom; it is complete freedom.”

Is it the heart and the mind? Is it awareness? Perception? Discernment? Cognition? Wisdom? Insight? Steadfastness? Thought? Reflection? Drive? Memory? Intention? Purpose? Will? Love? Desire? But these are various designations of cognition. (Aitareya 3.2.)

By mind one sees; by mind one hears. “Desire, imagination, doubt, trust, lack of trust, constancy, inconstancy, shame, meditation, fear – all this is mind.” (Maitrī 6.30.)

The Bṛhadāraṇyaka and the Aitareya belong to the earliest Upaniṣads, while the Maitrī is one of the latest. Most probably, the Maitrī was created at a time when the first Buddhist schools were already operating. In fact, it literally quotes the few centuries older Bṛhadāraṇyaka, but this short passage is placed within the context of a detailed soteriological procedure and therefore we shall return to it in a subsequent section. Now would be a pertinent moment to list all the Sanskrit terms, as a more detailed analysis requires reference to the original language and often to the etymology of individual words. In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka: *kāma* – desire, *saṃkalpa* – imagination, *vicikitsā* – doubt, *śraddhā* – trust, *aśraddhā* – lack of trust, *dhṛti* – constancy, *adhṛti* – inconstancy, *hrī* – shame, *dhī* – ruminating, *bhī* – fear (exactly the same terms appear in the Maitrī.) In the Aitareya: *saṃjñāna* – awareness, *ājñāna* – perception, *viññāna* – discernment, *prajñāna* – wisdom, *medhā* – cognition, *dṛṣṭi* – insight, *dhṛti* – steadfastness, *mati* – thought, *maniṣā* – intuition, *jūti* – drive, *smṛti* – memory, *saṃkalpa* – imagination, *kratu* – purpose, *asu* – life, *kāma* – desire, *vaśa* – will. These are in fact the most elaborate fragments of the Upaniṣads, which describe the features and functions of *manas* in such detail. The descriptions differ in some aspects, while some terms overlap. We shall now try to reconstruct on the basis of the above passages the functions of *manas* according to the message of the Upaniṣadic bards.

In general, there are two groups of terms in these passages: the first refers to the function of acting, primarily encompassing the cognitive acts, while the second refers to impulses initiating all acts, including emotions and feelings. We shall begin with desire (*kāma*), which plays an extremely important role in the earliest Indian texts. It is understood broadly and always aims at something. The desire to feel, experience or possess. In this context, it often appears as the primary cosmogonic factor, i.e. in the above discussed *Nāsadiya* hymn. The desire to create, to reproduce, the desire to know in the context of the soteriology of the monistic systems ultimately aims towards the act of self-cognition. *Kāma*, understood in this way, fundamentally shapes the cognitive subject, and in a technical sense its cognitive organ, namely *manas*. Depending on what impulses, desires or intentions initiate the action, the active subject acts according to them, which determines its position in *samsāra*. It is poetically presented in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 4.4.6.:

A man who's attached goes with his action,  
 to that very place to which  
 his mind and character cling.  
 Reaching the end of his action,  
 of whatever he has done in this world—  
 From that world he returns  
 back to this world,  
 back to action.  
 That is the course of a man who desires.<sup>162</sup>

Usually in this type of context, *kāma* is understood as a negative factor, mainly responsible for migration in *saṃsāra*, which is generally understood as painfulness (*duḥkha*), in opposition to the only legitimate objective, *mokṣa*. Such an interpretation mainly characterises the Advaita movements, where the only absolute reality is *sat*, while the empirical world, driven by different desires, is not real in the same way. The concept of *kāma* in the later schools can also stand for love – in a positive sense both as love between human beings, human love towards God, or God towards humans. In this case, desire as a cosmogonic factor will appear in these schools where it is God – *Īśvara*, *puruṣa*, Prajāpati – who, out of desire, creates a world that is no longer as pejorative as it was considered by the *nirguṇic* schools. This world is a real transformation, the body of God, and in the ontological sense it is entitled to the same state of reality. However, these are later, medieval concepts and projecting them into earlier Vedic texts would perhaps be an over-interpretation. In any case, *kāma* is always responsible for the formation of factors determining the fate and position of individual subjects in the world.

*Kāma*, as a characteristic of *manas*, appears to be an indeterminate impulse to experience or learn, or in any case to achieve something one does not have. This activity is combined with another factor – will (*vaśa*). *Kāma* would then correspond to desire as a naturally active factor. On the one hand, *vaśa* sustains the activity of *kāma* and, on the other hand, directs it towards the object of clinging.

In the course of our earlier deliberations, it was demonstrated that the term *saṃkalpa* includes collectively various functions of *manas*, and in the discussed passages, it is one of its definitions. The verbal root *klṛp*, from which the term originates, means “shaping,” “arranging,” “ordering,” “likening to something,” while the prefix itself points to collecting, shaping these activities into one

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162 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 4.4.6.: *tad eva saktaḥ saha karmaṇaiti liṅgaṃ mano yatra niṣaktamasya, prāpyāntaṃ karmaṇas tasya yatkiṃceha karoty ayam, tasmāl lokāt punair aityasmai lokāya karmaṇe.*

picture. In the later Sāṃkhya school which describes cognitive mechanisms very precisely, this function of *manas* will refer to receiving impulses from cognitive tools as a result of their contact with cognitive objects, and collecting them into one unit. Then, a single image is formed that is presented to the “higher” cognitive powers, *ahaṃkāra* and *buddhi*, and this is already a holistic object of cognition and not just a collection of cognitive impressions. In order for the streams of impulses from the senses to take on a specific shape, *saṃkalpa* cooperates with *smṛti* (memory) and *jūti* (passion).

*Jūti* means speed, energy or enthusiasm. This function points to *manas* not only as a source of activity, but it also indicates the continuity of this activity, emphasising its promptness and swiftness.

*Smṛti* means memory. The Indian schools mention six senses: five external and *manas* as the sixth internal one. The external senses operate only in the present time, while *manas* operates in three times, thus having the function of memory. Without it, every cognitive act, every object of cognition would repeatedly present itself to the cognitive subject as something new and unknown. It could not be judged, defined, confronted with other acts or with some form of an object already known previously. In this case, all kinds of activities or cognitive acts would cease to be effective, because only the recognition of their succession and its consequences can lead to effective cognition, transformation, and ultimately to the recognition of the nature of *saṃsāra* and liberation.

This function of *manas*, as a cognitive subject acting for a specific purpose, and not as a passive recipient of external impressions, is indicated by another term: *kratu*. *Kratu* means a goal, an intention, a perspective according to which one acts and recognises. The functions of *kratu* and *smṛti* overlap and complement each other. *Saṃkalpa* is responsible for imagining, receiving impressions, shaping images. *Smṛti* recalls previous experiences, and *kratu* sets the goal and direction for subsequent activities. The pure mental function (*saṃkalpa*), by reference to experience, gives meaning to every action.

*Vicikitsā* stands for doubt. It is a form of *desiderativum* of *vi* √*cit* (“to want to distinguish,” “to consider,” “to be uncertain,” “to doubt”). It points to this function of the mind, which, perceiving the objects presented to it as a result of *saṃkalpa* and relying on the function of *smṛti*, intends to recognise what a given object is. However, since *manas* is situated in *hṛdaya*, which is also a place of darkening emotions and feelings, it is still unable to see the true nature of what is presented to it. This doubt is connected with research and differentiation, aimed at reaching an unwavering truth. It seems that the *vicikitsā* plays a similar role to Descartes’ doubt, which is a testimony of conscious thought and

therefore a proof of the existence of consciousness above all, as a prerequisite for all cognitive functions. Doubt is a search for both the conditions of any cognitive powers and the uncertainty of judging the nature of the subject itself. It points to a critical analysis of the conditions and cognitive processes; such a critical approach seems to be one of the characteristics of *manas* itself. In the search for the foundations of cognition, one may refer to faith (*śraddhā*), as well as the lack of it (*aśraddhā*).

The notions of *śraddha* and *aśraddhā* can generally be considered on two levels. On the one hand, according to its literal meaning, as terms that strengthen and support the concept of *vicikitsā*, i.e., referring to critical analyses of cognitive mechanisms. On the other hand, they refer to the specific context of the Upaniṣadic texts, in particular their basic metaphysical message. This means the adoption of the thesis that the absolute reality (*sat*) is simple, non-complex and the sole object of true recognition, while everything else might be misleading. For the Upaniṣadic sage, it is a personally accomplished truth – he does not prove it to others, but only describes how it may be achieved. For a critical researcher, this hypothesis requires examination and verification. For some, it might be accepted as true by virtue of the authority of those who proclaim it. But those who initially accept a given truth as a belief, then subject it to a process of critical analysis, because, as is commonly accepted in Indian tradition, theoretical knowledge should be confirmed by individual experience. The faith in the truthfulness of the master's message makes it easier to implement. Thus, faith is not contrasted with rational judgment or analysis, but rather it is considered a sustaining attitude in the pursuit of truth. Understood in this way, it must cooperate with the function of memory (*smṛti*), because it constantly recalls the absolute dimension of the object of cognition. One can refer either to one's earlier experience of true cognition, or – which is obviously more commonplace – to a trustworthy authority.

This approach may look quite unconvincing from the point of view of critical European philosophy. It seems that this cannot be considered proper philosophising, because it presupposes a certain thesis. But we can also assume that this is not a thesis from the beginning, but a hypothesis that must be verified. The repetitiveness of experience giving very similar results brings this method closer to that of empirical research.

Further terms are: *dhṛti* – constancy, *adhṛti* – inconstancy, *hrī* – shame, and *bhī* – fear. They all correspond to the concept of *dhī* – thought, generally understood as the mental function. It may seem that describing *manas* (the realm of thought) with the term *dhī* does not contribute anything new to defining its nature. However, there is a certain interesting pattern to be observed. All the

terms in this group are grammatically feminine. This does not seem to be a coincidence. From the very beginning of philosophical and pre-philosophical considerations, there was a regularity in Indian thought. Analysing philosophical deliberations on the nature and ways of experiencing reality, and trying to separate the metaphysical level from the epistemic dimension, we find that the terms referring to the metaphysical categories are usually masculine (less often neuter), while the terms referring to the epistemic level are feminine. This opposition already occurs in the *śāhitas*, to recall the famous metaphor from the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, where the terms *puruṣa* (masculinum) and *virāj* (femininum) appear, to take the form of the classical opposition *puruṣa-prakṛti* in the later texts.

The model terms – of course feminine – that are key to the epistemic dimension are *māyā* and *śakti*. Without a detailed interpretation of the above, it can be said that they are primarily powers that have the positive effect of revealing or manifesting reality, as well as covering it. This power of covering as well as darkening indicates the internal, continuous dynamics of these processes. Also, it is important to remember that a whole host of feelings and emotions are involved in it.

In the above context, an interpretation of these terms may be offered. The mind – *manas* (neutrum) – is characterised primarily by the ability to think – *dhī*. The very act of recognising the true nature of reality, although ultimately momentary, is preceded by a long research process that generally falls under the category of *dhī*. The fact that these processes are subject to internal dynamics is attested to by the terms *dhṛti* and *adhṛti*, among others, which indicate how difficult it is for a thought to hold on to the subject being recognised and studied. The term *hrī* – shame – can also be understood as a metaphor that appears in a slightly different form, for example, in the classic treatise of Sāṃkhya. In the *Sāṃkhyakārikās*, which very precisely describe the nature of the subject and object of cognition, *prakṛti* is presented as an archetype of female power and female patterns of behaviour, of course as represented by the very patriarchally oriented Brahmin thinkers. *Prakṛti* is the principle of objectivity. By its very nature it overshadows *puruṣa*, but it also covers itself. It is said that out of fear of being recognised, it hides behind the varied game of its manifestations and forms, and when it is finally recognised and when *puruṣa* sees through its game, it hides in shame. It no longer manifests itself, i.e. it ceases to be an object of cognition, and then *puruṣa* can exist as the pure principle of subjectivity. Thus, the word *hrī* – may be treated as a metaphor complementary to the indefinite, cosmic *māyā*. The latter has universal functions that can be interpreted from an individual, psychological perspective, because *hrī* both obscures and reveals its nature to *puruṣa*.

Another notable term is *bhī* – fear. If these terms are considered in the context of the cognitive procedure that is ultimately to develop into the soteriological, the term *abhiniveśa* of the *Yogasūtras* may be recalled here. The *Yogasūtras* show the procedures of consciousness transformation in an exemplary, or even textbook way. As a result of these procedures, the adept of Yoga recognises all his conditioning – technically called karmic determinants – so that, having recognised them, he can free himself from them. These determinants leave traces (*saṃskāra*), in the form of imprints that settle in the inner organ of consciousness, called *citta* (in Yoga *manas* is one of the functions of *citta*.) Such imprints result in a tendency towards a given behaviour, and their causes are either directly realised or – and this applies to the vast majority – are not directly recognised by consciousness. The deepest of them are so “entangled” and formed out of so many layers and conditionings that when they emerge in specific circumstances, they might seem completely accidental. The whole meticulously described yogic procedure is aimed at investigating and recognising a given phenomenon in such detail that the most primary root cause could be identified. The above-mentioned *citta* – the internal cognitive organ – works in a certain way (which often results in suffering rather than happiness and the occasional achievement of what one wants), because its structure has not been thoroughly examined. That is why the nature of *citta* is so difficult to investigate that it is obscured by impurities, which Yoga refers to as *kleśa*.

In the technical language of Yoga, the five *kleśas* are the five types or rather dimensions of ignorance structurally attributed to *citta*, the internal organ of consciousness of the subject migrating in *saṃsāra* (entangled in existence and not yet liberated). The basic, fundamental ignorance – *avidyā* – means not recognising that reality as we perceive it, our dimension of existence, is not an absolute one. It can also be said that this dimension of reality is assigned an ultimate and unique rank. This statement, which is common to all those who are still not liberated, results in new patterns of behaviour. The first “product” of the original ignorance is the emergence of a mechanism called *asmitā* – “I am.” It includes a conviction that the individual cognitive, experiential and operational subject is independent. As a result, the subject operates in the world guided by two basic impulses: *rāga*, the desire to experience pleasure, and *dveṣa*, the aversion or avoidance of things that appear to be unpleasant or result in unpleasant sensations. The last *kleśa* is *abhiniveśa*: “Clinging to life is that which flows by its own potency and which is firmly fixed even in the minds of the learned as in that of the ignorant” (*Yogasūtras* II 9).<sup>163</sup> In the Vyāsa’s commentary to the *sūtras*

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163 *Yogavārttika of Vijñānabhikṣu*, Text with English translation and critical notes along with the text and English translation of the *Pātañjala Yogasūtras* and *Vyāsaśāstra* by T.S. Rukmani, Vol. II, p. 31.

of Patañjali this attachment is expressed in phrases like “may I not experience death” and “may I live.” Vyāsa explains *abhiniveśa* as the fear of death, which is the result of unconscious imprints of experiences from previous incarnations, related to the anguish of dying. Further in the commentary we read: “Because the experience of the pain of death being similar both in case of the learned and the ignorant, this latent impression is there (in both alike).<sup>164</sup>

It seems that Vyāsa’s commentary does not fully reflect the existential dimension of the problem. After all, the knower, *vidvāms*, is the one who penetrated the nature of reality, who distinguishes the dimension of the subject and pure consciousness (*cit*, *puruṣa*) from the subjective, presented, conditioned reality (*prakṛti*). This knowledge, according to most classical Indian schools, is identical to a state of liberation. But what could explain this fear? Can a knower at all be afraid?

The classical Yoga system builds its ontology on the Sāṃkhya school. Both the systems recognise that there exists one presented reality (*prakṛti*), which, consisting of qualities (*guṇa*), manifests itself in diverse ways. There is also a second dimension of reality, the pure conscious subject, referred to as *puruṣa*. Both these dimensions, or modi of reality, are totally different in an absolute sense. *Puruṣa* is completely transcendent from *prakṛti*, and their mutual contact results in a state of ignorance, which causes wandering in *samsāra*, and therefore suffering, felt as the pain of existence. One cannot say anything more about *puruṣa* in the absolute, liberated state, except that it is simple consciousness rather than realisation, because it is not directed at anything. It is pure cognition, not even recognising oneself, since even that subtle act of cognition assumes the distinction of the subject from the object. In its essence, it is an absolutely simple being, the pure principle of awareness, *cit*. Sāṃkhya assumes that the objective reality (*prakṛti*) is one. Thus, in order to reconcile the nature of *prakṛti*, as a single presented reality, with the diverse experiences and karmic paths of the individual cognitive subjects entangled in *samsāra*, both Sāṃkhya and Yoga accept a multitude of conscious beings, a multitude of *puruṣas*. Although many of them exist, in an absolute sense, in the state of liberation, the individual *puruṣas* do not differ. It is a kind of multiplication of an inherently identical conscious being, pure, simple, non-complex, unconditioned, without a sense of individuality, because this is the level of *asmita* – the second dimension of ignorance.

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164 Ibid., p. 32.

Maybe, therefore, in the context of this type of deliberation, we should interpret the *abhiniveśa* as fear of losing the sense of individuality? Maybe it is a kind of instinctive existential anxiety, connected with the pursuit of oneself, of one's own "I," of a sense of individuality, which persists even in the knowledgeable? Is it not the everlasting human longing, not so much for the absolute liberation, but for the eternal heavenly life, in a form that is somehow familiar to us, in accordance with our imagination, but devoid of all inconvenience, that resounds in this stanza of the *Yogasūtras*? But then the tragedy of human existence, with its structurally embedded fear, reveals its ever deeper dimension. A sensitive person, a person who develops spiritually, feels the fear of being immersed in existence, as well as the fear of being liberated from being, experiencing and feeling. The experience of fear is overwhelming, frightening, but also – paradoxically – provides a sense of security, a sense of individuality, because it is *I* who feels this fear. In the existential sense, this paradox seems insurmountable.

In the cosmological scheme of the earliest Upaniṣads, anxiety appears as one of the first elements or representations of the absolute being. It seems to be the most primordial characteristic of being, which through the act of self-cognition or self-determination perceives itself as an individual being. Let us quote a fragment of one of the earliest Upaniṣads:

In the beginning this world was just a single body (*ātman*) shaped like a man. He looked around and saw nothing but himself. The first thing he said was, "Here I am!" and from that the name "I" came into being. Therefore, even today when you call someone, he first says, "It's I," and then states whatever other name he may have. (. . .)

