

THE Upanishads FOR AWAKENING

A Practical Commentary on
India's Classical Scriptures



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Part of the Dharma for Awakening Collection

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by

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“Let those truths which are in the
Upanishads live in me dedicated to the Self.”

(Invocation at the beginning of the Kena Upanishad)

Preface

The sacred scriptures of India are vast. Yet they are only different ways of seeing the same thing, the One Thing which makes them both valid and ultimately harmonious. That unifying subject is Brahman: God the Absolute, beyond and besides whom there is no “other” whatsoever.

The thirteen major Upanishads are the fountainhead of all expositions of Brahman. The word “upanishad” itself comes from the root word *upasana*, which means to draw or sit near, and is usually considered to mean that which was heard when the student sat near the teacher to learn the eternal truths.

We do not know who wrote the Upanishads. This has a distinct advantage in that the image of a historical, finite personality does not intervene to obscure the revelation handed on to spiritual aspirants. The authority of the Upanishads rests not upon those who wrote them, but upon the demonstrable truths they express. They are as self-sufficient and self-evident as the multiplication tables or the Table of Elements. They are simply the complete and unobscured truth. And realization of that Truth alone matters.

The teachings of the Upanishads are the supreme expressions of the eternal wisdom, the eternal vision of the ancient rishis (sages) of India. Consequently, though simple in their mode of expression, they can be extremely difficult to grasp. There are many things in this world that we need not know, but the truths embodied in the Upanishads and their inspired digest-summary, the Bhagavad Gita, are invaluable for all who would ascend to higher consciousness.

The Upanishads have long interested students of philosophy in the West. The English philosopher David Hume translated some of them into English in the eighteenth century. Later he travelled to America where he taught Sanskrit to Thomas Jefferson and together they studied the Upanishads in their original form.

In this commentary I am using the translation of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, one of India’s most distinguished scholars in religion and philosophy. He was also the first Vice President of India (1952–1962) and the second President of India from 1962 to 1967. His works, which included English translations of the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Dhammapada, are of continuing value both intellectually and spiritually. Here I am giving only his translation of the upanishadic texts, but his translation, *The Principal Upanishads*, contains the original Sanskrit text in transliteration and a great deal of notes to clarify the text. So I recommend you obtain this most valuable book as a major element in your spiritual library. *The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal* by Swami Prabhavananda is a beautiful interpretive translation like his marvelous translation: *Bhagavad Gita: The Song of God*. I recommend that you obtain them both.

I have only commented on passages that seemed to need it. But I have included all the passages that convey eternal truths and need no comment. I have omitted

passages that do not deal directly with realization of the Self or those which are so obscure (especially in symbolism as well as the ancient form of Sanskrit) it is anyone's guess as to what they really mean.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

In the beginning this (world) was only the Self [Atman], in the shape of a person. Looking around he saw nothing else than the Self. He first said, I am Soham [I am That]. (1.4.1)

Soham is the “first speaking” of the Absolute Itself: the expression of the knowledge and knowing of the Self. Soham is the Name (Embodiment) of the Primeval Being, the Self of the Universe and the Self of our Selves. Soham is the Consciousness of Brahman and of the Self of each one of us. We, too, are Soham.

In the section of the Yoga Sutras (1:27) dealing with Ishwara, the Supreme Lord, also known as Viraj, Patanjali makes this statement: *Tasya vachakah pranavah*—“His vachaka is the pranava.” “Vachaka” means speech or speaking. “Pranava” means Life, Life-Giver and Breath Principle: the Breath Word. It is commonly thought of as Om, but integrating this with the verse we have been considering, we see that the Breath Word is Soham. For “he first said: ‘Soham.’” Patanjali continues regarding the Pranava: “Its constant repetition and meditation [is the way]. From it [result] the disappearance of obstacles [to enlightenment] and turning inward of consciousness” (1:28-29). Soham is the Breath and Life Word. Ishwara “speaks” Soham as the foundation of the universe, as the evolutionary life force within the cosmos and every individual being.

This is a key verse in the Upanishads, as it relates to both the philosophy of our true nature and the interior yogic process by which we realize it. We invoke our lower self when we say “I,” but in meditation we invoke our higher, divine Self when we mentally intone Soham in time with the breath: *So* when we inhale, and *ham* when we exhale. (See *Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self* regarding this as the means to Self-realization.) In the sixteenth verse of the Isha Upanishad it says: “I am that Purusha: I am Soham.”

At that time this [universe] was undifferentiated. It became differentiated by name and form. He [the Self] entered in here, as a razor is [hidden] in the razor-case, or as fire in the fire-source. The Self is to be meditated upon, for in it all these become one. (1.4.7)

At that time this [universe] was undifferentiated. It became differentiated by name and form.

At first only undifferentiated Unity existed, but inherent in It was all relative existence. Consequently it expanded into the cosmos—causal, astral, and physical—which is nothing but endless variations of name (*nama*) and form (*rupa*). This could only be true because the universe is fundamentally ideational (conceptual) in nature, and only an idea or dream in the consciousness of God and all sentient beings. Everything we see or experience is a thought in the minds of God and ourselves. That is why liberation is only a matter of awakening, of the

transformation of consciousness. Even good deeds are really just good thoughts. Thought and act are the same thing, however differently they may seem to us who are asleep in the dream. Enlightenment is living awake in the dream. (See the recording of Paramhansa Yogananda, *Awake in the Cosmic Dream*.) This is why all true yoga takes place solely in the mind, even if we experience physical phenomena during its practice. And the results we are after are purely psychological. This is a major fact for yogis to know.

The only way we can manage in the world of duality is to acknowledge and deal with name and form as realities, which they are, but only temporary ones. It is when we think they are all there is to life, here or hereafter, that we get into delusion and the misery of samsara begins and lasts long, through creation cycles. To awaken from the dream and be free is an option open only to the yogi who knows, “I am Soham.”

Meditation on that which is not the Self is pointless. Leaving name and form behind we must begin with the invocation of non-dual Reality that in the beginning was Soham. (Again, see *Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self*.)

That Self is dearer than everything else and is innermost. (1.4.8)

Nothing that is finite and external to us can satisfy us, because the only reality is infinite and within us. And that infinite and inmost entity is our own Self.

Those who seek the Self as not just the highest but the only good, certainly see the world around them in a manner totally opposite to those who do not hold the Self as dearer than everything else and innermost.

Whoever worships another divinity (than his Self) thinking that he is one and (Brahman) another, he knows not. (1.4.10)

If we begin with ignorance we will end up with ignorance. Those who approach spiritual life with any perspective other than the truth of their identity with the Self and the Supreme Self, Brahman, will not come to the Knowing that is really Self-realization, the awakening into the consciousness of the Self and Brahman, the Self of the Self.

Even if one performs a great and holy work, but without knowing this, that work of his is exhausted in the end. One should meditate only on the Self as his (true) world. The work of him who meditates on the Self alone as his world is not exhausted for, out of that very Self he creates whatsoever he desires. (1.4.15)

All that we attain outside the knowledge of the Self will melt and vanish away. This is the simple truth. Therefore Atmajnana, knowledge of the Self, should be the central pursuit of our life.

Only a matter of days before commenting on this verse, I read in a book of the teachings of Sri Gajanan Maharaj, a great twentieth century master yogi, that the yogi who applies himself to sadhana for the realization of the Self becomes himself

the granter of all his desires.

The great teacher, Ajatashatru, was asked by a man named Gargya to teach him the truth about Brahman. Ajatashatru agrees, and this is what occurred:

Taking him [Gargya] by the hand he rose. The two together came to a person who was asleep. They addressed him with these names: Great, White-robed, Radiant Soma. The man did not get up. He woke him by rubbing him with his hand. He then got up. (2.1.15)

Occasionally in the Upanishads we find humor used to make a point, and this is one of them. Coming across a sleeping man, Ajatashatru addressed him as the divine Self: “Great, White-robed, Radiant Soma.” But it did no good, for the man was unconscious. It was pointless to address him at all. In the same way, all the positive affirming and philosophizing are worthless if the speaker and the hearers are spiritually asleep! Such sleepers do not need high-sounding words about the Self: they need to awaken. So Ajatashatru shook him until he woke up. We need to be shaken up, to awaken and see with our real eyes and hear with our real ears. Otherwise nothing meaningful will go on. The truth being spoken to us means nothing if we are not awake to hear it. Yoga is the great awakener. Other factors can disturb our sleep, get us to open our eyes a bit and then go back to sleep and just mumble and turn over and sleep on. But yoga alone fully awakens us. All the religion and piety mean absolutely nothing if we are not awake and clear in the mind.

Verily, not for the sake of all is all dear, but all is dear for the sake of the Self. Verily, it is the Self that should be seen, heard of, reflected on and meditated upon. Verily, by the seeing of, by the hearing of, by the thinking of, by the understanding of the Self, all this is known. (2.4.5)

The Self (Atman) is of the nature of bliss (ananda). When something makes us happy, it is not the thing itself that is the source of happiness, but rather the touch of the joy that is the Self which we experience. Actually, our response to that thing opens the barrier between us and the Self for a while, and like the light coming through the shutter of a camera we get a flash, a glimpse, of the bliss of the Self. What we are really valuing is that touch of the Self, but in our ignorance we think those objects are the source. Therefore it really is because of (“for the sake of”) the Self that they are thought by us as dear.

The wise seek to know the Self through study, deep thought, and meditation upon the Self. And we are assured that “by the seeing of, by the hearing of, by the thinking of, by the understanding of the Self, all this is known.”

To know the Self is to know everything. To not know the Self is to know nothing.

As a lump of salt thrown in water becomes dissolved in water and there

would not be any of it to seize forth as it were, but wherever one may take [taste] it is salty indeed, so, verily, this great being, infinite, limitless, consists of nothing but consciousness [samjnana]. (2.4.12-14)

Nothing exists but infinite, limitless Consciousness: Brahman. There is no place or no thing that is not essentially Consciousness. The Self-realized person perceives this directly and continuously. The enlightened individual does not go into a kind of non-dual coma in which nothing is perceived. Rather, those who know Brahman still hear and see names and forms as before, but now they know that they are seeing only the Supreme Self. They do not just *believe* that, they *perceive* that to be so. Only the One remains, however many things might be seen in the cosmic dream.

This shining, immortal person who is in this earth and with reference to oneself, this shining, immortal person who is in the body, he, indeed, is just this Self. This is immortal, this is Brahman, this is all. (2.5.1)

Within this material creation, as the Projector of the dream creation, is the self-luminous, immortal Person, the Parampurusha, the Cosmic Dreamer. And within this material body is the self-luminous, immortal Self, the jiva, the individual purusha who is dreaming along with the Dreamer its personal, finite dream of incarnation after incarnation.

This Self, verily, is the lord of all beings, the king of all beings. As all the spokes are held together in the hub and felly of a wheel, just so, in this Self, all beings, all gods, all worlds, all breathing creatures, all these selves are held together. This, verily, is the person dwelling in all bodies. There is nothing that is not covered by him, nothing that is not pervaded by him. This Brahman is without an earlier and without a later, without an inside, without an outside. This Brahman is the Self, the all-perceiving. (2.5.15, 18, 19)

It is this dynamic Unity beyond past, future, inside or outside which we must realize and recognize as the Self of our Self, the Consciousness in our consciousness.

Perhaps the greatest of the sages whose teaching are presented in the Upanishads was Yajnavalkya. He was once asked:

Since everything here [in this world] is pervaded by death, since everything is overcome by death, by what means does the sacrificer free himself from the reach of death?

[Yajnavalkya replied:] By speech [vak]. Verily, through speech. This [speech] is freedom [mukti-liberation], this is complete freedom. (3.1.3)

By the power of sound liberation is attained, as is stated by the last sutra of the Brahma Sutras. Through mantric invocation of the Immortal, the yogi becomes liberated, not partially but completely.

Yajnavalkya, said he: When such a person [a liberated sage] dies, do the vital breaths move up from him or do they not?

No, replied Yajnavalkya. They are gathered together in him. (3.2.11)

Just as a snake sheds its skin, so the liberated person leaves his material (annamaya) body behind. But his subtle astral and causal energy bodies merge into him, are literally transmuted and assumed into spirit. For after all, everything is essentially spirit in manifestation.

Yajnavalkya, said he: When such a person dies, what is it that does not leave him?

The name. The name is infinite. Thereby he [who knows this] wins an infinite world. (3.2.12)

“Name” here means the mantric designation/embodiment of the Self, of Pure Consciousness: Soham. In the very first verse I have commented on it says that the Cosmic Self in the beginning first said: *Soham asmi*: “I Am Soham.” And as we will see later in the sixteenth verse of the Isha Upanishad, the departing Self says exactly the same: “I Am Soham.”

He who breathes in with your breathing in is the Self of yours which is in all things. He who breathes out with your breathing out is the Self of yours which is in all things. He is your Self which is in all things. (3.4.1)

Inhalation and exhalation are direct manifestations of the Self, and therefore breath yoked to sound is the yogi’s indispensable tool. It is the Self which breathes within the breath, vibrating *So* during inhalation and *Ham* during exhalation. Therefore the yogi observes his breath and mentally intones the same in order to link with and merge into the consciousness that is his Self.

You cannot see the seer of seeing, you cannot hear the hearer of hearing, you cannot think the thinker of thinking, you cannot understand the understander of understanding. He is your Self which is in all things. Everything else is of pain [arta]. (3.4.2)

Sri Ramakrishna was once asked: “What is the Self?” He answered: “The witness of the mind,” which includes all the perceptions of the senses. It is Consciousness Itself.

Arta means pain(ed), distress(ed) and affliction (afflicted), which certainly apply to both the world and those in it. Everything but the Self is arta.

He who dwells in all beings, yet is within all beings, whom no beings know, whose body is all beings, who controls all beings from within, he is your Self, the inner controller, the immortal. Thus far with reference to the beings. Now with reference to the Self.

He who dwells in the breath, yet is within the breath, whom the breath does not know, whose body the breath is, who controls the breath from

within, he is your Self, the inner controller, the immortal. (3.7.15-16)

Again we see why breath is indispensable to the yogi, and why the breath is the foundation of authentic Raja Yoga—not the contortions of the breath produced by the breathing exercises of Hatha Yoga, but the Atmic Breath, the natural, spontaneous breath of the Self which vibrates *So* and *Ham* as its essence.

Verily, that Imperishable is unseen but is the seer, is unheard but is the hearer, unthought but is the thinker, unknown but is the knower. There is no other seer but this, there is no other hearer but this, there is no other thinker but this, there is no other knower but this. (3.8.11)

Infinite Consciousness pervades everything. That is Brahman. And the Katha Upanishad says to each one of us: *Tat Twam Asi*: Thou Art That.

**Then Vidagdha Sakalya asked him, How many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?
He answered: Three hundred and three, and three thousand and three.**

How many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?

Thirty three.

How many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?

Six.

How many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?

Three.

How many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?

Two.

How many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?

One and a half.

How many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?

One. (3.9.1)

Depending on how we look at it, there are many gods and yet only One. In the following twenty-seven verses there are enumerations of the gods indicated by all the numbers before One. You will find them in the complete translation of the Upanishads. But at the very end we find this:

Which is the one God?

The Breath [Prana]. He is Brahman. They call him tyat [that]. (3.9.9)

Here again we see why the breath is an indispensable element of yoga sadhana.

The Self is not this, not this [neti, neti]. He is incomprehensible for he is never comprehended. He is indestructible for he cannot be destroyed. He is unattached for he does not attach himself. He is unfettered, he does not suffer, he is not injured. (4.2.4)

This very clear, but let us recall the glorious words of the Bhagavad Gita:

“It is known that the unreal never comes to be, and the real never ceases to be. The certainty of both of these principles is seen by those who see the truth. Know

indeed that That by which all this universe is pervaded is indestructible. There is no one whatsoever capable of the destruction of the Eternal.

“Neither is the Self slain, nor yet does it die at any time; nor having been will it ever come not to be. Birthless, eternal, perpetual, primeval, it is not slain whenever the body is slain. This Self by weapons is cut not; this Self by fire is burnt not; this Self by water is wet not; and this Self is by wind dried not. This Self cannot be cut, burnt, wetted, nor dried. This primeval Self is eternal, all-pervading, and immovable. Unmanifest, unthinkable, this Self is called unchangeable” (2:16-17, 20, 23-25)

That Self is, indeed, Brahman, consisting of [or identified with] the understanding, mind, life, sight, hearing, earth, water, air, ether, light and no light, desire and absence of desire, anger and absence of anger, righteousness and absence of righteousness and all things. This is what is meant by saying, [it] consists of this [what is perceived], consists of that [what is inferred]. According as one acts, according as one behaves, so does he become. The doer of good becomes good, the doer of evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action. Others, however, say that a person consists of desires. As is his desire so is his will; as is his will, so is the deed he does, whatever deed he does, that he attains. (4.4.5)

This is a description of both Brahman and the Self in their relation with relative existence. It is especially an outline of the dream-life of the individual spirit. For in all these identifications and changes, the Self is unchanging, in all these births and deaths the Self remains birthless and deathless. The fact that we so easily forget this truth is evidence of how good we are at fooling ourselves. We are always masters of the situation.

I especially want to point out that the Upanishad is not saying that by doing good one becomes good. Rather it is saying that good dream actions produce good dreams, that the quality of the role the individual person is playing in the dream changes according to the person's actions. But it is only a drama, the reality being that the Self is never really a part of relativity, nor can the dreams of relativity affect the true, transcendent nature of the Self, any more than Brahman is affected by the changes of the dream creation.

On this there is the following verse: “The object to which the mind is attached, the subtle Self goes together with the deed, being attached to it alone. Exhausting the results of whatever works he did in this world he comes again from that world, to this world for [fresh] work.” This [is for] the man who desires. But the man who does not desire, he who is without desire, who is freed from desire, whose desire is satisfied, whose desire is the Self, his breaths do not depart. Being Brahman he goes to Brahman.

On this there is the following verse: “When all the desires that dwell in the heart are cast away, then does the mortal become immortal, then he

attains Brahman here [in this very body].” Just as the slough of a snake lies on an anthill, dead, cast off, even so lies this body. But this disembodied, immortal life is Brahman only, is light indeed.

On this there are the following verses: “The narrow ancient path which stretches far away, has been touched [found] by me, has been realized by me. By it, the wise, the knowers of Brahman go up to the heavenly world after the fall of this body, being freed [even while living].

“That path was found by a Brahmana and by it goes the knower of Brahman, the doer of right and the shining one.” (4.4.6-9)

The way to realization is subtle. Without refinement of mind and the interior faculties of perception, yoga is not going on. Yoga is itself the purification of the mind and heart in order to allow the highest powers of the individual to come into play and transform his life and consciousness. This is a total overhaul of external and internal life, and yet it is only a part of yoga.

The yogic path is long and “stretches far away.” It takes lifetimes—many if we dawdle, and not so many if we knuckle down and put our whole heart into it. So we need to get busy. There can be no periods of coasting along, deluding ourselves that our liberation is assured and just around the next corner. Buddha meditated and engaged in intense discipline right up to the moment of his leaving the body, even though he had attained enlightenment decades before. And so did Swami Sivananda. All real yogis do the same.

The successful yogi is “freed even while living.” Liberation takes place right here in this world which is no longer an obstacle to enlightenment. By changing himself the yogi changes the effect the world has on him. What hindered him before now helps him. The once-closed door is now open to him. Death is the final going through that door. For him there will be no return unless he wills it.

It is interesting that “The narrow ancient path which stretches far away has been found by me” is paraphrased in the esoteric Creed of the Wedgwood-Leadbetter Mass, which says: “We believe in the Law of Good which rules the world and by which one day all His sons shall reach the feet of the Father, however far they stray: We strive towards *the ancient narrow path* that leads to life eternal. So shall His blessing rest on us and peace forevermore. Amen.”

Into blind darkness enter they who worship ignorance; into greater darkness than that, as it were, they that delight in knowledge [enter].

Those worlds covered with blind darkness are called joyless. To them after death go those people who have not knowledge, who are not awakened. (4.4.10-11)

Those who worship the darkness of ignorance enter the realms of darkness after death. And those devoted to knowledge that is no true knowledge at all, but also ignorance, enter into even darker worlds after death. That is why Jesus said: “If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matthew 6:23). For if we are deluded and our “light” which we think is

knowledge is really false and is darkness, we will never seek the true light.

Any relative world is fundamentally joyless and enveloped in darkness, so the truly wise understand. No world is fit to live in, for they are all realms of death and constant change. There is no peace possible for those who live therein. But those who know the Self have ended that compulsion, for:

If a person knows the Self as “I am this [purusha],” then wishing what, and for desire of what should he suffer in the body? (4.4.12)

Needing nothing more than the Self, to what pain or trouble will he impel himself, for whom or to what purpose? He abides in complete realization: I am the purusha, the Self. Desire being the root of rebirth, when it is eliminated rebirth vanishes along with it.

Whoever has found and has awakened to the Self that has entered into this perilous, inaccessible place [the body], he is the maker of the universe, for he is the maker of all. His is the world, indeed he is the world itself. (4.4.13)

Since the Self wills the entry into relative existence and the lives therein, it “makes” the universe. For the universe is but a dream within a dream, the dream of the individual Self within the dream of the Supreme Self.

Verily, while we are here we may know this; if [we know it] not we would be ignorant, great is the destruction. Those who know this become immortal while others go only to sorrow. (4.4.14)

This is a truth which our earthly experiences prove over and over, yet human beings run after everything but Brahman, thinking that outside Brahman peace and fulfillment is possible. The suffering may be very subtle, but it will be there, nonetheless.

If one clearly beholds him as the Self, as God, as the lord of what has been and what will be, he does not shrink away from him. (4.4.15)

Since darkness is dispelled by light, those who dwell in darkness while thinking it is light run away from the light lest it take away their false “light.” Insane as it is, humans run after that which pains and destroys them and run away from that which can end all suffering and death for them. This is what it means to be truly negative: darkness is seen as light and light is seen as darkness. It is like a photographic negative in which the light portions are dark and the dark portions are light. As long as we cling to the unreal, to darkness and to death, we cannot be led to the Real, to the Light and to Immortality. What a terrible condition!

That in front of which the year revolves with its days, that the gods worship as the light of lights, as life immortal.

That in which the five groups of five and space are established, that alone I regard as the Self. Knowing that immortal Brahman I am immortal.

(4.4.16-17)

In this creation, things are grouped in fives, such as the five senses, the five bodies, etc.. All rest in the immortal Self. When one knows that Self as Brahman, he realizes: "I am immortal."

I am simply going to give much of the rest of this section without comment, because by now I am sure you get the idea which has been repeated in so many various and wise ways. And yet I hope you feel like Arjuna when he told Krishna: "Explain to me further in detail your powers and manifestations. I am never satiated with hearing your amrita-like words" (Bhagavad Gita 10:18).

They who know the life of life, the eye of the eye, the ear of the ear and the mind of the mind, they have realized the ancient primordial Brahman.

Only by the mind is it to be perceived. In it there is no diversity. He goes from death to death, who sees in it, as it were, diversity.

This indemonstrable and constant being can be realized as one only. The Self is taintless, beyond space, unborn, great and constant.

Let a wise Brahmana after knowing him alone, practice [the means to] wisdom. Let him not reflect on many words, for that is mere weariness of speech.

Verily, he is the great unborn Self who is this [person] consisting of knowledge among the senses. In the space within the heart lies the controller of all, the lord of all, the ruler of all. He does not become greater by good works nor smaller by evil works. He is the bridge that serves as the boundary to keep the different worlds apart. Him the Brahmanas seek to know by the study of the Veda, by sacrifices, by gifts, by penance, by fasting. On knowing Him in truth, one becomes an ascetic. Desiring Him only as their worlds, monks wander forth. Verily, because they know this, the ancient [sages] did not wish for offspring. What shall we do with offspring [they said], we who have attained this Self, this world. They, having risen above the desire for sons, the desire for wealth, the desire for worlds, led the life of a mendicant. For the desire for sons is the desire for wealth and the desire for wealth is the desire for worlds; both these are, indeed, desires only. The Self is [that which has been described as] Not This; Not This. He is incomprehensible for He is never comprehended. He is indestructible for He cannot be destroyed. He is unattached for He does not attach himself. He is unfettered, He does not suffer, He is not injured. Him [who knows this] these two [thoughts] do not overcome, for some reason he has done evil or for some reason he has done good. He overcomes both what he has done or what he has not done does not burn [affect] him.

This very [doctrine] has been expressed in the hymn. This eternal greatness of the knower of Brahman is not increased by work nor diminished. One should know the nature of that alone. Having found that, one is not tainted by evil action. Therefore he who knows it as such, having become calm, Self-controlled, withdrawn, patient and collected sees the Self in his

own Self, sees all in the Self. Evil does not overcome him, he overcomes all evil. Evil does not burn [affect] him, he burns [consumes] all evil. Free from evil, free from taint, free from doubt he becomes a knower of Brahma. This is the world of Brahma.

This is that great unborn Self who is undecaying, undying, immortal, fearless, Brahman. Verily, Brahman is fearless. He who knows this becomes the fearless Brahman. (4.4.18-25)

In the space [akasha] within the heart lies.... The ultimate Self of all is Brahman that dwells in each sentient being. It can be said of each of them what Saint Paul said about Jesus: "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9). He would also have said it about anyone who attained perfect realization, for Saint Paul very plainly stated: "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit [with him]" (I Corinthians 6:17). (Apparently the State Church editors missed that in their revision of the Bible.) The difference between Jesus (and any master) and other sentient beings is that he knew the Indweller and they did not. The Self is surrounded by the senses like someone in a theater that has a 360-degree screen. All of us really are "in the picture," and that is most of our problem.

He is the intellect of the intellect. Every faculty, every quality we possess, is derived from the Self and has its primal archetype in Brahman. This is because everything exists within Brahman as an eternal potential.

The controller of all, the lord of all, the ruler of all. This is extremely important. The Upanishads continually remind us that Brahman is transcendent and beyond all qualities or conception. Yet here we see that Brahman has an intimate relation with all creation, is in contact with all things, and controls all things. Brahman is also Ishwara, the Lord. So it is an error to try to push Brahman completely out of the picture and exile It to a void that is antithetical to all we presently know or are. Brahman is indeed both This and That. In a short while we will be examining a verse that sums this up quite well.

He does not become greater by good works nor smaller by evil works.

Brahman never acts, as both the Upanishads and the Gita insist. So what does this mean? It means that the actions of sentient beings in no way change the Self, nor do they increase or decrease the presence of the Self. However, good actions do help us to perceive the Self as present, and evil actions dim our mental vision and cause us to lose awareness of the Self. Because of that we may think that the Self is affected and drawn closer or pushed away, but we will be wrong. Reality is untouched and unaffected by our delusions and illusions.

Our gratitude for this wisdom should be wholehearted. Who can calculate the lives we have passed struggling to comprehend the truth of things before at last these great truths have come into the sphere of our life and become known to us? May we hasten to the realization of these eternal truths.

The simultaneous immanent and transcendent nature of Brahman and the Self is not easy to grasp. But the first half of the following verse from the next section of the Upanishad is very helpful.

That is full [purna], this is full. From fullness fullness proceeds. If we take away the fullness of fullness, even [only] fullness then remains. (5.1.1)

The word translated “full” is purna, which means both full and complete, the totality of something. In this verse it means the totality of being: Brahman. So it tells us that the Transcendent (Nirguna Brahman) is the total Reality; but so is the Immanent (Saguna Brahman). The Unmanifest is all that is—and so is the Manifest. The Immanent is an emanation from the Transcendent. If we confine our awareness to the Immanent we will find it to be the Totality of Being. If we turn to the Transcendent and intellectually negate the Immanent, we will perceive that the Transcendent is All. How is this? *Because they are one and the same.* Further, Brahman cannot be labeled or described, so even the words immanent and transcendent cannot be absolutely applied to It.

The threefold offspring of Prajapati, gods, men and demons [asuras], lived with their father Prajapati as students of sacred knowledge. Having completed their studentship the gods said, Please tell [instruct] us, sir. To them then, he uttered the syllable *Da* [and asked] Have you understood? They [said], We have understood, you said to us *damyata, control yourselves.* He said, Yes, you have understood.

Then the men said to him, Please tell [instruct] us, sir. To them he uttered the same syllable *Da* [and asked] Have you understood? They said, We have understood. You said to us: *give.* He said, Yes, you have understood.

Then the demons said to him, Please tell [instruct] us, sir. To them he uttered the same syllable *Da* and asked, Have you understood? They said, We have understood, you said to us, *dayadhvam, be compassionate.* He said, Yes, you have understood.

This very thing the heavenly voice of thunder repeats: *Da, Da, Da*, that is, control yourselves, give, be compassionate. One should practice this same triad: self-control, giving and compassion (5.2.1-3)

Gods, men, and asuras make up our present human nature. The gods are the parts of us that are superior to the normal human condition. They have arisen as we have begun to evolve to the point where we can take the next step up on the evolutionary ladder. Men are our human traits, and the asuras are their negative distortions as well as the animal traits that we have brought along with us in our evolutionary journey through prehuman forms. Consequently the advice to be self-controlled, charitable and compassionate applies to us. And its following will ensure our continued evolution.

And so ends the wisdom part of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. The rest of the Upanishad is a collection of cosmological, philosophical and ritualistic snippets. So I need not comment on them.

Chandogya Upanishad

The Chandogya Upanishad is appended to the Sama Veda which is composed of Rig Veda hymns pointed so they may be sung. Therefore a great deal of it concerns Vedic chanting and its technicalities. Consequently I will not be commenting on those passages.

There are three branches of duty: sacrifice, study and almsgiving. Austerity [tapasya], indeed, is the first. The second is the pursuit of sacred wisdom [brahmajnana]. Absolute brahmacharya is the third. All these attain to the worlds of the virtuous. He who stands firm in Brahman attains life eternal. (2.23.1)

The things listed here are the very pillars of the life in pursuit of God realization, and must be major factors in the life of a yogi. Here are their definitions.

Tapasya: Austerity; practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline; spiritual force. Literally it means the generation of heat or energy, but is always used in a symbolic manner, referring to spiritual practice and its effect, especially the roasting of karmic seeds, the burning up of karma.

Brahmajnana: Direct, transcendental knowledge of Brahman; Self-realization.

Brahmacharya: Continence; self-restraint on all levels; discipline; dwelling in Brahman. Brahmacharya includes both continence and control of all the senses, including the most unruly: the mind. (See *The Foundations of Yoga*.)

He who is established unshakably in all three “attains life eternal.”

Verily, this whole world is Brahman, from which he [the individual] comes forth, without which he will be dissolved and in which he breathes. Tranquil, one should meditate on it. (3.14.1a)

We have already been told that Brahman is all, but this half of the verse adds a practical instruction. “Tranquil, one should meditate on it” is an interpretative translation of two words: *shanta upasita*. Literally, they mean: “Draw near peacefully” or: “Go near peacefully.” *Upasana* means to sit or draw near, and is usually understood to mean either worship or meditation. (In the Greek original of the New Testament the word translated “prayer” is *prosevki*, which also means to draw near. The Greek word translated “worship” is *proskuneo*, which has the same meaning.)

The important thing to realize is that true worship and meditation are both an inner process, for God is the Light that shines within each one of us. So to draw near to that light we must turn within. As Jesus said: “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20-21).

The inner search must be done *shanta*—peacefully. This is a major key in yoga. All

meditation must be done calmly and carefully in a relaxed manner, otherwise it will be impossible to perceive and assimilate the subtle states of awareness which meditation is intended to produce. The mind must be as still as a mirror to really meditate, and meditation alone produces that stillness. Meditation is being described by Saint Paul when he says: “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (II Corinthians 3:18). That is why in the book of Revelation, which Paramhansa Yogananda said is a book about yoga, it says that a “sea of glass” like a great mirror is before the throne of God, and that the saints “stand” upon it (Revelation 4:6, 15:2). This symbolizes the perfectly still mind of the yogi by which he experiences higher realities.

Now verily, a person consists of purpose [kratu]. According to the purpose a person has in this world, so does he become on departing hence. So let him frame for himself a purpose. (3.14.1b)

Kratu means purpose, plan, intention and applied will, as well as a firm belief. Certainly it is the focus of a person’s life. It is not just intellectual, it is an active carrying out of purpose. It is the sum of the individual’s life, its very core. Therefore it is demonstrated in the thought, word and deed of the aspirant. This is a serious matter, indeed, and surely one of the most important statements in all the Upanishads.

The will is the highest faculty we possess. It is higher even than the intellect, for we often say: “I won’t think about that right now...,” and we do not, because the will controls the thinking faculty. The only thing higher than the will is the Self. The will approaches closer to the Self than any other aspect of our being. This is so important to realize, because the quality of our religion and our yoga is determined by which aspect is the basis of our belief and practice.

We have five levels or bodies. They are: 1) the physical, material body (annamaya kosha), 2) the magnetic or bio-energetic body (pranamaya kosha), 3) the sensory mind (manomaya kosha), 4) the intelligent mind, the intellect (jnanamaya kosha), and 5) the will (anandamaya kosha). These also correspond to the five elements: earth (prithvi), water (apah), fire (agni), air (vayu), and ether (akasha), which are also the seats of the five senses: smell, taste, sight, touch, and hearing.

The will is the anandamaya kosha, which corresponds to the element of ether, whose special faculty is sound (shabda), both the passive faculty of hearing and the active faculty of speech. This is why the primary focus in yoga meditation is breath and sound. Yoga meditation is the way to correct and develop the will. Since we *are* our will according to the Upanishad, it must be made alive through joining breath and sound in meditation. (*Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self*, considers this in depth, and also has an appendix entitled Breath and Sound in Meditation.) Only through yoga can we gain mastery of the will, and thereby of ourselves. If in this life we become united to Brahman, when we leave this world we will go to Brahman. “So

let him frame for himself a purpose,” concludes this verse. For as Krishna said: “He who thinks of me constantly, whose mind never goes elsewhere, for him, the constantly-united yogi, I am easy to attain” (Bhagavad Gita 8:14).

He who consists of mind, whose body is life, whose form is light, whose conception is truth, whose soul is space, containing all works, containing all desires, containing all odors, containing all tastes, encompassing this whole world, being without speech and without concern:

This is my Self within the heart, smaller than a grain of rice, than a barley grain, than a mustard seed, than a grain of millet or than the kernel of a grain of a millet. This is myself within the heart, greater than the earth, greater than the atmosphere, greater than the sky, greater than these worlds.

Containing all works, containing all desires, containing all odors, containing all tastes, encompassing this whole world, without speech, without concern, this is the Self of mine within the heart, this is Brahman. Into him I shall enter on departing hence. Verily, he who believes this, will have no more doubts. (3.14.2-4)

It can reasonably be considered that the Bhagavad Gita is of the highest importance because it embodies the teachings of the Upanishads and provides practical advice for their personal application. But the Upanishads are certainly indispensable for us who seek the Goal. One of their most wonderful aspects—and one that I have never heard mentioned in over half a century of study—is their marvelous ecstatic exulting in the wonder and glory of the Self. Just reading such joyful declarations produces a powerful stirring of the will towards perseverance in the divine search. This verse is one such rapturous affirmation and well worth our savoring wholeheartedly.

Now we come to a very interesting part of the Chandogya Upanishad which consists of stories of seekers who came to know Brahman.

A feature that will seem odd to Western readers is the instruction of some of the seekers by animals and even by the forces of nature. Any explanation I might give is purely speculative, but here they are: 1) The accounts are simply symbolic parables, the animals and nature forces symbolizing powers within the yogis. 2) These are not actual events, but dreams which the yogis had. This, too, is a matter of symbolism. 3) They are intuitions occurring to the yogis as they pondered the animals and the natural forces, wanting to understand the ideas behind them, for the universe is entirely ideational in nature.

I do not think that any of these are fully satisfactory, so I prefer to just focus on the spiritual teaching and let the rest go by, the way we crack the shell and throw it away, keeping the nut inside to eat. One thing is, evident, though: the pure-hearted will be instructed by other means if human teachers fail to do so or are not available.

Truthfulness (satya), a foundation of yoga, is taught now in the story of

Satyakama.

Once upon a time Satyakama Jabala addressed his mother Jabala, Mother, I desire to live the life of a student of sacred knowledge. Of what family [gotra] am I? Then she said to him, I do not know, my child, of what family you are. In my youth, when I went about a great deal, as a maid-servant, I got you. So I do not know of what family you are. However, I am Jabala by name and you are Satyakama by name. So you may speak of yourself as Satyakama Jabala [the son of Jabala]. (4.4.1-2)

Caste was the basis of Indian society at this time. Within the castes were gotras, gigantic clans consisting of innumerable individual families. Even today, if someone in India tells you his family name you know both what state (country, really) he comes from and what his caste is. Also, at the beginning of very important formal worship the gotra of those for or by whom it is being conducted publicly state their gotra.

An individual's gotra was no small thing. At the time of Satyakama it was essential for the teacher (acharya) to know the gotra/caste of the student, for the instruction given was according to the student's caste so as to prepare him for his distinctive life within the society of that era. It is true that in very ancient times a student's caste was finally determined during his education, according to his aptitudes and inclinations, but he started out being considered of the caste of his parents. Later, caste became solely a matter of heredity. Whichever era this story took place in, the father's gotra/caste had to be known.

Complicating the whole thing was the fact that different gotras had their own dharma shastras—scriptures which set forth the social and religious rules for members of that gotra. Sometimes these texts governed such minutiae as the student's style of hair, mode and color of clothing, and even the type of wood their staff should be made of and how long it should be. Those born completely outside such a system may consider this all meaningless complication, but it was not meaningless at the time the Upanishad was written, and we should realize the seriousness of all this, at least at that time.

Anyhow, Satyakama needed to know his caste and his gotra. Since his mother was a servant, a shudra, it was not likely he would be accepted anyway, and on top of it he was illegitimate—a total bar to assimilation by society on any level, including education. But Satyakama thirsted for knowledge, and with the single-minded intent of a child dared to approach the great sage Gautama, something even those of highest caste might hesitate to do.

Then he went to Gautama, the son of Haridrumat and said, I wish to become a student of sacred knowledge. May I become your pupil, Venerable Sir.

He said to him Of what family are you? He replied, I do not know this, sir, of what family I am. I asked my mother. She answered me, In my youth, when I went about a great deal as a maid-servant, I got you. So I do not know of

what family you are. I am Jabala by name and you are Satyakama by name. So I am Satyakama Jabala, Sir.

He then said to him, None but a Brahmana could thus explain. Bring the fuel. I will receive you as a pupil. You have not departed from the truth. Having initiated him, he separated out four hundred lean, weak cows and said, Go with these. While taking them away, he said, I may not return without a thousand. He lived away a number of years. When they came to be a thousand... (4.4.3-5)

Here we see that character, composed of karma and samskara, was the basis for caste in the Upanishadic age. Truthfulness is a prime trait of a Brahmin, as is indicated here. "None but a Brahmana could thus explain." This is extremely powerful, for it not only indicates that a true Brahmin is in such a purified state that it is impossible for him to not speak the truth, and speak it fully, it also indicates that a Brahmin will not have the egoity that would prevent him speaking truthfully and plainly regarding himself in all aspects of his life. For him there is no ego-based shyness or embarrassment of any sort. A Brahmin will never seek to hide anything about himself by speech or silence. As yogis we must seek to be perfect Brahmins.

Now I will summarize what is a rather wordy and sometimes obscure text. Satyakama, at the instruction of his guru, Gautama, lived some years in the forest. During that time, from various natural sources he learned in stages that the entire cosmos is a manifestation of Brahman. Even though I say he learned this, it was not learning in the ordinary, intellectual sense. Rather it was direct experience gained in the depths of meditation. Thus Satyakama knew Brahman, and knew Brahman was manifesting as all the worlds and at the same time transcending them.

Then he reached the teacher's house. The teacher said, Satyakama. He replied, Yes, Revered Sir. Verily you shine like one knowing Brahman. Who has taught you? He replied, Others, than men. But I wish, Revered Sir, that you teach me. For I have heard from persons like you, Revered sir, that the knowledge which has been learned from a teacher best helps one to attain his end. To him, he then declared it. In it nothing whatsoever was left out, yea, nothing was left out (4.9.1-3)

This reminds us of the radiant Buddha walking down the road after his enlightenment. Like Gautama, a Brahmin met him and also saw the divine radiance and asked him: "Who are you?" Continuing to walk on, Buddha simply said: "I am awake."

Although he possessed the perfect knowledge of Brahman (Brahmajnana), Satyakama wisely asked that Gautama should teach him. For he knew that his perceptions might be either incorrect or incomplete, and he wanted to check them by hearing the truths from the lips of an enlightened master. (It should also be noted that the word "guru" appears nowhere here; only "acharya"—teacher.) This is the way of the wise; they are always aware that they may not have perfect knowledge or experience. It is only the ignorant that insist they know the truth and

have no need of testing or instruction.

As Dion Fortune remarked in one of her books, those who are deluded will hysterically insist on the veracity of their “revelations,” even being violent verbally and physically in defense of those delusions. On the other hand, a person who has had valid experiences and garnered true wisdom from them will speak of such things very apologetically, even hesitantly, frequently commenting that they realize their experiences may be delusions or they may be mistaken in their understanding of them even if they are real.

Because of his sobriety and humility Satyakama was worthy (and capable) of being instructed fully in the wisdom of the sages (rishis). And so he was.

Now we come to the story of another student:

Now, verily, Upakosala, the son of Kamala, dwelt with Satyakama Jabala, as a student of sacred wisdom. He tended his fires for twelve years. But the teacher, though he allowed other pupils (after they learnt the sacred wisdom) to return to their homes, did not allow him [Upakosala] to depart.

His wife said to him, This student of sacred wisdom has performed his penance and tended the fires well. Let not the fires blame you. Give him the teaching. But he went away without teaching him.

Then, on account of sickness [grief], he resolved not to eat. The teacher’s wife said to him, O student of sacred wisdom, please eat. Why, pray, do you not eat? Then he said, Many are the desires in this person which proceed in different directions. I am filled with sicknesses [griefs]. I will not eat. (4.10.1-3)

Satyakama did not let Upakosala return home because he had not learned all that was necessary for leading a fully dharmic life according to the scriptural precepts. It is interesting that Upakosala does not consider that his failing is an academic one, but rather one of interior disposition. “Many are the desires in this person which proceed in different directions.”

This reminds us of the following from the life of Jesus: “Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:38-42).

Upakosala understood this (and Jesus must have studied this Upanishad in India), realizing that although desires may not be negative or foolish, yet they pull us in many directions, whirling us around and confusing our minds and depleting our life energies. Only when the mind is fixed on the One can the many be safely attended to.

Why did the sage leave this boy to his sorrow? Those who see with earthly eyes and think only earthly thoughts often accuse saints of being heartless or even cruel. But they know what they are doing, and are aware that their actions are needed. When Jesus told his disciples that he would be leaving them, they were unhappy. So he said: "Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:6-7). Vivekananda once commented: "A man harms his disciples by staying too long with them," for they do not develop the independence needed to pursue spiritual life. Swami Sivananda often sent his disciples away to engage in spiritual practice or spiritual work. Even at the time of his leaving this world, only a few long-time disciples were present.

There was a man who very much wanted spiritual instruction from one of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples, but that man sent him to another disciple, who sent him to still another, and that one refused him, too. Becoming very upset, even angry and bitter, the man left Calcutta and returned home. That very night he awoke, feeling that someone was in his room. Indeed there was: Sri Ramakrishna himself in living, physical form! He touched the man, blessing him, and gave him spiritual instruction. The next time that man saw one of his refusers, he was told: "We knew you were destined to receive personal instruction from Sri Ramakrishna himself; that is why we did not teach you ourselves."

Then the fires said among themselves: This student of sacred wisdom has performed his penance and tended us well. Let us teach him then. (4.10.4)

And so it was. Voices came out of the sacrificial fires which he had attended so many years. Perhaps these were the voices of disembodied sages who knew of his aspiration and frustration and felt merciful toward him. They may even have been teachers from previous lives.

Then they [the fires] said, Upakosala, you have this knowledge of our selves and knowledge of the Self. But the teacher will tell you the way. Then the teacher returned. The teacher spoke to him, Upakosala.

Revered Sir, he answered. Your face shines like that of one who knows Brahman. Who has instructed you? Who should instruct me, sir? said he. Here he conceals it as it were. And he said [pointing to the fires], They are of this form now, but they were of a different form. The teacher said, what did they indeed tell you?

This, he replied. [And told him.] They, have indeed spoken to you about the worlds, but I will tell you this, and as water does not cling to the lotus leaf, so an evil deed does not cling to one who knows it. Tell me, revered sir. (4.14.1-3)

This is thoroughly clear, and needs no comment, except to say that here we see the nature of enlightenment as a total transformation of perception. And that is one

of the greatest teachings of this Upanishad.

To him, he then said: Now the [five] senses disputed among themselves as to who was superior saying [in turn], I am superior. I am superior.

Those senses went to Prajapati, [their] father and said, Venerable sir, who is the best of us? He said to them, He on whose departing the body looks the worst, he is the best among you.

Speech departed and having stayed away for a year returned and said, How have you been able to live without me? [They replied] Like the dumb not speaking, but breathing with the breath, seeing with the eye, hearing with the ear, thinking with the mind. Thus [we lived]. Speech entered in.

The eye departed and having stayed away for a year returned and said, How have you been able to live without me? [They replied] like the blind not seeing but breathing with the breath, speaking with speech [the tongue], hearing with the ear, thinking with the mind. Thus [we lived]. The eye entered in.

The ear departed and having stayed away for a year returned and said, How have you been able to live without me? [They replied] Like the deaf not hearing, but breathing with the breath, speaking with speech [the tongue], seeing with the eye and thinking with the mind. Thus [we lived]. The ear entered in.

The mind departed and having stayed away for a year returned and said, How have you been able to live without me? [They replied] Like the children mindless but breathing with the breath, speaking with speech [the tongue], seeing with the eye, hearing with the ear. Thus [we lived]. The mind entered in.

Now when breath [prana] was about to depart, tearing up the other senses, even as a spirited horse about to start might tear up the pegs to which he is tethered, they gathered round him and said, Revered Sir, remain, you are the best of us, do not depart.

Then speech said to him, If I am the most prosperous, so are you the most prosperous. Then the eye said to him, If I am the firm basis, so are you the firm basis.

Then the ear said to him, If I am success, so are you the success. Then the mind said to him, If I am the abode, so are you the abode.

Verily, they do not call them speeches or eyes or ears or minds. They call them breaths [pranas], for all these are breath [prana]. (5.1.6-15)

Once again, I need only point out that the Upanishads tell us over and over that breath and sound are the two elements of life, individual and cosmic.

Now we come to the best known and most valued section of the Upanishads: the story of Shvetaketu and his learning about Brahman and also his own Self.

There was Shvetaketu Aruneya. His father said to him, Live the life of a

religious student. Verily there is no one in our family who is unlearned, who is a Brahmana only by birth. (6.1.1)

What a blessed time it must have been when education was aimed at the attainment of Brahmajnana!

He then, having become a pupil at the age of twelve, returned when he was twenty-four years of age, having studied all the Vedas, greatly conceited, thinking himself well read, and arrogant. His father then said to him, Shvetaketu, since you are now so greatly conceited, think yourself well read and arrogant, did you ask for that instruction by which the unhearable becomes heard, the unperceivable becomes perceived, the unknowable becomes known? [He asked:] How, Venerable Sir, can there be such teaching? (6.1.2-3)

Here we have three words: *Ashrutam*, *amatam*, and *avijnatam* that are most important. *Ashrutam* means “the unhearable,” *amatam* means “the unperceivable,” and *avijnatam* means “the unknowable.” These are epithets of Brahman, the Absolute Being. Not only do we not at this moment hear, think of or know Brahman, we *cannot* do so through the mind. But we can know Brahman directly at the core of our Self where It ever abides as the Self of our Self. When we go beyond the inner and outer instruments of perception, the *jnanendriyas*, into the Self that is the ultimate Knower, then we will hear without hearing, think without thought, and know without knowing. To do this, we must be yogis.

Uddalaka now tells Shvetaketu:

Just as by one clod of clay all that is made of clay becomes known, the modification being only a name arising from speech while the truth is that it is just clay.

Just as by one nugget of gold, all that is made of gold becomes known, the modification being only a name arising from speech, while the truth is that it is just gold.

Just as by one pair of nail scissors all that is made of iron becomes known, the modification being only a name arising from speech while the truth is that it is just iron: thus is that teaching. (6.1.4-6)

This is pretty straightforward, but it has an interesting implication. Uddalaka says that if we know one lump of clay or one nugget of gold we will know all clay and gold. The Self (Atman) and Brahman are absolutely one, yet the Self is limited in its scope, whereas Brahman is limitless—and willing to share that limitlessness with us. Therefore the way to know the Paramatman, Brahman, is to first know the *jivatman*, the individual Self. Once we know the part we know the whole. There is even more to it, because in that knowing we participate in the infinite Being of Brahman. This is a matter of yoga and beyond the scope of language to express or explain. That is why the Kena Upanishad says: “To whomsoever It [Brahman] is not known, to him It is known: to whomsoever It is known, he does not know. It is not

understood by those who understand It; it is understood by those who do not understand it” (2.3). The interpretive translation by Prabhavananda make this clear: “He truly knows Brahman who knows him as beyond knowledge; he who thinks that he knows, knows not. The ignorant think that Brahman is known, but the wise know him to be beyond knowledge.”

In response Shvetaketu says:

Verily, those venerable men did not know this; for if they had known it, why would they not have told it to me? Venerable Sir, please tell me that. So be it, said he.

In the beginning this was Being alone, one only without a second. Some people say, In the beginning this was non-being alone, one only, without a second. From that non-being, being was produced. (6.2.1)

But how, indeed could it be thus? said he, how could being be produced from non-being? On the contrary, in the beginning this was being alone, one only, without a second (6.1.7; 6.2.1-2)

In the beginning—and evermore—there was SAT: Existence; Reality; Being: Brahman, the Absolute, Pure Being. And this Sat was *ekam, evam, advityam*: one only, without a second. This Absolute Unity is all that ever has been or ever can be. This is a major principle of the Upanishads, one that is not easy to always keep in mind since we find ourselves immersed in the experience of duality. But when through self-purification and the practice of yoga we sweep aside this delusive curtain we will see the One and know It within our own Self (Atman) as its inmost essence. The Sat is always One, not one among many, and is absolutely indivisible. Duality cannot arise in It to any degree.

This being so, Uddalaka warns Shvetaketu away from the mistaken idea that there was an original Nothing from which came Something. Certainly, Brahman is No Thing, but that is a far cry from Nothing. Rather, it is Everything. This is important to us for two reasons. First, if originally there was nothing, then when we return to our primal state we will be annihilated and dissolve back into nothing. And, indeed, there are those who believe and even yearn for this. But it is not so. Second, for us raised in Western religion, it points out the absurdity of the theological principle that God created the world *ex nihil*—from nothing.

Since this second proposition is merely an intellectual perception, it is not particularly negative, but the first one is, for it deludes us as to what our ultimate state is meant to be. And it is perfectly possible to enter into an empty, jada state of unconscious inertia that can be mistaken for nirvana which is often wrongly translated “annihilation” or “extinguishment.”

It thought, May I be many, may I grow forth. (6.2.3a)

This is extremely important. Brahman did not create anything: It projected everything out of Its own being—and not as a separate entity, for It is within every thing as its sole Reality, as its Self, as its subtle Essence.

You might be interested to know that this was the original teaching of Christianity. In the New Testament the word translated “made” in speaking of the origin of the universe is *ginomai*, which means to be generated, or manifested, not made from nothing. It also means to arise or be assembled from something already existing. In *The Apostolic Constitutions*, one of the earliest texts of Christianity, God is said to have “brought forth all things as from a treasure house,” not from nothing.

Sometimes the longer Upanishads branch off from the central subject and explore a byway or two. This happened in the preceding dialogue between Uddalaka and Shvetaketu. Uddalaka began expounding the origin of various components of the human being, including the mind, the *manas*, which is the sensory mind, the field of energy which conveys the impressions of the sensory impulses of the brain. It is part of our astral bodies, but since it consists of the grossest of astral substance, it is integrated, even interwoven, with the material body and brain. According to Uddalaka the energy of the mind is derived from the physical body:

Food when eaten becomes threefold, its coarsest portion becomes the faeces; its middle [portion] flesh, and its subtlest [portion] mind. (6.5.1)

From this we see how important diet is, for the very substance of the mind is the essential energy of the food we eat. For that reason we must be careful both as to what we eat and what its vibration might be. For example, we should avoid meat, fish, eggs, alcohol, nicotine, and mind-influencing drugs—that should be obvious to the yogi. But we must also be careful about the vibration of acceptable food, for if it is a vehicle of negative vibrations it will be poisonous to the mind. When food is cooked or handled, the vibrations of the cook and the handler enter into it, for cooked food is very receptive to vibrations. Usually a prayer or blessing will neutralize any negative energies attached to food, but not always, especially if the cook or handler were mentally disturbed. Food in a restaurant that serves meat can be a problem for that reason, and also because the food may be prepared on the same surface or in the same utensils in which meat has been cooked, or the ingredients of the food may have been touched by meat in some way in the restaurant kitchen.

Prana, the subtle life force in the yogi’s body, must also be kept pure, as it affects everything in the physical and astral bodies, and has a major influence on meditation, during which the *pranas* must be as pure and subtle as possible, since the mental energies and the *prana* interact with one another intimately.

About the *prana*, Uddalaka says:

Water when drunk becomes threefold, its coarsest portion becomes the urine; its middle [portion] the blood, its subtlest [portion] the breath [prana]. (6.5.2)

What is said about water stands for any liquid, and we must be as careful about that as about our solid food.

Thus mind consists of food and breath [prana] consists of water. Please, Venerable Sir, instruct me still more. So be it, said he. Of the curd [yogurt], when churned, that which is subtle moves upwards, it becomes butter. In the same manner of the food that is eaten, that which is subtle moves upwards, it becomes mind. Of the water that is drunk, that which is subtle moves upwards, it becomes breath. Thus mind consists of food, breath [prana] consists of water. Please, Venerable Sir, instruct me still more. So be it, said he (6.6.1-3, 5)

This is extremely valuable knowledge for everyone, but especially for the yogi, as we see that food and drink have a direct effect on the mind and the vital force within—and become the mind and prana of the yogi.

To prove the truth of his assertions, Uddalaka directs him to make an experiment:

A person consists of sixteen parts. For fifteen days do not eat [any food], drink water at [your] will. Breath which consists of water will not be cut off from one who drinks water.

Then for fifteen days he did not eat [any food], and then he approached him saying, What, sir, shall I say? The Rig verses, the Yajus formulas, and the Saman chants. He replied, They do not occur to me, Sir. He said to him, Just as of a great lighted fire, a single coal of the size of a firefly may be left which would not thereafter burn much, even so of your sixteen parts only one part is left and so with it you do not apprehend [remember] the Vedas. Eat. Then you will understand me.

Then he ate and approached him [his father]. Then whatsoever he asked him, he answered it all. To him he then said, Just as of a great lighted fire if a single coal of the size of a firefly is left, and made to blaze up by covering it with straw and with it the fire would thereafter burn much. So of your sixteen parts only one part was left and that, when covered with food, blazed up. With it you now apprehend the Vedas. For the mind consists of food, the breath [prana] consists of water. Then he understood what he said; he understood it. (6.7.1-6)

In some texts the following verse is found. “When the (mind of the) person consisting of the five senses is not supported by food, then his intelligence goes away, even as the water flows away from the mouth of a leathern bag.” So not only the quantity but the quality of the mental and pranic energies is determined by the food we eat.

Then Uddalaka Aruni said to his son, Shvetaketu, learn from me the true nature of sleep. When a person here sleeps [without dreaming], as it is called, then he has reached pure being. He has gone to his own. Therefore they say he sleeps for he has gone to his own. Just as a bird tied by a string, after flying in various directions without finding a resting-place elsewhere settles down

(at last) at the place where it is bound, so also the mind after flying in various directions without finding a resting-place elsewhere settles down in breath, for the mind is bound to breath. (6.8.1-2)

Again we see why the breath is so important to the yogi; for his mind “settles down in breath,... is bound to breath.”

Now we come to the supreme teaching of the Upanishads.

All these creatures have their root in Being. They have Being as their abode, Being as their support.

That which is the subtle essence (the root of all) this whole world has for its Self. That is the true. That is the Self. That you are, Shvetaketu.

Please, Venerable Sir, instruct me still further. So be it, said he.

Just as the bees prepare honey by collecting the essences (juices) of different trees and reducing them into one essence, and as these juices possess no discrimination [so that of that they might say] I am the essence of this tree, I am the essence of that tree, even so, indeed, [are] all these creatures. Whatever they are in this world, tiger or lion or wolf or boar or worm or fly or gnat or mosquito, that they become.

That which is the subtle essence, this whole world has for its Self. That is the true. That is the Self. That you are, Shvetaketu.

Please, Venerable Sir, instruct me still further. So be it, said he.

These rivers flow the eastern toward the east, the western toward the west. They go just from sea to sea. They become the sea itself. Just as these rivers while there do not know I am this one, I am that one. In the same manner all these creatures even though they have come forth from Being do not know that We have come forth from Being. Whatever they are in this world, tiger or lion or wolf or boar or worm or fly or gnat or mosquito, that they become.

That which is the subtle essence, this whole world has for its Self. That is the true. That is the Self. That you are, Shvetaketu.

Please, Venerable Sir, instruct me still further. So be it, said he.

Of this mighty tree if someone should strike at the root it would bleed but still live, if someone should strike at the middle, it would bleed, but still live. If someone should strike at the top, it would bleed but still live. Being pervaded by its living Self, it stands firm, drinking in its moisture [which nourishes it] and rejoicing. If the life leaves one branch of it, then it dries up; if it leaves a second, then that dries up; if it leaves a third, then that dries up.

If it leaves the whole, the whole dries up. Even so, indeed understand, said he. Verily, indeed, this body dies, when deprived of the living Self, [but] the living Self does not die.

That which is the subtle essence, this whole world has for its Self. That is the true. That is the Self. That you are, Shvetaketu.

Please, Venerable Sir, instruct me still further. So be it, said he.

Bring hither a fruit of that nyagrodha tree. Here it is, Venerable Sir. Break it. It is broken, Venerable Sir. What do you see there? These extremely fine seeds, Venerable Sir. Of these, please break one. It is broken, Venerable Sir. What do you see there? Nothing at all, Venerable Sir. Then he said to him, That subtle essence which you do not perceive, verily from that very essence this great nyagrodha tree exists. Believe me.

That which is the subtle essence, this whole world has for its Self. That is the true. That is the Self. That you are, Shvetaketu.

Please, Venerable Sir, instruct me still further. So be it, said he.

Place this salt in the water and come to me in the morning. Then he did so. Then he said to him, That salt you placed in the water last evening, please bring it hither. Having looked for it he found it not, as it was completely dissolved. Please take a sip of it from this end. He said, How is it? Salt. Take a sip from the middle. How is it? Salt. Take a sip from the other end. How is it? Salt. Throw it away and come to me. He did so. It is always the same. Then he said to him, Verily, indeed you do not perceive Pure Being here. Verily, indeed, it is here.

That which is the subtle essence, this whole world has for its Self. That is the true. That is the Self. That you are, Shvetaketu.

When we merge with Brahman in mahasamadhi, the yogi's great exit of death, then all that we knew and believed in is nothing to us: only Brahman remains for us to know and identify with. The long journey is over, Reality gained at last. All that was enslaving and misery-producing, all the trivia and folly of relativity, is over forever. No return engagement. No return trip ticket. Home at last; home forever. Home in Infinity, in Life to a degree undreamed of by us for ages beyond calculation. For the final time we close our external eyes to open the inner eye of spirit.

My miracle-working grandmother asked me to have sung at her funeral the song "We'll Say Goodnight Here, But Good Morning Up There." It certainly is night here, and there is eternal dawn in God. But attaining it is not so simple as the song implies. Nevertheless, one day beyond all time it will happen to us all. Then we will really know: "That which is the subtle essence, this whole world has for its Self. That is the true. That is the Self. THAT ART THOU."

Please, Venerable Sir, instruct me still further. So be it, said he.

Just as one might lead a person away from the Gandharas with his eyes bandaged and abandon him in a place where there are no human beings, and just as that person would shout towards the east or the north or the south or the west, I have been led here with my eyes bandaged, I have been left here with my eyes bandaged. And as, if one released his bandage and told him, In that direction are the Gandharas, go in that direction, thereupon, being informed and capable of judgment, he would by asking [his way] from village to village arrive at Gandhara, in exactly the same manner does one here who has a teacher [acharya] know, I shall remain here only so long as I shall not be released [from ignorance]. Then I shall reach perfection.

That which is the subtle essence this whole world has for its Self. That is the true. That is the Self. That you are Shvetaketu.

Please, Venerable Sir, instruct me still further. So be it, said he.

Also around a sick (dying) person his relatives gather and ask, Do you know me? Do you know me? So long as his voice is not merged in mind, mind in breath, breath in heat and heat in the highest deity, so long he knows (them). Then when his voice is merged in mind, his mind in heat, and heat in the highest deity, then he does not know (them).

That which is the subtle essence this whole world has for its Self. That is the true. That is the Self. That you are, Shvetaketu.

Now we come to the account of the great sage Narada and his inquiries made to the great master Bhagavan Sanatkumara. This contains a lot of rhetoric and repetition, so I will omit some things.

Narada approached Sanatkumara and said, Teach me, Venerable Sir. He said, Come to me with [tell me] what you know. Then I will teach you what is beyond that.

[Narada said:] Venerable Sir, I know the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda, Atharvana as the fourth (Veda), the epic and the ancient lore as the fifth, the Veda of the Vedas (*i.e.* grammar), propitiation of the Father, the science of numbers (mathematics), the science of portents, the science of time (chronology), logic, ethics and politics, the science of the gods, the science of sacred knowledge, the science of elemental spirits, the science of weapons, astronomy, the science of serpents and the fine arts. This, Venerable Sir, I know.

But, Venerable Sir, I am only like one knowing the words and not a knower of [the] Self. It has been heard by me from those like you that he who knows the Self crosses over sorrow. Such a sorrowing one am I. Venerable Sir. Do

you, Venerable Sir, help me to cross over to the other side of sorrow. (7.1.1-3)

This contains a cardinal truth: there is no peace or real happiness outside the knowledge of the Self (Atmajnana). Those who wish to end all sorrow must seek that knowledge. Such is the assertion of the great teachers of humanity.

[Sanatkumara said to him:] The infinite is happiness. There is no happiness in anything small (finite). Only the infinite is happiness. But one must desire to understand the infinite. [Narada said:] Venerable Sir, I desire to understand the infinite. (7.23.1)

This is not an easy lesson to learn: that there is no joy outside of the Infinite Brahman, and there is no joy outside of our own Self. The meditator knows how difficult this is, for the mind keeps running after utter trivia in meditation, turning from the way to ananda and thinking of those things that only bring suffering even though the mind delights in the idea of them. Fool's gold is preferred by the mind to real gold. This is an addiction incredibly hard to be cured. The first step is asking about the Infinite, as this verse shows.

What now follows is not a definition of the Infinite, because that is impossible since It is beyond conceptualization, and therefore beyond words. But it is possible to give a hint about the experience of the Infinite, even though it will be more of a *neti-neti* (not this-not that) approach.

[Sanatkumara said:] Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else, that is the infinite. But where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else, that is the small (the finite). Verily, the infinite is the same as the immortal, the finite is the same as the mortal. [Narada said:] Venerable Sir, on what is the infinite established? On its own greatness or not even on greatness. (7.24.1)

“Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else, that is the small [the finite],” can be understood in two ways, both of which are correct. First, if someone sees anything besides the Infinite, then he is not perceiving the Infinite, for when the Infinite is perceived, all else either disappears or is seen as the Infinite Itself. Second, if anyone sees anything other than his Self, which is one with the Infinite, he is not seeing the Infinite.

The last sentence means that we dare not say that Brahman is “established” on anything. But we need very often to use expressions that are not exactly accurate, because we are attempting to speak of Something that cannot be spoken of in words or thought of in concepts.

[Sanatkumara said:] That [infinite] indeed is below. It is above. It is behind. It is in front. It is to the south, it is to the north. It is indeed all this [world]. Now next, the instruction in regard to the Self-sense: “I, indeed, am below. I am above, I am behind, I am in front. I am to the south, I am to the north, I, indeed, am all this (world).” (7.25.1)

Now, the ego would like to make these claims, but only the Self can truly say such things. By this verse we should see that the miniscule experiences which so many people claim are evidences of their enlightenment are nothing at all but ego claiming to be the Self. Only when the yogi experiences what is described by this verse can he begin to think of having attained enlightenment. (Please see *Dwelling in the Mirror* for an explanation of false non-dual “realization.”)

Now next the instruction in regard to the Self. The Self indeed is below. The Self is above. The Self is behind. The Self is in front. The Self is to the south. The Self is to the north. The Self, indeed, is all this [world]. Verily, he who sees this, who thinks this, who understands this, he has pleasure in the Self, he has delight in the Self, he has union in the Self, he has joy in the Self, he is independent [Self-ruler], he has unlimited freedom in all worlds. But they who think differently from this are dependent on others [have others for their rulers]. They have [live in] perishable worlds. In all worlds they cannot move at all [have no freedom]. (7.25.2)

What is true of Brahman is true of the Self of each one of us.

For him who sees this, who thinks this and who understands this, life-breath springs from the Self, hope from the Self, memory from the Self, ether from the Self, heat from the Self, water from the Self, appearance and disappearance from the Self, food from the Self, strength from the Self, understanding from the Self, meditation from the Self, thought from the Self, determination from the Self, mind from the Self, speech from the Self, name from the Self, sacred hymns from the Self, (sacred) works from the Self, indeed all this (world) from the Self.

He who sees this does not see death nor illness nor any sorrow. He who sees this sees everything and obtains everything everywhere. He is one, becomes threefold, fivefold, sevenfold and also ninefold. Then again he is called the elevenfold, also a hundred and elevenfold and also twenty-thousand fold.

In the Self we find everything, for outside the Self—outside Brahman—there is nothing.

When nourishment is pure, nature is pure. When nature is pure, memory becomes firm. When memory remains firm, there is release from all knots of the heart. To such a one who has his stains wiped away, the venerable Sanatkumara shows the further shore beyond darkness. (7.26.1-2)

Here again we see why purity (shaucha) is an essential element in yoga according to Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras (2:30, 32). If there is purity of diet, then the prakriti-energy of the mind and body will be pure. When the mental energies are pure, the memory of who we really can become established in us. When this is fostered and brought to fruition by mediation, freedom from all bonds result. Such

a one is then shown (brought to) the further shore beyond darkness: the infinite Self.

Who is this Sanatkumara that the Upanishad calls “Bhagavan Sanatkumara”? A *Brief Sanskrit Glossary* defines Bhagavan: “The Lord; the One endowed with the six attributes, viz. infinite treasures, strength, glory, splendor knowledge, and renunciation; the Personal God.” At the beginning of this creation cycle the four most advanced human souls (Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara and Sanatsujata) from the previous cycle refused to engage in the creation of the world and to enter into worldly life, despite the command of Brahma that they do so. Instead they engaged in intense yoga and attained liberation. The chief of these was Sanatkumara, who thereby became the Lord of Liberation for all humanity. Ever present in subtle form, Sanatkumara assists those who truly seek liberation—usually invisibly and unknown to them. But at their attainment of perfect realization he reveals himself to them and leads them to the worlds beyond compulsory rebirth.

