

**THE BRAHMA SUTRA
AS A
MOKSHA SHASTRA**



Swami Krishnananda

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This is a series of discourses on the essence of the Brahma Sutras given to the students of the Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy of The Divine Life Society, Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India during March of 1997. In this series Swamiji focuses primarily on the fourth and most important chapter, called Phala Adhyaya, The Fruit of Knowledge, which deals with the attainment of liberation.

PREFACE

The structure and development of this academy has a long history, as envisaged by its founder, Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, for the spiritual development of the human individual. Spirituality in the true sense of the term implies an all-round consideration of the faculties of the human individual so that we become healthy in the total structure of our being, healthy in every aspect of what we really are.

There is nothing with which we are not connected in this world. The physical body is the nearest object of consideration no doubt, but we are not merely the physical body. We are also a mind, we are emotion, and we are intellect and reason. We belong to human society, we are citizens of a country, and we are units of an international setup. We belong to the whole world, whose breath we breathe, whose life in the form of the sun in the sky we enjoy, whose waters we drink, whose diet we take into ourselves. If you deeply consider your involvement in life, you will find that you are much more than what you appear to be to your own self. You have a wider comprehensiveness of being than your physical individuality.

Every one of you has been introduced as so-and-so, from such and such a place, such and such a qualification, with such and such an occupation, but this is not the whole truth of yourself. You are a citizen of this nation, which is a very important factor to be considered. That aspect is the duty involved therein. You have a duty towards anything to which you belong. To what is it that you do not belong? Anything that contributes to your very existence in this world is that to which you belong, and towards that you have a debt

to pay, as you have to pay a tax for the protection you receive from that administration.

It was realised by our great founder Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj that people are generally very ignorant of themselves. They may be great masters in the arts and the sciences, they may know the structure of the stars and the inbuilt operation of the sun, they may be highly professional experts in geology, geography, history, and mathematics, but they may not know anything about themselves—as the lamp gives light to everybody, but the bottom of the lamp is dark. That should not be the predicament of any person. You may be educated and you are able to give light to other people in the arts and the sciences, but at the back there should not be a dark, ignorant base.

The discipline that is necessary for any person is all-round in the sense that it has to contribute to happiness in your life. The dissatisfaction that gnaws into the vitals of people in any manner whatsoever has to be taken care of properly, as we do in medical administration. You must be happy internally, emotionally, politically, and also financially. In every way you have to be happy. There should not be pricking or pinching of part of your personality from any side. This requires tremendous adjustment of your constitutional alignment. The whole personality has to be aligned to the structure to which it is actually related.

As you are all very highly educated people, you may be accustomed to think in a rational and intellectual manner, and the rationality spoken of should also be a comprehensive approach of your being. In the East, the emphasis has always been on spiritual experience and a universal approach to all things. In the West, the emphasis has been logical, mathematical, empirical, outwardly motivated, and principally social, as

differentiated from the Eastern inwardising process of the integration of life. Now it is necessary to combine both these aspects. As you are part and parcel of the world of experience outside, the exteriorising tendency of the mind and the reason also has to be given proper training and made part and parcel of the process of the final inwardising process which is the spiritual approach to life.

The inner and the outer are not contrasted. That idea should be given up. What you think inside should not be in opposition to what you see outside; then there is a gulf between the outer experience and the inner experience. You may be grieved outwardly or grieved inwardly. This is not the proper way of envisaging things. The logical approach, which is the emphasis laid in the West, and the inwardised mystical and spiritual approach which is emphasised in the East, have to be brought together.

Chapter 1

THE DIFFERING VIEWS OF SANKARACHARYA AND RAMANUJA ON BRAHMAN

The tripod of Indian thought and culture is constituted of three great venerable scriptures known as the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras and the Bhagavadgita. The Upanishads are the hidden mystical import of the Veda Samhitas such as the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. Each Veda has four sections dealing with different topics. The primary and the most important part of each Veda is the Samhita, which is the mantra recited with intonation, as is chanted in temples and during worship of any kind. Even in our own temple these mantras—Rudra Sukta, Purusha Sukta, Narayana Sukta, etc.—are chanted during *abhisheka* to Lord Siva. These are outwardly and apparently hymns or prayers offered to the gods in the high heaven, which I do not wish to discuss now because my subject is something different.

The mystical meaning of these hymns or prayers is so deep that it passes human understanding. Therefore, these hidden meanings are transcendent in their nature, transcendent because they touch the core of being, beyond sense perception and intellectual comprehension. The seers and sages of the Upanishads, the great masters of yore, plumbed the depths of Reality and recognised a common substance permeating all things, going beyond the usual distinction that we make between the seer and the seen object. They are transcendent because of the fact that their perception is totally different from ordinary human perception.

We have a stereotyped way of assessing values in the world. I see something, and I judge that thing in the

light of how I see that particular thing. Seeing is believing. But the truth of the universe does not seem to be confined to this apparent bifurcation compelled upon human perception due to the individuality of each being segregated from the world outside. I am inside and the world is outside. Above this distinction commonly made in the human vision of things there is a supernormal vision which reveals before us a reality which will astound us and raise our spirits to a height that is unimaginable to our ordinary thinking process. Such a procedure was adopted in the Upanishads.

These days, many people study the Upanishads. The schools teaching the Upanishads generally follow a tradition of trying to learn the meaning of the Upanishads grammatically, linguistically—purely from the point of view of their lexical and etymological meaning. The spirit of a thing is not the same as what we can comprehend about it through any linguistic or literary process. The Upanishads are not easy to understand. Though we may read them several times and imagine that we have grasped them with our learning and educational capacity, yet they cannot be easily understood. It is because of the difficulty of going into the depths of the Upanishads that great masters or *acharyas* such as Sankara, Ramanuja, and Madhava differed from one another. That these great heroes of learning and theological wisdom did not agree with one another is evidence enough to show the difficulty involved in understanding the true meaning of the statements of the Upanishads.

Great *tapas* and austerity are called for on the part of any student who embarks upon this adventure of studying and understanding the import of the Upanishads. The Upanishads are the result of intense austerity of the soul, the spirit, of those great masters

who detached themselves from every kind of external contact and confined themselves to a face-to-face encounter with the Reality of the universe. Who on earth can think in this way? Which person in the world is capable of encountering the whole universe directly, face to face, without being conditioned by the apparatus of sensory perception and logical understanding?

To obviate this difficulty which students generally feel in their classrooms of Upanishadic studies, the great sage Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa classified the Vedas. Sri Krishna Dvaipayana is called Veda Vyasa, which means to say one who analysed, classified, edited and arranged the mantras of the Veda into the present form we see in texts or editions of the Vedas. This great Vyasa who wrote the Mahabharata and the eighteen Puranas, who analysed the Vedas into the present section-wise form, also wrote the Brahma Sutras, which means 'aphorisms on the nature of Brahman'. Very few people study the Brahma Sutras, as it is frightening. Even the name itself is abhorrent to ordinary intellectual understanding.

The Upanishads confine themselves to an investigation into the structure of the Ultimate Reality of the universe, and in the language of the Upanishads, this Ultimate Being is designated as Brahma—but not the Brahma who created the world as one of the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. This Brahma, or Brahman, is the transcendent Absolute, to put it in the language of Western thinkers. Brahman in the neuter gender, representing the Ultimate Existence, Reality of the universe, is known as the Absolute in Western philosophical parlance. Often people call it the Ultimate Substance. These names—Ultimate Substance, Ultimate Reality, the Absolute, Transcendent Being, Brahman—are all appellations of this wondrous, eluding Reality that is beyond human comprehension.

The Brahma Sutras contain more than five hundred and fifty small, enigmatic statements, known as sutras. A sutra is a short saying. The Brahma Sutras particularly consist of sayings which are so short that we can make no sense by reading the sutra by itself. Sometimes there is no verb, and sometimes there is only a verb without a subject. We cannot find the meaning, and have to depend upon learned commentaries on the Brahma Sutras in order to understand these explanatory notes. The sutras were written to explain the intricate meaning of certain passages of the Upanishads, but these annotations themselves are so difficult that no sense or meaning can be made of them. This is because in those days when the texts were written there was no printing press to make copies of this textual lore, so they had to be communicated by word of mouth and heard by the student. They had to be committed to memory by rote, and as lengthy explanations made it difficult to commit the whole thing to memory, they used code words, such as the difficult sutras of Panini in Sanskrit grammar. There are several thousand small sutras of Panini comprehending the whole of Sanskrit grammar and literature. People study them by rote, wracking their heads to find out the meaning therein. The Brahma Sutras are intricate annotations. Here I will be dealing with the aspect of their practical usefulness to spiritual seekers.

The Brahma Sutras commence with a wonderful statement. *Athāto brahmajijñāsā* (1.1.1): Now, therefore, an enquiry into the nature of Brahman. What is the meaning of 'now', and what is the meaning of 'therefore'? These little words have a deep import. 'Now' means after having completed one's obligations in the form of the duties of life—'now, at this moment, when you are free from entanglement in worldly affairs

and your heart and mind are free from any kind of tension, emotionally or intellectually, at this moment, therefore...'

What is 'therefore'? 'Therefore' means having disciplined your personality enough to be able to receive the meaning of these teachings. Firstly, you have to be free from the obligations and duties of life. If there is a pinch or a pinprick from human society, family, office or the factory in which you work annoying you every day, the mind will refuse to go deep into these matters. Either you have to develop such a capacity that you harmonise your external duty with internal aspiration, for which you have to be a genius in your own self, or if you do not accept that you are a genius of that type, you have to fulfil your duties and then, when there is nothing of the nature of a call from the world distracting your attention, take to a leisurely period of concentration of mind in order to understand the meaning of this great text. 'Therefore' means 'after disciplining your intellect and emotion, having withdrawn yourself from attachments of every kind'.

It has already been mentioned in the introduction that the subject is transcendent. It is out of ordinary reach through the sense organs or even the intellect. Therefore, any kind of intellectual obsession, emotional attachment, should be taken care of before we enter into the path of this great study. Briefly to say, this is the meaning of the first aphorism, *athāto brahmajijñāsā*: Now, therefore, we enquire into the nature of the Supreme Being.

Who is the Supreme Being? The sutra that follows gives a definition. *Janmādyasya yataḥ* (1.1.2): That is the Supreme Being from which follows the creation, sustenance and dissolution of this universe. This Supreme Being causes the emanation or the creation of

this universe, and after having created it, sustains it by its own immanent presence. At the end of time, it withdraws the whole universe into itself. That is Brahman.

In this matter there has been a great controversy among the *acharayas*, learned people both in the East as well as in the West. Is it proper to define the Ultimate Reality as that which is the creator, preserver and dissolver of the universe? It may be true that the Ultimate Being is responsible for all these processes. It is the cause, the sustenance, and also the final aim of everything in the universe—accepted. But is this a proper definition?

Referring to a person as the principal of a college may be a good definition, but when that person is not the principle, what is he? That is his real nature. So to say that God is He who creates the universe may not be actually the characteristic of the Reality by itself, independent of the process of creation. Nobody can compel God to create the world; therefore, to define God only through the process attached to Him in the form of creation, etc., would be a faulty definition.

Every person or every thing is something by himself, herself or itself, independent of the function that one performs. We cannot identify ourselves with the activity in which we are engaged. Though activity may oftentimes be inseparable from our existence, yet we are certainly something apart from the activity. The activity is an emanation, but by ourselves we are something more than the activity. This question has raised many other difficult consequences as to the aim of life itself.

Acharya Sankara and Ramanuja, who wrote massive commentaries on the Brahma Sutras, differ from each other in drawing the import of this definition.

Ramanuja, who is a theistic philosopher, a Vaishnava, a worshipper of Narayana or Vishnu as the God of the universe, has no problem at all in understanding the meaning of this sutra, namely, that the Supreme Being is the one who creates, sustains and dissolves the universe. But for Acharya Sankara there is a great problem because he conceives the Ultimate Reality as something transcendent, totally independent of the universal process, eternal in its nature and not having any kind of touch of temporality in it, because creation implies time process and also space.

