The Supreme Being is the pinnacle of happiness. The Absolute is the climax of all joys: Nothing can be compared to that state of perfection. The glories of the world pale before Its presence. The powers that we can conceive of in our minds, even the highest forms of strength and authority, they all fall short of this ideal of the perfection of the Absolute. The various inadequate forms of perceptions, the forms of completeness and perfection that we aspire for in this world are minute reflections, fractions as it were, of the great perfection of the Absolute. Whatever happiness can be there in this world, even the highest conceivable happiness, is said to be only a jot of this ocean of bliss - bliss which is Brahman, the Absolute. This is the greatest glory, the greatest magnificence. This is the highest abode that we are aspiring for in our lives. This is the greatest achievement we can ever imagine in our minds. This is the perfection of all the worlds. This is the supreme, formost bliss. All the happiness of the world is a reflection of it, a fraction of it, a tiny part of it, a jot of it, a distorted shape which it has taken by reflection through the medium of individual minds and bodies.

The extent of the joy that we can experience in this world depends upon the instrument through which the Supreme Bliss is manifest, like the electric current which manifests itself weakly or strongly, depending on the conductivity of the medium. The brilliance of the electric bulb depends upon the extent of the wattage rating, as they call it - hundred watts or five hundred watts or one thousand watts, whatever it is. The wattage of the bulb construction will tell you the extent of the brilliance it will give by the absorption of the current which...
passes through it. Likewise, we may say, in some sort of a comparison, the bliss of
the Absolute cannot fully be experienced in this life because of inadequate,
imperfect and transient instruments which we are utilising for manifesting it or
expressing it. The bodies in which we are encaged, the minds through which we
are experiencing happiness in life, are all limited in their structure. How can an
infinite content pass through a limited vehicle? You cannot carry the whole ocean
in a tumbler or a glass or a katorie (bowl). The little tumbler can carry only a little
water. Though the ocean is so big, if you dip this bucket or tumbler in the vast
ocean of the Pacific or the Atlantic itself, you cannot lift much water. What is the
capacity of the tumbler? The capacity is so little. What is the use of dipping it in
the ocean? It is of no purpose. Likewise, how can the mind which is finite, which
is located within the body, which can think only in terms of specific objects, and
whose structure therefore is restricted to the operations of its own aspiration,
desires etc. in terms of the body and its relationships - how can such a finite mind
aspire to hold within it the infinite content of Absolute Bliss? It is impossible for
us to imagine what Absolute Bliss is. We are asking for better and better things
and larger and larger things and more and more of things, not knowing what this
more means. We can never reach the end of it because the end is infinitude. It is
only a word for us which carries no sense because the infinite cannot be imagined
by the mind. The mind which is finite can think of only that which can be
contained within it, and so even its imagination stretched beyond conceivable
limits, cannot conceive the extent of the Absolute and the intensity of its bliss and
power.

But the Upanishad, for the purpose of giving us an idea of the magnitude of
the Bliss, gives a staggering description of what this Absolute is, what that
happiness is, what that perfection is, what the depth of that bliss is in comparison
with the greatest perfection we can think of in this world. To give us a faint idea,
as it were, of the perfection of the Absolute, it goes on explaining, in a beautiful
way, the gradations of bliss. There are degrees and degrees of happiness. Are you
not more happy than an ant? Perhaps you are in a position to imagine that your
capacity of comprehension is greater, your capacity to appreciate is deeper, and
your understanding is more intense than those of the lower species of animals. A
cow, a bull, a horse - they are also happy. But an intelligent human being is
supposed to be capable of enjoying better the things of the world, compared to
the animals, beasts, the flies, and the mosquitoes because of a
comprehensiveness of understanding, a better capacity to grasp etc. Perfection is
equivalent to consciousness itself. The deeper and more expansive is the
consciousness, the greater is the perfection. It is not a question of physical
possession or the magnitude of the physical body. It does not mean that an
elephant is happier than a human being because its body is larger and it is
physically stronger. Its happiness cannot be equal to that which is experienced by
an intelligent human being who has the capacity to grasp the mysteries of things
and the intricacies of human experience.

