



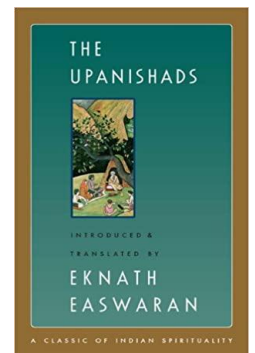
The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad - Commentary

Introduction to the Upanishads

This is the edition I have and it has wonderful introductions on each chapter also. It is not necessary to get the same version (unless you want to). You can find it on Amazon and most major book stores:

The Upanishads (Easwaran's Classics of Indian Spirituality, 2) – by Eknath Easwaran [link](#).

There is also an abridged audio version available on Audible and Apple Books.



In the Bhagavad Gita, we find a more practical description of the natural state of human beings when they have realised the Truth. The Gita also describes the main pathways of meditation, devotion and wisdom as the fastest ways to Truth. By contrast, in the Upanishads we see a collection of writings that have much less instruction of how to actually realise what you are but are rich in descriptions of that essence of Truth and what it is like to live it. The Upanishads are some of the oldest scriptures known to us and they are so old we do not even really know who wrote them. We can place them in a different category to the Gita if we see their function is to inspire us, light a fire or even to make us jealous of the Rishis (ancient seers) who wrote them. If the Gita is here to help us understand the power of devotion to the Truth, then the Upanishads are here to make the flame of our devotion a raging fire.

We could think of the Gita as the “How to reach it and why it’s worth making the journey” and the Upanishads as the “Here’s what you are missing out on - Love letters from the Self” If we look at the meaning and etymology of “Upanishad” we will see it is describing a transmission from Truth directly into the illusion of our thoughts and penetrating it deeply. Infusing our minds and hearts with the power of Truth, the Upanishads are legendary in their power to pierce the veil of illusion. If we read them softly, gently and with reverence we will feel more focused, devoted and inspired that we too can live in freedom. The Upanishads are not to be read to try to understand or to achieve deeper knowledge (although that may happen) and are best taken in as if you are listening to some beautiful music that moves you. Simply letting them into your heart, they will work their magic on you.

Some of the Upanishads come in a story form and some are the records of a dialogue between teacher and student. Often the teacher can come in a very surprising form and so we can see immediately that the Upanishads are already pointing to a pivotal understanding that Truth can come from anywhere at any time and need not necessarily come in a formal way. Each Upanishad is complete on its own and does not rely on any other teaching or even any other Upanishad. We are going to study eleven main Upanishads and allow them to infuse us with their wisdom, power and love. You will notice there are some that you resonate more with and some you may feel an indifference to at first. I would urge you to pay special attention to the ones you do not feel a

resonance with at first as these will be the ones that have potential to provide the greatest breakthroughs. The spiritual power of these great writings is such that our mind senses it and may immediately offer resistance to the words. Your mind may say "I don't like the names and the language used" or it may think that this information is too old to be relevant today but let's not let this type of resistance stop us from reaping the rewards of diving deeper into this powerful body of scriptures.

The Upanishads are teachings based on the description of the One Being/Self of all/Noumenon and so whilst the Gods may be mentioned (such as Brahma, Agni and more) they are mentioned as individual aspects of this One Consciousness and are not to be taken to be separate entities. If we can see the Infinite Self can show itself in an infinite number of ways, we can come to think of these Gods (and even demons) as aspects of our own Divinity.

It is important to note also that whilst the Upanishads have often been associated with ritual and religion, they are describing the Reality that is beyond any such religion (and all religions). They are also beyond philosophy and mind and stand alone in their wisdom. The wisdom in these writings is powerful enough to cause a shift in our spiritual understanding of Reality (as is any authentic non-duality teaching) and as such can be as powerful as any teaching, teacher, retreat, prayer or otherwise. They are a true Darshan or blessing. We must read the words of each Upanishad and then meditate upon them until we bring them into our actual experience. It is with this in mind that I am offering these commentaries on this revered body of scripture, so that you may fall in love with the Upanishads as much as I have and maybe even more. I initially had resistance to these great teachings just like we may all do and I thought they would hold no relevance to me as a seeker of Truth and I am overjoyed to admit how utterly wrong I was. I would not be writing these words without the insight, inspiration and power of the Upanishads and they infused my being with love for the great Sages and Seers of ancient India that I will never know but will eternally offer my gratitude to.