How can we define God in terms of something which He has created afterwards? Is God tied to the concept of space and time? We always say God is above space and time. But for Ramanuja, no such problem arises because he believes in the stage-by-stage ascent of the soul to Narayana in Vaikunta, whereas according to the doctrine of Sankara, who believes in the Impersonal Absolute, no such ascending is possible because God is everywhere. There is no movement necessary in the direction of that which is everywhere. If something is only in one place, there is a necessity to move towards it. Delhi is in one place, so we have to move in one direction to reach it. But if we find Delhi everywhere, we need not move at all. It is just here. Therefore, is it necessary to move towards God, or are we perpetually in contact with God because of the Universal Being of God? Here is the difference between Sankara and Ramanuja, the doctrine of the identity of the Absolute and the personality of the Absolute.

All the religions of the world generally confine themselves to the personality of God. Whether it is Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism or any Semitic religion, the concept is that God is a transcendent, super-spatial Father in heaven. This is the transcendence of God. God

is above the world; He is not in the world. Religions are afraid of bringing God into the world because the world is defective, perishable, full of contradictions. It is even considered as an evil realm of wrong action. How would God come into it? Hence, Semitic religions, especially, abhor any kind of mysticism. They detest it because God cannot be contaminated by the defects of the world. God is always above, transcendent, very holy, untouched by the defects of the world. That is one view of things.

But the other aspect of the matter involves God even in the world. That is to say, God has to create the world out of some substance. Where is the substance? Where is the brick, where is the material out of which God could have manufactured this world? If we say, as Sankhya philosophers and some theologians hold, there was an original matter out of which God created the world, we are creating a distinction between the world and God. If there is a distinction between the world and God, there is a serious flaw involved in the very concept of God. God would be limited. He would not be omnipresent. The finitude consequent upon the nature of God following the acceptance of a world external to Him is a serious defect in the definition of God.

Either God manufactured the world out of His own Being, in which case He is automatically immanent, or He stands apart. If a potter manufactures a pot, he is the creator of the pot, we may say. But he creates the pot out of a material totally external to him. The condition of the pot does not affect the potter. But suppose the clay that is the substance or the material of the pot is conscious of itself, and the clay wishes to modify itself into the shape of the pot. Taking for granted that there is such a possibility, then the creator will modify himself in the form of the created object. Acharya Ramanuja holds that God modified Himself into the world,

whereas for Acharya Sankara such a thing is not possible because anything that is subject to modification is also perishable.

Milk modifies itself into curd. In that process, milk is transformed into another thing and there is no milk afterwards. Curd cannot go back to milk. The milk is destroyed completely. If God has manufactured the world by transforming Himself as milk is transformed into curd, there is no way of returning to God. Just as curd cannot return to milk, no one can go to God. This is a very strange consequence that follows. If God has become the world, there is no God left now. So what is the use of thinking of God? He is no more. He has become the world; He has become the curd of the universe. This possibility must also be ruled out. Therefore, we cannot say that God has modified Himself into this world.

There are others who feel that God created the world out of nothing. There was a *shunyam*, like a magician manufacturing things out of nothing. We have seen magicians simply clap their hands and a bird comes out, or an elephant. Anything will appear. There is no bird, no elephant, nothing of the kind, but he performs a magical trick and it appears as if things are manufactured.

This implication of attempting to define Brahman, or the Absolute, as has been made out in the second *sutra*, *janmādyasya yataḥ*, leads to further difficulties as to what the aim of life is because the last *sutra* of the Brahma Sutras says, *anāvṛttiḥ śabdādanāvṛttiḥ śabdāt* (4.4.22): Once you reach the Absolute, you will not come back. There is no rebirth after reaching God. But if you are going to reach a God who is subject to modification in the form of creation, etc., then you are

likely to get modified together with Him, and there is a possibility of not reaching God at all.

Sankaracharya faces great problems in his commentary because he cannot accommodate his doctrine of the Impersonal Absolute with the possibility of God being the Creator, etc., and with the final word of the Brahma Sutras being the attainment of God who is the final Creator, etc. Ramanuja has no problem with this, but Sankara has a terrible problem.

This is only an introductory remark that I am placing before you as to the nature of the Brahma Sutras, which consists of four chapters. The first chapter is called Samanvaya Adhyaya. *Samanvaya* means reconciliation. All the apparently difficult and so-called contradictory statements in the Upanishads are harmonised in a very logical manner by the statements made in the sutras of the first chapter. For example, there is one sutra, *ānandamayo'bhyāsāt* (1.1.12): *Anandamaya kosha* is Brahman. The personality of a human being is a composite of different layers known as the physical, the astral, and the causal. The physical body is indwelt by a causal body consisting of mind, emotion, intellect, sense organs, prana, etc., and deep inside the subtle body is an unconscious layer which we experience in the state of deep sleep. When we are fast asleep we are not in the physical body or the subtle body; we are in the causal body where we are absorbed into an almost nothingness of experience.

It is believed by many thinkers that when we enter into the state of deep sleep we are actually in the lap of the Supreme Being, though we are not conscious of what is happening there. This is the reason why we feel so happy when we are asleep. Even a poor person or a sick person wakes up feeling refreshed, and fatigue vanishes. How does it happen unless in the state of deep

sleep we have contacted something which is a healer of all sorrows? We have entered into our own deepest self, which is called the Absolute Brahman. Therefore, can we say that deep sleep is the same as Brahman, the Absolute? *Anandamaya* means full of *ananda* or bliss.

Here Ramanuja and Sankaracharya differ in their interpretation. Ramanuja refuses to accept that the causal body is Brahman. He says if sleep is identical with samadhi or entry into Brahman, then we will not come back from that state. But after sleep we wake up into the turmoil and sorrow of life once again. If a blindfolded person is lifted and carried far away to the throne of a king and is seated on that throne, does he become a king? He is sitting on the throne of the king, no doubt, but he has been blindfolded, and if he is brought back to his house and his blindfold is removed, can we say that he has experienced kingship for some time? It is absurd to say that he was a king, because we have covered his eyes and he did not even know what was happening to him. Knowledge is existence, and absence of knowledge is equal to non-existence. So the absence of knowledge of what is happening in the state of deep sleep refutes the idea that it is the same as going to Brahman. Acharya Sankara is against the feeling or the conviction that deep sleep has anything to do with contact with Brahman. These are some of the difficulties which the Upanishadic statements raise, into which these sutras enter for the purpose of clarification.

The second chapter is called *Avirodha Adhyaya*. There are doctrines such as Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Mimamsa, Jaina, Buddha, Charvaka, etc., which are opposed to the Upanishadic statements. In the sutras which go to make up this second chapter, the doctrines of these schools are systematically refuted.

In the third chapter, called Sadhana Adhyaya, the Brahma Sutras confine themselves to explaining the methodology of meditation on the Ultimate Being, Brahman, in accordance with the descriptions of Brahman given in the Upanishads themselves. There are different types of descriptions in the Upanishads in regard to the nature of Ultimate Being. Whether one description can be combined with another description or each description should be taken by itself independently for the purpose of meditation is the subject of the third chapter, known as Sadhana Adhyaya.

The fourth chapter is called Phala Adhyaya, the fruit of knowledge, and is the most important. I wish to confine myself only to this last chapter. What is the use of giving you knowledge without telling you what is the result of this knowledge? You want to achieve something. The attainment of liberation is the subject of the fourth chapter. This is the theme which I will try to take up in this particular course, and as much as possible within this period I shall cover the whole theme of the coming and going of the soul of the individual, the birth and death of individuality, the reason for suffering in this world and the manner of absolving the individuality from such involvement, the stages of the ascent of the soul to God, and the various meditations that we have to practise for cleansing ourselves in order to make ourselves fit for this great, arduous journey to God Almighty.

Chapter 2

RETRACING OUR STEPS

Our subject is that part of the Brahma Sutras which deals with the salvation of the soul. In this context, the Sutras start from the causative factors of the bondage of the soul because unless there is bondage, there is no need to search for salvation. What is our bondage? This is picturesquely described in the Brihadaranyaka and Chhandogya Upanishads under the title Panchagni Vidya. '*Pancha*' means five. '*Agni*' means fire. '*Vidya*' means knowledge. So Panchagni Vidya is the knowledge of the five fires.

What are these five fires? They are the fires into which the soul offers itself for its own bondage—something surprising even to hear. It was Buddha who is reported to have said that the world is a burning pit of live coals. It is not a hotel where milk and honey are served. This is a place of discipline, and we will examine the nature of the discipline during the course of our studies.

The Panchagni Vidya is actually a description of the process of the birth of a person. The birth means birth into bondage. How are we born into this world? That we are born through our parents is a very simple answer, but it is not really the case. The parents, so-called, are only the last link in a long chain of development that originates far above even the skies, and we are not children of our father and mother—two persons of a specific type, of a particular country, speaking a particular language. Nothing of the kind is the truth. The whole world presses us forward into this pit of bondage.

The process is very intricate. When a person falls sick and complains of a fever, we should not be under the impression that the sickness is in the physical body. It is only an outer manifestation of a dislocation that has taken place inside. We may even say it is from the causal body itself. The very root is sick, and it vibrates in the form of a discomfort of the whole personality through the subtle body, and only when it manifests through the physical body do we come to know that we are sick. When a fruit is ripening and we see that its outer colour is changing, we should not conclude that it has suddenly become ripe in one day. The ripening process started right from the seed form. The fruit was ripening gradually, little by little, manifesting that ripeness until it reached the outer skin. Only then can we know that the fruit is ripe.

Great thinkers even in the West, such as Plato, for instance, have said that every action originates in the heavens. Every event is a vibration that takes place first in the high heavens, and then it descends in a gradually condensed form until it comes to the Earth as war, catastrophe, cataclysm, disturbance, cyclone, tornado, or whatever we may call it. The events that take place on the surface of the Earth are merely outer manifestations of a disturbance in the higher levels of being.

The birth of a person into this body is a disturbance that is taking place. What kind of disturbance? How are we born at all, and what is the purpose of our coming into this world? The reason for the birth of a person is explained in terms of certain pressures in the cosmic substance, that pressure being the reactions produced by a person's thoughts and actions in an earlier incarnation. When we take birth into the world, we do not drop suddenly from the skies. There is a process of

precipitating the congealing process of birth from what we may consider the archetypical condition of existence.

Modern science tells us that events do not take place in space; they take place in a space-time continuum, which is another way of saying that they do not take place in the world at all. The space-time continuum does not pervade the surface of the Earth; it is transcendent in its operation, which ordinarily a mind cannot understand. It is a fourth dimension, as it is called, which is the original source of the three-dimensional manifestation in the form of anything that happens in this world, whether social revolutions, war, or anything that we can think of. That is to say, the event is a cosmic disturbance. A philosopher humorously said, "At the birth of every event, the whole world is in travail." Travail is the birth pang. The pang of birth is felt by the whole world when any event takes place anywhere, even in the remotest part of the world.

That is to say, there is no such thing as a secret event. There is no such thing as unknown, secret action. Everything is public because the world is a public arena of performance. Any pain in any part of the body is a pain in the whole body. It is not only in a finger, a toe or the nose. When we sneeze, we are not sneezing only through our nose. The whole body ejects a pressure, and it comes up visibly in the form of a sneeze. It says that our body is sick, not that our nose is sick.

The Panchagni Vidya is the Upanishadic doctrine of the coming of the soul into the birth of individuality through certain operations taking place in the high heavens. First the whole space-time continuum, in the language of modern science, vibrates. Any reward or punishment that the administration of a country may award to a person is based on the articles of the

country's constitution. That is to say, the reward is given by the whole nation; it is not one person uttering some word and rewarding or punishing. When a judge pronounces a word of decree, it is not a person speaking; it is the constitution of the country speaking. So the whole nation is active when a judgement is passed in a court. We have to understand that we are units of the whole nation, inseparably connected to the whole structure of the country. We are not living in a marketplace somewhere, or in a remote place such as Uttarakashi. We are living in a country. We are living in India, in Europe, in America, whatever it is. We should not say we are living in a house, in a cottage. That is a very poor way of understanding our location. We belong to the world, and this is what we have to understand. We belong not only to our nation, not only to the United Nations, we belong to the world, and so anything that is connected with us is a world action. The five elements—ether, air, fire, water, earth—and everything that is on the Earth, take part in the birth of an individual.

