



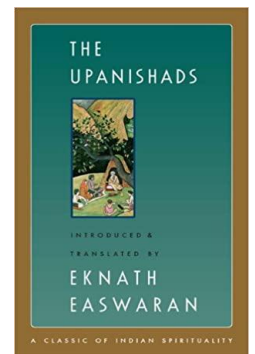
Isha and Katha Upanishads - Commentaries

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.

Chapter 1 The Isha Upanishad - The Inner Ruler

The Isha Upanishad is perhaps the most revered by many teachers and students alike and it is shorter than most and very powerful. Isha carries an essential message for us all and also serves as a fundamental platform to base our spiritual practice on. As this Upanishad comes to a close, we are drawn a beautiful picture of the awakened way and is the epitome of devotion to the Self/Noumenon/Brahman.

We will take each part of this beautiful scripture and distil its wisdom, savouring it like a cool glass of water after a long drought. The Isha Upanishad has the capacity to instruct, inspire and move us beyond the mind's doubt into awe and reverence for the unified Consciousness that is our real nature. The essential gifts of any of the Upanishads is to help lift us out of our ordinary thinking process into something much more profound and this is never more so than in the Isha.

The invocation at the beginning of the Isha is also a key to understanding its meaning:

***“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”***

“All this is full. All that is full” points to the unmanifest Silence, Stillness or Consciousness which is as yet not taking any shape at all and yet is absolutely full of all things that have existed in the past, do exist now and could ever exist in the future. “This” refers to the formless ground of Being and “that” refers to the manifestation of form and imbues it with the fullness of where it came from. This in itself is an important point as we are being guided to realise that nothing is at all lost in the manifestation process. No form can be less than perfect (or full) because it came directly from “this”. We see this again in the second, third and fourth lines. Fullness can only give birth to fullness, there is no imperfection in manifestation (except in our imagination!). “When fullness is taken from fullness, fullness still remains” points also to the Infinite power of the Self. The Fullness is never depleted and is not even slightly diminished by the manifestation of the whole universe. The universe and creation are happening effortlessly to the Self, like steam rising from boiling water. No effort is made to produce steam, it simply happens.

Now let's consider the message of this invocation in respect to our own imagined flaws and self-doubts. In essence, all of our unworthiness can vanish in a moment if we fully allow this message to pierce our hearts. This invocation is saying, in essence, that all of our imagined imperfections are nonsense. It is telling us that from Fullness, only Fullness can come and that there is no other option! In the light of this we must rethink our shame, guilt and unworthy thoughts. How could we fail to realise the Truth of our Being and live like this with this beautiful invocation taking root in our hearts? Will we keep holding onto ideas that we may not make it, don't deserve awakening or that we are not ready as yet? From perfection comes only perfection. All else is our imagination. The fall from Grace never occurred. If we were to simply contemplate this point alone long enough, ultimate liberation would ensue

The first few verses of this Upanishad contain the essence of the whole text and the essence of all non-dual teachings. We are told that “The Lord is enshrined in the hearts of all” and to “rejoice in him through renunciation” in reference to the fact the Lord is all there really is. We see the same reference to renunciation being the key to joy and freedom here as we saw in the Bhagavad Gita; we are told to renounce thoughts of anything other than the Lord as the key to freedom because in Reality there is only the Lord and nothing else exists. Even if we imagine something other than the Lord/Self exists it would still be happening inside the Lord. Our imagination is made of the same stuff as the Lord/Self. In confirmation of this we are urged to “Covet nothing. All belongs to the Lord”. There is ultimately no use in wanting anything other than the Self because there is nothing other than it. This does not mean we should suppress or ignore all other desires, rather to simply realise that whatever we think we are wanting, it is actually the Lord appearing as that thing. We find in verse 2 a key to a happy, long and healthy life as we are urged to work in freedom. The phrase “thus alone” is repeated twice for emphasis so that we may understand that this is the only

way to work and live in freedom. Any thoughts that are allowed to continue around the existence of something other than the Self/Lord will lead to suffering from the sense of a core division into two That which is One.

We are warned in verse 3 that all those who refuse (or are as yet unable to) see that everything is made of the same substance, that all is the Self, will continue to be born again and again involuntarily. This is not some arbitrary punishment for not having woken up but from the unfilled desires we still carry as a separate being. We may want more peace, less fear, more money, a better career or any number of things until we realise what everything is actually made of. When we believe in this core division of “me and other” then we will find it impossible to satisfy these desires. We are looking for something that does not exist. We will also find we are unable to feel safe, loved and valued too because the idea of separation keeps us looking outwards to the other imaginary beings and things we think will bring us those feelings or states. “Utterly devoid of love for the Lord” shows us why it is often so challenging for us to come out of the illusion of two-ness or duality. Whilst we love two-ness we will find it impossible to love Oneness. (1-3)

Verses 4 and 5 point us back to the Infinite nature of the Self and also its timeless nature. “Swifter than thought, swifter than the senses” indicate that the Self is here before thought and the sense perception. “Though motionless, he outruns all pursuit” also points to the effortless nature of the Self, indicating the Self is already wherever and whatever we would try to reach and pursue. This verse alone can save years of spiritual seeking and struggle if we allow it to enter our hearts. (4-5)

We see the key to freedom from suffering and loss in verses 6, 7 and 8. If you can see yourself (with inner vision or knowing and not with our physical eyes) as being omnipresent because you are formless, then you will always be free of fear and the sense of loss. You cannot lose anything or anyone (even in death) when there is nothing other than you. You cannot fear anything or desire anything when there is nothing other than you. We are also insulated and immune to suffering when we can see that only the Lord (you) exists as we see in these words:” How can the multiplicity of life delude the one who sees its unity?” We are also reminded that the Self is the source of all apparent creation because it “holds the cosmos together”. (6-8)

From this point on the Isha takes a different turn and begins to warn us where we may get caught in illusion. I always feel these verses have a cautionary mood to them and apply universally to us all because we all falter along the path at some points. We all feel the world within or without is more real than the other at some point. If we are sure the outside world alone is real, we will be obsessed with action and trying to change the manifestation to make ourselves feel better. This will only cause us to feel more disturbed though because the outside world IS us and it will be like trying to change ourselves. Consider the last time you found yourself trying to change what is and pushing against some experience you were having. Did you feel peaceful or in fact even more disturbed by trying to change it? When we feel the inner world of our own separate sense of self is more real than anything else we will be even more lost in illusion than when we find ourselves constantly trying to change the outer world. The Isha tells us that the best way is to combine meditation with action, or that meditation should lead to selfless action. (9-11)

