

# KATHOPANISHAD—THE SCIENCE OF THE INNER LIFE

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by

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## **Introduction**

The Kathopanishad may be regarded as a most appropriate introduction to spiritual life in general. The story with which the Upanishad begins provides the proper foundation for commencing a study of the science of the higher life of man. From the exoteric ritual of the performance of sacrifice and charity by sage Vajasravasa, the Upanishad takes us to the spiritual longing of the seeker, Nachiketas, which moves along a definite pattern of development. The three boons requested for by Nachiketas from Yama represent the terrestrial, heavenly and spiritual realms of attainment. In the movement from the outward liturgy of Vajasravasa in the world to the inner aspiration of Nachiketas for spiritual values, we have the first step taken towards the higher consciousness. The second step is the rise from temporal relationships to the universal significance of all things found in the all-comprehensive Vaisvanara, known also as Hiranyagarbha in his higher manifestation, and as Virat in his lower universal form, represented in the second boon granted by Yama. The third step is the ascent from the universal to the Absolute, which is the third boon asked for

by Nachiketas, but most reluctantly granted by Yama, after subjecting Nachiketas to a severe test in the form of supernormal temptations of sense and ego, to which even the best minds cannot but succumb when placed in favourable circumstances. The Upanishad now leads us on to the theme it intends to propound.

The path to perfection can be trodden only after encountering several threats and temptations. The example of Nachiketas shows that he was even cursed to death and tempted severely in his attempt at adhering to righteousness and truth of the spirit. In the process of the search for truth, the subjective propensities and objective tendencies show their heads in concrete forms and either tempt or threaten the aspirant. For an aspirant of weak will advanced spiritual practices are very near impossibility. A person believes in what he sees and experiences and not in what he does not see and does not experience. He has love for certain things and fear for certain others, because he has a faith in the value of those things, as they are the objects of his direct experience. He, however, does not believe in supersensuous realities, because they are not the objects of direct experience. Love for comfort and hatred for pain and sorrow pull the aspirant from two opposite sides, and he is left at sea. It is here that the strong weapon of will and discrimination should come to one's help. One has to clear the way in the midst of these oppositions which are inevitable in one's struggle for transcending one's individuality in the Absolute. The individual modes try their best to persist in appearing again and again, and to bar the gate to Truth. It is hard to recognise the faces of these thieves in the form of friends, who deceive the aspirant every moment and frustrate all his aspirations. The objects and states of every plane of consciousness have to be rejected, as they are objective, and one has to resort to the Infinite Subject which is divisionless fullness. One should realise that anything that is achieved as the result of desires and actions shall vanish one day or the other, and that the only thing ever enduring and worth knowing is the one Self in all. Nachiketas

persisted in his aspiration for Truth, in spite of the most formidable temptations, and in the teeth of the refusal of Yama to impart knowledge to him. Finally, Yama initiates him into the mysteries of the Self.

### **The Good and the Pleasant**

The good is one thing and the pleasant is another. They have different aims, and they drag a person from different directions. Of these two, he who chooses the good obtains blessedness, but he who chooses the pleasant falls from his aim. The good is that which leads one to God or the Absolute. It gives the freedom of Moksha or liberation from Samsara. It is not pleasant, because it is against body-consciousness. It destroys what is pleasant and, hence, is rather painful. The pleasant, on the other hand, is intimately connected with the body, and prevents a person from choosing the good. One falls down from one's aim if one chooses the pleasant, because one shall never be able to possess the pleasant objects for ever, and, also, these objects are false appearances and not real existences. All pleasant things shall vanish, and only the good shall remain. One cannot pursue the good and the pleasant at the same time, even as light and darkness cannot be perceived in the same place. One who chooses the good should reject the pleasant and take refuge in the supermundane Truth, though it is invisible. The good does not come quickly, though the pleasant may do so. The Real is the unseen. One who pursues the Real attains the blessed state of eternity, but that short-sighted and dull-witted person who pursues the pleasant is separated from the objects of his desire, and he shall mourn for their death and take birth for their sake.

Both the good and the pleasant come to a person. But the wise man discriminates between the two. The wise one prefers the good to the pleasant, and the stupid one chooses the pleasant, for the sake of protecting and fattening the body and ego. All run after the pleasant alone and not after the good, because the pleasant is connected with the present limited life. The good is not longed for, because it is

transempirical. The good and the pleasant are opposite to each other, like the two poles. One cuts the tree of Samsara, and the other waters it. Those who justify sense-enjoyments are blind men guided by blind philosophies and they fall into deep pits. All enjoyment is mere friction of nerves. It does not merely bring pain but is the very form of misery itself. A sensation cannot be called bliss, and all worldly experiences are sensations. Those who believe in the reality of this present world alone and do not care for the existence of another plane of life get attached to this world, and, thus, have to experience births and deaths, incessantly.