Now, here in this city of Brahman is an abode, a small lotus flower; within it is a small space. What is within that should be sought, for that, assuredly, is what one should desire to understand. If they should say to him, with regard to this city of Brahma and the abode and the small lotus flower and the small space within that, what is there that should be sought for, or that, assuredly, one should desire to understand? (8.1.1-2)

The body is the abode of Brahman and the Self. The core-center of each relative, sentient being is its heart. And within the heart is a *dahara*, a dwelling; and within that dwelling is pure akasha, ether or space. But it is not the akasha that is one of the five primal elements (panchabhuta), but rather the Chidakasha, the Space [Ether] of Consciousness in the center of the Sahasrara chakra in the head. In other words, the inmost dweller of the heart is Brahman Itself. Such is the import of these verses according to Shankara. So it is Brahman “that should be sought for, or that, assuredly, one should desire to understand.”

He should say, as far, verily, as this [world] space extends, so far extends the space within the heart. Within it, indeed, are contained both heaven and earth, both fire and air, both sun and moon, lightning and the stars. Whatever there is of him in this world and whatever is not, all that is contained within it (8.1.3)

How is this possible? Because space, like time, is only a idea, only an experience, not a reality. Infinity is within each one of us. I have had various experiences of this fact that could be mistaken for cosmic consciousness, as I have written about before. I experienced the mirror-image of the cosmos that exists within the Chidakasha in the heart. No one had ever told me about this, so at first I was at a loss to figure it out. But then in a moment the truth flashed into my mind. When much later I read these words of the Chandogya Upanishad I realized how amazing and invaluable is yoga. The yogi can realize for himself the things written in the

wisdom texts of India. He can both experience and understand the meaning of the experience—and all from within.

If they should say to him, if, within this city of Brahma, is contained all [that exists], all beings and all desires, then what is left of it when old age overtakes it or when it perishes?

He should say, it [the Self within] does not age with old age, it is not killed by the killing [of the body]. That [and not the body] is the real city of Brahma. In it desires are contained. It is the Self free from sin, free from old age, free from death, free from sorrow, free from hunger, free from thirst, whose desire is the real, whose thought is the real, For, just as here on earth people follow in obedience to command [as they are commanded], of whatever object they are desirous, be it a country or a part of a field, on that they live dependent. (8.1.4-5)

The mystic Angelus Silesius wrote that if he could die, then God would die; that if he could cease to exist, God could cease to exist. Such was his perfect understanding of the identity of the Self and God. Since this is so, the Upanishad tells us that the Immortal is within us, whatever the condition of the body. Moreover, the desires of that Self are *satyakama*, true desires, and Its will is *satyasankalpa*, true will. So if we will center our consciousness in the Self, we will not have to worry about desire or will: they will be Sat: revealers of the Real.

Having spoken of true desire and true will as properties of the Self, the Upanishad now outlines the practical aspect of such.

As here on earth the world which is earned by work perishes, even so there the world which is earned by merit [derived from the performance of sacrifices] perishes. Those who depart hence without having found here the Self and those real desires, for them there is no freedom in all the worlds. But those who depart hence, having found here the Self and those real desires—for them in all worlds there is freedom. (8.1.6)

The desires and intentions of those who have not realized the Self, even if seemingly fulfilled, eventually evaporate and come to nothing. But it is vastly different for those who know the Self and act and will accordingly.

If he becomes desirous of the world of the fathers, by his mere thought, fathers arise. Possessed of the world of fathers he is happy.

And so if he becomes desirous of the world of mothers, by his mere thought, mothers arise. Possessed of that world of mothers he is happy.

And if he becomes desirous of the world of brothers, out of his mere thought brothers arise. Possessed of that world of brothers he is happy.

And if he becomes desirous of the world of sisters, out of his mere thought, sisters arise. Possessed of that world of sisters he is happy.

And if he becomes desirous of the world of friends, out of his mere

thought, friends arise. Possessed of that world of friends he is happy.

And if he becomes desirous of the world of perfumes and garlands, out of his mere thought, perfumes and garlands arise. Possessed of that world of perfumes and garlands he is happy. (8.2.6)

And if he becomes desirous of the world of food and drink, out of his mere thought, food and drink arise. Possessed of that world of food and drink he is happy.

And if he becomes desirous of the world of song and music, out of his mere thought, song and music arise. Possessed of that world of song and music he is happy.

And if he becomes desirous of the world of women, out of his mere thought, women arise. Possessed of that world of women he is happy.

Of whatever object he becomes desirous, whatever desire he desires, out of his mere thought it arises. Possessed of it he is happy. (8.2.1-10)

This is also a description of some worlds that are beyond the reach of rebirth as well as the higher realms where the liberated dwell. It is lengthy and perhaps not too obvious of meaning. The idea is that the realized person has access to and embodies all that is positive from his past lives, both persons and karmic conditions. This being so, he can obtain anything he desires and wills in the present and the future. Yet his happiness is far beyond this description: he is happy in the Self, in Brahman, in Absolute Being.

These same are true desires, with a covering of what is false. Although the desires are true there is a covering that is false. For whosoever of one's [fellows] departs hence, one does not get him [back] to see here.

But those of one's [fellows] whether they are alive or whether they have departed and whatever else one desires but does not get, all this one finds by going in there [into one's own Self], for here, indeed, are those true desires of his with a covering of what is false. Just as those who do not know the field walk again and again over the hidden treasure of gold and do not find it, even so all creatures here go day after day into the Brahma-world and yet do not find it, for they are carried away by untruth (8.3.1-2)

Meditation on the Self is the key to the treasure house. So the Upanishad next says:

Verily; that Self is [abides] in the heart. Of it the etymological explanation is this. This one is in the heart, thereof it is the heart. He who knows this goes day by day into the heavenly world. (8.3.3)

Now that serene being, rising out of this body, and reaching the highest light appears in his own form. He is the Self, said he [when asked by the pupils]. That is the immortal, the fearless. He who knows this goes day by day into the heavenly world. (8.3.3-5)

Meditation is the way to go day by day into the heavenly world. Those who

practice right meditation in the right manner will experience this in a short time. (Again: see *Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self*.)

Now the Self is the bridge, the [separating] boundary for keeping these worlds apart. Over that bridge day and night do not cross, nor old age nor death, nor sorrow, nor well-doing nor ill-doing. All evils turn back from it for the Brahma-world is freed from evil. (8.4.1)

Setuh literally means a dam. In the experience of conditioned beings within the realm of relativity, the individual Self or jivatman acts as a boundary between its Supreme Self, Brahman, the Paramatman, and the world of samsara. This is a very interesting fact, made even more interesting by the fact that I have never encountered it except here in this section of the Chandogya Upanishad.

We may think of the Self as a sea wall. On one side is the vast ocean of Brahman, and on the other side is the earth of material form and change. On one side the wall is experiencing the wetness of the sea, and on the other the dryness of earth. That in which the individual finds himself immersed only applies to the earth side of his being. However much we may experience birth, death, change and all that attends them, they never touch the realm of Brahman. Conversely, although we are living in and as Brahman, samsara never touches That. Samsara and Brahman are mutually exclusive of one another. But we participate in both, linking them with one another. Presently we are centered in samsara, experiencing our own Self as a barrier to Reality. But that barrier can be crossed, so the Upanishad continues:

Therefore, verily, on crossing that bridge, if one is blind he becomes no longer blind, if wounded, he becomes no longer wounded, if afflicted he becomes no longer afflicted. Therefore, verily, on crossing that bridge, night appears even as day, for that Brahma-world is ever-illuminated.(8.4.2)

That is so powerful and obvious that there is no place for comment, other than to point out that the conditions listed from which the knowers of the Self are freed are really only illusions, just mirages. The Self being Real, such illusions vanish when it is known.

But only they find that Brahma-world who practice brahmacharya; only they possess that Brahma-world. For them there is unlimited freedom in all worlds. (8.4.3)

You cannot get more clear than this. Brahmacharya is the indispensable way to the realm of Brahman (Brahmaloka). Certainly, sexual continence is the core of brahmacharya, but it includes self-restraint on all levels. There is no other way to qualify for union with Brahman than through brahmacharya. Yoga is an essential for that union, but frankly the practice of yoga is worthless without brahmacharya. The proof of that is the American and European yoga “scenes.” Nothing is coming of them spiritually, only profiteering and self-delusion.

Now, what people call sacrifice is really brahmacharya. Only by brahmacharya does he who knows obtain that [world]. Now what people call: What has been sacrificed, is really brahmacharya, for only by sacrificing with brahmacharya does one obtain the Self. (8.5.1)

Brahmacharya is the necessary worship-sacrifice to know God. As the Beloved Disciple wrote: “Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (I John 3:3). Why claim to believe the teachings of the Upanishads and the Gita if they are ignored or despised and even denied?

But there is more.

Now what people call the protracted sacrifice [sattrayanam] is really brahmacharya. Only by brahmacharya does one obtain the protection of the real Self. Now what people call the vow of silence is really brahmacharya, for only by finding out the Self through brahmacharya does one [really] meditate. (8.5.2)

Perhaps I should explain a bit about this fulsome assurance that brahmacharya will accomplish everything.

We, like God, are incarnate in a field of energy which we are intended to evolve just as God evolves the cosmos. When the evolution is completed, that is enlightenment and liberation. The human complex is like a machine that requires a certain amount of voltage, or an engine that cannot run without the right amount of fuel. This process requires the total application of the inner and outer powers (energies) of the individual, powers that are devastatingly dissipated through sensory experience, emotion, and desire: especially lust. This is a purely pragmatic proposition, having nothing to do with concepts of right, wrong, good, bad or any kind of moral evaluation. For example, sex is destructive. Anything that diverts or dissipates the powers needed for evolution and enlightenment is to be avoided. It is a hindrance and distraction in spiritual life. For this reason the intelligent (buddhic) yogi is at all times vigilantly disciplined—a brahmachari or brahmacharini. Those who do not wish to pay the price of enlightenment are free to pass it by. No one is under coercion. To seek freedom the yogi must be free in that decision (sankalpa) and in the requisite disciplines for success in seeking.

The necessity for brahmacharya is an absolute.

Now what people call a course of fasting is really brahmacharya, for the Self which one finds by brahmacharya does not perish. Now what people call the life of a hermit [aranyayanam—dwelling in the forest] is really brahmacharya. (8.5.3a)

Fasting (anasakayana) is abstinence from food. Brahmacharya is abstinence from the food of the senses: sensory experience.

Most yogis have an inward pull to the forest life, to live in the midst of real nature away from the noise and poisons of city life as well as the noise and pollutions of human society. The Gita describes the yogi as “remaining in solitude,

alone” (6:10), and “having distaste for association with many people” (13:10). Whether this is a samskara or an intuition, it will be found in nearly all serious yogis.

One of my best friends was constantly going out into the wilds and risking life and limb so he could meditate far from any other human being. I am not exaggerating about the risks he took. One time he was literally starving, and even wrote a note to anyone that might find his body, saying that it was his unwise ways that caused his death, and yoga should not be blamed. He had been taken into the wilderness by a friend who was to come back in a few weeks to check on him, but he had left his original camp and gone farther into the forest. So when the man came back after some weeks he could not be found. As my friend was lying on the ground, preparing to die, suddenly that man came hurrying up and asked: “Where is that woman?” Hardly able to speak, my friend asked his own question: “What woman?” “That woman with the long black hair in the orange dress! If I hadn’t followed her, I couldn’t have found you.” At first my friend was flummoxed, but then he reached in his pack for his photograph of Paramhansa Yogananda. “Is that the ‘woman?’” he asked, holding it out to the man. “Yes, that’s her!” the man replied. “She came walking by me really fast, and I asked her if she knew where you were. But she just kept walking and I came running after her. Then she disappeared and I saw you.” Such was the miraculous loving care of the great Master Yogananda, who certainly honored my friend’s forest-yearning, however impractical.

Solitude is a matter of interior condition. The remarkable Russian Orthodox saint, Saint John of Kronstadt, not only never slept, he was never alone more than two hours in twenty-four. Yet a man who knew him very well said: “Father John was always alone.” In contrast are those that go miles away from any human being and take the whole world and its population right with them. The teaching of the Upanishad is that brahmacharya is the way to accomplish true inner solitude and quiet.

Verily, ara and nya [aranya: forest] are the two seas in the Brahma-world. Only they who find the two seas Ara and Nya in the Brahma-world through brahmacharya, only they possess the Brahma-world. In all the worlds they possess unlimited freedom. (8.5.3b-4)

Here “forest” means the interior state of solitude even though physically surrounded by the world. Since Brahman is beyond materiality and even any kind of subtle name and form, these verses are speaking symbolically of the immortality-bestowing effects of union with Brahman which can only be effected by those that practice brahmacharya. (Shankara agrees with me in his commentary.) The meaning is pretty obvious: those who enter the ocean of Brahman and drink will be filled with bliss, made immortal with the immortality of Brahman, and will have access to all the worlds of relative existence and mastery in those worlds. Those who find the Absolute do not lose the relative, for the relative is a manifestation of the Absolute.

Blessed are they who believe this and act upon it.

Now as for these arteries [nadis] of the heart, they consist of a fine [subtle] substance. On this there is this verse: A hundred and one are the arteries of the heart, one of them leads up to the crown of the head. Going upward through that, one becomes immortal. (8.6.1, 6)

Regular deep meditation prepares us for the Great Departure by purifying and activating the subtle energies (prana) and the channels (nadis) in the subtle body through which they move. Furthermore, meditation polarizes the energies to habitually flow upward. Therefore at his departure from the body the adept yogi goes upward through the brahmarandhra at the crown of the head and merges into Spirit.

One time when I was with an Indian yogi someone asked him if it would be good to teach meditation to a mentally ill person. “No,” he replied instantly. “If you teach a crazy person to meditate they will just meditate crazily and harm themselves.” It is the same with dishonest, negative and self-deluding people. They will misunderstand what they are taught and come up with a dishonest, negative and self-deluding interpretation or misunderstanding. Through the years I have found that the yogi spoke the truth. And the following section bears it out.

The Self which is free from evil, free from old age, free from death, free from grief, free from hunger and thirst, whose desire is the real, whose thought is the real, he should be sought, him one should desire to understand. He who has found out and who understands that Self, he obtains all worlds and all desires. Thus spoke Prajapati. (8.7.1)

This is the very heart of truth: the Self must be known, otherwise all is lost. Sri Ramakrishna said it quite directly: the purpose of human life is knowing God, so those who do not strive to know God are wasting their life.

The gods and the demons both heard it and said, Well, let us seek that Self, the Self by seeking whom one obtains all worlds and all desires. Then Indra from among the gods went forth unto him and Virochana from among the demons. Then without communicating with each other, the two came into the presence of Prajapati, fuel in hand. (8.7.2)

The sixteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita is devoted to the idea that human beings are divided into two types: divine (daivic) and demonic (asuric). It should be carefully studied by those who seek higher consciousness, for it is bedrock truth. Here in the Upanishad we are given an exposition of the two natures by means of a story.

It may seem that the gods and demons had a common goal: to “obtain all worlds and all desires,” but that is not so. It was certainly the aim of the demons, but the gods desired the realization of the Self, although they certainly knew that “all worlds and all desires” come to a knower of the Self as a side effect.

For thirty-two years the two lived there the disciplined life of a student of sacred knowledge. Then Prajapati asked them, Desiring what have you been living? The two said, The Self which is free from evil, free from old age, free from death, free from grief, free from hunger and thirst, whose desire is the real, whose thought is the real. He should be sought, him one should desire to understand. He who has found out, he who understands that Self, he obtains all worlds and all desires. These people declare to be your word, Venerable Sir, desiring him we have been living. (8.7.3)

Here we see that Indra and Virochana after thirty-two years had not even brought up the subject of instruction. We need not take so long, but we should be very careful and not rush into accepting the teachings of anyone. That is one of the value of books. We can read them and discard them if we find them worthless without any conflict with the teacher. And we can apply them without becoming the teacher's slave or dependent on him.

In this story we see the first step in the discovery of the nature of the Self. It is not uncommon in the ancient texts for the truth to be presented as a kind of ladder, starting with either a dim perception of the truth or even a complete misunderstanding and leading upward bit by bit until the complete truth is comprehended. Just why this was done has not been said. Perhaps it was to show that even mistaken or partial ideas were to be seen as steps on the way to perfect understanding. Or it may have been as a kind of yardstick by which the level of development of a person might be known. On the other hand it may have been a showing of the logical progression of thought on a subject. However it may be, this account is part of that tradition.

Prajapati said to the two, The person that is seen in the eye, that is the Self, said he. That is the immortal, the fearless. That is Brahman. But, Venerable Sir, he who is perceived in water and in a mirror, who is he?. He replied, The same one, indeed, is perceived in all these.(8.7.4)

Look at yourself in a pan of water and whatever you do not understand of the Self, tell me. Then the two looked in a pan of water. Then Prajapati said to the two, What do you see? Then the two said, We both see the Self thus altogether, Venerable Sir, a picture even to the very hairs and nails. (8.8.1)

Then Prajapati said to the two, after you have well adorned yourselves, put on your best clothes, make yourselves tidy, look into the pan of water. Then the two adorned themselves well, put on their best clothes and made themselves tidy and looked into the pan of water. Then Prajapati said to the two, What do you see? (8.8.2)

The two said, Just as we are, Venerable Sir, well adorned, with our best clothes and tidy, thus we see both these, Venerable Sir, well adorned. with our best clothes and tidy. That is the Self, said he. That is the immortal, the fearless, that is Brahman. They both went away with a tranquil heart. (8.8.3)

Brahma asked the two inquirers to have experience for themselves, which they

did. Notice, that they were the first to put forth the idea that the body “who is perceived in water and in a mirror” was the Self. The teacher agreed. Puzzling as it seems there is a great lesson here. It is better to be mistaken on our own than to have the truth imposed on us. I have known of teachers in India agreeing to very silly ideas or proposals put forth by disciples because they wanted them to learn for themselves the error of their thoughts. This is virtually unique to India. It is better for an idea to be ours, even if wrong, than to bow to the belief of another, even if it is more correct. The Gita (3:35) says: “Better is one’s swadharma, though deficient, than the swadharma of another well performed. The swadharma of another brings danger,” and this applies to personal philosophy, as well. Only when we have the freedom to make wrong conclusions will we develop the capacity for right conclusions. Intellectual integrity is of the utmost necessity, however most religionists and “gurus” are opposed to it.

Indra and Virochana “went away with a tranquil heart.” And this is normal. The whole world is at peace with delusions and illusions. So a religion or philosophy that “satisfies” us, “answers all our questions,” and in which we are “happy” may be completely worthless. But we need to discover that for ourselves. Though their conclusions were wrong, twice in this passage Brahma has told them that Brahman is immortal and fearless. In this way he planted the seed of truth in their minds.

Then Prajapati looked at them and said, They go away without having perceived, without having known the Self. Whosoever will follow such a doctrine, be they gods or demons they shall perish. Then Virochana with a tranquil heart went to the demons and declared that doctrine: one’s (bodily) Self is to be made happy here, one’s (bodily) Self is to be served. He who makes his own Self happy here and he who serves his own Self, he obtains both worlds, this world and the yonder.

Therefore even here they say of one who is not a giver, who has no faith, who does not offer sacrifices, that he is a demon, for this is the doctrine of the demons. They adorn the body of the deceased with what they have begged, with clothes and with ornaments, and think that thereby they will win the yonder world. (8.8.4-5)

The assertion that “whosoever will follow such a doctrine, be they gods or demons they shall perish” is crucial. It tells us that thoughts really are things and they lead us to a revelation of their nature: if false, to confusion and delusion, and if true, to the True. As Jesus said: “According to your faith be it unto you” (Matthew 9:29). Literally we are creating the world of our personal life sphere. As we think it to be, so it will tend to be, though much depends on the strength of our mind and the intensity put forth in exercising its creative power. Brahma let them hold a wrong concept of the Self because they had to discover the right concept for themselves. This is hard for those brought up in coercive religion to accept, but it is true. The nursery rhyme is right: “Leave them alone and they will come home.” But only in the East will this faith in the individual be found.

Body-worship, which is really only body-enslavement, is the “faith” of those possessing a demonic nature, and they literally do die for it. When demons think about yoga it is always Hatha Yoga–Virochana Yoga. Most (not all) of the myriads of yoga studios in the West are the haunts of the spiritual offspring of Virochana.

But Indra, even before reaching the gods saw this danger: Even as this Self [the body-self] is well adorned when this body is well adorned, well dressed when the body is well dressed, tidy when the body is tidy, that Self will also be blind when the body is blind, lame when the body is lame, crippled when the body is crippled. It perishes immediately when the body perishes. I see no good in this.

He came back again with fuel in hand. To him Prajapati said, Desiring what, O Maghavan, have you come back, since you along with Virochana went away with a tranquil heart? Then he said, Even as this Self [the body-self] is well adorned when this body is well adorned, well dressed when the body is well dressed, tidy when the body is tidy, that Self will also be blind when the body is blind, lame when the body is lame, crippled when the body is crippled. It perishes immediately, when the body perishes. I see no good in this. (8.9.2)

So is he indeed, O Maghavan. Said he [Prajapati], However, I will explain this further to you. Live with me another thirty-two years. Then he lived with him another thirty-two years. (8.9.1-3)

In Eastern Christianity they say that it is the nature of demons to fall and never rise, and of human beings to fall and rise and fall and rise over and over again until they no longer fall. In the same way it is the nature of human demons to adopt an error and hold to it throughout their life. But it is the nature of devic human beings to keep sifting through their ideas, discarding the ones they discover to be mistaken and using the ones that are true as steps to even more and higher truth. Since Indra was not a demon, even before he got back to Indraloka he understood the fallacy of identifying the body with the Self. His reasoning is quite clear. So he returned to Prajapati for another period of time, after which he was again instructed.

To him he then said: He who moves about happy in a dream, he is the Self, said he, he is the immortal, the fearless. He is Brahman. Then he went forth with a tranquil heart. But even before reaching the gods he saw this danger: Even though this Self is not blind [when the body] is blind, is not lame [when the body] is lame, though he does not suffer defects from the defects [of the body], he is not slain [when the body] is slain. He is not one-eyed [when the body] is one-eyed, yet it is as if they kill him, as if they unclothe him. He comes to experience as it were what is unpleasant, he even weeps as it were. I see no good in this. (8.10.1-2)

In the conscious, waking state it is the physical body, including the physical brain, that dominates our consciousness, but in the dream state it is the astral body

and brain that come into function and dominate our awareness. This astral body leaves the physical body at death, so it is usually mistaken for the Spirit-Self by the various religions. But, as Indra realized, this cannot be if the definition of the Self formulated by the ancient rishis of India is believed to be accurate. We must go a step higher.

There is another aspect to this. The astral body is the seat of emotions and many religious people base their religion on emotions and feelings. This is a grave error and one that causes much trouble, for not only does it not lead to spiritual perception, it often leads downward to base emotions and desires. Wherever emotion holds sway in religion, there moral corruption is bound to lurk. And this includes the “bhakti movement” in India. As Swami Sivananda used to say: “Emotion is not devotion.” But in the religions of the world emotion and sentimentality are continually thought to be real love of God. We must remember that bhakti means devotion in the sense of dedication. Those who are truly devoted to God dedicate their life to the search for God, for Self-realization.

And now I really think I need to say this. In the Yoga West wherever there is exploitation, deception, outright charlatanry or utter foolishness, “bhakti” is the dust thrown into the eyes of the innocent. “Devotion” and “love” are the covers for shameful deception and exploitation, especially “guru bhakti.” Through the guru cult any and every kind of nonsense is foisted on their members by using this strategy, along with shameless bullying and intimidation in the same vein.

He came back again with fuel in hand to him. Prajapati said, Desiring what, O Maghavan, have you come back since you went away with a tranquil heart? Then he said, Venerable Sir, even though this Self is not blind [when the body] is blind, lame [when the body] is lame, even though he does not suffer defects from the defects of the body. He is not slain [when the body] is slain. He is not lame [when the body] is lame, yet it is as if they kill him, as if they unclothe him. He comes to experience as it were what is unpleasant, he even weeps as it were. I see no good in this.

So is he indeed, O Maghavan, said he (Prajapati). However, I will explain this farther to you. Live with me another thirty-two years. Then he lived with him another thirty-two years.

To him he then said: When a man is asleep, composed, serene, and knows no dream, that is the Self, said he, that is the immortal, the fearless. That is Brahman. Then he went forth with tranquil heart. Even before reaching the gods he saw this danger. In truth this one does not know himself that I am he, nor indeed the things here. He has become one who has gone to annihilation. I see no good in this. (8.10.3-4; 8.11.1)

In dreamless sleep the causal body is dominant, and even in India there are people who try to identify it with the Self, and equate the dreamless sleep state with the eternal state of the Self. This is because of the extreme subtlety of that condition. Here, too, Indra’s reasoning is as clear as it is inevitable.

This, too, has another aspect to it. Many people base their religion on ideas, on theology or what they call “higher reason.” This, too, leads away from the perception of spirit and imprisons it in the buddhi, which is meant to be a tool for our seeing beyond external perceptions. This is a kind of golden prison, based on the error that the Self can be known by the intellect. These people inevitably become coercive, attempting to enlighten everyone they meet, and in time become dry-as-dust intellectuals, bored and boring bullies.

He came back again with fuel in hand. To him Prajapati said, Desiring what, O Maghavan, have you come back, since you went away with a tranquil heart? Then he said, Venerable Sir, in truth this one does not know himself that I am he, nor indeed the things here. He has become one who has gone to annihilation. I see no good in this.

So is he, indeed, O Maghavan, said he. However, I will explain this further to you and there is nothing else besides this. Live with me for another five years. Then he lived with him for another five years. That makes one hundred and one years and so people say that, verily, for one hundred and one years Maghavan lived with Prajapati the disciplined life of a student of sacred knowledge.x (8.11.2-3)

It is significant that Brahma only required a residence of five years this last time. Obviously Indra is so near the truth that a longer time of purification is not required.

To him he then said: O Maghavan, mortal, verily, is this body. It is held by death. But it is the support of that deathless, bodiless Self. Verily, the incarnate Self is held by pleasure and pain. Verily, there is no freedom from pleasure and pain for one who is incarnate. Verily, pleasure and pain do not touch one who is bodiless. Bodiless is air, clouds, lightning, thunder, these are bodiless. Now as these, when they arise from yonder space and reach the highest light appear each with its own form, even so that serene one when he rises up from this body and reaches the highest light appears in his own form. Such a person is the Supreme Person. There such a one moves about, laughing, playing, rejoicing with women, chariots or relations, not remembering the appendage of this body. As an animal is attached to a cart so is life attached to this body.

Now when the eye is thus turned to space, that is the seeing person, the eye is for seeing. Now he knows let me smell this, that is the Self, the nose is for smelling. Now he who knows let me utter this, that is the Self, the voice is for uttering. Now he who knows let me hear this that is the Self, the ear is for hearing. Now he who knows let me think this he is the Self, the mind is his divine eye. He, verily, seeing these pleasures through his divine eye, the mind rejoices. (8.12.1-5)

This is as inspiring as it is simple: freedom and bliss (not mere pleasure) are the

attributes of the Self and of those who know the Self. Therefore Prajapati (Brahma) concluded his teaching of Indra with these words:

Verily, these gods who are in the Brahma-world meditate on that Self. Therefore all worlds and all desires are held by them. He obtains all worlds and all desires who finds the Self and understands it. Thus spoke Prajapati, yea, thus spoke Prajapati. (8.12.6)

And so the creator himself has told us the truth of the nature of the Self.

The Aitareya Upanishad

The Self, verify, was [all] this, one only, in the beginning. Nothing else whatsoever winked. He thought, Let me now create the worlds. He created these worlds. (1.1.1)

Several times in the Upanishads we are told that when nothing else existed, Brahman “was” and from Brahman proceeded all the worlds. But in these opening verses of the Aitareya Upanishad the word Atman (Self) is used instead of Brahman. This is fitting for two reasons: First, because Brahman is the ultimate Self of all. Second, because what occurred on the cosmic level in relation to Brahman has occurred on the microcosmic level with each one of us, with each individual Self that has entered into the field of relative existence. Just as the various worlds or lokas have emanated from Brahman, so the several bodies or koshas have emanated from the individual Self.

He thought, Here then are the worlds. Let me now create the guardians of the worlds. From the waters themselves, he drew forth the person [purusha] and gave him a shape. (1.1.3)

This verse really has two subjects.

First there is the manifestation of the world-guardians. The word translated here as “world-guardian” is *lokapala*. A lokapala is the ruler or custodian of a world (loka). At the beginning of creation, each world is assigned an overseer or guardian. These are beings who have evolved to the status of gods and sometimes are mistaken for the Absolute by those within those worlds whose understanding is imperfect. Nevertheless, to approach them is beneficial, for they will themselves reveal their limited nature and point questing souls to Brahman the Infinite. The lokapalas are like gardeners, they work with living things for their development as well as their safety.

The Upanishad is speaking of the beginning of things. So immediately after the manifestation of the worlds, the lokapalas were awakened and made aware of their assignments, for their work is part of their personal evolutionary process. Now the same thing happens with us. We are the custodians of our private worlds or bodies. And our experiences through those bodies and the development we gain is our work, just as it is for the lokapalas.

The second subject is the manifestation of the Virat, the Cosmic Person which embraces all that exists in the material worlds. Regarding him the Upanishad continues:

He brooded over him. Of him who has thus been brooded over, the mouth was separated out, like an egg. From the mouth speech, from speech fire. The nostrils were separated out from the nostrils’ breath, from breath air. The

eyes were separated out from the eyes' sight, from sight the sun. The ears were separated out from the ears' hearing and from hearing the quarters of space. The skin was separated out, from the skin the hairs, from the hairs, plants and trees. The heart was separated out from the heart, the mind and from the mind, the moon. The navel was separated out from the navel, the outbreath, from the outbreath death. The generative organ was separated out; from it semen, from semen water. (1.1.4)

Keep in mind that this is not a human being spoken of here, but an account of the manifestation of the archetypal and all-pervading Cosmic Pattern that finally becomes manifest in each human being. So its history is our history in the womb as the body is formed from its original "lump" form. Therefore what is said of the Virat is also said of the individual person.

Many years ago, Dr. Judith Tyberg, a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and director of the East-West Cultural Center in Los Angeles, told me that she had attended a lecture at Benares Hindu University in which a map of the universe and charts from *Gray's Anatomy* were compared and seen to be strikingly alike. Our bodies are little models of the universe.

Some months before she told this to me I had experienced this for myself. While meditating one day all ordinary physical sensation vanished. Spatial relation ceased to exist and I found myself keenly aware of being beyond dimension, neither large nor small, but infinite (for infinity is beyond size). Although the terminology is inappropriate to such a state, to make it somewhat understandable I have to say that I perceived an infinity of worlds within me. Suns, some solo and others surrounded by planets, glimmered inside my spaceless space. Not that I *saw* the light, but I *felt* or intuited it in what Saint Teresa of Avila called "intellectual vision." I did not see anything... and yet I did. It is not expressible in terms of ordinary sense experience, yet I have no other terms. I experienced myself as everything that existed within the relative material universe. Or so it seemed, for the human body is a miniature universe, a microcosmic model of the macrocosm. The physical human body is a reflection of the universal womb that conceived it. I had experienced the subtle level of the physical body that is its ideational (i.e., causal) blueprint. On that level it can be experienced as a map of the material creation.

In this matter, it was crucial that I not mistake the copy for the Original and think I was an infinite being or had attained Cosmic (Macrocosmic) Consciousness. It was microcosmic consciousness: not an insignificant experience, but certainly not the final step in evolution. I have told my experience so those who have similar experiences will not assume they are the Infinite.

The sequence of manifestation listed here in the Upanishad is quite literal, and we see in its delineation a sophistication unparalleled in any other religion, as is true of virtually every other aspect of Sanatana Dharma. For Sanatana Dharma is the all-embracing Universal Dharma, Manava Dharma, the Dharma of Humanity.

These divinities thus created fell into this great ocean. [The Self]

subjected that [person] to hunger and thirst. They said to him [the creator], Find out for us an abode, wherein established we may eat food. For them, he brought a cow. They said, Indeed this is not enough for us. For them he brought a horse. They said, Indeed this is not enough for us. For them he brought a person [human being]. They said, Well done indeed. A person verily is [what is] well done. He said to them, Enter into your respective abodes. (1.2.1-3)

The “divinities” are the various powers that were differentiated on the cosmic level and are now established in the human being. The cow is considered the embodiment of purity and purification, and the horse is considered the embodiment of power and the life principle in living organisms. These faculties could only manifest in the human form, for in the material plane the human is the highest and best mode of life, truly “well done” from the standpoint of potential for evolution of consciousness, and especially the capacity for self-evolution. Thus the yogi is the crown of all creation.

Fire, becoming speech, entered the mouth. Air becoming breath, entered the nostrils. The sun, becoming sight, entered the eyes. The quarters of space, becoming hearing, entered the ears. Plants and trees, becoming hairs, entered the skin. The moon, becoming the mind, entered the heart. Death, becoming the outbreath, entered the navel. Water becoming semen entered the generative organ. (1.2.4)

This is a listing of the various powers in the body and the primal elements of which they are the embodiment.

To him (the creator), hunger and thirst said, For us (also) find out an abode. He said to them, I assign you a place in these divinities and make you sharers with them. Therefore to whatever divinity an offering is made, hunger and thirst become partakers in it. (1.2.5)

Ashanayapipashe—hunger and thirst—mentioned here are not just the desire to eat or drink. They are the deep-seated impulse to encompass and assimilate. Therefore even our material desires are actually metaphysical in their fundamental nature. They may even be considered spiritual impulses. Consequently those who think they are merely mental, emotional or physical impulses and attempt to satisfy and quiet them by mental, emotional or physical objects or means will remain unfulfilled, hungry, thirsty and frustrated. When the Upanishads, Gita and other scriptures warn us against desires and the attempt to fulfill them, this is the reason. The only way to become satisfied, content and at peace is to fulfill the metaphysical-spiritual hunger and thirst by Self-realization.

Next follows an interesting sequence that deals with the Virat, the manifested Cosmic Guiding Intelligence.

He thought, Here are the worlds and the guardians of the worlds. Let me

create food for them.

He brooded over the waters and from the waters so brooded over issued a form. That whichever was produced as that form is, verily, food.

This, so created wished to flee away. [The person] sought to seize it with speech. He was not able to take hold of it by speech. If, indeed, he had taken hold of it by speech, even with speech, one would have had the satisfaction of food.

[The person] sought to seize it with breath. He was not able to take hold of it by breath. If, indeed, he had taken hold of it by breath, even with breath one would have had the satisfaction of food.

[The person] sought to seize it with sight. He was not able to take hold of it by sight. If, indeed, he had taken hold of it by sight, even with the sight (of food) one would have had the satisfaction of food.

[The person] sought to seize it with hearing. He was not able to take hold of it by hearing. If indeed, he had taken hold of it by hearing, even with the hearing (of food), one would have had the satisfaction of food.

[The person] sought to seize it by the skin. He was not able to take hold of it by the skin. If, indeed, he had taken hold of it by the skin, even with the skin (*i. e.* by touching food) one would have had the satisfaction of food.

[The person] sought to seize it by the mind. He was not able to take hold of it by the mind. If, indeed, he had taken hold of it by the mind, even with the mind (*i.e.* by thinking of food), one would have had the satisfaction of food.

[The person] sought to see it by the generative organ. He was not able to take hold of it by the generative organ. If, indeed, he had taken hold of it by the generative organ, even by emission one would have had the satisfaction of food.

Then [the person] sought to seize it by the out-breath. He got it. The grasper of food is what air is. This one living on food, is, verily, what air is. (1.3.1-10)

Obviously, God can do anything, but he has laws in his manifestation, and by those laws certain things cannot be done: not because he is not omnipotent, but because he is himself *Ritam*, Cosmic Order, and he never goes against his own laws.

This is especially true in the matter of karma, even though religion continually claims that God can be conned into letting us off the karmic hook, and false, deluded gurus claim to be able to manipulate and annihilate their disciples' karma. A true yogi will never make such a claim. Even if he was able to interfere in karma he would not do so, since the purpose of karma is not punishment, but is an instrument of learning and awakening. If karma was not for good and good alone, it would not exist.

In this passage of the Upanishad, it is showing how the individual spirit, the source of its personal universe in the form of its various bodies, cannot use its abilities to grasp and control food/matter. Only one power in the individual's

makeup can do that, and that is the prana. The prana is the fundamental life force, and though it all things are done in the inner and outer worlds. This is why pranayama in its subtle forms is a major aspect of yoga. (Ordinary externalized breathing exercises are not really pranayama, but merely breath control.)

He thought, How can this food exist without me? He thought, through what [way] shall I enter it? He thought [again], If speaking is through speech, if breathing is through breath, if seeing is through the eyes, hearing is through the ears, if touching is through the skin, if meditation is through the mind, if breathing out is through the outbreath, if emission is through the generative organ, then who am I?

After opening that very end [of the head], by that way he entered. This is the opening known as vidriti. This is the pleasing. For that, there are three abodes, three kinds of dreams as this is the abode, this is the abode, this is the abode. (1.3.11-12)

This narrative is more instructive than literally accurate. First of all, there is nothing that is not a manifestation of Brahman. It is not possible for Brahman to enter into anything, for It is always everywhere. But the upanishad is teaching us as we teach children: piecemeal and partially. The idea here is that Brahman is enlivening and enabling all beings, from the lokapalas down to the least evolved of sentient beings.

These two verses are more individual than cosmic, however, and refer mostly to us. Our lokapalas are the various faculties of the mind that administer the different levels of our being as humans. Brahman is, as I said, always present, but this verse speaks of the entry of the individual consciousness into the human complex when it incarnates as a human being. The Self enters through the psychic center or energy whorl at the crown of the head called the Brahmarandhra, the Aperture of Brahman, and from there administers its private cosmos, a god within its finite universe. According to yogis, when we leave our body we go out through the gate [chakra] that corresponds to our dominant state of consciousness. Those who are liberated depart through the Brahmarandhra. Others leave through the lower centers.

For that [Atman], there are three abodes, three kinds of sleep. If the Self is not known, then even our waking is only a sleeping and dreaming. There is a lot of going around and around about the question of the reality of the world. But the upanishad gives us a quite simple answer: To those that sleep, not knowing the Self, the world is unreal; to those that are awake in the knowledge of the Self, the world is real, for the world is the Self. This is the frame of reference Buddha had when, meeting a Brahmin after his liberation, when the Brahman asked: "Who are you?" he simply replied: "I am awake."

As this is the abode, this is the abode, this is the abode. The subtle life force moves in different parts (abodes) of the Sahasrara, the Thousand-petalled Lotus of the astral and causal brain, during the three states of waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep.

He, being born, perceived the created beings, what else here would one desire to speak? He perceived this very person: Brahman all-pervading. I have seen this, he said. Therefore his name is Idandra. Indeed, Idandra is the name. Of him who is Idandra, they speak indirectly as Indra. (1.3.13-14)

No matter what we speak about, we are always speaking of Brahman and our Self, for they are all that is. Having seen/known himself and Brahman, both are Idandra, “the Perceiver.” Brahman and the Self both are the knower and the known.

In a person, indeed, this one first becomes an embryo [garbha]. That which is semen is the vigor [tejas] come together from all the limbs. In the Self, indeed, one bears a Self. When he sheds this in a woman, he then gives it birth. That is its first birth. (2.1.1)

The moment we are conceived, the embryonic form begins. The human embryo is a combination of the egg from the mother and the semen from the father. The Upanishad tells us that semen is really the embodied subtle power that is drawn from the entire body of the father. This is the reason that the wise, monastic and non-monastic, conserve the seminal fluid. To waste it is to waste life itself, and will manifest in low vitality and susceptibility to disease and degeneration in future lives, and very often in this present life. The impetus to birth comes from the father, but the vehicle of that birth comes from the mother.

The first teaching of Paramhansa Yogananda I read explained that in the womb the growth of the embryo is guided by the incarnating spirit (jiva). Thus to say that our mother or father “made” us, is ridiculous. They certainly supplied the building materials, but God and the Self are the only creators of sentient beings. Nevertheless, our mother and father are the gateway to life for the incarnating soul, providers of our body (mother) and blood (father) and therefore benefactors of life worthy of respect and care, whatever else may follow after birth.

Conception is our first “birth.”

It becomes one with the woman, just as a limb of her own. Therefore it does not hurt her. She nourishes this Self of his that has come into her. (2.1.2)

This is no news that the embryo becomes part of the mother’s body. Since the blood develops from the elements of the father, in a sense the mother incubates and gives birth to him, as well as to herself. Therefore the relationship between father, mother and child is extremely complex and, if unmarred by negativity, is extremely profound and wonderful. I recently read the autobiography of my sannyasa guru in which his writing about his parents was truly moving and inspiring. Yogananda’s words about his mother and father in his autobiography are likewise admirable.

She, being the nourisher, should be nourished. The woman bears him as an embryo. He nourishes the child before birth and after the birth. While he nourishes the child before birth and after the birth, he thus nourishes his own

Self, for the continuation of these worlds, for thus are these worlds continued. This is one's second birth. (2.1.3)

In India, in an dharmic household, the expectant mother is cared for every moment and watched over to see that she is well and strong. After the birth she is still an object of great care. And in a joint family, even if poor, the mother never knows the misery and drudgery that can attend birth and child care in the West.

The father's role is outlined here, before and after the birth. The psychology involved is hardly seen outside a household that observes Sanatana Dharma.

The actual physical birth is our second "birth."

He (the son) who is one Self of his (father) is made his substitute for (performing) pious deeds. Then the other Self of his (father's) having accomplished his work, having reached his age, departs. So departing hence, he is, indeed, born again. That is his third birth. That has been stated by the seer. (2.1.4)

The idea is that the son in time takes over the duties and functions of the father. There is no place here for the son setting up his own home and eventually putting his parents away in a nursing facility. The son brings his bride to live with his family, and as the years go on, assumes the responsibilities of the father. In this way the household becomes both a physical and spiritual organism.

A joint family is a wonderful thing. Some of them are huge, occupying an entire neighborhood or living in the equivalent of a large apartment complex. The family of one of my friends, all of them disciples of Swami Keshabananda or one of his disciples, had a common kitchen-dining room in which upward of a hundred people were accommodated at each meal. One family I know of in Calcutta built a twelve-story building for them all to live in. The family itself should be a true spiritual community.

I have drifted away from the Upanishad a bit in this, but not in essence. For this verse can only be followed in a joint family. In such a situation the father eventually leaves his entire family to the care of his son(s) and departs this world to be born again. So what is thought of as death is really the third birth. That is why in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches the day of a saint's death is called his birthday.

While I was in the womb, I knew all the births of the gods. A hundred strongholds made of steel guarded me. I burst out of it, with the swiftness of a hawk. Vama-deva spoke this verse even when he was lying in the womb. He, knowing thus and springing upward, when the body is dissolved, enjoyed all desires in that world of heaven and became immortal, yea, became [immortal]. (2.1.5-6)

Many great masters have spoke of their continuing spiritual awareness in the womb. The sage Vamadeva entered the womb and dwelt there in full consciousness. Even there he was advancing in spiritual wisdom and moving toward liberation

until at the complete of his earthly incarnation he “enjoyed all desires in that world of heaven and became immortal, yea, became immortal.”

Who is this one? We worship him as the Self. Which one is the Self? He by whom one sees, or by whom one hears, or by whom one smells odors, or by whom one articulates speech or by whom one discriminates the sweet and the unsweet.

That which is heart, this mind, that is consciousness, perception, discrimination, intelligence, wisdom, insight, steadiness, thought, thoughtfulness, impulse, memory, conception, purpose, life, desire, control, all these, indeed, are names of intelligence.

This is extremely important for us, since it is only natural that we would mistake these various faculties for the Self, for they are functions of consciousness, though not Consciousness itself.

He is Brahma, he is Indra, he is Prajapati, he is all these gods, and these five great elements, namely, earth, air, ether water, light, these things and these which are mingled of the fire, as it were, the seeds of one sort and another, those born from an egg, and those born from a womb, and those born from sweat, and those born from a sprout, horses, cows, persons and elephants, whatever breathing thing there is here, whether moving or flying or what is stationary. All this is guided by intelligence, is established in intelligence. The world is guided by intelligence. The support is intelligence. Brahma is intelligence.

This takes us a very necessary step further: Even those things that are not Brahman Itself in the purest sense, in another sense are Brahman and to be regarded as such. This is a bit like telling us to go two ways at the same time, something impossible for the ordinary mind, but quite easy and even natural for the yogi's mind.

Swami Gambhirananda's rendering of the last part of this verse is very revealing: “All these have Consciousness [Prajna] as the giver of their reality; all these are impelled by Consciousness; the universe has Consciousness as its eye, and Consciousness is its end. Consciousness is Brahman.” What sublime statements. Surely the Upanishads are unparalleled in their beauty and profound teaching.

He, with this intelligent Self, soared upward from this world and having enjoyed all desires in that world of heaven became immortal, yea became (immortal). (3.1.1-4)

And so shall we. It is passages like this that render the Upanishads supreme and unique in the world of religion.

The Taittiriya Upanishad

Right away in his study the beginning yogi encounters many technical terms, a major one being tapasya. Tapasya is often translated as austerity, which it is since it involves both self-discipline and self-denial. But it is best understood as practical, result-producing spiritual discipline which produces spiritual force in the individual. Literally it means the generation of heat or energy, but is always used in a symbolic manner, referring to spiritual practice and its effect, especially the roasting of karmic seeds, the burning up of karma.

We naturally think of yogic disciplines as tapasya, but the Upanishad wants us to understand that every aspect of dharmic life is tapasya, resulting in purification, strengthening and development of consciousness—in other words: spiritual evolution.

The right [ritam] and also study and teaching, the true and also study and teaching, austerity and also study and teaching, self-control and also study and teaching, tranquility and also study and teaching, [tending] the [sacrificial] fires and also study and teaching, [performing] the agni-hotra [sacrifice] and also study and teaching, [entertaining of] guests and also study and teaching, [seeking the welfare of] humanity and also study and teaching. That, verily, is austerity, aye, that is austerity. (1.9.1)

If a person is going to follow dharma in the world, this verse tells how to do it. It names the necessary factors of the completely dharmic life, but after every one adds “and also study and teaching.” This means that a shallow and superficial approach to dharma is not for those who are going to attain the Self. All these elements must be incorporated into the yogi’s life. And beside that he must always be studying, increasing his knowledge of dharma (not expanding trivial worldly knowledge). Dharma must be his life. And he must be teaching that dharma in some manner. He must both receive and give, accumulate and distribute. He must be a light in the world, the embodiment of the next verse:

I am the mover of the tree [of the universe]; my fame is like a mountain’s peak. The exalted one making [me] pure, as the sun, I am the immortal one. I am a shining treasure, wise, immortal, indestructible. (1.10.1)

In the Benares Hindu University the following six verses are read by the Vice-Chancellor every year to those who are graduating and leaving the university:

Having taught the Veda, the teacher instructs the pupil: Speak the truth. Practice virtue. Let there be no neglect of your [daily] reading. Let there be no neglect of truth. Let there be no neglect of virtue. Let there be no neglect of welfare. Let there be no neglect of prosperity. Let there be no neglect of study and teaching. Let there be no neglect of the duties to the gods and the

fathers.

Be one to whom the mother is a god. Be one to whom the father is a god. Be one to whom the teacher is a god. Be one to whom the guest is a god.

Whatever deeds are blameless, they are to be practiced, not others. Whatever good practices there are among us, they are to be adopted by you, not others. (1.11.1-2)

Be one to whom the mother is a god. Be one to whom the father is a god. Be one to whom the teacher is a god. Be one to whom the guest is a god. This is the famous passage shamelessly twisted to make people believe they are to look upon their guru as God. But the word here is *deva*, a shining one like an angel, not God. Furthermore, father, mother and teacher (acharya, not guru) are equated.

Respect for parents is an element often very much lacking in the West, and it is not easy to respect parents who do not merit it. But we should remember that when the boy Vivekananda came to his father and asked: "What have you ever done for me?" his father calmly replied: "Go look in the mirror." So we can certainly feel appreciation toward our parents for being the means by which we live here on the earth where we can engage in sadhana and attain realization, even though that was not their intention at all. And it is our duty to personally look after our parents in their old age.

Whatever deeds are blameless, they are to be practiced, not others. Here is meant deeds that are perfectly pure and right with not a shadow of wrong. "Shady" actions are not worthy of the aspiring yogi. There should be no taint whatsoever in our actions. And that includes the way we make a living. Before we do anything we should consider whether it can be done as an offering to God. For our entire life is to be Ishwarapranidhana, the gift of our life to God.

Whatever good practices there are among us, they are to be adopted by you, not others. Only those things we have seen or heard that the Self-realized do should be done by us. The examples of holy ones should ever be before us for our following. That is why reading the lives of saints and master yogis is so beneficial. From them we learn how real human beings live so they may become gods.

[What is to be given] is to be given with faith, should not be given without faith, should be given in plenty, should be given with modesty, should be given with profound respect, should be given with sympathy.

Then if there is in you any doubt regarding any deeds, any doubt regarding conduct, you should behave yourself in such matters, as the Brahmanas there [who are] competent to judge, devoted [to good deeds], not led by others, not harsh, [but as] lovers of virtue would behave in such cases.

Then, as to the persons who are spoken against, you should behave yourself in such a way, as the Brahmanas there, [who are] competent to judge, devoted [to good deeds] not led by others, not harsh, lovers of virtue, would behave in regard to such persons.

This is the command. This is the teaching. This is the secret doctrine of

the Veda. This is the instruction. Thus should one worship. Thus indeed should one worship. (1.11.3-6)

Those who follow these precepts are worshipping God in the hearts of others.

The knower of Brahman reaches the Supreme. As to this the following has been said: He who knows Brahman as the real, as knowledge and as the infinite, placed in the secret place of the heart and in the highest heaven realizes all desires along with Brahman, the intelligent. (2.1.1)

Non-existent, verily does one become, if he knows Brahman as non-being. If one knows that Brahman is [exists], such a one people know as existent. This is, indeed, the embodied soul of the former.

Now then the following questions Does anyone who knows not, when departing from this life, go to the yonder world? Or is it that any one who knows, on departing from this life, attains that world?

He [the supreme soul] desired: Let me become many, let me be born. He performed austerity. Having performed austerity he created all this, whatever is here. Having created it, into it, indeed, he entered. Having entered it, he became both the actual and the beyond, the defined and the undefined, both the founded and the non-founded, the intelligent and the non-intelligent, the true and the untrue. As the Real, he became whatever there is here. That is what they call the Real. (2.6.1)

Non-existent, verily does one become, if he knows Brahman as non-being. If one knows that Brahman is, such a one people know as existent. If he considers Brahman as existent, then know him as existent. In *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-conception*, Max Heindel mentions more than once that the most negative state of which a human being is capable is that of unbelief and denial in relation to God and higher principles. Both passive and active unbelief are equally destructive. To not believe because thoughts of God simply do not arise in his mind or perhaps were completely missing from the person's environment and upbringing, or because his mind simply is incapable of reaching that high, is passive unbelief. To not believe because he resists such ideas from aversion to their reality and actively, willfully and intentionally does not want God or higher life to exist, and blots them from his mind, is active unbelief. Both indicate the worst possible condition of the total person, a complete opposition to life itself in the truest sense. Only those of tremendous personal evil in this or previous lives are in this condition. Such people do not exist spiritually, but are zombies in their soul and will sink lower and lower in their births until they are human in name only, not in functional reality. "Entering the demonic wombs, and deluded birth after birth, not attaining to me they fall into a progressively lower condition" (Bhagavad Gita 16:20). It is possible for their subtle bodies to disintegrate until they are right back where they started from in the evolutionary chain.

The Upanishad is not speaking of those who claim to not believe simply because

of personal whim or some mental kink. They are just liars and fools. I have met quite a number of them. They do not even have the force of mind or personality to be real unbelievers.

This is, indeed, the embodied soul of the former. Brahman is the embodied soul of the five bodies listed previously. Brahman is the Ultimate Self of all beings, existing at the core of our being, distinct from us but not separate or different. Only the yoga adepts understand this. Those who deny Brahman deny their very existence, and the negativity corrodes them from inside out. On the other hand, mere belief in Brahman counts for little unless it is followed up with conduct in keeping with that belief and most especially the practice of yoga to realize Brahman.

Now then the following questions Does anyone who knows not, when departing from this life, go to the yonder world? Or is it that any one who knows, on departing from this life, attains that world? Nikhilananda considers that “world” means the world of Brahman, but Radhakrishnan thinks it simply means the world beyond this one, the astral world closest to the earth plane. It is obvious that one who does not know Brahman cannot rise to the transcendent realm of Brahman beyond all relative existence, and equally obvious that there is no other world but the astral region for the non-knower of Brahman to enter after death.

He (the supreme soul) desired: Let me become many, let me be born. In the depths of Brahman every individual spirit, or jiva, has existed from eternity, resting in a state of oneness with Brahman. Yet those jivas experience that oneness in a finite manner. So they may come to experience the oneness in an infinite manner by developing the capacity to participate in the infinity of Brahman: creation is projected and they begin a long series of incarnations by means of which they evolve the capacity to participate in the Divine Life. (For more on this, see *Robe of Light*.)

He performed austerity. Having performed austerity he created all this, whatever is here. The tapas of Brahman was not the austerities of the yogis, but the rousing of the primal energy into the manifestation of the manifold universe, just as a sculptor makes a statue from clay or other malleable material. The truth is that all “creation” is really only a thought produced in the Divine Mind. That is why Mary Baker Eddy could confidently say Mind Is All, as had Sri Ramakrishna before her.

At all times we are living in Brahman. Yogananda said that creation is the dream of God, a dream in which we are each one dreaming our own private dream of evolution and liberation. And both God and ourselves, in our own respective spheres, are the dreamer and the dreamed.

Having created it, into it, indeed, he entered. Having entered it, he became both the actual and the beyond, the defined and the undefined, both the founded and the non-founded, the intelligent and the non-intelligent, the true and the untrue. While remaining absolutely unchanged, Brahman projected the creation, entered into it and “became” it along with the dualities inherent in it. And yet Brahman is always and only What It Is without modification or change in any way. And that is because “creation” is an idea, a dream that both takes place and does not take place. When we look with the

two eyes of earth we see all as real, but when we look with the one eye of spirit we shall see The Real.

As the Real, he became whatever there is here. That is what they call the Real. Brahman is the Reality behind the real, the Dreamer behind the dream. Thus this world is both real and unreal simultaneously. The Real is pretending to be the unreal. And so are we.

Non-existent, verily, was this (world) in the beginning. Therefrom, verily, was existence produced. That made itself a soul. Therefore is it called the well-made.

Verily, what that well-made is—that, verily, is the essence of existence. For, truly, on getting the essence, one becomes blissful. For who, indeed, could live, who breathe, if there were not this bliss in space [akasha]? This, verily, is it that bestows bliss. For truly, when one finds fearlessness as support in Him who is invisible, bodiless, undefined, without support, then has he reached fearlessness. When, however, this (soul) makes in this One the smallest interval [difference], then, for him, there is fear. That, verily, is the fear of the knower, who does not reflect. (2.7.1)

Non-existent, verily, was this (world) in the beginning. We must not forget that the Upanishads and the Gita say that Brahman is both existent and non-existent. When Brahman manifests as creation, It is existent; and when It withdraws creation and alone remains It is non-existent. Therefore in the beginning only Brahman “was.”

Therefrom, verily, was existence produced. From Brahman, the Great Void, the No Thing, was emanated or created (in the realm of Thought alone) all that exists. This section of the Upanishad and the one before it are expressed in a hymn of the Rig Veda, and demonstrates the unity and continuity of the Veda and the Vedanta (“end of the Veda”—the Upanishads that are appended to the Vedic collections of hymns, the Samhitas). Here is hymn one hundred and twenty-nine of the tenth book:

Then was not non-existent nor existent: there was no realm of air, no sky beyond it.

What covered it, and where? and what gave shelter? Was water there, unfathomed depth of water?

Death was not then, nor was there aught immortal: no sign was there, the day’s and night’s divider.

That One Thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature: apart from it was nothing whatsoever.

Darkness there was: at first concealed in darkness this All was indiscriminated chaos.

All that existed then was void and formless: by the great power of Warmth [Tapas] was born that Unit.

Thereafter rose Desire in the beginning, Desire, the primal seed and germ of Spirit.

Sages who searched with their heart's thought discovered the existent's kinship in the non-existent.

Transversely was their severing line extended: what was above it then, and what below it?

There were begetters, there were mighty forces, free action here and energy up yonder

Who verily knows and who can here declare it, whence it was born and whence comes this creation?

The Gods are later than this world's production. Who knows then whence it first came into being?

He, the first origin of this creation, whether he formed it all or did not form it,

Whose eye controls this world in highest heaven, he verily knows it, or perhaps he knows not.

Obviously he does know, otherwise the Vedic Rishis would not have known it. But course it is all a matter of what we mean by "knowing."

That made itself a soul. Therefore is it called the well-made. The "Itself" that was created is the projection of Brahman as the creation.

Verily, what that well-made is—that, verily, is the essence of existence. For, truly, on getting the essence, one becomes blissful. The word translated "essence" is *rasa*, which in this case means both the experience and the essence of Brahman: ananda-bliss. So "essence" also means experience, the experience of the bliss that is Brahman.

For who, indeed, could live, who breathe, if there were not this bliss in space [akasha]? Brahmananda, the Bliss of Brahman, is the true Self of all conscious beings (jivas) and as it is their inmost nature they naturally strive for it. Most seek it in the wrong place and suffer as a consequence, yet they never stop the search. Therefore the Upanishad is saying that the very reason we breathe is this bliss which exists in the Chidakasha, the Ether of Consciousness. It is not "love, and love alone, the world is seeking," but Atmanandam, the Bliss of the Self. The truly wise know this and seek it.

This, verily, is it that bestows bliss. Not only is Brahman bliss, It is a communicable, realizable and obtainable bliss. That is the essence of its existence, just as it is the essence of our existence.

For truly, when one finds fearlessness as support in Him who is invisible, bodiless, undefined, without support, then has he reached fearlessness. We are never truly fearless (abhaya) until we are beyond the possibility of that which is to be feared. This state is only possible when the consciousness of the yogi is made one with and absorbed into Brahman, "who is invisible, bodiless, undefined, without support."

When, however, this (soul) makes in this One the smallest interval [difference], then, for him, there is fear. Brahman, being beyond all difference and duality, those who "see double" in relation to it will remain in the realm of fear.

That, verily, is the fear of the knower, who does not reflect. Brahman Itself becomes a cause of fear to such a one who will eventually become so entangled in illusion that

he will fear that union with Brahman will be absorption into nothingness and therefore his utter annihilation. Some form of this fear, even if not conceptualized, can occur in meditation to the double-sighted.

He who is here in the person and he who is yonder in the sun—he is one. He who knows thus, on departing from this world reaches to the Self which consists of food, reaches the Self which consists of life, reaches the Self which consists of mind, reaches the Self which consists of understanding, reaches the Self which consists of bliss. (2.8.1)

Whence words return along with the mind, not attaining It, he who knows that bliss of Brahman fears not from anything at all. Such a one, verily, the thought does not torment, Why have I not done the right? Why have I done the sinful? He who knows this, saves himself from these [thoughts]. For, truly, from both of these he saves himself—he who knows this. Such is the secret doctrine. (2.9.1)

Fear and doubts, including self-doubts, of any kind is impossible to the knower of Brahman.

Bhrigu, the son of Varuna, approached his father Varuna and said, Venerable Sir, teach me Brahman.

He explained to him thus: Matter, life, sight, hearing, mind, speech. [All these are manifestations of Brahman.] (3.1.1.)

Brahman is the origin, sustainer and ultimate absorber into Itself of all things, which never have been anything but Brahman. As Yogananda often said when speaking of a spiritual principle: “But you have to realize that” by direct yogic experience. There is no other way. As we have already seen, Brahman caused an internal movement or stirring of potential energy which then became actualized and manifested as both the state of relative existence and everything in that state. (This is a tremendous oversimplification.)

He knew that matter is Brahman.... He knew that life [prana] is Brahman. ... He knew that mind is Brahman.... He knew that intelligence is Brahman.... He knew that Brahman is bliss..... This wisdom of Bhrigu and Varuna, [is] established in the highest heaven; he who knows this, becomes established. He becomes great in the splendor of sacred wisdom. (3.2.1; 3.3.1; 3.4.1; 3.5.1; 3.6.1.)

Those who meditate on Brahman will eventually merge into Brahman, and all the attributes of Brahman will be his. It has been said: “What you worship, that you become.” Meditation is the supreme worship of Brahman.

He who knows this, on departing from this world,... He sits singing this chant: Oh Wonderful, Oh Wonderful, Oh Wonderful. (3.10.5.)

The Isha Upanishad

We now will look into the Isha Upanishad, so called from its opening word: *Ishavasyam*.

Just before going to India for the first time in 1962, I had the great good fortune to meet and hear Sri A. B. Purani, the administrator of the renowned Aurobindo Ashram of Pondicherry, India. From his lips I heard the most brilliant expositions of Vedic philosophy, and nothing in my subsequent experience has equaled them. In one talk he told the following story:

In ancient India there lived a most virtuous Brahmin who was considered by all to be the best authority on philosophy. One day the local king ordered him to appear before him. When he did so, the king said: "I have three questions that puzzle—even torment—me: Where is God? Why don't I see him? And what does he do all day? If you can't answer these three questions I will have your head cut off." The Brahmin was appalled and terrified, because the answers to these questions were not just complex, they were impossible to formulate. In other words, he did not know the answers. So his execution date was set.

On the morning of the execution day the Brahmin's young son appeared and asked the king if he would release his father if he, the son, would answer the questions. The king agreed, and the son asked that a container of milk be brought to him. It was done. Then the boy asked that the milk be churned into butter. That, too, was done.

"The first two of your questions are now answered," he told the king.

The king objected that he had been given no answers, so the son asked: "Where was the butter before it was churned?"

"In the milk," replied the king.

"In what part of the milk?" asked the boy.

"In all of it."

"Just so, agreed the boy, "and in the same way God is within all things and pervades all things."

"Why don't I see him, then," pressed the king.

"Because you do not 'churn' your mind and refine your perceptions through meditation. If you do that, you will see God. But not otherwise. Now let my father go."

"Not at all," insisted the king. "You have not told me what God does all day."

"To answer that," said the boy, "we will have to change places. You come stand here and let me sit on the throne."

The request was so audacious the king complied, and in a moment he was standing before the enthroned Brahmin boy who told him: "This is the answer. One moment you were here and I was there. Now things are reversed. God perpetually lifts up and casts down every one of us. In one life we are exalted and in another we

are brought low: oftentimes in a single life this occurs, and even more than once. Our lives are completely in his hand, and he does with us as he wills.” (“He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree” Luke 1:52)

The Brahmin was released and his son was given many honors and gifts by the king.

The Isha Upanishad opens with a description of the consciousness of God’s immanence that should be ours.

(Know that) all this, whatever moves in this moving world, is enveloped by God [Isha]. Therefore find your enjoyment in renunciation [tyaga], do not covet what belongs to others. (1)

Whatever we experience, whether through the inner or outer senses, it is enveloped by the Lord (Isha). Everything is within the Lord, and the Lord is within everything. The awakened experience the world as the Divine Presence.

Tragically, throughout lives without number we have not had this awareness and have as a consequence believed that what we have experienced, whether objective or subjective, is the sole reality and have dissipated life after life in involvement with it to our pain and destruction. A door itself is never the way out: the way out is revealed when the door is moved aside. Not knowing this either, we have clawed, hammered, and hewn at the door—at least in those lives when we were not adulating and worshipping it or calling it “God’s greatest gift to us”—to no avail. The root problem is our believing in the door’s reality, thinking that it is the beginning, middle, and end. Only when it disappears will we see the truth that lies beyond outer appearances.

We must not just get inside things, we must get to their heart. And how is that done? By getting into our own heart, into the core of our own being. There everything will be found. The key to the door is meditation.

All this, whatever moves in this moving world, is enveloped by God. Rather than speaking of piercing to the heart of things, the literal meaning is that the Lord (who is the heart of all things) should be seen covering—that is, enveloping—all things. This has two meanings.

1) What I have just expressed, that we should experience—not just think intellectually—that God is encompassing all things, that we should not see things as independent or separate from God, but as existing within God. And this vision should extend to us: we, too, exist only within him.

2) In our seeing of things, God should always be between us and them. First we should see God, and only secondarily see the things.

The renowned Swami (Papa) Ramdas in his spiritual autobiography *In Quest of God* writes of his initial spiritual awakening in these words: “It was at this time that it slowly dawned upon his mind that Ram was the only Reality and all else was false.... All thought, all mind, all heart, all soul was concentrated on Ram, Ram covering up and absorbing everything.”

In the Bhagavad Gita, which is a digest and expansion of the Upanishadic

message, Krishna tells Arjuna that the wise see God in all things and all things in God. “He who sees me everywhere, and sees all things in me—I am not lost to him, and he is not lost to me” (6:30).

If we accept the foregoing, then we will take the next step and experience that God alone is reality. This can be understood more than one way. We can conclude that God alone is real and everything else is unreal. The problem with that is our tendency to equate “unreal” with non-existent, and wrongly believe that everything is only an illusion, that it has no reality whatsoever.

The great non-dual philosopher Shankara explained the accurate view by likening our experience of things to that of a man who sees a rope in dim light and mistakes it for a snake, his mind even supplying eyes that glitter and a mouth that hisses at him. When light is brought, he sees that there is no snake, only a rope. The snake was not real, but his impression, as illusion, was real and did exist in his mind. The rope was the reality and the snake was an illusion overlaid on it. In the same way God is the reality and everything else is illusory like the snake.

But illusion does exist. Denying it gets us nowhere; we have to deal with it by seeing through it and dispelling it. Then we will see the reality: God. After that we can progress to the understanding that even though our interpretation may be wrong what we perceive does have a real side to it, and that is God himself. Hence, all things are God in their real side. The unreal side is in our mind alone. We can say that God is the reality of the unreal which we need to see past. And that is the whole idea of the opening verse of the Upanishad. He alone is real; he is all things.

Therefore find your enjoyment in renunciation. The word translated “renunciation” is tyaga, not sannyasa. Sannyasa means renunciation in formally taking up the monastic life, but tyaga is purely psychological, being renunciation in the sense of dissociation of the mind from worldly objects and the seeds of desire. It is basically the same as vairagya, which is defined in *A Brief Sanskrit Glossary* as: “Non-attachment; detachment; dispassion; absence of desire; disinterest; or indifference. Indifference towards and disgust for all worldly things and enjoyments.” In the Bhagavad Gita it is the relinquishment of the fruit of action.

When the mind is protected by objective vision and dissociation from the world around us in the realization that what we see is not the reality of things, and the erasing of desire (craving) for them as a consequence, we are at peace and possess the clarity of mind needed to intelligently and effectively elevate our levels of perception and consciousness. We can become genuine yogis.

All of our sorrows and troubles come from our mistaking vain appearances for reality, from our looking at them with our outer eyes instead of beholding God with the inner eye. But we are addicted to those vain appearances; we have to admit that. Yes, we are even addicted to all the pain and anxiety they bring us. That is foolish, but is it any more foolish than it is to be addicted to drugs or alcohol, or to people that harm us? We are insane on certain levels; this world is a madhouse for people of our particular lunacy. The sooner we understand this and resolve to be cured and released, the better it will be for us. For from illusory things we can move on to

God-perception.

