

The Vedantic Concept of Knowledge (Brahma Chatuspad).

The concept of Brahma Chatuspad is important for us as it is defining all the faculties of our consciousness (including senses) in relation to the Spirit and the Spirit to our consciousness.

Brahman, according to the Rishi Bhrigu, is depicted as *annaṃ prāṇaṃ cakṣuḥ śrotraṃ mano vācam iti*.¹

If we try to examine these faculties, we will find that they correspond to higher cognitive capacities of Consciousness as well to our ordinary level.

chakshuh shrotram ka u devo yunakti: “Who is the God who unites Seeing and Hearing?”²

- 1) SEEING, DRISHTI, CAKSHUS, was perceived as a faculty of consciousness which puts a seer into a direct contact with the object, which can be translated in terms of a "direct evidence of the truth". Drishti in the Vedas is the ultimate faculty of Consciousness, as a direct revelation of the Truth. It is of direct and self-evident nature, direct contact with the Self (as FORM).³
- 2) HEARING, SHRUTI, SHROTRAM. If Cakṣus is direct then Shrotram is of indirect nature (as Inspiration), without this faculty we may not know the relation of the object we see with the other objects we don't see. It's like we see a face, which tries to tell us something, but we can't hear it. We don't understand what it wants from us, because the intention is not visible. So everything which is intended but not yet manifest, realised, understood, is falling into the domain of Hearing, or “indirect evidence of the Truth”. It is of nature of all-pervading Space, connecting all into the Oneness, we can compare it to the Spirit.

MANAS and VAK, is another constant dvandva in Vedanta: *van me manasi pratishthita mano me vaci pratishthitam*, “My Speech is established in my Mind, and my Mind is established in my Speech.”⁴

- 3) MANAS, Mind, was perceived by Vedic seers as an equal faculty to Seeing and Hearing and not as their synthesiser, as it was categorised later in Sankhya and Yoga. It was considered to be equal to the Word-faculty also, which later was completely submitted to the Mind, fully depending on it. In the Vedic Vision MANAS was perceived as the active counterpart of the Seeing-faculty of the self-existent subject, SELF.

¹ TaitUp 3.1.2

² KeUp 1.1.1

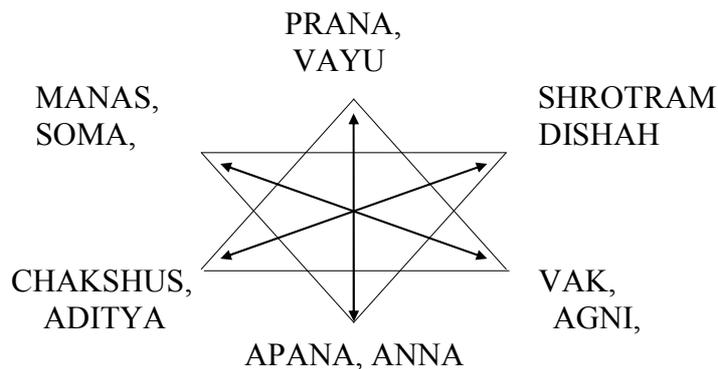
³ Savitri, p. 311

*But who has lifted up the veil of light
And who has seen the body of the King?
 The mystery of God's birth and acts remains
 Leaving unbroken the last chapter's seal,
 Unsolved the riddle of the unfinished Play;
 The cosmic Player laughs within his mask,
 And still the last inviolate secret hides
Behind the human glory of a Form,
Behind the gold eidolon of a Name.*

⁴ AitUp 1.1.1

4) VAK, Speech, was considered to be an independent faculty of Consciousness also, having it's own power and character. It was considered to be an Active part of the All-pervading Spirit: Hearing. Brahman was referred to as mantra in RV, and only later it came to denote Spirit.

Thus, these four *chakshus* and *srotram*, *manas* and *vak*, according to Upanishads, constitute *brahma chatushpad*, *Spirit on four legs or pillars*,⁵ through which Brahman, the Creator is manifested in the world. Prana very often symbolised the embodiment of Brahman itself, especially in the old Upanishads.⁶ It was also understood as the offspring of MANAS, as its father and VAK, as its mother.⁷ In this way the process of manifestation of the Spirit in matter was conceived, which made matter animated, annam ("eatable"). It gives us one more dvandva PRANA-APANA, Breathing in and Breathing out, or PRANA- ANNA, Life and Matter.⁸



(pict.1)

There are three dvandvas constantly used in Upanishads:

