



# Upanishad Vahini

Divine Discourses of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

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# Preface

## DEAR READER!

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba has come among humanity and is providing spiritual sustenance and guidance, in order to re-establish truth, justice, peace, and love as the mainspring of individual, social, and national life. He is using ancient and modern instruments for this great task, Sanathana Dharma and science. His writings, discourses, and conversations, which correct, communicate, and convince, are full of statements and commentaries on the discoveries of physical and metaphysical sciences.

This book, which gives in English His articles (first published in Telugu in the Sanathana Sarathi) on the Ten Upanishads (invaluable textbooks on spiritual discipline and on the glorious fruit of spiritual adventure) will reveal to you the vast limitless mercy that impels Him to save us from trivialities and prompts Him to guide us along, until we reach the Goal of Life.

Making us tread the path discovered by the sages of the past, inducing us to revere their light and their message, illumining in us the flame of knowledge, which dispels delusion - that is what Bhagawan, with His Supreme Love, does for us in this book.

Let us read it with care, recapitulate it with earnestness in the silence of our hearts, and practise it with humility and faith in every turn of thought, in every tilt of tongue, and in every digit of deed.

N. KASTURI

Prasanthi Nilayam, 21 April 1968

# 1. The Upanishads

Humanity is essentially divine. However, one believes oneself to be an individual, limited and temporary, because one is entangled in the characteristics of the five elements: sound, touch, form, taste, and smell. This error brings about joy and grief, good and bad, birth and death. To escape from this association with the elements, to rid oneself of the pulls of their characteristics, is the sign of liberation, known as kaivalya, moksha, or mukthi.

The names may change, but the achievement is the same.

While entangled in the five elements, one is attracted, distracted, or disappointed by them, all of which causes distress. Wealth, possessions - vehicles, buildings, etc. - are all transmutations of the elements. One craves them, and when one loses them or fails to get them, one spurns them.

Let us take the five elements, one by one. The living being has the first one, the earth, as its base. Water, the second, is the basis for the earth. Water is produced from fire, the third element, and fire itself emanates from wind (vayu), which is the fourth. Wind arises from ether (akasa). Ether emerges from the primal nature, and the primal nature is but the manifestation of one aspect of the majesty of God, or the supreme sovereign Atma (Paramatma).

Seeking to reach that supreme Atma, the source and core of the universe, the individual (jivi), who has entangled himself in the elements, has to overcome the bonds one by one, by discrimination and steady practice of detachment. One who does this is a spiritual aspirant, and one who wins in this struggle is liberated even while alive (is a jivan-muktha).

**Study the Upanishads for higher spiritual wisdom**

For the process of such discrimination and for the visualisation of one's innate reality, one has to study the Upanishads. Collectively called Vedanta, they

form the section of the Vedas that deals with the higher wisdom - the Jnana-kanda. Liberation from the consequences of ignorance can be secured only by spiritual knowledge (jnana). The Upanishads themselves declare, By knowledge alone can freedom be won (Jnanath eva thu kaivalyam).

The Vedas are reputed to be "three-sectioned", the three sections being spiritual wisdom (jnana), contemplation or worship (upasana), and dedicated activity (karma). These three are also found in the Upanishads; they provide the basis for the non-dualist (a-dwaitha), qualified non-dualist (visishta-adwaitha), and dualist (dwaitha) systems of philosophy.

The word Upanishad denotes the study and practice of the innate truth, Brahma-vidya denotes the supremacy of spiritual contemplation, and Yoga-sastra denotes the mental churning that brings success.

What is the fundamental activity that is required? What is the basic thing to be known? It is just one's real reality. The Upanishads describe the various stages and modes of this search.

The name Upanishad is full of significance. Upa-ni means the process of studying with steadfastness (nishta); shath means the attainment of the Ultimate Reality. The name Upa-ni-shath arose for these reasons. The Upanishads do not only teach the principles of knowledge of the supreme Reality (Atma-vidya), they also instruct in the practical means of realisation. They point out not only the duties and obligations one has to bear but also tell us the acts to be done and those to be avoided.

Why, the Gita is but the essence of the Upanishads, isn't it? Arjuna acquired by the lessons of the Gita the fruit of listening to the Upanishads. The statement, "That thou art (Thath twam asi)" is found in the Upanishads.

In the Gita, Krishna says to Arjuna, "I am Arjuna among the Pandavas," that is to say, "I and You are the same." This is the same as saying "Thou art That," that the individual and God (jiva and Iswara) are the same. So, whether it is the Gita or the Upanishads, the teaching is non-duality, not duality or

qualified monism.

### **Develop purity of consciousness, moral awareness, and spiritual discrimination**

The human eye cannot delve into the microcosm or the macrocosm. It cannot read the mystery of the virus or the atom or the stellar universe. Therefore, scientists supplement the eye with the microscope and the telescope.

Similarly, sages are able to experience Divinity through the eye of knowledge gained by following the dharma of moral conduct and spiritual discipline.

When the human eye needs an extraneous instrument to observe even the insignificant worm and virus, how can a person refuse to go through the process of mantra in order to see the omnipresent transcendent Principle? It is very hard to acquire the eye of wisdom. Concentration is essential for it. And, for concentration to develop and stabilise, three things are very important: purity of consciousness, moral awareness, and spiritual discrimination.

These qualifications are difficult for ordinary folk to attain.

But humanity is endowed with the special instrument of discrimination, of judgement, of analysis and synthesis.

Among the animals, only mankind possesses it. It has to be developed and utilised to the best purpose.

Through this instrument, one can realise the immanent Divinity.

Instead, one pesters oneself and others with questions like: Where does God reside? If He is real, why isn't He seen? Hearing such queries, one feels like pitying the poor questioners, for they are announcing their own foolishness. They are like the dullards who aspire for university degrees without taking pains even to learn the alphabet. They aspire to realise God without putting

themselves to the trouble of the required spiritual discipline.

People who have no moral strength and purity talk of God and His existence and decry efforts to see Him - such people have no right to be heard.

### **Upanishads are the whisperings of God**

Spiritual practice is based on the holy scriptures (sastras). They can't be mastered in a trice. They can't be followed through talk. Their message is summed up in the Upanishads, so they are revered as authoritative. They are not the products of human intelligence; they are the whisperings of God to man. They are parts of the eternal Vedas, and the Vedas shine gloriously through all their parts.

The Upanishads are authentic and authoritative, since they share the glory of the Vedas. They are 1180 in number, but, through the centuries, many of them disappeared from human memory and only 108 have survived.

Of the 108, 10 have attained great popularity as a result of the depth and value of their contents.

The sage Vyasa classified the Upanishads and allotted them among the four Vedas. The Rig-veda has 21 branches, and each branch has one Upanishad allotted to it. The Yajur-veda has 109 branches and 109 Upanishads. The Atharvana-veda has 50 branches and 50 Upanishads. The Sama-veda has 1000 and 1000. Thus, Vyasa assigned the 1180 Upanishads to the four Vedas.

Sankaracharya raised the status of ten of the Upanishads by selecting them for writing his commentaries, so they became specially important. Humanity stands to gain or fall by these ten. All who seek human welfare and progress are now apprehending whether even these ten will be forgotten, because neglecting them will usher in moral and spiritual disaster. However, there is no reason for such fears. The Vedas can never be harmed. Pundits and those with faith should resolve to present at least these ten Upanishads before humanity. They are:

1. Aithareya
2. Brihadaranyaka
3. Chandogya
4. Isa
5. Kena
6. Katha
7. Prasna
8. Mundaka
9. Mandukya
10. Taithiriya

The remaining 98 are:

11. Adhyatma
12. Adhvayatharaka
13. Aksha-malika
14. Akshik
15. Amritha-bindu
16. Amrithanada
17. Annapurna
18. Aruni
19. Atharvasikha
20. Atharvasira
21. Atma
22. Atmabodha
23. Avadhutha
24. Avyaktha
25. Bhasma
26. Bhavana
27. Bhavaricha
28. Brahmajabala

29. Brahmana
30. Brahma-vidya
31. Dakshinamurthi
32. Dattatreya
33. Devi
34. Dhyana-bindu
35. Ekakshara
36. Ganapathi
37. Garbha
38. Garuda
39. Gopalatapani
40. Hamsa
41. Hayagriva
42. Jabaladarshana
43. Jabali
44. Kaivalya
45. Kalagnirudra
46. Katharudra
47. Katharudra
48. Kaushitaka
49. Krishna
50. Kshithi
51. Kshurika
52. Kundiska
53. Maha-bhiksuka
54. Mahanarayana
55. Mahavakya
56. Maitrayani
57. Maitreyi
58. Mandala
59. Mantrika
60. Mudgala
61. Muktika
62. Nadabindu
63. Narada-parivrajaka



64. Narasimha
65. Narayana
66. Niralamba
67. Nirvana
68. Nrisimhatapani
69. Paingala
70. Panchabrahma
71. Parabrahma
72. Paramahamsa
73. Parama-parivrajaka
74. Pasupatha
75. Pranagnihotra
76. Ramarahasya
77. Ramathapani
78. Rudrahridaya
79. Rudraksha
80. Sandilya
81. Sanyasa
82. Sarabha
83. Saraswathi-rahasya
84. Sariraka
85. Sarva-sar
86. Sathyayana
87. Savithri
88. Sita
89. Skanda
90. Soubhagyalakshmi
91. Sukarahasya
92. Sulabha
93. Surya
94. Swethasvatara
95. Tejobindu
96. Tharasara
97. Thripura
98. Thripurathapini

99. Thuriyatita
100. Trisikhi-brahmana
101. Vajrasuchika
102. Varaha
103. Vasudeva
104. Yajnavalkya
105. Yogachudamani
106. Yogakundalini
107. Yogasikha
108. Yogathathwa

The Upanishads have inspired other works on geography, astronomy, astrology, and economic and political theory, as well as the eighteen Puranas comprising Skanda, Siva, Garuda, and others.

### **God is the prophet of the universal spirituality of the Upanishads**

The Vedas and the Upanishads are the very foundation of the Eternal Religion (Sanathana Dharma). This religion has no one founder, as do others. The invisible unknown founder is God, the source of all wisdom. He is the prophet of this eternal universal religion. His grace and inspiration manifested through pure sages, and they became the spokespersons of this dharma. When the moral purity of men degenerates, God takes form as grace and inspiration in sages and teachers. Through the Upanishads, He has also spoken the wisdom concerning the Supreme Reality.

## 2. Isavasya Upanishad

### The spread of the Vedic wisdom

The Lord, intent on the regeneration of the world, communicated Vedas through Hiranyagarbha, who in turn passed them on to His ten mental sons (manasa-putras), including Athri and Marichi. From them, the Vedas spread among humanity, handed down from one generation to another. As time passed and ages accumulated and continents moved, some Vedas got lost or were neglected as too difficult for comprehension, and only four have survived into modern times. These four were taught in the Dwapara era (yuga) to his disciples by Veda Vyasa, the greatest of the exponents of the Vedas.

When Vyasa was thus expounding the Vedas, engaged in spreading the sacred scripture, one disciple of his, Yajnavalkya by name, incurred his wrath. As punishment, Yajnavalkya had to regurgitate the Yajur-veda, which he had already learned, into the custody of his guru, leave the place, and take refuge in the divine Sun (Surya-deva), the treasure-house of the Vedas. Just then, the sages, who revere the Vedas, flew into the place in the shape of partridges (thithiri) and ate up the regurgitated Yajur-veda. That particular section of the Veda is called Taithirya.

Meanwhile, the Sun was pleased with the devotion and steadfastness of the unfortunate Yajnavalkya. He assumed the form of a horse (vaji) and blessed the sage with renewed knowledge of the Yajur-veda. The version thus taught by the horse came to be called Vajasaneyi. The Yajur-veda as promoted by Veda Vyasa is called Krishna Yajur Veda; that handed down by Yajnavalkya, Sukla Yajur Veda. (Krishna means black; sukla, white).

The first few sections, the Karma-kandas of these Vedas are mantras connected with ritual actions, and the last few sections, the Jnana-kandas, deal with spiritual wisdom.

## Renunciation is the pathway to liberation

The Isavasya Upanishad is concerned with the sections on spiritual wisdom (Jnana-kanda). Since the opening mantra of this Upanishad starts with the word Isavasya (pervaded by the Supreme), the Upanishad is called by that name.

Ishavasyam idham sarvam yathkinchatjagath-yam jagath  
Thena thyakthena bhunjeetha, ma gridhah kasya svith dhanam.

All things of this world - the transitory, the evanescent - are enveloped by the Lord,  
who is the true Reality of each.  
Therefore, they have to be used with reverent renunciation and without covetousness or greed,  
for they belong to the Lord and not to any one person.

This verse says that the universe is the immanence of the Lord, His form, His body. It is wrong to take the universe and Its Lord as different. It is a delusion, just a product of your own imagination. Just as your image under the water is not different from you, the universe (which is His image produced on your ignorance) is the same as He.

As long as one has this delusion, one cannot visualise the Reality immanent within; in fact, one will slide into wrong thoughts, words, and deeds. A piece of sandalwood produces a bad smell when kept in water, but when taken out and rubbed into paste, the former perfume will return. When the authority of the Vedas and scriptures is respected, and when discrimination is sharpened on the practice of dharmic actions, the evil smell of wrong and wickedness will vanish and the pure innate perfume of the Atma will emerge. Then, the duality of doer and enjoyer will disappear, and the stage will be reached that

is called withdrawal from all activity (sarva-karmasanyas).

In this Upanishad, this type of renunciation (sanyasa) is described as the pathway to liberation.

### **Work without the desire for its fruits**

Renunciation that involves the destruction of the three urges for a mate, for progeny, and for wealth is very difficult to attain without purity of the mind (chittha).

In this Upanishad, the means for obtaining this renunciation is declared in the second mantra: carry out the daily offering of milk to the god of fire, etc. prescribed in the scriptures, believe that for liberation one has to be actively engaged in such work, and become convinced that no sin can cling as long as one is so engaged. Work without the desire for its fruit slowly cleanses impurities, like the crucible of the gold-smith. The pure mind is spiritual wisdom (jnana); it is the consummation of detachment.

If you are able to divest yourselves of desire when you are doing work, no impurity can touch you. You know that "chilliginji" seeds, when dropped into muddy water, have the power to separate the dirt and deposit it at the bottom; the seeds also sink to the bottom and slip out of sight! In the same way, those who are adepts in doing action (karma) without attachment have their minds perfectly cleansed, and the results of their acts lose their effectiveness and sink to the bottom.

