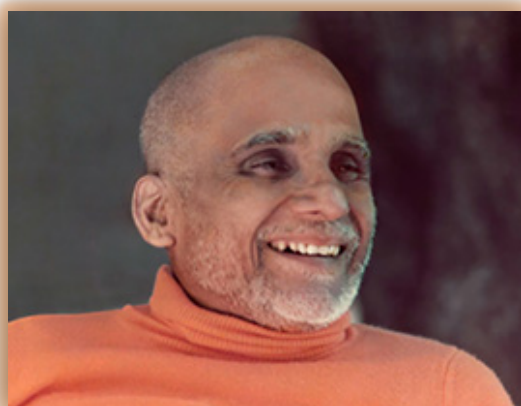


COMMENTARY ON THE KATHOPANISHAD



SWAMI KRISHNANANDA
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Highlighting the glory of Kathopanishad Sadgurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj says, “This is one of the most beautiful Upanishads in which the eternal truths are given in the form of a narrative.”

With great delight, we offer to our readers an exhaustive and illuminating commentary on this beautiful Upanishad by Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj. In the present book ‘Commentary on the Kathopanishad’, Pujya Sri Swamiji Maharaj blesses the spiritual aspirants with an insightful analysis of each verse in his unique and all-comprehensive style and also explains the sublime doctrines of Vedanta in a very attractive manner.

It is our sincere hope that earnest seekers will find ‘Commentary on the Kathopanishad’ immensely useful in clarifying all their doubts regarding spiritual life and thereby marching ahead on the path to attain the Supreme Goal of life.

—THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

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**COMMENTARY
ON THE
KATHOPANISHAD**

Discourse 1

NACHIKETAS GOES TO THE LORD OF DEATH

The manner of presentation of the Kathopanishad, and also some of its contents, bear some resemblance to the manner of presentation of the Bhagavadgita. The Bhagavadgita commences with a student, the seeker Arjuna, and the Kathopanishad, which is what we are going to study now, starts with a student, Nachiketas by name. Arjuna, as a seeker of higher knowledge, surrendered himself to his Master, Sri Krishna. Here Nachiketas surrenders himself to Yama, the Lord of Death, for the sake of knowledge.

The Bhagavadgita instruction starts with the distinction between *sankhya* and yoga. The Kathopanishad starts with an instruction on the distinction between the good and the pleasant. *Sankhya* and yoga are distinguished in the beginning of the Bhagavadgita. Here we have the distinction drawn by the great teacher between the good thing and the pleasant thing.

As the Bhagavadgita proceeds to more and more complicated themes, the Kathopanishad also moves to very interesting subjects. Surprisingly, the analogy of the inverted tree that we have in the Kathopanishad: *ūrdhva-mūlo'vāk-śākha* (K.U. 2.3.1), we also have in the Bhagavadgita: *ūrdhvamūlam adhaḥśākhā* (B.G. 15.1).

That very same word is there in the Kathopanishad as we have in the Bhagavadgita. Which came first, and which came afterwards, we need not discuss here. Perhaps the Upanishads came first, and the Bhagavadgita came afterwards. Questions of life and death, and problems concerning human life, the nature of the immortality of the soul and the hereafter, which is the aim of the soul's ascent finally, are some of the themes which appear to be commonly present in the Kathopanishad and in the Bhagavadgita.

Aum saha nāv avatu, saha nau bhunaktu, saha vīryam karavāvahai: tejasvi nāv adhītam astu: mā vidviṣāvahai; aum śāntih, śāntih, śāntih. A Shanti Mantra is recited at the beginning of the Upanishad. Every Upanishad has some Shanti Mantra which is recited in the beginning as well as in the end. In this particular context of the Kathopanishad, the Shanti Mantra is what we have recited just now.

Saha nāv avatu: May That protect us both. Here 'both' means the teacher and the disciple. May we, the teacher and the disciple, be blessed and protected by That. *Saha nau bhunaktu:* May That energise both of us, and on the one side, make us fit for teaching, and on the other side, make us fit for receiving the teaching. *Saha vīryam karavāvahai:* May we get strengthened by the energy imparted by the teacher. *Tejasvi nāv adhītam astu:* May our study impart radiance and light to us. *Mā vidviṣāvahai:* May there be no conflict between us, may there be no difference of opinion between us, may there be nothing between us which will break the harmony between us, may there be always harmony between us. *Aum śāntih, śāntih, śāntih:* May there be peace, may there be peace, may there be peace. "May

there be peace” is said three times as an invocation of divine powers for the freedom from three kinds of troubles to which humanity is generally held: troubles that arise from our own selves, known as *adhyatmika tapa*; troubles from the outside world, known as *adhibhautika tapa*; troubles coming from above by thunderstorm, heavy rains, and even earthquakes, which are all superphysical occurrences causing pain to mankind, known as *adhidaivika tapa*. May there be peace in all the three directions. We begin the study of the Kathopanishad after the recitation of the Shanti Mantra.

Uśan ha vai vājaśravasaḥ sarva-vedasaṁ dadau: tasya ha naciketā nāma putra āsa (1.1.1). This is the first mantra of the Kathopanishad. The meaning of this passage is that a sage, a holy man called Vajasravasa, wanting to reach heaven, desiring the joys of the celestial kingdom, performed a sacrifice called Sarvavedas, also known as Vishvajit. The condition of this particular kind of sacrifice, which is performed for the attainment of heaven after death, is that the person aspiring for this joy of the celestial world should offer in charity everything that he has. Whatever one considers as one’s belonging should be offered in gift, in charity, so that after this performance of the sacrifice one has nothing to call one’s own. One remains stripped of all possessions and the consciousness of having any kind of belonging.

This is a very difficult situation to imagine. Many of us may not be able to summon to our own mental imagination how it would look if we were stripped of every idea of possession and belonging. “I have no house, I have no land, I have no money. There is nothing with me

that I can call my possession.” That circumstance in life is a very interesting theme for study in spiritual psychology. The spiritual method of approach to life is specifically a way of placing oneself in a condition in which one is not actually now, but in which one can find oneself some day or the other. It requires a power of imagination. One can imagine that one is a king. It is not merely a joke. The mind can enjoy in sheer imagination the powers and glories of an emperor or it can imagine the tragedy and grief of a beggar because, after all, human experience, whatever be its nature, is a mental operation in the end. All our experiences in life are psychological, a kind of position that the mind occupies in the structure of individual existence, by which experiences follow. Usually, the buffeting of the individual by outer circumstances in the world causes experience. Inner conditions of the body may also cause certain experiences, but we can summon an experience even without anything happening outside or inside us.

Actually, the way of meditation, the principal occupation of the yoga student, is nothing but a circumstance that we are creating in our own mind which does not physically exist in the world. In a similar manner is the purpose of this sacrifice called Vishvajit, wherein one frees oneself from every kind of attachment. This was attempted by the great sage Vajasravasa, who had a son called Nachiketas. This is what the first mantra, the first passage, the first sloka, the first verse of the Kathopanishad tells us: *uśan ha vai vājaśravasaḥ sarva-vedasaṁ dadau: tasya ha naciketā nāma putra āsa.*

Tam ha kumāraṁ santaṁ dakṣiṇāsu nīyamānāsu śraddhā-viveśa, so'manyata (1.1.2). The innocent boy, being a very

little lad, was observing the sacrifice. Children are very observant and can sometimes notice things much better than older people because of the tremendous concentration that they have and their capacity to focus their minds on only one thing. The boy was observing the great sacrifice being performed by the father and the gifts being given in great abundance to all the people gathered there. Some feeling arose in his mind. There was some kind of inner transformation that took place in the mind of this little boy when he saw his father giving charity—giving, giving, giving, giving everything. What did the boy notice? What was he seeing? He was seeing a very interesting phenomenon.

Pītodakā jagdha-tṛṇā dugdha-dohā nirindriyāḥ anandā nāma te lokās tām sa gacchata tā dadat (1.1.3) is the third mantra. The venerable father, wanting to enjoy the joys of heaven and trying to follow the conditions of the sacrifice meant for that purpose, was giving cattle in charity. Perhaps, as was the case in ancient times, cattle were considered as real wealth, more than gold and silver, which was not respected very much. Generally people did not own coins, currency notes, gold and silver, as much as cattle. Cattle wealth was great wealth. So when cattle were given as gifts in charity, it was tantamount to giving whatever wealth one has. Cattle were being offered as gifts. What kind of cattle?

Here is the peculiarity of the situation which touched the very heart of this little boy. The boy was not foolish; he was intelligent. He had a sense of what was proper and what was not proper. What was he seeing? Cattle were being given in gift. What kind of cattle? *Pītodakā*:

They had drunk water for the last time. They would not drink further. *Jagdha-trṇā*: They had chewed grass for the last time. They would not be able to eat grass further on. *Dugdha-dohā*: They had been milked for the last time, and further milk would not come from them. *Nirindriyāḥ*: They were so weak that they were tottering. They could not even walk properly. They were in the lowest ebb of their life principle, weakened by starvation—bony cattle that could not eat grass further, could not yield milk anymore, and could not even drink water. Such cattle were being given as gifts. Very surprising indeed!

What does 'gift' mean? Charity means the giving of that which we love most. It does not mean simply giving something. Our heart has to go a little bit by the process of alienation, and our joy should diminish a little because of a part of our joy going to contribute to the joy of another person. If we do not share a little of our love and joy, and do not contribute thereby to the joy of some other person, any kind of giving in that condition cannot be regarded as a gift. If we have lost nothing by giving, we have given nothing. And if the person receiving actually receives nothing, the gift has not been received. So if cattle which were about to die were offered like dead coins or broken currency notes, Vajasravasa really lost nothing because he had given things which were of no value whatsoever. Because the things that he gave in gift had no value, he had lost nothing, and because of that very reason, the person receiving also received nothing. So it was a big game of pretentious sacrifice.

The boy was looking at this. What did he feel inside? People who give charities and gifts of this kind go to joyless

worlds: *anandā nāma te lokās tān sa gacchata tā dadat*. The child felt: “My dear father does not know even this much. The joyless, grief-stricken realms will be the result that follows from the gifts pretentiously offered in this manner. I am also a belonging; therefore, I too have to go as a gift. All things that belong to my father should go in charity. As I am his son, I belong to him, and so I must also go, and he must offer me as a gift to somebody.”

Sa hovāca pitaram, tāta kasmai mām, dāsyasīti; dvitīyaṃ tṛtīyam; taṃ hovāca: mṛtyave tvā dadāmi (1.1.4): Nachiketas asked his father, “Dear Father, to whom are you going to offer me?”

The father did not pay any attention to this blabbering of the impertinent child. He thought: “You speak like this before me as if I am going to offer you, my dear son, to somebody else?” and he spoke not a word in reply.

A second time the child asked, “Father, to whom are you going to give me?”

The second time also the father did not give a reply. He was annoyed.

A third time this boy persisted in asking the same question: “To whom are you going to offer me as a gift?”

The father got irritated. “To hell you go. To death I offer thee.”

Sometimes, in uncontrollable irascibility, people utter words, to their own repentance afterwards. You might have seen a father or mother condemning their children in words which are abominable, they themselves not knowing the meaning at all. Anyway, this word came from the mouth of the father in haste and anger, though he would not have uttered such words in saner moments.

Bahūnām emi prathamah, bahūnām madhyamah; kim svid yamasya kartavyam yan mayādyā kariṣyati (1.1.5): This was a very terrible thing for the boy to hear. “You ask me to go to death? It is to death that you are going to offer me as a gift? After all, what is the wrong that I have committed that I should be consumed by the jaws of death? Maybe among people I am not the best, maybe I am at least middling in quality, but am I the worst that I should go to death? What is the Lord of Death about to do with me? Should I die for no fault of mine? Anyway, these words have come from the mouth of my dear father. He wants me to go to death. Father, stick to your words. Do not withdraw these words.”

This is what Rama might have told Dasaratha because Dasaratha might have felt really sorry for having given the promise to Kaikeyi: “I shall offer you boons, whatever be the boons that you ask.” But when the time came for it and he had to offer the boons, to the chagrin of all people, to his own sorrow and to his demise, he would have very much liked to withdraw the promise, indications to which he gave in his anguish-ridden words to Kaikeyi. But Rama said, “Stick to your word, and I shall fulfil the promise that you have given to Mother Kaikeyi.”

Anupaśya yathā pūrve pratipaśya tathāpare, sasyam iva martyaḥ pacyate sasyam ivajāyate punaḥ (1.1.6): So does the boy Nachiketas speak here. “Father, stick to your word. Do not withdraw the idea that was behind the words that you spoke. I shall go to death. Remember how ancient people stuck to their truth; *pratipaśya tathāpare*: how people who came afterwards also stuck to truth. Once you utter a word, it has to be stuck to forever. Do not withdraw that word.

So please remember how ancient people behaved, and how people who follow the ancient ones also behave. After all, what is there in dying? There is nothing surprising in it, and nothing to fear. Like corn, human beings shrivel, and like corn, human beings rise up into action. When the harvest dries up and is cut, the corn falls on the field. Likewise, decrepit old age catches hold of every human being and compels the body to shrivel to death. As corn is cooked, human beings are also cooked by the power of death. *Sasyam iva martyaḥ pacyate sasyam ivajāyate punaḥ*: Even if dried-up grain falls on the ground dead, as it were, it is not really dead. It has to rise again into action when it germinates. So is the case with people. People die only to be reborn. After all, what is there if I go to death? I shall lose nothing. I shall be born once again, perhaps as a better man. Therefore, Father, stick to your word, knowing that truth has to be followed, and also knowing that death is not to be feared because death necessarily leads to rebirth, possibly in a better state of affairs.” Either Nachiketas actually spoke these words or he mentally thought them, as the case may be.

There is a linguistic gap between the verse that I read just now and the verse that follows, either due to a lacuna in the redaction of the text, or the original text propounded by the ancient Master has been kept as a guarded secret in certain ways so that everything is not told, while something necessary is told. Secrets of spiritual life are, no doubt, taught by Gurus, but they do not teach every blessed thing. Something they withhold because students are not always ready to receive everything that the Guru knows. In a similar manner, perhaps some little thing between the two

verses is kept secret. What seems to be there as the point that is to be read between the two lines is that the soul of Nachiketas leaves the body.

In another edition of this Upanishad that occurs in the Taittiriya Brahmana, the same story is told in a different way. A voice from the sky speaks.

Nachiketas went to the abode of the Lord of Death, and passed three nights in the absence of Yama. He went there when Yama was not at home, and stood outside, starving.

After three days, when the lord of the house came, he asked, "You have been here for three nights. What did you eat?"

"On the first day, your cattle," so goes the reply.

"What did you eat on the second day?"

"Your progeny."

"What did you eat on the third day?"

"All your good works."

The word used in the Sanskrit language for an uninvited guest is *atithi*. *Atithi* is one who comes uninvited. The uninvited comers are sometimes considered as God coming because anything that happens without our knowledge and without our interference should be considered as the work of God, especially if the *atithi* is a knower of Brahman, a Brahmana. In Nachiketas' case he was such. He was a Brahmin boy, and very self-controlled and, therefore, very powerful. If such a person arrives at the gates of the house of a person and is not properly received, he shall destroy all the good works of the lord of that house. Like a fire does the *atithi* come. As a burning flame does the *atithi* enter the house.

Vaiśvānaraḥ praviśaty atithir brāhmaṇo grhān: tasyaitāṁ śāntiṁ kurvanti, hara vaivasvatodakam (1.1.7): Commentators say that this verse, this particular half passage, is actually the words spoken by the queen of Yama. The queen speaks, say the commentators of this passage, to pacify this new guest. “He is burning like a flame because of no attention being paid to him. May he be satisfied. Bring water immediately. Wash his feet, make him seated, and offer him gifts so that his anger may subside and you will have peace. For three days this boy has been standing here without anyone’s knowledge. He will destroy all your good deeds and all your belongings. All your future will be in ruins if you do not treat him properly. Bring water.”

Āśā-pratīkṣe saṁgataṁ sūnṛtāṁ ceṣṭāpūrte putra-paśūmś ca sarvān, etad vṛṅkte puruṣasyālpamedhaso yasyānaśnan vasati brāhmaṇo grhe (1.1.8): When a person come in that way is not properly received, what happens? All the hopes of the lord of the house are destroyed then and there. All his expectations get burnt to ashes. All the good things that he has done immediately die. All his friends depart. All the results that followed from his sacrifices, i.e., philanthropic deeds such as charities of different types that he has done to people and the results of Vedic sacrifices, they also immediately perish. His children die, and his cattle perish when he disregards an *atithi* who comes. If the lord of the house, not knowing the value of receiving guests, *atithis*, ignores their presence, he loses everything that he has got and himself gets ruined. This is what happens when a starving man stands in front of him.

Yama is suddenly aware of all this because of the instruction that is imparted to him by his own queen:

“Great danger is ahead for you if you do not satisfy this lad.”

Tisro rātrīr yād avatsīr gr̥he me'naśnan brahman atitthir namasyaḥ. namaste'stu, brahman; svasti me'stu; tasmāt prati trīn varān vṛṇīṣva (1.1.9). “My dear boy,” says Yama, “you have stood at my house for three nights without taking anything from me, without taking food and drinking water. You are a respectable holy man. Holy respectable Brahmacharin, I have made a great mistake in not being present when you came, and I made you starve. You did not drink even water. Namaskar. Prostration to you. I salute you and prostrate myself before you, great Brahmin, the glory of *tapas*. May peace be unto me. Do not curse me. As a recompense for the trouble that I have given to you, please ask for three boons. I shall immediately, instantaneously, grant you these three boons.”

This is an introduction to the Kathopanishad.

Discourse 2

THE FIRST TWO BOONS

We observed that the boy Nachiketas stood there at the gates of the palace of Yama for three days and nights without taking any food, and without even drinking water. The great Master speaks to Nachiketas: “Prostrations to you, O holy lad. As a recompense, as an expiation for all the mistakes that may be involved in not treating you properly, I offer you three boons.”

Nachiketas now speaks what he would like to have from Yama, the great Master: the first boon, the second boon, and the third boon. In asking, the boy is very logical. The easiest thing, which can be granted at once, he asks for initially. A more difficult thing he asks for as the second boon. The most difficult thing, surpassing the earlier two, he keeps for the last. Perhaps if he had mentioned the last at the beginning itself, it would not have succeeded, and it would have actually defeated the very purpose of the granting of the boons. Wise was this boy, very intelligent, and he knew what he was asking. So what did he say? The first boon is here in this verse.

*Śānta-saṁkalpaḥ sumanā yathā syād vīta-manyur
gautamo mābhi mṛtyo, tvat-prasr̥ṣṭam mābhivadet pratīta,
etat trayāṇām prathamam varam vṛṇe* (1.1.10): “When I

return, freed from you, O Lord, to the world where my father lives, may he receive me with a calm and composed mind, free from the anger with which he sent me to you. When you release me from this place, let him recognise me and speak to me cordially, lovingly and affectionately. Of the three boons that you have been good enough to grant me, this is the first one. Please be good enough to give it to me,” says Nachiketas.

This is a single verse whose literal meaning is obvious and clear, and we know what is actually meant. It has a spiritual import. Actually, the Kathopanishad is a textbook for the highest kind of spiritual instruction, a mystical text even, and it has an outer meaning as well as an inner one. Nachiketas, who faced death, could not have been an ordinary person, as facing death is the last thing that anyone can do. Death is said to be the greatest instructor and educator of people. One who has faced it will, to a large extent, know the secret of life, because death is the secret that is hidden from our vision throughout our earthly sojourn. We live in this world minus the consciousness of death. We do not even imagine that such a thing exists in this world. What exists is a conglomeration of sense objects which are expected to give us physical satisfaction, and we consider that life is coeternal and coeval with the joys of life, not for a moment thinking about the possibility of our having to face a thing called death. Nobody thinks of it at any time in the day, though that is what rules the world. It is often said that what we call life in this world is only a camouflage which death has put on. It is an incessant dying that we are experiencing in this world, which we mistake for actual continuous life.

Little pieces of pictures totally different from one another give the impression, illusorily, of a motion picture, with people walking about, speaking, singing and dancing. It is an illusory presentation presented to our senses, which cannot catch up to the speed of the movement of the pictures. If the power of the eyes can be adjusted to the speed of the motion picture, we will see each picture moving separately. Inasmuch as our visual capacity is inferior to the velocity of the movement of the pictures in a cinema, we mistake the isolated bits for a continuous stream of motion.

In a similar manner, the ruling principle in this world is fluxation, which is the very structure of everything. Everything moves; everything is heading towards something else every moment of time. Nothing is; everything is becoming. If this is the law of life and this is what is actually happening in the world, death is actually what we call life, and our knowledge is nothing but a shadow of ignorance. One who has faced death, one who has actually encountered it, understood it and learnt a lesson from it, would not anymore be a human being. He would be a super-person, a superman.

When that person returns to the world, he would be received in a different manner altogether. The reception given by the world to a person who knows the world is like the reception given by a thief to a person who knows that he is a thief. If we mistake the person for somebody other than a dacoit, he will be treated differently. The world treats us as subjects, as servants, as it were, under the clutches of it being impossible to understand how the world is working. But a superman, or a Godman, is one who has insight into

the very structure of things. We may call him a *jivanmukta purusha* if we like, in traditional language.

When we take a bath in the sea of death and come out drenched with it, we view things with a new perspective altogether that has been given to us by the bath of death. We will not be confined to the limitations of the world if we overcome death. When a person who has overcome the tribulations caused by the death principle visualises the world, the world shall receive that person quite differently from the manner in which it receives most of us ignorant persons. It will not anymore be a terrifying phantasm before us. The world will not anymore be a controlling power over us. We shall have no fear from anything in this world, because knowledge is also power. Knowledge of the world gives us power over the world.

At present we are ignorant people. We have no knowledge of things. Neither do we know how we are related to this world, nor do we know what the world is made of, what its internal constituents are. We are helplessly dragged by the whims and fancies of nature, we may say, or even granting they are not whims and fancies, by the laws of nature, of which we are totally ignorant. The days and the nights and the seasons, the heat and the cold and the rain and the drought, and the concomitant difficulties that arise from these events over which we have absolutely no control, make us subjects in this world. We are no more masters of the world, because these problems are the outcome of our not being able to understand how we stand in the context of this world.

When we return to this world after having faced death, it means to say, having plunged very deeply into

the constituent death-like features of the world, it shall no more be a fearsome ogre before us. Calm and quiet will be the world before us. It will not be a terrifying medium of material presentations, as it is to us now. We will not be a servant of the world anymore; it shall be our servant. It shall not anymore be an object of our senses; it shall be our friend. Control over things follows from the inner knowledge of the constituents of the objects. Wherever there is insight, there is also strength over the things of which we have an insight.

So spiritually construed, this particular mantra, or verse, is also a hint into the manner in which a great genius, a spiritual stalwart in insight, lives in this world, and how the world reacts in respect of that person. The world is not anymore a snare to that person. All things will be smiling before us. They will not frown at us, as they are doing now. The things in the world will be our friends. The so-called inert matter of this earth stuff will assume an intelligence which will speak to us in the language of friendship and conformity, rather than difference and dissidence.

A superman's return to the world is an inner significance of this verse, a secret meaning that is hidden here, while the outer meaning is just the literal dictionary meaning which I read out just now: "When I go back, may my father greet me with affection." This world is our father; may it greet us with affection. May it not tantalise us, may it not subject us to its drama-creating activities. May it not subject us to death. We shall not be subject to death anymore, because we shall have the vision of death much before we return to the world. This is the meaning of Nachiketas having confronted death and wanting to come back to the world

unscathed and unaffected by the turmoil characterising the world. This is an inner, secret, mystical meaning which may be read into this verse, apart from the exoteric meaning which is obvious to everybody.

Yathā purastād bhavitā pratīta auddālakir āruṇir matprasṛṣṭaḥ, sukhaṁ rātrīś śayitā vītamanyus tvāṁ dadṛśivān mṛtyumukhāt pramuktam (1.1.11). Yama gives a reply to this request of the boy Nachiketas. “Granted. As your father was loving and affectionate towards you before you came here to me, so will he be loving and affectionate to you even when you go back after having been released by me. In the same way as he was, so shall he be in the future also. After having seen you come back from my realm, his anger will totally vanish. He shall be happy to see you.”

This is another verse which has a similar internal meaning as the earlier one, complementary to the internal meaning attached to the earlier verse, signifying that the principle of death will free us from its clutches provided that we transcend the limitations of the human personality and become supermen.

We have supermen in this world. Bhagavan Sri Krishna was a superman. The Avatars of Vishnu are all symbols of supermen. The Incarnations and the Avatars that we speak of in the religions of the world are supermen. They could walk on this earth and also keep their heads high in the heavens. They think through the heavens but walk with their feet on the earth; such are supermen. That is, they have a direct contact with the two worlds at the same time, the deathless and the death-ridden, whereas people who are ordinary men, not supermen, have no consciousness of a heavenly existence and do not think like heavenly beings.

They think like mortals, and their thoughts are overcome by anxieties, vexations and constant distractions, giving no peace in this world even for a moment.

No human being can have real happiness in this world because we are involved in a fluxation of the movements of nature, the world as a whole, and like a straw that is being driven by the flood of a river without any control over itself, we seem to be moving in this world of nature which is helplessly driving us as a shepherd is driving sheep. Such a predicament will no longer be ours if we overcome the defects of human nature by freeing ourselves from passion, greed, anger, and desires of every kind, and cleanse our personality with the knowledge of there being such a connection between the mortal and the immortal. That is to say, we shall be able to live in the world as gods verily walking on earth. Then the world shall not be anymore an inimical presentation before us. It shall be friendly, affectionate, loving.

So the great Lord says, "Go back, and you shall have no problems anymore." This much is briefly the import of the first boon. Great is the consequence of even this first boon. To be a superman is not an ordinary achievement, but there is something more than being a superman. There are greater secrets than the secrets mentioned already. What are they?

"May I ask you, great Master, another thing which is a different boon altogether, far superior to the one which you were good enough to grant to me? I shall spell out the second boon. Please condescend to grant it to me," asks Nachiketas. This is something more difficult, deeper, wider and grander than the earlier one.

Svarge loke na bhayaṃ kiṃ ca nāsti na tatra tvam na jarayā bibheti. ubhe tīrtvā aśanāyā pipāse śokātigo modate svarga-loke; sa tvam agniṃ svargyam adhyeṣi mṛtyo, prabrūhi taṃ śraddadānāya mahyam, svarga-lokā amṛtatvam bhajanta, etad dvitīyena vṛṇe vareṇa (1.1.12-13): Nachiketas speaks. “I have heard, O Master, that there is a heavenly world of deathless beings. *Na tatra tvam*: You are not there. It means that death is not there. And no one there is afraid of old age. The gods in heaven are said to be free from old age and death. There is birth, childhood and youth. There are only three conditions of life there—birth, childhood and youth—but no decay, no old age, no death. I have heard that such a realm exists. There is no fear in that kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is free from fear of every kind; this is what I have heard. Hunger and thirst do not torment people there. They are not actually people; they are called angels, gods. Freed from every kind of grief, the denizens of heaven enjoy life perpetually. What is this heaven? Where does it exist? What is its dimension, and what is the reason for the denizens, the citizens, the occupants of that region to be so happy, free from the sorrow of old age and death? Please instruct me in the knowledge of that particular sacrifice, the fire sacrifice, by the performance of which I shall be able to attain to that heaven where glory is the heritage of everyone. No sorrow of any kind will be there. Please instruct me into this *vidya*, the secret knowledge of a great unknown sacrifice, because it is difficult to imagine what kind of sacrifice it could be which can transform a mortal into a deathless being in the heavenly world. It is not known to people because had it been known to everybody, all would have performed that sacrifice. The world would

have been depopulated and there would be overpopulation in the kingdom of heaven. That does not take place because no one in the world knows what it is.”