That first being became afraid; therefore, one becomes afraid when one is alone. Then he thought to himself: "Of what should I be afraid, when there is no one but me?" So his fear left him, for what was he going to be afraid of? One is, after all, afraid of another.

He found no pleasure at all; so one finds no pleasure when one is alone. He wanted to have a companion. Now he was as large as a man and a woman in close embrace. So he split (*pat*) his body into two, giving rise to husband (*pati*) and wife (*patnī*). Surely this is why Yājñavalkya used to say: "The two of us are like two halves of a block." The space here, therefore, is completely filled by the woman.

He copulated with her, and from their union human beings were born.<sup>165</sup>

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165 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.4.1–3.: *ātmaivedamagra āsīt puruṣavidhaḥ so'nuvikṣya nānyadātmano'paśyat so'hamasmītyagre vyāharat tato'ham nāmābhavat tasmād apy etarhy āmanvito'ham ayam ity evāgra uktvāthānyannāma prabrūte yad asya bhavati (. . .) so'bibhet tasmād ekāki bibheti sa hāyam ikṣāṃ cakre yan madanyan nāsti kasmān nu bibhemīti tata evāsya bhayaṃ vīyāya kasmād dhy abheśyat dvitīyād vai bhayaṃ bhavati, sa vai naiva reme tasmād ekāki na ramate sa dvitīyam aicchat sa haitāvān āsa yathā strīpumāṃsau saṃpariṣvaktau sa imam evātmānaṃ dvedhāpātayāt tataḥ patīś*

This is a fragment presenting the classic cosmogonic scheme of the Upaniṣads. The absolute being is defined here both by the term *ātman*, which is characteristic of the *nirguṇic* trend<sup>166</sup> of the later Vedānta, and *puruṣavidha* (“in the form of a person”), which may lead to *saguṇic* interpretations.<sup>167</sup> The latter have the tendency to anthropomorphise the primordial being, indefinable in its deepest nature. But both *ātman* and *puruṣavidha* belong to the dimension of *sat*, existing or remaining in its basic, undifferentiated nature. The fundamental property of the primary being is the ability to recognise, which, in the non-manifested state, is limited to recognising oneself. On the basis of this passage, we can conclude that the act of self-cognition alone does not yet result in the emergence of further manifestations. Only a conscious, specific act of self-cognition triggers the whole process that leads to perceiving the world as a domain of diversity.

What is the first reflection of the individual being, not so much existing as happening? It is fear. A primordial and completely undefined fear, whose source is the very fact of being, the very fact of living. The text of the Upaniṣad carries a very important message. Recognising the situation in which a given being finds itself can result in two completely different reactions. It is recognised that there is no such thing as fear in itself. We are always afraid of the other, separate, different and unknown. This is always a fear of something, and the more undefined it is, the greater the fear. The state of fear requires an object as the reason for anxiety. The above passage from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka may also be interpreted in this way, which will be creatively developed in the later Advaita Vedānta, that the same act of cognition can lead to both true and false cognition. When one realises that the fear is always about something and, as the text claims, that there is no one else but the cognitive subject, then there is no object and thus no source of anxiety. As a result, the fear disappears. This passage anticipates Advaita’s later interpretation of the liberating cognition. The latter, as the proper insight into the nature of reality, is an act of existence as pure subject, since only then we can claim that it is *advaita* – uniqueness with no trace of another object. When it turns out that

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*ca patnī cābhavatām tasmād idam ardhavṛgalam iva sva iti ha smāha yājñavalkyaḥ tasmād ayam ākāśaḥ striyā pūryata eva tāṃ samabhavat tato manuṣyā ajāyanta.*

166 *Nirguṇic* trend – *nirguṇa* – of no traits or attributes; the conviction that the absolute dimension of reality cannot be adequately judged. An assumption similar to the one made by medieval apophatic philosophy.

167 *Saguṇic* trend – *saguṇa* – with features; the absolute reality, is by nature (per essentiam) equipped with the highest attributes. Traditionally, there are three such attributes: reality, truthfulness, existence – *sat*, consciousness, cognition – *cit*, bliss – *ānanda*.

reality in its essence is a pure subject, all the representations, sources of fear, suffering and being disappear; this is the transcendence of *saṃsāra*.

But the same act of cognition can also lead to a misjudgement. The reason may indeed be fear, when the subject recognises its reflection as something separate from itself, as an “external” object. We can refer to it with the Advaita’s later term *adhyāsa*, meaning false superimposition. As a result of this erroneous superimposition of the “object” on the subject, the inherently simple and homogeneous reality is presented as complex. The subject loses a sense of happiness and security that can be correlated with an absolute, homogeneous reality, and seeks some kind of anchoring, some sort of justification for itself beyond itself, seeking it in a misrepresented reality. Therefore, as the Upaniṣad claims, it desires something else. It is this desire, this lingering – as the philosophical texts of all the Indian traditions say – that entangles it ever more in *saṃsāra*, resulting in increasingly complicated and looped feelings. This leads to growing difficulties in recognising both the true nature of reality and the nature of the primordial fear, which is the most basic characteristic of the state of existence itself.

The above considerations also demonstrate that the same categories may apply to two radically different situations. The most obvious is the evocation of the cognitive act, which can be both true and false, resulting in entering different dimensions of reality. Also, desire can initiate diverse actions: when its object is the absolute, it leads to the absolute, and when it is directed towards particular objects, it becomes entangled in *saṃsāra*. The nature of fear is also dual; it is both the fear of existence itself and the fear of losing empirical individuality. All these categories belong to *manas*, and *manas*, as a cognitive tool, also shows this ambivalence. It can be useful on the path leading to *mokṣa*, but it can also be limited to learning about the ever-new forms of the presented world, and remain stuck in *saṃsāra*.

The above excerpt from Bṛhadāraṇyaka clearly shows that the broadly understood mental field, technically called *manas*, is not only a domain of cognitive powers, but also a dwelling of feelings and emotions, obscuring and covering up cognitive acts. All the complexity makes it very difficult to grasp and explore the nature of the mind.

In the Aitareya, the purely cognitive power of *manas* is described by several terms. The first is *saṃjñāna* – cognition, consciousness.<sup>168</sup> The etymology of this word indicates the processes of “gathering” (*saṃ*) the “knowledge” (*jñāna*) from

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168 Sarasvati Chennakesavan, *Concept of Mind in Indian Philosophy*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1991, pp. 46–48.

cognitive acts and creating a coherent whole from them. Thus, it is the cognitive power that refers to the realisation of both the stimula coming from objects, as well as to the acts of memory (*smṛti*), because only through them can one become aware of a given object. Another term is *ājñāna* – perception. It indicates a process that penetrates (*ā*) into the process of cognition (*jñāna*). While the previous term indicated the awareness of the object, here more emphasis is placed on the direction of penetration into the nature of the object. In a sense, this is the next stage. The awareness may or may not be related to the perception that defines the nature of the object. It can be merely a recollection of the image of a given object, and at this stage the most important is the act taking place in the present moment and the use of other cognitive senses (*indriya*), which, after all, play an instrumental role towards *manas*.

Another term is *vijñāna* – understanding/recognition. The prefix *vi* points to the cognitive processes in which the mechanisms of distinguishing, differentiating and separating one object from another, or individual cognitive acts from each other, are incorporated. This indicates an in-depth study of the nature of a given subject. Proper understanding would be impossible without another feature, which is *prajñāna*. This term can be understood both in a narrower as well as in a broader sense (the latter in the technical texts). In a narrower sense, it is a generally understood feature or ability to acquire knowledge, which is the basis of all cognitive processes. The development of this feature shapes the ability of proper cognition, in which case *prajñāna* becomes wisdom, that is in fact an insight into the nature of reality. It seems that the order of appearance of the above terms is not accidental; here one can trace the process of transition from undefined knowledge to an increasingly defined version. These successive stages lead to the state of *medhā* (knowledge). The awareness, defining, differentiating, immersing oneself in the nature of an object leads to a certain knowledge of it. But this stage is still discursive, and misjudgements may occur. However, it can also lead to a certain, unwavering knowledge, which is none other than *dr̥ṣṭi* – an insight, a simple, real cognitive act, not mediated by anything. It is known, however, that the nature of the mind is very unstable, so this act of insight should be supported by the feature of steadfastness – *dhṛti*. In this context, the two subsequent terms *mati* (thought) and *manisā* (intuition) seem to belong to the very nature of *manas*. If the mind is calm, if it is not overshadowed by darkening feelings and emotions, and if the cognitive attributes of the mind are properly harmonised and developed, the natural capacity of the mind for intuitive insight, for penetrating and exploring a given object with the thought, prevails.

All the above attributes of *manas* indicate that it is the basic cognitive apparatus of a living creature, one entangled in *saṃsāra*, and therefore capable of both

true and false cognitive acts. These activities are vital for life – *asu*. But it can also be understood that without life, all these processes are no longer possible.

In the classic forms of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, *manas* acts as a technically defined inner sense: “The mind (*manas*) is of the nature of both; it is characterised by reflection (or synthesis or construction) and it is a sense because it is similar (to the senses). The variety of external things and the variety (of the organs) is because of the specific modifications (or transformations) of the *guṇas*.”<sup>169</sup> In the emanation scheme, *manas* is another element (*tattva*), after *buddhi* and *ahaṃkāra*, that emerged from the non-manifested *prakṛti* – *avyakta*. This role is assigned to *manas* by the later canonical Upaniṣads, especially the Kaṭha, and further developed by the Maitrī.

Higher than the senses is the mind;  
Higher than the mind is the essence;  
Higher than the essence is the immense self;  
Higher than the immense is the unmanifest.<sup>170</sup>  
Intelligence, mind and sense of ‘I’ are its consciousness-body. (Maitrī 6.5.)

The Maitrī’s interpretation of *manas* is closer to Yoga than Sāṃkhya. The three modes of the internal cognitive organ (*antaḥkaraṇa*) – *buddhi*, *manas* and *ahaṃkāra* – are encompassed by one term: *cetanavātī*. They are three forms of thinking.

The characteristics of *manas* as presented by the Kaṭha, anticipating the conclusions of Sāṃkhya, or the Maitrī, anticipating the conclusions of Yoga, actually adds nothing new to the previously presented overview based on the passages of the Aitareya and the Bṛhadāraṇyaka. The new term that appears here is *ahaṃkāra* – “the operating self.” The earlier descriptions of *manas* do not distinguish between a universally understood mental dimension and an indication of the mental forms and structures of an individually understood subject. In the previous cosmological schemes, the transition from the universal dimension to the individual dimension was not clearly marked and tended to arise from the context. Mixing these two levels led to the overlap of metaphysical and existential dimensions. It is worth emphasising that the emergence of *manas* (already strictly understood as the internal sense) from *ahaṃkāra* occurred only after the individual subject was structured. Thus, here it is much more legitimate to interpret *manas* as an individual cognitive apparatus, distinguished by its structure

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169 Sankhjakarika 27, G. J. Larson, p. 264.

170 Kaṭha Up. 6.7.: *indriyebhyaḥ paraṃ mano manasas sattvam uttamam, sattvād adhi mahān ātmā mahato’vyaktam uttamam.*

and – using the language of Indian traditions – particular karmic inventory. Such precise differentiation of the individual conscious subjects wandering in *saṃsāra* is possible only in these Upaniṣadic passages that anticipate the concepts of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, because these systems assume a multitude of conscious beings and corresponding individual subjects equipped with separate cognitive apparatus.

Different and closer to the spirit of the earliest Upaniṣads is the situation when the individual fragments correspond with the Vedāntic interpretation. The first canonical Upaniṣads display more *nirguṇic* tendencies than the later texts of this body. *Manas* is seen in them as a broadly defined cognitive apparatus. Not only does it serve to explore the presented world, but it is also a tool, allowing not so much to learn about reality directly, as to enable an unmediated experience. Here the following problem arises: if the reality of *ātman-brahman* lies radically beyond the reach of the cognitive apparatus, that is, beyond the reach of *manas*, then what, if at all, is the relation between the absolute dimension and the dimension of reality in which *manas* operates? This is one of the most difficult and indeed not fully understood problems. The Kena Upaniṣad directly says that this relationship cannot be explained:

Sight does not reach there;  
neither does thinking or speech.  
We don't know, we can't perceive,  
how one would point it out.<sup>171</sup>

But immediately, a few stanzas further, it states that although we are not able to adequately describe this absolute dimension, only by assuming its existence, we can try to make judgements about the presented world:

Which one cannot see with one's sight,  
by which one sees the sight itself—  
Learn that that alone is *brahman*<sup>172</sup>

This finds corroboration in other Upaniṣadic passages, such as the Taittirīya 2.9:

Before they reach it, words turn back,  
together with the mind;  
One who knows that bliss of *brahman*,

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171 Kena Up. 1.3.: *na tatra cakṣur gacchati na vāg gacchati no manaḥ na vidmo na vijānīmo yathaitad anuśiṣyāt.*

172 Kena Up. 1.6.: *yan manasā na manute yenāhur mano matam tad eva brahma taṃ viddhi nedaṃ yad idam upāsate.*

he is never afraid.

He does not agonize, thinking: “Why didn’t I do the right thing? Why did I do the wrong thing?”<sup>173</sup>

Here, attention should also be paid to the characteristics of the *saṃsāric* state through fear. As already described in detail in this chapter, the basic equipment of an individual being, the most original impulse for action, is fear. Here it seems to be more specific; it is the fear of the consequences of one’s actions, especially when they are assessed in an ethical dimension.

In the Maitrī Upaniṣad, *manas* is already very clearly considered an insufficient cognitive tool (from the ultimate perspective):

The meditation on the supreme entity within  
Is placed on the objects of sense,  
So the knowledge that is without distinction  
Becomes subject to distinction.  
The joy that is witnessed by the self  
When the mind is dissolved  
Is *brahman*, the immortal, the pure:  
It is the bourn; it is the world. (Maitrī 6.24.)<sup>174</sup>

Of great interest in this passage is the image of *manas*, which, upon reaching its destination, disappears, ceases to exist as a tool and dissolves in *ātman* – the absolute reality: *mānase vilīne*.

In the same Upaniṣad, there is an attempt to answer a question that seems to be an unresolvable paradox. How can *manas*, as a tool, bring about the highest cognition or the achievement of the state of *ātman*, if, as the Kena teaches, it is unable to attain this reality. Here, it is suggested to distinguish two parts or layers in *manas*: pure and impure.

The mind is said to be twofold,  
The pure and the impure –  
Impure from contact with desire:  
Pure when apart from desire.  
When, making the mind thoroughly firm,  
Free from laxity and distraction,

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173 Taittirīya Up. 2.9.: *yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha, ānandaṃ brahmaṇo vidvān na vibhēti kutaś caneti, etaṃ ha vāva na tapati, kim ahaṃ sādhu nākaravam, kim ahaṃ pāpam akaravam iti.*

174 A reference to this passage can be found also in the chapters dedicated to the observer as well as the one analysing the metaphor of the Om̐ as a bow and arrow.

One reaches a state without mind,  
 That is the highest state.  
 The mind should be kept in check  
 Until it has dissolved into the heart:  
 This is both knowledge and liberation.  
 The rest is multiplication of books.  
 The bliss that the stainless consciousness, washed by concentration,  
 May have when it has been brought into the self  
 Cannot be described by speech:  
 It is experienced directly through the inner organ.  
 Water in water, fire in fire,  
 Or space in space cannot be made out:  
 Just so the one whose mind has gone within  
 Is completely freed.  
 For human beings the mind is cause  
 Of bondage and freedom.  
 When attached to objects, it brings bondage:  
 When without object, it brings freedom, so it is recorded.<sup>175</sup>

In this passage, far more precisely than before, *manas* is presented as a cognitive apparatus whose clarity and effective operation is limited by feelings, emotions and desires. The nature of *manas*, which, after all, is a form of the objective reality (*prakṛti*), is action and constant activity. Therefore, it is not in the cessation of actions that we should look for a solution to the paradoxical role of *manas*. The very nature of the act must be analysed. From the very beginning, the Upaniṣads emphasise the relationship between acting to achieve one's desires and becoming entangled in *saṃsāra* as a result. But their message and teachings are mostly intended for the advanced *yogis* and *sannyasins*, which is why the problem of the relation between the desire and the action was ultimately solved by defining only the non-binding karmic desire. He who only desires *ātman* achieves liberation, while action initiated as a result of other desires entangles the subject in *saṃsāra*.

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175 Maitrī Up. 4.6.: *mano ho dvividham proktam śuddham cāśuddham eva ca aśuddham kāmasamparkāt śuddham kāmavivarjitam, layavikṣeoharitam manaḥ kṛtvā suniścala, yadā yāty amanībhāvaṃ tadā tat paramam padam, tāvan mano niroddhavyaṃ hṛdi yāvat kṣayaṃ gatam etaj jñānaṃ ca mokya ca śeṣānye grantha vistarāḥ, samādhinirdhantamalasya cetas niveśitasyātmani yat sukham bhavet na śakyate varṇayituṃ girā tadā svayaṃ tad antaḥkaraṇena grhyate, apām āpoḅgnir agnat vā vyomni na lakṣayet evam antargatam tasya manaḥ sa parimucyate, mana eva manuṣyāṇāṃ kāraṇam bandhamokṣayoḥ bandhāya viṣayāsaṅgim mokṣo nirviṣayaṃ smṛtam.*

So the very problem of the nature of desire is not solved, and it is a significant issue. The later texts began to appreciate various forms of activity; not only the meditation procedures were analysed as the sole noteworthy forms of activity. Actions inspired by the desire for the good of others began to be valued positively, and then the problem began to require reconsideration. This issue requires a broader study, but attempts to present new concepts are present in the later Upaniṣads and *smṛiti* texts.