We are also warned against taking the view that the Lord is transcendent only (only the formless) as it may stop us from seeking the realisation of what we actually are from the belief we cannot experience it now. The perspective of some religions also point to the idea that God can only be realised or met after physical death and never during this lifetime. If we believe that the Lord is immanent only then we will feel that there is nothing other than physical reality or that the Lord dwells inside each of us but that we are separate to it. We can believe in a Creator who sustains the universe but still suffer from the illusion that this is separate to us. The wisest way then is to see the Lord/Self is both immanent and transcendent and this makes us immune to suffering. The one who perceives God must already BE God or as Krishna urges us in the Bhagavad Gita we must “Behold the Self by the Self”. (12-14)

Finally, the Isha switches to a mood of praise and reverence for the Lord with a nugget of spiritual guidance on meditation. We read now a prayer or plea to the Divine to help us realise our true nature. It is important to note that prayer is from the Self, by the Self, to the Self. It is not the prayer of a “someone” trying to find their way home back to God/the Lord but rather the absolute

invocation of the power of the real Self to burst through illusion now and into freedom. Such prayers are always answered and once we realise the power of such a prayer we are out of suffering. When we understand this, we will realise the spiritual blessing being bestowed on us by these great Rishis (seers or sages) over the thousands of years since this Upanishad was first written or spoken. These last few verses of the Isha show exemplify why the Upanishads have stood the test of time over thousands of years and will still be relevant millennia from now. It brings tears to my eyes and joy in my heart knowing that these great Beings who are the authors of these valuable scriptures thought ahead and spoke these prayers and invocations on our behalf even then. Even all that time ago, they knew the spiritual struggle we would face to overcome illusion and took the time to make sure we would be able to. Such a blessing is very rare indeed and must be realised in its importance. When the Self wants to wake up to Truth it always will. Our study of this Upanishad (and the others) is evidence of the fulfilment of the desire and prayers of the Seers of the Upanishads.

We are given a hint of how to realise this Truth in this very powerful sentence: “O mind, meditate on the eternal Brahman”. This is really all the spiritual guidance and practise an astute student needs as we come to realise this is the only thing to do. To meditate on Brahman (because that is all there is) is the only way to practise to find our way out of suffering. There is no point in offering worship to any other thing or person because ultimately, all is Brahman (Self). The core imagined division of “me and other” never occurred and therefore to practise from there as a separate self will only lead to more delusion. (15-18)

May the power, wisdom and instruction of the Isha find its home in your heart and may you live in freedom.

Chapter 2 The Katha Upanishad - Death as the Teacher

The Katha Upanishad is unique because it really is the story of a Satsang held between teacher and student but with the most unusual participants! Death himself, Yama is the god of death, is the teacher and the student is a teenage boy named Nachiketa. Right from the start of this powerful scripture there is so much we can learn about ourselves from the choices the great author of this work made. There are layers upon layers of wisdom in this powerful Upanishad to uncover and we will look together. This commentary is by no means claiming to have seen all the mysteries of this Upanishad (as no interpretation can) and it only meant as food for thought and to stimulate intelligent inquiry in the reader.

Let's consider, first of all, if in fact it is unusual that Yama is the teacher. How many of us would actively seek out death and ask for spiritual instruction from him as Nachiketa does? How many of us would demand guidance as Nachiketa does? For most of us, death is the last thing we want to think about and we avoid it at all costs. We entertain and distract ourselves as much as is possible from this vital area of life but we can only do that for so long before death comes knocking on our door. The death of a relationship, a loved one or a pet can force us to think about death even when we try to avoid it. Eventually we all must come to ponder this subject deeply and transcend it and the Katha helps us to recognise this. We can entertain ourselves with thoughts and experiences but death will keep bringing our attention back here. Death is the relentless teacher that we do not want, like or even choose to seek out and yet it is perhaps the most effective overall.

Death is the outcome for us all eventually and so we all must think about it at the end of our physical life if not before. None of us want to think about it but nonetheless, it will not go away. Perhaps we may even move towards religion, philosophy or spirituality as a way to make ourselves feel better about death but eventually we will have to face the fact that this body we are using will die - nothing is more certain. Perhaps we could say then that death is the most compassionate teacher of all, allowing us to avoid it for a while but then making us do what we do not want to and face the inevitable. Perhaps death is the most available teacher because it is universal and treats everyone equally. We find a similar teacher in physical pain and loss. They never let us escape what we have insisted on transcending and will keep holding our hand even when we try to pull away. They will keep bringing us back to our journey into the Deathless Self despite our unwillingness and outright hostility to them. Death cannot be offended by our fear and hatred of it and so makes the perfect teacher, unwanted but nonetheless perfect. If the purpose of having this

mind and body is to realise the real nature of our being as the Immortal Self then what better teacher could we ask for? That which suggests and insists upon endings perhaps may be the only thing that will eventually bring us willingly to Satsang.

It also serves us to consider what underlying wisdom we can glean from the fact that the student here is a teenage boy. How many of us would seek out death as a teenager to help us find peace? Would we even be able to admit that death is inevitable as a teenager? Why has the author of this great Upanishad chosen a teenager as the student? Perhaps he represents that in us which is rebellious and unable to follow along with society's normal ways of thinking? Perhaps he shows an inner aspect of questioning the usual ways of thinking? Could Nachiketa represent that which eventually rebels against the tendency to avoid thinking about death? At some point we all come to the most vital questions of all by overcoming the resistance to looking at death. The teenage way of being is to seek out our own destiny, to not go blindly with the majority and to create anarchy in our own thought limited self. Isn't that what happens to us all when we finally ask "who am I?", "what happens after I die?" and "how can I ever be happy fully now I know I am going to die?" There is a lesson for us here then that we do not need to reject this antagonistic, rebellious part of ourselves but merely to find the best area to focus it on. What would happen in our awakening if we choose to be antagonistic towards our tendency to keep on blaming ourselves or seeing flaws and faults where there are none? Haven't we all used this mischievous, mutinous quality to our own end without realising? If we turn this energy towards what most of us tend to avoid, the outcome may really surprise us. Could we rebel against this urge to avoid looking at death long enough to realise the Deathless and Timeless essence of our Being?

Let's start as usual with the invocation:

"May the Lord of Love protect us.

May the Lord of Love nourish us.

May the Lord of love strengthen us.

May we realise the Lord of Love.

