



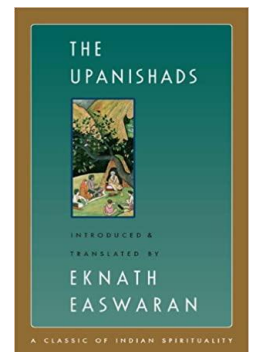
The Chandogya Upanishad - The Commentary

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.

The Chandogya Upanishad - Sacred Song

The Chandogya Upanishad takes us through various subjects and begins with a direct teaching about the Self, universal law and how to work with it. We see powerful explanations of how to work selflessly for the good of all beings. In later chapters, we see the traditional dialogue between teacher and student, as is common in the Upanishads. In this beautiful Upanishad we see the continuing theme of the unusual teacher and student continuing. We see courage and bravery of the student coming to the forefront as in the Katha and the Brihadaranyaka also and the form of the teacher being very different with a bull, the fire, a swan and a diver bird instructing our student. After receiving the wisdom from these animals, the student asks to be taught by the human teacher and receives exactly the same message! We see the humble but persistent theme of the Upanishads that the teacher is everywhere and if one is open, it can take an infinite number of forms. Humility again is shown as a prized trait for seekers of Truth. Would we have the eyes to see that a single drop of rain could teach us if we let it? Or would we hurry to get home and dry, out of the rain, muttering about the weather. Herein lies the power of the Upanishads that teach by allegory and suggestion, the merest hint of something we may pick up on if we are open and curious. Like a wonderful aroma of something baking in the oven coming towards us, we can soften and open up to the more subtle themes of the Upanishads, for there are many!

Before we dive deeper into this Upanishad let's remind ourselves, once again, to listen lightly, openly and with curiosity. The great power of the Upanishads to lift us up into Divine Splendour will be lost if we are trying too hard to understand. The Chandogya is no different than the others in its ability to elevate us out of the ordinary mindset and into Silence if we let it. Just being open to see and never concluding anything will allow all the ways the Upanishads are transmitting knowledge to us. As they teach us with their words and instruction, they also teach us to stay open, like a small child and full of wonder. There are many levels to any authentic spiritual teaching and the Upanishads are no different. The words on a page, or spoken by someone are only the most obvious form of the teaching and are a starting point into the beautiful freedom of the Self. Just like a child, sitting down with a beloved adult and eagerly waiting for their bedtime story, full of excitement, wonder and curiosity; can we literally *be* the Upanishad and "sit down near" the Truth and openly invite it to warm us with its heat and passion? If we can, we will find this is all we need. The words will flow directly into the heart of our being and begin to blossom like a spring flower opening to the warmth and light of the sun. Let's not live in the shade but place ourselves directly in the path of Truth as it is transmitted to us.

This attitude, skill or practice of "sitting down near" is never more powerful than in the Chandogya Upanishad which is believed to be one of the oldest Upanishads. "Chandogya" comes from the Sanskrit root "chanda" meaning "poetic metre", suggesting and alluding to the highest way we can listen to it. "Chandogas" were a kind of priest in ancient Hinduism who would intone the chant of sacred texts at ritual sacrifices and offerings. From all of this we get the faintest aroma of the sweetest perfume of the Truth through the Chandogya Upanishad and we can invite it into our heart by sitting down near the Truth, with a curious heart, listening as if we were about to hear the most beautiful music, poetry or see the most profound sunrise or work of art we could ever encounter. If God painted a picture, sang a sacred song or created an epic mountain range covered in beautiful nature just for us, the joy and awe we would feel is also revealed in these beautiful Upanishads. Are you sitting comfortably by the fire?

As usual we will begin with the invocation for this Upanishad:

"Lead me from the unreal to the Real.

Lead me from darkness to light.

Lead me from death to immortality.

Om shanti shanti shanti"

As we read this invocation either out loud or inwardly let us not forget it is coming from the Infinite Self/Brahman. An invocation is not reaching out to get or bring something from outside in but rather a calling forth of what is latent but already present within us. It is the Self calling to the Self. As we

invoke our awakening to deepen with these words, we can remember that it must be so and there is no question of whether this will happen or not.