### **The Nature of the Self**

The Atman, being the presupposition of all acts of understanding, feeling and willing, is not known to any individualised knower, and so it appears as a mystery, a Wonder of wonders, awe-inspiring. To many, this Atman is difficult to hear of, to many others, even when heard of, it is difficult to understand. Wonderful is the teacher of this; blessed is the obtainer of this; wonderful is the knower of this, who is taught by a blessed teacher. The Atman cannot be known if it is taught by an inferior teacher, even if it is thought of in various ways. Only when the Atman is taught by one who is identical with the Atman (i.e., a Brahmanishtha), it can be known, because the Atman is subtler than the subtlest and does not come under any of the logical categories. The Atman cannot be known through logic, but it can be known when it is instructed about by one who has realised it. The wealth of the universe, its resources and powers, are insufficient as means to the realisation of the Atman, for the permanent is not reached by the impermanent. The Atman is reached when the whole universe with its contents is abandoned. Even the source of the highest happiness, the basis of the world, the end of all desires, the state of fearlessness, the praiseworthy great being, viz., Hiranyagarbha, is not worth having. Rejecting all these, that Atman which is very difficult to know, which is seated in the innermost cavity of the heart, the attainment of

which is attended with great dangers, should be known by abstracting the senses and the mind from their respective objects and resolving this energy into Self-consciousness. Knowing this self-luminous being, the hero casts off both joy and grief. He rejoices in the bliss of the Self, because he has attained the highest object of attainment through hearing, understanding and contemplation of this subtle Truth. It is different from what is done and what is not done, different from past and future, and is of the nature of immediate knowledge. All the Vedas speak of the glory of this. All penances point to the greatness of this. All observe continence for the attainment of this. This supreme state is denoted by the word OM. This is the Supreme Absolute. After knowing this, whatever one wishes for, becomes one's own. This is the supreme support; knowing this support, one glories in the region of the Absolute.

This omniscient Atman is not born, nor does it die. It has not come from anywhere, and it has not become anything. Unborn, eternal, perpetual and ancient, this Atman is not killed when the body is killed. Birth is the process of the production of an effect from a cause, and hence, it is the process of transient becoming. For the same reason, death also is a process. The processes of birth, life and death are impermanent and, therefore, they are denied in the Atman. Ceaseless consciousness is free from all change. Change is the character of phantasmal presentations. Changelessness is the nature of the Atman. This Atman does not come from anywhere, and it has not become anything else, because coming and becoming are, again, transient processes. It has not ceased to be itself. It does not decay or suffer diminution. It is the most ancient and the newest of all. An object becomes new when its constituents are changed and set in a different condition. The Atman exists even prior to and later than the newest of objects. It exists together with everything, and also after everything. Nothing newer and other than the Atman can ever be produced. In other words, the Atman is whatever is, was and will be. Hence, it is indestructible. It neither kills anyone nor is killed. It suffers from nothing,

because it is untouched like ether. It is free from the experiences of Samsara. It is bodiless, and hence relationless. Non-becoming or changelessness is the one character which denies of the Atman all phenomenal natures. The Atman is subtler than the subtlest and larger than the largest. It is situated as the central being of all. Free from thought and action, one beholds it through the cessation of distraction and attainment of tranquillity, and becoming sorrowless, rejoices in the glory of the Atman. It is the subtlest of all, because it is limitless. It is possible to know it through the practice of hearing, contemplation and meditation, after getting oneself freed from desires and actions, and separating oneself from objects, seen as well as heard of. As long as the mind shakes and the body gets agitated, it is not possible for one to know the Atman. Perfect satiety of the mind, the senses and the body is absolutely necessary before the attempt at the vision of the Self. Those who have desires and passions are prevented from the realisation of the Self.

The Atman, lying down, goes everywhere. Sitting, it moves far. It is the bodiless among all bodies, it is the permanent among the impermanent. It is the great omnipresent being, knowing which the hero does not grieve. It is not possible to know this Atman through debate, intellectuality and study. It is attained through a relationless immediate method in which the Self is both the subject and the object of attainment. One who has not ceased from bad conduct, who is restless, whose mind is wandering, who has no peace within, cannot know the Atman through any amount of thinking. The Atman is beyond all knowledge and power conceivable in the world. Death itself is swallowed in it, and all processes are put an end to.

### **The Soul and Its Chariot**

The conscious principle within is the lord of the chariot. The body is the chariot, the intellect is the charioteer or the driver, the mind is the reins, the senses are the horses, the objects of the senses are the roads. This chariot is useful either to drive down or drive up. The body is dragged by the

horses of the senses in different directions. The driver is responsible for the movement of the chariot, and this is the intellect, which can either understand or misunderstand, and consequently either ascend with the chariot to the Abode of Vishnu or fall down to the mortal state. Whatever is done through this body, consciously, is done, ultimately, by the intellect. It is the principle of egoism, desire, activity, birth and death. It is the factor which brings pain and pleasure, unity and separation. The doer or the enjoyer is a strange mixture of consciousness, mind and the senses, because, independently, none of them can be either a doer or an enjoyer. This shows that doership and enjoyership are illusory; their constituents have no independent existence. The knowledge of this chariot and its contents is to be obtained before attempting to drive the chariot. One whose intellect is bad and uncontrolled, whose mind is weak and impure, cannot control the horses of the senses, and they will run riot in different directions. He does not attain to the Supreme, but enters *Samsara*. One whose intellect is steady and brilliant, and whose mind is strong and pure, can control the horses of the senses, and drive the chariot to the supreme state of Vishnu, and is never born again, having reached the Highest Consummation of life.

### **The Gradation of the Categories**

The objects of the senses are grosser than the senses, which, again, are grosser than the subtle rudimentary principles which actuate the senses. The subject which is characterised by the senses is always superior to the object which is bereft of consciousness, because the subject is subtler than the object. Only that which is subtle can pervade and comprehend what is gross. The mind, however, is subtler than even the subtle principles which preside over the senses, because the mind is the synthesising agent and the real operator behind the diverse sense-functions. The mind is nearest to consciousness and, hence, it has the greatest power over all that is an effect and that which is inferior to the mind in subtlety. The mind is naturally fickle in character,

and hence, it is not useful to the individual in acts like steady knowledge of anything. The intellect is subtler than the mind, and it is free from the fickleness which the mind is infected with. Intelligence in its aspect of determination is found only in the *Buddhi* or the intellect. The highest faculty of knowledge in the individual is the intellect.