- 1) MANAS-VAK,⁹
- 2) CHAKSHUS- SHROTRAM,¹⁰
- 3) PRANA-APANA, or PRANA-ANNAM

There are also three major streams of cognition, according to Sri Aurobindo: Seeing, Hearing and Touch (see pict.2) as three basic cognitive accesses to Reality. In Vedic terminology "...for the truth-consciousness there are corresponding faculties,—*dr̥ṣṭi*, *śruti*, *viveka*, the direct vision of the truth, the direct hearing of its word, the direct discrimination of the right."¹¹

⁵ ChUp 3.18; KauUp 2.1-2

⁶ KauUp 2.1 *prāṇo brahmeti ha smāha kauṣītakiḥ*

⁷ BrhUp 1.5.7

⁸ PrUp 1.4; TaitUp 3.7.1 *prāṇe śarīraṃ pratiṣṭhitam śarīre prāṇaḥ pratiṣṭhitah*

⁹ cp: Agni-Soma in RV

¹⁰ cp: Nama-Rupa in Brahmanas

¹¹ The Secret of the Veda, p. 65

Seeing and Hearing are perceptive faculties (marked (-)), whereas Mind and Word are their active counterparts (marked (+)). These four are neutralised or, better to say, realised in the Manifestation of Life and Matter. In other words, Mind and Seeing are related to *Rupam*, Form, as the expression of the aspect of Power, whereas Word and Hearing to *Nama*, Name, as the expression of the aspect of Knowledge. These Knowledge and Power, as the source for Nama and Rupa, constitute the phenomenon of Consciousness in the Manifestation. It is by these Nama and Rupa that Brahman could enter in this creation.

There is a profound insight into the nature of Nama and Rupa and the usage of the word in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad:

*“That indeed was then unformed. That was formed by Name and Form: “He is of That Name and This Form!” And even now it is being defined as: “He is of That Name and This Form!”*¹²

Immense realities took on a shape:

There looked out from the shadow of the Unknown

The bodiless Namelessness that saw God born

And tries to gain from the mortal's mind and soul

A deathless body and a divine name.¹³

*“Thus He entered here up to the finger-tips. ... But none can see him, for He is incomplete: when He is breathing, then the Name becomes “Breath”; when He is speaking, then the Name is “Speech”; when He is seeing, then the Name is “Sight”; when He is hearing, then the Name becomes “Hearing”; when He is thinking, then the Name becomes “Mind”. These are indeed His names of different actions! So, if one believes in them separately one by one then he does not know. Being divided by separate actions He looks incomplete. The Self is to be considered as such, where all these become One.”*¹⁴

¹² BrUp 1.4.7

taddhedam tarhy avyākṛtam āsīd/ tannāmarūpābhyām eva vyākriyatāsaunāmā ‘yam idaṃrūpa iti/ tad idam apy etarhi nāmarūpābhyām eva vyākriyate ‘saunāmā ‘yam idaṃrūpa iti/

¹³ Savitri, p. 40

¹⁴ BrUp 1.4.7

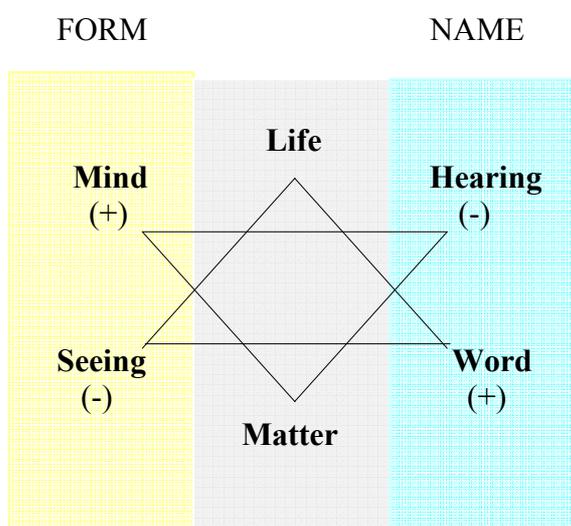
sa eṣa iha praviṣṭa ā nakhāgrebhyaḥ.../ taṃ na paśyanti/ akṛtsno hi sa prāṇanneva prāṇo nāma bhavati/ vadan vāk paśyaṃś cakṣuḥ śṛṇvañ śrotraṃ manvāno manaḥ/ tānyasyaitāni karmānāmāny eva/ sa yo ‘ta ekaikam upāste na sa veda/ akṛtsno hyeṣo ‘ta ekaikena bhavati/ ātmetyevopāsīta / atra hyete sarva ekaṃ bhavanti/ ...