(Chapters 2 and 5 are omitted from the translation and commentary of this Upanishad by Eknath Easwaran. As discussed in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad commentary I will also leave these chapters out for sake of continuity of commentary).

Chapter 1 The Word

This chapter could be considered a combination of a prayer, a meditation and an invocation and although comparatively brief we must not overlook it. Its title of “The Word” speaks to us in a biblical and absolute voice and this is how we can read it and allow the words to become a living truth inside us.

In the very first line of this Upanishad we see another powerful nugget of wisdom which is worth really spending some contemplating on. “Let us meditate on the OM the imperishable, the beginning of prayer.” This invites us to see that the OM is the beginning of everything. “OM” is the first sound or the seed of all things, it is the Self and is found in many powerful mantras and prayers over the ages. We see the OM referenced here as the beginning of prayer and perhaps we can intuit the answers to our prayer also come from the OM . If we can remember that all prayers and answers come from OM, we may notice more peace and faith that our prayers are always answered and able to see how the answer comes. Prayer that comes from the Self is so very powerful. (1)

We see a few words in the next few verses that may be unfamiliar. Referenced in verse 2 is the “Rig Veda” which is a portion of the “Vedas” which are perhaps the most ancient Hindu scripture of all. “Rig” means to praise or to know and indicate that this is the highest way to know anything. The “Rig Veda” then can be loosely translated as “praise and knowledge of the verses.” Whenever we see the word “Rig” in this Upanishad we could intuit that this means the best or the essence. “Sama” means equanimity or that everyone is equal. Finally, we see the word “Udgitha” which is the OM, the primordial mantra.

Man comes from plants (which we eat) and plants come from the earth; in turn the earth relies upon water. We can come to see the dependance of humans upon everything, we cannot survive without these things, so are we really different to them? This section of the Upanishad is pointing to the interconnectivity in all things. We may think we are a human being but aren't our bodies made of water as we drink it? Aren't we really air when we breathe it? Aren't our bodies made of the food we eat and the sunlight that helped to grow the plants? If we continue to look in this way, we will have to admit that we are not so sure what a “body” is. On the physical level we can say it is a conglomeration of food, air, water, earth, light and more. The body is also made of our parent's bodies and in turn of our grandparents and so on. In this understanding, we must begin to change how we think about the body. Does it really belong to anyone? On an energetic level we can say that the body is made up of elements and atoms in a certain combination. Is it really a body or is it atoms? Those atoms are made up of sub-atoms particles and those in turn are made from the Self or Brahman. As we begin to look like this we may find that the word “body” seems to refer to something very definite and clear but now perhaps we are not so sure. Is our body a body? Or is it atoms, sunlight, water, subatomic particles, Silence or is it our parents? Which one of these is true? Or could all of them be true? The only thing we can be certain of is that the essence of all of those things is the same and this is the OM, the Self of all things.

“Speech and breath, Sama and Rig, are couples and in the imperishable OM they come together to fulfil each other's desires” (4-7) In this beautiful line, we learn of the interaction between the unmanifest and the manifest. We could say it is the nature of the unmanifest Silence to want to make sound or that the Stillness wants to move into form, simply for the joy of it. We are directed to meditate on the OM to have all our desires fulfilled. The final few lines of this chapter compare the same actions done by someone who has realised the Truth to someone who hasn't and is still living in ignorance. The action may be the same thing but for the one who knows the Truth it comes with a

great power and this changes everything. All our actions can be sanctified with the power of the Self/OM. We must act anyway in our daily lives so the only choice we have is whether to act from the place of power and Truth or from the Illusion. This choice is always and only ours.

Chapter 3 The Wisdom of Shandilya

This section is a short passage that is the words of the rishi or sage Shandilya. Immediately, we are told the absolute Truth in this passage “This universe comes forth from Brahman, exists in Brahman, and will return to Brahman. Verily, all is Brahman”. There is nothing other than Brahman, the Absolute Reality. Even though this universe looks like a collection of ever-changing infinite forms, what it really is can be described as Brahman. The One Indivisible Self takes many shapes and appears to be infinite in number of forms but these forms are like waves on the surface of a deep and vast ocean. Each wave looks and acts differently to all the rest and yet they are all just water, expressing itself uniquely as each wave.