The intellect, however, has certain defects, in spite of its being the most precious possession of an individual. The intellect always functions on a dualistic basis. It can have no knowledge except by connecting the subject with the object. Unfortunately, contact is not the way of acquiring perfect knowledge of anything. This means that the intellect cannot have perfect knowledge, unless it ceases from working on the basis of duality. With duality there is no real knowledge and without duality there is no intellect at all. Therefore, perfect and complete knowledge is not given to the human being. It is only the cosmic intelligence or the Mahat-Tattva that can have complete knowledge, because it is free from the perception of duality. It is the collective totality of all principles of intelligence in the universe, and, therefore, outside it there is nothing. The cosmic intellect is not the understander of anything external to it. But it knows itself as complete in itself. Thus, the Mahat is superior to the individual intellect. The Mahat is characterised by omniscience, and omniscience necessitates the acceptance of a cause of omniscience. This cause of even the Mahat is called the Avyakta which is superior to the Mahat. The cosmic intellect exists buried in a potential condition in this Avyakta. In fact, the Avyakta is not an existent something but only the possibility and the explanation of the appearance of the Absolute as cosmic intelligence, etc. Superior to the Avyakta is the Purusha. The Purusha is the same as Brahman, beyond which there is nothing. This is the Supreme Goal.

The Purusha is described as the supreme destination of all the individuals. The word 'destination' may give rise to a doubt that it is possible for one to move towards the Purusha, even as a person may move towards a town or a village. In the case of movement towards a place, destination

has got its literal meaning, but, in the case of the attainment of the Purusha, it has only a figurative meaning. The Purusha which is to be attained is not different from the one who attains it. It is the knowledge of the Self which is signified by the word, destination. Movement is an action, and knowledge is not action; in movement we have to do something; but in knowledge, we have to do nothing. A literal movement towards the Purusha is not possible, because external to the Purusha there is nothing. Movement is the function of the Pranas, the senses, the mind and the intellect. But knowledge is not the property of any of these. Hence knowledge is different from movement or any kind of action. If one can go to or move towards anything, one can also come back from it. Action always implies reaction. But the *Srutis* declare that there is no return to mortal experience after the attainment of the Purusha. This shows that the attainment of the Purusha is the same as existence which is eternal, and not an act which is temporary. The *Sruti* says, "They go by the pathless path", which means that the path to perfection is not like a lengthy road situated in space but a state of consciousness within. It is quite obvious that one cannot have the awareness of oneself through any amount of external struggle, even as a sleeping person cannot know himself except by waking into consciousness.

The Atman is subtler than every conceptual being. Therefore it does not shine before the organs of knowledge. The cognitive organs can know only what is grosser than themselves and not what is subtler. This Atman is beheld only by the subtlest condition of the intellect, viz., the steady intelligence of a Sattvikacharacter in which alone the consciousness of the Self can be reflected. The Atman is known only by the most careful *seers* who have the subtlest sense of perception and the most acute and penetrating intelligence freed from the shackles of desires and actions. In fact, even the principle of the creator of the universe, himself, is an object when compared to the Brahman-consciousness. Therefore, even the creator is less than Brahman. The knowers of the Atman constitute only a minority of the

individuals, because of the difficulty of the transfiguration of oneself from mortal experience in the world to nonrelational Absolute-Experience. The principle which is nearest in subtlety to the Atman knows it *the best* and those that are subtler know it *better*. The senses have the least knowledge of the Atman. The mind has a better knowledge of it. The intellect knows it still better. The cosmic intellect supersedes even the ordinary intellect in knowledge. It is the cosmic intellect that has omniscience, because of freedom from the obstructions of objectivity. The state transcending omniscience is the Absolute or Brahman.

### **The Process of Withdrawal**

The energy that is spent by the senses should be conserved through the stoppage of the activity of the senses. When the senses are prevented from their functions, there is a natural revolt of the senses, as a reaction to the attempt at their subdual. The reason for this revolt is that the energy that is withdrawn from the senses is, usually, not utilised well. No energy can rest in suspension, without being used; it shall find a way out. Hence the totality of sense-energy should be dissolved in the mind, so that there may not be any chance or possibility of its being expressed once again through the senses. But the mind also, being an organ which is an extrovert in nature, may project itself again through the senses, if the energy is allowed to stay in the mind without being utilised for a purpose. Generally, forced stoppage of sense-activity without proper discrimination results in nervousness, excitement, confusion and ultimately a kind of mental aberration. For this reason, the energy of the mind should be spent in the process of purifying it and transforming it into the purity of intelligence. The character of intelligence is not dynamic energy, but unruffled consciousness. Consciousness does not require itself to be spent out, because there is nothing subtler than consciousness. But, when the mental energy is transformed into the intellect, it remains in the individual in the form of a dynamic power. Power is always objective and tends to

motion. Power cannot rest in itself and so forces itself out in some way or the other. The intellectual energy should therefore be reduced to universal consciousness or Mahat, where there is no danger of power getting itself externalised. The Mahat should further be reduced to the Santa-Atmanor the Absolute Self which is free from even the possibility of objective consciousness. This is the ultimate Goal. The drift of the whole statement is that all ideas, names and forms, actions and their results, have to be resolved into their Source, by a knowledge of its absoluteness.