May we live with love for all;

May we live in peace with all;

OM shanti shanti shanti"

In this powerful invocation we see a prayer that must be fulfilled if we can hold it in the light of what is true. This is not something written by a Sage thousands of years ago and now being read and digested by you, the student. This is the Self, desiring for Itself all the grace, wisdom, freedom and joy that is our birthright. If we look at this invocation as a glimpse of our own future, rather than as some nice words to try to live by, we will feel very excited. Whatever the Self wants, it must have or achieve. There is nothing in this phenomenal universe that can get in the way of this. This invocation is YOU speaking directly to YOU. That may give you goosebumps if you take it into the heart! If you read this as the Self it is what is certain to happen. If you read this as a separate being it is what might happen at some point in the future.

The Katha is divided into two main parts in this translation and each of the two parts is divided into three smaller subsections. We will look at each in turn and dive deeper into the wisdom of each.

- **Part 1 Section 1**

As soon as this beautiful Upanishad begins, we are into very direct spiritual instructions that resonate many times throughout all scriptures. Vajasravasa, Nachiketa's father has given away his possessions to progress in his awakening journey. Nachiketa can see immediately that this will not work because anything sacrificed as a separate "someone" in order to gain benefits for a separate "me" will not work. He can also see that his father gave away possessions that are of very little or value to himself (cows that can no longer produce milk). If we examine this first part of the text, we see a vital clue here and we are reminded that our intention behind renouncing possessions is more important than what we actually renounce. We can give away everything that we own and leave only a begging bowl and actually end up further entrenched in the illusion that we are a separate being. Contradictory to this, we could give away nothing at all and live in the middle of a noisy city, work a job and raise a family and live in freedom from suffering.

We can also see that giving away something of great value to us, rather than something we do not need, is going to gain us the most spiritual benefit. As Krishna says many times in the Bhagavad Gita and as we learn in the Isha Upanishad, to renounce something of great value really means to renounce our own thoughts of separation. Our treasured stories about our self and others are our most prized possessions and we feel very reluctant to let them go and this is usually because they feel very true. The Katha also points to a very subtle point that what we value immensely at first later becomes meaningless and of no value. Consider how easily we let go of thoughts that we know are no longer true. If someone were to offer us now 100 beautiful insights about the Truth in exchange for 1000 thoughts in our mind about life as a separate being, we would most likely gladly pay that cost. If we remember how hard and dangerous it seemed to even question if we are a separate being at first (and how much resistance we had) we will know this is true. Giving away thoughts about ourselves eventually becomes as easy as giving away cows that can no longer produce milk. We love those thoughts and care for them, just like we would the cows, but they have no special value anymore and they are just thoughts. (1-3)

Nachekita asks his father who he would offer him to and here we find a deep teaching that wisdom, truth or even a great teacher can come in the form of a young boy. We must not assume we know what form wisdom will come in and we will receive many blessings if we stay open. The beautiful lotus flower grows and prospers from the deepest mud of its humble beginnings. Vajasravasa tells his son he will offer him to death, intending it as an expression of his annoyance with his son but perhaps again here we see a profound teaching that the highest thing any of us can offer ourselves to is the idea of death. Nachekita expresses this when we are told of his thoughts. "I go, first of many who will die, in the midst of many who are dying, on a mission to Yama, king of death". The death spoken of here is metaphorical and allegorical, as we approach the king of death, we know we will not come back the same from this encounter. We will be forever changed and what was untrue in our thoughts will die, we will be forever more unable to completely believe we are alone in this universe, scared and searching for happiness. This is the kind of death we all seek, a death of the illusion and pain and the birth of freedom, joy and love. (4-6)

When Nachekita reaches Yama's house he finds he must wait 3 days to see Yama. Perhaps Yama is testing Nachekita and seeing how much he really wants to be free. We have all experienced such tests in life when we have to decide how much we really want to be free. When a familiar story plays in our head and we feel that pull to agree with us in those moments we are standing in Yama's doorway deciding whether to stay or leave. It is the great test that all spiritual students face over and over. Perhaps we can learn from Nachekita and rebel against the tendency to walk away and go back to what is familiar but painful in our consciousness. Yama grants three boons or blessings to Nachekita because he was able to wait for three days and this could perhaps signify the spiritual blessing we receive from being willing to go beyond our mind even though at times it may seem difficult or even impossible.

Nachekita immediately asks for his father's anger to disappear so that his father may recognise him when he returns and receive him with love. Perhaps Nachekita is asking for his own father's awakening here, knowing that only in Truth can his father actually receive him in love and release anger. Yama also indicates this when he grants this boon and says "When he sees you released from the jaws of death, he will sleep again with a mind at peace". Again the mystery of the Katha is apparent here; Nachekita is supposed to be the student and yet is already evolved enough to immediately ask for his father's freedom and not his own. There are many points in this Upanishad that the roles of teacher and student are not so clear. We cannot really say absolutely who is the teacher and who is the student and this in itself is a powerful teaching. (7-11)

Immediately then, Nachekita shows his wealth of knowledge by describing the kingdom of heaven and asking Yama for instruction on how to realise it. "heaven" in this context is the state or condition of liberation from the mind. Again, it is poignant that the "dread king of death" is the teacher. What we learn only from death will set us free. It is also important that Nachekita is able to listen and then repeat the instruction back to Yama, indicating that he has at least some ability to listen attentively (and therefore is not completely lost in his mind).

The altar here is a metaphor for that place inside us where we hold what is most precious to us. It is the place where we offer anything and it is the urge to renounce. The fire is also metaphorical

and is the internal fire of devotion to the source of all creation (of course a ritual fire ceremony can be held but it would be wise to focus more on what it represents than the ceremony itself). This ritual represents our willingness to renounce the mind and our devotion to freedom from all suffering; when we offer all our identification with the body and mind into the fire of our devotion to Truth, freedom is assured.

Yama points to this when he offers a special boon or blessing to Nachekita when he describes that anyone who performs this fire ritual three times but consciously knowing what it represents will achieve total liberation. This is a reference to the power of the Self and that any action performed is not so important compared to the intention behind the action. When the Self (appearing as a human being) does something with the purest of intentions to wake up to the Truth and live in freedom, nothing at all can stop it. Intention is all powerful as it has to manifest as the Self. More important than any action is the reason for doing it and what you know yourself to be as you do it. (12-19)

As we move further into this part of the Upanishad, Nachekita increases his urgency and inquiry with Yama and wants to know (for his third boon) whether or not we exist or not after our body dies. Yama urges him to ask for another boon and not have this question answered, he says that the secret of death is hard to answer, but Nachekita is insistent and perhaps senses that Yama is testing him to see if he really wants to know the answer but Nachekita knows there is the no greater blessing than this. Yama goes further by trying to tempt him, offering to give him all the worldly things he could ever want but Nachekita knows better. He says “these pleasures last but until tomorrow, and they wear out the vital powers of life, how fleeting is all life on earth!” Nachekita points to the fact that no human can really be ultimately happy once they have seen the face of death. He says “we cannot live while you are here”.