We know very well that there is space, air, heat, liquid, and solid matter inside our body. All the five elements congeal into the formation of this particular individuality of ours—this man, this woman, whatever it is. Therefore, our bondage is not created by some neighbour near us. We may say that someone is creating trouble for us, but it is the whole world that is troubling us, not one person, because no one can lift a finger unless the order comes from the skies. They are only external instruments. As I mentioned, if a person is sent to prison it is not a policeman taking that person to the prison; the whole nation is behind it in the form of the manifestation of the constitution through the judge's pronouncement. This is also in the case of rewards, and

the good and bad things that we think of in the world. They are all universal operations. We cannot find fault with any person, nor can we praise any person. Nobody is worthy of praise, and nobody is worthy of condemnation. The whole world is with us, either for our pleasure or for our pain.

How this vibration of the five elements—earth, water, fire, air and ether—actually takes place is beyond our comprehension, nor can we say when it starts. Can we say when the four-dimensional continuum thinks of becoming the three-dimensional world? We can say it does not take time at all, or we can say it may take time for the solidification of the material of manifestation, just as we cannot say how many days it takes for a person to fall sick or to recover from illness and become healthy. We cannot immediately give an answer to this question. We must have fallen sick one month earlier, but we came to know of it only today because of its outer manifestation in the form of pain in the external crust of this body.

The five fires mentioned in the Panchagni Vidya are the five pressures exerted by the five elements—earth, water, fire, air and ether—to press the individuality of a person into manifestation through two persons, called father and mother, who are only the last link in the process of development. We have many fathers and many mothers. The whole world is our parent. The sky itself is our father, and time is our mother. They join together and produce this individuality. We belong to the whole world. You are a child of the Immortal, says the Upanishad: *amritasya-putrah*. The immortal kingdom ordains the coming of our individuality into this process for the fulfilment of all the reactionary processes created by our previous actions. Karma is the cause of our birth, as people generally say. This karma is

not something that we do secretly somewhere inside our room. It is a disturbance that we are causing to the whole world by interference with it.

Every thought is an interference with the world structure. That is why it produces a reaction. Why is it so? It is because every thought of an individual is contrary to the thinking of the world mind. In spite of the fact that individual minds are basically inseparable from the cosmic mind, the egoistic nature of the assertion of individual minds assumes such an atrocious importance of self-complacency that it violates the dictates of the cosmic mind in its self-affirmation. Then the cosmic mind immediately gives a kick. That kick is the reaction of the action. If we touch a high voltage electric wire or we go near a high magnetic field, we will immediately be thrown back by the current of the electricity. Any thought which is not in consonance with the dictates of the cosmic mind is a karma that we are producing, and so the reaction is produced. The reaction is not an unintelligent, meaningless thing that is taking place. It is an attempt of the cosmic mind to set right the balance that it is maintaining by counteracting the interference caused by any individual mind.

To reap the fruit of these reactions, one is born into this world; and to learn the lesson of the manner of harmonising one's thoughts and actions in the light of the requirements of the cosmic mind—we may call it nature's mind or God's mind—is how we are born. You can imagine how important you are. You are not just dropped from the mother's womb as a non-entity or a good-for-nothing individual. You are a very important person. The whole nature knows that you are here. It loves you, and it punishes you if you do not agree with its edicts. The punishment is not born of anger and hatred. Nature has no anger, nor has it any affection. It

maintains a balance. The maintenance of balance is the nature of anything, and we may call it a good thing or a bad thing. There is no ethical mandate that can be applied to such operations either of God or of nature. It is a scientific operation, like the law of gravitation. We cannot say it is good or bad. Gravitation is not a friend of anybody, nor is it an enemy of anybody. It just is what it is, and it is up to us to obey its laws. Law is impersonal, and if we make it a personal matter of our so-called individualised satisfaction, that universal law will give us a kick and teach us a lesson by throwing us out into the arena of individual suffering, which is the birth.

We have to free ourselves from this bondage of cosmic involvement in this process. The method of gaining this freedom is the process of the salvation of the soul.

The Brahma Sutras are based on the Upanishads. We cannot say they are independent treatises saying something totally new. The Brahma Sutras are interpretations of varied expressions in the Upanishads concerning man's bondage and salvation. The Upanishad is a moksha shastra, as is one section of the Brahma Sutras, particularly the fourth chapter.

I mentioned in the previous session that the Brahma Sutras have four parts. The first part is known as Samanvaya Adhyaya, the chapter on the reconciliation of apparently disconnected statements in the Upanishads. In the case of the Bhagavadgita, for instance, it is difficult to know what the Gita is saying because, on a cursory outward look, it may appear that many things are told in a disconnected, haphazard manner, one not being in harmony with the other. That the whole thing is a contradiction and chaos is the feeling which one may have on a sudden reading of the

Bhagavadgita. So is the case with the Upanishads. There is a harmony behind it if we go deep into it, but if we do not have time enough to go so deeply, they look like contradictions. To show that there is no contradiction among the variegated statements of the Upanishads is the purpose of the first chapter of the Brahma Sutras, which is not my subject. I am going into more practical sides because you are here for a short time and I am not going to theorise philosophical doctrines unnecessarily, as they will not benefit you much.

The second chapter of the Brahma Sutra is confined to the creative process of the universe—how God creates the world—as well as explaining the relationships of God with the world, of God with the individual, of one individual with another individual, of the individual with the world, and of one part of the world with another part of the world. This theme is highlighted in the second chapter. There are various schools of philosophy which have something to say of their own on this subject. The second part of the Brahma Sutras also deals with the problem of the refutation of unorthodox doctrines which create a mess in their interpretation of the relationship of God, world, etc., and do not try to harmonise them by going deep into their meaning. Negative doctrines are refuted, and the positive doctrine of the reconciliation of all statements in the Upanishads is taken up in the second chapter. It is called Avirodha Adhyaya, the chapter on non-contradiction in the statements of the Upanishads.

In the third chapter, which is called Sadhana Adhyaya, the methods of Upanishadic meditations are described. The Upanishads prescribe their own ways for meditation on the Supreme Being. Everything is said in the Upanishads. There are social doctrines, personal psychological questions, eschatology, cosmology, and

psychological questions, eschatology, cosmology, and metaphysics. Everything is there in the Upanishads, only it is spread out in different places because the Upanishads are not the creations of one person; they are a collection of meditations by various rishis or sages. As the Upanishads are not one textbook written by one author, reconciliation is necessary among them.

How are we to take the statements of the Upanishads as a means of meditation on the Supreme Absolute? The fourth chapter is now what we are concerned with—Phala Adhyaya, the fruit of knowledge. The fruit of knowledge is moksha, liberation. What is liberation, actually? What does it mean? Moksha means liberation from bondage. Then what is bondage? In order to make us understand what salvation is, the Upanishads have taken pains to first explain what bondage is. This is why I briefly stated that bondage is our disharmonious relationship with the structure of the universe.

We are at loggerheads with everything in the world. Nothing is agreeable to us, and we condemn all things. Then a tit-for-tat attitude is developed by that with which we are at loggerheads, and we will get what we have done. We will be paid in the same coin. There is nothing that can please us, finally. Something is abhorrent in everything. Even a most delicious thing looks tasteless after awhile. If we see our friend continuously for years together, our friendship gets diluted. Too much familiarity breeds contempt.

This is the case with everything in the world. We want to eat food, but we do not want too much food, nor should it be very little. We want to breathe air, but we do not want all the air pumped into our nose. We want to sleep, but we do not want to sleep twenty-four hours a day, nor should it be too little. We cannot be satisfied

with anything. There is a basic dissimilarity between the workings of individuality and the operations of nature. We are dissimilar to the opinion of people outside, dissimilar to the requirements of natural laws, dissimilar to God's ordinance, and also dissimilar to what is good for our own physical health. There is a non-alignment of the inner constituents of our own individual personality, non-alignment with society outside, non-alignment with nature around us, and finally, the worst of things, non-alignment with the glory of God—which we cannot tolerate if we do not understand; and even if we try to understand it, we get frightened rather than appreciate it.

Hence, this bondage of ours is a very intricate involvement from which we have to free ourselves through certain techniques that we have to adopt, called meditation or dhyana. We can imagine what kind of meditation we have to practise from the nature of the bondage in which we are involved. Universal bondage requires a universal meditation to set it right. A little scratch on a rock made by a pin will not create any dent in the rock; it requires a hammer or a chisel to make some impression. In a similar manner, a cosmically involved bondage cannot be set right by a little casual thinking of an individualistic mind.

The gradual shedding of the insistence of individual thinking and a gradual attempt to expand the dimension of the process of thinking is the preliminary to any kind of worthwhile meditation. The nearer we go to the cosmic mind, the better is our meditation. But if we insist on our own individualistic process of thinking, and go on insisting on it again and again, day and night, that kind of individualised meditation will bring no result. That cannot lead to moksha, or salvation.

The process of meditation towards the salvation of the soul is a gradual befriending of the individual with the cosmic. Tell the cosmic mind, "I am going to be friendly with you and appreciate what you are saying." The cosmic mind is not blind; it is not unintelligent. It can see us, and it can know what we are thinking. If we inwardly feel and decide, "I shall be friendly with everything around me," this decision itself is a repentance which can set right all our past karmas. Many of our sufferings get mitigated by our heartfelt conviction that we shall not commit such mistakes in future.

The cosmic mind is the mind of God, the mind of society, the mind of nature. It is very fond of us. God loves us more than we love Him. Nature loves us more than we love it. The entire structure of the environmental procedure outside loves us. The larger always loves the smaller, with more intensity than the individual can love the larger, because the individual is included in the larger, so it has a greater force. Even the thought of the larger dimension is a great virtue, actually. The greatest form of righteousness and virtue, ethicality, or morality that we can think of is the inward friendship that we establish with that which is above us and more than us. As the Bhagavadgita tells us, *uddhared ātmanātmānaṁ nātmānam avasādayet* (Gita 6.5). We have to love our higher Self, and tell it, "I love you. I want you. I cannot be here without you. Come to rescue me." We may call it the rescue operation taking place from the higher Self or from nature or from God. Whatever be the case, it is actually all the same thing. The higher Self is higher nature; it is higher God. *Nātmānam avasādayet*: Never be despondent in your spirit, or think, "This is not for me."

In meditation we have to retrace our steps. When we come down, we have to step on every step. When we go up, we have to step on the very same steps in another direction. So salvation is a retracing of the very thing that happened when we were pushed down into this birth through individuality. Whatever might have happened anywhere when we were pushed into this physical birth, that has to be set right. The tables have to be turned. There has to be a right-about turn, as they say.

This is a simple method, if only our mind is prepared for it. It is very easy to speak truth, but very difficult to speak untruth. This art of the salvation of the soul is the movement toward truth. It succeeds everywhere. *Satyam eva jayate nānṛtam, satyena panthā vitato devayānaḥ* (Mundaka 3.1.6). Any movement in the direction of the Ultimate Truth or the Reality of the universe is a blessing to us. Even the thought of it is a grace that will descend upon us. God will bless us with His divine grace when we want it inwardly. "O God, we want Your grace." It will come, and the whole of nature will pour its blessings.

Āsīnaḥ sambhavāt (4.1.7). The Brahma Sutra says, meditation should be practised by sitting, not by walking, standing or lying down. We must sit in such a posture as would not cause any agony to the limbs, pain in the joints, pain in the back, neck and so on. We may assume any position that we like according to our convenience so that we may remain in it for protracted period, say for an hour at least. We can do japa even while walking, but part of the mind goes to the legs because otherwise we will fall down. So is the case with standing. And lying down is still worse because we may go to sleep. So, *āsīnaḥ sambhavāt*: Success is immanent if the meditation is carried on by sitting.

In the same way as the Panchagni Vidya of the Upanishads is the process of the coming down of the soul into individual form, there is also a detailed description of the way of ascending to God. It is a reconciliation of ourselves with anything in the vicinity that is connected with us, whether remotely or in any manner whatsoever. The Upanishads are particularly our help here, especially the Brihadaranyaka and the Chhandogya Upanishads.

In the seventh chapter of the Chhandogya Upanishad, the great sage Narada is introduced into the system of graduated meditation on the Absolute by the supreme master, Sanatkumara, the son of Brahma. Narada, a master of all sciences and arts conceivable, approaches Maharshi Sanatkumara and asks, "Please teach me, great Master."

Sanatkumara says, "Let me know what you have already studied."

Narada opens up his repertoire; the whole encyclopaedia is open. "There is nothing that I do not know. Every art, every science is mastered."

