

# COMMENTARY ON THE ISAVASYA UPANISHAD

---

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society

Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: [www.swami-krishnananda.org](http://www.swami-krishnananda.org)

## Verses

Ōm pūrṇam adaḥ, pūrṇam idam, pūrṇāt pūrṇam  
udacyate |  
pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate ||

That is Full; this is full. From the Full does the Full proceed. After the coming of the Full from the full, the Full alone remains.

Ōm īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvam yat kiṁ ca jagatyāṁ jagat |  
tena tyaktena bhuñjitha, ma grdhaḥ kasyasvid  
dhanam ||1||

OM. All this – whatsoever moves on the earth – should be covered by the Lord. Protect (your Self) through that detachment. Do not covet anybody's wealth. (or – Do not covet, for whose is wealth?)

kurvann eveha karmāṇi jijīviṣet śataṁ samāḥ |  
evaṁ tvayi nānyatheto'sti na karma lipyate nare ||2||

By doing karma indeed should one wish to live here for a hundred years. For a man such as you (who wants to live

thus), there is no other way than this, whereby karma may not cling to you.

asuryā nāma te lokā andhena tamasā vṛtāḥ |  
tāms te pretyābhigacchanti ye ke cātmahano janāḥ ||3||

Those worlds of devils are covered by blinded darkness. Those people that kill the Self go to them after giving up this body.

anejad ekaṁ manaso javīyo nainad devā āpnuvan  
pūrvamarṣat |  
tad dhāvato'nyān-atyeti tiṣṭhat tasminn apo mātariśvā  
dadhāti ||4||

It is unmoving, one, and faster than the mind. The senses could not overtake It, since It ran ahead. Remaining stationary, It outruns all other runners. It being there, Matarisva allots (or supports) all activities.

tad ejati tan naijati tad dūre tad vad antike |  
tad antarasya sarvasya tad u sarvasyāśya bāhyataḥ ||5||

That moves, That does not move; That is far off, That is very near; That is inside all, and That is outside all.

yas tu sarvāṇi bhūtani ātmany evānupaśyati |  
sarvabhūteṣu catmānaṁ tato na vijugupsate ||6||

He who sees all beings in the very Self, and the Self in all beings, feels no hatred by that (realisation).

yasmin sarvāṇi bhūtāny ātmaivābhūd vijānataḥ |  
tatra ko mohaḥ kaḥ śokaḥ ekatvam anupaśyataḥ ||7||

When to the man of realisation all beings become the very Self, then what delusion and what sorrow can there be for that seer of oneness?

sa paryagāc chukram, akāyam, avraṇam, asnāvīram,  
śuddham, apāpaviddham |  
kavir manīṣī, paribhūḥ, svayambhūḥ, yāthātathyato'rthān  
vyadadhāc chāśvatībhyaḥ samābhyaḥ ||8||

He is all-pervasive, pure, bodyless, without wound,  
without sinews, taintless, untouched by sin, omniscient,  
ruler of mind, transcendent, and self-existent; he has duly  
allotted the (respective) duties to the eternal years (i.e., to  
the eternal creators called by that name).

andhaṁ tamaḥ praviśanti yo'vidyām upasate |  
tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u vidyāyām ratāḥ ||9||

Those who worship *avidya*, enter into blinded darkness;  
but into greater darkness than that, enter they who are  
engaged in *vidya*.

anyad evāhur vidyayā anyad āhur avidyayā |  
iti śūsruma dhīrāṇām ye nas tad vicacakṣire ||10||

“They say that by *vidya* a really different result is  
achieved, and by *avidya* a different result.” Thus have we  
heard (the teaching of) those wise men who explained that  
to us.

vidyām cāvidyām ca yas tad vedobhayaṁ saha |  
avidyayā mṛtyuṁ tīrtvā vidyayāmṛtam aśnute ||11||

He who knows these two – *vidya* and *avidya* – together,  
attains immortality through *vidya*, by crossing over death  
through *avidya*.

andhaṁ tamaḥ praviśanti ye'sambhūtim upāsate |  
tato bhuya iva te tamo ya u sambhutyām ratāḥ ||12||

Those who worship the Unmanifested, enter into blinding darkness; but those who are devoted to the Manifest, enter into greater darkness.

anyad evahūḥ sambhavād anyad āhur asambhavāt |  
iti śuśrūma dhīrāṇām ye nas tad vicacakṣire ||13||

“They spoke of different results from the worship of the Manifested, and they spoke of different results from the worship of the Unmanifested” – thus we have heard (the teaching of those wise men.)

sambhūtiṁ ca vināśaṁ ca yas tad vedobhayaṁ saha |  
vināśena mṛtyuṁ tīrtvā sambhūtyā amṛtam aśnute ||14||

He who knows these two – the Unmanifested and Destruction – together, attains immortality through the Unmanifested by crossing death through Destruction.

hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpihitam mukham |  
tat tvaṁ pūṣan āpāvṛṇu satyadharmāya dṛṣṭaye ||15||

The face of the Truth (Brahman in the solar orb) is concealed with a golden vessel. Do thou, O Sun, open it so as to be seen by me, who am by nature truthful (or, who am the performer of rightful duties).

pūṣann ekarṣe yama sūrya prājāpatya vyūha raśmīn  
samūha tejaḥ |  
yat te rūpaṁ kalyāṇatamaṁ tat te paśyāmi yo sāv asau  
puruṣaḥ, so’ham asmi ||16||

O Thou, who art the nourisher, the solitary traveller, the controller, the acquirer, the son of Prajapati, do remove Thy rays, do gather up thy dazzle. I shall behold that form of Thine, which is the most benign. I am that very person that is yonder (in the sun).

vāyur anilam amṛtam athedam bhasmāntaṁ śarīram |  
aum krato smara kṛtaṁ smara krato smara kṛtaṁ smara  
||17||

Let my vital force now attain the (all-pervading)  
immortal air; and now let this body be reduced to ashes.  
OM, O my mind remember – remember all that has been  
done. Remember – remember all that has been done.

agne naya supathā rāye asmān viśvāni deva vayunāni  
vidvān |  
yuyodhyasmaj juharāṇam eno bhūyiṣṭhām te nama-uktim  
vidhema ||18||

O Fire! O God! Knowing as Thou doest all our deeds,  
lead us by the good path for the enjoyment of the fruits of  
our deeds; remove us from all crooked sins. We offer Thee  
many words of Salutation!

Ōm śāntih śāntih śāntih!

Om. May there be peace, peace, peace!

## Part 1

The first two mantras of the Isavasya Upanishad are  
supposed to give us in a few words a perfect philosophy of  
life. There are thinkers who feel that if none of the  
Upanishads becomes available at any time, and if only these  
two verses remain, that will sustain the world of  
philosophy.

What this Upanishad in its commencing mantras tells  
us at the very outset is something which we always forget,  
but which has to be kept in mind constantly if there is to be  
any meaning in our living in this world. What it makes out

in the beginning is that there is the same invisible content pervading all things, connecting everything with everything else, and bringing about a relationship of all diversity, whatever be its nature – organic or inorganic, living or non-living. Whatever be the nature of the diversity of content, irrespective of this nature of diversity, a mysterious link brings them together into a perfect formation and leaves nothing unrelated. Right from the highest heaven to the lowest atom conceivable, everything is taken notice of, and all these things are put in their proper position.

The manner in which things are put in proper position is called organisation. Where such a thing is not done, it is chaos and a medley, a pell-mell, a presentation of meaninglessness. The relation that this unknown content manages to maintain is proportionally manifested. It does not strike everything with the same blow. The prick of a needle by a physician varies in its intensity from the hammer of a blacksmith or the axe of a woodcutter, etc. We have examples of difference in the manner of the placement of values. Yet everything is connected. The brain, the heart and the lungs, and the limbs of the body are placed in a position of unitedness. This is something known to us in our daily life. But they are not just chaotically related. They are in their different particularities placed in the proper context. The different limbs of the body perform different functions, one not overlapping the other, one not repeating the function that the other does, yet not contradicting the function of the other.

Such a relation is maintained throughout the variety of creation, presenting a beautiful picture of perfection that this creation really is. The different kinds of work that the

limbs of the body perform do not create ugliness in their performances. We know what the teeth and the tongue do, the ears and the eyes do, and the legs and the feet, fingers, and so on do. Even the hairs on the body have some function to perform. But irrespective of a distance apparently being there between their functions, all of them look perfectly all right. The feet are as beautiful as the nose and the eyes and the face. Their position is the one that is intended for us. When a particular thing occupies a position intended for it, it looks beautiful. When it does not occupy that position and occupies somebody else's seat, it is not beauty.