This short passage is in its essence confirming the latest philosophical trends in the Western Philosophy of the 20th century, that the “ultimate signified” can not be grasped and known by any “signifier”, for it is partial. (Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, etc.) And if it is to be pointed out by a certain name then the name has to be taken “under erasure”, that is to delete the influence of the signifier once it was used. (Of Grammatology, Derrida,...)

The usage of the pronouns is meaningful here: “He is of *That* Name, and *This* Form.” The name is hidden, it is to be known, and it is always a symbol of some other reality, whereas the form is concrete and obvious: *This*.

Sri Aurobindo explains symbolism in his letters: “A symbol, as I understand it, is the form on one plane that represents a truth of another. For instance, a flag is the symbol of a nation.... But generally all forms are symbols. This body of ours is a symbol of our real being and everything is a symbol of some higher reality.”¹⁵ For Sri Aurobindo nothing stands here for itself, but represents some higher prototype here, being thus signifier and signified in itself.

These Nama and Rupa are also compared to Heaven and Earth, Father and Mother of the Child, Prana.¹⁶ Here we give a scheme with their identifications throughout different Upanishads:



(pict.2)

Dyauḥ	Antarikṣam	Ṙṥhivī	(BrhUp 1.5)
Sūrya	Vāyu	Agni	(TaitAr 1.1.1,2)
Pitā	Prajā	Mātā	(BrhUp 1.5)
Rūpam	Karma	Nāma	(BrhUp 1.6)
Manas (Artha) Yajña		Vāk	(AitBrh 25.8-9)
Caḥṣuḥ	Brahma	Shrotram	(KeUp 1.1.1)

There is an important passage in the Secret of the Veda, where Sri Aurobindo actually determines the central notion of the Veda introducing these faculties of consciousness: **“Truth comes to us as a light, a voice, (cp. *drishti* and *shruti*) compelling a change of thought, imposing a new discernment of ourselves and all around us (*viveka*). Truth of thought creates truth of vision and truth of vision forms in us truth of being, and out of truth of being (*satyam*) flows naturally truth of emotion, will and action. This is indeed the central notion of the Veda.”**¹⁷

¹⁵ LY 954

¹⁶ BrhUp 1.7.

¹⁷ The Secret of the Veda, p.100

The Gods and the Self. (Kena Upanishad)

“And when we have gone on thus eliminating, thus analysing all forms into the fundamental entities of the cosmos, we shall find that **these fundamental entities are really only two, ourselves and the gods.**”¹⁸

*yad asya tvam yad asya deveṣv atha nu mimāṃsyām eva te manye viditam*¹⁹

“Well, but what then of the Brahman is myself? and what of the Brahman is in the Gods? The answer is evident. I am a representation in the cosmos, but for all purposes of the cosmos a real representation of the Self; and the gods are a representation in the cosmos—a real representation since without them the cosmos could not continue—of the Lord. The one supreme Self is the essentiality of all these individual existences; the one supreme Lord is the Godhead in the gods.”²⁰

THE GODS

“The gods of the Upanishad have been supposed to be a figure for the senses, but although they act in the senses, they are yet much more than that. They represent the divine power in its great and fundamental cosmic functionings whether in man or in mind and life and matter in general; they are not the functionings themselves but something of the Divine which is essential to their operation and its immediate possessor and cause. They are, as we see from other Upanishads, positive self-representations of the Brahman leading to good, joy, light, love, immortality as against all that is a dark negation of these things. And it is necessarily in the mind, life, senses, and speech of man that the battle here reaches its height and approaches to its full meaning. The gods seek to lead these to good and light; the Titans, sons of darkness, seek to pierce them with ignorance and evil. Behind the gods is the Master-Consciousness of which they are the positive cosmic self-representations.”²¹

“The cosmic functionings through which the gods act, mind, life, speech, senses, body, must become aware of something beyond them which governs them, by which they are and move, by whose force they evolve, enlarge themselves and arrive at power and joy and capacity; to that they must turn from their ordinary operations; leaving these, leaving the false idea of independent action and self-ordering which is an egoism of mind and life and sense they must become consciously passive to the power, light and joy of something which is beyond themselves. What happens then is that this divine Unnameable reflects Himself openly in the gods. His light takes possession of the thinking mind, His power and joy of the life, His light and rapture of the emotional mind and the senses. Something of the supreme image of Brahman falls upon the world-nature and changes it into divine nature.”²²