### **The Path of the Seeker**

The Srutisays, "Arise, Awake! Through obtaining men of wisdom, know it. A sharpened edge of a razor, hard to tread, a difficult path it is—thus sages declare." The individuals of the universe are all sleeping persons or dreamers in the night of ignorance. They are exhorted to wake up to the day of knowledge. The path of Sadhana is beset with great dangers. The Sadhaka has to experience sorrows and very unpleasant conditions in the process of the transformation of the individual into the Supreme Reality. Knowledge arises, in the beginning, not through mere self-effort, but through the company of the wise, the result of which is accelerated by the effects of past meritorious deeds. Self-effort takes the form of an intellectual undertaking, and the intellect being very strongly influenced by internal convictions and experiences of the individual concerned, the effort is many times not well directed. Every right effort should be preceded by right thinking, and no right thinking is possible as long as the individual is controlled by personal prejudices and desires. Hence the need for the company of the wise, which shall break open the fort of preconceived notions in the individual. Further, the path is a very difficult one to tread. The search for Truth is attended with many dangers. The Sadhaka is likely to be tempted, opposed, misled or held up on the way. The inner propensities take concrete forms and present themselves before the seeker because of his attempt at concentration of mind. Concentration is a death-blow given

to mental desires, and hence the latter rise up with all might to put an end to the practice of concentration. Moreover, Sadhana is the method of the disintegration of the personality consisting of the five material sheaths. These sheaths include within themselves the substance of the entire universe. Therefore, when the aspirant turns his face against these sheaths, he is actually acting against the lower natural current of the whole external universe of manifestation. Here lies the danger of the practice. The objective powers of the universe rebel against the internal consciousness, and though this consciousness is more powerful than any objective power, it does not appear to be so because of its non-manifestation. The aspirant seems to be defeated, because his condition is one where the external tendencies are opposed and the internal Self is not known. Hence, he has no help until a higher state is reached, though he is unconsciously being led higher by the law of the Absolute. It is in this helpless condition of the absence of knowledge that the power of the result of previous discriminative practices raises the individual above the material entanglements. The object of knowledge is too subtle to be easily known, and the object of the senses is too gross to be easily avoided. This is the reason why there is every likelihood of the seeker's falling back into relative experience. But there is one great helping hand which pushes forward every Sadhaka, in spite of the several oppositions before him. Every bit of action that is done as a Sadhana for perfection produces such a power that it can never be destroyed by any material force of the universe. When a Sadhaka is opposed by an external power, the impression of the previous practice urges him forward, and this forward march is another act which adds another fresh stock of power to the already existing one. Every step taken forward adds more power to the previous stock, and the cumulative effect of Sadhana-Sakti becomes so great that it is able to overcome any external power. The subject is always more powerful than the object, because the subject is conscious and influences the object. The knower has a power over the

known. The fact that the knower has the power to know the entirety of Nature shows that Nature is subservient to the knower. If the knower were less than the known, it would never have been possible for the knower to have complete knowledge of anything. Knowledge of everything means transcending everything in quality as well as in quantity. The path to perfection is, therefore, the way to the expansion of the localised being into limitless existence. Since every being is essentially consciousness, it is possible for everyone to become the greatest and the best, and exist as the Absolute, in the end.

### **The Liberation of the Individual**

When that which is soundless, touchless, formless, changeless, tasteless, eternal, odourless, beginningless, endless, greater than the cosmic intellect, the permanent being, is known, one is liberated from the mouth of death.

That which is characterised by qualities like sound has to modify itself, because these qualities are not absolute values, but valid only relatively. That which is not absolutely valid cannot exist eternally. All relative values serve a purpose only in respect of particular times and conditions. That which is ever enduring does not exist in relation to another thing or condition, but is self-sufficient. That which has no beginning may have an end, and that which has no end may have a beginning. But, Brahman is beginningless and endless. That which has a beginning is a product, and every product, being conditioned by its cause, is limited. It has to resolve itself into its cause, because the effect cannot have a nature different from that of its cause. But that which is beginningless and endless is neither a cause nor an effect. Hence, it is transcendently real. The Atman is Kutastha-Nitya, eternally real, as distinct from the elements which are Parinami-Nitya or changefully real. By knowing such Atman, as being identical with one's own Self, one gets liberated from the jaws of death. Death consists in the presence of Avidya (nescience), Kama (desire) and Karma (action) within. Avidya is the cause of Kama and Kama is the cause of Karma.

Karma is the cause of birth and death. Hence, death is situated within, and not without. The cause of change which gives rise to birth and death and different experiences in life is present in the mind in the form of the necessity to transform oneself from one condition to another. The fact that there is imperfect knowledge, imperfect power and imperfect joy in an individual, shows that perfection can be attained only by transcending this imperfect condition. This process of transcending oneself is called change and death. It is not possible to become unlimitedly perfect as long as the consciousness of limitedness is not negated. Deaths, therefore, are the processes of purification of the soul for immortality.