It is highly likely that at the time when the Maitrī was created, the Bhagavadgītā was also being composed. It is the latter that contains a fully developed concept of *niṣkāmakarmamārga* – the path of selfless deeds. When one undertakes an act that is not initiated by the desire to achieve some earthly benefit, only to maintain the harmony of the world, it has neither negative nor positive karmic effects. How to perform such acts? The answer seems very simple. He who knows the nature of reality always acts in full harmony with nature. The knowledgeable is not only the one who rejects all desires, wanting only *ātman*, but also the one who does not reject desires, but perfectly analyses their structure. Therefore, from the final perspective, talking about pure and unclean desires turns out to be a metaphor. Desire remains desire alone; it leads to action, but it also sustains all life activities. And when one notices its instrumental, objective function, the object obtained as a result ceases to be attractive. So *manas*, when properly used, might be a handy, effective tool.

There are passages in the Upaniṣads where *manas* is understood more metaphorically, but ultimately in a clearly positive way:

“*Brahman* is the mind.” That’s what Satyakāma Jābāla told me.

“Jābāla told you ‘*Brahman* is the mind’? Why, that’s like someone telling that he has a father, or a mother, or a teacher! He probably reasoned: ‘What could a person who has no mind possibly have?’ But did he tell you what its abode and foundation are?”

“He did not tell me that.”

“Then it’s a one-legged *brahman*, Your Majesty.”

“Why don’t you tell us that yourself, Yājñavalkya?”

“The mind itself is its abode, and space is its foundation. One should venerate it as bliss.”

“What constitutes bliss, Yājñavalkya?”

“The mind itself, Your Majesty,” he replied. “For surely, Your Majesty, it is with the mind that a man takes a woman to himself and through her fathers a son who resembles him. And that is bliss. So clearly, Your Majesty, the highest *brahman* is the mind. When a man knows and venerates it as such, the mind never abandons

him, and all beings flock to him; he becomes a god and joins the company of gods.<sup>176</sup>

*Manas* in this passage is a kind of a form of the absolute. As such it surrounds and overshadows reality. But whoever understands that this character refers to its source, to the absolute being, treats *manas* as a very useful cognitive tool and, thanks to it, recognises the nature of *ātman*-brahman. *Manas* emerges from the absolute and finally the identity between the very essence of reality (*brahman*) and its form (a luminous figure in a mystical vision) is revealed. Experiencing the pure form of the absolute results in a state of bliss, when *brahman* perceived through its form becomes an object of worship. The basis of reality understood in this way is the sky – *ākāśa*. The word comes from *ā kaś* – “to shine,” “to illuminate,” “to brighten.” This form, which becomes the subject of the most sublime experiences, shines with pure light. *Brahman*, who becomes an object of worship and honour, often in later texts is presented as *Īśvara*. The worship of an object that is assigned the highest rank is accompanied by the feeling of bliss – *ānanda*. Therefore, in some Upaniṣadic passages, it is said that the domain of *manas* is *ānanda*. *Ānanda*, *sat* (existence, truthfulness) and *cit* (thinking, consciousness) are the three cardinal attributes (*guṇa*), which in the *saguṇic* concepts belong to *brahman per essentiam*. According to Rāmānujā’s interpretation, a man strives for liberation – in his concept of eternal communion with *brahman* – because he is attracted to the bliss, a state of eternal happiness, not disturbed by any inconvenience (*kleśa*), nor mixed with any trace of sensual cognition. Bliss, understood in this way, becomes a kind of attractor, which by its very nature attracts the soul, stimulates it and leads to liberation.

As demonstrated in the last passage, this understanding of *manas* differs from the one presented in the entire chapter. This proves that in the Upaniṣads there are fragments that may be used to justify different ontological positions. However, we aim to demonstrate in this book that the *nirguṇic* interpretation prevails, especially in the earlier and the later Upaniṣads.

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176 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 4.1.6.: *abravīn me satyakāmo jābālahi mano vai brahmeti, yathā mātrmān pītrmān ācāryavān brūyāt tathā taj jābālo’bravīn mano vai brahmeti. amanaso hi kiṃ syād iti. abravīt te tasyāyatanamṃ pratiṣṭhām, na me’bravid iti, ekapad vā etat samrāḍ iti sa vai no brūhi yājñavalkya mana evāyatanam ākāśahṃ pratiṣṭhānanda ity enad upāsita kānandatā yājñavalkya, mana eva samrāḍ iti hovāca manasā vai samrāḍ striyam abhīhāryati tasyāṃ pratirūpaḥ putro jāyate sa ānandaḥ, mano vai samrāḍ paramaṃ brahma nainaṃ mano jahāti sarvāṇy enaṃ bhūtāny abhikṣaranti devo bhūtva devān apyeti ya eva vidvān etad upāste.*

## 12. *Bhūtātman* – “the elemental soul,” the ethical operating subject. *Pracodayitā* – “the instigator”

*Bhūtātman* and *pracodayitā* are technical terms which, among the entire canon, appear only in the Maitrī Upaniṣad. The word *bhūta* denotes elements, the gross-material ones and those that shape the perceived forms, as significantly distinct from the cognitive subject. The term, as analysis of the text demonstrates, was developed to identify the differences between the absolutely undifferentiated, invariable realm of *ātman* and the operating subject governed by the law of *karman* and the resulting restrictions. The word *pracodayitā* is a *causativum* of *pra-cud*, “to cause movement,” “to instigate,” “to announce.”

Before discussing the terms *bhūtātman* and *pracodayitā*, let us first look at the ontological assumptions of the Maitrī Upaniṣad. We have already referred to the thesis of a certain specificity of this text more than once in this book. Although traditionally included in the canon, Maitrī seems to be the last of the Upaniṣads. It was created in the context of a polemic with Buddhist schools and reflects the spirit of that era. However, it also echoes the emerging theistic tendencies of the Brahmanical tradition. It is a syncretic text, on the one hand extensively referring to *śruti*, often in the form of literal quotations and, on the other hand, striving to reconcile the *nirguṇic* and *saguṇic* interpretation. This last challenge seems as interesting as it is difficult.

The author of the Maitrī Upaniṣad, in presenting his concepts, moves seamlessly from the epistemic to the metaphysical perspective; that is why the key assumptions are so difficult to interpret. In the very beginning the text describes a subject experiencing above all pain and uncertainty, a subject who, on the one hand, is fully aware of the frailty of his empirical condition and, on the other hand, has an unshakeable conviction that there exists some kind of self-contained being above all limitations, somehow conditioning or sustaining him. It is precisely the answer to these questions as to whether there exists and, if so, who is this absolute being and what is the relationship between the absolute and that which is experienced as full of limitations, imperfections and suffering, that becomes the basis for all the considerations in this text. These questions do not appear for the first time in the Maitrī; they are more or less explicitly articulated throughout the canon of *śruti*. A novelty of this text is that in certain places it seems to take a dualistic perspective, distinguishing the subject's from

the object’s domain both phenomenologically and ontologically, although the final interpretation of the text is monistic, even Advaitic. This methodological perspective of ontological dualism is very clear in the fragment 2.3–4:

Blessed one, the body is without intelligence, like a cart. Who is it that, higher than the senses, had such power as to set it up in this form, with intelligence? Who is the instigator of it? Blessed one, tell us what you know.

He told them:

The one who is famed as standing above – pure, clean, void, at peace, without breath, selfless, unending, indestructible, steadfast, eternal, unborn, independent – rests in his own power. He set up the body in this form, with intelligence. He is the instigator of it. They said, Blessed one, how has one like this – invisible, without wants – set it up in this form, with intelligence, and how is he the instigator of it?<sup>177</sup>

In this passage, another term for the subject appears: *pracodayitā*, “instigator,” “mover.” Here, the relation between the instigator and *ātman* is presented. The text assumes the existence of an absolute, unconditioned being, called *ātman*. Similarly to the *nirguṇic* texts, it is presented as a being, as an entity that cannot be adequately defined; only through insight may it be recognised in its nature. Most of the terms are negative, while the luminosity, brightness and glow of its form are presented positively. This seems to be the primary manifestation of the absolute, luminosity devoid of any characteristics; this form, when recognised as active, is called an instigator. Given the poetic quality of the text, the relationship between the two dimensions of one reality is presented in rather precise terms. *Ātman* as an absolute or complete being (*pūrṇam*), as everything (*sarvam*) is presented in the Upaniṣadic tradition as not requiring any addition, as not desiring anything, because nothing else exists. This term: *aniṣṭa*, “without wants,” is used here.

Explaining such a paradoxically understood nature of the absolute is a challenge for all cosmogonies, not only Indian. From where does the impulse originate to create or produce an imperfect world “by” or “out of” an absolute being?

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177 Maitrī Up. 2.3–4.: *bhagavan śakatam ivācetanam idaṃ śārīra kasyaiśa khalv idṛśo mahimā’indriya-nhūtasya enaitad-vidham etac cetanavat pratiṣṭhāpīhitam pracodayitā vā asya yad bhagavan vetsy tad asmākam brūhīti tān hovāceti.*

*yo ha khalu vāvoparisthaḥ śrūyate guṇeṣvivorhva-retasaḥ sa vā eṣa śuddhaḥ pūtaḥ śūnyaḥ śānto’prāṇo nirātmānanto’kṣayaḥ sthiraḥ śāsvato’jaḥ svatantraḥ sve mahimni tiṣṭhaty ajenedaṃ śārīra cetanavat pratiṣṭhāpītam pracodayitā vaiṣo’py asyeti te hocur bhagavan katham anenedeṣṇēnāniṣṭhenaitad-vidham idaṃ cetanavat pratiṣṭhāpīhitam pracodayitā vaiṣo’sya katham iti.*

A fully satisfactory answer to this question was not provided by any philosophical or religious system. In the following passages (2.5–6) the Maitrī Upaniṣad attempts to answer it by referring to the concepts contained in the earlier texts of the Brahmanical tradition.

The concept of a desireless being, which in an inexplicable way causes a manifestation or creation of the world, is explained using the terms *puruṣa* and *prajāpati*. Both these terms refer to fundamental cosmogonic concepts already presented in the earliest Vedic hymns. The concept of *puruṣa* was mainly based on the cosmogonic myth presented in the 10th *maṇḍala* of the Ṛgveda. In its classical form it refers to the monistic image of the world, where reality is presented as an actual transformation of the absolute being (*pariṇāma*). The Maitrī Upaniṣad understands *puruṣa* similarly. An absolute, ultimately *nirguṇic* being, takes on a subtle form and is named *puruṣa*:

That subtle, ungraspable, invisible one called the person returns here, without previous consciousness, with a part of himself, just like one who wakes up from deep sleep without previous consciousness. That part of him is that element of intelligence in each person, the knower of the field, with the characteristics of will, determination and conceit, Prajāpati with all eyes. He, as intelligence, set up the body with intelligence, and he is the instigator of it.<sup>178</sup>

Two terms referring to the field of consciousness appear here: *buddhi* and *caitāmātra*. The first one appears in the compound *buddhipūrvam*. It appears in the middle of the sentence and can also be read as *abuddhipūrvam*, as is apparent from the rules of Sanskrit grammar. Thus, we can read it both as “being previously conscious” and as “being previously unconscious.” The two possibilities of reading the same phrase seem to be totally contradictory. However, one may be tempted by an interpretation that, paradoxically, reconciles these two translations.

One should start with the question of how to understand the term *buddhi* itself. The first interpretation refers to the etymology of the word. It comes from the root *budh*, meaning “waking up,” “awakening,” “realisation,” “being conscious.” The second interpretation refers to the functioning of *buddhi* in the Sāṃkhya texts, whether in the earlier or classical version. There, *buddhi*

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178 Maitrī Up. 2.5.: *sa vā eṣa sūkṣmōgrāhyo’drśyaḥ puruṣa-saṃjñō’buddhipūrvam ihaivāvartate’ṁśeneti sūptasyevābuddhipūrvam vibodhā evam iti atha yo ha khalu vāvaitasyāṅso’yam yas caitāmātraḥ pratipurūṣaḥ kṣetrajñāḥ saṃkalpādhyavasāyābhimānāliṅgaḥ prajāpatir viśvākhyas cetanedam śārīraṃ cetanavat pratiṣṭhāpitam pracodayitā vaiṣo’pyasyeti.*

functions as the subtlest, but nevertheless a product of an objective reality which by its very nature lacks absolute consciousness – *cit*. *Buddhi* and the cognitive subject based on it are only spoken of in terms of empirical consciousness, which is merely a reflection or representation of pure consciousness. We can then say that *puruṣa*, while functioning in the *saṃsāric* sphere, is endowed with empirical consciousness – *buddhi*. Such an interpretation seems to be justified by the metaphor of a man awakening – as if unknowingly, automatically – from a dream. The technical understanding of *buddhi*, like in the Sāṃkhya tradition, is confirmed by the subsequent verses. The relationship between absolute consciousness, *caitāmātra*, and empirical one, *buddhi*, is also emphasised here. *Cit*, manifesting itself in various representations, functions as *kṣetrañña* – the knower of the field, i.e. of the subject matter, and as an observer or viewer who is at the same time the experiencing one. This *kṣetrañña* – the term corresponds to the concept of an individual soul – is characterised by three basic features: *saṃkalpa*, “imagining,” which is the main function of *buddhi*, *adhyavasāya*, “determination,” which is the function of *manas* and *abhimāna*, “self-esteem,” the function of *ahaṃkāra*. The association of *saṃkalpa*’s function with *buddhi* emphasises its volitional, judgmental activity, which is the main impulse for action. When the undifferentiated consciousness, *cit*, takes on an individualised form, *kṣetrañña*, *buddhi* appears as the primary function that is the motor of action, experiencing, cognition and judgment. It can also be said to be a function aimed at self-determination or self-awareness. The act of self-cognition, and thus self-determination, paradoxically leads to a limitation of absolute existence.

In the beginning there existed one, Prajāpati. Being one, he was not happy. He meditated on himself, and created many creatures. He saw them, standing like a stone, without intelligence, without breath, like a post. He was not happy. He thought, ‘I must enter inside them to wake them up.’ He made himself into air, as it were, and entered inside them. As one, he could not, so he divided himself into five (. . .)

When he had divided himself in five, ‘hidden in the secret place,’ ‘made of mind, with breath as body, with light as form, of true resolve, with space as self. . .,’ within the heart, not having achieved his object, he thought, ‘I must eat objects.’ So he opened up holes, and he goes out and eats objects through five rays (*raśmi*). The organs of perception are his reins (*raśmi*); the organs of action are his horses; his chariot is the body; the mind is his driver; his whip is made of nature.

Impelled by him the body moves around, like the wheel impelled by the potter: he set up the body with intelligence, and he is the instigator of it.<sup>179</sup>

179 Maitrī Up. 2.6.: *prajāpatir vā ekoḡre’tiṣṭhat sa nāram ataikaḥ sotmānam abhidhyātīvā bahvīḥ prajā asṛjata tā aśmevāprabuddhā aprānāḥ sthāṇur iva tiṣṭhamānā apaśyat sa*

In this passage, the repeated question is answered by referring to the myth. When we recall the primary cosmogonic scheme initiated by the *Nāsādīya* hymn of the Ṛgveda and continued in the Upaniṣadic canon – the phrase *idam agre āsīt* – we see that the first stanza of this passage does not denote the domain of existence, *sat*, but the domain of being, *bhava*. In the Maitrī there is no clear transition between *sat* and *bhava*, as it was, for example, presented in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka (1.4.1–3). But the concept behind both Upaniṣads is similar. The original *sat* introducing itself as an active *bhava* remains undifferentiated between the subject and object of cognition, but already as a result of this original self-determination it perceives itself as *ekam*, one. Therefore, unity (*ekatva*), appears as the most primordial form of Advaita (non-duality). The realisation of one’s uniqueness causes a sense of loneliness. And this feeling is the impulse to create or produce other beings. Bṛhadāraṇyaka makes reference to an unequivocally monistic pattern, where *puruṣa* manifests himself as an androgyne, separating into male and female aspects. In Maitrī, Prajāpati creates numerous beings.

This act should not be interpreted as *creatio ex nihilo*. The text clearly states that it is as a result of an original meditative act or contemplation of oneself (*sotmānam abhidhyātva*), that the absolute not so much creates as emerges beings out of oneself. When Prajāpati, the most conscious being, perceives the emerging beings, it experiences them as separate from itself. They become mainly objects, which are perceived as being devoid of consciousness. And again, it evokes an analogy to the Sāṃkhya image of a distinction between the sphere of conscious *puruṣa*, and the objective, unconscious sphere of *prakṛti*. From this passage, it is clear that dualism in the Maitrī, unlike in classical Sāṃkhya, is only methodological and not ontological. However, the next verses must be interpreted by adopting a methodological perspective of subjective-objective dualism. Then, the instigator appears as a being that bestows its consciousness on the dead or unconscious beings.

Also, attention should be paid here to the consistency of the symbolism of metaphors appearing in the Upaniṣads. In the passage discussed above, it is said

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*nāramata so'manyataitāsāmpratibodhanāyānhyantaram vivīśāmi sa vāyur ivātmānaṃ kṛtvābhyantaram prāviśat sa eko nāśakat sa pañcadhātumānaṃ vibhajyoc yale (. . .) sa vā eṣa pañcadhātumātmānaṃ vibhajya nihito guhāyām manomayaḥ prāṇaśarīro bhārūpaḥ satyasamkalpa ākāśātmeti sa vā eṣo'smād hṛdantarād akṛtārtho'manyatārthān aśnānīti ataḥ khānimāni bhittvoditaḥ pañcabhī raśmayaḥ karmendriyāny asya haya rathaḥ śariraṃ mano niyantā prakṛtimayo'sya pratodo'nena khalviritaḥ paribhramatīdaṃ śariraṃ cakram iva mṛtyavenedam śariraṃ cetanavat pratiṣṭhapitam pracodayitā vaiśo'pyasyeti.*

that Prajāpati, in order to penetrate the entities it emerged, turns into wind. A very similar image can be found in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka (3.7.–123), where the “inner governor” is referred to as wind (*vāyu*), which as a thread (*sūtra*) connects and permeates all forms of reality. (More on this topic in the chapter on *antaryāmin*) It should also be noted that both *puruṣa* and *Prajāpati*, as well as *antaryāmin* and *sākṣin* belong to the state of *prājña*, as presented in the description of states of consciousness in the *Māṇḍūkya*.

Let us now return to the Maitrī Upaniṣad. It is very important to note that the impulse to act comes from nature, from *prakṛti*. The most fundamental feature of the instigator proves to be action. Action as a primordial impulse, does not come from an undifferentiated absolute being, but from its form resulting from the act of self-cognition. Yet, the instigator in an absolute sense is no different from *ātman*.