Now, when we read this, we should not be under the impression that we will get this knowledge merely by reading these two verses. The writer of the Upanishad has been careful to tell us that such a knowledge was granted to Nachiketas without telling us what that knowledge is.

“So great Master, you know this great *vidya*, this art, this science of this sacrifice. I am full of faith. I eagerly seek this knowledge. Please tell it to me, because one who attains to that heavenly world enjoys deathlessness. May I also be blessed with that boon. This is the second boon. Will you kindly give it to me?” asks Nachiketas.

Pra te bravāmi tad u me nibodha svargyam agniṁ naciketaḥ prajānan, anantalokāptim atho pratiṣṭhāṁ viddhi, tvam etaṁ nihitaṁ guhāyām (1.1.14): The great Master speaks, “I shall gladly give it to you. Take it. My dear boy, listen carefully to what I am saying. This heavenly universal fire is now the object of your quest, and I know what it is. I shall grant this boon to you in the form of instruction in this knowledge. What happens if you gain this knowledge? Do you know? Endless will be the suzerainty that you will gain. Power unlimited will be in your possession, and you will be established in the very root of the world—*pratiṣtha*.”

Actually, according to the commentaries, this *pratiṣtha*, or the root of the world, is the Virat, or the Vaishvanara-tattva, which is also known as the Vaishvanara-agni, details of which meditation are described in the Fifth Chapter of the Chhandogya Upanishad. This great root of the world, the knowledge of which will make one endowed with

immense power and endless suzerainty, is not just spread out outside. It is also in the deepest recesses of one's heart.

The secret of this wisdom is indirectly revealed, though not clearly and publicly, when it is told to us that this universal root of the world is also in the heart of every person. The secret lies here, that the attainment of this universal suzerainty is tantamount to acquiring control over one's own self because it is the essence of our own being, while it is also the essence of the whole world outside. How would we envisage it? The difficulty is in the method of adjusting our mind, or consciousness, for the purpose of this great meditation.

As I mentioned, the Chhandogya Upanishad goes into great detail in regard to this subject. Some learned people, six in number, went to Ashvapati, a great Master, who was the king of that country. They were all already well learned, in a way they were *brahmasrotriyas*, but they had great difficulties. They had doubts in their minds as to what this universal Atman is. How would we think the universal Atman in the mind? When we use the word 'universal', we imply that it is as large as the whole of creation, or even larger than that. This means to say that is very, very far from us, unimaginably remote. But at the same time, it is said that this unimaginably distant so-called something, dimensionless infinity, we may say, is inside us. This is a startling feature of this instruction. "If you say it is within me, I understand something is inside me. Or if you say it is everywhere, I also understand that. But if you bring these two features together, I cannot understand." So these great men had to go to Master Ashvapati, and he gave them the secret of this meditation. Yama, the Master who teaches

Nachiketas here in this Upanishad, mentions once again that the root of the world—which is the cause of unlimited rulership of the whole world, of the cosmos—this root is within us.

Lokādim agniṁ tam uvāca tasmai, yā iṣṭakā, yāvatīr vā, yathā vā. sa cāpi tat pratyavadat yathoktam; athāsya mṛtyuḥ punar evāha tuṣṭaḥ (1.1.15). Now, having uttered these words, the great Master initiates the boy into the secret of this sacrifice. The origin of the universe, which is the supreme Vaishvanara fire, is told to Nachiketas. *Lokādim agniṁ tam uvāca tasmai*: The origin of all things, which is the fire of the sacrifice, is clearly told: how many bricks are to be there in the altar of this sacrifice, what types of bricks are to be used for this altar, and how one is to commence the actual oblations in the sacrifice. *Yā iṣṭakā, yāvatīr vā, yathā vā*: How, what kind, and how many—all these things were mentioned.

Actually, it will be very clear that these bricks cannot be made of earth. Though symbolically the word ‘brick’ is used here for the construction of the altar in the sacrifice, it cannot be a material brick because of the fact that the sacrifice, which is the subject of this verse, does not seem to be a material offering. The object of attainment is non-material because it is everywhere, and inside us also. These bricks are nothing but certain patterns of thinking. They are modes of thought, adjustments of consciousness, and processes of conditioning oneself. These are the bricks, and a tremendous type of initiation is necessary for this. To conceive a universal that is inside us, our consciousness has to be adjusted in such a way that is ordinarily a total impossibility. So these bricks are not

material substances weighing some kilograms; they are bricks of consciousness.

When this instruction was given, every word was repeated by Nachiketas. “Do this, do this, this way, this way,” Lord Yama said; and Nachiketas repeated it: “Yes, yes, yes. I understand, I understand, I understand.” *Sa cāpi tat pratyavadat yathoktam*: As was told, so was repeated word for word by Nachiketas. Great thing! A tremendously earthshaking knowledge is described here very, very briefly—so briefly, so secretly that the ordinary, shackled mind cannot make any sense of this. Great purification is necessary even to grasp the import of what this *vidya* is. Nachiketas understood it, practised it, and conquered death. This is the Upanishad for conquering death.

Tam abravīt prīyamāṇo mahātmā varam tavehādya dadāmi bhūyaḥ. tavaiva nāmnā bhavitāyam agniḥ, sṛṅkām cemām aneka-rūpām grhāṇa (1.1.16): Having been pleased with the way in which Nachiketas received this *vidya*, Yama speaks. “I shall bless you with another boon which is not one of the three—a fourth one, as it were. In future this *vidya* will be called Nachiketas *vidya*. That is, your name will be immortalised from this day onwards.” As we dedicate a building in the name of some great personage or call a road by somebody’s name, etc., this *vidya* specially granted by Yama to Nachiketas was hereafter known as Nachiketas *vidya*, or Nachiketas *agnividya*. *Tavaiva nāmnā bhavitāyam agniḥ*: “This *vidya* will be known by your name in future, and I shall give you a garland full of colourful constituents.”

What is this garland? The Upanishad does not tell us what the garland is made of. It cannot be a flower garland. It also may not be a garland of jewels. It is a secret, mystical

garland. Here the commentators come to our aid when they say that this garland of many hues, contours and colours mentioned in this verse is actually the knowledge of the mystery of life and death, of the process of karma itself. One of the greatest secrets of the world is the mystery of karma—how actions produce complementary reactions, what kind of fruit is the outcome of what kind of action that we perform, and what is actually the connection between birth and death. We know these words, but their actual import is difficult to immediately grasp. Why is it necessary for us to be born? If we had not been born, what is the harm? Having been born, why should we die? If we do not die, what is the harm? And why should every action produce a reaction? These are the multifaceted hues of life in this world. The secret of this is also given here in the form of a garland—mystical, invisible, unsubstantial, intangible. Power and glory are attached to this spiritual garland. This is what the commentators tell us. The secret of life and death and karma is also granted. This is a new kind of boon that was granted—a fourth boon, as it were.

Triṇāciketas tribhir etya sandhiṃ trikarma-kṛt tarati janma-mṛtyū, brahmajajñāṃ devam īdyaṃ viditvā nicāyye'māṃ śāntim atyantam eti (1.1.17). Yama speaks further, “Any person who has performed the sacrifice of Nachiketas three times, and anyone who has been inwardly united through this knowledge which is secret, which is threefold in its nature, overcomes birth and death.”

What is the threefold knowledge, the threefold getting united? We have to look to the commentators here again because the words are too mystical. They do not give an overt meaning. The three-times performance is identified

with the practice of a kind of meditation which consists, first of all, in receiving knowledge from a preceptor, then contemplating it inwardly in one's own mind, delving deeply into it, and converting that knowledge into the very being of one's own self, which is sometimes known as *sravana*, *manana*, *nididhyasana*. This is one meaning that commentators attach to the passage "he who has thrice performed the Nachiketas sacrifice"; or we may literally say it means one who has performed it three times and has been inwardly united through instruction by means of the Vedas, the Smritis and the Masters, which is also a meaning that has been read into it by commentators because the original itself is too mystical and its meaning is not obvious. Knowledge comes to us through the Vedas, the Smritis, and the observation of great people. This is the threefold unity to be inwardly achieved by the study and acquisition of the knowledge of the highest scripture, which is the Veda, and the secondary scripture, which is the Smriti, the law of ethics and morality, and the lives of saints, the conduct of the Masters.

Thus, one who has performed the Nachiketas sacrifice in a threefold manner, and has performed the three duties, is free from death. *Yajna*, *dana*, *tapas* are the three words that we have in the Bhagavadgita. The greatest duty of the human being is *yajna*, *dana*, *tapas*. We have gone into the meaning of these three words on other occasions, so I shall not repeat them now. These three are said to be the study of the Veda, the performance of sacrifice, and giving in charity. These three meanings are available to us in the Chhandogya Upanishad, but to make it less complicated, we may take it as *yajna*, *dana*, *tapas* in the language of

the Bhagavadgita. Great conditions are put here: thrice performing, in a threefold manner, and getting inwardly united by three means of knowledge, and performing three duties—*yajna, dana, tapas*. Such a person is free from death. He overcomes birth and death. He becomes omniscient by knowing this, the root of the universe, Vaishvanara, which is rooted in Brahman.

Brahmajajñam devam īḍyam: having known this adorable God of the cosmos who was born of Brahman. We know the gradation of the manifestation of the Supreme Being as Brahman, Ishvara, Hiranyagarbha and Virat. We are now discussing the power and knowledge of the Virat as the Vaishvanara-tattva, knowing which, one becomes the Lord of the universe, and are describing it here as being born of Brahman. Knowing this, one becomes endowed with eternal peace: *brahmajajñam devam īḍyam veditvā nicāyye'mām śāntim atyantam eti*.

Discourse 3

NACHIKETAS ASKS FOR THE THIRD BOON

The great Master Yama initiates Nachiketas into the mystery of the Vaishvanara-agni through the sacrifice which is mystical in its nature, and every kind of detail connected with the sacrifice is also explained. Nachiketas, like a very good student, repeats every word of the instruction given to him by the Master.

Triṇāciketas trayam etad viditvā ya evaṁ vidvāṁś cinute nāciketam, mṛtyu-pāśān purataḥ praṇodya śokātigo modate svarga-loke (1.1.18): Yama says, “Whoever knows the secret of this Nachiketas fire, performing it three times, in three ways, with three modes, etc., and knowing this, conducts this sacrifice in one’s own consciousness, such a person frees himself from the rules of death and, transcending all sorrow, enjoys immeasurable bliss in the kingdom of heaven.”

Eṣa te’gnir nachiketas svargyo yam avṛṇīthāḥ dvitīyena vareṇa, etam agnim tavaiva pravakṣyanti janāśas; tṛtīyaṁ varam naciketo vṛṇīṣva (1.1.19): Yama continues, “You have asked for the second boon in the form of this great fire, and here it is for you. Take it and be happy. Your name will be associated with this sacrifice for all eternity, and in future this sacrifice will be known as the Nachiketas sacrifice. Now, my dear boy, ask for the third boon.”

This next boon comes unexpectedly like a bombshell on the head of Yama, the great Master. The boon which Nachiketas asks for is startling, shocking to Yama himself. He never thought that the boy would ask such a question, because the first two were simple enough to understand. The third boon is something which one cannot easily understand. What is this third boon? Supremely intelligent indeed is the boy Nachiketas to have thought of putting this question to Yama, the greatest of teachers.

Yeyam prete vicikitsā manuṣye 'stīty eke nāyam astīti caike; etat vidyām anuśiṣṭas tvayāham, varāṇām eṣa varas tṛtīyaḥ (1.1.20): Nachiketas says, “Here is the third boon that I ask for. There is a great doubt among people on one important matter. After the soul leaves this physical body and this physical world, people say it is, or sometimes they say it is not. I want to be initiated into this knowledge of what actually happens to the soul that leaves this physical world, this physical body. Where does it go? What happens to it? Will you kindly grant this third boon?”

Devair atrāpi vicikitsitam purā, na hi suvijñeyam, aṇur eṣa dharmah, anyam varam naciketo vṛñiṣva, mā moparotsīr ati mā sṛjainam (1.1.21): Lord Yama replies, “You are asking this kind of question? Don’t harass me unnecessarily. Because I asked you to choose a third boon, you are asking this kind of question which is too difficult for me, because even the gods have a doubt about this matter, let alone mortals. Even the celestials in heaven cannot answer this question and you, mortal young boy, want to know this?” *Devair atrāpi vicikitsitam purā, na hi suvijñeyam*: “It is not easy to understand.” *Aṇur eṣa dharmah*: “Very subtle is this truth. Please ask for something else.” *Anyam varam naciketo*

vr̥ṇīṣva: “Don’t bind me with this request.” *Mā moparotsīr ati mā sṛjainam*: “Please relieve me from this obligation to answer this kind of question.” Yama himself wants to be free from this bond, or noose, of the question of this boy. “Ask for something else. Every glorious thing, wonderful thing, magnificent thing I shall give you, but don’t put a question like this.”

Nachiketas says, “You are telling me that even the gods cannot answer this question, which means that you know the answer to this question. Otherwise, how would you say this?” *Devair atrāpi vicikitsitam kila, tvam ca mṛtyo yan na suvijñeyam āttha, vaktā cāsyā tvādṛg-anyo na labhyaḥ; nānyo varas tulya etasya kaścit* (1.1.22): “Did you tell me that it is not possible for even the gods to know this? You told me that it is more subtle. Do I gather from this that you know it? And shall I find a better teacher than you? I shall not ask for any other boon, because I will never find a teacher like you anywhere else. When you say it is so subtle and even the gods do not know it, it means you know it.” *Nānyo varas tulya etasya kaścit*: “No other boon that you give me will be equal to this. Therefore, don’t tempt me with anything else.”

Yama says, “Don’t go on persisting like this. Please listen to me.” *Śatāyuṣaḥ putra-pautrān vr̥ṇīṣva, bahūn paśūn hasti-hiraṇyam aśvān, bhūmer mahad-āyatanam vr̥ṇīṣva svayam ca jīva śarado yāvad icchasi; etat tulyam yadi manyase, varam vr̥ṇīṣva, vittam cira-jīvikām ca, mahā-bhūmau nachiketas tvam edhi, kāmānām tvā kāmabhājam karomi* (1.1.23-4): “Sons and grandchildren, and living for hundreds of years—ask for these things, and I will give them to you. Cattle, any number of cattle, thousands of cattle, ask for this. Elephants, as

many as you want. Gold, horses, ask for this. Why do you put this question? Ask for the emperorship of the whole world, and I shall grant that. I shall make you the emperor of the whole world. Do you think it is not good enough? And I shall make you live for the longest period of time. As many years as you want to live in this world, so many years I will permit you to live. What else do you want, sir? All the glory, all the gold, all the elephants, all the horses, all the cattle, children and grandchildren, kingship of the whole earth and the longest life, endless—I don't think that there is anything more glorious than this kind of present that I am offering. Ask for that, but don't put this question."

You can imagine there is something terribly difficult in this answer that is to be given; otherwise, why should Yama be so very particular to withdraw himself from the responsibility of answering this question, and wanting to make Nachiketas emperor of the whole world instead? Can you imagine? There is something very mysterious about it; otherwise, he would not have been so reluctant to speak on this matter.

"Take everything else, but do not ask this question. All gold, all wealth, all long life—if you think it is okay, take it. In this glorious world, be a glorious ruler. Whatever you wish will be given to you. Your wish will be materialised immediately; there will be nothing that you lack in this world. But don't put this question," says Yama.

Ye ye kāmā durlabhā martya-loke sarvān kāmāṁś chandataḥ prārthayasva, imā rāmāḥ, sarathāḥ satūryāḥ, na hīdṛśā lambhaniyā manuṣyaiḥ, ābhir mat-prattābhiḥ paricārayasva, naciketo, maraṇam mānuprākṣiḥ (1.1.25): Yama continues, "You can ask for things which no man on

earth can get, and I shall give that also.” See the temptations. “All wealth which humanity cannot expect, you can have that. That which is superhumanly possible but humanly not possible, that also I am prepared to give you—all the desires conceivable in the world. Here are the maidens with musical instruments in their hands, capable of entertaining you with their songs and dances. These things you cannot get anywhere in this world. No man in the world can have this opportunity of such a blessedness and glory that I am presenting before you.” *Ābhir mat-prattābhiḥ paricārayasva*: “Be attended with all the celestials. Are you satisfied?” *Naciketo, maraṇam mānuprākṣiḥ*: “About death, speak not to me.”

“What is this, my dear Lord? Are you tempting me in this way?” replies Nachiketas. *Śvo-bhāvā martyasya yad antakaitat sarvendriyāṇām jarayanti tejah, api sarvaṁ jīvitam alpam eva tavaiva vāhās tava nṛtya-gīte* (1.1.26): “You have told so many things. I have heard it. You want me to enjoy all these things. How will I enjoy them except through the sense organs, which will one day wear out? Tomorrow may be the last day. Bubble-like is this world which can burst at any moment, and worn-out sense organs cannot enjoy anything. What is the good of living a long life with worn-out sense organs? The energy, the vitality and the capacity to enjoy gradually diminish day by day as age progresses. Do you want me to live for the longest number of years and become old and decrepit? Even the longest life is very short in the life of eternity that is ahead of us. What is the good of telling me I can have a long life? Take all your chariots, take all your music, take all your dances. I do not want them. Take them back.”

Na vittena tarpaṇīyo manuśyaḥ, lapsyāmahe vittam adrākṣma cet tvā, jīviṣyāmo yāvad īśiṣyasi tvaṁ varastu me varaṇīyaḥ sa eva (1.1.27): Nachiketas continues, “No man can be satisfied with wealth. Have you seen anybody in the world who is satisfied with wealth?” *Lapsyāmahe vittam adrākṣma cet tvā*: “When we behold a person like you, we have observed all the world. The very vision of a Master like you is wealth by itself. I am face-to-face with the great celestial Master. Is that not wealth? Do you want me to have further wealth of gold and silver? Is it equal to you when I am sitting before you? We will live in this world only as long as you permit us, because death will overtake everybody one day or the other. Even if I am granted the longest life, what is the longest life? It has to end one day, and Yama will come. Therefore, I want only that which I asked for, and not anything else.” *Varastu me varaṇīyaḥ sa eva*: “I insist on that one thing which I asked for, and I shall not listen to anything else that you tell me.”

Ajīryatām amṛtānām upetya jīryan martyaḥ kvadhasthaḥ prajānan, abhidhyāyan varṇaratipramodān, atidīrghe jīvite ko rameta (1.1.28): “Immortal thou art, O Master. Mortal am I. When a mortal is face-to-face with an immortal, what mortal things will he ask for? He will ask for immortal things only, and you are offering me all mortal things with all these glorious descriptions that you have placed before me just now. Would I ask for mortal things from an immortal teacher like you?” *Abhidhyāyan varṇaratipramodān*: “What is enjoyment? It is colour, sound and motion—colour, titillation of the sense organs, and imagined joy appearing to arise from objects which are falsely considered as the source of our joy. Considering

all these defects of sense enjoyment, who will ask for long life in this world?” *Atidīrghe jīvite ko rameta*: “Who will be happy with a long life in this world which is infested with destruction of every kind and sorrows galore?”

Yasminn idam vicikitsanti mṛtyo yat sāmparāye mahati brūhi nas tat, yo’yaṁ varo gūḍham anupraviṣṭo nānyaṁ tasmān naciketā vṛñīte (1.1.29). Here a peculiar word is used: *sāmparāye mahati brūhi nas tat*. It appears that Nachiketas is not actually wanting to know what happens to the soul after dying in this world. He wants to know what happens to the soul when it is finally free from individuality itself. That is why the words here are *mahati sāmparāye*. *Sāmparāye* is ‘death’. *Mahati sāmparāye* is ‘great death’. Nachiketas was wise enough to know something about what happens to the soul after passing from this body. He was not ignorant. He does not want to know only about the rebirth condition of the soul. He wants to know something more. Perhaps that is the reason why Yama does not want to say anything. Nachiketas is asking, “What happens to the soul when it is finally divested of individuality itself, which is the greatest death?” He does not want to know what happens at the physical death. It is the death of individuality itself. This is a terrible question. Nobody can tell us where God was before He created the world, because He cannot sit anywhere. There is no place, no time, and nobody to talk to.

In Milton’s *Paradise Lost* Adam speaks to God Almighty: “Lord, you are very unkind to me. You have created trees. You have made so many creatures. You have created so many animals. Each one has a friend; one is living with another. You have made me alone. I have nobody to talk to. Why are you so unkind?”

The Almighty answers, “Do you know, Adam, that I have been alone for eternity? I have no friends; I have nobody to talk to. Do you think that I am an unhappy person?” This is what Milton puts into the mouth of God in that great poem.

What is this situation that the soul would find itself in when it is divested of individuality? Our minds cannot comprehend this truth. There is some great point indeed in Yama not being ready to answer the question. *Yat sāmparāye mahati brūhi nas tat*: “What happens in that condition of that great death of deaths? Please tell me that,” asks Nachiketas. *Yo’yaṁ varo gūḍham anupraviṣṭaḥ*: “Subtlest and most secret is this question. I shall not ask for any other boon.” *Nānyaṁ tasmān naciketā vṛṇīte*: Nachiketas will not ask for any other boon. Only this, only this, only this. Very insistent, very persistent, very wise indeed is this great, exemplary student of the highest spiritual experience, Nachiketas.

This is the introductory section of the Kathopanishad, something like the First Chapter and the first ten verses of the Second Chapter of the Bhagavadgita. It is only from the twelfth verse or so of the Second Chapter that the Lord really speaks words of wisdom.

The teaching actually commences at the start of the Second Chapter of the Kathopanishad. As I mentioned, in the same way as the Bhagavadgita distinguishes between *sankhya* and yoga, a specific subject of the Second Chapter of the Bhagavadgita, here the Lord distinguishes between the good and the pleasant. The good is not always pleasant, and the pleasant need not be good. In the Gita we are also told that what appears to be very unpleasant in the

beginning but is nectar-like in the end should be considered as the best form of happiness, but that which appears to be nectar-like in the beginning but poison-like in the end should be considered as *rajasic* and *tamasic*, and should be discarded.

Anyac chreyo anyad utaiva preyaste ubhe nānārthe puruṣam sinītaḥ: tayoh śreya ādadānasya sādhu bhavati, hīyate 'rthād ya u preyo vṛñīte (1.2.1): There are two paths for people to tread in this world, and either one of these two paths one can choose: the path of pleasant experiences, and the path of good deeds. One path leads to one result, and the other path leads to another result. The human being is summoned in two different directions by the paths which are of the pleasant and the good. Blessed indeed is that person who chooses what is good, but that person who chooses the pleasant for the purpose of gaining immediate satisfaction falls from his aim. People who want immediate satisfaction, without considering the painful consequences that will follow in the end, are not the wise people in this world. But those who are prepared to bear the brunt of the sorrows of life in the beginning for the purpose of the great spiritual satisfaction that will follow in the end, they are the great masters. They shall be called heroes, or *dhīra* in the language of this Upanishad.

Śreyaś ca preyaś ca manuṣyam etas tau samparītya vivinakti dhīraḥ, śreya hi dhīro'bhipreyaso vṛñīte, preyo mando yoga-kṣemād vṛñīte (1.2.2): That man is idiotic who, for the purpose of the immediate acquisition of property and the enjoyment thereof, chooses what is of sensory satisfaction and titillation. But the hero like Nachiketas, who shunned even the lordship of the three worlds, such people choose

the blessedness of the soul, not the pleasures of the sense organs. The hero on the path of the Spirit carefully distinguishes between what is going to be his doom and what is going to be his real blessedness. As we distinguish between the characteristics of wisdom and action, *sankhya* and yoga, we try to distinguish between what is really going to be good in the end and what is apparently pleasurable at the present moment.

Sa tvam priyān priyarūpāṁś ca kāmān abhidhyāyan naciketo, tyasrākṣīḥ; naitāṁ sṛṅkāṁ vittamayīm avāpto yasyām majjanti bahavo manuṣyāḥ (1.2.3): Yama says, “Nachiketas, you are a very good student. Considering the defect of all forms of sensory enjoyment, you have rejected all of them though I offered every one of them in abundance. You carefully bestowed thought on the defective character of even the best joys of this world and you abandoned all of them unceremoniously, though they were there at your disposal in the largest measure conceivable. People get sunk in the mire of wealth. They go deep into this quagmire of the desire for material riches. You did not want it. I offered you a garland of treasures; you were not willing to accept it because it was connected with wealth, and you are far from it.”

Dūram ete viparīte viṣūcī, avidyā yā ca vidyeti jñātā: vidyābhīpsinaṁ nachiketasam manye, na tvā kāmā bahavo lolupantaḥ (1.2.4): The path of the pleasant is called *avidya*, and the path of the good is called *vidya*. They are totally different, one from the other. The aims of these two paths, the goals to which these paths will lead, are totally different, one having no connection with the other as night has no connection with daylight or illness has no connection

with health. Great indeed is the glory that comes upon the person treading the path of the good. Sorrow will be the outcome of the person who searches after pleasures, treading the wrong path. Yama says, "Now I understand that Nachiketas wants only knowledge and not wealth. Now it is clear to me. All the greatest of joys materially construed have not been capable of tempting you."

Avidyāyām antare vartamānāḥ, svayaṁ dhīrāḥ paṇḍitam manyamānāḥ, dandramyamānāḥ pariyaṁti mūdhāḥ, andhenaiva nīyamānā yathāndhāḥ (1.2.5): Yama continues, "People in this world are actually like blind people led by blind people. The teachers of humanity are blind. They understand nothing about the ultimate reality of life, and they are the rulers, the administrators, the teachers, the prophets. The subjects are also blind, and so one who cannot see is instructing the other who also cannot see. These are the people who are sunk in *avidya*, ignorance of the ultimate nature of reality. *Avidya* is non-apprehension of what is really there, and apprehension of what is really not there."

Avidya has two characteristics: *avarana* and *vikshepa*. *Avarana* is the veil that covers the consciousness and prevents it from knowing what is actually there, and *vikshepa* is the other aspect of *avidya* which, while it has already screened the perception of the reality away from consciousness, it compels it to know something which is not there. So, a double tragedy follows for people who are sunk in *avidya*: they do not know what is really there, but they know very well what is not there. They think they are very wise; such are the people in this world. They think they are most learned, highly cultured, and no one is equal

to them. Staggering, dizzy, giddy due to the pride of wealth and the strength of the ego, they live a futile existence in this world. *Mūdhāḥ* is the word used in respect of these people, fools of the first water.

Na sāmparāyaḥ pratibhāti bālam pramādyantaṁ vittamohena mūḍham: ayaṁ loko nāsti para iti mānī, punaḥ punar vaśam āpadyate me (1.2.6): Children are these people living in this world. They do not know what is above the world. Do children know what is outside the world? Children indeed are all people, all humanity, because mankind as a whole is wrongly under the impression that this world is complete in itself and whatever we get from this world is all we can expect in our life, not knowing that there is a life beyond this world.