Out of the 18 mantras in this Upanishad, only the first two deal directly with the problem of liberation and its solution. The other sixteen elaborate on this solution and serve as commentaries thereon.

### **See the Supreme Self in all beings and all beings in the Self**

The Atma never undergoes modification; yet, it is faster than the mind! That is the mystery and the miracle.

It appears to experience all states, but it has no growth, decline, or change. Though it is everywhere, it is not perceivable by the senses. It is because of its underlying existence and ever-present immanence that all growth, all activities, all changes take place. Cause and effect act and react on account of the basic stratum of the Atmic reality. Why, the very word "Lord (Isa)" carries this meaning. The Atma is near and far, inside and outside, still and moving. He who knows this truth is worthy of the name "spiritually wise person (jnani)".

The ignorant can never grasp the fact of Atmic immanence. Those who are conscious can see things and feel their presence. Those who have lost awareness will search for the lost jewels, even though they actually wear them at the moment. Though one may know all things, one conceives the Atma as existing in some unapproachable, unreachable place on account of loss of consciousness. But the wise person, who is aware, sees the Atma in all beings and sees all beings as Atma. The wise person sees all beings as the same and perceives no distinction or difference. So the wise person saves themselves from duality.

The Isavasya Upanishad makes this great truth clear to all. Wise people, who have tasted that vision, will not be agitated by the blows of fortune or the enticements of the senses. They see all beings as themselves, having their own innate identity; they are free from bondage, from dharma and lack of dharma (a-dharma), and from the needs and urges of the body. They are "self-illuminating (swayam-prakasa)". So, the individual body (jiva-rupa) is not their genuine form, no, not even the gross and the subtle bodies are their forms.

That is why the first mantra of the Isavasya expounds on intentness on acquiring spiritual wisdom (jnananishta) characterised by the absence of craving of any sort. This is the primary goal of the Vedas. But those who have cravings will find it difficult to get stabilised in that state of mind (nishta). For such, the second mantra prescribes a secondary means, ritual action (karma-nishta).

The rest of the mantras elaborate and support these two states - based on

spiritual wisdom and action. Ritual action has desire and delusion as the cardinal urges; intentness on the cultivation of spiritual wisdom has discrimination (vairagya), the conviction that the world is not Atma, that is to say, not true, so it is profitless to have any dealings with it. Such an attitude of discrimination is the gateway to acquiring spiritual wisdom.

From the third to the eighth mantra, the real nature of the Atma is depicted through the condemnation of ignorance (a-vidya), which prevents understanding Atma.

### **Renunciation leads to self-realization**

Thus the Isavasya teaches the lesson of renunciation through the first mantra and the lesson of "liberating activity" (through action devoid of attachment and anger (raga and dwesha)) in the second mantra. In the fourth and fifth mantras, it speaks of the Atmic principle (Atma-thathwa) and later of the fruits of the knowledge of that Atmic principle.

In the ninth mantra, the path of progressive liberation (krama-mukthi ) is laid down. This path is useful for those who are too weak to follow the path of total renunciation but who are adepts in acts that are conducive to moral development and inner purification. This path coordinates all action on the principle of contemplative worship. Those who are engaged in acts that are contrary to spiritual knowledge (vidya) are full of ignorance, it says; those who confine themselves to the study and practice of divine forms are even worse, for their desire is for powers and skills. Knowledge leads to the world of the gods (deva loka), while action leads to the world of the fathers (pitru loka), it is said. So the spiritual wisdom (jnana) that results in Self-realization (Atma-sakshathkara) is something quite distinct from these; no attempt to coordinate the two can succeed.

### **To escape the cycle of birth-death, contemplate on Cosmic Divinity**

Of course, one should not engage in anything opposed to the scriptures, and in the ultimate analysis, all actions are classed as ignorance (a-vidya). At

best, action (karma) can help only to cleanse the mind, and contemplative worship can help only to achieve single-mindedness. Worship has to rise to the level of contemplation of the cosmic Divinity, the Hiranyagarbha; it has to ripen and develop into liberation while alive (jivan-mukthi) before the end of this life.

Knowledge of gods (devatha-jnana) and ritual actions have to be complementary and coordinated; then, one can escape the round of birth and death and become divine.



### 3. Katha Upanishad

This Upanishad contains the story of Nachiketas, who was initiated into spiritual discipline by Yama himself.

The same story is also mentioned in the Taithiriya Upanishad and its Brahmana portion and also in the Mahabharatha, in chapter 106 of the section of moral principles. This Upanishad has become famous on account of its clarity and depth of imagination. Many of the thoughts expressed in it can be found in the Bhagavad Gita.

Since it belongs to the Katha Sakha of the Black (or Krishna) Yajur-veda School, it is called Kathopanishad.

#### **Nachiketas seeks everlasting Self-knowledge**

A very strict ritualist, Yajnasravas, also known as Gautama, performed a sacrifice. As part of the sacrifice he gave away cows that were no longer able to eat grass or drink water, much less yield milk! They were too old for any useful purpose. Seeing this, his virtuous and intelligent son, Nachiketas, realised that his father was in for a great deal of sorrow because of these sinful gifts. The boy wanted to save his father from his fate as much as he could, so he asked his father to whom he intended to offer him (Nachiketas) as a gift! He pleaded that he too should be given away to someone.

At this the father got so incensed that he shouted in disgust, "I am giving you to the God of death." Nachiketas resolved that his father's words must not be falsified, even though they were uttered in the world of the living, infected with birth and death. So he persuaded his father to offer him, in strict ritualistic style, as a gift to Yama. Nachiketas promptly proceeded to the abode of the God of death. He had to wait three nights before he could see Yama. Yama felt sorry for the delay and promised Nachiketas three boons, one for each night he had spent outside his doors.

Nachiketas first asked that when he returned to his native place and home at His behest, his father must welcome him gladly, bereft of all anger at his former impertinence and full of mental equanimity. His second desire was to know the secret of the absence in heaven of hunger, thirst, and fear of death.

Yama gladly gave him these boons. In addition, Yama initiated him into the mystery of a special ritual. Nachiketas listened reverentially and grasped the details of the ritual quickly and clearly. Yama was so delighted with his new disciple that He gave the sacrifice (yaga) a new name, Nachiketa Agni! This was an extra boon for the young visitor.

Nachiketas said, "Master! Man is mortal, but some say that death is not the end, that there is an entity called Atma that survives the body and the senses. Others argue that there is no such entity. Now that I have the chance, I wish to know about the Atma from you." Yama wanted to test the credentials of his questioner's steadfastness and his eagerness to know the highest wisdom. If he was undeserving, Yama didn't want to communicate the knowledge to him. So he offered to give him instead various other boons, related to worldly prosperity and happiness. He told him that the Atma is very subtle and elusive and is beyond the reach of ordinary understanding. He placed before him other attractive boons that could be enjoyed "more quickly" and "better".

Nachiketas replied, "Revered master! Your description of the difficulty of understanding the Atma makes me feel that I should not let this chance go by, for I can get no teacher more qualified than you to explain it to me. I ask this as my third boon and no other. The alternative boons You hold before me cannot assure me the everlasting benefit that Self-knowledge (Atma-jnana) alone can bestow." Yama teaches Nachiketas the Atmic wisdom Pleased with Nachiketas' faith and steadiness, Yama concluded that he was fit to receive the highest wisdom.

He said, "Well, My dear boy! There are two distinct types of experiences and urges, called spiritually elevating (sreyas) and worldly pleasant (preyas). Both affect the individual. The first releases; the second leashes. One leads to

salvation; the other to incarceration! If you pursue the worldly pleasing path, you leave the realisation of the highest goal of humanity far, far behind. The spiritually excellent path can be discerned only by the refined intellect; the worldly pleasant path is trodden by the ignorant and the perverted. Spiritual wisdom (vidya) reveals the spiritually elevating; ignorance (a-vidya) makes you slide into worldly pleasure. Naturally, those who seek the spiritually elevating road are very rare." Yama continued, "The Atma is agitationless, unruffled; it is consciousness, infinite and full. One who has known the Atma won't be moved by the dual ideas of "is" and "is-not", "doer" and "not-doer", etc. The Atma is not even an object to be known! It is neither knower, known, nor knowledge. Discovering this is the supremest vision; informing one of this is the supremest instruction. The instructor is Brahman; the instruction is Brahman, and the instructed is also Brahman. Realisation of this ever-present truth saves one from all attachment and agitation, so it liberates one from birth and death. This great mystery cannot be grasped by logic; it has to be won by faith in the scriptures (smrithis) and experienced.

"The Atma is capable of being known only after vast perseverance. One has to divert the mind from its natural habitat - the objective world - and keep it in unwavering equanimity. Only a hero can succeed in this solitary internal adventure and overcome the monsters of egotism and illusion! That victory alone can remove grief." The highest truth can be realised by all. The teaching of the Vedanta is that the highest truth is capable of being realised by all. All the texts proclaim so with one voice; they also say that the syllable Om (Pranava) is the symbol of the transcendent and immanent (para and a-para) Brahman; they declare that worship of the Om brings within your reach even the Cosmic Mind (Hiranyagarbha) stage, and it also helps you to attain two aspects of Brahman. The Hiranyagarbha is enveloped by the thinnest veil of illusion (maya), and, through Om, the veil can be rent asunder and both the transcendent and immanent Brahman can be realised.

### **The Atma is beyond the senses**

The Katthopanishad also elaborates on the Atma in various ways. It says that the Atma is not measurable, that it can never be contained by limitations,

though it appears so. The image of the Sun in a lake quivers and shakes due to the quivering and shaking of the water; the Sun is but a distant witness. It is unaffected by the media that produce the images. Likewise, the Atma is the witness of all this change in space and time.

The individualised ignorance (jiva) is the participant of the fruits of action, of right and wrong, of good and evil; the individual (jivi) forges bondage through egotism and loosens the bonds through the intellect (buddhi), the counterforce of ignorance.

Realise that all is won the moment the senses (indriyas), external and internal, are put out of action. Discard them as false and misleading; merge them all in the mind (manas). Throw the mind back into the intellect and the individualised intelligence into the cosmic intelligence of Hiranyagarbha. And, having reached that stage of spiritual practice, merge the cosmic intelligence into the Atmic principle (Atma-thathwa), of which it is but a manifestation. Then you attain the stage of the perfect unruffled equanimity of Absolute Oneness (nir-vikalpasamadhi), which is your true nature. That is the secret propounded by this Upanishad; that and the fact that all creation is but a creation, a proliferation of name and form.

Misled by the mirage, you are unable to see the desert waste; frightened by the snake (superimposed by you on the rope), you are unable to discern the basic reality. The beginningless delusion that haunts the individual (jivi) has to be broken through. The fourteenth mantra of this Upanishad wakes up the individual from the sleep of ages and leads him on toward the goal.

The Atma is beyond sound, touch, form, taste, and smell (sabdhya, sparsha, rupa, rasa, and gandha); it knows no end. The senses are object-bound and outward-bound. The Atma is the prime instrument for all activity and knowledge, the inner motive-force behind everything. This delusion of manifoldness, variety, multiplicity, and manyness has to die. It is born of ignorance (a-jnana). The "many" is a mirage caused by "circumstances"; the feeling that you are separate from the One is the root of all this seeming birth and death through which the individual appears to go.

## **Cut the tree of worldly illusion**

Yama then declared the nature of Brahman to Nachiketas, to remove his doubts on that point.

Like a light hidden by smoke, the thumb-sized supreme Spirit is eternally shining. Just as the torrent of rain falling on a peak is shattered downward in a thousand streams, the individual (jivi), who feels manyness and difference, falls down through manyness and goes to waste. This Upanishad announces that there is nothing higher than or even equal to the Atma. The roots of a tree are invisible; they are hidden underground, but their effect is evident in the visible flowers, right? So too, this tree of worldly illusion (samsara-vriksha), right? From that experience, you have to infer that the root, Brahman, is there as sustenance and support, said Yama.

The tree of worldly existence (samsara) is like the magician's mango tree; it is just an illusion. One who has purified their intellect (buddhi) can see the Atma in it in this very life, as in a fine mirror. Brahman is the thing known (jneya) to the seeker of knowledge; it is the worshiped object, the thing attained by the seeker of attainment.

The spiritually wise person is liberated by their visualisation of Brahman, but the worshiper reaches the world of Brahma after death. There, the worshiper merges in Hiranyagarbha and, at the end of a day of Brahma (kalpa), is liberated along with the Hiranyagarbha Itself.

Nachiketas understood without a flaw this knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya) that Yama taught him; he was released by death and attained Brahman. As far as this knowledge of Brahman is concerned, one who even attempts to know what it is becomes thereby a better personality, free from the dirt of sin.

## **The secret: learn and practise the singular Omkara**

This Upanishad teaches in many ways the fundamental subjects: the embodiment of the Om (Pranava-swarupa), auspicious activities (sreyas), and knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya). My resolve is to tell you now the essence of these teachings. Of course one mantra is enough to save those who have sharpened intelligence and who are full of the yearning to escape. But for the dull-witted, sense-prompted individual immersed in secular pleasure-seeking, advice, however plentiful, is a waste.

The Atma is like the ocean; to instruct a person about it, you need not ask the person to drink the entire ocean.

A single drop placed on the tongue will give the needed knowledge. So too, if you desire to know the Upanishad, you need not follow every mantra. Learn and experience the implication of one mantra and you can realise the goal without fail. Learn and practise. Learn to practise. That is the secret of the teaching.

## 4. Mundaka Upanishad

This Upanishad begins with an invocation, praying that the eye may see auspicious things, that the ear may hear auspicious sounds, and that life may be spent in contemplation of the Lord. The teaching of this Upanishad is referred to as knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya), either because it describes first the message of Hiranyagarbha, the causal Brahman, or because the message relates the glory of Brahman. This Upanishad speaks of knowledge of Brahman as the mystery that only those with shaven heads and those who go through a rite of having fire on the shaven head can understand. So, it is called Shaven Head (Mundaka). This Upanishad is honoured as the crest of all, since it expounds the very essence of knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-jnana). It is assigned to the Fourth Veda, the Atharvana.