Incidentally, it appears to us that beauty is not a solid substance which we can touch with our fingers. It is an arrangement, a pattern, a relativity of adjustment and a proportionate recognition of values, bringing all these values into a completion, such that the whole which they constitute gives a magical touch of perfection to every little part of which the whole is made. The whole gives its beauty in a requisite proportion to every part which belongs to it, and of which it is constituted. The different limbs of the body look beautiful because they cooperate with the wholeness of the organism, which we call this body. Any particular part of the body which does not so cooperate hangs unconnectedly with the system. Its beauty vanishes in a second. A hair that is severed from the head has no beauty. It has a beauty only when it is stuck to the head, in the place where it has a position. Even the nail on a finger has its beauty. It loses its beauty when it is cut off from the finger. Isolated parts, unrelated to the whole to which they really belong, become ugly, redundant, unnecessary things,

contingent aspects, and not anything contributing to vital life.

The meaning of life, in this light, appears to be a participation that is called upon everyone in relation to that organisation to which each one belongs. Extending the analogy of the physical body to larger organisations, we will feel that we live only when we participate in a larger-than-ourselves. When we do not participate in a system to which we necessarily belong, we do not really live. We just hang on. There is a difference between hanging on and actually living. A paralysed part of the body may hang on, but it is not living. It is not a part of the body. It exists. We can see it hanging lifelessly, as it were, to no purpose.

The life of a person comes to no purpose when the participation expected of that person in the context of the whole to which that person belongs is absent. The society of human beings is an organisation, and everyone belongs to human society as long as one is a human being. The very finitude of human organisms compels them to participate in a system known as society. There is no necessity for a perfected individual to participate in anything. But the perfected individual is a misnomer, because that which is perfect cannot be an individual. Anyone who is an individual, human or otherwise, is, therefore, not perfect in any sense of the term. Thus, considering even the lowest category to which one belongs in a conceived wholeness, the human individual has to participate in the organic activity of society.

The word 'society' has several connotations. It includes within its compass any activity, performance or evaluation necessary for the maintenance of this group called society.



We need not go into the details of the issues that may rise from its definition. In every endeavour, project, adventure, work or activity necessary for the continuance of the human individual to sanction the survival of the human personality in order to achieve this perfection, the participation of the individual in society is necessary. An anti-social person cannot be a happy person. An unsocial person will be privately suffering the sorrows of finitude, and cannot enjoy the delights of participation.

Why should we feel happy in participation and feel miserable when we do not participate? The necessity for participation of the limbs in respect of the organism arises because of the necessity for the survival of the body itself. Disorganised limbs of the body disintegrate the body; the organism perishes. It decomposes itself, and is no more there after some time. The parts also die together with their non-cooperation with the whole. It does not mean that a non-cooperating individual will survive, even as a non-cooperating part of the body will not survive, together with the death of the whole to which it belongs, and with which it does not cooperate.

In this analogy, human society becomes an organism of a larger type, wider than the physical body which requires to be maintained by this cooperative participation of individuals for their own equanimous welfare. The participation is not complete merely with a social participation. It is not true, finally, that we live only because other people help us and our friends are charitable to us. It may be that in a social organisation, in a setup of human society, there is a mutual give-and-take policy of people, and they appear to be contributing to mutual survival and

existence in a satisfactory manner. But this is only a surface view of things. Irrespective of the fact that social cooperation is necessary for our existence, that is not the whole truth. We do not live merely because of the goodwill of other people. There is something more about things, which escapes the notice of the common eye.

The geographical system of the universe, the astronomical pattern, the solar system, to take only one instance among many other things, conditions us. Human cooperation or no cooperation is irrelevant to the working of the planets and the operation of the solar system – which gives breath to our life, which pumps blood through our veins, and makes the heart pump and the brain think. Cosmic mysteries are beyond human imagination. Who pumps the blood and works the heart? Incessantly there is operation. Even when we are in deep sleep, the breath does not cease. Who pushes the *prana* like bellows even in the state of deep sleep, when we contribute nothing to the working of the breath? We are nowhere there. Who moves the breath and keeps the body warm and alive, even when cold sleep supervenes? Have we ever thought about the mysteries of the working of the heart? Why should it work? It moves without rest even for a moment.

Have we ever seen motion without a momentum? Unless there is something to propel the motion, motion is inconceivable. Where is the propelling force behind the motion of the heart and the action of the brain? We may be under the impression that the brain thinks and has knowledge. If the brain has plenty of knowledge inside of it, the skull of a dead man also will have knowledge. The

propulsion of intelligence is elsewhere than in the cells of the brain, or the parts of the body.

Social life is transcended by universal life. That organisation is a larger society than the human society that we can imagine in our minds. The larger world before our eyes is itself a society of its own kind. The mountains and the rivers and the trees, the shrubs, the flowers, even stones and particles of sand, are not there unnecessarily, for no purpose. To consider these as unnecessary things would be to regard the tip of a fingernail as an unnecessary encumbrance of the body. The nail is not an encumbrance, though it is not doing great work for us. Yet it does some work, if we carefully think over the matter.

Unnecessary things cannot exist in this world. Their importance can be recognised and visualised only when we have the insight to probe into the circumstances of their existence, and the part that they play in a larger society of life – wider than the human, and even the organic as it is conceived – in a cosmical setup. The wind that blows, the rays of the sun that impinge upon the earth, the cool balming radiance of the moon in full-moon night, the scintillating movement of water in a flowing river, the waves of the sea, are not inconsequent occurrences. They are tremendously responsible performances taking place, as is the case with the performances in our own body. This system, which is physiological, sociological, cosmological, can be understood only on the acceptance of a living principle pervading all things, a life that is indwelling the parts, which look like physical entities.

Do we know that the life we seem to associate with our own selves is not capable of identification with any part of

the body? I live, you live, and someone lives. I am alive. It is a great joy to feel that I am alive. This joy of the feeling that one is alive does not come from the nose, from the fingers, from any part of the physiological system. This is an instance of the presence of an unknown content operating beneath and behind visible particulars, which are otherwise physical in their nature. Our own personality is an example here. Our feeling, our joy, our satisfaction of having lived in this world, or of living in this world, is an unknown thing operating within the physiological setup we call the body. This very same link is bringing satisfaction in human society in the form of friendship, cooperation, a system of coming together or a get-together, a larger organisation of a nation.

International organisation, whatever it be, gives a satisfaction. It gives a satisfaction not because of the heaps of bodies that form that organisation, but because an unknown element operates in and through the media of these individuals which appear to form the members of this organisation. An organisation is not a bundle of members, just as our life is not a heap of these physical parts. Many people sitting together do not make a society, just as a heap of legs, hands, noses and eyes do not make a man; and so is the case with international organisations and world systems. The physical part is the secondary aspect thereof. There is an unknown element pervading everything.

Īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ: a ruling principle pervades the whole Cosmos. 'Īśa' is the word used in the Upanishad. A controlling, restraining, determining, harmonising, and satisfying principle is Īśa, or Isvara. All these aspects are present in it. It gives life to all things. To be alive is the

greatest satisfaction, and minus life, nothing can be called satisfaction. Merely to exist is a joy. *Sat* is *chit*, as they say; existence is consciousness. Consciousness itself is joy, as it is told us. The gesture of conscious participation in this working of a cosmic content is itself a joy unknown to the sense organs.

The joy of living is not a sensory happiness. Suppose we are sick for some days and suddenly we regain health; don't we feel a satisfaction? The regaining of health is felt as a kind of jubilation, "Oh, I am happy today. My disease has gone." A new life has entered into us when we are healthy. That new life is joy. That joy has not come from contact with sense objects. The joy of healthy existence is not a sensory joy. It is super-sensory in the sense that it arises from the totality that we are, the organism that we are, and not the contact that we have. Mostly we think that we can be happy only if we come in contact with things. Where is the contact in being alive? Minus all contacts, a healthy man is happy. A strong man is happy, a powerful man is happy, in spite of the absence of any kind of external contact. This joy, this satisfaction, this delight, arises not because of the limbs which constitute the organism, but because of a life that is present in the organism.

This life, the so-called 'I' or 'me' that we speak of in our own selves, is not any of the parts of the body. No limb of the body has the right to say 'I'. "I am coming." When we make a statement like this, no limb of the body is making the statement. It is a principle that is making this expression. That is what we are! We are a principle rather than a person, an operation rather than a solid existence, a

force rather than a material content, an invisible thing rather than a visible thing.

We will be wondering, that we are really an invisible thing. This so-called person sitting here, apparently visible to the eyes, is really an invisible something, making itself felt through the so-called physical body. Such a thing pervades the whole cosmos. It does not pervade merely living bodies. Even the so-called inanimate elements are sustained in their existence by the operation of this force. It is inactive in some forms, active in some other forms, and merely equilibrating in certain other conditions. These three states are called *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.