We are given a huge clue how to realise this in the next section when we are told that we will become whatever our deepest desire is. If our greatest desire is to realise the Truth about ourselves, each other and the universe then we will realise that. Our deepest desire drives our thoughts, words and habits and our habits either lead us towards Truth or further into illusion. (14.1)

We see the beautiful, paradoxical reference to the Self as being smaller than the kernel of a grain of millet and yet being greater than the Earth, the sky and all the worlds. Although the Self is infinite and goes on forever, it also has no size at all. The Self has no attributes that we can usually use to describe things, such as size, shape and texture. It is described as small because it can seem hidden from us when we do not know how or where to look. It is hidden inside every object and every object is hidden inside it.

Chapter 4 The Story of Satyakama

This chapter of the Chandogya also features an unusual student and teacher. Satyakama does not know his family lineage (something that would have been shameful at that time) but still goes to meet his teacher anyway, prepared to admit the Truth to the teacher, Haridrumata Gautama. Haridrumata recognises the courage of Satyakama and accepts him as a disciple anyway. After giving Satyakama 400 cows he asks them to look after them and says he will return when there are 1000 cows. (4.1-5.0)

The first unusual teacher appears in the form of the bull of the herd and tells Satyakama to meditate on the four quarters or directions (north, east, west and south). Upon meditating on them, Satyakama is told he will become full of light and master the resplendent regions of the cosmos. The bull tells him that this is one of the four feet of Brahman, or one of the four things to know and he calls it the Shining. The first instruction then is to know the manifestation as the cosmos, to meditate upon it and to see how Brahman shines as the cosmos itself. Satyakama is learning that whichever direction he goes in, he will find Brahman. We are learning that Brahman is everywhere. The bull tells him that Agni, god of fire, will tell him more. (5.1-6.1)

Next, as Satyakama makes his way back to the teacher’s house with the herd of cows he stops to make a fire in the evening. The fire speaks to him and tells him about the second foot of Brahman which is called “Without end”. Satyakama is told that if he meditates upon this, he will see that Brahman is also the sky, earth, atmosphere and oceans. (6.2-7.1)

As he continues his journey back to Haridrumata, he reaches the end of the second day and after taking care of the cows and lighting a fire, he sits down and a swan calls to him. The swan offers to teach him the third foot of Brahman, called “Full of Light”. Satyakama is learning that Brahman is in all the sources of light too, such as the sun, the moon, fire and lightning. (7.2-8.1)

Finally, towards the end of the third day Satyakama is approached by a diver bird who tells him that the fourth foot of Brahman is called “Established”. This fourth foot is guiding Satyakama to see that Brahman is present in man too as the breath, mind, eye and ear. (8.2-8.4)

After learning all this, Satyakama returns to his teacher to learn the Truth again. As he receives the Truth from his teacher it becomes a lived realisation of Truth. Satyakama goes on to be a wise Sage in his own right and instruct many beings in the realisation of the Truth.

Chapter 6 The Story of Shvetaketu

In this chapter of the Chandogya we see Shvetaketu, who is the son of Uddalaka, searching for wisdom as his father instructs him that it is time to find a teacher. The profound authors or the Upanishads are never shy to say what they feel is important and in this chapter, we see more of the repeated theme that studying scripture alone will not awaken us, we must meditate upon and try to apply what we are learning for it to become experiential knowledge. Shvetaketu studies scripture for 12 years with his teacher but when he returns home to his father it has only given him more mental knowledge. Poignantly, Uddalaka asks him if he knows how to think the unthought and know the unknown? When it becomes apparent to Shvetaketu that there is more to learn, he immediately asks his father to teach him. Here again we see the repeated theme of the unusual teacher appearing right as we are ready to see. Uddalaka is able to instruct Shvetaketu more in one conversation than in 12 years with his previous teacher. Perhaps we see again also the recurring theme of humility as Uddalaka does not assume he can teach Shvetaketu himself and sends him away to find a teacher first. The rest of this chapter details the conversation between father and son which becomes a profound Satsang. (1-1.3)