Poets declare him to be the self. As though under domination, as though overcome by the white and black fruits of actions, he wanders among bodies. But, because of his unmanifest nature, subtlety, invisibility and lack of possessiveness, he is without fixity, not an agent, though he seems an agent and fixed.

He is fixed like a watcher, pure, steadfast, unmoving, not prone to defilement, undistracted, without yearning. Remaining his own, experiencing the law (*ṛta*), he is fixed, hiding himself with a veil made of the strands (*guna*).<sup>180</sup>

The notion of the “instigator” therefore indicates those forms, or levels of the absolute, which function in the macrocosmic dimension. The relationship between the instigator and *ātman* seems analogous to the correlation between *Īśvara* and *ātman*, as presented by the *Māṇḍūkya*, namely to the relationship between the state of *suṣupti* and the state of *turiya*. The subsequent passages of the Maitrī introduce the concept of *bhūtātman*, which appears, as the text presents it, as a manifestation of the absolute *ātman* at the level of the microcosm. It includes all functions responsible for individual action, and therefore individual karmic responsibility.

There is another, different, one, called the elemental self [*bhūtātman* M. K.], which, overcome by the white and black fruits of actions, goes to good and bad wombs; that wanders about to a bourn below or above, overcome by dualities.

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180 Maitrī Up. 2.6–7.: *sa vā eṣa ātmehoṣanti kavayaḥ sitāsitaīḥ karmaphalair anabhibhūta iva prati śarīreṣu caraty avyaktatvāt saukṣmyād adṛṣyatvād agrāhyatvān nirmamatvāc cānavasthoṣati kartā kartairvāvasthaḥ sa vā eṣa śuddhaḥ sthīroccalas cālepyo'viagro nispr̥haḥ prekṣakavad avasthitaḥ svasthaśca ṛtabhug guṇamayena paṭenātmānam antardhayāvasthitā ity avasthitā iti.*

To explain further: the five subtle elements are called by the name ‘element’, and the five gross elements are called by the name ‘element.’ Their coming together is called ‘the body.’ So the one who is said to be ‘the self in the body’ is said to be ‘the elemental self.’ This self is to that one as a drop of water to the blue lotus on which it rests. The elemental self is overcome by the strands of nature. Because it is overcome, it falls into utter delusion. Because of this utter delusion, it has not seen him resting in the self – the lord, the blessed one, the causer of action. Delighting in the mass of strands and grown dirty, unsteadfast, fickle, utterly bewildered, full of yearning, distracted, it falls into conceitedness. ‘I am this: this is mine:’ thinking like this, it binds itself with itself like a bird with a net. Overcome by the fruits that follow on from action, he wanders around.<sup>181</sup>

This extensive passage does not seem to require any particular explanation. What is important here is that the first words point to *bhūtātman*, functioning as an individual subject, mainly because of its individual karmic responsibility. In this Upaniṣad, emphasising the ethical sphere may be seen as an outcome of discussions and controversies that were familiar to all the philosophical and religious systems, especially those founded on monistic ontological assumptions. This dilemma is expressed by the classical question: *unde malum?* If the absolute *sat* is the ultimate perfection and it definitively exhausts the totality of reality, then who or what is responsible, and how, for the imperfections, which are obvious given our experience. According to the Maitrī, this is due to the mechanism of self-limitation of the absolute and the emergence of two spheres: the objective one functions as *prakṛti*; and generates the stimulus to act and differentiate. Once the objective sphere is stimulated, it begins to produce more and more diverse beings and elements. Those are technically called *bhūta* (“elements”) by the Sāṃkhya school, and they are responsible for the most external form of individual manifestations, i.e. individual empirical subjects. In fact, this whole passage is very Sāṃkhya-Yogic in character, both in the atmosphere and

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181 Maitrī Up. 3.2.: *asti khalvanyo’paro bhūtātmākhyo yo’yam sitāsitaḥ karmaphalair abhibhūyamānaḥ sadasadyonim āpadyatā ity avāñcyordhvā vā gitar dvandvair abhibhūyamānaḥ paribhramatīty asyopavyākhyānam pañcatanmātrā bhūtaśabdenocyante atha pañcamahābhūtāni bhūtaśabdenocyante’tha teṣāṃ yat samudayam tat śarīraṃ ity uktam atha yo ha khalu vā va śarīra ity uktam sa bhūtātmety uktam athāṃto syātmā bindur iva puṣkarā iti sa vā eṣo’bhibhūtaḥ prakṛtair guṇair iti, atho’bhibhūtavāt sammūḍhatvam prayātaḥ sammūḍhatvād ātmastham prabhum bhaga vantaṃ kārayitāraṃ nāpaśyad guṇaughair uhyamānaḥ kaluṣīkṛtas cāsthiraś cañcalo lupyamānaḥ saṣṭho viagra cābhimānitvam prayatā iti, aham so mamedam iti evam manyamāno nibadhnāty ātmanātmānaṃ jāleneva khacaraḥ kṛtasyānu phalair abhibhūyamānaḥ sadasadyonim āpadyatā ity avāñcyordhvā vā gitar dvandvair abhibhūyamānaḥ paribhramati.*

terminology. (With one very important assumption mentioned at the beginning of this chapter; the Maitrī assumes ontological monism, we can only speak of dualism from a methodological epistemological perspective). The objective domain, *prakṛti*, is characterised by its features, *guṇa*. The subtlest manifestation of *prakṛti*, which corresponds to *antaḥkaraṇa* or *citta*, is characterised as in classical *darśana*, mainly through the element responsible for the relations determining the individual subject. Along with the distinction of the *aham* subject, “what is mine,” *mama idam*, is distinguished from what is experienced.

A certain addition to the classic Sāṃkhya-Yogic pattern is the figure of the Venerable Lord – *Prabhu Bhāga*. In Sāṃkhya we cannot point to any analogous being, and Yoga’s *Īśvara* is more passive. The figure is the closest to the *Īśvara* of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, or *puruṣa* of the Muṇḍaka, where the metaphor of two birds in the same tree is presented. The appearance of this image in the above-mentioned passage may indicate, albeit not an entirely common, but a coherent vision presented by the Upaniṣadic bards. The metaphor continues in the subsequent stanzas:

It has been said elsewhere:

The maker is the elemental self. The causer of action through the organs of action is the person within. As a lump of iron, overcome by fire, when beaten by the smiths becomes various, so the elemental self, overcome by the inner person, when beaten by the strands becomes various. Its variousness takes this form: the mass of beings, with three strands, transformed by eighty-four hundred thousand wombs. The strands are impelled by the person, as the wheel is by the thrower. And as, when a lump of iron is beaten, the fire is not overcome, so that person is not overcome. The elemental self is overcome on account of its close contact.<sup>182</sup>

In this passage, the instigator of the previous stanzas, who functioned in the macrocosmic dimension, corresponds to the inner *puruṣa* (*antaḥ puruṣa*), functioning in the dimension of the microcosm. In the absolute sense, it is *ātman*, fully perfect and untouched by any imperfections. It is interesting whether in the classic Upaniṣads one can find any explanation of why a truly perfect existence could produce beings, which as its manifestations and therefore parts, are

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182 Maitrī Up. 3.3.: *athāntrāpy uktam yaḥ kartā so’yaṃ vai bhūtātmā karaṇaiḥ kārayitantaḥ puruṣaḥ atha yathāgnināyasponḍo vābhibhūtaḥ kartṛbhir hanyamāno nānātvam upaiti evam vā va khalv asau bhūtātmāntaḥ puruṣeṇābhibhūto guṇair hanyamāno nānātvam upaiti, caturjālam caturdaśavidhaṃ caturasitidhā pariṇataṃ bhūtagaṇam etad vai nānātvasya rūpam, tāni ha vā etāni guṇāni puruṣeṇeritāni cakram iva mrtyaveneti atha yathāyaspiṇḍe hanyamāne nāgbir abhibhūyaty evam nābhibhūyaty asau puruṣo’bhibhūyaty ayaṃ bhūtātmopasaṃśliṣṭatvād iti.*

inherently deprived of completeness and perfection. Let us refer here to one of the earliest, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (1.2.5.):

Death reflected: “If I kill him, I will only reduce my supply of food.” So, with that speech and that body (*ātman*) he gave birth to this whole world, to everything that is here—*Ṛgvedic* verses, *Yajurvedic* formulas, *Sāmavedic* chants, meters, sacrifices, people, and animals. He began to eat whatever he gave birth to. “He eats (*ad*) all”—it is this that gave the name to and discloses the nature of *Aditi*. When someone comes to know the name and nature of *Aditi* in this way, he becomes the eater of this whole world, and the whole world here becomes his food.<sup>183</sup>

The absolute being in this passage is called *aditi*. The word has many meanings: “infinite,” “eating,” “death.” The whole phrase, which can be read in two ways and whose meanings complement each other, is *sarvam vā atīti tadaditeradītvam (...)* *sarvasyānnam bhavati*.

The word *aditi* can be read as the name of the Goddess Infinity in which case it indicates the infinite nature of the manifested absolute. But it is also possible, as mentioned in Śāṅkara’s commentary, to read this word as derived from the root *ad*, “to eat,” and then understand it as “eating what is there to eat.” This passage is discussed in more detail in the chapter dedicated to *manas*. At this point it should be mentioned once again that the act of self-cognition or self-determination of the absolute results in a very subtle, but nevertheless subjective-objective distinction. The resulting beings become a kind of fuel to sustain the process of self-cognition. But this fuel is devoured by an infinitely voracious being. Let us return to the *Maitrī* (6.10):

Something else should be known: there is a further development of the sacrifice of the self – food and the eater of food. To explain further: the person is the watcher who rests inside matter. He is the enjoyer: he enjoys the food of nature. The elemental self is its food: matter is its agent. So with its three strands it is the object of enjoyment. The person rests inside. What is seen is the proof here. Since all animals are produced from seed, the seed is the object of enjoyment. By this is explained the fact that matter is the object of enjoyment. So the enjoyer is the person, nature is the object of enjoyment, and resting in it he enjoys it. The food of nature, through the development of the distinction of the three strands, is the subtle body, which begins with ‘the great’ and ends with ‘the particularities.’ In this way the fourteenfold path is explained: ‘This world, known as joy, sorrow and delusion, has become food.’<sup>184</sup>

183 *sa ikṣata yadi vā imamabhimaṁsyē kaniyo’nnam kariṣya iti sa tayā vācā tenātmanedaṁ sarvamsjata yadidaṁ kiṁca – ṛco yajūṁṣi sāmāni chandāsi yajñān prajāḥ, sa yadvadevāsṛjata tattattumaghriyata sarvam vā atīti tadaditeradītvam sarvasyāitasyātāā bhavati sarvamasyānnaṁ bhavati ya evametadaditeradītvam veda.*

184 *Maitrī* Up. 6.10.: *athāparam vedītvayam uttaro vikāro’syātmayajñāsya yathānnaṁ annādaś ceti asyopavyākhyānām puruṣaś cetā pradhānāntaḥsthaḥ sa eva bhoktā*

This passage is clearly an extension of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka’s metaphor. Once again, the ultimately *nirguṇic* reality is described from the methodological perspective of the epistemological dualism. The absolute being, sacrificing itself to oneself, is presented as the one who is both the subject and the object of experience. The term *puruṣa*, defined here as *cetā* – “conscious,” does not refer to absolute consciousness, but to empirical one – *cetas*. Its empirical character is determined by the fact that it is located in the realm of *prakṛti* – *pradhānāntaḥ sthaḥ*. Its primary function is experiencing, which is described as consuming food. The word *bhoktā*, “experiencing,” comes from the root *bhuj* – “to experience,” “to consume.” The basic subjective-objective differentiation is presented in this passage as a distinction between the terms *puruṣa* and *pradhāna*. When *puruṣa* is “immersed,” “entangled” in *prakṛti* it is referred to as *puruṣaś cetā*. It is a moment of primary relationship, i.e. of *puruṣa* being “grasped” by *prakṛti*, as a result of which *puruṣa* identifies himself with the nature of *prakṛti*. *Puruṣaś cetā* as *bhoktā* experiences or “consumes” *bhūtātman*, a subject already woven with three *guṇas*. It is clearly stated in this text that the primary function of *prakṛti* is that it must be experienced, i.e. there must be some entity that experiences it. This is a very strong thesis accepted by all the Brahmanical *darśana* – the object reality is never independent; it exists, or rather it is because of a subject.

For as long as there is no bringing forth, there is no grasping of sweetness. It, too, turns into food, in three states. They are childhood, youth and old age; because of development it becomes food. When matter has reached manifestation in this way, it can be got hold of. Then it has the sweetness, intelligence etc.: they are called intelligence, resolution and conceit. Now the five sweetesses are the sense objects, likewise all the activities of the senses and the activities of the breath. So there is manifest food and unmanifest food.<sup>185</sup>

Food is all that comes from *prakṛti*, even in its subtlest form, both as *vyakta* and *avyakta*. The Upaniṣad presents a rather detailed emanation scheme as known

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*prakṛtam annam bhuṅktā iti tasyāyam bhūtātmā hy annam asya kartā pradhānaḥ tasmāt triguṇam bhojyam bhoktā puruṣo’ntaḥsthaḥ atra dṛṣṭaṃ nāma pratyayam yasmāt bījasambhavā hi paśavas tasmād bījam bhojyam anenaiva pradhānasya bhojyatvaṃ vyākhyātam tasmād bhoktā puruṣo bhojyā prakṛtis tatstho bhuṅkta iti prakṛtam annam triguṇabhedaparīnamatvān mahadādyam viśeṣāntaṃ liṅgam anenaiva caturdaśavidhasya mārḡasya vyākhyā kṛtā bhavati sukhaduḥkhamohasaṃjam.*

185 Maitrī Up. 6.10.: *na hi bījasya svād uparigraho’stīti yāvann aprasūtiḥ tasyāpy eva tiṣṭsu avasthāsv annatvam bhavati kaumāram yauvanaṃ jarā pariṇamatvāt tad annatvam evam pradhānasya vyaktatāṃ gatasypopalabdhīr bhavati tatra buddhyādīni svādūni*

from the classical Sāṃkhya, except that the mental body, *liṅga*, consists here of fourteen, and not as in the Sāṃkhyakarikas, of thirteen elements. This is due to the fact that the Maitrī (similarly to Vedānta) assumes that *antaḥkaraṇa*, the internal body, operates through four rather than three *modi* (*vṛtti*): *buddhi*, *citta*, *ahaṅkāra* and *manas*. The mental body, *liṅga*, is already the whole world, whose basic characteristic is that it is to be experienced, consumed, because it has the nature of food – *anna*. It is defined by three basic attributes: *sukha*, *duḥkha*, and *moha* – joy, pain and astonishment. These three terms clearly recall the Buddhist concepts of *rāga*, *dveṣa* and *moha*.

As already mentioned, the basic characteristic of *prakṛti* is that it is to be experienced. The continuous emergence of successive forms of experiencing is inherent to its nature. The transition from a latent state to a manifested one is to justify nature’s eternal activity; its subsequent forms are to make it more and more “attractive,” i.e. more and more capable of entrapping the experiencer. This pattern shows the mutual relationship between the objective field and the experiencing subject.

When we combine the concepts presented in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Maitrī Upaniṣads, we obtain the following image of the relationship between the absolute dimension of reality and the broadly defined presented reality. According to Bṛhadāraṇyaka, the absolute produces subsequent, increasingly formed (*rūpa*) characters, functioning as individuals because they have their own names – *nāma*. What was produced becomes fuel, sustains the activity of the absolute still recognising itself in its representations. All those forms appear to be required by the absolute to sustain the cognitive and self-cognitive processes, which is why it continuously produces new ones. The initiation of the process of manifestation or creation of the world reveals the objective dimension of reality, the broadly defined *prakṛti*, whose ontological status is assessed as lower than that of the absolute being. The nature of the presented reality is constant action. But for its activity to be sustained, it must be experienced by something or someone. That is why, as explained in the Maitrī, *prakṛti* emerges subsequent beings, supposedly more and more “attractive” and thus capable of engaging the cognitive subject. According to such a description, it is the experiencing one, functioning as an empirical subject, that gets entangled in relations. As a result, it becomes objectified. And so the phrase can be interpreted as meaning that eating what can be eaten (or is to be eaten) is a process of infinite manifestation, and therefore

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*bhavanty adhyavasāya saṅkalpābhimānā iti athendriyārthān pañca svāduni bhavanti evam sarvāṅṅendriyakarmāṇi prāṇa karmāṇi eva vyaktam annam avyaktam annam.*

existence. The subject, which in the absolute sense is *sat*, functions as *bhava*. It is only by recognising that the true nature of the experiencer is to learn only its own nature that the true nature of reality is recognised. This recognition ends the process of manifestation and also the process of presenting itself as food.

The following stanzas of the *Maitrī* proceed to reflect on the nature of food, *anna*, but a more detailed analysis of these stanzas goes beyond the scope of this book.

### 13. Buddhist terminology in the Maitrī Upaniṣad

According to recent findings,<sup>186</sup> the Maitrī is considered to be a later text than previously believed, the time of its creation shifting from the 5th to the 2nd century B.C. Although most classical commentators consider it to be part of the canon, it differs in form from the other twelve Upaniṣads. The Maitrī is a syncretic text, containing extensive annotated passages of other Upaniṣads and even *sūktas*. It is evident that the special aspiration of the author was to reconcile many of the contradictions and discrepancies that can be found in other *śruti* texts. It can be concluded that the Maitrī tries to make the *nirguṇic* passages of the Upaniṣads compatible with those of more *saguṇic* expression. Besides, this Upaniṣad was created approximately at the same time as the Bhagavadgītā, as indicated by the use of the same technical terms, such as *kṣetrajña*. The influence of the theistic trend is noticeable in places, although the Upaniṣad's general overtones are much more *nirguṇic* than those of the Mahābhārata poem.