A mere participation in existence, as in the case of a stone or any inanimate matter, is *tamas* predominating. Yet the aspect of existence is present there, which is the characteristic of that connecting link pervading the universe. It is existence. The stone exists. At least to that extent, it participates in the Cosmic Reality. But it does not know. In the higher species, the aspect of understanding manifests itself gradually; dimly in plants and animals, and more perspicaciously in the human being. Human beings like us exist like a stone, but we also know that we exist. The stone exists without knowing that it exists. A human being exists with knowledge that there is such an existence. I am aware that I exist. Now, mere knowledge of the existence of something also is not adequate to the purpose. We cannot survive for a long time merely by being aware that we exist. We should also be happy, delighted, composed, satisfied, and feel a sense of freedom inside. If the sense of freedom and satisfaction is absent, but we are simply aware that we exist, it is not sufficient.

So the whole Reality is not manifest in existence such as a stone or a rock, though some part of it is manifest there. But in us, a larger degree of Reality is manifest, because it is known that it is. There is *rajas* – intellect and rational activity. We may be full of education, knowledge, information, academic qualification, but we may be incomplete persons nevertheless, due to absence of peace inside the mind. An educated person may be bankrupt in inward peace because while the *tamasic* element of existence and the *rajasic* element of understanding are there – the fact of this individualised existence is there – the *sattvic* quality of joy is absent.

The *ananda* aspect of Reality, the bliss aspect of Truth, has also to manifest itself in order that this consciousness of existence can fulfil itself and become complete. So we have to exist. We also have to know that we exist, and we also have to be happy that we know that we exist. This happiness of knowing that we exist is the bliss of the consciousness of existence. Here we are face to face with the great dictum, Reality being *sat-chit-ananda*.

Such a thing is pervading the whole Cosmos: *īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ yat kiṁ ca jagatyāṁ jagat*. Living or non-living, known or unknown, visible or invisible, potential or manifest, whatever be the nature of existence, everything is linked together by this unknown content, the supreme organisational principle, call Him God, Isvara, the Supreme Absolute, or the Universal Atman.

Be happy by knowing this. The Upanishad says, merely by knowing this, be happy. But puny man, with his frail intellect, will ask the question, “How can I be happy by merely knowing this matter? I want to enjoy the objects of

sense. I want wealth. I want property. I want a house. Without this, where is joy? A mere knowledge of what you have told me cannot make me happy. I want to grab, possess, hold as my own, and become a property-holder.” Do not make the mistake of imagining like this.

Possession does not make us happy. It is the consciousness of possession that makes us happy. Unconscious possessions are no possessions. Do not covet wealth in this world, because wealth, the so-called property, is nobody’s actually. We want to grab somebody’s property and make it our own. How can we say that anything is ours, and make a statement that we have to possess it in order that we may enjoy it? What made us feel that something is ours? On what grounds is this statement made? No part that belongs to a whole can belong to another part that also belongs to the same whole. This is the logic behind the mistake that we make in desiring any property. As all things are part of a whole, all parts necessarily belong to the whole; but one part does not belong to another part.

We are friends because we are commonly placed in the position of participants in a cosmic purpose. Individually we cannot be friends. Sometimes the individual character asserts itself, and we behave like enemies. We hate each other. We do not always participate and love. The trait of dislike or hatred arises when the individuality in us asserts itself minus its position of participation in a cosmic whole. When we are awakened to the fact of the necessity to participate in a larger whole, we became friends, we smile at each other. But when we forget this aspect and assert this bodily individuality only, we begin to hate each other. Love and hatred, the positive and the negative aspects of



psychological operation, arise on account of two different attitudes altogether, organisational and anti-organisational.

The Upanishad is very brief. It does not give us a large commentary. Know this, and grab not property, and covet not any wealth. Be happy. Anyone who has a little common sense, who has the leisure to think deeply over this important issue, will appreciate the meaning of this dictum of the Upanishad that merely by knowing this, we will be happy. Knowledge is bliss. *Chit* is *ananda*.

We are not accustomed to this kind of thinking. Our thinking is commercially oriented. It is conditioned by a give-and-take policy, exploitation, and possession of property, as I mentioned. We do not know any other way of thinking except this kind of crude materially-oriented thinking. But divine thinking is free from this trait of the desire to possess external objects.

Is God happy? Or do we think that He is an unhappy person? In Milton's 'Paradise Lost', Adam raises a question, "Lord, Thou hast created comrades for animals. Even trees live together. I, poor fellow, have no comrade. You have left me alone." God, in the world of Milton, says, "Do you believe I am alone? I have no friends. I have no partner. Since eternity I have been alone. Adam, do you believe that I am happy?" This question of God to Adam in Milton's poem is a question before us.

How can God be happy if He has no property? He has no money. He has no land. He has no house. He has no family. What kind of existence is God's, if we conclude that it is these things that make a man happy, and minus these he is a wretched individual? God possesses nothing except the awareness of being complete and inclusive of all things.

If we can accept for certain reasons that God can be the highest state of bliss irrespective of possessions, connection with property, etc., and just being aware of that perfection only – if only this awareness of being complete, excluding any other external contact, can make God perfect – anyone who wishes to be perfect, likewise has to be godly. And anyone who wishes to be godly, also has to be perfect.

It is futile to imagine that external property can make us happy and enable us to live long. It is the breath that conditions our joy. Have all the gold and silver of this world and let your breath be choked, you will see how happy you will be. Let the organism not work properly. Even the little stupid joy that we seem to be enjoying in this world does not come from the house that we have or the land that we own. It is from an organic, harmonised, aligned function of the body that is the reason for our happiness. The life that is inside us, the principle of life that we really are, when it is operating in a perfectly harmonised way, makes us happy. If disorganisation takes place inside, life struggles to maintain itself in a disorganised society of physical limbs, what can property do? What can friends do? What can anyone do in this world, when we are disarranged in ourselves? How can any kind of arrangement outside help us?

The greatest arrangement is God's existence. Whoever moves in the direction of this perfect arrangement, which is universal in its nature, also becomes comparatively happy in larger and larger dimensions. A spiritual seeker is happy in himself, in herself, in itself. The confidence has to be there that the perfection that we seek does not come to us by our contact with external things, because externality and

perfection are contraries. Perfection is an inwardness of comprehension, and not an externality of contact. A spiritual seeker, a yoga student, should always be aware and be confident of this great truth, and keep it before one's mind's eye that the more we grow spiritually, the less we would need external appurtenances for our existence. The less we require friends, the less we require money, the less we have the desire to live in a house, the less we wish to own anything by way of land, etc., the larger we become in our inward dimension and the narrower becomes our contact with external objects. The narrower we become in our inner dimension, the larger seems to be our need to come in contact with external objects. The poorer we are inside, the richer we are outside; and the richer we are inside, the poorer we may appear to outside eyes.

The poorest man is God Himself. One of the qualities of God is utter dispassion. God is known as Bhagavan, one who is qualified with *bhaga*, dispassion. Many qualities are mentioned. One of them is total dispassion, unconnectedness, unrelatedness to anything, non-possession. 'Bhole Baba' is Lord Siva, as people say. Bhole Baba means like a fakir, as God sometimes is portrayed. In a poetic fashion, saints and sages sometimes portray God like a beggar in order to depict this truth of total freedom from the sense of possession and utter disconnection from externality of any kind of space-time objects. Can we believe that such a Being is the happiest of all beings? And can we believe that we also would be equally happy, if we move in the direction of that Perfect Being?

Confidence is lacking. Perseverance is lacking. Power of will is lacking. The powerful senses drag the mind again

and again to old ruts of thinking in the direction of old, old habits. “Indriyani pramathini haranti prasabham manah” (Gita 2.60): A wild tempest may throw a boat on the sea hither and thither by the powerful winds of sensory desire. Covet not; remember this truth. The universe is animated, controlled, directed and sustained by an invisible element, totally unknown to any sensory perception, which is that which makes us feel happy that we are alive. Can we imagine that finally we want nothing in this world except the permission to exist and live? Larger and larger dimensions of this harmony have to be achieved. The physical body is a harmony. Larger societies have been mentioned as organisations. The largest dimension is Universal Existence. The happiness that we can derive by merely being aware of our unitedness with that completeness is unimaginable, unthinkable, beyond the conception of the intellect. It passeth all understanding.

So much magnificent treasure is hidden in a few words of the first mantra of the Isavasya Upanishad. *Īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ yat kiṁ ca jagatyāṁ jagat, tena tyaktena bhuñjītha*: unattached, enjoy. Unattached, enjoy – that is what the Upanishad says. It does not say, get attached to things and then enjoy. No, *tyaktena*, by renunciation, by abandonment of the greed to possess things, be happy. *Ma gr̥dhaḥ kasyasvid dhanam*: covet not the wealth of anyone, because the wealth of the world is nobody’s, and no one has the right to possess it. Possession is a misnomer. There is no such thing as property, finally; and one does not want it, also. What we want is a harmony of our life-principle, which appears to falsely get increased in its dimension by contact with external possessions – falsely, not really,

because what we can possess can also be taken away from us. When we can be possessed of something today, we can be dispossessed of it tomorrow. What is the guarantee that we will possess the whole world every day? We will be dispossessed of even this body itself. Where is the guarantee of possession?