Uddalaka uses the examples of clay, gold and iron to expound how we know anything at all. When we know what something is made of, then we know all there is to know about it. Clay, iron and gold can be made into many shapes and forms and for each one we give the shape a name. In naming something, we forget its essential nature, we see a necklace, watch or ring and we forget that it really is gold. We see a nail, a magnet or a fence or railings and forget they are all iron. It is our obsession with the shape and name of things and the meanings given to those names that cloud our vision of what we really are. We have become so infatuated with the infinite number of shapes that Reality can appear as, that we forget the essence of everything is the Self. Uddalaka points his son to this fact as the only thing to realise Perhaps wisdom lies in valuing the essence of everything more than our labels and names we give to those things. Our whole conceptual knowledge of our world is based on the idea that the name of something actually tells us what it is. We think a car is actually a car, when in fact it is really made of metal, upholstery, rubber, plastic and more. Is the car even really these things or is it the ions and elements making up the rubber, metal and plastic? Or is it the Self? How much is all of our conceptual knowledge worth about any particular thing if we do not actually know what it really is? Isn't it just thoughts about names and labels? Thoughts talking about thoughts? These kinds of thoughts are useful in worldly terms, we may decide we would like to buy one type of car over another. In terms of finding peace and meaning in our lives however, we will find that when we turn attention to the essence of everything we feel a deep rest in our Being.

Shvetaketu is surprised by this deeper knowledge than was taught to him before and asks his father again to help him go deeper into the realisation of his true nature. (1.4-1.7)

In verse 2.2 we see a beautiful reference to the immanent and transcendent nature of the Self. "In the beginning was only Being, One without a second". This points to the essence of everything being the same. "In the beginning" refers to before time began, which is before the mind started to think and label and categorise. So before the mind there is only One. After the mind is thinking there is only One.

In verse 8.2 we see the famous and wonderful analogy of the mind being compared to a tethered bird flying this way and that, trying to get away. Eventually the bird comes to rest and sits still. So it is with the mind too when it starts to realise that everything it is thinking about (including itself) is none other than the Self. As the realisation hits deeper that there is only One substance to think about, we begin to taste freedom from likes and dislikes, fear and anger, grabbing and rejecting. What would be rejected if it is all the same One?

The next verse (8.4) describes how the prana (life force) differentiates itself in a human incarnation and how this reverses itself upon death. At first, there is only the Self and then it becomes the individual soul (jiva) and then the life force. The life force then enters the mind and becomes that. Later, still it becomes the body and the senses and we begin to perceive reality through the senses and mind. As it comes near for the life force to leave the body, first it will leave the senses and then withdraw back into the mind, then from the mind back into the individual soul where it rests for a while, just as we may rest after taking off an outfit of clothes before putting on another one. After each description and analogy Uddalaka uses to help Shvetaketu understand, he reminds him “You are that, Shvetaketu; you are that”.

In the next verse (9.1) we see a reference to the honey being made by bees as one whole unit. No individual flower is responsible for the honey. We see many flowers but in reality it is only one honey. We also see the analogy of many rivers all flowing into the one sea in the next verse (10.1). Before the rivers meet with the sea they seem separate and different but upon merging with the ocean we see they are all one body of water, they look different, separate and isolated but in Truth it is all only water.

In verse 11.3 Uddalaka refers to the real and only cause of death that exists; when the Self leaves the body, the body dies. There is never any other reason for death than this. Whatever words a doctor may put on our death certificate we can say this was only the mechanism of the body breaking down after the Self has already begun to withdraw the life force from the senses, body and mind. Uddalaka says “Just so, dear one, when death comes and the Self departs from the body, the body dies. But the Self dies not.”