Comparing the Bhagavadgītā and the Maitrī, both belonging to the Vedānta tradition, it must be said that the Gītā, like most theistic texts, represents the *pravṛtti* school, appreciating the worth of the empirical world and positively evaluating commitment to it, while the Maitrī represents the *nirvṛtti* movement, more ascetic and ultimately depreciating worldly activity.<sup>187</sup> Such a reading of the Maitrī seems most legitimate given the atmosphere of this text, composed at the time of the formation of the earliest Buddhist schools. The atmosphere of the so-called pessimism of the original Buddhism is very strong here – all deliberations begin with a clear statement that all aspects of the world are characterised by *duḥkha*.

The first stanza of the Upaniṣad refers to the Brahmanical ritualistic tradition, equating the Vedic ritual act with a broadly defined sacrifice in honour of *brahman* and contemplation of *ātman*, concluding that these are all activities

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186 Hajime Nakamura, *A History of Early Vedānta Philosophy*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1990.

187 The fire-building of the ancients was a sacrifice of *brahman*: so, after building the fires, the patron of the sacrifice should meditate on the self. Then the sacrifice becomes full and complete. Who is the one that should be meditated upon? The one called 'breath.' (. . .) 'Blessed one, I am not a knower of the self. We hear you are a knower of the entity: so teach us.' (Maitrī 1.1–2.)

aimed at the same goal. However, the next stanza already uses the example of king Bṛhadratha, to demonstrate that neither worldly activity, nor even the most advanced asceticism provides an answer to the question of how to ultimately liberate oneself from the cycle of *saṃsāra*. The *saṃsāric* dimension is understood very broadly here, as encompassing not only migration through the subsequent incarnations but also the eons, and not limited to the beings and creatures considered as bestowed with a conscience.

The third stanza of the Upaniṣad is very Buddhist in tone. It describes the results of meditation, resembling the broadly understood model of the Buddhist *vipaśyanā*.

blessed one, in this body, an evil-smelling insubstantial mass of bone, skin, muscle, marrow, seed, blood, mucus, tears, water of the eyes, faeces, urine, wind, bile, phlegm, what is the use of indulging in desires? In this body, afflicted with desire, anger, greed, delusion, fear, despondency, envy, being apart from what one likes and being with what one does not like, hunger, thirst, old age, death, disease, grief and so on, what is the use of indulging in desires?<sup>188</sup>

The term *niḥsāra*, which is typical for Buddhist texts, refers to what is perceived as the body. It is defined by the term *durgandha* – evil-smelling, stinking – to express disgust, disapproval of the body already in the first stanzas. The interpretation of the term *niḥsāra* as “insubstantiality” is confirmed by the expressions used in the further verses of the Upaniṣad. The description of the presented reality is constructed using a method that can be called “pre-phenomenological,” where successive elements of the experienced reality are rejected, considered conditional, while the aim is to grasp not the conditional, but the being that determines everything. In this passage, it is finally stated that there is no unchangeable material substrate. The first, most external layer of the presented reality is described as a combination of mutually conditioning elements such as bones, skin, muscle, marrow, seed, blood, mucus, tears, faeces, urine, wind, bile, and phlegm. Let us note that the focus is on the factors that are considered unpleasant. All these factors correspond structurally to the *dharmā* category of the *rūpa* group. They make it possible to experience everything that can ultimately be characterised as *duḥkha*. Let us take a closer look at these feelings

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188 Maitrī Up. 1.3.: *bhagavann*

*asthicarmasnāyumajjāmāṃsaśukraṣoṇitaśleṣmāśrudūṣīkāvīṃmūtravātā-  
pittakaphasamghate durghandhe niḥsareṣṣmin śarīre kiṃ kāmopabhagaiḥ?  
kāmakrodhalobhamohabhaya-viṣāderṣyeṣṭaviyogāniṣṭa samprayogakṣutpīpāsājarā  
mrtyu rogaśokādyair abhigate asmin śarīre kiṃ kāmopabhogaiḥ.*

and emotions. The first mentioned are: *kāma*, *krodha*, *lobha* and *moha* – a very Buddhist sounding sequence. Also the ideas known from the Four Noble Truths appear here (“union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering”), as well as emphasising the structural hunger and thirst that cannot be separated from all these elements, and which make us unable to feel pleasure – *kāma*. All these elements appear to king Bṛhadratha as transient, which refers us to the concept of *anitya*; the term *kṣaya* appears here. Further on, the text emphasises that there is nothing permanent, because every moment of pleasure passes and we experience the world again as *duḥkha*. To the last words of the fourth stanza, this fragment, so pessimistic in its overtones, could easily appear in classical Buddhist texts. But the discussed Upaniṣad belongs to Brahmanical tradition which from the very beginning believed in the existence of the absolute subject. Therefore one sentence will determine the fundamental difference between the Buddhist and Brahmanical concepts, in terms of metaphysical assumptions. The teacher is requested to explain the nature of all the phenomena that are experienced in this way. King Bṛhadratha compares himself to a frog in a dry pond, which represents a creature trapped and unable to free itself, blind and ignorant. Despite such a comparison, Bṛhadratha also says of himself *aham asmi*, “I am,” I exist in all that surrounds me, but I still perceive myself (*aham*) as something different (presumably constant and unchangeable) from all that is unstable and transient.

The expression *aham asmi* used here – as demonstrated in the previous chapters – is not just an ordinary grammatical formula. Such an interpretation of the phrase is confirmed by the sage Śākāyanya’s answer: you Bṛhadratha follow the right path, so you will reach the goal of your quest. This goal is to learn about *ātman* (*ātmajñā*), this goal is to “become a knower of *ātman*” (*ātmajñakṛta*).

The next stanza confirms the classic, Upaniṣadic understanding of *ātman* as one that is different from the body, i.e. different from everything that was described earlier. Separated from the body, *ātman* manifests itself in its own form – *svarūpa*. It is immortal (*amṛta*), without fear (*abhaya*), i.e. it is not subject to the loss of what is pleasant, nor to the pursuit of the ever-changing phenomena. It is identical to *brahman*.

Before moving on to the next passage containing some very Buddhist sounding terms, let us summarise the image of the world encountered here. Its description is “phenomenological.” From the point of view of the subject or observer, a kind of anthropological dualism is assumed. On the one hand, we have everything that is transient, changeable, non-substantial, and that makes for the experience of the body, all its functions, sensations, emotions, and impressions. On the other hand, there is that which is inaccessible to any experience, even the subtlest, and

which was revealed by the master as something constant, unchangeable, totally different from the cognitive reality. If translated into the Kantian realms of phenomena and noumena, some similarities become apparent, as well as differences resulting from the Indian specificity. The model of classical Brahmanical thought assumes the existence (*sat*) of the field of reality analogous to the world of noumena as the most obvious fact and an explanation of the phenomena we experience. The existence of the world of noumena is not considered at any stage as a mere hypothesis. To be sure, it is emphasised in various ways that an adequate knowledge of the field of *sat* exceeds experience. The problem here is not **what** we want to explore, because this is strictly defined as *ātman-brahman*, but **how** we should do so. The later considerations developed in the *darśana* will also concern why, with the help of generally available means, we cannot get to know a reality so precisely defined, let alone adequately describe it.

Against the backdrop of the assumptions of this hypothetical methodological dualism, a question is posed which continues to reappear throughout much of the text. When we describe what the body is, we indicate that it is composed of many factors, none of which are conscious. And yet, as an aggregate, it seems to be endowed with consciousness. Therefore, the key question is: who or what causes the body to act consciously? “Who is it that, higher than the senses, had such power as to set it up in this form, with intelligence?” It is a question about the instigator – *pracodayitā*. In the next stanza it is called *aniṣṭha* – “free of attachment,” or in another edition of the text: *aniṣṭa* (*icch*) – “free of desire.” This being is defined as:

The one who is famed as standing above – pure, clean, void, at peace, without breath, selfless, unending, indestructible, steadfast, eternal, unborn, independent – rests in his own power. He set up the body in this form, with intelligence. He is the instigator of it.<sup>189</sup>

The words used here more often appear in the Buddhist texts: *śūnya* – “void,” *nirātman* – “selfless.” The word *śūnya* does not indicate a negation of absolute existence, since the term describes an indestructible, steadfast, eternal being whose technical equivalent is the term *sat*. The word *śūnya* appears again as a compound in the same Upaniṣad. Stanza 6.23 comes after the passage regarding two forms of *brahman*: *śabda* and *aśabda* – manifested in the form of a word and

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189 Maitrī Up. 2.4.: *yo ha khalu vāvoparisthaḥ śrūyate guṇeṣvivoradhvaretasaḥ sa vā eṣa śuddhaḥ pūtaḥ śūnyaḥ śānto'prāṇo nirātmananto'kṣayaḥ sthiraḥ śāsvato'jah svatantraḥ sve mahimni tiṣṭhaty ajenedaṃ śāriraṃ cetanavat pratiṣṭhāpihitam pracodayitā vaiṣo'py aṣyeti te hocur bhagavan katham anenedrśenāniṣṭhenaitadvidham idaṃ cetanavat pratiṣṭhāpihitam pracodayitā vaiṣo'sya katham iti.*

beyond word. The *śabda* level we understand unlike the later Advaita, as a reference to the presented reality, devoid of complete existence. The Upaniṣad claims that liberation is achieved when both levels or modes of existence are recognised. The *śabda* level is a realm of naming, where individual designations or signs are distinguished (*prthag lakṣaṇa*), denoting the realm of distinctiveness and measurability. The *aśabda* level is *avyakta brahman*, from which the individual qualities (*prthag dharminas*) and all distinctions (*prthag vivekhyās*) are transcended. This is an order of existence in which names are given to individual beings (*bhūta*) who are subsequently treated as separate entities, ignoring the fact that they are conditioned by an absolutely undifferentiated level of existence (*sat*).

A similar stanza, in which the call to recognise both orders of existence is made, can be found in the much earlier Muṇḍaka. However, in the Maitrī, which so clearly uses the “phenomenological” method to explore the essence of reality, the call takes on a slightly different meaning.

The author of the Maitrī Upaniṣad repeatedly demonstrates perfect awareness of the limited capacity of words, names or statements. For example, in stanza 3.1. after the description of absolute reality, there comes a summary “one called *self*,” unlike older texts which used “this is the self (*ātman*).”

What the sound is is OM: this is the imperishable. The peak of it is peaceful, soundless, fearless, sorrowless, joyful, content, steadfast, immovable, immortal, unfallen, constant, known as Viṣṇu: one should worship it to achieve supremacy over all. Someone has said: The god, the higher and the lower, Is called by name the OM: Without sound, become void, One should then concentrate on it in its place in the head.<sup>190</sup>

The term “soundless,” “wordless” is originally *niḥśabda*. In Sanskrit, the meaning of a noun can be negated by the *privativum* “a” or by the prefix *nis*. In dictionaries there is no clear distinction between these two ways of negating. It follows from the context (as the analysis of the next term will demonstrate) that negation through the *privativum* “a” concerns the negation of both the concept and the designate of the concept, e.g. *aśabda*, *anātman*, *advaita*. *Nis* seems to be slightly weaker, tending to indicate a lack of certain qualities. Then *aśabda*

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190 Maitrī Up. 6.23.: *yaḥ śabdaś tad aum ity etad akṣaram yad asyāgraṃ tac chāntam aśabdam abhayam aśokam ānandam trptam sthiram acalam amṛtam acyutam dhruvam viṣusamjñitam sarvāparatvāya tad etā upasīteya eva hy āha: yo'sau parāpara devā auṃkāro nāma nāmataḥ niḥśabdaḥ śūnyabhūtas tu mūrdhni sthāne tato'bhavet.*

would denote – in the epistemic dimension – the realm differing from *śabda*. On the basis of the text in question, one can see the contrast between the realm characterised by particular distinguishing features (*prthag lakṣaṇa*) and the realm beyond any judgement. This distinction is also made using a metaphor, where the “I,” the pure conscious being, is contrasted with the body devoid of consciousness. *Niḥśabda* points to the lack of a certain distinguishable attribute, because although the name of this level is OM, no word is fully adequate to describe it, the word only indicates a given level achieved in the meditation procedure. The weaker negation denotes the epistemic order while the stronger one, both the epistemic and metaphysical ones.

The interpretation of the term *śūnya bhūta* (however, not explicitly confirmed by the dictionary), which means “empty in being” or rather “devoid of beings,” may also legitimate this reasoning. It refers to the previous stanza, where there was a juxtaposition of the orders of *śabda* and *aśabda*. The order of *śabda* is connected with distinguishing and assigning a separate existence to individual beings. Then the level of *śūnya bhūta* may be interpreted as existing (*sat*) above individual beings (*bhava*).

Such an understanding of the expression *śūnya bhūta* seems consistent with the perception of the term *śūnya* from the stanza 2.4. Coming back to this passage, let us take a closer look at the term *nirātman*. It does not appear at all in traditional dictionaries, and in this Upaniṣad it is also present in stanzas 6.20 and 6.21. When analysing this term, the proposal to make a certain distinction between negation through the privativum and the *nis* prefix will become even more relevant.

The term *anātman* is crucial for Buddhist thought. It denotes an absolute rejection of the existence of *ātman*, both as a concept and as a designation. From the very beginning it became the “metaphysical distinguishing marker” of Buddhism, so it must have been known to the author or authors of the Maitrī. The appearance of the term *nirātman* in this Upaniṣad may indicate an attempt to reinterpret this key Buddhist term in the spirit of the early Brahmanical Vedānta. Perhaps Brahmin thinkers intended to prove that the use of such a term does not necessarily denote the absolute non-existence of metaphysical being, but merely indicates the impossibility of finding an adequate concept. However, this is no longer a thesis of Buddhism, but of the Advaita Vedānta school.

It is notable that the term appears for the first time in a statement from Prajāpati, who describes what this mighty, extrasensory being is, who is powerful enough to bestow consciousness on an unconscious body. So, let us emphasise once again: there is a clear indication of a being which, according to the Brahmanical tradition, belongs to the pure domain of *sat*, pure existence. All the

descriptions of *sat* as existing by itself, unchangeable, unborn, eternal and permanent are present here. (This understanding of *sat* was criticised by Nāgārjuna). Apart from these, terms typical for the *nirguṇic* Vedānta and paradoxically sounding phrases appear here. The term “breathless” (*aprāṇa*) indicates that the being that is the essence of life – of which *prāṇa* is a synonym, or rather a metaphor, the life-giving force (the development of this metaphor in the form of a myth is presented in stanza 2.6.) – is itself deprived of this essence. On the basis of the analysis of the remaining passages and subsequent commentaries, it follows that this term cannot be understood literally. The use of such a paradoxical term only shows that although we cannot reach the essence of life nor experience it in its own nature, since the cognitive process takes place in the realm accessible only to the senses (even if as subtle as *manas*), it does not mean that it does not exist.

By analogy, we can understand the term *nirātman*. If we were to assume that it denotes an epistemic rather than a metaphysical level, we would make a pure Upaniṣadic interpretation that the fact that we cannot perceive the existence of *ātman* does not indicate its non-existence, but its subtlety, its inaccessibility to cognition. In this way, Brahmanical philosophers may have wanted to tell the Buddhists: you are wrong to reject the existence of *ātman* and at the same time indicate that it is an empty concept. You only indicate the impossibility of its adequate recognition.

Let us look at the context in which the term *nirātman* appears in the stanzas 6.20–21. Both describe very high, advanced forms of contemplation, achieved through slightly different meditation techniques. Both passages present what appears to be the object of meditation.

Now the supreme contemplation of this. By pressing together the palate and the tip of the tongue, by the cessation of speech, mind and breath, one sees *brahman* by investigating. When, on the dissolution of the mind, by the self one sees the self, which is subtler than the subtle, shining, then by the self seeing the self, one becomes selfless. Because one is selfless, one can be thought to be uncountable, without source – the mark of liberation.<sup>191</sup>

The use of the phrase “seeing *brahman*” (*brahma tarkeṇa*) indicates that this experience takes place at a level where there is still a subtle distinction between

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191 Maitrī Up. 6.20.: *ataḥ parāsyā dhāraṇā tālurasanāgranipīḍanād vāimanaḥprāṇanirodhanād brahma tarkeṇa paśyati yad ātmanā ātmānam aṅg aṅḍīyāṅsaṃ dyotamānam manaḥkṣayāt paśyati tad ātmanātmānam dīṅḍīvā nirātmā bhavati nirātmakatvād asaṅkhyo'yonis cintyo mokṣalākṣaṇam ity etat paraṇi rahasyam.*

the subject and the object of cognition – analogous to the patterns expressed by formulas such as *aham brahma* and *aham asmi*. The use of the expression “dissolution of the mind” (*manaḥ kṣaya*) can be understood as a description of the disappearance of differences between the subject and the object, which is further confirmed by the wording: *ātmanātmānam dṛṣṭva*. Subsequently, the term *nirātman* appears, which, in our opinion, should not be understood as the lack of *ātman*, but as a state in which there is no perception of duality. The interpretation is legitimised by the following sentence, which claims that as a result of the state of *nirātmakatva*, all kinds of distinctions disappear. It should be noted that the abstractum *nirātmakatva* is used here, and not, for example, the compound *nirātmā bhūtvā*, which could suggest some very subtle but nevertheless dynamic state of transition. This is in line with the later interpretation of the Advaita movement, stating that the liberating knowledge, identical to *ātman* remaining in its own realm, cannot be achieved, because *sat*, or *ātman*, exists invariably – and one cannot achieve what exists eternally. Therefore *nirātmakatva* does not indicate the achievement of something new, but rather a change in the way of existing. The term *nirātmakatva* denotes the state of liberation – *mokṣa lakṣaṇa*. Stanza 6.21 corroborates such interpretation:

The channel called Suṣumna, which goes upward together with the breath, cuts through the palate. When it is joined with the OM and the mind, the breath can go out by it. By turning back the tongue-tip against the palate and harnessing the senses, as greatness one may see greatness. Then one reaches selflessness. Because one is selfless, one no longer experiences joy and sorrow: one reaches absoluteness.<sup>192</sup>

In this stanza, the process of the disappearance of the distinction between the subject and the object of cognition is represented by the expression *mahimā mahimānam nirikṣeta*. (The term *mahiman* seems to correspond structurally to the level of *buddhi* in Sāṃkhya-Yoga.) As a result of this process, the state of *nirātmakatva* is reached: all sensations disappear, after which the possibility of expressing or naming them also disappears. This is a pattern similar to *rajayoga*; the state of liberation is expressed by the term *kevalatva* – “absolute-ness.” Returning once again to the beginning of this Upaniṣad, one can observe how coherent the text is. The key question was: how does the extra-sensory being bestow consciousness upon the body? It assumed dualism, even if only

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192 Maitrī Up. 6.21.: *ūrdhvaḡā nāḡī suṣumnākhyā prāṇasancāriṇī tālvantarvicchinmā tayā prāṇoṃkāramanoyuktayordhvam utkramet tālvadhyagram parivartya indriyāṇy asamyojya mahimā mahimānam nirikṣeta tato nirātmakatvam eti nirātmakatvān na sukhaduḡkhabhāḡ bhavati kevalatvaṃ labhatā iti*.

hypothetical. Here the problem is outlined as the pursuit of the state of absolute-ness – *nirātmakatvam eti*, that is, of achieving, using the language of Yoga, the state of *puruṣa* in his own nature – *svarūpe*.