Here is a dig at atheists and people who do not believe that there is another world different from this world. Like children, they do not apprehend the existence of a world beyond this world. Why is it so? Because they are giddy with the power and intoxication of wealth that has deprived them of their understanding, and they seem to be satisfied with this earthly joy. They do not know that there is something else waiting for them, which they will have to confront one day or the other. Ignorance of the law is no excuse. We should not be under the impression we can go scot-free just because we do not know that there is another world. One day we will have to know it, and we will have to pay the price for our ignorance. People say, "This world is all; there is no other world." Such people come under the clutch of death. They perish, and they get reborn only to perish once again. Sorrow shall be their lot. Yama shall control them because they do not believe

in other worlds and the laws that are transcendent to this physical world.

Śravaṇāyāpi bahubhir yo na labhyaḥ, śṛṇvanto'pi bahavo yaṁ na vidyuḥ, āścaryo vaktā kuśalo'sya labdhā, āścaryo jñātā kuśalānuśiṣṭaḥ (1.2.7): Yama says, “This truth, Nachiketas, about which you have been asking me to speak, is indeed very difficult. I shall tell it to you. Even if it is told and you hear it, you will not be able to comprehend it immediately. Even to hear this great truth is difficult, and if you have the blessing to listen to this kind of truth, you are really a great man, a virtuous person, and you have done great meritorious deeds in the previous birth. Otherwise, the opportunity to even listen to this will not arise.”

There are people who listen to it, but nothing enters their brain. Some sound is made, and some words enter, but what is the meaning of it? What exactly is meant by saying that there is a world above this earth? What exactly is meant by saying that the soul can exist independent of the physical individuality? Who can understand all these things? Even if you are told this, you will not be able to understand it. If anybody can talk and make you understand what it is, that teacher must be a great wonder indeed, and if anyone can receive this knowledge, that student must also be a great wonder. A miracle indeed is the student who can listen to this and understand it, a wonder indeed is the teacher who can actually speak it, a wonder indeed is the person who has understood it, and a wonder indeed is the person who has been able to express it in an intelligible style.

Discourse 4

THE BEST OF TEACHERS AND THE BEST OF STUDENTS

The conversation between Nachiketas and Yama continues. This great knowledge, this *vidya*, this wisdom, this truth is difficult even to hear of. Many in the world have not the opportunity of even listening to what this truth can be, and there are many who listen but are not able to comprehend the meaning of what they are hearing. A competent teacher is a miracle, and a competent student is also a miracle. One who knows this is a wonder, being taught by a teacher who is also a wonder.

Na nareṇāvareṇa proktā eṣa suvijñeyo bahudhā cintyamānaḥ: ananya-prokte gatiḥ atra nāsty aṇīyān hy atarkyam aṇupramāṇāt (1.2.8): This cannot be known unless it is taught by a person who is here designated as *ananya*. The word *ananya* also occurs in the Bhagavadgita. *Ananyāś cintayanto mām ye janāḥ paryupāsate, teṣāṃ nityābhiyuktāṇāṃ yogakṣemaṃ vahāmyaham* (B.G. 9.22): “He who undividedly contemplates on Me.” Here *ananya* means ‘a person who is non-separate’. *Anyā* means ‘different’ or ‘separate’; *ananya* means ‘not separate’, ‘not distant’, ‘not isolated from’. *Ananya-prokte gatiḥ atra*: There is no hope for the student unless he is initiated or taught by one who is *ananya*, who

is non-different from that which he teaches. A professorial knowledge is not what is meant here, because learning of an academic type is not necessarily a part of the very life and existence of the academician. Knowledge has to be non-different from the person who wields this knowledge. It is not enough if we know; we have to be that very thing which we know. Knowledge has to be non-separate from us, and we have to be non-separate from what we know. The knowledge of Truth should be the very essence of our existence. We are an embodiment of that great wisdom which we are imparting to the student. Otherwise, if we stand apart from the knowledge, the knowledge will be there in the study or in the books, and it will not be there in us. If the knowledge that emanates from us in the form of instruction is not an emanation of our own being but it is a modulation of language, an arrangement of words in a linguistic style, that knowledge will not be of any utility, because what counts finally is the being of the person, rather than the words of the person.

The knowledge of the Guru, the teacher, is a ray, a light that emanates from the very existence of the Guru, or the teacher. The knowledge is nothing but an illumination of the teacher. Thus is a possibility of knowing what Truth is. There is no way of knowing it: *gatir atra nāsty*. The Purusha Sukta says *nānyaḥ panthā vidyate'yanāya*: Unless we know this Purusha as non-separate from us, there is no way, no hope for us. In a similar way it is said *gatir atra nāsty*: There is no possibility of achievement of any kind unless one is instructed by a person who is *ananya*, non-different from Truth itself, virtually a *brahmanishta*. One who is established in the knowledge of Brahman is a *brahmanishta*.

Otherwise, if it is taught by an ordinary man, it is difficult to understand.

Na nareṇāvareṇa proktā eṣa suvijñeya means 'the lower category of people'. If a lesser person than the one who is identical with knowledge is our teacher, that knowledge will not help us because the lesser person, who may be helpful to us in gaining a job-oriented education, will not have the knowledge for enlightenment. *Na nareṇāvareṇa proktā eṣa suvijñeyo bahudhā cintyamānaḥ*: We may go on scratching our head and thinking of it any number of times; if we have been initiated or instructed by a lesser person than the one mentioned here, there is no likelihood of our actually entering into the substance of this knowledge. Why is it so?

Añīyān hy atarkyam aṇupramānāt: Subtler than the atom is the subtlety of this knowledge. Gross words, words that we use in language for outer expression, cannot become adequate vehicles to convey this knowledge which is subtler than even the subtlest sound. Of all principles in the world, sound can be regarded as the subtlest. Light is also very subtle. But here is something subtler than light and heat, subtler than sound, subtler than anything that we can think of in terms of the five elements—*sabda*, *spārsha*, *rupa*, *rasa*, *gandha*—on account of the intense secrecy and atomic character. Here 'atomic character' does not mean a physical characteristic that is attributed to the Atman, but the impossibility of perceiving it as an object of the senses. Only that which is physically characterised can be seen by the sense organs. It is superphysical. Its subtlety lies in the fact that it is not an object of knowledge; it is knowledge itself. Because of this reason, ordinary secular instruction

of any kind will not be of any utility here. We have to be instructed by one who is veritably a *brahmanishta*. Only a Godman can teach us.

Naiṣā tarkeṇa matir āpaneyā, proktānyenaiva sujñānāya preṣṭha: yām tvam āpas satyadhritir batāsi; tvādṛṇ no bhūyān naciketaḥ praṣṭā (1.2.9): Argument is not a means of right knowledge. Logic is not going to help us, because argument is based on logical dissection of what in grammar is called the subject and the predicate. A sentence has a subject side and a predicate side. The very fact that we distinguish between the subject and the predicate in a sentence shows that they are not identical with each other. If they are one and the same, we should not use two different words. If they are unconnected, the sentence will be cut into two parts, and it will not convey a wholesome meaning. What logic or grammatical construing does, is that the apparently segregated parts of a sentence known as the subject and the predicate are brought together as two pieces of wood are dovetailed by a carpenter, yet not knowing that the two pieces of wood are always two pieces of wood. They have not become identical with each other. That is to say that logic, in its attempt at uniting two parts of a sentence which are actually sundered one from the other, will not ultimately be of any use to us because all logic is based on a certain hypothesis, and unless we logically establish the hypothesis itself, which cannot be done, logic will not help us. Logic is an intellectual activity, and as the intellect itself is a feeble medium of the individual egoistic personality, our argument, logic or disputation of any kind is not going to be of utility. Thus, this knowledge cannot come to us by logic and argument.

Naiṣā tarkeṇa matir āpaneyā, proktānyenaiva sujñānāya preṣṭha. Again the same word comes: *anya*. Somebody who is different from the logician has to teach us, and the one who is above the logician is the spiritual Master, like Yama himself. Then only does knowledge become rooted in our personality.

Yām tvam āpas: “Nachiketas, you are blessed. You have obtained such a teacher, and the teacher has obtained such a suitable disciple. You are established in truthfulness,” says Yama. *Tvādrñ no bhūyān naciketaḥ praṣṭā:* “May I have more and more students like you, who put questions of this kind.” How happy Yama is, we can imagine. He is immensely pleased with this student. “You have obtained the best of teachers, and I have obtained the best of students. Wonderful!”

Jānāmy aham śevadhir ity anityam, na hy adhruvaiḥ prāpyate hi dhruvaṁ tat, tato mayā naciketaś cito'gnir anityair dravyaiḥ prāptavān asmi nityam (1.2.10). Yama says, “I myself have performed this sacrifice. Now it is being called the Nachiketas sacrifice. It may be called the Nachiketas sacrifice now, but that Vaishvanara-tattva worshipped in a sacrifice as this universal fire did exist earlier also. I know that all wealth and treasure is impermanent.” *Śevadhi anitya:* *śevadhi* is ‘treasure’, *anitya* is ‘impermanent’. *Jānāmy aham:* “I know that all the glory of this world is impermanent.” *Na hy adhruvaiḥ prāpyate hi dhruvaṁ:* “The permanent cannot be obtained through the media of the impermanent.”

The ends and the means should have coherence between themselves. There cannot be a means which is not connected with the nature of the end, nor can there be an end which has no connection with the nature of the means.

Many people say that the end justifies the means, but it does not justify it because the end is nothing but the evolution of the means, and the means is nothing but the incipient existence of the end in itself at the very beginning. So they are not two different, isolated phases of knowledge. Hence, impermanent means cannot procure permanent realities. What is there permanent in this world? Nothing whatsoever. We see everything coming and going. The world is in a state of flux. People die, all things perish, and the whole system of creation is going to be dissolved at the end of *pralaya*. Therefore, nothing in this world can be regarded as a means to the knowledge and realisation of the Eternal, implying thereby that we should not be attached to anything in this world. We should not cling to impermanent things, which are just the stuff of this world.

Now Yama says, "I know all this, yet what have I done?" He speaks in a very friendly way, in a very intimate manner. The teacher reveals his own inner nature to the student: *tato mayā naciketaś cito'gnir anityair dravyaiḥ prāptavān asminityam*. This is a very peculiar verse which has an intricate meaning. It has got one meaning on the one hand, and another meaning on the other hand. Some commentators say that this verse is the utterance of Nachiketas. Others say that it is spoken by Yama. It appears that it is spoken by Yama, and not by Nachiketas, because it is said: "I have performed the Nachiketas sacrifice." Nachiketas has been initiated into the performance of the sacrifice, but he has not yet performed it, and so this statement "I have already done it" cannot be attributed to Nachiketas. Therefore, we have to conclude that these are the words of Yama himself. This is very intriguing indeed because of the fact that he

says, “Knowing very well that everything is impermanent in this world, that the impermanent cannot be a means to the attainment of the Eternal, what have I done? After all, I have performed this sacrifice for the purpose of the attainment of the kingdom of this god which I am today as Yama.” He indirectly extols the student Nachiketas as perhaps even superior to himself.

It is said that the greatness of the Guru can be seen when the disciple excels the Guru. You can imagine how great the Guru should be to produce a disciple excelling himself. So, in a similar strain, as it were, Yama says *anityair dravyaiḥ prāptavān asmi nityam*: “Temporarily stable joys of heaven, like the joys of the god Yama himself, have been acquired by the performance of the Vaishvanara-agni sacrifice, and I did not go into the depths of the question that you are posing before me, though today I know the answer to this question.” Perhaps here Yama is referring to the development of the stages of spiritual attainment which he himself has reached, just as a teacher may speak to the student as to how he was once a little child going to nursery school, and how he was truant, how he was not a good student at all, and afterwards how he picked up things, and how he has become the genius that he appears to be today. Some such intricate implication seems to be hidden in this verse: “Though I know that all the treasures of the world are impermanent, I have performed this sacrifice which will give me only impermanent joys which temporarily look like a permanent happiness of heaven. You are greater than I.”

Kāmasyāptim jagataḥ pratiṣṭhām krator ānanyam abhayasya pāram, stoma-mahad urugāyam pratiṣṭhām drṣṭvā

dhṛtyā dhīro naciketo'tyasrākṣiḥ (1.2.11): “You have rejected something very great and grand, Nachiketas. Nobody would do that. What have you rejected? That state which is the fulfilment of every desire. This Vaishvanara-tattva is what is referred to here. That state of Vaishvanara attainable through this sacrifice, this is the fulfilment of all desires at one stroke, not in succession. Today you are granted this, tomorrow another thing, the third day something else, and mostly your desires are apparently being fulfilled stage by stage in a state of succession in this world. All things cannot be had in one moment. But here, at one stroke, instantaneously, in a timeless grasp, as it were, you have all the desires fulfilled in this Vaishvanara-tattva.” *Jagataḥ pratiṣṭhān*: “It is the very source, the root of this whole cosmos.” *Krator ānantyaṁ abhayasya pāram*: “The endless fruit accruing from the performance of all good deeds and sacrifices is that great thing. It is the ultimate state of final fearlessness, most adorable, most glorious, the final resort of all beings. I offered it to you and you have got it, and yet with the power of your will and understanding, you have abandoned even that thing. You have abandoned even the bliss and joy of Brahmaloka, to put it in other terms. O Nachiketas, how glorious, how powerful you are! Brahmaloka's joy, Vaishvanara's joy, Virat's happiness you have rejected for the sake of another thing, about which you are questioning me.”

Tam durdarśam gūḍham anupraviṣṭam guhāhitam gahvareṣṭham purāṇam, adhyātma-yogādhigamena devam matvā dhīro harṣa-śokau jahāti (1.2.12): “That thing about which you are querying me is impossible of perception. Difficult is the vision of this great Truth. Very deeply hidden

is that Truth. In the deepest recesses of one's own heart can this Truth be recognised. It is in the cave of the heart, or the cave of the cosmos, as you may call it; macrocosmically or microcosmically it is the deepest essence of everything ever outwardly conceived." *Gahvareṣṭham purāṇam*: "It is the most ancient repository of all values, earthly as well as celestial. Such a great thing it is, impossible to perceive." *Adhyātma-yogādhigamena devam matvā dhīro harṣa-śokau jahāti*: "This impossible-to-perceive Truth has to be known through the yoga known as *adhyatma* yoga. This great God, the God of all gods, the Real of reals, can be attained by the practice of *adhyatma* yoga, the yoga of the Self. The unitedness of the self with the Self, the manner in which the lower self of a person gets identified with the higher dimension of itself, the way in which the Atman gets united with Brahman, the manner in which the individual identifies himself with the cosmos, the way in which the subject melts into the object, these are some of the characteristics of *adhyatma* yoga. Know that great joy through this wonderful yoga known as *adhyatma* yoga." This verse is also difficult to understand. "Knowing That, the great hero, the spiritual hero, abandons both the joy and the grief of this world. Neither is he exhilarated at anything he will gain, nor is he depressed by anything he appears to lose."

Etac chrutvā samparigrhya martyaḥ pravṛṇhya dharmyam aṇum etam āpya, sa modate modanīyaṁ hi labdhvā vivṛtaṁ sadma nachiketasam manye (1.2.13): "I think the door is open for you, Nachiketas. The gates of heaven are slowly opening for you." For most of us the door is closed; for Nachiketas it is now open. *Etac chrutvā*: Having heard this; *samparigrhya*:

having grasped it also—not merely hearing it, but having grasped the meaning of it; *martyaḥ*: a human being; *pravṛhya dharmyam*: this *anu*, this subtle dharma, having been absorbed into one's own life, such a person enjoys the best joys of all joys which one can think of in one's mind.

Priya, moda, pramoda are the three states of joy. We can be happy in three ways. When a dear object is seen, we are happy. That is called *priya*. When the dear object comes very near, we are happier. That is *moda*. When the dear object is completely under our possession, we are happiest. That is *pramoda*. *Priya, moda, pramoda*. This *pramoda* cannot be had through contact with objects because it is said that we have this highest happiness only when the objects of desire are completely under our possession, but we can never have complete control over anything in this world. Objects always remain as objects; they can never become subjects. Therefore, the subject, which is totally different from the object, can never be in possession of the object. Hence, no one in this world can be happiest. There can be only a comparative degree of *priya* and *moda*, but *pramoda*, the actual possession of joy, is not to be granted to any mortal in this world because possession of a thing is impossible here. Possession implies unity of the subject and the object, which is not possible as long as space and time exist. *Sa modate modanīyaṁ hi labdhvā*: Having enjoyed that which is worth enjoying, one sees the open door.

It is said that this fort of eternal bliss has eighty-four doors, and all except one are closed. Eighty-four doors represent the eighty-four lakhs of species through which one has to pass in the process of evolution. Within this fort everyone is caught up. We can somehow come near

the one door which is open, which is human-like. To all the other categories of life, which are lower, the door is closed. The mineral, the plant, the animal are the species to whom the door is closed. Only at the human level is the door open. There is only one open door, and the other doors are closed. All are inside this fort. The human being is blind and cannot see where the open door is—blind due to the ignorance, *avidya*, engendering *kama* and karma. Due to the obliteration of the knowledge of reality and the compulsion to visualise the externality of the objects of sense, the consciousness of there being an open door is completely obliterated. He is blind. So, what does the man do? He tries to feel the wall. Like a blind man going around the fort to see where the door is open, he goes, touching every little brick of this wall. He goes round and round, round and round. Somehow when he comes near that open door, he has an itching of the head. He scratches his head, and then misses the gate. That is to say, when the human being is about to be endowed with the capacity to transcend this human nature, he gets sunk in the desires characteristic of human nature. Impelled by egoism and *avidya*, once again the propulsion for *kama* and karma drowns him. He gets some itching, and then he cannot go out. Again and again, again and again he goes around and around. But Nachiketas has found the open door.

Nachiketas says, “Please speak further. Let me hear something more. Whatever you have told me up to this time appears to be related to a truth which is not of this world. There are good things and bad things in this world, there are causes and effects in this world, there are things to be done and things which ought not to be done in this

world, there is past and present and future in this world, but this truth about which you are about to speak to me cannot be of this nature. It can be neither dharma nor adharma, neither good nor evil, neither cause nor effect, neither action that is permitted nor action that is prohibited, neither the past, nor the present, nor the future. What is that? Please tell me.”

Anyatra dharmād anyatrādharmād anyatrāsmāt kṛtākṛtāt, anyatra bhūtāc ca bhavyāc ca yat tat paśyasi tad vada (1.2.14). Nachiketas is slowly getting enlightened. He puts a very peculiar question once again, as he did earlier: “Tell me that which is neither good nor bad, tell me that which is neither cause nor effect, tell me that which is neither to be done nor not to be done, tell me that which is not in the past, not in the present, not in the future.” A very shrewd disciple indeed!

Nachiketas, having posed this question, evokes the answer of Yama who says, “Nachiketas, dear boy, listen to me.” *Sarve vedā yat padam āmananti, tapāṃsi sarvaṇi ca yad vadanti, yad icchanto brahmacaryaṃ caranti, tat te padam saṃgrahaṇa bravīmi: aum ity etat* (1.2.15): “I shall tell you that which all the Vedas unanimously glorify. I shall tell you that which is the goal of all kinds of *tapas*, or austerity, in this world. I shall tell you that which is to be attained by complete self-restraint, or *brahmacharya*. I shall tell you what it is. Om—this is the truth. This Om, this *pranava*, is the symbol, or the emblem, or the representation of universal Reality. Knowing this, one has everything in one’s hand. The moment you think that you want something, that is in your hand, provided that you know what Om is.”

Let us see what it means.

Discourse 5
THE SECRET OF OM
AND THE NATURE OF THE ATMAN

Sarve vedā yat padam āmananti, tapāṃsi sarvaṇi ca yad vadanti, yad icchanto brahmacaryaṃ caranti, tat te padam saṃgrahaṇa bravīmi: aum ity etat (1.2.15): “I shall tell you the great secret about which the Vedas go into ecstasies, and to attain which people perform *tapas* and self-restraint. What is that great truth and secret? It is Om. I shall tell you that, having obtained which, one obtains everything.”

Om is the principal mantra which is attached to every other mantra, and it is a sound vibration which produces a sympathetic effect in the system of the person who recites it properly. We should not chant Om in a hurry—Om Om Om Om Om Om. That is not the way. Sometimes when people do *purascharana* of Om for some 3½ lakhs or crores, and they want to finish it as early as possible, the quality gets absorbed into quantity. We should not do that. Nor also should it be lengthened too much. It should be moderate, medium, capable of getting properly accommodated into the mind and the physical system. When we do *purascharana*, *japa*, recitation of Om, neither should it be too short, nor too quick, nor too elongated.

Aaaaauuuuuummmmm. It should taper off gradually into a soundless ethereal state. In the beginning it is a gross sound, as it were, that gradually becomes more and more subtle, ethereal, until it melts into a soundless pure vibration, without the grossness of the sound produced. Aaaaauuuuuummmmm, Aaaaauuuuuummmmm, Aaaaauuuuuummmmm, Aaaaauuuuuummmmm. This is the *vaikhari*, or the gross form of sound. It becomes gross, known as *vaikhari*, when it is audible; and when it is inaudible, it is only mentally chanted.

There are four stages of sound: *para*, *pashyanti*, *madhyama* and *vaikhari*. Sound has a vibration which starts with the naval, and when we chant Om, we should feel a sense of vibration in the naval itself. It should start from the very root of our plexus, corresponding to the naval. It rises up gradually. *Para* is inaudible, pure vibration, having no characteristic of sound. It is a pressure that we are exerting, and it comes from a source which is beyond the constitution of the physical body. We summon into ourselves, as it were, the forces of nature, all things and everything. "The power of the mountains, the power of the ocean, the power of all the rivers, the power of all the trees in the forest, the power of the sun and the moon and the stars, and the power of the sky, I withdraw into myself." Feel like that when you recite Om. And, as the saying goes, what you think you are, that you really are.

This is a meditation by which we keep ourselves open to the influx of the forces of nature. The whole universe is vibration. It is a large quantum of force, energy and motion, of which we are a little part, a modicum, a little eddy or a wave in the sea of force. Therefore, let this eddy on the

surface of the ocean feel its harmony with the vast sea of force. Let the ego subside. Open up the gates, the doors and the windows of the sense organs. Let in the influx of this force that is universal.

But the sense organs will not permit the entry of the universal force as long as the ego is conditioning it. The ego is the affirmation of individual personality, and universal force is the contrary of it. Nothing that is universal will contact that which is particular, or egocentric. We are mostly egocentric persons, very much conscious of our body and mind and personality, and never feeling a unity with the atmosphere outside, not even being truly friendly with people. Such is our ego. But that has to be shed. This trait has to be given up. And in the meditation, in the chanting, in the recitation of Om, it has to become not merely a recitation or a chant but a veritable meditation, a communion process taking place between the deepest essences in us with the deepest essences in the universe.

Para is the soundless origin of the sound process. As I mentioned, it is just pressure, a pressure point. It cannot be called sound in a tangible, audible, intelligible sense. It manifests itself into a slightly gross, articulated form in a very minute, subtle way in the next stage, called *pashyanti*. It becomes more comprehensible in the sense of getting into an integrality of knowledge when it becomes the third stage, *madhyama*; and it actually becomes audible when it is *vaikhari*. The words that we speak which are listened to, which are audible, which we can hear, these sounds are *vaikhari*. So when we chant Om it starts with *vaikhari*, the actual production of an audible sound. From there, it gradually tapers off into the thinness and

vaporised ethereal condition of the sound melting into the soundless state. The Manduka Upanishad tells us that the three *matras*—A-U-M—constituting Aum, or Om, become *amatra*, or non-constituents of the word symbol, the *amatra*, the fourth state, being practically identical with the universality of the Atman. This is how we have to place ourselves in the context of the universal setup when we recite Om.

Then what happens to us? We become friendly with all things in the world, and all things become friendly with us. Animosity ceases. We do not become only friends; it is much more than that. We commune one into the other so that when proper meditation, by the process of chanting Om, is carefully conducted every day without remission of effort, we shall gradually feel ourselves as super-individuals, a miniature cosmos within ourselves.

The Upanishad tells us of the greatness of this Om. *Etadd hy evākṣaram brahma, etadd hy evākṣaram param, etadd hy evākṣaram jñātvā, yo yad icchati tasya tat* (1.2.16). *Etadd hy evākṣaram brahma*: Verily this is Brahman itself because outside this final centre of immortality there is nothing. Therefore, it is Absolute, Parabrahman. *Etadd hy evākṣaram param*: Supreme is the state. External to it, beyond it, nothing is. *Etadd hy evākṣaram jñātvā, yo yad icchati tasya tat*: Whoever knows this, whatever that person wants is on the palm of his hand. You will have what you want, you will achieve what you want, and it will be on the palm of your hand. Let this ego vanish. Try to be no more a human being. Cease to be a human being, cease to be this body, cease to be this personality, cease to be this individuality, cease to be Mr. or Mrs. so-and-so. Cease to be anything visible,

tangible, sensible, contactable. Then you actually melt into the very bricks of the wall that is in front of you.

Etad ālambanam śreṣṭham etad ālambanam param, etad ālambanam jñātvā brahma-loke mahīyate (1.2.17). *Etad ālambanam śreṣṭham*: Very good indeed is this dependence of a person on Om. It is the best support for you. *Etad ālambanam param*: This support is supreme, without any parallel or equal. *Etad ālambanam jñātvā brahma-loke mahīyate*: Having known and realised this support, one glories in Brahmaloka at the end of time when the body is gone. In Brahmaloka everyone is like everyone else. They are not human beings; they are souls centred, reflecting one in the other as mirrors reflect one in the other. Everywhere everything is. Every person is like every other person, everything is everywhere, and everywhere everything is found. That is Brahmaloka. Would you like to go there as early as possible? *Brahma-loke mahīyate*: You shall glory in this grand Brahmaloka of universal inclusiveness.

This great soul essentially does not die, and basically it also does not get born. As the soul gets conditioned into egoism, personality, mind, *prana* and the physical sheath, it appears to be born on account of its apparent limitation within the walls of this physical and psychological personality. As space may appear to be limited when it is seen as being contained in a little vessel or bucket, we may say that space is born the moment the bucket is born and space dies when the bucket is destroyed. Really, the space is not being born, and it is not dying. It is only the bucket walls that create the impression of space being born, space dying, etc. In a similar manner, the impression that the soul is born or the soul dies is an impression created by the false

identification of the otherwise all-pervading soul with this little wall of the psychophysical personality.

Na jāyate mriyate vā vipaścīn nāyaṁ kutaścīn na babhūva kaścit: ajo nityaḥ śāśvato'yaṁ purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre (1.2.18). *Na jāyate*: The soul does not really get born. It is not born. It is birthless. *Mriyate vā vipaścīn*: This all-knowing soul never dies. *Nāyaṁ kutaścīn*: It does not come from somewhere, because it is everywhere. *Na babhūva kaścit*: It does not become something else when it appears to be born. *Ajo nityaḥ*: It is eternal, unborn. *Śāśvato'yaṁ*: Perpetual is this ancient reality. *Purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre*: Even when the body perishes, it does not perish.

This is similar to a verse from the Bhagavadgita. *Na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ, ajo nityaḥ śāśvato'yaṁ purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre* (B.G. 2.20): If person imagines himself to be a destroyer, if he thinks that he is really a destroyer, and if a person who is apparently destroyed or killed feels that he is struck with death and destruction, neither of these know the truth properly. The impulsion, the Consciousness that is necessary for creative activity of any kind—creating or killing, or whatever it is—that Consciousness which is essential, without which the body will be deadened and no activity would be possible, that Consciousness which is finally responsible for good deeds and bad deeds, even the worst of deeds, that Consciousness is not involved in the goodness or the badness of the deeds. The killer does not kill, and the killed is not killed, because of the fact that the thing that is really responsible for making such actions possible cannot be killed, and is not killed, because it is Pure Consciousness.