Perhaps there is one final clue to the path to peace in this section. Nachekita says “Having approached an immortal like you...” as he addresses Death. It is interesting that Death is immortal because it signifies that even death itself is transcended in the end and that at the other side of death is immortality. Perhaps we could say that because of death we may realise our own immortality. We can even consider that death and immortality are perhaps two ends of one continuous spectrum and that we can appear as this mortal body, born and destined to die at some point and we can appear as the immortal Self of all and yet they are not opposites at all. (20-29)

- **Part 1 Section 2**

The second part is really a Satsang between Yama and Nachekita and it is powerful. Yama instructs Nachekita on the most important things to focus on in his pathway and how to move beyond death into Timelessness.

Yama speaks first of the two major motivations behind any actions we take and again we see a reference to joy being the highest motivation. Our actions are either prompted from an urge to pursue momentary pleasure from the “perennial joy” or the Self. Consider something as simple as deciding whether to eat something; you could choose to eat it from the momentary pleasure it gave you as you tasted that food in your mouth and that pleasure would be fine but would only last a few minutes at most. Alternatively, you can be in the state of joy and eating the food as an offering to your Self enjoying every delicious morsel. The food eaten from pursuit of pleasure would probably have lots of thoughts diminishing the experience and is eaten in a lower energy field which makes it more challenging for the body to digest it and use it. Food eaten as an unfolding of joy is easily digested in that high energy field and the body can easily use what it needs and discard the rest. The flavours of the food will be experienced in all their exquisite nature and it will be an uplifting experience. From joy it's very hard to eat too much and there is a natural listening to your body and what/how much it wants. Now, let's consider this in terms of our spiritual practice. What difference would it make to sit down and meditate because it feels so joyful to do so, rather than to meditate because we feel we should do it? In the first instance, we can enjoy the meditation whatever the outcome (even if our mind is restless) because there is no goal or anything we need to achieve from the time spent sitting. From the latter, we will feel worse because we are trying to get something from it (momentary pleasure of a deeper state) and we may even feel further away from awakening afterwards. In simple terms then, anything at all done from pure joy is adding to that joy

and moving us deeper into the realisation of who we really are. Yama says “This is the choice one is to make always. Those who are wise recognise this, but not the ignorant”. Looking at this even in terms of studying this Upanishad (or anything else at all) we can see we always have a choice. Are we studying this for the joy of communing deeply with the words written or spoken by the authors of the Upanishads? If this is the case, we succeed at this and everything we do. Or are we studying it in order to try to get towards some goal in the future? In which case we will only see failure as the very act of trying to move towards something in the future is impossible. This is our only choice ever as Yama says. We must pick the kids up from school, clean the house, go to work etc and the only choice we have is our reason “why”. Consider how useful these commentaries would be if they were written because I felt I should and not because it feels the right time now and it is so enjoyable.

Yama acknowledges Nachekita’s spiritual progress when he says “Well, have you renounced these passing pleasures so dear to the senses, Nachekita, and turned your back on the way of the world that makes mankind forget the goal of life”. Here we see validation that Nachekita (although only a teenage boy in this lifetime) is very far down the spiritual path already and has chosen the way of the wise (joy) rather than the way of the world (to seek pleasure). Nachekita is worthy of spiritual instruction not because he is better than anyone else but because he has chosen long term, stable joy over momentary pleasure. He has chosen wisdom over ignorance. We are given yet another jewel of wisdom here in this Upanishad as Yama shows us what actually makes us worthy of instruction is where we choose to place our focus. “Worthy” is not feeling a certain way, having done a certain amount of spiritual practice, feeling ready for awakening, following the teacher or any other number of things our mind may say it is. Let us be clear here what this Upanishad is saying - what makes us “worthy” is our recognition that there is a choice we can make in any particular moment and choosing that as often as we can. By this measure then, we are all “worthy” because we are doing the best we can to focus on the Truth (rather than illusion and pleasure). Paradoxically, the moment we realise there is a choice we can make, we have already made it. When we know there is something other than our usual sense of who we are, with all its issues and problems, naturally we are coming out of identification with it anyway. Yama says that those who are deluded and hypnotised by illusion are unaware they are caught. This is important to understand because it points to the fact that once we begin to see we have been caught in the mind, we are already freeing ourselves of it. In ignorance Yama says he holds sway over people and in wisdom they are freeing themselves from the reach of death and realising their own immortality. (1-6)

It is important to note that we are not told that pleasure is bad, wrong or evil by Yama or Nachekita. Pleasure is only to be recognised as not the way to lasting joy and peace. We must not infer from this instruction that we are to ignore or mistreat our body and our senses, merely not to become obsessed with pleasure and ignoring the road to unending joy. We are being asked to keep our focus on what is True.

Next, Yama describes how rare and beautiful it is that we have even heard about the Self and that we have dedicated our lives to it. Perhaps we feel it is not such a big deal because it is just “my spiritual search” but here we are told otherwise. We are blessed indeed to not only know about the Truth, be actively engaged in the pathway to it. Only a few make it this far out of all humanity and so we can celebrate that we are already on the pathway and watching our own awakening unfold. Yama continues by saying that the mind cannot realise the truth and again alludes to the fact it is the Self that is on the pathway and never the ego. When we recognise our own self in all things and that all things are inside our own Self, we bless those who are still seeking Truth with our own power and realisation. Yama uses the word “osmosis” here to suggest the effortless nature of the transmission of Truth between an awakened being and a seeker. Osmosis occurs to water across a membrane naturally, spontaneously and effortlessly spreading from where there is a high concentration to a lower concentration and this is a perfect metaphor for the benefit of being around an awakened being. Awakening happens not by logic or scholarly study says Yama but instead through “close association with a realised teacher”. He tells Nachekita he is already wise because he knows the best thing to focus on and the best place to go to have that realisation occur. As Socrates said “The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing” and here Yama is saying the same. When someone realises they do not know who they really are, then they are only a tiny distance from total freedom. Nachekita again proves he knows what the most important thing

is by reminding us that he has already let go of seeking worldly desires and Yama agrees, reminding him that he rejected all of Yama's offerings of worldly achievements without a second thought. It is important here to remind ourselves that the Upanishads are not making family, career and other worldly pursuits wrong and they are not telling us not to live and work in the world, they are merely counselling us that these things should not be the main focus of our life. Instead, the things we have and achieve in our life should be the fruit of applied wisdom. An abundant outer world will never bring joy on its own but it can be a reflection of the joy we already feel. (7-11)