The previous stanza and the meditation scheme presented in it are closer to the Advaita tradition, so there is no talk of achieving *ātman*, since everything is *ātman*. The next stanza is more in line with the *raja yoga*, where by liberating oneself from the realm of *prakṛti*, one reaches the state of *puruṣa*'s uniqueness – *kaivalya*. However, in both schemes, the state of purely conscious being which for Advaita is *ātman* and for Yoga *puruṣa*, is referred to as *nirātmakatva*. It confirms the interpretation of the term *nirātmān* from stanza 6.4 that the lack of perception of *ātman* does not prove its non-existence, but merely the inability to capture it in the act of perception. The use of this term, so close to the key concept of Buddhism, seems to be a very consistent testimony that one cannot reject the existence of *ātman*, but only at most the concepts that were supposed to adequately define it. Although at first glance it may seem that the Upaniṣad is influenced and inspired by Buddhism, it seems that it not only criticises it, but also attempts to reinterpret it – as it did with many other doctrines – in the spirit of orthodox Brahmanical thought. It is an attempt to prove that not only does Buddhism not offer anything new, but neither does it fully understand the concepts it uses.

Now the diseases of the knowledge:

‘Your majesty, the net of delusion has its source when those who are bound for heaven are defiled by those who are not bound for heaven. There are those who are always jolly, always abroad, always begging, always living by crafts; others who beg in cities, sacrificing for those for whom one should not sacrifice, students of Śūdras, Śūdras who know the sciences; others who are vagabonds, wearers of matted locks, dancers, mercenaries, who have gone forth yet appear on the stage, renegades who work for kings, and so on; others who pay reverence to *yakṣas*, ogres, ghosts, imps, vampires, serpents, ghouls etc., saying that they will placate them; others who falsely wear saffron robes and earrings, or carry skulls; and others who by false logic, examples, jugglery and conjuring seek to find status among those who know the Vedas. One should not live with them. They are patently thieves, and not bound for heaven.’ Someone has said:

With juggleries of the non-self doctrine,

With false examples and causes,

Going astray, the world does not know

The difference between knowledge and ignorance.<sup>193</sup>

This is one of the final stanzas of this Upaniṣad. It lists a number of doctrines that hinder the acquisition of liberating knowledge. The list is very long and

193 Maitrī Up. 7.8.: *athedānīm jñānopasargā rājan mohajālasyaiṣa vai yoniḥ yad asvargyairiḥ saha svargyasyaiṣa vāṭye purastād ukte'py adhaḥ stambenāḥṣīyanti atha ye cānye ha*

diverse: it contains magicians, deceivers, but also Sūdras who gained access to sacred books, false Brahmins and representatives of various ascetic sects. In the verse summarising their activities they are all called *nairātmyavāda* – preaching the doctrine of the non-existence of *ātman*. According to the author of the text, they play a role similar to that of the Greek sophists, and by resorting to various rhetorical tricks, try to demonstrate with arguments based on false premises that the basic concept of Brahmanical thought – *ātman* – is invalid. Their argumentation belongs to a field calling itself knowledge – *vidyā* – but it is knowledge limited to a fragmentary understanding of certain parts of the presented reality. In this work, *vidyā* is contrasted with Veda (*veda*) understood as wisdom, the basic message of orthodox Brahmanical thought. Here, a synonym for orthodoxy, although the term is very vague and its meaning often depends on who uses it, is the term *vaidika*. It seems that the author of the Maitrī represented very conservative Brahmanism; this is indicated by such a wide range of people who are not entitled to possess knowledge of *brahman*.

In this text, Buddhism becomes synonymous with false doctrine that distracts people from the path to liberation. It is possible that the adoption of such a conservative attitude was caused by the fact that Buddhist thought began to pose a real threat to the Brahman orthodox tradition. If we consider that the text of the Upaniṣad, which for the most part considers subtle metaphysical issues, begins with emphasising the extraordinary role of sacrificial ritual, we can presume that this conflict concerned not only the intellectual sphere, but also, and perhaps even above all, the social one.

It remains an open question whether Brahmanical thinkers actually believed that Buddhists did not fully understand the terms they used, such as *nirātman* or *śūnya* discussed above, or instead deliberately wanted to mislead the reader. Anyway, the final stanzas indicate the clearly polemical character of the Maitrī Upaniṣad. However, one should not forget that Buddhists similarly depicted the representatives of the Brahmanical schools as those who, through their teachings, distract people from achieving *nirvana*.

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*nityapramuditā nityaprasvitā nityayācanakā nityam śilpopajīvinō'tha ye cānye ha pura yācanakā ayājīyayājakāḥ sūdraśiśyāḥ sūdraś ca śāstravidvāṃso'tha ye cānye ha cā ʔajataṇaṇabhaṭpravrajitarāṅgavatāriṇo rājakarmaṇi patitādayo'tha ye cānye ha yak ʔarākṣasabhūtaḥaṇapīśaciragagrahādīnām artham puraskṛtya śamayāma ity evam brahmāṇā atha ye cānye ha ʔthā kaṣāyakunḍalinaḥ kāpālino'tha ye cānye ha vṛthā tarkadṛṣāntakuhakendrajālair vaidikeṣu paristhātum icchanti taiḥ saha na saṇvaset prakāśaya bhūtā vai te taskarā asvargyā ity eva hy āha: nairātmyavāda kuhakair mithyādṛṣāntahetuvhiḥ bhrāmyan loko na jānāti vedavidyāntarantau yat.*

## 14. Why is there *I* rather than *it*?

: Summary: the bow and arrow metaphor

The starting point for the reflection presented in this chapter, which are in a way a summary of the entire book, is the conclusive statement to be found in the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad: *ātmā eva saṃviśati ātmanā ātmānaṃ ya evaṃ veda*, which means “Anyone who knows this enters the self (*ātman*) by himself (*ātman*).” The key concept of the Upaniṣads – *ātman* – can be found here being used in three different grammatical cases, although, the matters of grammar are certainly not the main impulse to conduct the analysis. It is interesting to research what kind of situation this phrase refers to, as well as why only one term is used here, and why this one. The most general reading of the sentence suggests a description of a particular experience that is, of a cognitive process in which the cognising subject, the object of cognition, and the tools involved, are all expressed with the same term, *ātman*.

At the very beginning the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad presents several concepts – *brahman*, *ātman*, *sarvam*, *Om̐* and *akṣara* – as equivalent. If the concepts (and the realities behind them) are to be understood as wholly identical, which is the approach adopted by the later Advaita Vedānta, then it is reasonable to ask why, even though several notions are identified as identical in the beginning of the text, at the end of it only one particular term seems to assume the functions and meaning of them all.

The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, although among the youngest texts of the canon, is strictly *nirguṇic* in its form and content; in fact, it completely transgresses the ritual context so typical for the earlier Upaniṣads. In older Upaniṣadic texts, *Om̐* plays a fundamental role in conducting ritual ceremonies, especially when it comes to initiating them. However, even in these texts not only the cosmogonic, but also the soteriological meaning of the syllable *Om̐* is indicated. Let us quote some passages:

Om̐—one should venerate the High Chant as this syllable, for one begins the High Chant with Om̐.

A man who utters this syllable with that knowledge enters this very syllable, the sound that is immortal and free from fear. As the gods became immortal by entering it, so will he.

Brahman is Om̐. This whole world is Om̐ (...) They say Om̐ before singing the Sāman chants; they say Om̐ ŚOm̐ before they recite the hymns of praise; the Adhvaryu priest says Om̐ before giving his response; the Brahman priest says

OM̐ before singing the introductory praise. One says OM̐ in giving one's permission to conduct the fire sacrifice. When a Brahmin is about to recite the Veda publicly, he first says "OM̐," and then, "May I grasp the Veda (*brahman*)."<sup>1</sup> And he does, indeed, grasp the Veda.

Here, ritual singing symbolises holy speech, speech that has the power to create the world. This fragment echoes the fundamental thesis of the Brāhmaṇas that the utterance of a name brings its designate to reality. This is related to the concept of *śabdabrahman*, which is reinterpreted in the *nirguṇa* spirit in the later Maitrī Upaniṣad, which shall be discussed at the end of this chapter. But even in the passage from the Chāndogya we can see that this is not purely ritual singing; knowing the meaning of these practices results in liberation. The Taittirīya points to the fundamental significance of the Om̐ mantra in the Vedic ritual. Uttering the word Om̐ initiates and validates every ritual activity. However, here too, as in the Chāndogya, not only the ritual aspect is pointed out, but also the connection between the sacred Om̐ mantra and the knowledge what the sacrificial ceremonies mean (and not only the fact that they are conducted). This is a shift in focus from the Brahmanas to the Upaniṣads, as can be found in another passage:

But when he is departing from this body, he rises up along those same rays. He goes up with the sound "OM̐." No sooner does he think of it than he reaches the sun. It is the door to the farther world, open to those who have the knowledge but closed to those who do not. In this connection, there is this verse:

One hundred and one, the veins of the heart.  
 One of them runs up to the crown of the head.  
 Going up by it, he reaches the immortal.  
 The rest, in their ascent, spread out in all directions.

The passage just quoted now provides us with a clear reference to Om̐ as the basic tool used in the yogic soteriological procedure. There is no technical term used here, but reference is made to the main channel of energy, to *suṣumnānāḍī*. This practice will be described in much more detail in later texts. But the most important point for our deliberations is to show that in an old text such as Chāndogya, Om̐ plays a more important role than just a mantra necessary to perform Vedic rituals.

Let us now proceed to an analysis of those fragments in which the syllable Om̐ occurs in the context of the precisely described meditation procedure. Putting aside the main postulate of the Upaniṣads that the final cognition is attained not through discourse but through insight resulting from practice, let us now look at those Upaniṣadic texts in which we encounter the same set of terms that appear in the Māṇḍūkya. Of course, at this point we do not want to refer to all the

passages that speak of the relationship between *ātman* and *brahman*, but only to those that use the above-mentioned terms within a certain closed image to describe the act of experience. In order to narrow down the number of the main passages, we will search for those texts that grammatically and symbolically split the Om syllable into the letters A, U, M, in order to assign them to specific areas of reality or consciousness.

All these conditions are fully met by the famous image of a bow, a shield and an arrow depicted in the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad and further developed in the Maitrī. As a starting point, we will analyse a large excerpt from the Muṇḍaka (as it is an earlier text), referring to other Upaniṣadic texts, before ultimately returning to the Māṇḍūkya, where an analysis of the Om mantra is presented in a technical way. At the end we will analyse a few fragments from the Maitrī.

What is smaller than the smallest and intensely bright,  
 in which rest these worlds and those who live therein—  
 It is the imperishable brahman;  
 It is breath, it is the immortal.  
 It is what we must strike, my friend.  
 Strike it!

In the quoted passage there is an identification of the notions of *akṣara* and *brahman* (from a grammatical point of view they are neuter). The word *akṣara* means not only “never-ending,” but also: “the syllable,” which refers to Om. There is also a subject in masculine – *sa* (“he”). First of all, let us combine them with the following terms and the formulation at the end: “he must be pierced (with an arrow), stricken.” The phrase that something should be pierced or stricken indicates a process, an act, namely, an act of cognition. This interpretation is justified by the last word of the passage: *viddhi*, usually translated according to the earlier form: *tad veddhavyam*, which is derived from the verbal root *vyadh* – “to strike,” “to pierce.” But the term itself – *viddhi* – can be understood as a derivative from the root *vid* – to know. Besides, the interpretation of this entire stanza, as well as the subsequent ones, which form a coherent whole, indicates that the image of an arrow, a bow and a shield refers to the process of cognition. So the phrases: “should be pierced, stricken” can be understood as: “should be learnt.” After all, the word *viddhi* itself means: “hit (the target),” “learn.” A comparison with another passage from Bṛhadāraṇyaka (5.7.) comes to mind, where it is said that the final cognition is just a moment, like a lightning – *vidyut*. “Pointedness” and instantaneousness seem to be indicated here as the characteristics of the act of identifying the subject with the object and the act of cognition.

We can therefore understand this stanza as a description of the cognitive process and its outcome. A transition from the definitions of the absolute being in neuter to ones in masculine, quite typical for the Upaniṣadic texts, takes place here. Explored more extensively in the chapter on cosmogony of the Upaniṣads, this procedure was conducted in various ways. Sometimes immediately after defining the absolute being in the neuter, the term *puruṣa* appears, while in some cases, the personal pronoun *sa* (“he”), appears right in the subsequent phrase. When analysing many such passages, we will see a great persistence of the authors of the Upaniṣads in promoting the notion that the absolute being, when presented as captured in a cognitive act, becomes more or less anthropomorphic. And when *brahman* becomes an object of cognition, it begins to “function” at the levels that can be grasped by tools or by means that may be grouped into domains: *prāṇa*, *vāc*, *manas*.

In the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, stanzas 2.1.1. an image is presented of fire and sparks gushing out of it. This refers us to a symbolic depiction of the cosmogonic act, showing the emergence of its representations from the absolute being. The image of fire was expressed by the term *akṣara*, but it was only an image, the text said nothing about any transition processes, let alone any cognitive procedures.

Śaṅkara, commenting on the stanza 2.2.2, says that *akṣara brahman* is an inner consciousness, being the prerequisite of everything. Thus, the breath, the mind and the system of cognitive organs beginning with *vāc* are dependent on consciousness. *Akṣara brahman* is a glow, which refers us, for example, to stanza 2.1.1. It is potentially everything. All the worlds, that is, all the levels of reality, are in him and are in him, although his nature is – paradoxically – simple and uniform. Explaining this process poses a classical problem, not only in the Upaniṣads, but in most Indian philosophical schools. It was passionately debated especially in the Vedānta. How can that which is one, simple and non-complex manifest itself as diverse? Answers to this question differed, but it was usually agreed that the mechanisms “responsible” for the manifestation of Unity as plurality are immanent to the nature of the absolute being. This single stanza may indicate that frequently the definitions of the absolute of the Upaniṣads, and especially of the Advaita Vedānta, as an ultimately static reality, are hard to defend. The idea that all the worlds and their inhabitants are hidden in the absolute being can be interpreted in a way that their form, type of action, or – using the terminology of Indian tradition – certain dispositions or karmic determinants are already present in the absolute. (Is this approach very different from the views presented by the Mahāyana school of Vijñānavāda?) We do not want to make overly broad comparisons or draw over-reaching conclusions at this point, but it seems that the radically “static” understanding of the absolute being in Brahmanical

thought should be revised in opposition to the “dynamically” perceived reality in Buddhism.

In this passage, Śaṅkara points out that describing the being as *akṣara brahman*, but also manifesting as *satyam*, means that the presented world is not an illusion or false image, but the truth. It can be understood that a proper application of tools which are not the *akṣara brahman* itself, can still lead to achieving the right goal, because it is *brahman* who conditions their functioning. Thanks to real measures the real goals can be achieved. All such tools ultimately lead to *brahman*. Therefore it is said that by an appropriate use of the means belonging to the realm of *prāṇa*, *vāc*, *manas* one may perform a liberating cognitive act and recognise *brahman*. It is a description of *brahmavidyā*.

Take, my friend, this bow,  
 this great weapon of upaniṣad;  
 Place veneration on it  
 as the whetted arrow;  
 Stretch it with the thought fixed on the nature of that;  
 That very imperishable is the target, my friend.  
 Strike it!

The previous stanza claimed that there is a method, a way, a procedure, of how to combine or unify the three components of the cognitive act, i.e. the subject, the object and the act of cognition itself (or cognitive tools). The above-mentioned stanza explains how to achieve this.

The bow is Om̐, because it decomposes into AUM (as in Māṇḍūkya's and Muṇḍaka's earlier stanzas). This image points to a yogic practice in which the subsequent levels or states of consciousness are distinguished. The goal is *akṣara brahman*. The tool is the mind – *manas*, focused only on the goal; at this stage, there are no other tools referring to the realm of the senses – *prāṇa*, or speech – *vāc*. It is a clear indication of this stage of yogic practice, where all the lower, but also more external “elements” have been restrained. This is possible because a complete focus on the goal has been achieved.

As in the previous stanza, we can understand the term *viddhi* both as: “learn!” and as: “hit the target!” The target was called *lakṣya akṣara* – “that, whose sign is *akṣara*,” “that which was previously characterised as *akṣara*.” If we interpret *lakṣya* as *akṣara*, then *akṣara* should consistently be interpreted as an attribute.

In this passage, two sets of concepts are also present. Both refer to how the “tool,” i.e. the arrow, should be prepared. Firstly, it is said that the arrow should be sharpened by meditation, *upāsāniśitam*, which refers to the classic Upaniṣadic kind of meditation – *upāsana*. From the earlier Upaniṣads we know that this

process is supposed to create a bond, *bandhu*, indicating the equivalence of *brahman* and *ātman*. The term *upāsana* itself was not precisely defined in the earlier texts; the details of yogic practice were not explained. The Muṇḍaka is one of the so-called middle Upaniṣads, so one can expect that it will provide a more detailed description of the above-mentioned practices. Therefore, a thorough analysis of all the terms used in this passage should be carried out.