"Then what is the problem now?" asks Sanatkumara.

"I have no peace of mind," Narada says. "Peace of mind has not come after being a master of all the arts and the sciences." *So'ham bhagavaḥ śocāmi* (Chhandogya 7.1.3): "Great master, I am in grief."

The great master says, "All this that you have studied is only verbal jugglery. It is a network created by words and linguistic processes. You have not touched the soul of things by learning their external characteristics."

"So please teach me," says Narada.

Gradually, from the lowest category of perceptual process, Sanatkumara, the great master, takes the mind

of Narada higher and higher, higher and higher, through various stages of the developmental process until he touches upon the nature of the Absolute, wherein one can find peace.

As with Narada, people also come here and say, "I want to achieve peace of mind." They have a very curious idea of peace of mind. If there is no noise anywhere, it is peace of mind. If nobody talks to them, it is peace of mind. This is what people imagine, but peace of mind is nothing of the kind. Until you reach universal perfection, peace of mind is not going to come.

Yatra nānyat paśyati nānyac chr̥ṇoti nānyad vijānāti sa bhūmā (7.24.1): Where you operate from the point of view of that eternal perfection that outwardly you do not see anything, outwardly you have not to hear anything, outwardly you need not have to struggle with your intellect to understand anything, that self-complete universality is Brahman, the Bhuma, the Absolute. Here is the peace of mind. This is the instruction received by Narada from Sanatkumara.

All these, as well as many other things such as the Vaishvanara Vidya described in the Chhandogya Upanishad, are taken up for consideration in the Brahma Sutras. One by one I shall gradually try to touch upon them. You will be very pleased to hear them, and perhaps many of you will be able to practise them and feel blessed in this very life.

Chapter 3

THE SOJOURN OF THE SOUL AFTER DEPARTING FROM THE BODY

The Brahma Sutras, as we have noted, is a moksha shastra. It is a scripture on the liberation of the soul. Since, as we have observed already, bondage of the soul consists in its involvement in the body, and the body is a formation of the five elements—earth, water, fire, air and ether—and also because these elements are cosmically spread out everywhere, it would follow that bondage assumes a cosmic proportion. It is not sitting on the head of any particular individual. Everywhere there is bondage. Perhaps it is from this point of view that Buddha eagerly proclaimed again and again that the whole universe is a fluxation and a perishable phenomenon, with nothing subsisting and everything moving.

If this is the case, we are involved in a larger atmosphere of involvement and bondage in our own selves than we imagine, as is the usual condition of uneducated, unlettered, inexperienced individuals. We think that our body is a bondage, but actually the whole world is a bondage, and this is what we have to remember. The body is made up of the world substance. Wherever the world is, there the elements are, and the subtle potentials, called *tanmatras*, of these gross elements of earth, water, fire, air and ether impinge upon the soul due to its attachment, caused by various factors.

Liberation from bondage, therefore, is not an individual affair. Even the meditations that are prescribed in the Brahma Sutras on the basis of the statements of the Upanishads are not just exercising a

thought somewhere in the corner of one's brain; it is a cosmic affair. The whole world wakes up when a sincere aspirant of liberation commences meditation in right earnest. All the lions in the forest rise up as if some catastrophe is taking place in the forest, and start looking at things from all directions. Sleeping dogs wake up when meditation comes.

These are what are called the obstacles in meditation. A cosy friendship of the attachment of the soul to the condition of being enveloped by these five elements, and its affiliation to them, is something like when a person in prison gets accustomed to prison life and cannot think of any other way of living. Plato, in his *Republic*, refers to this kind of predicament of bound souls where he compares the individuals caught up in the ignorance of bondage to people who are locked up in a dark cave, and are chained to face a wall on which the rays of the Sun are being cast from outside. They cannot see the Sun and the activity behind them outside the cave, but they see the shadows moving on the wall, and they consider the shadows to be their own world of society. They cannot know that there is an archetype of individualities outside in the open sunlight. People walk about in the sunlight, cast their shadows on the wall, and those shadows are considered as the realities. This is the case with every person here. The shadows of movements, activities and performances in the world are taken for realities, while actually they are the reflections of certain originals that are in the high heaven which is illumined by the Sun of the supreme Idea of the Good, to put it in the language of Plato. All great people think alike; whether it is Plato or the Upanishads, it makes no difference.

Now, therefore, the Brahma Sutra, being a moksha shastra, is not concerned with any kind of slipshod and

half-hearted program that one may follow in spiritual practice: "I shall do a little meditation, if it is possible, and I shall do a little more tomorrow." These excuses will not cut ice considering the intensity of the suffering caused by the bondage due to the involvement of the soul in these elements.

When birth takes place in the form of this individual psychophysical organism, these elements rush towards this would-be formation and cling to the point of consciousness which we call the *jiva*. Like smoke, fog, and darkness, they envelope the soul, not allowing it to perceive anything beyond its own limitations. Throughout our life, these subtle potencies of elements stick to us more vehemently than our skin sticks to our own body. These elements, which constitute our personality, our sorrow, our bondage, and whatever we do, persist throughout our life and continue even after death. This embodiment of the five elements in the subtle form is known as the *sukshma sharira*, the subtle body, which includes the forces of the sense organs, the mind, intellect and will, as well as the pranas in their various operations. This is the actual person.

The person, so-called, is not what is seen in their identity card or photograph. The real person is something different from what we consider as the person, because the photo on the identity can be seen even after the death of the individual. We say that someone has departed. Nobody has departed, because we can see the same old person lying there without any sensation and consciousness. Who has departed, then? The person has departed. Who is that person? It is that person who has left this physical encasement. It is the subtle body of the five elements which is the real me, the real you, the real he, she, it; and it can never perish, it cannot die, it cannot change. It persists throughout

space and for all time. It is there in deep sleep, it is there in swoon, it is there in birth, and it is there in death. This is our real friend. Who is our friend? We think the cause of our bondage, which we hug with great joy, is our friend. "Dear me, come." This 'dear me' is going to harass us throughout this sojourn in time and space, and we shall have no peace of mind anywhere.

All this description in the Brahma Sutra is to awaken us to the fact of our true bondage, and we cannot take it very lightly. It is a serious matter, and nothing can be so serious as involvement of one's own self in a bondage that cannot even be understood by the mind. It is very serious indeed. We cannot use a better word.

The liberation from this bondage, as I mentioned, consists in a togetherness of a spiritual power mustered in with great effort of concentration that exceeds the limit of mere psychological operation of the mind inside the brain. Mere thought, which is an empirical psychological operation, cannot touch Reality, is a point which Immanuel Kant made so prominent. Thought cannot touch Reality. But because thought is something which emanates from the bodily encasement, it is empirical, exteriorised, sense-bound, and is also bound by space and time, and any amount of thinking in a state of psychological bondage and submission to the five elements will not enable the soul to contact its own original Reality.

There is a transcendence which is the essence of freedom, and therefore the meditation that we practice should also assume a transcendent form. A mere half-hearted effort in the form of a little routine every day in a religious mood of church-going, temple-going, bell ringing, will not work. The problem is more serious than we can imagine in our mind. That a bound soul cannot know that it is bound is the worst of tragedies

that one can imagine. That is the nature of *samsara*. *Samsara* is the binding force of ignorance, which will not permit even the knowledge that such a thing has taken place. We can imagine where we are standing.

The way of freedom in the spiritual sense consists in the meditations on the prescriptions given to us in the Upanishads, as we have it detailed further in the third chapter of the Brahma Sutra.

The karma potencies, which are the causes of the clinging of material elements to the soul, have to be taken care of very carefully. Why do these elements cling to us and get pulled towards the soul as iron filings towards the magnet? It is due to the karmas, *vasanas* or *apurvās*, as they are called in certain schools of thought, which have come upon the soul from various earlier incarnations. Bondage is from eternity to eternity. Nobody knows when it began, and it is difficult to say when it will end.

Ordinary effort will not suffice. There are people who do good deeds, philanthropic acts, charity; they perform sacrifice, dig wells, plant trees, and give food to the poor. This is called, in the technical language of the Vedānta, *ishtapurta*. *Ishta* is the power generated by sacrifices of a religious nature, such as *agnihotra*, etc., and *purta* is the charitable deed, as I mentioned. These good deeds produce good effects, no doubt, but good effects will not suffice in the attainment of freedom or spiritual liberation. A good person will receive good rewards, but moksha is not a good reward; it is another thing altogether. Reaching heaven is the result of righteous and virtuous actions of the nature of charity, etc., and the world will pay us for all the sufferings we underwent in our good deeds. Every action that we perform will produce a reaction, and good deeds produce good reactions. So good are the reactions that

they can propel us to heaven—Indraloka, and any other *loka* of that kind. But when the propelling engine becomes cool, gets exhausted by its operation, the soul that went to that heavenly region will be thrown back by the power of the gravitation of the Earth. Even a rocket can come down when its power to propel upward is exhausted. So good deeds alone are not enough, though we praise good deeds very much and nothing is greater than a good deed.

Now we are talking about the subject of the Brahma Sutra, which is not an ordinary scripture. There are people who do good deeds, and also do bad deeds. Those who perform very good deeds of an intensive nature will reap the fruits immediately. If our action is very intense, whether it is intensely good or intensely bad, it will produce its effect here itself. Sudden fortune may befall us. A windfall will be our blessing in a manner we cannot understand. How has a windfall suddenly come? It is because of the intense sacrifice and good deeds that we have performed. Intense suffering and catastrophe, death, can also take place if the deeds are very bad. Hell can descend here itself, and there is no need to go to some other hell. This is the case with intense good deeds and intense bad deeds. What about mild deeds? They will not manifest themselves in this birth because they have to give place for the intense ones. The ordinance of the universe seems to operate in such a way that mild deeds are not recompensed, and they lie in ambush as if they do not exist at all. They are like creditors of an intense nature or a mild nature. The mild deeds wait for the time for their manifestation, which may be even after three births, not necessarily in the next birth, because the actions are too mild to be able to manifest themselves in actual experience. This is about the result of karma, or action.

What is karma, actually? It is a reaction set up by the whole world in respect of any interference of its law. It is like a magnetic field revolting against the person going near it and giving a shock of such an intensity as is the nature of the interference and the distance one maintains from the magnetic field. Every action is an interference with the natural forces. It is an interference because nature has no egoism. It has no personality. It is an all-pervading, ubiquitous operation. Impersonal is the nature of cosmic operations, but everything that we do is intensely personal. So any personal action motivated by the egoism of an individual clashes immediately with the impersonal requirement of the ubiquitous nature, and a war takes place between the individual and the all-pervading nature. In this war, it is the individual who is defeated because the individual consciousness, the personality consciousness born of egoism, is untrue to the requirement of the cosmic ordinance.

The intensity with which a repulsion is created by cosmic nature because of the individual's interference with that cosmic nature is called the nemesis of action or karma *phala*, the result of our deed. Otherwise, from where does the result follow? It does not drop from the trees. It manifests from all sides. It comes from all sides because nature is everywhere, from every side. So karma does not come from one direction, from the front or from behind; it is like a gale rising to the surface of violent movement, encircling everything and moving from all directions.

'Karma' is a much-misunderstood word, but truly it is a scientific, mathematically construed consequence of an interference of individual egoism with cosmic nature. This is the reason why a recompense follows which is suitable to the kind of interference which is unselfishly

done in the form of charitable deeds, or selfishly done in the form of evil deeds. This is the story of the action of karma. Everybody is happy; everybody is unhappy. The so-called happiness arises on account of a pleasant reaction produced by the action of the individual in the field of universality, and on the other side is the unpleasant interference causing unpleasant experience. These people will not reach moksha, whether they are good people or bad people. Bad people will suffer more; good people will enjoy, but will revert once again to the original condition from where they rose up.

Then what is the way to moksha? The Brahma Sutra takes details from the Upanishads themselves. Moksha *marga* is described. The *marga*, or the path to moksha, implies a kind of movement, and movement is inconceivable without space and time. This spatiotemporal movement, which is also made possible in certain forms of the ascent of the spirit to the point of liberation, is due to our concept of God. This is something much higher than the good deeds that one performs. I am not touching the karma aspect at all; it is over. Now something higher is taken up, which is pure meditation. Meditation on our idea of God will tell upon what kind of experience we will have through these meditations. If our God is sitting somewhere, one kind of reaction follows. Or if He is the Super Person, the Supreme Purusha as it is described in the Purusha Sukta of the Veda, that concept of God produces another reaction.