The sun in the sky, without whom we cannot do anything, good or bad, is not responsible for any good or bad in this world. Neither the virtues nor the evils of the world can manifest themselves if the sun is not to be there in the sky, yet the virtues and the evils of the world are not connected with the sun in any manner whatsoever. So is the case with the Atman that is responsible for anything that we are to do. The good action of charity or the worst action of killing, nothing is possible unless Consciousness is backing us up as an ocean of force behind us, but it does not get involved in this action of ours. Even as space is not involved in what is contained in the vessel and the sun is not involved in what is happening in the world, so also the universal Atman that is Consciousness is not involved in any action. Neither the killer nor the killed, appearing to be identified with this action and experience, knows the truth.

Hantā cen manyate hantuṁ hataś cen manyate hatam, ubhau tau na vijānito nāyaṁ hanti na hanyate (1.2.19): This Atman is not destroyed. It cannot be killed, and it does not kill anybody. There is a magnificent description of it in the Bhagavadgita.

Aṇor aṇīyān mahato mahīyān, ātmāsya jantor nihito guhāyām: tam akratuḥ paśyati vīta-śoko dhātu-prasādān mahimānam ātmanaḥ (1.2.20). *Aṇor aṇīyān mahato mahīyān*: Smaller than the smallest and bigger than the biggest is this. Yogis become small and big according to their will. When Hanuman went to Lanka, to the abode of Ravana, he became small like a cat or a mosquito, and he perched upon the walls to observe everything that was taking place in the palace of Ravana. But he could also assume such a form which covered up the earth and the sky at the same

time, which form he assumed when he jumped across the ocean, and which form he showed to Sita when she could not believe that this little monkey was in a position to carry her back to Rama.

Hanuman said to Sita, “If you want the trouble to cease just now, I shall see that it ceases just now. Sit on my back, and I shall take you to Rama. Then the problem is solved in one day.”

Sita replied, “After all, monkeys are monkeys only.”

When Hanuman had changed his size to the size of a human being, and he was equal to Sita, he said, “Sit on my back.”

Sita said, “I am a human being. I am heavier than you, and you want to carry me on your back? What kind of person are you? This is monkey-like talk.”

Immediately Hanuman thought, “This mother does not know who I am. Let her see my real form.” He assumed a shape which was not easy for Sita to even behold. He was towering to the skies.

Sita said, “I understand your greatness, but I cannot come with you for various reasons. Let Rama come and get me.”

Smaller than the smallest and bigger than the biggest is this Atman. Deeper than the deepest, in the recesses of your heart is this Atman. Wider than space is this Atman. Because it is you yourself, it is the subtlest, and deepest, and is incomprehensible. Because it is more than space, overstruck by the limits of space itself, it is the remotest, and very big. Very small and very big is this Atman.

Ātmāsyā jantor nihito guhāyām: This Atman of the *jivas*, this Atman of me and of you and of everybody, very small

it appears to be, but the biggest it is. It is in the deepest of our own self.

Tam akratuḥ paśyati vīta-śokaḥ: Only those people who are *akratuḥ* can behold this Atman. *Akratuḥ* is a peculiar word that is used in this Upanishad. This word is also used in the Brahma Sutra. Meanings attached to this word are several. One of the meanings of *akratuḥ* is 'actionless, motionless and volitionless'. There is a verse in the Sixth Chapter of the Bhagavadgita which is similar to the significance of this word. *Na hyasannyastasaṅkalpo yogī bhavati kaścana* (B.G. 6.2): No one can become a yogi unless he is free from creative willing, creative volition, creative determination and decision. If we are able to live a life where it is not necessary for us to create anything in our mind—neither the will to decide, nor to determine, nor to want anything at all—that is the state of *sannyasa saṅkalpa*, and that is the state of *akratuḥ*, free from any kind of creative will. *Akratuḥ paśyati vīta-śokaḥ*: Free from all griefs characteristic of the world, this person who is free from every kind of undertaking, willing and feeling realises this Atman.

How does one realise this Atman? *Dhātu-prasādān mahimānam ātmanaḥ*. Here is a word which has been interpreted in different ways by the *acharyas*. *Dhātu-prasādā*: one who realises the Atman through *dhātu-prasāda*. Now, what is *dhātu-prasāda*? Those who insist on a pure, universalised form of interpretation of the Atman, like Acharya Sankara, say *dhātu-prasāda* means the *prasāda* of *dhātu*. *Dhātu* are the humours of the body, the constituents of the mind, the structure of the personality. This is *dhātu*. Its cessation, its harmony, its alignment, its uniformity of

action, calmness of the entire personality, is considered as *dhātu-prasāda*. The stability, harmony, equilibrium, alignment, calmness, etc., of the very constituents of our personality is the cause for the perception of the Atman. When we are calm and quiet, and our personality ceases completely, we behold the Atman from inside. This is what Acharya Sankara says.

But devotees such as Ramanuja, Madhva and others say this is not *dhātu-prasāda*. *Dhātu* means 'of *dātta*'. *Tāsyā dhātu*, as we would say. *Prasāda* is 'grace'. By the grace of the Supreme Creator alone can we behold the Atman. This is what devotees say. *Dhātu-prasādān mahimānam ātmanah*. The Vaishnava devotees say that one cannot behold the ultimate Truth except by the grace of God. Individual effort is not sufficient here. They follow the doctrine of the *bhaktas*. The Vaishnavas, particularly the devotees, follow the doctrine of the cat which takes care of its kitten. It is called the kitten doctrine, *marjara-nyaya*. The kitten has no responsibility. It does not put forth any effort; it simply surrenders itself to its mother. It is the responsibility of its mother to take it from place to place and do whatever is necessary. God is responsible for everything in regard to us, but we must surrender ourselves to God. This is the factor of grace operating in the personality of the human being in spiritual living. That is one interpretation. The other interpretation I mentioned is the stability and the calmness of personality, causing the revelation of the Atman automatically from inside. This is the meaning of this very interesting mantra: *aṇor aṇīyān mahato mahīyān, ātmāsyā jantor nihito guhāyām: tam akratuḥ paśyati vīta-śoko dhātu-prasādān mahimānam ātmanah*.

Āsīno dūram vrajati, śayāno yāti sarvataḥ: kastam madāmadaṁ devam mad anyo jñātum arharti (1.2.21). *Āsīno dūram vrajati*: Sitting in one place, it moves everywhere. A thing that is sitting in one place cannot move, as we know very well, but here is a thing which is sitting in one place only, and yet it is everywhere—*śayāno yāti sarvataḥ*. It is lying down, calmly resting, as it were, but it travels to all places. Who can know this secret? Yama says, “Except for people like me who have the blessing of this realisation, who can know this great truth of that Being which can move about without actually moving, and travel without actually travelling?” Faster than the fastest, nearer than the nearest, remoter than the remotest, greater than the greatest, smaller than the smallest, most wonderful is this Atman. There is neither joy nor sorrow in that Atman. *Madāmada* is the word used here. It is the state where there is no joy and no sorrow. Who can know it? Only a great Master like Yama can know it, and perhaps Nachiketas may know it.

Aśarīram śarīreṣu, anavastheṣv avasthitam, mahāntaṁ vibhum ātmānam matvā dhīro na śocati (1.2.22): It is the bodiless among the bodies. Among all the bodies that we see, it is bodiless, existing through the body, inside the body. *Anavastheṣv avasthitam*: Stable among all unstable things in the world; *mahāntaṁ vibhum ātmānam*: the great universal all-pervading Being; *matvā dhīro na śocati*: knowing it, great heroes do not grieve.

Nāyam ātmā pravacanena labhyo na medhayā, na bahunā śrutena: yamevaiṣa vṛṇute, tena labhyas tasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūṁ svām (1.2.23). *Nāyam ātmā pravacanena labhyaḥ*: Disquisition, argumentation, verbosity and

academic investigation cannot enable us to know this Atman. *Na medhayā*: By intellectuality this Atman cannot be known. *Na bahunā śrutena*: By immense learning we cannot know this.

How will we know it? Another intricate passage comes here, which is interpreted in two ways by the universalists and the dualists. How do we know this, then? *Yamevaiṣa vṛṇute, tena labhyaḥ*. The devotees, the Vaishnavas, say only that person who is chosen by the Ultimate Being can attain to that glorious state. God has to choose us as a fit person to know Him, and we have to wait until He chooses us. So our destiny is in His hands, not entirely in our hands. People say that man is the master of his own destiny. The Vaishnava devotees do not believe this. God is the master of the destiny of everybody; we are not the masters. We are helpless people, and therefore only he knows the Ultimate Reality, the Atman, whom the Atman chooses. Whom the Atman chooses, only that person will know the Atman. This is the devotee's interpretation of this verse: *yamevaiṣa vṛṇute, tena labhyaḥ*.

But Acharya Sankara has another interpretation. He does not bring in the factor of division between God and devotee. He wants to unite them both. So his interpretation is that it is known by the seeker who seeks it as non-different from his own self, it is known by the knower only, it is sought by the one who seeks, and it is the attainment of That which itself is the seeker of That. Here the path and the goal are identical. The path which leads to the goal is itself the goal. If the path is totally different from the goal, it cannot lead to the goal. A cannot be B; this is the law of contradiction in logic. If the path is different

from the goal—if A is different from B—it shall always be different. So, Acharya Sankara says that the one who seeks That is itself That, and finally it is That which seeks itself. This interpretation is read into this passage: *yamevaiṣa vṛṇute, tena labhyaḥ. Tasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūm svām*: In the case of that blessed one, the Atman reveals itself.

Nāvirato duṣcaritān nāśānto nāsamāhitaḥ, nāśānta-mānaso vāpi prajñānenainam āpnuyāt (1.2.24): Nobody can attain that Atman who is not free from evil conduct. No one can know the Atman, or reach it, who is not calm and composed in mind, and who is distracted inside. No one can know the Atman whose mind is not concentrated on it. Distracted and torn emotions will not be good media for contacting the Atman. Here intellect is not of any utility. *Nāśānto nāsamāhitaḥ, nāśānta-mānaso vāpi prajñānenainam āpnuyāt*: Unsettled minds, merely with the power of will and intellect, will not be able to know it, contact it, or realise it.

Yasya brahma ca kṣatram ca ubhe bhavata odanaḥ, mṛtyur yasyopasecanam ka itthā veda yatra saḥ (1.2.25): Brahmanas and Kshatriyas are the diet of this Great Being. This Great Being eats Brahmanas and Kshatriyas every day. What does this mean? It is symbolic of knowledge and power. The highest knowledge and the highest power are embedded in this great Atman. That is the meaning of saying that it eats knowledge and power embedded in what we call Brahmana and Kshatriya. Brahmanas are supposed to be the repositories of knowledge and wisdom; Kshatriyas are supposed to be the repositories of power and strength. Both these are swallowed by this Great Being, because it is above all knowledge and power. *Yasya brahma ca kṣatram*

ca ubhe bhavata odanaḥ: It is a good meal. Brahmanas and Kshatriyas are its daily breakfast and lunch. *Mṛtyur yasyopasecanaṁ*: But it cannot digest this easily, so it wants some *achar*, some condiment. Death is the condiment. When we take a meal we have a little condiment, *achar* as it is called in Hindi. We eat the meal, whatever it is, *chapati*, *paratha*, with a little condiment. And this Great Being takes death itself as the condiment. What a great power! It is staggering, really staggering. It will make us giddy. We are unable to think it, so great and grand it is. *Ka itthā veda yatra saḥ*: Who can know it? Yama himself is saying, “Who can know it?” Who can know where it is? Great indeed it is! May it bless us.

Discourse 6

ISHVARA AND THE JIVA

Yasya brahma ca kṣatram ca ubhe bhavata odanaḥ, mṛtyur yasyopasecanaṁ ka itthā veda yatra saḥ (1.2.25). This is the last verse of the Second Section. The Supreme Being is the repository of knowledge and power, which is here indicated by the statement that the Supreme Being consumes Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, indicating thereby that it is the final ocean of knowledge and power—Brahmana representing knowledge, and Kshatriya representing power. Omniscience and omnipotence are blended in the Supreme Being.

Generally, in this world we exercise knowledge in the form of a power. Some effort is necessary in implementing one's ability of knowledge in the form of a performance that is called power. Power proceeds from knowledge. In the case of God, something does not proceed from something else. It is one and the same thing that is knowledge as well as power. The very thought of God is also the power of God. The very being of God is also the action of God. In our case, being is not the same as action. We may be sitting, but that does not mean that we are doing something at the time. In the case of God, the very existence is cosmic activity. Existence is action; knowledge is power. They are

self-identical in the case of the Almighty, and the statement that it consumes death itself as a pickle shows that it is immortal.

Na mṛtyur āsīd amṛtaṁ says the Nasadiya Sukta of the Rigveda: Immortality and death are like shadows of the Almighty. Well, death may be a shadow, but is immortality also a shadow? We can imagine the transcendence of God when it is held that even the deathlessness that we are thinking of in our mind is transcended in the Almighty essence, because our concept of immortality is the counterpart of mortality. That which is not mortal is immortal. Why do we use such a word? Why should we designate the state of being forever and ever as an absence of death? Has it not got any positive definition? It is like saying “I am free from disease”. Why do we use such words? Why do we not say “I am healthy”? If we say “I am not sick, I have no disease”, it is not a proper definition of a positive condition. We should say, “I am healthy, strong, vigorous. Everything is fine.” But we are using the word ‘immortal’, or ‘deathlessness’. Deathlessness is the absence of death. Now, absence itself is not a positive thing. There must be something positive which can be designated as not just a negation of death or a negation of mortality. That something is, therefore, superior to the concept of the absence of death and the absence of mortality. This is the reason why the great mantra of the Rigveda says it is that of which both immortality and death are shadows. So it consumes death itself. It consumes even the counterpart of death.

Immortality is generally believed to be a long-duration existence. In our childlike way of thinking we imagine that when we become immortal, we will be living a long, long life.

Just as we are now living fifty, sixty, seventy years, a hundred years, then we will be living for millions and millions of years. This is what we think the state of immortality is. It is not the case. In the state of immortality we will not be living for a long, long time, because there is no time there. Immortality is also timelessness. Hence, it is deathlessness. So a long, long continuance in an endless duration of time is not God-experience. Therefore, God-experience should be considered as totally transcending, different from just a long, continuous existence in space and time in the world. It is also not negation; it is positive, a positive something. We cannot define God positively. We can only say what He is not, but it is not possible to say what He is. Therefore, in a metaphorical way the Veda mantra says death and deathlessness are shadows cast by That which is the only One. So here is the meaning of this mantra: *yasya brahma ca kṣatram ca ubhe bhavata odanaḥ, mṛtyur yasyopasecanam ka itthā veda yatra saḥ*. Who can know That?

The Third Section commences now. *Ṛtam pibantau sukṛtasya loke guhām praviṣṭau parame parārdhe, chāyā-tapau brahma-vido vadanti, pañcāgnayo ye ca tri-ṇāciketāḥ* (1.3.1): In this world, in this body, there are two beings who are connected with the deeds performed while living in this world, or while living in this body. They are occupying the deepest recesses of the hearts of people. Their relationship is something like the relationship between light and darkness or light and shade. This is what the knowers of Brahman, and those people who know the Panchagni Vidya, tell us.

The Panchagni Vidya is wonderfully described in the Fifth Chapter of the Chhandogya Upanishad. The Vaishvanara Vidya and the Panchagni Vidya are

interconnected. Knowers of this Panchagni Vidya, as well as those who have performed the Nachiketas sacrifice three times, tell us that there are two beings living in this world, in this body, enjoying the fruits of actions in the deepest recess of the heart, having a relationship between them as light and shade. The two beings are God and man—Ishvara and *jiva*, we may say. Ishvara and *jiva* operate in a twofold fashion: externally in the universe, and internally in this body. The world and God are the two beings envisaged cosmically, and the Atman and the *jiva* are the two beings envisioned internally within our own selves. This *jiva*, this individual soul, eats the fruits of its own actions. It enjoys the fruits of its actions.

Two beings are said to be enjoying the fruits of actions, which was mentioned when reference was made to the two birds perching on a single tree. One bird is enjoying the delicious fruits of the tree. The other bird does not enjoy; it just looks on. It is unconcerned with what is happening to its comrade seated nearby, plunging himself in the joy of eating delicious fruit. Here, in this mantra, it is said that there are two beings enjoying the fruits of action. Earlier, one was not enjoying the fruits of action, and now here both are enjoying the fruits of action. This is a highly philosophical connotation which we have to understand with some concentration of mind.

Ishvara and the *jiva* are not identical with each other in the sense that Ishvara is cosmic, and therefore He has no karma. As a sutra of Patanjali tells us very picturesquely, the concept of Ishvara is also the concept of freedom from karma of every kind. *Kleśa karma vipāka āśayaiḥ aparāmṛṣṭaḥ puruṣaviśeṣaḥ Īśvaraḥ* (Y.S. 1.24) is the sutra

of Patanjali: Nothing that affects the *jiva* can contaminate Ishvara. In this way we may say Ishvara, as the bird, does not have to get involved in the tangles in which the *jiva* is involved. We have to go to the other verse where it is said that one of the birds is not entangled. Now Ishvara is said to be connected with the *jiva* in another way. Ishvara knows what is happening to the *jiva*. He is not unconcerned. There is a direct give-and-take policy, as it were, between ourselves and God as Ishvara. Also, the existence of Ishvara as the controlling power of the universe is determined in a very important sense by the requirements of the *jivas*, or the individuals, inhabiting the universe, just as the head of a government is having those characteristics which are the conditioning factors in relation to the citizens in the country. The requirements of the nation determine the character of the ruling head. So the ruling head, though he is not directly connected with the sorrows of any particular citizen in the country, is in a way directly connected in the sense that he is responsible for the fate of the people in the country. As we know very well, though in one sense the direct connection between the ruling head and the public is not there, there is a very intimate connection between the two because the head is totally determined by the requirements of the country. Otherwise, he cannot manage the country.

There is an interrelationship between the universe and Ishvara, who rules the universe. The fate of the universe is the duty of Ishvara, just as the fate of the country is the duty of the ruling head. Whatever be the condition in which the nation finds itself will be the condition that affects the ruler, because he exists there only to see that the prevailing

conditions are harmonious. So Ishvara controls the world by bringing about a state of harmony and, in that sense, He is related internally; thus, we may say Ishvara is connected with the *jivas*, and only in that sense can we say that the two beings enjoy the fruits of action. The ruler, the king, or the final administering principle of a country enjoys the fruits of the actions of the subjects of the nation. He is directly affected by it, so they are correlated existences. Ishvara and the *jivas* are correlated, and the existence of Ishvara is demanded by the necessity of the *jivas* to have a ruling power. If Ishvara does not exist as something related to the *jivas*, there will be no dispensing of justice in terms of the actions of the *jivas*. The merits and the demerits of the *jivas* are to be rewarded or punished accordingly. The *jivas* who perform actions cannot reward themselves, nor can they punish themselves, so there must be a principal above the *jivas*. The necessity for the existence of Ishvara arises on account of there being a necessity for a dispensing power, and that dispensing of justice will have validity only as long as *jivas* exist. This is the reason why the mantra seems to say that two beings enjoy the fruits of action.

It also draws a marked distinction between the two beings, though it was already said that they are interconnected. The marked difference is that one is like light, and the other is like shade. Such is the difference between man and God that man looks like a shadow, and God is eternal light. So both these aspects of the God and *jiva* relationship are mentioned here in this single verse: enjoying the fruits of action simultaneously in a cooperative manner on the one hand, and Ishvara remaining totally independent on the other hand.

Ṛtam pibantau sukr̥tasya loke guhām praviṣṭau parame parārdhe, chāyā-tapau brahma-vido vadanti, pañcāgnayo ye ca tri-ṇāciketāḥ. Knowers of Brahman, knowers of the great Vaishvanara Vidya and the Panchagni Vidya, knowers of the performance of the Nachiketas sacrifice tell us that this is the position of the relation between God and man, Ishvara and the *jiva*.

Yas setur iṣṇānām akṣaram brahma yat param, abhayam titīṣatām pāram nāciketam śakemahi (1.3.2): We are now in a position to understand the nature of the Nachiketas sacrifice. By the performance of such a sacrifice, or *yajna*, one reaches the *akṣara*, the imperishable Brahman, the Absolute, *yat param*, the Supreme Being. It is a fearlessness granted to all those who are to cross the ocean of mortal existence, *samsara* as it is called. This Brahman, this Supreme Being, is like a bridge, by walking over which, by traversing which, we can cross over *samsara*, this mundane existence. This knowledge comes to us through the Nachiketas sacrifice—*nāciketam śakemahi*.

Now we have some verses which are of practical importance. Actual sadhana, spiritual practice, is described here in the coming verses, which are very, very important for every seeker, worth committing to memory every day as a holy mantra.

Ātmānam rathinam viddhi, śarīram ratham eva tu: buddhiṁ tu sārādhiṁ viddhi, manaḥ pragraham eva ca (1.3.3). *Ātmānam rathinam viddhi*: This body is compared to a chariot. The rider of the chariot is the Self, the *jivatman*. *Śarīram ratham eva tu*: This body is the chariot; the rider, the Lord seated in the chariot, is the *jivatman*, our own Self. *Buddhiṁ tu sārādhiṁ viddhi*: The charioteer here is the

intellect, the reason, the *buddhi* in us. *Manah pragraham eva ca*: The horses pull this chariot, and the reins that control the movement of the horses are the functions of the mind.

Indriyāṇi hayān āhur viṣayāṃś teṣu gocarān, ātmendriya-mano-yuktam bhoktety āhur manīṣiṇaḥ (1.3.4). *Indriyāṇi hayān āhuḥ*: The sense organs are the horses of this body chariot; the *jiva* is the rider; the *buddhi* or intelligence, the reason, is the charioteer; the mind is the reins controlling the horses, which are the sense organs; the objects of the senses are the roads along which the chariot is driven. *Ātmendriya-mano-yuktam bhoktety āhur manīṣiṇaḥ*: The experiencer or the enjoyer of anything is not the Atman by itself, not the sense organs by themselves, not the mind by itself. The mind has no consciousness; it is like a mirror which by itself has no light in it. A mirror does not shine by itself. Only when light falls on the mirror does the mirror appear to shine. In a similar manner, the light of the Atman has to fall on the mind in order that it may work as an intelligent principle. Therefore, the enjoyer cannot be the mind.

How can one enjoy a thing unless there is intelligence, consciousness? Unconscious enjoyment is unthought of. As the mind has no consciousness of itself, it borrows consciousness from the Atman inside. The enjoyer cannot be regarded as the Atman. The senses are also not the enjoyers of anything, because they are insentient in their nature. The sense organs are there even when we are fast asleep, but none of the sense organs can operate—neither the eyes see, nor the ears hear. Even if we touch a person, he will not feel that we are touching him. The senses do not enjoy anything, the mind does not enjoy anything, and the Atman is also not the enjoyer, because it is all-pervading.

Who enjoys? Not the Atman, not the sense organs, not the mind. But when we say “I enjoy”, who is speaking this? The Atman does not say it, because the Universal Being does not enjoy anything. The sense organs do not say it, because they have no consciousness, not even the mind. Who is speaking? A peculiar mixture, a blend or an alignment, we may say—a coming together in a peculiar manner of the Atman, the sense organs and the mind—this blend is called the experiencer. The experiencer is an illusion finally, inasmuch as it does not exist by itself. It is only a product by way of a combination of the characteristics of the Atman, the mind and the sense organs. The enjoyer does not exist by itself. Therefore, all enjoyment in the world is false, it is illusory, it is a metaphysical corollary that follows from this fact of there being no such person as an enjoyer except as a peculiar illusory product created by an apparent coming together of the Atman, the mind and the sense organs: *ātmendriya-mano-yuktam bhoktety āhur manīṣiṇaḥ*. So the wise man says.

The fact that the body is the chariot is to some extent intelligible, and we understand what it means. We also understand that the intellect is the charioteer because the body moves in the direction as prompted by the reason. We also understand, to some extent, that the mind controls the sense organs, the horses. But what is meant by saying that the road is the sense objects?

Usually the objects of the senses are connected very, very mysteriously with the sense organs. In spite of the fact that the objects are not directly connected with the sense organs, we know very well that the sense organs move along the direction of the objects. The objects here

become a kind of help to us rather than a hindrance, because the path along which the chariot moves cannot be regarded as a hindrance. The objects become obstacles only when they are considered as things in which the senses have to indulge, but they become aspects of support and they become guiding factors when they are regarded as a manifestation of a hierarchy of guiding forces through whose assistance alone is it possible for us to ascend higher and higher. That the objects are the lowest support, from which lowest rung of the ladder we have to rise gradually higher and higher, is mentioned in the coming verse. The objects are not obstacles, spiritually viewed; but unspiritually viewed as things for indulgence, they are obstacles. Spiritually viewed as the lowest manifestation in the form of matter of the very same substance that constitutes the final universe, in that sense the objects are roads that take us higher and higher and enable us to drive our chariot along them.

The world is a bondage as well as a liberating principle. Wrongly viewed, it is a bondage. Rightly viewed, it is a help. The human being is an enemy when wrongly approached, but the human being is a friend when rightly approached. If we rub our shoulders against a person wrongly, that person is not a friend anymore. But if we humanely approach and compassionately encounter the person, that person becomes a friend. The world is a friend and a foe at the same time; so are the objects of the senses. Here the objects of the senses are not considered as hindrances. They are the manifestations of the lowest level of the descent of the Absolute in creation. This is the meaning that we have to draw from the significance of objects being the road

along which the chariot of the body has to be driven by the charioteer, the *buddhi*.

Yas tv avijñānavān bhavaty ayuktena manasā sadā, tasyendriyāṇy avaśyāni duṣṭāśvā iva sāratheḥ (1.3.5). *Yas tv avijñānavān bhavaty*: The horses of the senses become non-cooperative if a person is unintelligent. *Ayuktena manasā sadā*: by not having a controlled mind; *tasyendriyāṇy avaśyāni*: for such a person the *indriyas*, or the senses, become restive and uncontrolled as uncontrolled horses. *Duṣṭāśvā iva sāratheḥ*: Sometimes we see horse carriages moving from Rishikesh to Lakshmanjhula. We can observe that the driver drives the cart up to the water tank, and then the horse stops; and if he pushes the horse, it will go backward. The carriage goes backwards into a ditch, and all the occupants have to get down. That is *duṣṭāśvā*, which means 'not cooperative', 'a non-cooperative thing'.

Yas tu vijñānavān bhavati, yuktena manasā sadā, tasyendriyāṇi vaśyāni sadaśvā iva sāratheḥ (1.3.6): But the reverse is the case for that person whose horses are good and well trained, and the charioteer is capable of understanding. In this case the reins are never let off, and the movement of the chariot is proper in its course.

Yas tv avijñānavān bhavaty amanaskas sadā'suciḥ, na sa tat padam āpnoti saṁsāraṁ cādhigacchati (1.3.7): If the driver of the chariot is bereft of understanding, the goal is never reached and the chariot is hurled down. This is *samsara*.