### **The transcendent and immanent aspects of Supreme Reality**

This knowledge has been handed down from teacher to pupil by word of mouth, enriched and confirmed by experience. When it deals with the attributeless principle, it is also called the knowledge of the Transcendent (Para-vidya); when it deals with the attribute-full, the materialised principle, it is called the knowledge of the immanent (a-Para-vidya), not the transcendent aspect. These two are found in this Upanishad. They were taught by Sounaka to Angiras; that is what the text announces. The Vedas and the subsidiary texts (Vedangas) deal with knowledge of the immanent or materialised aspect of Brahman. The Upanishads deal specifically with knowledge of the transcendent Brahman. But the interesting thing is: knowledge of the immanent, materialised Brahman leads to the knowledge of the transcendent Brahman, which is the goal.

The spider evolves out of itself the magnificent manifestation of the web; so too, this moving, changing world is manifested from the causative Brahman. The objective world is the product of the creator-creation complex. It is true, factual, and useful as long as one is unaware of the Reality. The utmost that one can gain by activity - that is, holy or sacred activity - is heaven (swarga),

which has a longer lease of life but nevertheless has an end. So, the seeker loses all yearning for heaven and approaches an elderly teacher full of compassion, who instructs the seeker in the discipline for realising Brahman.

**Brahman is both the material and the instrumental cause of the world**

All beings are Brahman and no other. They all emanate from Brahman. Just as sparks emanate from fire, just as hair grows on the skin but is different from it, so too beings originate from Brahman. Brahman causes the sun, moon, stars, and planets to revolve in space; Brahman grants the consequence of all acts of beings. The individual (jivi) and the Lord (Iswara), the individual and the Universal, are two birds sitting on the same tree - the human body. The individual acts and suffers the consequences of those acts. The Lord sits quietly, as a witness of the other bird. When the individual looks at the Lord and realises that it is but an image, it escapes from grief and pain. When the mind is drawn by yearning to know the Lord, all other low desires diminish and disappear. Then, knowledge of Atma is attained.

The last mantra of this Upanishad declares that its aim is to make people attain that spiritual wisdom (jnana).

Munda means head, and we can say that this Upanishad is the head of all Upanishads. Even the Brahma Sutra devotes two chapters to elaborate on the inner meaning of the mantras of this Upanishad.

This Upanishad has three sections, with two chapters in each. In the first section, knowledge of the materialised aspect of Brahman (a-Para-vidya) is dealt with; in the second, knowledge of the transcendental Supreme (Para-vidya) and the means of mastering it. In the third, the nature of the Reality and of the release from bondage are defined. Activity (karma) that helps attain the Brahman is described in the mantras. That is why this Upanishad is respected as very sacred.

As already indicated, the spider spins out the web from itself without any



extraneous agency; it also takes in the web it has spun. So too, creation was effected without an agent and the universe emanated. This nature (prakriti) is but a transformation of the basic Brahman, like pot from mud, cloth from cotton, jewels from gold.

So, Brahman is called the material (upadana) cause of nature. It is also the instrumental cause (nimitta-karana).

For, nature can be the result only of a higher intelligence, an intelligence that is all-comprehensive (sarva-jna).

### **Perform individual duties as well as public service activities**

Heaven is the highest attainable stage through activity (karma). Of such rites (karmas), the worship of fire, called agnihotra, is the chief. The performance of such rites contribute to the cleansing of the mind. Such cleansing is a necessary preliminary to knowledge of the Transcendent (Para-vidya). The flames that rise high from the sacrificial altar of fire appear to the performers as if they are hailing them on to realise the Reality or Brahman.

One who does the rite with full awareness of the significance of the mantra is able to reach the solar splendour, through the offerings made; they take the performer to the region of Indra, the Lord of the gods.

The Vedas recommend two types of obligatory activities (karmas): individually auspicious and charitably auspicious (ishta and purtha). The rite of agnihotra, adherence to truth, asceticism (tapas), study of the Vedas, service offered to guests in one's home - these are individually auspicious.

Construction of temples, caravanserais, rest-houses, tanks, planting of avenue trees - such acts are charitable.

These give consequences that are beneficial, but all such cause-effect chains are transient; they are fundamentally defective.

## **Om is the arrow and Brahman the target**

The entire creation is bound up with name and form and is thus unreal. It can be described in words, so it is limited and circumscribed by the intellect and the mind. Only the supreme Person (Parama-purusha) is eternal, real, and pure. He is the prompter of activity and the dispenser of consequence. But He is beyond the eye, beyond the intellect. Like the spokes of a wheel that radiate from the hub, that lead from all directions to the centre, all creation radiates from Him.

The mind is the instrument to reach the central hub and know that all spokes radiate from it. Brahman is the target to be reached by the arrow-mind. Have your mind fixed on the target and, using the Upanishadic teaching as the bow, shoot straight and hard, to hit the Brahman and master. Om (Pranava) is the arrow; Brahman is the target.

The Brahman illumines the individual soul (jivi) by getting reflected in the inner consciousness (an-thahkarana).

One has only to turn that consciousness away from the objective world, contact with which contaminates the mind. Now, train the inner consciousness to meditate on the Om with single-pointed attention. Meditate on the Atma as unaffected by the individual, though It is in one and with one and activating one. Meditate on Him in the heart, from which countless subtle nerves (nadis) radiate in all directions. If this process is followed, one can attain spiritual wisdom (jnana).

## **Brahman is beyond rituals or asceticism**

The universe is an instrument to reveal the majesty of God. The inner firmament in the heart of man is also equally a revelation of His glory. He is the Breath of one's breath. Since He has no specific form, He cannot be indicated by words. Nor can His mystery be penetrated by the other senses. He is beyond the reach of asceticism, beyond the bounds of Vedic rituals. He can be known only by an intellect that has been cleansed of all trace of

attachment and hatred, of egotism and the sense of possession.

Only spiritual wisdom (jnana) can grant self-realisation. Meditation can confer concentration of the faculties; through that concentration, spiritual wisdom can be won, even while in the body.

The Brahman activates the body through the five vital airs (pranas). It condescends to reveal itself in that same body as soon as the inner consciousness attains the requisite purity. For the Atma is immanent in the inner and outer senses just as heat is in fuel and butter is in milk. Now, the individualised consciousness is like damp fuel, soaked in the foulness of sensory desires and disappointments. When the pool in the heart becomes clear of the slimy overgrowth, the Atma shines in its pristine splendour. One who acquires knowledge of this Atman is to be revered, for that one is liberated. One has become Brahman, that which one strove to know and be.

## 5. Mandukya Upanishad

This Upanishad is the kernel of Vedanta, the most profound among all the Upanishads. It is the chief one, having the distinction of being recommended as enough, by itself, to lead man to salvation. It is very brief, consisting of just a dozen mantras! They are divided into four chapters: origin (agama), falsehood (vaithathya), non-duality (a-dwaitha), and extinction of the firebrand (alatha-santhi). In the first chapter, the secret doctrine of the Om (Pranava), which is the key to self-realisation, is expounded. In the second chapter, the doctrine of dualism, the great obstacle to liberation, is discussed and rebutted. In the third, the non-dual (a-dwaitha) Unity is propounded. In the last chapter certain mutually contradictory non-Vedic doctrines are described and rejected.

No sound is beyond the ken of Om; they are all Om, its permutations and products. Brahman is also Om, identified by It and with It. The Brahman, which is beyond vision, is manifest for vision as Atma.

**The waking, dream, and sleep states are appearances imposed on the Atma**

The distinctions of waking state, dream state, and sleep state (viswa, taijasa, and prajna) are but appearances imposed on the Atma; that is to say, the Atma continues the same, unaffected by the waking, dreaming, and deepsleep stages of man's existence. This Atma and the Atma that one refers to as "I" are basically the same. The "I" or the Atma swims like a fish in the river, paying no regard to this bank or that, though the waters are limited and guided by them.

In deep sleep, all the impulses (vasanas) are suspended; though they still persist, they are not manifest or active.

In the dream state, one follows the impulses and wins satisfaction in the process. All the manifold pulls and attractions of the sensory world, which

impel one toward the surrounding objects, are born during the waking and dream stages. The mind is full of agitations, and these are the fertile fields where the impulses grow, multiply, and strike root. As a matter of fact, it is the agitating mind that causes creation (srishti) and that is behind all creation.

### **Transcend the mind and senses: Thuriya**

However, there is a fourth stage that is distinct from these three: it is named thuriya! This stage cannot be described by words or even imagined by the mind, for it is beyond both intellect (buddhi) and mind (manas). The experience is inadequately described as peace, grace, and oneness (santham, sivam, a-dwaithama); that is all. The mental agitations are stilled, so there is no more mind. It is the conquest of the mind, its negation, the mindless stage.

What a victory it is! For in deep sleep the mind is latent; while dreaming, the mind is restless with agitations; and in the waking stage it is active and motivating. In all three stages, truth remains unknown. The objective world is but a delusion of the agitated mind, the superimposition on the rope of a nonexistent snake. The world is not born, nor does it die. It is born when you are ignorant and dies when you become wise.

### **AUM is the symbol of the Supreme Atmic Principle**

The AUM of the Omkara, representing the stages of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep of existence, each have a particular role in spiritual practice. Worship, which A emphasises more, makes one realise all desires; if U is concentrated upon, spiritual wisdom increases; and if M is specially dwelt upon in the worship, the final merging of the soul in the Supreme is effected. The worshiper of Aum (Pranava) will also earn knowledge of the truth of the world and creation. Therefore, the worshiper of the Aum draws to themselves the reverence of all.

The A, U, and M proceed from one to the other in the Aum and finally merge

in a letterless resonance, which thins out into silence. That is the symbol of the peace (santhi), the auspicious (siva) and the non-dual (a-dwaita), the merging of the individualised soul in the Universal after shedding the limiting particulars of name and form.

This is not all. Gaudapada's commentary on this Upanishad, verses 24-29, praise the Aum as the cause of creation.

It is extolled as quenching all grief. Why? One who ruminates on the Aum, ever aware of its significance, can steadily move on to an awareness of the Real behind all this unreal appearance, of the Supreme Atmic Principle (Param-atma-thathwa) Itself.

### **Brahman is the cause of all causes, never an effect**

In the first section of the commentary, the non-dual (a-dwaitic) uniqueness of the Atma is established in a general way; in the second, as has been said, the positing of two entities, God and the world, is shown as empty and evanescent. In the section called specifically non-dualism (a-dwaita), the doctrine is established by arguments and affirmations. At first, the world was latent and unmanifest; the Creator Brahma is Himself an effect, so reflection on the effect will not lead man to the source of all things. The Brahma revealed in this Upanishad is not the effect; It is the Primal Cause. It is neither born nor limited; it isn't broken into all this many.

The Atma is like ether (akasa), all pervasive. It may seem enclosed in certain limits, like a pot or a room, and it may be spoken of as individualised, but there is no truth to that limitation. The body is also like the pot, which, for all appearances, limits the sky enclosed in it. There is no innate distinction between the sky in the pot and the sky outside; take away the limiting factor, and they are One. When the body is destroyed, the individual soul (jivi) merges with the Universal (Paramatma). The limitation appears to qualify the Atma, but the Atma is the Highest Atma (Paramatma) itself. The individual soul can never be considered a limb or an adaptation of the Highest Atma.

## **Non-dualism is the Highest Truth**

The birth and death of individual souls (jivis) and their wanderings in space and from one world to another are all unreal. It is appearance, not reality. Go deeply into the matter: you will find that duality (dwaitha) or appearance is not opposed to non-duality, the substratum. The opposition is between various dualistic religions and schools of thought. For the non-dualist, all is Supreme Brahman (Parabrahman), so no opposition is known.

For the dualist, there is always the atmosphere of attachment and pride and hate, for where there are two there is always fear, attachment, and all the consequent passions. Non-dualism is the Highest Truth; dualism is a certain mental attitude. So, dualism can move you only as long as the mind is active. In sleep or samadhi, there is no cognition of "two". When ignorance (a-vidya) prevails, difference is rampant; when spiritual wisdom (vidya) is established, union is experienced. So there is no opposition or quarrel between dualism and non-dualism. The rope is the cause of all the illusion and delusion; Brahman is the cause of all the illusion and delusion connoted by the word world (jagath).

## **Attain the no-mind state with non-attachment and discrimination**

It is not correct to say that the supreme Atma (Paramatma) is born as the world, for how can one's essential quality (swa-bhava) be changed? Manifoldness is not the characteristic of the supreme Atmic Principle (Paramatma-thathwa).

The scriptures (sruthis) declare this in many contexts. Why, they even condemn those who see It as many. The witness of all the phases of the mind, of even its annihilation, can never be known by the mind.

That witness alone is eternal, unaffected by time and space. That is the Atmic consciousness (Atma-chaithanya), the truth (sathya). The rest is all unreal.

Turn the mind away from the sensory world through the practice of

discrimination and non-attachment; then, you attain the no-mind experience. Well, you have to remember another thing: trying to control the mind without a clear understanding of the nature of the sensory world is a vain, valueless effort; the attachment will not end, the agitation will not cease so easily.

### **Transcend all agitations and attachments**

Attachments and agitations sprout at the first chance. What has to be done is to develop inertness of the mind during the deep sleep stage into a stage of permanent ineffectiveness. When the conviction that all sensory experiences are unreal is well and truly stabilised, the mind will no longer function as a distracting agency; it will lie powerless, as a defunct limb. However hungry people are, they certainly won't crave for excreta, will they?

To know that the Atma, which is the goal of realisation, is devoid of sleep, birth, name, form and so on, to know that It is eternally self-effulgent (nithya-swayam-prakasa), is to transcend all agitations of the mind. Attempting to curb the mind without the aid of discrimination, or attempting to make known the unreality of objects is as foolish and fruitless as attempting to empty the ocean using a blade of grass. Be firmly fixed in the conviction that the world is a myth; then, you can aspire to perfect peace (prasanthi) and fearlessness (a-bhaya).

### **Cause-effect nexus is delusory ignorance**

As the motivating force behind every birth or product, there should be a purpose, either existence (sat) or nonexistence. Exactly what transformation takes place? The cause (karana) undergoes change (vikara) and gets transformed into the effect (karya). Well, existence has no change, so no birth is possible from it. Nonexistence is void, so nothing can emanate from it. Existence and nonexistence are inconceivable together. Therefore, logically, nothing can be born or produced; cause cannot become effect.