For this reason the yogis, those who seek God in meditation, should be the most cheerful and optimistic of people. If we look to God we will see only perfection and rejoice in all things. If we look at ourselves, others and the world around us we will see only imperfection and be discontent. Depression comes from looking in the wrong place. It is the bitter fruit of ego-involvement, of ego-obsession. The remedy is not to have high self-esteem but rather to have high God-esteem. And since we live in God, we will see the divine side even of ourselves and be ever hopeful.

The unreal “me” need not be struggled with: it is only a ghost, a shadow. Bringing in the light of God-contact will reveal that to be the truth. Then we will be at peace and in perfect joy, knowing the truth of our Self. What a burden is lifted from those who come to know that God alone is real and true, and that we need only look to him. When we look within we find him at the center of our Self.

We must renounce unreality. As I say, we are addicted to it, so we will have to struggle to break the terrible habit of delusion, just as those addicted to the hallucinations produced by drugs have to break away from them and discard them forever. Then we will be secure in our interior fortress, our spiritual protection: tyaga.

Do not covet what belongs to others. Why? Because it does not exist! Therefore we can never have it, nor can anyone else. It is just a bubble destined to burst leaving nothing in its place. There are no “things” to covet or possess. They are the fever dreams of illusion from which we must awaken. No one really owns anything, because the thing (as we perceive it) does not exist, and the false “owner” does not exist either; and neither do we: as least so far as our perceptions of “them,” “it,” and “me” go.

God and I in space alone
And nobody else in view.
“And where are the people, O Lord!” I said.
“The earth below and the sky o’erhead
And the dead whom once I knew?”

“That was a dream,” God smiled and said,
“A dream that seemed to be true,
There were no people, living or dead,
There was no earth and no sky o’erhead
There was only Myself—and you.”

“Why do I feel no fear,” I asked,
“Meeting you here in this way,
For I have sinned I know full well,
And there is heaven and there is hell,
And is this the judgment day?”

“Nay, those were dreams,” the great God said,
“Dreams that have ceased to be.
There are no such things as fear or sin,
There is no you—you have never been—
There is nothing at all but Me.”
 (“Illusion” by Edna Wheeler Wilcox).

Always performing works here one should wish to live a hundred years. If you live thus as a man, there is no way other than this by which karman [or deed] does not adhere to you. (2)

It is generally felt that this verse, along with other passages from scriptures and books on spiritual life, indicates that one hundred years is the normal lifespan for a human being. On the other hand, the figure of one hundred years may also symbolize the complete lifespan of a person, however brief or long, the idea being that not one moment of our life need be a burden nor should we ever wish to shorten our life by a single breath—that life should be lived in fulfillment with peace and happiness all the way through. The saints and masters of all religions and ages have shown that this is possible. We need only know how to do it; and these words give the way.

In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna draws very clearly for us the picture of a person who lives in anxiety and misery and him who lives in peace and contentment. Both may be living in exactly the same situation, for it is not external conditions that make us happy or miserable, but our reaction to them. Krishna makes it quite plain that the secret of happiness or misery lies in the absence of two things: attachment and desire. Those who live in attachment to externalities, anxious to fulfill desire, must suffer and live in frustration. On the other hand, those who live without egoic desire are perpetually at peace. Krishna not only holds out the ideal for us, he also tells us how to accomplish it in the following verses from the Bhagavad Gita.

“Steadfast in yoga, perform actions abandoning attachment, being indifferent to success or failure. It is said that such evenness of mind is yoga” (2:48).

“He who engages in action, holding me as the highest aim, devoted, abandoning attachment, free from enmity to all beings, comes to me” (11:55).

“Truly, embodied beings are not able to give up actions entirely; but he who relinquishes the fruit of action is called a man of renunciation” (18:11).

“He whose intellect (buddhi) is unattached, whose lower self is subdued, from whom desire has departed, by renunciation attains the supreme state of freedom from action” (18:49).

In other words, keeping the mind on God frees us from egoic attachment to our activities. This is an extremely high ideal and one very hard to attain; yet we must strive for it through the practice of meditation, for only the clarity of vision reached through meditation can enable us to live out such a lofty ideal.

Negative or passive indifference is not detachment, nor is carelessness and

shoddiness in our daily work spiritual-mindedness—a view that prevails in much of the Orient and among many in the West. This is really a great portion of the Bhagavad Gita’s message: that we must work with skill to the best of our abilities while leaving the results to God. In that way we truly are “workers together” with God (II Corinthians 6:1) in our life. Sri Ramakrishna said: “If you can weigh salt you can weigh sugar,” meaning that if a person is proficient in spiritual life he will be proficient in his outer life as well. That does not mean that all yogis need to become great successes in business or some profession, but it does mean that they need to work with the full capabilities they possess and do absolutely the best they can, and not worry about the results. In this way they will be at peace both internally and externally.

The real cankerworm in the garden of our life is desire, whether in the form of wanting, wishing, yearning, desiring, hoping, demanding or craving. Whether to a little or a great degree, desire destroys our hearts and our chances for inner peace. Desire is a wasting fever which drives us onward to spiritual loss. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36). As Wordsworth wrote: “We have given our hearts away—a sordid boon!” I have spent my entire life watching people gain a little bit of the world and lose their souls. And ultimately they lost the world, too, either in the changes of earthly fortune or through the finality of death.

“And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:15-21).

Desirelessness is not a zombie-like passivity, a kind of pious vegetating. Far from it. Krishna lauds the desireless in these words: “When he leaves behind all the desires of the mind, contented in the Self by the Self, then he is said to be steady in wisdom. He whose mind is not agitated in misfortunes, freed from desire for pleasures, from whom passion, fear and anger have departed, steady in thought—such a man is said to be a sage. He who is without desire in all situations, encountering this or that, pleasant or unpleasant, not rejoicing or disliking—his wisdom stands firm. And when he withdraws completely the senses from the objects of the senses, as the tortoise draws in its limbs, his wisdom is established firmly. Sense-objects turn away from the abstinent, yet the taste for them remains. But the taste also turns away from him who has seen the Supreme” (Bhagavad Gita 2:55-59).

The desireless who have fulfilled themselves in God are the most alive, happy, and satisfied of human beings. For them there is no talk of death being a “blessed release” for they are already freed in spirit.

Demonic, verily, are those worlds enveloped in blinding darkness, and to them go after death, those people who are the slayers of the Self. (3)

The Upanishadic seer opened by speaking of the way of fulfilled and peaceful life: seeing the divine in all things, and living on the earth according to divine law. But this is not the only world in which we can find ourself as we move through a cycle of continuous birth and death: birth into one world after having died out of another, or another birth into the world where we were just previously. When we speak of birth we usually think only of physical embodiment on this earth. But when we die in this world we are born into an astral world where we remain for some time and then die to that world and become born back into this world. Although this world remains virtually the same, despite the fact that every generation thinks it is a great advance over previous eras, we can spend time in a vast array of astral worlds, positive and negative, pleasant and unpleasant. The earth becomes a kind of stable place of return for us. Or is it?

Although the earth accommodates a wide range of spiritual and psychological evolution, the astral worlds are more specialized. There is an astral world for every degree of consciousness. These worlds can be classified just as sentient beings are classified. Nevertheless the masters of wisdom have generally agreed: there are two basic kinds of people—suras and asuras, those who dwell in the light and those who live in the dark. “Divine” and “demonic” are commonly used to translate sura (or deva) and asura. A sura (deva) is in the light, an asura is not. Sometimes a person dwells in the dark by choice, but most often it is a state of ignorance rather than negative volition. Because of this we need to avoid a “deva is good, asura is bad” reaction in all cases, though there are instances when this is accurate, and to deny it would be foolish—and asuric.

The entire sixteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita is directed to this manner of divine (daivic) and demonic (asuric) nature as it manifests in human beings. I know it is pretty lengthy, but it is so insightful and complete that it merits inclusion here. Sri Krishna speaks:

“Fearlessness, purity of being, steadfastness in knowledge and yoga, almsgiving, self-control, sacrifice, self-study (swadhyaya), tapasya, and straightforwardness, non-violence, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation, tranquility, without calumny, compassion for beings, uncovetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness, vigor, patience, fortitude, purity, absence of hatred, absence of pride—they are the endowment of those born to a divine state.

“Hypocrisy, arrogance, conceit, anger, harshness and ignorance are the endowment of those born to a demonic state.

“The divine state is deemed to lead to liberation, the demonic to bondage. Do not grieve: you are born for a divine state.

“There are two types of beings in this world: the divine and the demonic. The divine has been described at length. Hear from me of the demonic.

“Demonic men know not what to do or refrain from; purity is not found in them, nor is good conduct, nor is truth. ‘The world,’ they say, ‘is without truth, without a basis, without God, produced by mutual union, with lust for its cause—what else?’ Holding this view, these lost souls, small-minded and of cruel deeds, arise as the enemies of the world, bent on its destruction. Attached to insatiable desires, full of hypocrisy, arrogance and intoxication, having accepted false ideas through delusion, they act with foul purposes. Clinging to boundless cares ending only in death, with gratification of desire as their highest aim—convinced that this is all—bound by a hundred snares of hope, given over to desire (lust) and anger, they seek to gain by unjust means accumulation of wealth to gratify their desires.

“‘Today this has been acquired by me. This I shall also obtain. This is mine, and this gain also shall be mine. That enemy has been slain by me, and I shall slay others, too, for I am the Lord, I am the enjoyer, I am successful, powerful and happy. I am wealthy and high-born,’ they say, ‘who else is equal to me? I shall sacrifice, I shall give, I shall rejoice.’ Thus, they are deluded by ignorance. Led astray by many imagined fancies, caught in a net of delusion, addicted to the gratifying of desire, they fall into a foul hell. Self-conceited, stubborn, filled with the intoxication of wealth, they sacrifice in name only, for show, not according to the prescribed forms. Clinging to egotism, power, haughtiness, desire and anger, these malignant people hate me in their own and in others’ bodies. These malicious evildoers, cruel, most degraded of men, I hurl perpetually into only the wombs of demons here. Entering the demonic wombs, and deluded birth after birth, not attaining to me they fall into a progressively lower condition.”

What are the basic traits that render someone an asura? The Upanishad has already given them: 1) spiritual blindness, 2) spiritual darkness, 3) spiritual ignorance, and 4) engaging in deeds that destroy the awareness and the freedom of the eternal, immortal, divine Self. The first three are what dispose us to the fourth, destructive trait. Krishna has already given us quite an exposition of the ways of the asuric personality, but it can all be summed up in their effect: the negation of the consciousness of the individual spirit.

The fact that spiritual ignorance is a matter of unawareness of our own Atman (Self), is particularly important because many asuras think to hide their true status under an externalized cloak of religiosity. But it is absurd to pretend that we know or are aware of the infinite Spirit when we are not aware of the finite spirit, our own Self, which is right within us. This is why Buddha simply refused to speak about God or gods, and insisted that each one must seek for nirvana alone, rejecting all other matters as harmful distractions.

In India it is said that if we learn about ocean water from a single cup of water we then know about the water of all oceans. In the same way, if we come to truly comprehend our nature as spirit we will be able to know God the Infinite Spirit.

Thus Self-knowledge—knowledge of our spirit—is essential. Shankara says that until we know the Self we are all asuras in the absolute sense, but if we are seeking to know the Self the distinction is not so drastic.

An asura, then, is one whose life and thought obscure and darken their inner consciousness so their true Self remains unknown and buried, often even unsuspected as to its existence. It has nothing to do with what philosophers and theologians say about it; the matter is thoroughly pragmatic. Do we or do we not, are we or are we not? Verbal claims mean nothing here. State of being alone matters.

Because it is their will, asuras are born over and over in worlds “enveloped in blinding darkness” at the time of their death, earthly or astral. Naturally our thoughts go to the ideas of hell so beloved to all exoteric religionists, East and West, whether it is the simple fire pit of Christianity or the horrifically complex and lurid hell(s) of Hinduism, Taoism and Buddhism. But what is this world in which we presently find ourselves: a world ravaged with hatred, violence, disease, cruelty and aggressive ignorance and greed? The fact that there is also kindness, love, mercy and toleration in the world makes it even more crazy: schizophrenic and schizophrenogenic (making us crazy). No wonder *The Onion*, a satirical magazine, ran an article entitled: “God Diagnosed With Bipolar Disorder.” It might seem blasphemous, but it is the preposterous religion prevailing in the West that is blasphemous, and the satire is just pointing it out.

Someone once asked Paramhansa Yogananda if he believed in hell. Paramhansaji smiled and asked: “Where do you think you are?” A very good question, indeed.

We write our own ticket by the way we think and act. No amount of rationalization or assurance from others will change this fact. If we seek darkness we will find darkness; if we seek the light we will find the light. Nothing more; nothing less.

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8).

Just be aware of the consequences.

(The spirit) is unmoving, one, swifter than the mind. The senses do not reach It as It is ever ahead of them. Though Itself standing still It outstrips those who run. In It the all-pervading air supports the activities of beings. (4)

This verse is not easy to grasp because it speaks of a mode of being far different from our usual condition.

“One” has two meanings in Eastern thought: 1) number and 2) quality. This a very important point, since many controversies have arisen philosophically simply because Western thinkers tend to limit “one” to a numerical value only. The incredibly bitter and violent controversy over the so-called “Monophysite heresy” in the early centuries of Christianity in which tens of thousands of Egyptians and Syrians were killed by the armies of the Byzantine empire, took place only because

the Italian-Byzantines could not grasp what the “heretics” meant by the simple word *monos* when applied to spiritual matters. Both meanings, number and quality, have significance for us who seek the knowledge of the Self.

The principle that the Self is one (non-dual) should set us to thinking about our own present self-concept and, perhaps even more important, the way we live out our self-concept. Many people think one thing intellectually (or at least verbally, for public consumption) and think another instinctively. For example, I knew a minister who was once challenged by a self-styled atheist that spent about an hour expounding the truth of atheism and the folly of theism. When he was finished the minister said: “There are two points about all that you have just said. One: it is complete nonsense. Two: you do not believe a word of it yourself.” The man threw his right hand up in the air and declaimed: “I swear to God in heaven that I *do*!”

Once an Eastern Orthodox seminarian remarked to me that the worse thing that had ever happened to Western Christianity and Western philosophy in general was the invention of the “pie chart”—those round diagrams divided into “slices” that plagued us throughout school in many subjects, from mathematics to sociology. “People have come to think that they are conglomerations of pieces that make up a whole, rather than a single homogenous being,” he explained. How many times do people speak of having several “roles” in life or of wearing many “hats.”

Fragmentation is a terrible plague destroying our capacity to either see or attain unity, the integration of our being. This is a serious mental and spiritual disorder. Being both fragmented and dispersed in our energies and awareness rather than operating from a central point of order, the mirror of our life is shattered into innumerable fragments that cannot convey any coherent image of our true face. The unity that is the true image is defaced, effaced and even erased as far as our consciousness is concerned, even though our true nature can never be altered in any manner. Struggling and submerged in the illusion of multiplicity, the truth of our unity is far from us. For we are not just one numerically, we are absolutely one in nature. This is an eternal truth that must be regained by us. How to do so? By the process that alone truly unifies the consciousness: authentic yoga meditation.

(The spirit) is unmoving, one, swifter than the mind. How can the Self move swifter than thought and yet be unmoving? The Self, the spirit, is completely outside of time and space (which are illusions, anyway), yet it can scan time and space, moving backward and forward simply because of the fact that it is one. Being one in the truest sense, the Self is everywhere since there really is no “where” at all. The Self is truly Whole and therefore all-embracing. It moves swifter than thought, because a thought requires a time, however small, to arise or be expressed. The Self, in contrast, exists only in the Now. The questions “Where did I come from?” “Where am I going?” “What was I in the past?” and “What shall I be in the future?” are valuable because they set us on the quest to the discovery that we do not come or go, nor do we have a past or future, only a Present. When Sri Ramana Maharshi was at the end of his physical embodiment he commented: “They say I am ‘going,’ but where shall I go?”

The senses do not reach It as It is ever ahead of them. The Self does not move, but it is always before the questing senses, always out of their reach. The Mandukya Upanishad (7), speaking of the consciousness of the Self, of turiya, describes it as “not that which is conscious of the inner (subjective) world, nor that which is conscious of the outer (objective) world, nor that which is conscious of both, nor that which is a mass of consciousness. It is not simple consciousness nor is It unconsciousness. It is unperceived, unrelated, incomprehensible, uninferable, unthinkable and indescribable. The essence of the Consciousness manifesting as the Self in the three states, It is the cessation of all phenomena; It is all peace, all bliss and non-dual. This is what is known as the Fourth (Turiya). This is the Atman and this has to be realized.” Who can say any more?

Though Itself standing still It outstrips those who run. The Self is unmoving, as we have been told. Hence, any “movement” is incompatible with it and blots it from our awareness. That which moves cannot possibly perceive it, nor can any process of movement (including the labyrinthine ways of so much that is called yoga) ever result in touching or seeing it. Rather, movement must cease, as Patanjali points out in the very beginning of the Yoga Sutras: Yoga is the cessation of movement in the mind-substance. In other words, when we stop “running” we will rest in our Self.

Radhakrishnan has a very relevant comment on this verse: “The Supreme is one essence but has two natures, an eternal immutability and an unceasing change. It is stillness and movement. Immovable in Itself, all things are moved from It. The unity and manifoldness are both aspects of the life divine. Unity is the truth and multiplicity is its manifestation. The former in the truth, *vidya*, the latter ignorance, *avidya*. The latter is not false except when it is viewed in itself, cut off from the eternal unity. Unity constitutes the base of multiplicity and upholds it, but multiplicity does not constitute and uphold the unity.”

In It the all-pervading air [vayu] supports the activities of beings. Prabhavananda’s translation is very terse, but perhaps gives it the impetus it needs by simply rendering it: “Without the Self, there is no life.”

This is perhaps the hardest lesson for human beings to learn: *Without the Self, there is no life.* We may engage in frantic activity, running here and there and accomplishing tremendous things in the world, indulging the senses to the maximum and immersing ourselves in ambitions, emotions, and relationships, but through it all the truth is simply this: we are dead, mere wraiths feeding desperately on a shadow life that is no life at all, not even a poor imitation. In the Self alone do we find life. How hard this is to learn, and how much harder it is to follow through on, for it inevitably leads to the total renunciation of all that is not the Self: in other words, to the renunciation of everything we hold dear and identify with as being ours and ourself when they are no such thing at all. This is a bitter insight in the beginning, but as our inner eye begins to adjust to the truth of it, we find it the source of greatest joy. The Gita refers to this joy as “that happiness which is like poison at first, but like amrita in the end, born of the light of one’s own Self (Atmabuddhi)” (18:37).

It moves and It moves not; It is far and It is near; It is within all this and It is also outside all this. (5)

It moves and It moves not. Being outside of the illusions of time and space, the Self neither moves nor goes through any type of change whatsoever. Yet it experiences a multiplicity of externalities as the unmoving witness, momentarily caught up in the movie and thinking it is inside it and undergoing the changes in the scenario.

Just as imagining seeing or doing something is not the same as actually seeing or doing it, so observing the motion picture of countless lives with their attendant joys and sorrows is not the same as actually being born, living and dying over and over. But we are deluded into thinking so, and the Upanishadic sage is endeavoring to wake us up, just as we awaken someone who is having a nightmare and calling out in pain or fear. We, however, having become accustomed and even addicted to the nightmare, are a lot more difficult to awaken.

It is far and It is near. Since the Self is existing in eternity, transcending any degree of relativity, it could not be further away from the relative realm of experience (not existence, because the relative does not actually exist at all except as an illusion). On the other hand, since relativity is only a concept, the Self is the nearest possible because it alone is actually present.

At the end of the Syrian Jacobite Liturgy the celebrant gives a blessing beginning: "You who are far and you who are near...." The reference is not to those who are at the back of the church and those who are at the front, but to those who are far and near in their minds and hearts.

For those who are immersed in the illusion of relativity, nothing could be further away than the transcendent Self. Yet, since the Self alone is ever present, it is nearer than any relative experiencing. As the Kena Upanishad says: "It is that which is the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech, indeed of the speech, the breath of the breath, the eye of the eye" (Kena Upanishad 1:2).

It is within all this and It is also outside all this. Nothing can exist apart from the Self, not even an illusion. A hallucination is a "thing" even though it is solely mental. The Self is the substratum upon and within which everything subsists, the screen on which the light-and-shadow play of life is projected. It is itself the basis of all that is perceived. From one perspective it can be said that the Self (Consciousness) is inside everything. From another, since it is forever separate from all things, it can be spoken of as outside and alien to all things. Whichever way you say it, the idea is the same: the Self never touches any "thing."

And he who sees all beings in his own Self and his own Self in all beings, he does not feel any revulsion by reason of such a view. (6)

Here we come to the practical application of what the Upanishad is telling us about the Self. (This is the inestimable value of the Bhagavad Gita. Where the Upanishads express spiritual mathematics in a usually abstract manner, the Gita outlines both the Upanishadic principles and what the result will be when they are

followed or realized, defining spiritual realities in practical, observable terms.)

If we never lose sight of the Self we will be able to perceive what is not the Self. And since what is not the Self is not even real, why would we hate it? Conversely, how could we hate or be averse to the real Self? This vision is the foundation of dynamic even-mindedness.

“Where one sees nothing but the One, hears nothing but the One, knows nothing but the One—there is the Infinite. Where one sees another, hears another, knows another—there is the finite. The Infinite is immortal, the finite is mortal” (Chandogya Upanishad 7:24:1. Prabhavananda).

It is also the absolute end of all delusion and negative reaction to it, for the Upanishad concludes:

When, to one who knows, all beings have, verily, become one with his own Self, then what delusion and what sorrow can be to him who has seen the oneness?

He has filled all; He is radiant, bodiless, invulnerable, devoid of sinews, pure, untouched by evil. He, the seer, thinker, all-pervading, Self-existent has duly distributed through endless years the objects according to their natures. (7-8)

To one who knows, all beings have, verily, become one with his own Self. The Self is both all things and not anything, depending on one’s point of reference. One thing is definite: the Self cannot be separated from to any degree and is always present in the fullest measure. This being so, we need not seek the Self, but only *realize* it. We are always seeing, touching and living in the Self, yet we do not recognize it, just as fish have no perception of water because of its intimate and integral connection with them. The Self is even more immediate to us than is water to the fish.

The most practical application of this truth is simple: We should always be aware of the Self and centered in the Self. And that is done by the faithful practice of meditation.

He is radiant. In the Katha Upanishad it is said of the Self: “The sun shines not there, nor the moon and the stars, these lightnings shine not, where then could this fire be? Everything shines only after that shining light. His shining illumines all this world” (Katha Upanishad 2:2.15). The Self is illumined by no external light, but rather illumines all itself. We could shine the brightest of lights into the eyes of a dead man and he would see nothing. But if the Self is present to enliven him, then he will see. The Self is known (seen) by the Self, and therefore it is called *swayamprakash*: self-illumined. Hence only those in contact with their Self can be said to possess illumination to any degree. Those who obsess on external practices and deities can only dwell in the light that is really darkness (Matthew 6:23). We must seek illumination in the Self alone, keeping in mind that God is the Self of the Self, that to seek one is to seek the other.

Sukram, the word translated “radiant,” also means pure in the sense of being of such perfect clarity that no light is obscured. For it is from the core of the Self that

the pure Light of God shines forth. Therefore, to attain Self-knowledge is to realize both the Atman and the Paramatman. Only when we are centered in our Self can we see God, and only when we are centered in God can we truly know our Self.

In a flawless crystal, what do we see? Nothing. So also in the Self there is nothing seen, for all objects are transcended, and pure Being alone remains in our consciousness. Therefore the Chandogya Upanishad tells us: “Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else, that is the infinite. But where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else, that is the small (the finite). Verily, the infinite is the same as the immortal, the finite is the same as the mortal” (Chandogya Upanishad 7:24:1).

Bodiless. Obviously the Self is not material, but it is necessary for us to further realize that the Self never touches materiality, that it never has a body in the sense that it is integrated with a body and either affects it or is affected by it. This is extremely important, for religion and some approaches to yoga can get us involved in a multitude of activities, including intellectual study and conceptualizations that take place only in the various bodies (koshas) and therefore have little to do with the Self. It is true that we need to purify and refine the bodies so they will cease to veil or obscure the Self, but we should understand that the entire process takes place outside the Self and never affects the Self to any degree.

It is also necessary to comprehend that the Self is not really “in” the body/bodies at all, for by its very nature it cannot be encompassed or contained by anything. “I am not in them—they are in me,” says Krishna (Bhagavad Gita 7:12). And the same is true of our own Self.

To realize the Self we must disengage our awareness from the bodies, although in the practice of meditation we use the bodies as stepping-stones to approach the Self and eventually transcend them altogether. So we need not reject the bodies, but simply have the correct perspective regarding them.

Invulnerable. Imperfection can occur only in the level of relativity. Being eternally outside of relative existence it is not possible for the Self to ever be “marked” for either good or bad—neither of which even exists for the Self. In Yoga Sutra 1:24, Patanjali describes the Supreme Lord, saying: “Ishwara is a particular Purusha who is untouched [aparamrishta] by the afflictions of life [kleshas], actions [karma] and the results [vipaka] and impressions [ashayai] produced by these actions.” The relevant idea here is that God is beyond all action and therefore incapable of either incurring karma or of being conditioned or affected in any way by action, since he never acts. Exactly the same is true of the Self.

Devoid of sinews. Obviously the Self has no body, so why this statement about the Self being without sinews? The idea being presented is that the Self has no “inner” or “outer.” It has no essence as a substratum or framework (skeleton) which can become the ground or basis of another, external entity that is an extension or mutation of itself. The Self has neither parts nor appendages (upadhis). It is thoroughly homogenous and absolutely one. It cannot be “more” than itself or “less” than itself. There are no gradations or shadings in the Self. It simply IS.

Pure. We have already considered the purity of the Self and need only add one more point: The Self is also pure because there is nothing intervening between the Self and anything else—including God. It is absolute and direct without admixture of any kind.

Untouched by evil. Obviously the Self is untouched by evil, for it is not touched (affected) by anything at all or at any time. Nothing can enter into it and become part of it, altering it. Evil cannot touch the Self, though it can pervade the bodies through which the Self is temporarily manifesting.

The Seer. The unwitnessed witness is the Self. In truth there is no other witness on the individual level because the senses, mind, and intellect are mere energy constructs, instruments that have no consciousness of their own. The eye never really sees, nor does the ear hear. No more does the brain or intellect. Rather, the spirit that is consciousness witnesses their messages; therefore the Upanishadic seer said of the Self: “It is that which is the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech, indeed of the speech, the breath of the breath, the eye of the eye, the wise, giving up [wrong notions of their Self-sufficiency] and departing from this world, become immortal” (Kena Upanishad 1:2). And of Brahman it was said: “They who know the life [breath] of life [breath], the eye of the eye, the ear of the ear and the mind of the mind, they have realized the ancient primordial Brahman” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4:4:18).

Regarding the Self and the Self of the Self, Krishna stated: “Presiding over hearing, sight, touch, taste and smell as well as the mind, this experiences the objects of the senses” (Bhagavad Gita 15:9).

Thinker. Not being the brain, only its witness and not its possessor, the Self is here called “the thinker” only as an attempt to convey the idea that it is the Self that both witnesses and knows what it is witnessing. It is not just a screen on which the motion picture of life is projected, nor is it a consciousness of objects alone without cognition of their nature. An infant or an animal perceives exactly what an adult human being perceives, but has no idea what it is perceiving—or even that it perceives, in many cases. The Self, on the other hand, does indeed know and comprehend what is presented to its view. And because of its proximity the will and intellect respond to the stimuli, mirroring the consciousness that is the Self. Consequently they are often mistaken for the Self or wrongly supposed to have a consciousness and intelligence of their own.

The Self is omniscient concerning those things that relate to its present, incarnate status. On occasion it can draw on the cosmic omniscience of God regarding something. Millions of cilia on the surface of our brain are continually moving back and forth. “Science” does not know why, but the yogis know that they are antennae reading the universe. The early explorers of hypnotism such as Dr. Sidney Weltmer found that in the deepest level of their consciousness human beings are virtually omniscient. This is because the Self is divine and an image of the Cosmic Self. Usually that faculty is buried deep in us, but it can emerge or be tapped when circumstances are favorable.

Nevertheless, each one of us knows what he is doing and why. People self-destruct because they intend to. They pass up truth and the way to freedom because they prefer untruth and bondage. As I say, we are all reading out the universe. So people who follow false teachers know they are false, and avoid true teachers because they do not want their ignorance upset or lost.

For this reason, talk and forms of coercion never help those determined to keep on a collision course. It is better to silently bless them, show by action that they will be loved no matter what they do, and stay aware that the divine plan will unfold, no matter what a mess it may seem to be. Be a still point of peace and caring.

Do your best.

Leave the rest.

Angels do no more.

All-pervading. There is nothing higher than the Self, nothing beyond the Self. What about God? God and the Self being one, even God should not be thought of as beyond or above it. Further, Brahman is not a “thing” in a hierarchal chain of being that It could possibly be said to be “above” or “below” any thing whatsoever.

This statement is extremely practical, for it is impossible to conduct a spiritual life without the correct perspective: the spirit is supreme. Not only is everything lesser than the spirit, in truth everything else is *nothing* in comparison. Those who do not hold this conviction really have no spiritual life in the truest sense. *God First. God Alone.* This is the only correct perspective.

Self-existent. The spirit never had a beginning. It always was. Again, this does not mean that the Atman is separate from Brahman, or in any way independent of Brahman. Brahman being self-existent and eternal, so also is the Self. It is necessary for us to realize that nothing conditions or really affects the Self, that it is absolutely independent of all objects, places or conditions. Otherwise we fall into the labyrinth of confusion and false identities.

He has duly distributed through endless years the objects according to their natures. God is in charge of the cosmos and the Self is in charge of the life sphere in which it presently manifests. What is to be done is known to those who engage in cosmic creation. The Self that is presently enveloped in the experiences of samsara also knows what is to be done, but the light of intelligence (buddhi) that would convey it to the lower levels usually does not reach there. So again, each one of us knows that we should seek God alone, that there is no other destiny for us. But our ignorance blocks that knowledge. This is why the path to higher consciousness is the path of purification: the removal of the debris between us and the light of the Self (Atmajyoti) so we can see the path and follow it.

This statement implies that there is at all times a perfect order to everything, even though it remains unseen. A “let’s make the world a better place” person was once asked by Anandamayi Ma: “Why do you think that it is not perfect right now?”

And of course it is. It is a mess because we are at that level of evolution in which we can only see a mess. When we come to the point where our mind is in order we will see order. The world is a mirror of our own mind. The situation is exactly like what Sri Yukteswar said regarding astrology: “If ignoramuses misread the heavens, and see there a scrawl instead of a script, that is to be expected in this imperfect world.”

Theravada Buddhist monks of the Forest Tradition daily recite: “I have nothing but my actions; I shall never have anything but my actions.” The day we start taking full and exclusive responsibility for our past, present, and future is the day we will begin moving toward real perfection.

Into blinding darkness enter those who worship [are devoted to] ignorance and those who delight in knowledge enter into still greater darkness, as it were. (9)

Here avidya, ignorance, means samsara, this illusory world which plunges us into increasing illusion/ignorance. By vidya, knowledge, is meant both erroneous knowledge based on worldly existence and the merely intellectual theorizing and dogmatizing of philosophy—even philosophy based on the scriptures of Sanatana Dharma—without any basis in genuine realization of the ultimate realities of the Self and the Supreme Self by the individual. This latter darkness is greater because the person believes that he knows the truth and his ego is satisfied. Therefore he never seeks the truth, but revels in his ignorance, congratulating himself on being wise.

The Bhagavad Gita (2:11) right away begins dispelling our myths of knowledge. Krishna tells Arjuna that though he speaks words of wisdom, he is completely wrong in his conclusions.

Distinct, indeed, they say, is the result of knowledge and distinct, they say, is the result of ignorance. Thus have we heard from those wise who have explained to us these. (10)

Ignorance produces more ignorance, but true knowledge (not that referred to in the previous verse) produces higher and higher knowledge and realization of spiritual realities. Therefore the wise immerse themselves in knowledge and free themselves from ignorance. How do they do it? By following the advice of Krishna: “Therefore be a yogi” (Bhagavad Gita 6:46).

Two serious errors can be committed by the thoughtful aspirant: 1) the conclusion that since none of it is real nothing really matters and there is no need for spiritual endeavor; and 2) the conclusion that since only the spiritual is real we should ignore the external and the material aspects of life and put all our attention on the inner spiritual side of life. But right there the error is uncovered, for the spiritual is only a side of life, as is the material, and together they make the two-sided whole. Or we can look at it in an even better and truer way: the material is the spiritual and therefore demands and deserves our full attention as well as the obviously spiritual aspects of life. This is the meaning of the Vedic verse beginning *purnamadah purnamidam*:

That is the Full, this is the Full.
The Full has come out of the Full.
If we take the Full from the Full
It is the Full that yet remains.

The two are really and always the One. To reject or turn from one is to reject and turn from the All. It cannot be without meaning that the Vedas and Upanishads were written by sages who lived fully in the world with families and their attendant responsibilities, including that of making a livelihood. Of course it was the Satya Yuga then, and earthly life was very different from life in our present age. Nevertheless, those who like to excuse themselves from striving for Self-realization by citing their involvement in the world and worldly responsibilities should consider the historical facts. (And anyway, where exactly do they think the monastics are living?)

The Purna, the Full (it also means the Complete) is one, yet it is dual. This makes no sense to us, but considering the limitation of our intellects that should be no surprise. It is our intuition that must come into function when we begin dealing with these higher spheres of reality. We, too, are dual, being image-replicas of the Divine Archetype. Just as God is both relative and absolute, both immanent and transcendent, so are we on a miniature scale. We, too, then, must learn to function fully in both spheres, for since they are essentially one, if we do not so function we will be partial, incomplete, and therefore faulty rather than perfect, which originally meant to be complete rather than without fault. ("Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" Matthew 5:48.)

Life is not just some maze to be somehow gotten through, or a Monopoly board with random advances and regressions, and there is certainly *no* Get Out of Jail Free. Rather, life demands the fullest exercise of the two faculties that mark human beings out from the rest of earthly life-forms: developed reason and intuition. Intelligence of the highest order is necessary. This does not mean that the aspirant needs to be an intellectual, but he must be intelligent. Yogananda actually said that stupid people cannot find God. (This is because stupid people do not seek God.) Nor can the seeker's intelligence be kept on the shelf for only occasional use and amusement. At all times the yogi must be keenly aware of what is going on in his life sphere and ever seeking to understand and work out the mystery. As already said, he needs highly developed intuition as well. Both of these are only produced by meditation. This is because both intelligence and intuition (direct knowledge) are divine attributes. In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna declares himself to be intelligence (7:10; 10:34) and the knowledge of the mystic (9:12). I am not speaking of cunning or cleverness or "savvy;" I am speaking of the intelligence which only arises in those who are of highly evolved consciousness.

It is those who possess right intelligence and right intuition that can live both the inner and outer lives simultaneously—not first one and then the other in

alternating cycles—in a spiritually productive (i.e., evolutionary) manner. By doing so they will accomplish two things: they will come to understand the real meaning and purpose of all they experience and do and thereby learn the lessons for which they came into relative existence; and they will come to experience (not just intellectually think) that the two are really one, manifestations of the One. Having seen the One in all, they have attained immortality even in this mortal life.

A final point. Notice that the Upanishadic sage speaks of actively pursuing the outer and inner lives. This means steadiness and regularity in practice as well as adamant adherence to the required disciplines such as yama and niyama. But most important it means *wanting*, even *loving*, to lead the outer and inner lives according to the precepts of dharma. There is no place here for grudging admittance of necessity, of stingy eking out of the barest minimum that is required, grumbling and resenting and wishing it need not be so.

Consider the perspective of a Christ. Crucifixion was the most horrible of deaths, yet according to Saint Paul: “Jesus... for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:2). What a different perspective from the morbid and sentimental carryings-on over the passion of Jesus that some Christians engage in. Loving the world and the body that links them to the world, nothing seems to them more painful or tragic than its torture and death. But Jesus hastened to the mockery, the scourging, and the crucifixion *for the joy that was set before him*. His secret? He was a yogi.

Knowledge and ignorance: he who knows the two together crosses death through ignorance and attains life eternal through knowledge. (11)

One of the fundamental errors of dualistic religion is its setting of the material against the spiritual and thereby insisting that the material must be rejected and the spiritual alone embraced. This produces deep spiritual conflict, for it is simply impossible to do and also involves a rejection of an eternal part of ourselves (and God). The Upanishads in contrast make it clear that the two are really one and must both be cultivated—according to the principles of dharma—for us to attain the consciousness of perfect unity in ourselves and in God.

Those who devote themselves only to life in the world become sunk in the limitations of materiality and addicted to its vagaries. Egoism and intense selfishness and exploitation of both the world and those living in it with us can be the sole result of such a limited focus. Having only a perspective of mortality, the higher nature of the individual is suppressed to give free rein to the dog-eat-dog, every-man-for-himself, the-world-is-a-jungle attitude that must arise from preoccupation with external existence. Having no idea of the true nature of either the world, ourselves, or our fellow human beings, only chaos and destruction can come to us.

On the other hand, those who devote themselves only to meditation or abstract philosophizing to the exclusion of material considerations and practical living, come to a worse result: complete psychological disintegration (literally) and alienation

from any form of reality. Hypocrisy also results, because to even eat and drink is to admit the necessity of physicality, and that food must come from somewhere, so dependence on those regarded as “the ignorant and astray” becomes necessary. It reminds me of a cartoon I saw years ago in an emigré Russian newspaper just after the United States had supplied the Soviet Union with incredibly huge amounts of grain and saved their economy and the life of millions. Two old ladies were sweeping the street in Red Square. One was saying to the other: “It is good we did not kill all the Capitalists; otherwise we would have starved to death.” How can a person justify living off those whose earthly involvement they despise and condemn? The Bhagavad Gita discusses this matter thoroughly and points out the folly of the “spirituals” who pretend to have transcended worldly concerns.

We must function in matter and in spirit. Both elements must be integrated through the following of dharma to complete the picture and solve the evolutionary puzzle. The material must be spiritualized and the spiritual must be materialized in the sense of making both practical and beneficial to one another.

How do you pursue ignorance? By coming to see its true character and turning away from it by knowledge and vairagya. The world may not be ultimately real, but we need to work through the puzzles presented to us by relative experience. Knowledge is pursued through study of the teachings of the wise, such as the Upanishads and the Gita as well as Self-realized masters such as Shankara.

Yoga is the ideal pursuit of both knowledge and ignorance because it is a combination of both. In what way? Yoga takes into account the fact that we find ourselves bound in the illusions of materiality and uses them as steps to higher awareness through the disciplines of yoga (yama and niyama), which include purification of mind and body through right conduct and especially right (purely vegetarian) diet and abstinence from alcohol, nicotine and mind-altering drugs. The body is illusory, but contains within it subtle mechanisms such as the breath that assist us on the path to enlightenment, and the mind contains the faculty of reasoning and the power of sound/speech (vak) which, when applied in mantric invocation and meditation, leads to enlightenment as both the Brahma Sutras and Yoga Sutras state. So the yogi uses ignorance and knowledge to transcend both and realize Wisdom (vijñana). Death (rebirth) is conquered through purification and evolution of the body/mind complex and immortality is gained through the practice of yoga meditation as outlined in the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Yoga Sutras.

The lesson here is the need to value both body and spirit and unite them in our sadhana. For we are not interested in *serving* the physical, astral and causal bodies, but in *mastering* them.

The body is the instrument of evolution, so to despise and neglect it under the guise of spirituality is foolish. Any machine that malfunctions should be repaired, not despised and tossed away, the body included. Also, hidden within the body are many doorways to higher consciousness. Therefore the body must be enabled to become the evolutionary device it is intended to be.

The first step is purification, and that includes two major factors: celibacy

(brahmacharya) and pure diet, which excludes all meat, fish, eggs, nicotine, alcohol and all mind-altering substances. There is no getting around it. Just take a look at those who are not purifying themselves in these two ways and you will have proof enough. All the rationalizing and mind-gaming in the world cannot contravene the truth: brahmacharya (continence), ahimsa (non-killing), and shaucha (purification) are absolute essentials for those who seek higher consciousness.

Let us take a look at what the Chandogya Upanishad tells us about food. “Food when eaten becomes threefold, its coarsest portion becomes the faeces; its middle (portion) flesh, and its subtlest (portion) mind. Water when drunk becomes threefold, its coarsest portion becomes the urine; its middle (portion) the blood, its subtlest (portion) the prana. Thus, mind consists of food, breath [prana] consists of water [liquid]” (Chandogya Upanishad 6:5:1-2, 4). “Of the curd, when churned, that which is subtle moves upwards, it becomes butter. In the same manner, of the food that is eaten, that which is subtle moves upwards, it becomes mind. Of the water that is drunk, that which is subtle moves upwards, it becomes breath [prana]. Thus, mind consists of food, breath [prana] consists of water” (Chandogya Upanishad 6:6:1-3, 5).

Body and mind come from the food we eat. Thus our food must be both as pure as possible and also blessed by being offered to God. And the conduct of the body must be as pure as possible and its deeds worthy of being offered to God. Action and thought determine the quality of body and mind. Ethics and good thoughts are also essential, but purity of body and mind is the crown jewel. Through these means both body and spirit are truly divinized and immortality is gained.

Into blinding darkness enter those who worship the unmanifest and into still greater darkness, as it were, those who delight in the manifest. (12)

The basic idea of this and the next two verses has already been covered, but we should notice the use of the word “worship.” We are used to thinking of worship only in relation to God, but it comes from an older form, *worthship*, which meant to acknowledge the value and significance of something. This and the next two verses really deal with two things: the unmanifested and manifested creation and Saguna Brahman and Nirguna Brahman. First let us look at the creation side of the matter.

There is no doubt that the unmanifested level of existence is higher than the manifested level. But it is a mistake to neglect the manifested in the idea that the unmanifested will be easily attained if the manifested is shunted aside. And those who ignore or deny the unmanifested and occupy themselves wholly with the manifested will spiritually be limiting themselves to a crippling degree. This is especially so since the manifest is materiality and those who put all their attention on it will become materialistic in consciousness and enmeshed in sense experience and intellectual definition (dogmatism, actually). On the other hand, those who fixate on the unmanifest will become nothing more than abstract thinkers and philosophizers, so caught up in theory that they ignore the actual and obvious.

Brahman is beyond all conceptualization, whereas Hiranyagarbha is Ishwara,

Brahman within creation as its inner guide. Sometimes these are called the Lesser and Higher Brahman or Saguna Brahman and Nirguna Brahman. Saguna Brahman is Brahman with attributes, such as mercy, omnipotence, omniscience, etc., the personal aspect of Brahman. Nirguna Brahman is the impersonal, attributeless Absolute beyond all description or designation. Obviously both Nirguna and Saguna Brahman are one and the same. And ourselves being manifestations of God we, too, have impersonal and personal aspects. Therefore, both aspects must be cultivated through spiritual discipline in order to in time become a complete revelation of the divine nature.

Those who ignore one aspect of Brahman and concentrate on the other will, because of imbalance both intellectually and practically, limit themselves and therefore plunge themselves into darkness. Although the Upanishad is so clear on this, still there are tamasic people who insist that only the Saguna should be accepted or that only the Nirguna should be accepted. I say such persons are tamasic because Krishna tells us in the Gita: “That knowledge which clings to a single effect as if it were the whole—that is declared to be tamasic” (18:22).

Being a digest and expansion of the Upanishads, the Gita has a section on the verses of the Upanishad under consideration. Arjuna asks Krishna who has the better understanding of yoga: those who worship the manifest or those who worship the unmanifest. Krishna replies: “Those who are ever steadfast, who worship me, fixing their minds on me, endowed with supreme faith, I consider them to be the best versed in yoga. But those who worship the Imperishable, the Undefinable, the Unmanifested, the All-pervading, Inconceivable, Unchanging, Unmoving, the Constant—controlling all the senses, even-minded everywhere, happy in the welfare of all beings—they attain to me also. Greater is the effort of those whose minds are set on the Unmanifest, for the Unmanifest as a goal is truly difficult for the embodied ones to reach. But those who, renouncing all actions in me, intent on me as the highest goal worship me, meditating on me with single-minded Yoga—of those whose consciousness has entered into me, I am soon the deliverer from the ocean of mortal samsara. Keep your mind on me alone, causing your intellect to enter into me. Thenceforward, without doubt, you shall dwell in me” (12:2-8).

The final summation is in the next two verses:

Distinct, indeed, they say, is what results from the manifest, and distinct, they say, is what results from the unmanifest. Thus have we heard from those wise who have explained to us these.

He who understands the manifest and the unmanifest both together, crosses death through the unmanifest and attains life eternal through the manifest. (13-14)

The manifested universe is the place of continual change and birth and death. The higher, subtle worlds of prakriti are free from this. Therefore he who masters the manifest conquers death, and he who masters the unmanifest attains

immortality unshadowed by either birth or death.

The face of truth is covered with, a golden disc. Unveil it, O Pushan, so that I who love the truth may see it. (15)

The final four verses of the Isha Upanishad are recited at the cremation of bodies in India, and are a prayer for ascension to the higher realms that are beyond the compulsion of rebirth in this world. These deal mainly with the sun. Throughout history and throughout the world the sun has been worshipped or considered a symbol of divinity. The full comprehension of the spiritual nature of the sun was discovered in India untold ages ago and embodied in the Upanishads.

That which we see as the sun (or perhaps more exactly, the way we see it) is not the true face of the spiritual force that is embodied in the sun. Pushan, translated Nourisher, is a title of the Sun—really of Brahman—that means Surveyor of the Universe and Protector of the Universe. Therefore the gold disc of the sun is covering the the actual thing. The sun is the door of the Truth because those who are evolved beyond the need for earthly incarnation rise upward at death and pass through the sun into higher worlds of evolution within which the spirit (jiva) will attain progressively higher degrees of realization, until even those worlds will be transcended and it enters into the unalloyed transcendent being of the Absolute Brahman. For this reason we pray to that Truth which is beyond the sun and is our ultimate Goal.

The “golden disc” has more than one meaning, all of which are significant.

1) The most obvious meaning of the golden orb is the sun itself. All plant, animal, and human life on this planet depend upon the sun. It is the subtle powers of sunlight which stimulate growth and evolution. Sunlight particularly stimulates the activity of the higher centers in the brain, especially that of the pineal gland. Even in the depths of the earth a sensitive person can tell when the sun rises and sets above. The sun appears to illuminate us, but it is a light that covers the Light in order to lead us to the Light. We must use it to go beyond it.

2) All things have an inner and outer life, and that includes the sun. We may say that there is the outer sun of the material universe, and there is also the metaphysical sun of the psychic and spiritual universe. They operate simultaneously, being the same thing. The sun truly awakens us in the deepest sense. As the germinating seed struggles upward toward the sun and out into its life-giving rays, so all higher forms of life reach out for the sun, which acts as a metaphysical magnet, drawing them upward and outward toward ever-expanding consciousness. The Chandogya Upanishad discusses it in this way: “Even as a great extending highway runs between two villages, this one and that yonder, even so the rays of the sun go to both these worlds, this one and that yonder. They start from the yonder sun and enter into the nadis. They start from the nadis and enter into the yonder sun.... When a man departs from this body, then he goes upwards by these very rays.... That, verily, is the gateway of the world, an entering in for the knowers, a shutting out for the non-knowers” (Chandogya Upanishad 8.6.2, 5).

The solar rays do not just flow into this world, they also draw upward through the sun and beyond. In the human body the process of exhalation and inhalation is related to solar energy, and much of the solar power on which we subsist is drawn into the body through our breathing. The solar rays do not just strike the surface of our body, but actually penetrate into the physical nerves (nadis). The nadis are also the channels in the astral body that correspond to the physical nerves. Just as the electrical impulses flow through the physical nerves, the subtle life force, or prana, flows through the subtle nadis and keeps us alive and functioning. The prana, then, is a vehicle for the solar energies that produce evolution.

When the individual comes into manifestation on this earth he passes from the astral world into the material plane by means of the sun, which is a mass of exploding astral energies, not mere flaming gases. And when the individual has completed his course of evolution within this plane, upon the death of his body he rises upward in his subtle body and passes through the sun into the higher worlds, there to evolve even higher or to pass directly into the depths of the transcendent Brahman.

3) The golden disc is also the entire creation, the means by which through experience the individual spirits can evolve to perfect conscious union with God. Without it we would be unable to attain that union. Yet, just as we use a ladder or stair to ascend and then step beyond it, in the same way the creation is meant to be eventually transcended. We must therefore keep both these aspects in mind while living in this world.

4) The golden disc is also our own mind, that which perceives the world around us and the intelligence which comprehends what is going on and directs our lives accordingly. Potential is not enough; there must be actualization. It is our mind alone that can lead us beyond the mind, our intelligence alone that can lead us onward to intuition. At all stages the mind and intelligence are “golden,” but if we allow ourselves to become stagnated at any point they rapidly “tarnish” and turn from beneficial to harmful. Immersed in this creation, we are like the fish that must keep perpetually moving or they will die of suffocation if they come to a standstill. If we do not move forward we shall move backward—and often mistake it for progress.

5) Our own Self (Atman) is also the golden orb. We must come to know our true Self and delight in the Self in wonder at its nature. But that is not enough. We must then pass onward to experience the Self of our Self, the Paramatman. This transcendence must ever be kept in mind, for out of ignorance and even laziness a lot of people like the idea that we need only enter into the experience of our Self and that is the end. The same wrong-headed view abrogates the need for our evolution and assumes that if we smash the evolving machine we will attain the transcendent—or even worse, that there is no transcendent to experience or even an experiencer to see it. However cleverly this view may be worded or how sophisticated it appears, it is nihilism of the deadliest sort, a ruinous pitfall.

6) The golden orb is also the evolutionary impulse within all things which,

though life itself to the evolving spirit, yet urges us to continual transcendence of its various stages until we transcend it as well. It is a golden stair that urges us onward to the heights where it cannot come.

The ultimate Golden Orb is the Supreme Self. That is what we are striving toward. Being transcendent, how shall we reach it? By means of Its immanence within the world in the form of the individual and universal Self. Krishna states in the Bhagavad Gita: “At the time of death he who remembers me while giving up the body attains my Being—of this there is no doubt. Moreover, whatever he fixes his mind on when he gives up the body at the end, to that he goes. Always he becomes that. Therefore at all times remember me with your mind and intellect fixed on me. Thus without doubt you shall come to me. With mind made steadfast by yoga, which turns not to anything else, to the Divine Supreme Spirit he goes, meditating on him. He who meditates on the Seer, the Ancient, the Ruler, subtler than the atom, Support of all, whose form is inconceivable and radiant like the sun and beyond darkness, at the time of death with mind unmoving, endowed with devotion and yoga power, he goes to the Divine Supreme Spirit” (8:5-10).

Simply wanting a thing does not make it happen or come to us. In the same way, spiritual daydreaming is fruitless. Therefore, he who petitions for the removal of the golden orb describes himself as “I who love the Truth.” He is one who wishes to pass from the unreal to the Real, to no longer live in the magic of Maya, but to move onward to the Reality behind all appearance. And he does not just seek truth or think about it—he is devoted to truth, a virtual worshipper of the Truth. Only such aspirants “may behold it.”

O Pushan, the sole seer, O Controller, O Sun, offspring of Prajapati, spread forth your rays and gather up your radiant light that I may behold you of loveliest form. I am that Purusha [Spirit-Self]: I am Soham. (16)

These titles can be applied both to the sun and the Truth beyond the sun.

Nourisher [Pushan]. In Indian philosophy God is often thought of as Mother. This verse bears that out, speaking of the divine as the Nourisher of all beings, the Fountain of Life. God the Mother is frequently addressed in Sanskrit hymns as *Jagata Janani*, *Jagata Palani*—the Birthgiver and Nourisher of the world (*jagat*). The sun is source and nourisher of all evolving beings upon the earth just as God is the cosmic source and nourisher. To be nourished is to grow, so God is nourisher in the sense of the divine evolver of all sentient beings.

The sole seer. The sun moves through space and Brahman is the Sole Seer of all things throughout the entire range of relative existence, extending upward and downward through many worlds (*lokas*).

Controller. Life and its cycles on earth is determined by the sun, and all the incarnations in all the worlds from lowest to higher are determined by God who is the controller of all things seen and unseen, visible and invisible.

Offspring of Prajapati. The sun is the creation of God, the light of evolution.

Spread forth your rays and gather up your radiant light that I may behold you of loveliest

form. How is this? Why does he not ask that the light should flood down upon him? Because the light he is speaking of is not the Absolute Light, but the light of relative existence which by its nature veils that Ultimate Light. He asks, then, that God withdraw the light of temporality in order that he might behold and enter into the Light of Eternity.

This has a yogic aspect, as well. We must withdraw all the scattered rays of our energies and awareness and unite them to our inmost consciousness. We must gather up that which is dispersed and fragmented and restore our original state of unity. Meditation is the only way this can be accomplished.

I am that Purusha [Spirit-Self]: I am Soham. The Sanskrit text is: *Yo sav asau purushah; so'ham asmi*, which literally means: "I am that Purusha [Spirit-Self]: I AM SOHAM." In Sanskrit Soham means "I Am That," but at the core of every sentient being Soham exists as the Self-is the Self. Therefore the seer of the upanishad concludes: "I am Soham." *Soham asmi*—"I am That I am"—is exactly what God told Moses was his Name (Exodus 3:14). In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1:4:1), we are told: "In the beginning, this universe was the Self [Viraj] alone, in the shape of a person. He reflected and saw nothing else but His Self. He first said: 'I am He [Soham]'" (1:4:1). Thus, Soham is the "first speaking" of the Absolute Itself: the expression of the knowledge and knowing of the Self. Soham is the Name (Embodiment) of the Primeval Being, the Self of the Universe and the Self of our Selves. Soham is the Consciousness of Brahman and of the Self of each one of us. We, too, are Soham. (See *Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self* regarding the invocation of Soham as the means to Self-realization.)

May this life enter into the immortal breath [life]; then may this body end in ashes. O Intelligence, remember, remember what has been done. Remember, O Intelligence, what has been done. Remember. (17)

The poet Browning wrote of "the end of life for which the first was made." That is a lovely expression, but very few really believe it and therefore rarely think of their life's end. Those of us who seek liberation must from the very beginning be looking toward the end we desire. In the next to the last verse at the close of the Isha Upanishad we are given the perspective we should be living with every moment of our life if we would truly "come to a good end."

Emily Dickinson wrote: "While others hope to go to heaven at last, I am going all along!" This is the only way for those who would succeed in spiritual life. Nothing should be delayed for the future—it is all now or not at all. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:2).

There are many partially awakened people who know that God is the only real goal, yet they delay their endeavor. "After I get this," they say, "then I will really dig in and seek God." But they never do, for as soon as one little short-term goal is reached another arises that seems even more demanding. In this way they create in their minds the habit of postponing spiritual life, a habit that will surely carry over into the next life and perhaps into others.

How often do we think that the vision of God will somehow interfere with our life, when in reality we can have no true life outside that vision. Silly children, we dawdle and dally until the night of death overtakes us. “Now or never” happens to be the simple truth.

“May this life enter into the immortal breath.” Prana means both breath and life. So this is a prayer that our small life may be united to the infinite, immortal Life of which it has always been a part.

Many people want to “embrace life” so they can egocentrically possess it and exploit it to the full. But they have no idea what life is. What they think is life is really death. “The all-pervading life” is the only life, for that is God. And the necessity is not to find or see God as an object (and certainly not to possess God), but to merge with God in complete unity-identity. That is, our consciousness must be completely merged in the infinite Consciousness, and irrevocably so. Just as a cup of water poured into the ocean cannot be drawn back out of the ocean, so we need to attain that state of unity which can never be reversed. Many yogis paddle their feet or go for a quick dip in the ocean of Satchidananda, but the goal is to unite with that ocean, to merge in it and become totally one with it. Consequently at every moment of our life we must be holding in mind and living out the sankalpa: “Let my life now merge in the all-pervading Life.”

Those who are unfit for union with God become all anxious and even fearful when they hear about merging with the Divine. “O! will I go out of existence?” they quaver. “What will happen to me?” They ever get nervous when they hear the prospect of not being reborn on earth. Over and over again they plunge headlong into the sea of rebirth, never raising such questions about relative existence, but rushing on heedlessly. Only when confronted with God do they develop false prudence and caution and begin to question and doubt. Jesus has assured us, though: “Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it” (Luke 17:33). This is because we are truly negative: absolutely backwards one hundred and eighty degrees. Consequently what we think will annihilate us will immortalize us, whereas what we think will make us live will destroy us. Like Yogananda we must pray: “Let me drown in Thine ocean and live!”

It is not a simple thing to rid ourselves of the conditionings of billions of lives wherein we identified completely with the body. Even when we have evolved enough to identify more with the mind and the spirit, still the body claims the majority of our attention and attachment. It is completely reflexive with us, overriding any emotional or intellectual factors to the contrary. Therefore we must continually affirm in word, attitude and act: “may this body end in ashes.” This will only seem painful or pessimistic if we are still identifying with the body. But if not, it will be as happy a statement as an affirmation that our prison is going to evaporate into dust.

We have died many times (or thought we did), but that did not free us at all. And in many lives we were no doubt cremated. Still, that accomplished nothing. Evidently there is a deeper meaning to the “ashes” that are the body’s end. It is the

fire of wisdom that turns our “bodies” into wisdom-ashes. Let us then be busy stoking the fires of yoga and getting on with the burning. Sadhus wear gerua, orange-red color, to remind them of the fire of discrimination and spirit-knowledge that must be perpetually burning in order to reduce all that impels us into embodiment to the ashes of freedom.

“Purified by knowledge-based tapasya, many have attained my state of being” (Bhagavad Gita 4:10).

“As the kindled fire reduces wood to ashes, in the same way the fire of knowledge reduces all karmas to ashes” (Bhagavad Gita 4:37).

When the “bridges” of all bodies, subtle and gross, have been burned in the holy fires, then we will pass on into the kingdom of Infinity that is our eternal birthright.

How to kindle the ignorance-consuming fire? The Upanishadic sage continues: “O Intelligence, remember, remember what has been done.” The thorough practicality and good sense of dharma is one of its most striking features: *it works*. And it works very well. So it is meaningful that the Upanishad tells us to remember our own past deeds. This is to keep us from falling into the serious error of being so focused on the “spiritual” that we do not pay attention to what is really going on with us on the relative level of evolution. Patanjali (Yoga Sutras 2:32) lists *swadhyaya*, introspective self-study, as an essential ingredient of yoga practice. Yet this self-study must be done in the greater context of divine consciousness: “In thy light shall we see light” (Psalms 36:9). Only in the divine light can we see things as they really are.

So we should meditate, and outside of meditation we should look at our past, comparing our past deeds and our past states of mind with our present deeds and mental condition. This will reveal to us whether we are truly progressing or not. I knew a woman who sincerely believed that God was appearing to her in meditation and talking to her so sweetly, making her feel so holy and pure. Then she would come out of meditation and be unspeakably cruel to her daughter, both physically and mentally. In meditation she was an angel, but outside of meditation she was a devil. Wrong meditation gives us a wrong image of ourselves, but right meditation shows us the truth about both God and ourselves.

Of course we have to have a correct memory of our past. Many people are so blinded to the truth about themselves that when they learn to meditate they start saying: “My mind used to be calm, but it has gotten so restless,” or: “I used to be a nice person, but now I am just a wreck and falling apart.” The reality is that their mind was always restless, but not being introspective they did not realize it. They were also a complete ruin, mentally and spiritually, but they had no eyes with which to see it. Now they do, and they foolishly blame meditation. On the other hand, people who are practicing a wrong form of meditation (or a right form wrongly) do become increasingly restless and increasingly negative. I know of several kinds of meditation that really do bring about the mental and spiritual disintegration of those who practice them, and often the physical degeneration, as well. But those who meditate according to the teachings of the Upanishads, knowing I Am Soham,

will have no problem.

O Agni, lead us us along the auspicious path to prosperity, O God, who knowest all our deeds. Take away from us deceitful sins. We shall offer many prayers unto you. (18)

Because bodies are cremated in India, this final verse of the Isha Upanishad addressed to Agni (Fire) is recited when the crematory fire is lighted. But the Upanishadic rishis had a far more profound intention when they intoned it.

The most prevalently venerated natural force throughout the history of humanity is the sun. The next is fire, which was considered a divine gift. Fire is a mystery. Throughout my schooling, from grade school to university, I asked many teachers: *What* is fire? Nobody gave me any answer at all, much less an accurate-seeming one.

A friend of mine once pointed out an interesting fact about fire. When people, especially the young, sit around an open fire, the subject of the supernatural in some form or other usually comes up. Ghost stories around the campfire are a staple of campers. My friend said that it was because fire stimulates awareness of the unseen levels of existence. Certainly this was the opinion in India where fire was considered a channel of communication between this world and the subtle worlds. Long before Christians were lighting candles in church to convey their prayers to Christ and the saints, in India people were reciting prayers in the presence of fire and making offerings into the fire, confident that the prayers and offerings would be transferred by the fire to their intended recipients. Consider in our own time how much attention and meaning is attached to the Olympic Flame—really only a shadow of the original Greek Fire.

Everything has multiple layers to its existence, one of which is ideational. Everything that exists is a thought in the Divine Mind. Consequently everything is both meaningful and symbolic. To the yogis of India fire became a most significant symbol, the symbol of the will of the yogi and the transforming power of yoga itself. So much so, that yoga practice came to be called *tapasya*: the generation of heat. In the twentieth century, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh wrote extensively on this subject, especially in relation to the yogic symbolism of the Vedic hymns.

In Vedic religion the fire rite, the agnihotra or havan, is the supreme ritual act. It is emblematic of the soul's progression to divinity, and its elements and actions can be studied to reveal many secrets of esoteric life and unfoldment. This is especially true of the Satapatha Brahmana, which is incredibly detailed. The sacred fire is kindled by the friction of two wooden sticks called aranis or drills. This is an important symbol, for it is considered that the fire is latent in the wood until the friction causes it to manifest. In the same way, enlightenment is latent in the yogi, awaiting the right conditions to be provided for its manifestation. Meditation is the friction (*tapasya*) that produces the fire of God-perception. With this in mind we can unravel the intentions of the rishis when they prayed: "O Agni, lead us us along the auspicious path to prosperity, O God, who knowest all our deeds. Take away

from us deceitful sins. We shall offer many prayers unto you.”

Knowledge of spiritual practice and the will to practice must go together. Knowing what to do but having no interest to do it will get us nowhere. At the same time, wanting to succeed and not knowing how is equally useless. But put the knowing and the wanting together for the necessary time, and all benefit will be ours. Agni represents the radiance of our Self and of God as well as that which is produced by sadhana. These three fires will light our way to blessedness. But their combined effect will not just show us the way, it will lead us along the way, illumining our heart and minds with the requisite wisdom for spiritual attainment. It will also draw us along the path, but only in the degree that we are actively walking the path. This is indicated in the Song of Solomon when he prays: “Draw me, we will run after thee” (Song of Solomon 1:4). Both God and man must actively seek each other. It is said in India that when someone chooses God you can know that God has chosen him. The liberating power we call Agni is the result of these two forces meeting and combining with one another.

After one of his classes on the Narada Bhakti Sutras, Swami Prabhavananda was asked how a person could avoid spiritual pride. His answer was remarkable: “You cannot develop spiritual pride if your spiritual practice is correct, for you will see yourself correctly and can neither fall into pride nor despair.” This is certainly true. The light of tapasya reveals all that we need to know about ourselves. Self-knowledge, even if fragmentary or dim at the beginning, is an immediate fruit of right meditation, and will in time develop into the full light of spiritual day. The Eastern Orthodox hymn to Saint Nicholas begins: “The truth of things revealed you....” This is profoundly true. When we begin approaching the Real, the Truth becomes revealed, both the Truth of God and the truth of us.

Understanding the nature and consequences of our deeds, we will learn how to truly live as Krishna outlined in the Bhagavad Gita, especially the second chapter. At the closing of the third chapter, Arjuna asks: “By what is a man impelled to commit evil, against his own will, as if urged by some force?” To which Krishna replies:

“This force is desire and anger born of the rajo-guna, the great consumer and of great evil. Know this to be the enemy. As fire is enveloped by smoke, as mirrors are covered by dust, as wombs cover embryos, in the same way knowledge is covered by this, the constant enemy of the wise, having the form of desire which is like insatiable fire.

“The senses, mind, and intellect are said to be its abode. With these it deludes the embodied one by veiling his innate wisdom. Therefore, controlling the senses at the outset, kill this evil being, which destroys ordinary knowledge and supreme knowledge.

“They say that the senses are superior [to the body], the mind is superior to the senses, the intellect (buddhi) is superior to the mind. And much superior to the intellect is the supreme intelligence (param buddhi). Having learned this, sustaining the lower self by the higher Self, kill this difficult-to-encounter enemy which has the form of desire” (3:36-43)

Meditation and other forms of sadhana are that which protects us from the attraction of folly and ignorance. Wherefore Krishna says: “For the undisciplined there is no wisdom, no meditation. For him who does not meditate there is no peace or happiness” (Bhagavad Gita 2:66).

Kena Upanishad

In the world we see a prime duality: cause and effect. Yet, we see no cause for the world itself. Inquiry into its cause naturally arises. Many insist there is no cause and pursue their exploitation of the world and its inhabitants. The wise and the worthy, however, seek to know the truth. Many are the theories set forth by profound thinkers. But those who have gone beyond thought into pure knowing have unanimously told us of the cause, and in that insight have also come to perfectly understand the effect: the world and all within it.

The Kena Upanishad opens with a question that is answered in the rest of the Upanishad:

By whom willed and directed does the mind light on its objects? By whom commanded does life the first, move? At whose will do [people] utter this speech? And what god is it that prompts the eye and the ear? (1.1)

This is one of the few philosophical questions that really matter, for if we come to the wrong conclusion it will cloud or even distort our understanding of life. For example, if we say God, or Nature or happenstance is the the answer, we will in essence be saying that we have nothing to do with our existence, that a force far beyond us is making all this occur to us, that we are like seaweed being carried along on the wave of the sea, able to yearn for situations and things but unable to bring anything about. If we believe that if we somehow do the needful in response God will give us what we want, still it will be his doing and beyond our capacity to accomplish or even hold on to once we have it. This view of ourselves as utterly helpless and therefore utterly insignificant in the vast universe will cripple and frustrate us, distorting us profoundly. You Are Nothing becomes the watchword of our life, a life which bears that maxim out. Hopeless and helpless we drift along, controlled by everything that is other than us. This is truly a living hell.

Into this darkness shines the realization embodied in the Upanishads, a realization that we will somehow recognize from deep within us, for that realization is ours on the inmost level of our existence. We do not learn the truth, we recognize it.

All right, then: who makes the mind think, the body live, the faculty of speech to manifest and causes the senses to operate?

Because it is that which is the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech, indeed of the speech, the breath of the breath, the eye of the eye, the wise, giving up [wrong notions of their self-sufficiency] and departing from this world, become immortal. (1.2)

The ear, mind, speech, breath and eye are only instruments, only messengers. The one who causes them to function, the hearer of hearing, the witness of the

mind and thought, the understander of speech, the source of the breath and the seer of seeing, is our own Atman, the Self. External experience may be illusory, but if we trace the illusion back to the perceiver of perception we will find the reality that is the Self. In a motion picture we see so many images, so many illusions, but when the picture stops we see the screen that was behind it all the time, without which no picture would have been possible. Such is the Self. Knowing the Self to be none other than Brahman, the Absolute, rebirth is no more.