The degrees of happiness, therefore, depend upon the degrees of the subtlety
of the manifestation of being. The subtler you are in your capacity of
comprehension, the more expansive is your being, the greater is your capacity to include within your being the beings of others. Happiness also increases correspondingly. Happiness is identical with Being, ultimately. It is a form of existence itself. So, the measure of the expanse of your being will determine the measure of the happiness that you experience. Your being is now limited to the body. You cannot include within your physical being the beings of other people, other existences. Hence, you exclude from your experience the experiences of others. To that extent, your experience is limited, and to the same extent, your happiness also is limited. But if your being expands, comprehends within itself other beings and becomes subtler in its capacity, it becomes more powerful, greater in knowledge and intenser in the experience of happiness. Gradations of happiness are explained in this passage here in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad. (A similar description also occurs in the Taittiriya Upanishad, with a slight modification.)

33. sa yo manusyanam raddhah samrddho bhavati, anyesam adhipatih, sarvair manusyakair bhogaih sampannatamah, sa manusyanam parama anandah; atha ye satam manusyanam anandah, sa ekah pitram jitalokanam anandah; atha ye satam pitnram jita-lokanam anandah, sa eko gandharva-loka anandah; atha ye satam gandharva-loka anandah, sa eka karma-devanam anandah, ye karmana devatvam abhisampadyante; atha ye satam karma-devanam anandah, sa eka ajana-devanam anandah, ya ca strotiyo’vrjino’ kama-hatah; atha ye satam ajana-devanam anandah, sa eka prajapati-loka anandah yas ca srotiyo vrjino’ kama-hatah; atha ye satam prajapati-loka anandah, sa eka brahma-loka anandah, ya ca srotiyo vrjino’ kama-hatah; athaisa eva parama anandah, ya ca srotiyo vrjino’ kama-hatah; athaisa eva parama anandah. esa brahma-lokah samerad, iti hovaca yajnavalkyah. so ‘ham bhagavate sahasram dadami; ata urdhvam vimoksayaiva bruhiti. atra ha yajnavalkyo bibhayam cakara; medhavi raja sarvebhyo mantebhya udarautsid iti.

What is happiness? We can imagine it to some extent with our yardstick of measuring different grades of happiness. If we possess all the valuables in this world we are likely to be happier than when we do not have these valuables. One can close one’s eyes for a few seconds and imagine how immensely happy one would be if one owned all the valuables of the world. Generally, the ordinary man’s concept of happiness is possession. He wants to possess things as much as possible. So, taking that to be the standard of judgment of the ordinary human mind, the Upanishad says: let us imagine for a while that there is such a person. He is youthful and strong; he is the ruler of the whole world. We have never seen a ruler of the whole world at anytime, but we can imagine it for the time being just for the purpose of explaining the maximum possibility of available happiness in this world. Take for granted that there is a very strong, youthful and learned person, learned in all the scriptures, acquainted with every branch of learning, highly educated, highly cultured, very youthful, never falling sick, very strong, king of the whole world. Such a person naturally must be a standard of
happiness. He has nothing to grieve for and nothing is there that he lacks. He is the Emperor of the whole world. He has no enemies to fear, nothing that he lacks because everything has become his. He has no fear either from outside or from inside. He is physically well-placed, intellectually highly illumined, externally no fear exists for him and he possesses everything. Such a person’s happiness can be regarded as ‘one unit’ of happiness. It is only a theoretical conception because such a person does not exist in this world. But we can imagine that such a person exists, and even if such a person were to exist, his would be the smallest conceivable unit of happiness in our yardstick according to the Upanishad. It is the initial, kindergarten stage of the conception of happiness, one might say. This is the maximum our imagination ordinarily can comprehend, but it is only the minutest degree of happiness, according to the scale mentioned in the Upanishad.

Sa yo manusyanam raddah samrddho bhavati anyesem adhipatih sarvair manusyakair bhoga sampannatamah, sa manusyanam parama anandah:

