

Brahman and the Atman

Read the story of Svetaketu and Uddalaka found in the Chandogya Upanishad using your Internet search engine. Now arrange these statements to put the story of Svetaketu and his father, Uddalaka, into the correct order.

Deep in the forest lived a learned hermit, a sage called Uddalaka and his son, Svetaketu. Uddalaka sent Svetaketu to an Ashram, for education, once he had come of age. After 12 years at the Ashram, Svetaketu returned home announcing, "I learned everything that can be known, father".

"So why can't I see it?" asked Svetaketu. "If we cannot see the essence, the Atman, how can we truly know it exists?" "Ah, go and fill a glass with water and pour salt into it and bring it to me, please," said Uddalaka, "now we'll leave it overnight and return to me in the morning."

"Now try some from the centre. How does it taste?" "Salty, father," came the reply. "As you cannot see the salt, you cannot see the essence. However, it is always present and everywhere. The Atman permeates everything, and you too are that, Svetaketu."

Svetaketu looked puzzled at his father who replies to his quizzical look, "The life I refer to, that does not die, is the Atman, you are the Atman, and the Atman is inescapable and in everything living or non-living".

Upon hearing this, Uddalaka fell silent and thought, "Clearly he has not learned all there is to know. He has not grasped the essence of supreme knowledge. He has not fully understood the concept of Brahman which in turn would bring humility."

"Come with me," said his father, "can you see which of the branches of that tree is dead? It dies if deprived of sap, but the sap does not die." As they were talking, a group of people carry a deceased man to be cremated. "Look," says Uddalaka, "similarly, when life deserts the body, the body dies, but the life does not."

Svetaketu replied, "What is that instruction, learned one?" Uddalaka said, "Just as through one lump of clay all that is made of clay is known the Truth can be known too." Svetaketu, unaware of what his father meant, asked Uddalaka to teach him.

Uddalaka said to his son, "You say you know everything that can be known. Have you ever asked for that instruction by which one hears what cannot be heard, but which one sees what cannot be seen, by which one knows what cannot be known?"

Svetaketu returned to his father in the morning with that very same glass. "Can you see the salt?" Asked Uddalaka. Svetaketu looked, but the salt was no longer visible. "Now take a sip from the glass. How does it taste?" said Uddalaka. "Salty," replied his son.

Extension:

- 1) Explain what this story teaches a Hindu about the connection between Brahman and the Atman.
- 2) Look up the Katha Upanishad (Chapter 5) and explain how this links to the teachings found throughout.

Ordering the statements into their correct order. Order on the sheet is jumbled at the moment.
Correct order below:

- 1) Deep in the forest lived a learned hermit...
- 2) Upon hearing this, Uddalaka fell silent...
- 3) Uddalaka said to his son, "You say you know..."
- 4) Svetaketu replied, "What is that instruction..."
- 5) "Come with me," said his father...
- 6) Svetaketu looked puzzled at his father...
- 7) "So why can't I see it?" Asked Svetaketu...
- 8) Svetaketu returned to his father in the morning...
- 9) "Now try some from the centre..."