Radhakrishnan has translated the word *dhira* as “the wise,” but in actuality *dhira* means those who are steadfast, in this instance those who are firmly established in the practice of yoga and in the realization arising from yoga.

Brahman is beyond all sensory perception or intellectual comprehension. Yet we can infer the existence of Brahman by that which It causes to occur, by the consciousness that perceives and comprehends. So in conclusion the Upanishad says this, which really needs little comment:

There the eye goes not, speech goes not, nor the mind; we know not, we understand not how one can teach this.

Other, indeed, is it than the known, and also it is above the unknown. Thus have we heard from the ancients who have explained it to us.

That which is not expressed through speech but that by which speech is expressed, that, verily, know, is Brahman, not what [people] here adore.

That which is not thought by the mind but by which, they say, the mind is thought (thinks); that, verily, know, is Brahman and not what [people] here adore.

That which is not seen by the eye but by which the eyes are seen (see), that, verily, know, is Brahman and not what [people] here adore.

That which is not heard by the ear but by which the ears are heard (hear), that, verily, know, is Brahman and not what [people] here adore.

That which is not breathed by life, but by which life breathes, that, verily, know, is Brahman and not what [people] here adore. (1.3-9)

When the Upanishad says that we do not know Brahman, it refers to intellectual knowledge. Therefore, as it continues, we cannot teach about Brahman as an intellectual subject.

When it says that Brahman is “other than the known” it is not speaking of Brahman’s unknowability, but rather that Brahman is not an unknown object that in time the intellect will come to know.

The most striking part of this passage is the statement that Brahman is not what is worshiped (“adored”) by human beings. This presents two significant points. First, that Brahman is not an object, but the Eternal Subject, and consequently cannot be worshipped as an object. Second, human beings cannot relate to Brahman at all, but those that have passed beyond all relative identity can experience Brahman as their own Self.

All classical commentators say that in this second part of the Kena Upanishad the first two verses are a dialogue between a teacher and a student, and the remaining three verses are an exposition of the discussion. First, the teacher says to the student:

If you think that you have understood Brahman well, you know it but slightly, whether it refers to you [the individual Self] or to the gods. So then is it to be investigated by you [the pupil] [even though] I think it is known. (2.1)

After having thought this over, the student responds:

I do not think that I know it well; nor do I think that I do not know it. He who among us knows it, knows it and he, too, does not know that he does not know. (2.2)

That may have only compounded the bewilderment, but we can untangle it with patience. These verses are excellent examples of the difficulty we have when we try to speak of the Unspeakable and explain the Unexplainable.

Brahman is not only everywhere, but actually is all things. This, too, we cannot exactly comprehend, and to express or understand it simplistically is to make things much worse. Because of this, it is easy for those who have experienced only a hint of Brahman to say: "Now I know Brahman." But that would be like someone who has seen a cup of sea water saying: "Now I have seen the sea."

If we do not know Brahman fully, we cannot truly say that we know Brahman at all. Yet, there is a knowing that is beyond the intellect and is both knowing and unknowing in an experiential sense. This is why a medieval mystical English text on the knowledge of God is called *The Cloud of Unknowing*. When we know Brahman we know that It cannot be known in the human sense of knowing. The same concept is held in Eastern Christianity, where it is said that God cannot be seen, but you must see God to realize that he cannot be seen.

Is all this said to confuse and mystify us? No; but it does have the purpose of our giving up the hopeless attempt to comprehend Brahman only intellectually.

So the teacher says that to think we know Brahman when we have just glimpsed a hint of Its existence is a mistake. The clever student, however, points out that we can dimly know something of Brahman. He then points out that when we come to truly know Brahman we will understand that we both know and do not know Brahman, that it is foolish to say either, "I know Brahman," or "I do not know Brahman." In wisdom, the two go together.

If you still do not get the idea, do not worry. The Upanishadic author assumed we might not, so he gives us this verse to clear things up:

To whomsoever it is not known, to him it is known: to whomsoever it is known, he does not know. It is not understood by those who understand it; it is understood by those who do not understand it. (2.3)

The knowledge of Brahman is not an intellectual matter, and neither is it incapacitating, despite the common misconception that mystical vision renders us

unfit for practical life. So the next verse tells us:

When it is known through every state of cognition, it is rightly known, for [by such knowledge] one attains life eternal. Through one's own Self one gains power and through wisdom one gains immortality. (2.4)

To live in unbroken consciousness of God is liberation. Liberation is possible even here in this world, while living in the body. For the Upanishad continues:

If here [a person] knows it, then there is truth, and if here he knows it not, there is great loss. Hence, seeing or [seeking] [the Real] in all beings, wise men become immortal on departing from this world. (2.5)

It is affirmed over and over in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita that perfect realization and liberation is possible even here in the world. This is one of the glories of their teaching. It does not hold out some vague “sweet bye and bye” hope to be realized only after death—a sure trait of fraudulent religion. The truth of the Eternal Religion (Sanatana Dharma), including Yoga, can be proven at every moment of our life, just as advances in science, especially in physics and astronomy, reveal the truths intuited by the sages of India thousands of years ago.

We need to hold firmly to the fact that we can overcome ignorance and bondage in this very lifetime, that we need not think it will take many incarnations to come to enlightenment. The Bhagavad Gita, particularly, emphasizes the immediacy of our spiritual potential. Blind faith, another requisite of ignorant religion, is not needed, either. (I was once taken to a vegetarian restaurant run by disciples of a yoga cult guru. It was most revealingly named Blind Faith.) Our practice of yoga and the resulting maturation of consciousness will enable us to see, experience and demonstrate the great truths of the Upanishads.

What about doubts? They mean nothing, any more than blind beliefs. In some instances, a negative rejection of truth on the subconscious level masquerades as doubts and can hinder our progress. But honest doubts cannot. I could cite for you many instances in which I not only doubted something, I denied its possibility, but still I came to see for myself the truth of what I had not believed. My practice of yoga kept pushing the frontiers of my insight into areas that I had ignorantly thought were superstition or silly. And my doubt and denial did not delay even for a moment my coming to understand the truth of what I had disbelieved.

This is why no scripture of India is considered to be the “word of God,” the supreme and final authority. Scriptures, like spiritual teachers, can only point the way, but they cannot definitively state the truth. Yet through interior development there is nothing that can elude the yogi in his quest for reality. This is why in the Bhagavad Gita Krishna speaks of Abhyasa Yoga, the Yoga of Practice, as the foundation for those who wish to really know.

If here he knows it not, there is great loss.

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36). Those who do not realize God suffer the greatest loss, for

they lose both themselves and God. What, then, is left for them? Nothing. Desolate, they wander in the desert of their own barren minds and hearts. Shankara says that the *mahati vinashtih*, the great destruction, is interminable birth and death in the material world with all its attendant pains, sorrows and fears.

Hence, seeing or [seeking] [the Real] in all beings, wise men become immortal on departing from this world.

On the other hand, the wise whose consciousness is steadfastly fixed in God turn away from the world—or more exactly, from the bonds and blandishments of the world—and become immortal (*amritam bhavanti*) by entering forever into Immortal Brahman.

Blessed are those who live their lives in the perspective of this single verse. Realization and attainment shall be theirs. For them immortality shall be their assured and eternal future.

The Kena Upanishad is quite brief, and now concludes with a story and a short reflection on the story.

Brahman, it is said, conquered [once] for the gods, and the gods gloried in that conquest of Brahman. They thought, ours, indeed, is this victory and ours, indeed, is this greatness. (3.1)

[Brahman] indeed knew this [conceit of theirs]. He appeared before them. They did not know what spirit it was. They said to Agni, O Jata-vedas, find this out, what this spirit is. Yes [said he]. He hastened towards it and it said to him, Who are you? [Agni] replied, I am Agni indeed, I am Jata-vedas. He again asked, What power is there in you? Agni replied, I can burn everything whatever there is on earth. [He] placed [a blade of] grass before him saying, Burn this. He went towards it with all speed but could not burn it. He returned thence and said, I have not been able to find out what this spirit is.

Then they said to Vayu [Air], O Vayu, find this out—What this spirit is. Yes (said he). He hastened towards it, and it said to him, Who are you? Vayu replied, I am Vayu indeed, I am Matarisvan. [He asked Vayu] What power is there in you? [Vayu] replied, I can blow off everything whatever there is on earth. (3.9) He placed before him [a blade of] grass saying, Blow [this] off. Vayu went towards it with all speed but could not blow it off. He returned thence and said, I have not been able to find out what this spirit is. (3.10)

Then they said to Indra, O Maghavan, find this out—what this spirit is. Yes [said he]. He hastened towards it [but] it disappeared from before him. When in the same region of the sky, he [Indra] came across a lady, most beautiful, Uma, the daughter of Himavat, and said to her, What is this spirit? She replied, This is Brahman, to be sure, and in the victory of Brahman, indeed, do you glory thus. Then only did he [Indra] know that it was Brahman. (3.1-4.1)

This is a very straightforward account. The “gods” are mostly the intelligent faculties of the individual human being. The philosophical element is very simple:

the senses and mind cannot comprehend Brahman, but Its truth can be revealed by the Divine Feminine aspect of God, Mahashakti or Adishakti, the Great, Primal Power that is the dynamic aspect of Brahman, the Prakriti, Divine Creative Energy, that is inseparable from Purusha, the Supreme Spirit. God the Father is Unmoving Consciousness, whereas God the Mother is Moving Consciousness. The entire field of creation is Mother, the Father being the Transcendental Witness of Her manifestations. The Mother is the Divine Ladder which we ascend to the knowledge of the Father.

Prakriti proceeds from Purusha, just as the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father” according to the ancient Nicene Creed of Christianity.

The fundamental idea of the dance of the Creative Energy before the face of the Supreme Spirit is found in the book of Proverbs where she speaks of herself, saying: “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: when he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: when he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.” (Proverbs 8:22-31). The Divine Mother dances the dance of creation before the witnessing Lord.

“Uma, the daughter of Himavat,” was the daughter of King Himalaya, and so was called Himavati. She was considered a manifestation (avatara) of the Divine Mother aspect of God. Uma is a name often given the Divine Power. But Shankara in his commentary has a different and interesting interpretation of Himavati. He says it means “one who was as though attired in dress of gold.” This is most intriguing, because in the Bible we have similar imagery of the Divine Mother, the Queen (sometimes called “the King’s Daughter” because She emanates from the King) being dressed in gold. David sang: “Upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir” (Psalms 45:9). And a few verses later: “The king’s daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold” (Psalms 45:13). In the book of Revelation we find: “There appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun” (Revelation 12:1). In this instance the “gold” is the light of the sun.

Therefore, these gods, Agni, Vayu and Indra, surpass greatly other gods, for they, it was, that touched Brahman closest, for they, indeed, for the first time knew (it was) Brahman. (4.2)

As said above, in this Upanishadic story the gods are mostly the intelligent faculties of the individual human being. However, Agni, Vayu and Indra are

representative of the primeval elements fire, air and ether. These are closer to the Self, to Brahman, than are the earth and water elements, whose faculties are smell and taste. The faculties of fire, air and ether respectively are sight, touch and sound. In meditation we see light of various colors, experience sensations that are the inner modes of touch, and in our japa hear the inner mental sound. These are three revealers of the presence of the Self/Brahman. However:

Therefore Indra surpasses greatly, as it were, other gods. He, indeed, has come into close contact with Brahman. He, indeed for the first time knew that [it was] Brahman. (4.3)

The etheric body is the nearest to the Self, and its faculty of sound is that which unites our consciousness with Brahman. Thus etheric sound is the supreme faculty by which we recognize (perceive) Spirit.

Brahman and Shakti (Power) are in reality one. Sri Ramakrishna often used the simile of fire and its power to burn. Fire is the Purusha and the burning power is the Prakriti. It is not amiss to say that Prakriti is the Effect of the presence of Brahman—is Brahman Itself. The Upanishad recapitulates this, saying:

Of this Brahman, there is this teaching: this is as it were, like the lightning which flashes forth or the winking of the eye. This teaching is concerning the gods.

Now the teaching concerning the Self. It is this toward which the mind appears to move; by the same [mind, one] remembers constantly; volition also likewise. (4.4-5)

Wherefore:

Brahman, the object of all desire, that, verily, is what is called the dearest of all. It is to be meditated upon as such [tadvanam]. Whoever knows it thus, him all beings seek. (4.6)

It is the presence of Brahman within it which draws us to seek after or value an object. As the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says:

“Verily, not for the sake of the husband is the husband dear, but a husband is dear for the sake of the Self. Verily, not for the sake of the wife is the wife dear, but a wife is dear for the sake of the Self. Verily, not for the sake of the sons are the sons dear, but the sons are dear for the sake of the Self. Verily, not for the sake of wealth is wealth dear, but wealth is dear for the sake of the Self. Verily, not for the sake of brahminhood is brahminhood dear, but brahminhood is dear for the sake of the Self. Verily, not for the sake of kshatriyahood is kshatriyahood dear, but kshatriyahood is dear for the sake of the Self. Verily, not for the sake of the worlds are the worlds dear, but the worlds are dear for the sake of the Self. Verily, not for the sake of the gods are the gods dear, but the gods are dear for the sake of the Self. Verily, not for the sake of the beings are the beings dear, but the beings are dear for the sake of the Self. Verily, not for the sake of all is all dear, but all is dear for the

sake of the Self. Verily, O Maitreyi, it is the Self that should be seen, heard of, reflected on and meditated upon. Verily, by the seeing of, by the hearing of, by the thinking of, by the understanding of the Self, all this is known” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.4.5).

The proof of this is the fact that when we successfully meditate on Brahman other sentient beings will sense the presence of Brahman in us and value us accordingly.

The teaching is wonderful, but it is not enough. The student of the Upanishadic sage intuits this, but comes to a wrong conclusion:

Sir, teach (me) the secret (Upanishad).

But the teacher responds:

The secret has been taught to you; we have taught you the secret relating to Brahman. (4.7)

Naturally, the student will assume, as would we, that the secret knowledge is the philosophy about Brahman, etc. Therefore the teacher continues:

Austerities, self-control and work are its support, the Vedas are all its units, truth is its abode. (4.8)

The importance of this perspective simply cannot be exaggerated. The Secret Knowledge is not philosophic formulations, it is practice: Abhyasa Yoga, the Yoga of Practice. The Vedas are only its adjuncts. Truth is at its heart to be realized by the practitioners. Tapasya, self-mastery and karma yoga form the body of the secret knowledge. There are no effects without a cause. These three enable the knowing of Brahman about which the sage concludes:

Whoever knows this, he, indeed, overcoming sin [papam], in the end, is firmly established in the Supreme world of heaven, yes, he is firmly established (4.9).

Katha Upanishad

The Katha Upanishad opens with the account of a very stingy man, Vajashravasa, who hoping for heavenly reward performed a sacrifice in which he gave away all his property. But what he gave was useless and worn-out cattle, some hardly able to eat or drink. Since this was a mockery and not a virtuous act, his son, Nachiketas, who was still a boy, was concerned over his father's evident attempt to hoodwink the gods (and God) with such a farce. He asked Vajashravasa, "Father! To whom will you give me?" Annoyed, his father replied: "I give you to Death!"—that is, to Yama the god of death.

Nachiketas then spoke to his father in an attempt to awaken in him the awareness of the folly he was committing in the light of rebirth and karma.

Here is the way the Upanishad tells it:

Desirous [of the fruit of the Visvajit sacrifice] Vajashravasa, they say, gave away all that he possessed. He had a son by name Nachiketas.

As the gifts were being taken to the priests, faith entered him. Although but a [mere] boy, he thought: Their water drunk, their grass eaten, their milk milked, their strength spent, joyless, verily, are those worlds, to which he, who presents such [cows] goes.

He said to his father, O Sire, to whom will you give me? For a second and a third time [he repeated] [when the father] said to him, Unto Death shall I give you.

Nachiketas [thought], Of many [sons or disciples] I go as the first, of many, I go as the middling. What duty towards Yama that [my father has to accomplish] today, does he accomplish through me?

[He said to his father:] Consider how it was with the forefathers, behold how it is with the later [men], a mortal ripens like grain, and like grain is born again. (1.1.1-6)

There is no use denying it: we all follow in the path of Vajashravasa on occasion, though some do it more exuberantly and overtly. This is especially deadly in the realm of spiritual life.

One day two friends from South India who were living in America asked me wonderingly: "What is an 'Indian giver'?" When I said it meant someone who promised but did not deliver, or who gave and then took back, they were really bewildered. But when I explained that it was not the Indians who were the "givers" but the deceitful white men, they understood, and to my confusion thought it was very funny. When I told them about "Honest Injun?" and "The only good Indian is a dead Indian," they laughed till they cried, and thereafter frequently asked: "Honest Injun?" when I told them something. But it is not funny when we are Indian givers in spiritual life, just as double-tongued and devious with God and our own spirit as

the American politicians were with the Native Americans.

One of the funniest and most typical examples of this is found in the comic motion picture, *The End*. In one scene Burt Reynolds is swimming in the ocean about to drown. He starts shouting out to God how much of his income he vows to give if he survives. The percentage goes up and up to the total amount. But then he sees that there is a chance he may make it back to shore. So the percentage starts dropping in proportion to how near he gets to the land! Finally he is telling God that he will be giving nothing, and if God does not like it, that is just too bad. We are very much (often exactly) like that ourselves. When we think we are not going to have something, or will have no use for it, we generously offer it to God or renounce it. But the moment we see a need or a use for it, then we announce to ourselves that God would not expect us to hand it over or renounce it.

Many people start out spiritual life with great enthusiasm, ready to dedicate and sacrifice in order to attain liberation. But as time goes by, the sands in the hourglass of will and interest grow less and less, shifting back to the bottom level of ego and the material life until what remains is so feeble and negligible it really is nothing.

The principle that we reap only and exactly what we sow is an absolute in spiritual life. Here are Saint Paul's words on the subject: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:7-9). Fainting in the sense of losing heart is a very real possibility for all of us, and that is why these words of Nachiketas were written in the Upanishad: "Look back and see how it was with those who came before us and observe how it is with those who are now with us. A mortal ripens like corn [grain] and like corn [grain] he springs up again."

The law of reaping what has been sown, and conversely not reaping what has not been sown, is to be taken most seriously in all aspects of life, but especially in spiritual matters. Solomon cautions us: "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay" (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5). The question here is not that of God being angry or sad at our non-payment, but the negative effect our own perfidy will have on us directly. It is not God that rewards and punishes, but our own Self, and its justice is inexorable. So asking God to release us or forgive us means positively nothing: it is our own Self we are dealing with and it cannot be gotten around in any degree whatsoever.

Sad to say, there are many examples of "those who came before" who foolishly reneged on their own selves and suffered the consequences, from simple unhappiness to abject and long-lasting misery and even death. This latter is no exaggeration. I know of many examples myself, but would rather not cite any, for it is simply too bleak. Just do not be one yourself. But I will tell you the principle I have seen demonstrated over and over again: *Whatever a person abandons his spiritual*

life to keep or to gain will be taken away from him—usually abruptly or even violently—and he will never regain or restart his spiritual life in this incarnation. I have never seen an exception. Never. I am, however, not speaking of merely risking or retarding the personal spiritual life—we all do that just from making mistakes or from silly foibles—but of the actual giving up and turning from and even rejecting one’s spiritual life and obligations. This is fatal.

At every step of our spiritual life we must keep in mind the law of cause and effect and “see how it was with those who came before us and observe how it is with those who are now with us.” And lest we think that if we escape the karmic reaction in this life we are home free, Nachiketas added: “A mortal ripens like corn and like corn he springs up again.” So there are future lives in which our neglect can come to fruition in many forms, all of them inimical to our further progress.

Of course, the words of Nachiketas only have meaning to the wise. As Krishna told Arjuna: “One acts according to one’s own prakriti—even the wise man does so. Beings follow their own prakriti; what will restraint accomplish? Those who constantly follow this teaching of mine, full of faith, not opposing it, they are released from the bondage of their actions. But those opposing and not practicing my teaching, confusing all knowledge, know them to be lost and mindless” (Bhagavad Gita 3:33, 31-32).

For some reason there are narrative passages at this point in the text which were lost or never written. When Vajashravasa heard the reproof of his virtuous son, Nachiketas, he uttered the curse: “Unto death shall I give you!” Nachiketas was no ordinary son. He was an accomplished yogi, one who could penetrate into the unseen worlds, and in keeping with his unjust father’s unjust words he went to the realm presided over by Yamaraja, the King of Death. Yama was not there, so Nachiketas remained waiting for him, not eating or drinking anything. (The realms where one goes after earthly death are very like the earth itself. The inhabitants eat and drink, and there is also night and day.) When Yama returned, his servants told him about his guest. Therefore Yama approached Nachiketas and said: “Since you, a venerable guest, have stayed in my house without food for three nights, I salute you. Therefore, in return, choose three gifts.”

Nachiketas asked two questions regarding ritual observance, which Yama answered readily. But then Nachiketas said:

There is this doubt in regard to a man who has departed [is dead], some [holding] that he is and some that he is not. I would be instructed by you in this knowledge. Of the boons, this is the third boon.

[Yama said] Even the gods of old had doubt on this point. It is not, indeed, easy to understand; (so) subtle is this truth. Choose another boon, O Nachiketas. Do not press me. Release me from this.

[Nachiketas said] Even the gods had doubt, indeed, as to this, and you, O Death, say that it is not easy to understand. [Instruct me,] for another teacher of it, like you, is not to be got. No other boon is comparable to this at all.

[Yama said] Choose sons and grandsons that shall live a hundred years, cattle in plenty, elephants, gold and horses. Choose vast expanses of land and life for yourself as many years as you will.

If you deem [any] boon like unto this, choose [that] as also wealth and long life. O Nachiketas, prosper then on this vast earth. I will make you the enjoyer of your desires.

Whatever desires are hard to attain in this world of mortals, ask for all those desires at your will. Here are noble maidens with chariots and musical instruments the like of them cannot be won by men. Be served by these whom I give to you. O Nachiketas, (pray) ask not about death.

[Nachiketas said] Transient (are these) and they wear out, O Yama, the vigor of all the senses of men. All life (a full life), moreover, is brief. Yours be the chariots, yours be the dance and song.

Man is not to be contented with wealth. Shall we enjoy wealth when we have seen you? Shall we live as long as you are in power? That alone is [still] the boon chosen by me.

Having approached the undecaying immortality, what decaying mortal on this earth below who [now] knows [and meditates on] the pleasures of beauty and love, will delight in an over-long life?

Tell us that about which they doubt, O Death, what there is in the great passing-on. This boon which penetrates the mystery, no other than that does Nachiketas choose. (1.1.20-29)

As Yama told Nachiketas, even those powerful beings that control the forces of the cosmos have been puzzled by the mystery of whether those who have gone beyond death can be said to exist or not to exist. Reflective human beings have agonized over the same problem. When inquirers came to Buddha with the question he refused to give any answer, saying that whatever he told them they would misunderstand and distort his words. So he said nothing. Consequently, to say that Buddha taught the non-existence of an immortal Self and individual immortality is perhaps an even worse distortion than that which he sought to avoid through silence.

Yama, however, was not talking to a word-juggling philosopher, but to an eminently qualified inquirer. Yet, testing the strength of Nachiketas's interest in such a profound matter, he attempted to dissuade him from pressing the question. When that failed, he resorted to that which has effectively deflected seekers throughout the history of humanity. He offered him long-lived and prosperous progeny, vast material wealth and possessions, unlimited pleasure and unlimited power and finally dominion over even the subtle worlds and all that is therein. Throughout countless ages the mere promise or prospect of such acquisitions have turned awakening consciousnesses from the path of immortality and led them further into the morass of mortal life. But Nachiketas could not be moved from his original resolve to learn the truth regarding immortality.

The Katha Upanishad would surely have been known to Jesus when he lived and

studied in India, and it can be speculated that it was in the context of the teachings of this Upanishad that he asked his disciples: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

When as a primary grade-schooler I first heard this verse read out in church, I immediately thought: "No. The real question is: What will a man *take* in exchange for his soul?" Through the years I kept questioning as to whether things were a blessing for life or a bribe to embrace inner death. This, too, we see so often. From those early years and even till now I have seen so many bribes offered and taken, all of them cheap and paltry compared to what the seekers would have gained if they had turned away from the offers. And as I earlier pointed out, in every instance the promise was withdrawn unfulfilled or the supposed gain was ruthlessly wrested from their grasp and they were left broken and empty.

People do not need to die to become lost souls. The suffering may not be eternal, but it is no less terrible for that. I can truthfully say that throughout my life the most desolate souls I have met were those that said to me with sad nostalgia: "I used to be...", and then mentioned some abandoned spiritual calling or involvement. The wheels of life were grinding them down and tormenting them with the bitter memory of that which they had so carelessly and foolishly tossed aside long ago for supposed "life."

In Eastern Christian worship the exclamation "Let us attend!" is usually uttered before some special reading or prayer is about to be intoned. We should indeed attend to the words of Nachiketas when he replied to Yama's offer: "Transient [are these] and they wear out, O Yama, the vigor of all the senses of men. All life [a full life], moreover, is brief. Yours be the chariots, yours the dance and song. Man is not to be contented with wealth. Shall we enjoy wealth when we have seen you? Shall we live as long as you are in power? That alone is [still] the boon chosen by me. Having approached the undecaying immortality, what decaying mortal on this earth below who [now] knows [and meditates on] the pleasures of beauty and love will delight in an over-long life? Tell us that about which they doubt, O Death, what there is in the great passing-on."

In Christianity and Buddhism a great deal of emphasis is placed on the memory of death as a universal principle and the particular mortality of each one of us. In the modern West this is superficially shrugged off as unhealthy morbidity, but it can be salutary indeed.

It was only sensible that Nachiketas, having come face-to-face with Death, should disregard all that which the human race has been madly seeking throughout its existence. For in the East (including Eastern Christianity) only that which lasts forever without any change is considered real. Everything else is unreal, illusory. Therefore that which can change and pass away is even now essentially nothing. Who, then, would value any such? There is no need for a lengthy philosophical analysis of psychic niceties or suchlike. The fact of their evanescent nature turns all desired objects to mere fantasies in the consciousness of the wise.

In sum: Renunciation is the key to the secret of immortality.

Yama said: Different is the good, and different, indeed, is the pleasant. These two, with different purposes, bind a man. Of these two, it is well for him who takes hold of the good; but he who chooses the pleasant, fails of his aim. (1.2.1)

How simple and direct these words are! When, after years of being soaked (and sometimes drowned) in mere religion I found real dharma, one of the most beautiful and wonderful things about it was its incredible simplicity. The religion I had had before was simplistic, even childishly so, but at the same time it was complex, convoluted and tangled, because that was the state of mind which had produced it and which it produced in those unfortunate enough to accept and follow it. (Many avoided the problem by professing the religion but not really following it.) In contrast, the profound dharma I had discovered was also as simple as the great ocean, gathering all into unity. I had tried reading Western philosophers and theologians and found them impossible to understand—mostly because they were not really saying anything.

The first time I opened a book by Shankara, the greatest philosopher India has ever produced, it was with real anxiety. He was supremely brilliant and profound, I knew. Would I break apart on the rock of his verbiage? Not at all. Every sentence was so exquisitely clear, every concept so unbelievably simple and equally vast and deep. I understood why: Shankara *knew* by his acquisition of divine consciousness what he was talking about. When Shankara talked to me God was speaking. And God knows how to communicate.

“Different is the good, and different, indeed, is the pleasant.” This does not have to be the situation: the problem is in us. Since the good dissolves the ego and frees us from its seemingly eternal domination and bondage, it is only natural that those who are inured, even addicted, to the ego’s rule will find the good bitter in the extreme. In the closing chapter of the Bhagavad Gita Krishna speaks of: “That happiness which is like poison at first, but like amrita in the end, born of the light of one’s own Self” (Bhagavad Gita 18:37). Who would not choose this? Just about everybody. Why? Because it requires strict self-schooling.

We have to educate and deliver ourselves. Neither God nor any holy being can do it for us. Therefore those who cling to their ego-addiction avidly “take refuge” in and “surrender” to and “place all trust” in God, gods, gurus, saints, teachers, a religion, a scripture and whatever, knowing at least subconsciously that it will not work, *for they themselves alone can do the needful*. The holy ones have already done all they could do for them. They have given the message and pointed out the way. Now it is their turn to get to work. Otherwise nothing will happen. And in their perversity this satisfies them completely, though they may cover it up with religiosity and “devotion.”

Those who do wish to achieve the good must shake off their self-hypnosis and begin the labor. They will be surprised at how pleasant it really is, and in time will

come to realize that they were enjoying pain and avoiding the real happiness and fulfilment that is found only in spiritual life.

Krishna describes “that happiness arising from the contact of the senses with their objects, which in the beginning is like amrita but changes into that which is like poison” (Bhagavad Gita 18:38). It is not just harmful, it is deadly. Saint Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of Saint John the Evangelist, wrote of those who, drinking a sweet drink that contains poison, “sweetly drink in their death” (Epistle to the Trallians). “Aren’t we having fun?” “Come on: live!” “What are you afraid of?” “Why don’t you find out what it is all about?” “What do you know about life?” These are the desperate appeals of those whose consciousness is awakened enough for them to be tormented by the example of those who have more fully awakened and who “touch not the cup: it is death to the soul.”

The wise know that the good and the pleasant utterly differ in their ends. The pleasant leads to ever more addiction, a craving for ever-increasing intoxication, and finally complete collapse and destruction.

“Truly, pleasures born of contact with the senses are wombs of pain, since they have a beginning and an end. The wise man is not satisfied with them” (Bhagavad Gita 5:22). On the other hand: “Released from desire and anger, with thoughts controlled, those ascetics who know the Self find very near to them the bliss of Brahmanirvana” (Bhagavad Gita 5:26). “The yogi who is satisfied with knowledge and discrimination, unchanging, with senses conquered, to whom a lump of clay, a stone and gold are the same, steadfast—is said to be in union (yukta).... He knows that endless joy which is apprehended by the buddhi beyond the senses; and established in that he does not deviate from the truth (tattwatah: thatness)” (Bhagavad Gita 6:8, 21).

The good also leads to complete collapse and destruction: the collapse and disintegration of the ego and its attendants, ignorance and desire. Then: “When he leaves behind all the desires of the mind, contented in the Self by the Self, then he is said to be steady in wisdom” (Bhagavad Gita 2:55). “He who possesses faith attains knowledge. Devoted to that pursuit, restraining the senses, having attained knowledge he quickly attains supreme peace” (Bhagavad Gita 4:39). “He whose Self is unattached to external contacts, who finds happiness in the Self, whose Self is united to Brahman by yoga, reaches imperishable happiness” (Bhagavad Gita 5:21). “He who is able to endure here on earth, before liberation from the body, the agitation that arises from desire and anger is steadfast, a happy man” (Bhagavad Gita 5:23).

“Both of these, serving different needs,” impel us to actions, but they do so in completely different ways.

The good points us to the way of benefit in a completely intelligent and non-emotional way. For example, the good never motivates us by selfish means such as promising reward or threatening punishment—this is the way of evil, including much of religion. The good motivates us toward itself simply by revealing its inherent value.

The pleasant is altogether different. It only shows us its external appearance. It does not reason with us, but entices or even compels us to seize it. The pleasant only shows us its immediate or short-term effect, but completely hides from us its long-term effects and blinds us to its inherent defects. The archetypal example of this is found in the Bible. There we are told that “when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat” (Genesis 3:6). Here we see all the problems with the pleasant: only the external is considered, emotion and instinct come to dominate and eclipse reason, and the ultimate effect is completely unapparent until it is too late. In sum, the good reveals but the pleasant conceals. It is necessary that we see the good as truly good and the pleasant as harmful and even potentially evil. This is not easy.

One of the problems with prevailing religion of all kinds is its incredible small-sightedness. Like the pleasant-oriented and pleasant-obsessed ego which it supports and feeds, it is concerned with only the moment at hand or with goals that are utterly irrelevant to the real nature of the human being. When we understand who/what we really are, then alone can we comprehend what is the sole purpose of our existence: conscious union with the Absolute. In light of this the Upanishad concludes: “Of these two, it is well for him who takes hold of the good; *but he who chooses the pleasant, fails of his aim.*” So the discrimination between the good and the pleasant is no light matter.

In the Gospel of Matthew (25:1-13) we find a parable about foolish and wise souls. Most of us do not really care if we are foolish, just as long as no one labels us so. But we *should* care, and so the Upanishad continues its teaching, saying:

Both the good and the pleasant approach a man. The wise man, pondering over them, discriminates. The wise chooses the good in preference to the pleasant. The simple-minded, for the sake of worldly well-being, prefers the pleasant. (1.2.2)

There is a lot of truth in these few lines that are beneficial for us when understood and followed.

“Both the good and the pleasant approach a man.” Whatever may be the excuses we may make for ourselves, even portraying ourselves as weak or victims, nothing and no one forces anything upon us in life, however much it may seem otherwise. Rather, the good and the pleasant simply present themselves to us. We are totally responsible for our response to them, although, like Adam and Eve in Genesis, we try to put the blame on someone else, on some external factor. “The man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.... And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Genesis 3:12-13).

It is really essential to know as we move through life (hopefully forward) that although our deluded experience seems just the opposite, in reality all things are completely neutral. It is our response to them that really gives them any character such as good, bad, destructive, positive, etc. A little thought will show this. The

deadliest poison is harmless if we do not make contact with it. Conversely, the best medicine is worthless if we do not consume it. Or think of it in this way: garbage seems heavenly food to a starving person, but not to someone who is well fed; a child's toy means nothing to a mature adult. Nothing has an innate ability to draw or force us. All the drawing and forcing is in our mind as it responds to the object. We can blame no one at any time. It is all in us. If there are no grass seeds in the soil no grass will grow. The seeds have to be in us to sprout and grow and bear fruit as thinking, willing and acting.

"The wise man, pondering over them, discriminates" between them. Viveka, the ability to distinguish between the real and the unreal, between the true and the false, between the transient and the permanent, is indispensable for the serious spiritual aspirant. The wise possess and exercise this faculty, the eye of wisdom, by deeply examining whatever is presented to them and discerning whether it is the good or the merely pleasant they are being confronted with. Intelligence comes into the foreground, feeling and emotion being banished from the mental field altogether. Human beings operate either rationally or instinctually/emotionally. The wise are rational at all times. For example, real love is clear-sighted, never blind, whereas infatuation masquerading as love is both blinding and blindness.

Between the wise and the foolish the distance and differences are profound, for they are rooted in their mind and intellect. Even as a child I always thought that the statement of Abraham to Lazarus: "between us and you there is a great gulf fixed" (Luke 16:26) was spiritually symbolic, that a great gulf did indeed lie between the Godwards and the earthwards. The Upanishad is outlining the nature of this gulf for us by describing its effects on both.

The wise prefer the good; they are not enticed, coerced, or "somehow drawn" to the good. They intelligently (yes, intellectually) prefer it because they know its nature and its effects. This is true of everything in their life, mundane, mental, and spiritual. This is markedly true in the matter of religion. The religious expression of the wise is always peaceful, clear, intelligent, informed and practical. It works.

The foolish, however are not so. As Isaiah and Saint Paul observed, they truly are a "troubled sea" (Isaiah 57:20) "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind" (Ephesians 4:14). "The simple-minded (foolish), for the sake of worldly well-being, prefers the pleasant." It only follows that they prefer the pleasant to the good, for the earthbound cannot even perceive the good to any appreciable degree; but they create a lot of illusions about it, all negative and self-assuring.

Their religion, of course, caters to their emotions and their demands for the indulgence of their whims and vices. However educated they may be, or how "uplifting" their religious activities, still animality reigns and all manner of subhuman behavior is sanctioned and even elevated and "spiritualized." Wallowing in the sty of their comforting and indulgent religion, they cast many a contemptuous (and secretly guilty) glance at those who are not so, and create many a *bon mot* about their "unnatural denial and repressions," hinting of sinister implications for those who "run away from life" and "refuse to face themselves,"

and “expect too much from themselves and others.” Even though they like to say they are only human and that God understands they are, they are really subhuman in character though human in body. Driven by pleasure/pain, their humanity becomes submerged in the animality impressed in their subconscious by millions of incarnations in subhuman forms.

Merely possessing a human body is no guarantee of humanity. The redoubtable Dr. Bronner in a conversation with one of the monks of our monastery referred to some people as “not yet HUMAN!” He was right. A house does not make a home and a human body does not make a human being. Humanity only dawns when intelligence dominates and wisdom is gained. We need not be intellectual in the academic sense, but we must be intelligent. Then if we use our intelligence there is a chance we may become wise and thereby cross the great gulf.

Chances are Nachiketas never got voted “most popular” of anything and was not “a good mixer.” But Yama assessed him quite highly, saying:

[But] you, O Nachiketas, have rejected [after] examining, the desires that are pleasant and seem to be pleasing. You have not taken to the way of wealth, where many mortals sink [to ruin]. (1.2.3)

Now this is a thumbnail portrait of a wise human being, but it is a test of the wise and the foolish. The wise will accept it and the foolish will not. So we should take a square look at it and our reaction will tell us which we are.

First of all, Nachiketas is not naive or “an innocent.” He knows what is going on, even if most things should not be going on. He has deeply looked into the desires of the flesh and the delights of the senses. He knows what the fake life of the foolish is all about, and he has renounced it all: not just a little bit or even most, but the whole mess. Why? Because he does not identify with the flesh and the senses, but with his intelligence and his true Self that is pure consciousness. He knows he is not the perishable body.

“You have not taken to the way of wealth, where many mortals sink,” says Yama. Nachiketas sees that the world of body-sense enslavement is a suffocating bog, not just ugly and repulsive to the wise, but deadly. He knows, with Jesus, that: “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). He also knows that in reality once a person has reached the level of human evolution he cannot live like an animal without dire consequences, including terrible suffering. We have at least potentially gone beyond that to which the foolish cling to so obsessively.

This is strikingly illustrated in Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son found in the fifteenth chapter of Saint Luke. After wasting his inheritance, the man hired himself out to a pig farmer. This is a symbol of someone who has enslaved himself to the lower nature and the senses: pigs that wallow in filth, eat garbage, and demand more. “And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him” (Luke 15:16). Like nearly all of us, the poor soul wants to feed on and be satisfied with the garbage that the pigs revel in, grunting: “This is living!” But it cannot be; we are not pigs; we are not the senses or the body.

No matter how much we desire to regress to animal living, we cannot really do so. And usually only pain will wake us up from such folly. When we do wake up, like the Prodigal we will resolve: “I will arise and go” forward in the path of evolution, leaving the sty and its pigs behind. The rising and the going will not be easy, but there simply is nothing else for a true human being to do. Moreover, the path will not be long, though it may seem so, for time drags when we are having struggle and pain. Jesus indicates this, saying: “when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.” All the perfected souls that have gone before have assured us that the effort required of us is but a token, nevertheless a token that must be paid. If we can but get a glimpse or conceive a bit of what it will be to have arisen and travelled the way, then the price will be seen to be small. As already cited, Saint Paul tells us that Jesus “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Just think: *the joy*. This should be our perspective, too.

Again, renunciation is the way of immortality.

Widely apart and leading to divergent ends are these, ignorance and what is known as wisdom. I know [you] Nachiketas, to be eager for wisdom for [even] many desires did not distract you. (1.2.4)

It is interesting to note that the concept of two ways of human life is to be found in all religious traditions. Jesus spoke of the Broad Way and the Narrow Way (Matthew 7:13-14), and when they met in Jerusalem and issued a joint spiritual letter (*The Didache*, usually called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*) his apostles began by saying there are two ways in this world. Long before that, the Katha Upanishad spoke to Jesus of the way of ignorance and the way of knowledge.

The way of ignorance is the subject of the three verses we will be considering, but first Yama tells us the key trait of one who aspires to knowledge: he cannot be tempted by the pleasant. This is because he sees its nature and its results. The pursuers of the way of ignorance are not such as Nachiketas, and Yama now tells us about them and the results of their walking in that way.

Abiding in the midst of ignorance, wise in their own esteem, thinking themselves to be learned, fools treading a tortuous path go about like blind men led by one who is himself blind. (1.2.5)

That certainly is plain speaking! Let us go through this verse bit by bit.

Abiding in the midst of ignorance. Such a person is sunk deep into the darkness of ignorance, so deep that he cannot see anything but darkness, so deep that he can hardly be extricated from it, at least in this life. It is not that his condition is utterly hopeless, but that he simply has neither awareness nor interest. If that dawns, he is on his way out of the abyss. But most of the time it does not happen. I once heard in a comedy routine a disease described with the concluding words: “the only cure for which is death.” In many (actually most) cases of dark ignorance this is the

truth. The individual requires another birth before he can arise from the depths. Until then he should be left alone.

Wise in their own esteem. Somewhere I once read the words: “The problem with ignorance is that it picks up confidence as it goes along.” Since ignorance is a by-product of ego, as ignorance increases so does egotism. Increasing in this alternating cycle, invincible arrogance and invincible ignorance arise, take hold and consume the person. This is really an ugly picture, but an accurate one. Thinking themselves wise, how can the ignorant ever see the truth about themselves—both the higher and the lower selves—and try to rectify themselves? They cannot. Not content to revel in their private kingdom of ignorance, they then set about to aggressively expand it through influencing others. And if they cannot influence they will dominate and bully others until they have extended their sphere of darkness. Again: ugly but accurate. Living in the fantasy-land of ego, they sink deeper, believing that they are rising. Actually the compulsion to control is inherent in ignorance.

Go about. Cycling in confusion, the foolish spiral downward, seeming to go up and down but really only going down and down. In their minds they veer back and forth, up and down, agitating themselves and others, but in actuality they just keep on sinking. Because of this they continually go round and round in the wheel of birth and death, perpetually bound to the torture wheel of samsara, and reveling in every moment. They have discovered the secret of false happiness in this world: unconsciousness.

Blind men led by one who is himself blind. Ignorance as well as misery loves company, in fact needs it desperately and thrives on it. Supporting each other they stumble through this world until death claims them and they get to do it all over and over and over. When they are not being the leader and the led, they are the pusher and the pushed, the dominating and the dominated, the victimizer and the victim. Alternating in these two roles, they reel onward and downward.

What lies beyond shines not to the simple-minded, careless, [who is] deluded by the glamor of wealth. Thinking: This world exists, there is no other, he falls again and again into my power [into death]. (1.2.6)

Rendered heedless of the truth about his condition through involvement with materiality (both his body and objects in the world) and deluded by what he thinks is going on, the ignorant never sees the way beyond the abyss in which he dwells. He simply cannot see it, just as we cannot hear sounds beyond the range of our hearing or see things beyond the range of our sight. He is deaf and blind to spirit in all its aspects. Even if by some chance he should seek the way, if he finds it he will not know it, nor if he comes face to face with the way will he realize it. Just the opposite. He will despise and deny it, even denouncing it as delusive or evil. On the other hand, he will exult in devilish religion, teachers and practices, seeking them out and devoting himself to them. Let me give two examples I know of personally.

Yogananda used to plead with a young American man to learn meditation,

assuring him that his progress would be rapid and he would be liberated in this life. But he did not heed the master's urging. When the master was about to leave his body he told his disciples that if the man ever came to the ashram and expressed an interest, one of them was to instruct him in meditation immediately. A dozen or so years later one of the biggest frauds the yoga world has ever produced came to town charging money for a worthless technique. The man was in poor financial condition, and could not really afford it, but he immediately paid the money and got initiated into nothing.

Two Buddhist friends of mine, practitioners of the Pure Land School of Buddhism, regularly visited a prison and instructed the inmates in Buddhist philosophy and spiritual practice. Whenever they tried to get the prisoners to chant the liberating name of Amitabha Buddha they would refuse and insist that they chant "power mantras" instead. They loved bondage and lusted after control. They belonged where they were.

"This world exists, and there is no other" is thought by many of the foolish, and there are many others who do not actually think it but live as though they did. Denial of spiritual realities is done more by deeds than by words. It does not matter how devoutly or spiritually we may think, if we live carelessly and materially, as centered on our ego as any ignoramus we would regard as "unspiritual."

This is the real test. Thinking the material world alone is real, the ignorant return to it again and again, living in the jaws of death. If we do the same, then we are fools. If we do not, then we are wise.

Seeing is not always seeing and hearing is not always hearing. In some instances it is misperception, and in others it is no perception at all but complete delusion, a fantasy. Yama had this to say to Nachiketas about the matter of understanding the Self:

He who cannot even be heard of by many, whom many, even hearing, do not know, wondrous is he who can teach [about Him] and skillful is he who finds [Him] and wondrous is he who knows [Him] when instructed by the wise (1.2.7)

He who cannot even be heard of by many. Most people have never heard of the Self and never will in this lifetime. Oh, yes, they will hear about an immortal soul/spirit that a tyrannical God will reward or punish according to his whim, but the real nature of that spirit as part of and therefore one with the Supreme Reality, eternal, immortal, and indivisible, will never be even hinted at nor will they come up with the concept on their own. Further, it will not be even suggested to them, either from within or without, that the spirit nature is their true Self and is the only true identity they can ever have.

Being unchanging, this Self cannot be affected or changed by anything—no, not even by God. It is what it is, just as much as God is what he is. It is, therefore, not only the most worthwhile thing for us to get involved with, it is the *only* thing we can possibly be involved with. Everything else is illusion. This glorious truth of the

Self must be the sole perspective in which we view our present situation as consciousnesses experiencing the process of evolution.

Many, even hearing, do not know. This is true of many who, though ostensibly adherents of dharma, really do not get the idea about the Self. These are those that frequent temples, ashrams and saints as a kind of insurance against calamity and trouble. Then there are those that only run to those holy places when problems arise. Obviously they have no degree of comprehension regarding the Self.

Neither do most who profess to understand the Self, as is seen by their words and deeds. If someone believes the building is on fire we can tell it by their attempts to get out. Similarly, if someone believes in the truth about the Self they will order their entire lives accordingly, not just assent to the concept. To *know* the Self, to enter into the fullness of its consciousness and being, will be the focus of their life and thought.

Sri Ramakrishna often said that if a thief learned of a great treasure kept in the room next to where he was living, he would not be able to sleep for thinking about how to break through the wall and get it. In the same way, those who really understand about the wonder of the Self will not rest until they have (re)claimed the Treasure for themselves. Spiritual purification and spiritual practice are the means for breaking through the wall and claiming the prize.

We have a dilemma here, also: Only those who understand about the Self will be motivated to engage in tapasya to realize it fully. Yet only those who are engaged in tapasya can have any glimmer of the Self and be motivated to practice. The solution lies in the fact that in time the Self begins to urge us to its realization, that we will intuit the presence of the Self and start moving toward the point where, when we hear about it, we will accept and act upon what we hear.

It is interesting to see that Yama does not mention those who reject or deny the truth of the Self. Apparently to him they do not even exist.

We joke sometimes about the exaggerations of the motion picture industry in its early years. “Colossal! Magnificent! The Greatest Ever!” and similar effusions continually poured out in conversation and advertisements. The song, “Hollywood” assured us that out there “you’re ‘terrific’ if you’re good.” Divinity, on the other hand, has a somewhat different viewpoint, so Yama tells Nachiketas: “Wondrous is he who can teach [about the Self].” He is not speaking of a parrot, a spiritual phonograph, but of one who speaks with awakened awareness, even if not from perfect knowledge or realization. “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matthew 12:34). The implication here is that we should seek out and only listen to those who speak of the Self, from the Self and in the perspective of the Self. Theology is usually only so much distracting noise, and so is most religious and “spiritual” talk. Buddha likened a true teacher or teaching to a finger pointing at the moon—only that which points us to our own reality is itself real and worthwhile. Such a teacher or teaching is wonderful indeed.

Yama assures Nachiketas that the intelligent person is the one who pursues

knowledge of the Self. This is done in two ways: listening to or reading the teachings about the Self by those who have themselves known the Self, and (most importantly) by actively seeking to know one's own Self through careful self-analysis (swadhyaya) and spiritual practices, most especially meditation. This latter point is very necessary for us to grasp. Intellectually intelligent people love learning, and they should. However, it is easy to fall into the trap of studying all the theory and not getting down to any practice to determine the validity of the theory.

Saint Silouan of Athos said that delight in the study of theology was the false mysticism of the ego. When Swami Turiyananda first met Sri Ramakrishna he was intensely studying Vedanta for at least six hours a day. Upon hearing of this, Sri Ramakrishna was astounded. "What else does Vedanta say except that Brahman alone is real, the world is illusory, and the Self and Brahman are one?" he asked. "Why do you need six hours of study for that?" Turiyananda had the good sense to understand, and began to devote himself to japa and meditation in order to know the Self, not just know *about* the Self. In the West it is a common error to assume that knowing about something is the same thing as knowing it. More than once I have read in a Catholic catechism that knowing God is accomplished by reading the catechism.

To be wonderful and intelligent is good, but to be rare among men is the ideal. So Yama concludes: "Wondrous is he who knows when instructed by the wise." This is because a good teacher does not just impart theoretical knowledge, but reveals to the student the practical means by which he can open his understanding through meditation to behold and know the Self. Krishna, being the Supreme Teacher, instructs Arjuna in the Gita about meditation, saying: "Having directed his mind to a single object, controlling thought and activity of the senses, sitting on the seat he should practice yoga for the purpose of self-purification" (Bhagavad Gita 6:12). "The yogi who is always content, self-controlled and of firm resolve, whose mind and intellect are fixed on me, who is devoted to me—he is dear to me" (Bhagavad Gita 12:14). "Tranquility of mind, kindness, silence, self-control and purity of the mental state: these are called tapasya of the mind" (Bhagavad Gita 17:16). "With mind made steadfast by yoga, which turns not to anything else, to the Divine Supreme Spirit he goes, meditating on him" (Bhagavad Gita 8:8).

Taught by an inferior man He cannot be truly understood, as He is thought of in many ways. Unless taught by one who knows Him as himself, there is no going thither, for it is inconceivable, being subtler than the subtle. (1.2.8)

By "taught" is meant learning the intellectual truth about the Self, its nature, and its possibility of realization. We all know the incredible and impenetrable tangle of theologies that constitute the religions of the world. The reason for this is simple: most (almost all) teachers of religion are fundamentally ignorant—ignorant not in the intellectual sense, but in the intuitive sense. Since we do need an intellectual road map to help us in our search for direct experience of the Self, this is a serious matter. For an attempt to figure out the truth of the Self in a purely

theoretical manner will only add to the prevailing confusion. We will just become one more voice in the cacophony of ignorant religion and philosophy.

Few things are worse than an ignoramus who believes he has an inside track. As Jesus observed: "If therefore the light that is in thee be [actually] darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:23). Consequently, it is a most detrimental thing to come into the orbit of an ignorant teacher and accept his words, and even worse to act on them.

"It is inconceivable, being subtler than the subtle," says Yama. Being subtler than the subtlest, the Self cannot possibly be perceived by any senses, including those of the subtle bodies, or conceived of by even the highest and subtle reaches of the intellect. Yet, the Self can be known. This is possible when "taught by one who knows Him as himself [his Self]" through the practice of meditation, in which a qualified teacher will give instruction first and foremost. This really marks out the knowledgeable teacher from the ignorant teacher. The ignorant teacher will only expound theory, proving what he teaches by intellectual means. The worthy teacher may say much the same words, but will point the student to the means by which he can attain the vision of the Self. He will establish the student in the practice of meditation, without which nothing that is real can possibly be known.

A bit more. Yama tells us that the teacher should be one who has become one with the Atman, not a rhetorician or theoretician. Now it is impossible for us to look into the consciousness of a teacher, so how will we know he has real knowledge? We cannot, but there is a trait that at least assures us the teacher is not altogether astray: He will affirm the oneness of the Self and Brahman. No matter how cleverly and convincingly he may speak, however much he may appeal to our emotions and deluded intellects, if he does not insist on the unity of the Self and Brahman, saying with the Chandogya Upanishad, "That You Are," he is unworthy and to be turned away from.

Unhappily, there are a lot of ignoramuses who appeal to egotistical students by saying: "You are God." The true teacher says not that we are God, but that God is us. There is an infinite difference. Furthermore, the real teacher does not just tell us this fact, he instructs us in the way to find it out for ourselves. These two traits must be present before we even begin to think about accepting anyone as a valid guide.

The ultimate test of a teacher is our own capacity, made accessible to us by his instruction, to leave all speculation behind and enter into the Reality that is both Brahman and the Self, yet One. Then all the gods and sages will say of us what Yama said of Nachiketas:

Not by reasoning is this apprehension attainable, but taught by another, is it well understood. You have obtained it, holding fast to truth. May we find, Nachiketas, an inquirer like you. (1.2.9)

There is a little-known Protestant song entitled "With Eternity's Values in View." Musically it is not much, but philosophically it is right on target. We are not temporal, mortal beings, and if we live our life as though we were, then only

confusion, conflict and chaos can result. Instead we must see ourselves as eternal beings presently dreaming the dream of evolution, a dream whose culmination is the awakening toward which all of our attention and awareness should be directed. Nachiketas knew this, but Yama underlined it, telling him:

I know that wealth is impermanent. Not through the transient things is that abiding [one] reached; yet by me is laid the Nachiketas fire and by impermanent means have I reached the everlasting. (1.2.10)

What are a billion years compared to eternity? Not even a glimmer. Why, then, do we scramble after short-lived earthly goals, goals that even if attained prove to be worthless since they vanish away so quickly? Why do we continually deny our eternity and affirm the delusion of temporality? Because we identify thoroughly with that which is temporal and finite.

It is true that there is nothing on this earth we cannot ultimately attain, even if it takes many lives, if we put forth the effort. In previous creations human beings performed elaborate rituals to become gods in this subsequent creation, including Brahma the creator. They succeeded, and the result was that they suffer more pain and anxiety than human beings do and are more subject to mental aberrations than humans. Furthermore, they are bound until the end of this creation cycle to fulfill their offices and can in no way shirk or abandon them. So they are bound more than any human being could ever be. Their main anxiety is fear over falling from their exalted status and returning to human form. They have learned nothing from their experience.

“Yet by me is laid the Nachiketas fire and by impermanent means have I reached the everlasting.” Only the spirit is eternal and everlasting. Everything else is temporal and impermanent, and in time will dissolve back into the primal energy of pre-manifestation and we will lose them, never really having had them at all. Consequently, the wise seek only for the eternal spirit, though using the material and the temporal to aid them in their search. For example, physical health is not enlightenment, but it certainly makes the enlightenment process easier. Material sufficiency relieves us from anxiety and helps us pursue spiritual life without distraction.

Discipline is essential for material life, and even more so for spiritual life. Yet, discipline will not take us to the goal. It will greatly facilitate our going, but we must never mistake proficiency in any discipline or practice for spiritual attainment. In the same way, any type of yogic practice that does not deal directly with consciousness will not result in enlightenment. Like discipline, it may help us in our ascent to higher awareness, but it must not be mistaken for that awareness.

Sadhana is spiritual practice that leads to the revelation of the Real (Sat). The temporal does not lead to the eternal, therefore real sadhana must begin and end in spirit-consciousness. No material procedure is sadhana, nor is any externally-oriented practice sadhana. The only true sadhana is the turning inward of the mind and the perception of the inmost spirit. In other words, meditation alone is

sadhana, meditation free of all mechanics and gimmicks, simple and direct, leading to the ultimate simplicity that is the Self. We must begin with spirit if we are to end with spirit.

All truth is a two-edged sword. It tells us what *is* and what *is not*. The truth about the Self and Brahman also tells us what is not the Self or Brahman. Those of us who are clinging to the unreal will find this painful or at least uncomfortable, but we have to let go of the unreal to lay hold of the Real. The wise listen and act upon Yama's next words to Nachiketas:

[Having seen] the fulfillment of [all] desire, the support of the world, the endless fruit of rites, the other shore where there is no fear, the greatness of fame, the far-stretching, the foundation, O wise Nachiketas, you have steadfastly let (them) go. (1.2.11)

To enter into Life we turn away from all fulfillments of material and temporal desires, no longer attracted by their false glitter. Nor do we aspire to some heaven or heavenly pleasures offered to us by ego-oriented religion, things that also end as painfully as the joys of earth. Even miracles mean nothing to us, for they occur only in the realm of duality, the realm of death.

Seeing that Nachiketas was yearning to pass from death to immortality, Yama continues:

Realizing through Self-contemplation that primal God, difficult to be seen, deeply hidden, set in the cave [of the heart], dwelling in the deep, the wise man leaves behind both joy and sorrow. (1.2.12)

By knowing ourselves through meditation both the primal God and the primal Self can be known. But it is difficult to see because it is so deeply hidden beneath the layers of our gross and subtle bodies and the countless illusions and delusions, samskaras, vasanas, desires and aversions we have accumulated through equally countless births. But by dwelling in the depths of our heart, having become true knowers of the Self, we leave behind both joy and sorrow.

It is not that Self-knowledge renders us incapable of experiencing pleasure or pain, but of being in bondage to them, being subject to *reaction* to pleasure and pain. "He who is without desire in all situations, encountering this or that, pleasant or unpleasant, not rejoicing or disliking—his wisdom stands firm" (Bhagavad Gita 2:57). "In tranquility the cessation of all sorrows is produced for him. Truly, for the tranquil-minded the buddhi immediately becomes steady" (Bhagavad Gita 2:65).

All the world seeks happiness. The Declaration of Independence says that the pursuit of happiness is an inalienable right for every human being. But see how miserable people really are beneath the frantic veneer of the pursuit of happiness in an ever-changing and pain-producing world. The problem? We are looking in the wrong direction. We are seeking outward when we should be seeking inward. We are seeking the non-self instead of the Self. From the Katha Upanishad we learn the right line of action.

Hearing this and comprehending [it], a mortal, extracting the essence and reaching the subtle, rejoices, having attained the source of joy. I know that such an abode is wide open unto Nachiketas. (1.2.13)

The Self is separate from the body, the senses, and the mind. Therefore the body, senses, and mind cannot perceive the Self as an object, and so cannot possibly experience the Self to any degree. The happiness experienced by body, senses and mind is not true happiness at all, but an approximation, a sham that distracts us from the real thing, inevitably leading us to frustration and all-around misery. This must be learned. Then the Self itself must be known as totally separate from that realm of illusion-producing ignorance.

The Self is the very soul of Truth, of Reality. It is not just the basis of reality, it is reality. Apart from it there simply is nothing. It is subtle beyond all conception, but not beyond all experience. It is when we enter fully into the Being that is the Self, that we attain to the Boundless. For the Boundless itself shall be ours.

Yama then tells us an important fact: the Self is the source of all joy. Now this is most intriguing. We are saying that the Self is all there really is, and then we hear that it is the source of all. This is the key to true non-dual comprehension. Sri Ramakrishna explained that at first we follow the path of negation saying “Not this, not that,” the idea being that everything we can see or think of is not the Real. But when we come to the end of that approach which is not just intellection or mind-gaming, but the inner path of meditation, and turn back, we will say, “All this!” We will see that everything is the Real, that the unreal was only our way of seeing and (mis)understanding it. The whole world, said Sri Ramakrishna, will then be seen as “a market of joy.” Unless this is understood at the beginning we will end up being just another dyspeptic world-and-life-denying philosophical grouch, claiming that our dryness and grimness is jnana (wisdom). “There is a state beyond bliss, you know,” grated one of them to a friend of mine who dared to smile. India abounds with these anatomic misfits and we have plenty of them in the West, too. (One is too many.)

All that dwells in and is rooted in the Self and is therefore an expression of divine ananda. What a wonderful world-view: one that sees not “the world” but Spirit. We do not go from one point to another to pass from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to the Light, from death to Immortality. It is only a matter of changing our base of perception. This is the real alchemy, changing the lead of mundane experience to the gold of supernal joy.

No one is excluded from this glorious truth, it extends to all and is vital to all in an equal degree. No one is nearer or farther from the Self: it embraces all. This is the real Gospel, the *Evangelion*, the Good News humanity needs so desperately. Therefore Yama says “I know that such an abode is wide open unto Nachiketas.” And for us, too.

Previously Yama has spoken to Nachiketas of the manner to experience the Self that is immanent in all that “is.” Now he completes the picture by an exposition of

the Transcendent and the means to realize It. He does this in response to Nachiketa's question:

[Nachiketas asks] Tell me that which you see beyond right and wrong, beyond what is done or not done, beyond past and future. (1.2.14)

He desires to know about the Transcendental Reality that is beyond all qualities or designations. The Immanent Being has infinite names, forms, conditions, and qualities, but beyond that is something much greater: the Transcendent. That can neither be said to exist or not to exist, to be with form or without form, with qualities or without qualities, for all these propositions are dualities, one presupposing the other. Where there is one there is its opposite: duality is an absolute in the realm of the Immanent Reality.

Nachiketas is certainly pleased with the truth that all can be seen as the Divine Unity, but he wishes to complete his knowledge by learning about what lies beyond even that. For there is a state of consciousness in which even the question of duality/unity, form/formless, and suchlike cannot even arise. That is the state Nachiketas aspires to comprehend and experience.

Everything in manifestation is dual. This is the truth for every aspect of life. There is an interesting divinatory process known as The Alphabet of the Magi. To work it a question is formulated and then written on cards—one letter per card. The cards are then shuffled and dealt out in a special way to form the words that are the answer to the question. It was The Alphabet of the Magi, worked by a Benedictine monk who practiced divination and astrology in Paris after his monastery had been closed by the anti-religious government, that inspired Charlotte Corday to assassinate Marat, and inspired Napoleon, then a mere corporal, to aspire to the rulership of France. So it certainly works.

The idea that the answer is inherent in the question is very important, for it means that the questioner already knows the answer on the subconscious (or superconscious) level, that the question cannot arise until the answer is subliminally known. The purpose of questioning, then, is to bring out onto the conscious level what is known unconsciously. When we seemingly ask another to teach us we are really seeking to stimulate and bring forth our own knowledge. That is why the wise have assured their students that in time they would be able to find the answers within themselves: it is only a matter of developing intuition through clarifying the mind.

It is very common to hear someone demand: "Why did you ask me if you are not going to accept what I tell you?" The reply should be: "So I can figure the answer out for myself." The very fact that we reject a given answer indicates that we think we do know what is the truth about the matter. Otherwise we would mindlessly accept what we are told. (Many do, alas.) It is all inside us. Questioning reveals the ripening of our innate knowledge. Knowing this, Jesus said: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it

shall be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8). He is not urging us to seek outside ourselves, but to seek within.

Nachiketas seems to be asking Yama about the Transcendent, but his question reveals how much he already knows.

The moment we enter duality, relative existence, we become subject to the situation that some thoughts, words, and acts will impel us onward to higher consciousness and others will impel us to lower consciousness. No matter where we may be at the moment, it cannot be permanent. By the nature of things we will keep moving up and down, back and forth. Whenever we think we have attained some stability it is only a matter of the movement being so slow it is imperceptible to us. We are always in danger of incurring suffering because of this. In truth, suffering is inevitable, for even rising requires effort and unsureness or doubt as to the success of our endeavor. As Krishna describes, the ordinary person is “bound by a hundred snares of hope” (Bhagavad Gita 16:12). We suffer anxiety as to what is the right or wrong and anxiety as to whether we can avoid the wrong and manage to think and do the right. Even more, we are busy getting and losing, anxious to get the good and rid ourselves of the wrong. And of course we are mostly deluded as to what is really right and wrong, usually thinking that the pleasurable is right and the painful is wrong. The danger is obvious.

Nachiketas intuitively feels that this terrible dragging back and forth, this dilemma inherent in relative existence, can come to an end—not in the realm of relative existence, but in its transcendence. Realizing this truth is a tremendous breakthrough for the developing consciousness and indicates that the end of the search is near. Some of our monks visited a great saint in the Himalayan foothills and spoke with him about spiritual life. He told them: “Your questions show that you are not far from the Goal.”

In ignorant religion “sin” and “righteousness” occupy a great deal of attention, not necessarily because of a sincere desire to be virtuous, but because of their effects. Desire and fear motivate the religionist, at least mentally and emotionally, for sin gets punished and righteousness gets rewarded. Punishment hurts and reward feels good. Punishment takes away and reward supplies. The dispenser of reward and punishment is some kind (or many kinds) of deity who, being an extension of the ignorant egos of the adherents of the religion, judges good and bad on the basis of “I like” and “I don’t like,” “I want” and “I don’t want.” Good sense and practicality have nothing to do with it. The deity is either pleased or displeased and acts accordingly.

To complicate matters, the deity can be placated if “sinned against” and, being mollified by groveling and penitence, will reward the sinner as much as if he had been virtuous—maybe even more, so the deity’s “love” and “mercy” can be revealed. We see this behavior in human beings all the time: tears, apology and self-castigation not only stop the anger or displeasure, they evoke a tenderness and openness that should sensibly only be evoked by right conduct. So in evil religion (for ignorance is evil), despite the assurance that virtue is rewarded, we see that sin

and repentance are rewarded and the sinner assured of salvation.

Unfortunately we can carry this along with us if we only intellectually adopt a higher, more metaphysical view. For example, we see among people who “turn East” in their search that good karma and bad karma are bugaboos just as much desired and feared as any heaven or hell proffered by Western religion. I knew a man that had a metaphysical bookstore. Shoplifting was a real problem. Now, if he had put a sign on the door so the departing malefactors would have read something like: “Thou shalt not steal,” (Exodus 20:15), or “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” (Ezekiel 18:4), or “Know thou that God will bring thee into judgment.” (Ecclesiastes 11:9), it would have had no result, perhaps even the opposite. For after all, were not his customers “beyond all that Judeo-Christian negativity”? Indeed they were! So he put a sign on the door for all to see as they departed saying: “Shoplifting Is Bad Karma.” Nearly every day that sign stopped at least one person. Most sheepishly shuffled back to the shelf and sneaked the book back. Some actually came to the owner and gave him the book along with an apology. Why? Had he evoked their higher moral sensibilities? Not a bit. They had traded fear of sin and hell for fear of bad karma and retribution, maybe even a bad rebirth. The ego was still in the driver’s seat, and quite liable to stay there for a long time. Karma may be more positive a concept than sin, punishment, and hell, but the fear engendered is just as egoic, and therefore just as negative and ultimately ignorant.

Nachiketas had a clear vision of things. The problem was not tears or smiles, but the Law of Cause and Effect, the truth that for every action there is an equal responsive reaction. Reactivity, inner and outer, is also inherent in relative (dual) consciousness. But Nachiketas did not just want to get away from the noise and damp of the ocean of samsara, he wanted to get away from the ocean itself. A jail cell may be luxurious, but it is still a prison. Nachiketas aspired to freedom. He wished to attain that which was beyond cause and effect, not just a means of avoiding them. This is one of the reasons why religion is usually so pointless: it attempts to make the fire stop burning rather than showing the way out of the conflagration. It seeks to make bondage palatable, pleasing to both the egocentric deity and the egocentric devotee. A confederacy of dunces, indeed.

My first reading of the Bhagavad Gita revealed to me something I had intuited all my life: the fundamental truth that space and time are basic delusions in the human consciousness. What a relief! So when in three or four days I heard one of the most intelligent of my university professors remark that time and space were the two fundamental realities, you can imagine how much I appreciated the Gita for clearing that nonsense up for me. (I appreciated myself, too, for being so clever as to understand it.)