Notes for reading these commentaries.

The numbers in brackets/parentheses refer to the verse numbers in the translation in the book itself. I have added comments on sections of each Upanishad that directly affected and inspired me when I have studied these and absorbed them, however this does not mean that if I have not commented on a particular verse that it contains no wisdom or something that may inspire you. For this reason, I would urge you to read each verse slowly and feel inside your body which ones feel most relevant. For some of the Upanishads that may be all or a lot of the text. For others it may be less. After some time has passed you may find you resonate with other sections that you did not before and so with such great works of scripture it is worth revisiting over time.

It has been the most beautiful opportunity for me to do the same in writing these commentaries and I am grateful.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad - The Forest Of Wisdom

As always let us begin with a description of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad to help us open to this beautiful teaching. As usual in the Upanishads, we see the teaching taking the form of a dialogue between student and teacher and we see husband and wife, sage and king and other unusual combinations brought together in mutual love of Satsang. This Upanishad is a collection of conversations and only serves to further the rebellious nature we saw in the student/teacher relationship in the Katha. We see a woman as the student in the first section and later as a spiritual pundit or wise person.

The story begins with a shock for Maitreya, the wife of the great sage Yajnavalkya, as he informs her that he is leaving home to continue his spiritual journey. It is perhaps helpful to remember this was normal to anyone to do at a certain point in their journey at the times the Upanishads were written. Maitreya is also deeply invested in the spiritual path but is not prepared for him to leave and so the news is most unwelcome. We have all experienced some kind of shocking or traumatic event in our lives and often this is when we are the most open in our awakening. Perhaps we can all sympathise with Maitreya as we know all too well that feeling when life takes a sudden and shocking turn, leaving us feeling lost and ungrounded. This turns out to be the greatest gift Yajnavalkya could give his wife though as it opens her up and leads to a profound Satsang between them. As suggested by Eknath Easwaran, in his introduction to this Upanishad, we see a very literal manifestation of the meaning of the word "Upanishad". Husband and wife transcend their relationship and become immersed in a compelling dialogue about the nature of Reality and how to realise it.

In the next section we see another beautiful gem of the Upanishads and a recurring theme. We see the human desires and nature of the sage Yajnavalkya as he hears of King Janaka's promise of 1000 cows to be given to the wisest person amongst those gathered around him. Again, the Upanishads show that the deepest realisation of Truth must also involve an embracing of the human experience too and not be in avoidance of it. When Yajnavalkya casually says to his disciple "Son, drive them home" he knows he wants those cows and that he will indeed have them. We are given the message here that human life can be the expression of abundance as the experiential realisation of our awakening. He may walk away with the cows in the end (and more) but he has given everyone who gathered the highest gift of the most profound Satsang.

Towards the end of the Brihadaranyaka we see the usual simple and deeply practical spiritual instruction hidden in a dialogue between Prajapati (the Creator) and his children who include gods, humans and the godless (perhaps demons?). It is important to note in the Upanishads that often even the gods are in need of spiritual instruction as they still operate in duality as they rule their particular domain or realm. Although the gods are many in the Hindu pantheon, it may help to consider them more as energies or distinct vibrations, rather than as actual separate entities to help our understanding. This was useful for me at first to allow my understanding to unfold and I came to see the gods, demons and humans were not in some hierarchical structure but instead expressed various aspects of the creative force of the universe.

Now let's take each section of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (literally meaning "of the great forest" which may represent the Self). As always, we will start with an invocation we have seen before. As you read it you may feel the urge to speak the words out loud or internally and allow the full power of it to resonate within your being.

All this is full. All that is full.

From fullness, fullness comes.

When fullness is taken from fullness,

Fullness still remains.

Om shanti shanti shanti

Note: Section/Chapter 1 of this Upanishad has been omitted by Eknath Easwaran for unknown reasons. After some research I found reference to the fact he wanted to try to keep it as open and accessible as possible to those new to the Upanishads (and as such other smaller sections may also be missed out later in the text). This was not a direct quote from Eknath himself though and I

could find nothing directly from him. A decision was made not to include a translation of section one (and any further sections missed out) from a different awakened being/author and translator and insert it here because I felt it would disturb the flow of the beautiful translation and notes we have from Eknath Easwaran. We may come back to look at chapter one of this Upanishad later, through a different translation and of course readers are able to look at other translations of The Upanishads now if you wish.