Next, Uddalaka shows Shvetaketu the seeds of a nyagrodha (banyan) tree and asks him to look inside where he finds nothing at all. The essence of the seed, from which the whole tree will come is emptiness, nothing solid at all. Uddalaka refers to this essence as “hidden”. Uddalaka shows Shvetaketu that salt dissolved in water cannot be seen in its original shape and form anymore but it is still there as the whole water tastes salty. The salt has merged into the water and is now everywhere. Uddalaka has used many examples to tell his son the wisdom he is asking for. Again and again Uddalaka tells him that he is the Self and that there is nothing else than the Self. No matter how many forms the Self takes, some subtle and some gross and tangible, it never actually becomes anything other than itself. Just as we can give someone a whole wardrobe of outfits to wear and in each one they would look completely different, they would still be the same person inside and could never actually change.

Chapter 7 Narada's Education

This chapter is again in the form of spiritual instruction from teacher to student. The Student, Narada, approaches the sage Sanatkumara and asks to be shown how to go beyond sorrow. Narada tells the sage that he has studied the scriptures and many academic subjects too but this has not shown him how to be peaceful and joyful. Sanatkumara gives us a huge clue to self realisation with his beautiful instructions to Narada. “Whatever you know is just words, names of finite phenomena. It is the Infinite that is the source of abiding joy because it is not subject to change. Therefore, seek to know the Infinite.” What we can know is only the names of objects, forms or phenomena and these are only the way the Infinite Self is appearing. When we think we know a lot of things we really still know nothing. All of these forms will come and go and we are still left without anything lasting to rest our attention on and depend upon. Only the infinite Self, the essence and source of all phenomena, can be relied upon to never change, come or go. “Where one realises the indivisible unity of life, sees nothing else, hears nothing else, knows nothing else, that is the Infinite. “The use of the word “else” is very important here for Narada to realise the Self. If we can see, feel, touch, taste or know nothing else than the Self then we will come to know the Infinite. The Self is all there is, there is no “second” substance that was ever created nor could there ever be. The idea that there could be something else is the illusion. If there could be something other than the Self, it would no longer be infinite. If there was something other than the Self then it would now be just a phenomenon and it would have to have arisen out of something. (1.1 -24.1)

The first cause of anything has no cause. Nothing created the Self and it exists eternally and needs no support. Sanatkumara tells Narada that the Self does not depend on anything, it cannot be diminished, destroyed or changed in any way because it does not depend upon anything for its existence. There was no time when the Self did not exist and nor could there ever be, only created phenomena must depend upon something for their continued existence. The Self is utterly free. Perhaps we can take a moment to ponder what Sanatkumara is showing Narada here and go deeper in our own seeing. What would it mean for us if we did not depend upon any external factor for survival? If we did not need anything else at all (because there is nothing else) then our survival would not only be assured but it would be unquestionable. The Self is immortal and immutable. Body forms come and go inside you and you seem to live in them for a while but nothing can change you or bring you to an end. (25.1)

At the end of this chapter, we see Sanatkumara instructing Narada to meditate on the Infinite Self to be free of sorrow once and for all. To try to know, understand and take deep into our heart what it means to be infinite is a way to meditate on the Self. The sage says "In a pure mind there is constant awareness of the Self. Where there is constant awareness of the Self, freedom ends bondage and joy ends sorrow". When we meditate upon the One, the idea of two, many or infinite numbers of forms will be seen to be the only illusion and the source of all sorrow. The "pure" mind is one that sees nothing "else" than the Self. Whatever we encounter throughout our life must be our very own Self, for that is all there is. (26.2)

Chapter 8 The City of Brahman

This final chapter of the Chandogya Upanishad is absolutely full of wisdom and it begins in the very first section. "In the city of Brahman is a secret dwelling, the lotus of the heart." This lotus is the Self and this is what we should long for and realise. As soon as we begin this chapter we are immediately at the highest spiritual teaching as we are told that everything exists inside the space inside the inner space. The Self is deathless, ageless and can never decay, feel hunger or thirst. We can be in no doubt as to the highest purpose of our existence, to realise the Self and win our freedom, both in this physical world and the next. "Those who depart from this world without knowing who they are or what they truly desire have no freedom here or hereafter" shows us that we will be bound to experience another human lifetime in order to try again to realise what we really are. If we leave this body without realising the Truth/Self/Brahman we will have another opportunity to try again until we do realise. We see reference here to our realisation being once and final and affecting all of our existence. "But those who leave here knowing who they are and what they truly desire have freedom everywhere, both in this world and the next." (1.6)