Next, we are instructed to follow the path of meditation on the Self to realise freedom. Yama gives us a beautiful glimpse into the enlightened state and says those who are living in freedom are beyond pain and pleasure, beyond identification with the body and mind and live in "joy abiding". Yama says "I see the gates of joy are opening for you, Nachekita" and he is excited, asking Yama to show him what is beyond all duality or right and wrong, past and future etc. Yama points to sense-restraint (not seeking pleasure) and to self-naughting (not pursuing goals that fulfil only the separate being because this will only strengthen illusion's grip upon us. Anything I try to achieve for me (even my awakening) will solidify and cement my belief in the fact I am a separate being. He also points to the fact that all spiritual disciplines lead one to the Self eventually, the Om or the Godhead is the end of all journeys. "When Om reverberates unceasingly within the heart, that one is indeed blessed and deeply loved as one who is the Self " says Yama, pointing to the fact that when remembrance or knowing of the Self has become automatic and effortless one is awakened and free. He finally answers Nachekita's question and says that even when the body dies, we do not die. The Self lives on and is seemingly hidden in the heart of all beings. Perhaps the "heart" here refers to the innermost core of our being.

Again, we are told the briefest of instruction here, to extinguish self-will, as the way to the Self. This self-will only leads to more confusion and takes us further from the Truth. If I pursue my own awakening, I am going to feel further from it than ever. I can only come to realise I am already what I have been seeking to find. Yama alludes to just how powerful our meditation upon the Self is when he tells Nachekita "Though one sits in meditation in a particular place, the Self within can exercise his influence far away. Though still, he moves everything everywhere". Hidden in this sentence is another powerful nugget of Truth as Yama alludes to the fact it is not, nor has ever been, the separate someone that is meditating. It is the omnipresent Self meditating. (12-22).

The final few verses of this section give us vital spiritual information that is important to understand. Yama says "The Self can be attained only by those whom the Self chooses." At first reading this we may feel disempowered and as if it is out of our hands as to whether we awaken or not. We may feel there is some other power than us, such as Grace which chooses who awakens and who doesn't. If we ponder this, we can see that the Self has already chosen you and you have chosen the Self. This is the wise choice of focus we were learning about earlier. The Self chooses those who are worthy and that is everyone and anyone who holds the most important desire above all other desires. You have chosen You already and reading this Upanishad is simply the unfolding of that choice and the mechanism of the awakening but not the cause. Again, Yama points to this when he finishes this section by saying "None else can know the omnipresent Self, whose glory sweeps away the rituals of the priest and the prowess of the warrior and puts death to death itself." When the Self chooses Itself in wisdom the only outcome is awakening, nothing else is possible. No other agent than the Self would choose the Self so the very fact you are here reading this shows the Self that you are has already chosen a long time ago. This means awakening for you is not an "if" at all but an absolute definite. The mind cannot perceive the Self but can only think about it, this means the fact that we can notice awareness, silence or stillness is evidence that the great Self is waking up to Itself even now. It is the Self that draws us to try to realise the Self always. Nothing else exists. (23-25)

- **Part 1 Section 3**

The third section of Part 1 of this Upanishad now moves into a deeper instructional stance as Yama begins a series of descriptions and direct instructions aimed at ending Nachekita's suffering.

We could take only this section of the Upanishad and it would contain all we needed for freedom, so it is important to take this section slowly and absorb the wisdom in it for us.

This section begins with Yama describing the apparent two living inside the “secret cave of the heart”. He describes the modes and methods of the Self and the ego so that we may compare. We may be tempted at this point to say that there is only one but Yama is giving us a great gift by showing us the Self and the ego ARE one and simply function in different ways. Yama implies there is no difference between them or that what the ego really is, is a way of being, rejecting what it does not like and groping for what it does like. The ego is caught in its own trap because it can only think about things and decide if it likes or dislikes something based on whether or not it feels that thing will help it achieve its goals. That decision is made from thoughts about the thing and never from actually experiencing it. The ego cannot actually experience anything, it merely labels something (based on previous experience of that thing) as soon as it encounters an object. The previous experience of something and therefore the label ego gives it of wanted or unwanted is totally detached from any actual direct contact with it. It spins around forever labelling, rejecting or grasping, based on its own thought conclusions which are in turn formed from thoughts. The ego can never experience Reality. It is a mechanism for sorting and classification, more like a glossary or dictionary of definitions and it is all based on mind and not actual experience.

In contrast, the Self neither likes or dislikes because it is only experiencing the thing-ness of it and has only the ability to let it be as it is. The Self has no other option but to directly experience it and it will even experience the labels ego forms about it too without commenting on it. The Self just experiences and this allows the thing-ness of whatever is experienced to move and change into a more pleasant shape or form that ego would call enjoyable. Paradoxically, ego cannot ever transcend something or let it be because of its very tendency to label it. The labelling itself is an act of pushing it away and creates the imaginary “me and what I am labelling”. The Self could only ever say one thing about something it experiences and that would simply be “it is”.

If we take the example of fear, ego will dislike it and label it as bad, pushing it away as much as it can. Ego wants to feel better but it's very labelling of fear as bad creates a sense of separation and duality and therefore it feels bad. The very mechanism of ego is limited in duality and separation and can never be otherwise. Let us notice here that Yama never says ego is bad, unwanted or worse than the Self, he simply describes the two modes of being. He also does not say the Self is better than the ego! To do so would seem to create the sense of them being two and perpetuate suffering.