Chapter 2: The Path to Immortality

In this first section of dialogue, we see Maitreyi shocked by her husband's declaration it is time for him to leave. He offers to divide his property as is usual but Maitreyi is not interested in it. She asks Yajnavalkya poignantly "My lord, if I could get all the wealth in the world, would it help me go beyond death?" (4.2) The question represents that time in each of our individual paths where we understand that nothing we achieve in the material world can help us overcome or postpone the inevitable death of the body. Maitreyi, like each one of us in our own time, suddenly understands the most important thing to focus on is the truth about Reality and the world. She asks her husband how to realise her own immortality. (4.3)

Yajnavalkya proceeds to explain that love is the same as our very own Self, love is God and God is love. He explains that wherever we see love emerging in our human life, such as love from a husband to his wife or love of a child from a parent, that this is the True Self and never a separate being at all. We say that "I love you" or "I love to dance" for example, both of these infer there is a "someone" who is loving something or someone else. In fact, there is no object or intermediary of love and only love itself. The person loving, the act of love and what they love are all different expressions of the one Love that is all things. (4.4-4.6)

Next, we see a beautiful explanation of why the mind can never experience Reality/Love/Self. Yajnavalkya says that nobody can really understand and enjoy the sound of the drum if they think that the drum is separate to the sound it makes and the person beating the drum. Only when we have released these ideas of separateness can we fully hear and enjoy the sound of a drum. Any sound becomes the sound of "Om", any sound is heard as the whole universe and our body responds to the fullness of this sound without any thoughts diminishing that experience. Whether we realise it or not, the sense that "I am over here listening to that drum over there" is filtering our experience of it in that moment. When the drum is truly heard it will be indistinguishable from our own body and every sound becomes quite blissful, even the sound of a car honking its horn can be experienced the same way. We have spoken here about a sound as an example but we could also apply this to any object our senses can experience. If you ponder this deeply you may be startled to realise you have never actually just seen a sunset, felt a hug from someone, tasted your favourite meal or heard your favourite music at all! What would our everyday human experience be like without the filter of separation thoughts pervading it? How would it be to move through life without having to label everything with a name and separate yourself from it? Pure bliss! As Yajnavalkya says, everything that arises out of the Self is indeed the Self, it is the "breath of the Supreme". The separate sense of self is created and sustained in each moment by the habit or tendency to label ourselves and the other people and things in our life as "not me", If you stop and check in this moment as you read, you may find a subtle but real sense that the book or device you are reading this on is separate to the hand that holds it. You may find the subtle but well believed idea that the one who wrote these words is separate to you, the reader. You may find that you believe these words were written in one place in the world which is different to where you are reading them. On and on the subtle division goes and it is constantly reaffirming and sustaining itself. If you think about what is written here can you notice the subtle sense that these "thoughts" are different to and separate from the "me" that is thinking them? What is the Self? It must be the experience of "all of this" without the core division of separation. What is life like without labels and mental concepts? What is your experience if, just for a moment, you don't insist that these words are outside of you and being taken inside? What do you feel when you do not know if you are what is read, the reader or the author of these words? It is possible to live your whole life this way if you can cultivate this new habit. (4.7-4.12)

Maitreyi then speaks of her confusion and bewilderment at her husband's words and Yajnavalkya compassionately directs her to reflect on what he has said. To meditate on the Self is to notice,

ponder, think about the One Undivided Self and this will then move to the forefront of our consciousness and we will cease labelling and categorising. At first we cease identifying as the labeller and then the labelling comes to a stop. The mind becomes quiet but alert and ready to think about something when we want or need it to. Yajnavalkya ends this chapter with the beautiful question “Maitreyi, my beloved, how can the knower ever be known?” This question has the power to take us deeper into our realisation of the Self, at first we may notice we are looking for a “someone” that can be known by us. Over time and with self-inquiry or spontaneous insight borne from inquiry or meditation, we will find that what we are looking for is something invisible and intangible. How can we know the invisible Knower then? We know the Knower is here, it is reading these words even now but we cannot see it with our eyes or our mind. Mind can think about the Knower, it can even think “I am the Knower” and the Knower watches all this Silently. Mind is something known by the Knower and the mind can never directly know what is watching. The Knower is not being recognised by the mind or the senses then. How do we actually know the Knower is present? Again, we can prove the Knower exists, it is noticing these words and the attempts to reach an answer. Can the visible see the invisible? Can the tangible know the intangible? Mustn't we be both tangible and intangible then? We are the invisible, formless Self that knows itself as being everywhere, undivided and complete. We are also the visible and tangible forms that seem to be emerging from and disappearing back into the invisible.