### **Self-Control**

The senses are always projected outward to their respective objects. Therefore, no individual has a consciousness of the Self. By aspiring for immortality and turning the consciousness to itself, within, the Atman is beheld. It is not possible to have, at the same time, the consciousness of both the subject and the object. The subject can know itself only when it does not cling to the object. When the object is known fully, the subject is entirely forgotten. Because true bliss is found in the subject alone, this bliss is never experienced as long as the subject is not known, i.e., as long as there is consciousness of an object. The whole universe is the object of the subject which is Consciousness. Self-realisation, thus, is the absorption of the consciousness of objectivity into the Consciousness not infected by thought or affected by any object. The doors of the senses and the intellect have to be closed if the light is to be beheld within. The light of the Self is dissipated, ordinarily, because of external consciousness. These rays of consciousness should be collected and centred in one thought or one idea of one nature. This practice puts an end to external awareness and makes the mind break its boundaries and expand itself beyond the limitations of causation. Further, when concentration is practised, all Rajas

is put an end to, and there is the revelation of Sattva through which the bliss of Truth is reflected. Bliss always comes after knowledge, and knowledge is always accompanied by power. This means that meditation is the way to perfect knowledge, power and bliss, which know no decay.

Since it is evident that worldly consciousness and Divine Consciousness do not co-exist, it is also clear that sensuality is the opposite of Self-knowledge. Sense-knowledge is natural to the individual, whereas Self-knowledge is extraordinary. This is the reason why everyone is by force made to experience the Anatman or something objective. They are children who follow the course of the objects of the senses. They fall into the wide-spread net of destruction. Those who have consciousness of the Immortal do not ever seek it among things impermanent. The cause of destruction or death is wide-spread, i.e., it is everywhere. The meaning is that the outward conditions necessary for the destruction of something are made manifest by the corresponding conditions in the thing to be destroyed. Since all desires are connected with their respective objects and not with the entire existence, it is not possible for one who desires, to escape death. Death is the process of the extension of one's consciousness by casting off the obstructing factors, viz., limited experiences. The spiritual heroes do not find Reality among shadows, because the Infinite Subject, viz., the Atman, never becomes an object of itself. This Self does neither increase by good action nor decrease by bad action. Its glory is eternal, because it is independent of all externals. The wise ones, therefore, have no desire for anything at all, for they do not find anything as valuable as their own essential consciousness. They experience every objective condition as an intense opposition to what is absolutely Real, and cast it off as pain. In short, absorption into the Self is the same as absence of sense-experience and the negation of thought in pure awareness.

The Self has the knowledge of every kind of existence. This knowledge, however, is not the pain-giving temporary knowledge acquired through contact, but the knowledge of

every fibre of being, in essence. Every constituent of existence is known by it in the most perfect manner, because all these constituents are parts of itself alone. Its knowledge is knowledge of itself, and is not separative knowledge which is possible only in terms of space, time and causation. Hence the Self is omniscient and, therefore, absolutely perfect.

Whatever is here, is there; and whatever is there, is here; he goes from death to death, who perceives diversity here. The substance of immediate existence is the same as that of remote existence. Persons move from place to place in search of things, because of the ignorance of the fact that everything can be found everywhere. The different forms of experience do not mean that they are really different. These differences belong to the cognitive organs or the modes of knowledge, and not to the objects of knowledge. The whole universe of creation is a gradual unfoldment of one substance alone. Through meditation on the Reality of oneness of substance, it is possible for one to actualise or make manifest anything, at any place, in any form. Truly, there is no diversity here. Those who perceive diversity due to the defects of the inner organs experience birth and death, as they have to conform to what they believe in. What one intensely believes in, that one experiences, because every belief pertains to an aspect of reality. But, because individual beliefs are partial, the experiences corresponding to these, too, are partial. This is the reason why desirers or perceivers of duality and multiplicity do not have absolute experience, but are caught in the meshes of the effects of their own desires. Meditation should, therefore, be practised in the form of the affirmation of the divisionless being which is full, and which includes everything. This is the same as meditation on one's own Self.

Even as water that is dropped by rain on the top of a mountain runs here and there, and is wasted, one who perceives manifoldness and follows different paths runs to waste with them. But, even as pure water poured into pure water becomes pure water alone, the sage who knows the Self as one whole being becomes the whole being itself, without dissipating his energy. Whenever there is a thought

of something, energy is at once sent to that thing, whereby the energy is spent out. Weakness and distraction are caused by spending out energy in contemplation of external objects and states. But, true withdrawal from thinking of externals means complete conservation of energy and the dissolution of it in Self-consciousness. The mind should not be allowed to follow diverse methods of practice, as, thereby, it distracts itself and attains nothing substantially. But, when it follows one method of practice, concerned with one goal, and concentrates itself completely on this goal, it integrates itself and becomes identical with the Absolute.

A person does not live by Prana or Apana, but he lives by something on which Prana and Apana, also, depend. The Pranas serve a purpose to another of which they are auxiliaries. They are made up of parts, they are inert, they are actuated by another conscious principle. A person lives by the conscious Spirit within. The Pranas move the senses, because they themselves are moved by internal consciousness. This means that all life belongs to the Atman, and all values also belong to it. Even as fire which has only one form appears in form corresponding to the media through which it burns, this Atman, which is one, appears in form corresponding to the form through which it manifests. Even as the sun who is the eye of all is not sullied by the defects of the eye, the one Atman, the Self of all, is not sullied by the defects of the world, because it is transcendental and unconnected with objective experiences. The Atman, the controller of all, the Self of all, is really the essence of all the diverse forms of existence. Happiness belongs to those who realise the Self within themselves, not to anyone else, who is busy with the externals. The peace belonging to those is eternal, who realise the Self within, the eternal among all impermanent beings, the one consciousness beyond all ordinary consciousness, and the one goal of all aspirations and desires. Peace does not belong to anyone else. The sun does not shine there, nor the moon and the stars; these lightnings, too, do not shine; what to speak of this fire! Every

thing shines after Him who shines. This whole universe is illumined by His Light—the Great Being.