When the senses move among objects as their road, they do not know which course to pursue. If a charioteer without intelligence comes to a crossroad, he does not know which way to choose. Or if the horses go amuck, we can imagine the fate of the chariot and its rider. The objects

are many, though the elements which constitute them are only five. There is a tremendous excitement of the senses when they behold the colourful world of objects, because our intellect fails. We begin to see through the senses rather than through the intellect, and since the senses are diversified, we are presented a diversified world from which we do not know what to choose. Thus, without intelligence, there is restless activity. A person without self-control enters the womb of *samsara*.

Yas tu vijñānavān bhavati samanaskas sadā śuciḥ, sa tu tat padam āpnoti yasmāt bhūyo na jāyate (1.3.8): “Are the roads really many, or is it one?” is the question. The roads to the senses are many, but to the purified intellect it is one. The one road is Hiranyagarbha, or Vaishvanara, in whom everything gets combined and all roads meet. The diversified activities of the senses can stop only when the unity behind them is beheld, which is not possible without self-withdrawal through intelligence. The five roads merge into a single road. If five horses tied to the same chariot run in different directions, what will happen to the chariot? That is our case. On the other hand, if they all move in one direction, what will be their power! So he whose senses are controlled and whose intellect is purified, he does not come back.

Vijñānasārathir yastu manañ pragrahavān naraḥ, so'dhvanañ param āpnoti tad viṣṇoḥ paramam padam (1.3.9): A person who has intelligence as the charioteer, whose mind acts as reins, he reaches the final destination of the path, which is the supreme state of God.

The last quarter of this mantra is borrowed from the Rigveda. It says that the state of Vishnu is beheld by the

wise ones as the state of all-pervading ether. The place of Vishnu is not a location or a place. It is spread out like ether or space, like the ocean. A river goes everywhere when it reaches the ocean, and it does not remain localised in one place. Likewise is the soul which enters Vishnupada. The Universal Being is Vishnu. The moment a *jiva* reaches his destination, he enters Vishnupada. Therefore, the body is to be utilised as a vehicle of action in the movement of the soul to God.

There is nothing wrong with our senses, mind, etc., but they should be directed properly. Evil is that which is misdirected. A thing is not evil in itself, but when it performs another's function it is evil, just as anything out of place is dirt. So everything should be in its proper place, and yoked properly. The world is a training ground in which the objects and the senses are occasions for mastering our energies so that they get unified through the senses, the mind and the intellect. We look weak because all our energies leak out through the senses. If we conserve our health and concentrate our effort in a single channel, it is called *dharana*. This will make us powerful; this is yoga. By the control of the senses, the mind and the intellect, the soul becomes fit for God-realisation.

After this description, another aspect is being discussed. How are we to subdue the senses? How is the charioteer to control the horses? What steps are we to take? This difficult effort on the part of the soul is called *indriya-samyama* or *manonigraha*. It is summed up in the two following slokas.

Discourse 7

THE METHOD OF YOGA

We had the description of the chariot of the body, which is said to be driven along the road of the sense objects by the charioteer, who is the reason, or the intellect. The Lord is seated there, the *jivatman*, with the mind being the reins controlling the sense organs as horses. It was said that if the horses are not properly trained they may become restive and cast the chariot somewhere on the way, and the Lord seated in the chariot may not reach the destination unless the charioteer is very reliable, which means to say, unless the reason is purified and free from the faults characteristic of egoism such as greed and passion, etc. In connection with this, the gradation of the categories of the universe is mentioned in the subsequent two verses.

Indriyebhyaḥ parā hy arthā, arthebhyaś ca param manaḥ, manasaś ca parā buddhir buddher ātmā mahān paraḥ; mahataḥ param avyaktam, avyaktāt puruṣaḥ paraḥ, puruṣān na param kiñcit: sā kāṣṭhā, sā parā gatiḥ (1.3.10-11). In connection with the horses, the chariot, etc., indication is given of the manner of the ascent or the progress of the chariot of this individuality in the direction of the goal, which is referred to here as *viṣṇoḥ paramam padam* (1.3.9), the supreme abode of Vishnu, the all-pervading Being.

What are the stages of the movement of this ascent, or progress? What is the first thing that we encounter? The objects of the senses are the first things that we behold. They are the grossest manifestations in the evolutionary process. They strike us every day. We hit our heads against them, as it were, and we see nothing in the world except objects which are cognised by the sense organs. The sense organs are to be considered as somehow superior to the objects because the manner in which the consciousness of an object arises within is determined by the manner in which the sense organs comprehend the object. The way in which the senses are constituted is also the way in which the object will appear to us in our consciousness as, for instance, the kind of lens that we wear on our eyes will decide the way in which the objects appear to our eyes. If the lens is concave, convex, broken, coloured or distorted, accordingly we will see the objects as topsy-turvy, small, big, distorted, expanded, broken, coloured, and so on, though the objects themselves are really not so affected. Inasmuch as there is a tremendous conditioning power of the sense organs over the objects, they are said to be superior to the objects of their perception.

But superior to the sense organs are the subtle principles which constitute them, the *tanmatras*, as they are called—*sabda*, *sparsa*, *rupa*, *rasa*, *gandha*—the principles of hearing, touching, seeing, tasting and smelling. These are the subtle rudimentary principles which go to form the power of the sense organs. Therefore, the sense organs can perform only five functions. We can see, we can hear, we can touch, we can smell, and we can taste. We cannot do anything more than this in this world. We see a fivefold manifestation of

the universe—earth, water, fire, air and ether—because of the organs which are fivefold. Some wise men have held that if we had millions of sense organs, we would behold the world in a million ways, and not only in the limited way as it appears to the fivefold senses.

Inasmuch as the senses are constituted of a higher essence called *tanmatras*, which I have already mentioned, the causes thereof naturally should be considered as higher than, or superior to, the sense organs. *Artha* here means the potential of the sense organs. They are the *tanmatras* mentioned. The objects are the lowest, the sense organs are higher, and the *tanmatras* are superior still. The mind is subtler than even the *tanmatras* because it can conceive; it can think the *tanmatras*. The mind can understand what *sabda, sparsa, rupa, rasa, gandha* are. The mind is potentially *sattvic* in its nature, though it is also affected with *rajas* and *tamas*. There is torpidity and immobility on the part of the mind in *tamas*. It is distracted many a time on account of *rajas*, but it also has some *sattvic* qualities, on account of which it often feels happy inside. It is intelligent, and can understand the pros and cons of things. The joys that we feel inside are a reflection of the Atman. The *sattva guna* of Prakriti occasionally manifests through the mind. The mind, therefore, is superior even to the *tanmatras* which it knows. The knower is superior to the known. *Manasaś ca parā buddhir buddher*: The intellect is superior to the mind. The mind generally thinks in an indeterminate manner, but the *buddhi*, or the intellect, determinedly cognises, decides and concludes. The intellect is purified mind. Some say the intellect is like sugar and the mind is like jaggery, out of which the sugar is made by a purification process.

But there is something superior to the intellect of the human being, which is *mahat-tattva*. *Mahat-tattva* is the cosmic intellect. The word *mahat* is used in Sankhya philosophy. According to the Sankhya philosophy, Prakriti is the supreme potential for creation. It is constituted of the properties of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. In the beginning of things, Prakriti remains in an equilibrated condition where the three properties are in a state of harmony; therefore, there is no perception or knowledge of anything at that time. Suddenly there is a disturbance of Prakriti, and one property rises to the surface and has an upper hand over the other two properties, and that particular property becomes the medium for the reflection of the Cosmic Being through it. Various mediums through which the Supreme Being manifests itself are said to be of the cosmic *sattva guna*. The cosmic *sattva* pervading all things is *mahat*, according to the Sankhya doctrine. It is identifiable with Hiranyagarbha-tattva of the Vedanta doctrine.

Hence, the intellect of individuals is to be considered as only a fraction of this universal intellect, which is *mahat-tattva*, which has omniscience and omnipotence, whereas the individual intellect has no such power. It has limited knowledge and limited power. The *mahat-tattva*, or cosmic intelligence, is like the ocean of knowledge, and the human intellect is like a drop of it, but even this drop is a distorted drop. It does not mean that the human intellect is qualitatively equal to the *mahat-tattva*, though quantitatively small. A spark of fire is quantitatively smaller than a huge conflagration of fire, but qualitatively it is the same as fire. Here, when we say that the intellect of the human being is a part, a little fraction of the

universal intelligence, we should not conclude that it is qualitatively the same. Otherwise, we would be thinking like small gods, and that we are not doing. We are not thinking like gods at all but as suffering, distorted and finite individuals. There is a topsy-turvy activity going on in the human intellect; though it is part and parcel of the universal Consciousness, it is also a reflection.

Now, the sun can be reflected in water. We can see that when the water shakes, it appears to make the sun also split or fraction into little bits, as it were. On the one hand, the reflection has created the segmentation of the original into little bits, and on the other hand, being a reflection, it does not have the quality of the sun. The heat that is perceived in the sun is not there when we see the sun in the reflection. In a similar manner, the intellect, which is the highest faculty in the human being, has a double disadvantage in that it is, first of all, a fraction or a little part of the cosmic intelligence, and secondly, it is a reflection. Therefore, it is not qualitatively equal. So, quantitatively it is not equal, and also qualitatively it is not equal. Therefore, the *mahat-tattva* is supremely above the human intellect.

Mahataḥ param avyaktam. As I mentioned, the *mahat-tattva* is a manifestation of the Supreme Being through the *sattva guna* of Prakriti; therefore, the very appearance and the very possibility of the existence of such a thing called *mahat-tattva* is due to the existence of another principle above it, called Prakriti. So Prakriti *avyakta*, as it is called, is above the *mahat-tattva*. *Avyaktāt puruṣaḥ paraḥ*: The Supreme Being—Puruṣa, as it is called, or Brahman as it is called in the Vedānta—is superior even to Prakriti, because Prakriti acts only as a medium of reflecting the original

Consciousness. Consciousness is the Ultimate Reality. Brahman, Purusha, is Supreme.

So what are the gradations? From the objects we go to the sense organs. This is also a method of meditation—how we have to gradually withdraw the mind from the lower categories to the higher categories. This is the system of meditation that is being described in these two verses. Withdraw the consciousness from the objects to the senses, withdraw the consciousness from the senses to the mind, withdraw the consciousness from the mind to the intellect, and withdraw the consciousness from the intellect to the cosmic intellect. From there, withdraw the consciousness to the potential of creation, called Prakriti. Then withdraw this potential to the purely universal existence, the Mahapurusha.

Puruṣān na paraṁ kiñcit: There is nothing superior to the Purusha. It has been said that there is something superior to every category in this list mentioned, but when we reach the Purusha there is nothing superior to it, and there is no further ascent. That is the goal, and that is the end of all things. *Sā kāṣṭhā:* That is the final abode, and that is the blessedness which we all seek. It is the goal, the beatitude, the blessedness, and the eternal that we seek in our life. *Sā kāṣṭhā, sā parā gatih:* It is the abode of blessedness. Nothing beyond that exists.

Eṣa sarveṣu bhūteṣu gūḍho'tmā na prakāśate, dṛśyate tvagryayā buddhyā sūkṣmayā sūkṣma-darśibhiḥ (1.3.12): This Purusha is present everywhere. The Purusha manifests itself through Prakriti, then indirectly through Prakriti it manifests itself in *mahat*, through *mahat* it reflects itself in the intellect, through the intellect it reflects itself in the

mind, through the mind it reflects itself through the sense organs, and through the sense organs it illumines the objects. So this Supreme Purusha, though above all things, is also in all things. Though it is transcendent, it is also immanent.

Therefore, it is not difficult to contact the Purusha. We can contact the Purusha even in the objects of sense. Though it is the lowest manifestation of the Purusha, it is nevertheless a manifestation. Even the smallest official in the government is capable of contacting the government at the highest level. Similar is the case with this. All things in the world are roads, passages, paths leading to the Supreme Reality. This Supreme Purusha is manifest in all things, and yet is not visible to the sense organs. It is present even in objects, but it cannot be seen with the eyes in objects. Objects can be seen only with the eyes, with the sense organs, but the Purusha is not an object. It is the Subject that knows. Therefore, when we behold objects through the sense organs, we do not realise that we are actually seeing the Purusha in the form of the object. Externality, which is the characteristic of the activity of the senses, vitiates all perception and connects even the Purusha with the object, and we think that the object is outside, due to which reason the Purusha is not recognised, though it is really present there. The whole world is flooded with God-consciousness, but we cannot know that because we mistake the world for an externality, whereas God is universality.

Eṣa sarveṣu bhūteṣu gūḍho'tmā na prakāśate: Subtle Reality as it is, it is not visible to the sense organs. *Drśyate tvagryayā buddhyā:* But subtle analytic understanding can recognise the presence of the Supreme Being by philosophical acts of inference, and in meditation.

Sūkṣmayā sūkṣma-darśibhiḥ: With a subtle mind, with a purified intellect, great geniuses on the spiritual path such as rishis, sages and saints recognise Brahman present in this very world of material manifestation, though the sense organs cannot behold it in that manner.

Yacched vān manasī prājñas tad yacchej jñāna-ātmani, jñānam ātmani mahati niyacchet, tad yacchec chānta-ātmani (1.3.13). This is another verse which briefly states the categories of ascent, which was mentioned in a little more detail in the earlier verse. What should we do in meditation? The sense organs should be settled in the mind. Here *vak*, which means ‘speech’, is to be considered as representative of all the sense organs. It is not merely the speech that has to be withdrawn, but everything that represents sensuality, or sensory cognition. The mind should withdraw the power of the sense organs. The seeker should withdraw the consciousness from the senses and fix it in the mind, and then he should withdraw the consciousness from the mind and fix it in the intelligence. Then he should withdraw the consciousness from the intelligence and fix it in the cosmic intellect. Then he should withdraw it from there and fix it in the universal Atman. This is a brief statement of what has already been said in the previous verse. *Chānta-ātman* is the Supreme Being, Brahman, in which we have to settle ourselves finally in meditation.

Uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata: kṣurasya dhārā niśitā duratyayā; durgam pathas tat kavayo vadanti (1.3.14): Arise, awake! This is a call for us. The Upanishad tells us, “Sleep not, wake up, stand up, gird up your loins.” *Prāpya varān nibodhata*: Go to competent teachers and Masters and know the secret of this path, because it has already

been mentioned that unless the teacher is competent in his approach, knowledge cannot be gained. The competent person has been described as one who is identical with the knowledge, or rather, identical with the object of his knowledge. That is a God-realised man, we may say. A Godman should be your teacher, and until this is achieved, progress is not likely to be speedy. So wake up from your slumber of ignorance. Stand up and prepare yourself for the practice of yoga by contacting great Masters who will bless you with instruction.

Kṣurasya dhārā niśītā duratyayā: This path of the Spirit is very subtle, sharp, cutting, invisible to the eyes, like the edge of a razor. The edge of a razor is cutting, sharp, but invisible to the eyes. So is this path. It can cut us if we are not able to walk on it properly. The path to God is invisible to the sense organs. It is said that it is like the path of fish in the water or the path of birds in the air. Birds have a path in space, but we cannot know where that path is. It is invisible. Similar is the path of fish in water; we cannot track them. Likewise is the path of the great souls who tread the path of the Spirit. It is very subtle.

Durgam pathas tat kavayo vadanti: A great difficulty is before you. Almost impossible is this achievement. The path of God is an almost impossible endeavour for inefficient people because it is sharp, subtle, invisible, slippery, and not easy to confront. Therefore, take resort to a great Master who will guide you. Do not sleep. Wake up, stand up, and be ready for the great onslaught of this spiritual conquest. This is a great mantra: *uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata: kṣurasya dhārā niśītā duratyayā; durgam pathas tat kavayo vadanti.*

Aśabdam asparśam arūpam avyayam tathā arasam nityam agandhavam ca yat, anādy anantam mahataḥ param dhruvam nicāyya tam mṛtyu-mukhāt pramucyate (1.3.15): One can be freed from the jaws of death by knowing that which is above all that is audible, all that is tangible, all that is visible, all that is capable of comprehension through the sense organs. That which cannot be tasted or touched or smelt because of its eternity of character, such a thing which has no beginning and no end, which is above *mahat-tattva*; *mahataḥ param, dhruvam*: permanent, ancient, perpetual; *nicāyya*: knowing that, one is freed from the clutches of death. There is no other way. A proper concentration of the mind every day is necessary to adjust oneself with the requirements of the spiritual reality which masquerades in this very world as the visible objects.

Nāciketam upākhyānam mṛtyu-proktaṁ sanātanam, uktvā śrutvā ca medhāvī brahma-loka mahīyate (1.3.16): Here a tentative closing of the teaching takes place. Many people think that the Upanishad closes here and perhaps it is taken up again in the Second Section, or perhaps the Second Section is an independent Upanishad itself, etc., on account of the words that are used here in this verse. This is the story of Nachiketas. This is the wisdom imparted to Nachiketas by Mrityu, the great Lord of Death. Whoever speaks it, whoever hears it, such a blessed soul, highly intelligent, glories in Brahmaloка, the region of the eternal. Whoever reads this, whoever studies this, whoever speaks this, whoever hears this, understands it, and practises it according to the rules mentioned here will reach the abode of the Absolute.

Ya imam paramaṁ guhyaṁ śrāvayed brahma-saṁsadi, prayataś śrāddha-kāle vā tad ānantyāya kalpate, tad ānantyāya kalpate, tad ānantyāya kalpate iti (1.3.17): This is a supreme secret that has been described in this Upanishad, not easy to understand by a casual mind. If anyone will be good enough and great enough to expound this secret to an audience of seekers, with eagerness to expound it, or expounds it to an audience of people who have come to attend a *shraddha* ceremony—which is the ceremony performed for the well-being of the forefathers or departed souls—whoever teaches, expounds, and makes a large audience of seekers and good people understand the great truth of this Upanishad, such a person will attain to the limitless abode, *tadānantyāya kalpate*. He will not come back to this world. He will reach eternity instantly. *Tadānantyāya kalpate iti*. It is repeated a second time. There is no doubt about this.

Here concludes the First Chapter, as it is called, of the Kathopanishad, of which we already had three subsections. This Upanishad contains two chapters, each chapter containing three subsections. In that way, we can say it has six subsections. Now we go to the Second Chapter.

Parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhūs tasmāt parāñ paśyati nāntarātman: kaś cid dhīraḥ pratyag-ātmānam aikṣad āvṛttacakṣur amṛtatvam icchan (2.1.1): It appears as if the Creator pierced the sense organs in an externalised manner to punish them, as it were, so that they move outwardly like the rushing waters of a gushing river, and the river will not go back; it will always move onward. Externally oriented are the sense organs. This is the cause of knowing everything as if it is outside, and not in the universal context. Therefore

it is that the Universal Being is never seen in this world, though it is actually present everywhere. We see only the objects that are in space and time, but never see that which is hidden inside space and time. But there are great souls who withdraw the powers of the senses and do not permit the sense organs to construe things in an externalised manner. They behold what is inside, rather than what is outside, by turning their gaze to the very consciousness that is the responsible power for the operation of the mind and the sense organs. By analysis of the process of the operation of consciousness, great souls withdraw their consciousness from its involvement in the externality of things, involvement in the sense organs, involvement in the mind, involvement in the intellect, etc., and turn it back to the original universal source which is *mahat-tattva* and Parama-purusha, Brahman, the Absolute. Only great souls can achieve this. Ordinary souls are sunk in the mire of this erroneous perception caused by the distorted activity of the sense organs.

Parācaḥ kāmān anuyanti bālās te mṛtyor yanti vitatasya pāśam, atha dhīrā amṛtatvaṁ viditvā dhruvam adhruveṣv iha na prārthayante (2.1.2): Children run after the sense organs and their objects. Ignorant people are like children. Children are people who have little knowledge, and children, in their ignorance, run after the joys of the objects of sense. *Te mṛtyor yanti vitatasya pāśam*: Whoever runs after the joys of the objects of sense will be caught by the noose of death. Death is pervading the whole world. There is no place, no atom where death is not present. Yama is ruling this world as the immanent force of destruction, as the power of time that swallows everybody. Whoever is

foolish enough to conclude that joys are only in the objects of sense, and runs after them day in and day out, and does not believe that anything is superior to this world, he shall be caught by death, and he shall have to meet the consequences thereof.

Atha dhīrā amṛtatvaṁ viditvā: But the great heroes of the Spirit, knowing that there is such a thing called immortality, never seek the permanent among impermanent things. You want permanent happiness, but you seek it in the impermanent fluxations of the physical constituents of the world. Therefore, be not caught by this transient picturesque manifestation of the colours and the sounds of the objects of sense. Seek not the eternal in the non-eternal world. Knowing this, great souls withdraw themselves from even the perception of objects, leave alone an interest in them. They settle themselves in the permanent that is within them and attain to the Atman, which is the same as Brahman.

Discourse 8

REALISING THE ATMAN AND THE UNITY BEHIND ALL THINGS

We have read two verses of the Second Chapter. *Parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhūs tasmāt parāñ paśyati nāntarātman: kaś cid dhīraḥ pratyag-ātmānam aikṣad āvṛtta-cakṣur amṛtatvam icchan; parācaḥ kāmān anuyanti bālās te mṛtyor yanti vitatasya pāśam, atha dhīrā amṛtatvañ viditvā dhruvam adhruveṣv iha na prārthayante* (2.1.1-2). Children without understanding run after the pleasures of sense objects because the Creator Himself pierced the senses in an outward tendency, as it were. The senses cannot see anything that is behind; they see only what is in front. Not only do they see what is in front, they rush vigorously forward in search of more accumulation of objects for their indulgence. Then what happens? Their vigour wears away, the instruments of actions, the sense organs and the body become old, and there is decay and destruction. Death takes possession of such people who have no consciousness of there being a higher reality than the visible world of objects.

Heroes on the path of the Spirit, knowing this predicament of human nature in this world, turn their gaze within and behold within themselves, in their own selves,

that light which illumines the whole world. The light of intelligence, which is within us, is also that glorious radiance of God-consciousness. Knowing this, people tread the path of the true Spirit for attaining immortality, and they do not seek the permanent attainment of Godhood through any means which are perishable and impermanent. Impermanent means are these objects of the world, which are incapable of contacting that which is permanent in nature. Everything in this world is infested with the tendency to perish one day or the other. Therefore, nothing in this world can be regarded as a suitable way or means to attain God. The Atman is the way to God, not the body, not the senses, not the objects.

Yena rūpaṁ gandhaṁ śabdān sparśāṁś ca maithunān, etenaiva vijānāti, kim atra pariśiṣyate: etad vai tat (2.1.3): That, with the help of whose light and awareness one beholds things in perception through the eyes, tastes things through the tongue, smells through the nose, hears through the ears, touches with the skin, and contacts in various ways—with the help of this one thing, all things are known. Having known this, there is nothing more to be known.

“This verily is the answer to your question, Nachiketas,” says Yama. “Here I am giving you the answer to your question, the third boon that you asked, and I am gradually revealing it here in the instruction that I have given to you in these passages. After knowing this, what remains—*kim atra pariśiṣyate?* This verily is that. This indeed is that which you seek, and here it is before you.”

Svapnāntaṁ jāgaritāntaṁ cobhau yenānupaśyati, mahāntaṁ vibhum ātmānam matvā dhīro na śocati (2.1.4):

Wise people do not grieve when they realise this great universal Atman, which is the reason behind perceptions in dream as well as in waking. It is through this Atman that we are able to behold the world in front of us and be conscious of something being there. It is through the light of this Atman that we are dreaming and seeing things in dream. It is because of the presence of this Atman that we are able to wake up from sleep. The waking consciousness, the dream consciousness, and the unconsciousness of sleep are all vestures put on by this Atman, as it were, and one who knows this Atman as dissociated from the body, the mind and this causal sheath which we experience in sleep knows the Atman verily. These bodies, known as *sthula*, *sukshma* and *karana*—gross, subtle and causal—are like covers or sheaths over the light of the Atman, which shines within everybody as the sun shines behind clouds. Knowing this great Atman, the hero treading the path of the Spirit will not grieve anymore, will not have sorrow of any kind, because the true Atman is the true person. You and I and everyone, and everything in the world, are basically this Atman making life possible and giving form and shape to things, and also making things appear attractive, beautiful and worth the while. The value of things in the world, whatever that value be in any capacity whatsoever, is the value of the Atman that is peeping through the sense organs and contacting the objects by means of the perceptual process.

Ya imam madhvadam veda ātmānam jīvam antikāt, īśānam bhūta-bhavyasya, na tato vijugupsate: etad vai tat (2.1.5): One who knows this great Atman seated in the heart of all—the experiencer of the consequences of the deeds performed by

itself through its association with the three sheaths—one who knows this Atman as independently reigning supreme above the three sheaths, as well as involved in the three sheaths, thereby experiences the fruits of karmas. *Madhu* is the word used here. *Madhva*: one who eats honey. Honey is the fruit of the action one performs, and the eater thereof is the *jiva*, the individual soul, which is nothing but a limited expression of the universal Atman reflected, peeping through the three bodies: causal, subtle and physical. This Atman is actually the Lord over the past, the present and the future. Timeless is this Atman, spaceless is this Atman, objectless is this Atman. It has no limitations of any kind. One who knows this shrinks not from anything, fears not anything, wants not anything. Here is the truth. This is verily that: *etad vai tat*. “What you ask, here it is. Take this knowledge, Nachiketas,” says Yama.

Yah pūrvam tapaso jātam adbhyaḥ pūrvam ajāyata, guhām praviśya tiṣṭhantam yo bhūtebhir vyapaśyata: etad vai tat (2.1.6): Whoever knows this Great Being which originated from the *tapas* of Brahman, the Absolute, prior to the manifestation of the five elements—earth, water, fire, air and ether—and yet is embedded in the very five elements, knows the Truth. This Atman is above the body, and yet is birthing through the body. The body is the individualised symbol of the physical elements earth, water, fire, air and ether, and cosmically these elements represent the body of God Himself, the Viratsvarupa. This Virat, who has entered the five elements through the form of this universe, is the cause of all things that we call creation as we perceive it, but this Virat himself is the effect of a great *tapas* of concentration of the will of Brahman, the Absolute, we may say.

In the Upanishads there are statements repeatedly making out that Brahman concentrated itself; it performed *tapas*. What kind of *tapas* did Brahman perform? We do *tapas* by eating less, sleeping less, wearing little clothing, and not speaking much. Observing *mauna*, and so on, are the ways of our austerity, or *tapas*. But when Brahman performed *tapas*, what did Brahman do? Brahman's *tapas* did not consist of not eating, not sleeping, not speaking, or wearing less clothes. These are not the ways of the *tapas* of the Supreme Being. Concentration of consciousness, the projection of the will in a given direction, and the embodying of the whole of oneself in the direction which this will has taken, that is real *tapas*, austerity; and in our case also that would be real austerity. Merely wearing frail fragments of cloth and not speaking and not eating, these are not adequate *tapas*. They are inadequate. Where the mind is not cooperating, the body cannot achieve anything. Our *tapas* consists in what the mind is doing, and not merely in what we do to the body. We may eat or not eat, that is a different matter; but what are we doing in the mind? We may not be eating anything, not even drinking water for a month, but we may be glutting through the mind, building castles in the air and vying over the pros and cons of all the blessed things in the world, with the mind never getting concentrated. So to the extent the mind concentrates, to that extent only are we in a state of *tapas*.