Chapter 3 The Imperishable

In this next section we see Yajnavalkya with his student Samashrava and they are with the wise King Janaka and a group of brahmins (a brahmin is someone from the priestly class or a spiritual teacher). Janaka has offered one thousand cows, each with ten gold coins attached to them, to the wisest brahmin among the group. We see a different side of Yajnavalkya in this section when we see his desire to take the cows and this is a beautiful teaching in itself. A sage is one who embraces the Truth deeply, having realised it and is living authentically in all the ways it can appear. This means realising that our true nature is formless Silence (the Self/Brahman) and that this can also appear as a human being. The sage totally lives as a normal human being too with seeming desires and aversions. When we simply look at the mind and body of a sage, she may appear to look exactly like everyone else, with preferences, likes and dislikes. In reality the sage lives as a human being but is completely unidentified with any aspect of it. She can show up as formless, infinite Self or as a woman working a job, raising children and much more. She has no ideas that formlessness is better than form because she cannot see any difference at all between them. She does not even see two. The Upanishads will sometimes depict spiritual teachers in the usually expected roles of forest dweller or ashram inhabitant but they also depict them as householders and people living in society. This message is the same as we find in the Bhagavad Gita and other scriptures, moving away from the myth that to be fully awakened is to leave the world behind and live in seclusion. We could even say that to awaken as fully as is possible a human life, with all that comes with it, is all but essential to the process.

Yajnavalkya has such confidence in his ability to prove he is the best amongst the brahmins gathered that he tells his student to take the cows home right away. The other brahmins are upset of course and he is challenged by the royal priest but does not back down.” I salute the wisest, but I want those cows” he says. The Upanishads break with tradition again now by introducing the wise female figure Gargi who decides she will ask Yajnavalkya two questions and they will judge his wisdom based on his answers. (1-2)

Gargi sets out to prove Yajnavalkya wrong as she tests how deep his awakening is. The great sage answers wisely, describing the Self as the “Imperishable” and tells everyone of its greatness. He describes the Self as the creator and sustainer of everything in the universe and that everything has its existence according to the will of the Imperishable Self. Yajnavalkya says even when we practise rites, rituals, meditation and even renunciation without knowing this Imperishable Self we still remain in ignorance of the truth. Anything that we can achieve during our lifetime will in effect die with our body. There is only one thing that we can take into a future lifetime and that is the realisation of what is permanent about us. The Self is the witness of all and is seeing, hearing, touching and tasting through the body and its senses although we cannot see it with our eyes or hear it with our ears. As Yajnavalkya finishes his answers. Gargi is so impressed that she admits

he is the wisest of all gathered. "No one can defeat Yajnavalkya in debate about Brahman" she says and falls silent. (3-12)

Chapter 4 The States of Consciousness

This chapter of the Brihadaranyaka explores a dialogue between the wise King Janaka and the sage Yajnavalkya and this dialogue may be seen to represent many levels of teaching, as do so much of the Upanishads. Let's take these levels or themes in the words one at a time (and of course there may be more of them that you notice too).

Firstly, we see the king of a domain who sees that to rule wisely and for the benefit of all he must deepen his own Satsang and understanding of the Truth. Perhaps this may suggest to us that nobody is exempt from the craving for Truth, that our desire is also the desire of the Self to recognise itself. Taken in this light, the struggle to reach awakening can be seen more as a movement towards greater expression of freedom in the manifestation as a whole and not the impossible challenge of the separate someone that it may seem to be. All life is desiring "more" in some way; plants want more light, flowers or growth. In the animal world we see this desire for "more" as we see the desire for more love and connection in family groups and maternal bonds forming as the species become more evolved. Our human brain is more developed than any other species and so this desire for "more" will show itself on many levels such as financial, our body weight or fitness, in the search for the right person to spend our lives with, succeeding in our career and many more. This desire also appears in our search for more peace, love and joy, although we may try to fulfil it in many worldly ways. Eventually, we see this desire showing itself as and in our awakening journey. Even with all King Janaka has achieved and has in the physical world he still feels this desire which transcends all other desires. Interestingly, King Janaka's desire for awakening also makes him a better king than he would be without it and so we see the full circle of this desire here in a beautiful way.