The time-space continuum is a torment to the awakened consciousness, for it is the basis for the existence of cause and effect and therefore of right and wrong. It is impermanence itself, the root cause of all suffering, fear, anxiety, and instability. Since we have been immersed in relativity for creation cycles beyond number, we

find ourselves in a present whose vast roots are thoroughly unknown, and whose effects will create an unknown future that will be a fusion of the past and the present. Uncertainty and confusion are the results of even a small attempt to make sense of the whole thing. And the idea of controlling any aspect is simply beyond our imagination.

We are drowning in a shoreless ocean. But we do not just drown once and have it over with. We drown daily—every moment, actually. Only the stupid or the willfully ignorant do not see this. How can we blame those who take refuge in illusion, whatever the form? They do not need an analysis or judgment of their predicament; they need a way out. Nachiketas is asking for that, not for more philosophy or exposition of the problem.

There is not a *place* beyond right and wrong, beyond cause and effect, beyond past, present, and future, but there is That which transcends them. Nachiketas sought to become an altogether different order of being, to enter into the state of Brahman Itself. Knowing this to be so, Yama does not hesitate, but literally spells it out.

The knowing Self is never born; nor does he die at any time. He sprang from nothing and nothing sprang from him. He is unborn, eternal, abiding and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain. (1.2.18)

Through Self-realization we shall know that we are pure consciousness, we are not born, we do not die, we are neither cause nor effect; we are birthless, eternal, everlasting and ancient. For us there is no beginning and no end. We do not die when the body dies. We are unaffected by any conditions of the body whatsoever. For as Shankara sang:

I am not the mind, intellect, thought, or ego;
Not hearing, not tasting, not smelling, not seeing;
I am not the elements—ether, earth, fire, air:
I am the form of Conscious Bliss: I am Spirit!

I am neither Prana, nor the five vital airs;
Nor the seven components of the gross body;
Nor the subtle bodies; nor organs of action:
I am the form of Conscious Bliss: I am Spirit!

I have no aversion, clinging, greed, delusion;
No envy or pride, and no duty or purpose;
I have no desire, and I have no freedom:
I am the form of Conscious Bliss: I am Spirit!

I have no merit or sin, nor pleasure or pain;
No mantra, pilgrimage, Veda or sacrifice;

Not enjoying, enjoyable, or enjoyer:
I am the form of Conscious Bliss: I am Spirit!

I have no death or fear, no distinction of caste;
Neither father, nor mother, nor do I have birth;
No friend or relation, guru or disciple:
I am the form of Conscious Bliss: I am Spirit!

I am without attributes; I am without form;
I am all-pervading, I am omnipresent;
By senses untouched, neither free, nor knowable:
I am the form of Conscious Bliss: I am Spirit!

We do not really need to become immortal and eternal, for we are that already. Instead we need to get beyond the illusory consciousness of birth and death, cause and effect, and the entire range of relative existence.

If the slayer thinks that he slays or if the slain thinks that he is slain, both of them do not understand. He neither slays nor is he slain. (1.2.19)

Before considering this Upanishadic passage, here is what the Bhagavad Gita, the great digest of the Upanishads, has to say about this: “These bodies inhabited by the eternal, indestructible, immeasurable, embodied Self are said to come to an end. He who thinks the Self is the slayer and he who thinks the Self is slain: neither of the two understands. The Self slays not, nor is it slain. Neither is the Self slain, nor yet does it die at any time; nor having been will it ever come not to be. Birthless, eternal, perpetual, primeval, it is not slain whenever the body is slain. In what way can he who knows this Self to be indestructible, eternal, birthless and imperishable, slay or cause to be slain?” (2:18-21).

Prabhavananda and Isherwood very poetically rendered this final verse: “Knowing It birthless, knowing It deathless, knowing It endless, for ever unchanging, dream not you do the deed of the killer, dream not the power is yours to command it.” Dreaming: that is the key. God is dreaming the entire drama of the cosmos, but he knows it and controls the dream. We, too, are dreaming the drama of our life, so Krishna tells us (in Prabhavananda’s version): “You dream you are the doer, you dream that action is done, you dream that action bears fruit. It is your ignorance, it is the world’s delusion that gives you these dreams” (Bhagavad Gita 5:14). The richest people in the world, if they dream they are penniless, suffer the frustration and fear of poverty just as keenly as do those who really are paupers. When they awake, the mental pain disperses, but it was no less real.

This is something we often miss when we subscribe to the theory of Maya. The experiences, such as birth, death, and disease, may be illusion, but the suffering they produce is not. It is real. The grief we feel at the death of a loved one is real, even if the death is not. That is why the *Sankhya Karika*, the basic text of the

Sankhya philosophy upon which the Yoga philosophy is based, opens with a discussion of suffering as our problem. Certainly, illusion should be dispelled, but that will not take care of the deeper problem: our capacity for suffering. It is foolish and callous to bully those who suffer by expounding on the unreality of that to which they are reacting. For there is no thing or situation which can make us suffer. Suffering is our *reaction* to those things. When we reach the state where we no longer react (for pleasure is as destructive as pain), then we will be free.

Patanjali's dictum that yoga is the cessation of modifications of the chitta does not refer at all to restless thoughts in the superficial mind. He is speaking of the capacity for any kind of reactivity to outer stimuli. It is when we are unreacting and resting in our true Self that we are in the *state* of Yoga. To merely fiddle around with the shallow thinking mind, believing that calming it makes us yogis, is deluding ourselves. Our problem is far, far greater and deeper than jittery thoughts. It is the capacity for suffering and for being deluded. To be awake in the fullest sense is to be incapable of sleep and dream. (I am speaking metaphysically.) All the philosophy and analysis in the world will not help us. We need to awaken forever. That is what real yoga is all about.

Slayer and slain are roles in the dream-drama of the evolving consciousness. If we know this, not just suppose or believe it, then nothing can move us from the state of peace that is a quality of our true Self. Fortunately for us all, the cliché about "There is naught but thinking makes it so," is false, another Western "truth" that mercifully is not true.

In dream the body can be slain and can be a slayer. Being part of the dream, it really acts and is acted upon in the dream context. The dreamer, however, is not part of the dream, even when it projects an image of itself into the dream and slays or is slain. Nothing external can affect or change the internal reality. Again, awakening is the only solution, and we should accept nothing less. Any view other than this which Yama presents to Nachiketas is but the blind leading the blind.

A great flaw in the thinking of most of us is only accepting half of this great truth. We easily affirm our immortality, saying: "I can never die," and thus reject the idea that we can be slain. Yet we accept the concept that we can be slayers, and make a great to-do about "sin" and "karma." Because we want to control the behavior of others by promising rewards and threatening punishments, we have literally bought into this delusion and traded on it for life after life, fooling even ourselves.

Though we find the truth in the Upanishads or the Gita, we still keep on worrying about purifying ourselves and clearing out our karma. Half-deluded, we stumble on, distracting ourselves from the real goal, sinking deeper into the morass. Consider the lives of saints. So many of them have been great sinners, even murderers, or incredibly ignorant, and yet we see them either instantly entering into the state of holiness or rocketing to it in a short time. The reason is simple: they had never committed a sin in their eternal lives. Like David, they awoke and found themselves with God. ("When I awake, I am still with thee." Psalms 139:18.)

Krishna told Arjuna: “If even an evildoer worships me single-heartedly, he should be considered righteous, for truly he has rightly resolved. Quickly he becomes a virtuous soul and goes to everlasting peace. Understand: no devotee of me is ever lost” (Bhagavad Gita 9:30-31).

Smaller than the small, greater than the great, the Self is set in the heart [guhayam] of every creature. The unstriving [akratuh] man beholds Him, freed from sorrow. Through tranquillity of the mind and the senses [he sees] the greatness of the Self. (1.2.20)

We tend to think of infinity as boundlessly large, when in actuality that which is infinite transcends space and can therefore not be measured in any manner. It cannot be small or large. Which is why there is no thing too small or too great for God to be involved with. The Self, being a part of God, is likewise beyond measurement. It is neither small nor large, gross nor subtle. In fact, the Self is simply beyond description. We can only talk around it, not really express its mystery.

However, there are some things that can be said about the presence of the Self. Therefore Yama tells Nachiketas that this Self is “set in the heart of every creature.” Within every living being, as well as human beings, there is a divine spirit, jiva or Self. Every living being is on the path of evolution to total, conscious union with Brahman the Absolute. This is the fundamental idea behind all of Sanatana Dharma. Everything should be seen from that perspective.

The Self is eternal. It has no beginning and it can never have an end. Whatever it is, it has been forever. What it is not, it shall never be. This is bedrock truth.

The Self, being beyond time and space, cannot possibly be anywhere. Yet we readily say that it is within. This is as close to the truth about the Self as we can get. At the core of all things, having itself neither periphery or core, is the unchanging Self. It dwells in us in the sense that it abides, yet the Self does not at all exist in the way we understand existence, which is completely relative. The Self is absolute, and relativity can never affect or touch it.

The Self abides in the hearts of all. But what is the heart? *Guha* means both cave and heart, but it also means “in a secret place.” Within the inmost heart of all things is that which transcends even “inmost.” That is the Self. And there is no thing whatsoever that does not have the Self as its eternal, unchanging indweller. The Self can be within all as their essential being because the Self of the Self, the Supreme Self, Brahman, is all.

This is the Great Revelation. All that we see around us is resting upon the Self as the substratum. All that we perceive objectively is Maya, illusion. That which we cannot see, but which we can “be,” is the Self, the all-pervading subject.

This is wonderful, but what possible meaning can it have if we do not experience this glorious truth for ourselves? Nothing, obviously. So Yama proceeds to tell Nachiketas about the person who can realize the Self.

To be truly free from desire is to be *incapable* of desire. To not be desiring

anything at the moment is not what is spoken of here. We mistakenly think that if we can become indifferent to all things and want nothing we will be free from desire. But we will still be in the condition where desire is possible, even if it be in the future of this or a subsequent life.

To desire something we have to feel inadequate, but even more fundamentally, we have to have objective consciousness, a belief in the reality of the objects perceived, and a belief that in some way we can enter into relation with those objects, that we can affect them and they can affect us. Quite a heap of delusions! Desire is only a symptom of profound ignorance and delusion. In itself it is no more the problem than red blotches on the skin are the disease we call measles. (See? We even name a disease as the symptoms.) However, true desirelessness—and that is what Yama is speaking about—is the state of the liberated, those who know the Self. They have no desires because they have attained that which is the All. Actually, all desires are misdirected desire for the Self. So those who enter into full consciousness of the Self have fulfilled that single true desire.

The Self cannot be intellectually conceived or spoken about, but it can be *seen* and thereby fully known by the purified consciousness. And it is seen within the core of our being, within the cave of the heart. Caves are important symbols. Though yogis are found everywhere, we naturally think of yogis as dwelling in caves, which they do, metaphorically. In the Gospels we see that Christ (Consciousness) is born in a cave and resurrects in a cave. It all takes place in the heart. Wherefore the wise Solomon said: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23). The practice of yoga (meditation) is the keeping of the heart which transforms the yogi’s life.

It is said that Shiva sits immersed in samadhi, but occasionally awakens, arises, and dances in ecstasy, exclaiming over and over: “O! Who I am! O! Who I am!” The same wonder at the glory of the Self will be experienced by the persevering yogi.

Tranquillity of the senses and the mind is attained through total fulfillment in the experience of the Self. This fulfillment is accomplished through the purifying and evolving process we call yoga. Therefore I would like to pause here and consider the difference between the Sankhya philosophy, which is the basis of the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and the Yoga Sutras, and the popular “Vedanta” that presents a very mistaken idea about the individual Self and its destiny.

A few years ago a valuable book was published by the Sri Ramakrishna Math in Madras: a translation of the *Sankhya Karika* by Swami Virupakshananda. In the Publisher’s Note we find this: “Vedanta takes off to ethereal heights only from the granite platform provided by Sankhya.... Not only Vedanta, but also modern science, cannot be understood in all their nuances without a firm grasp of the Sankhyan tenets.” And the translator writes: “Of all the philosophical systems, the Sankhya philosophy is considered to be the most ancient school of thought. Sankhya philosophy maintains a prominent place in all the shastras.... In the Mahabharata it is said that there is no knowledge comparable to Sankhya and no power like that of Yoga which is based on Sankhya. We should have no doubt as to

Sankhya being the highest knowledge.” Later he outlines how the Sankhya philosophy is presented in the Chandogya, Katha, and Shvetashvatara Upanishads particularly. And: “In the Mahabharata and Puranas we find the Sankhya Philosophy fully explained.” The second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita (part of the Mahabharata) is entitled *Sankhya Yoga*, and in five verses (2:39; 3:3; 5:5; 18:13, 19) Krishna mentions Sankhya by name as the truth he is expounding.

I mention this because it is so common for students to approach the Gita and Upanishads as exponents of the simplistic monism that is erroneously thought to be Advaita Vedanta. With this distorted frame of reference the teachings that are very obviously opposed to their opinion are ignored. But we cannot afford the luxury of mistaken understanding in so great a matter. Simply insisting that “It is all one” and “We are already there” accomplishes absolutely nothing. And besides, it is not true in the simplistic sense they mean.

God, the Primal Purusha, is eternally associated with Prakriti (Pradhana) on the macrocosmic level, and continually projects and withdraws it as the ever-evolving creation. In the same way each individual purusha is eternally associated with prakriti on the microcosmic level and engages in a series of incarnations, evolving its personal prakriti to the point where it becomes a perfect mirror of the individual purusha and there is a practical separation between the two, just as on the cosmic level. Let us not forget: Patanjali defines yoga (liberation) as a condition of the chitta, of our personal prakriti, not a simple intellectual insight or realization.

The essence is this: Each one of us is evolving our own prakriti, just as God is evolving the universe. The difference is that God is not caught in the drama, and we are. Sankhya states that we must learn to separate our consciousness from its enmeshment in prakriti, but that is only the preparation. Then we must engage in the process of bringing our prakriti to a state of perfection in which it no longer produces waves, but becomes a permanently quiescent reflection of purusha, of our true Self, which Buddhism calls our Original Face.

That process is Yoga, and Yama has this in mind when he speaks of the seeker beholding the Self “through tranquillity of the mind and the senses.” Merely reading a few books and hearing a few lectures on the nature of the Self will not do it. We must, through yoga sadhana, completely repolarize and reconstruct the energy fields that are the mind and senses. “Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.... Be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23), wrote Saint Paul. Patanjali (Yoga Sutras 2:1) speaks of the process of kriya yoga, the yoga of purification, consisting of austerity (tapasya), self-study, and devoting the life to God. Yama, Saint Paul, Patanjali, and Krishna all tell us the same thing: “Become a yogi!” (Bhagavad Gita, 6:46).

How could there be sorrow or any slightest form of suffering or discontent for those who have established themselves in the tranquillity that is the Self? It can be said of such a one, as Arjuna said of Krishna: “You know yourself by yourself” (Bhagavad Gita 10:15). And as Krishna said of the perfected yogi: “In tranquillity the cessation of all sorrows is produced for him. Truly, for the tranquil-

minded the buddhi immediately becomes steady” (Bhagavad Gita 2:65). “Having attained this, he regards no other gain better than that, and established therein he is not moved by heaviest sorrow” (Bhagavad Gita 6:22). And Krishna speaks of: “That happiness... born of the light of one’s own Self” (Bhagavad Gita 18:37).

Sitting, he moves far, lying he goes everywhere. Who, save myself, is fit to know that god who rejoices and rejoices not? (1.2.21)

Yama continues instructing Nachiketas on the nature of the Self. Being a highly developed being, Nachiketas had doubtless intuited most of this already, but for us who were raised in the dry gulch of the West and its religion his words are profoundly stirring–astounding, actually. Who could believe that in this chaotic world there ever were, and still are, sages who by direct experience have seen and spoken these truths? We should analyze them carefully, not for mere philosophical exactitude, but for a good, joyful revel in knowing the facts at last.

Being rooted in Infinity and thereby beyond space, the Self can never “go” anywhere. When we speak of the Atman descending into relative existence or coming into matter, we are only describing the mayic experience that is itself nothing more than a training film. If we see a motion picture about Europe, we do not think we have actually been there, yet we did see Europe. In the same way, under the spell of Maya we have all kinds of experiences, yet they are mere appearance only. Appearance, however is real, even if insubstantial. So we are both here and not here. I experience writing this, and you experience reading it. That is real. But the environment in which we live, including our bodies, is but the picture projected onto the formless screen of consciousness that is our Self.

So, going nowhere, the Self “goes” everywhere. Doing nothing, the Self “does” everything. This is the way of it. Nothing affects the Self, but the Self affects all situations and things. Sankhya philosophy postulates that although Prakriti never touches the Purusha, it is the proximity of the Purusha that causes Prakriti to move and manifest in manifold ways. In the West we find the expressions “uncaused Cause” and “unmoved Mover.” These apply to the individual Self as much as to God.

There is a very practical application of this fact. Being under the spell of Maya we think: “All this is happening to me. All this is being done to me.” But that is erroneous. We are making it all happen, we are “doing” it to ourselves. There are no victims. Everything proceeds from us. Consequently we can study our lives and determine what is going on in our inner mind (which is not the Self, either). Our lives and environment are mirror images revealing our states of mind. Our life is an exercise in consciousness. There are computer games in which the images on the screen are actually manipulated by the player’s mind and will. That is but a feeble glimpse of the truth about our entire chain of births and deaths. That is also what karma is.

“The Lord does not create either means of action or action itself in this world, nor the union of action with its fruit. On the other hand, the swabhava impels one

to action” (Bhagavad Gita 5:14). Again, Prabhavananda’s translation is very memorable and informative: “You dream you are the doer, you dream that action is done, you dream that action bears fruit. It is your ignorance, it is the world’s delusion that gives you these dreams.”

We have a terrible conditioning. We believe that all knowledge must come from outside ourselves, that we are blanks that need to be written on. In contemporary America this is very marked. Everybody thinks they need to have classes or lessons in everything. Some years back a friend of our ashram pointed this out about horse-riding. She commented that everyone she knew took horse-riding lessons, in contrast to her children who just got up on a horse and rode. Then she commented: “Everyone thinks they have to be taught to do anything, rather than learning on their own by just doing it.”

This spills over into our philosophical life, too. We think we are dummies that have to have every nuance, every subtle point, taught to us. And even worse, that they all have to be embodied in technical terms. It is only sensible to inquire about these things from those with more experience and knowledge than ourselves, but childish dependence is no wisdom at all. Dr. Spock began one of his books by telling new mothers that they knew much more about caring for babies than they thought they did, and to trust their inner feelings on the matter. This caused quite a stir. I was only a child at the time, and yet the ripples of consternation even reached me through a magazine review of his “revolutionary” book. We have no confidence, and spiritual laziness often compounds the problem.

Except for yourself, no one but you can know your Self. No one can know the Self for us and pass their experience along to us, even though false gurus claim to be able to do that for their disciples. Some even claim they have already done everything for them or that it is they who really meditate in them when they sit for meditation. This is disempowerment to the maximum degree that is nothing less than demonic! Plus it is false. Just look at their disciples.

But the positive side is that each one of us can and will know the Self—for ourself. “Who, save myself, is fit to know that god [*devam*—the Self] who rejoices and rejoices not?” This is not just an inspiring thought, it is perfect good sense. *Being* the Self, who else but I can *know* my Self? Others may *see* the divine in me, but I alone can *know* the divine in me.

In the Chandogya Upanishad we have the thrilling story of Uddalaka instructing Shvetaketu on the nature of the Self, saying to him over and over: “That you are.” But however stirring that account may be, Uddalaka is only telling him *about* the Self. It is up to Shvetaketu to *know* the Self. Someone can bring us strawberries, show them to us, and even put them in our mouths, but we alone can know their taste; no one can taste them for us. In the same way, millions may tell us about our Self, but we alone can really know it. It begins and ends with us. Self-knowledge is the most natural thing for us all. We are working very hard to produce and maintain the unnatural state of not knowing the Self. Once we get sensible and literally “wise up” things will change.

The Self is “that who rejoices and rejoices not.” There is no happiness or joy anywhere but in our Self, for we are not happy or joyful by nature, we *are* happiness and joy. Joy is the permanent, eternal condition of our true Self. The word translated “joy” in this verse is *mada*, which means delight, intoxication, and exhilaration. To delight in our Self is the ultimate enjoyment.

Previously I mentioned that it is said that Shiva sits immersed in samadhi, but occasionally awakens, arises, and dances in ecstasy, exclaiming over and over: “O! Who I am! O! Who I am!” This is delight in the Self. Sri Ramakrishna said: “Now and then man catches a glimpse of his real Self and becomes speechless with wonder. At such times he swims in an ocean of joy... Meditating on his Inner Self, Siva dances about. He exclaims, ‘What I am! What I am!’”

Yet Yama says that the Self “rejoices and rejoices not.” He is trying to convey that the delight in the Self is not delight in an object, but is totally subjective and inward-turned. It is not an action; it is a state. As the yogi develops through his sadhana, his prakriti-nature begins to reflect his inner joy more and more, so glimpses of this can be gained right away in meditation.

We must also be sure that we do not think a little rejoicing is the whole thing: the perfect bliss of the Self. Many people get some impressive experiences and figure they have attained Self-realization. This can have serious consequences.

Earlier I briefly mentioned a man who was a confirmed “bliss bunny.” Since he was a disciple of a real master, everyone considered him to be “very high.” He liked to have a group of people join hands and follow him in devotional prayers, songs, etc. He would be “overcome with bliss” and stagger, nearly falling down. Only by holding on to the hands of those on either side of him was he able to keep standing. After years of this “joy, joy, joy, joy” everything went flat for him for some reason and he became a grouchy “jnani” who scorned “bhakti.” (He really had no idea what either of those were.) Then instead of enthusing everyone with devotional joy, he would drone on and on with a scowl on his face, attacking anyone who seemed to be enjoying themselves. So when he met one of his admirers who did not know of the change, the admirer came up to him smiling and holding out his hand. In response he growled: “There is a state beyond bliss you know!” Such is the way with such people.

Sri Ramakrishna had this to say: “Men often think they have understood Brahman fully. Once an ant went to a hill of sugar. One grain filled its stomach. Taking another grain in its mouth it started homeward. On its way it thought, ‘Next time I shall carry home the whole hill.’ That is the way shallow minds think.” At least the ant knew there was an entire hill to bring back. Most think the single grain is the whole!

Innumerable are the yogis who have been deluded in this way and become trapped in the subtlest reaches of Maya. That is why Lord Krishna said: “Truly this maya of mine made of the gunas is difficult to go beyond. Verily only those who attain me shall pass beyond this maya” (Bhagavad Gita 7:14). As Krishna further tells us: “He whose happiness is within, whose delight is within, whose

illumination is within: that yogi, identical in being with Brahman, attains Brahmanirvana” (Bhagavad Gita 5:24).

Once a friend of mine showed me a book in which within a few pages a supposed master described the various stages to enlightenment and that of enlightenment itself. I read through it and told my friend: “I had gone through all those states by the time I was nine years old. And I was not enlightened then, nor am I enlightened now. There is a tremendously long journey still to travel.”

How do we avoid mistaking the hint for the whole truth? By continuing to practice meditation and other spiritual disciplines until the moment the body drops off. Although Jesus could say: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9), he continually withdrew into solitude throughout the three years of his ministry and taught his disciples to do the same.

A sure sign of a deluded individual is the belief that he has gone beyond the need for meditation and other spiritual practices. A very famous Indian guru of the twentieth century believed that he had attained sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi, so he announced that he no longer needed to meditate, since there was nothing more it could do for him. While his disciples meditated, he stayed in his room and fiddled around with this and that and read the newspaper and listened to the radio. After some years he was visited by two Americans who thought of themselves as big guns on the American spiritual scene. Not wanting to scandalize them by messing about while everyone else in the ashram meditated, Sahaja Nirvikalpa Samadhi Baba started attending the meditation sessions and meditating also. After a few days he remarked to a group of disciples that he could perceive a very marked improvement in his mind and consciousness since starting to meditate daily, and expressed wonder and puzzlement over how that could be. Unfortunately, no one had either the good sense or the courage to tell him that it was because he was not really enlightened. Anyhow, when the American biggies left, SNSB went back to fooling around in his room during the meditation periods.

Consider the perfect life of Gautama Buddha. To the last moment of his life he lived like a normal monk. He was eighty years of age, yet he went out and begged for his food every day, no one brought specially-prepared goodies for him. He lived outdoors, under a tree, not in a special “retreat” designed by a renowned architect-disciple. He dressed in the simple, minimal clothing of a monk, not in some expensive rigs donated by disciples to express their “devotion.” He walked everywhere he went, he did not ride in some cart or chariot provided by a rich patron out of consideration for his age. And here is the most important point of all: He meditated for hours a day, often withdrawing for weeks and months at a time to engage in even more intense meditation. He never relaxed his disciplines for an hour, much less a day. In this way he showed us how to not fall into delusion: keep on till the end, until the Self is truly known. And then keep on until death says: The End.

Knowing the Self who is the bodiless among bodies, the stable among the

unstable, the great, the all-pervading, the wise man does not grieve. (1.2.22)

Yama continues to instruct us regarding the nature of the Self, using the most simple words yet with the most profound meanings.

Ashariram sharireshu, the bodiless within bodies, such is the Self. Though always without a body or adjunct in any form (as far as its true nature is concerned), yet all bodies are inhabited by the Self. There is no form in which the formless Self does not dwell. Who can number the forms in which we have manifested from the beginning of our evolutionary peregrinations in relativity, yet we have slipped away from each embodiment as bodiless as we were from the first. Being one with Brahman, it can be said of the Self as well as of Brahman: “With hands and feet everywhere, eyes, heads and faces everywhere, with ears throughout the universe—THAT stands, enveloping everything. Having the appearance of all the qualities of the senses, yet free of all the senses, unattached yet maintaining all, free from the gunas, yet experiencing the gunas, outside and inside beings—the animate and the inanimate—incomprehensible because of its subtlety, far away and also near, undivided, yet remaining as if divided in beings, this is to be known as the sustainer of beings, their absorber and generator. Also this is said to be the light of lights, beyond all darkness; knowledge, the to-be-known, the goal of knowledge seated in the heart of all” (Bhagavad Gita 13:13-17).

Anavastheshv’ avasthitam, the stable among the unstable, the unchanging among the ever-changing: so is the Self. For aeons we are entertained with the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of Maya’s web. Finally we are no longer entertained by it, but wearied. Yet we find ourselves addicted to it. Only in the beginning do addicts love their addiction. In time they come to loathe it, yet refuse to even hear of ridding themselves of it. And then at last they see themselves as slaves, hating their bondage but incapable of shedding it. Yet we are ever free.

People bound by various addictions, including alcohol and drugs, would come to Sri Ramakrishna and plead for help. Often he would just touch them, and their enslavement would be gone forever. Learning of this, we naturally glorify Sri Ramakrishna for his power of merciful deliverance, but we must not overlook the great truth it demonstrates: *It was the nature of those people to be free*. Otherwise he could not have freed them. If we would seek freedom, then, we must seek it only in the Self. And the Self being within, we must seek within.

Time and space being mirages, the Self is everywhere. Infinity is not “bigness” so big it cannot be calculated, it is beyond measuring because it transcends the modes of measurable being. It is simply another mode of existence altogether. The truth is, the Atman, like the Paramatman, is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. (This latter quality is easy, since the Self never “does” anything.) So there is no place where the Self is not present. It goes everywhere without moving.

The Self is supreme, but not in the sense of earthly entities. It is all-embracing. Not only is there nothing above it, there is nothing beneath it, for such states are not native—and therefore impossible—to it. But Maya is doing a superb job at convincing us otherwise and fooling us into thinking that the purpose of both

material life and sadhana is to expand in the illusory realms of conditioned existence, to become large or small, to enter in or depart, none of which are even possible for the Self. Simply hearing about the Self can make us more ignorant than we were before if we interpret the Self in terms of samsaric delusion.

The wise are those who know the Self as it is. And that they have accomplished by shedding their association with the unreal and turning back to their own reality. They transcend all grief by removing their center of awareness from the realm in which suffering is possible. Suffering being an illusion, they need only awaken from the dream and abide in the Real. This is not a negative state, for it is not just a removal of sorrow but the entering into the bliss that is the nature of the Self. “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21).

I once read an essay about Shakespeare’s practice of putting discomfiting truths into the mouths of fools so people in the audience could scorn them and not get upset with him for unmasking their folly. It often happens that what people hope is “just fun” or “nonsense” is really insightful commentary on their foibles. This happens very often in poetry, also. Edward Lear, who wrote “nonsense verse,” sometimes made profound observations on life. Some of his limericks have a lot to say about how life should be lived. One of his wisest works was a poem entitled “The Jumblies,” in which he tells us at the end of every verse:

Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,
And they went to sea in a Sieve.

These exotic people went to sea in a sieve. Everyone else said they would drown, considering that a sieve is more holes than anything else. Some even told them that though they might manage, it would be a wrong thing to do. But they did it anyway, excellently and to great profit. Upon their return, all the nay-sayers announced that they, too would go to sea in a sieve. But Lear assures us that still: “Far and few, far and few, are the lands where the Jumblies live.” No; everyone will not be going to sea in a sieve. Just the far and few Jumblies.

“Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:23-24). This is not a statement of pessimism, but of simple fact. All manage salvation (liberation) eventually, but only a comparatively few at a time.

Yama has been very encouraging in his exposition of the Self, but now having told of its wonder he enters upon the subject of what is required to know the Self. Actually, the price he presents to us is quite simple and direct. If we are interested, then the price is substantial but not impossible. If we are only spiritual window-shoppers, then the price seems unreasonable and beyond payment. Here it is in two

verses:

This Self cannot be attained by instruction, nor by intellectual power, nor even through much hearing. He is to be attained only by the one whom the (Self) chooses. To such a one the Self reveals his own nature. Not he who has not desisted from evil ways, not he who is not tranquil, not he who has not a concentrated mind, not even he whose mind is not composed can reach this (Self) through right knowledge. (1.2.23-24)

Reading the Bhagavad Gita opened to me a world I had never thought could exist. How many wonderful things I found therein! Many were amazing, not the least being the statement: “For the wise Brahmin with true knowledge, a great deal in all the Vedas are of as much value as a well when there is a flood all around” (Bhagavad Gita 2:46). Here was a scripture that told me I should go beyond it and know for myself, and told me the way to do that.

The Self cannot be known through scriptural study, for Krishna tells us that “he who just desires to know about yoga goes beyond the Vedas” (Bhagavad Gita 6:44). Books are nothing more than paper and ink. Obsession with them is detrimental, proving the truth of the statement that: “the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (II Corinthians 3:6). We must get behind the words of even illumined masters and tap the Source of those words. There was a rabbi who was a leading authority on the Jerusalem Talmud. When he was asked how he understood it so well, he simply replied: “I know its Source,” God.

Sri Ramakrishna said: “It is true that many things are recorded in the scriptures; but all these are useless without the direct realization of God, without devotion to His Lotus Feet, without purity of heart. The almanac forecasts the rainfall of the year. But not a drop of water will you get by squeezing the almanac. No, not even one drop.” Intense study of scriptures without meditation cannot give a drop of higher spiritual knowledge, for no book can reveal That which lies beyond all we think or know. But meditation can and does.

Yama lists mere intellectual study, the heaping up of extraneous knowledge which by its character is external and superficial, as an obstacle, not so much in itself, but by the illusion of knowledge that arises in the self-satisfied mind of the “knower.” Yama’s assertion shows how mistaken it is to translate *swadhyaya* (self-study) as “study of scriptures” (*shastradhyaya*) when we encounter it in the Yoga Sutras.

The Kena Upanishad examines this matter, saying: “To whomsoever it is not known, to him it is known: to whomsoever it is known, he does not know. It is not understood by those who understand it; it is understood by those who do not understand it” (Kena Upanishad 2:3). Obviously the word “know” (*veda*) has two meanings here. One is the mere intellection about Brahman, the other is knowledge derived from the direct experience of Brahman, from conscious union with Brahman. There is a knowing that is unknowing and an unknowing that is knowing. That is why Swami Prabhavananda renders the Kena verse: “He truly knows

Brahman who knows him as beyond knowledge; he who thinks that he knows, knows not. The ignorant think that Brahman is known, but the wise know him to be beyond knowledge.”

We cannot possibly figure out the nature of anything, much less the Self, by mere intellection. This is not the fault of the mind, any more than it is the fault of a radio that we cannot get television programs through it. There is absolutely no faculty which can perceive or reveal the Self. The Self alone knows itself. As long as we attempt to perceive the Self through any intermediary, just so long shall we be frustrated or worse, deluded. There is no instrument, however subtle, no capacity of the mind, however refined, that can reveal the Self. Certainly the purified intellect (buddhi) can intuit the presence of the Self and even some of its traits, and this is good, but this is not Self-knowledge.

Many intelligent people with highly developed intellects mistake this intuition for direct experience and knowledge. This is a subtle trap we must avoid diligently. How can we know if we have fallen into the trap rather than risen into the Light? That actually is easy to determine. *If we can talk about what we perceive, and define it, then it is not the Self.* That which lies within the range of speech lies outside the Self. No matter how near we can come to the Self, it is not the same as knowing the Self. For when the Self is revealed, all “knowing” not only ceases, it becomes impossible.

That is why Jesus said to God: “Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matthew 11:25). To demonstrate this vividly, “Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:2-3). Think how direct and uncomplicated a child’s mind usually is. Also, they are capable of intensely magical/mystical thought. How unquestioningly they accept the idea of the miraculous, including the power of the individual to work marvels. How sad that they ever come to “know better.” A friend of mine was watching a television program in which a pianist seemed to be floating in the air and even turning over and over. “How do you suppose they do that?” she mused to herself aloud. Instantly her five-year-old son said: “Easy! There’s a magician hidden in the piano.” And that is so true: there is a magical being hidden in each one of us known as the Self which can do, and does, all things.

Shankara was the greatest sage of post-Vedic India, commentator on the Upanishads, Gita, Yoga Sutras, Brahma Sutras (Vedanta Sutras) and author of books on Advaita philosophy. Vast as his writings were, he summed up everything that was taught by these holy books, saying: “I shall tell you in half a verse what has been written in tens of millions of books: Brahman is real. The world is illusory. The jiva is nothing other than Brahman.” That is it. So, as I have already mentioned, when the future Swami Turiyananda told Sri Ramakrishna that he studied Vedanta for several hours a day, the great master was astonished. Quoting these words of Shankara, he asked: “How can you spend hours studying something so simple? What more is there to say?” Turiyananda got the idea behind the idea and himself

became a knower of the Self.

All the learning in the world is futile in relation to the Self and Brahman, for they lie outside the scope of the intellect. The ear cannot hear color, the eye cannot smell fragrance. No thing can know the Self but the Self.

Yama's words of seeming negation are really quite positive, for he then tells Nachiketas: "He is to be attained only by the one whom the [Self] chooses." To whom does the Atman reveal itself? To the yogi, none other. As the Psalmist said: "Deep calls unto deep" (Psalms 42:7). Like attracts like; it really does take one to know one.

In India they have the saying: "He who chooses God has first been chosen by him." Jesus told his disciples: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). The very fact that we are seeking God is guarantee of our finding, for it is an indication that he has called us. He does not call in vain, nor do we seek in vain. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7). "To such a one the Self reveals his own nature."

Yet there are those who because of their condition cannot know the Self. "Not he who has not desisted from evil ways, not he who is not tranquil, not he who has not a concentrated mind, not even he whose mind is not composed can reach this [Self] through right knowledge."

"The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal,... Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." (II Timothy 2:19). Evil in all forms must be abandoned if the Self, which is all good, is to be known. This should not be hard to understand, but many deny it anyway, or try to get around it. Of them Jesus said: "They have their reward" (Matthew 6:2), a false security that is really "the sleep of death" (Psalms 13:3). But for us who wish to live it is important to determine what is good and what is evil, what is right and what is wrong.

The Upanishads present a concept of right and wrong different from that of the world religions which teach that something is right or wrong because their God or Prophet has said so in their supposedly infallible scriptures. "It is in the Bible," "It is in the Zend Avesta," "It is in the Koran," etc. Although the Upanishadic sages know that things are good or evil, their basis for the classification is utterly different from that of ordinary religion. They do not look upon a thing as wrong because God or gods have declared it wrong or some lawgiver has prohibited it, or that something is right because they have advocated it. Rather, a thing is good or evil according to its innate character.

The perspective of true religion (dharma) is this: If it takes you toward the Goal it is good; if it takes you away from the Goal it is evil. That which darkens, obscures, or limits our consciousness is bad. That which lights, clears, and expands our consciousness is good. That which helps in the search for God is good; that which hinders or delays it is not.

We all know people who declare that their addictions and illusions either do not harm them or are even good for them. But the intelligent do not engage in such

childish rationalization. They impartially examine and conclude accordingly. It is all a matter of the individual's interest and honesty. In other words, it is all in our hands, as are all the aspects of our life if we face up to it. Those who wish to pursue dharma should judge for themselves on the basis of the foregoing principles. Before we can become gods we must first be truly human, and human beings use their intelligent reason. The Upanishadic teachers, like God, leave everyone free to be wise or foolish. Dharma never condemns or praises. It just waits to be fulfilled.

The senses must be controlled, but we usually mistake the way to do so. We think of the senses as being tremendously powerful, incredible forces to be overcome. But we need not think so drastically. Before we can control the senses we purify them through sadhana. Meditation alone purifies in a lasting manner. At the same time we purify the senses by directing them Godward. We make the eyes look at sacred symbols or depictions, the ears to hear the words of sacred texts and sacred music, the nose to smell the offered incense, the tongue to taste the food blessed by offering and prayer, and the inner sense of touch to feel the exalted atmosphere created by worship and contact with the holy. The good news is that we need not struggle with the senses, but turn them in spiritual directions.

Restlessness of mind is itself great suffering. Yama says that a quiet mind is indispensable to self-knowledge. Here is what Krishna has to say about it:

"Always disciplining himself, the yogi whose mind is subdued goes to the supreme peace of nirvana, and attains to union with me" (Bhagavad Gita 6:15).

"When he is absorbed in the Self alone, with mind controlled, free from longing, from all desires, then he is known to be steadfast. As a lamp in a windless place flickers not: to such is compared the yogi of controlled mind, performing the yoga of the Self. When the mind comes to rest, restrained by the practice of yoga, beholding the Self by the Self, he is content in the Self. He knows that endless joy which is apprehended by the buddhi beyond the senses; and established in that he does not deviate from the truth" (Bhagavad Gita 6:18-21).

"For the undisciplined there is no wisdom, no meditation. For him who does not meditate there is no peace or happiness" (Bhagavad Gita 2:66).

The *sine qua non* of self-knowledge is meditation. The Self is ever-present but we do not perceive it because our vision is obscured by the illusion known as Maya. After describing meditation, Krishna says: "Having directed his mind to a single object, controlling thought and activity of the senses, sitting on the seat he should practice yoga for the purpose of self-purification" (Bhagavad Gita 6:12). Then the Self will become literally self-evident. In conclusion he remarks: "With mind made steadfast by yoga, which turns not to anything else, to the Divine Supreme Spirit he goes, meditating on him" (Bhagavad Gita 8:8).

The Self can be known by those who truly desire to know. And that true desire manifests through desisting from evil, controlling of the senses, quieting (restraining) the mind, and practicing meditation. This is the real formula for gaining the knowledge of Reality.

In the East the concept of the Self as identified with the Supreme Self rather

than a creation whose tenuous existence is continually threatened by the possibility of divine wrath, has produced a psychology and a society the reverse of that found in the West. The Self is as eternal and immovable as God because it is one with God.

In the nineteenth century the remarkable poet, author, and mystic Emily Bronte had rejected the ignorant religion of her childhood for intuitive affirmation rather than negation. When death was only a matter of weeks away, she wrote this final poem:

No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere:
I see Heaven's glories shine,
And Faith shines equal, arming me from Fear.

O God within my breast,
Almighty, ever-present Deity!
Life, that in me has rest,
As I, undying Life, have power in Thee!

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts: unutterably vain;
Worthless as withered weeds,
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main,

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by Thy infinity,
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of Immortality.

With wide-embracing love
Thy Spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears.

Though earth and moon were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou wert left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.

There is not room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render void:
Thou—you are Being and Breath,
And what you are may never be destroyed.

Yama's analysis of the Self has had a very logical progression. Then he tosses out to Nachiketas a single incredible sentence:

He for whom priesthood [Brahmins] and nobility [Kshatiryas] both are as food and death is as a sauce, who really knows where he is? (1.2.25)

All that we consider worthy of respect, either venerable (brahmin) or powerful (kshatriya), is but a snack to the everlasting Self. Even death, which is ever with us and seemingly rules our destiny, is but a flavoring for the Self at its feast of life, adding spice.

Yama's words are reminiscent of Arjuna's vision of the Universal Self in the eleventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. Since the individual Atman and the Paramatman are one they have the same qualities. Just as Arjuna saw that all things emanate from the Supreme and are reabsorbed in the Supreme (are "eaten" by It), so it is with the Self. All that is "us" has come from the Self and shall return to the Self. The Self is the eternal immortal source of that which we think is temporal and perishable. But only the forms are such. Their essence is the Self.

Unborn, the Self moves through many births. Formless, the Self inhabits many forms. Untouched, the Self encounters a myriad objects. Unconditioned, the Self manifests countless qualities. Remaining what it is, the Self appears to be all that it is not. All that it encounters is but its repast, and its births and deaths merely a sauce.

"You lick up and swallow all the worlds on every side with your flaming mouths. Filling the whole world with radiance, your fierce rays are consuming it" (Bhagavad Gita 11:30).

There are two selves that drink the fruit of Karma in the world of good deeds. Both are lodged in the secret place [of the heart], the chief seat of the Supreme. The knowers of Brahman speak of them as shade and light. (1.3.1)

There are two kinds of Selves, the many individual Selves and the one Universal Self. The Mundaka Upanishad likens them to two birds of the same appearance who sit in the same tree. "Two birds, companions [who are] always united, cling to the Self-same tree. Of these two, the one eats the sweet fruit and the other looks on without eating" (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.1).

First we come to know the individual Self, and that enables us to attain the knowledge of the all-inclusive Supreme Self. How the two exist as one yet two is incomprehensible to the intellect but is readily experienced by the inmost consciousness of the persevering yogi. Yet intellectually we need to have some grasp of the unity/duality, otherwise we can have no correct perspective on anything, inner or outer. Extreme dualism is an error, and monism of any kind is even worse in its simplistic nature. For this reason the enlightened use the expression non-dual (advaita) as the nearest we can come to conveying the truth of our existence.

The verse beginning *Purnamadah purnamidam* is usually interpreted as a statement

that the Relative has come from the Transcendent while retaining essential unity with the Transcendent. But it can also be understood as referring to the individual Self that exists rooted in the Universal Self. It, the Atman, originates in the Supreme Self, the Paramatman, and is never separate from that Self. If examined, the two will be seen to be one. How is it possible? The One alone knows—and those who have united their consciousness with the One through yoga.

In the heart of our consciousness (not the physical heart) the sages say there is the Chidakasha, Conscious Space or Ether also called the Hridayakasha, the Space/Ether of the Heart. There the individual Self and the Supreme Self dwell together. It is also known as the cave of the heart.

It is easy to understand that the individual Self abides in (and as) the heart (hridaya), but when we look at the vast manifestation of cosmic life that is the creation it is natural for our awareness to be drawn outward and thereby forget that the Supreme Self is right there inside in the same space (akasha). The Paramatman is not in the cave of our heart only incidentally, since It is everywhere, but that is Its *abode*, its native place, Its center. Its manifestation can be found everywhere, but It can be found only in the cave of the heart. How foolish to climb mountains, delve into the earth, wander across the plains, or cross the seas, thinking to find the abode of God which is in the heart alone.

There are those who know Brahman directly and those who possess a secondary knowledge based on intuition resulting from their seeking of Brahman. Though only the first really know Brahman, yet the others' knowing about Brahman is of such a character that it can lead them on to the direct knowledge of the illumined. Both of these have the same understanding without contradiction. Therefore the finders never disdain the seekers.

What do the finders and seekers know? That the Atman and the Paramatman, though one, are as different as light and shadow. But not in the sense of being opposite or antithetical to one another. Rather, it means that the individual Self exists only because the Supreme Self exists, just as a shadow can only exist because of the light. As the Rig Veda says of the Supreme Self: "His shadow is immortality" (Rig Veda 10:12:2). Also, the idea is that the individual Self (jivatman) is a reflection of the Supreme Self (Paramatman). Later, Yama will say: "Everything shines only after that shining light" (2:2:15). Prabhavananda: "He shining, everything shines."

Since the foregoing is true, the next verse of the Upanishad says:

That bridge for those who sacrifice, and which is the highest imperishable Brahman for those who wish to cross over to the farther fearless shore, that Nachiketas fire, may we master. (1.3.2)

What is the Nachiketas Sacrifice? It is not a secret fire ritual that produces a magical enlightenment. The Nachiketas Sacrifice is the determined search for knowledge (jnana) which stops not until the Goal is reached.

The search for union with God is the bridge which we cross to be free from this

world of suffering. Seeking God is itself the guarantee that we shall find him. Many who lack confidence worry as to whether they can succeed in spiritual life, if they are “ready,” and so forth. But the very fact that they wish to find God means that they have already travelled far along the path in previous lives. Otherwise they would sleep along with most of the world. “He who just desires to know about yoga goes beyond the Vedas” (Bhagavad Gita 6:44). “Whatever meritorious fruit is declared to accrue from study or recitation of the Vedas, sacrifice, tapasya, and almsgiving—beyond all these goes the yogi; and he attains to the supreme, primeval Abode” (Bhagavad Gita 8:28).

Truly, may we know that “highest imperishable Brahman,” which is sought by those “who wish to cross over to the farther fearless shore.”

Know the Self as the lord of the chariot and the body as, verily, the chariot, know the intellect as the charioteer and the mind as, verily, the reins. (1.3.3)

The Atman is by nature the master of the body, intellect and mind. Yet it has become dispossessed by the usurper, the ego, and its attendant negative forces. It is like a legitimate government that has been overthrown and imprisoned by revolutionary thugs. The good and worthy do their best to restore that government to its rightful seat. Of course, since the body, intellect and mind cannot function without the presence of the Self, it is still master, yet in exile at the same time. This is the mystery of Maya.

The body is the chariot, a conglomerate of parts without any consciousness or will of its own. Yet, being pervaded by the intellect (buddhi) it does seem to have a mind of its own because it is an extension-expression of the mind and as such has great relevance for the spiritual aspirant. Sri Ramakrishna used to study the physical configuration of newcomers and thereby determine their spiritual qualifications. So we must not think of the body as an inert thing. It is alive, but alive through the indwelling spirit. We may not be the body, but the body is certainly an expression of our Self. The body is not only the vehicle of our accumulated karmas it is the embodiment of them. Our karmas are incarnated in the body much more than is the Self.

“The intellect as the charioteer.” Our movement through life is produced solely through the agency of the intellect, the buddhi. This is why in the Gita Krishna speaks of buddhi yoga as the process of liberation. “This buddhi yoga taught by Sankhya is now declared to you, so heed. Yoked to this buddhi yoga, you shall avoid the bonds of karma” (2:39).

Yoga is solely under the supervision of the buddhi. Yoga takes place both through the buddhi and takes us beyond the buddhi into the Self. This gives us a tremendous insight into the nature of liberation: it is totally a matter of regaining Atmic awareness. The wise certainly undertake many external, even physical, disciplines to assist in their practice of yoga, but all of these are intended to affect the buddhi in its striving towards enlightenment.

Since the buddhi is the charioteer, its quality determines everything in life. The

cultivation of our buddhi, then, is a vital part of our sadhana. Any “humanimal” can be taught asanas and physical breathing exercises, but only the developed human can engage in real yoga. If you think this statement is extreme let me tell you something I learned early on in my “yoga life.”

In 1962 I was privileged to meet and listen to the venerable A. B. Purani, the administrator of the renowned Aurobindo Ashram. Sri Purani had been a fellow revolutionary with the (future) great master Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (who, incidentally, was a high school teacher and inspirer of Paramhansa Yogananda). Later he became Sri Aurobindo’s disciple and lived in the ashram for many years before the master’s passing.

During one of his brilliant discourses at the East-West Cultural Center in Hollywood, Sri Purani told of an experience he had while traveling to the United States. He had stopped over in Japan where he was invited to speak to a yoga group in Tokyo. This group taught and practiced only Hatha Yoga (asanas and breathing exercises). At the conclusion of his talk, Sri Purani asked them: “Would you agree that the greatest yogis of recent times were Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo, and Sri Ramana Maharshi?” They expressed unanimous assent to this statement. “Yet,” he pointed out, “not one of them practiced Hatha Yoga. So why do you consider yourselves yogis when you only practice that which they never bothered with?”

No matter how many external assists we may use, yoga is essentially of the buddhi.

“And the mind as, verily, the reins.” By mind (manas) is meant the sensory mind, the intermediary between the intellect and the body. Through the mind the intellect sees whether the body should act or be still. For example, the mind conveys the sensation of a hand being burnt by fire to the intellect, which then directs the body—again, through the mind—to pull the hand away from the fire.

The next element in the matter are the senses, without which the mind would have nothing to show the intellect. Therefore:

The senses, they say, are the horses, the objects of sense the paths [they range over], [the Self] associated with the body, the senses and the mind—wise men declare—is the enjoyer. (1.3.4)

It is the senses that drag the chariot of the body along according to their impulses. If the buddhi is weak or underdeveloped, the mind which is driven by pain-pleasure motivation alone takes complete charge and gives full rein to the senses. Having no intelligence they plunge onward, ever seeking fulfillment and, not finding it, hurtling even further on the paths of unreason and folly. As a consequence the individual becomes hopelessly lost and mired in the morass of external sensation. Enslavement to body and senses is the only possible consequence.

“Who am I?” is the gate to real understanding, for it sets us seeking true knowledge. And the Upanishadic verse continues: “[The Self] associated with the body, the senses and the mind—wise men declare—is the enjoyer.” We certainly do

not always enjoy a great deal of our experiences in/through the body, so perhaps a better translation of *bhokta* is “experiencer” rather than enjoyer.

The major idea in this verse is that the Self is the actionless consciousness that experiences the intellect, mind, senses and body. Sri Ramakrishna was once asked: “What is the Self?” He answered: “The witness of the mind,” which included the buddhi. As a consequence we can understand that the Self is never the doer at any time. The Gita illumines this for us, saying: “In all situations actions are performed by the gunas of Prakriti. Those with ego-deluded mind think: ‘I am the doer.’ But he who knows the truth about the gunas and action thinks: ‘The gunas act in the gunas. Thinking thus, he is not attached’” (Bhagavad Gita 3:27-28). That is, the gunas as the senses move among and act within the gunas manifesting as the sense-objects and this world. “When the beholder sees no doer other than the gunas, and knows that which is higher than the gunas, he attains to my being” (Bhagavad Gita 14:19).

There is more material like this, but the sum is: “He who by the mind controls the senses, and yet is unattached while engaging action’s organs in action, is superior” (Bhagavad Gita 3:7). This is because: “The senses are superior to the body, the mind is superior to the senses, the intellect is superior to the mind. And much superior to the intellect is the supreme intelligence” (Bhagavad Gita 3:42-43).

He who has no understanding, whose mind is always unrestrained, his senses are out of control, as wicked horses are for a charioteer. He, however, who has understanding, whose mind is always restrained, his senses are under control, as good horses are for a charioteer.

He, however, who has no understanding, who has no control over his mind [and is] ever impure, reaches, not that goal but comes back into mundane life. He, however, who has understanding, who has control over his mind and [is] ever pure, reaches that goal from which he is not born again. He who has the understanding for the driver of the chariot and controls the rein of his mind, he reaches the end of the journey, that supreme abode of the all-pervading. (1.3.5-9)

The Upanishadic seers have just told us that the Self in the body is like a driver in a chariot. Now they set the intended journey before us.

Beyond the senses are the objects [of the senses] and beyond the objects is the mind; beyond the mind is the understanding and beyond the understanding is the great Self. Beyond the great Self is the unmanifest; beyond the unmanifest is the spirit. Beyond the spirit there is nothing. That is the end [of the journey], that is the final goal. (1.3.10-11)

It is the genealogy of perception that is being outlined here, beginning with the Source, the Eternal Witness Itself. This verse, then, is a exposition of the chain, or progression of consciousness. According to it, the hierarchy of perception is:

Brahman (Purusha)

Unmanifested seed (Avyaktam)
Ego (Atman Mahan—the Great Self or Mahat Tattwa)
Intellect (Buddhi)
Mind (Manas)
Senses (Indriyas)
Physical objects (Arthas)

The Bhagavad Gita (3:42-43) gives a similar but simpler list relating exclusively to the individual (microcosm) rather than the Universal (Macrocosm), but we can translate the foregoing list to relate to us as individual beings (jivas). In that case we get:

The Self
The unmanifested yet out-turned will-energy
The sense of “I am”
The intellect
The mind
The senses
The sense organs

Having descended the ladder, how do we get back up, especially since we have no memory of how we managed the descent? Luckily for us the yogis of India figured that out for us untold eons ago, and it works as well today as it did then. Meditation is the way of ascent back to awareness of the Self. It is possible to work our way back up the ladder, for the rungs are not disparate elements but evolutes or emanations of those above them. If all the rungs, including the senses themselves, were not extensions of the Self, we could not reach back to the Self. This is as true on the microcosmic level as it is on the macrocosmic. Fortunately Brahman has not fallen and forgotten Itself, but It, too, withdraws and projects himself as creation, as we do ourselves by coming into manifestation and eventually into physical birth. “As above, so below” has many ramifications.

“Beyond the spirit there is nothing. That is the end, that is the final goal.” So the Upanishad continues:

The Self, though hidden in all beings, does not shine forth but can be seen by those subtle seers, through their sharp and subtle intelligence. (1.3.12)

Who sees Brahman? The *sukshma-darshibhih*—those who can see the subtle, the inmost Reality. How, then, can we become seers of the Subtle? By continually developing our capacity for inner perception and simultaneously refining our inner faculties. To do that we must “go inside” in meditation and work with our inner mechanism called the *antahkarana* by the yogis until it is so subtle that it can grasp the Subtle Itself. As the Taittiriya Upanishad says: “Through austerity [tapasya], seek to know Brahman. Brahman is austerity” (3.2.1).

The wise man should restrain speech in mind; the latter he should restrain in the understanding Self. The understanding he should restrain in the great

Self. That he should restrain in the tranquil Self. (1.3.13)

This is an invaluable instruction for the yogi. In meditation his perceptions of the mantra should become subtler and subtler. It cannot be described. Only the rightly practicing yogi will experience and understand.

Arise, awake, having attained your boons, understand [them]. Sharp as the edge of a razor and hard to cross, difficult to tread is that path (so) sages declare. (1.3.14)

After his translation of this verse Radhakrishnan cites Jesus' words: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Luke 13:24). The clue to difficulty in spiritual life is found in the description of the path as "sharp as the edge of a razor." The idea is that the path is extremely subtle, not arduous. But that makes it all the more difficult, even impossible, for those of coarse minds. This, and this alone, is what makes the path hard to tread. The edge of a very sharp razor is so fine, so subtle, that it is almost non-existent. Narrow is almost too "broad" a word to use concerning it. Those who tread it have to be both in and out of this world at the same time. But the yogis manage.

No spiritual discipline comes near to being as hard as the things human beings commonly do every day to get the things they want. And "want" is the operative word. If we do not want a thing, then any action needed to obtain it will be tedious and too hard. But if we want it intensely, then no effort is too much or too hard. That is why the thirty-fourth Ode of Solomon says: "There is no hard way where there is a simple heart, nor any barrier where the thoughts are upright. Nor is there any whirlwind in the depth of the illuminated thought. Where one is surrounded on every side by pleasing country, there is nothing divided in him." So the problem is in us, not in the path.

Here we see again that the solution is to refine our consciousness through meditation. We must also refine our physical and mental bodies through purity of thought and deed and especially purity of diet. The ingesting of animal flesh, alcohol, nicotine and mind-affecting drugs is a frontal attack on spiritual life. It is completely insane for a seeker to engage in such destructive habit-addictions.

The absolute necessity for refinement of perception through refinement of all the levels of our being is revealed by the nature of the path's goal:

[The Self] without sound, without touch and without form, undecaying, is likewise, without taste, eternal, without smell, without beginning, without end, beyond the great, abiding; by discerning that, one is freed from the face of death. (1.3.15)

We must become able through yoga to experience all these aspects of the Self and thereby become ourselves embodiments of them.

Though most people do (will) not realize it, as long as we live on this earth we are literally in the jaws of death. That is why we pray: "Lead me from death to

immortality.”

The Self is not to be sought through the senses. The Self-caused pierced the openings [of the senses] outward, therefore one looks outward and not within oneself. Some wise man, however, seeking life eternal, with his eyes turned inward, saw the Self. (2.1.1)

The first thing this verse teaches us is that the Divine itself has caused our consciousness to turn outward. What was the purpose of our turning outward? Evolution. We had to enter into relative existence and run the maze of ever-ascending evolution in order to satisfy our innate urge for infinity that is part of our eternal nature. (See *Robe of Light* for a complete exposition of this.) Consequently, there is nothing wrong with the senses turning outward; the problem is when the senses become locked in externalization. The purpose of our entering the field of evolutionary life was for us to experience the many shades of evolving consciousness while never losing awareness of our true nature or identifying with the bodies we constantly put on and off as the ages progressed. However it may have been intended, the situation has horribly changed, making us blind to inner realities.

Sunk in awareness of seeming mortality, human beings either seek to distract themselves from the terror and pain which arises from their delusion, or they seek some outer way to attain immortality. Both searches are based on delusion, so they can only fail. We need not become immortal, but realize our present, eternal immortality. Those who shut the eyes of their consciousness to the false appearances of external existence and turn within discover the truth of their immortality. No longer do they think that the solution is to be found in some external factor, but clearly see that their own Self is the wondrous answer.

The small-minded go after outward pleasures. They walk into the snare of widespread death. The wise, however, recognizing life eternal do not seek the stable among things which are unstable here. (2.1.2)

Interior experience in meditation will open our eyes to the ways of the world and bring us to spiritual adulthood. In its true state, relative existence is a vast field of life, but when it is overlain with the veneer of our inner delusions, it becomes death to us. That which is meant to expand our consciousness and free us into infinity becomes a prison, a killer of our soul, and this is all our doing. The world remains what it ever was, but we have lost sight of its nature just as we have become blind to our own Self.

The urge to expansion of consciousness through upward-moving evolution becomes distorted into a myriad desires arising from our false identity with the body and its illusory mortality. “Seize the moment!” is our despairing cry. Seeking to live, we plunge ourselves “into the snare of widespread death.” Saint Anthony the Great, looking back on the beginning of his spiritual awakening said: “I saw the nets of delusion spread upon the earth.”

The wise, who have come to know their immortality through the direct experience produced by meditation, turn from the snare and seek only that which cannot pass away because it has never come into being at some point in time, but is immortal, like us. In other words, we seek the kingdom of God that is nothing less than God and our own Self.

There is a seeking that is necessary, but a seeking for deepening our consciousness rather than for something that is not already ours. We must not fall into the facile illusion that we have nothing to do or attain. Certainly there is nothing objective to be done or attained, but in the subjective realm of consciousness there is literally everything to be sought and attained. “Establishment in the knowledge of the Supreme Self, keeping in mind the goal of knowledge of the truth—this is said to be true knowledge. The contrary is ignorance” (Bhagavad Gita 13:11).

That by which [one perceives] form, taste, smell, sounds and touch, by that alone one perceives. What is there that remains [unknown to it]? This, verily, is that. (2.1.3)

All the doors of perception function through the Divine Presence, not just the Divine Power. Our consciousness is the Consciousness of God, the finite drawn from the Infinite, as the wave draws its existence from the ocean. It is a grave error to decry the experience of our senses on themselves as either deluding or somehow degrading. It is our response to sensory experience that is often deluding or degrading, but we are at every moment living in and by God.

But God is not just the Power by which “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). He is the all-embracing Consciousness within our consciousness and within all things. If we come to know, to enter into the being, of that Infinite One we shall know with his knowing and therefore know all things. As Saint Paul said: “Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (I Corinthians 13:12). This is the inmost meaning of Saint John’s statement: “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (I John 3:2).

That by which one perceives both dream states and waking states, having known [that as] the great, omnipresent Self, the wise man does not grieve. (2.1.4)

All states of consciousness are directly rooted in the Self, individual and universal. When through yoga this is truly known, all grief ceases, for the yogi identifies with his all-perceiving Self.

He who knows this Self, the experiencer, as the living spirit close at hand, as the lord of the past and the future—one does not shrink away from Him. This, verily, is that. (2.1.5)

What an incredible statement! We are thinking that we are poor, mortal beings swept along by forces alien to us and totally beyond our control, when all the time we are the masters of past and future. All our fear comes from our unawareness of this glorious fact. By turning inward and discovering the truth of ourself we will pass beyond fear. The message of the Upanishads is inseparably bound up with the necessity for sadhana if it is not to be no more than dead words on a dead page.

He who was born of old from austerity, was born of old from the waters, who stands, having entered the secret place (of the heart) and looked forth through beings. This, verily, is that. (2.1.6)

This is a reference to Ishwara, the immanent aspect of Brahman within creation as its manifestor (creator) and guide.

Whenever “This, verily, is That” is said in this and the following verses it means that the individual Self is also one with that aspect of God or his manifestation. It further means that the Self is a reflection of that aspect of God. In that sense it “is” all those aspects that shall be cited. And all are found in the cave of the heart.

She who arises with life [prana], Aditi, the soul of the gods, who stands, having entered the secret place (of the heart), who was born with the beings. This, verily, is that. (2.1.7)

Prana referred to here is the universal life force, the substance of creation itself. The Self is that as well.

Agni, the all-knower, hidden in the fire-sticks, like the embryo well borne by pregnant women, should be daily adored by the watchful men with oblations. This, verily, is that. (2.1.8)

The universal element of fire, also the power of life, which is manifested in the sacrificial fire, especially in the inner fire sacrifice of meditation and spiritual practice and discipline: The Self is that as well.

Whence the sun rises and where it goes to rest; in it are all gods founded and no one ever goes beyond that. This verily, is that [Atman]. (2.1.9)

Infinite space, akasha, in which the entire cosmos rests and evolves, containing all things and beyond which no form of relative existence can go: The Self is that as well.

Whatever is here, that [is] there. Whatever is there, that, too, is here. Whoever perceives anything like manyness here goes from death to death. (2.1.10)

There is a pause in the theme of the preceding verses to assure us that “here” and “there,” relative and absolute existence, are mutual reflections of one another. “As above, so below,” is the way the wise of the Mediterranean world expressed it many centuries ago. And of course we can correctly come to the conclusion that

they are not two, but One.

The outer is the inner; the inner is the outer. We have touched on this slightly. It is of inestimable importance to realize that our outer life is but a mirror image of our inner life, that whatever is taking place in our external body and environment is happening in the depths of our mind. So by studying and analyzing our outer life we come to gauge the true character of our inner life. This is not palatable to the ego, for it means that our misfortunes are our own doing and reveal our inner negativity. As the Chinese maxim has it: When mean-spirited people live behind the door, mean-spirited people come in front of the door. So let us be careful before we indulge in a litany of all the wrongs we have suffered and all the bad people that have done those wrongs to us. We will only be confessing our own sins. It is not sympathy we need, but self-correction. As a very wise book, *The Astral City*, says: "Self-pity is a symptom of mental illness."

It is also necessary that our inner and outer lives be identical. We are all aware that very corrupt people can act and speak in a seemingly virtuous way. Also, many soft-hearted people pretend to be callous or even prickly. But neither is admirable. "What you see is what you get" should be our rule of life. Our outer life must be an exact imaging of our inner life. In the Gospel of Thomas, section 22, Jesus tells his disciples that they will enter the kingdom of God: "When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below."

By mind alone is this to be obtained. There is nothing of variety here. Whoever perceives anything like variety here, goes from death to death. (2.1.11)

"Mind" in this verse means our individual consciousness which becomes totally non-dual in perfect realization. Only those possessed of such realization become freed from continual birth in relativity, which is really passage from death to death.

The universe and ourselves are in an ineffable way part of the indivisible Brahman. That is why Jesus said when praying to God: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God" (John 17:3), and why the Upanishad tells us that "whoever perceives anything like variety here, goes from death to death."

The Upanishad calls us to see God and enter into Life Eternal. For numberless ages, in the rest of the world people have been intent on the awesome greatness of God, and nothing more, whereas in India the sages were intent on the awesome greatness of both the individual and the universal Selves. Perceiving their unity, they understood that whatever can be said about one can be said about the other. Thus their teachings are a unique revelation of the true nature of us all. Without this self-understanding, our life is nothing but confusion with a few random stumblings into insight. It is an absolute necessity that we comprehend the Upanishadic teachings and strive to gain the Upanishadic vision.

The person of the size of a thumb resides in the middle of the heart. After

knowing him who is the lord of the past and the future, one does not shrink [from Him]. This, verily, is that [Atman]. (2.1.12)

Since the Self transcends space, how can it have a measurable size? It cannot. Shankara explains in his commentary that “the lotus of the heart is of the size of a thumb. Existing in the space within the lotus of the heart, [the Self] has the size of a thumb, just like space existing in a section of a bamboo that is of the size of a thumb.” Just as water filling a vessel sunk in the ocean has volume and shape, in the same way the Self seems to have a shape and a measure. But once the vessel is broken, the shape and volume of the water cease to be, and so it is with the Self. Incarnate in a body, the Self pervades it and reflects it, but upon the dissolution of the body those seeming conditions cease instantly, for they have no objective reality. So it is not the Self that is really of the size of a thumb, but rather the lotus of the heart within which it momentarily dwells.

We should not mistake the lotus of the heart for the organ that pumps blood through the body. The real lotus of the heart is the core of our consciousness, the essence that is our Self, the inmost level of our being, our absolute essence beyond which we simply do not exist. It also indicates that to know ourselves we must meditate and penetrate deep into our consciousness.

The person of the size of a thumb resides in the middle of the heart, like a flame without smoke. He is the lord of the past and the future. He is the same today and the same tomorrow. This verily is that [Atman]. (2.1.13)

The purusha, the individual spirit, is beyond space and therefore not really measurable. Nevertheless, people have seen it as a bright light or flame of white fire approximately the elliptical shape and size of a thumb. It is all light; it has no shadow or “smoke.” In my early teens I met a Christian minister who described the death of his twin brother. He said that at the moment of death his brother’s mouth opened, and as he exhaled for the final time, a white light shaped like a thumb emerged from his mouth and passed from the room.

The Self is pure light without covering or admixture. In our present state of delusion we think that the Self can be inhibited and even corrupted, but that is not so. The various energy levels within which the Self is dwelling certainly can be inhibited, corrupted and even destroyed. If we identify with those levels we will live in fear and uncertainty, relieved only occasionally by utterly false hopes. But once our consciousness is posited in the Self, all that is past, dispelled by the eternal Light of the Self.

Our Self is the master of our past and future, and therefore of the present, as well. Knowing it, we pass beyond fear. That Self never changes, but the bodies in which it is presently encased do evolve. They are the stage on which the drama of incarnation after incarnation unfolds, and through which by the practice of yoga the bodies are purified, evolved and ultimately revealed as themselves being the Self.