Brahman contemplated, concentrated itself, and did *tapas* in the form of the will to create the universe. The first manifestation is Virat, which came out of the *tapas* of Brahman and is prior to the five elements, yet it is involved in the five elements in the form of this vast cosmos. This

Virat, so big, so great, so expansive, the effect of the very will and *tapas* of Brahman, is within us. The kingdom of God is within us. 'Kingdom' means 'very big'. Such a vast area of suzerainty is within the little space of the heart of man.

Unfortunately, one knows this mystery of mysteries only through the five elements. The Virat is spreading itself everywhere in front of us as this glorious presentation of what we call creation, but we see only trees, we see twigs, we see bricks and stones, we see walls, we see rivers and mountains. Instead of seeing a person standing before us, we are seeing his skin, his hair, his bones and his sinews. This is the mistake that we make in the perception of the world. To see a person in front of us is different from seeing his limbs, as if the limbs constitute the person. The person is an enchantment, an attraction, a separate entity altogether. "I have gone and seen that person." When we make statements of this kind, we do not mean that we have gone and seen a conglomeration of hands and feet and nose and eyes. This is not what we have seen. The person is different from the bodily limbs. Similar is this Virat that we are beholding in the form of this cosmos. We are seeing only the nose and the ears and the little things that we call the limbs of the world, whereas these are the manifestations of another thing, which is the Supreme Person, the Mahapurusha, the Purushottama of the Vedas, the Bhagavadgita and the Upanishads. The great Reality is verily in front of us, and day and night we are actually hitting our heads against it but not knowing what has happened. "This verily is that. Nachiketas, I am giving you the answer," says Yama.

Yā prāṇena sambhavaty aditir devatāmayī, guhām praviśya tiṣṭhantī, yā bhūtebhir vyajāyata: etad vai tat (2.1.7). Brahman has been explained, Virat has been explained, and now Hiranyagarbha is being explained here—that great Prana, the cosmic Prana known as Hiranyagarbha or Sutratman, unborn among the born individualities of the world, the embodiment of all the gods. All the gods were shining in the Virat form which Lord Sri Krishna showed, as described for us in the Eleventh Chapter of the Bhagavadgita. Every divinity was shining in every part of its body. That is Hiranyagarbha-tattva, or we may call it Virat. This great unborn Cosmic Being, Sutratman, Hiranyagarbha, is in gods everywhere, seated in the heart of every person, and yet perceived only through the five elements, which are the objects of the senses. “This verily is that. Nachiketas, I have given you the answer,” says Yama.

Aranyor nihito jāta-vedā garbha iva subhṛto garbhīṇibhiḥ: dive diva īdya jāgṛvadbhir haviṣmadbhir manuṣyebhir agniḥ: etad vai tat (2.1.8). Yama is driving this idea again and again into the mind of Nachiketas. “Don’t be under the impression that I am not giving you the answer. Here is that, as fire is hidden between two fire sticks.” There are certain types of wood which embody the principle of fire in a greater measure than other pieces of wood. Everywhere fire is pervading. If two sticks strike each other, there will be fire in the forest. There is a particular tree called the *arani*, and when two pieces of wood from this tree are rubbed one over the other, sparks are produced. Sparks emanate even when we strike one stone against another. It shows that fire is embedded everywhere in a subtle, hidden form. As fire is hidden between two fire sticks, as a foetus is hidden in the

womb of the mother, this Great Being is hiddenly present in the heart of all. Every day it is adored, worshipped and glorified by awakened spirits who perform sacrifices day in and day out for contacting this wonderful Being, and by all people who are seeking it. This is the cosmic fire, the eternal fire of God. *Etad vai tat*: “Here is the answer for you, Nachiketas. Be happy,” says Yama.

Yataś codeti śuryo astam yatra ca gacchati, taṁ devās sarve’rpitās tadu nātyeti kaś cana: etad vai tat (2.1.9): It is because of the impulsion of this Cosmic Being that the sun rises in the east, and the planets rotate on their axis and revolve around the central nucleus of the sun. The seasons come and go in proper time. There is administration in this universe. Things do not happen confusedly. There is precision, order, mathematical perfection seen in the workings of nature. Everything is beautiful. Nothing is untoward in this world. Mathematics is a poor science of precision before this great precision of the workings of nature, inwardly as well as outwardly. This perfection, this precision, this ordered manner of the movement of things like the sun and moon and stars, is all due to the universal controlling power of the Atman that is Hiranyagarbha, Virat. God controls everything. All the gods are embedded in this. The millions of gods that people worship in the forms of religion in this world are twinkling sparks of this wondrous divinity universally present everywhere and twinkling in our own hearts. Nobody can go beyond that. Once we reach that, our movement stops, as the movement of a river stops when it touches the ocean. All our activities cease there, our aspirations find a fulfilment there, and our desires are granted entirely, abundantly. We

ourselves cease to be there. We become verily that which we are seeking. *Etad vai tat*: “This is that, Nachiketas. Take it,” says Yama.

Yad eveha tad amutra, yad amutra tad anviha, mṛtyos sa mṛtyum āpnoti ya iha nāneva paśyati (2.1.10). *Yad eveha tad amutra*: Whatever is here in this individual is also there in the cosmos. *Yad amutra tad anviha*: Whatever is in this microcosmic individuality of a person is also in the macrocosmic body of God. And conversely, whatever is in the macrocosmic body of the Almighty is to be found in the microcosmic individuality of ours. The human being is a cross-section of the cosmic ranges of worlds after worlds, realms over realms, and all the wonders and glories of the cosmos can be seen scintillating within the particles of the bodily individuality of a person. But if anyone sees duality, multiplicity, and does not realise this great oneness that is operating between us and the Supreme Being, such a person will go from death to death and from birth to birth continuously in a cycling movement of metempsychosis. No one can avoid birth, death and suffering in the form of *samsara*, this earthly existence, because of the fact that we do not see this unity operating in all things. We do not realise that the wonder that is everywhere is also the wonder within us. “Nachiketas, is this sufficient for you? What do you say?” asks Yama.

Manasaivedam āptavyam neha nānāsti kiñ cana: mṛtyos sa mṛtyum gacchati ya iha nāneva paśyati (2.1.11): It is not possible to envision this integral reality by ordinary means. It requires a great effort on the part of every one of us to chasten ourselves in order that we may become fit instruments for the vision of this glory. Otherwise, the

little comforting sadhana that we may be performing in our daily life may not be sufficient. With all the effort of our mind and intellect, we will not be able to behold the unity behind things. We see only duality, duplicity, multiplicity. All unwanted things are seen in this world. What do we see when we read a newspaper, for instance, every day in the morning? All unwanted things, all useless stuff, all dirt and garbage, all horrible things are what we see, and where is the instrument in our personality that can behold the unity behind them?

The perception of the ugliness of the world is the effect of the operation of a lower instinct operating in us, the lower self, as they call it, which works through the sense organs that are our taskmasters in misguiding the *jiva*. They are dacoits of the first water. These are the friends that we have. *Tasmat jagrata, jagrata*, says Sankaracharya. There are thieves here in the form of the sense organs, and they want to deprive us of the treasure of our wisdom by compelling us to see what is not there through the distorted sense organs. And what do we see in the world? We see the world exactly as it is not. It is the topsy-turvy, erroneous vision of the sense organs that makes us feel that the world is wretched. God has never created a wretched world, because if the effect, which is God's operation, is so bad, God should also be a little bad indeed because whatever is in the effect should also be in the cause. If God is perfection, glory, wonder, honey and milk, eternity and infinity, how could such a Being create a dirty world full of evil? Such a thing is impossible. It only shows that our mind is not prepared for the insight that is necessary to behold the glory in this otherwise wretched world. Wretchedness is

not actually of the world; it is the wretchedness of the process of perception.

Hence, a faculty of subtle, purified, concentrated means is necessary in order that the depth of unity can be seen in the midst of the diversity of otherwise unwanted things in the world, as it were. Actually, many things do not exist here. *Neha nānāsti kiñcana*. The Upanishad tells us the multiplicity that we perceive in the world is a false perception. Many things do not exist. There is only one thing. As a unity, as a blend, as a totality, as a oneness that the world is, we have to see it, but not behold it as a distracted, isolated, fractional, divided world, because the world is not so divided as we wrongly perceive it through the senses. But if we persist in seeing the world as so divided, and cannot visualise the unity behind these things if we are not endowed with that insight which is supreme and superb, what will happen to us? From death to death we go: *mṛtyos sa mṛtyum gacchati*. Who goes from death to death? *Ya iha nāneva paśyati*: He who sees variety, multiplicity, and absence of unity. Therefore, may one be guarded.

Discourse 9

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE LIBERATED SOUL AFTER DEATH

This is a series of instructions to Nachiketas as a sort of answer to his query as to what happens to the soul finally. Through various analogies, illustrations, images, comparisons, etc., the point of the circumstance of the soul in the state of liberation is emphasised. Questions of this kind are not easy to answer, because all questions and all answers are involved in certain categories of the world of substances and attributes, and the soul is neither a substance nor an attribute. Qualities and relations do not apply to it, but we can think only in terms of qualities and relations; therefore, any amount of exposition of the nature of the soul is impossible of comprehension finally. That is why great Masters and teachers take to methods of illustration, analogy, comparison, artistic presentation, etc., instead of argument. The Upanishad has already said *naiṣā tarkeṇa matir āpaneyā* (1.2.9): By logic and argument this Atman cannot be known.

Aṅguṣṭha-mātraḥ puruṣo madhya ātmani tiṣṭhati: iśāno bhūta-bhavyasya na tato vijigupsate: etad vai tat (2.1.12): This Atman looks like a small flame in the cave of the heart. The vast range of the light of the sun pervading the whole sky

looks like a little twinkling streak when it passes through a small aperture of a screen on the window of our house. The vast space, which is endless in its expanse, looks like a tiny spot when it is seen inside a little tube. Likewise, the universal Atman may appear to be like a little speck of radiance within the heart of a person, sometimes considered as the lotus of the heart.

The body is the outermost crust of human personality. Inside the body is the subtle body, consisting of the mind, intellect, sense organs and *prana*. Then there is the *karana sharira*, or the causal body, which envelops the soul. This soul, which is otherwise everywhere, manifests itself in the human being only through that instrument which is capable of revealing it, or manifesting it, in the same way as the vast sunlight can manifest itself only as a little beam because of the smallness of the aperture through which it passes, and the vast space may look very little in quantity and expanse on account of its being imagined to be contained within a small container. Likewise, there is a little *sattvika* aperture, as it were, in the heart of a person. The heart is described in multifarious ways in the scriptures of all the religions of the world. Especially in the Eighth Chapter of the Chhandogya Upanishad, we find a special elucidation of the heart, which is called there as the city of Brahman, the abode of God.

The abode of God is our own heart, but when that infinite God occupies a space that the human understanding can occupy, He looks like a little thumb-like flame. *Āṅguṣṭha-mātraḥ puruṣaḥ*: So small He is. We sometimes compare the soul of a person to a little flame, which at the time of death is said to leave the body and fly.

You must have seen pictures drawn by artists of the way in which the soul is said to depart from the body. Actually, the soul does not depart; it is the body that departs. The body is shed by the soul. As we cast off a cloth that is old and worn out, so does the soul shed and cast off the body, the apertures, the encrustations and the sheaths that are not anymore of utility to it. It stands isolated.

Nevertheless, generally in the case of people in the world, the soul does not become a universal expanse after death. It does not mean that the space becomes vast. In the case of the soul of the individual, there is a marked difference. If the walls of a pot are broken, the little space appearing to be inside it assumes a universal shape at once; and if the curtain is removed, the sun assumes its original expansive form of radiance. But the soul does not become universal when the body is cast off. It maintains its limited, isolated individuality in a subtle form. That is to say, death of the physical body does not mean liberation of the soul. The soul is not automatically liberated when the body is cast off. The attachment which it had to the body through the mind and the sense organs continues to be there because of the fact that, at the time of death, the mind follows the soul. *Manaḥṣaṣṭhānīndriyāṇi prakṛtisthāni karṣati* (B.G. 15.7), says the Bhagavadgita. The soul drags with it by force, as it were, the mind and the potentials of the senses, and as it is even then attached to them, the limitedness of the soul continues. The *jivahood* is still there after the passing of the body, the leaving of the body. The misery of the individual continues even if the body is thrown out.

The idea is that the soul appears to be limited and small, as a thumb-like structure, on account of its apparent

association with the limited aperture-like manifestation of human understanding through the intellect and the mind, principally the heart. *Madhya ātmani tiṣṭhati*: In the centre of our being it is located. The heart is the centre of our personality. *Īśāno bhūta-bhavyasya*: Otherwise, this great Lord, who is parading as a little soul in our own heart, is the master of all that is past and future. *Na tato vijigupsate*: Knowing this, nobody will shrink from anything. *Etad vai tat*: “This verily is that, Nachiketas. Here is an answer to your question of what happens to the soul,” says Yama.

Āṅguṣṭha-mātraḥ puruṣo jyotir ivādhūmakāḥ: īśāno bhūta-bhavyasya sa evāद्या sa u śvaḥ: etad vai tat (2.1.13): The flame of the soul in the heart is like a flame without smoke. Generally, when we light a lamp there is a flame, no doubt, and there is also a little smoke. But here is a smokeless flame which is the light of the soul in the deepest recesses of the heart. *Ivādhūmakāḥ*: without smoke; *īśāno bhūta-bhavyasya*: the Lord of all, past and future; *sa evāद्या sa u śvaḥ*: it is today just as it was earlier also, and what it is today, it shall be tomorrow also. There shall be no distinction between past and future for the soul. Its dramatic departure from the body, and its movement through space for the purpose of reincarnation and rebirth, all this is the consequence that follows from attachment. Consciousness is stuck to the body, stuck to the mind and the intellect and the sense organs. How it is stuck is a mystery by itself. We cannot say how the Universal can implant itself by attachment to the particular parts of its own self. Somehow it has taken place.

Yathodakam durge vṛṣṭam parvateṣu vidhāvati, evaṁ dharmān prthak paśyaṁs tān evānuvidhāvati (2.1.14): When rain falls, water is poured on the peak of a mountain. If

there is a large depression, like a valley on a mountain of great height, the rainfall will channelise itself through that valley, and there will be a concentrated rush of water in one direction only. But if there are many such little crevices and cracks on the mountain, the downpour of water that falls as rain will be distracted in many directions. Some water will flow here, some water will flow there. Everywhere there will be a scattered movement of the water from the rainfall.

In the case of a distracted mind, this is what happens. The rain of wisdom, which actually falls from the essential soul of man, is distracted in many ways, as the water on a mountain is split in different ways, because of the movement of the five sense organs and the millions of thoughts and feelings. Endless thoughts and endless feelings are the channels through which consciousness manifests itself, so that there is a tremendous inconceivable multiplicity of the manifestation of the soul consciousness when it actually reveals itself through the conditioning factors of the mind and the sense organs. When a person sees many things, thinks many things, feels many things, the consciousness will also be diverted along the same channel of diversity in a manifold manner, so that there would be no concentration in life. There will be no sense of unity in personality. There will be no alignment of the psychic modes of operation. There will be unhappiness and a kind of impossibility to choose even what is good and proper, or is the aim of one's life.

Yathodakam śuddhe śuddham āsiktam tādṛg eva bhavati, evam muner vijānata ātmā bhavati gautama (2.1.15): Suppose water is poured on water. If heavy rain pours on a lake or on the ocean, what happens? Water becomes water. It does not

move hither and thither. Like merges in like, and friends unite in a communion of inseparability of substance and character. Milk poured on milk, or water poured on water, is the example of concentratedness and communion where the parts are completely inseparable, and they stand not merely united as two parts, but as one indivisible being; so does the Atman become.

“You asked me what happens to the Atman. This happens to the Atman. It stands united with that from where it came, of which it is a part, from which it is inseparable, and which is itself basically, essentially eternal. Hey Gautama!” Nachiketas Gautama is the rishi whose descendent was Vajasravasa, the father of Nachiketas. Therefore, Nachiketas is also called Gautama by descent. “O Gautama Nachiketas, listen to me. The Atman, the soul, becomes one with its original universal nature in the case of a saint and sage who has realised it. This is the answer to your question, the third boon that you wanted me to grant. Here it is. Take it!” says Yama. Here we conclude this section.

Now begins the next section. Every little thing is said here and there, like varieties of diet served in a good meal.

Puram ekādāśa-dvāram ajasyāvakra-cetasah, anuṣṭhāyā na śocati vimuktasca vimucyate: etad vai tat (2.2.1). *Puram ekādāśa-dvāram*: This city of the human individual has eleven openings. This city of the body has eleven gates, openings, doors or windows, as they may be called: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and a mouth make seven, the navel makes eight, the apertures of excretion and generation make ten, and the central *brahmarandra*, or the crown of the head, is also considered as an aperture. So there are

eleven passages through which something can enter, and also through which something can go out.

Ajasyāvakra-cetasah: This otherwise indivisible, undistorted intelligence, immortal though it is, appears to be confined within the eleven-gated city of this body. Concentrating on this, meditating on this great truth, the great Lord, ruling from the city of the heart, is so near us that it is not difficult for us to meditate or fix our attention on Him. The moment we are absorbed in the feeling of our unity with the remotest and the nearest Lord seated in the heart, we are immediately liberated: *vimuktasca vimucyate*. The words used here are *vimuktasca vimucyate*: The liberated one is liberated. *Vimukta* is 'liberated one'; *vimucyate* means 'becomes liberated'. What is this two times liberation? Why is it said that there is liberation to the liberated one?

There are two types of liberation, usually known as *jivanmukti* and *videha mukti*. *Jivanmukti* is the liberation one attains even while this body is alive. The connection of consciousness with ignorance is snapped in the case of a *jivanmukta purusha*, or a being who is liberated in the sense that the person has God-consciousness even if the body is lingering. Due to the *prarabdha* karma persisting for a while, the body of even a liberated spirit may continue for some time.

There are three kinds of karma, known as *sanchita*, *prarabdha* and *agami*. All the karmas, the potential impressions of the actions that we performed in all the incarnations that we took earlier, are stored in the recesses of the unconscious, which is the *anandamaya kosha*, the dark causal sheath of our personality. The part of that storehouse intended for experience through

a particular incarnation, or a body, is separated from the storehouse, as a merchant who has a grocery shop takes some commodity for retail selling out of the large storehouse that he has got at the back of his shop. This particular body cannot experience all the consequences of every deed that we performed in previous lives. If the pressure of the consequence of everything that we did in all the incarnations were to be exerted upon this body, it would crack in one second. But the intention of the karma is not to break the body. All the potentials of karma should be experienced as pleasure and pain; therefore, certain types of results of action are intelligently separated from the storehouse of *sanchita*, the vast reservoir of karma, and only that kind of body is manifest by the mind in rebirth which can tolerate the manifestation of that set portion of karma called the *prarabdha*.

There is another kind of karma, called *agami* karma. After having been born into this body due to the pressure of *prarabdha* karma, we again perform new actions. We do some good things, and also some bad things. So further potential impressions created by these new actions are added to the existing storehouse. It is something like a person withdrawing from their bank account, thereby diminishing the balance, but at the same time adding something to it, so that whatever be the quantity taken from it, the storehouse is never exhausted. Thus, there will be no hope of liberation if the process of continuously adding potential karmas to the storehouse goes on and on, endlessly.

Well, the point now, in this context, is that the *jivanmukta*, who is liberated, has no *sanchita* karma. The

storehouse is burnt up by the wisdom of the Supreme Being. But he has a body which has been given to him for the purpose of experiencing that little portion of karma called *prarabdha*, and until the momentum or the force of the expression of that *prarabdha* exhausts itself, the body will continue. A *jivanmukta* is such a person who has a body because of the continuance of the *prarabdha* karma for a while, until the exhaustion of the force of the *prarabdha*, but he will not be taking birth again because the storehouse of potential is destroyed, burnt by the fire of wisdom. Thus, *vimuktasca vimucyate*: The person who is so liberated individually as the *jivanmukta purusha* again becomes liberated as a disembodied *videha mukta purusha*. When the *prarabdha* karma is over, the body is cast off. He is not a person moving as a knower of Brahman; he becomes Brahman itself. That is the implication of these two words, *vimuktasca vimucyate*: The liberated one is also liberated. That is, liberated while in the body, he is afterwards liberated without the body. Embodied salvation becomes, in the end, disembodied salvation, which is the final goal. *Etad vai tat*: “This is the answer to your question, Nachiketas.” Yama is driving the point again and again.

Haṁsaś śuciṣat, vasur antarikṣasat hotā vediṣat, atithir duroṇasat, nṛṣat, varasat, ṛtasat, vyomasat, abjā, gojā, ṛtajā, adriyā, ṛtam bṛhat (2.2.2). This is a Rigvedic mantra quoted here. It is not an ordinary passage. It is lifted from the Rigveda Samhita, and it has a way of pronunciation as a Veda mantra. This is a prayer to the sun, incidentally, a prayer or a description of Brahman, the Absolute, manifest as the sun in the firmament. *Haṁsaḥ*: This is the luminous sun of Consciousness. *Śuciṣat*: This is the pure Radiance

dwelling in the heart of all. *Vasuḥ*: This is the Spirit that is moving in the air that blows everywhere. *Antarikṣasat*: This is the Great Being that appears as the vast expanse of space. *Hotā*: This is the Consciousness that appears as the performer of a sacrifice. *Vediṣat*: This is the Consciousness that appears as the altar of the sacrifice. *Atithi*: This is the Consciousness that appears as the guest that comes to one's door. *Duroṇasat*: This is the Consciousness that appears as the vessels, the sanctified pots that are used in the sacrifice. *Nṛṣat*: This is the Consciousness that appears as human beings moving around us. *Varasat*: This is the Supreme Consciousness appearing as the gods in heaven. *Ṛtasat*: This is the Consciousness appearing as the rule and law operating in the cosmos. *Vyomasat*: This is the Consciousness appearing as the white space. *Abjā*: This is the Consciousness appearing as the waters of the ocean. *Gojā*: This is the Consciousness appearing as the very earth. *Ṛtajā*: This is the Consciousness appearing as the ultimate Truth. *Adrijā*: This is the Consciousness appearing as the hills and mountains. *Ṛtam*: This is the Truth. *Br̥hat*: This is the greatest Reality. Wonderful statement! *Haṁsaś śuciṣat, vasur antarikṣasat hotā vediṣat, atithir duroṇasat, nṛṣat, varasat, ṛtasat, vyomasat, abjā, gojā, ṛtajā, adrijā, ṛtam br̥hat*. This is a great mantra from the R̥gveda Samhita, which you can repeat every day as your *japa*. This particular mantra has left nothing unsaid. Everywhere everything is. The Great One is pervading all things. Brahman is the Atman.

Ūrdhvam prāṇam unnayaty apānam pratyag asyati, madhye vāmanam āsīnaṁ viśve devā upāsate (2.2.3): The *prana* is thrown out when we exhale our breath. Who is

throwing it out? Somebody is there inside who pushes the breath out. *Apānam pratyag asyati*: When we inhale the breath, it is pulled in. Who is it that pulls it? There is somebody sitting in between the *prana* and the *apana*. The most glorious Being, beautiful, radiant, that Being expels the breath as *prana*, and inhales the breath as *apana*. This Great Being sitting inside and silently making this subtle act of throwing out and bringing in, this Great One is the most adorable of all the gods in heaven. Daily worship it, adore it, and be aware of it.

Asya visramṣamānasya śarīrasthasya dehinaḥ, dehād vimucyamānasya kim atra pariśiṣyate: etad vai tat (2.2.4): When this consciousness is separated from the body, what remains? That is the Reality. Ordinarily, the mind and the sense organs remain in the case of the death of a person who is not liberated, but in the case of the death of a person who is liberated, the mind and the organs of sense do not go with the soul. They dissolve here itself, together with the body dissolving. The *brahmanista puruṣa*, the knower of Brahman, does not depart from the body. He dissolves himself there. The drop in the ocean does not have to move in any direction to dissolve itself in the ocean. It sinks into the ocean then and there. The departure from the body is only a way of speaking in the case of people who are ignorant, who are not realised. But in the case of those who are realised, who are God-conscious always, in their case the *pranas* do not depart, the mind and the senses do not depart. There is nothing that departs; the body is simply cast out. The bubble sinks into the body of the ocean, and the thing that was apparently in one place at once becomes that which is everywhere. That is final liberation. *Etad*

vai tat: “This is the answer to your question, Nachiketas,” says Yama.

Na prāṇena nāpānena martyo jīvati kaś cana, itareṇa tu jīvanti, yasminn etāv upāśritau (2.2.5): We sometimes believe that we are living because of the breath, that if the breath stops, we are no more. But actually, we do not live by breathing; we live by that which causes the breathing. If that propulsion to breathe inwardly and outwardly is not to be there, if that billowing action of the coming and going of the breath is not to be there, if somebody inside is not working this incessant operation of the breathing process, exhalation and inhalation, there would be no life at all. We are not living by our breathing process. *Itareṇa tu jīvanti*: We are living by something which is other than the breathing process, on which the *prana* and *apana* are dependent, on which the fivefold *prana* is fixed. Breath is not the source of our life; that which causes the breathing process, which is very important indeed, which is invisible to the eyes, that is what is to be considered as the source.

When the body is cast off in the case of a person who is ignorant, how he takes rebirth is explained in the following verses.

Discourse 10

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE BOUND SOUL AFTER DEATH

Hanta ta idaṃ pravakṣyāmi guhyam brahma sanātanam: yathā ca maraṇam prāpya ātmā bhavati gautama (2.2.6): Yama says, “Nachiketas, I shall describe to you some mystery. When you really die, you become the Atman. But in ordinary death, one does not become the Atman.” In real death, one really becomes the Atman. What is this real death? Some call it the mystical death. Having known this Supreme Brahman, one becomes the Atman. Having known the Supreme Being, one becomes the Self of all beings.

What happens to a person after death is the answer that is attempted in one or two mantras that follow. What happens is to be determined by the conditions that are of the present and the past. It is said that a straight answer to this question cannot be given, because what was in store even before the birth of this body is to be taken into consideration.

Many karmas are performed, as is usually done by everyone, and these karmas are done under different impulses: intense, middling and mild. Intense thoughts impel deep actions which create deep-seated impressions in the subconscious mind, but mild thoughts produce mild

impressions. Every thought is recorded, and nothing goes unrecorded. These impressions are the determining factor for the reincarnation of the soul. Strong impressions may seek expression earlier than weak ones. It is not that the present one will be taken first; it depends on the intensity. For karmas there is no past and present. It depends on their intensity. Very powerful karmas may seek expression even in this very birth itself. When karmas produce an effect, these effects get buried in the unconscious and subconscious levels, and we do not know what is in our store. Subconscious impressions can rise to the conscious level in this very birth if their intensity is strong enough.

It is difficult to escape the nemesis of our thoughts, acts and feelings; we are answerable to them. Like our children, they will claim their due share. These karmas are obstinate, powerful and violent if they are given a long rope, and they will hurl us into *samsara*, as they have done now. We cannot say what our next birth will be like, because it cannot be said now what karmas will be allotted to us. Jadabharata became a deer, Ahalya a stone, and Yamalarjuna became the trees. This means that human consciousness can degenerate to the animal, vegetable and inanimate levels under certain given conditions, but they will again revert to the human kingdom. The stronger impressions collect themselves, and this is *prarabdha* karma. When the body dies, all these forces awake and rise to the conscious level, demanding their share; this is *prarabdha* karma. Because we also do fresh karmas, as we do not remain a witness to them and so we keep adding new ones, another birth is taken as new and fresh karmas are added. Again, karmas are fresh actions done with the sense of doership and enjoyership,

and mantras six and seven are some sort of reflection on this subject.