Secondly, this dialogue could be seen to exemplify true humility as being one of the highest spiritual values, revered by the wise. King Janaka is already wise and is ruling a whole country and yet still feels the need to be in the study and service of Truth. He is wise enough to know he can never fully know the Truth and he is also wise enough to see Yajnavalkya is able to take him deeper into his own Self than he has been able to go so far. Humility is not self-negation or sacrifice or a false diminishment of our own self as we may have believed. Humility can be described as a love affair with the unknown mystery that is our own nature. When we are more in love with open, curious and continuous exploration of what we are than wanting to reach a conclusion and feel that we know, then we are truly humble. When we are humble we know that the true teacher can appear in any moment, through any human or bird song, through any animal, plant or event and show us some profound insight. True humility, as illustrated through Janaka, is always being open to learn and deepen our insight no matter what form the teacher takes. Sometimes the teacher will take the shape of a sage, sometimes a small child, a fallen leaf on the path, a sunset, a disease and an infinite number of other ways. Would we recognise the Buddha showing up as a leaf falling off a tree? Would we see life showing us that everything falls in its own time and yet the tree is the leaf and is still here? Or would we walk right past Yajnavalkya disguised as a leaf? The teacher is life itself and as such if we can have true humility then we are always in Satsang, we are always being the Upanishads and "sitting down near the Truth".

The third meaning we could explore here is that the sage and the king are seen as the same and they both revere and honour each other in their own ways. Yajnavalkya had come to this meeting wishing to remain silent but speaks to honour the promise he made to him of any boon or blessing he would like. King Janaka also honours the sage by asking his permission to question him in their Satsang. One is the master of the physical world and the other is the master of the spiritual world. Neither is put on a higher pedestal here in the Upanishads and this is so important. How often do we view worldly activities and achievements as less than our spiritual achievements? As we learn in the Bhagavad Gita, selfless service (karma yoga) is perhaps one of the highest paths we can follow to awakening. Perhaps King Janaka is performing the highest kind of karma yoga by serving as king from the realisation of the Truth?

Perhaps the fourth meaning becomes clearer as the dialogue unfolds and we see Janaka asking this simple question “What is the light of man?” again and again. Each answer given by Yajnavalkya seems to only prompt a further question in Janaka and the sage takes him a layer deeper in his awakening with each answer. Perhaps this may signify the gradual unfolding of our awakening. Slowly the Self is revealing itself to us in progressively deeper ways. Janaka stays with the same question; peering through the many veils of answers until he finds one that brings him peace as it resonates deeply in his heart. This is also a profound teaching by its example. The ability to stay with one question, meditative technique or a particular teaching long enough to get profound results is the one pointed mind we see spoken of in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita (along with many other sources). It is akin to holding a magnifying glass under the sun, in one place long enough that the heat concentrates and eventually we see smoke and then fire. We could say the one pointed mind is the magnifying glass and the devotion to Truth is the smoke, the fire being a complete awakening to the Truth.

The fifth meaning may be seen in the varying answers from Yajnavalkya regarding the source of light for humans. Could the sage be saying that the light is appearing as the sun, the moon, fire, speech and all these things? Could he be saying that light (Truth) can appear as anything at all and also as everything? This perhaps complements our discussion on humility as we begin to see the Truth and the teacher appearing everywhere.

There could be many more points discussed here about this section (or any section) of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad but let’s now look more closely at the writing itself. King Janaka is asking the sage to show him what the light is in man and what power moves us. He is curious about what moves the universe and what the real intelligence is. “Light” in this context may mean truth, power, reality or guidance (and perhaps a combination of all of these is the best description) and the meaning may vary. King Janaka is really asking the most important question of all when he asks this question again and again. He wants to know where to place his attention, curiosity and devotion on his pathway. Surely this is already profoundly wise of him to want to know the most important thing to know! Yajnavalkya can see this wisdom and therefore takes him deeply into the realisation of the Self, recognising that Janaka is not only curious and open but willing to stay open and demonstrates true humility. (1-6)