People who meditate on the personal God also depart from this world, as is the case with people who do either good deeds or bad deeds. The departure is common to everybody. When the time for departure arrives, certain things take place inside. We are told in the Upanishads that the tip of the heart blazes forth

with a spark-like flame, which is the indication of the need to exit from this body. It is actually the soul symbolised in the form of this little flame illumining the tip of the heart at the time of passing from this body. Then a jerk of the whole system is felt because, as one feels a mild shock at the time of touching an electric field, the exit order causes a tremor in the whole body. There is a kind of shivering, a tendency to become cold in the feet.

The first effect of the force that is generated by the life that is ejecting itself out is cessation of the power of speaking. At that time people come, relatives sit around the dying man and say, "Do you recognise me? Do you know who I am?" The person knows who they are because the mind is still active, but speech stops. Sometimes the mouth opens in order to articulate, but the sound does not come. The *agni* withdraws itself. The *agni devata* is the force which causes articulation and speech through the throat. The first divinity that withdraws itself is *agni*, and speech stops. A dying man cannot speak, though the other organs operate. Then hearing ceases. The *devatas* withdraw themselves from the ear, and if the dying person tries to speak, nobody knows what he is saying. Then slowly the mind also stops thinking. Then unconsciousness prevails. But life is still there; prana still operates. If people want to know whether the person has really died, they bring a little piece of cotton near the nostrils to see whether the breath is still there. If the cotton moves a little, they conclude that prana is still operating and the *jiva* is alive. If the cotton does not move at all, the conclusion is that the breath has departed. The last thing that departs is the breath, the prana. Before that the mind goes, before that the ear does not hear, and before that the

speech goes. When the prana leaves, the whole body feels as if it is getting shattered. Chillness prevails.

But if this person has been a meditator on the personal God with deep devotion, and is not merely a good person doing charitable deeds and so on but a real lover of God, the soul of that person rushes out through the exit space at the tip of the heart and moves along the rays of the Sun, says the Upanishad. We give scant respect to the Sun in the sky; we take it for granted. "Let the Sun be there, let the Sun not be there, what does it matter? I can get on." We cannot exist even for a moment if the Sun does not protect us.

The moksha *marga* of the meditator on the personal God is through the rays of the Sun. The rays, which look like diffused, vaporous things, assume a hardened form and lift the soul in the direction of the Sun, the solar orb. Various divinities begin to operate. The divinities that were in the body controlling the operation of the sense organs rise up and greet this soul there in the high heaven. Earlier they worked through the body and were subject to the limitations of the physical embodiment, but now that they are liberated from their duty in the physical body, they greet this soul above, beyond the ambit of the Sun. To be able to reach the Sun with such brilliance and force, the soul that departs from here should shed its material encasements and become subtle, which it attains due to the meditations that it has practised on the personal God. *Saguna upasana* is the name for such meditations and religious worships connected with adoration of the personal Creator of the universe. If one can conceive the whole universe as an embodiment of one Supreme Person and go on meditating only on that being and have no other thought in the mind, day in and day out, that person

becomes fit to ascend to the Sun through the ray of the Sun.

Ordinarily, this blessing is not given to anybody, because who can meditate like that? Our idea of God and meditation is so poor we are mostly not fit to go to that realm. We will be repelled by the Sun rather than pulled by the Sun towards himself. This path of ascent to the highest reality through various stages is called the *devayana* path, the path of the gods. All the gods join together to receive this soul and lead it upwards. Both the Bhagavadgita and the Upanishads unanimously tell us that the *agni* that withdrew itself from the power of speech at the time of passing receives the soul in the high heaven as a first guide to the higher ascent. Then the entire time process assumes a divinity. Time and space are not dull, stupid entities. They are consciousness operating in a particular form.

The power that is generated by the Sun during daytime, the power that is generated by the Sun during its northern movement in summer, the power generated by the whole year, dominated by the power of the Sun, all these are divinities. They are not just abstract concepts. The universe is populated by gods everywhere. Sometimes when modern Western historians translate the Veda mantras, they cast aspersions on the wisdom of these great sages and think that these prayers through the Veda mantras are just the blabbering of unlettered souls. They think that the Aryans were merely nomads who knew nothing about the higher realities except what they visualised through their eyes in the form of sunrise and sunset, in the form of day and night, in the form of wind, etc., and so this is the kind of translation we have of the Veda mantras from Western scholars. Not so is the case. The Veda mantras correspond to actually operating divine

powers everywhere. The whole universe is agog with divinity. There are no undivine things anywhere in the universe. These divinities come up to serve, as it were, this soul that is departing to the high heavens.

At one point, the consciousness of personality of the soul is lost completely. It tends to become impersonal in its nature. At that time, the ego ceases completely. Then it cannot be conscious of the movement. When we are conscious of the movement towards some particular end, we can say a subtle form of *sattvic* egoism continues. But when the *sattvic* egoism also melts away, there will be an automatic propulsion in a direction which one cannot know individually. At that time, the power of God manifests itself, says the Upanishad. God Himself takes care of the soul when it loses particular individualised consciousness. This is the grace of God that we generally speak of in religious language. Though the grace of God is everywhere, at every time, always, and it is endless, here it pointedly manifests itself, and a deputy of God Himself, known as a superhuman force, *amanava purusha*, takes the soul by the hand. A person who is not human descends from Brahmaloaka deputed by the great God, takes the soul by the hand and directs it towards the high heaven of Brahma, the Cosmic Being.

In the language of the Brahma Sutras and the Upanishads, the Cosmic Being, Brahma, is not to be identified with the Supreme Absolute. Because the Absolute is not cosmic—it is super-cosmic, supracosmic—we should not use words like ‘universality’, ‘omnipresence’, ‘omnipotence’, ‘creative force’, etc., in respect of the highest Brahman, which is the Absolute Reality. But this is now a passage leading to that great end. The soul is taken by the hand of this Impersonal Being, *amanava purusha*, to Brahmaloaka, where everything scintillates, everything shines,

everything is reflected in everything else, everybody finds himself or herself everywhere. We should not use the words 'himself' or 'herself'. There is no sex there. There is no man, there is no woman, there is no child; there is only spirit everywhere.

That kind of individuality is super-personal. It is difficult to understand what a super-personal individuality can be. It is humanly inconceivable, but such a thing is there. There are things in the world which we cannot understand. Super-personal entities are the population of Brahmaloaka, where each one will find itself in every other being. Everyone is everywhere, and everything is in every place. So it is a commingling of personality with impersonality, omnipresence with particularity, which is impossible to explain, making a person dizzy even by the thought of such a thing; and there the soul glories in the high heaven of Brahma, the Creator, for such time as the universe lasts.

The Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras tell us the soul merges in the Absolute when the universe is dissolved at the end of time and the cosmic creatorship also ceases. This is the *devayana* path, the godly, divine way of the ascent of the soul to the highest, Ultimate Being. This is moksha. It is impossible to think, impossible to conceive. No one can say what happens there, what one beholds, what one experiences. We who are too mortal, too body-minded, too socially oriented, too individualistic, cannot even imagine what that condition is, and even if we try to imagine that state, it will be a distorted imagination. We should be humble and not expect to know that which is not supposed to be known. This is the progressive path of salvation described in the Brahma Sutras as an exposition of the Upanishadic passages—*krama mukti*, as it is called. *Krama mukti* is the gradual salvation of the soul. Stage

by stage there is promotion, as it were, and it reaches the highest pinnacle at the end of time.

But those more blessed ones do not require a personal God, because the concept of the personal God also involves a transcendent existence of God above the world, and it invariably, unwittingly creates a distinction between God, the world and oneself. This is the difficulty which we have to avoid. The process of time is obviated completely in meditation on the nature of Being, independent of involvement in space and time and omnipresence, etc. That meditation which does not involve ascent or descent frees the soul immediately, at one stroke, and one wakes up to the Absolute as one is shaken up from dream and comes to the waking consciousness. Such a kind of freedom which is instantaneous, just here and now, without moving in any direction, is called *sadyo-mukti*, immediate salvation.

Now, any one of you can contemplate deeply, in the heart of your hearts, on which way is your way. Which path of this process is your path? Are you good people wanting good rewards, or are you bad people who have to suffer? Are you charitable people, or are you selfish? Are you worshippers of a personal God, or are you totally impersonal in your being? We are something of this kind, either of this category or that category.

Here we have a brief history of the sojourn of the soul after departing from the body.

Chapter 4

TYPES OF LIBERATION

We are studying the Brahma Sutras, which constitute the standard text on the subject of the spiritual freedom of the soul of the human individual. We have already noticed something about this process in an introductory manner. We have also observed that religions of the world conceive of the travel of the soul after death in certain directions, towards whatever be its destination. Though the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita and the Brahma Sutras do not go into minute details in their cut-and-dried process of this ascent and descent, the Puranas go in a different direction altogether using picturesque details, making the whole story dramatic and interesting, and often frightening. The Vishnu Purana, Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana and even the Mahabharata have much to say on this subject.

All the glory of the life lead by a person vanishes like vapour at the time of passing, a thing which nobody even dreams of. This solid life, this beautiful way of living in this grand world of pleasures, possessions, relations, power and authority, all get nullified in a moment; and this is a matter to think over. Who is behind this drama? That which we hug as our dearest and nearest, these values of life for which we are even prepared to become martyrs and die, do not exist. They desert the person as purchased friends who are no friends at all. Even the sense organs desert us and will not function. Our own limbs and organs will refuse to cooperate with us. Then who are our friends at that time?

There is an illusion in the mind of every person that even if this be the case, there is enough time left for enjoying the life of this world, and let us look to this tragedy a little later on. Ignorance is so deep, so dark, so distorted and confusing that even the wisest of people will not believe that they have to quit this world tomorrow, because if this belief enters into the mind of any person, there will be no world at all to be seen.

There is a story in Buddhist tradition and also in the Mahabharata to exemplify the predicament of an ignorant person in the world. A person was walking through a forest, and he was pursued by a tiger. He ran and fell into a well. As he was falling down, he saw at the bottom a crocodile opening its mouth. In confusion, he caught hold of the root of a tree which was projecting through the wall of the well. But, unfortunately, he found there were two rats gnawing at the root so that in a few minutes the root would break and he would fall. In this predicament where he could neither cling to the root for his safety, nor could he go up because the tiger was there or go down because of the crocodile, he looked up in agony and saw that a branch of a tree with a beehive hanging on it was bent over the well, and from that beehive, honey was dripping down. He stretched out his tongue to catch that honey. Above was the tiger, below was the crocodile. Let the tiger be there, let the crocodile be there, let the root break, but honey is sweet.

This is the fate of everybody in the world. Total ignorance is the nature of human life. When the soul departs from this world, it goes totally unbefriended—no father, no mother, no husband, no wife, no relation, no money, no property. Is it a happy thing to hear all this? The Puranas go into picturesque description, as I

told you. We do not find it in the Brahma Sutras. Though a hint is given, there is not much detail.

The ruler of the realm of death—Yama, as we call him in Indian tradition—sends his messengers, and the departed soul is taken to the court of judgement. There he is queried, “What did you do when you were living in the world?”

The confusion and the shock of death prevents the soul from remembering anything. It pleads, “I do not remember anything.” The Puranas say that then the rod of justice, which burns like a heated flame, is applied to the head, and then this departed spirit begins to remember everything that it did in this world. Flabbergasted, unable to say anything, it pleads guilty. “I have done so many bad things. But I have relatives who are still in the world. They will pray for me. They will perform some sacrifices. They will do charity in my name. They will feed the poor. They will give gifts. These acts of my relatives who are still there must be able to expiate some of my sins, so I request that time be given to me to complete this process.” The Puranas say that then the Lord orders, “Go back and let us see what your relatives are doing for you.”

The Puranas say it will actually take one year for all this process to be undergone. With dim eyes, with groaning throat, with sorrow, with agony indescribable, the soul hovers around that place where its body was and where its relations are. The relations do charitable deeds, they mourn, they do good deeds, they give charity of cows, clothing, food and all sorts of things, and recite mantras for the purification of the departed soul. If this happens, so much is the good for this soul. This is the reason why one year’s ceremony is observed when anyone in the house departs. The relatives of the departed soul observe the mourning ceremony for

several days, and a monthly worship, charity, feeding, etc., are done. Then there is a final observance after one year. That is the final expiation, and the soul is taken back to the court of justice.