In the next verse the author of this Upanishad explains to us how the higher realms operate and what to expect after we leave our body. Whatever we wish for we will experience as our intention manifests immediately without the time delay of the physical world and its dualistic opposites. In the energy (astral) realms our intention manifests immediately. "Lo, by their mere will they enjoy these things. Whatever they desire, the object of that desire arises from the power of their own thoughts; they have it and are happy." This is an important section because it reveals to us the purpose of this physical incarnation in even further detail. Without a human body then, our intention manifests immediately. Whilst that may seem like a good thing, let's imagine for a moment everything we have wanted coming to us with zero effort. We would be manifesting "objects" in energy form endlessly and enjoying continuously. Perhaps we would enjoy ourselves but would we be able to grow spiritually like this? Would we have to move beyond resistance, transcend limitations or get clearer on what we desire? Imagine giving a child a game in which they always win no matter what they do, perhaps they would enjoy it for a while but sooner or later they would get bored with no challenge and no skill involved at all. If they play, they win. No other option. In this physical world then we can see manifestation slows down with the apparent time delay and are given choices and have options we do not have in astral realms. We can experience both polarities of any choice, the good and the not so good. We can also see where there are resistant thoughts and energies inside us because here in physicality our desires will not manifest fully (or at all) if we have ideas, resistance or doubts.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity of having this physical body is that we begin to believe that we are separate and alone, apart from the Self. When we experience this belief in being a separate person enough, it gives us enough contrast to begin to transcend it finally. Only with enough apparent suffering can we come to a strong desire to see what is true for us. Could we ever have this desire on the energy realms where anything we want will show up for us? Can we suffer and grow like this? Once we have realised the reason and purpose behind our suffering, we no longer need suffering to drive our growth and we will continue to grow (albeit much more slowly) in the energy realm too after our physical body is gone. (3.2)

Each night when we go to sleep we experience the Self/Brahman, or as the Chandogya says “Like strangers in an unfamiliar country walking over a hidden treasure, day by day we enter the world of Brahman while in deep sleep but never find it, carried away by what is false.” Each night during deep sleep we experience pure non-dual bliss. There is no time, no change, no sense perception and no objects to perceive here in the land of Brahman. We wake feeling rested and then immediately go back to believing that what we perceive through our senses is a world of separate objects and beings. We have not yet unsubscribed from the belief in multiplicity and so we are only a visitor in the land of no change during our deep sleep. An awakened being knows that the world she perceives with her eyes open is nothing other than the land of Brahman. There is equanimity and endless peace because she knows what she sees is her very own Self in disguise. There isn’t multiplicity and diversity in reality, only the appearance of it. The One is disguised to look like the many. “Those who know this live day after day in heaven even in this very life”. The Self spans all the worlds both physical manifestation and subtle manifestation of energy realms. It contains all dimensions but nothing can contain the Self. There is no such concept as evil in the Self, nor is there good either. Whatever we feel we may be suffering with and whatever our problems seem to be, we will find them untrue when we realise the Self. (4.1-4.2)

We see another important clue in section 4.3 as we learn that “Only those who are pure and self-controlled can find this world of Brahman. That world is theirs alone. In that world, in all the worlds, they live in perfect freedom.” So what does it mean to be pure and self-controlled? Could it mean that we have cultivated the habit of keeping attention as much as possible on what is real? Our one pointed attention comes back to rest on the Self ever more frequently and to realise the Self is our most powerful desire. These are the characteristics of someone who will succeed in waking up to the Truth, they must want awakening more than anything else and they must encourage healthy habits that bring them closer to awakening. “Pure and self-controlled” then does not refer to our worthiness or skills but rather to our habits and these habits are driven by our deepest desire.