Finally, Janaka asks “Who is that Self?” and Yajnavalkya answers with a beautiful description of the Self and how it seems to fall into illusion. The sage gives this long and profound answer to Janaka’s question which is the remaining text in the chapter. There are many precious gems of wisdom in this speech and we will look at some of them. “Only seeming to think, seeming to move, the Self neither sleeps nor wakes nor dreams. When the Self takes on a body, he seems to assume the body’s frailties and limitations; but when he sheds the body at the time of death, the Self leaves all these behind.” Yajnavalkya is describing the identification process, in complete perfection. When the Pure Self assumes the shape of a human body and dwells within it, it begins to think and it labels itself as the body. Naturally then, if we identify with the body we will feel “This body is me, I am the thinker and the one performing actions. This is my mind and my body and everything that happens in them is happening to me. I was born and at some point I will grow old and die”. In short, everything that can and does happen to this human body seems to be happening to us. Perhaps most importantly for our study of this great Upanishad and our awakening is we may come to see that when we identify as the thinker of thoughts, we identify with and as the one who has fallen from perfection or grace. When we are sure that we are the thinker, we will also be sure that we are the one who has forgotten who we are and must remember it also. In reality, all this forgetting and remembering is only happening in the thought process of the mind and that mind is made out of our own Self. Perfection shapes itself as a human body, as thoughts about forgetting who we are and later as thoughts about the Self and remembrance of our true nature. All the while nothing has actually changed for us except for the shapes we are making ourselves into. Some thoughts about Truth feel better than thoughts about illusion in our body and that is all that is actually unfolding. What happens to our experience if we realise that we can stop identifying as the one who is waking up to the Truth? Can we suffer then? (7-8)

The next few verses describe the death process and what causes reincarnation. We learn that when the physical body dies, we leave it behind and remain in our subtle (energetic) body which contains all we have learned from our previous human lifetimes and all that we still wish to resolve. It is this unfinished business that makes another human lifetime appealing in order to try to fulfil our

desires. It is this subtle body that realises and has insights as well as stores karmic patterns and previous breakthroughs, not our mind and body. In this way, any practice we make on the pathway is never wasted or lost and accumulates over lifetimes (we hear Krishna compassionately telling Arjuna this also in the Bhagavad Gita). This subtle body is individual and unique in each of us, like a wave on the ocean surface is always a unique shape, but it is never separate. Only the human bodies seem separate and yet even they are not. Oxygen, carbon dioxide and other gases are constantly being exchanged by human bodies. Cells, hairs and waste excretions are being shed even now and will be recycled into other forms and used to build cells in “someone else’s body”.

The subtle body is where the tendency to see objects occurs and therefore the capacity to suffer is also housed here. When the physical body dies, we continue in the next body right where we left our spiritual journey as soon as we feel ready. Awakening happens once then and happens in our subtle body. The mind and body are more like an instrument to perceive Reality through or a set of binoculars that we can hold up and look through. When we are finished with the binoculars, or when they break through old age, we simply set them down but we are no different in ourselves whether we are looking through new, old or no binoculars at all. If it were not so, our awakening would last only until the end of the physical body and we would have to begin again to wake up to the Truth each and every lifetime! (9-19)

In verse 21 Yajnavalkya says “As a man in the arms of his beloved is not aware of what is without and what is within, so a person in union with the Self is not aware of what is without and what is within, for in that unitive state all desires find their perfect fulfilment. There is no other desire that needs to be fulfilled and one goes beyond sorrow.” We see the reference to “within and without” here as the core idea that keeps us feeling separate. “Within” refers to inside our own self and “without” is what is outside of us and therefore not us. In the unitive state there is only One and therefore we cannot hold on to any desires because they involve these ideas of within and without. Total fulfilment is the outcome then as we can see it is not that desires are wrong but instead are a product of duality and separation. We can loosely embrace any desire that arises, knowing it can only be fulfilled permanently from this unitive state. This is especially relevant to the desire for awakening or to merge into the Self. Can this desire ever really be fulfilled whilst we are believing in two - inside and outside, me and “not me”. If I try to merge into the Self, I will only find myself seemingly further away from it. I am what I am seeking and what is seeking is what is sought. In the unitive state there is no inside or outside but only that which Is. (20-30)