Concentrate on this great truth, meditate on the great reality of utter perfection, completeness, knowledge and bliss in this universe, inside and outside flooding you through every vein of your body, every cell of your personality, every breath that you breathe. The joy of your life is actually the joy of God that is permeating through you. Reach it with effort, with daily meditation and wanting only That – wanting nothing else.

This is the first mantra of the Isavasya Upanishad.

## **Part 2**

The Isavasya Upanishad announced at its very commencement what we may call the doctrine of being, the philosophy of God. Now it has something to say about the doctrine of work, or the philosophy of action. Normally, from the point of view of human thinking, the characteristics of God do not seem to be compatible with the impulsion to action. Precisely to remove this misconception, the Upanishad immediately takes up the question of the necessity to work – necessity arisen merely because of the existence of a God, of the type described earlier.

One may wonder what is the logic behind the assumption that the impulsion to work automatically follows from the

nature of the Supreme Being. On a cursory glance at the super-abundance of the might of the omnipresent God, it may appear that any kind of work, or action, is a contradiction of God's being. But the point made out here is, that it is not only not a contradiction, but an obligatory consequence that follows from the nature of God. "Īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ" has been said earlier. Now the Upanishad mentions, "kurvaṇn eveha karmāṇi jijīviṣet." Life is identified with action, while God is identified with omnipresence. Can we see a connection between omnipresence and action?

The reason why there is a propulsion to act, a motivation to do anything whatsoever, is to be recognised in the nature of God's existence itself. Nothing of value can survive, except on the basis of the characteristic of God. If God is the only reality, all value that is real also has to have some relevance to God's existence. If work or action has any value at all, if we can recognise any meaning in the work that people do in the world, then it must be in consonance with the nature of God, which is all value and all reality. In fact, as the Upanishad would tell us briefly, and the Bhagavadgita would explain in greater elaboration, the impulsion to act arises not from any psychological centre. It is not my mind or your mind that is just thinking in terms of a project or an action. Its basis is somewhere else. The philosophy behind it, the foundation of the very impulsion to act, is not in the instrument of action. It transcends the instrument. The mind and the body of the human individual, for instance, may be said to be the instruments of action. But instruments themselves cannot

be causes. The causes are interior, precedent to the agent of action as well as the instrument.

It has been reiterated in the Bhagavadgita that inactive, no one can exist. But its meaning is not easy to understand. Why is it difficult to be inactive? Its answer has to be found in the first verse of the Isavasya Upanishad. The impulsion to act arises through the instrumentality of a human individuality, which, again, has a remote aim in front of it, namely, a furtherance of the evolutionary process. There is an incessant transformation taking place in the constitution of every little being, inanimate matter included. All things are constituted of minute parts, which tend towards the formation of a new constitution altogether, indicating, thereby, that the constitution of the present form of the individuality is inadequate and would not suffice for the fulfilment of the purpose of evolution.

Birth and death are also processes included, involved, in the evolutionary process. The sudden coming and the sudden going of forms look like births and deaths of individuals. But, in fact, nothing suddenly comes and nothing suddenly goes, even as a fruit does not suddenly ripen. Though, suddenly, one morning we see a mango ripened in the tree, it has not ripened on that morning. It was working for that purpose from several days earlier. The ripening was made visible to our eyes only on the outer surface on a particular day, but the process of ripening was going on from the inside of the fruit. In a similar manner is anything and everything in this world.

Events do not suddenly arise like upstarts. We sometimes say that an unexpected event has taken place, an accident has occurred. Actually, unexpected events are

really to be expected events. That they are not contents of our awareness at the present moment, cannot make them unexpected. The fructification of a particular cause brings about an effect, which we call an event that takes place in the world. But, as in the analogy of the ripening of the fruit, we see only the ripened colour of the fruit at a particular moment of the day, not being cognizant of the processes that preceded the vision of this ripened fruit. The occurrence of a particular event is a sudden occurrence for all practical purposes from the point of view of our vision. But it has been propelled into the form of this event or occurrence by the forces that were preparing themselves gradually days before, months before, years before, or even ages before. Any event, any occurrence, any activity, anything that happens anywhere, at any time, is a visualisation in concrete form, through space and time, of what is actually not in space and time.

The occurrences in space and time are caused by factors which are themselves not in space and time. Causes of illnesses are supposed to be far beyond and beneath the outer surface of their appearance; not only illnesses, every occurrence, for the matter of that. The birth of things and the death of individuals, which we generally call sudden comings and sudden goings, are actually gradual processes. Right from the time of our birth, we have been preparing to die. There is a maturation, a ripening of the fruit of this physical body for the dropping of it after some years. But the mind is so much attached to this particular form of the body that it cannot visualise the antecedent causes that are the reason behind the coming of the body at one time and the going of it at another time.



We look at things purely from an empirical point of view. We see things with our eyes. Very rarely do we think with our minds. Even thinking with the mind is not always sufficient, because with any amount of thinking we cannot know why we are born at all and why we should die, because the mind is tethered to this body. Even when it thinks, even when the ratiocinating process takes place, logically speaking, it is physiologically conditioned thought, socially conditioned mentation, economically conditioned volition, and bound by various factors like family attachment, etc., so that a wholly impersonal thinking is far from the reach of ordinary human individuality.

The little fruit that we see slowly emerging from the tip of a little branch of a mango tree has not suddenly appeared there. The entire sap that fills the whole tree through all the branches and twigs has been getting mature slowly through the process of time in the direction of the formation of this condensation, which is called the fruit. A little bit of it is visible one day, and we say, "Oh, the season has come. Mangoes are appearing on the tree." They have prepared themselves to appear in that manner long, long before they actually become visible to the eyes. The fruit is actually in the very sap of the tree. It is not hanging somewhere on the top, though it appears to be somewhere, practically disconnected from the vital function of the tree. The entire tree is filled with the fruit, and therefore it is that we find the manifestation of the fruit and the flower everywhere in the tree.

In a similar manner, the whole circumstance into which one is born is conditioned by every kind of experience. All the processes of our life, all the joys and sorrows, everything

that has happened, everything that is yet to happen, including the length of our life in the world, all of these have to be seen in a seed form in that particular causative factor that has been the reason behind our coming into this world. When a child is born and an old man dies, it does not mean that something suddenly has taken place. A vast sea of causes has been pushing the waves of these conditions that gradually concretised themselves into the birth of an individual and matured into the further action of the decay of that formation and the death of the individual.

Similar is the case with every kind of action, every work, every event, every occurrence. The omnipresence of the Ultimate Reality, about which the first verse of the Upanishad told us so much, and on which we dilated a little bit earlier, implies that everything has to move towards it. We noticed that every part that belongs to a whole is not only conditioned by the nature of the whole to which the parts belong, but the whole also determines the very function and the manner of the working of the parts. I mentioned last time the analogy of the working of the physiological organs. The characteristic of our physical body as a whole will decide how each limb of the body will work. The parts of the body are conditioned by the intentions of the whole.

Likewise is the activity that takes place in all creation. It is not that only human beings work. There is activity taking place in all levels, subhuman as well as superhuman. In the Bhagavadgita, again, we have this statement, that neither on earth nor in heaven can we find anything that is free from the operation of the properties of *prakriti*, known as *gunas*.

“Na tad asti pṛithivyām vā divi deveṣu va punaḥ, sattvaṁ prakṛiti-jair muktaṁ yad ebhiḥ syat tribir guṇaiḥ (Gita 18.40). The propulsion to work, is the cause originating from the *rajasic* quality of *prakṛiti*. The stability that we sometimes experience in our life, is the work of the *tamas* of *prakṛiti*. The balancing of forces between *rajas* and *tamas*, is *sattva*. All that is born, gods in heaven, human beings on earth, whatever be the created being, everything is composed of these three *gunas*.

*Sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are not merely abstract qualities, like the colour of a rose or the whiteness of a flower. These three *gunas*, as they are called, are properties of the very substance of the world. They constitute the brick and mortar of all things, living as well as non-living. The weight of the body, its substantiality, is the *tamas* thereof. The agitation, causing impulsion to movement of any kind, is the *rajas* there. And any kind of satisfaction that we feel in our mind, is the *sattva* prevalent in the mind. If we are always agitated and there is no satisfaction of any kind, we are never happy at any moment of the day, it will mean that there is no *sattva* working; only *rajas* is active. But if we feel sleepy and lethargic and very heavy in our personality, it would mean that *tamas* is predominant.

*Sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* being the constituents of the human individuality, they propel the individual to work and act in a particular direction. It is impossible for the *rajas* element to keep quiet without some movement; the element of *rajas* in our personality will compel us to act. Na hi kaścit kṣanam api jātu tiṣṭaty akarmakṛt, kāryate hy avaśaḥ karma sarvaḥ prakṛti-jair guṇaiḥ (Gita 3.5). Everyone shall move. The atom shall move, the sand particle shall move,

the solar system shall move, the planets shall move, every cell of the body shall move. Why shall they move? The reason is the constitution of the universe itself. The centre of the universe is like a magnet, which pulls everything towards itself.

We have estranged ourselves from God. The fall of the individual from the 'Garden of Eden', the headlong sinking into empirical existence, *samsara*, mortality, is the upside-down vision of the individual, opposed to the vision of the Universal. The separation of man from God is the cause behind every kind of work. The necessity to work, the need for action, arises on account of the restlessness of the psychophysical individuality, caused by the isolation of it, the finitude of it, and its aspiration for breaking through the fortress of this finite individuality.

"Which is better, meditation on the Universal Absolute or devotion to a personal God?" was a question raised by Arjuna at the commencement of the Twelfth Chapter of the Bhagavadgita. One would have certainly expected the Lord to say that contemplation on the Absolute is the best. He, of course, did not cease from saying that. But He added that this is a difficult type of meditation, impossible for those who are conscious of the body. Those who are immersed in the consciousness of the body cannot have, at the same time, a consciousness of Universality. The personality-consciousness with which we are infected will also compel us to visualise the Universal in the form of a personality. If we are impersonals, our contemplation also will be impersonal. But who are we to think in an impersonal matter, when we think only through this body and all the conditions associated with it?

Hence work, or action, becomes a natural characteristic of finite formations of every kind, whether they are organic or inorganic. Thus, the second mantra of the Isavasya Upanishad says that one should wish to live in this world by the performance of work that is designated in the light of what was mentioned in the earlier verse concerning the omnipresence of God. Work becomes obligatory, not because we are going to acquire any ulterior fruit out of it, though some fruit may accrue in a different way. The intention of the work is not reaping the harvest in the form of the fruit, but the participation of individuality in the structure of the universe.

Work is actually a longing for the Infinite. We are asking for God, even when we are propelled to work. Only if we are conscious of this fact can we convert work into yoga. We say many a time that work is worship. How does work become a worship of God, unless it is a love for God? The whole personality is crying for God. It is a yelling out for the Almighty in this sorrow-stricken world, where bodies and minds of people are sunk deep in the nether regions of sorrow. We are stretching our arms as high as possible, to reach out to that from where we have come, from where we have fallen. Our desires and our actions are both indications of our longing for That which is above us. Every desire – however binding it may appear on the surface, however meaningless it may sometimes be – is nevertheless caused by some power at the back of the desires, which originates from our dissatisfaction with this personality, and from our inward longing for the Universal being, from which the finite parts have been severed.

Our thoughts, our desires, our feelings, and our actions are different forms of the manifestation of this inward anguish that arises due to our separation from God. Hence, there is no such thing as *mere work* in a secular sense of the term. Work is a spiritual longing that originates in the deepest recesses of being, even in the form of an unhappy service. As long as this finite existence continues due to the *prarabdha karma* (causative propulsion) behind it, the impulsion to act also will persist. The body moves in a given direction, and we call it work. The mind moves in a given direction, and we call it thought. The feelings move in a given direction, and we call it desire. But all these movements, whether of the body, the feeling, the mind or the will, are ramifications of a single impulsion to move towards a wholeness of experience, God-Being. The *jiva* is crying for Isvara. Therefore, says the Upanishad, by work alone can you attain salvation, so long as you are bound to this body, because the means of contacting God is conditioned by the type of embodiment in which one is lodged. If it is purely a mental existence, it is one kind of action. If it is a physical embodiment, it is another kind of action.

As long as we want to live in this world – it is said to be ‘a hundred years’, a word used in the Upanishad indicating a very long life – we have to work. Nothing can be more valuable than life. One should not cut off life. The Manu Smriti says, “You should not extol, you should not condemn, but you should get on with the conditions that prevail according to the circumstances into which you are born.” In the light of the all-pervading nature of Isvara, God, do your duty.

The word 'duty' is a specialisation of the Bhagavadgita. In the Isavasya Upanishad there is just a mention of action or work. By doing alone should you wish to live in this world. "Kurvann eveha karmāṇi jijīviṣet śataṁ samāḥ, evaṁ tvayi nānyatheto'sti na karma lipyate nare." Evam tvayi: there is nothing else that you can expect in this world. That is to say, we cannot expect complete cessation from action in this world. But we may be afraid that action may bind. Karma is supposed to react in the form of a nemesis. Are we not acquainted with an old saying that every action produces reaction? Yes, it is true that when a finite action is propelled in the direction of a finite fruit thereof, a reaction is set up in the direction of that agent of action from the fruit that is expected. But it is not so in the case of every action, because it need not necessarily proceed from a finite source. Finitude is a limitation of consciousness itself, and so consciousness bound to the finitude of existence can contemplate only a finite fruit that can accrue to it. And anything that is finite, is binding. So the cause, the ideation behind the performance of any work, should not be motivated by the finitude of consciousness, but by an infinitude of consciousness. Because of the fact that God is all-pervading, īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ, it is necessary for us to work, not because we have to expect anything in the form of a remote result that is to follow, but because action is a necessary characteristic, an automatic reaction produced by the finite mind and body, as long as consciousness continues to be in the mind and the body.

When work gets exhausted by the withering away of the momentum that caused the work, and the desire that was at the back of the work also ceases, the transmigratory life also

will cease. Birth and death will be no more. The coming into being and the going, as we call birth and death, are caused by the desires that arise in terms of finite existence, finite fruits. So we are disciplined by means of this work, or action, in two ways. On the one hand we have not the freedom to sit quiet without doing anything. This kind of freedom is not there, because it is the nature of the body and the mind to work. The mind and the body form part of a cosmic whole, and therefore they always move in the direction of that whole. So everyone is impelled to work.

We cannot ask for freedom from work. But at the same time, we cannot work in the manner we would like. It is a prescribed form of attitude that has to be maintained during work. That is to say, the work that we perform is not a means to an end. It is an end in itself! Our work will be unsatisfactory, if we consider it as a means to an end. Suppose we work only for salary's sake, our mind will be only in the salary, and not in the work. Also, if there is anything ulterior beyond the actual performance, the performance will be poor. The discipline of action is not a means to some other goal that is to be attained. The very essence of karma yoga is that action is an end, and not a means.

It is difficult to conceive this objective in our mind, because we are not accustomed to think in this manner. How can work be an end in itself? It always brings something. If we sow a seed, a fruit comes up. If we do some work, we will get wages. We know all this that happens in this world. But have we ever seen somebody working for nothing? Here is a novelty of the philosophy of work, it being the principle that all life is a studious



participation in the purpose of the creation of God. It is a participation in the work of God. It is a cooperation in the structure of the universe. It is not an agent individually working for his own or her own purpose. It is a movement towards the Self-realisation of the cosmos.

The cause that is at the back of any kind of action is multifold in its nature. That is, when we think we have done the work, or we shall be doing the work, we may be under the impression that only we are responsible for the kind of work we are contemplating to do. We are not the only ones responsible for the work. The motivation comes from various other sources, also. Not knowing this fact is the reason for the bondage of the soul. If we impute everything to ourselves, naturally we have to become bound by the very fact of that imputation that we have ignorantly done. If we have done the work, we reap the fruit thereof. But actually we have not done the work. It has been forced upon us by certain circumstances which condition the whole creation.

Adhiṣṭhānaṁ tathā kartā karaṇaṁ ca pṛthag-vidham, vividhāś ca pṛthak ceṣṭa daivam caivātra pañcamam (Gita 18.14). Five causes are there behind every occurrence. Not merely the action that you do or I do, but every occurrence, every event, everything that happens everywhere has a fivefold cause behind it. So we cannot say that some particular thing alone is the cause. "I went out in the rain; I caught a cold." That is only a manner of speaking. We have not caught a cold merely because we went out in the rain. Though going out in the rain and drenching ourselves is one of the causes, there were also susceptibilities of various other kinds, which were the causes of catching cold.

The fivefold causative factor mentioned in the Bhagavadgita shows that no particular individual can be regarded as the sole agent of any particular action. The whole world is at the back of every action. The physical body conditions action to some extent. An elephant can do one kind of work. The ant does another kind of work. The human being does a third type, because of the limitation of the physical conditions.