The changeless nature of the Self puts us beyond all fear, concern, and anxiety, knowing “this Self to be indestructible, eternal, birthless and

imperishable” (Bhagavad Gita 2:21). The Self really has no past, present or future. It is itself the Eternal Now.

It is a grave error to think that we are helpless flotsam and jetsam on the bosom of the ocean of Relativity, being moved about by forces such as karma, our thoughts and even God. It is our own Self that determines whatever happens to us and is the sole controller of our past, present and future. Look at the chaotic lives of those who “trust in God” and “surrender to the divine will.” They rationalize their disordered state by saying they have peace of mind through their attitude, but that is a poor substitute for the truth of things. Look at how many people die peacefully. Peace counts for little when it is nothing more than an opiate. We must stop living a lie. It is not our karma, our thinking or even God that ordains our life. It is our Self. And until we unite our awareness with the Self we shall know nothing but uncertainty and confusion. But when we do, “the cessation of all sorrows is produced” (Bhagavad Gita 2:65) which is ours forever.

As water rained upon a height flows down in various ways among the hills, so he who views things as varied runs after them [distractedly]. (2.1.14)

The gravity of delusion pulls inexorably downward those who think that the many layers of their incarnate existence are the Self. Yet, they do not think they are enslaved by the consequences of their ignorance, but believe they have free will as they “run” into the valleys of darkness and pain. “It’s my life, and I will do what I want to,” they shout as they roll downward into the jaws of sorrow and death. Only when the unity of our Self is known, both in the fact of its unitary state of being and its eternal oneness with Brahman, will the earthward pull disappear along with the compulsion to continual rebirth. “Brahman is to be attained by him who always sees Brahman in action” (Bhagavad Gita 4:24). It is as simple as that.

As pure water poured forth into pure [water] becomes the very same, so the Self of the seer who has understanding becomes [one with the Supreme]. (2.1.15)

We and Brahman are one substance. There is no difference. We are not creations, we are beginningless and endless, co-eternal with God. “Truly there never was a time when I was not, nor you, nor these lords of men—nor in the future will there be a time when we shall cease to be” (Bhagavad Gita 2:12). Knowing this makes all the difference, the only difference we need. Brahman is Pure Being and we are Pure Being. Uniting with Brahman we remain what we always have been, but no longer subject to ignorance and delusion. The Self does not change, but becomes irrevocably established in the consciousness of its changelessness.

[There is] a city of eleven gates [belonging to] the unborn, uncrooked intelligence. By ruling it one does not grieve and being freed is freed indeed. This, verily is that. (2.2.1)

The human body is usually called “the city of nine gates,” as in the Gita (5:13),

because of the nine apertures of the body, but here it has the number eleven. Shankara says this is because the navel and the Brahmarandhra, the “soft spot” at the crown of the head, are also being counted as gates. This is appropriate, as before birth we are nourished through the navel, and at death the adept yogi departs through the Brahmarandhra.

The important point being made here is in contradistinction to most religious thought and attitudes, even in the East. For it is commonly thought very spiritual to disregard the body, push it aside in our consciousness and despise it as a liability and even a prison. But the Upanishad tells us that the body is not alien to the Self (Atman), but rather belongs to the Self, just as the cosmos belongs to God and is in a sense the body of God. It is good to keep in mind that whatever can be said of God can usually be said about the individual being, as well. The body is ours, and is fundamentally a mirroring of our personal consciousness, which is why we can legitimately speak of “the body-mind connection.”

The body, the divine abode of the divine Self, is the vehicle through which the individual evolves during the span of life on earth, and must be taken into serious account by the yogi who will discover that the body can exert a necessary effect on the mind. Purification of the body, especially dietary purity, can greatly assist the mind in meditation. The yogi who observes will discover that the diet of the physical body is also the diet of the mind, that whatever is eaten physically will have an effect mentally. One who does not know this is no yogi at all. Authentic morality, based on the yama-niyama of Patanjali’s yoga system, also has a transforming effect on the mind.

“By ruling it one does not grieve.” When we master the gross and subtle bodies we will end all sorrow. The Gita says of the yogi who meditates on the Self: “When the mind comes to rest, restrained by the practice of yoga, beholding the Self by the Self, he is content in the Self. He knows that endless joy which is apprehended by the buddhi beyond the senses; and established in that he does not deviate from the truth (tattwatah: thatness). Having attained this, he regards no other gain better than that, and established therein he is not moved by heaviest sorrow. Let this dissolution of union with pain be known as yoga. This yoga is to be practiced with determination, with an assured mind” (6:20-23)

We must meditate on the Self, not on external deities or symbolic forms of psychic states. As Sri Ma Sarada Devi said: “After attaining wisdom one sees that gods and deities are all maya” (*Precepts For Perfection* 672). The Upanishads, Gita, and Yoga Sutras know nothing of meditating on ishta devatas and ishta mantras, only on our Self.

“And being freed is freed indeed.” There is no need for commentary, but here is some corroboration: “Those who are truly established in the buddhi, the wise ones, having abandoned the fruits of action, freed from the bondage of rebirth, go to the place that is free from pain” (Bhagavad Gita 2:51). “Released from desire and anger, with thoughts controlled, those ascetics who know the Self find very near to them the bliss of Brahmanirvana” (Bhagavad Gita 5:26).

He is the swan in the sky, the pervader in the space [between earth and heaven], the priest at the altar, the guest in the house. He dwells in men, in gods, in the right and in the sky. He is [all that is] born of water, sprung from the earth, born of right [ritam], born of mountain. He is the true and the great. (2.2.2)

We have already seen in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad that the Self is symbolized as a swan. Where in all the scriptures of the world can we find such a thrilling statement as this, thrilling and glorious because it is true?

To fully comprehend the teachings of the Upanishadic sages we must keep in mind that whatever can be said of the Paramatman on the cosmic, universal level can usually also be said of the jivatman on the level of our individual life within the cosmos. So the Upanishads do not only describe God, the Supreme Spirit, in passages like this, but the nature of our own individual spirit.

There is another, essential, side to this Upanishadic statement, and indeed to all scriptural teachings, that must be kept in mind at all times in our study: We must *experience* and *know* the realities spoken of by the sages. They did not write down their perceptions for us to merely accept them and be intellectually convinced of their veracity. Rather, they wrote them down as signposts so we could check our own perceptions against them. Never did they mean for their writings to become dogmas and doctrines. They assumed that their readers would be yogis like themselves, sadhaka pilgrims pressing on toward the ultimate frontiers of consciousness.

This is the absolutely unique character of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. Nearly all other scriptures, including those of later authorship in India, are statements of truths we are supposed to accept on faith without question. This is why intelligent investigation and analysis are so little valued by the expounders of those scriptures, why nearly all religions warn their adherents away from reading the books of “heretics” and demand that they shun their company. Intellectual fearlessness terrifies “the chosen faithful” and sets their teeth on edge.

But no religious system that employs a bond of any type can lead us to freedom, only confusion and enslavement. For example, in Yoga yama and niyama are not commandments from God but necessary and helpful supports to our search for Self-realization. Just as we learn what food is harmful to the body, so from Patanjali we learn what conduct limits and clouds the consciousness of the aspiring yogi. If we wish to ignore his counsel, that is our own concern. No one will call us to account for our heedlessness except our own Self.

Those who are fit to be yogis joyfully learn what to cultivate and what to avoid, and live accordingly. Those who drag their feet, sigh and sullenly demand mitigations, are simply not fit for yoga and should occupy themselves in other areas. This is why Jesus asked: “Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it

begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish” (Luke 14:28-30).

Every yogi must be *adhikarin*—qualified and worthy, fit for yoga and capable of its total practice. Jesus said: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). It is interesting that he likens spiritual life to the cumbersome wooden yoke of oxen or bullocks, assuring us that it will be restful and easy and light to bear. How is this? To a strong ox or bullock the heaviest of yokes will be of no consequence. So if we are the kind of people for whom yoga is intended, its requirements and disciplines will be light and easeful. But if instead of being oxen or bullocks we are dogs and swine (symbols used by Jesus for the unworthy), the light and easy yoke will break our backs. This is why some people should take up bowling or surfing and forget religion altogether, what to say of yoga. For the serious seekers, though, the ancient rishis hold back nothing, but give the full picture of the Self.

The Self can seem (please note I say *seem*) to enter into numberless conditions and interior states. It even experiences millions of births and deaths, yet it never really dies, for immortality is a fundamental trait of its nature. It is not easy, but the yogi must cultivate a continual awareness that he is Immortal Being and order his life accordingly. I do not mean by this that he denies his present (seeming) condition, but that, as Yogananda continually advised, he is always aware that he is only sitting in the motion picture theatre of the cosmos watching a movie that, cosmic as its scope may be, can be wiped away in a moment, that only he and the other viewers are real, and all must eventually leave the theater and go home to Infinity. How splendid are the truths of the Upanishads.

The Self is the source of all light, the Inner Light of Consciousness that illumines all things. For outside the Self there is no perception of even the brightest of material suns. It is the presence of the Self that produces awareness of all phenomena. Outside the Self nothing at all exists. Within the Self is everything.

The Self shines in the sky of the Chidakasha, the subtle Ether (Akasha). The Chidakasha is the infinite, all-pervading expanse of Consciousness from which all things proceed, the true heart of all things. The shining of the Self in the Chidakasha is Life itself. In the individual, the Chidakasha is the subtle space of Consciousness located in the Sahasrara, the Thousand-petalled Lotus that is the astral/causal brain. From that point the Self enlivens and illumines all things.

The Self is also that power which moves within the Chidakasha as the wind moves within earthly space. As the wind causes movement in the trees and on the surfaces of earth and water, in the same way it is the Self that produces all movement in the cosmos, in all the worlds gross and subtle.

The Self is the transmuting force of Cosmic Fire on the altar of the universe. In India of the Upanishadic rishis there were no temples, nor were there any external religious rites other than the sandhya (morning and evening salutations of the sun)

and the havan, the fire ritual in which by the agency of consecrated fire the offerings were transformed into subtle energy forms and transferred into higher worlds. The Self, then is the ultimate transmuting power which evolves both the cosmos and the personal energies of the individual spirits within it. The entire universe is an altar in which, through the power of the Self, all things are offerings unto and into Infinite Being.

All things, even the least atom, are dwellings for the all-pervading Self. All things that exist have the Self as their inmost dweller. Where there is any objective thing, there is the Self. Yet, since no things are permanent, the Self is only a momentary Guest, but none the less real for that.

What is meaningful to us is the truth that the Supreme Self is the Dweller in all conscious beings. And since they like the Supreme Self are not “things,” the Supreme Self is not a guest but the permanent Indweller as the Self of the Self. The consciousness of each one of us is the only temple in which Spirit ever dwells in Its essential being. Although it can be said that in a sense our bodies are temples of God, that is not really true in the purest sense. Only in our consciousness is Spirit to be found. This is why the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita insist that we must identify with the Self alone, seeing all else as mirages destined to dissolve away and cease to exist. Their message has been summed up by Shankara in these words: “Brahman is real. The world is illusory. The jiva is nothing other than Brahman.”

In the Upanishads, “gods” mean not only highly evolved beings that can control the forces of nature, etc., but also our higher faculties of perception which illumine our awareness of both the inner and outer worlds. Here the idea is that the Self is the enlivening power by which our higher faculties function.

Wherever there is true knowing, there the Self is operative as the Sun of Consciousness, revealing both relative and absolute truth. For Truth is Its nature. A popular Sanskrit adage is *Satyam eva jayate*: “Truth alone conquers,” meaning that victory over ignorance and bondage is found only in the Self, the ultimate Truth.

By “sky” (*vyoma*) is meant the Ether, the *Chidakasha*, the natural home of the Self. Only in this inmost level of being can the Self be always perceived. In the lesser levels we usually lose the Self by losing perception of It. How can we establish ourselves in etheric awareness? Through the ever-increasing subtle states experienced in meditation.

In all forms of life that are found in this world, Brahman and the Self are “born.” All the things listed as abodes of the Self are ever-changing, and their forms are evanescent, soon seen to be without permanent reality. Since we identify with what we see around us, we continually fall into the snare of thinking that we, too, change and have no ultimate reality. Even if we think otherwise intellectually, we keep acting in a delusive manner. Hence we must keep reminding ourselves that we are changeless and absolutely real.

Equally wonderful is the truth that we are beyond limitation, that infinite are our possibilities, for we are the Infinite Self.

Those who embodied their realizations in the Upanishads did not do so to

furnish us with a bundle of beliefs to take on faith and wrangle over. Their intention was to spur us onward to attain the same vision as they possessed, to be sages equal with them. Their call to us is that with which Swami Vivekananda, continually exhorted his hearers: “Awake! Arise! And stop not until you reach the Goal!”

He leads the prana upward, he casts downwards the apana; the dear one [vamanam] who is seated in the middle, all the gods worship. (2.2.3)

The life processes in our bodies are all movements of prana, the life-force. The Self causes the life-force to move upward as the prana and downward as the apana. It is this movement which manifests as our inhalation and exhalation, which is why it is such an important part of Yoga. “He who breathes in with your breathing in is your Self which is in all things. He who breathes out with your breathing out is your Self which is in all things. He is your Self which is in all things” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3.4.1).

The middle in which the Self is seated, controlling the movements of the life-force, is also called the heart. In the spiritual texts of India the word hridaya means not just the heart, or core, but also is said to indicate the space (akasha) where the inbreath and outbreath merge: the ultimate heart. This is why yoga must involve working with the inhaling and exhaling breaths in the form of subtle pranayama. (See *Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self*. “Life [Prana-Breath] is, in truth, Your Majesty, the highest Brahman. Life does not desert him, who, knowing thus, worships it as such. All beings approach him. Having become a god, he goes even to the gods” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.1.3). “They who know the life [breath] of life [breath], the eye of the eye, the ear of the ear and the mind of the mind, they have realized the ancient primordial Brahman” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.18).

The word *vamanam* means adorable, dear and pleasing. These epithets are traditionally used in relation to Shiva, the symbol of the Atman and atmic consciousness. This is important, for when the Self is even just glimpsed, reverent awe arises in our minds. And that reverent awe is the beginning of true worship. When Jesus spoke about external, ritualistic worship to the Samaritan woman, he concluded: “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). Meditation is the true worship of the God who is seated in the heart of every one of us. And that is where we find him.

“I am the Self abiding in the heart of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle and the end of all beings as well” (Bhagavad Gita 10:20). “The light of lights, beyond all darkness; knowledge, the to-be-known, the goal of knowledge seated in the heart of all” (Bhagavad Gita 13:17). “Seated within the hearts of all,... I alone am to be known” (Bhagavad Gita 15:15). To the yogi, then, the Self and Brahman are equally worshipful.

The “gods” who worship the Self are the various sensory faculties, the

jnanendriyas, the organs of perception. The senses do homage in the evolved individual by drawing near to (upasate) and becoming merged in the Self, which is their source. This implies two interesting and usually unsuspected things. First, that it is natural for the Self to control the senses, not to be their slave. Second, it is completely natural for the senses to move inward toward the Self and experience the Self by uniting with It. Neither of these is our present experience. Rather, we consider it normal for the Self to be bound by the senses, and for it to require great struggle to turn them inward and bring them to experience of the Self. We have lived in a subnormal condition so long that we have come to think subnormality is normal. We are like the drunk man who was walking along with one foot on the sidewalk and the other down in the street. When someone stopped him and asked why he was walking with one foot on the sidewalk and the other down in the street, he burst into tears and answered: "Thank God! I thought I was a cripple."

When the embodied Self that dwells within the body slips off and is released from the body, what is there that remains? This, verily, is that. (2.2.4)

The Self is as different from the body as the pearl is from the oyster and its shell. The body will disintegrate and be no more, but the Self will remain, for it is the Self alone that gives and is life.

Not by any outbreath or inbreath does any mortal whatever live. But by another do they live on which these [life-breaths] both depend. (2.2.5)

It is not breath that makes us live, though breath is the basis of our body's metabolism. What we cannot do without and by which we do live is him who is the source of breath.

Jesus, himself a yogi having lived over half of his life in India, expressed the same idea, which he had first read in the Upanishad: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). That is, we live not on matter, but on the very Life of God, because matter is only a modification of that Life Energy. "For in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

I shall explain to you the mystery of Brahman, the eternal, and also how the soul fares, after reaching death. (2.2.6)

This is an interesting juxtaposition: Brahman and the Self after death of the body. The Upanishad puts these together because Brahman and the Self are one, and after death the spirit recovers the memory of its immortality and its eternity. One with Brahman, the Self yet experiences many changes. Those changes may only be appearances, but they are nonetheless real experiences, and profoundly affect the Self in its evolutionary journey. So they need to be set forth.

Some souls enter into a womb for embodiment; others enter stationary

objects according to their deeds and according to their thoughts. (2.2.7)

Here we have a most interesting thing. Instead of discussing the worlds entered by the spirit after bodily death, and their nature as reflections of the spirit's karma, physical rebirth is immediately being spoken of. This is because it takes a goodly degree of evolution for the subtle worlds to have meaning for the developing spirit. The undeveloped learn neither from earthly or astral experiences. Further, many of them simply go to sleep at the moment of death and awaken only at the moment of birth. The period of time in between does not exist for them in any meaningful sense.

In his commentary on this verse Shankara says: "Creatures are born in accordance with their knowledge"—that is, their level of awareness. For evolution is a matter of knowing (jnana). The spirits that are unaware of their true nature come back into two general categories: into living organisms that gestate them in some form or other, and "stationary" forms such as gaseous, mineral and plant life. (I am speaking of subhuman spirits, not humans.) Obviously, very little goes on in the life of such incarnations as far as consciousness is concerned. The development is subliminal. Only those who are born and live a life with some degree of control over a body vehicle can develop their consciousness to any significant extent.

Implicit in this verse is the principle of the transmigration of the Atman from lower to higher forms of life. We start out as atoms of hydrogen, move into mineral forms, then plant forms, then animal forms and then into the human body from which we shall eventually evolve into forms in higher worlds.

Most of the time earthly evolution is automatic and incredibly slow, but at some point we become capable of directing and enhancing our evolutionary movement. At first this is only through thinking and acting, but eventually we become capable of yoga, of fully taking charge of our growth in consciousness. Until this point is reached, little of any lasting importance occurs to us. So the Upanishad is starting at a basic rung of the ladder of evolution. But since, as I have said, nothing of much value take place on that level, the Upanishad moves ahead quite a bit to the level where we are capable of dreaming: to at least the intelligent animal level.

That person, who is awake in those that sleep, shaping desire after desire, that, indeed, is the pure. That is Brahman, that, indeed, is called the immortal. In it all the worlds rest and no one ever goes beyond it. This, verily, is that. (2.2.8)

It is a fundamental assertion of India's primal wisdom that there are four states of consciousness: jagrat (waking), swapna (dreaming), sushupti (dreamless sleep) and turiya, the pure consciousness that witnesses the first three. Turiya is the state proper to the Self, actually is the Self, which is why this verse speaks of it as that which "is awake in those that sleep."

"Shaping desire after desire." There is more to this Self than consciousness. It is also creative power. Although as yogis we use the terminology of Sankhya and speak of Purusha and Prakriti as two entities, we are only speaking of two aspects

or views of the One Absolute Existence. The Upanishad reveals this by telling us that the Self is not only witness, it is also the witnessed.

The Self is desireless, yet it shows us in dreams the things we desire. Why? Because the Self is more than witness, it is guide and guru. In every way it is attempting to show us our present spiritual status. Dreams are one of the avenues for its teaching.

It is true that dreams arise from the subconscious, but they do so at the impulse of the Self. Unfortunately our subconscious is distorted, like a badly ground lens or a bent mirror, so the original imaging of the Self comes through to us distorted or partial, and the message is flawed. However, the more we clarify our minds through meditation, the more faithful our dreams will be to the original impulses from the Self. In time our dreams can become on occasion authentic spiritual visions.

Although showing us our desires, the Self remains pure. The actual word in the Sanskrit text is shukra, which means “bright; resplendent; clear; pure; spotless; white,” to signify that the Self has no inherent “colors” (qualities or traits), for it is Brahman by nature. Thus it is also immortal, no matter how many deaths we may experience, both through the death of the body and the “little death” we experience each time we sleep, dreams being a kind of after-death astral experience.

All levels of experience arise from the Self in union with Brahman. Nothing exists apart from the Self. The Self is also the ultimate Being. There is no going beyond it. Because it is one with Brahman, even conscious union with Brahman does not cancel out our awareness of ourselves as the individual Atman. This is a most important principle, for many are led into the delusion that they have transcended the Self and “entered the Not-Self,” when they have merely sunk into the morass of tamasic ignorance. They are suffering from the subtlest form of mental illness which in time will manifest as recognizable psychosis and lead to great mental and moral disintegration, and in many instances to attempted or successful suicide. (See *Dwelling in the Mirror*.)

As fire which is one, entering this world becomes varied in shape according to the object [it burns], so also the one Self within all beings becomes varied according to whatever [it enters] and also exists outside [them all].

As air which is one, entering this world becomes varied in shape according to the object [it enters], so also the one Self within all beings becomes varied according to whatever [it enters] and also exists outside [them all].

Just as the sun, the eye of the whole world, is not defiled by the external faults seen by the eye, even so, the One within all beings is not tainted by the sorrow of the world, as He is outside [the world]. (2.2.9-11)

Each individual Self inhabits a vast number of body-vehicles as it moves up the ladder of evolution to the Highest. And in each one it appears to actually *become* that vehicle. Yet the Self remains only itself, one and unique. In this way the Self gathers experiences of every form of life that exists. This is necessary for it if it is to

approximate the status of Brahman, for Brahman, existing in all forms, has the experience of being all those forms. Hence the microcosmic Self mirrors the macrocosmic Self.

Having spoken to us of the fact that the Self somehow takes on the form of its many incarnational forms, the Upanishad reminds us that the Self is nonetheless absolutely unmarked by that formation and undergoes no alteration or conditioning whatsoever. Even while immanent in relative existence, the Self remains essentially transcendent, in the same relation to its incarnate form as is Brahman to the universe. The divine eye of the Self illumines all things yet is affected by none.

The one, controller [of all], the inner Self of all things, who makes his one form manifold, to the wise who perceive him as abiding in the soul, to them is eternal happiness [sukham]—to no others. (2.2.12)

The Self is ever the Master, however much the forms inhabited by the Self may be bound. The Self is the essential principle of the existence of all those forms, always remaining one and unchanged. He alone who beholds the Self in/as the core of his being possesses eternal happiness (sukham).

The one eternal amid the transient, the conscious amid the conscious, the one amid many, who grants their desires, to the wise who perceive Him as abiding in the soul, to them is eternal peace and to no others. (2.2.13)

Consciousness of the conscious, the eternal link between all the temporal bodies it inhabits, the Self is “the one amid many, who grants their desires” through countless incarnations. He alone who beholds the Self in/as the core of his being possesses eternal peace.

Yamaraja has presented his student with a great deal of philosophical knowledge regarding the Self. This is all valuable, but Nachiketas feels impelled to ask a question, without the answer to which all the teaching on the Self means nothing. He asks:

This is that and thus they recognize, the ineffable Supreme happiness. How then may I come to know this? Does it shine [of itself] or does it shine [in reflection]? (2.2.14)

It is pointless to hear about the Self if we do not know how to find the Self. It is true that in metaphysical circles the majority of people are enamored of theory and discussion without practical application, but the wise see things differently. Nachiketas has already grasped the fundamental nature of the Self. Now he wants to know how to realize that Self, and whether it is *swayamprakash*, luminous by its very nature, or depends on another for illumination.

The Self is attainable. Those who at present are ignorant of the Self can become knowers of the Self. Although only the knowers of the Self are fully worthy of being called wise, we can certainly call those who are seeking the Self also wise. All of us can be among the potentially wise if we follow the path to Self-knowledge as

outlined in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita.

The Self cannot be defined or evaluated in the terms of relative existence or relative objects, none of which exist outside the Self. Consequently the Self cannot be intellectually understood or even defined. Nevertheless, the Self can be known in a manner beyond any ordinary knowing, for it can be experienced as both object and subject, a quality unique to itself.

Analysis shows that the basic motivation of all beings is bliss (ananda) or happiness (sukham), that all the things we strive for are only prized because their acquisition will give rise to ananda. In this perspective we see that all beings are in search of the Self, for it alone is of the nature of ananda. Once a person truly grasps this fact he can only seek for the Self, all else being seen as insignificant.

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad we read the exposition of Yajnavalkya about what makes things dear to us, ending: “Verily, not for the sake of all is all dear, but all is dear for the sake of the Self” (2.4.5).

The sun shines not there, nor the moon and the stars, these lightnings shine not. Where then could this fire be? Everything shines only after that shining light. His shining illumines all this world. (2.2.15)

Nothing of heaven or earth illumines the Self or causes it to be radiant. Rather, it is, as already said, swayamprakash, self-luminous. Furthermore, it is the Self that illumines all beings. “His shining illumines all.” The Self is the essential nature of all sentient beings that “shine” with consciousness. “He shining, everything shines.”

All glory to the blissful, supreme, and ineffable Self! All glory to the wise who strive to attain that Self as well as the supremely wise who have attained it!

With the root above and the branches below [stands] this ancient fig [ashwattha] tree. That [indeed] is the pure; that is Brahman. That, indeed, is called immortal. In it all the worlds rest and no one ever goes beyond it. This, verily, is that. (2.3.1)

The entire range of relative existence is symbolized by the ashwattha tree. Its roots are in Brahman. Therefore ultimately all things are rooted above in the Supreme Consciousness. Everything has Brahman for its essential Being. From this we get the Hermetic principle: As Above, So Below. Applying this principle to our own experience we can come to understand a great deal about the higher and truer nature of what is arising and subsiding in our life. Original Christianity, being rooted in the Upanishadic teachings of Jesus (Isha Nath), taught the same, and that is why in the oldest text of Christian hymns, *The Odes of Solomon*, we find this: “The likeness of that which is below is that which is above. For everything is above, and below there is nothing, but it is believed to be by those in whom there is no knowledge” (Odes of Solomon 34:4-5). That is, the ignorant believe that things have an independent existence, an existence that can cease, rather than the truth that they are not only rooted in Brahman, they are an imperishable extension of

Brahman. “For in him we live, and move, and have our being;... For we are also his offspring” (Acts 17:28), as Saint Paul pointed out. “And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17). David simply sang: “For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light” (Psalms 36:9). Brahman is the ultimate state and stage of being. There is no transcending Brahman, for Brahman is truly the Self of all.

From this we see the principle only comparatively recently discovered by science: that in essence all things are immortal, that there is not a single atomic particle in creation that can go out of existence, that the changes we think are death and birth are only rearrangements of the living energies of which all consist.

The whole world, whatever here exists, springs from and moves in life. [It is] the great fear [like] the upraised thunderbolt. They that know that become immortal. (2.3.2)

Vibration, spanda or movement, is the nature of relative existence. Movement is life. Brahman, its source is the Vibrationless Void. “Mahad bhayam” means great fear in the sense that those who perceive the infinite Brahman within the universe as Divine Potential are overcome with awe, indeed terror. This is the subject of the eleventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gita called The Yoga of the Vision of the Cosmic Form. There Krishna reveals the universal form of Brahman to Arjuna, the master yogi. Yet even he, greatly evolved as he was, tells Krishna: “I am delighted at having seen that which has never before been seen, and yet my mind trembles with fear” (11:45). We always think of fear being a reaction to something threatening, but in this case it is the overwhelming of the finite mind in seeing the Infinite Being.

Brahman is Inexorable Power as well as Infinite Consciousness. His presence is like the thunderbolt whose light blinds us to all lesser lights. But those who unite with Brahman experience their eternal immortality and become fearless, especially in the face of the mirage called death.

Through fear of him, fire burns, through fear [of him] the sun gives heat; through fear both Indra [the lord of the gods] and wind and Death, the fifth, speed on their way. (2.3.3)

Here, too, a state of ecstatic awe and wonder is meant. In older English, “fear” meant to be filled with awe and respect, not to be afraid. So when we read in the older Bible translations that we should fear God we are actually being told to reverence God.

In awesome reverence of Brahman the creation responds to the Supreme Will, for it is itself an extension of Brahman, as already said. All that occurs is the movement of Divine Consciousness in response to Divine Will. When Brahman moves Brahman, creation manifests and moves onward. When Brahman ceases to move Brahman, creation resolves into its potential, causal form and seems to cease. At all times it is Brahman moving Brahman. Even death is only a change of Life.

If one is able to perceive [Him] before the body falls away [one would be freed from misery], [if not] he becomes fit for embodiment in the created worlds. (2.3.4)

Perfect realization of Brahman, total union of our consciousness with Brahman, is the only passport beyond this world or any worlds of relative existence. Realization-experience is the root determinant of our rebirth or our freedom from rebirth. This is why most religion is so useless; it deals with good and bad, truth and error, on the tiny level of individual human mentalities. The infinite scope of Brahmic Consciousness simply does not come into its purview. Human beings waste lifetimes with such mundane religions that only program them for more and more births upon this earth. Even their ideas of the afterlife only condition them for more rebirth and bondage. Degenerate Christianity, especially, with its doctrine of physical resurrection and physical immortality instills material consciousness in its adherents, binding them to the wheel of perpetual birth and death. Thinking they are “creatures,” they sink into the quagmire of “creation.” Actually, they impel themselves into the morass, calling it the will of God. As Jesus said: “If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matthew 6:23). If our “truth” is actually untruth, its blinding and binding power is absolutely inescapable.

As in a mirror, so [is it seen] in the soul, as in a dream, so in the world of the manes, as [an object] is seen in water, so in the world of the gandharvas; as shade and light in the world of Brahma. (2.3.5)

This is outlining the various ways the Self is perceived in the less material worlds. Just as a mirror reflects objects without distortion, and the reflection is exactly as the reflected, so those whose consciousness is centered inwardly in the buddhi will perceive the Self exactly as it is. They are the yogis, striving for liberation consciously and intelligently through the practice of yoga. Those who live in the astral worlds of the departed have unstable, partial and even incomplete and distorted perceptions of the Self as in a dream. In the world of the gandharvas the Self is perceived waveringly and distorted like an image in water. Even in the world of Brahma, the creator of the lower worlds (bhur, bhuvah and swah), the Self is seen as a conglomerate of light and shadow, black and white, without color or dimension.

So here we see why it is said that even the gods desire human birth, for not only do the experiences of worldly life impel the wise to seek for liberation, the human is able to perceive the Self more truly than in those lesser astral regions. So, difficult as things can be here in material existence, we have a capacity that is missing in the denizens of the astral worlds, even though they may not have the afflictions that are universal “down here.” It is great wisdom to become a yogi right here and now and waste no time lest we become lost in the labyrinth of astral worlds. There is more spiritual opportunity and capacity in this world than in those realms.

Knowing the separate nature of the senses, which spring separately [from the various subtle elements] and [knowing also] that their rising and setting [are separate], the wise man does not grieve. (2.3.6)

If a lost person could somehow be lifted up high and see his surroundings from that perspective, he could easily see his way out of his confusion. In the same way, those who are lost in the jungle of the senses can find their way by heeding the wisdom of the Upanishads.

Sense experience is just that: the experiences of the senses themselves. We witness these experiences and think that we are really undergoing them and being affected by them. This produces great fear and suffering, what to say of the mountain-high heaps of illusions and delusions those experiences produce in our mind. Whether the senses are active or inactive, the potential suffering is ever there. If, however, we can realize that such perceptions are utterly separate from us, from our Self, all fear and sorrow cease forever. But we must *realize* that truth, not just accept it or act as though it is so.

Beyond the senses is the mind; above the mind is its essence [intelligence]; beyond the intelligence is the great Self; beyond the great [Self] is the unmanifest.

Beyond the unmanifest is the person, all-pervading and without any mark whatever, by knowing whom, a man is liberated and goes to life eternal. (2.3.7-8)

It is necessary for us to be aware of this personal hierarchy, for the lesser levels can be controlled from the higher levels, thus saving a great deal of time and frustration.

By “senses” is meant the five organs of perception: ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose. At other times “senses” means the five organs of action: voice, hand, foot, organ of excretion, and the organ of generation. Often the word “senses” really refers to the five sense perceptions. By “mind” is meant the sensory mind; the perceiving faculty that receives the messages of the senses. “Intellect” is the faculty of understanding, of reason: the thinking mind. The Great Atman (Paramatman) is the Self as it relates to the world, and the Unmanifest is its aspect that is always turned toward the Purusha, its essential being. These three could be called the lower Self, the higher Self and the ultimate Self.

The Self and Brahman being one, it is the knowledge of our Self that bestows upon us freedom and immortality.

But how do we know this Self—not merely hear about it or believe in it, but truly know it by direct experience?

Not within the field of vision stands this form. No one soever sees Him with the eye. By heart, by thought, by mind apprehended, they who know Him become immortal. (2.3.9)

We enter into the heart, into the Chidakasha that is at the core of our being, the pure mind/buddhi. There the Self is revealed. Immortality is the result of such knowing.

When the five [senses] knowledges together with the mind cease [from their normal activities] and the intellect itself does not stir, that, they say, is the highest state. (2.3.10)

This is extremely important. Nearly everyone thinks that the highest state involves chills and thrills in the form of inner sensory experiences of cataclysmic proportion, including opening of chakras and rising of kundalini. Notice that the Upanishad says nothing like that, nor do the Gita or the Yoga Sutras. What it does tell us is that the pure consciousness that is Reality is experienced “when the five knowledges [senses] together with the mind cease [from their normal activities] and the intellect itself does not stir.” That, and that alone, is the highest state which in time becomes permanent and is itself liberation.

Obviously much that is called yoga is not yoga at all. This is brought out by the next verse.

This, they consider to be Yoga, the steady control of the senses. Then one becomes undistracted, for Yoga comes and goes. (2.3.11)

The state of calm, or steadiness (*sthiram*) in awareness of awareness itself, is yoga. This frees us from delusion because it makes us aware of our true nature as the Self. In those who have not attained perfection this state comes and goes. The Upanishad tells us this so we will not be foolish enough to think that experiencing it once or even a few times is enough and wrongly believe we are enlightened. (People claim enlightenment on the basis of much less.) We must practice diligently to become permanently established in it.

Although I have told about Lahiri Mahashaya’s teaching on the subject of this state which he called *sthirattwa* in my Gita commentary, I would like to repeat it here. Yogiraj Shyama Charan Lahiri Mahasaya continually expounded the idea that the goal of yoga is to be established in *sthirattwa*, in perfect tranquility.

“A group of spiritual leaders from Calcutta once conspired against Lahiri Mahasay. They invited him to join in an evening discussion on spiritual matters. Lahiri Mahasay accepted the invitation and accordingly attended the meeting.

“The conspirators had well prepared themselves to trap Lahiri Mahasay. For example, if Lahiri Mahasay were to express his preference for a particular deity, or *Istadev*, ‘desired Lord,’ then a particular leader would find exception to that choice.

“In fact, each member of the group selected a particular *Devata*, (‘deity’) such as Lord Vishnu, Lord Krishna, Lord Siva or the Goddess Kali (the Divine Mother) and prepared to debate and challenge Lahiri Mahasay’s choice.

“As soon as Lahiri Mahasay arrived, he was received in the traditional manner and shown proper courtesy. After a while one of the members of the group asked Lahiri Mahasay, ‘Upon which deity do you meditate?’

“Lahiri Mahasay looked at him but did not reply. Then another gentleman asked him, ‘Who is your *Istadev*, “desired deity?”’ Lahiri Mahasay turned his head towards him and looked at him in the same way, while keeping his peace.

“Finally, a third gentleman asked him, ‘Can you tell us upon which deity usually you meditate?’

“Lahiri Mahasay faced him and said very gently, ‘I meditate on *Sthirattva* (Tranquility).’

“The gentleman replied that he did not understand what was meant by this. Lahiri Mahasay continued to observe silence. After some time, another gentleman asked him, ‘Could you please explain this? I do not understand exactly what you are saying.’

“Lahiri Mahasay, as before, continued to maintain silence. Another gentleman asked, ‘Can you enlighten me as to what you mean by that? I do not understand at all!’ Lahiri Baba told him, ‘You will not be able to understand, and also I will not be able to make you understand (realize) through words.’

“The group was at a loss. All of their preparation and conniving had come to naught. Only silence prevailed. All kept silent.

“After a long time Lahiri Mahasay got up and silently prepared to leave the meeting. All showed him the traditional courtesy as he left.”

As Paramhansa Yogananda, who made Lahiri Mahashaya known in the West, often said: “He who knows, knows; none else knows.”

Not by speech, not by mind, not by sight can he be apprehended. How can he be comprehended except by him who says, He is? [2.3.12]

If there is not the strong and constant intuitive conviction that the Self exists, no one can realize It. The Upanishad does not mean that simply affirming the existence of the Self is sufficient, but that without the needed conviction and assurance based on a goodly degree of spiritual awakening the yogi will not persevere and come to true experiential knowledge of the Self.

Brahman can only be truly known by direct experience in meditation. This verse is not speaking of that ultimate knowing, but of the knowing about Brahman that will stimulate us to seek Brahman. Empty words and intellectual ponderings cannot bring about this knowing, nor can our mind and senses. But those who know of Brahman, even imperfectly, possess a spiritual power in their minds which conveys an intuitive glimmer of the reality of Brahman. That glimmer, entering into our hearts, causes our inmost awareness to awaken, arise, and respond, and seek the full realization of Brahman for ourselves.

He should be apprehended only as existent and then in his real nature—in both ways. When He is apprehended as existent, his real nature becomes clear [later on]. (2.3.13)

It is common in Western metaphysical thought to speak of the “lower self” that is not truly the Self, but the lesser aspects of human existence, and the “higher self”

that is the real Self. We must distinguish between the two, and this is impossible without enough inner development to make possible the intuition of the Self, even if it is not directly known. One who has this intuition, if intelligent, will then begin to seek to know the Self, to become a yogi. To such a one who perseveres, the Self will be revealed in its fulness. As Swami Gambhirananda renders the first part of this verse: “The Self is to be realized as existing, and then as it really is.”

“Lead me from death to immortality” is part of a prayer at the beginning of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. In this final part of the Katha Upanishad we are given practical understanding of the way in which immortality is gained.

When all desires that dwell within the human heart are cast away, then a mortal becomes immortal and [even] here he attains to Brahman.

When all the knots that fetter here the heart are cut asunder, then a mortal becomes immortal. Thus far is the teaching. (2.3.14-15)

When desire dies, when ignorance drops away, immortality is revealed.

“Thus far is the teaching.” Shankara says that the subject of the Self and its realization is the only teaching in all the Upanishads, however varying the approaches may be. The aspirant must not lose himself in philosophical byways, including those set forth in mountains of books on the Upanishads. He must keep his vision clear and focused by understanding that liberation is the only point the Upanishads ever make.

It is easy to tell ourselves to rid ourselves of desire and ignorance, but how is that to be done, especially since we have been in the grip of these two ogres for creation cycles? The Upanishad gives us the yogic key to rising above desire and ignorance into immortality:

A hundred and one are the arteries of the heart; one of them leads up to the crown of the head. Going upward through that, one becomes immortal, the others serve for going in various other directions. (2.3.16)

It is noteworthy that this comes at the very end of the Upanishad. Yogananda used to say: “Yoga is the beginning of the end.” So it is appropriate that after all the philosophical exposition the yoga teaching should be given.

By “heart” is meant the hub located in the midst of the upper trunk of the body of subtle passages known as nadis (here translated “arteries”) through which the life force (prana) circulates throughout the gross and subtle bodies, just as the blood circulates from the heart through the veins of the physical body. One hundred of these nadis direct the life force to the life processes of the bodies and are the forces of embodiment. One unique nadi, however, rises directly upward from the heart-hub into the head and to the brahmarandhra, the crown chakra. (This nadi rises from the heart directly into the head; it is *not* the passage in the midst of the spine.) If at the time of death the departing spirit leaves through that channel, passing out through the crown of the head, he gains immortality. But if his consciousness attaches itself to any of the hundred other nadis he will be impelled

into the subtle worlds that lead inexorably back to incarnation in relativity.

In every meditation involving the joining of Soham to the breath (see *Soham Yoga: The Yoga of the Self*), we activate this channel, causing the life force to spontaneously and effortlessly flow upward into the thousand-petalled lotus (sahasrara chakra) in the head toward the divine radiance that shines above and upon the upper levels of the brain-lotus. Then at the end of life, having prepared himself by this practice, sitting in meditation the yogi ascends upward from the body into the realm of immortality.

Who is liberated in this manner? In conclusion to his teaching, Yama tells Nachiketas:

The person of the size of a thumb, the inner Self, abides always in the hearts of men. Him one should draw out with firmness from the body, as one separates the tender stalk from a blade of grass. Him one should know as the pure, the immortal, yea, Him one should know as the pure, the immortal. (2.3.17)

If the Self is seen, immaterial as it is, it will appear as an oval light, in the shape of a human thumb. (The shape is also that of a naturally-formed Shiva Linga that is found in the sacred Narmada river, which is a symbol of the Self.) Those who have seen this are unanimous in describing it in the manner of the Upanishad.

“Him one should draw out with firmness, from the body, as one separates the tender stalk from a blade of grass.” If I had not lived in a small Illinois town where I spent a great deal of time roving through vacant, weed-filled lots, I would not know what this means. But I do. There was a kind of weed that in the midst of its length would have a joint like that of a bamboo stalk. If I carefully bent the joint until it split open all around and then pulled gently on one end, an inner blade of a lighter green and a few inches long, would come out. I found this a very curious mystery and did it a lot. I would like to think that I had a subconscious memory of this teaching of the Upanishad. But however it might be, I can now explain it to you. In the same way we are to draw out the Self from the confining and concealing body.

It is through meditation, as I have described it, that we daily work on the separation of the Self from the body which will finally occur at the time of death. Not that we leave our body in meditation, but we begin conditioning all our bodies so they will not hold on to us at the final moments. As the fully ripened kernel of a nut pulls away from the shell so that when it is cracked the kernel comes out in full separation, so will it be with our Self in relation to the body. Sri Ramakrishna described it as being like the release of a fish back into the river.

May these final words of Yama echo within us: “Him one should know as the pure, the immortal, yea, Him one should know as the pure, the immortal.

Now the Upanishadic sage gives us a final assurance:

Then Nachiketas, having gained this knowledge declared by Death and the whole rule of Yoga, attained Brahman and became freed from passion and

from death. And so may any other who knows this in regard to the Self.
(2.3.18)

The Prashna Upanishad

This Upanishad, the Prashna Upanishad, is called The Question (Prashna) Upanishad because of its format of question and answer throughout. But the first two verses set the stage for the reader, and also indicate what is needed for a successful quest after the knowledge of Brahman.

Sukesha son of Bharadwaja, Satya-kama son of Shibi, Gargya grandson of Surya, Kausalya son of Ashvala, Bhargava of the Vidarbha country, Kabandhi son of Katya, these, indeed, devoted to Brahman, intent on Brahman, seeking the highest Brahman, approached the revered Pippalada with sacrificial fuel in their hands, thinking that he would explain all to them. (1.1)

The listing of the parentage and family ties of these six seekers is significant, for a yogi must have psychological ancestors in the form of inner spiritual qualities that will help him to persevere in yoga practice. Besides a good inner background, the Upanishad cites three traits needed by every aspirant to higher evolution: “devoted to Brahman, intent on Brahman, seeking the highest Brahman.” Furthermore they desired a teacher that “would explain all to them.” They knew they needed the complete knowledge of the way to Brahman, not a little bit, nor even most, but all of it. That was because these wise seekers were intent on a single thing: the truth of the Supreme Brahman. We should aspire to and settle for nothing less.

Faith in the form of conviction of the reality of spiritual matters is also a necessity, for who can persevere in search of something about which they have no inner assurance? We need the conviction-faith that God is real and can be known. That is why the Apostle wrote: “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). For God had said to Abraham: “I am thy exceeding great reward” (Genesis 15:1). An interior knowing that God is real and can be experienced will give us the strength we need to keep on to the Goal.

The seeker must be keenly aware that he lacks something (a great deal, in fact), with emphasis on *need*. He must not forget that seeking implies needing and asking. Those who strut up to a teacher as though they are visiting a zoo will (and should) receive nothing. On the other hand, the seeker should not grovel or be unthinkingly accepting. The student should carefully examine the prospective teacher to see if he is qualified and worth listening to. The worthy teacher will also equally carefully examine the prospective student to see if he has the right attitude and is capable of learning and applying what is learned. A dud on either end ruins the equation.

To them that seer said; live with me another year with austerity, chastity and faith. Then ask us questions according to your desire and if we know, we shall, indeed, tell you all that. (1.2)

Now this is the way of a real teacher of Brahmajnana. He tells what they must do and what he will then do.

There is a story told in India of a young man who came to a guru and asked to live with him and learn from him. The guru told him what he would have to do during the time of preparation in order to qualify himself. Not very happy with the list, the youth asked what the guru would do in all that time. When told that the guru would teach him occasionally, as he would deem appropriate, the would-be disciple remarked: "Why don't you make me a guru, instead; that sounds a lot easier." Yes, indeed.

Many approach a teacher while living in a fantasy world projected by their over-confident ego. If the teacher is as false as they and conforms to their fantasy, they are happy. But if the teacher is real, and dares to speak to them realistically about the means and the goal, they are most displeased. We are not of this type, hopefully, so let us look at the requirements Pippalada sets forth.

We have been told that the seekers had three qualities that proved them worthy: "devoted to Brahman, intent on Brahman, seeking the highest Brahman." And the teacher demands of them three observances: tapasya, brahmacharya and shraddha. (Shraddha is faith, confidence or assurance that arises from personal experience). These are absolute necessities and they must be unwaveringly practiced and held to for all one's life. First the students must be qualified, otherwise a qualified teacher will be of no use to them at all.

"Then ask us questions according to your desire and if we know, we shall, indeed, tell you all that." This promise contains two major qualities of an authentic spiritual teacher.

First, the teacher will accept and consider whatever the student asks. He will not shrug off even the silliest inquiry, nor will he reject the student's questioning of the veracity or value of what he believes or teaches. This is one of the most glorious characteristics of the wisdom of the Upanishads: it has no fear of honest inquiry and honest doubt. Not being insecure, the teacher of dharma is not disturbed by questioning or statements of disbelief.

A friend of mine told me that she quit being a Christian when, as a teenager, she dared to express doubts to her parish priest. He raved at her and threatened her with hell, saying that to even ask for explanation of "the mysteries" was a sin and an insult to God. So she walked away and never went back. Over sixty years (!) later she came into the orbit of Sanatana Dharma and Yoga, asked all her questions and received answers that restored her faith in Jesus (but not in Churchianity). In true dharma we find the key to understanding the teachings of all the masters of all the ages. I have found throughout nearly fifty years that the Upanishads and the Gita illumine their words to a degree that their professed followers and "isms" cannot even dream of.

Those who would follow Jesus and Buddha need to seek out the same source from which they drew their teachings: the Upanishads and the Gita. Then they can become their true disciples. The Upanishadic wisdom expands their horizons to

embrace all truth wherever it may be found. It is true that of late there have arisen bigots in India who speak as hatefully and ignorantly about other religions as those religions speak of Sanatana Dharma. But they are not true followers of the ancient sages of India, for dharma has no place for hate, ignorance and sectarianism.

Second, a worthy teacher will acknowledge that he cannot answer some questions. This is because some things are simply beyond verbal expression. Further, no true teacher is egotistical, therefore he will readily admit it if he feels it is beyond his capacity to explain something, just as we find that sometimes we cannot find a word to express what we know well inwardly. And most of all, a good teacher is willing to admit when he just does not know the answer to something. Only a fool thinks he is omniscient, and only a fake wants others to think he is.

In my encounters with teachers, the person nearest to being (and perhaps was) all-knowing was Swami Sivananda, and he was known to reply: “I really don’t know” to certain questions. But he certainly knew the way to God, as the lives of his disciples attested.

So we have seen the two elements needed for a meaningful exchange of questions and answers: worthy questioners and worthy answerers.

Then Kabandhi, son of Katya, approached him and asked, venerable Sir, whence, verily, are all these creatures born? (1.3)

This is the question of any reflective person. There are many answers to it, but this Upanishad goes to the root of relative existence as Pippalada replies.

To him he said, Prajapati [the lord of creation], verily, was desirous of offspring. He performed austerity. Having performed austerity, he produced the pair, matter and prana, thinking that they would produce creatures for him variously. (1.4)

Prajapati (the Lord of Creation, Brahma) did not create the world in the manner understood in the West. Rather, he manifested it from the primal energy known as Prakriti by the power of his meditation. This was no new occurrence, for the projection and withdrawal of the cosmos in precise cycles has been going on from eternity. Just as wind moving over water causes it to take on a multitude of wave-forms, so does the creative thought of Brahma. In Genesis we are told: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.... and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:1-2). The Breath (Ruach) of God, the creative thought of God, moved on the causal “waters” and the cosmos began to manifest.

The following verses give a great deal of allegory that is obscure. I will spare you the tangle, but the whole idea is that creation occurs precisely and exactly as the individual consciousness takes up life in relative existence.

To them is [belongs] that stainless Brahma world, in whom there is no crookedness, falsehood or trickery. (1.16)

This is very straightforward, yet crucial. All untruth in whatever forms it may come, must be purged from our minds and hearts as well as our outer life.

Each of us is both Who and What. The Who is simple to define: individualized consciousness, the jivatman, the individualized Self. The What, on the other hand is quite complex, which is why we have gotten lost in it and confused for lifetimes beyond number. The first step in learning how to undo this dilemma is knowing what is keeping it going. And that is prana. Now follows a great deal of verses all about prana. Why is so much attention being given to the subject of prana? Because, as I pointed out in the commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, prana/breath is the foundation of yoga sadhana along with shabda/sound. The entire technique of authentic yoga consists of mental intonation of Soham in time with the breath. Everything follows from that, incredibly simple as it is.

Then Bhargava of the Vidarbha country asked him [Pippalada,] Venerable sir, how many powers support the created world? How many illumine this? And who, again among them is the greatest?

To him, he said Ether verily is such a power—wind, fire, water, earth, speech, mind, eye and ear too. They, having illumined it, declare, we sustain and support this body.

Prana, the greatest of them, said to them, Do not cherish this delusion. I, alone, dividing myself fivefold, sustain and support this body.

They believed him not. Through pride, he seemed to go upward [from the body]. When he went up, all the others also went up. When he settled down, all others too settled down. This, as all the bees go up when the long bee goes up and as they settle down when the long bee settles down, even so, speech, mind, sight and hearing. They, being satisfied, praised Prana. (2.1-4)

“Ether verily is such a power—wind, fire, water, earth, speech, mind, eye and ear too.” The devas (gods) are those faculties that convey information to us. They are formed of one or more of the five elements: earth, water, fire, air and ether. Ether is the paramount element, for all the other four proceed from it and contain elements of it. Further, the five senses arise from earth (smell), water (taste), fire (sight), air (touch) and ether/akasha (hearing/speech). Only akasha has both an active and passive power: hearing and speech. The four have powers of perception, but not of projection or generation as does akasha. (Akasha is called both space and ether.) Akasha is the foundation of everything, even the creation. Sound arises from the akasha.

Sound and prana are the basis of yoga. Together they can liberate the consciousness of the yogi and reveal the Self and the Supreme Self.

When the various element/faculties boasted: “We sustain and support this body,” a heretofore unknown presence revealed itself. Prana spoke, admonishing them not to be deluded, but to realize that, dividing itself into the five lesser pranas or modes of itself, it alone was the support and sustainer of the body. The devas did not believe it, so prana just began to rise up from the body and they were carried

along with it. When the prana settled back into the body they returned along with it. Realizing that prana was their life and existence, they began to praise it.

We see from this that the five elements are modifications of the cosmic life, the Prana (Vishwaprana)—that although the body seems to be formed only of the five elements, the prana itself is the underlying substratum as the ocean is to the waves. The body, then, is really nothing but prana, as is everything else in the realm of relative existence. Even the smallest particle of the cosmos is the Universal Life in manifestation.

All the elements of the cosmos are rooted in prana. It is the same with the elements and the senses in the individual's body complex (for the human being has five bodies corresponding to the five elements). Just as the waves are in total dependence upon the ocean for their very being, so everything cosmic and microcosmic depend upon prana. Furthermore, the breath (also called prana) is the outermost, physical manifestation of prana. He who controls prana controls all, since prana is all. Therefore the elements praised Prana, saying:

As fire, he burns, he is the sun. He is the bountiful rain god; he is the wind. He is the earth, matter, god. He is being and non-being and what is immortal.

As spokes in the center of a wheel, everything is established in prana; the Rig [verses], the Yajus [formulas] and the samans [chants], as also sacrifice, valor and wisdom.

As the lord of creatures, you movest in the womb, it is then yourself that art born again. O prana, creatures—here bring offering to you who dwellest with the vital breaths.

Thou art the chief bearer [of offerings] to the gods; you are the first offering to the fathers, you are the true practice of the seers, descendants of Atharvan and Angiras.

Indra art you, O Prana, by your valor; Rudra art you as a protector. Thou movest in the atmosphere as the sun, the lord of the lights.

When you pourest down rain, then these creatures breathe [and] live in a state of bliss [thinking] that there will be food according to their desire.

Thou art ever pure, O Prana, the one seer, the eater, the real lord of all. We are the givers of what is to be eaten. O, all-pervading Air, you are our father.

That form of yours which is well-established in the speech or in the ear and in the eye, which exists continuously in the mind, make that auspicious, do not get away.

All this is under the control of prana, which is well established in the three worlds. Protect us as a mother her sons. Grant to us prosperity and wisdom. (2.5-13)

Prana, the universal life force, is all things. It is not just energy, it is also consciousness, for it is a manifestation of Brahman. Prana brings us into incarnation and takes us out of incarnation. It is the Life of all the living. It is Father

and Mother to all. In us, the breath is the direct manifestation of prana, which is why in the practice of yoga attention is given to the breath, combining it with sound, the other basis of relative existence that leads beyond to the Absolute.

Mastery is the result of evolution. Prana, the universal life force, must be known about and mastered. So:

Then Kausalya, the son of Ashwala, asked him [Pippalada]. Venerable Sir, whence is this prana born? How does it come into this body? And how does it distribute itself and establish itself? In what way does it depart? How does it support what is external? How [does it support] what relates to the Self? (3:1)

All these questions are going to be answered subsequently, so the only important point is the referring to Prana as a conscious being, which it is because it is the life of Brahman and therefore is Brahman. The fact that everything is conscious is a clear teaching of the Upanishads. Science considers itself extremely bold in cautiously approaching this concept and tentatively postulating it. Those in the West who bravely make the statement as evident fact are those whose thinking has, at least in its ancestry, been derived from the wisdom of India.

To him, he then said, You are asking questions which are [highly] transcendental. Because [I think] you are most devoted to Brahman, I will tell you. (3:2)

This I have seen for myself in India. The great saints just will not bother with the idly curious and the hopelessly shallow. But they will gladly speak with those who are seeking the knowledge of Reality. Once I made the mistake of taking a Western spiritual wanderer to meet Maitri Devi, a beloved saint in New Delhi. When he told her he wanted to ask some questions, she replied in Hindi: "I do not speak English." When he asked if someone could translate his questions she again responded: "I do not speak English." So I said to him quietly: "Tell me your questions and I will ask them." For quite some time he would softly tell me his questions and I would ask them (in English!) and she would readily answer through a translator. I appreciated her kindness to me, but I also decided to never again bother her with roamabouts. Other saints I met would do the same, some diplomatically, others not very tactfully.

We should learn from this and question ourselves as to why we seek and study: to eventually reach the knowledge of God, or just to cram more ideas into our head to show how wise we are? Yogananda often spoke of those who had "spiritual indigestion" from cramming useless philosophy into their minds.

But Kausalya is a worthy questioner, so the sage replies:

This prana is born of the Self. As in the case of a person there is this shadow, so is this [prana] connected [with the Self]. It comes into this body by the activity of the mind. (3:3)

Just as the cosmos is an extension of the Consciousness that is Brahman, in the same way our individual prana is an extension of our Self (Atman). It is inseparable from the Self because it is the Self. This is the authentic non-duality (advaita) of the Upanishads, not a negation or denial of either Prakriti or Prana. Seeing them as separate from Spirit and therefore dual, not acknowledging their innate reality, is an error.

Prana provides the continuity between our present and past lives. It is also the force that enables the continuation of our evolution from past lives and carries us through this present life and future ones as well. Prana truly is Life itself.

This verse also tells us that karma is a matter of the mind, and not some external force. Change the mind and you change the karma or even dissolve it. It need never extend into our external existence. “Working out” or “fulfilling” karma is not a compelling necessity. We are never slaves to karma. We are its creators and its masters, at least potentially. But we have forgotten that fact and lost control of our karma. It must be regained if we would be free.

As a sovereign commands his officers, saying, You superintend such and such villages, even so does this prana allot the other vital breaths to their respective places. (3:4)

We usually speak of “five pranas,” but there is really only pure prana and its four modifications, also called pranas. Here is the definition of Prana found in *A Brief Sanskrit Glossary*: “Life; vital energy; life-breath; life-force; inhalation. In the human body the prana is divided into five forms: 1) Prana, the prana that moves upward; 2) Apana: The prana that moves downward, producing the excretory functions in general. 3) Vyana: The prana that holds prana and apana together and produces circulation in the body. 4) Samana: The prana the carries the grosser material of food to the apana and brings the subtler material to each limb; the general force of digestion. 5) Udana: The prana which brings up or carries down what has been drunk or eaten; the general force of assimilation.” If this is kept in mind the following will be more comprehensible and meaningful.

The out-breath is in the organs of excretion and generation, the life breath as such is in the eye and ear as also in the mouth and nose. In the middle is the equalizing breath. It is this that equalizes whatever is offered as food. From this arise the seven flames.

In the heart is this Self. Here are these hundred and one arteries. To each one of these belong a hundred smaller arteries to each of these belong seventy-two thousand branching arteries. Within them moves the diffused breath.

Now, rising upward through one of these the up-breath leads, in consequence of good [work] to the good world, in consequence of evil to the evil world, in consequence of both to the world of men. (3:5-7)

Prana brings us into the body, prana sustains the body as long as we need it and

then leads us into the astral world and either beyond or back into earthly birth, according to our karma.

Since each of us is a reflection of the universe, there is a cosmic pranic arrangement also, so the sage continues:

The sun, verily, rises as the external life for it is that which helps the life breath in the eye. The divinity which is in the earth supports a person's outbreath. What is between [the sun and the earth] is the equalizing breath. Air is the diffused breath.

Fire, verily, is the upbreath. Therefore, he whose fire [of life] has ceased, goes to rebirth, with his senses sunk in mind.

Whatever is one's thinking, therewith one enters into life. His life combined with fire along with the Self leads to whatever world has been fashioned [in thought]. (3:8-10)

This final principle is the most important. It is expanded in the Gita in this way: "At the time of death he who remembers me while giving up the body attains my Being—of this there is no doubt. Moreover, whatever he fixes his mind on when he gives up the body at the end, to that he goes. Always he becomes that. Therefore at all times remember me, and fight with your mind and intellect fixed on me. Thus without doubt you shall come to me. With mind made steadfast by yoga, which turns not to anything else, to the Divine Supreme Spirit he goes, meditating on him" (8:5-8).

The importance of knowing the functions of prana by direct experience (through yoga practice) is summed up by the sage, saying:

The wise one who knows prana thus, to him there shall be no lack of offspring. He becomes immortal. As to this, there is this verse:

The birth, the entrance, the abode, the fivefold over-lordship and the relation to Self of the prana, knowing these one obtains immortality, knowing these one obtains immortality. (3:11-12)

For, as the other Upanishads declare: Prana is Brahman.

Then Gargya, the grandson of Surya, asked him [Pippalada], Venerable Sir, what are they that sleep in this person? What are they that keep awake in him? What is the god that sees the dreams? Whose is this happiness? In whom, pray, are all these established? (4.1)

Anyone who ponders the nature of consciousness comes to realize that there are three modes of experience: waking, dream, and dreamless sleep. All three of these states are experienced by a single witness who says: "I slept without dream," "I slept and dreamed," and "I am now awake." Who is that witness? This is Gargya's inquiry. Who is the unchanging witness of change? Who is the unseen seer? For no intelligent person of unclouded intellect can doubt the existence of such a one.

To him, then, he said, O Gargya, as all the rays of the setting sun become one in this circle of light and as they spread forth when he rises again and again, even so does all this become one in the supreme god, the mind. Therefore, in that state, the person hears not, sees not, smells not, tastes not, touches not, speaks not, takes not, rejoices not, emits not, moves not. [Then] they say, he sleeps.

The fires of prana alone remain awake in this city. The householder's fire is the out-breath. The [southern] sacrificial fire is the diffused breath. The in-breath is the oblation fire, from being taken, since it is taken from the householder's fire.

The equalizing breath is so called because it equalizes the two oblations, the in-breathing and the out-breathing. The mind, indeed is the sacrificer. The fruit of sacrifice is the upbreath. It leads the sacrificer every day to Brahman. (4.2-4)

Prana is the primal life-force or vital energy. The prana that manifests in the evolving universe also manifests in the evolving body of each human being. In the body there are five basic forms of prana as already listed in the definition of Prana. The pranas also correspond to the five elements: earth (prithvi), water (apa), fire (tejas), air (vayu), and ether (akasha). One of these five elements is the foundation for one of the five senses: earth=smell, water=taste, fire=sight, air=touch, and ether=hearing/speech.

In the waking state all the pranas are quite active and fundamentally outflowing, even those that maintain the internal functions of the body that are externalized through being expended in the fulfillment of their tasks. But in sleep they withdraw into the inner reservoirs of the body and the state of sleep occurs. On the subtlest energy level they withdraw into the manas, the energy field we call the mind. For the mind is the highest sense, being the sum and goal of them all. It is not amiss to say that the senses serve the mind, at least when the right order prevails. Otherwise they drag the mind helplessly along addicting and enslaving it. Breaking the web of this addiction-slavery is then impossible without the refinement of the pranas.

When the pranas withdraw into the mind, their distracting activities lessen unless they occupy and overwhelm the mind with constant and vivid dreaming. When (if) the mind is thus granted a reprieve from their clamor, it begins to sense what is behind it, just as it is behind the senses. The mind is the witness of the senses, but it is also itself witnessed. That ultimate witness is the Self. Therefore the Upanishad says that in sleep the mind is led nearer to the Self (Brahman).

Where do dreams come from? Gargya has not asked, but Pippalada tells him:

There, in sleep, that god [mind] experiences greatness. He sees again whatever object has been seen, he hears again whatever has been heard, he experiences again and again whatever has been experienced in different places and directions. What has been seen and not been seen, what has been heard and what has not been heard, what has been experienced and what has not

been experienced, what is existent and what is non-existent, he sees all, being all he sees [all]. (4.5)

Everyone is creative in the dream state, though some are definitely better writer/directors of their inner movies than others.

When he is overcome with light, then in this state, the god [mind] sees no dreams. Then here in this body arises this happiness. (4.6)

From the very first yogis have spoken of the importance of the dreamless deep sleep state they call sushupti. This is because in dreamless sleep we are aware of awareness itself with no interference from the senses. This is the light we are “overcome” by. We are aware deep within ourselves, aware of our nature as simple, pure consciousness. Dreamless sleep is also proof that the Self exists. For although no objects are presented to the mind, there is a witness of that non-experiencing. Otherwise we would not awaken and say: “I slept but had no dreams at all.” Instead we would not know any time had passed, would not even know that we had been asleep. That witness which cognizes the waking, dream and dreamless states is the Atman itself.

There is a higher form “when sushupti [the dreamless sleep state] is rightly cognized [experienced] while conscious,” says the Shandilya Upanishad (2:46). In that state we are “asleep while awake” and are fully conscious of the fact. This is very near the actual experience of the Self and partakes of that experience to some degree, the happiness and ease we feel being a touch of the joy (ananda) that is the nature of the Self. It is extremely valuable because it shows us that when all sensory experience is gone beyond there yet remains the truth of ourselves in the form of pure, unconditioned consciousness that is the Self.

In deep meditation we enter this state intentionally and begin working our inner transformation from this center.

Even as birds resort to a tree for a resting-place so does everything here resort to the Supreme Self. They all find their rest in the Supreme Self.

Earth and the elements of earth, water and the elements of water, fire and the elements of fire, air and the elements of air, ether and the elements of ether, sight and what can be seen, hearing and what can be heard, smell and what can be smelled, taste and what can be tasted, the skin and what can be touched, speech and what can be spoken, hands and what can be handled, the organ of generation and what can be enjoyed, the organ of excretion and what can be excreted, the feet and what can be walked, the mind and what can be perceived, the intellect and what can be conceived, the Self-sense and what can be connected with the Self, thought and what can be thought, radiance and what can be illumined, life-breath and what can be supported by it. (4.7-8)

All the things listed here ultimately come to rest in the Supreme Self (Paramatman) because That is their origin. They are returning to their source after

ages upon ages of separation in relative existence/experience.

He, verily, is the seer, the toucher, the hearer, the smeller, the taster, the perceiver, the knower, the doer, the thinking Self, the person. He becomes established in the Supreme Undecaying Self. (4.9)

“He” refers to the individual Self which is the experiencer in all beings, the knower of all things, and the doer of all acts. This points out the fact that Maya (illusion) is the misperception of things, not perception itself. Also, sense experience, thought, and actions are not illusions. It is our misunderstanding of them that is illusion. The Self is real and its experiences are real. It is true that they are purely mental in nature, but is the mind not real? Again, it is a matter of how we perceive.

The Self is a wave of the ocean of Brahman the Absolute whose nature is Consciousness. The Self is immutable, and beyond it there is nothing else, for in essence it is one with Brahman, the ultimate Being. Yet, the Self needs to attain itself, needs to attain the consciousness of its Being which is Brahman. Therefore the sage says further:

He who knows the shadowless, bodiless, colorless, pure, undecaying Self attains verily, the Supreme, Undecaying [Self]. He who knows thus becomes omniscient, [becomes] all. As to this, there is this verse:

He who knows that Undecaying [Self] in which are established the Self of the nature of intelligence, the vital breaths and the elements along with all the gods [powers] becomes omniscient and enters all. (4.10-11)

This is most important, for it indicates that first we know the Self—the individual Self, the jivatman—and then we are enabled to know the Supreme Self, the Paramatman: Brahman. And the Self we will know is immortal, luminous, beyond diminishment or differentiation, always exactly what it is, perfectly non-dual, neither inside or outside of any thing. It cannot be contained, so it is bodiless. It is “colorless” in the sense that it has no relative or objective qualities or characteristics, but is always I AM. All of this indicate that the Self is the same as Brahman. And the Self that knows its Self, Brahman, does in truth come to know all things, being one with the Self in all things. Omniscience and omnipresence are experienced by that liberated spirit who knows its oneness with the All.

So far the questions put to Pippalada have been about the components of the human organism which both empower and limit it. In the last section the subject of the Self was considered, specifically the nature of the Self and the results of knowing the Self. Now we approach the subject of the way in which the Self is known. Without knowing this, all the foregoing teaching is pointless.

Then, Sukesha, son of Bharadwaja, asked him, Venerable Sir, Hiranyanabha, a prince of the Kosala kingdom approached me and asked this question: Bharadwaja do you know the person with sixteen parts? I replied to

that prince, I know him not. If I had known him, why should I not tell you about it? Verily to his roots, he withers, who speaks untruth. Therefore, it is not proper for me to speak untruth. In silence he mounted his chariot and departed. I ask you about him, where is that person? (6.1)

This is an introduction to the teachings of this section, but it also contains a couple of interesting points.