### **The Tree of Samsara**

The tree of life has its roots upwards in the unmanifest, which, again, is rooted in the Divine Being; its branches spread below as the manifested universe. This tree is inclusive of great miseries like birth; old age, grief and death. It appears to be of a different nature every moment. It is now seen and now not seen, like a jugglery or water in the mirage, or the city of the clouds. It can be felled down like a tree, and it has a beginning and an end, like a tree. It is essenceless like the sapless plantain tree. It is the cause of great doubts and confusions in the minds of the non-discriminating. Its true nature is not ascertained even by aspirants after knowledge. Its meaning is found in the original essence of Brahman which is ascertained in the Vedanta-Sastra. This tree has grown out of the potency of ignorance, desire and action. It has come out of the sprout of Hiranyagarbha, who combines in himself cosmic knowledge and action. The branches of this tree consist of the various subtle bodies of the individuals. It has a proud stature through being watered by the desires and cravings of the individuals. Its buds consist of the objects of the mind and the senses. Its leaves consist of the knowledge that is obtained from scripture, tradition, logic and learning. It has the flowers of the impulses for sacrifice, charity, austerity, etc. Its essence is the experience of pleasure and pain. Its root is fastened tightly, because of the constant watering through the intense longings for the different objects on which all individuals depend. It is inhabited by several birds called individuals from Brahma down to inanimate matter. It is full of tumultuous noises like those of weeping, shouting, playing, joking, singing, dancing, busily running, and such other sounds created by the experiences of exhilaration and grief, giving rise to pleasure and pain. This tree can be cut down with the strong weapon of detachment consequent upon the realisation of the identity of the Self with Brahman, through hearing of the

Vedanta texts, contemplating on their meaning and profound meditation thereon. This tree shakes, being blown by the wind of the various desires and actions of the individuals. Its different parts are the many worlds inhabited by celestial beings, human beings, beasts, demons, etc. The beginning of this tree is not known. It extends everywhere and its form is incomprehensible. This tree is ultimately based on the pure essence of self-luminous consciousness. The enigmatic character of this tree is accounted for by the incomprehensible nature of Brahman in which it is rooted. This tree is essentially unreal, because it is experienced as a modification. The Sruti says that all modification is only a play of speech, a mere name, and therefore false. This Brahman which is the reality behind this universal tree is transcended by nothing, and other than it there is no reality. This whole universe works systematically, being controlled by the Supreme Life-Principle, viz., Brahman. This Brahman is like a great terror, like an uplifted thunderbolt, because none can transgress its law. Its rule is relentless, and anyone who tries to go against its law, reaps intense sorrow. But, those who know the Truth of Brahman become Immortal. By fear of this Supreme Being fire burns; by fear the sun shines; by fear Indra and Vayu perform their functions; by fear death does its duty. Fire, sun and the other, principles of the universe, including the process of change and death, are the different phases or aspects of the one Brahman. Hence, they are all united in its self-identical nature which never ceases to be. It is not possible for any individual to live according to his personal inclinations without obeying the law of the Infinite. A part cannot exist independent of the whole; the part always should and does partake of the nature of the whole. Hence, everyone is controlled by this whole, viz., Brahman.

If knowledge rises in a person before the death of this body, he shall attain liberation and will not be born again. Rebirth is the result of the absence of Self-knowledge and the presence of desire at the time of casting off the physical body. Therefore this Atman has to be realised in this life itself, so

that the pain of another life may be put an end to. Among all the different regions of existence, the human region is the best suited for the purpose of the attainment of Self-knowledge. No doubt, the region of the creator is better than the human region and is nearest to Brahman-knowledge, but the individual has to spend a long time in its attempt to reach the region of the creator and then to acquire Self-knowledge. In the human world, the Self is experienced as something like a reflection of an object in a mirror. But in the region of the creator, the distinction experienced between the true Self and the phenomenal self is like that between light and darkness. Therefore, here, one has the highest spiritual experience. But, in other worlds, the attainment of Self-knowledge is not possible, because the inhabitants there are either absolutely devoid of knowledge or engrossed in external enjoyment or sunk in great grief, or not possessed of the required instruments for effort towards Self-realisation. The human being, therefore, should try to attain Self-knowledge here itself, and not after going to another region.

### **The Practice of Yoga**

This Atman is not seen through the eyes, nor is it perceived through any of the other senses, as it never becomes an object of itself. It is known only when the centre of personality is dissolved through the absorption of the factors causing individuality, viz., the mind and the intellect, into the Atman. Equanimity of inner vision is the same as spiritual knowledge, and it cannot be had as long as the mind and the intellect function in their own fashion. The Atman cannot be sought in external conditions, but it can be known and realised through a reverting from externals to eternal being. It is this introversion that enables one to enter into the very substance of being. This state of spiritual equilibrium is attained when the five senses of knowledge rest together with the mind, and when the intellect does not perform its functions of objective knowledge. Yoga consists in the withholding of all individual functions, beginning from the physical body and ending in the intellect, and the directing of

the whole energy to the apperception of consciousness. It is, in other words, a steadying of the power of consciousness and making it rest in itself, in the state of perfection and motionlessness. Yoga and Jnana differ from each other in the sense that the former is the negative process of the annihilation of personal consciousness, whereas the latter is the positive realisation and experience of infinite consciousness. In a general sense, Yoga may include Jnana also, if Yoga is taken to mean *the method* of the attainment of the Brahman. In the practice of Yoga, one should become very vigilant, and not become proud or heedless. Yoga comes and goes. It does not rest for long, unless great care is taken in the maintenance of that consciousness of Oneness. Yoga is the separation from contact with pain. In this state, the powers working through the external senses and the internal senses are made to go back to their source, viz., the power of Self-consciousness, where they rest in perfect peace. The noise of the senses ceases, and, as a consequence of this, pain and sorrow also are negated.