When you remember fire, you don't feel the heat. Only when you hold fire in your hand do you experience the heat. So too, all objects are different from



knowledge (jnana) about them. Knowledge is one thing, actual experience is another. Moreover, the search for the first cause is an endless adventure. Even in the complete absence of the snake, one sees it in the rope. It is all a figment of the imagination. In dreams, with nothing concrete, all the joy and sorrow of manifoldness are undergone. For the machinations and inferences of the mind, no basis or explanation is needed. Irresponsible inferences about the unreal world will pester the mind as long as the illumination of truth is absent. The clasp of delusion is the fate of those who are steeped in ignorance (a-vidya or a-jnana).

This Upanishad declares in unambiguous terms that existence (sat) can never be the cause for the effect (karya) viz. nonexistence. The external world is created by our own subconscious mind (chittha), like smoke emanating from a burning incense stick. Everything is appearance, a superimposition, an apparition - something mistaken to be there but really nonexistent. The atmosphere of ignorance (a-jnana) is the fertile field for their birth and multiplication. Worldly illusion, which has the dual characteristic of evolution, of origin and ruin, is the fruit of this mistake.

### **Transcend pulsating consciousness, which is the cause of creation**

Since the supreme Atma (Paramatma) is the whole being (Sarvatma-swarupa), no possibility of cause-effect or wish-fulfillment or purpose-product appears in it. For one who has had the vision of Atma, all is Atma. The illusion-infected (maya-infected) seed will sprout into an illusion-infected tree; both are false and fleeting. So too, both the birth and the death of the individual (jivi) are false; they are mere words, signifying nothing. The things seen in dreams are not distinct from the dreamer, are they? They may appear as different and as outside of the dreamer, but, really, they are part of the dreamer, arising out of their own consciousness. One who is the witness has no beginning or end. That one is not bound by duties or obligations, right or wrong. To know this, and to get firm in that knowledge, is to attain liberation from the shackles. It is the quivering of the consciousness (chittha) that causes things to originate. Pulsating consciousness is the cause of creation.

Contemplate on this and reach up to the union stage (thuriya) of consciousness. Then, name, form, object, and being (nama, rupa, vasthu, and bhava), all get merged in the one all-pervasive all-inclusive Atma!

This Upanishad teaches man the essential philosophy, in the briefest terms. It does not refer in the least to activity (karma) or kindred subjects. It concerns itself purely with the science of the Atmic Principle (Atmathathwa).

## 6. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

### Atmic principles, experience, and constant practise

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is affiliated with the White (*Shukla*) Yajurveda. Of its six sections, all except the third and fourth describe worship (*upasana*) associated with ritualistic action (*karma*). The third and fourth sections deal with the teachings of Yajnavalkya on spiritual truth, which he imparted to Janaka. The grandeur of the intellectual eminence of that sage is impressively evident in this Upanishad, so the sections are referred to as Yajnavalkya Kanda. This part of Brihadaranyaka offers the best guide for aspirants eager to reach the goal of liberation.

The Brihadaranyaka is the last of the famous ten Upanishads. On account of its size, it is named *brihath* (big); since it is best studied in the silence of the forest (*aranya*), it is an *aranyaka*; it instructs in knowledge of Brahman, so it is classed as a Upanishad.

Scholars have designated the first two sections of this text as Madhu Kanda, the next two as Muni Kanda, and the last two as Khila Kanda. The first section deals with the basic principles, as they are; the second proves their truth by reference to experience; and the third shows how to practise them and get mastery over them. The first section teaches spiritual wisdom (*jnana*), which is essential for spiritual progress; it is assimilated with the paths of spiritual activity and contemplative worship - it is not mere dry intellectual discipline. Khila means appendix, so the name Khila Kanda is appropriate.

### The four knowledge instruments: word, seed, measure, and geometry

For those eager to earn spiritual wisdom, there are four instruments or media for acquiring it. They are:

word (*pada*), seed (*bija*), measurement (*sankhya*), and geometry (*rekha*).

Word means the Vedas and the codes of law (*smrithis*) that attempt to explain them.

Seed connotes the entire gamut of *mantras* learned directly from the spiritual teacher (*guru*).

Measurement is of two kinds, Vedic and worldly (*loukika*). Vedic measurement means the calculations and quantitative analysis of the various mantras; worldly refers to the numbers and their interrelations as far as they are related to the external world and the interrelations of human activities.

Geometry also has two such categories: Vedic geometry is part of the worship activity mentioned in the Vedas, and worldly geometry is part of the mathematics of the universe.

### Unity in diversity in nature

The Madhu Kanda describes the Brahma Principle in light of the categories accepted as authoritative by the scriptures. God (*Purusha*) is the primeval Person, from whom or on whom all this name-form manifoldness has emanated. We conceive the horse in the horse sacrifice (*aswamedha*) as the Creator (*Prajapathi*) Himself. He is directed to impose on the horse the characteristics and attributes of Prajapathi, so that he might acquire the fruits of that ritual. This portion is known also as the "Sacrificial horse-related text" (*Aswa-Brahmana*). Again, the fire that is the central figure in the sacrifice is also to be felt and consecrated as Prajapathi. Some descriptions attribute the qualities of Prajapathi to the god *Agni*, so this is called *Agni-Brahmana*.

This world (*jagath*), taken as true by the deluded, is just a jumble of names and forms; it is devoid of the permanence that only Atma can have. Hence, it breeds disgust and discontent and causes renunciation to grow.

The mind is soon free from attachment to the objects of sensory pleasure, and it moves along its natural bent to Brahman itself. All sounds are names; voice is the cause for its emergence. Form is the result of vision or sight; it

emerges from the eye. Karma similarly has the body as its source; the body is just a context for speech and other instruments. Contemplation on such truths helps the process of inquiry into the Atma to start and progress.

The vital air (*prana*), the body that is its basis, the head, which is the seat of the instruments of acquiring knowledge, the strength that is derived from food - all these are considered in this Upanishad.

Just as the sweetness of a thousand flowers is collected into honey, so this world (*jagath*) is a concatenation of the elements. *Dharma*, truth (*Sathya*), and such abstract principles, people, and such concrete living beings, the first incarnation of *Brahma* (Virat-Purusha) and such conceptions - all these again are the effects of the same Brahman principle, i.e. an immortal changeless principle. The realisation that this principle inheres in every individual is knowledge of Brahman (*Brahma-jnana*).

### Janaka's sacrifice

Janaka, the King of Videha, celebrated a sacrifice, giving away vast wealth in gifts. Many brahmins from the Kuru-Panchala territory attended. The King had a thousand cows decorated with anklets, necklaces, and hornlets of gold and announced that they would be donated to whoever taught him the Brahman. The brahmins, though great scholars in their own line, hesitated to claim the cows, through fear of failure. Yajnavalkya, however, was so confident that he asked his students to drive the cows to his ashram (hermitage)! The other brahmins got enraged at his audacity and started testing his scholarship and experience.

### Yajnavalkya explains the significance of ritual

The first to challenge Yajnavalkya was Janaka's family priest. The answers that the sage gave to his questions clarify the method of attaining the Atma encased in the vital airs (pranas), through the conjoint yogas of action (karma) and devotion. In the sacrifice, the sacrificial priest's voice is Agni, time (kala) is Vayu, and the mind of the performer is the moon - such is the

manner in which one has to grasp the meaning of ritual and free oneself from the limitations of mortality.

### **Yajnavalkya explains the concept of Atma as super consciousness**

The next to accost the sage was Bujyu. His questions were: Is there an entity called God (Purusha) who rules the senses and who is not entangled in this current named life (*samsara*)? Or is there no God of this type? If there is one such, what are his characteristics?

Yajnavalkya answered him thus: Your Atma is the entity you inquired about; just as a wooden contrivance cannot operate on its own but must be moved by some outside power or inside force, or just as this arm can move like this only when the will operates on it, so too, unless a super-spiritual power presides, the body cannot act and the vital airs cannot function as they do. He is the seer of the see-ing function of the body; He hears - not the ear. The super-consciousness (*chetana*) that sees and hears and feels is but a reflection of the Atma on the mind.

That super-consciousness sees even the seer; what happens is that the consciousness reflected in the mind moves out through the senses and grasps the external world of the five elements, so it appears as if the consciousness is engaged in activity. Really speaking, it has no activity.

### **Atma is to be attained by total renunciation**

That consciousness (*chetana*) is the Atma; it is beyond the reach of the senses, it is above and beyond the subtle and even the causal bodies (*sariras*). It has been understood by experience where the Atma is and what its nature is. It is the same in all. The Atma is to be attained by total renunciation. Attachment to children, riches, wife, etc. - all have to be given up; these originate in desire. Why, all activities, whether ordinary or ritual or worshipful, are basically the products of desire. The desire for the fruit is present in ritual actions also. There is no denying this. Hence, they are opposed to true renunciation (*sanyasa*).

Light and darkness cannot be together, at the same place and time. So too, activity (karma) and knowledge of Atma cannot be together. Renunciation is renunciation of all action (*sarvakriya-parithyaga*). Begging for food is an action and is against renunciation. The brahmins of ancient days knew this; they gave up attachment and, through the path of withdrawal (*nivritti*), realised the Reality. This is scholarship - this understanding and this attainment.

This is the achievement, the adventure, the fruit, the strength, and the endurance. He alone is a brahmin who has detached himself from all things concerned with non-Atmic ends. All other credentials are secondary.

### **Brahman is the warp and woof of Creation**

In this Upanishad, the all-pervasiveness (*sarva-antar-yamithwa*) of the Atma is described. All this earth becomes habitable through association with water. Without water, it would fall apart like a lump of rice flour.

Gargi asked Yajnavalkya what the earth is based on. This question and the answer given inform us that earth, water, space (akasa), sun, moon, constellation, celestial being, Indra, Prajapathi, the world of Brahma - all these, one from the other, were woven out of the supreme Atmic Principle (*Param-atma-thathwa*), which is the warp and woof, the yarn of creation. Such truths are beyond the reach of the imagination of people. They have to be imbibed from the scriptures (*sastras*) by a clarified intellect.

Yajnavalkya negated Gargi's arguments, for her questions could not be solved by mere intellectual feats; they could be solved only by intuition earned by the guidance of a guru. The earth is pervaded and protected by air. The individualised Universal, individualised according to the impressions of experience in previous lives, is associated with seventeen instruments: the five organs of action (karmen-driyas), the five organs of perception (jnanen-driyas) the five vital airs (pranas), the mind (manas), and the intellect (buddhi).

The concrete body is a mutation of the Earth; it is pervaded by air. Forty-nine "earth-bits (angas)" can be identified in the body, and, like a string that holds pearls together, "air" holds them together as one coordinate whole. When the air leaves the body for good, the earth-bits become distinct and derelict. The body then becomes a corpse. However, the immanent spirit (*antar-yamin*) that is in the body-complex abode, the mystery that is beyond the reach of that complex, the motivating force of the impulses and intentions of that complex - that immanent spirit has no death; It is Atma.

### **The never-changing Reality is the basis of the phenomenal world**

Gargi put her second question - after taking due permission from the gathering, for it is not courteous to pose problems without such notice. Her question was: On what does the inner Core - the Atma - rest in the past, present, and future in this dual world? Gargi's intention was to bring about Yajnavalkya's discomfiture, for he would be forced to admit that "The timeless Entity is beyond words and cannot be described at all." This shows that Gargi was also an adept in the knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya), so you can infer that in the field of knowledge of Brahman there is no place for distinctions between one sex and the other.

"The masters of Brahmic wisdom declare that the highest Brahman (Parabrahman) is immanent in the unmanifested ether (akasa)," said Yajnavalkya, thus escaping from the trying situation into which Gargi wanted to drive him. Then he described the nature of that Indestructible (A-kshara): It has no gross, subtle, or other such changes; It has no material qualification like colour, smell, shape, etc. There are no "measures" to comprehend It.

Time is but the execution of Its will. Why elaborate? The Sun and the five elements all carry out Its will.

Gargi then asked the assembled brahmins to bow before Yajnavalkya and acknowledge his supremacy. That action stopped further questionings.

### **Brahman is the Source of all Bliss**



The Atma is effulgent, just as the sun is, by its very nature. People say that they "see" the Atma or Its effulgence, but there is no seeing It. Since It has no second, nothing is outside It. It is not seen, and It cannot see. It has no organs of sight or smell; it has no parts that, when coordinated, can perform any function.

From the lowest joy to the highest bliss of Brahman (Brahma-ananda), each step is an increase of the feeling of delight. Words like highest bliss (Param-ananda) indicate only stages of bliss (ananda). As a matter of fact, all types of bliss are derived from the primary basic source of the bliss of Brahman. Yajnavalkya explained all this to Janaka, for he took great delight in instructing the king on all that he knew.

The body grows like a tree sprouting from a tiny seed, and, when the body falls like a ripe fruit to the ground, the seed in it grows into another tree. Voice and other senses also follow; the breath also takes to its own path. The Atma alone is not affected, one way or the other. It remains as ever: unmoved, immovable.

Through sinful deeds, sin (*papa*) accumulates; through meritorious deeds, merit (*punya*). They produce the impulses for a new body, as the primary motive force of the body (*sarira*). The Atma leaves the old body, with its vision directed to the new one it occupies, like a caterpillar fixes its forelegs on a spot when it lifts up its hind legs.

However, the knower of Self (Atma-jnani) has no impulse toward bodily activities, so in his case the Atma is not bothered by a new body at all. The path of spiritual wisdom is the path of the knower of Brahman (Brahma-vid).

The action-enthusiasts are led on to renunciation (*tapas*). The knowers of Self have escaped from desire, so their minds know no anguish or agony or yearning, which is the mark of renunciation. They are the very Artist who has evolved the creation (the very Viswakartha). One who has attained the vision of Brahmanhood has nothing further to attain, realise, guard, or seek.

## All things are loved for Atma alone

The instruction that Yajnavalkya gives in this Upanishad to Maitreyi, his consort, reveals to us clearly the knowledge of the Self (Atma-jnana) that comes after a study of the scriptures with reasoning as a constant companion. It also describes the principles of renunciation (sanyasa), which is the instrument for getting that spiritual wisdom. The entire sensory world and the senses have to be equated only with the dream-reality; there is no use pursuing them as ultimate and valuable.

The Atma alone has to be loved; all other things are loved for the sake of the Atma. When the Atma is understood, everything else is understood. All effects are subsumed by the Cause. The ocean is the goal of all the waters; so too, all tastes find their goal in the tongue, all forms realise themselves in the eye, all sounds are for the ear, all resolutions have the mind as their goal. That is to say, the entire creation merges in Brahman.