The Self is said in this verse to have sixteen parts. Yet the Self is one, so how can this be? The Upanishad is referring to the extensions or instruments of the Self by means of which it manifests within relative existence. They will be enumerated shortly.

It is impressive when a spiritual teacher honestly admits to not knowing something. In a filmed interview, Carl Jung was asked what he thought some dream symbol meant. He laughed and said: “I haven’t the faintest idea!”

Here we see the integrity of Sukesha who readily admitted not knowing the answer to a question. And he gives the reason for his admission, saying: “Surely he who speaks what is not true withers away to the very root; therefore I should not speak untruth.” Satya, truthfulness, is one of the essential observances of Yoga, according to Patanjali, and here we see why. This should be taken to heart by us throughout our life. Sri Ramakrishna said that a person can realize God by scrupulously adhering to truth. On the other hand, a person who speaks untruth will wither in his body, mind and soul. For a lie carries within it the vibration of anti-truth, of death. Since the power of speech is a human being’s most powerful faculty, a single lie uttered is poisonous to his entire being. Through lies a person loses himself utterly. I knew a man who in one part of his mind was insane as a result of continually lying to himself and others.

To him he said, Even here, within the body is that person in whom these sixteen parts arise. (6.2)

How precious, then, is the human body! And how foolish it is to think that spiritual experience will involve escaping from the body and flying off to some spiritual realm to hobnob with angels and masters.

Now he will describe the sequence of cosmic manifestation.

He [the person] thought [in himself]: In whose departure shall I be departing? And in whose settling down shall I be settling down? (6.3)

This is a problem for both the infinite and the finite Selves.

He created prana; from prana, faith, ether, air, light, water, earth, sense organ, mind and food; from food, vital vigor, austerity, [Vedic] hymns, works, worlds and in the worlds, name. (6.4)

The world was made by the mere thought of God. As said before, this is the dream of God; it is all creative thought. Merely thinking of something gets us human beings nowhere: we have to bring it into manifestation by action and

materials. But this is not the case with God. He thought; and so it was. Consequently, in the following list of cosmic ingredients, we must think of them as cosmic thoughts.

Prana. First the Universal Life Force (vishwaprana) was manifested. This was the formless, basic substance of relative existence.

Faith. Next came the power of intention or aspiration. For unless we are motivated with the idea that something can be attained, we will not act. So the power to desire or will, and thereby to shape and work with the cosmic prana, is absolutely necessary for anything to happen. The Sanskrit word is *shraddha*. This was used, Shankara says in his commentary, to mean a stimulus to the individual spirits (jivas). That is, subliminally all of us know that we have come from God and are intended to return to God. With this aspiration as the deepest impulse of our being, we are moving up the evolutionary path, ever onward, however many delays our ignorance and laziness may bring about.

Space [akasha], air, fire, water, earth. the great primal elements and all their variations down to their material manifestations.

The sense organs. Actually, the word is *indriyam*, which means “organs” and often does mean only the five organs of perception (jnanendriyas): ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose, but Shankara feels (and so do I) that it no doubt includes the five organs of action (karmendriyas): voice, hand, foot, organ of excretion, and the organ of generation. The indriyas are here being thought of as sheaths of the individual consciousness as well as being instruments of bodily function.

Mind. The indriyas are unconscious. That which activates them is the mind which both perceives and acts through them.

Food. By this term is meant all that goes to affect the evolving consciousness, from physical food to psychological and intellectual impressions that shape and move our development either forward or backward, according to their character. That this is so is demonstrated by those things that are said to be made from food:

Vital vigor. Virya is the strength and energy that manifests in body, mind, and intellect, and especially as will power in the yogi.

Austerity. Tapasya is the application of practical spiritual disciplines, such as moral observances, self-purification, and the practice of meditation. Their practice is impossible without virya to empower it. Thus the yogi is careful about his diet because virya comes from food. Therefore only food that increases the life force should be eaten and not that which brings degeneration and death over a period of time. Furthermore, those without virya do not have the ability to sustain yogic practice or discipline. Consequently brahmacharya is a requisite for successful yoga practice, and that, too, is affected by diet.

Vedic hymns. The word is not Veda, but *mantra*: words of power which produce changes spiritually, mentally and physically by their repetition. From vigor comes the capacity for spiritual discipline, which is manifested in the form of the repetition (japa) and meditation (dhyana) centered on mantras. The vedic hymns

and their verses are indeed powerful mantras, but mantra includes so much more, especially the Soham mantra which is the basis of sadhana.

Works. The actual word is *karma*, a very wide and far-reaching matter, indeed. Here it means the law of action/reaction which fuels the very existence of the world and our bodies within it. Karma causes the manifestation of the cosmos and impels all sentient beings to take incarnation within it in forms appropriate to their level of consciousness and the nature of their past deeds, both physical and mental. Certainly merit-producing actions are part of karma, but karma is much more and includes the practice of yoga.

The worlds. The many worlds (*lokas*) are produced in response to the varying degrees of evolution and past karma of the sentient beings within them.

And in the worlds (he created) names. The prime factor in relative existence is *nama*: name. This seems very peculiar to those whose philosophy does not postulate that everything is ideation (thought). But the primeval sages of India perceived through their meditation that the thoughtform, the *idea* that is the matrix around which the body-vehicle of any manifested entity forms itself, is that entity's "name." In the depths of their meditation the sages perceived the primal idea of each thing. Since everything is formed of vibration, they translated that into spoken forms. In all other languages a word is just an agreed-upon symbol of an object, but in Sanskrit each word is a sound-form of the basic energy pattern of the designated object. Sanskrit is a kind of sonic physics: creative speech. For that reason Sanskrit script is called Devanagari, The City of the Gods, meaning that the divine powers manifesting as all objects are inherent in the Sanskrit words. In the subtle levels of being the Sanskrit word is the thing designated by the word.

These are the sixteen parts of the cosmic and the individual Selves.

As these flowing rivers tending towards the ocean, on reaching the ocean, disappear, their name-shape [nama-rupa] broken up, and are called simply the ocean, even so of this seer, these sixteen parts tending towards the person, on reaching the person, disappear, their name-shape broken up, and are called simply the person. That one is without parts, immortal. As to that there is this verse:

In whom the parts are well established as spokes in the center of the wheel, know him as the person to be known, so that death may not afflict you (6.5-6)

There is an important principle here: All that exists has emanated from the Cosmic Self and is withdrawn into It. And the same is true of our many levels: they have come from our true Self and will remerge in our Self. The idea that the world is to be discarded or escaped from so we can be free, is as illusory as the world from which we wish to rid ourselves. It is ignorance alone that we need to banish. We need to refine all our bodies through the practice of tapasya so they will be seen as nothing more than the projections of our mind: projections that can be reabsorbed in the state of perfect knowing. The macrocosm and the microcosm are both proper

to Spirit and spirit. They are not impositions or prisons, though we make them so, but rays of the Self. They exist because we exist.

The only path to the Self is that of realization through yoga. Once that realization arises within us, death dissolves and immortality alone remains.

To them, then, he [Pippalada] said, Only thus far do I know of that Supreme Brahman. There is naught higher than that. (6.7)

So anything more we may say, that has not already been said in the Upanishads (and the Gita), will really be of no worth and pointless. What is needed now is to become genuine yogis. Then we will truly know That Which Is To Be Known.

They praised him [and said]: You, indeed, are our father who takes us across to the other shore of ignorance.

Salutation to the supreme seers. Salutation to the supreme seers. (6.8)

Those who teach us the truth of the Self and the way to realize the Self are our true fathers, enabling us to enter into true Being. They are worthy of worship (archanam) and all honor. They are the gods that lead us to God.

Namah Paramarishibhyah—Salutations to the Great Rishis!

The Mundaka Upanishad

It is an interesting trait of the Western mind that it wants encapsulations of things, lists of essentials, advice on shortcuts, and “what is the one thing?...” in every department of life and thought. Whether this is a desire for efficiency or a form of intellectual minimalism or outright laziness—it varies from person to person. Nevertheless, “getting to the heart of the matter” is something dear to the heart of Americans, especially. They are not alone in this attitude. The Upanishads reflect the same mentality. Perhaps that is why Vivekananda considered the West, and America particularly, as being more suited to the teachings of the Upanishads than the contemporary East.

In the first section of the Mundaka Upanishad we find the highest expression of this attitude:

Brahma arose as the first among the gods, the maker of the universe, the protector of the world. He taught the knowledge of Brahman, the foundation of all knowledges, to Atharvan, his eldest son.

That knowledge of Brahman, which Brahma taught to Atharvan, and Atharvan in olden times told Angiras, he [in his turn] taught it to Satyavaha, son of Bharadwaja, and the son of Bharadwaja to Angiras—both the higher and the lower [knowledge].

Shaunaka, the great householder, duly approached Angiras and asked, through what being known, Venerable Sir, does all this become known? (1.1.1-3)

According to Indian texts, at the beginning of the present creation cycle Brahma, that person who was destined to be the creator/projector of the three lower worlds, awoke to find himself in infinite, empty space. At first he felt fear, but then he laughed at his foolishness, for there was no one there but him. Who would he fear? Then he pondered his situation, attempting to comprehend it. At one point a great voice resounded all around him, saying a single word: *Tapa*: “do tapasya.” This awakened Brahma’s memory of yoga meditation, so he began to meditate. After some time he attained full memory of his past as well as the knowledge of how to create the worlds: which he did. He also became established in direct perception of Brahman.

Among his “children” brought forth through his meditation was Atharva, to whom he taught the way to realize Brahman, who being everything, is the One Thing which when known all things are known. We have already been told by the preceding Upanishads that the knowledge of Brahman, Brahmanvidya, is the foundation of all knowledge. But Shaunaka has a very salutary impatience and ambition. He wants to know what is the one thing which, being known, causes all to be known. This is both a wise quest and a wise attitude.

Little Red Riding Hood ended up in the wolf's stomach because she dawdled on the way instead of going straight to her destination. If we look at the history of religions we will find that the countries which produce the most enlightened persons are those countries which have produced empires. For when such people turn to spiritual life they become imperialists of the spirit and go after the loftiest spiritual attainments. They seek out the most direct way and go there. Shaunaka is one of them, and hopefully so are we.

Knowledge is the subject of the question, so Angiras lays a foundation for his answer.

To him he said, two kinds of knowledge are to be known, as, indeed, the knowers of Brahman declare—the higher as well as the lower.

Of these, the lower is the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda, the Atharva Veda, Phonetics, Ritual, Grammar, Etymology, Metrics and Astrology. And the higher is that by which the Undecaying [Akshara] is apprehended. (1.1.4-5)

Now we should look at this very carefully. First of all, who do we believe? When I first emerged from the deadly cocoon of fundamentalist Protestantism my intellectual world was quite simple—simplistic, actually. Fortunately I first read the Bhagavad Gita and then *Autobiography of a Yogi*. The next step was to get out of my deadly environment, so within a few months I was on the plane to California and wider horizons.

But I discovered in a short time that wider horizons can have a drawback. I began encountering just about every shade of philosophical and religious thought and attitude, most of them incompatible with each other. Almost daily I was told conflicting things, and always with the utmost confidence. I loved being in the wide-open mental spaces of California, but which way should I go? Who could (or should) I trust?

Since I had been shaken out of my spiritual entombment by learning of the yoga tradition, I wisely followed the principle that only those who know God really know anything. So I sought out the teachings of illumined yogis of past and present, discarding those inauspicious Indian teachers who claimed to have a new revelation for a new age, and only paying attention to those who were right in the center of the Eternal Dharma. Once somebody asked me what a great yogi's "distinctive teachings" were. "None!" I replied with satisfaction. "If he taught anything 'new' I would have nothing to do with him. Truth is eternal." I appreciated it if the English of a book was good and free from typos, and expressed in a way that someone in the twentieth century like myself could comprehend, but I wanted to know what all the great yogis throughout history knew: the tried and proven way to God.

My great blessing was being able to trek many times to the Vedanta Bookshop in Hollywood. There I found an abundance of eternal wisdom, the same wisdom that had been flowing in a life-giving stream for countless ages like the holy Ganga. The Ganga that emerges at Gangotri high in the Himalayas is the same Ganga that flows

into the ocean at Gangasagar. In the same way I found on the shelves of that little shop the same truth spoken by the primeval sages of India. All this prepared me for India where, as a friend of ours once said about the same pilgrimage, “I got the idea.” And have treasured it ever since.

So “two kinds of knowledge are to be known, as, indeed, the knowers of Brahman declare—the higher as well as the lower.” The lower, they say, is the knowledge of scriptures, ritual and philosophy, including, by the way, astrology. Please note that they do not denounce these things as useless or as ignorance. They are definitely said to be knowledge, and a sensible person appreciates and learns them to a reasonable and practical degree. But it must be understood that “the higher is knowledge of that by which one knows the changeless reality” which is Brahman.

The knowledge which enables us To Know is to be sought for and prized above all else. While writing this previous sentence I could clearly hear in memory the recorded voice of Yogananda saying: “I walked my feet off from Cape Cormorin to the Himalayas” in search of the knowledge that would reveal God to him.

The lesser knowledge tells us only of that which changes, including our own short physical life. But the higher knowledge brings us to the Changeless Reality.

That which is ungraspable, without family, without caste, without sight or hearing, without hands or feet, eternal, all-pervading, omnipresent, exceedingly subtle, that is the Undecaying which the wise perceive as the source of beings. (1.1.6)

The Absolute Consciousness, the Totality of Being, is shown to the wise, to the yogis, by this knowledge.

What about this world in which we find ourselves? Is it to be despised as worthless and antithetical to Brahman, our Goal? Angiras further says:

As a spider sends forth and draws in [its thread], as herbs grow on the earth, as the hair [grows] on the head and the body of a living person, so from the Imperishable arises here the universe. (1.1.7)

The world, then, is an extension or emanation of Brahman. In other words, Brahman is the world. We are living and moving in divinity manifesting as the world. Why, then, do we say that the world is illusory? It is the world in our mind, our perception, our interpretation of the world that is an illusion, not the world itself.

In Indian texts we often find the simile of the snake in a rope or a man in a tree stump. That is, in darkness we see a rope lying on the ground and immediately see a snake lying there. We see the glitter of its eyes and may even hear it hiss! Yet, when a light is brought we see only a rope. The rope was always real, was always there, but the snake was an illusion that existed only in our mind. In the same way, walking in the darkness we may see a dead tree and mistake it for a human being, taking its branches for arms. We may even see the arms move and think we see a

face looking at us. But when we come closer we see it is only a tree, and a dead one at that. The tree was real, but the man was not. Illusion is never an objective thing, and yet is nevertheless real as a mental phenomenon. So it is illusion and ignorance we must decry, but never find fault with the world, for the world is Brahman.

In both instances, rope and tree, we may experience great fear. But the moment we see them for what they really are, our fear evaporates and we are at peace. This is how it is with us and this world. Our illusions fill us with terrible fears and anxieties, all of which will be dispelled when we see its actual nature as Brahman. No wonder, then, that Krishna told Arjuna: “Even a little of this dharma protects from great fear” (Bhagavad Gita 2:40).

The sage now gives us an outline of the process of the emanation of the world from Brahman.

By contemplative power Brahman expands. From that food is produced. From food, life [thence] mind, [thence] the reals [the five elements]; [thence] the worlds, [thence the rituals] in the rituals, immortality. (1.1.8)

Creation is also spoken of as expansions from Brahman, and that is the mode here. “Brahman” comes from the root word *brih*, which means “to expand.” Brahman first expands as primordial energy/matter. From this comes the intelligence inherent in creation, then the elements and the various worlds in which they predominate. The final ingredient, though, comes from the sentient beings within the universe: karma. God supplies the stage and we supply the actions and reactions which unfold upon the stage.

He who is all-knowing and all-wise, whose austerity consists of knowledge, from him are born this Brahma [Hiranyagarbha], name-shape and food. (1.1.9)

No wonder, then, that in the Gita we find the words: “Brahman is the offering, Brahman is the oblation poured out by Brahman into the fire of Brahman. Brahman is to be attained by him who always sees Brahman in action” (Bhagavad Gita 4:24).

The lower knowledge leads to the higher knowledge, so the Upanishad is returning to the lower knowledge and its practice as the way to the higher knowledge.

The next seven verses deal with the agnihotra sacrifice (literally, not symbolically) and have no relevance to us so I am omitting them.

Abiding in the midst of ignorance, wise in their own esteem, thinking themselves to be learned, fools, afflicted with troubles, go about like blind men led by one who is himself blind. (1.2.8)

“They be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” said Jesus (Matthew 15:14), surely having this verse in mind.

“Afflicted with troubles.” How true. Promising others the cessation of all

troubles and sorrows, these religious mountebanks are more afflicted than ordinary people. (Some even commit suicide.) Whether this is from the negative karma accruing from their dishonesty or a manifestation of their own inner diseases, the result is the same. “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption,” as Saint Peter (II Peter 2:19) put it. Such hucksters and their dupes literally undergo “the sufferings of the damned.” And all the while they denounce those taking another path as deluded and of the devil. Well, as Jesus said: “They have their reward” (Matthew 6:2). And they must like it, for they certainly cling to it. Such is the grave danger of externalized religion.

The immature, living manifoldly in ignorance, think: We have accomplished our aim. Since those who perform rituals do not understand [the truth] because of attachment, therefore they sink down, wretched, when their worlds [i.e. the fruits of their merits] are exhausted. (1.2.9)

Foolish children are those spoken about in these verses. They are not evil, only undeveloped, ignorant and without good judgment. Nevertheless, their poor judgment keeps them from knowing the truth, and their attachments to egoic and earthly things drags them down from the lower heavens to which those who engage in external religion go after death. Because of this they are misery-stricken as they fall and after they enter another mortal body.

These deluded men, regarding sacrifices and works of merits as most important, do not know any other good. Having enjoyed in the high place of heaven won by good deeds, they enter again this world or a still lower one. (1.2.10)

Rituals of worship and good deeds certainly produce good karma, but that is not the force that lifts us above samsara, the ever-turning wheel of birth and death. If our religion consists only of outer observances it will condition our consciousness even more to identify with the material level of existence. And that identification will be a round-trip ticket for our return to another birth after another death.

Even helping others is spiritually valueless if it is not done with a wider, spiritual perspective. One of the hallmarks of today’s ineffectual religion is its obsessive involvement in social action and reform. When we look at the lives of saints we see they were the most generous of people, even sacrificing themselves for others. But they did these things not as their religion, but as an expression of their love for God and his children: which is the true religion.

We must not be those who “do not know any other good,” but must seek the Highest Good within through meditation and the cultivation of spiritual consciousness even outside meditation. Unless we do this we will find ourselves shuttled right back to earth on completion of our “heaven karma.”

But those who practice austerity and faith in the forest, the tranquil knowers who live the life of a mendicant, depart freed from sin, through the

door of the sun to where dwells the immortal, imperishable person. (1.2.11)

Obviously those being spoken about are yogis living in solitude, engaged in tapasya and meditation. Such who purify themselves sufficiently will leave this world of rebirth behind and enter through the sun into the higher worlds. To better understand their character a look at some of the Sanskrit terms in this verse will be helpful to us.

The wise are said to be *aranye*—living in the forest. At the time of the Gita, many serious sadhakas lived on the outskirts of towns, preferring to live in the wooded areas where neighbors would not be visible, even if somewhat near. This ideal is found twice in the Gita: “Unswerving devotion to me with single-minded yoga, living in secluded places, having distaste for association with many people” (Bhagavad Gita 13:10). And: “Dwelling in a solitary place, eating lightly (what is easily digested), with speech, body and mind controlled, constantly devoted to yoga meditation, taking refuge in vairagya, forsaking egotism, force, pride, desire, anger, possessiveness, freed from the notion of ‘mine’ and peaceful—he is fit for union with Brahman” (Bhagavad Gita 18:52-53). It is not a matter of surrounding vegetation, but the inward withdrawal from outer association that is being praised here. Even in a crowded city we can live in the forest of inner solitude. In the thirteenth chapter of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, the master yogi, Ram Gopal Muzumdar, asked Yogananda: “Are you able to have a little room where you can close the door and be alone?” When he said that he did have such a room, the saint told him: “That is your cave. That is your sacred mountain. That is where you will find the kingdom of God.” Though that is so, still the aspiring yogi should be extremely sparing of social contacts, and then only with those who benefit him spiritually.

The first words of this verse in Sanskrit describe the wise as *tapahshraddhe*—an interesting fusion of tapasya and shraddha: ascetic discipline and faith. Shraddha in this instance means aspiration more than faith. Many people engage in spiritual practice for the wrong reasons, but the right one is a confidence in one’s ability to attain Self-realization. Tapah literally means to generate heat, so tapahshraddha can also mean heat-generating faith or aspiration, that which heats us up, builds the proverbial fire under us, gets us moving and keeps us moving. Tapasya is the energy generator of the wise directed by their assurance that the Goal exists and is within grasp. Tapahshraddha is the radiance (tejas) that fills the proficient yogi. In the Chandogya Upanishad, when a young man returns from a long period of tapasya, his teacher said to him: “Your face shines like that of one who knows Brahman” (Chandogya Upanishad 4:14:2). This is the effect of tapahshraddha.

The wise are *vidvamsah*—learned. They not only practice, they study and learn and assimilate what they have learned. There is no place in spiritual life for pious ignorance. Sentimental dummies are not devotees, they are fools. And fools do not find God. It is very true that many people get what Yogananda called “intellectual indigestion” from reading loads of theories and trivia. But the wise carefully choose books of spiritual wisdom such as scriptures, lives of holy people and the writings

and teachings of those who possess genuine inner illumination. Such books can never do anything but good. It is especially necessary to read the teachings of realized yogis.

Naturally, they will have to use their own good sense as to whose words are worthwhile and whose are worthless or even poisonous. They will not have a library of thousands of books, but they will have a goodly number of spiritual gems which they will perpetually read and ponder. And if they are wise they read one chapter of the Gita daily. Certainly they will not spend hours a day on reading, but they will allot an appropriate amount of time for it each day.

Fake teachers and cults hate what I have just written, insisting that “loyal” and “in tune” cultists will read nothing but what the cult authorizes, so the dupes will not “get confused.” This only reveals their proprietary and predatory nature and motivation. Their “protection” of their “sheep” is nothing less than the “protective custody” of the Nazi death camps. They fear that if their followers become informed as to the real nature of religion and interior life they will realize they are being lied to and will sensibly go elsewhere and find real truth. And that is bad for business.

Now comes an interesting adjective: *virajah*—beyond (free from) rajas. This may seem odd, but some yogis, especially beginners, are very rajasic. First of all, they want to tell everyone they are yogis, and they often accumulate spiritual “stuff” of all kinds. They begin to star in their own spiritual movie and some of them make quite an epic. Their motives are perfectly all right, even laudable, but they are rajasic, filled with activity and passion for getting on to the Goal. The intentions are good, but the feverishness and externalization is not.

For a lot of people, when the rajas fizzles out so does their impetus toward God. Most abandon any form of spiritual life, while others settle down to a comfortable and ineffectual life in some yoga cult that makes them feel secure and one of the chosen. But what is needed is for the rajasic heat to mutate into the steady warmth and radiance of sattwa. Then the aspiration and involvement actually increases, but in a fully effectual way: an increasingly interior way. Spiritual life changes from a compulsion to an intelligent choice. Spiritual restlessness becomes steadiness in spiritual practice and development. God is no longer the brass ring to strain at, but an ever-present Reality whose perception keeps on increasing in a naturally supernatural way.

And the result of all this? The Upanishad says: “*prayanti suryadvarena*,” which Shankara says means: “they move superbly [skillfully] along the path of the sun.” That is, they ascend steadily and skillfully to the solar world, the realm of the Self-existent Light that is Brahman.

Having scrutinized the worlds won by works, let a Brahmana arrive at non-attachment [nirvedam]. The [world] that is not made is not [won] by what is done. For the sake of this knowledge, let him only approach, with sacrificial fuel in hand, a teacher who is learned in the scriptures and established in Brahman. (1.2.12)

Anyone whose spiritual conscious is awakened can rightly be called a Brahmin. Such a one will, “after having examined all these worlds that are gained by works, acquire freedom from desires.” Back in high school I came across an eighteenth-century collection of humor and satire. I have forgotten most of it, but there was one story about a man who fell in love with a woman he often saw at the theater when all lighting came from candles, and in that light she looked stunningly beautiful. He got the courage to ask her if he could visit her at home in the daytime. She agreed, and in the daylight he saw that she was horrible-looking, incredibly old, wore a wig and loads of make-up. He fell out of love instantly! It is the same with this and all other worlds and the enjoyments they offer in return for good karma. It is all deathly illusion. What we need is the light of spiritual day.

Seeing the world clearly is the only lasting antidote for the poison of worldliness. First we approach the matter intellectually. Just the fact of inevitable death should begin to turn us from attachment, and the fact that nothing lasts should seal our disillusionment. Yet, old habits do indeed die hard, and there is no habit as strongly entrenched as attraction to the world and its promises. So discipline is needed.

The wise aspirant must exert his will and refuse to even give a thought to the “good things” offered by the world, things that will melt away in time, and that often prove to be anything but good. Look at those who have worldly success. For many of them misery and confusion is their daily bread, but those who envy them are convinced that they have found the way to happiness. We must in contrast refuse to even look at the mirages held out to us by the world and our own habit-deluded mind.

How will we cure the mind of its awful addictions? Meditation cures the fevers of the mind and heart and dispels the hallucinations produced by illusions and desires. The only way to be absorbed in meditation is to be constantly cultivating interior consciousness through constant japa even outside of meditation. Our whole life must become a meditation process.

The Sanskrit word *nirvedam* means being indifferent, not being influenced or moved by something—in this case the world and its ways. It is an inner state, a condition of the mind very akin to the non-arising (*nirodha*) of mental reactions (*vrutti*) spoken about in the Yoga Sutras as being the state of yoga. “When your buddhi crosses beyond the mire of delusion, then you shall be disgusted with the to-be-heard and what has been heard” (Bhagavad Gita 2:52). And consequently you will be indifferent to the actions that produce those results as well as the world-stage on which their dramas are enacted. None of this occurs just for the asking or wishing, so Angiras give us practical advice:

“Let him only approach, with sacrificial fuel in hand, a teacher who is learned in the scriptures and established in Brahman.” The ideal of the Upanishads often differs from that of later Indian thought which often is not based on wisdom but on whimsy and theatrical effect. Today there is a lot of talk about how wonderful is the teacher who is ignorant of the scriptures, but who has spiritual knowledge. This is

silly. You cannot get spirituality from books, it is true, but you can get spiritual instruction that will lead to the acquisition of spirituality. On the other hand, what kind of a person, supposedly intent on gaining spiritual knowledge, will choose to remain ignorant? Consider Sri Ramana Maharshi. He had no interest in academic matters, but after going to Arunachala and attaining realization he became a living library of countless spiritual texts, having read widely in several languages. So the Upanishadic sage tells us that a worthy teacher has a thorough knowledge of the holy writings and is also *Brahmanishtham*: established in the experiential knowledge of Brahman.

Such a teacher is rare, but if we find such a one we must learn all we can and then apply it. If we cannot find one, then we should diligently study the words of realized masters and follow them. Such a one will need to act on what he already knows if he hopes to gain further understanding. And if he is wise he will assiduously avoid all those who claim to be their representatives or intermediaries.

Unto him who has approached in due form, whose mind is tranquil and who has attained peace, let the knowing [teacher] teach in its very truth that knowledge about Brahman by which one knows the Imperishable person, the true. (1.2.13)

By these words we know the qualified student and the qualified teacher. When the two come together the result is Perfect Knowing.

This is the truth. As from a blazing fire, sparks of like form issue forth by the thousands, even so many kinds of beings issue forth from the Immutable and they return thither too. (2.1.1)

This is a spectacular simile, mostly because it happens to be the absolute truth. Swami Gambhirananda, the saintly President of Ramakrishna Mission, translated it this way: “As from a fire, fully ablaze, fly off sparks, in their thousands, that are akin to the fire, similarly from the Immutable originate different kinds of creatures and into It again they merge.”

There are three points being made here that are the bedrock of Upanishadic philosophy. First, all beings that exist—past, present, future—are of the same nature, even the same substance, as Brahman. Second, all forms (modes of existence), though ever-changing, proceed from the Unchanging Unchangeable. This seeming contradiction is made possible by the illusory power of Maya. That is, the changing forms are illusory while the essential being, the Self-Atman is unchanging. Third, having come from Brahman they shall all without exception return to Brahman. When life is viewed this way we can understand its nature and purpose, and live accordingly. For the Upanishads are not interested in giving us empty theory without a practical application.

Divine and formless is the person [purusha]. He is without and within, unborn, without breath and without mind, pure and higher than the highest

Immutable. (2.1.2)

Pervading all, both Brahman and the Atman are yet untouched and unconditioned by any forms in which they dwell, knowing themselves through themselves: self-illuminated (swayamprakash). Both the internal and the external are permeated with the presence of Conscious Spirit. Although the forms floating on the surface of the Ocean of Being are born, conditioned, endowed with mind and senses and compelled to experience the consequence of the sowing and reaping of karma in previous lives, in reality none of this takes place in an absolute, objective sense. Rather, it is the power of Maya that produces these appearances.

As the Gita says: “All this world is pervaded by me in my unmanifest aspect. All beings dwell within me, but I do not dwell within them. And yet beings do not dwell within me: behold my Divine Yoga. Sustaining beings and yet not dwelling in them, I myself cause all beings to come into manifestation. As mighty winds move everywhere, yet always dwell in the ether, know that even so do all beings dwell within me. At the end of a kalpa, all beings merge into my Prakriti: at the beginning of another kalpa, I myself send them forth. Resting on my Prakriti, I send forth again and again this entire multitude of beings, helpless under Prakriti’s power” (9:4-8)

Yet, the sage is telling us in this Upanishad that, almighty as Maya seems to be, Spirit is higher. When we are sunk in delusion, then Maya seems the most powerful, but when we transfer our consciousness into spirit, then we find that the Self is always the master of Maya on the universal and the individual levels.

Again, Brahman is the Source:

From him are born life [prana], mind, all the sense-organs [also] ether, air, light, water and earth, the supporter of all. (2.1.3)

God’s creation is never separated from him for an instant. By his indwelling presence He maintains and unifies them. All that exists is held in the Mind of God, for they are his thoughts made visible or tangible.

Fire is His head, His eyes are the sun and the moon, the regions of space are His ears, His speech the revealed Vedas, air is His life and His heart the world. Out of His feet the earth [is born]; indeed He is the Self of all beings. (2.1.4)

The universe is not really God’s creation, it is his manifestation, his incarnation. And he remains its Inner Controller (Antaryamin).

From him [proceeds] fire whose fuel is the sun; from the moon, the rain; herbs on the earth [nourished by them]; thus are creatures produced from the person. (2.1.5)

Though this differs from her style of expression, it reminds me of the great wisdom spoken by Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science. She said that in reality we all come from God, but we ignore the fact. We say: “Everybody in my

family gets...” and then name some disease or negative condition. We think it is genetics that must manifest. But our real genes are Divine Qualities. Why do we not believe they will manifest in us? Our father and mother were adult human beings, and we became the same. But the ultimate Father/Mother is God, so why do we neglect the development of divine consciousness? Divinity is our only true nature.

From him are born the rik [verses], the saman [chants], the yajus [formulas], the rites of initiation, all the sacrifices, ceremonies and sacrificial gifts, the year too, and the sacrificer, and the worlds where the moon purifies and where the sun [shines]. (2.1.6)

You cannot get more complete than that.

From him also the gods are born in manifold ways, the celestials, men, cattle, birds, the in-breath and the out-breath, rice and barley, austerity, faith, truth, chastity [brahmacharya] and the law. (2.1.7)

It is this last part that is of special meaning for us. We are told that austerity (tapasya), meditation, faith, truth, continence and law arise from God. They are the presence of God manifesting in our life and through us to the world. Who, then, can be more beneficial to the world than a yogi? The word *vidhi*, translated “law,” means both instruction and method. There is an innate order in the universe which each of us should embody. It is not learned intellectually but is intuited by the yogi. The yogi will then order his life accordingly: methodically. Of course the supreme method is the practice of meditation itself.

From him come forth the seven life-breaths, the seven flames, their fuel, the seven oblations, these seven worlds in which move the life-breaths, seven and seven which dwell in the secret place [of the heart].

From him, all the seas and the mountains, from him flow rivers of every kind, from him are all herbs and their juice too; by which, together with the elements, the inner soul is upheld.

The person [purusha] himself is all this, work, austerity and Brahma beyond death. He who knows that which is set in the secret place [of the heart], he, here on earth, cuts asunder the knot of ignorance. (2.1.8-10)

Brahman is all and therefore all that is to be known. Further description of Brahman is now to be given along with instructions on how to know Brahman. The Upanishad is so clear, and the concepts have been referred to before, so some verses hardly need more than a sentence of comment.

Manifest, well-fixed, moving, verily, in the secret place [of the hearts] such is the great support. In it is centered all this which moves, breathes and winks. Know that as being, as non-being, as the supreme object to be desired, as the highest beyond the reach of man’s understanding.

What is luminous, what is subtler than the subtle, in which are centered all the worlds and those that dwell in them, that is the imperishable Brahman. That is life, that is speech and mind. That is true, that is immortal, that is to be known, know [that]. (2.2.1-2)

The word translated “to be known” is actually *veddhavyam*, which means to strike something with the intention to penetrate into it, to reveal its inner condition. If we penetrate into our Self we will find Brahman, and knowing Brahman we shall ourselves be True [Real] and Immortal.

He who is all-knowing, all-wise, whose is this greatness on the earth, in the divine city of Brahma, in the ether [of the heart] is that Self established.

He consists of mind and is the leader of life and body and is seated in food [i.e. the body] controlling the heart. The wise perceive clearly by the knowledge [of Brahman] the blissful immortal which shines forth. (2.2.8)

Since the Self understands and knows all, to be truly knowledgeable and wise all we need do is shift our awareness into our own Self.

Although the Self should not be identified with external things such as our body or the world, nevertheless, the glory of our Self (including the Supreme Self) is manifested in our own private universe and the greater universe as well. We can come to perceive spiritual realities hidden within the material illusions.

The Self abides in the core of our being. This is sometimes called the Chidakasha, the Space of Consciousness. Both God and the individual Self dwell there. In the Sanskrit text there is the expression Brahmapuri, the City of God, used for this spiritual heart. It further says that God and the Self are known by centering our awareness in this heart.

It is meditation which illumines the mind and enables us to see and know this blissful, immortal Self all around us, in everything.

The knot of the heart is cut, all doubts are dispelled and his deeds terminate, when He is seen—the higher and the lower. (2.2.9)

When we enter into the consciousness of our individual spirit and the Infinite Spirit, the blinding veil of ignorance will dissolve away along with all the bonds of karma.

In the highest golden sheath is Brahman without stain, without parts; pure is it, the light of lights. That is what the knowers of the Self know. (2.2.10)

What greater goal can we have than this? In summation of this section, the sage says:

The sun shines not there, nor the moon and stars, these lightnings shine not, where then could this fire be? Every thing shines only after that shining light. His shining illumines all this world.

Brahman, verily, is this immortal. In front is Brahman, behind is Brahman,

to the right and to the left. It spreads forth below and above. Brahman, indeed, is this universe. It is the greatest. (2.2.11-12)

These thrilling words need no comment—only response.

Cross-eyed people see a single object as two. In the same way the ignorant see the One as many. Yet, there is a perverse spiritual cross-eyedness which works just the opposite, making its victims see two as one. This is the disease of half-baked Vedanta that is merely conceptual and not based on the experience that only yoga imparts. There is no such thing as a genuine Vedantist who is not first and foremost a Yogi. The Upanishad is now going to give us the right understanding of the Paramatman and the jivatman, the Supreme Self and the individual Self, their unity and their distinction, and their relationship with each other. Here, too, only the yogi will fully understand what is being said.

Two birds, companions [who are] always united, cling to the Self-same tree. Of these two, the one eats the sweet fruit and the other looks on without eating. (3.1.1)

The same name of the two is Self: Individual Self (Jivataman) and Infinite Self (Paramatman).

This verse gives us three words in relation to the two Selves: *suparna*, *sayuja* and *sakhaya*. *Suparna* means intimately related, the idea being that the individual Self and the Cosmic Self exist in an eternal relation. *Sayuja* means being in a state of union—perpetual union, as Shankara points out in his commentary. A secondary meaning of *sayuja* is being in the same place, that the two Selves are inseparable, are ever present to one another. According to Shankara, the third expression, *sakhaya*, means that the two Selves have the identical name or designation, and exist in an identical manner. That is, they possess the same qualities: one in an absolute degree and the other in a limited degree. *Sakhaya* also means companionship and friendship, indicating the deep personal relation between the jivatman and Paramatman.

The “same tree” is the body, and by extension the cosmos. The form of every sentient being has two indwellers, the two Selves. However, they do not have the same experience of the tree. The individual, the jiva, “tastes” the fruit of the tree in the form of the inner and outer senses, and according to the quality of that experience is made happy, unhappy, contented, discontented and so forth. The individual undergoes experience. The Supreme Self, God, on the other hand, experiences being in all forms and is aware of all that the individual spirit experiences, yet he “looks on without eating,” without being affected or conditioned by it. But he does know exactly the effect and conditioning that accrues to the individual Self. He is experiencing right along with us, but unlike us is not pulled into a mistaken identity with the body-mind and its experiences. On the other hand:

On the Self-same tree, a person immersed [in the sorrows of the world] is

deluded and grieves on account of his helplessness. When he sees the other, the Lord who is worshipped and his greatness, he becomes freed from sorrow. (3.1.2)

We are bewildered by our impotence: submerged in the deadly ocean of samsara, of continual birth, death, unsurety, pain and confusion. Shankara points out that the individual is overwhelmed with confusion because it cannot understand what is really happening to it, and why. Just like a piece of driftwood on the heaving sea, it is lifted up and down, thrown onto the shore and then pulled out to sea again. So it grieves at its helplessness and hopelessness. All is changed, though, when the individual sees, right in the core of its being, the very God it has been hitherto worshipping as separate from itself. Experiencing within its own being the presence and the glory of God and thereby realizing that glory as his own, the individual becomes liberated from sorrow. The sage elaborates on this, continuing:

When a seer sees the creator of golden hue, the Lord, the Purusha, the source of Brahma, then being a Knower, shaking off good and evil and free from stain, he attains supreme equality with the lord. (3.1.3)

The jiva recognizes that Shiva, the Absolute, is its true nature. Then, no longer bound by “do” and “don’t,” it is able to act according to its essential being. Not that morality will be abandoned, but that there will be no more need to think if it “should” or “should not” do something. Rather, it will do the right and perfect thing spontaneously, naturally, as a consequence of its rediscovered divinity. For it will be free from all bonds or compulsions whatever. This is because in the divine vision it has become free from all defects or blemish.

But most important is the trait that is listed last: *paramam samyam*, supreme sameness, literally, but the meaning is absolute unity, and therefore absolute identity, with the Absolute Itself.

Since the two are really one, the Upanishad continues describing both the individual and the infinite Selves, as they partake of one another’s traits.

Truly it is prana that shines forth in all beings. Knowing him, the wise man does not talk of anything else. Sporting in the Self, delighting in the Self, performing works, such a one is the greatest of the knowers of Brahman. (3.1.4)

“He whose happiness is within, whose delight is within, whose illumination is within: that yogi, identical in being with Brahman, attains Brahmanirvana” (Bhagavad Gita 5:24).

Anyone who ponders these astounding words with intelligence will be eager to attain Brahman, so the sage tells how that is done.

This Self within the body, of the nature of light and pure, is attainable by truth, by austerity, by right knowledge, by the constant [practice] of chastity. Him, the ascetics with their imperfections done away, behold. (3.1.5)

Unbroken observance of truthfulness, tapasya, right knowledge (insight) and brahmacharya: these enable us to behold the Self within.

This Self within the body. The Self is within the body, therefore it is absurd to disdain the body, and even more absurd to ignore the body and the necessity for its purification and spiritual empowerment. Just forgetting about the material side of things and flying off into pure spirit is an appealing idea, but the problem is, it can never work. However long or short a journey, it always begins right from the point where we are. And at this point we are not only in the body, we are tied into it by a multitude of bonds that must be dissolved. Our yoga practice must cover this situation.

The prime implication, though, is that since the Self is right here in the body, it is not far away. We need not even seek it: just *perceive* it.

The ascetics. The word rather poorly translated as “ascetic” is *yati*, which actually means a wanderer. This is because in the ancient times in India the wandering ascetics who moved about teaching dharma were given this title. They were not monks or sannyasis in the later sense. Obviously they were not married, as their mode of life prevented that, and their life was dedicated to spiritual discipline and teaching. Nevertheless, they were not considered outside society as the sadhu is today in India. They were simply those who sacrificed personal life to serve others. It was a noble way of life, but not a separation.

The original Christian ascetics were just the same. They wore ordinary clothes and were considered Christian laity. The only distinctive thing about them was their way of life. The men usually lived on the edge of towns, usually as hermits. The women lived together in houses within the town for mutual protection. In the eyes of everyone they were pious bachelors and spinsters, not at all distinct from other Christians in an official sense.

That is the historical background, but what is the meaning for us today? No matter where we might live, or how, we must all be wanderers in the spirit, aware with both Saint Paul and Saint Peter that we are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13). Jesus said: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). This is actually the truth about every single sentient being on the earth: there is no place here where we can come to rest and be at home, for our nature is spirit and our home is infinity.

So the *yatis* spoken of here are those who have become rootless in relation to this world. Or more to the point, those who have recognized that they have no roots in the world, only in God. “The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). And so in their hearts they are always on pilgrimage back to the Source, aware that wherever they may be it is only a temporary accommodation on the long journey home to Brahman.

With their imperfections done away. The Upanishad has a very informative expression: *kshinadoshah*: those whose mental defects such as anger, etc., have become significantly lessened. Eventually they will be totally eliminated, but even

now such persons are capable of the beginning stages of knowing the Self. This is important, because we tend to think that until we are absolutely perfect we cannot know either God or our Self. This is not so. Just as the sky becomes lightened even before the sun appears above the horizon, so it is with those yogis who earnestly strive for realization. The elementary stages of enlightenment dawn for them.

Right knowledge. *Samyag-jnanena*, complete insight into the nature of the Self both intellectually and intuitively, also enables us to begin experiencing the realities of the Self. Of course this cannot occur outside of yoga practice that is disciplined and steady.

Constant practice. Some translators think this word *nityam*, perpetual, refers to continence (brahmacharya), but others think it refers to constant and uninterrupted observance of all the virtues and practices listed in this verse. That is logical, because a break in any of these will set back the sadhaka to a significant degree, and in some cases can destroy the possibility of his continuance in sadhana by turning his mind away from the Real to the unreal. This is, however, particularly true about brahmacharya, as is seen over and over. In *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Yogananda relates this sad but telling incident:

“A year later [after entering the ashram], Kumar set out for a visit to his childhood home. He ignored the quiet disapproval of Sri Yukteswar, who never authoritatively controlled his disciples’ movements. On the boy’s return to Serampore in a few months, a change was unpleasantly apparent. Gone was the stately Kumar with serenely glowing face. Only an undistinguished peasant stood before us, one who had lately acquired a number of evil habits.

“Master summoned me and brokenheartedly discussed the fact that the boy was now unsuited to the monastic hermitage life.

“‘Mukunda, I will leave it to you to instruct Kumar to leave the ashram tomorrow; I can’t do it!’ Tears stood in Sri Yukteswar’s eyes, but he controlled himself quickly. ‘The boy would never have fallen to these depths had he listened to me and not gone away to mix with undesirable companions. He has rejected my protection; the callous world must be his guru still.’” This narrative is particularly ironic, since “Kumar” means a young male virgin.

Now all this is extremely to the point, with no fudging under the guise of diplomacy or moderation. Perhaps that is why the sage then says to us:

Truth alone conquers, not untruth. By truth is laid out the path leading to the gods by which the sages who have their desires fulfilled travel to where is that supreme abode of truth. (3.1.6)

Satyam eva jayate: Truth alone conquers/wins. This satya is not just speaking truthfully, it means living truthfully, living as the eternal, immortal Self whose only goal is to reunite with the Supreme Self. This mode of life is called *devayana*—the way of the gods, the divine path. Those who pursue anything else pursue untruth, the path of the asuras, those that dwell in darkness of consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna often said that “God is realized if one holds fast to truth. If there is no

strictness in observing truth everything is gradually lost.”

This is especially true in the matter of yoga sadhana. Many gurus in the West (and a few in the East) lie quite actively and shamelessly, telling their dupe-disciples that the ancient disciplines of yogis for thousands of years are no longer needed, particularly vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol, nicotine and (what else?) sex. The result spiritually is nil, but the guru laughs all the way to the bank.

Vast, divine, of unthinkable form, subtler than the subtle It shines forth, farther than the far, yet here near at hand, set down in the secret place [of the heart]. [As such] even here it is seen by the intelligent. (3.1.7)

This is the great mystery of the Divine. It is subtle beyond subtlety, yet exists equally in the most tangible. God is utterly beyond us, and yet nearer to us than can be conceived. This latter fact is a foundation-stone of spiritual life. The more we can turn inward, the deeper we can penetrate into our own essential being, the cave of the heart, the closer we will come to God.

He is not grasped by the eye nor even by speech nor by other sense-organs, nor by austerity nor by work, but when one's [intellectual] nature is purified by the light of knowledge then alone he, by meditation, sees Him who is without parts. (3.1.8)

No action, feeling or idea can reveal God to us. But when the heart has become purified by tapasya the spiritual insight that only meditation can produce then reveals God to the yogi. For:

The subtle Self is to be known by thought in which the senses in five different forms have centered. The whole of men's thought is pervaded by the senses. When it [thought] is purified, the Self shines forth. (3.1.9)

Meditation is the beginning, middle, and end of spiritual life. There is a remarkable statement made here: that the consciousness which even now causes the body, senses, and mind to function is the same consciousness in which the Divine Vision takes place. We need only use it to free ourselves into Spirit. For that which binds also frees. This is the unique understanding of the ancient sages of the East, an understanding needed by the whole world.

Whatever world a man of purified nature thinks of in his mind and whatever desires he desires, all these worlds and all these desires he attains. Therefore, let him who desires prosperity worship the knower of the Self. (3.1.10)

This tells us two things. First, whatever the liberated sage thinks of, wills, or desires, that comes about. Examples of this are given in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and manifested all through Yogananda's life, especially toward its end, as seen in *Paramahansa Yogananda: In Memoriam*. The life of Sri Ramakrishna also demonstrates this. Second, those that seek Self-realization as their highest good should reverence

and honor the *atmajnanam*, the one who knows the Self. This is very important. The Upanishad is not counseling us to make a god of a Master or to substitute a Brahmajnani for God. When we want to learn something we go to an expert. In the same way, those seeking the knowledge of God should seek out the teachings of great masters of past and present. If very fortunate, the seeker will meet such a person in the flesh and have personal interchange with him. The mere presence of such a great soul can transform our thinking and awaken our consciousness.

If we follow the instructions of an enlightened person regarding our inner development we will come to the exact same state of consciousness attained by him. How can we tell a true master? A true master keeps pointing his students away from himself to God, the only Goal. And a true disciple is one who goes to God instead of making an idol or fetish of the guru. Anyone foolish enough can become a brainwashed groupie, but the wise heed the teacher's message and go to God. As Buddha said, a worthy teacher or teaching is like a finger pointing at the moon. The idea is to see the moon, not the finger. Nevertheless, the sage can be a very meaningful factor in our spiritual life, so the Upanishad continues with more information for us.

He knows that supreme abode of Brahman, wherein founded, the world shines brightly. The wise men, who, free from desires, worship the Purusha, pass beyond the seed [of rebirth]. (3.2.1)

Here are two more principles: A sage is one who knows Brahman in the absolute sense, and those who honor him without any taint of ego, desiring only liberation, will break the ties of earthly rebirth.

This second part gives us a picture of real disciples or students who will attain spiritual benefit from a teacher: they have no egocentric or personal desire coloring the way they relate to the teacher. Their only interest is in the Self. They are not looking for a teacher to give them power or a reputation for having the best guru. Glory through association is of no interest to them. Nor are they wanting the guru to become a substitute for an unsatisfactory parent, friend, spouse or lover. They do not want a personal relationship with the guru, to either possess the guru or be possessed by the guru. They are not looking for some kind of fulfillment in a relationship with the teacher, but only fulfillment in the Self. They are not looking for Love, they are looking for Liberation.

Swami Bimalananda, a disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda, once told us in a conversation that those who lived in the ashram-headquarters of Self-Realization Fellowship just for the personality of Yogananda eventually left the ashram as well as the spiritual life, but those who came for God remained steadfast in both. I think we can conclude that real disciples are as rare as real gurus. The Upanishad is not talking to spiritual fool-arounds, but to the worthy, those who wish to transcend the seed of human birth: the ego.

Since the sage Angiras has put so much emphasis on the value of approaching and reverencing a master-teacher, he now digresses a bit to point out what makes

the student succeed or fail in spiritual life.

He who entertains desires, thinking of them, is born [again] here and there on account of his desires. But of him who has his desire fully satisfied, who is a perfected soul, all his desires vanish even here [on earth]. (3.2.2)

Those in the grip of desire are born where the objects of desire are to be found, and bring the desire for them along. It does not say that the objects are obtained, however, and we see that this is a continual torment for human beings: wanting something but not able to get it. To be in such a situation will only condition the mind more and more toward grasping at the things desired. After who knows how long, the object is then gotten and either lost, or in danger of loss, or proves to be disappointing or misery-producing. Such is the dilemma of those who desire.

There is no use asking questions like: “How do I kill desire?” or: “How do I get rid of the ego?” You do not kill desire or discard the ego, for that is a negative approach which by its nature will not work. Rather you take the positive approach: “I shall realize the Self.” For realization of the Self alone can quench all desire and dissolve the ego. Until then we ignore the clamor of desires, disregard the demands of the ego, and single-mindedly go after the Self. Along the way the desires will begin dropping away of themselves, and the ego, starved of attention, will become less and less until desires and ego are simply gone forever. It may not be easy, but it is marvelously simple.

This Self cannot be attained by instruction nor by intellectual power nor even through much hearing. He is to be attained by the one whom [the Self] chooses. To such a one the Self reveals his own nature. (3.2.3)

Anyone who has travelled this far through the Upanishads is very well acquainted with the fact that the Self is not to be known through the usual avenues of human knowledge. What is striking is the literal meaning of the next phrase: “He who chooses the Atman, by him alone is the Atman attained.” The desire for God is the way to God since the desire will prompt us to action, not just mere wishing. No one seeks for God who is not already able to find God, for it is the very nearness of God that prompts his seeking. Seeking God is a guarantee, a symptom, of sure attainment. It is also the thing which enables the Self to reveal itself to him.

This Self cannot be attained by one without strength nor through heedlessness nor through austerity without an aim. But he who strives by these means, if he is a knower [vidvan], this Self of his enters the abode of Brahman. (3.2.4)

There is a lot to think over here. Those devoid of the strength imparted by the strict observance of yama and niyama cannot possibly know the Self. Nor can dependence on God or guru be pled. It is with spiritual life just as the well-known adage about the American westward expansion: “The cowards never started and the weak died along the way.”

It is utterly useless to engage in meditation without making the life correspond to the sole purpose of meditation: liberation of the spirit. Yoga has been propagated here in the West for a little over a hundred years, and see how little good and how much devastation and delusion has resulted. The reason is supremely simple: yama and niyama are not followed, and in many instances the fake gurus actually tell their dupes that yama and niyama are unnecessary. I cannot calculate how many tangled-minded “yogis” have boasted to me that they do not need to be vegetarians. If a survey is taken of almost any yoga group, the ideal of brahmacharya is not being followed by anyone; many will be living together “in a relationship” without being married, and those who are married have no idea of the need for brahmacharya in marriage except for the conception of children.

I really have no hope that the foregoing will provoke anything but contempt or resentment in most instances, but it still has to be said in case some readers do want to reach the Goal, whatever the price. The neglect or rejection of yama and niyama: these two shoals have wrecked many a yogi of East and West. “But he who strives by these means, if he is a knower, this Self of his enters the abode of Brahman.”

Having attained Him, the seers [who are] satisfied with their knowledge [who are] perfected souls, free from passion, tranquil, having attained the omnipresent [Self] on all sides, the wise, with concentrated minds, enter into the All itself. (3.2.5)

What an inspiring description. To at last be ourselves as we really are, to end all struggle with unreality and ignorance: this is the worthy aim. The worthy prayer is that of Jesus: “O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5).

How do the sages get that way? The next verse tells us.

The ascetics who have ascertained well the meaning of the Vedantic knowledge, who have purified their natures through the path of renunciation [sannyasa-yoga], they [dwelling] in the worlds of Brahma, at the end of time, being one with the immortal, are all liberated. (3.2.6)

Who have ascertained well the meaning of the Vedantic knowledge. First the Vedantic truths, the teachings found in the Upanishads, are carefully read and pondered. But this is not enough; in fact it is worthless unless they go on to realize those truths through meditation, for it is this realization which is of supreme value, and the wise diligently seek it.

Who have purified their natures. Not wanting empty theory, the wise understand that their lives must be disciplined for the purification of their outer actions and inner consciousness. Moreover, they establish themselves immovably in that purity.

Through the path of renunciation. Since neither Angiras or his students were monks, it is mistaken to interpret *sannyasa yoga* as monastic life. Rather, it is the inner discipline of detachment from all externals while fixing the mind on the Eternal.

At the end of time, being one with the immortal, are all liberated. For them there is no longer any need for future birth in the material plane. As the Buddhist texts say: “Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled [has been lived], the task done. There is nothing further for this world.” But they are not just liberated from the earth, they are liberated from all worlds and enter the Real as their eternal abode. At that time:

Gone are the fifteen parts to their [respective] supports [the elements] and all the gods [the sense organs] into their corresponding deities. One’s deeds and the Self, consisting of understanding, all become one in the Supreme Immutable Being.

Just as the flowing rivers disappear in the ocean casting off name and shape, even so the knower, freed from name and shape, attains to the divine person, higher than the high.

He, verily, who knows the Supreme Brahman becomes Brahman himself. In his family, no one who does not know Brahman will be born. He crosses over sorrow. He crosses over sins. Liberated from the knots of the secret place [of the heart], he becomes immortal. (3.2.7-9)

There are two aspects to these verses: what is shed by the sage and What he merges with in liberation.

At the time of death, the various bodies no longer retain their configuration. Since they are no longer needed for future incarnations, they resolve back into the elements from which they came. What remains? Brahman and the Atman-Self. Since these are really the source of all the foregoing, in reality nothing whatever is lost, only the conditioning dreams that held them in false bondage for so long. Finitude is traded for infinity. Blessed bargain!

This very [doctrine] is declared in the verse. Those who perform the rites, who are learned in scriptures, who are well-established in Brahman, who offer of themselves oblations to the sole seer [a form of fire] with faith, to them alone one may declare this knowledge of Brahman [to them alone], by whom the rite [of carrying fire] on the head has been performed, according to rule.

This is the truth. The seer Angiras declared it before. Let none who has not performed the rite read this. Salutation to the great seers. Salutation to the great seers. (3.2.10-11)

In India everyone knows the basic principles of Brahmanvidya. The sage is not recommending secrecy, but warning us away from wasting our time with people who are willfully disqualifying themselves for spiritual life. So those who are qualified (adhikari) to receive detailed instruction in the eternal truths are described here.

Those who perform the rites. The word translated by this phrase is *kriyavantah*, which means those who are engaged in the practice of kriyas. In the broad sense a kriya is any practice that entails doing something, because the root of kriya is *kri*, which means “I do.” Any practice, exercise, rite, or even movement can be called a

kriya. Usually, though, kriya means a yogic practice or method which purifies the body and nervous system, as well as the subtle bodies, to enable the yogi to reach and hold on to higher levels of consciousness and being. Only those who are perpetually engaged in such practices need even hear about those states and their meaning. For to anyone else it is mere theory which can easily be misunderstood by those who have no practical yogic experience (and of course those who, hearing about those states, immediately start claiming to have them.)

Who are learned in scriptures. The word *shrotriyah* means one who both knows the scriptures and the disciplines and practices they enjoin. Although mere scriptural knowledge is of little value, it is necessary to know the teachings of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita in order to retain a right perspective in spiritual life. Buddha said that a seeker for enlightenment must be careful to follow the teachings of the liberated ones that have gone before. A great deal of problems in spiritual life will be avoided if the Upanishads and Gita are studied daily and applied in their entirety.

Who are well-established in Brahman. Shankara says that the *Brahmanishthah* are those who are devoted to Brahman as manifested in the cosmos and are actively seeking to know the transcendent Brahman beyond the cosmos. They must not be intent only on Saguna or Nirguna Brahman to the exclusion of the other. The worthy seeker starts from where he finds himself—in the realm of Ishwara, the creation—but strives to know That which lies beyond, as well. This is the real “yoga of synthesis.”

Who offer of themselves oblations to the sole seer (a form of fire) with faith. In the Atharva Veda there is a form of sacred fire called *ekarshi*, but in this verse the reference is to “the sole fire,” the “fire” that is Brahman. For *ekarshi* is a contraction of *eka-rishi*, “the sole seer.” As the Gita says: “Brahman is the offering, Brahman is the oblation poured out by Brahman into the fire of Brahman. Brahman is to be attained by him who always sees Brahman in action” (Bhagavad Gita 4:24). The ultimate offering into Brahman is our own Self.

By whom the rite (of carrying fire) on the head has been performed, according to rule. Continuing this idea, the rishi speaks of those who have accomplished in due order the *shirovratam*, a vow of holding or carrying the holy fire on the head. That is, one who has established the divine fire of Brahman-realization within himself, who ever carries Brahman in his head—his consciousness.

Let none who has not performed the rite read this. This is a caution about a person reading the highest levels of philosophy such as the Upanishads with an untrained, unpurified and therefore inexperienced mind. For it is likely that his illusion-distorted mind will misunderstand the teachings and he might come to think and do wrong things. I can give an example. A friend of mine was talking about the value of human life and the evil of taking the life of another. Her brother asked: “Well, what about the Gita?” “What about it?” she asked, and he answered: “It says that he who thinks he kills and he who thinks he is killed are mistaken.” We were amazed. He was outrageously twisting the words of the Gita about the immortal Self: “He who thinks the Self is the slayer and he who thinks the Self is slain:

neither of the two understands. The Self slays not, nor is it slain” (2:19).

But what is the vow (vrata) referred to? It is that which Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras calls “the Great Vow [Maha Vrata].” It is the observance of the five yamas: Ahimsa (non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness), Satya (truthfulness, honesty), Asteya (non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriativeness), Brahmacharya (sexual continence in thought, word and deed as well as control of all the senses), and Aparigraha (non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness).

There may not be a great number of students if these criteria are followed, but we must make sure that we are among them.

Salutation to the great seers!

Swetashwatara Upanishad

Those who discourse on Brahman say: What is the cause? [Is it] Brahman? Whence are we born? By what do we live? And on what are we established? O ye who know Brahman, [tell us] presided over by whom do we live our different conditions in pleasures and other than pleasures [pains]. (1.1)

“Those who discourse on Brahman” is the translation of the Sanskrit word *Brahmavadin* which literally means “one who walks the path to Brahman.” Of course, every sentient being is on the path to Brahman, but the Upanishad is referring to those who not only know that fact, but are consciously walking the path, taking charge of their life and therefore their evolution. In other words, they are yogis. Certainly they read spiritual texts and respect spiritual teachers, and they use their intelligent reason. But their real inquiry, their real search, arises from within themselves.

There is no need to analyze this verse, but the Upanishad is showing us what real seekers of Brahman want to know. They realize that unless they know how the whole scheme works they will not be able to work their way out of it. Simplistic people think all they need do is learn some yoga practices, but they are mistaken. We have to know the lay of the land, both inner and outer, and order our entire life accordingly. Otherwise yoga is as useless as a wet match in a rainstorm.

Time, inherent nature [swabhava], necessity, chance, the elements, the womb or the person [should they] be considered as the cause? It cannot be a combination of these because of the existence of the soul. Even the soul is powerless in respect of the cause of pleasure and pain. (1.2)

Through ignorance we blame all these things for what happens to us, considering that they are being imposed on us regardless of our will or desire. We also consider that they are the forces pushing us to act or think as we do, and that they produce in us various reactions. In sum, we ignore the sole truth that all our deeds and thoughts proceed from within, that our responses are manifestations of our inner disposition (swabhava). Both the ignorant and the wise live from inside out: all is a spontaneous flow from within. Outer circumstances are only a mirroring of that inner landscape I just mentioned.

Those who followed after [were devoted to] meditation and contemplation and saw the Self-power of the Divine hidden in its own qualities. He is the one who rules over all these causes from time to the soul. (1.3)

So what is the cause of all? Divine power—*devatma shaktim*, the power of the divine Self. There is no other power or force in the universe. And although that power is manifested outside us (mostly), we cannot discover it except by turning within and plumbing the depths of our inner consciousness that is untouched by all

phenomena.

[We understand] Him [as a wheel] with one felly, with three tires, sixteen ends, fifty spokes, twenty counter-spokes and six sets of eights, whose one rope is manifold, which has three different paths, whose one delusion [arises] from two causes.

We meditate on him as a river of five streams, from five sources, fierce and crooked, whose waves are the five vital breaths, whose original source is the fivefold perception, with five whirlpools, an impetuous flood of five pains, divided into fifty kinds [of suffering] with five branches.

In this vast brahma-wheel, which enlivens all things, in which all rest, the soul flutters about thinking that the Self in him and the Mover [the Lord] are different. Then, when blessed by Him, he gains life eternal. (1.4-6)

The speculations by commentators about what all these lists mean are tenuous and tedious. All we need get from this verse is this: The entire evolving universe within which we ourselves are evolving is Brahman and our Self within Brahman. At first “the soul flutters about thinking that the Self in him and the Mover [the Lord] are different.” This is immersion in samsara. “Then, when blessed by him, he gains life eternal” by realizing the truth that his Self and Brahman are one.

This has been sung as the supreme Brahman and in it is the triad. It is the firm support, the imperishable. The knowers of Brahman by knowing what is therein become merged in Brahman, intent thereon and freed from birth. (1.7)

Brahman has been “sung” in the Vedas and Upanishads as threefold (trayam): transcendent (Parabrahman), immanent (Ishwara) and the entire range of relative existence (Prakriti)

Union with Brahman is the only freedom, and that is accomplished through perfection (siddhi) in yoga. In this way cause and effect are transcended.

The Lord supports all this which is a combination of the mutable and the immutable, the manifest and the unmanifest. And the soul, not being the Lord, is bound because of his being an enjoyer. By knowing God [the soul] is freed from all fetters. (1.8)

The soul, not being the Lord, is bound because of his being an enjoyer. By experiencing through the mind and senses the continual stimulation of the world, the jiva becomes bound through and to the mind and senses and all they lead it into from birth to birth.

By knowing God [the soul] is freed from all fetters. Forgetting is bondage, remembering is freedom. To say that mind, matter, and Maya are only illusion and non-existent accomplishes nothing. We must come to know that they are the dreams of God, plays of the Consciousness that IS God. And this is done only by the illumination of our own consciousness.

There are two unborn ones, the knowing and the unknowing, the one all-powerful, the other powerless. Indeed there is [another] one who is unborn, connected with the enjoyer and the objects of enjoyment. And there is the infinite Self, of universal form, non-active. When one finds out this triad, that is Brahman. (1.9)

This triad is spoken of in the Bhagavad Gita. “Om, Tat, Sat: this is known as the triple designation of Brahman” (17:23). *Sat*, the Real, the Absolute, is the transcendent Brahman. *Tat* is Ishwara, Brahman immanent in (and within) creation as its guide and controller. *Om* is the entire vibratory creation, Mahashakti, Mulaprakriti.

What is perishable is the *pradhana* [primary matter]. What is immortal and imperishable is *Hara* [the Lord]. Over both the perishable and the soul the one God rules. By meditating on Him, by uniting with Him, by reflecting on His being more and more, there is complete cessation from the illusion of the world.

By knowing God there is a falling off of all fetters. When the sufferings are destroyed, there is cessation of birth and death. By meditating on Him, there is the third state, on the dissolution of the body, universal lordship, being alone, his desire is fulfilled. (1.10-11)

Meditation alone is the key to all this.

That Eternal which rests in the Self should be known. Truly there is nothing beyond this to be known. By knowing the enjoyer, the object of enjoyment and the mover [of all], everything has been said. This is the threefold Brahman. (1.12)

Many people assume that since they are always the Self, are always really one with Brahman, there is nothing to be done. It is true that nothing can make us anything that we are not already. But yoga can open our eyes to see what we are, and always have been. Those asleep and dreaming need to awaken, and yoga is the process of awakening, as the next two verses indicate.

As oil in sesamum seeds, as butter in cream, as water in riverbeds, as fire in friction sticks, so is the Self seized in one’s own soul if one looks for Him with truthfulness and austerity.

The Self which pervades all things as butter is contained in milk, which is the root of Self-knowledge and austerity, that is the Brahman, the highest mystic doctrine. That is the highest mystic doctrine. (1.15-16)

No more need be said.

The next seven verses are extremely obscure in the Sanskrit original. Fortunately we have the commentary of Shankara whose stupendous intellect and perfect Self-

realization rendered him capable of explaining them. Swami Prabhavananda translated them according to Shankara's insight, so I am including them here.

To realize God, first control the outgoing senses and harness the mind. Then meditate upon the light in the heart of the fire—meditate, that is, upon pure consciousness as distinct from the ordinary consciousness of the intellect. Thus the Self, the Inner Reality, may be seen behind physical appearance.

Control your mind so that the Ultimate Reality, the self-luminous Lord, may be revealed. Strive earnestly for eternal bliss.

With the help of the mind and the intellect, keep the senses from attaching themselves to objects of pleasure. They will then be purified by the light of the Inner Reality, and that light will be revealed.

The wise control their minds, and unite their hearts with the infinite, the omniscient, the all-pervading Lord. Only discriminating souls practice spiritual disciplines. Great is the glory of the self-luminous being, the Inner Reality.

Hear, all ye children of immortal bliss, also ye gods who dwell in the high heavens: Follow only in the footsteps of the illumined ones, and by continuous meditation merge both mind and intellect in the eternal Brahman. The glorious Lord will be revealed to you.

Control the vital force. Set fire to the Self within by the practice of meditation. Be drunk with the wine of divine love. Thus shall you reach perfection.

Be devoted to the eternal Brahman. Unite the light within you with the light of Brahman. Thus will the source of ignorance be destroyed, and you will rise above karma (Shvetashvatara Upanishad 2:1-7).

Now I will resume Radhakrishnan's translation.

Holding the body steady with the three [upper parts, chest, neck and head] erect, causing the senses and the mind to enter into the heart, the wise man should cross by the boat of [the realization of] Brahman all the streams which cause fear. (2.8)

The word "heart" in the scriptures can mean the chakra in the center of the chest, but usually it means the core of our being: consciousness. And it means that here.

Repressing his breathings here [in the body], let him who has controlled all movements breathe through his nostrils with diminished breath. Let the wise man restrain his mind vigilantly as [he would] a chariot yoked with vicious horses. (2.9)

Through refinement of breath, and therefore consciousness, our breathing

becomes slower and subtle during meditation. This is the only way to control the mind.