There is also the intention behind the performance of an action. The nature of the intention will decide to some extent the nature of the performance also. The instruments that are used in the performance of an action will also decide upon both the quantum and the quality of the action that is performed. There are various other distracting factors, which are associated with the main intention. They also condition the action in several ways. But above all these things, *daivam caivātra pañcamam*, the will of the Universal Being, is the final deciding factor. If the ruling power does not wish, no other lieutenant can execute an action. Even the success of the projection of a particular intention, the working of the body, the manipulation of the instruments, etc., should be considered as permitted processes by the central organisation. God's Will is supreme. The real worker, the real agent is God Himself.

If God is the only agent of action, all work automatically becomes the nature of a worship. There is no need of any commentary on this point. If there is only one agent in the whole world, only one action takes place; there are not many activities taking place. We say that many things are taking place. History is a chronology of many activities. But they are not many activities; they are many ramifications of

a single thing that is taking place. There is only one work performed by one person in the world. If this is so, work cannot bind. Who will bind? The individual agent has gone off. He has evaporated into the Supreme Agent. All these declarations suggest and indicate that inasmuch as all performance of every kind is engendered by the centrality of the universe, God willing, no individual karma can be permitted in creation. Nobody individually does anything. There is no individual agent. Therefore, *karma* cannot bind, action cannot bind.

This is a theoretical foundation behind the practical suggestions given to us in greater detail in the Bhagavadgita, which gives a large scripture, as it were, on the method of working in the world. It is something like a vast commentary on the Isavasya Upanishad.

We are likely to go to extremes in our thoughts. We either think of God independent of creation, or of creation independent of God. This will be mentioned in the context of our study of those verses which say that *vidya* and *avidya* should be combined. *Vidya* and *avidya* should not be considered as two different factors. Knowledge and action are supposed to be contradictory to each other. This is a mistake in thinking. They have to be blended. It is necessary that knowledge should blend all action. An action should be guided by knowledge. They are the obverse and reverse of the same coin, as it were. Knowledge and action are not two different things, or processes, taking place. They are one and the same thing that is moving. On one side it looks like illumination, knowledge; on the other side it looks like action.

Here is the sum and substance of the Isavasva Upanishad, as far as the first two verses go. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is supposed to be a large exposition of the intentions of the Isavasya Upanishad. The Purusha Sukta of the Vedas and the Isavasya Upanishad sum up the intentions of a disciplined living, the philosophy of living, and transmuting every work into not only a worship of God, but also a meditation proper. Contemplation and action have to go together. Not only have they to go together, contemplation itself has to become action, and action itself has to become contemplation. The work of God is the same as the existence of God, and the existence of God is itself the work of God. God does not work with hands and feet. The very existence of the sun is the activity of the sun, and the activity of the sun is identical with the existence of the sun. So in a higher sense, action becomes knowledge, and knowledge becomes action. Existence is becoming, and becoming is the same as existence.

A very lofty thought is adumbrated in the Isavasya Upanishad through its few verses that sum up the intentions of all the Upanishads, practically: how we can conduct ourselves as instruments of God in the work of this world. We are not merely instruments in the sense of some independent entities guided by something else, but are actual fingers of God operating. We are the fingers of God working. We are not just fountain pens with which He writes the book of life. We are more than ordinary instruments. We are vitally connected parts of that stupendous whole.

Sarvataḥ pāṇipādaṁ tat sarvato'kṣi-śiro-mukham,  
sarvataḥ śrutimal loke sarvam āvṛtya tiṣṭhati (Gita 13.14).  
Its hands work everywhere, Its feet are moving everywhere,  
Its eyes see everywhere, It hears through all the ears.  
Whether it is the Bhagavadgita or the Upanishad, or our  
logical conclusion, they all converge at the same point of it  
being necessary for everyone to be perpetually in a state of  
contemplation and action, meditation and work, which will  
be for our blessedness, both here and hereafter.

### Part 3

andhaṁ tamaḥ praviśanti yo'vidyām upasate |  
tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u vidyāyām ratāḥ ||9||  
anyad evāhur vidyayā anyad āhur avidyayā |  
iti śuśrūma dhīrāṇām ye nas tad vicacakṣire ||10||  
vidyām cāvidyām ca yas tad vedobhayam saha |  
avidyayā mṛtyuṁ tīrtvā vidyayāmṛtam aśnute ||11||  
andhaṁ tamaḥ praviśanti ye'sambhūtim upāsate |  
tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u sambhutyām ratāḥ ||12||  
anyad evahūḥ sambhavād anyad āhur asambhavāt |  
iti śuśrūma dhīrāṇām ye nas tad vicacakṣire ||13||  
sambhūtim ca vināśaṁ ca yas tad vedobhayaṁ saha |  
vināśena mṛtyuṁ tīrtvā sambhutyā amṛtam aśnute ||14||

These are very knotty statements in the famous Isavasya Upanishad, with which the Shukla Yajurveda Samhita concludes. This is the only Upanishad which forms part of a Samhita of the Veda. All the other Upanishads belong either to a Brahmana or an Aranyaka portion of the Veda.

Having pronounced the omnipresence of God in all creation at the very commencement of the Upanishad, it is said, "They go to darkness, who entangle themselves in

activity born of ignorance. They go to greater darkness, who satisfy themselves with mere learning, with knowledge in the ordinary sense. The aim of activity is one thing; the aim of learning is another thing. There is no connection between the two. But those who are in a position to blend activity and knowledge in the requisite proportion, they cross over the clutches of death through action and attain immortality through knowledge.”

They go to darkness who involve themselves in this world. They go to greater darkness who think that reality is above this world, as if it is outside. Clinging to the world has one aim, and clinging to that which is otherworldly has another aim. They are two different things altogether. Those who are in a position to blend the externality of the world with the transcendence of reality overcome death by living in this world, and attain the Immortal by communing themselves with the transcendent Reality.

This is an almost literally translated meaning of these verses. Commentaries after commentaries have been written on these verses, and everyone finds a great problem in understanding what all this means. Everyone has to say something new about them; and everyone can say something new about them, because they are so enigmatic in their meaning and their intention is not very clear from a mere surface reading. Having considered the importance of these verses, whatever they may be signifying, Acharyas have left no stone unturned in ransacking their mystery, and have come to some sort of conclusion which seems to be rationally founded and perhaps even scientifically acceptable. The Upanishad wants to free us from any kind of extreme in approach.

We live in a world that has a peculiar characteristic of its own. The characteristic of the world is that it obliges us to do something, compels us to be active every day, to engage ourselves in some work or the other. There is no one who does not do something. Activity is the essential character of earthly existence, empirical life. We would have never seen a person who does not do something. The impulsion to act is generated by the very relation that seems to obtain between ourselves and the world outside. When we are thus compelled to engage ourselves in activity of some kind or the other, we have, at the same time, an idea of the motive behind our performances. It is true that we do not act deliberately of our own accord. We feel pulled and pushed by some force in the direction of activity, making it impossible for us to be inactive, whether or not this activity is going to bring any fruit as a result of its performance.

Our concept of activity involves a result that has to follow from what we do. We become habituated to this vehement impulsion. It becomes part and parcel of our very life itself, and then we never feel that we are impelled to work. We begin to feel that 'we' work. 'I' do the work. No one says, "I am forced to work. I am compelled." Though originally it is a sort of compulsion consequent upon the empirical relationship between ourselves and the world of externality, our habituation to this continuous activity, day in and day out throughout our life, creates a peculiar psychological circumstance which makes us wrongly feel that we do the work, even though we are forced to work. And inasmuch as 'we' do the work, we do it with a purpose. We expect a result to follow from the work that we do in this world.

This is the kind of attitude that we generally have towards life, and we have no other opinion about ourselves except that we work and some fruit is reaped out of this work. We start our day with work, and end our day with work. We are born with an impulse to work, and we die with work. If this is the only meaning that we can see in this world, then to darkness we go after death, because that is not the meaning of life. Merely because there is an impulsion to work and we are helplessly driven, as it were, in the direction of this work, and we do the work, it does not follow that there is a proper comprehension of the meaning of what this work is. Why should we be impelled so? Taking for granted that there is an impulsion to act, from where does this impulsion come? This question is rarely raised by anybody.

We have to work. We have this duty to perform. We have this family. We have these obligations. "I am involved in it. I am very busy. I am helpless. I do, and I must do." This is all we hear from anyone in the world, as if this explains the whole mystery of life. It is an explanation of a particular phenomenon through which life presents itself as an aspect. But the impulsion to work is not the whole meaning of life. And, worse still, we feel that it is good to subject oneself to the pressure of some force that is impelling us to work, and then get on with this drudgery of action. To darkness we go after we leave this body, if we live a life of this kind, which is pure slavery, involvement without any kind of freedom attached to it. *Avidya*, ignorance is the name of this kind of living.