The urge for reincarnation testifies to the immortality of the soul. The soul never ceases its efforts toward its liberation, and its efforts in this direction take the form of a series of births and deaths, outwardly manifesting the internal nature of its constitution. The soul never gets the supreme satisfaction that it hopes for in this endless process of achievements. All its efforts are unfortunately in an erroneous direction, and so instead of immortality, there are only endless births and deaths.

Things are connected by a perpetual bond of affinity, and emotional affections are propelled by the existence of internal unity. This internal union of things and persons manifests as loves outside. While this internal spiritual unity is the reality, it takes the form of an external attraction and pull when it manifests in the world. The ocean is one at the bottom, but if its waters are being let out through different channels, it can be split.

Human beings, and all beings in the phenomenal world, are incapable of diving into this unity at the bottom. They are floating on the surface because their senses are being directed outward right from the time of creation, as mentioned in an earlier mantra, and only a few turn inward. Birth and death are correlative, and when one is there, so is the other. If we are born, we have to die; and if we die, we have to be born. There are repeated births and deaths with an interlinking series of experiences, which is called *samsara*. So long as there is recognition of value in the things of the world, there will be love and hatred for them; and so long as there is love and hatred, desire cannot cease.

Desire is an internal urge, and affection for things is an external movement towards the desired object. The births through which the soul passes indicate the restlessness of the spirit for a search for immortality. But nowhere does the spirit find satisfaction, because love for objects does not touch the bottom unity which we have. Thus, loves and hatreds are far removed from reality. So births and deaths do not cease, and the soul enters different bodies in order to experience a set of karmas.

Yonim anye prapadyante śarīratvāya dehinaḥ, sthānum anye'nusamyanti, yathā karma, yathā śrutam (2.2.7): Souls which have not been liberated enter into wombs of different species for the sake of embodiment. The scriptures say that the soul passes through eighty-four lakhs of species until it becomes a human being. The soul may enter into any species: a human body, or that of an animal or anything else, even an immovable object. According to the karmas it has performed and the remnant of their force, the soul enters into lower or higher wombs.

It is difficult to say where the soul will go after death, but certain outlines of the course of the soul are mentioned. It may enter a body in the physical realm, or in some higher, subtler realm. It may reach the realm of *svarga* or that of hell. It may follow the northern course of the sun and reach Brahmaloka, it may follow the southern course of the sun and reach Pitriloka, or it may attain *jivanmukti* or *sadyo-mukti*. Any of these are possible. The Bhagavadgita says that the last thought determines the nature of the next birth, and this indicates the type of life one has to lead if a particular thought is to be engendered at the time of death.

The last thought, determined by the earlier ones, may be regarded as the fruit of the tree of life. The time of death is that condition of the whole personality when there is a cessation of the willpower and freedom of thought in the conscious level of our being. We cannot think as we think now. Something that may be said to happen in dream does not occur in our waking state. In waking we deliberately suppress the thoughts and feelings by the power of will, but in dream there is no such taboo or restriction and we are free to think as we like in accordance with our deepest feelings, so that the last thought comes from the whole of our being.

Therefore, the deeper layers of our personality come to outer manifestation at the time of death. Rather than the thought, the feelings come at that time. Thought is deliberate thinking, while feelings are the real personality of the individual. Thoughts may be due to pressure, but feelings are free thought, or unrestricted expression of thought. So one has to be careful of one's feelings. Hushed thoughts, suppressed feelings, etc., are dangerous, and one has to be careful with them because it is these that we carry with us at the time of death, and not our relatives and wealth.

Hence, in an unbefriended condition the soul carries its *samskaras*, casting off this physical body here and seeking an atmosphere where it would be possible to pay for the *samskaras* and *vasanas* it carries with it. Violent *samskaras* seek expression in the nether regions. The nether regions and the higher realms are not in space and time. The space and time necessary are created by consciousness, just as when we enter into dream we seek to enter a new space and time. The most enchanting story of Lila and Padma of the

Yoga Vasishtha shows how illusory are space and time, and how different space-time relations can exist simultaneously. Though it may appear that we move in space and time, we do not actually move. Even in this world the movement of the soul is relative, just as it is after death. Birth, death and transmigration are conditions of consciousness through which the soul passes.

Thus, the soul can travel through various courses, enter different wombs of species, and again revert to the original status when the karmas are exhausted. All this happens under one condition: our deeds coupled with our feelings. If we think we have done something, we will have to reap the fruits thereof. This is why karma yoga is prescribed. Our actions should not bring about a reaction which will cause rebirth. All the karmas of all previous births will have to seek expression some time or other, and as we go on adding new karmas in every birth, *samsara* never ends.

Ya eṣa supteṣu jāgarti kāmam kāmam puruṣo nirmimāṇaḥ tad eva śukraṁ tad brahma tad evāmṛtam ucyate, tasmin lokāḥ śritāḥ sarve, tad u nātyeti kaś cana: etad vai tat (2.2.8). Here, the Upanishad shifts its emphasis to another aspect. While the soul is reincarnated in different bodies, it can also liberate itself, if it is honest. For this purpose, it has to investigate itself deeply. Just as there is sensation behind the awareness of objects, thinking behind ordinary sensation, there is consciousness behind thoughts. This consciousness is not the same as sensation; one is not the other. Sensation is to be separated from the awareness of objects, thought from sensation, and consciousness from thought.

Consciousness is not mind, mind is not sensation, sensation is not object. Yet due to a mix-up of character,

one gets superimposed on the other. This mutual superimposition is *ananya-adhyasa*, and when we investigate it, the independence of consciousness will be realised. This is easily done by analysing the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. In this mantra, a hint at it is given. Even when we are fast asleep, we may slip into the world of dream. The various experiences we have there are similar to the waking condition. As far as their structure is concerned, these two states are the same.

Just as the consciousness that animates mentation, etc., is different from it, consciousness is different from sensation and objects both in waking and in dream. Consciousness exists even in deep sleep, on account of which we remember previous experiences. This shows that consciousness stands as a witness of all the states. That consciousness is Brahman; that is the immortal Atman. That which stands separated from all phenomena—physical, mental, etc.—is Brahman. That consciousness is the witness of the desire-filled activities in waking, etc. “All the worlds hang on this pure Atman in its universal nature. No one can go beyond this. Transmigration ends here. This verily is That,” says Yama.

Agnir yathaiko bhuvanam praviṣṭo rūpaṁ rūpaṁ prati-rūpo babhūva, ekas tathā sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā rūpaṁ rūpaṁ prati-rūpo bahiś ca (2.2.9). This Atman is uniformly present in all things; it is not different in different persons and things. It is not that the Atman is big in an elephant and small in an ant. Three examples are given here: the wind, the sun, and fire. Fire burns equally, without any partiality. It enters various objects and burns in various hues, putting on various contours, not on account of the

difference in fire itself, but because of the medium through which it passes. As fire is one in its original state but when it enters the world it puts on various forms, likewise the one Atman that is uniformly present in all bodies appears to be various because of the differences in the bodies and intellects. These things called 'men', 'animal', 'tree' are due to the intensity of the manifestation of the Atman. When *sattva* predominates, we call it a genius because there is more manifestation of the Atman in *sattva*. In the animal and vegetable kingdoms, there is lesser manifestation of the Atman. And when there is no manifestation of the Atman because of *tamas*, we call it a stone, etc. But the Atman is uniform, One and Absolute, even as is fire. Internally and externally it is the same.

Vāyur yathaiko bhuvanam praviṣṭo rūpaṁ rūpaṁ prati-rūpo babhūva, ekas tathā sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā rūpaṁ rūpaṁ prati-rūpo bahiś ca (2.2.10): The odour of air is not really its property. We have scent at one place and stink at some other place. Just as the quality of the air does not limit air, the quality being due to the limitations of bodies such as room, vessel and so on, just as the odour that we attribute to the air does not really belong to it, so is the Atman free from any container. It is not large or small. The properties of the world do not belong to the Atman. The Atman is the existence of all beings, and their being is the being of the Atman.

Sūryo yathā sarva-lokasya cakṣur na lipyate cakṣuṣair bāhya-doṣaih, ekas tathā sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā na lipyate loka-duḥkena bāhyaḥ (2.2.11). How is the Atman unaffected? Like the sun is the Atman unaffected. If we spit at the sun, or praise or abuse the sun, it does not affect it. Just as the

sun, the eye of all the world, is not affected by the way it is viewed by all people, likewise is the Atman transcendent to the world and is unaffected by it. Change, increase, decrease, decay and death are the characteristics of the world. They do not touch the Atman. Physical and ethical characteristics, characteristics of the senses and the mind, do not reach the Atman, because the Atman is far, far removed from the operation of the *jiva's samsara*. Without the sun we cannot live, and yet nothing that happens to us affects the sun. Even so, the Atman does not take either of our good or bad. Though the Atman is immanent, it stands transcendent.

Eko vaśī sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā ekam bījam bahudhā yaḥ karoti, tam ātmastham ye'nupaśyanti dhīrās teṣaṃ sukhaṃ śasvataṃ netareṣaṃ (2.2.12): The one controller, the all-pervading Atman, single, undivided, indivisible, appears as this manifold universe, as we may appear manifold in dream. To the wise who behold the Atman abiding in the soul, to them belongs real happiness, and not to anyone else. Permanent happiness belongs only to those who have realised the Atman in their own being, and not to those who run after objects.

Happiness and peace are the subjects of mantras twelve and thirteen. To whom does happiness belong? And who is it that can have real peace? Happiness and peace belong to those, says the Upanishad, who are able to recognise the Atman in its purity as the single Source of the multitudinous variety, and the Substance of all the forms that seem to fill the universe. The Upanishad is tending to describe the unfolding of the world with its evolutionary and involutionary activity, and the Center of the universe

tending to ramify into the *nama-rupa prapancha*, the name-form world.

But happiness is not for those who pursue the objects of the world. All pleasures are created, or brought about, by the union of the senses with objects. We have heard of the term 'sensation', but it is rare for people to deeply think what it means. Unfortunately for us, happiness is a form of sensation, and sensation is a stimulation generated by the repulsion taking place when senses come into contact with objects. It is repulsion rather than union. These experiences, falsely taken for union, can even be brought about by the mind contacting objects directly, without the help of the senses. The eyes get stirred into activity in perception, and so is the case with the other senses. This irritation is like the morbid irritation which the body experiences during illness. But when we get used to a particular sensation it becomes normal to us, like getting accustomed to alcoholic drinks. A person used to alcohol will not feel anything if he takes a small quantity. This is the effect of the habit. Habits become values, significances and realities, so much so that we become subjected to them. Instead of our controlling them, they begin to control us.

These habits and such experiences to which we are accustomed in the world of forms constitute the world, all which are regarded as realities, and sensation appears as concrete objects, like the thoughts of dream appear as solid objects. Desires, feelings, etc., concretise themselves into solid objects, and we get real experiences from non-existing objects. So to have a real experience, objects are not necessary. On the other hand, even when there is real existence of objects we may not experience them, as in

sleep, swoon and death. So whether the formations outside are real or not, we can have an experience, because what is necessary for experience is sensation, and not an object. Sensations are certain impacts on our nerves, though the objects outside may act as agents in the generation of a sensation. But if we can create those sensations by an inner technique, we can have the experience without objects.

What we want is an experience, whether or not objects exist. This is the cause of our unhappiness, because we do not really come in contact with objects. A real union can never happen. One thing cannot become another thing; otherwise, there would be only one thing. Until we become the object and the object becomes us, there can be no real union. Therefore, possession or enjoyment is an imagination, not a reality. The whole world is drowned in sensory happiness, but because of the fundamental defect—the impossibility of one possessing or enjoying the other—happiness does not belong to those who have not sought the Substance within all. Happiness belongs to that One Thing.

If the senses are to withdraw themselves from all contact then there can be real happiness, because contact is not the way of happiness. The Gita says *ye hi saṁsparśajā bhogā duḥkḥayonaya eva te* (B.G. 5.22): All pleasures that are contact-born are sources of pain because in contact we do not come into real union with what we want. Physical contact is not union, and as long as union does not come about, there cannot be real happiness. When diversity gives place to unity in whatever degree, there is happiness to that degree. We are in a world of imaginary happiness or unhappiness brought about by the contact of the senses,

conveyed through the nerves to the mind. No one can be happy who has not entered into the substance of the object.

Nityo'nityānām cetanaś cetanānām eko bahūnām yo vidadhāti kāmān, tam ātmastham yenupaśyanti dhīrāḥ; teṣām śāntiḥ śasvatī, netareṣām (2.2.13). Peace is like happiness. Peace cannot be had as long as we do not know the way. Silence, or peace, is not absence of outward noise or tumult. Even if all people keep silent, there cannot be real peace, for there will be a burning within. Peace is another name for happiness. It is not a dead substance; it is vitality. It is not sleep. Peace is attended by consciousness; it is connected with an awareness of it. Then only has it meaning. If we are wealthy but not aware of it, the fact has no meaning for us. It is awareness that gives meaning to life. *Maya* is nothing but the net spread out by the senses who deceive us. We mistake one thing for the other. This is *adhyasa*, this is *maya*. Under such circumstances, there cannot be peace.

Peace is the nature of the Atman, as is bliss. The more we manifest the Atman in our life, the more do we become blissful, powerful. Our face glows with radiance. Not only have we peace within, but we can also radiate it outward, like the sun. It is eternal among all the so-called imperishable things of the world. *Parinama nitya* is the temporarily permanent, not the eternally permanent. A building is permanent, but not eternal. While the objects of the world can be called permanent, they are not eternal; but within them is a permanent substance, the Atman.

There is a consciousness behind all things. Intelligence is immanent in human beings, in animals, in the vegetable kingdom. In the subtler realms, such as *svarga*, etc., where we are in a spiritual world, not in an intellectual world like

ours, we are closer to Reality, and the senses become more and more ethereal and less and less useful, so that when we reach the highest, Brahmaloka, we do not need the senses at all, and one mirrors the other, one reflects the other. This is the experience where one transcends the world of senses, and so it is the purified intelligence transcending the rationality of the world.

Even heavenly satisfactions of the world are only forms of that one Supreme Satisfaction. The ocean can be diverted through various channels, and it can run through them with greater or lesser intensity, but the content of water is the same irrespective of its force through the various outlets. Similarly, the Atman is in the same intensity in all beings. If a mirror is clean, it will reflect well. If it is painted with tar or any other colour, it will reflect accordingly. Higher forms of life reveal greater and greater manifestations of the Atman, until we come to the human level and even higher ones. When a creeper moves towards the light of the sun, it is seeking the Atman in its own blind manner. When trees strike their roots deep inside the earth, it is for the sake of the Atman. When birds fly hither and thither in search of food, when animals graze in the field, they are seeking the Atman. When we, human beings, work hard, it is not for any other reason but for that Atman which we have not yet found. We have been creeping like plants, grazing like animals, and we have not found the Atman, because it is not to be found by these means. These variegated forms are the great drama of the Atman; but we are involved in it, and so we do not enjoy it. Enjoyment is for the spectator, not for the dramatist. Such is the degeneration into which consciousness has descended. The one experience of the

Atman appears to have taken the manifold forms of this world. Suppose our different limbs became self-conscious, what would our condition be? They would fight among themselves. War taking place in one's own body is insanity. The wars in the world are only a kind of insanity, a tension between forms which are of a single Being.

"My dear Nachiketas, never can you find peace in this world which is torn asunder," says Yama. "Peace is to those who recognise the one Atman as present in their own self, as the supreme Enjoyer, and not as the object of enjoyment."

"Know the Knower, see the Seer, understand the Understander," says the Upanishad. Who is to understand the Understander? There is a strange way of knowing the Knower. It is called *atma sakshatkara*, or Self-realisation. To them who have attained this belongs real peace.

Tad etad iti manyante' nirdeśyam paramam sukham, katham nu tad vijānīyām kimu bhāti vibhāti vā (2.2.14). How are we to designate the Atman as this or that when it is in all things? Mystics have called it 'That which Is'. 'This is That' is the definition of the Atman, and not anything else, because indescribable supreme bliss is that Supreme Being. It cannot be indicated by any symbol.

Katham nu tad vijānīyām kimu bhāti vibhāti vā: In a humorous way Yama speaks to Nachiketas: "How can I speak about it? How can I understand it and explain it to you? How can I say whether it shines from within or from without? It is within as also without. This wonderful Atman, what shall I say about it? It can crop up in any form, here, there, everywhere. Does it shine or is it reflected through objects? What shall I say? I can only say verily it is That."

Na tatra sūryo bhāti na candra-tāarakam, nemā vidyuto bhānti, kuto'yam agniḥ; tameva bhāntam anubhāti sarvaṁ tasya bhāsā sarvaṁ idaṁ vibhāti (2.2.15). This light of the Atman is such that the sun cannot shine there. If millions of suns were to shine, it would not be equal to That, what to say of lesser lights like the moon, stars, fire, etc. Every light is illumined by That light. Which light can illumine That light? We breathe because of the breath of that Breathless Being. We exist because of that Supreme Existence. Everything depends on That; how could they derive vitality from anything else? In that Supreme Life, this so-called sun of empirical life, this moon or mind, or the fire of human desire, do not shine. All these are mockeries before the Atman. Our intellect, even that of a genius, all that we regard as the highest in us, are matchless before the Atman. All these values are borrowed from that Supreme Value, and there is nothing here if what is borrowed is returned to it. The empirical values and realities of the world are reflections of the *paramarthika satta*, or the Eternal Reality.

These three realities—*pratibhasika*, *vyavaharika* and *paramarthika*—are not three realities, but three expressions of the One Reality. Just as light can pass through a clear, coloured or broken glass and get reflected accordingly, the One Reality can reveal itself in different ways. But all these degrees of reality—matter, body, mind, earth, water, fire, air, ether, etc.—are subtleties, varying in intensity, of the same Reality. All lights come from that One Light. That is the joy which sustains us. That is the ocean of ambrosia which is not the lifeless nectar of the celestials, but a conscious one. In this mantra is a description of the Satchidananda Atman.

Discourse 11

THE TREE OF THE UNIVERSE

This is the concluding section of the Kathopanishad. It is a short chapter of eighteen mantras.

Ūrdhva-mūlo'vāk-śākha eṣo'śvatthas sanātanaḥ, tad eva śukraṁ tad brahma, tad evāmṛtam ucyate. tasmin lokāḥ śritāḥ sarve tad u nātyeti kaś cana: etad vai tat (2.3.1). *Ūrdhva-mūlaḥ* is a word we have also heard in the Bhagavadgita: *ūrdhvamūlam adhaḥśākham* (B.G. 15.1). This is a description of the tree of the universe, which is said to have its roots above and its branches below, contrary to the way in which trees grow on the earth. This tree is called *aśvattha*. *Sanātana*: It is there always, permanently. *Aśvattha* may mean 'that which is not going to last for a long time'. That which will not last even for tomorrow is *aśvattha*. *Sanātana* means 'always being there'. Two words are used here to designate the character of this tree that is upside down. There are two aspects of this passage. Firstly, the tree is inverted, with the roots above and branches below. The second aspect is that it is called permanently existing, *sanātana*, and also not lasting for the morrow.

The tree is above in the sense of the reality being above and its manifestations being below. The aboveness and belowness connected with this description of the tree

are not to be taken in the sense of a spatial invertedness, as if something is hanging in the sky with roots above and branches below. The tree is not physically visible; it is not visible to the eyes. The Bhagavadgita says that it is inscrutable in its nature. Where it starts and where it ends, nobody can know. It is not an object of the senses in the ordinary way. It is a power which releases itself by degrees into more and more types of externality, and the more it becomes external, the more also does it become spatialised.

There is an integrated concentration of the tree in the seed. All the ramifications and the diversifications of the tree can be found to be hiddenly present in the seed, though not visible to the eyes. When the tree germinates into a little plant, it shoots forth the energies embedded in the seed, and externalises itself to some extent. There is a total absorption of power within itself in the case of the seed. The externalisation into space and time commences when it becomes a little tendril, and it grows taller and stouter. When this happens, its longing to become other than what it was in the seed becomes more and more pronounced. It becomes more objective in its nature, more externalised in space and time, and more filled with a desire to expand itself into space. Thus is this tree of God and the universe. The root of this tree is God Himself. Because of the transcendence of God, the root of the tree is regarded as something that is above us.

Transcendence is something which is above in a very specialised sense. There are people who are above us in their stature, in their importance, in their genius, in their qualifications, in their wealth. "That man is far above me." When we say this, we do not mean that the

person is physically sitting on our head. It is a conceptual, consciousness-oriented, logical aboveness. That is how we have to understand the transcendence of God: far, far beyond the reach of the logical intellect, not physically distant but conceptually separable as the higher and the lower. When the higher, which is the transcendent, which is beyond the concept of the mind, descends into immanence, it enters into the world. Just as the sap of the tree which was hidden in the seed then permeates through the plant, and then pervades the whole tree through the trunk and the branches, up to the tips of the leaves and the flowers, in a similar manner God's power, which is the sap of the universe hiddenly present in Himself, manifests itself externally through space and time. Through every object and everything that is visible we find the presence permeating, not only as an immanent presence but also as an externalised force.

This tree is the abode of all the individuals, the *jivas*—yourself, myself, and everything. According to at least one analogy, we are like birds on this tree, and this tree is full of sweet fruits in the form of delicious objects of sense. Ignorant *jivas*, individuals who have no consciousness of the source from where they have come, indulging externally in terms of the sense organs, are busy with the eating of the fruit of this tree, and so they are bound by the maddening effect produced by the fruit, something like the fruit of the forbidden tree.

It is also said that this tree is permanent, yet it is not lasting. Sometimes when we walk on the road at dusk and cannot see things properly, we may see a rope coiled up on the path and mistake it for a snake. Now, when

did this appearance of the rope as a snake begin? Did it begin yesterday? Did it begin today? It has no beginning. It shall always appear like that. Under given conditions of perception, the rope will always, permanently, appear like a snake. Similarly, therefore, this tree is permanent. There is no beginning and no end for it.

Likewise is this world perception. The world, looking like what it is—or rather, God Himself appearing as this universe—did not have a beginning. We cannot say God created the world some time back. It is like saying the rope started appearing to be a snake on some day. The rope never began to appear as a snake on some day or at some time. The rope never created this snakehood from itself, yet it is there. But it is not permanent because the moment light is splashed on the rope, we will immediately recognise that the snake is not there. The snake was there; always it has to be there on account of the dimness of light and our defective perception—but, at the same time, it is not there. So is this world. It is always there. God did not create this world, but the appearance of God as this manifested universe has to always be there. Eternally we will see the world, and there is no end for that. We cannot prevent God from appearing in this manner of space, time and object. God did not think “Let Me become the tree; let Me become the object and other things” in the same way as the rope does not feel that it should become a snake. There is no beginning and end for creation, and it has never taken place, actually, to tell the fact.

There is another illustration. There is a stone. This stone is made up of molecules, the molecules are made up of little atoms, and the atoms are made up of even more

minute particles, called electrons. Through a very powerful microscope which can enable us to see the innermost content of this object as forces gyrating vigorously in the form of electronic energy, we will not see the stone there. Now, somehow or other, this energy that is inside has become the stone. Can we say that one day the energy started thinking "Let me become a stone"? It has never become the stone, and the stone does not exist at all because if the stone were to exist really, the microscope would show it. It does not show it. The inner content has not transformed itself into the outer form. That is to say, the inner energy, which is electromagnetic, has not become the stone. The power of the universe has not transformed itself into the objects of sense. They appear to be like that on account of a defective vision, and if we have a microscopic eye, we may not see the world at all. We will see only a continuum of energy billowing like waves in the sea. The world will vanish in one second, provided we have got X-ray eyes or microscopic eyes. Now we have a dull eye; therefore, we see things which are not here. So this tree which is inverted with roots above and branches below is permanent in one sense, and not permanent in another sense: *eṣo'svatthas sanātanaḥ*.

Tad eva śukraṁ tad brahma, tad evāmṛtam ucyate: This world that we see is actually the appearance of the immortal purity, as God Himself is this universe. *Tasmin lokāḥ śritāḥ sarve:* All the fourteen realms of being are fixed on this consciousness, which is of God Almighty. *Tad u nātyeti kaś cana:* Nobody can transcend it; there is nothing above it; it is the final one. *Etad vai tat:* This is the answer finally to the question of Nachiketas: "What is the nature of the soul?"

Yad idam kiñ ca jagat sarvam prāṇa ejati niḥśṛtam, mahad bhayaṁ vajram udyatam, ya etad vidur amṛtās te bhavanti (2.3.2): All this world, whatever be its form, is a manifestation of the cosmic Prana, Hiranyagarbha-tattva, or Sutratman. Prana is a traditional Sanskrit name for describing what we may call cosmic energy. The quantum of cosmic energy, which is equilibrated in its nature, with no high and low, and with no disbalance in the distribution of its parts, can be called Hiranyagarbha-tattva, cosmic power. Everything is controlled by this energy. It is like a terror to everybody. *Mahad bhayaṁ vajram udyatam, ya etad vidur amṛtās te bhavanti*: God is like a terror to all people. This Mahat-Brahma, this Sutratman, this Hiranyagarbha-tattva is like an uplifted thunderbolt causing fear to everyone. Due to fear of Him, the sun rises in the east. Due to fear of Him, the moon rises.

Bhayād asyāgnis tapati, bhayāt tapati sūryaḥ: bhayād indraś ca vāyuś ca, mṛtyur dhāvati pañcamah (2.3.3). Due to the fear of this terrible law, the sun seems to be rising in the east and setting in the west precisely. Fire burns, Indra and Vayu perform their functions, and death itself does its duty because of fear of this Being. Even death is afraid of this great law. It is the central authority ruling the whole cosmos. The idea is that everything appears to be what it is, and everything seems to be functioning in the manner it does because of the law that is there at the back of the constitution of things, and the order that is behind the performance of actions through these constitutions.

We are human beings with a body and mind, with a personality, and we behave in a particular way. We do not behave like insects, and we do not behave like trees; trees

do not behave like animals, and animals do not behave like human beings. Why is it that certain species behave only in that way, and do not behave in any other way? The reason is that the concentrated force is exerted by this cosmic power in a particular channel for the purpose of manifesting a particular intention, the intention being a desire or the necessity for a species to grow, to act, and then to perish in the course of time.

There is a diversified action of this universal Prana. One alone it is, as a central authority in a government, for instance, but it has diversified actions. The power of the government works in different ways in different departments, though it is the same power operating. Similarly, by the fear of this energy, as it were, by the legality, the force, the energy and the compulsion of this universal Prana, all the gods work systematically. Even the gods are afraid. Even death itself is afraid of that. *Bhayād asyāgnis tapati*: For fear of Him, fire burns; otherwise, fire will not burn. *Bhayāt tapati sūryaḥ*: For fear of Him, the sun shines. *Bhayād indraś ca vāyuś ca*: For fear of Him, the gods Indra, Vayu, and Mrityu, death itself, all perform their functions. We all live and behave in the manner we do because of the compulsion from the Universal Will. We cannot lift a single finger if that Will is not to be there at the back of this lifting. One leaf cannot fall on our head. As they say, a sparrow cannot sit on us unless the will of the Father is there behind it. Even a breeze cannot touch our body unless the Original Will dispenses the order that it should touch us. Such is the tremendous control that this cosmic Prana exercises on everything that is visible and invisible.