Regarding the environment for meditation, the Upanishad continues:

In a level, clean place, free from pebbles, fire and gravel, favorable to thought by the sound of water and other features, not offensive to the eye, in a hidden retreat protected from the wind, let him practice Yoga. (2.10)

Frankly, today's conditions are much more conducive than what is described here. A simple meditation room is much more advantageous on all levels.

Fog, smoke, sun, wind, fire, fireflies, lightning, crystal moon, these are the preliminary forms which produce the manifestation of Brahman in Yoga. (2.11)

These are but a few of the visual phenomena that can occur during meditation.

When the fivefold quality of Yoga is produced, as earth, water, fire, air and ether arise, then there is no longer sickness, no old age, no death to him who has obtained a body made of the fire of Yoga. (2.12)

Lightness, healthiness, steadiness, clearness of complexion, pleasantness of voice, sweetness of odor, and slight excretions, these, they say, are the first results of the progress of yoga. (2.12-13)

What we think is matter is really objectified spirit (consciousness). Therefore the practice of meditation, though spiritual, will be reflected in the yogi's body. Observance of yama and niyama along with yoga practice will purify and refine the body.

Even as a mirror stained by dust shines brightly when it has been cleaned, so the embodied one when he has seen the [real] nature of the Self becomes integrated, of fulfilled purpose and freed from sorrow.

When by means of the [real] nature of his Self he sees as by a lamp here the [real] nature of Brahman, by knowing God who is unborn, steadfast, free from all natures, he is released from all fetters.

He, indeed, is the God who pervades all regions, he is the first-born and he is within the womb. He has been born and he will be born. He stands opposite all persons, having his face in all directions.

The God who is in fire, who is in water, who has entered into the whole world [the God], who is in plants, who is in trees, to that God be adoration, yea, be adoration. (2.14-17)

Here we have the affirmation that Brahman is the core of the consciousness of all beings, that It is incarnate in all beings and experiences all they experience. This is how intimately united Brahman is to each one of us.

Many people, however intelligent, find it difficult to understand that seeming contradictions and opposites—even seeming incompatibilities and incongruities—are

part of reality. The conflicts, of course, are only in their minds. This is an inherent defect of what we now call “left-brain” thinking, but to the “right-brainers” such appearances are understood as being just that: erroneous perceptions. For them there is the possibility of developing such a degree of intuition that they can see the whole picture in which no contradictions exist. They are the kind of people to whom the Upanishadic teachings were addressed. For them it will be simplicity itself, as is the case with all truth.

The one who spreads the net [of creation, of Maya], who rules with his ruling powers, who rules all the worlds with his ruling powers, who remains one [identical], while [things or works] arise and continue to exist, they who know that become immortal. (3.1)

These words are an excellent definition of the indefinable Brahman. Brahman always exists. Indeed, there is nothing but Brahman at any time. And Brahman is always One, never two. But through Maya, the creative power of Brahman, Brahman can appear as many. Maya is as incomprehensible to the limited human mind as Brahman Itself. For Maya is Brahman, otherwise it could not exist.

When the seeming duality of Brahman and Maya arises we immediately have the appearance of Brahman as Ishwara, the Lord, the personal God. It is all Brahman, of course, but we relate to this threefold appearance of Brahman, for we are ourselves trinities. We possess a transcendent Self (Atman) which has taken on a complex of coverings (koshas) or bodies and begun to function within it as its intelligent guide. We are thus mirror-images of Brahman.

Brahman is nirguna, without any qualities or traits, but Ishwara is saguna, possessing innumerable qualities. So although we cannot conceive of Brahman or speak of It, we can say a great deal about Ishwara, even though we cannot intellectually or verbally encompass his total being. And note that we can use a personal pronoun in relation to Ishwara. For Ishwara is of positive (male) polarity and can be referred to as “he,” just as Maya is of negative (female) polarity and can be called “she.” When we say “God” we usually mean Ishwara. Ishwara controls and guides the evolution of all creation through his divine power (Mahashakti) that is Maya. All that is done is done by him in union with Maya, for Brahman the transcendent never acts.

Ishwara, as an emanation of Brahman, arises as the first step in creation, and remains as the last step, as well. Then he merges into Brahman and only Brahman remains.

“They who know that become immortal.” This is important. Because Ishwara is Brahman, those who approach him and come to know him thereby become one with Brahman, and know Brahman. Therefore it is mistaken to say that meditation on Saguna Brahman has a different result than meditation on Nirguna Brahman. Saguna Brahman is the bridge to Nirguna Brahman.

This is well explained in the first eight verses of the twelfth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. There Arjuna asks Krishna: “The constantly steadfast who worship

you with devotion, and those who worship the eternal Unmanifest—which of them has the better understanding of yoga?” Krishna replies: “Those who are ever steadfast, who worship me, fixing their minds on me, endowed with supreme faith, I consider them to be the best versed in yoga. But those who worship the Imperishable, the Undefinable, the Unmanifested, the All-pervading, Inconceivable, Unchanging, Unmoving, the Constant—controlling all the senses, even-minded everywhere, happy in the welfare of all beings—they attain to me also. Greater is the effort of those whose minds are set on the Unmanifest, for the Unmanifest as a goal is truly difficult for the embodied ones to reach. But those who, renouncing all actions in me, intent on me as the highest goal worship me, meditating on me with single-minded Yoga—of those whose consciousness has entered into me, I am soon the deliverer from the ocean of mortal samsara. Keep your mind on me alone, causing your intellect to enter into me. Thenceforward, without doubt, you shall dwell in me.”

Truly Rudra is one, there is no place for a second, who rules all these worlds with his ruling powers. He stands opposite creatures. He, the protector, after creating all worlds, withdraws them at the end of time.

That one God, who has an eye on every side, a face on every side, an arm on every side, a foot on every side, creating heaven and earth forges them together by his arms and his wings.

He who is the source and origin of the gods, the ruler of all, the great Seer, who of old gave birth to the golden germ [Hiranyagarbha], may He endow us with clear understanding. (3.2-4)

In these verses Rudra means Ishwara. Ishwara is Consciousness Itself. And in this capacity of omniscient omnipresence he interacts with all beings. Those who wish can enter into the most intimate relationship and communication with him. He indeed is all possible relationships—father, mother, brother, sister, friend—and all functions: king, master, servant, helper, companion and guide. He it is that in this world as well as the next is the dearest of the dear and the nearest of the near. Through the laws established in his universe, which itself is a great, living evolution machine, and especially through the law of karma, he brings about the teaching and furtherance of all sentient beings. His creation reacts to all action in the manner of a mirror, a reflection which reveals to us the true character of our thoughts, words, and deeds—our whole state of mind and being (bhava). As is said in the Gita: “I am the same to all beings. There is no one who is disliked or dear to me. But they who worship me with devotion are in me, and I am also in them” (Bhagavad Gita 9:29).

Consequently, prayer to Ishwara is a very real and effective act. How do we address this infinite Being? The Upanishad gives us some examples.

Rudra, your body which is auspicious, unterrifying, showing no evil—with that most benign body, O dweller in the mountains, look upon [manifest yourself to] us.

O Dweller among the mountains, make auspicious the arrow which you hold in your hand to throw. O Protector of the mountain, injure not man or beast. (3.5-6)

Finally:

Higher than this is Brahman, the supreme, the great hidden in all creatures according to their bodies, the one who envelopes the universe. Knowing Him, the Lord, [men] become immortal. (3.7)

The sage whose name this Upanishad bears, now speaks of his realization of Ishwara. In his exposition he will speak of Ishwara in the same manner and in the same terms that all the Upanishads speak of Brahman. We should keep this in mind whenever reading of Brahman or Ishwara: what can be rightly said of Brahman can be said of Ishwara, for they are the same Being.

I know the Supreme Person of sunlike color [luster] beyond the darkness. Only by knowing Him does one pass over death. There is no other path for going there.

Than whom there is naught else higher, than whom there is naught smaller, naught greater, [the] one stands like a tree established in heaven, by Him, the Person, is this whole universe filled.

That which is beyond this world is without form and without suffering. Those who know that become immortal, but others go only to sorrow. (3.8-10)

The only point that needs comment is the statement that Ishwara “is without form.” Actually, all forms are Ishwara’s, for all things are He. What is meant here is that Ishwara has no “native” form, that his nature is absolutely formless. It also means that there is no form that confines him, that can encompass his total Being, for no form is infinite.

He who is in the faces, heads and necks of all, who dwells in the cave [of the heart] of all beings, who is all-pervading, He is the Lord and therefore the omnipresent Shiva.

That person indeed is the great lord, the impeller of the highest being [He has the power of] reaching the purest attainment, the ruler, the imperishable light. (3.11-12)

The sole purpose of this universe is the evolution and ultimate liberation of all sentient beings within it. And it is Ishwara who guides and awakens those beings. The impulse to enlightenment arises from him in cooperation with the innate impulse of each individual Self to attain conscious and total union with God. From within the depths of each one of us he reveals the possibility of enlightenment and shows us the way. That is why Patanjali says: “He is Guru even of the Ancients” (Yoga Sutras 1:26). We must ever be in attunement with this guru, and that is accomplished through meditation.

A person of the measure of a thumb is the inner Self, ever dwelling in the heart of men. He is the lord of the knowledge framed by the heart and the mind. They who know that become immortal.

The person has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. He surrounds the earth on all sides and stands ten fingers' breadth beyond.

The person is truly this whole world, whatever has been and whatever will be. He is also the lord of immortality, and whatever grows up by food.

On every side it has a hand and a foot, on every side an eye, a head and a face. It has an ear everywhere. It stands encompassing all in the world.

Reflecting the qualities of all the senses and yet devoid of all the senses, it is the lord and ruler, it is the great refuge of all.

The embodied soul in the city of nine gates sports [moving to and fro] in the outside [world], the controller of the whole world, of the stationary and the moving.

Without foot or hand, [yet] swift and grasping, he sees without eye, he hears without ear. He knows whatever is to be known, of him there is none who knows. They call him the Primeval, the Supreme Person.

Subtler than the subtle, greater than the great is the Self that is set in the cave of the [heart] of the creature. One beholds Him as being actionless and becomes freed from sorrow, when through the grace of the Creator he sees the Lord and His majesty.

I know this undecaying, ancient [primeval] Self of all, present in everything on account of infinity. Of whom they declare, there is stoppage of birth. The expounders of Brahman proclaim Him to be eternal. (3.13-21)

This is a kind of summation of all the Upanishadic teaching about Brahman.

This Upanishad has a unique feature: it concludes with an ecstatic prayer-invocation addressed to Brahman. It will not need much comment, as you will see.

He who is one, without any color, by the manifold exercise of his power distributes many colors in his hidden purpose and into whom in the beginning and at the end the universe is gathered, may He endow us with a clear understanding [4.1)

This final petition is the crux of the whole matter: our consciousness must be filled with the remembrance-awareness of Brahman.

That indeed is Agni [fire], that is Aditya [the sun], that is Vayu [the wind] and that is the moon. That, indeed, is the pure. That is Brahma. That is the waters. That is Prajapati [the lord of creation].

You are woman. You are man. You are the youth and the maiden too. You, as an old man, totter along with a staff. Being born you become facing in every direction.

You are the dark-blue bird, you are the green [parrot] with red eyes. You are [the cloud] with the lightning in its womb. You are the seasons and the seas. Having no beginning you abide through omnipresence. [You] from whom all worlds are born.

The One unborn, red, white and black, who produces manifold offspring similar in form [to herself], there lies the one unborn [male] delighting. Another unborn gives her up, having had his enjoyment [4.2-5]

Maya, Mahashakti, Mulaprakriti, is the Divine Mother wedded to the Divine Father. Formed of the three gunas, all are her children. This latter sentence is a very unsatisfactory rendering of a very obscure passage whose meaning relates to the individual Self, not Brahman the Absolute Self. The meaning is that when we unite with Maya, unlike Brahman we forget ourselves. Yet that forgetfulness is only temporary, and when at last we evolve to the necessary level, we part from Maya and are released back into Infinite Spirit.

Two birds, companions [who are] always united, cling to the self-same tree. Of these two the one eats the sweet fruit, and the other looks on without eating. (4.6)

On the self-same tree, a person immersed [in the sorrows of the world] is deluded and grieves on account of his helplessness. When he sees the Other, the Lord who is worshipped and His greatness, he becomes freed from sorrow. (4.6-7)

This is another, more expository version of Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.1-2.

For him who does not know that indestructible being of the Rig Veda, whereon in the highest heaven all the gods reside, of what avail is the Rig Veda to him? They, indeed, who know that rest fulfilled. (4.8)

Scriptures and philosophical words that are glibly reeled off by the shallow and the hypocritical mean absolutely nothing. Rather, the divine teachings of the liberated sages must be written in our hearts by our own experience through yoga. Those who know about God are certainly fortunate, but only those who know God directly are fulfilled and freed.

The Vedas, the sacrifices, the rituals, the observances, the past, the future and what the Vedas declare, all this the maker sends forth out of this, in this the other is confined by maya.

Know then that prakriti is maya and the wielder of maya is the Great Lord. This whole world is pervaded by beings that are parts of Him. (4.9-10)

To realize that all things are parts of the Divine Whole, that we are one with God, part of God and yet never God in the sense of the Absolute, is true wisdom and realization. There is no difference between us and God in that essentially we are spirit and God is Spirit. Yet we are eternally distinct. As Krishna tells Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita: “Truly there never was a time when *I* was not, nor *you*, nor *these*

lords of men—nor in the future will there be a time when we shall cease to be” (2:12). The incarnating spirit takes on numberless bodies and names, yet that which is incarnating is the same spirit or jiva. That has always been and always will be. Union with Brahman is not absorption into Brahman, so our distinct existence will never cease to be. This is the understanding of Sankhya, the original philosophy of India on which the Yoga philosophy is based. Monism is merely a simplistic misunderstanding, mistakenly thought to be authentic Advaita or Non-dualism. The only accurate non-dualistic view is that of the foregoing verse and the Gita.

The One who rules every single source, in whom all this dissolves [at the end] and comes together [at the beginning of creation], who is the lord, the bestower of blessing, the adorable God, by discerning Him one goes forever to this peace.

He who is the source and origin of the gods, the ruler of all, the great Seer, who beheld the golden germ [Hiranyagarbha] when he was born, may He endow us with clear understanding.

He who is the overlord of the gods, in whom the worlds rest, he who is the lord of two-footed and four-footed beings, to what God shall we offer our oblations?

More minute than the minute, in the midst of confusion, the creator of all, of manifold forms, the one embracer of everything, by knowing Him as the auspicious, one attains peace for ever.

He indeed is the protector of the world in time, the lord of all, hidden in all things, in whom the seers of Brahman and the deities are united, by knowing Him thus one cuts the cords of death.

By knowing Him, the auspicious, hidden in all beings like the film exceedingly fine that rises out of clarified butter, the one embracer of the universe, by knowing God one is released from all fetters. (4.11-16)

That god, the maker of all things, the great Self, ever seated in the heart of creatures is framed by the heart, by the thought, by the mind, they who know that become immortal. (4.17)

God and the Self are always within us, in our heart, our intellect and our mind: they hedge the Self around. Therefore at all times we are as intimately with and within God as we shall ever be. The most unevolved consciousness in the universe is as much one with God in the fullest manner as is the consciousness of a totally liberated being, a siddha avatar. It is only the limitation of the scope of consciousness in all beings that keeps them from perfect freedom in the realization that they, too, are That. It is only a matter of knowing, of realization. And for that reason the only authentic yoga is that which deals with the opening of our perception to see the Self, that which begins at the very onset to open us to experience of the Self in however small a degree, and gently and easily, virtually effortlessly, unfolds our consciousness until full realization is ours.

When there is no darkness, then there is neither day nor night, neither being nor non-being, only the auspicious one alone. That is the imperishable, the adorable light of Savitri [the sun] and the ancient wisdom proceeded from that.

Not above, not across, not in the middle, nor has any one grasped Him. There is no likeness of Him whose name is great glory.

His form is not to be seen, no one sees Him with the eye. Those who through heart and mind know Him as abiding in the heart become immortal. (4.18-20)

In the imperishable, infinite highest Brahman are the two, knowledge and ignorance, placed hidden. Ignorance is perishable while knowledge is immortal. And he who controls knowledge and ignorance is another [distinct from either]. (5.1)

Knowledge (vidya) and ignorance (avidya) are within Brahman, yet Brahman is absolutely other than them. So is the Self, and so, then, is he who knows the Self. The enlightened do not possess knowledge in this sense, but rather possess the direct knowing which transcends knowledge and ignorance.

He, who being one, rules over every single source, over all forms and over all sources, He who bears in His thoughts and beholds when born the fiery [red] seer [Hiranyagarbha] who was engendered in the beginning.

That God, who, after spreading out one net after another in various ways draws it together in that field, the Lord, having again created the lords, the great Self, exercises his lordship over all. (5.2-3)

The “nets” are the various lokas, levels or planes of existence, which together are the “field” of the entire range of relative existence. And each loka has its ruler, all of whom are subordinate to the Great Self (Mahatman).

As the sun, illumining all regions, above, below and across, shines, so that one God, glorious, adorable, rules over whatever creatures are born from a womb.

The source of all, who develops his own nature, who brings to maturity whatever can be ripened, who distributes qualities, He the one, rules over this whole world. (5.4-5)

Evolution is the developing within the evolving entity of the innate consciousness, the swabhava, of the Self and the Supreme Self. The Self within each one brings to fulness the potential of each being. All is under the supervision and control of these two (that are also one).

That [Self] which is hidden in the Upanishads which is hidden in the Vedas, Brahma knows that as the source of the Vedas. The gods and seers of

old who knew that [Self], they came to be of its nature and have, verily, become immortal.

But he [the Self] who has qualities [guna] and is the doer of deeds [karma] that are to bear fruit [i.e. bring recompense], he is the enjoyer, surely, of the consequence of whatever he has done. Assuming all forms, characterized by the three qualities, treading the three paths he, the ruler of the vital breaths [the individual soul], wanders about according to his deeds.

He is of the measure of a thumb, of appearance like the sun, endowed with thought and Self-sense, but with only the qualities of understanding and the Self he seems to be of the size of the point of a goad.

This living [and inconceivably subtle] Self is to be known as a part of the hundredth, part of the point of a hair divided a hundredfold, yet it is capable of infinity.

It is not female, nor is it male, nor yet is this neuter. Whatever body it takes to itself, by that it is held.

By means of thought, touch, sight and passions and by the abundance of food and drink there are the birth and development of the [embodied] Self. According to his deeds, the embodied Self assumes successively various forms in various conditions.

The embodied Self, according to his own qualities, chooses [assumes] many shapes, gross and subtle. Having himself caused his union with them, through the qualities of his acts and through the qualities of his body, he is seen as [though] another.

Him who is without beginning and without end, in the midst of chaos, the creator of all, of manifold form, who alone embraces the universe, he who knows God is freed from all fetters.

Him who is to be grasped by the mind, who is called incorporeal, who makes existence and non-existence, the kindly [the auspicious], the maker of creation and its parts, the Divine, they who know Him have left the body behind. (5.6-14)

Some wise men speak of inherent nature [swabhava], others likewise of time [kala] [as the first cause], being deluded. But it is the greatness of God [devasyaisha mahima] in the world, by which this Brahma-wheel is made to turn.

He by whom this whole world is always enveloped, the knower, the author of time, the possessor of qualities and all knowledge. Controlled by Him [this] work [of creation] unfolds [evolves] itself, that which is regarded as earth, water, fire, air and ether.

Having created this work and rested again, having entered into union with the essence of the Self, by one [the purusha], two [purusha and prakriti], three [gunas] or eight [the five cosmic elements and manas, buddhi and ahankara], or by time [kala] too and the subtle qualities of the Self.

Who, having begun with works associated with the [three] qualities, distributes all existents. In the absence of these [qualities], there is the destruction of the work that has been done and in the destruction of the work he continues, in truth, other [different from what he has produced].

He is the beginning, the source of the causes which unite [the soul with the body]. He is to be seen as beyond the three kinds of time [past, present and future], and as without parts, after having worshipped first that adorable God who has many forms, the origin of all being, who abides in one's own thoughts.

Higher and other than the forms of the world-tree and time is he from whom this world revolves, who brings good [dharma] and removes evil, the lord of prosperity, having known him as in one's own Self, the immortal, the support of all [he attains Brahman].

He in whom is the Supreme Lord of lords, who is the highest deity of deities, the supreme master of masters, transcendent, him let us know as God, the lord of the world, the adorable.

There is no action and no organ of his to be found. There is not seen his equal or his better. His high power is revealed to be various, indeed. The working of his intelligence and strength is inherent [in him].

Of him there is no master in the world, no ruler, nor is there any mark of Him. He is the cause, the lord of the lords of the sense organs, of him there is neither progenitor nor lord.

The one God who, according to his own nature, covers himself like a spider with threads produced from pradhana [unmanifested matter], may he grant us entrance into Brahman.

The one God hidden in all beings, all-pervading, the inner Self of all beings, the ordainer of all deeds, who dwells in all beings, the witness, the knower, the only one, devoid of qualities.

The one controller of the many, inactive, who makes the one seed manifold. The wise who perceive him as abiding in their Self, to them belongs eternal happiness, not to others.

He is the eternal among the eternal, the intelligent among the intelligences, the one among many, who grants desires. That cause which is to be apprehended by discrimination [of sankhya] and discipline [yoga]—by knowing God, one is freed from all fetters.

The sun does not shine there nor the moon and the stars, nor these lightnings, much less this fire. After him, when he shines, everything shines, by his light all this is illumined. (6.1-14)

The one swan in the midst of this world. This indeed is the fire that has entered into the ocean. Only by knowing him does one pass over death. There is no other path for going there. (6.15)

A yogi I know once had a striking vision of a cloud of light out of and into which

flying swans emerged and merged continuously. Within the cloud were countless swans flying but remaining always within the cloud. Some flew in and out of the cloud and others remained within it always. He understood that the cloud was Brahman and the swans were the individual Selfs that alternately left that unity for samsara and returned to that unity until they attained liberation. Then they remained in the cloud always.

Spirit-fire (Brahman and the Self) enters the ocean of matter which seems to be antithetical to it, and yet is not extinguished as earthly fire is by water. In the philosophical sense spirit extinguishes matter in that it frees itself from the bondage of matter. Yet the cosmic Spirit and the individual spirits dwell in that ocean, while the liberated individual spirits rise out of it and merge into the Chidakasha, the infinite Consciousness that is Brahman and themselves.

He is the maker of all, the knower of all, the Self-caused, the knower, the author of time, the possessor of qualities, the knower of everything, the ruler of nature and of the spirit, the lord of qualities, the cause of worldly existence, and of liberation, of continuance and of bondage.

Becoming that, immortal, existing as the lord, the knower, the omnipresent, the guardian of this world is he who rules this world for ever, for no other cause is found for the ruling.

To him who, of old, creates Brahma and who, verily, delivers to him the Vedas, to that God who is lighted by his own intelligence, do I, eager for liberation, resort for refuge.

To him who is without parts, without activity, tranquil, irreproachable, without blemish, the highest bridge to immortality like a fire with its fuel burnt.

When men shall roll up space as if it were a piece of leather, then will there be an end of sorrow, apart from knowing God.

By the power of austerity and the grace of God, the wise Shwetashwatara in proper manner spoke about Brahman, the Supreme, the pure, to the advanced ascetics, what is pleasing to the company of seers.

This highest mystery in the Vedanta which has been declared in a former age should not be given to one whose passions are not subdued nor again to one who is not a son or a pupil.

These subjects which have been declared shine forth to the high-souled one who has the highest devotion for God and for his spiritual teacher. Yea, they shine forth to the high-souled one. (6.16-23)

Thus is the glorious and wondrous conclusion of this Upanishad and of all the Upanishads.

Glossary

Adhikari(n): An eligible or qualified person; a worthy person. It implies both fitness and capability.

Adishakti: Primal Power.

Advaita: Non-dualism; non-duality; literally: not [a] two [dvaita].

Advaita Vedanta: The teaching that there is only One Reality (Brahman-Atman), as found in the Upanishads. Non-dualistic philosophy, especially that of Shankara.

Advaitic: Non-dual; having to do with the philosophy of Advaita (Non-Dualism).

Advaitin: A proponent of Advaita philosophy.

Agni: Fire; Vedic god of fire.

Agnihotra: “Fire offering;” a Vedic fire sacrifice.

Ahimsa: Non-injury in thought, word, and deed; non-violence; non-killing; harmlessness.

Akasha: Ether; space; sky; literally: “not visible.” The subtlest of the five elements (panchabhuta), from which the other four arise. It is all-pervading, and is sometimes identified with consciousness—chidakasha. It is the basis of sound (shabda), which is its particular property.

Akshara: Imperishable; indestructible, immutable, undying; undecaying; unchanging—all in reference to the individual self and the Supreme Self, Brahman.

Amatam: Unperceivable.

Amrita: That which makes one immortal. The nectar of immortality that emerged from the ocean of milk when the gods churned it.

Ananda: Bliss; happiness; joy. A fundamental attribute of Brahman, which is Satchidananda: Existence, Consciousness, Bliss.

Anandamaya kosha: “The sheath of bliss (ananda).” The causal body (karana sharira). The borderline of the Self (atman).

Annamaya kosha: “The sheath of food (anna).” The physical—or gross—body, made of food.

Antahkarana: Internal instrument; the subtle bodies; fourfold mind: mind, intellect, ego and subconscious mind.

Antaryamin: Indweller; inner guide; inner ruler; God as the Inner Controller.

Apah: Water.

Arani: Sacrificial wood stick for creating fire through friction.

Aranya: Forest.

Archa(nam): Worship; adoration; offering of flowers and sacred leaves, etc., at the time of puja or worship, uttering the names of the object of worship.

Arta(m): Pain(ed); distress(ed); affliction (afflicted); one who is seeking/asking for relief from personal troubles or suffering.

Ashrutam: Unhearable.

Atma(n): The individual spirit or Self that is one with Brahman. The true nature or identity.

Atmajnana: Direct knowledge of the Self; Brahma-Jnana.

Atmajnani: One who has atmajnana.

Avidya: Ignorance; nescience; unknowing; literally: “to know not.” A Sakti or illusive power in Brahman which is sometimes regarded as one with Maya and sometimes as different from it. It forms the condition of the individual soul and is otherwise called Ajnana or Asuddha-maya. It forms the Karana Sarira of the Jiva. It is Malina or impure Sattwa. Also called ajnana.

Avijnatam: Unknowable.

Bhagavad Gita: “The Song of God.” The sacred philosophical text often called “the Hindu Bible,” part of the epic Mahabharata by Vyasa; the most popular sacred text in Hinduism.

Bhagavan: The Lord; the One endowed with the six attributes, viz. infinite treasures, strength, glory, splendor knowledge, and renunciation; the Personal God.

Bhaya: Fear; terror.

Bhokta: Enjoyer; experiencer; subject of experience or enjoyment.

Brahma: The Creator (Prajapati) of the three worlds of men, angels, and archangels (Bhur, Bhuwah, and Swah); the first of the created beings; Hiranyagarbha or cosmic intelligence.

Brahma Sutras: A treatise by Vyasa on Vedanta philosophy in the form of aphorisms. Also called the Vedanta Sutras or Vedanta Darshana.

Brahmacharya: Continence; self-restraint on all levels; discipline; dwelling in Brahman.

Brahmajnana: Direct, transcendental knowledge of Brahman; Self-realization.

Brahmajnani: One who possess Brahmajnana.

Brahmaloka: The world (loka) of God (Brahman); the infinite consciousness of God.

Brahman: The Absolute Reality; the Truth proclaimed in the Upanishads; the Supreme Reality that is one and indivisible, infinite, and eternal; all-pervading, changeless Existence; Existence-knowledge-bliss Absolute (Satchidananda); Absolute Consciousness; it is not only all-powerful but all-power itself; not only all-knowing and blissful but all-knowledge and all-bliss itself.

Brahmana (1): A knower of Brahman; a Brahmajnani.

Brahmana (2): A member of the Brahmin caste.

Brahmananda: The bliss of communion with Brahman.

Brahmanishtha: Remaining steadfast in the Absolute (Brahman). One who is firmly established in the Supreme being, in the direct knowledge of Brahman, the Absolute Reality.

Brahmarandhra: “The hole of Brahman,” the subtle (astral) aperture in the crown of the head. Said to be the gateway to the Absolute (Brahman) in the thousand-petaled lotus (sahasrara) in the crown of the head. Liberated beings are

said to exit the physical body through this aperture at death.

Brahmavidya: Science of Brahman; knowledge of Brahman; learning pertaining to Brahman or the Absolute Reality.

Brahmin (Brahmana): A knower of Brahman; a member of the highest Hindu caste consisting of priests, pandits, philosophers, and religious leaders.

Caste: See Varna.

Chidakasha: “The Space (Ether) of Consciousness.” The infinite, all-pervading expanse of Consciousness from which all “things” proceed; the subtle space of Consciousness in the Sahasrara (Thousand-petalled Lotus). The true “heart” of all things. Brahman in Its aspect as limitless knowledge; unbounded intelligence. This is a familiar concept of the Upanishads. It is not meant that the physical ether is consciousness. The Pure Consciousness (Cit) is like the ether (Akasa), an all-pervading continuum.

Chitta: The subtle energy that is the substance of the mind, and therefore the mind itself; mind in all its aspects; the field of the mind; the field of consciousness; consciousness itself; the subconscious mind.

Dahara: Dwelling-place; abode.

Darshana: “Seeing” in the sense of a viewpoint or system of thought. The Sad-darshanas are the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy: Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta.

Deva: “A shining one,” a god—greater or lesser in the evolutionary hierarchy; a semi-divine or celestial being with great powers, and therefore a “god.” Sometimes called a demi-god. Devas are the demigods presiding over various powers of material and psychic nature. In many instances “devas” refer to the powers of the senses or the sense organs themselves.

Devayana: The way or path of the gods, “the shining ones;” the path that leads beyond earthly rebirth and ultimately to liberation.

Dharma: The righteous way of living, as enjoined by the sacred scriptures and the spiritually illumined; law; lawfulness; virtue; righteousness; norm.

Dharmi: One who follows dharma.

Dharmic: Having to do with dharma; of the character of dharma.

Dhira: Steadfast; strong; bold; courageous. One who possesses these qualities.

Dhyana(m): Meditation; contemplation.

Gandharva: A demigod—a celestial musician and singer.

Ganga: See Ganges.

Ganges (Ganga): The sacred river—believed to be of divine origin—that flows from high up in the Himalayas, through the plains of Northern India, and empties into the Bay of Bengal. Hindus consider that bathing in the Ganges profoundly purifies both body and mind.

Garbha: Womb; belly; embryo; act of conception; inside, middle, or interior of anything; offspring of the sky.

Gotra: Clan; family; lineage.

Gurukula: “Teacher’s school” or “teacher’s abode.” A gurukula is the residence

of a spiritual teacher where young students (brahmacharis) came to live and learn.

Hamsah: “I am He;” swan.

Hansa: Swan; see Hamsah.

Havan: Fire sacrifice; yajna.

Hiranyagarbha: Cosmic intelligence; the Supreme Lord of the universe; also called Brahma, cosmic Prana, Sutratma, Aparā-brahman, Maha-brahma, or karya-brahman; Samasti-sukshma-sarirabhimani (the sum-total of all the subtle bodies); the highest created being through whom the Supreme Being projects the physical universe; cosmic mind.

Hridaya: Heart; essential center or core of something; essence; the Self.

Indra: King of the lesser “gods” (demigods); the ruler of heaven (Surendra Loka); the rain-god.

Indraloka: Indra’s world; Indra’s heaven.

Indriya: Organ. The five organs of perception (jnanendriyas) are the ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose. The five organs of action (karmendriyas) are the voice, hand, foot, organ of excretion, and the organ of generation.

Ishwara: “God” or “Lord” in the sense of the Supreme Power, Ruler, Master, or Controller of the cosmos. “Ishwara” implies the powers of omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience.

Jada: Inert; insentient; unconscious; matter.

Jagat: World; cosmos; the ever-changing.

Japa: Repetition of a mantra.

Jiva: Individual spirit.

Jnana: Knowledge; knowledge of Reality—of Brahman, the Absolute; also denotes the process of reasoning by which the Ultimate Truth is attained. The word is generally used to denote the knowledge by which one is aware of one’s identity with Brahman.

Jnanamaya kosha: “The sheath of intellect (buddhi).” The level of intelligent thought and conceptualization. Sometimes called the Vijnanamaya kosha. The astral-causal body.

Jnanendriyas: The five organs of perception: ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose.

Karma: Karma, derived from the Sanskrit root *kri*, which means to act, do, or make, means any kind of action, including thought and feeling. It also means the effects of action. Karma is both action and reaction, the metaphysical equivalent of the principle: “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). It is karma operating through the law of cause and effect that binds the jiva or the individual soul to the wheel of birth and death. There are three forms of karma: sanchita, agami, and prarabdha. Sanchita karma is the vast store of accumulated actions done in the past, the fruits of which have not yet been reaped. Agami karma is the action that will be done by the individual in the future. Prarabdha karma is the action that has begun to fructify, the fruit of which is being reaped in this life.

Karmendriyas: The five organs of action: voice, hand, foot, organ of excretion,

and the organ of generation.

Klesha: Literally, taints or afflictions; pain. The kleshas are: ignorance, egotism, attractions and repulsions towards objects, and desperate clinging to physical life from the fear of death. (See Yoga Sutras 2:2-9.)

Kratu: Action; plan; intention; desire; applied will; intelligence personified; conviction; purpose; determination; a firm belief; inspiration; enlightenment; sacrificial rite or ceremony; sacrifice; yajna; offering; worship, resolution. *Bhadra kratu:* right judgment; good understanding.

Kshatriya: A member of the ruler/warrior caste.

Kumaras (Four): At the beginning of this creation cycle the four most advanced human souls (Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara and Sanatsujata) from the previous cycle refused to engage in the creation of the world and to enter into worldly life despite the command of Brahma that they do so. Instead they engaged in intense yoga and attained liberation. The chief of these was Sanatkumara who thereby became the Lord of Liberation for all humanity. Ever present in subtle form, Sanatkumara assists those who truly seek liberation—usually invisibly and unknown to them. But at their attainment of perfect realization he reveals himself to them and leads them to the worlds beyond compulsory rebirth.

Loka: World or realm; sphere, level, or plane of existence, whether physical, astral, or causal.

Lokapala: The ruler, overseer or guardian of a loka.

Madhu: Honey; sweet substance; sweet.

Maha: A prefix meaning “great,” the root of the Latin word magna.

Mahabharata: The world’s longest epic poem (110,00 verses) about the Mahabharata (Great Indian) War that took place about three thousand years ago. The Mahabharata also includes the Bhagavad Gita, the most popular sacred text of Hinduism.

Mahashakti: The Great Power; the divine creative energy.

Manomaya kosha: “The sheath of the mind (manas—mental substance).” The level (kosha) of the sensory mind. The astral body.

Manusha(m): Human being; humanity.

Moksha: Release; liberation; the term is particularly applied to the liberation from the bondage of karma and the wheel of birth and death; Absolute Experience.

Nama: Name. The Divine Name.

Nama-rupa: Name and form; the nature of the world.

Nirguna: Without attributes or qualities (gunas).

Nirguna Brahman: The impersonal, attributeless Absolute beyond all description or designation.

Nirodha: Restraint; restriction; suppression; dissolving/dissolution; cessation; disappearance; control inhibition; annihilation; process of ending.

Nirvana: Liberation; final emancipation; the term is particularly applied to the liberation from the bondage of karma and the wheel of birth and death that comes from knowing Brahman; Absolute Experience. See Moksha.

Nirveda(m): Complete indifference; disregard of worldly objects.

Panchabhuta: The Five Elements (Mahabhuta): ether (akasha), air (vayu), fire (agni), water (ap), and earth (prithvi).

Papa(m): Sin; demerit; evil; sinful deeds; evil deeds; trouble; harm; anything which takes one away from dharma.

Paramatma(n): The Supreme Self, God.

Paramahan[m]sa/Paramhan[m]sa: Literally: Supreme Swan, a person of the highest spiritual realization, from the fact that a swan can separate milk from water and is therefore an apt symbol for one who has discarded the unreal for the Real, the darkness for the Light, and mortality for the Immortal, having separated himself fully from all that is not God and joined himself totally to the Divine, becoming a veritable embodiment of Divinity manifested in humanity.

Paramhansa: See Paramahan[m]sa/Paramhan[m]sa above.

Pradhana: Prakriti; causal matter.

Prajapati: Progenitor; the Creator; a title of Brahma the Creator.

Prakriti: Causal matter; the fundamental power (shakti) of God from which the entire cosmos is formed; the root base of all elements; undifferentiated matter; the material cause of the world. Also known as Pradhana. Prakriti can also mean the entire range of vibratory existence (energy).

Prana: Life; vital energy; life-breath; life-force; inhalation. In the human body the prana is divided into five forms: 1) Prana, the prana that moves upward; 2) Apana: The prana that moves downward, producing the excretory functions in general. 3) Vyana: The prana that holds prana and apana together and produces circulation in the body. 4) Samana: The prana that carries the grosser material of food to the apana and brings the subtler material to each limb; the general force of digestion. 5) Udana: The prana which brings up or carries down what has been drunk or eaten; the general force of assimilation.

Pranamaya kosha: “The sheath of vital air (prana).” The sheath consisting of vital forces and the (psychic) nervous system, including the karmendriyas.

Prithvi: The element of earth with density and fragrance as its characteristic features.

Priya(m): Dear; beloved; pleasing. It can also mean the happiness or joy felt when seeing a beloved object.

Purana: Literally “The Ancient.” The Puranas are a number of scriptures attributed to the sage Vyasa that teach spiritual principles and practices through stories about sacred historical personages which often include their teachings given in conversations.

Purna: Full; complete; infinite; absolute; Brahman.

Purusha: “Person” in the sense of a conscious spirit. Both God and the individual spirits are purushas, but God is the Adi (Original, Archetypal) Purusha, Parama (Highest) Purusha, and the Purushottama (Highest or Best of the Purushas).

Pushan: Surya, the Sun-god.

Rajas: Activity, passion, desire for an object or goal.

Ramakrishna, Sri: Sri Ramakrishna lived in India in the second half of the nineteenth century, and is regarded by all India as a perfectly enlightened person—and by many as an Incarnation of God.

Rasa: Taste; essence; savor; juice; nectar of delight.

Rishi: Sage; seer of the Truth.

Rita(m): Truth; Law; Right; Order. The natural order of things, or Cosmic Order/Law. Its root is ri, which means “to rise, to tend upward.” It is said to be the basis for the Law of Karma.

Rupa: Form; body.

Sadhaka: One who practices spiritual discipline—sadhana—particularly meditation.

Sadhana: Spiritual practice.

Saguna: Possessing attributes or qualities (gunas).

Saguna Brahman: Brahman with attributes, such as mercy, omnipotence, omniscience, etc.; the Absolute conceived as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe; also the Personal God according to the Vedanta.

Samjnana: Consciousness; sentience.

Samsara: Life through repeated births and deaths; the wheel of birth and death; the process of earthly life.

Samskara (1): Impression in the mind, either conscious or subconscious, produced by action or experience in this or previous lives; propensities of the mental residue of impressions; subliminal activators; prenatal tendency. See Vasana.

Samskara (2): A ritual that makes an impression or change in the individual for whom it is done. There are sixteen samskaras prescribed by the dharma shastras, beginning with conception (garbhadan) and concluding with the rite for the departed soul (antyshti). The major ones besides these two are the birth rite (jatakarma), naming ceremony (namakaranam), the first eating of solid food (annaprashnam), the first cutting of the hair (chudakaraman), bestowal of the sacred thread and instruction in the Gayatri mantra (upanayanam), marriage (vivahanam), taking up of the retired life (vanaprastha), and taking up the monastic life (sannyasa). They are all done at points in the person’s life when significant changes in the subtle energy bodies are going to take place. Thus the samskara protects and strengthens the individual at those times and also prepares him for those changes, making actual alterations in his subtle bodies. Although they are often made social occasions, they are very real instruments of change to facilitate and further the person’s personal evolution. They are the linchpins of dharmic life, and essentially spiritual events.

Sanatana Dharma: “The Eternal Religion,” also known as “Arya Dharma,” “the religion of those who strive upward [Aryas].” Hinduism.

Sanatana Dharmi: One who follows Sanatana Dharma.

Sanatkumara: One of the Four Kumaras (see Kumaras).

Sanatkumaras: The Four Kumaras (see Kumaras).

Sankalpa: A life-changing wish, desire, volition, resolution, will, determination, or intention—not a mere momentary aspiration, but an empowering act of will that persists until the intention is fully realized. It is an act of spiritual, divine creative will inherent in each person as a power of the Atma.

Sankhya: One of the six orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy whose originator was the sage Kapila, Sankhya is the original Vedic philosophy, endorsed by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita (Gita 2:39; 3:3, 5; 18:13, 19), the second chapter of which is entitled “Sankhya Yoga.” A *Ramakrishna-Vedanta Wordbook* says: “Sankhya postulates two ultimate realities, Purusha and Prakriti. Declaring that the cause of suffering is man’s identification of Purusha with Prakriti and its products, Sankhya teaches that liberation and true knowledge are attained in the supreme consciousness, where such identification ceases and Purusha is realized as existing independently in its transcendental nature.” Not surprisingly, then, Yoga is based on the Sankhya philosophy.

Sannyas(a): Renunciation; monastic life. Sannyasa literally means “total throwing away,” in the sense of absolute rejection of worldly life, ways and attitudes. True sannyas is based on viveka and vairagya. It is not just a mode of external life, but a profound insight and indifference to the things of the world and the world itself—not the world of God’s creation, but the world of human ignorance, illusion, folly and suffering which binds all sentient beings to the wheel of continual birth and death. The sannyasi’s one goal is liberation through total purification and enlightenment. His creed is Shankara’s renowned Vedanta in Half a Verse: “Brahman is real. The world is illusion. The jiva is none other than Brahman.”

Sannyasi(n): A renunciate; a monk.

Sanskrit: The language of the ancient sages of India and therefore of the Indian scriptures and yoga treatises.

Sat: Existence; reality; truth; being; a title of Brahman, the Absolute or Pure Being.

Sattwa: Light; purity; harmony, goodness, reality.

Satya(m): Truth; the Real; Brahman, or the Absolute; truthfulness; honesty.

Satya Yuga: See Yuga.

Shabda: Sound; word.

Shankara: Shankaracharya; Adi (the first) Shankaracharya: The great reformer and re-establisher of Vedic Religion in India around 500 B.C. He is the unparalleled exponent of Advaita (Non-Dual) Vedanta. He also reformed the mode of monastic life and founded (or regenerated) the ancient Swami Order.

Shastra: Scripture; spiritual treatise.

Shaucha: Purity; cleanliness.

Shraddha: Faith; confidence or assurance that arises from personal experience.

Shudra: A member of the laborer, servant caste.

Shukra: Bright; resplendent; clear; pure; spotless; white; juice; the essence of anything; semen.’ **Siddhi:** Spiritual perfection; psychic power; power; modes of success; attainment; accomplishment; achievement; mastery; supernatural power

attained through mantra, meditation, or other yogic practices. From the verb root *sidh*—to attain.

Soham: “That am I;” the ultimate Atma mantra, the mantra of the Self; the Ajapa Gayatri formula of meditation in which “So” is intoned mentally during natural inhalation and “Ham” is intoned mentally during natural exhalation.

Spanda: Vibration; expanding vibration; flutter; throb; movement; creative shakti; movement; pulsation; creative pulsation; apparent motion in the motionless Shiva which brings about the manifestation, maintenance, and withdrawal of the universe; the principle of apparent movement from the state of absolute unity to the plurality of the world.

Sthira(m): Fixed; firm; still; steady; stable; enduring.

Sthirata (Sthirattwa): Steadiness or firmness of body or mind; the steady tranquillity born of meditation.

Sthirattwa: Sthirata.

Sukha(m): Happiness; ease; joy; happy; pleasure; pleasant; agreeable.

Sukshma: Fine; subtle; invisible; belonging to a subtler order of existence than the physical.

Sushupti: The dreamless sleep state.

Sutra: Literally: a thread; an aphorism with minimum words and maximum sense; a terse sentence; in Buddhism, an entire scripture.

Swabhava: One’s own inherent disposition, nature, or potentiality; inherent state of mind; state of inner being.

Swadharma: One’s own natural (innate) duty (dharma, based on their karma and samskara. One’s own prescribed duty in life according to the eternal law (ritam).

Swapna: The dream state; a dream.

Swarga: Heaven-world; the celestial region.

Swayamprakash(a): Self-luminous; self-illuminated.

Tamas: Dullness, darkness, inertia, folly, and ignorance.

Tapasya: Austerity; practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline; spiritual force. Literally it means the generation of heat or energy, but is always used in a symbolic manner, referring to spiritual practice and its effect, especially the roasting of karmic seeds, the burning up of karma.

Tat Twam Asi: “Thou art That.” The Mahavakya (Great Saying) of the Chandogya Upanishad.

Tejas: Radiance; brilliancy (especially spiritual); the element of fire; Agni; heat.

Turiya: The state of pure consciousness. *A Ramakrishna-Vedanta Wordbook* defines it as: “The superconscious; lit., ‘the Fourth,’ in relation to the three ordinary states of consciousness—waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep—which it transcends.”

Upadhi: Adjunct; association; superimposed thing or attribute that veils and gives a colored view of the substance beneath it; limiting adjunct; instrument; vehicle; body; a technical term used in Vedanta philosophy for any superimposition that gives a limited view of the Absolute and makes It appear as the relative.

Upanishads: Books (of varying lengths) of the philosophical teachings of the ancient sages of India on the knowledge of Absolute Reality. The upanishads contain two major themes: (1) the individual self (atman) and the Supreme Self (Paramatman) are one in essence, and (2) the goal of life is the realization/manifestation of this unity, the realization of God (Brahman). There are eleven principal upanishads: Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, and Shvetashvatara, all of which were commented on by Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhavacharya, thus setting the seal of authenticity on them.

Upasana: “Sitting near” or “drawing near;” worship; adoration; contemplation of God or deity; devout meditation; both teaching and learning.

Vairagya: Non-attachment; detachment; dispassion; absence of desire; disinterest; or indifference. Indifference towards and disgust for all worldly things and enjoyments.

Vaishya: A member of the merchant, farmer, artisan, businessman caste.

Vaishwanara: Universal Being; the Self of the waking state; the sum-total of the created beings; Brahman in the form of the universe; Cosmic Fire; the god of fire; the digestive fire; the gastric fire; the sum-total of the created beings; Brahma in the form of the universe; Virat-purusha.

Vak: Speech.

Varna: Caste. (Literally: color.) In traditional Hindu society there were four divisions or castes according to the individual’s nature and aptitude: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra.

Vasana: Subtle desire; a tendency created in a person by the doing of an action or by experience; it induces the person to repeat the action or to seek a repetition of the experience; the subtle impression in the mind capable of developing itself into action; it is the cause of birth and experience in general; an aggregate or bundle of samskaras—the impressions of actions that remain unconsciously in the mind.

Vasana(s): A bundle or aggregate of such samskaras.

Vayu: The Vedic god of the wind; air; vital breath; Prana.

Vedanta: Literally, “the end of the Vedas;” the Upanishads; the school of Hindu thought, based primarily on the Upanishads, upholding the doctrine of either pure non-dualism or conditional non-dualism. The original text of this school is Vedanta-darshana, the Brahma Sutras compiled by the sage Vyasa.

Vedanta Sutras: The Brahma Sutras.

Vedas: The oldest scriptures of India, considered the oldest scriptures of the world, that were revealed in meditation to the Vedic Rishis (seers). Although in modern times there are said to be four Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva), in the upanishads only three are listed (Rig, Sama, and Yajur). In actuality, there is only one Veda: the Rig Veda. The Sama Veda is only a collection of Rig Veda hymns that are marked (pointed) for singing. The Yajur Veda is a small book giving directions on just one form of Vedic sacrifice. The Atharva Veda is only a collection of theurgical mantras to be recited for the cure of various afflictions or to be recited

over the herbs to be taken as medicine for those afflictions.

Vidhi: Injunction; method; rule.

Vidvan: A knowing person; the term is particularly applied to one that knows the real nature of the Self as distinct from the body; an expert in all aspects of the Sanskrit language.

Vidya: Knowledge; both spiritual knowledge and mundane knowledge.

Vijnana: The highest knowledge, beyond mere theoretical knowledge (jnana); transcendental knowledge or knowing; experiential knowledge; a high state of spiritual realization—intimate knowledge of God in which all is seen as manifestations of Brahman; knowledge of the Self.

Virya: Strength; power; energy; courage; seminal energy.

Vishwaprana: The universal life force (prana).

Viveka: Discrimination between the Real and the unreal, between the Self and the non-Self, between the permanent and the impermanent; right intuitive discrimination.

Vrata: Vow; a resolution; rule of conduct.

Vritti: Thought-wave; mental modification; mental whirlpool; a ripple in the chitta (mind substance).

Vyoma/Vyomakasha: Ether (akasha); the sky.

Yajnopavita: Sacred thread. A triple thread worn by the twice-born (dwijas) that represents the threefold Brahman. It is essential for the performance of all the rites of the twice-born. Usually worn only by Brahmins, originally it was worn by Kshatriyas and Vaishyas as well.

Yoga: Literally, “joining” or “union” from the Sanskrit root yuj. Union with the Supreme Being, or any practice that makes for such union. Meditation that unites the individual spirit with God, the Supreme Spirit. The name of the philosophy expounded by the sage Patanjali, teaching the process of union of the individual with the Universal Soul.

Yogananda (Paramhansa): The most influential yogi of the twentieth century in the West, author of *Autobiography of a Yogi* and founder of Self-Realization Fellowship in America.

Yuga: Age or cycle; aeon; world era. Hindus believe that there are four yugas: the Golden Age (Satya or Krita Yuga), the Silver age (Treta Yuga), The Bronze Age (Dwapara Yuga), and the Iron Age (Kali Yuga). Satya Yuga is four times as long as the Kali Yuga; Treta Yuga is three times as long; and Dwapara Yuga is twice as long. In the Satya Yuga the majority of humans use the total potential—four-fourths—of their minds; in the Treta Yuga, three-fourths; in the Dwapara Yuga, one half; and in the Kali Yuga, one fourth. (In each Yuga there are those who are using either more or less of their minds than the general populace.) The Yugas move in a perpetual circle: Ascending Kali Yuga, ascending Dwapara Yuga, ascending Treta Yuga, ascending Satya Yuga, descending Satya Yuga, descending, Treta Yuga, descending Dwapara Yuga, and descending Kali Yuga—over and over. Furthermore, there are yuga cycles within yuga cycles. For example, there are yuga cycles that affect the

entire cosmos, and smaller yuga cycles within those greater cycles that affect a solar system. The cosmic yuga cycle takes 8,640,000,000 years, whereas the solar yuga cycle only takes 24,000 years. At the present time our solar system is in the ascending Dwapara Yuga, but the cosmos is in the descending Kali Yuga. Consequently, the more the general mind of humanity develops, the more good can be accomplished by the positive, and the more evil can be accomplished by the negative. Therefore we have more contrasts and polarization in contemporary life than previously before 1900.

About the Author

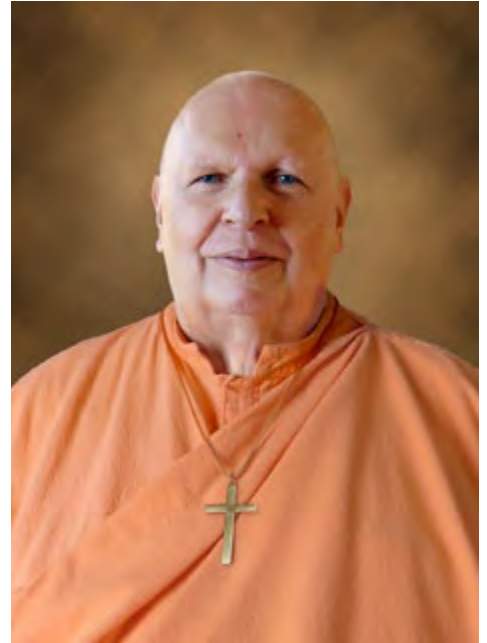
Abbot George Burke (Swami Nirmalananda Giri) is the founder and director of the Light of the Spirit Monastery (Atma Jyoti Ashram) in Cedar Crest, New Mexico, USA.

In his many pilgrimages to India, he had the opportunity of meeting some of India's greatest spiritual figures, including Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh and Anandamayi Ma. During his first trip to India he was made a member of the ancient Swami Order by Swami Vidyananda Giri, a direct disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda, who had himself been given sannyas by the Shankaracharya of Puri, Jagadguru Bharati Krishna Tirtha.

In the United States he also encountered various Christian saints, including Saint John Maximovich of San Francisco and Saint Philaret Voznesensky of New York. He was ordained in the Liberal Catholic Church (International) to the priesthood on January 25, 1974, and consecrated a bishop on August 23, 1975.

For many years Abbot George has researched the identity of Jesus Christ and his teachings with India and Sanatana Dharma, including Yoga. It is his conclusion that Jesus lived in India for most of his life, and was a yogi and Sanatana Dharma missionary to the West. After his resurrection he returned to India and lived the rest of his life in the Himalayas.

He has written extensively on these and other topics, many of which are posted at OCOY.org.



Light of the Spirit Monastery

Light of the Spirit Monastery is an esoteric Christian monastic community for those men who seek direct experience of the Spirit through meditation, sacramental worship, discipline and dedicated communal life, emphasizing the inner reality of "Christ in you the hope of glory," as taught by the illumined mystics of East and West.

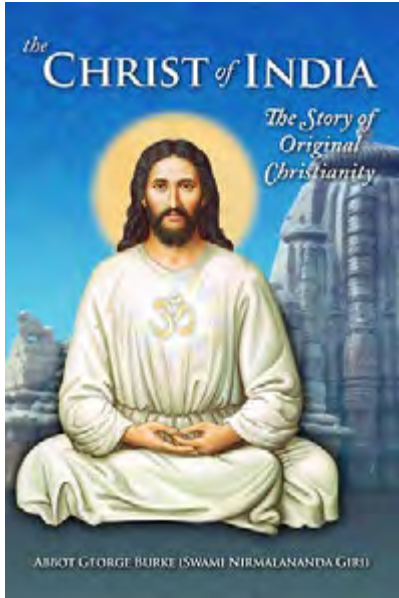
The public outreach of the monastery is through its website, OCOY.org (Original Christianity and Original Yoga). There you will find many articles on Original Christianity and Original Yoga, including *Esoteric Christian Beliefs*, *Foundations of Yoga* and *How to Be a Yogi* are practical guides for anyone seriously interested in living the Yoga Life.

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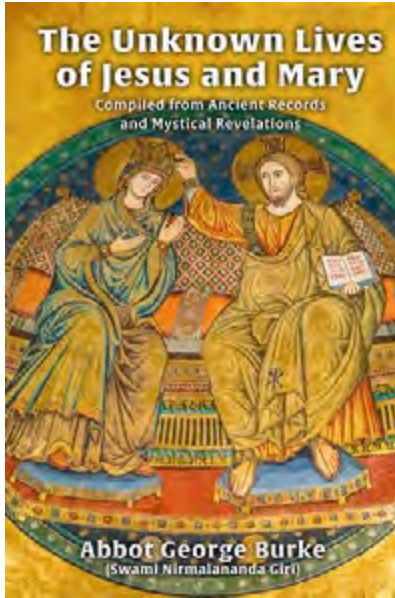
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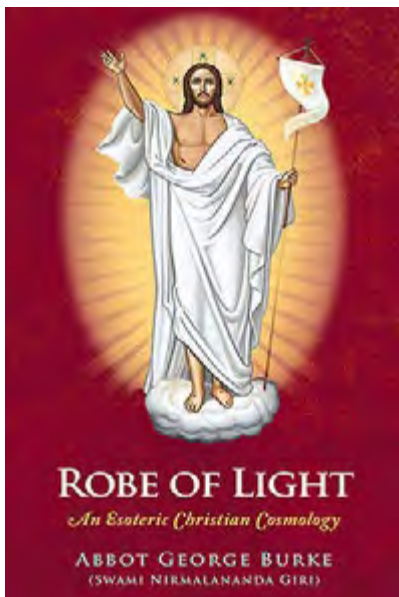
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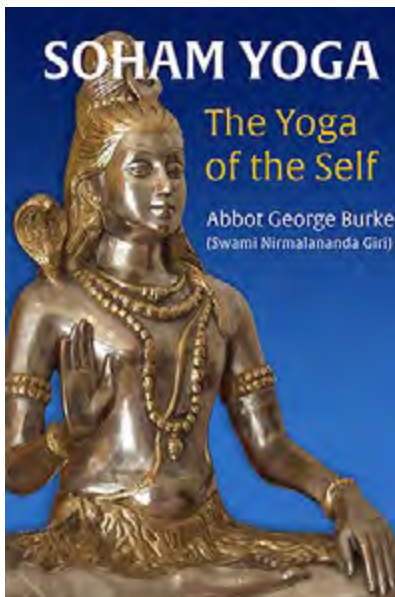
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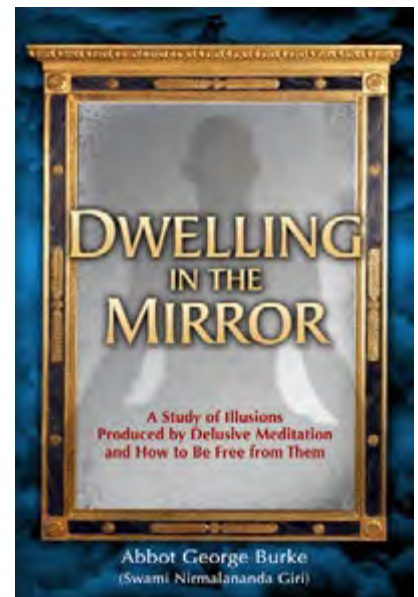
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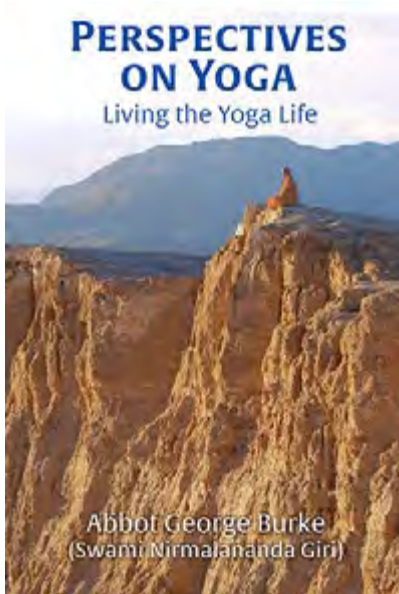
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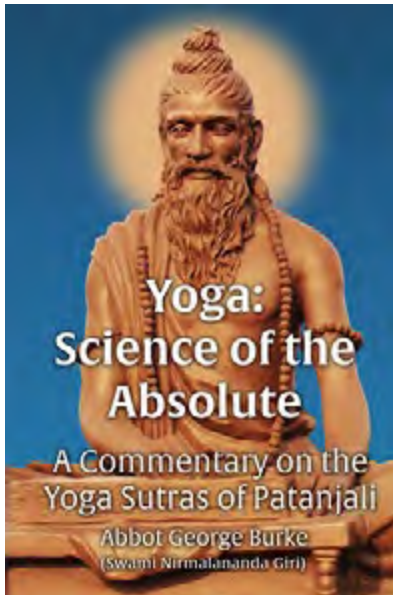
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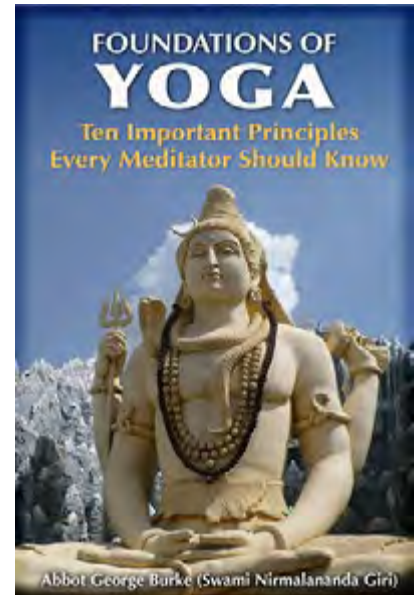
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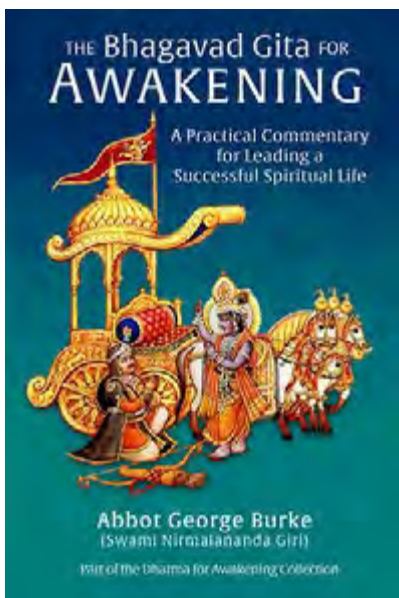
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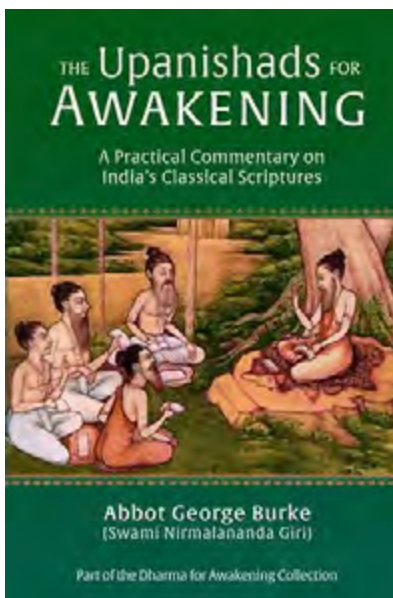
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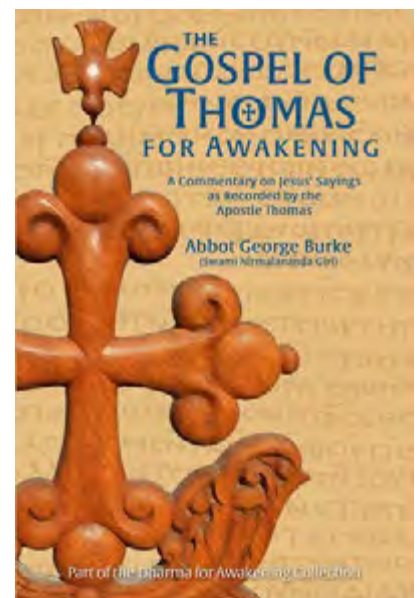
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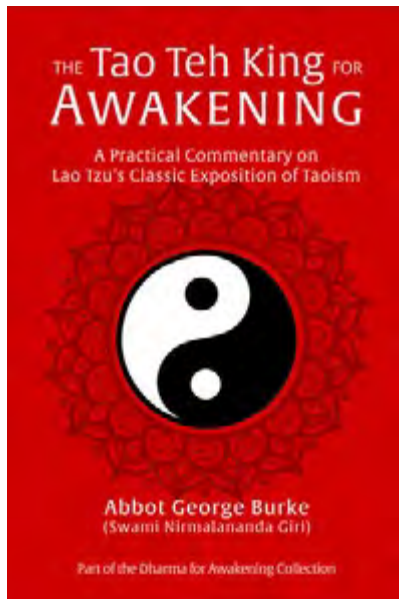
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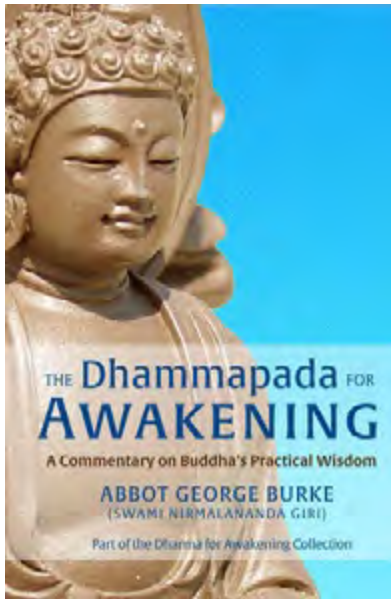
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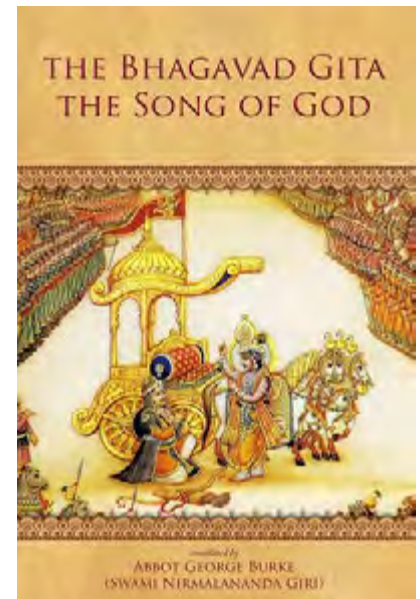
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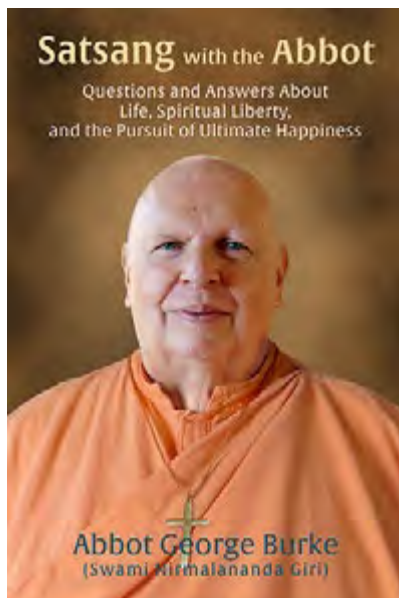
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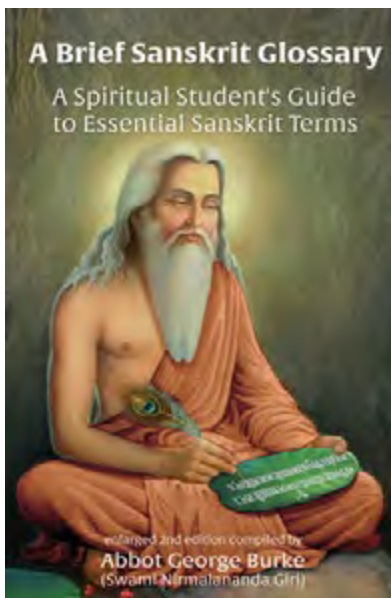
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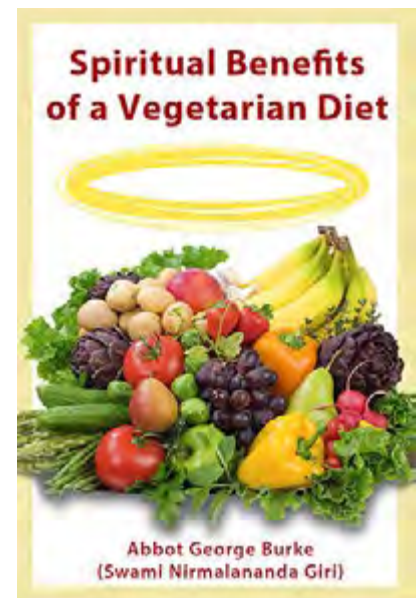
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