Then the good and the bad of the soul are weighed on the balance as to which is heavier, which is lighter. The stronger one will be taken into consideration first, the weaker one afterwards. The very good deeds that the person may have done may also be coupled with milder bad deeds, or there may be intensely bad deeds and milder good deeds. Whichever is the heavier will be taken into consideration first, and in that direction the soul will be taken. Suffering will be the fate of the soul if the bad actions are heavier, and the reactions and the fruits of good actions also remaining there will bear fruit later on. But if the good deeds are heavier, the pleasant rewards will be given first and the punishments will follow afterwards. This is, briefly, the methodology described in the Puranas.

But if a person has been very virtuous, very righteous, stuck to the principle of cosmic justice, and did charitable deeds, that person goes to the lunar regions of the light. I am repeating what I told you last time. But greater still are those people who continuously worship, adore and meditate upon the Supreme Creator of the universe. Rare are those people who can contemplate the creative force of the whole universe—God Almighty, as we designate this Ultimate Being in the language of all the religions of the world. Such people go to Brahmaloaka. I have already described the process.

But more blessed are those who need not go anywhere. They are what we may call the salt of the Earth, and the Yoga Vasishtha says they can be counted in number. It is mentioned there may be some half a

dozen people who are fit for that kind of salvation. What kind of salvation is it? There is no travelling of any distance; no movement is necessary because the soul assumes its original universal status and beholds itself everywhere, in all things, at one stroke. Space and time, which are necessary for the purpose of travelling any distance, enter into the consciousness. The Sun and the Moon, who are supposed to be the destination of the departed soul, enter into this consciousness. The entire creation melts down into the composite structure of the soul, the consciousness of the spirit. Such an experience of immediate salvation, without waiting for tomorrow or even for a few minutes, is the reward of mighty spiritual adepts who see nothing outside themselves.

A passage of the Chhandogya Upanishad called Bhuma Vidya—knowledge of the Infinite—describes what this experience is of such people who have, even while living in this body, touched the borderland of the Infinite. *Yatra nānyat paśyati nānyac chr̥ṇoti nānyad vijānāti sa bhūmā* (Chhand. Up. 7.24.1): In that infinitude of comprehensiveness of experience, the eyes need not see anything, because anything that is to be seen is the Seer itself. There is nothing to be heard, because what is expected to be heard is a part of the Seer's existence. There is nothing to be understood, analysed or logically deduced, because such things also melt down into the structure of the consciousness. The whole universal objectivity merges into universal subjectivity. Unthinkable! We think of externality, internality and so on, the object and the subject side, but they coalesce into an amalgam of experience, and nothing is there to be seen, heard or understood. There is nothing to be done through the sense organs. At that time, to know anything, eyes are not necessary, ears are not necessary, no organ is necessary. Legless, that spirit

walks; earless, it hears; eyeless, it sees; tongueless, it speaks. This is echoed in one the great verses of the Bhagavadgita—*sarvataḥ pāṇipādam tat sarvatokṣīsiromukham, sarvataḥ śrutimal loke sarvam āvr̥tya tiṣṭhati* (Gita 13.13): Everywhere you find the feet of this Great Being; everywhere eyes, everywhere ears, everywhere hands, everywhere mouth. It can think through the legs, walk through the head, eat through the ears, and grasp through the legs. Anything is possible through any means because there are no limbs at that time. It is just Being operating through Being, in Being, for the sake of Being. Words fail here. Nobody can describe what it is. Wonderful is the way of the *sadyomukta*, the one who is fit for immediate salvation!

In the Chhandogya Upanishad it is said that six great learned people decided in a conference among themselves, “Let us know this great Atman, this Universal Being, by knowing which we have immediate liberation.” They went on discussing, and could not come to any conclusion. The king of that country, called Ashvapati Kaikaya, was reputed to be a master of this great knowledge of the identity of the subject with the universal object. They approached this king and requested him, “We have come as your humble disciples. Teach us what you know.” The king queried, “What do you already know? Are you doing any meditation?”

Each one had something to say. “I meditate on the sun as my all-pervading deity.” “I meditate on the earth.” “I meditate on the water principle.” “I meditate on fire, on sky, on space, on time.” All sorts of answers were given by them.

The king said, “All these techniques of your meditation have two defects. Though because of these meditations you are well off in the world, you have

plenty of everything, you are highly placed comfortably, there are two defects. Firstly, you are seeing your object of meditation as located somewhere—the earth is below, is above, water is somewhere, air is somewhere, etc. Your divinity is not everywhere; it is in one place only. Also, your divinity is outside you. Whether it is earth, water, fire, sun, moon, stars, whatever it is, they are all external to you. That which is really outside you cannot be any use to you because there cannot be a connection between yourself and that which is external to you. These are the defects of your meditations.”

“Then what is the true object of meditation?” they asked.

“It is the commingling of the meditating consciousness and the characteristic of the object of meditation as if it is a sea of experience,” replied the king.

Salila eko draṣṭādvaito bhavati, eṣa brahma-lokaḥ, samrāḍ iti. hainam anuśāśā yājñavalkyaḥ (Brihad. Up. 4.3.32): Yajnavalkya Maharaj says we enter into a sea of experience, an ocean of consciousness. It is Brahmaloaka and above it, and it beholds itself. *Brahma vā idam agra āsīt* (Brihad. Up. 1.4.10): The Absolute alone was, is, and will be. *Tad ātmānam evāvet*: What does the Absolute know? It knows only itself. *Tasmāt tat sarvam abhavat*: Because it knew only itself, it became the whole universe by itself. Its very existence is the universe. Its being is action. *Ya evaṁ veda*: Whoever knows this kind of meditation will be as powerful and as blessed as the Absolute itself, says the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. Such a person who is able to think like this is confident of his own or her own presence as the spirit in everything that one can imagine, and such a person eats the whole world. If that person eats anything, the whole world eats through the mouth of every individual,

through every bird and animal, through every leaf and every tree. Unthinkable is this experience. If they eat one leaf, the whole world will be satisfied.

We know the story of Bhagavan Sri Krishna suddenly appearing one day to the Pandavas in the forest. When the retinue of Durvasa Maharishi consisting of thousands of devotees were nearby at lunchtime, Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandavas, said, "You are all welcome, great people. Today you shall have lunch." The Pandavas had no food and were sleeping in a hut in the jungle. There was a pot which they had received from the Sun god with the condition that if food is cooked in that vessel, it will remain inexhaustible until Draupati eats it. When Draupati eats, the vessel becomes empty, and there is no food for the rest of the day. Yudhishtira had confidence that there was inexhaustible food in the pot that the thousands of disciples of Sage Durvasa could eat. "We are welcoming you all," said Yudhishtira.

The sage said, "We shall go to the river, take a bath, and then come."

Meanwhile, Draupadi heard this conversation and knew that the vessel had already been emptied. That whole day there would be no food. She cried and told Yudhishtira, "What a blunder you have committed! The sage is a very angry person. You have invited him for lunch, but there is not a grain of food here. If he gets angry, as is usual, he will burn us completely to ashes." She was weeping at their fate. She prayed to Bhagavan Sri Krishna. Krishna was not there. He was in Dvarka, but her agony was such that it drew Sri Krishna to that place. Suddenly he appeared, knocked at the door, and immediately demanded food. He said, "I have come from a long distance. I am hungry. I have no time to speak to you. Give food first."

The lady said, "I have no food, my dear Lord. I have eaten, and therefore the vessel is empty. I have already washed it."

"No, there must be something left. Bring the vessel," Lord Krishna said.

It so happened that Draupadi had not washed the vessel properly. A little leaf of vegetable was sticking to it. Krishna took that leaf and said, "This is sufficient to fulfil the appetite of all the people in the whole world." Saying that, he ate that leaf, and it filled the stomachs of all the disciples of that sage who were bathing. Their stomachs started bloating with surfeit. They all thought, "Now if we go back to Yudhishtira, it will be a shame to us. We cannot eat anything. Already our stomachs are bloated." They ran away from there, and never came for lunch.

Nobody knew what had happened. Then Yudhishtira said, "Why are they not coming? What is the matter? They must be angry with us. You go." Bhima went to call them to come, but when they saw Bhima they ran further away because they thought he would curse them. They ran away and never showed their faces there again. Wonderful!

I will tell you another story—of Suka Maharishi, the son of Veda Vyasa. Yudhishtira wanted to perform a sacrifice after he was blessed with being coronated as king. Thousands and thousands of people were being fed. He was eager to know how many people were eating. He asked the great sage Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa, "Maharaj, please arrange some contrivance by which I can know how many thousands are eating."

Vyasa said, "Okay, I will tell you." He hung a bell which was charged with a mantra, and said, "When one thousand people eat, it will ring once." So whenever there was a dong sound, Yudhishtira knew that one

thousand had eaten, and another dong meant two thousand had eaten, and the third dong meant three thousand. He was very happy.

The feeding went on for hours; and when evening fell, all the people departed. Then the bell started ringing continuously. It rang faster than it did earlier. "What is this? When everybody has left and nobody is eating, it is ringing like this. Is there something wrong with the bell?" Yudhishtira went to the great master Vyasa. "Great sage, how is this that the bell is ringing continuously, as if millions are eating? There is nobody here. All have left. Is there something wrong with the bell?"

Vyasa said, "No, there cannot be anything wrong with the bell. My apparatus is perfect. There is some mystery behind it. It means there is something happening which is unthinkable."

They went to find out whether someone was eating, but they found nobody. The young boy, Suka Maharishi, who was perpetually united with the Supreme Absolute in his consciousness, was found picking up grains of rice from the leaves that were thrown after the people were fed and had left, and at each grain that he put in his mouth, the bell started ringing. That is, one grain entering the mouth of this great being was like thousands eating at the same time. Yudhishtira saw this phenomenon. He was surprised to see this little boy, at whose eating of a grain the bell started ringing. He went to Veda Vyasa. "There is some boy there, some mystery, who eats grains and then the bell starts ringing."

"Oh, this is my son," Vyasa said. "He is the Universal Being himself, and if a grain enters the universe, the whole thing is satisfied. That is why the bell is ringing. It is to tell you that your sacrifice is nothing. Your feeding

of thousands is nothing before the grain that this one boy eats.”

Such are the *jivanmuktas*, as they are called. These *sadyomuktas*, people who have attained immediate salvation in their spirit, hang on to this body for a short time as long as their *prarabdha* karma continues. There are three kinds of karma, action, called *sanchita* karma, *prarabdha* karma and *agami* karma. We have taken many births, passed through several incarnations, and in every birth, action is performed, and every action performed produces a reaction. The fruit, or the nemesis of this action, is stored up in the unconscious lowest level of the psyche of the individual, and this becomes larger and larger in its quantum due to continued addition of karmas as one passes through various incarnations. This large quantity of the potencies of all the actions performed through many lives cannot manifest at one stroke because any particular body manufactured for the purpose of the experience of these karmas cannot stand the weight and strength of all the karmas manifesting at the same time. So only some portion is allotted as can be experienced through a particular individuality or body. That allotted portion of the karma from the large storehouse in the unconscious is called *prarabdha* karma.

This body that we have assumed here is nothing but a hardened form of the *prarabdha* karma. A subtle potency gets concretised into a hard stuff, as it were, which is this body, which we consider as our own, and it drops at the time of death when that particular quantum allotted for experience is exhausted. So death is nothing but the exhaustion of that particular portion of karma that has become responsible for the manifestation of this body.

There is a third kind of karma, called *agami*. In spite of the *prarabdha* working and it becoming incumbent on the part of the person to enjoy the reaction of all the actions performed in earlier lives and allotted for experience in this life, further actions are done. For example, we are sitting here, and we have some karma to be experienced through this body. Our joys and sorrows, and everything that we pass through in this life, is only an expression of the *prarabdha* karma which uses this body as an instrument of action. But we are doing further action and add to our own bondage. This kind of further action that we commit to our woe is called *agami* karma.