## Yajnavalkya, the crown jewel of scholars of Brahmic knowledge

In his reply to Bujyu, Yajnavalkya reveals his knowledge of the process of evolution of the universe (*Brahmanda-nirmana*).

In his reply to Gargi's two questions, he reveals and teaches the true nature of Brahman, which is direct spiritual knowledge (*a-paroksha*). In the Sakalya-brahmana, the sage has astounded everyone by his erudition in spiritual mysteries.

He earned victory in the Hall of Janaka from the wisest of the land. He sanctified it by his teaching. He met the hard tests of the crooked Bujyu and the harder tests of the eager inquirer, Gargi, with equanimity and skill. He was acclaimed as the crown jewel of scholars.

Of course, he himself acknowledged greatness wherever he recognised it. He was generous enough to recognise the greatness of the teachers who were

instructing Janaka until then.

Lastly, he felt that he had no more to learn or earn, so he became a monk. Realising that Maitreyi, his consort, was also eager to attain realisation, he instructed her in the knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-jnana), for in those days women were considered equally fit to practise the path of spiritual wisdom, which leads to liberation.

## 7. Prasna Upanishad

The Prasna Upanishad is an appendix of the Atharvana-veda. It is so named because it is in the form of questions (prasnas) and answers. By this means, it discusses more elaborately some topics dealt with briefly in the Mundaka Upanishad. It has thus become a commentary on the Mundaka Upanishad.

For example, the Mundaka says that knowledge (vidya) is of two types - absolute transcendent and worldly - and that knowledge of the world-related Brahman is of two kinds - action and worship (karma and upasana).

The second and third questions in Prasna Upanishad deal with worship. The discipline of action is fully covered in the section on action (Karma Kanda), so it is not elaborated on here. When both activity and worship are practised, regardless of the fruits thereof, they promote renunciation and non-attachment. This is the conclusion arrived at by the first question. So, studying the Prasna Upanishad after the Mundaka makes the subject clearer.

### **Seekers meet the guru with sincere heart offerings**

Of the two entities, the eternal supreme transcendent (para) Brahman and the worldly or qualified (a-para) Brahman, the worldly Brahman is incapable of conferring the goals of human life (purusha-arthas), which are of lasting value. Realising this, and eager to attain the eternal supreme Brahman, aspirants approached Pippalada, a competent teacher. The word seeking (anveshana) used here to signify the attitude of these disciples shows that these disciples, attached to the lower Self (a-para Brahman) and unrelated to the Supreme Absolute Over-Self, fail to identify their own basic truth as the Atma. That is why they still seek it somewhere outside the truth of their being! The eternal unique transcendent Brahmic principle can be known only through the discipline of the scriptures (sastras), directed personally by a teacher.

Seekers have to approach the guru as holding in the hand sincere heart-

offerings, that is to say not simply "holding the ritualistic fuel, the sacrificial fire". Further, worthy, desirable offerings should be presented.

The seekers meet Pippalada, who tells them, "The rare and precious teaching related to the fundamental mystery of the universe and the Self, known as knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya), cannot be imparted to the uninitiated. Students have first to be kept under observation and tested for a year." Beings are born to perpetuate Creation When the year is over, Kabandi Kathyayana asks Pippalada, "Why are beings born?" "Those who wish for progeny are the desirers of offspring. The wish is basically to become the progeny, to perpetuate oneself. Hiranyagarbha, who is non-separate from the supreme Brahman (Parabrahman), is the Prajapathi (God presiding over creation). Hiranyagarbha, as Prajapathi, wishes for progeny; he has traces of knowledge of the lower or world-related Brahman (a-Para-vidya) attached to Him from past origins, which induce in Him the wish." This is the reply of the guru.

### **Contemplate on the orderly universe and its principles**

Surya (the Sun) illumines all beings in the ten regions with His rays. Surya is the very Self of Prajapathi, so all beings born in the regions so illumined become the very "self" of Prajapathi. The word "vital air (prana)" therefore refers to Aditya (the Sun) Itself, for the Sun gives the vital essence (prana). Since all beings are able to live by consumption of food, etc., the Sun is also known as the Cosmic Universal Personality (Vaiswanara). The whole universe is of His nature, so He is also known as Cosmic Form (Viswa-rupa).

The year is an indicator of time, according to the position of the sun. Time is but a series of days and nights, and these phases are caused by the sun. The rotation of the moon causes phases in fullness. The twin forces, the sun and moon, are products of Prajapathi, so time, which is marked out by the tropics, seasons, months, etc., is also of the same essence. Prajapathi also has northern and southern cycles.

The contemplation and worship of Prajapathi in this universal aspect is

referred to as "spiritual wisdom (jnana)" itself. Those who are endowed with this spiritual wisdom and who have mastery over the senses as well as faith in the Vedas can easily convince themselves that they are the very Atma. Pursuing the northern path (uttara-marga), they reach the spiritual stage known as the world of the Sun (Surya-loka). That world is the refuge of all living beings. Only those who worshipfully engage themselves in their daily duties, without any desire for the fruits thereof, can enter that world of the Sun.

The seasons like spring are the feet of the Sun, the symbol of time; the twelve months are His personal traits; He is the Cause of the worlds - these truths are expressed in the fourth and sixth mantras. The rains are also caused by the Sun, so He is the master of another world too, the third, the heavenly world (dyu-loka).

### **Consecrate the body, a complex of vital elements, by sacrifice**

Ether (akasa), air (vayu), fire (agni), water (jala), and earth (bhumi) - the elements that make up the body - have their presiding deities. The "activating" senses like voice and the "knowing" senses like the eye also have their deities, which reside in them and promote their functions. Finally, the mind and the intellect also have their deities; they are all pillars that support the being and prevent the structure of the body from falling asunder.

The body is a complex produced by a combination of the five elements. The organs of perception (jnanendriyas) are the consequences of this combination. So, the body is a bundle of consequences and causes. Like the spokes of a wheel, they are fixed in the hub of vital airs (prana). So too, the sacred hymns, the Yajur-vedic mantras, the Sama-vedic mantras, the sacrificial rituals (yajnas) where they are employed, the valour of the warrior (kshatriya) who protects the people from danger, the brahmanic force consecrating the sacrifices - all these are of the nature of the vital air.

When Prajapathi becomes the cloud and pours rain, all beings rejoice and are enabled to live. "All things that contribute to happiness are bound to You;

cherish us therefore as the Mother. You cause all wealth and welfare related to spiritual and physical protection. Give us that wealth and wisdom." The Rik, Yajur, and Sama mantras are the brahmanic wealth; riches are the warrior (kshatriya) wealth. Thus, the Upanishad elaborates on the vital air (prana) as Prajapathi and its functions and attributes.

### **The Sun governs the vital air and vital functions**

Thereafter, Pippalada takes up Bhargava's question. Later, Kausalya, from the Aswalayana school, asks him about the vital air (prana). Pippalada replies, "My dear boy, like the shadow caused by a person, the vital air is produced by the Atma. The vital air dedicates itself to the Atma through the resolve of the mind (manas). Like a ruler who arranges for the governance of his possessions, the chief vital air appoints different airs (pranas), assigning functions and areas of work for each. The chief vital air has the Sun (Aditya) and other Gods as its impelling force. Like sparks leaping out of the flames of a raging fire, beings emanate from the imperishable supreme Atma (Paramatma) and lose themselves in the self-same fire." This is mentioned in the Mundaka (II-I-I).

### **The Self abides in all beings**

Then, Pippalada answers Gargi, "The rays of the setting sun merge in the Sun itself; they emanate and spread again when the sun rises the next day. In the same manner, during a dream, the sensory world gets merged in the consciousness-reflecting mind, and when one wakes from sleep, the sensory impressions emanate as of old and move out in their native form. That is why the Divine Self (Purusha), which abides in all beings, doesn't hear or see or touch or enjoy. It doesn't walk or talk.

The Atma, which is pure effulgence during the dream stage, sees, hears, and experiences as subconscious impulses (vasanas) whatever it sees, hears, and experiences during the waking stage. When the statement is made that "The Atma is the base of everything", the impression is created that everything is different from It. But the distinction that is apparent between the "Base of all"

and the "individual souls (jivas)" that rest upon It is merely an illusion caused by circumstances; it is mental, not fundamental. Pippalada also said that whatever world (loka) is connoted by the deity worshiped through the Om (Pranava), that world will be attained.

### **God resides in the heart**

Next, Sukesha, Bharadwaja's son, questioned the master. Pippalada's answer ran thus: "The Divine Self (Purusha) you inquire about is in this body itself, as the resident of the inner sky, the heart. It is on account of His being there that you shine forth in full splendour of attainment and personality. Souls emanate from Him and merge in Him. Like milestones, progressively increasing and interdependent, the Earth, Durga (the mother goddess), food, the supreme Soul (Purusha) - all four principles originate from the other (according to the second section of the Taithiriya Upanishad). The origin might not be evident to the eye, but, since the origin of the sense organs (jnanen-driyas) and the organs of action (karmen-driyas) has been described already, the origin of the supreme Soul is as good as said. All rivers join the sea and lose their names and forms therein. The rivers are thereafter called the "sea". So too, only the supreme Soul or Self remains. He is without any attainment and traits or changes.

He is imperishable, endless. That is all I know about Brahman and that is all there is to know," said Pippalada to Kabandi and other disciples.

### **The never-changing Absolute Reality and the ever-changing phenomenon**

This Upanishad ends with respectful homage paid by the disciple to the master. The father gives only the body; Pippalada gave them the body of Brahman by teaching them the Atmic principle (Atma-thathwa). The six disciples, who asked six questions in all, were,

1. Sukesha, son of Bharadwaja.
2. Sathyakama, or Saibya, son of Sibi.



3. Souryayani, grandson of Surya, born in the family of Garga (hence, called Gargya).
4. Kausalya, son of Ashvala.
5. Bhargava or Vaidarbhi, who was born in Vidarbha in the line of Bhrigu.
6. Kabandi Kathyayana, a descendent of Kathya.

The first section of Mundaka Upanishad elaborates on both the highest or transcendental (para) and the lower or creation- or world-related (a-para) aspects, along with the causal or creative aspect of Brahman. Although its second section begins by extolling the creation-related aspect, it ends with the firm declaration of the evanescent nature of the creation-related aspect.

In the answer to the sixth question, the Om (Pranava) as the core of all methods of gaining the transcendental and the non-transcendental aspects is fully elaborated upon.

The questions and answers in the Prasna Upanishad bring out the implications of the Mundaka and serve as a nice commentary on that succinct text. The 6 questions are:

1. What exactly is the relationship between the transcendental or non-dual (para) and the differentiating or dualistic (a-para) principles?
2. Who protects and guards created beings?
3. How does Hiranyagarbha emerge from the Supreme Atma (Paramatma)?
4. How does creation take place from the Supreme Atma?
5. How does the consciousness-full (chaithanya-full) principle, the vital air (prana), enter the body and get diverted into five channels?
6. Which senses operate in the three stages of waking, dreaming, and sleeping?

These lines of inquiry are followed in this Prasna Upanishad.

## 8. Kena Upanishad

### Seek to know the Eternal, not the ephemeral

The Kena Upanishad is ascribed to Sama-veda and its Thalavakara branch, so it is also referred to as the Thalavakaropanishad. The name Kena is derived from the first word of the stanza of the first section of the Upanishad:

Keneshitham pathathi presitham manah, kena pranah prathamah  
praithiyukthah,  
keneshitham vacham imam vadhanti, chakshuh shrothram ka-u-deveo  
yunakthi?

Who impels the mind to alight on its object? Enjoined by whom does the vital force proceed to function? At whose behest do men utter speech? What intelligence, indeed, directs the eyes and the ears?

The ear, skin, eye, tongue, nose - these five senses are able to cognise sound, touch, form, taste, and smell respectively. Objects of knowledge are cognised only through these five. The world is experienced through these instruments, which stand intermediate between the knower and the knowable. The inner capacity to understand objects is named mind (manas). The mind moves out through the senses (jnanen-driyas) mentioned before and attaches itself to objects. At that time, by that very occurrence, the mind assumes the form of that object; this is called a function (vritti). The mind is non-intelligent (a-chetana), so its transformations and manipulations (vikaras) are also non-intelligent, non-vital. A wooden doll has only the property of wood; a sugar doll, the property of sugar. The unintelligent mind cannot achieve knowledge of the supreme Intelligence (Chetana), which pervades the Universe.

Just as the unintelligent chariot is directed by a charioteer, a charioteer must direct the unintelligent mind (manas), seated in the mind and having it as His vehicle. The motive force that activates the inner instruments, the senses of action, the senses of knowledge, the five vital airs (pranas) - that force is God. The questions quoted above imply that this force is distinct from the senses. Naturally, therefore, the motivator of the entire group of senses must be distinct from the mind too, right? Those who seek to know the eternal, convinced that all acts and activities are ephemeral, will not worry about the ephemeral.

### **The Atma activates and illumines all**

That eternal entity is agitationless, so it is not moved by the three-fold urge. It does not order the senses about for this purpose or that. The question then arises: Do the mind (manas), the vital air (prana), speech, the eye, the ear, etc., carry out their respective functions prompted by the law of cause and effect? Or are they moved by the wish of a conscious force? That is the doubt.

The ear has the capacity to know sound, the eye is endowed with the skill to know and distinguish form. The other senses are also similarly equipped. When the mind passes out through the knowing-senses toward objects and envelops them, you acquire knowledge about them. Therefore, the five senses and the mind are all instruments of knowledge. How could they manage to perform this intelligent function, being themselves devoid of intelligence?

Well, the answer is: It is all due to the presence of the Atma, due to the reflection of the effulgence of the Atma on the inner instrument of mind, intellect, memory, and ego (an-thah-karana). The Sun illumines the world and makes it active in a thousand ways. So too, the Atma, by its spiritual power (tejas), activates and illumines the world. All instruments of knowledge are activated by the Atma. The electric current energises a machine and does various operations - printing, etc. - but it is not visible or concrete. The electric current is the mover of the movement, the machine of the machine. So too, the Atmic splendour (tejas) is the Ear of the ear, the Eye of the eye.

That is the activating current.