But if this kind of extreme attitude that we adopt, due to sheer subjection to outer activity, will take us to darkness



after death, what else are we expected to do? There are people who withdraw themselves from all activity in a theoretical concept of the structure of things, and rational investigation is conducted into the motivation to work. They come to the conclusion that the life that we live in this world has a transcendent meaning. Reality is transcendent. The knowledge of the transcendent is to be the main occupation of our life, because the meaning of life cannot be discovered in empirical activity. Activity is an outer expression of another impulse that originates from a transcendent significance, so let us resort to the transcendent only and do nothing, because the transcendent does not compel us to work. Work is an arrangement between the human individuality and the outer world of space and time. The transcendent is not in space and time and, therefore, there is no question of work. These are people who try to contemplate an ethereal transcendence that is totally divested of any kind of connection with this world. For instance, to put it in a more concrete form, as it is bad to get attached to the body, we ignore the body totally and go on contemplating on a self that we imagine in our mind: "I am contemplating on my Atman; I am not interested in this stupid body."

If one is totally ignorant of the existence of the Atman inside, and is wholly engaged in bodily comforts and works through the body for the sake of physical satisfaction, it is bad because the physical body is not the reality. So, one kind of extreme in the attitude of people makes them bend down to the needs and clamours of the bodily satisfactions and work for the body only, whether one's own body or family body. This is sheer ignorance, as we know very well.

And contemplation on the Atman by imagining it to be a light transcendent to the physical world and this body would take another course, whereby we are likely to ignore the body completely. On the one hand, we ignore the Atman and cling to this world and the body for its own satisfaction; and on the other hand, we ignore the body and the world, and cling to a concept of the Atman as a transcendent element. To greater darkness we go if we think that the Atman is outside the body or inside the body, and we are totally oblivious – deliberately, as it were – to the existence of the body and its connections with the world, and we engage ourselves in a contemplation that is pure ethereal engagement and pure theory.

The effect of this kind of involvement in physical activity and bodily comfort is one thing. That is unadulterated bondage, as can be very well imagined by everyone. We will be born into the same condition in which we lived because of such attachment to the physical body and the actions of the body in relation to the physical world. There is no Atman, no God, no spirituality; no such idea occurs to the minds of people who are totally physical, material, economic, bound to human society, family, money, name, fame and power. All these come under worldly comforts, connected with human activity of various kinds. There is no talk of Atman, Self, Light, etc. To darkness they go, because of the sheer ignorance in which they are living.

Now, what is the step that we have to take to free ourselves from this possibility of entering into darkness? If we ignore the world, ignore the body, and contemplate the Atman, to greater darkness we go. This is how the

Upanishad tries to catch us from both sides. We will not be permitted to be wholly interested in the bodily requirements and the world of activity, because we will be condemned to go to darkness. Killers of the Self are those who think only of the body and all its relations in the form of activity in the physical world, says the Upanishad. But what about those who have awakened to this consciousness of the bondage of this body and the world, and abstain from all work, ignore the body, punish it, and do *tapas* to such an extent that it starves and kills the body for the sake of the Atman? To greater darkness they go. It is worse than the darkness into which others enter.

The nature of Ultimate Reality is neither externality nor internality. God is not outside. God is also not inside. There are people who have no idea of the Selfhood of the Supreme Being, which dominates all life as the Atman Supreme, and consider themselves satisfied with world relations. There are others who think that God is not connected with the world. He is extra-cosmic. There is absolutely no relation between God and world, because God is uncontaminated by space, time and objectivity. This is what we hear in the scriptures. There is neither space nor time, nor individual objects in God. And this world is nothing but that. It is just space, time and objectivity. How can there be any connection between darkness and light? This world is like darkness, and it is perpetually changing. God is unchanging. Everyone in this world is grief-stricken; everyone has some sorrow or the other. God is free from all grief and sorrow; He is all bliss. This is the world of death, where everyone has to die one day or the other. God is immortal. What connection can there be between this

world and God, if this is the state of affairs? Therefore, it is futile to have any kind of relation with this world. We shall retire from all relationship to the body and the world, and contemplate that which is not of this world, not in this world and which has no connection with this world.

This is a mistake, says the Upanishad. It is a mistake to think that this world is everything, that bodily comfort is all-in-all, and to live and die only for work. It is a mistake not to have any cognisance of a reality that is above the world. But it is also a mistake to imagine that reality is totally outside the world and has no connection with this body, the *prana*, the senses, the mind, and any kind of relation in this world. Mostly religious practices go to extremes of this type or that type. Transcendence is mostly the attitude of religion. We have to blend *avidya* and *vidya* together for the sake of freedom and immortality, says the Upanishad. The bondage to which we are subjected by action, day in and day out, will make us disgusted with everything, and we will be automatically freed from the impulse to act. The world itself will liberate us from its clutches when we have paid our debts to it.

We owe a debt to this world, and we owe a debt to this body. It is the debt that we owe to this body and the world that compels us to live in this body and to work in this world. Sometimes this debt is designated as *prarabdha karma* – a kind of nemesis, a reaction produced by certain actions that we did in the past, accumulated for the purpose of experience in this world, forcing us to reap the fruit of those actions, whether pleasurable or miserable, whatever the case may be. This is that impulse to act. It is this impulse that keeps us alive in this body. As long as the

reaction of those actions, called *prarabdha*, continues, as long as the momentum of those actions continues, as long as we have not exhausted by experience the results of those actions which are called *prarabdha*, the body will continue to live. The body cannot live even for a moment after the exhaustion of this *prarabdha karma*. Like the flame of a lamp gets extinguished when there is no more oil, death of the body will take place instantaneously when the momentum of those actions which have produced this body ceases to act. Similarly will the impulse to act in this world cease automatically.

Therefore, it is futile to try to cut off connection with the world. No one can ignore this body. No one can deliberately disconnect oneself from this body and the world as long as this impulse with which we are born, and which itself is the reason for our birth, is alive. Hence, the warning is discharged in this Upanishadic Mantra: do not attach yourself to this body or the work of this world under the impression that there is nothing more; and also, do not ignore the body or the world, because you cannot do that. No one can peel one's own skin. Work has to be carried on in this world through this body, though not for the pleasure that the work brings or the delicious fruit that the work may yield. That would again be further attachment to the work, and would increase the desire to perpetuate life in this body. Work should not be done for the pleasurable fruit that it brings, not for name, fame, authority, not for any kind of compensation that we expect through this action, but merely because it has to be done as a debt that we owe to the body and the world through this working of the *prarabdha karma*.

In that manner, live in this world. Thus the world will free you from its clutches. *Mrityu*, death, will not any more harass you because death, which goes together with birth, is a consequence of the *karmas* of the past. As long as the *karmas* of the past germinate into action, life in this world and the body will continue to exist, with all its involvements in life. Knowing this, one has to discharge the debt through the body in respect of the world – but be not attached.

The knowledge which is referred to here as the counterpart of action, resorting to which entirely, unconnected with action, is supposed to lead one to greater darkness, is theoretical knowledge. It is imagining in the mind, like building castles in the air: I am not this body, I have no connection with this world, I have no connection with anybody, I have no relation to any person in the world, this body is not me. There are people who chant mantra-like statements of this kind, which cut no ice because what is the use of merely saying “I am not this body”, when we know we are the body? That knowledge, which is mere adumbration of a false notion entertained conceptually – not actually a freedom from the body that is realised, but a mere thought in the mind together with the entanglement in the body – such a knowledge will take us to greater darkness because it is hypocrisy. It is hypocritical contemplation to imagine theoretically “I am the Atman”, while we know that the body pinches with every kind of pain in this world. We have hunger and thirst, and terror of every kind in this world. The body experiences them. As long as this consciousness of the existence of the body is with us, we cannot say that we are not the body. Merely

saying, or chanting a mantra-like type of conceptualisation that is theoretical, scriptural, will make a person go to greater darkness, because the bondage will not cease. They will take birth once again, and because of the egoism with which they started this kind of theoretic contemplation – a hypocrisy, as it were – they will entangle themselves once again in rebirth, and continue to do the same work to which they were subjected earlier.

What is the solution? The solution is also mentioned in the Upanishad. We have to work with knowledge, and not simply work without knowledge. We should not only have knowledge, minus work. Both should be known together as a blend.

Here, in these mantras of the Isavasya Upanishad, we seem to have a seed of the gospel of the Bhagavadgita, where Sri Krishna hammers into the mind of the student Arjuna that *karma* should be based on *buddhi*, or *sankhya*. Yoga is an expression of *sankhya*. Yoga is action, *sankhya* is knowledge. Arjuna knew what action was, but he did not know what knowledge was. He was considering the pros and cons of activity. The gains and losses, the loves and the hatreds involved in action, were before his mind's eye. But he did not know; he had no *sankhya*. He had no knowledge as to why he had this sentiment of love and hatred inside, and the idea of gain and loss outside. Sri Krishna reprimanded Arjuna, "You are lacking *sankhya*." *Sankhya buddhi* was not there. Here in a little passage, in a two-line instruction of the Isavasya Upanishad, we have a premonition, as it were, of the great gospel of the Bhagavadgita.