The second group of concepts referring to the image in question are the words: *cetasā tadbhāvagatena* – “with the mind that assumes the state of brahman.” The term *cetas*, used instead of the earlier one, *manas*, indicates that it is not only about the inner sense, but also about the wider sphere of thought and consciousness. An even more precise definition of the process of technically understood meditation practice can be found in the Maitrī:

When one has gone beyond the elements, senses and objects, then one seizes the bow whose string is the renouncer’s life and whose stave is steadfastness, and with an arrow made of freedom from conceit one strikes down the primal doorkeeper of brahman. (That overseer of conceit, who has confusion as his crown, craving and envy as his earrings, and sloth, drunkenness and impurity as his staff of office, seizes the bow whose string is anger and whose stave is greed, and kills beings with an arrow made of wanting). After killing him, one crosses to the farther shore of the space within the heart on the boat of the OM.

This fragment clearly refers to the pattern described in the Yogasūtras. The yogi is already at the *dhāraṇā* stage, as the phrase may indicate that the stave of his bow, his weapon is steadfastness – *dhṛti*; this term, as well as *dhāraṇā* – “determination,” comes from the same core – *dhṛ*. The yogi had already overcome his longing for both gross (*mahābhūta*) and subtle (*tanmātra*) objects. Nor does he involve himself in sensory activity (*indriya*) or contact with its objects (*artha*). He is beyond feeling the state of bliss (*sānandasamāpatti*) and he is transcending the state referred to as *sāsmītāpatti* in Yoga, and *abhimānāmaya* in the Upaniṣads – the state of self-loving, the state of distinguishing the “self” (*aham, asmitā*) from the rest of reality. Only such a yogi is able to destroy and overcome the last obstacle on his way to liberation. The Upaniṣad describes in a very suggestive way the metaphorical doorkeeper, guarding the gateway to freedom, dazzled (*sammoha*) with various negative feelings and emotions. The mind of an almost liberated man, whose main attribute is steadfastness, is clearly contrasted here with the mind of an enslaved man, tormented by emotions – his main driving force is desire (*pralobha*). Neither the term *kāma* nor even *tṛṣṇa* was used here, but the term *lobha*, “lust,” strengthened further by the prefix *pra*, which indicates its fundamental, primeval character. As we can see, the Maitrī Upaniṣad specifies the term *cetas* used by the Muṇḍaka.

The bow is OM, the arrow's the self,  
 The target is brahman, they say.  
 One must strike that undistracted.  
 He will then be lodged in that.  
 Like the arrow, in the target.

Om̐ (AUM) is a bow, it is a tool. Thanks to Om̐ *ātman* merges with *brahman*. In this stanza, *ātman* is an arrow, it is something heading towards the goal, which means it is not yet one with the goal. According to Śaṅkara's commentary, *ātman* in this stanza is limited by conditioning factors, i.e. by *upādhis*. It takes the form of a witness, *sākṣin* (this interpretation, which was earlier discussed in the chapter dedicated to the observer, is confirmed by stanza 3.1.1, where the image of two birds living on one tree is presented). This stanza refers to the description of the act of cognition, when *ātman* penetrates the body and becomes a witness.

The phrase *brahma tal lakṣyam ucyate* can also be translated as: "brahman is named because it can be defined, described." Only by defining the brahman's domain can it be distinguished from the *ātman*'s, which are ultimately identical. However, in the cognitive act, the subject is distinguished from the object and from the process itself, precisely because of their functions. Therefore, the final reality, which is *brahman*, is compared to a shield, to a goal or to the result of a liberating act of cognition.

The term *apramatta* appears in this stanza, as in the Kaṭha 6.11; it is a strictly technical use of the term and in both texts it refers to the description of the same stage of yogic practice. Here we can also draw a comparison to the formulation of Vyāsa (Yoga Bhāṣya III 3), in which the term *yoga* will be understood as both the beginning, the act itself, as well as the end of the process. As for the term *apramatta* in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad, we can see that it is referring to a specific yogic procedure in which, after pulling consciousness away from the external objects, the "one-pointed" consciousness is directed to the ultimate goal. In the Māṇḍūkya's terminology, it is a transition from the state of *prājña* to the state of *turiya*, where everything remains only *ātman*. This is the *ājñācakra* level, as confirmed by the following stanzas, describing the functioning of the energy channels – *nāḍī*. When describing the functions of *nāḍī*, it is possible to divide Om̐ into three letters; *iḍā* stands for A – the state of awakesness, *pingalā* is U – the state of dream-filled sleep, M represents *prājña* – the state of deep sleep. If we interpret the image in this way, we can see that pulling the senses away from the objects is not any kind of abandonment, or expulsion of objects beyond the act of consciousness, but a retraction of phenomena or manifestations to their deeper, more original level; it is a unification of everything in *suṣumna*. *Suṣumna* means *prājña*, and through it we enter *turiya*, which is the state of liberation.

That alone is the self, you must understand,  
 On which are woven the earth,  
 intermediate region, and sky,  
 the mind, together with all breaths.  
 Put away other words, for this  
 is the dike to the immortal.

According to Śaṅkara, “on which” refers to the eternal *puruṣa*, who is an image and an archetype of the cognitive being. In a man who has undertaken the yogic procedure, all worlds are represented, all areas of reality. The symbol of the three worlds, the depiction of their operation are *prāṇas* while the tool to recognise them is *manas*. The only reality is *ātman*. The rejection of words refers to the abandonment of lower knowledge. As a consequence of this understanding, *karman* will also be surpassed, because it stands for “happening” at the level of lower knowledge. (Śaṅkara comments on this verse with an excerpt from the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 3.8., 6.15).

Om̐, as it results from this stanza, is not treated like other words, because as in the other discussed passages (Muṇḍaka, Māṇḍūkya) the same equivalence exists: *Om̐-akṣara* = *ātman* = *brahman*. *Ātman* in this fragment refers to both the absolute *ātman* and *ātman* limited by the *upādhis*; identifying *ātman* with Om̐ is still not the state of *turiya*. *Turiya* is a simple *ātman*, not limited in any way.

Where the veins come together like spokes,  
 in it that one, taking birth in many ways.  
 “It is Om̐”—meditate thus on this self;  
 Good luck to you, as you cross  
 beyond the darkness!

According to Śaṅkara, “where” – *yatra* – refers to *hṛdaya*. This stanza symbolically shows the “overlapping” of the two levels of *ātman*: the absolute, higher *ātman* and the *ātman* limited by *upādhis*. The way these levels are distinguished may be explained by the image of two birds representing the two levels (or perhaps forms?) of *puruṣa*.

Who knows all, who observes all,  
 to whom belongs all greatness on earth—  
 He is this self in the divine fort of brahman,  
 having a secure footing in the sky.

Consisting of thought, controller of body and breaths;

he has a secure footing in food,  
 after having settled in the heart.  
 By perceiving him the wise see

what becomes visible as the immortal  
in the form of bliss.

Manomaya points to a realm of reality which is “made of the mind,” “consisting of thought,” a field whose main function is *manas*. A being which is by nature omniscient and knowledgeable of everything, perceives through *manas*. The two above-mentioned definitions of the nature of *brahman* most probably refer to the knowledge of ideas of general and specific things. *Manas* is *upādhi*, “limiting factor,” and that is why all it cognises is limited. And in this sense, *ānanda*, “bliss,” appears to be a form (*rūpa*) of *ātman*, and not its nature. Form is something that allows formless consciousness to become tangible, visible, but form also becomes an intermediary. During the cognitive process one gets to know *ātman* first through the form, but the very moment, the act of grasping *ātman* is already simple, beyond the form, so it can be said that the final awareness of identity with *ātman* is an immediate state, simple and uniform.

When one sees him—  
both the high and the low;  
The knot of one’s heart is cut,  
all doubts are dispelled;  
and his works come to an end.

Śaṅkara explains that the knot of the heart refers to desires, which originate in the mind; he quotes the Kaṭha 2.3.14. and the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 4.4.7. At this point, let us recall the above-cited passage from the Maitrī Upaniṣad, where various feelings and emotions resulting from desire to constantly experience and thus obscuring the mind are listed in detail. When the fullness of reality was seen in what is superior and what is inferior, when the unity of cause and effect was identified, then the expression “I am that” was implemented.

In that high golden container is brahman,  
stainless and partless,  
the brilliant light of lights!  
This is what they know,  
those who know the self.

The knowers of *ātman*, *ātmavidas*, are those who in a simple act (*anubhava*) recognise the luminosity and simplicity of the partless *brahman*, who is pure consciousness. *Brahman* is not only the glow, the “golden container,” but above all the source of the glow.

At this point we shall end the analysis of this fragment of the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, as further stanzas refer to slightly different images. The metaphor of the bow and arrow will reappear at the end of this chapter. What is most

important at this stage of our deliberations is described in the above stanzas. The cognitive process begins with *ātman*, its aim being to recognise the reality of *brahman*, a process that is achieved through Om̐, the corresponding yogic procedure and meditation. In Om̐, specific levels and stages are distinguished. The whole process results in a fusion, a unification of all factors; *ātman* becomes Om̐ and becomes *brahman*. Let us now look at the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad.

In the introduction to his commentary to the Māṇḍūkya, Śaṅkara writes that the world of phenomena is nothing more than a manifestation of duality, its expansion and development. It is created by *avidyā*. Only *vidyā* can cause this process to stop. This idea is confirmed by other Upaniṣads: Bṛhadāraṇyaka 2.4.14., 4.3.31. (Śaṅkara also refers to other texts that show the equivalence between *brahman* and Om̐: Kaṭha 1.2.15., 1.2.17., Praśna 5.2., Maitrī 6.3.) As we read further in this commentary:

And the word *aum* is *ātman* itself, for it is name [the name and the named being one]. For this reason, the reason that the name and named are one, phenomenal appearances of the self, breath and the like, too, have no being apart from their names, names that are but modifications of the word *aum*. This is borne out by such *śruti* texts as the following: Modifications originate in speech; they are mere names (ChU 6.1.4.) ‘All this creation of Brahman is held together by the thread of speech and the string of names;’ all this exists in names.’

Since all phenomena are one with their names and since names are but appearances of *aum*,

therefore does the text declare ‘Aum! This imperishable word is all this..’

Om̐—this whole world is that syllable! Here is a further explanation of it. The past, the present, and the future—all that is simply Om̐; and whatever else that is beyond the three times, that also is simply Om̐

The following terms are identified in this text: *Om̐* = *akṣara* = *idam sarvam* = *Om̐kāra*. The term “all this “ (*idam sarvam*) can be understood in this way that reality is both the unmanifested, unconditioned, existing beyond the three times, as well as all manifestations of beings whose basic characteristic is that they can be named and spoken of.

The term *upavyākhyānam* means “explanation,” “clear speech.” This introduces an explanation of how meditation on Om̐ becomes a medium, a tool for recognising *brahman*; it seems to be a kind of introduction to the technical explanation of the process. Perhaps, in this case, the phrase “beyond the three times” refers not only to the image of reality as both transcendent and immanent, but also to the “technical” aspect, in the sense that the correct utterance and execution of the relevant procedure is correct when it can produce the desired

result, which is clearly defined here. Stanza 2. provides a connection between stanzas 1. and 12.

For this brahman is the Whole. Brahman is this self (*ātman*); that [brahman] is this self (*ātman*) consisting of four quarters.

In this passage the sequence of equivalence is extended: *sarvam = brahman = ātman*. (Maitrī 6.3.: *Om̐ = ātman*, Taittirīya 1.8.1.: *Om̐ = brahman*, Chāndogya 2.23.3.: *Om̐ = sarvam*). The appearance of the term *ātman* can be interpreted as a kind of transition to another level. In the previous stanza there was a description of reality made from the presented, seemingly theoretical level. The introduction of the term *ātman* indicates that a new relationship has been introduced; the subject (and this, after all, in the broadest sense, is *ātman*) is presented with a specific reality. This reality is shown as real, concrete; this is how one can understand the double repetition of the pronoun *ayam* – “this here”; it is a typical technique also known from the other *mahāvākya* of the Upaniṣads. The specificity of any given situation is usually, as we read in many commentaries, symbolised by the movement of a hand directed at the heart, at the “abode” of *ātman*. In this one stanza two *mahāvākya*s are found. The achievement of the goal as defined in the first stanza will be possible when all definitions of reality are referred to the cognitive *ātman*, the only being capable of carrying out the cognitive and self-cognitive process. At this point, *ātman* symbolises the being manifested in a human form; *ātman* is the principle of being a human as a conscious and self-conscious being. As demonstrated by the Iśā Upaniṣad (6), the fulfilment and discovery of harmony and completeness of reality, *pūrṇam = ātman*, although filled with beings, is only possible in a human. Only a human being (Bṛhadāraṇyaka 2.5.1.) possesses advanced self-awareness and the ability to self-reflect and is the only one to ask questions of a transcendent nature. The transition to an anthropomorphic approach to reality is indicated by the introduction of the personal pronoun *sa*, “he.” As already mentioned in other chapters, this technique is quite common in the Upaniṣads and it may take the following form: an absolute → *puruṣa*, *ātman* → *puruṣavidha*, *tad* → *sa*. The personal pronoun is a kind of definition or clarification, albeit still a very general one. At the same time, the self-awareness of the subject is constituted, which, as other fragments demonstrate, leads to the original superimposition – *adhyāsa*, resulting in a cognitive error.

The third quarter is Prājña—the Intelligent One—situated in the state of deep sleep—deep sleep is when a sleeping man entertains no desires or sees no dreams—; become one, and thus being a single mass of perception; consisting of bliss, and thus enjoying bliss; and having thought as his mouth.

He is the Lord of all; he is the knower of all; he is the inner controller; he is the womb of all—for he is the origin and the dissolution of beings.

The state of consciousness, *prājña*, is described as *ānandamaya*, “consisting of bliss.” It is not a state of complete, absolute bliss; it is not pure bliss, because the text still mentions some kind of substance. “The Lord of all” is *sarveśvara*. We consistently interpret these passages in the spirit of the later Advaita system. By assuming this line of interpretation, one can see the role of *Īśvara* as functioning at the same level at which Śaṅkara placed it: not as identical to the pure, *nirguṇa brahman*, but as “coexisting” with the cosmic *māyā*. This *Īśvara* manifests itself as both the ruler of the world, as well as the very mechanism of manifestation and thus distinction. That manner of being indicates that it coexists with the realm of *māyā*. *Īśvara* is also referred to as *sarvajña*, “the knower of all,” which can be understood as “the one who knows the three times,” i.e. the mechanisms of the world’s operations. It is also an “inner controller,” *antaryāmin*. It not only guarantees the functioning of the world, but also ensures the meaningfulness of human existence. Another expression defining the state of *prājña* is “emerging and dissolving.” It is a state in which emergence and dissolution occurs alternately; this state is motion, dynamics, matrix (*mātra*) of *saṃsāra*. The phrase “the womb of all” may be understood in a way that the state of reality or consciousness is the source of the manifestation of the world. The Māṇḍūkya clearly formulates a very strong philosophical thesis that it is *Īśvara* (somehow correlated with the realm of *māyā*) and not *brahman*, that is the source of the presented world.

All these definitions perfectly correspond with the later Advaitic scheme adopted by Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara. The state of the *prājña* does not correspond to plain consciousness; it is not the same as pure *brahman*. It also includes a conscious cognitive act, however subtle – the concepts of *prajña* and *jñāna* are, indeed, often identified. The cognitive act itself can lead to *adhyāsa*, as this results from its very nature. Transcending this state means transcending *adhyāsa* and returning to the source, to a state of plain non-dual being – *a-dvaita*. The method enabling such return is indicated by the use of the term *cetomukha* – “directed only at the mind”; there is no more contact even with subtle objects, the whole procedure begins with the operation of the mind itself.

In his commentary to these stanzas, Śaṅkara evokes the image of a rope and snake as an allegory explaining the mechanism of a cognitive error. Someone may confuse a piece of rope with a snake, it may seem like a stream of water or even a curved stick. These representations appear one by one and they contradict each other. Contradicting and being contradicted by something else proves the unreality of these three states. But although they contradict themselves, they do

not deny the existence of a witness, the denying subject. It remains the same in all states. This fact indicates that it is the witness who is the reality (Bṛhadāraṇyaka 4.3.23 -30., 1.4.7.) A negation of inwardly oriented consciousness – as we read in Śaṅkara’s commentary – implies a negation of its content. The forms of an empirical subject figures identify themselves with three states; this implies a negation of the subject of dreams, the dreaming subject and the wakeful one. But it does not imply a negation of the pure subject.

They consider the fourth quarter as perceiving neither what is inside nor what is outside, nor even both together; not as a mass of perception, neither as perceiving nor as not perceiving; as unseen; as beyond the reach of ordinary transaction; as ungraspable; as without distinguishing marks; as unthinkable; as indescribable; as one whose essence is the perception of itself alone; as the cessation of the visible world; as tranquil; as auspicious; as without a second. That is the self (*ātman*), and it is that which should be perceived.

By claiming that the world disappears in the state of *turīya*, the Upaniṣad denies the independent existence of the mechanisms constituting “beings” in these states, which can be understood as a negation of the independent existence of the states of consciousness. This is why *turīya* is considered to be serene, a state that never ceases to be what it is, and is therefore devoid of duality – *advaita*, unaffected by any illusive (*māyā*) distinctions. It is called *turīya*, i.e. distinct from the three states which are its manifestations or representations.

*Ātman*, namely “that which should be perceived,” is recognised similarly to a piece of rope, which is ultimately different from its three representations: a snake, a stream of water or a piece of a stick. *Ātman* – the fourth state – is impossible to recognise due to ignorance, which characterises the three preceding states (they may only point to it). The truth (reality) occurs when *ātman* manifests itself, when the distinction between the cognitive subject and the object of cognition disappears.

In his commentary to Gaudapada’s 12th *kārikā*, Śaṅkara states that in the states of *viśva* and *taijasa* there is the awareness of duality – duality external to those states – as well as the awareness of the existence of a different *ātman*; it is the duality from which the seed of ignorance sprouts. But in the state of *prājñā* there is no such awareness. And this is why *prājñā* is described as being bound by darkness. This darkness takes the form of not grasping reality, which is the seed of mis-grasping. But *turīya* is always aware of everything. That is why it is omniscient, because there is nothing else but it. It is all that is. Therefore, it is not conditioned by not grasping reality, the seed of mis-grasping of it. And since there

is no seed, the mis-grasping is also absent. In the eternally shining Sun, darkness which is the contradiction of light is impossible. (Bṛhadāraṇyaka 4.4.23.)