The great sage takes Janaka deeper into his seeing now by reminding him that when we feel we are a separate being, we will see other beings and things everywhere. We can never solve the riddle of separation from the place where it seems real (in the mind). We can only look and see that we are never actually separate to anything or anyone, no matter what our senses and experience seem to be telling us. “Where there is separateness, one sees another” says Yajnavalkya. “But where there is unity, one without a second, that is the world of Brahman.” We must simply come to live where there is “one without a second” or see that duality is never actually real. If you are not a separate person then neither is anybody else. When we look at the world and still see “other” people and things it is only because we haven’t fully assimilated what it means to be the Self. We must learn to look and see the same One Self everywhere. King Janaka is really opening up at this point, seeing the answer to his question deepening. In his excitement he exclaims “I give you another thousand cows! Please teach me more of the way to Self-realisation”. (31-33)

In verse 37 we see a very important gem of wisdom as Yajnavalkya says “Just as when a king is expected to visit a village, the mayor and all the officials turn out to welcome him with food and drink, all creation awaits the person who sheds his body having realised Brahman. ‘Here he comes!’ they say. ‘Here comes Brahman himself!’ But the senses, while that man lies dying, gather around and mourn and mourn the Self’s departure, as courtiers mourn when their king is about to leave.” Here we see the beautiful description of what actually happens when a person realises the Self of all. It is important to understand that this is not a local event, happening somewhere in time and space. It is not that someone in Africa suddenly realised their Oneness with all things, for example. What is actually happening is that the Self which is everywhere is recognising itself, everywhere all at once. As we think about this further we will see that it could never be an event, happening to someone, somewhere. There is no separate being for awakening to happen to so

what is actually happening? Self-realisation must be That which is everywhere is seeing itself in its entirety. This means it isn't a physical process that is happening to a particular mind and body (although it of course has an effect upon that mind and body too). It is That which is not in any location realising it has no place to stand. Yajnavalkya says "Here comes Brahman himself" as what creation itself would say. This great sage also compassionately points out that the senses in the human body are reporting to the egoic sense of a separate being and the ego can never recognise what is actually occurring and mourns the departing of the apparent "someone" as if he were actually dying. From the ego perspective there actually is an ending or a death event because the Self will no longer be expressing itself through that particular form and it cannot see or experience the subtle realms or dimensions that our energy body can explore through. This is said to allow us to compassionately understand that the ego will never change its mind and that we do not need to even try. The love of the Self compassionately holds the ego in its powerful way, not wishing to change it at all.

In the next section, we find a beautiful description of how the Self removes itself from the physical body at the time of death. Seen from the perspective of the subtle energy body (prana) our individual (but not separate) Self is like a wave on the ocean surface that has scattered and divided itself through all of the senses and thoughts. This death process could be described as a glorious wholeness, a reuniting of all this life force into itself and the individual becoming whole again on the energetic level. It may even be felt as a huge relief and release for the soul or energy body to be back in only the energy realm again. At the end of verse four we see a reference to what usually happens to an awakened being after shedding their body. Yajnavalkya says "As a goldsmith fashions an old ornament into a new and more beautiful one, so the Self, having reached the end of the last life and dispelled all ignorance, makes for himself a new, more beautiful shape, like that of the devas or other celestial beings". Here, we see the suggestion that the continued evolution for the Self-realised individual can continue in more subtle energy realms and the new "more beautiful" body most likely will not be a physical one but an energetic one as the devas and celestial beings have. This is, of course, always our own choice at this point (once we have realised the Self) and we may always choose to have another physical incarnation to help humanity in their ongoing spiritual journey. A great many sages have chosen this option and there are even some who incarnate in every generation as a sage simply to further speed the mass awakening that is occurring and really gathering momentum as this is written.

In verse 5 and 6 we see reference to the simplest and fastest route to awakening by Yajnavalkya who says "You are what your deep driving desire is, As your desire, so is your will, as your will is, so is your deed. As your deed is, so is your destiny. We live in accordance with our deep, driving desire. It is this desire at the time of death that determines what our next life will be. We will come back to earth to work out the satisfaction of that desire." Intention or desire is held as the most important thing by the sage because he knows who that intention or desire belongs to. The Self can be said to not have any desires at all in its purest appearance as the invisible Self. It can also be said to have desires when it appears as a human being and so both of these perspectives are true. You would not be reading these words if your deep, driving desire was not already bearing fruit in this lifetime. This desire will become stronger and burn even more brightly as you continue to recognise yourself in this lifetime. After this lifetime is over you will then be able to choose what you want to experience next, knowing that if another earthly life is what you want, it will be lived without any forgetting at all. From this point forward, the great veil of illusion or maya will have no effect upon you. Life will simply and joyfully be the neverending expansion of exploring yourself in all of these forms.