In the Bhagavadgita, as well as in this mantra of the Isavasya Upanishad, we are told how we have to live in this world. We should not go to extremes, either empirically or transcendently. Neither can we deny what consciousness accepts as reality, nor can we cling to it as the only reality. In this condition of our physical existence, what consciousness accepts as reality has to be accepted as reality – to the extent it is accepted by consciousness. But in this acceptance, we cannot be attached to that perception, because it is not the whole of truth. Our consciousness clings to this body and clings to the world of values, though this clinging is unwarranted. It is a mistake. It is ignorance, *avidya*. It is death. As long as we persist in the acceptance of a mistake, it is a reality for us. We accept a mistake deliberately and affirm that it is right because our consciousness has taken a stand that it is right. As long as we are not disillusioned of this fact, the acceptance of reality of the otherwise mistaken notion will continue.

A gradual disentanglement of consciousness from the involvement in the physical world is advised. That gradual system is yoga. That is knowledge; that is *sankhya*. The *sankhya* says that *purusha* is involved in *prakriti*. If the *purusha* does not know that it exists independent of *prakriti*, and gets totally involved in *prakriti* and does whatever the *prakriti* does, it is earthly bondage, *avidya*, which takes us to darkness. But if, having involved itself, the *purusha* imagines, “I am not involved. I am totally independent” – that would also not be freedom. A person in a prison can say that he is a free man and nobody can bind him. He may have a conceptual freedom in his mind, but he is actually in bondage in a prison.



What is reality? Whatever we accept as reality is reality for us, whether or not it is the Ultimate Reality. The acceptance of the reality of this body and the world is a temporal concession given to the working of *prarabdha karma*. This vehement action of *prarabdha* on this body and the world cannot be avoided as long as it is working in the direction of its own self-exhaustion. Fire will burn as long as there is fuel. When the fuel is not there, the fire subsides. This fire of longing for this body and the world will subside only when the fuel of *prarabdha* subsides. As long as the *prarabdha karma* continues, the body will not die even if we starve it. It will live somehow or the other. And when the *prarabdha* is exhausted, we will certainly die, even if we are eating the best food. We do not live and die because of eating or not eating, as we may imagine. Unprotected but God-protected, one can live. But protected by the whole world and not protected by God, one will perish. Unknown, unbefriended, but under the care of providence, a person can live even in a forest. But he can die even when perfectly taken care of in the midst of family and friends, when providence is against it.

The idea is that we should neither attach ourselves to our body and the work that it does in respect of the world, nor should we shun it. Do not say, "I will only work; I don't know anything else but work." That is attachment. Do not say, "I don't want work," because it is attachment. That will not work, because it is attachment to non-action. The concept of not-doing is also a kind of doing because all action is actually only the mind working. Action, so-called, is mental. What the mind thinks is action, and not so much what the body does. If the mind is absent, physical action is

no action. But if physical action is absent, although the mind is acting, the real action is going on.

Thus, the Isavasya Upanishad goes together with the teaching of the Bhagavadgita, the great teaching that action and knowledge have to be combined. That is to say, work we must. But how would we combine them? No one can be here without any action. We must perform action because, as already mentioned, as long as we are in this body and this world, action is the law of this body in its relation to this world. We must participate in this action of this impulse to live through the body and the world, but not get attached to it. The idea of non-attachment cannot arise in the mind of a person unless he has knowledge, *sankhya buddhi, vidya*.

That action actually is a bondage, and that it is somehow to be carried on to discharge one's debts is the knowledge that is to be at the back of this action. We have to do the drudgery. We cannot free ourselves from that as long as it is necessary for us to live in the body and the world. But we need not be attached to it. This freedom from attachment can be possible only if we know why we have come into this body. That is called *sankhya*. So, knowledge and action should go together. This is one teaching of the three verses connected with *avidya* and *vidya*.

The other three verses tell us another aspect of the matter, relating us to the world and God. There are people who believe that the world exists, but God does not exist. There are those who think that God exists, but the world does not exist. These are two types of people in the world, and neither type is totally correct in their feelings. Those who feel that only the world exists, and God, or the

Ultimate, does not exist, will go to darkness. Those who deny the world entirely, and think that God is extra-cosmic, go to greater darkness.

What is the relationship between God and the world? The teaching of this mantra is that we have to blend the concept of God and the world. Here in this context, the Purusha Sukta of the Veda is a great admonition to us that the Supreme Being became the cosmos. He envelopes the whole Cosmos, and is immanent in every little particle of sand. Every atom in creation is indwelt by God. That is the immanent aspect of God. If that is the case, and that is the only thing that we know – we know nothing more about God except that He is indwelling, that He is enveloping the cosmos – then it would mean that He has exhausted Himself in this world. He does not exist anymore as an independent reality. Just as milk has become curd, God has become the world. If God has become the world as milk has become curd, then as there is no chance of curd becoming milk again, as we know very well, no one can attain God. The idea of God-realisation would be a futile attempt, as God has exhausted Himself in this curd of the world. Is it so? It is not true. God has not become curd, though one doctrine of philosophy, called *parinama vada*, adumbrates and tells us that God has transformed Himself into the world. This idea of transformation should be taken with a pinch of salt. What do we mean by ‘transformed Himself? Has He become something else? To say that God has transformed Himself into the world would be to say that God has become another thing.

God has not become another thing. Logically, ‘A’ cannot become ‘B’. ‘A’ is ‘A’, and once ‘A’ becomes ‘B’, ‘A’

ceases to be. God would cease to be, if He has transformed Himself into the world. And what is God-realisation? The question does not arise.

God also transcends the world, says the Purusha Sukta, and is not merely present in the world. Very metaphorically, we may say, the *sutra* tells us that a little fraction – one-fourth, as it were – has become the world. Three-fourths is still there as the transcendent, uncontaminated Eternity. It does not mean that God can be divided like that into one-fourth and three-fourths, etc. The idea is just to instruct that this vast creation that is unthinkable and unimaginably astounding in its extensiveness is, after all, a little fraction. This is one Brahmanda, and God is supposed to be the Lord of endless crores of universes, which are regulated, controlled and ruled by Him. Every little particle of creation is indwelt by Him, and yet He is transcendent.

If we soak cloth in a bucket full of water, every fibre of the cloth will be indwelt by water. I am giving a small example of daily life to illustrate how a thing that is immanent can also be transcendent. God is immanent. But He is not simply immanent; He is transcendent, also. The whole of the cloth is saturated with water. There is water everywhere, in every fibre of the cloth. Water is indwelling the cloth. It is immanent. But water is not the cloth. It is very well known that cloth cannot be water; water cannot be cloth. Water is transcendent to cloth, though it is immanent in the cloth. This is a homely example just to show how a thing that is immanent and indwelling can also be totally transcendent.

Therefore, the Upanishad tells us that the Ultimate Reality is not merely transcendent in the sense of complete disconnection from the world. So we need not shun the world as the creation of Satan, or utter evil, nor can we cling to the world as a final reality. The world is not evil, because it is indwelt by God. It is not the final reality, because God is also transcendent. So this clinging to the externality of the world as the only reality is a mistake which will take us to darkness. And imagining God as a totally transcendent Being above the world will take us to greater darkness. We have to combine in our meditations the blending of these two concepts. God is present everywhere in all creation, and yet stands above the world. We will not be attached to this world, and yet, at the same time, we will not ignore this world.

These verses of the Isavasya Upanishad warn us in two different ways. On the one hand, we are expected to bring together knowledge and action in our daily life, and not separate action from knowledge or knowledge from action. On the other hand, it does not want us to separate God from the world and the world from God. They have to be brought together. There is a synthesis in our personal life in the world, and a synthesis in our meditation on cosmic existence, which is the creation of God. There is inward synthesis and also outward synthesis. When this inward synthesis and outward synthesis are effected, these two syntheses have again to be synthesised into a total Infinitude, which is what the Bhagavadgita explains in its chapters from seven to eleven.

So goes the Isavasya Upanishad, a wonderful scripture. In pithy, precise statements it gives us the whole philosophy

of life, which is given to us in a more detailed form in the scripture of the Bhagavadgita. How have we to live in this world? By neither shunning action and the world, nor attaching ourselves to action and the world; by blending action with knowledge, and blending the whole cosmos with the Supreme Creator.

This is to live a totally integrated spiritual life, which is the only way to final salvation of the Spirit, *moksha prapti*.