Yama drops in a pearl of wisdom at the end of verse 1 when he says “So declare the illumined sages and the householders who worship the sacred fire in the name of the Lord”. “Householder” in this context refers to someone who is fully committed to the spiritual pathway but has chosen not to leave their homes, families and work to continue their journey in seclusion or in an ashram or other place. The Katha is making reference here to the fact householders are equal in stature to the illumined sages and this is very important to recognise. We may have encountered thoughts in our own mind or suggestions from others that stepping away from worldly life to live a life of seclusion alone in the forest or in a monastery, ashram or other such place is better than those who choose to pursue the pathway whilst working and raising a family. This is a huge myth that pervades a lot of the spiritual world and is simply not true. In the “Bhagavad Gita” we see Krishna urging Arjuna to live a life of “wisdom in action” applying what he learns in his Satsang through the vehicle of his daily life. We also see this in the “Dhammapada” which is the teachings directly of the Buddha. As the Buddha would travel from place to place in India some people would give up their life and follow him around to embrace his teachings. Others could not do that due to family commitments and other things and they asked him for something they could continue to study after he had moved on to the next village. The “Dhammapada” was his answer to this plea not to be left suffering without his teachings.

In three of the most important scriptures to come out of ancient India, we see this viewpoint that staying in your life and applying what your spiritual practice reveals to your life is not only as good as the other option and may in fact be even better. As we learned in the Isha and the Katha already, renunciation is best focused on our thoughts and not our life circumstances. Of course, it may suit some beings to leave their life and find some place they can study and assimilate and that

is absolutely best for them, we see this time and time again with great sages and Christian mystics over the ages. The only thing we must guard against is the idea that this is the only or best way for everyone. The best way to awaken for you is to live your life as it is right now for it is tailor made for your awakening.

Yama continues by urging us to use our discriminating faculties to know the difference between what is permanent and what is transient or temporary. He uses this beautiful metaphor of the chariot, charioteer, horses and the roads travelled to describe further. "Selfish desires" does not imply that they are wrong, lower or to be dismissed but rather to be understood that they only arise when the Self is confusing itself with the body and wants something that benefits only that particular body and mind. "Selfish desires" take us round around on various roads, not knowing where we are heading, being pulled along by the horses forever. Discrimination between what is real and unreal allows us to finally guide the journey by using the reins to show the horses where we want to go. Most importantly here, Yama is implying that discrimination and deathlessness are the same thing. It is important to note that "discrimination" may have taken on a different meaning over the time since this was written and Yama means the simple act of discerning or deciding between. "Discrimination" comes from the root Latin word "discriminate" which means "to distinguish between" and has no reference to labelling what we distinguish between as good or bad! Notice also the word "distinguish" has another meaning of being good, elevated or special. We often described people who have achieved things as being "distinguished" or a "distinguished guest". Could Yama be saying here then that discrimination is in fact the most important skill of all? (1-9)

In verse 10 Yama explains that everything we think exists (such as mind, senses, body and intellect) are all really the pure undifferentiated Brahman or Self. He says that Brahman is hidden and "does not shine forth" without keeping our mind one-pointed. Again, we see discrimination and discernment cited as the highest quality that makes the Self reveal itself to us. A one-pointed mind means it is focused on discernment only between the real and the unreal, the eternal and the transient, the Noumenon and the phenomena. Yama goes even further as to say that this one-pointed mind is the highest meditation of all and eventually brings us to the "Lord of Love" which is the Self in which there is nothing else. All transient, temporary phenomena are seen to be the Deathless Self. Wisdom emerges when we see that the Self can "hide" by appearing as the infinite number of appearance (but not actual) manifestations or dis-appear as the invisible infinite, formless Oneness. This is the end point of meditation where no matter what our senses perceive, we find only the Infinite Reality. (10-16)

- **Part 2 Section 1**

In this first section Yama continues by showing us the Self seems to be veiled to us at first. As we look through the senses at the outer world we begin to believe in multiplicity and diversity more than the unity of the Self. It has not yet occurred to us that the world is also our very own Self. When Yama says "A sage withdrew his senses from the world of change and, seeking immortality, looked within and beheld the deathless Self" he did not mean that we have to destroy or ignore the sense perception that is always going on in the waking state. When we seek that which is immortal, we must be seeking that which is always here and nothing we perceive through our senses is going to last forever. Even our subtler inner world of thoughts, emotions, dreams and desires will not last forever. Yama cautions us to "Seek not the changeless in the world of change" because even when looking for the Timeless Self, we usually begin by trying to find it in the world of phenomena.

Next, Yama brings us full circle as he reveals the body, senses, waking state and sleeping is all enjoyed by the Self. He is not telling us to disregard our human life but rather to realise the actual one enjoying it is the Deathless Self. Yama tells us "Those who know the Self as enjoyer of the honey from the flowers of the senses, ever present within, ruler of time, go beyond fear. For this Self is supreme!" Only when we realise our true nature as the Self, the changeless appearing also as change, can we be free of fear once and for all. (1-5)

Yama continues by saying that this urge or fire to create shapes and forms from the formless (personified by the god Brahma the creator) is in the hearts of each of us. It can be a very popular

idea that the Self created the universe some time ago in some sort of initial massive act of creation and since then it is running on its own momentum but this is not really how it is. Creation is an ongoing energy that never stops and we find that we are Brahma himself. Every time you have a thought, an emotion, paint a picture, create life through sexual intimacy or even cook a meal, we are creating something, always. Next, Yama shows us a different aspect of the Self found in the goddess of energy Aditi) is also the Self and is in each heart. The vital force to fuel our desire to awaken and to pursue life is also the Self. It is Aditi that fuels this urge to write these words and to read them even now. Finally, Yama tells us that the god of fire (Agni) is also our very own Self as he continues to point to the various ways that the Self is appearing. This beautiful metaphor spoken by Yama that Agni is “Hidden between two firesticks like a child well protected in the mother’s womb” points us to the invisible essence of all things in potential, the Self. Between two fire sticks there is no thing, there is fire only in potential and we can intuit a deeper sense of fire than the visible flame. Perhaps the most primordial fire is that of the Self itself, the fiery urge to burn through all illusion and find peace. Yama concludes this description by reminding us that the Self is not appearing or disappearing, coming or going. Even when the cosmos itself seems to come and go it is really only the Self moving from invisible, to visible and then finally back to invisible. (6-9)

As we move towards the end of this section of the Upanishad, Yama intensifies his instruction to Nachekita and the words take on a more direct approach. Yama tells him that “What is here is also there; what is there is also here” implying that whatever we find right here (where our body is) is the same substance (or insubstantiality) that we could find in any other place, or “there”. In effect, there is only one substance-less Self and it is everywhere. We are told that “Who sees multiplicity but not the one indivisible Self must wander on and on from death to death”. Multiplicity is defined as “a large number or variety” and we can see this is how the mind sees the world through the senses. When we look through our mind, we label everything and begin to believe more in that label than the actual thing itself. When do we ever actually experience curiosity to look at what a tree is made of? Usually, we turn to our mind to experience the tree the best we can and we begin to remember the last time we sat under that tree, how sunny it was that day, how big it’s grown, how many leaves it has shed and thousands more thoughts about it. This urge to think about things, rather than to just be there in the moment experiencing them, perpetuates the sense of multiplicity and diversity. The more that we think about something, the more it seems to feel separate to us. The more we just be here, the more we feel the same essential core of all things as our own being.