King Janaka readily asks for more Satsang as he gives Yajnavalkya another thousand cows. He sees that what he is receiving from the great sage is not only discourse of words but transmission of awakening to him. It is with humble gratitude Janaka recognises the blessing he is open enough to receive on so many levels and wishes to thank the sage in some way. At the end of this section, King Janaka finishes with the beautiful offering of his service and his Kingdom, recognising completely what this whole human incarnation is really for. It is not just for the awakening of our own self but for as many as are ready and able to receive it. "Venerable One, I offer myself and my kingdom in your service" is the most he could ever give to this great sage, to life and to himself. (1-23)

Chapter 5 What the Thunder Said

The final section of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad again takes us in a completely different direction and again this great Upanishad lives up to its name which means “Of the great forest”. Just like the various paths wandering through a forest seem unconnected and yet all lead to the edge of the forest in their own time and way, so too do all paths in spirituality lead to the end of suffering eventually. We see a few of these paths described in the Brihadaranyaka and yet they could also be the same path described in different ways! Such is the genius of the Rishis of the Upanishads. This section is also in the form of a dialogue between Prajapati and his children who are the gods, human beings and asuras (loosely translated as the godless or demons). Prajapati is the Creator and is also later known as Brahma in Hindu writings. He is that creative force that moves the Stillness of the Self into motion as creation of forms. In this context his children are his creations (as are all our children as parents) and may also be sometimes in the literal physical sense in some scriptures. The physical act of creation through sexual union and birth can be seen as simply the most physical expression of a spiritual process that occurs on many levels. In each moment we give birth to countless cells in our body and to many thoughts.

We see another Satsang with the first set of students being the gods, then the human beings and finally the godless asking Prajapati to teach them the way to freedom. Perhaps there is a clue to the stages of evolution that an individual soul will go through on the way to freedom. The godless may be seen to come last and be the lowest in terms of spiritual evolution. Perhaps the godless represent in us that part of us that feels cut off from the Divine, lost and alone and likely to say or do unkind things to other beings. Could the demons be our own inner demons that we must overcome, a representation of the tamasic vibrations we may still harbour inside unknowingly which may lead us further into ignorance rather than towards the light? Could human beings be a representation of that “middle” stage of evolution where we are more identified with and operating from the guna of rajas? Human beings are obsessed by action and by doing for long periods in our evolution. As we overcome this sense of having to do something to reach liberation, we may move into the more harmonious guna of sattva. The gods may represent this highly evolved being that is nearing the end of the journey in separation and who is ready to awaken fully.

Significantly, we see that each time Prajapati is asked to share his wisdom, he answers with the same answer each time and each of the three types of students (gods, humans and godless) understand his answer differently and give a different report to the others and he still agrees that they have understood. The teaching of Prajapati could be put into the following Sanskrit words “damyata datta dayadhvam”. “Datta” means to give (in an act of charity). “Damyata” means to be compassionate to others as a way of being. “Dayadhvam” means to be compassionate to others by understanding that everyone is caught in their own thought patterns and way of seeing the world and themselves. Damyata means to be self-controlled and this refers to our spiritual process of moving beyond thoughts and directing attention to the real Self, rather than attempting to control the physical body. Prajapati’s teaching mirrors what has been said by the other teachers in the Upanishads and even Krishna’s words in the Bhagavad Gita.

This section of the Upanishad is entitled “What the Thunder Said” because it is said the sound “Da” is how the Thunder sounds. Again, we see here the Upanishadic theme of unusual teachers emerging. Thunder is able to teach us if we are able to listen, just like everything else in creation. If Prajapati is the creator and the teacher then anything that he creates must also be able to teach those who are willing to listen. In the end, the teacher is found to be nowhere in particular and yet everywhere we may choose to look.

May the wisdom of the Brihadaranyaka come alive in you! May you be the living incarnation of the Upanishads.