So this is what can be regarded as the greatest happiness of a human being. But this is not the entire happiness, says the Upanishad. There are entities far greater in happiness than this person. This imagined person, this so-called king of the world who has been described in such glorious terms, who will attract our attention, naturally, and be an enviable being to all persons - such a man’s happiness is not the total happiness, it is only the lowest unit of happiness. There are people greater than this person. They are not in this world. They are in subtle realms of being. The universe is manifest in various degrees of intensity, and every degree is one world, each one being a separate plane of consciousness. Each plane is called a Loka, or a world. You do not know how many planes are there. There are infinite planes of being, and just as you have got frequencies of manifestation of electromagnetic energy, likewise there are infinite frequencies or levels of manifestation of the contents of the universe. The lowest is the grossest, which is the physical world. We are in the lowest form of existence, the grossest and the most material that can be conceived, and here it is we are imagining this kind of happiness. Higher than this is, according to this Upanishad, the happiness of beings, subtler than this happiest human being that we have thought of in our minds. They live in a more transparent world. That is described here as Pitr-Loka. The scriptures refer to a realm of being where departed souls, highly virtuous in nature, reside. Pitr means ancestor, forefather, one who has departed from this world but has done greatest virtuous deeds and now lives in a highly comfortable realm which is superior to this physical world in every respect. The happiness of people in that realm is supposed to be one hundred times more than the happiness of this great man who is supposed to be the king of the whole world. Hundred times happier these people are because of the subtlety of their existence. Atha ye satam manusyanam anandah, sa ekah pitrnam jitalokanam anandah: Those who have performed highly virtuous acts and departed from this world and gone to this world of the forefathers enjoy happiness which is one hundred times greater than the happiness of the most happy person in this human world. But they too are not fully happy. There are people greater than these, subtler, more powerful, more happy. Who are they?
Atha ye satam pitrnam jita-lokanam anandah, sa eko gandharva-loka anandah: They are the celestial minstrels, the Gandharvas, who are supposed to be celestial musicians, who create, not the music that we think of in this world, but something much more superb. You will be transported by hearing such music. You cannot hear such music with these physical ears. They are supposed to be living in the borderland of the celestial world. They are called Gandharvas. They are the minstrels of the gods and they are subtler than these Pitrs, or the forefathers. That realm is more comprehensive and internal. And so the Upanishad says: The happiness of the Gandharvas is one hundred times more than the happiness of the inhabitants of forefathers’ world, whose happiness is one hundred times more than the happiness of the happiest of human beings. But these Gandharvas are not the highest. There are people greater than the Gandharvas. Who are these?

Atha ye satam gandharva-loka ananda h, sa eka karma-devanam anandah: There are people who have done more intense virtuous deeds like the Asvamedha, Rajasuya etc. and gone to the celestial realm. Those who have, by the effect of their intense merits in this world, gone to the celestial realm or paradise are called Karma-Devas. Devas who have reached that realm of paradise by virtue of Karma, or the good actions that they have performed in their previous life. Their happiness is still more, one hundred times the happiness of the Gandharvas. But greater than these, there are others too.

Ye karmana devatvam abhisampadyant e; atha ye satam karma-devanam anandah, sa eka ajana-devanam anandah: There are celestials who have been in that condition ever since creation. They were born as gods. They did not attain that state by actions in this world. The happiness of such people who are born celestials in paradise, the Ajanadevas, is one hundred times more than the happiness of those other celestials, the Karmadevas who have risen from this world by performing good actions.

Yas ca strotriyo’ vrjino’ kama-hatah: Now the Upanishad adds some adjectives. This is the happiness of a person in this world also, provided he is free from any kind of specific attachment, provided he is not clinging to anything in particular, and his mind is generally pervasive throughout the whole universe, provided he is not connected to anything in a personal way, has no desires for objects and whose understanding is superb, and further provided he is highly learned in the scriptures, free from afflictions of every kind, and free from all kinds of limiting desires. Such a person’s happiness also is equal to those of the born celestials. You can have that degree of happiness even in this world itself. It is not like the happiness of a king. The king’s happiness is a false happiness because it is imagined in his mind only. It does not exist, really. It can be washed off in a second, if circumstances change. And you know very well how it can happen. So, that happiness of the emperor of the world is a stupid form of happiness. It is not a real happiness. But this happiness which is independent of any external aids such as are necessary for a king, for instance - such independent
happiness is real happiness. That can be had in this world also by someone conforming to the description given.

_Atha ye satam ajana-devanam anandah, sa ekah prajapati-lokah anandah:_ In the Taittiriya Upanishad there is a little change in the description of this portion. It does not suddenly jump to _Prajapati_. It says: Indra’s happiness is greater by one hundred times the happiness of the celestials. And the happiness of _Brihaspati_ who is the Guru of the gods is still greater by a hundred times than the happiness of Indra. Greater than the happiness of _Brihaspati_ is that of _Prajapati_. _Prajapati_ is _Hiranyagarbha_ Himself. His happiness is still more, a hundred times more.