Brahman should be conceived of as existence, between the two logical conceptions of existence and non-existence. Existence is the correlative of non-existence, and, hence, even non-existence may appear to have as much validity as existence. But the conception of non-existence, though logically deducible, is practically impossible, as the conception of Brahman as non-existence involves the negation of the consciousness of one's own existence, also. Therefore, Brahman should be known as existence, though from the highest standpoint this, too, is a limited conception. As far as the human being is concerned, the conception of existence is not limited in the ordinary way, because, it is not possible to set boundaries to existence. The idea of existence leads to the realisation of the transcendental Truth which includes and goes beyond the ideas of existence and non-existence.

When all the desires that are lodged in the heart are cast off, the mortal experiences the Immortal, and one becomes Brahman, here itself. Moksha is the realisation of that which

exists always and everywhere. Therefore, it can be realised at any place, provided the obstructions to this realisation are removed. These obstructions are desires for objective experience. Removal of desires is the same as the destruction of mind. The realisation of the Self does not involve a movement towards any external condition, but it is the extinction and transcendence of personality in the Absolute. It is like a drop dissolving in the ocean, or rather, the ocean itself becoming aware that it is ocean.

The Yogavasishtha makes reference to two methods of overcoming and transcending the mind, which is the stuff of individuality—Yoga and Jnana. Vasishtha defines Yoga as Vrittinirodha or inhibition of psychological functions, and Jnana as Samyagavekshana or right perception. Generally, Yoga is to be understood in the sense of that Integral Method whereby the individual is attuned to the Supreme Being. It is neither a creed nor a tradition, but the law governing the universe, and made manifest in the conscious activity of the individual. Yoga is the process of the evolution of the finite to the Infinite, consciously and deliberately systematised, and thus accelerated. In Yoga, the experiences of several future possible lives are compressed into those of one life or the least possible number of lives. Yoga is, therefore, nothing out-of-the-way or unconnected with the normal life of man. Truly, it is the only normal life, and a life bereft of the consciousness of Yoga, in some degree at least, may be said to be below the normal. To be forced to be something and to act in certain ways, instinctively, without the conscious and volitional activity of oneself, is not the glory of man. Yoga is to know the real relation which man bears to the universe as a whole, and to the Divine Being which is his Higher Self. Not to know this relation is to grope blindly in darkness and to be merely confined to the animal consciousness of subhuman beings. Yoga is not cutting oneself away from the reality of life in the world, but it is the understanding and realisation of the real meaning of existence in order to live a life of the essential freedom and bliss of one's deepest consciousness. In other words, it is to be a friend and citizen of the whole

universe, to feel oneself in all beings, to absorb into oneself the whole constitution of the universe, to be the Soul of the universe. This is the meaning of Yoga, understood in its general sense.

But Yoga has also a special and particularised meaning, as mentioned by Vasishtha. This is identical with the technical Yoga system of Patanjali. It consists in the inhibition of all the modifications of the mind-stuff. In this system, the faculty which plays the most important part is the will, not so much the understanding or the feeling. By sheer dint of determination and decision based on faith in the holy tradition and the instructions of the teacher, one fixes one's consciousness on the ideal of one's attainment. All Vrittis or psychoses are resolutely banished from consciousness by resort to various methods, such as thinking of the opposite of the obstructing psychosis, cultivation of virtuous qualities, practice of the abandonment of objects and enjoyments both seen and heard, complete restraint of the senses, fast, continence, positive love for all beings, truth-speaking, non-covetousness, cleanliness of body and of internal motive, contentment. with what one obtains independent of effort, austerity, study of sacred scriptures, recitation of the Name of God, prayer, self-surrender, steady posture of the body, harmonisation of the vital energy, etc. By these methods the Yogi withdraws his senses from their respective objects, and concentrates his mind on the Supreme Being. Before the attainment of actual concentration on God, one may pass through various lower stages of concentration on grosser objects which are more easily comprehended and taken as means of steadying the activities of the mind. Thus, with a negative method of abstraction of the functions of individuality, one attains That which is at the background of all individual functions.

Jnana is Samyagavekshana, or right vision of things. It is to behold the world as it is really, not merely as it appears to the individual functions of knowledge. It is to fix the consciousness on the Universal Substance, of which all things are made. Jnana is the knowledge that the Self is the All, and

that All is the Self. This Self is not the individual subject of knowledge, but the Self of the whole universe, the Consciousness to which the whole universe can be reduced. Jnana is to experience nothing objective, nothing external to one's consciousness, and to have the direct realisation of Eternity and Infinity. Jnana is the constant awareness of the Immortal Brahman. This awareness has an empirical as well as an absolute aspect. Empirically, it is called Brahmabhavana or Brahmabhyasa, which consists in ceaselessly thinking of and feeling the presence of Brahman, speaking of Brahman, discoursing with one another on Brahman, and totally resting in the consciousness of Brahman, in all activities of life. In its absolute aspect, it is to be merged in Brahman, to be in the state of perpetual Samadhi or Kaivalya, to be perfectly free from the consciousness of a second to oneself, to glory in the Absolute, and to be supremely blessed. This latter stage follows the former logically, when all the impressions of past actions are experienced and destroyed, when the body drops, and the individual enters the Absolute, as a river enters the ocean. This 'entering the ocean' is, of course, an analogy from the human standpoint, for, really, there was never a river, never is, and never will be. There was, is and will be only the ocean, and the ocean has to know that it is. Only the Absolute can be, and is, and liberation is the consciousness of the Absolute. Yoga and Jnana aim at this supreme beatitude.