The Gods and the Godless

We now move into a different theme in this chapter and a conversation unfolds between Prajapati (the teacher of the gods) and the devas and asuras (gods and godless) who wanted to realise the Truth and awaken. Again we see reference in the Upanishads that even those who are currently on the wrong path or have very tamasic energy can wake up to the Truth if they turn towards the light of the Self. We also hear Krishna confirm this in the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 4, verse 36). This also supports the additional theme that tamas is not an obstruction to self realisation but can actually be a beneficial factor. Indra and Virochana approach Prajapati and wish to become his students. Indra is from the gods and Virochana is from the godless. (7.3)

After 32 years they have not realised the Self and Prajapati asks why they have stayed with him so long. Perhaps Prajapati is testing their will and strength of desire to wake up to the Truth? Prajapati declares that when you look into someone’s eyes, what you see is the immortal Self. Prajapati asks them both to look into a mirror and a bowl of water and to tell him what they see. They both declare that they see the Self in another’s eyes, in a mirror or in the reflection in a bowl of water. Prajapati knows that they have not fully recognised the Truth as yet. Virochana believed that the body is the Self and began to spread this message to the rest of the godless. They were taught that the body is to be indulged and that this is the way to joy and freedom. The godless are perhaps metaphors here

for tamasic energy that is stuck in the illusion that the Self is only the body. Indra saw clearer than Virochana and returned back to Prajapati to learn more when he realised that if the Self was the body then it could fall ill and eventually die. Pleased with Indra's understanding, Prajapati invites him to stay with him for another 32 years. (It may be helpful to know that the gods were supposedly immortal and so spending 32 years with a teacher would not be the same as it would for a mortal human being). We notice that Virochana stopped his inquiry into the nature of the Self prematurely. Perhaps this indicates the pitfalls of a lack of spiritual discipline? Virochana decided that the Self was the body, just like Indra did, but he did not question that assumption and test it out in his reasoning or discernment as Indra did. (10.1)

After this period is finished, Prajapati teaches him that the Self is that which is found in the dream state during sleep. He is testing Indra and his ability to discern the Truth and Indra rises to the challenge when he realises that if the Self is only in the dream state it can still suffer and has a beginning and an end. He returns once again to Prajapati and asks him to teach him more. Next, after another 32 years, Prajapati tells Indra that the Self can be found in deep sleep, when the mind is quiet. Again, Prajapati is testing Indra to see if he will settle for each answer and again Indra passes the test, asking for more information because he knows he does not have the full answer or realisation. (11.2)

After living with Prajapati for another five years, Indra learns the full truth. Prajapati explains that the Self is not the body, nor is the sleeping, dream or waking state because all of these require and depend upon the body. Rising above body consciousness, we find the Self is dependent on nothing at all. The Self is using the senses to experience the world, but it does not need them. It does not need anything. "Worshipping this Self in the world of Brahman, the gods obtained all worlds and all desires. Those who know this Self and realise this Self obtain all worlds and desires." Prajapati's closing remarks show us that as Christ said "The meek shall inherit the Earth". When we realise the Self we will obtain everything because it is all inside us, the world, the subtle realms and anything at all that we could desire.

A Paean of Illumination

This beautiful Upanishad finishes with a declaration or invocation of Truth. "The Divine Dark" speaks of the unmanifest, invisible Self. We also see a reference here to "Rahu" which may be unfamiliar to some. Rahu is found in Vedic astrology and represents materialism, fear, obsession and confusion. As we pass from the unmanifest divine darkness into manifestation again and then back to unmanifest again we can see the cycle of our existence. We are lost in the confusion and obsession with having a mind and body, we obsess for such a long time over being manifested into form and become consumed and fascinated by watching the passing phenomena. We may even believe that the Divine Dark does not even exist, that we do not exist if we are not existing as a form. Eventually though, illumination blossoms in us and we come to see that "Brahman is my home. I shall not lose it again". We see that we can exist as formless Divine Dark or as manifestation. We come to see we are never simply one or the other but always both. We are the Darkness of the unseen (unseen by the senses) and the Light of what is perceivable by our senses.

OM shanti shanti shanti

May the power of the Chandogya Upanishad take root in your heart and blossom into deep illumination. Let it be so.

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