¹⁸ Up 167

¹⁹ KeUp 4.4

²⁰ Up 168

²¹ Up 167

²² Up 177

*tasyaiṣa ādeśah yad etad vidyuto vyadyutat ā iti in nyāmimiśad ā ity adhidaivatam*²³

“All this is not done by a sudden miracle. **It comes by flashes, revelations, sudden touches and glimpses**; there is as if a leap of the lightning of revelation flaming out from those heavens for a moment and then returning into its secret source; as if the lifting of the eyelid of an inner vision and its falling again because the eye cannot look long and steadily on the utter light. The repetition of **these touches and visitings from the Beyond fixes the gods in their upward gaze and expectation, constant repetition fixes them in a constant passivity**; not moving out any longer to grasp at the forms of the universe mind, life and senses will more and more be fixed in the memory, in the understanding, in the joy of the touch and vision of that transcendent glory which they have now resolved to make their sole object; to that only they will learn to respond and not to the touches of outward things. The silence which has fallen on them and which is now their foundation and status will become their knowledge of the eternal silence which is Brahman; the response of their functioning to a supernal light, power, joy will become their knowledge of the eternal activity which is Brahman. Other status, other response and activity they will not know. The mind will know nothing but the Brahman, think of nothing but the Brahman, the Life will move to, embrace, enjoy nothing but the Brahman, the eye will see, the ear hear, the other senses sense nothing but the Brahman.”²⁴

“For the limit of ego, the wall of individuality will break; the individual Mind will cease to know itself as individual, it will be conscious only of universal Mind one everywhere in which individuals are only knots of the one mentality; so the individual life will lose its sense of separateness and live only in and as the one life in which all individuals are simply whirls of the indivisible flood of Pranic activity; the very body and senses will be no longer conscious of a separated existence, but the real body which the man will feel himself to be physically will be the whole Earth and the whole universe and the whole indivisible form of things wheresoever existent, and the senses also will be converted to this principle of sensation so that even in what we call the external, the eye will see Brahman only in every sight, the ear will hear Brahman only in every sound, the inner and outer body will feel Brahman only in every touch and the touch itself as if internal in the greater body. The soul whose gods are thus converted to this supreme law and religion, will realise in the cosmos itself and in all its multiplicity the truth of the One besides whom there is no other or second.

Moreover, becoming one with the formless and infinite, it will exceed the universe itself and see all the worlds not as external, not even as commensurate with itself, but as if within it.”²⁵

THE SELF

“The other entity which represents the Brahman in the cosmos is the self of the living and thinking creature, man. This self also is not an external mask; it is not form of the mind or form of the life or form of the body. It is something that supports these and makes them possible, something that can say positively like the gods, “I am” and not only “I seem”. ...

²³ KeUp 4.5

²⁴ Up 177-178

²⁵ *ibid.* 178

The Self and the Lord are one Brahman, whom we can realise through our self and realise through that which is essential in the cosmic movement. Just as our self constitutes our mind, body, life, senses, so that Self constitutes all mind, body, life, senses; it is the origin and essentiality of things. Just as the gods govern, supported by our self, the cosmos of our individual being, the action of our mind, senses and life, so the Lord governs as Mind of the mind, Sense of the sense, Life of the life, supporting His active divinity by His silent essential self-being, all cosmos and all form of being. As we have gone behind the forms of the cosmos to that which is essential in their being and movement and found our self and the gods, so we have to go behind our self and the gods and find the one supreme Self and the one supreme Godhead. Then we can say, "I think that I know."²⁶

On Knowledge

yasyāmatam tasya matam, matam yasya na veda saḥ.
avijñātam vijñatām vijñātam avijñatām²⁷

"But at once we have to qualify our assertion. I think not that I know perfectly, for that is impossible in the terms of our instruments of knowledge. I do not think for a moment that I know the Unknowable, that that can be put into the forms through which I must arrive at the Self and Lord; but at the same time I am no longer in ignorance, I know the Brahman in the only way in which I can know Him, in His self-revelation to me in terms not beyond the grasp of my psychology, manifest as the Self and the Lord. The mystery of existence is revealed in a way that utterly satisfies my being because it enables me first to comprehend it through these figures as far as it can be comprehended by me and, secondly, to enter into, to live in, to be one in law and being with and even to merge myself in the Brahman."