The wonder is: the Atma is inactive and without qualifications. It does not get anything done with the mind or the senses, remember. They get activated by the very presence of the Atma! The rays of the Sun are not at all aware of the activity they invoke; the Atma is not responsible for the activity of the senses. (This teaching was given by Varuna to his son, Bhrigu.) No knower can know the Knower of All: Atma is beyond senses. The eye, when illumined by the splendour of the Atma, is able to grasp form, which is its sphere; it can never hope to illumine the Atma, which is self-luminous. The lamp illumines objects, but the objects cannot, in their turn, illumine the lamp. Words can describe or denote only such as possess qualifications, like name, form, quality (guna), and action (kriya). How can they describe or define that which has no qualifications, no name, no form, no characteristic, viz. the highest Atma (Paramatma)? You cannot describe sweetness or similar tastes by means of words. The Atma is not a subject for description. The non-intelligent mind (manas) cannot experience the Intelligence.

There is no knower who can know the Knower of all. He is beyond all knowable things. When known, He is no longer knower or knowledge.

Brahman is spiritual wisdom (jnana) itself, so it can never be "known" by a "knower". By the process of knowing, other things can be known, not knowledge itself. The lamp will not crave for another lamp to see itself; nor will it crave for its own light. It has light, it is light - that is all. It sheds light on other objects; it does not shed light on its light. So, you are also light, you are Atma. The Atma in you is of the same nature as the Atma in all beings. It is the only one reality; it has no limitation or attribute or qualification.

### **Those who claim to know Atma don't really know**

The Atma can be cognised by the study of the scriptures (sastras) and by following the injunctions laid down there. That which cannot be illumined by words or speech or by the senses, that which illumines the word, speech, and all senses - that is Brahman, or Atma. The first section of this Upanishad

makes clear that Brahman is incapable of being limited or discarded or overlooked.

So, for those who claim that they have seen Brahman, "It" is yet a subject for further investigation and inquiry.

They have not reached the final stage. For theirs is not authentic wisdom (jnana); theirs is but a delusion.

The Atma of the person who knows is itself the very Brahman; that is the undoubted verdict of Vedanta, isn't it?

Fire can't burn itself; how can Atma know Atma, how can the knower know Himself? Therefore, the statement "I have known Brahman" is an indication of delusion, not of real knowledge.

All people are entitled to knowledge of God; experience is the approach, the proof the result. It is said that Brahman has various cognisable and countable forms, but that is only in the limited sense of being qualified by name and form. By Itself, the Absolute doesn't have sound or smell or taste or touch or form.

It is ever-existing. In whatever activity you become aware of its presence, that activity lends its appropriate characteristic.

In whatever sphere the scriptures (sastras) discuss and decide, that sphere becomes the characteristic of Brahman for that particular scripture. The consciousness that becomes apparent when it is limited by certain bounds or vessels - that consciousness (chaitanya) is Brahman. Consciousness is attachment-less; yet, when associated with objects like the physical body, It gives the impression that It is attached. From the fact that when the waters of the lake are agitated the image of the Sun under the water shakes, you cannot infer that the Sun in the sky, which is remote and far away, also shakes! The Sun and the sheet of water are unrelated. No relationship can be posited between these two. Similarly when the body undergoes growth,

decay, destruction, etc., it gives the impression that the Atma is also affected, but the Atma is unaffected.

Brahman is beyond the reach of the intellectual seeker; Brahman can be reached only by those who give up the intellect as a useless instrument. Experience alone is the method of approach, the proof, the result. The ultimate state of knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-jnana) is the end of all enquiry, all search. Actual realisation (saksat-kara) is the fruition thereof. This highest stage is reached in the quietening of all agitations in all levels of consciousness (samadhi), though, of course, the preliminary steps of listening, reflection, and profound meditation are concerned with the intellect (buddhi). One will acquire the nature of truth if one understands the nature of the Atma; if one does not, then it is a big loss, no doubt. Wise souls recognise in every being and every object the principle of the all-pervading Atma, and when they leave the world, they become free from birth and death.

Knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-jnana) is the heritage of all; all people are entitled to it. If one is aware of this, and if, by one's efforts, one achieves spiritual wisdom or Brahman using the above-mentioned methods, then verily, one's career in this world is worthwhile. Otherwise, it is all a waste.

### **Snap the strings of worldly attachment**

The Atma, when cognised in the consciousness, flashes like a streak of lightning; in a second it will reveal its brilliance and splendour. It is impossible to grasp its full majesty. The mind is the cloak of the Atma; it conditions the Atma, or rather appears to. So it seems to be very close to the Atma and makes you believe that it attains It.

But the mind is incapable of doing so. Since the mind is closest, the spiritual aspirant imagines that the mind has realised the Atma and yearns for the experience again and again. This, of course, is good, for it fosters the search for merging with Brahman.

For the knower of Brahman (Brahma-jnani), the opposites of dharma and lack

of dharma, of merit and demerit, are nonexistent. Dharmic life offers the upper realms (lokas) after death, and unrighteous life leads one to the lower worlds. But both are shackles for the aspiring aspirant, whose eye is on the removal of ignorance and realisation of spiritual truth. He has to seek to snap the strings that bind the heart to the objective world. So, he wants an answer to the question with which this Upanishad starts: By what does the mind grasp things? To attain the spiritual knowledge (jnana) of Brahman, austerity (tapas), self-control, Vedic rites, and image worship are all good aids. Spiritual wisdom (jnana) has truth (sathya) as its location.

This Kena Upanishad gives all seekers the instruction of knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-jnana); it deals with Brahman, which is spiritual truth (sathya), spiritual wisdom (jnana), and eternal (an-antha).

## 9. Chandogya Upanishad

### Work, worship, and wisdom

This Upanishad is incorporated in the Sama-veda. It has eight sections. The first five deal with various forms of contemplative worship (upasanas) to approach the Ideal, and the last three explain the manner of acquisition of true knowledge. Purity of consciousness is the essential prerequisite for worship. Single-minded concentration is essential for knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-jnana). These can be obtained by dedicated work (karma) and worship; thus is knowledge of Brahman won. That is why, in the scriptures, work is described first, worship next, and spiritual wisdom (jnana) last.

The first chapter of the Chandogya details the contemplative practices that form part of the Sama-veda.

The second describes the entire ritual of chanting sacred verses. The third presents the contemplation (upasana) of the Sun (Surya) known as Madhu-vidya, the Gayatri contemplation, and the science of devotion. The fourth teaches the science of absorption (Samvarga-vidya) and the sixteen-phased science of Brahman (Brahma-vidya).

The fifth elaborates on the three sciences (vidyas), vital air (prana), the five sacred fires, and the omnipresent Self (Vaiswanara).

### Being or "is-ness" is the universal quality of all objects

Uddalaka taught his son Swethakethu knowledge that, if known, would make all things known. The knowledge of mud and of gold will give knowledge of all pots and pans, as well as of all bracelets and necklaces. Mud and gold are the truth; their modifications and transformations are temporary, mere name-forms. So too, the world, like the pot and the bracelet, is just an effect, and the cause is Being or "is-ness" (sat). Is-ness is common to all objects; the pot "is", the bracelet "is". Is-ness becomes manifest through association with the



pots and pans, the bracelets and necklaces. Is-ness may not be apparent to gross intelligences, for it needs subtlety to realise it.

The rosy colour manifested in the rose "is", even in the absence of the flower; it becomes apparent only when it "adheres" to the rose. It is not apparent when such attachment is nonexistent.

Similarly, the "is-ness" that is the universal character of all objects persists even in the absence of objects.

Prior to creation, there was only just this is-ness. There was no void then - this is-ness was everywhere! When the "is" was reflected in primal activity (maya), it resulted in the Lord (Iswara), who partook of that activity to manifest as the universe with the three elements of fire, earth, and wind. All creation is but the permutation and combination of these three.

### **By knowing Atma, you will know all**

Uddalaka's lineage is steeped in the study of the Vedas, so it is famed as a noble high-born family. But Swethakethu, his son, was wasting precious years after his thread-investing ceremony (upanayana) in idleness, without using them for Vedic study. This caused Uddalaka concern, for one who is born as a brahmin but neglects the study of the Vedas does not deserve that appellation. Such a one can be called only "one who has relatives who are brahmins"! So, Uddalaka took Swethakethu to task and forced him to go to a teacher. There, by the exercise of his superior intelligence, Swethakethu mastered the four Vedas and their meanings before he was 24. He returned proud and pompous, swelling with egotism, declaring that no one was equal to him in scholarship and righteousness.

In order to prick his pride, Uddalaka asked him one day, "You have become so haughty that you have no equal in learning and virtue. Well, did you seek from your teacher the message that reveals the Absolute, the lesson that only practice of the scriptures (sastras) can impart, the message that when heard makes you hear all things that are heard, that when imagined makes you

imagine all things imagined? Did you learn that? That message would have shown you the Atma, which is the fulfillment of all study and scholarship." The body decays and dies, but not the Self The Atma is the base of individuals like Swethakethu. The pure consciousness becomes apparently limited in a variety of individuals. In deep sleep, the variety disappears, and each individual lapses back into this "is-ness".

Then, all the manifold activities and experiences, like, "I am Ranga," "I am Ganga," "I am father," and "I am son," are destroyed. The sweetness and fragrance of many flowers are collected and fused into one uniformly sweet honey, where all the manifold individualities are destroyed.

The river names Ganga, Krishna, Indus are all lost when these rivers enter the sea. Thereafter, they are called "the sea". The individual soul (jivi), who is eternal and immortal, is born again and again as a transitory mortal; the soul continues to accumulate activity, prompted by inherited impulses, and the activity produces consequences, which must be shouldered and suffered. The body decays and dies, not the individualised soul. The seed of the banyan tree will sprout even if it is trampled upon. The salt placed in water is recognisable by the taste, even though it cannot be grasped!

The individual soul, befogged by ignorance (a-jnana), is unable to recognise its reality. Discrimination will reveal the truth. A millionaire is kidnapped and left alone in the jungle, but he discovers the way out and returns to his home. So also, the individual soul is restored to its millions! Once the individual reaches its real status, it is free from all the change and chance that is involved in the flow (samsara) of time and space, of name and form.

If the individual doesn't reach that status, then, like the happy sleeper who wakes into the confusion of the day, it will be born into the world of decay and death.

**Discover omnipresent Brahman in the heart lotus!**

Brahman is described as one without a second. All this visible world is

denoted as the form of Brahman (Thath-swarupa); Brahman can be realised by worship of the limited, qualified Divinity, just as Sathyakama and others did. The path of contemplation of Brahman is also called the path of the spinal nerve current. The Omnipresent Brahman can be enclosed and discovered in the firmament of the heart! It is the capital of that kingdom.

Since He is seated there, the heart is called the house of Brahman (Brahma-vesma). That firmament cannot, of course, limit or set boundaries to the illimitable Brahman!

Yogis who are turned away from the objective world can attain the supreme Brahman (Parabrahman), with Its splendour of realised knowledge, in the pure clear sky of their hearts. The worlds are fixed as the spokes of the wheel in the hub of Brahman. Decline, decay, and death do not affect It. Since that supreme Entity can achieve whatever It decides on, It is called True Desire (Sathya-kama) and True Resolve (Sathya-sankalpa).

What exactly is the supreme Brahman? We can know it by one test. Brahman is That which remains after everything is negated as "Not this, Not that (Nethi, Nethi)".

This is The Truth that all aspirants seek. Attaining It, they get the status of emperors and can travel wherever they like. The wise one who is established in the pure Reality sees all desires that dawn in the heart as expressions of that Truth only.

### **The journey of the soul after death**

The Atma transcends all the worlds. It is uncontaminated. One who is aware of only the Atma is ever in bliss. The student (brahma-charya) stage is an important step for attaining Atmic wisdom. Holy rituals, fasts, and other vows are equally helpful. The solar energy surges through the countless nerves of the body; the senses merge in the mind at the moment of death; the individual (jivi) who has realised that it was all this, while limited by the mind, then escapes into the lotus of the heart space (hridaya-akasa) through the

nerves. At last, on point of death, the individual soul moves out of the spinal column into the solar rays and from there to the realm of the Sun (Surya-loka) itself. The journey doesn't end there. It reaches out into the realm of Brahman (Brahma-loka).

But the individual who is caught in the mire of ignorance (a-jnana), who is identified with the mind and its vagaries, escapes through the ear or eye or other senses and falls into worlds where activities (karmas) rule. The feeling of content and joy one gets in deep sleep is the result of wisdom (jnana) persisting in the individual.

### **Expand your consciousness for liberation**

The individualised consciousness (chittha) is the source and support of resolution. All resolutions, decisions, and plans are products of the consciousness; they are of its form; they originate there; they are registered there.

That is why, when death overtakes a scholar of all scriptures (sastras), the scholar becomes but the equal of ordinary people and has the same fate as the ignorant person (a-jnani). The consciousness has to be saturated with Brahmic endeavour; only then will it be an instrument of liberation, freed from the shackles of resolve (sankalpa).

The mind, etc., cannot free itself, as the consciousness can.

The consciousness discriminates between resolutions; it tests them as duty and not-duty and justifies with proper reasons the classification it has made. Once this selection is made, the word utters it, the name signifies it.

The special sound-forms or mantras incorporate the resolutions, accepted as duty, by the purified consciousness; the rites become one with the mantras. There can be no proper action without consciousness.

Next, about meditation (dhyana), which is superior to individual

consciousness. Meditation is the fixing of the intellect (buddhi) on the Divine, when it transcends such inferior helps as images, idols, and saligrams (naturally formed linga stones). In meditation, all agitations cease, all modifications are unnoticed. On account of the effect of the quality of inertia (thamoguna), and even of the passionate quality (rajoguna), all created things - like the waters, hills, mountains, stars, planets, and people with the spark of the Divine in them - are agitationbound, change-bound.

Spiritual knowledge (vijnana) - knowledge based on experience steeped in the scriptures (sastras) - is better than meditation. Spiritual knowledge is attained by meditation, so it is more valuable than meditation.

Superior to spiritual knowledge is strength, fortitude, vigour. It illumines the objective world, it sharpens the intuition (prathibha). Intuition is the power by which you can sense the consciousness in all knowledge objects.

Now, there is one thing superior even to intuition: food, sustenance. It is the support of life. Deprived of it for ten days, one becomes powerless to grasp anything. It is life that makes possible study, service of teachers, listening to their teachings, cogitation over what is taught, and the earning of illumination (tejas).

Illumination is higher than intuition or food. Illumination is fire, heat, and light. Illumination creates water, and water produces food. Illumination can make even wind lighter. It shines as lightning and sounds as thunder.

Ether (akasa) is superior to illumination, remember. It is through ether that sounds are transmitted and heard.

Love and play are products of ether. Seeds sprout on account of ether or space.