_Yas ca srotiyo vrjino’kama-hatah; atha ye satam prajapati-lokah anandah, sa eko brahmaloka anandah:_ Their happinesses are incomparable. Really speaking, we cannot multiply, mathematically or arithmetically, any amount of finite happinesses and equate them with the infinite happiness of _Virat, Hiranyagarbha_, and _Ishvara_. It is only a way of speaking. It is not merely an arithmetical total, but is qualitatively more intense. And in what way it is more intense qualitatively, we can imagine to some extent if we know what _Virat_ is, what _Hiranyagarbha_ is, or what _Ishvara_ is. Higher than all finite forms of happiness, whatever be that form of finitude, even the finitude of celestials, of the people in paradise, of _Indra_ or _Brihaspati_, higher than all these forms of happiness is the happiness of this Cosmic Being whom we call _Virat, Hiranyagarbha_, or _Ishvara_, designated here in the Upanishad as ‘Brahmaloka’.

_Athaisa eva parama anandah, esa brahmalokah samrad, iti hovaca yajnavalkyah:_ “O, Emperor Janaka,” says Yajnavalkya, “this is the highest abode. I have described to you all that is necessary.” “Master! I am immensely happy.” This is what King Janaka says. “Great Sire! I give you one thousand cows.” He has nothing else to give except cows again and again. This is very interesting. This is the life of our ancient people. Whatever be the teaching, he offers one thousand cows, as _Guru Dakshina_ again and again - _so ‘ham bhagavate sahasram dadami_. _Ata urdhvam vimoksayaiva bruhiti:_ “Tell me more.” He is not satisfied. “Speak to me more about this path to liberation. I am awe-struck at the analysis of happiness which has been shown to me by your teaching. Speak to me more
about this glory and the way to freedom, ultimate salvation. I want to hear more and more of this.” Yajnavalkya says to himself: “This king is a very shrewd man. He is not going to leave me. However much I tell him he asks for more. He wants to extract everything that I have got in one day itself by putting so many questions’. So Yajnavalkya felt a little intrigued. Atra ha yajnavalkyo bibhayam cakara; medhavi raja: “This is a very shrewd man, this king. He is not leaving me easily. Medhavi raja, sarvebhyo mantebhya udarautsid iti: He wants to extract every bit of my knowledge through his questions. He does not want to leave anything unsaid. Very good!”

Now, so much about the nature of the highest Perfection. So far, so good. But it is not so easy to reach. It is not possible to aspire for such a grand goal unless one becomes fit for that state of experience. The majority of people in the world are not fit for such experience, because the mind is not merely a monkey, it is something worse than that. It will never allow you to think in this way at any time. When you get out of the lecture hall, you are a different person in one second. You will not be thinking of these things then. It is quite natural. But it is a sad fact that a person cannot be continuously thinking one thought, even for a few seconds, on account of various types of harassments to which the mind gets subjected, partly due to its past Karmas and partly due to various other reasons. Whatever be the reasons, the consequence is the same, that it is not possible to entertain these kinds of thoughts for a protracted period. And so, injunctions have been given again and again that one who is whole-heartedly aspiring for such a grand goal, as the goal of life is, should be very meticulous and extremely cautious in seeing that the mind does not move out of the track; that it does not go out of range, as they say, and that it moves in the given specific direction in spite of its having to engage itself in the manifold things of the world. It is a hard job. Everyone knows how hard it is, but there is no other alternative. You cannot, as they say in an adage, take a bath in the ocean after the waves subside. The waves will never subside, so you will never take a bath if you wait. If you wait for the world to become better and then practise Sadhana, you will never do it because the world is never going to be better. The only alternative is to make the best of the present circumstances. So, Yajnavalkya’s teaching concludes by saying that this is the highest teaching that he has given and that this teaching includes not only the description of the nature of the highest experience, but also a means of approaching it. You have to gradually rise from level to level by the expansion of consciousness, stage by stage as has been mentioned in the earlier sections of the Upanishad. Whatever we have studied right from the beginning of this Upanishad is nothing but the various stages of approach to this supreme goal whose climax, as it were, is mentioned here in this section, and there is practically nothing more to say about it.

If we are not able to entertain such a deep thought, if it is not possible for us to meditate like this, if it is hard for us to practise this kind of Sadhana for liberation and we cannot attain liberation in this birth, what will happen to us? That is what is now described. If you are not going to attain this realisation, if you
cannot attain this experience, if you are not going to reach God, not going to attain the Absolute, what is going to be your fate? Now Yajnavalkya says:

34. sa va esa, etasmin svapnante ratva caritva drstvaiva punyam ca papam ca, 
    punah pratinyayam pratiyony adravati buddhantayaiva.