*pratibodhaviditam matam amṛtatvam hi vindate*²⁸

"The mind can only reflect in a sort of supreme understanding and experience the form, the image of the supreme as He shows Himself to our mentality. **Through this reflection we find, we know; the purpose of knowledge is accomplished, for we find immortality,** we enter into the law, the being, the beatitude of the Brahman-consciousness."²⁹

*ātmanā vindate vīryam vidyayā vindate 'mṛtam*³⁰

"By self-realisation of Brahman as our self we find the force, the divine energy which lifts us beyond the limitation, weakness, darkness, sorrow, all-pervading death of our mortal existence; by the knowledge of the one Brahman in all beings and in all

²⁶ Up 167

²⁷ KeUp 2.3

²⁸ ibid 2.4

²⁹ Up 169

³⁰ KeUp 2.4

the various movement of the cosmos we attain beyond these things to the infinity, the omnipotent being, the omniscient light, the pure beatitude of that divine existence.”³¹

“The conscious force that supports our embodied life **must become simply and purely a reflector of that supreme Consciousness and Power** of which its highest ordinary action is only a twilight figure; the Life must become a passively potent reflection and pure image of that supreme Life which is greater than all our utmost actual and potential vitality; the **Mind must resign itself** to be no more than a **faithful mirror** of the image of the superconscious Existence. By this conscious surrender of mind, life and senses to the Master of our senses, life and mind who alone really governs their action, by this turning of the cosmic existence into a passive reflection of the eternal being and a **faithful reproducer** of the nature of the Eternal we may hope to know and through knowledge to rise into that which is superconscious to us; we shall enter into the Silence that is master of an eternal, infinite, free and all-blissful activity.”³²

“This will be the transfiguration of the gods, but what of the self? For we have seen that there are two fundamental entities, the gods and the self, and the self in us is greater than the cosmic Powers, its Godward destination more vital to our perfection and self-fulfillment than any transfiguration of these lesser deities. Therefore not only must the gods find their one Godhead and resolve themselves into it; that is to say, not only must the cosmic principles working in us resolve themselves into the working of the One, the Principle of all principles, so that they shall become only a unified existence and single action of That in spite of all play of differentiation, but also and with a more fundamental necessity the self in us which supports the action of the gods must find and enter into the one Self of all individual existences, the indivisible Spirit to whom all souls are no more than dark or luminous centres of its consciousness.”³³

*athādhyātmaṃ yad etad gacchati va ca mano anena
caitad upasmaraty abhīkṣṇaṃ sankalpaḥ*³⁴

“This the self of man, since it is the essentiality of a mental being, will do through the mind. In the gods the transfiguration is effected by the Superconscious itself visiting their substance and opening their vision with its flashes until it has transformed them; but the **mind is capable of another action which is only apparently movement of mind, but really the movement of the self towards its own reality. The mind seems to go to That, to attain to it; it is lifted out of itself into something beyond** and, although it falls back, **still by the mind the will of knowledge** in the mental thought continually and at last **continuously remembers that** into which it has entered. On this the Self through the mind seizes and repeatedly dwells and so doing it is finally caught up into it and at last able to dwell securely in that transcendence. It transcends the mind, it transcends its own mental individualisation of the being, that which it now knows as itself; it ascends and takes foundation in the Self of all and in the status of self-joyous infinity which is the supreme manifestation of the Self. This

³¹ Up 169

³² Up 175-176

³³ Up 179

³⁴ KeUp 4.5

is the transcendent immortality, this is the spiritual existence which the Upanishads declare to be the goal of man and by which we pass out of the mortal state into the heaven of the Spirit.”

“For the universe seen as our mind sees it is the little, the divided, the parcelling out of existence and consciousness in which we know and express things by fragments, and we can never really cage in our intellectual and verbal fictions that infinite totality. Yet it is through the principles manifested in the universe that we have to arrive at That, **through the life, through the mind and through that highest mental knowledge which grasps at the fundamental Ideas that are like doors concealing behind them the Brahman and yet seeming to reveal Him.**”³⁵

“Much less, then, if we can only thus know the Master-Consciousness which is the form of the Brahman, can we pretend to know its utter ineffable reality which is beyond all knowledge. But if this were all, there would be no hope for the soul and a resigned Agnosticism would be the last word of wisdom. The truth is that though thus beyond our mentality and our highest ideative knowledge, **the Supreme does give Himself both to this knowledge and to our mentality in the way proper to each and by following that way we can arrive at Him, *but only on condition that we do not take our mentalising by the mind and our knowing by the higher thought for the full knowledge and rest in that with a satisfied possession.***”³⁶

³⁵ Up 166

³⁶ *ibid.*