Now consider this. Memory (smarana) is superior to ether. Without it, all experience is meaningless, all knowledge is waste, all effort is purposeless. Nothing can be experienced without the help of memory. Objects like the

ether will be unrecognised in its absence. It can be said that memory creates the ether and other objects.

**To experience Reality, give up identification of the Self with the body**

Thus analysing the value and relative importance of objects and powers, people must give up identification of spiritual Self with the physical body and recognise their true Reality. One who does this rises to the height of the noblest of people, laughing, playing, and moving without regard to the needs or comforts of the body. One who is body-bound is caught in worldly existence (samsara); for the one who is free from that bondage, their own true nature is the field of activity. Wind, lightning, and thunder have no permanent existence. When the rainy season comes, they appear in the sky and get merged in it. So too, the particularised individual (jivi) appears as separate for a time against the background of Brahman and gets merged in It at last.

This eight-section Upanishad teaches the series of evolved objects from Hiranyagarbha, Kasyapa-Prajapathi, Manu, and human beings. This lineage and the lessons to ennoble it are vital for mankind. It has to be learned by children and students, from parents and teachers.

## 10. Aithareya Upanishad

### Freedom from delusion results in vision of Atma

This Upanishad is incorporated in the Rig-veda. It shines bejeweled by six chapters, which describe the absolute Atmic principle. It is therefore famous as the Atmic Six (Atma-Shatka). It makes possible for the aspirant the vision of the Atma that results from the destruction of delusion and ignorance. "Atma" is used in two ways:

worldly activity and supreme. Used in the activity sense, Atma indicates the individual (jivi); in every individual, the Atma expresses itself through the senses of perception (jnanen-driyas) into the outer world. The word is derived from the root ath, which indicates "expansion, consumption, movement", among other things. So, the word Atma denotes universal immanence, universal assimilation, and perpetual movement. That is to say, it connotes the Brahman itself.

### Atma is unlimited, endless, changeless, all

In the waking stage, the Atma, in the sense of the individual (jivi) in worldly activity, enjoys all the experiences.

In the dream stage, all the senses of perception and action hold back their activities, but the Atma creates its own forms and names on the basis of experiences and impressions collected from the outer world. In the "deep sleep" stage, it becomes immanent everywhere and assumes its basic role of pure bliss, unaware of anything outside or inside.

The meaning of the world is in conformity with the experience of the three stages. On account of the apparent limitation in time, space, and condition, the Atma is also taken to be conditioned and limited, but that is not its real nature. It is beginningless, changeless, endless. It knows all, it can achieve all. It has no attributes. It is eternal, unsullied, conscious, free. It has no second; it

is unique, whole, without parts.

### **Atma existed before Creation**

The external world is cognised through direct perception, etc. Therefore, all that is capable of being pointed out as this or that, or of being indicated by a name or a form, is subsumed by the idea of "creation (srishti)". Creation means an act, a result. What then was before that act?

Idam agre, Atma eva aseeth.  
Before this, the Atma alone was

The world was a latent product; later it becomes patent. In the latent stage, it was unmanifest in the Atma itself. When the urge to manifest appeared, the multiplicity of names blossomed forth, and all this variety arose to view. Being perceptible by the senses - this is the test of manifestation.

Name is fundamentally sound, manifesting as word. In the statement "this is Ranga", when the sound Ranga is produced, the listener turns to the person indicated and identifies him as Ranga. The word and its meaning are inseparable. The two were both nonexistent before creation. Therefore, the Atma and the unmanifested creation (jagath) were unreachable by the intelligence and the world that it fashions. After creation, since name and form became the essence of all this, everything can be grasped by words and meaning. The non-dual that was, is, and will be is the Atma. The multiple manifestation of variety proliferating in name and form is the creation. But, basically, it is just one unique substance (vasthu).

### **Atma is devoid of all distinctions and beyond the reach of senses**

The one uniform ocean appears as foam, bubble, wave, and wavelet; so too,



creation made manifest the apparent manifoldness from the changeless One. Manifoldness is due to myopia, ignorance. There is no need to posit a second entity other than the Atma. The ignorance or myopia or illusion (maya) is but a product of the will of the Atma. It is not distinct from the Atma. Strength is not distinct from the strong person, is it? The Atma is devoid of distinctions, from the same kind, from different species, or from one's own characteristic. It is categorically declared as one only.

But it doesn't become clear so soon that all this is one. The idea is just like the rope appearing as the snake, or the deluding mirage; the Atma also misleads us as creation (jagath). It is all a magician's trick, manipulated by the wish of the absolute. The rope is the prime cause for the illusion of the snake on the rope. The Atma is beyond the reach of the senses; it has no limbs or body. Only the explanation that it is all an unreal illusion can satisfy the critic who questions how creation can emanate from the Atma, which is pure consciousness only.

Everything is Atma, even the deluding illusion (maya) of variety. It is so strong that it causes execution of deeds through instruments like the sensory organs; you then declare that it is your will and power that did that deed, though it is the delusion that was manifested by Atma that accomplished it.

### **Atma governs the "deities" of the senses**

The world thus created is devoid of consciousness, so it has to be fostered like a machine (yantra). How can a machine operate after its manufacture, and even installation, without a mechanic or machinist? He created the first incarnation of Brahman (Virat-Purusha) out of the five elements; He also endowed that first incarnation with head and limbs. Like the figure of clay made by the potter from earth dug up by him, that first incarnation was produced from the elements. From the limbs of that perfect Person, the world-rulers (loka-palakas) were created.

Then, each sense was separated and equipped with an appropriate deity. In front, the face, the mouth, with Agni as the deity of speech (the function of

the mouth), the nose, and the eyes; in this manner, the senses and their respective deities were created and assigned.

These deities bless the senses and see that they function properly. The external appearance of the eye, the nose, and the ear may be quite right, but without the help of the presiding deity, they may not function at all. The cow and the horse were created from the waters and offered to the gods. But the gods were still discontented, so, to answer their prayers, human beings were created similar to the first incarnation of Brahman (Virat-Purusha).

Since that human being was associated with discrimination (viveka), the gods were delighted. All bodies other than the human are merely instruments for experiencing the fruits of action. The human is the only instrument for liberation.

### **Lord illumines everything through living beings**

The Lord, after entering the body, becomes the ruler of the conjunction of the senses and the mind with the objective world. Like an actor, He contacts the outer world and experiences all the lessons of the previous births.

In the presence of the Lord, the ballet-dancer intellect (buddhi) dances her steps, keeping to the timing of the senses and moving from one object to another.

Thus, the Lord illumines everything through the form of the individual living being (jivi). The Supreme Atma (Paramatma), who is limited as the individual soul (jiva-atma), has three areas of recreation: the eye, throat, and heart. The eyes shine with a special splendour when the realisation of Brahman is achieved or even attempted.

This is an evident fact. When the individual has earned the knowledge of its reality, it may not be able to describe how all is nothing besides Atma; but it will achieve the knowledge that Brahman itself is appearing as all this.

One who delves deep into the unity of the individual and the Brahman has certainly discovered the goal of life; there is no doubt of that.

The stages of wakefulness, dream, and deep sleep are unrelated to the Atma. They are concerned only with the physical sensory causes and effects.

### **Human beings have three forms of birth**

Every human being has two bodies: one's own and that of the progeny. The duties of study, teaching, repetition of the name - these assigned tasks are handed down by parent to child at the time of death, and they are carried on by the child as the representative of the parent and on their behalf. The parent leaves the body and assumes another, one that is more in conformity with the actions and tendencies cultivated and established in this birth. That is the third birth of the parent. The first three mantras speak about the two births, the physical and the spiritual. Now, a third one is added; the continuation by the child.

Sage Vamadeva understood the true nature of Atma in this form and became liberated from all the constant flux of the objective world.

## 11. Taithiriya Upanishad

Knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya) is the specific theme of this Upanishad. It has three chapters on:

instruction (Siksha-valli), bliss (ananda-valli) or Brahman (Brahma-valli), and Bhrigu (Bhrigu-valli). In the Chapter on instruction, certain methods are detailed to overcome obstacles placed in people's way by gods and sages (devas and rishis) and to acquire one-pointedness in mental exertions. This chapter has twelve sections.

The last two chapters are very important for those seeking knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-jnana). Both chapters give instruction on the knowledge of the sage Bhrigu (Varuni Vidya), which leads to liberation, so they are practically the same. For convenience of study, it is dealt with in two sections, that is all.

### **The objective world is caused by ignorance, with bondage the result**

In the Siksha-valli, subjects are dealt with that are not antagonistic to action (karma), like the combination of letters according to euphonic rules (samhitha), and also subjects that are associated with dedicated action, like worship (upasana). These lead to self-rule (swa-rajya). But the complete destruction of worldly flux (samsara) will not be accomplished by just these. Worship exists along with desire, so, like activity, even worship cannot bring about liberation.

All this flux, this objective world (samsara), is due to ignorance (a-jnana), and bondage is the result. So, when ignorance is destroyed, the bonds loosen and liberation is attained. Ignorance is there, persisting, through natural causes. It is just like the delusion that your train is moving when actually your train is stationary and the train on adjacent rails is moving! Watch only your train, and you know the truth; watch the other train, and you are deceived. There is no use seeking to know the cause of this delusion. Seek how to escape from

it. This ignorance, which is the seed out of which the flux sprouts, can be destroyed only by knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-jnana).

There is no other method.

### **Liberation cannot be produced by any action**

All that is caused, everything that is a result, is short-lived; this is evident from the scriptures (sastras) as well as from experience and reason. The scriptures speak of aspirants who discarded even higher regions like Heaven, which are attainable by persons who perform the prescribed rites, for liberation is beyond the reach of those who dwell therein. Heaven and Hell are results of actions, they are objects made, so they cannot be eternal; they are conditioned by birth, growth, decay, and death. They do not exist from the very beginning; they were made; before that act, they were not. That which once was not and later will not be is as good as "not" even in the present. The fruit of action (karma) shares this quality, so it cannot grant eternal joy.

No effort can result in the creation of space (akasa) now; what already exists cannot be produced anew. Liberation (moksha) exists and is there self-evident. It cannot be produced anew by any action (karma). The moment the ignorance (a-jnana) that hides it from experience disappears, you are liberated and know your Reality; you are free from bondage. Prior to that moment, you were free, but you imagined you were bound and you behaved as if you were bound. How then are you to get rid of this idea that you are bound? By listening to the teachings of the Vedas with faith therein. Only then can ignorance perish. The chapter on Brahman in this Upanishad has the task of presenting these teachings.

It is in the nature of things that ignorance prompts people to crave plentiful fruits through the performance of actions. Then, they become despondent, and the cravings only bind them more and don't help to make them free.

The craving for fruit is hard to shove off, though this fearful flux of growth and

decay makes them shiver in dread.

### **Brahman is Truth, Omniscience, Eternal**

In this Upanishad, the three words truth (sathya), spiritual wisdom (jnana), and eternal (an-antha) are meaningfully affixed to Brahman, to explain Its characteristics. These are three distinct words, signifying qualities, seeking to mark out the One from the rest, the One Brahman from other types of Brahman that don't have these traits. That is to say, Brahman is not to be confused with anything that is not truth, spiritual wisdom, and eternal.

Everything that is limited by time, space, and objectivity is inert (jada) material and apparently different from Brahman. The characteristics of truth, spiritual wisdom, and eternity help to differentiate and distinguish the real Brahman from kindred and similar phenomena. Whichever form a thing is determined to have, if that form is unchanged, then it is referred to as truth. If that form undergoes change, then it is falsehood. Modification is the sign of untruth; absence of modification is the sign of truth.

Brahman is truth (sathya), that is to say, It has no modifications. It is eternal (nithya), unaffected by time.

All that is not Brahman - that is, the world (jagath) - is subject to change. All objects are subject to the triple process of the intellect (buddhi): known, the knower, and knowledge. Hence, the intellect is spoken of as a cave (guha) where the three-fold process resides.

### **Do not swerve from Truth, duty, well-being of all**

In the Thaithiriya Brahmana, as well as this Upanishad, dharma is also treated elaborately. It has three forms: desirable (kamyā), produced by a cause (na-imitthika), and eternal (nithya). The scriptures (sastras) seldom command that action (karma) be pursued; there is no need to do so, for action comes naturally to people.

Desire (kama) is the prompter of such action, and people get various fruits thereby. The scriptures teach only the ways of directing this natural activity to ensure desirable objects.

The Upanishad exhorts you not to swerve from duties of learning and teaching, saying,

Swerve not from the true and the truth. ... From the true, it will not do to swerve,  
nor from dharma, nor from welfare and well-being, nor from duties to gods and fathers.  
Treat thy mother as God. Works that are free from fault should be re-sorted to, not others ....

### **The science of spirituality is the highest field of experiential knowledge**

Listening, rumination, and concentration are the three steps in realisation. Listening refers to the Vedas, which have to be revered in faith and learned by heart from a spiritual teacher (guru); this confers the knowledge of the Unknowable. Rumination (manana) is the austerity (tapas) taught in the chapter on Bhrigu. By this process, the essence of Brahman can be fixed in the mind. Concentration helps the development of single-minded attention on the principle so installed. The two chapters on Brahma and Bhrigu expound on the discipline that ensures the realisation of Brahman (Brahma-vidya). The chapter on Brahman teaches; the chapter by Bhrigu proves by experience.

Bhrigu, Varuna's son, tells him that Brahman is food (anna), life-breath (prana), the senses, the mind (manas), speech (vak), etc. But, since the son soon learns that these are not Brahman, he declares that Brahman is that from which these are born and by which they live and function. He first

believed that food is Brahman, since all beings exist on food, but, later, he feels that Brahman is much more inclusive. He asks for direct teaching of the Real, the Brahman.

Thereafter, he is told that austerity (tapas) is Brahman, for it is that by which Brahman the Reality is known.

He discovers by austerity that the highest wisdom (vijnana) is Brahman, for wisdom is that in which creatures are born and it is that by which creatures live.

Thus, it is announced that of all disciplines and subjects of study, the realisation of Brahman (Brahma-vidya) is the most sacred, holy, and esoteric.

### **Contemplate on the five sheaths of the human**

Food (anna) is not to be decried; that should be the vow of the wise. The vital airs (prana) are all food. The physical body is the gift of food, and the vital airs have the body as the vehicle. So, food should not be slighted.

That should be the resolution.