Iha ced aśakad boddhum prāk śarīrasya visrasaḥ, tataḥ sargeṣu lokeṣu śarīratvāya kalpate (2.3.4): It is good for people to realise this great Truth before the shedding of this body. If it is possible for us to realise this Truth before we leave this body, then we will have no rebirth. But if we have not attained it—*iha ced aśakad boddhum*—then what happens? *Tataḥ sargeṣu lokeṣu śarīratvāya kalpate*: If this Truth has not been realised in one's own experience before the departure from this body, there will be birth in some realm, some world, some location, for the purpose of working out the karmas that have not been properly discharged.

The birth of the soul can be in any one of the worlds, or *brahmandas*, universes, which are infinite in number. The mind will take us to exactly that spot where it is possible for us to fulfil our desires. There is an automatic action spontaneously taking place between the mind that is filled with unfulfilled desires and the location of the world where alone it is possible to fulfil these desires. Everything in the world is interconnected, one with the other. Everything in the world knows everything that is taking place everywhere. In modern physics, Bell's theory has declared that activities, events, take place in the world not one after the other, but simultaneously. If something happens here, it is also happening in the sun at the same time. If something happens in the sun, it also happens in the galaxies. And if something happens in the galaxies, at the same time it is happening in some star. And not only that, it is happening everywhere in space. So anything that is happening, even a pinprick in our foot, is a prick in the whole cosmos. This is Bell's theory of the simultaneity of action taking place

everywhere. But even before Bell was born, it was declared in the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita that our thoughts will gravitate to that particular spot where the desires will be capable of manifesting themselves. Any world will attract us. But this will not take place if our individual self blossoms forth into the universal God. It is good for us to realise it before we pass away.

The relationship between the soul, the self, and the universal Self is described in the next verse. *Yathādarśe tathātmāni, yathā svapne tathā pitṛ-loke, yathāpsu parīva dadṛśe, tathā gandharva-loka chāyā-tapayor iva brahma-loke* (2.3.5): In this world we have an experience of the Atman inside in an indistinct manner, as if light is cast on a mirror. Just as the qualities of the light are not entirely reflected in the mirror, and only some aspect of the light is so reflected, the entirety of the Atman cannot be seen reflected in our mind and intellect. So here, in the case of the individual personality, the experience of the reflection of the Atman in experience is as if light falls on a mirror.

In Pitṛiloka, or the world of the forefathers, the Self is experienced as we see things in dream. We see things in dream, but not very clearly; they are translucent and disturbed. Gandharva-loka is still higher up. Gandharvas are the celestial musicians and dancers who are said to be entertaining Indra in heaven. In that kingdom of Gandharvas, the Self is seen as if the sun is reflected in water. Just as there is a disturbance on account of the movement of water, there is no clear perception of the Atman even in Gandharva-loka. Only in Brahmaloка can the distinction between the universal and the individual be seen, as the distinction between light and shade. When the

sun is shining in the mid-sky, the light is so intense that we can clearly distinguish that brilliance from the shade cast by a tree. So is the distinction, the clarity, that we can perceive in Brahmaloka, the world of the Creator, where the supreme consciousness of the Atman will be clearly experienced as distinguished from all that is created and all that is *anatman*, or other than the Self. The Self and the not-Self are very rarely distinguishable, and even then, very unclearly in our case, and unclearly in Pitriloka also, very unclearly in Gandharva-loka, but clearly in Brahmaloka. The distinction between God and the world, in the form of the distinction between the universal and the particular, or the universal and the external, can be seen in Brahmaloka, which is the highest spiritual experience that is possible for any seeker. It is the penultimate region of Godhood.

Indriyāṇām pṛthag-bhāvam udayāstamayau ca yat, pṛthag utpadyamānānam matvā dhīro na śocati (2.3.6): The sense organs do not perform functions continuously. There is the projection of energy through the sense organs, and also the withdrawal thereof. There is the beginning of the action of the senses, and also the ending. The senses do not work continuously all the twenty-four hours. Who is it that knows that there is a beginning and an end for the functions of the sense organs? Who makes the distinction between the coming and the going of the sense powers? Know that. And who knows that hearing is different from seeing, and seeing is different from touching and smelling, etc.? Why do we not make a jumble of these perceptions? When we see a thing, we can also hear it, taste it, touch it, and smell it. All five things can be performed at the same time, but do we feel that five different people are doing this? We say,

“I am doing this work. I am seeing and hearing and tasting and smelling and touching.” Who is this ‘I’ that is capable of knowing the different functions simultaneously?

The functions are totally different, and there is no connection between one and the other. How do you bring a connection of one with the other? Know that. Know that which can enable you to bring about a harmony among the sense powers as seeing, hearing, etc. Know that which enables you to know the coming and going of the sense organs. You know that you are not working through the sense organs in sleep. When you close your eyes, you are not seeing. When you wake up in the morning, you open your eyes and see things, but you know all these things are taking place in you only. That continuity of consciousness which is responsible for the knowledge of the beginning and the end of the powers of sense, and also for the distinctions between the sense functions—that power is what is to be known. Having known that, the great hero of the spirit grieves not anymore. He shall not have any sorrow afterwards.

Indriyebhyaḥ param mano manasas sattvam uttamam, sattvād adhi mahān ātmā, mahato'vyaktam uttamam (2.3.7): There is a repetition, almost, of a verse that occurred earlier. Beyond the sense organs is the mind, beyond the mind is the intellect, beyond the intellect is the great intellect, the cosmic intellect, Hiranyagarbha-tattva, beyond that is the cosmic Prakriti, the Avyakta, and beyond that is the Purusha. That Purusha has no characteristic. Once having known that Supreme Purusha above the cosmic intellect, above the Avyakta Prakriti, above the intellect, mind, sense organs and objects, one immediately attains immortality.

Avyaktāt tu paraḥ puruso vyāpako'liṅga eva ca, yaṁ jñātvā mucyate jantur amṛtatvaṁ ca gacchati (2.3.8): This is a brief statement of the way in which sadhana has to be practised, meditation has to be carried on. Withdraw the consciousness from the objects and centre it in the senses, withdraw it from the senses and centre it in the mind, withdraw it from the mind and centre it in the intellect, withdraw it from the intellect and centre it in the universal intellect, Hiranyagarbha-tattva, the creative power, Mahat-tattva. Withdraw it from that also and fix it in the cosmic Creative Will. Withdraw it from the Will and enter into the Supreme Purusha, whose essence you yourself are. Thus you attain immortality, not before that.

Na saṁdrśe tiṣṭhati rūpam asya, na cakṣuṣā paśyati kaścanainam: hṛdā mañiṣā manasābhikṣpto ya etad vidur amṛtās te bhavanti (2.3.9): Those persons become immortal and deathless who are able to visualise inwardly, by insight, that great light which cannot be beheld through the sense organs. This form of the supreme essence is not to be comprehended within the field of ordinary ocular vision. No one can see Him with the eyes. All-pervading is that Being. How would you see that, inasmuch as it is not an object of the senses? That Great Being is revealed in actual insight and intuition, which arises in your own heart, in the Atman. Having known this, you are immediately selected as heir apparent to the throne of the Immortal Being.

Discourse 12

THE MORTAL BECOMES IMMORTAL

We are now concluding the Kathopanishad. A few more mantras are there, with which we shall bid goodbye to the Kathopanishad.

Yadā pañcāvatiṣṭhante jñānāni manasā saha, buddhiś ca na viceṣṭati, tām āhuḥ paramām gatim (2.3.10). This is a verse dealing with yoga practice. When the five senses stand together by blending their functions into a single activity, as it were, and root themselves in the mind, enhancing the strength of the mind thereby, and the mind settles itself in the pure reason, that state of equilibrium of awareness is the supreme state that one can achieve. *Yadā pañcāvatiṣṭhante*: When the five senses settle themselves together with the mind, *manasā saha; buddhiś ca na viceṣṭati*: and the intellect does not oscillate; *tām āhuḥ paramām gatim*: that is the greatest achievement of a person.

The energy of the mind flows through the sense organs. We have been told again and again that we waste our strength, our energy, our potential, in sense perception. Whenever we see a thing, hear a thing or enjoy any object of sense, a proportion, a part, some measure of the energy of the mind goes outwardly in the direction of that object. The more we enjoy objects, the weaker will we become in

our mind, and perhaps in our body also. Mental weakness, inability to remember things, forgetfulness, distraction, all these are characteristics of a weak mind that has exhausted itself by depleting all its energy through the sense organs.

There are five apertures. These apertures are the senses. We are constantly engaged in feeding them with sense objects. Every moment of time we see and hear, touch, taste and smell. These are not innocuous activities taking place; they are vital functions which sap our energy. The more we indulge in things, the weaker we become psychophysically. The Yoga System, which is briefly mentioned here in this verse, tells us that the senses should not work independently—the eyes go on seeing something, and the ears go on hearing something, etc. The energy that is responsible for the function of these five senses should withdraw itself from communicating itself through these organs.

For instance, if we open our eyes and are apparently gazing at some object in front of us, our mind may be somewhere else. When the mind is deeply thinking of something, we will not be able to see an object in front of us even if our eyes are open. This is a way in which the mental energy is withdrawn from the perceptive organ. Similarly, when we are deeply concentrating on something, we will not hear the honking of vehicles on the road. We may not even hear a gunshot taking place near us because we are deeply concentrating on a mathematical solution or a philosophical problem or some case that we have got to handle, and so on. A person who is grieved by the thought of bereavement will not taste any food. If we give the most delicious food to a person who is grieving on account of

the loss of something very dear and near—it may be the entire property or some dear person—there will be no taste in the tongue. That person will not have any peace of mind. So there are occasions even in our daily life when the mind can withdraw itself into non-perception through the sense organs. I mentioned some examples. We will not see, we will not hear, we will not taste, we will not enjoy anything. The whole world will look drab and dreary and meaningless to a person who has lost all property and everything that is near and dear.

But yoga is not the manner of concentration of the mind by bereavement, etc. It is a deliberate withdrawal, consciously attempted, due to the fact that there is really no joy in any object. Objects are mischievous sidetrackers. Philosophical analysis will tell us that there is a mistake we are committing every day in imagining that our joys are embedded in the objects of sense. Thus, by the practice of philosophical analysis and by the power of reason, convincing oneself that there is no great point in the senses being indulged so much, we withdraw the energy of the senses.

What happens then? The mind becomes very strong. Those who cannot see and hear have very powerful minds, generally speaking. They think better. When the mind is so concentrated by the energy embedded in it by the withdrawal of the sense organs, it settles itself in the higher reason which contemplates the Supreme Reality, and the intellect does not oscillate. The oscillation of the intellect is due to the logical process which it carries on, on account of reports received through the mind from the sense organs.

So there is a three-tier arrangement of sense indulgence and erroneous concepts. First of all, the senses give us a wrong report about the nature of the objects of the world. Secondly, the mind acquiesces in this report. Then the intellect passes an order agreeing to whatever the mind says. Now this verse says that such a thing should not take place. The intellect will not oscillate if the mind is settled, and the mind will be settled if the senses do not drag it in the direction of objects. If this state can be achieved, it is to be considered as the most blessed state, *parama gati*.

Tām yogam iti manyante sthirām indriya-dhāraṇām, apramattas tadā bhavati, yogo hi prabhavāpyayau (2.3.11). *Tām yogam iti manyante*: Yoga is that state of consciousness which is the restraint of the senses, with a deliberate will and intense cautiousness that the mind does not once again go in the direction of the senses. *Apramattas tadā bhavati*: We should be very careful in yoga. Heedlessness is death. This is what the great Sanatkumara told Dhritarashtra in a discourse that occurs in the Udyoga Parva of the Mahabharata.

Dhritarashtra was very much disturbed. He had no sleep. So he called Vidura and said, “Tell me something because I am not sleeping.”

Vidura gave a long lecture on righteousness, justice and virtue. He said, “Actually, nothing happens in this world. Death itself is a misnomer.”

“Please tell me something about it,” said Dhritarashtra.

“I am not fit to talk on this subject. It is beyond me,” replied Vidura. “I shall call Sanatkumara, the great son of Brahma, who shall instruct you on what is this that is called death.”

Vidura thought of Sanatkumara, and Sanatkumara descended. There was a discourse between Sanatkumara and Dhritarashtra, which goes by the name of Sanatsujatiya, a great philosophical section in the Mahabharata. What did Sanatkumara say? Death is nothing but heedlessness, carelessness, lethargy, and an inability to concentrate on what is good for us. First of all, there is a difficulty in choosing what is good. After having chosen it, there is a difficulty of fixing the mind on it.

Apramattas tadā bhavati. yogo hi prabhavāpyayau: Yoga cannot be always there. We should not be under the impression that day in and day out we will be in the state of yoga. It comes and it goes. Even the greatest of yogis cannot maintain this balance for years and years continuously, day in and day out. Not even the best of yogis can maintain it, what to speak of others.

Tām yogam iti manyante sthirām indriya-dhāraṇām: Again and again there is an emphasis on the restraint of the sense organs, the restraint of the energy that is flowing through the senses and establishing it in the mind and the intellect. In this practice of sense restraint, and mental control, and the stability of the intellect, or the reason, we must be very cautious because the winds of desire will blow so violently that all the fixity of our reason and our mind, though strong like a tree planted on the earth, will be broken and turned down. Even the strongest tree can be felled by a violent wind. Desires are such tornadoes. Therefore, the Upanishad says *apramattas tadā bhavati*: Be full of heed, carefulness and vigilance.

Sri Ramakrishna Parmamahamsa Deva has an analogy for how we have to be concentrating and be always heedful.

Suppose we are on a journey somewhere and are caught at night by a heavy rainfall, and we have no place to stay. We run here and there in search of a little hut where we can rest. On the way, in the pitch dark, we find a little thatched hut almost about to break, but because of the heavy rain we somehow or other get in, and we are shivering. When we feel like reclining a little bit, in the twilight, in a flash of the light from the lightning, we see a small snake crawling out from a hole. It is showing its head. When we look behind, there is another snake behind us. When we look to the right, we see a scorpion coming towards us, and another scorpion on the other side. Will we sleep because we are tired? Will we be cautious? Will we be vigilant? Will we be able to concentrate our mind on the predicament in which we are? Such is the way in which we have to concentrate. Death is at the elbow, as it is well said. Anybody can go any day, and therefore nobody knows what will happen to anyone at any moment of time. We should not say “Tomorrow I will do yoga”; we should do it today. Tomorrow may not come at all; who knows?

Thus, *apramattas tadā bhavati*: Yoga comes and goes. It never stays with any person. It is a very precarious achievement. Therefore, be cautious, cautious, cautious.

Naiva vācā na manasā prāptuṁ śakyo na cakṣuṣā, astīti bruvato'nyatra katham tad upalabhyate (2.3.12). Neither by speech nor by mind nor by perception through the eyes can this be known. Any amount of listening will not suffice. Any amount of mere thinking will not suffice. And touring, looking at all things the whole world over, will also not be adequate. We will not see God anywhere by any amount of thinking. We can travel from one corner of the

earth to another corner of the earth, but we will not see God. From the Himalayas to Kanyakumari we can travel, and we will not see God anywhere. Then where is God? We go on thinking, but nothing comes out of it. And we go on listening; then also, nothing comes out of it. What do we do now? *Astīti bruvato'nyatra katham tad upalabhyate*: It is to be accepted as Pure Existence. *Astīti*: That which Is, is God. It is not in the Himalayas, it is not in Kanyakumari; it is That which Is.

In the Panchadasi there is a chapter on this is-ness, or the existence of things. Generally we say a building exists, a chair exists, a table exists. We convert the term 'exists' as a predicate or a verb to be tagged on to the subject, which is the building, which is the chair, which is the table or anything, under the wrong impression that existence is an attribute of the chair or the table or the building or whatever it is, the fact being quite the reverse. Existence is first. The form of the building or the chair or the table, or anything, is secondary. There cannot be a chair unless existence is there prior to it. So why do we consider existence as a predicate? Why should we use 'existence' as a verb that follows a noun? The noun is non-existent practically, minus that verb which indicates the prior existence of the reality behind even the noun. So it is existence first, and chairhood afterwards. But we always say that the chair exists, as if existence is the quality of the chair. It is the other way around; the chair is the quality of existence. The chairhood, the buildinghood, etc., are qualifications, name-and-form complexes growing externally on existence as an accretion. Existence is Truth. So you exist, I exist, this exists, that exists. There is a general existence of everything. If we can boil down all the forms

and names, the shapes and contours, the differentiations and relations—all these diversifications which are the creations of the perceptions of the sense organs—boil them down to the basic substratum or the menstruum of pure Existence, we will find there is one uniform continuum of the existence of everything, without any distinction of one thing from the other thing.

How do we conceive God? As pure Existence only. There is no other way. By our senses, by our seeing, by our hearing, by our speaking, by our thinking aloud and logically arguing, nothing will come out, because existence is not an object of any of these activities of the faculties. It is beyond them. Existence is prior to every activity of the human faculty. Therefore, no one can know this by the attempts of the available faculties such as speech, mind, eyes, etc.

Astīti bruvato'nyatra katham tad upalabhyate: How can we know it except as that which just is, pure Being, pure Be-ness? 'Being' is also an inadequate word because it suggests some continuity of process. It is be-ness, as people sometimes say. I just be. So many words have been used by philosophers to come nearest to the definition of this Truth, and words fail always. That which Is: *astīti bruvato'nyatra katham tad upalabhyate*.

Astīty evopalabdhavyas tattva-bhāvena cobhayoḥ, astīty evopalabdhavyas tattva-bhāvaḥ prasīdati (2.3.13): Know it, comprehend it, and realise it as pure Existence, Sat. *Satta-samanya* is the word used in the Yoga Vasishtha. The general existence of all things is Reality. The particular existences of things are created by name and form. Thus, general existence, which is *satta-samanya*, the universally

pervading Existence, is the Ultimate Being. In that way only can we contemplate it and know it.

Lord Krishna speaks in the Bhagavadgita: “Know Me in truth. Whoever knows Me as I am, that person knows Me really. But do not call me the son of Vasudeva, etc. I am something different. There is a pure Beingness in Me which is pervading all existence, and in that way know Me.” *Tattva-bhāvena*: As the pure fundamental Reality of all names and forms, as Existence pure and simple, *satta-samanya*, know That.

Astity evopalabdhavyas tattva-bhāvaḥ prasīdati. There are two concepts: existence and non-existence, being and non-being. Between these two it is up to us to choose the being, and not the non-being. There are some people who say that nothing exists, that there is zero, there is a vacuum, there is nihil, there is *shunyata*, that all things go. This is not a proper way of conceiving or contemplating Reality, because existence cannot become non-existence. How can *sat* become *asat*? Even if we feel that there is such a thing called non-existence, that feeling has to exist. The feeling that something does not exist has to exist. As non-existence is also ubiquitous, the person who affirms non-existence is not actually affirming the non-existence of some particular thing. It is the negation of all things. Therefore, the negation of all things is also an all-pervading concept. This all-pervading concept has to exist in order that this statement may be true; therefore, there is an ubiquitous existence behind even the denial of all things. And therefore, do not choose non-existence. Choose only existence. Between the two concepts or possible definitions—existence and non-existence—choose only

existence, because it is only through this concept of Being that you can comprehend it for the purpose of meditation on Reality. Then it shall reveal itself before you as it is in itself.

Yadā sarve pramucyante kāmā ye'sya hr̥di śritāḥ, atha martyo'mṛto bhavaty atra brahma samaśnute (2.3.14): When all your desires are gone, you realise Brahman at once. How many days will you take to realise Brahman? So many days as you will take for eliminating all your desires. You have to make a list of all the desires that you have got, even if they are a hundred. Every day eliminate one of them—one, two, three, four. Finally, one or two or three or four may be remaining. They have to be handled like arch enemies, with proper equipment of confrontation, with great effort, perseverance, and love of God. When all the desires are plucked out from the heart, the mortal becomes immortal instantaneously. Waking up into God-consciousness does not take days and nights or months and years. It is an instantaneous illumination that takes place, as waking takes place when sleep ceases. Though the sleep may have been a very long darkness, the waking up is an instantaneous occurrence, and it is timeless. Waking does not take time at all.

Atra brahma samaśnute: Where do you realise Brahman? Do you go from here to a distant place? *Atra*: Here itself you realise Brahman, in this very place, at this very spot where you are sitting. In this very hall you realise Brahman, because it is not any distant place. The consciousness of the elimination of all desires connected with this body and relations with the world has to be the precondition for your acceptance of God as the only reality.

Yadā sarve prabhidante hṛdayasyeha granthayaḥ, atha martyo'mṛto bhavaty etāvad anuśāsanam (2.3.15): One becomes immortal when the knots of the heart are rent asunder. There are so many knots. We call them Brahma-granthi, Vishnu-granthi, Rudra-granthi, etc. They are something like the plexuses spoken of in the kundalini or the hatha yoga shastras. These *granthis*, or the knots of the heart, are the three cities which Lord Siva broke with one arrow. He is called Tripura Samhari, Tripurari. He destroyed the three cities of the demons, and these cities are also the *granthis*. Philosophically, these *granthis* are knots constituted of *avidya*, *kama* and karma. The inability to comprehend the nature of Reality is called *avidya*. This inability to contemplate Reality creates a compulsion to see the world outside, though it is really not there. This is called *kama*. The desire to perceive a world on account of the inability to perceive Reality creates effort in the direction of the fulfilment of these desires. That is called karma. So *avidya*, *kama* and karma are the threefold knot, which are the *granthis* spoken of here: Rudra-granthi, Vishnu-granthi, and Brahma-granthi. These knots are rent asunder; the Gordian knot is cut. There is a knot called the Gordian knot. Some Emperor called Gordian tied a knot which was not possible to untie. Everyone tried their best, and Alexander the Great said, "I will rend it." He took a sword and cut it into pieces. If we cannot untie it, we cut it.

It is a question of philosophical and practical sadhana whether we will cut our attachments or untie our attachments. Both these processes are prescribed. Sometimes the untying of the knot will take a long, long time. It may take years, or even some births, to untie

one knot and then another knot. Because of the endless ramifications of it, a lot of time is taken. But if we cut it in one stroke, sometimes danger is there. There will be a reaction produced by the mind which may end in untoward psychological experiences, and it may compel the *jiva* to take birth in a very unfamiliar and unhappy circumstance. The untying of the knot or the cutting of the knot cannot be done independently by oneself, as no one can study the advanced stages of any subject by themselves. It requires proper instruction from a teacher. Anyway, the point is that these *granthis* have to be removed. We untie them or cut them, as the case may be.

Atha martyo'mṛto bhavaty etāvad anuśāsanam: Here the mortal becomes immortal. This is the instruction. Nothing more is to be said. *Etāvad anuśāsanam*: Yama speaks to Nachiketas, "Are you satisfied? All things that you need to know, I have imparted to you. Here is the final word."

Śataṁ caikā ca hṛdayasya nāḍyas tāsām mūrdhānam abhiniḥsṛtaikā: *tayordhvam āyann amṛtatvam eti, viṣvaṁ anyā utkramaṇe bhavanti* (2.3.16): One hundred and one nerve currents are said to emanate from the centre of the heart. There are millions of nerve currents, but the main ones are one hundred and one. *Tāsām mūrdhānam abhiniḥsṛtaikā*: Among these nerve currents which are spread out throughout the body, one rises to the crown of the head. *Tayordhvam āyann amṛtatvam eti*: If the *jiva* departs through this central nerve current, called the *sushumna*, through the crown of the head, one attains immortality. *Viṣvaṁ anyā utkramaṇe bhavanti*: But if the *prana* departs horizontally or inversely through the lower parts of the body, there will be rebirth.

The belief is that if the *prana* departs through any aperture above the neck, there will be no rebirth. It can depart through the nostril or the ear or the mouth; or if it departs through the *brahmarandhra*, it means final salvation. And even if it is through the mouth, it may go to some region such as Brahmaloka, etc. But if the *prana* passes through any other horizontally moving nerve or downward moving current of the nerve, there will be rebirth in some realm or the other. So work has to be carried on through the practice of yoga by eliminating the circumstances which may make the nerve currents flow transversely or horizontally. They take that zigzag movement because of desires, which are horizontal.

All our desires are horizontal movements; they do not go vertically. They move to the front, to the rear, to the right, to the left, in the direction of objects. Because of the externality, the horizontality of the objects of attraction, the nerve currents and *prana* also move in that direction and compel us to take birth in this very world of objects. But if our consciousness rises up through the concepts of higher and higher dimensions of reality to the realms of being which are above, until we reach Brahmaloka and the Absolute, then the *prana* will push the consciousness through the *sushumna nadi* and pierce the *brahmarandhra*. There are some people who break the head with a coconut at the time of death—or sometimes they break the coconut only, just to give a semblance of the apparent movement of consciousness through the current of the head.

Āṅgusthamātrah puruṣo'ntarātmā sadā janānām hṛdaye sanniviṣṭaḥ, taṁ svāc charīrāt pravṛthen muñjād iveṣikāṁ dhairyena, taṁ vidyāc chukram amṛtaṁ taṁ vidyāc chukram

amṛtaṁ iti (2.3.17): The Atman is lodged in the heart as a pith is inside *munja* grass. In a particular grass called *munja*, a sacred grass which *brahmacharins* tie during the *upanayana* ceremony, there is a special kind of pith. People who observe long fasts sometimes consume the pith of this grass, which stops appetite and hunger. Generally, when we fast we will have hunger, appetite. That temptation to eat something will cease if we take the pith of this *munja* grass. This Atman, which appears to be like a thumb-like flame in the heart of everyone always, in every person at all times, this Atman within has to be separated from the shackles of the gross, subtle and causal bodies as the pith inside the *munja* grass is separated by taking out the stock. That Being will immediately shine, as a captive is liberated from prison, and it will assume its universal power at once. Here the purity of the Atman is actually the universality of the Atman. Impurity is localisedness and finitude.

Taṁ vidyāc chukram amṛtaṁ taṁ vidyāc chukram amṛtaṁ: The repetition of a word in the Upanishad is always indicative of the closing of the Upanishad. This is the great knowledge that the Lord Yama imparted to Nachiketas.

Mṛtyu-protāṁ naciketo'tha labdhvā vidyām etām yogavidhiṁ ca kṛtsnam, brahmaprāpto virajo 'bhūd vimṛtyur anyopy evam yo vid adhyātmam eva (2.3.18): Blessed Nachiketas received this science of yoga in its entirety. This great knowledge of Brahman was imparted to him by Yama, the Lord of Death, and he attained to Brahman: *brahmaprāpta*. Nachiketas became free from the contamination of the body, and he was free from the trammels of death. Whoever takes recourse to this method which Nachiketas took will also attain immortality in a

similar manner. *Anyopy evam yo vid adhyātmam eva*: It is not only Nachiketas who attained it; you and I also can attain it, provided we follow the same path which Nachiketas followed. That rejection of all values, that persistence in asking for Truth, that tenacity in knowing it somehow or other, concentrating the mind on the instruction that is given, and practising it assiduously until it is reached, these are the ways which Nachiketas adopted. He got it; and whoever follows this way of tenacious concentration on that Reality, rejecting all attachments, will also attain to the same goal.

This is the Kathopanishad—a great, grand scripture.

*Om sahanāvavatu, saha nau bhunaktu, saha vīryam
karavāvahai, tejasvinavadhītamastu, mā vidviśāvahai, aum
śāntih śāntih śāntih.*