The mind wakes up again into world-consciousness after going through the dream experiences. This waking up into world-consciousness is of two kinds. One is the experience we have when we rise up from dream and sleep, as mentioned. Everyday we have this waking up into the world of objects. We go to sleep everyday, we dream and go to sleep and we get up. The other kind of waking is rebirth. The condition through which one passes at the time of death is supposed to be something like the dream state. When a person is about to pass away from this world, his waking consciousness in the sense of his awareness of the sense-world, the consciousness of people outside and the feeling of the presence of things around etc. etc. diminishes in intensity, gradually. He cannot think as other people think. Then he will be in a state of dream, as it were. Though it is of a different kind, yet it is supposed to be something like dream. It is not exactly similar to our normal dreams of daily life in every respect, in every minute detail, but it cannot be compared to any other state. It is a dream-like experience because it is not intense like waking perceptions of the world, nor is it a complete obliteration of consciousness like in sleep. It is not abolition of all feeling. There is some sensation. And they say, when you are about to pass away from this world, you have some perceptions of the other world also. You will begin to see certain things. The feelings will indicate where you are going. The other world will begin to reveal itself in some modicum. Just as when you cross the boundary of one country and enter into another country, you will see the police of this country as well as that country. This police will see what you are taking out of this country, and the other police will check up what you are bringing. Both will be seen. You have to be checked up by two kinds of police when you are crossing from one country to another country. Likewise, at the time of passing, the conditions of life in this world will be pulling you in the outward direction towards objects of this world, due to the attachments you had earlier. The love of body, the love of relatives, the love of wealth, the love of position, various types of loves - they pull the mind back to this earth, and so you feel a sort of unhappiness as you know these have to be left behind. Then there is the pull from above, which tells you, as it were, ‘here your stay is finished, now you must come away’. That intermediate state through which one passes is said to be a kind of preparation for waking into another world altogether, which you call ordinarily, rebirth. Rebirth does not necessarily mean coming back to this world. It is an awakening in any realm whatsoever, according to the nature of your desires, the actions that you performed in this world; etc. etc.

THE SELF AT DEATH
35. tad yatha ‘nah su-samahitam utsarjad yayat, evam evayam sarira atma
prajnenatmananvarudha utsarjam yati, yatraitad urdhva ucchvasi
bhavati.

Sometimes it can happen that one has to pass through this condition for days
together. It is not that everyone passes through the same condition. Every
person’s manner of death is different from that of others. But here the Upanishad
gives an idea of the normal way in which people pass away from this world.
Rarely do people like to leave their body. It is very dear to them. If someone were
to say, ‘you have to die just now’, one would not be easily prepared for it.
Whatever be one’s experience that is going to be in the future, even if it is to be
better, one cannot imagine it. There is a natural clinging to the body and a feeling
for this present life, due to which there is a reluctance to depart from this body.
But, because of the pull from the other world, there is a tension one feels at that
time. You do not want to go, but you are forced to go, and naturally you can
imagine what you would feel at that time.

The Upanishad gives a comparison. Just as a bullock-cart which is heavily
loaded with material, almost beyond its capacity, dragged by two powerful bulls,
creaks and groans because it is heavily loaded and moves slowly and reluctantly
because of the weight, somewhat in a similar manner, this individual about to
expire moves out of the body reluctantly like a heavily laden cart, pulled by forces
which belong to the other world, with creaks and groans caused by the weight of
attachment that he still has to this world. That weight does not allow him to go
freely. So he makes a kind of ‘creaking’ sound as it were. There is difficulty in
breathing, or hard breathing. The Pranas depart; they are about to leave the
body. In sleep, the Pranas do not leave the body. Though the mind is withdrawn
from the body, the Pranas are not withdrawn. So there is no death in sleep. Life
is still present, though the mind is absent. But in the death condition, Pranas also
are withdrawn. So, there is no connection between the subtle body and the
physical body at the time of death. In sleep the connection is maintained, and so
you return to waking life once again through this body only. But when the Pranas
are withdrawn, the last connection that obtains between the subtle body and the
physical body is snapped, and the two are separated. At that time of the
separation of the Pranas from the physical body there is inordinate breathing.
What kind of breathing it is will differ from person to person. When a person is
about to depart, indications will be seen in the physical body as well as in the
mind. The person becomes emaciated and weakened in every respect.