To the previous identities: *ātman* = *brahman* = *sarvam* = *Oṃ* the term *caturtha* (*turiya*) is added, which is defined as: *amātra*, *avyavahārya*, *prapañca-upaśama*, *śiva*, *advaita*. The term *mātra*, “a measure,” refers to a dimension of reality which is characterised by measuring, organising and dividing. The term *amātra*, its negation, indicates a reality which is plain, indivisible, not composed of any parts. The word *mātra* comes from the root *mā* – “to measure”; from the same root comes the key term of the Advaita tradition – *māyā*. Thus, absolute reality is beyond representation, manifestation, delusion, or organisation, which are typical of *saṃsāra*. In the earlier stanzas the Upaniṣad defines the characteristics of particular states of consciousness (reality). It regarded the manifestations resulting from the overlapping of the mis-grasping of reality and the true perception of it. Advaita, as we know, adopts the concept of *vivarta* – “representation,” “manifestation” in order to keep the absolute reality unchanged. It was supposed to compete with and contradict the theory of *pariṇāma*, adopted by the schools of Sāṃkhya-Yoga.

The term *vyavahārya* indicates action in line with common practice or custom. These are activities that result from strictly defined tasks and rules, and whose universality is commonly “recognisable” and “verifiable.” Thus, the state of *turiya*, which is a contradiction of it, is intended to be a state beyond common knowledge. The recognition of this state is not a cognition made from everyday experience.

A very interesting phrase is *prapañca-upaśama*. The term *prapañca* means “development,” “manifestation,” “the process of ‘happening’ of the world,” “the definition of the nature of the world given to us in experience.” For Gaudapada it is a synonym for the term *dvaita*, duality, i.e. multiplicity and diversity. *Upaśama* means calming, silencing. Then, the state of *turiya* should be understood as calming, or disappearing of the manifested world. The level of *prapañca* is presented as order whose controller is *Īśvara*. Calmness, cessation of becoming makes the role of *Īśvara* superfluous. Thus, also *Īśvara*, as all other phenomena, disappears in the state of *turiya*.

The word *śiva* also appears here, which should be translated as: “gentle,” “favourable,” “auspicious.” Such a clearly positive term may indicate that the state of *turiya* should not only be understood negatively, although all the earlier descriptions of the described reality derive from the language of apophatic metaphysics. Thus, even though its description is *nirguṇic*, the reality is not necessarily “empty.” The term *śiva* is meant to indicate that *turiya* is a state free of

suffering. As the Chândogya 7.1.3. puts it: “those who know the self pass across sorrow.”

The last term, which is a sort of a summary of them all, is *advaita* – non-duality. It expresses the key thesis of this system, stating that there exists only the reality of *brahman*, that only *brahman* is sat. This is a much stronger formulation than the thesis of classical monism, since the latter presupposes the existence of a single substance, a single material or element, which, after all, can undergo certain transformations. In Advaita, *brahman-ātman* is a simple reality and in its absolute state it remains unchangeable in its realm. It is not so much actually transforming into the world but is a condition for the world to manifest itself. Only *brahman* absolutely exists, sat, and the reality manifested is described as: *sat, asat, anirvacanīya* – “unspeakable,” as well as “inexplicable.” In an absolute sense, *brahman* is different from the presented reality. The term *turiya* should be thus understood, as different from the three remaining states (dimensions?) of reality/consciousness.

The description of the state of *turiya* ends with the statement that everything previously described is *ātman*, the dimension of reality, which should be recognised. The next four stanzas explain in technical prose the meditation procedure that transforms the three states of reality/consciousness, by assigning to them subsequent symbolically understood letters into which the Om̐ mantra can be dissected. This description is concluded with a stanza similar to the one discussed earlier, which defines what *turiya* is. Some of the phrases are recurring.

The fourth, on the other hand, is without constituent phonemes; beyond the reach of ordinary transaction; the cessation of the visible world; auspicious; and unique.

Accordingly, the very self (*ātman*) is Om̐. Anyone who knows this enters the self (*ātman*) by himself (*ātman*).

The description ends with a statement that the state of *turiya* is identical to *ātman* and that this very fact should be recognised. Only then is a meditation pattern using the Om̐ mantra introduced, which helps to attain this truth. The final product of the cognitive procedure is simple *ātman*. As a result of the *adhyāsa* mechanism, *ātman* limited by *upādhi*, “used” Om̐ as a tool, visualised *brahman* as an object of experience, took on the form of an observer of the subsequently transcended, and in this way negated levels of consciousness. Only the reality of *ātman* is not contested. The cognitive procedure intended to have soteriological value begins with *ātman*. Only in *ātman*, which is the principle of human existence, may self-reflection appear as an impulse leading to liberation. The final culmination of the whole process is a simple, uninterrupted reality – pure *ātman*, pure subject, not oriented towards anything else but itself.

The one with sight, the mover in dreams,  
 The deeply asleep, and the one who is  
 beyond sleep—  
 These are the four divisions.  
 The greatest of them is the fourth.

This stanza sums up the four states of consciousness/reality, whose analysis is the content of the Māṇḍūkya. A slightly different naming of the individual states appears here. The state of wakefulness is called: *cākṣuṣa* – “seeing with the eyes,” thus emphasising the activity of the senses and empirical cognition. The third state is *śuṣṭa* – “sleeping.” But it is in the Maitrī, not in the Māṇḍūkya, that we find a technical term for the fourth state – *turya*. In the Māṇḍūkya, it is the term *caturtha*. But it is the term *turya* or *turiya* that is used in the classical Brahmanical *darshana*.

The Maitrī, which has been quoted several times, provides a very detailed analysis of the Om syllable and its role in the meditation procedure. Let us quote and interpret some of the most important passages for the deliberations here. As we will see, these fragments are in a way a summary of the considerations presented in the previous chapters.

There are two forms of brahman, the shaped and the unshaped. What is shaped is the unreal. What is unshaped is the real; it is brahman; it is light. What is light is the sun. This is OM. It became the self. It divided itself into three. OM is three elements. Through them, all this is woven on it as warp and weft. Someone has said, ‘One should apply (yuj-) oneself while meditating on this: the sun is OM.’

This passage contains, like almost all of the Maitrī, a great many cross-references – explicitly and implicitly – to the older Upaniṣads. We can read about the shaped (*mūrta*) and unshaped (*amūrta*) form (*rūpa*) of *brahman* in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka 2.3.1. *Rūpa* is a form, but not only in the sense of what is tangible, “material,” but any form that indicates its essence. This form, which has been shaped or structured, is treated as unreal (*asatyam*), and in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka it is referred to as mortal. Thus, the loss of ability for new forms or new phenomena to emerge is indicated. What is real is what is not shaped, what is fully potential and dynamic. What is both the very principle of the presented reality and the reality itself, what is growth – *br̥h*, is therefore called *brahman*. The reality called *brahman* is the light, or the form (*rūpa*), as well as the source of the light; it is symbolised by the sun. This is the very principle of existence – *sat*. The absolute reality understood in this way, reveals a subtlest, luminous figure. As we read in the text, what emerged and came into being is *ātman* (*ātmābhavat*). In the context of the Nāsadīya hymn, as well as the earliest Upaniṣads, this phrase seems surprising,

because *ātman* should then be ascribed to the dimension of *bhū*, i.e. becoming, which refers us to the manifested dimension. But it should be noted that the Maitrī Upaniṣad clearly states that any act of naming the reality is – by giving it a name – depriving it of its *nirguṇic* character. In the earlier texts it is said that this (absolute) reality is *ātman*, and it is *brahman*. In the Maitrī we find a phrase: “one called self” (3.1.). *Ātman* is a name of a *nirguṇic* being; the term *ātman* is used when referring to reality, as a principle of subjectivity. Absolute reality presents itself (*ātmānam*) and this presentation becomes the first form and the original object of knowledge and action.

The reality presented in this way becomes both the subject and the object of all procedures, including the subtlest one – the procedure of transforming oneself, which has a soteriological dimension. The tool of the soteriological procedure is called Om̐. But the mechanism of transformation requires the presence of parts to be transformed; a uniform, indivisible whole cannot be subjected to such procedures. And if there is nothing else but *ātman*, then it is *ātman* which emerges out of itself the parts to be transformed. The original object given in experience becomes light when taking a visible form, and is symbolised by the sacred eternal syllable Om̐ when it is uttered and heard. Let us recall here, that the word for “syllable” is *akṣara*, which also means “imperishable.” The Om̐ syllable consists of three sounds; a triple which gives rise to multiplicity. This is the warp of the presented world, the realm of all activity. There is a reference here to the metaphor of the weaving warp (*ota*, *protā*) known from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka on which everything is woven – *sarvam*. For a canvas to be woven, it is necessary to weave at least three threads, just as *prakṛti* is woven out of three *guṇas*.

The next stanza of the Maitrī Upaniṣad (6.4.) refers us to the identification of the syllable Om̐ with one of the main chants of the Vedic ritual, *udgītha*, most precisely described in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. The word *udgītha* is naturally divided into three parts or syllables: *ud – gī – tha*. In this passage it is stated that *udgītha*, also referred to as Om̐ has a form of light. It suggests that the original form (*rūpa*) and the original sound (the name, *nāma*) in fact had the same luminous nature. The syllable Om̐ is also called *praṇava*. The luminous nature of the sacred syllable is mentioned in the Maitrī 6.25.: “(...) one sees (. . .) the one (. . .) who is called the OM̐ (*praṇava*), in the form of light, free from sleep, free from old age, free from death, and free from sorrow.”

Number three seems to be the foundation of the presented reality. The following stanza describes various triads which form the dimensions of reality.

“What OM̐ is its sound-body.” Feminine, masculine, and neuter are its gender-body. Fire, air and the sun are its light-body. Brahmā, Rudra and Viṣṇu are its overlord-body.

The Gārhapatya, Dakṣiṇāgni and Āhavanīya are its mouth-body. Ṛc, yjus and sāman are its knowledge-body. BHŪḤ, BHUVAḤ and SVAḤ are its world-body. Past, present and future are its time-body. Breath, fire and the sun are its heat-body. Food, water and the moon are its growing-body. Intelligence, mind and sense of “I” are its consciousness-body. Breath, lower breath and diffused breath are its breath-body. So by saying “OM” these bodies come to be praised, worshipped and achieved. Someone has said, “Satyakāma, what the syllable OM is is brahman, both the higher and the lower.”

The act of the absolute being naming oneself, giving oneself a name, as it was explained in detail in the chapter dedicated to *aham*, results in the emergence of the original form which becomes the world. In the analysed passage, the word “form” was rendered with the term *tanū* – “body.” The world remains in such relation to the absolute as body to soul. The word *tanū* means body, person, self; similarly to *ātman*, it is sometimes used as the reflexive pronoun. It is a feminine word and in this context it is included in the list of concepts such as *māyā*, *avidyā*, *śakti* or *prakṛti*, which obscure the essence of reality. At the same time they point to this reality. And just as the Om̐ sound overshadows *ātman*, so the proper use of the Om̐ mantra enables the essence of reality to be grasped and penetrated, which ultimately is one. As a higher form it invariably exists in its realm, as a lower form it is/happens in its countless representations. But these representations are not independent entities, but forms of the absolute. Further, we read that Om̐ is both higher and lower brahman. The lower brahman is the world we experience as full of diversity as a result of the erroneous perception. We do not see that the essence and basis of multiplicity is indivisible unity. The Maitrī shows that the world seen as a multitude is set on triads; each triad calls to existence different structures functioning as distinct and diverse.

There are two brahmans to be named: sound and soundless. The soundless is revealed through sound. The sound is OM̐. By it one goes out upward and finds cessation in the soundless. This is the bourn, this is immortality, this is union and also ultimate bliss. Just as a spider goes up outwards by its thread and finds space, so one meditates on OM̐ and by it goes up outwards and finds independence. (. . .)

Someone has said:

There are two brahmans to be known,

The sound-brahman and the supreme.  
By bathing in the sound-brahman  
One wins the brahman that is supreme.

The concept of the *śabdabrahman* is presented here, a divine word considered to have world-forming power. In Indian thought, this concept is mainly adopted in the so-called grammar school. The Maitrī, whose final interpretation is *nirguṇic*, maintains the stance that the word – even a sacred one – is a form of the absolute.

However, there is no metaphysical difference between the source and the principle of reality and its forms, therefore through the manifestation of *brahman*, which is the word, its very essence may be penetrated. This lack of metaphysical difference between the two dimensions of reality is illustrated by the metaphor of a spider and a cobweb; although we experience them as separate, in fact the spider draws the thread from itself. To recognise *nirguṇa brahman* as existing beyond any category is to recognise reality in its totality; in this way everything is recognised. And to experience lower *brahman* is to experience its manifestations. When one manifestation is recognised, others remain outside the conscious cognitive act. Yet the manifestation points to the essence of being, and so the word leads to the reality not even mediated by the sacred word. The word is an instrument which, when applied properly to achieve its purpose, is later on rejected: “(...) one crosses to the farther shore of the space within the heart on the boat of the OM.” (Maitrī 6.28.) Then complete independence is achieved, independence from all categories, intermediation, or structures that differentiate or “fragment” reality. Because as the Maitrī 6.22. claims: “going beyond their separate characteristics, they meet their end in the supreme soundless unmanifest *brahman*.”

The god, the higher and the lower,  
Is called by name the OM:  
Without sound, become void,  
One should then concentrate on it in  
its place in the head.

God is *deva*, meaning luminous, as the etymology suggests. The name (*nāma*) is the sacred syllable Om̐. In this passage again, it becomes apparent how conscious the author of the text is of the use of language and the resulting limitations. A word is a category, an intermediary; Om̐ as a word is not so much a reality, as it points to a reality by naming it. Such a radically *nirguṇic* interpretation is supported by the successive terms used in this passage, which were analysed in more detail in the chapter dedicated to the Buddhist terms in the Maitrī Upaniṣad. Let us only recall the conclusions here.

The term “without a word” is originally *niḥśabda*. It is an indication of the lack of a certain distinctive attribute, because although the name of this level is Om̐, no word is fully adequate for its description; the word only indicates a given level achieved in the meditation procedure. Such a reasoning is also supported by the interpretation of the term *śūnya bhūta* – “empty in being,” or rather “empty in beings.” It refers to the previous stanza, where the orders of *śabda* and *aśabda* were contrasted. The order of *śabda* is connected with distinguishing

and assigning a separate existence to individual beings. Then the level of *śūnya bhūta* can be interpreted as existing (*sat*) beyond the individual beings (*bhava*). The distinction between the terms *nīśabda* and *aśabda* is not so much about the metaphysical level – brahman is both higher and lower – but about the epistemic dimension. It is not the reality that is different at the higher and the lower level, it is its perception and experience that differ. Therefore, the passage ends with the recommendation that the truth can only be recognised as a result of a meditative act. The following passage describes the meditation process in a very technical way:

The body is the bow; Om̐ is the arrow; the mind is its point. By piercing the target of darkness one comes to the darkness which is pervaded by non-darkness. Then, by piercing that which is pervaded, one has seen the supreme brahman, blazing like a circle of torchlight, the colour of the sun, powerful, beyond the darkness. That which is in the sun shines also in the moon, in fire and in lightning. By seeing it, one becomes immortal. Someone has said:

The meditation on the supreme entity within  
Is placed on the objects of sense,  
So the knowledge that is without distinction  
Becomes subject to distinction.

The joy that is witnessed by the self

When the mind is dissolved  
Is brahman, the immortal, the pure:  
It is the bourn; it is the world.

The body understood as a psychophysical organism is a bow, which means that not only the internal organ is used for a comprehensive meditation procedure, but also properly prepared senses of action and cognition. The syllable Om̐ acts as an arrow; for just as an arrow released from a bow is to hit the target, so the sound of Om̐, piercing the body along the *suṣumna*, is to lead to the highest goal, that is, to liberation. By passing through *suṣumna*, Om̐ awakens the elements and proceeds in the direction of the mind, towards this tool which is ultimately to transform consciousness/reality. The mind of a profane person, as evidenced by the above-mentioned excerpts, is obscured with passions, emotions and feelings, which overshadow his cognitive abilities, and therefore, as the text claims, he is surrounded by darkness. On the other hand, the mind of a yogi which, using the formulation of the Muṇḍaka, is purified by meditation, is able to pierce through darkness (*tamas*) and reach a state that allows insight into the essence of reality. Darkness points to that which it covers, so it is said to be a sign (*lakṣaṇa*), just like suffering (*duḥkha*) points to the possibility of achieving a state devoid of

any inconvenience. “So by OM one should worship the limitless brightness. By it one wakes up, rises up, and recovers one’s breath. There is a constant support through meditation on brahman.” (Maitrī. 7.11.) Darkness covers the reality called *brahman*. This reality is symbolised by the source of light, one source of various luminous phenomena. The source or the essence of reality, is metaphorically called immortality, a state neither subject to any transformations, nor conditioned by anything.

The mind in a state of contemplation (*dhyānam antaḥ*) is directed both towards external objects, which are initially props and points of attracting attention, and towards the highest goal. During the meditation procedure, cognition itself – which in this text is described as inherently devoid of any special features (*aviśeṣa*) – by focusing on individual objects, characterised by a variety of special features (*lakṣaṇa*), in a way becomes similar to them as well as tangible (*viśeṣa*). But when properly conducted meditation aims at the highest goal, then there is no longer any focus on a particular object. This state is called *aviśeṣa jñāna* – cognition without special features, without properties. Pure cognition melts with a featureless object – *aviśeṣa vastu*. This state is called “dissolution in the mind” – *mānase vilīne*. This is clearly a *nirguṇic* perspective; ultimately there is no difference between the individual and universal soul. The mind dissolves, the tool of cognition that served the intended purpose disappears. Then there is no longer any difference between the observer and the *ātman*; in the Maitrī, this state is described as *brahman* – the highest reality, devoid of any particular features: *aviśeṣa, nirguṇa*. There is no longer even a very subtle awareness of anything. This is pure consciousness, no longer focused on anything. The supreme being is purified of any limitations and contamination. Absolute being understood in this way can no longer even be considered a subject. Because it is not directed at anything, it is pure existence (*sat*), the principle of existence and subjectivity.



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