Yama continues by again urging Nachekita to cultivate a “one-pointed mind” to move beyond multiplicity into unity. A one-pointed mind may be understood better as a single focused intention that overrides all others and in this case that intention would be to see the essence of the tree and not the shape and thoughts about the tree. As we move into wanting to see everything as it really is, an expression of the unity of the Self, we engage Agni’s fire and devotion to fuel this intention. As we see the essence of something with our inner eye, even as our physical eyes see the shape and texture of something, we see the indivisible Self everywhere. Yama describes the Self as the “thumb-sized being” because it is seemingly the smallest, easiest to overlook and is hidden from the mind completely. Only the Self can see itself and that is the heart of our being. The smallest, most ordinary looking moment can be a portal into the infinite nature of the Self. As you read these words stop for a moment and listen to the Silence you hear, the reader is Silent. It would be very easy to note this and then move on, feeling that we know what we are, what Silence is. This is the “thumb-sized” being that we skip past each time and rarely stop and look deeply at. Consider Awareness too, right now you are aware of what you are reading. Does Awareness seem special, infinite and formless to you? Does “your” awareness feel the same as the infinite Self? Perhaps it does not quite feel the same as yet because it has not been really seen. Looking deeper at what it actually is will bring peace and infinite joy.

As Yama concludes this section, he speaks of the Self with two metaphors using water. Water running down a mountain slope will run down every path it can to the bottom and the paths will all seem to be different if we focus on the shapes the water makes, rather than the water itself, which is the only commonality here. The last sentence illustrates this beautifully. “As pure water poured into pure water becomes the very same, so the Self of the illumined man or woman, Nachekita, verily become one with the Godhead”. “My awareness” and “the Awareness” are both like the pure

water and are non-different to each other. They seem to be separate but never actually are. This is the unity of the Self. (10-15)

- **Part 2 Section 2**

In this section of the Katha, we see a beautiful description of the Self in various forms, The “City of eleven gates” refers to our body. Yama explains that the Self is the ruler of this city and those who meditate on the Self can no longer suffer and they will not be reborn involuntarily. It’s worth looking at what causes this involuntary reincarnation - what is it that draws us back to another human life? In each of us there are desires that can only remain unfulfilled whilst we believe ourselves to be a separate being. When we feel separate from the Self, from God and everything else we will always feel inadequate to some degree or feel scared of an imagined end to our existence. Of course, we are never actually separate beings but we keep trying to feel safe, loved and valued through our work, our family, friends, finances and more. No matter what we try to make us feel better, we can never quite feel safe or loved this way because we are never actually unsafe or unloved. When we start our search for happiness based on these incorrect ideas, we become lost in an endless search for what we do not even actually need. We keep looking in the world of other people or things such as food, sex, alcohol, drugs or countless other ways to feel better but it never works permanently. Only upon realising what we really are will we be able to allow the infinite love, security and peace to come from inside, from the heart of our being. Finally, we are able to choose consciously whether to reincarnate or not.

Yama paints a beautiful picture of the Self as the sun in the sky, the wind on our face, the fire of the sacrifice ritual, the guest in our home. The Self is the gods and goddesses, the firmament (heavens), the fish, the river and everything. Yama says “When the dweller in the body breaks out in freedom from the bonds of flesh, what remains? For this Self is supreme!” Yama is saying that when we recognise that we are not just this mind and body and are all of existence and its source, we find that everything is our own Self. When we are no longer identified with the body, we come to see ourselves everywhere and then everything else is gone, there is nothing other than our very own Self. This Self is in all things and all things are in it. (1-5)

As Yama continues, he makes reference to what happens to those who die and are not as yet awake to their true nature. Yama says “Of those unaware of the Self, some are born as embodied creatures while others remain in a lower stage of evolution, as determined by their own need for growth”. This suggests that being reborn as a creature is a higher choice than remaining without a body. This is very different to how we sometimes feel in our lifetime. It can feel like having a human incarnation is a punishment or a trial. This Upanishad seems to suggest the opposite and perhaps we can change our perspective too. After all, if incarnation in any form is higher choice, perhaps because it is the most challenging, then surely incarnation as a human being is the highest choice of all. As always on the pathway to Truth, what seems the most challenging is often the most rewarding and has the highest potential to help us wake up to the Truth.

Yama takes his instructions to Nachekita even further and explains that the Self is present even in deep sleep. The Self watches the lack of thoughts, emotions and sense perception in the depths of our sleep, something is there even when the mind is absent to watch and enjoy the absence of any sense of duality, time, space and change. The Self is the source of all dream objects during sleep and all the physical objects in the waking state. “Beyond whom none can go” refers to the Self being everywhere and infinite. No person can go beyond it because it goes on forever, its infinite nature means nothing can ever be excluded or found to be outside of it. (6-9)

The metaphors of fire and air are used to describe the Self which is invisible and yet it takes the shape of whatever it is appearing as. The shape of a fire is constantly changing as it burns, just like the Self is constantly changing shape in manifestation and yet the actual fire remains unchanged. Similarly, the air inside an object such as a balloon or a bottle, takes the shape of that object and so seems to have infinite shapes. The air remains unchanged no matter what shape it makes. The Self appears in infinite numbers of forms constantly, always changing, appearing to be born and die over and over. It takes the shape of the whole cosmos itself and lasts for eons and epochs and yet remains unchanged or tainted at all. No matter how many forms are made, the Self is still limitless and free and ever renewed, never depleted.

Why does Yama say that peace and joy come only to those who recognise the Self and never to a separate being? Peace is the outcome of feeling undivided as the Self. When we realise there is nothing inside or outside of us, that there really are no objects that exist independently from the Self we see that all is One. In this pure, undivided state we are supremely peaceful. It has always been this imaginary division between who we think we are and something other than us that disturbs our peace. The very idea of two or duality is what disturbs us more than anything. Knowing the Self can only be done by the Self and never by the mind or ego. This is important to know so that we can recognise our own progress and dissolve this core division once and for all. If we know only the Self can recognise the Self, we will fall into the unity of the One undivided consciousness much more easily.