### **Additional Exhortations from the Mundakopanishad**

The Mundakopanishad, as far as its contents are concerned, is, in many respects, a sequel to the teachings of the Kathopanishad. The one supplements the other, the Katha furnishing information on the earlier stages of spiritual endeavour and the practice of Sadhana and Yoga, and the Mundaka going further into the details of the practice and the nature of final liberation in the Absolute. The initial instruction in the Mundaka is that a search for Truth should be launched upon after one carefully examines the character

of the world of sense and of works, whereby a distaste for objects spontaneously arises in the mind on the knowledge of the fact that nothing of the realm of impermanence can be an adequate means to the realisation of the permanent or the everlasting, there being no conceivable link between the two patterns of experience. Upon arriving at this stage of understanding, the student goes humbly to the Teacher, who is well versed in the sacred lore (Srotriya) and is established in the wisdom of Brahman (Brahmanishtha). To such a well-prepared disciple does the Master offer initiation into the divine mysteries.

The first experience into which the student is introduced is that of the Cosmic Being—Virat: “The heavens are His head; the sun and moon are His eyes; the quarters are His ears; the Vedas are His speech; the air is His breath; the universe is His heart; the earth is His footstool:—such is the great Soul of all beings.” From Him do emanate Time and Space, gods, men, beasts, birds, food, relationships both perceptual and social, rules of conduct, bodies and worlds. This Supreme Being is all this universe: one who knows this secret hidden in the cave of one's heart tears asunder the knot of ignorance.

To reach Him, the way is meditation. In a symbology, the method of meditation is described. “The Pranava (OM) is the bow; the self is the arrow; Brahman is the target; this target is to be aimed at by one well trained in vigilance and one-pointedness of attention; then does one become one with Brahman, even as the arrow merges into its target, well hit.” “By taking hold of the mighty weapon of the bow of the wisdom of the Upanishads, one should fix on it the arrow sharpened with continued contemplation and worship; the bow is to be bent and drawn forth with the force of an ardent yearning for the goal; thus, do you hit that target of the Imperishable Brahman, my dear!” When this is achieved, when the soul unites itself with Brahman, Brahman is seen everywhere. “The immortal Brahman is in the front, Brahman behind, Brahman to the right, Brahman to the left,

Brahman above, Brahman below; all this universe, is just this Brahman, the Great, spread out everywhere.”

Though this is the highest form of spiritual practice prescribed in the Mundaka, it also provides us with a slightly lesser and easier technique intended for those who are of more moderate endowments. “God and the individual are like two birds perching on the same tree. These two birds are of like plumage and are eternal friends. One of these two eats the sweet fruit of the tree, and is bound; while the other merely looks on eating nothing.” “Though seated in the same tree, the individual is sunk in grief due to impotence caused by delusion; when he beholds the other, the adorable one, the master, he becomes freed from sorrow.” The contact of the soul with objects brought about by desire for them is the eating of the forbidden fruit. The Lord supreme is God, by a vision of whom the soul is lifted to the exaltation of immortal existence. Such a soul which is free “rejoices in itself, sports with itself, and its activity consists in the realisation of universality.”

“But he who runs after desires, cherishing them in his heart, is born in those respective places where he can fulfil the desires; whereas of him whose desires have reached their consummation (on account of sublimation), all desires melt away here itself (in the realisation of infinitude), due to having attained to perfection of the Self.” Having attained Him, the Supreme Being, the sages, satisfied in knowledge, with perfected consciousness of the Self, free from all desires, serene in being, the heroes—they attain to everything, from every side, fixed in and united to that which is everywhere.” “All the faculties of the individual vanish into their sources, all the presiding deities of one's faculties merge into their original forms, and all actions, and the individuality of the self—all these reach communion with the Supreme Imperishable.” “As the flowing rivers, casting their names and forms, become one with the ocean—so does the knower, freed from the bondage of name and form, attains to the Highest Divine Being.”

The lower and the higher means of reaching the Supreme Reality, the ways of *difference*, *equality* and *union*, are all to be found here concisely explained. At the lowest stage, the soul seems to be totally severed from God and the world, and the ultimate Fact appears as a collaboration of three real entities. But the possibility of such a collaboration implies an underlying organic connection among them; else, there would not even be a notion of there being three entities. The knowledge of this organic sameness of character hiddenly cementing the three points into a harmony of existence is a higher realisation. But harmony and equality and sameness do, still, retain a lurking element of difference in their constitution. And all difference is a tacit admission of a unity implanted beneath it. Without the admission of this unity, the very concept of difference defeats itself. The highest realisation, thus, is the communion of the soul with the Absolute, as rivers become one with the ocean. From the figure of the two birds, which are only friends, we come to the knowledge that they are capable of reaching sameness (Sarırya) of nature in their essentiality, which means that they were never wholly different in character, except artificially. From this uniformity of structure, again, the realisation rises to the status of supreme independence.