The waters, in conjunction with the fire in the stomach, become food. In the water that comes down as rain, the "fire" of lightning is inherent. So, whoever is established in the splendour of water is aware of the splendour of food and is persuaded to revere it. Food is the guru, for it leads you on to the knowledge of Brahman. Therefore, it should not be treated with disrespect. That must be observed just like a vow by the aspirant.

Since the physical body is the transformation of food, it has a food sheath (anna-maya kosa). The vital airs form the vital-air sheath (prana-maya kosa). Weighing between good and bad, right and wrong is the function of the mind sheath (manomaya kosa). Fixing upon a step, with a purpose in view, is the function of the sheath of intuition or spiritual wisdom (vijnana-maya kosa). Finally, the joy of achievement is tasted by the sheath of bliss (ananda-maya



kosa).

### **Rise from the gross to the subtle stage by contemplating on the vital breath**

The vital-air sheath is the first instrument in order to progress with the Brahmic outlook - that you are Brahman and not the body, etc. It is subtle, separate, and different from the body. It is activated by and saturated with the God of Wind (Vayu). It pervades and subsumes the entire food sheath.

You can say that the vital-air sheath is the soul of the food sheath, for it makes it function from head to foot.

It cannot survive without the vital air (prana). It is the motive force; it has five varieties: breath, downward breath, diffused breath, rising breath, and digestive air (prana, apana, vyana, udana, and samana). By contemplating that the vital-air sheath is the Atma of the food sheath, the notion that the body is the Self will disappear. You rise from the gross to the subtle. Breath (prana) is like the molten metal in the crucible. By effort, the vital-air sheath can be experienced.

The vital air appears in the form of the breath. The vital air activates the head, diffused breath the right part of the body, rising breath the left, digestive air the central, and downward breath the lower part of the body. The vital air moves from the heart through the nerves to the face, nose, etc., and reaches the head. From there, it motivates the various nerves flowing through the body under different names, with distinct names and distinct functions.

The vital air that functions around the navel is, for example, called the digestive air.

### **Mantras illumine the Atmic splendour**

For the mind sheath, the Yajur-veda is the head. The hymns form the right

wing; chanting the left wing.

Brahmanas are the soul and the Atharvana-veda is the tail. The mantras of the Yajur-veda are used very much in sacrifices; with them, food is offered ceremonially in the sacrificial fire. Hence, it is considered as the head. The sound of sacrificial prayer (yajus) produces auspicious modification. That is also the reason for the significance attached to the other Vedas. Thus, all mantras become the causes of mental modifications. These in turn illumine the splendour of the Atma. So, the Vedas and the mystery of their syllables belong to the science of the Atma itself.

The Vedas become eternally valuable and eternally existent. The Atharvana-veda treats various rites to win relief from evil forces and ailments, so it is described as the tail.

The mind sheath merges in the sheath of intuition and later into the bliss sheath; finally, the aspirant passes beyond even that, into the region of pure being (sat).

## 12. Brahmanubhava Upanishad

### **Nonduality is the essence of all Upanishads**

The traditional scriptures (sruthis) declare "Brahman is one only, without a second (ekam eva advithiyam Brahma)". That is to say, there is nothing besides Brahman. Under all conditions, at all times, everywhere, Brahman alone is. In the beginning, there was just being (sat) and nothing else, says the Chandogya Upanishad.

The Mandukya Upanishad calls it peace, auspiciousness, and non-duality (santham, sivam, a-dwaitam). Only the evolved or the manifested can appear as two. That which is seen is different, one from the other and all from the seer. Moreover, the seen is the product of the seer's likes and dislikes, their imagination and feelings, their impulses and tendencies. When the lamp is brought in, the "snake" disappears and only the rope remains and is understood as such. When the world is examined in the light of knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-jnana), the "illusory picture that attracted and repelled, the picture of duality" disappears.

It is the "two" that causes fear. If one is oneself the listener, the seer, the doer, the enjoyer, how can fear arise? Consider your condition when asleep! The external world is then absent; you are alone with yourself. The state is "One, without a second". Contemplation of that One and worship of that One leading to the realisation of secondlessness gives you that experience. Like the other, He is immanent; like the vital air, He is the secret of all consciousness (chit), activity, movement.

### **Brahman is described by five attributes**

Being, consciousness, bliss, fullness, eternity (sat, chit, ananda, paripurna, nithya) - Brahman is described by these five attributes. Through an understanding of these, Brahman can be grasped. Being is unaffected by time.

Consciousness illumines and reveals itself as well as all else. Bliss creates the utmost desirability. Fullness knows no defect or diminution or decline or defeat. Eternity is that which is unaffected by the limitations of space, time and objectivisation.

In light of this knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-jnana), the world is a mirage, temporary, unreal, and negated by knowledge. The world is but another name for "things seen, heard, etc.". But remember that "you", the individual (jiva), the seer, are "being, consciousness, bliss, Brahman". Get fixed in that assurance; meditate on the Om, which is its best symbol. Become aware from this moment that you are the Atma. When the fog of ignorance vanishes, the Atma in each will shine in its native splendour. Then you know that you were pursuing a mirage in the desert sands, that you were taking as "real" objects that had a beginning and therefore had an end.

### **Give up desire, attachment, and ego**

The mind becomes bound with attachment when it dwells upon, desires, or dislikes an object. To get free from such bondage, the mind should be trained not to dwell upon, desire, or dislike any object. It is the mind that binds and unbinds. If dominated by passion (rajas), it easily falls into bondage; if purity (sathwa) predominates, it can achieve freedom.

He who feels one with the gross body feverishly pursues the pleasure derivable through the senses. Desire is the consequence of identification with the physical frame. Give that up and you are given up by desire. Joy and grief are like right and wrong, to be transcended. Affection and hatred are of the nature of the internal instruments of people. They don't belong to the "Liver" who lives with them, to the individual soul (jivi), or to the Atma, the essential reality of the individual.

### **Atma is ever full, ever pure, and Self-luminous**

The Atma is ever pure, ever free from attachment, for there is no second to get attached to. The Mundaka Upanishad mantra (III-I) says, Two birds, ever

together, with significant and subtle wings, are perched on a tree. One bird is engaged in tasting the fruits. The other just watches.

The tree is the body, and the twin birds are the individual Self (jiva-atma) and the highest Atma (Paramatma).

The individual Self experiences the joy and grief from the deeds in which it engages. The Supreme Atma is subtler than the subtlest and just watches, is just a witness.

How can this gross physical frame of plasma and pus be the pure, the self-luminous, the ever-witnessing Atma? This is built up by food; this is ever in a flux. Before birth it was not, and after death it is not! It is perishable any moment. It can live on without a limb or two, but the moment the vital air stops flowing, it starts to decompose.

So, the body should not be taken as the chief or as the be-all and end-all.

The yoga you should practise is: watch the agitation in the mind as a witness, free yourself from resolutions and even decisions, for and against. Have your mind and its journeys always under control. Yoga is the parallel progress of the individual soul (jiva-atma), with every step in tune with the supreme Atma (Paramatma). The goal is the merger of both; then, all grief ends. One who steadily takes up yoga with faith and is prodded on by unswerving renunciation (non-attachment) can certainly win victory.

### **Give up desires, attachments and negate the mind**

The awareness of consciousness (chit) in being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda) means the super knowledge (vijana) that confers perfect equanimity and purity, in fact, Atmic wisdom (Atma-jnana), which can be experienced by one and all. In common parlance, super knowledge is used to indicate the sciences, but really it means the Higher Wisdom. In that "Self-form", there is no room for "impressions from action (karma)" or for wishes that prompt actions. Wishes vitiate the mind. Wishes lead to action, action

leaves a scar (vasana) on the mind. Be alone with yourself; then the mind can be negated. For this reason, yogis retire into caves.

The impressions (vasanas) fall into two categories: beneficent (subha) and maleficent (a-subha). Beneficent impressions help liberation. Repetition of the name, meditation, good works, charity, justice, unselfish service, gratitude, compassion - these are beneficent. The maleficent tendencies of anger, cruelty, greed, lust, and egotism have to be uprooted with the help of the beneficent. Finally, just as the thorn with which the thorn in the foot is removed is also thrown away, the impressions that were used to overcome the impressions that hurt are also to be discarded.

The beneficial impressions are the products of attachment and produce further attachment, which may persist through many births, so the liberated soul (jivan-muktha) also has to conquer the beneficial impressions. For such a soul, they should be like a burnt rope that can't bind. In fact the entire group - sensual craving, desire, greed, etc. - gets burned the moment the Atma is visualised. One will not be inclined toward anyone or anything; one will be unattached. Where the sun sets, there one lays down for rest. One moves among people unknown and unrecognised, seeking no recognition, why even avoiding it.

When the seer and the seen are the same, the joy is described as that of the fourth stage (thuriya). Beyond this, the Atma is certain to be reached. By dwelling constantly on the Atma and its reality, attachment to the world will fall off. The spiritual discipline must be without break. Genuine spiritual seekers must, with all their resources, redirect the mind from the affairs of the world and the objects that entice the senses and concentrate on the austere purpose of knowing Brahman.

Ignorant (thamasic) resolutions spell grief; pure (sathwic) resolutions promote dharma and help sustain society and individual; passionate (rajasic) ones plunge you into the worldly flood. Give up these three, and you become entitled to the honour of knowledge of Brahman.

## **Attain Brahman by the process of negation of senses**

Brahman is of immeasurable depth; how can It be measured and comprehended by this petty mind? It is beyond all possibility of being described by categories, without limit, beyond denotation. To grasp It through the senses is impossible.

The Brahman, which Vedanta declares can be spoken of only as "not-this, not-this," is I-Myself. My reality is the Brahman in the cavity of my heart; I am the Brahman that spiritual aspirants strive to know and succeed in reaching. Brahman is that which remains after subtracting the body, the mind, the vital airs, the brain, etc.

This knowledge is reached by the discipline of negation. Just as by this method of partial elimination you arrive at the conclusion, "So, this is Devadatta (a person)," by this principle of appearance or presumption and its later removal the truth "That thou art (thath thvam asi)" is established. When the veil hiding the individual soul (jivi) is removed, the individual soul is revealed as the highest Atma (Paramatma) or supreme Brahman (Parabrahman).

The true Self (jiva-atma) is of the essence of the highest Atma.

"I" refers to this reality, the being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda); it is only ignorance that can use it to indicate the body! This ignorance and this wrong identification are the causes of continuous cycles of grief and joy.

So, use the word "I" with discrimination to mean only your Brahmic reality; that will win knowledge of Brahman (Atma-jnana) for you.

For experiencing the Atma as your Reality, control of the senses, removal of physical attachment, and truth are essential.

## **God is encased everywhere**

Brahman is the teacher of the gods (brihaspathi) prompting the intellect (buddhi), the Mind of the mind, the Ear of the ear, the Eye of the eye, the Illuminer of all, the Self-illuminant One. His splendour is the light from which everything else emanates. He is the basic support and sustenance. In the mind, He is wisdom. The mind and the intellect do envelop the senses, and without Him, the mind and intellect are helpless to function. They emerge from Him and merge in Him like grass that is born from the earth and becomes part of it. Iron placed in fire becomes red and turns black again when cooled; so too, intellect becomes resplendent with spiritual wisdom (jnana) by dwelling on the highest Brahman (Parabrahman), who is the true nature of spiritual wisdom (jnanaswarupa).

God is encased everywhere, as the child in the womb.

### **Discover Divinity through the eye of wisdom or of love**

Some declare that they will believe only in a God that can be seen or demonstrated. This is the usual argument of the worldly minded. But it is not easy to see the Highest Atma, which is subtler than the subtlest, with gross physical eyes. You must first get command over a powerful microscope, one fit for the purpose. Either the eye of wisdom or the eye of love is wanted; only with these can you see God.

Can you show others what the thing called "pain" is, or "sweetness"? The eye cannot see an abstract thing like love, pity, mercy, virtue, faith; it is beyond its capacity. But by words, actions, and behaviour we infer that a person has love in the heart. So too, it is possible to judge whether people are knowers of Brahman, how deep they are established in their own reality, whether by fits and starts or steadily and securely. Divine wisdom, divine treasure, harmony with nature - through these He can be identified and discovered. Therefore, try by all means to earn either the eye of wisdom or the eye of love.

Just like sugar in cane juice or sweetness in sugar, the supreme Atma (Paramatma) is ever immanent in creation; He is the inner core of all beings. He is everywhere, always in everything; He has no form; Atma is "without



body (a-thanu)". It is the in-dweller (Purusha). Only by throwing off attachment to the body and purifying the mind and intellect can you merge in your truth and earn the eternal bliss, highest peace (prasanthi), the purest wisdom. Thus only can one earn liberation from the bond-age of birth and death.

### **Joy and grief, vice and virtue are binding products of the mind**

Deha, meaning the body, is derived from the root dhah, meaning burn. It implies that which has to be burned.

But, the wise man (jnani) has three bodies: the gross, subtle, and causal. Then what is burned? The fuels are the material world (adi-bhauthika), fate (adi-daivika), and the individual soul (adi-atmic), called the three penances or the cavity of the heart (hridaya-akasa). They can burn and consume the three bodies more quickly and completely than fire. However informed one may be, if one identifies with the body, one must be pronounced foolish.

On the other hand, one who is fixed in the faith that one is being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda) will be transformed into divinity Itself. Don't identify the individual with the gross body of flesh and bone or even with the subtle and causal. The Atma must be identified only with the Highest Atma (Paramatma). Only then can permanent bliss emerge. Joy and grief, good and bad belong to the realm of the mind, not to you. You are not the doer or the enjoyer of the fruits of the deeds. You are ever-free.

Virtue is dharma; vice is a-dharma (not dharma). Both are products of the mind, strings that bind the heart.

When people experience this higher truth, they become free from both and achieve the vision of reality. Just as the silk worm gets entangled and imprisoned in the cocoon that it spins around itself, so people spin cocoons of wishes around themselves and suffer.

The Atma is ever disentangled. It is "not-bound by worldly flux." Its nature is

purity, wholeness, joy, wisdom.

Where ego is, bondage persists. Where there is no "I", freedom holds sway. The "I" is the real shackle.

### **Overcome the triple distinctions or illusions**

The three obstacles in the path of the seeker of Atma-jnana are the past, present, and future. They must be overcome. The liberated soul (jivan-muktha) is not worried by these. It has gone beyond the triple distinction of the seer, the seen, and the sight; it has known that the distinction is artificial, a product of the mind. Once you have conquered the triple illusion, you will experience Brahman in all things and at all times.