Deeper into the instruction now, we begin to look at the two aspects of the Self and how we can come to know it. We can only know how it is appearing to us right now and we can never fully know it in the way our mind would like to know. In its unmanifest aspect, the Self is a pure mystery and beyond all description. How would you describe something with no form, shape and that is in no particular place and yet everywhere? In the manifestation it is constantly changing and therefore also indescribable. As we allow this to move deeper into our hearts, we find ourselves falling in love with the fact we cannot ever come to a final answer. We cannot ever reach a conclusion (even though our mind will keep trying to) and paradoxically is a conclusion we can come to. The light is the pure Self and its reflections are the apparent manifestations. Nachiketa asks a powerful question to finish this section, he asks "Is he the light, or does he reflect light?" He is asking Yama if the Self is manifested or unmanifested. Yama answers "There shines not the sun, neither moon nor star, nor flash of lightning, not fire lit on earth. The Self is the light reflected by all. He shining, everything shines after him." The Self is both the unmanifest and manifest, it is before and after, it is the light and its infinite reflections. (6-15)

- **Part 2 Section 3**

This section is the continuance of Yama's words to Nachekita and takes us even deeper. Yama says "The Tree of Eternity has its roots above and its branches on earth below. Its pure root is Brahman the immortal, from whom all worlds draw their life, and whom none can transcend. For this Self is supreme!" We see this metaphor of the upside down tree also in the Bhagavad Gita, its imagery suggests what is above is the strongest and beyond everything else. The roots always come first before anything else and our human existence is never more firmly rooted than when we know what our real Self is. Brahman is beyond even the reach of Yama himself, beyond any reach at all. Nothing comes before or after Brahman and all is inside it. When Yama says "In fear of him fire burns; in fear of him the sun shines, the clouds rain and the wind blows. In fear of him death stalks about to kill" he is referring to the fact that the Self (Brahman) is the source, power and Lord of everything. (1-4)

The next few verses contain descriptions of the Self and guidance on how to recognise it. Yama says that Brahman can be seen but only in a "pure heart" as its reflections or manifestations. Brahman is invisible in its pure essence and yet becomes visible to our senses as outer objects or perceivable as subtle inner objects such as dreams, thoughts and sensations. The term "pure heart" does not imply we must purify ourselves but instead refers to the duality of "me and other" having been eliminated. When the mirror is clean, your reflection (as the universe) is seen clearly. Yama urges us not to look for the Eternal Self through our time bound body and senses because the senses are limited to seeing the way the Eternal Self is appearing. We are told the senses report to the mind and then to the intellect, then to the ego and above that is the unmanifested Cause. The word "above" refers in this context to what is before or primary to something. The unmanifested Cause refers to the Infinite Self in its unmanifested state, before any form arises. It is quite common to read that the unmanifest is the cause of the manifestation in scriptures but it should only be taken very lightly. There is no cause for anything, the unmanifest does not cause the manifestation because that would allow for the existence of two things. We would have "cause" and "effect" then and the cause would not be infinite. The unmanifest does not cause manifestation to occur any more than the sky causes clouds to appear. Manifestation is in the unmanifest in potential and so already exists. The water vapour that forms as a cloud is present in the sky but is invisible as yet. When we boil hot water, steam arises but we would not say that water is the cause

of steam because they are one and the same. Non-duality means that there are not two and this is what the Self/Brahman really is, not two but one appearing two different ways. Just as water can appear as liquid, solid or gaseous, so too can the Self appear as visible or invisible, tangible or intangible. (5-9)

In the next few verses, Yama refers to what happens when the mind, senses and intellect are stilled, this is the yoga of complete stillness. How do we come to stillness or the unitive state? What would stop the mind from its constant thinking process? It is helpful to know that there is one thing to keep in mind as often as possible to bring the mind to a stop, we do not have to eliminate each and every thought, one by one, because that would be impossible to do. Instead, we can remember that there is only the Self and nothing else can exist. This means that every object we perceive, (whether subtle like a thought or an emotion or gross and tangible like a tree or a table) is the one Self. Whatever we think that we are thinking about, it is really only the Self. As the mind begins to realise that it is wasting a lot of time and energy thinking about things that do not exist in Reality then it begins to slow down and eventually rests in stillness and peace. When we realise that there is literally nothing to think about, we are free. There is no thing to think about other than the Self, whatever we think we are looking at is not what it appears to be. A tree is not really a tree but is the Self appearing as a tree. All of our thought process stops here because mind is trying to solve problems based on the concept that there are many things to think about. (10-12).

Yama describes the two selves we find inside our self in the concluding part of this Upanishad. There aren't actually two selves of course but two ways of experiencing ourselves and life. The first is the ego which sees itself as separate to everything and everyone. This illusion of separation is perpetuated by the sense that there is a separate "me" and things that belong to me become "mine" and are given a specialness that they would not have otherwise. "My body". "my mind" and "my life" begin to dominate our thoughts and we have no choice but to keep suffering. Yama says "When one rises above *I* and *me* and *mine*, the Atman is revealed as one's real Self. The Atman (or Self) is the second way we can experience ourselves. Atman is the one undivided consciousness. Atman reveals itself as what we really are when "the knots that strangle the heart are loosened" and "all desires that surge in the heart are renounced". It is important to note that these desires are renounced automatically when we realise that whatever we want to have, become or do is really our very own Self anyway. Whatever we could desire is already the Atman appearing as that object of desire. When it becomes clear to us that fulfilment of our desires is not going to give us lasting happiness then we finally can stop imagining that there is a "me" and "mine/not mine". Fulfilment of our desires gives temporary pleasure but only awakening to our true nature brings lasting and effortless joy.

As the Katha Upanishad draws to a conclusion, we are urged to allow the life force to rise from the heart to the crown of the head. Yama says "Draw him clear out of the physical sheath, as one draws the stalk from the munja grass" to indicate that as the life force moves to the top of the head and the crown chakra, we will not be born again believing ourselves to be separate. We will be free of death and karma. We will have killed death himself! (13-17).

The final words tell us of Nachekita's liberation into immortality by following Yama's profound instructions in the Katha. Meditating on the Self, renouncing all thoughts of "me and mine" we find freedom in this lifetime. We come to joy and peace forever more, free always.

May the Katha Upanishad become a living, breathing scripture through and as you.

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