In the case of the *jivanmukta*, the liberated spirit, his wisdom of the Absolute burns up all the potencies of actions stored up in the unconscious level, and because of the knowledge arisen already, he does not commit further deeds. The *agami* karma does not apply to him, and the store of *sanchita* karma is also burned up. Only the *prarabdha* continues. When this *prarabdha* is exhausted, he becomes liberated absolutely. So the *jivanmukta* becomes a *videhamukta*; embodied salvation leads to disembodied salvation. Then one becomes everything, all things, everywhere.

There are some interesting questions raised in the Brahma Sutras as to whether liberated spirits can manifest themselves once again or they can never be seen again. In a very difficult and ununderstandable manner, the Brahma Sutras tell us that it is possible. Examples are Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa, etc. They are called *adhikarika purushas*, commissioned authorities coming from God Almighty. They are stationed in this world for the benefit and welfare of all created beings. Their status is something like that of the *jivanmukta*. How a person who has attained the *videhamukta* state

can once again become a *jivanmukta* is difficult for any human being to explain. The Yoga Vasishtha is also of this opinion. The *jivanmukta*, when he becomes *videhamukta*, liberated ultimately, can even shine as the sun, blow as the wind and flow as the water, and he can become anything. We, whose understanding is limited to logical understanding and emotional thinking, cannot understand how it is possible that an Absolute Being manifests itself in any form it likes—as the sun, the moon and the stars, or even as great masters, as incarnations and commissioned authorities such as Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa. This is an incidental question that is raised in the Brahma Sutras; it is not an essential part of the doctrine of salvation. Thus, we have gone through this detail of the ascent through Brahmaloaka and further on, and this last and most wonderful possibility of attaining *videhamukti* here.

Yo'kāmo niṣkāma āpta-kāma ātmā-kāmaḥ, na tasya prāṇā utkrānti, brahmaiva san brahmāpyeti (Brihad. Up. 4.4.6). What is the fate of the soul that is bound by ignorance and commits wrong actions? As has been explained already, it will take rebirth. It has to pay for what it has done. But what about those souls which have no desires? *Athākāmayamānaḥ* (Brihad. Up. 4.4.6): What happens to the person who does not desire? *Yo'kāmaḥ*: In whom all the desires have fled completely. *Āpta-kāmaḥ*: He who has fulfilled all the desires at one stroke. *Ātmā-kāmaḥ*: Who lives as nothing but his own Universal Self. *Na tasya prāṇā utkrānti*: In the case of that person, the *pranas* do not depart. There is no exit passage, because there is no space at that time. They melt down here itself, as a drop in the ocean becomes the ocean. *Brahmaiva san brahmāpyeti*: Everyone has been the Absolute itself. By some ignorance or entanglement it looked like a *jiva* or an individual, an

embodied person, but now it has become the Absolute once again.

In the case of those who are not eligible for this kind of ultimate salvation but are eligible for the blessedness of high heaven in Brahmaloaka, they are subject to the law of God. There is a difference between the liberated soul of this type and the Almighty by Himself. *Jagadvyāpāvarjam* (4.4.17) is a word which occurs in the Brahma Sutras. The liberated soul who proceeds to the highest regions of bliss and blessedness through space and time, through the Northern Path described already, has all the glorious experience of God Himself; but that being who is liberated in that way cannot create the world, cannot destroy the world, cannot do anything to the world because there, in spite of his universality of experience as far as enjoyment and bliss is concerned, he is not identical with the Absolute. This is an intriguing statement that is made in the Brahma Sutras—again, ununderstandable to ordinary minds. Why is a person who is liberated in Brahmaloaka still subject to God Almighty's power?

Interpreters, commentators on the Brahma Sutras tell us this is exactly the doctrine of Acharya Ramanuja and the Vaishnava theologians, who do not expect the soul to merge as water in water in the ultimate salvation. They remain *with* God, but they do not remain *in* God. That distinction is made by the Vaishnava theologians especially, and Ramanuja particularly. Great scholars in the West, such as George Thibault who translated the commentary of Sankaracharya into beautiful English, is of the opinion that the greatest thought ever available to us in the world is in the commentary on the Brahma Sutras by Sankara, but that it does not agree with the original texts. The original texts seem to be a little lenient towards Ramanuja. And

even today this question has not been answered by anybody: Why should the soul have some limitation even after attaining liberation?

The Brahma Sutras are highly elevating and enthusing, and certain things are highly intriguing, as also we have such intriguing verses in the Bhagavadgita where *prakriti* and *purusha* are mentioned as existing in spite of the insistence on the Supreme Existence of God Almighty. There are three *purushas*, says the Bhagavadgita: the supreme *purusha*, called Purushottama, *akshara* and *kshara*. These are all difficult statements where we are expected to reconcile the existence of *purusha* and *prakriti* simultaneously with the Supreme Absolute. There are many such passages in the Bhagavadgita which appear to be contradictory, and yet they are required to be reconciled in a higher purpose.

So the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras and the Bhagavadgita are all for the salvation of the soul in the ultimate sense—*videhamukti*, or merging in the Absolute.

Chapter 5

KNOWING THINGS AS THEY ARE

Regarding the attainment of final liberation, the Brahma Sutras raise certain questions as to the means to be adopted for this attainment. What is the attainment? It is obvious that the search of the soul is for union with what is omnipresent. The soul is not seeking for unity with another finite being, whatever be the largeness of that finitude. Anything that is limited by space, time and causation ceases to be an eternal being; and that which is eternal should surpass the limitations of the time process and exceed the limitations of space, and cannot be bound by causal processes.

How would anyone reach that which is omnipresent? That is to say, it is an attempt to reach that which is everywhere. The question of reaching implies distance between the one who wishes to reach the destination and the destination itself. The great commentator on the Brahma Sutras is very eloquent on this subject, pointing out that there cannot be any kind of movement towards that which is everywhere. Yet, it is necessary for the soul to attain that which is everywhere.

The question finally hinges upon the necessity to attain it at all. The need felt for the attainment of what is omnipresent arises in some location which cannot be called omnipresent. The omnipresent itself does not search for the omnipresent. There seems to be a localised somewhereness of what we consider as the individuality, the *jivatva* of a person, which tries to overcome the limitations of individuality for the purpose of entering into the bosom of the omnipresent. Obviously, this would imply the negation of every

characteristic which distinguishes the individual from the omnipresent. This art of self-transcendence in a perfectionist manner carried to the point of logical conclusion would demand from the seeking spirit a qualification which is not easy to understand. This way of reasoning, this way of thinking, this conclusion that the omnipresent cannot be reached without the abolition of individuality, and simultaneously the feeling that it is practically impossible to annihilate individuality, bringing about a contradiction between the two issues, makes *jnana marga* a very difficult process. This is the way of knowledge calling for acute understanding, a sharp mind, and a will that is prepared to surrender everything that it considers as its belonging.

The dearest belonging of any individual is individuality itself. Our greatest love is to exist as we are today as persons. Our love is not for land and property, relations, money, authority, power, though they appear to be our longings. The final longing is to exist as a person, as an individual, as me, this particular identity that I am. If we are not prepared to allow the existence of even this much, and we need to sacrifice it for the sake of immolation in the Supreme Absolute, we generally will not be prepared for this arduous sacrifice. This is a hard path, says the Bhagavadgita. Body-consciousness prevents even the attempt to think in this matter. The love of one's own body is more potent and insistent than the love of anything else. If we want that to be sacrificed, we may be asking for the impossible. But the impossible has to become the possible if the path of knowledge is to become a practicability. The omnipresent cannot be reached by that which is localised. No human being can reach God; it will mean that, if this condition is not fulfilled.

Since the condition imposed is very hard, and the price is too high, the dear 'me' cannot be so easily sacrificed. This 'me' has to go. If 'me' goes, then what remains? There is a shock inwardly felt by even the question that the 'me' has to go. "You want me to go? Then, what happens to me?" Nobody can answer this question. "All my endeavour is engulfed in an unimaginable, unthinkable ideal which you consider as my goal. How will it be my goal when I myself will not be there?" These are the doubts that arise in the mind of even intelligent persons. Professors of philosophy and metaphysicians will have this very doubt: "If I myself will vanish in order to attain the Absolute, then who is it that is going to attain the Absolute?" Human nature is so inveterate in its insistence on clinging to this personality that any argument will not brook interference.

Acharya Sankara's commentary on this issue is profound and exhibits the highest acumen of logical intelligence. We will shiver even to read these commentaries. Only the omnipresent can reach the omnipresent. Only God can know God. Only the Absolute can reach the Absolute—not me, not you, not this, not that, not anybody. Does anybody understand what this means? It cannot be understood because the mind is impure; it has not been purified properly. Unpurified minds should not try this method of practice. It may blow the top off, if we insist on this kind of thinking too much. But this will not happen, and we will really achieve the goal, if the one who is attempting this kind of practice of meditation on the Absolute is hard like a diamond in the art of thinking and has an adamant will determined to achieve it, and has no desire of any kind other than this longing for the Supreme Being.

What is the meaning of purification that is necessary for the purpose of cracking this hard nut of the way of knowledge? It is sense control. What is the meaning of sense control? It is the withdrawal of the ramified channelising of energies of one's own system and centring them in one's own self. The outwardness of consciousness has to be inwardness of self-sufficiency, tending towards universal experience.

What are we conscious of day in and day out? Everything that is not ourselves. Does anyone think of one's own self? There is no time to think that because we are too busy. We have to run to the office. Where is time for us to think of ourselves? We have heavy work. We have pending files. We have a family. We have problems of many kinds. Externally motivated movement of consciousness through the sense organs prevents even the attempt to know that one exists at all. We have no time to know that we are existing. We are existing in something else—in a railway train, in a bus, in a car, in a shop, in a market—but we are not existing in our own selves. This 'me' does not exist; it is gone because there is no time to think of it. We get wedded to the outer world of activity to such an extent that we are conscious only of what is outside us day in and day out throughout, and do not know that we are also here.

People who are engaged in social welfare activities, who always say that they serve people, forget that they are also a part of the people whom they have to serve. The subject which serves the object cannot stand outside the object. There is a correlativity of action between the seer and the seen, the doer and the deed, and the target. This unfortunate situation in which every individual finds oneself is the pressure to sell oneself to the object and cease to be a subject. They think of the world always, and do not think anything

else. They think of the market, think of the office, think of everything, but do not think of themselves. This is the opposite of sense restraint. In sense restraint, we are conscious of ourselves as much as we are conscious of the world outside. There cannot be objective performance unless the subject is already there. The sense organ rushes with a great speed in the direction of its respective object with the wrong notion that the satisfaction that it seeks is outside it. We think that what we want is outside us, that it is not near us, much less inside us. We forget the fact that it is futile to pursue anything which is outside us. We have already dubbed that object as not connected with us, as it is totally outside. How will we get that which is outside, because the outsideness of the object will preclude the very possibility of possessing it? There is a self-contradiction in the expression of any kind of desire for objects. The objects cannot become subjects, which is to say, we cannot possess them. The possession of an object implies the necessity to convert the object into a subject, which is not possible.

Therefore, all sense activity is a mistake of individual effort. We have to employ the power of discrimination, *viveka shakti*, as they call it, in order to know what is actually happening to us in our daily life. One should not get drowned completely in a mess of confusion. There must be time enough to think clearly, cogently, logically, and systematically. Energy of the system should not be depleted by any means. This is called *brahmacharya* in ordinary language. It has nothing to do with having or not having a family life. We can be a *sannyasin* in the midst of a huge city or we can be a householder in a forest. It depends upon what we are thinking in our mind. In the midst of New York and London we can be a *sannyasin*, but in the Himalayas we

can be a householder, because it is the way of thinking that makes us what we are. So we should never imagine that not having a family is *brahmacharya*. It does not mean that, because the family is also a kind of object. If the object cannot be possessed for the reason mentioned already, the family also cannot be possessed. To call anybody our family is foolishness. They are not ours. They exist as we are existing, independent by themselves. We may have an obligation, but we cannot possess anything. Even a wife cannot be possessed by the husband, and vice versa. Nobody can be possessed by somebody else, because the object cannot become a subject. Hence, we may be living in the midst of a thousand of people and yet we may be free from any kind of attachment, or we may be alone in the wilderness of a forest but brooding over sense objects.

Space, time and circumstance may, of course, contribute largely to the way of self-restraint, but they are themselves not all. *Samma samadhi sampat* are the technical words used in the Vedanta system. *Viveka*, *vairagya*, *shad-sampat* and *mumukshutva* are the preliminary qualifications prescribed. *Viveka* is the capacity to discriminate between what is real and what is unreal, *vairagya* is dispassion towards that which is unreal, *samma samadhi sampat* means emotional restraint, and *mumukshutva* is ardent longing for union with God. Many feel that *mumukshutva* is the most important of qualifications. Whatever be the situation in which you are, it does not matter. Your longing is the qualification required of you. When you ask for it from the bottom of your heart, from the deepest recesses of your soul, you will have it. But any amount of intellectuality, logical argument, without feeling for it, will not cut ice.

These are some of the qualifications prescribed, and if emotional turbulence is made to subside to the extent necessary, and the understanding is sharp enough, and one is clear as to what the goal is that one is seeking, the mind gets purified automatically. This is something about the *jnana marga*, the way of knowledge, which is the method of cutting short *samsara* at one stroke. It is an immediate destruction of individuality, leading to immediate salvation—a thing that does not come tomorrow and is not somewhere else. It comes here and just now. The nature of this attainment is here and now, not somewhere else and tomorrow. But, as mentioned, it is a hard job because of the natural incapacity of the mind to adjust itself to this ordeal, which is hard enough. It is like entering into flames, which is not an easy affair.

The Brahma Sutra does not preclude the adopting of some other means to salvation which may be lesser in intensity and potency and may take more time for fructification or maturity. There is certain well-known jargon used in this connection, such as the way of the bird and the way of the ant, etc. Both the ant and the bird reach their destination. *Jnana marga* is like a flying bird; it directly reaches the place where it wants to go. The ant has to wriggle here and there on the ground, though it will also reach the same place the bird reached. They are called *suka marga* and *pipilika marga*. *Suka marga* is the path of the bird—immediate flight; and *pipilika* is the ant. Its way is slow, a gradual adaptation of oneself to the needs of slow, slow, slow concentration of mind to the personality of this Absolute.

There is certainly a repulsion created between the needs of an individual and the needs of the omnipresent Absolute. Therefore, that *suka marga*, that path of the

bird, is hard for ordinary people. The concept of Ishvara, or the personal God, is also one of the prescriptions in the Brahma Sutras. In the Veda there is a hymn called the Purusha Sukta, which describes the Absolute as a cosmic person. It is somewhat pleasant to conceive such an ideal because the person that we are would like to contact a person rather than a nonperson. We feel satisfied when we meet a person. We cannot easily be happy when we meet a thing which is not a person. So the prescription of the devotional path is also entertained even in this strict doctrine of the Brahma Sutra way of salvation. While the Absolute, the omnipresent Being, includes the whole of creation, creation does not exist outside it. The lesser concept, which is prescribed for the purpose of easier meditation, conceives of the Absolute as the Creator of the universe, holding that one may meditate on that which is seen with the eyes as the body of God. The Cosmic Person has the Cosmic Body, which is this universe, and we are all included within it.

The Brahma Sutra is very gracious in its prescriptions. In the case of third-rate individuals, it goes down even further by prescribing symbols for the purpose of meditation. We can meditate on a diagram of the creative process. The creative process of the twenty-five principles adopted by the Vedanta, and even according to the Sankhya, may also be directly taken as objects of concentration. We can go on thinking, "Here is the Supreme Purusha, here is the *avyakta*, here is the *mahat*, here is the *ahamkara*, this is space and time, here are *tanmatras*, here are the five elements which split themselves into the individuals and create all this problem of human existence." This is the philosophy of *yantra*, for instance, in the Agama Shastra. A diagram can represent our beloved object of meditation. *Pratika*

upasana is the name given to it. An emblem of the Absolute can be considered enough for concentration of the mind. Knowledge arises gradually.

In the earliest of stages, the very desire to know is called the first step in knowledge. *Subhecha* is the name given to it. If we wish to be good, we have already started moving along the right path. Though we have not actually moved, even the desire to move is good enough. It is a virtue. "I shall be a good person." Even if we decide in this way, we have become a good person from that moment. Ostensibly in the performance of our daily duties the goodness may not be easily visible, but our heart decides, "I should be good."

Subecha is the desire to be good. The longing to know is the first stage. The next stage is called *vicharana*, the deliberation on this subject. "How will I be good? What is the way of knowing the secret of things? Who shall I ask? Where shall I go? Who is to be the guide?" This kind of enquiry within oneself is the second stage.

The third stage is the attenuation of the thinking process, called *tanumanasi*. Now the mind is fattened with ego and stout with attachment to sense objects, but these processes of inwardised analysis, called *vicharana*, thin the mind in the sense that the gross *tamas* and *rajas* gradually get eliminated, and there is a sign of the transparency of *sattva guna* manifesting itself. It is in this stage that the light beams forth through the mind from within. Flashes of light will be the experience of the subsequent stage, which is known as *sattvapatti*, the acquisition of the joy of luminosity arising from the *sattvic* nature of one's own mind. In our case, mostly *rajas* and *tamas* cloud the mind, and there is no illumination from inside. By investigative process,

deep analysis, self-enquiry, the *tamas* and *rajas* are eliminated. Light flashes forth—*sattvapatti*.

Then the desire to be in the midst of objects ceases. This is called *asamsakti*. We are satisfied with our own self. We do not want to go and shake hands with some friend, and so on. We ourselves are the friend of ourselves. We feel satisfied with whatever we have and whatever we are. It is an unsatisfied individual that runs about like a dog in all directions seeking for its grub. The satisfied mind does not want any grub. Then people start speaking less. Sometimes they do not speak at all unless they are actually accosted and questioned. This is the sign of detachment from anything that is external—*asamsakti*.

The higher stage is called *padartha-bhavana*, which means to say, the recognition of the non-materiality of things. Matter does not finally exist. Matter is an externalised form of condensed light itself, as our modern science will tell us. Light externalised and condensed looks like a material object. The materiality is shed by the material objects, and radiance will be seen peeping through every corner of creation. We will see the eyes of perception everywhere. We will begin to note that the leaves are looking at us, the walls are hearing what we are speaking, the space and the time, the atmosphere around, reverberate with the sound of echo and response to whatever we are thinking in our mind. The world begins to say, "I am here with you." Usually the world does not respond in that manner. The world does not seem to care a hoot for us. But now the world will open up its treasures and say, "I am with you for all times." This is the recognition and experience of the non-materiality of things, experiencing light everywhere.

Then this non-materiality is recognised even in one's own body and personality. Of course, this is a very advanced stage indeed, where oneself also seems to be taking part in this large oceanic illumination of non-material light. Light experiences light. The subjectivity that is associated with one's own self is seen in every other thing also which usually went as an object. Philosophers oftentimes speak of what they call the kingdom of ends. The whole universe is a big empire where only ends are there, and means are not available anywhere. To consider anything as a means to some other end would be to subject the means to a subordinate situation and have the end as superior. Since the world does not contain subordinate things and each element has its own role to play in the perfection of the universe, the world stands as an empire of ends and not servants, means, etc. Selfhood beams forth in all those things which appeared as objects outside. This is the penultimate stage of liberation. It is one step before we invade the Absolute and enter into the sea of experience.

Then there is *mukti*, actual freedom—freedom from the very consciousness of objectivity, freedom from the necessity even to be aware that there is something external causing bondage. There is no one to impose a penalty upon us, or to restrict us in any manner. We are *svarat*—*svarat bhavati*. We become the Self-emperor. *Atma-rati*, *atma-krida* are the words used in the Upanishads about a person in this condition. One's self is pleased with one's own Self. One's self is satisfied with one's own Self. One's self loves one's own Self. One's self enjoys one's own Self. One's self enters into one's own Self, the Self being the Universal Self. *Ātmanas tu kāmāya brahma priyam bhavati* (Brihad. Up. 2.4.5). *Idam sarvam, yad ayam ātmā* (Brihad. Up. 2.4.6),

says the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. All this is the Self. This is the end of knowledge.

Pratika upasana was referred to, that is, concentration on a symbol of the ideal. Do we not keep a photograph of a person whom we love very much? We keep that photo in our pocket. It reminds us of that which we love. A *pratika*, or a symbol, can be anything. It can be even a *japa mala*. People generally keep a *japa mala* in their pocket, or a small edition of a scripture such as the Bhagavadgita. Keep it in your pocket always. It will remind you of what it is by itself. You can keep a symbol like a *yantra* or a mantra written on a plate. People call it a talisman. Anything is good enough to make the mind think of that which is above itself. Meditation is actually the art of concentrating on that which is beyond us. In meditation we do not think only that which is like us. It is not one thing thinking another thing; it is one thing thinking that which is above that thing. There is an element of transcendence in every kind of meditation. If we concentrate our mind on that which is more than what we are, then there is longing. We love that which is more than what we are. We cannot love that which is just like us. The finite cannot love the finite. Even when the thing that we love is a finite object, we impose upon it a non-finite characteristic, and then it looks like a divinity before us. The God that is above us is symbolised in the emblem that we are worshipping in the idol, in a *murti*, in a *yantra*, in a mantra, in a diagram, in a *mandala*, whatever we call it.

The Brahma Sutra is a very wide range of prescriptions for reaching the *summum bonum* of life in any manner whatsoever. By any manner we have to reach it, under any circumstance, with any effort. There is no other way.

A question arose oftentimes, whether what we do as activity or karma can be considered as a means to *moksha*. The Brahma Sutra has two answers to this question. Firstly, no action can lead to the Universal Being. It is in the Bhagavadgita that we hear of a message of this kind. *Na veda yajñādhyayanair na dānaiḥ na ca kriyābhir na tapobhir ugraiḥ evamrūpaḥ śakya ahaṁ nṛloke* (Gita 11.48): Not *yajna*, not study, not scripture, not *tapasya*, not charity, not anything that you do can be regarded as a means enough to enable you to pursue this Universal Being. *Nāhaṁ vedair na tapasā na dānena na cejyayā śakya evamvidho draṣṭum drṣṭavān asi mām yathā* (Gita 11.53): Nothing that you do can enable you to touch that boundaryless Absolute because anything you consider as your action or performance is what is happening outside you. The action, the performance, the work that you do is not going on inside you. You are not working inside your body; it is outside. Therefore, it ceases to be a part of the Self. The self can become fit enough to realise the Universal Self only when it has started developing within itself the characteristics of universality even in a small percentage.

There is a contradiction between external activity and universal experience. But there is a concession given to activity. Karma can purify the mind. This is the insistence of the Bhagavadgita. Do work. No one can sit quiet without doing something or the other. *Na hi kaścit kṣaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhaty akarmakṛt* (Gita 3.5). There are actions which bind, and there are actions which do not bind. There are actions that lead to the purification of the mind. There are actions which are the consequence of a liberated experience. God acts, and human beings also act, but they are two different kinds of action. There is a freedom in the activity of a liberated spirit;

there is bondage in the activity of an individual. The limited person is obliged, compelled to do work, whereas the free person is spontaneous in the performance of work. The overflow of the perfection of an individual may look like a performance of work, like the emanation of light from the Sun, but if action is a drudgery like a servant working for the master, that may be considered as binding. So there is liberating action, and also binding action. Any action that is universalised, or has even a tendency to get universalised, is liberating in its nature. Any action that is tending towards one's own selfish individuality and personal enjoyment can be regarded as binding.

Thus, the Brahma Sutra has two things to say about karma. It is binding if it is motivated by personal, egoistic enjoyment; it is liberating if it is a self-purificatory process and a gesture of goodwill. Very lengthy discussions on this subject are available in the Sutras, where there is argument and counterargument between the Mimamsa ritualists who advocate only karma or action, and the Brahma Sutra philosophers who take action in its true spirit, as mentioned, either as permissible or as not advantageous. Everything can bind a person from one point of view, but everything can also liberate a person, from another point of view. The world can become a chain to imprison us, or it can be means to the liberation of the soul and act like a ladder to the Supreme Being.

These discussions are highly interesting, and they require a lot of impersonality of the philosophical mind to appreciate and understand them. A philosopher is an impersonal investigator. A philosopher has nothing to gain for one's own self. Philosophy is the art of knowing things as they really are in their ultimate nature, and

not as they appear. The quest for Reality is the object of philosophy.