

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

If you are not affected by what you see, what you touch, what you feel, what you notice, what is the difference between you and a stone? (III, 47)

In India, tradition allows a disciple to complement the writings of his guru by supplementing the guru's writing with what the guru should have said but did not say. Secondly, the disciple has the permission of tradition to rephrase the argument of his guru if the latter's words do not properly serve to establish and arrive at the conclusion intended by the guru. (III.440)

Volume I

One's progeny is none other than oneself. (I. 249)

Science is to help us avoid the folly of putting our trust in nonsense. (I. 435)

***Regarding the Absolute:**

In all this, the knowledge which is concretely expressed also remains unseen as an immanent substance of reality all the way to the toes and fingertips. When a sword is in its sheath, the sword is not seen; only the sheath is seen. Fire is hiding in a tree from its roots to the leaves at the tip of its branches. Even so, the Self of a person is immanent in an individual, but we distinctly see only the breath that he breathes, the words that he speaks, and a number of behavioral actions when he behaves. When we breathe, we know the vital breath and not the Self. When we see, we experience our eyes and not the Self. When we hear, we experience our hearing faculty and not the Self. When we think, we experience only our mind. These names are all assigned to the functions of the various faculties. As we are always engaged with one sensory or mental

activity at a time, we have only a fragmentary knowledge about our sentience. A unitive or unified knowledge does not easily come to us because of our piecemeal knowledge. The one and indivisible knowledge of the Self remains transcendent from specific manifestations. So the Self can be seen, known, and experienced only by meditating on the totality of the Self, called *brahman*. (I. 602)

It is not through argument that one arrives at God. (I. 611)

*Regarding ego:

Many people muse on the glory of realization, and dream of someday reaching there while, as if from behind, they are eaten up by the canker of ego and the darkness of ignorance. Every religion and every philosophy is trying its best to assure us that there is a bright tomorrow when we will be in the benevolent hands of the Supreme. This is a kind of panacea where the believer is held captive by self-hypnosis. But if we can shake ourselves out of this stupor and become more wakeful and conscious, we will see that we are in the hellfire of ignorance—an ignorance that we ourselves have generated, if not during this very life, then in a previous one. It is all because we glorify the highest and neglect our existential life.

Unfortunately, our existential life is one of functioning as a masochist and/or a sadist, taking pleasure in hurting ourselves, as well as feeling the vigor of life in the blood we or others profusely shed. Although we make many hypotheses painted in numerous colorful forms that fascinate our imagination, they do not help us to come out of the quagmire of illusion. The next course for us in our search for the Absolute or Self-realization is to give time to the factual situations of life. However, this does not mean one helpless person should hold another helpless person on their lap with the two sitting together bemoaning their fate. That will not help either. We have to see our egos clearly to know which aspects are

malevolent and which aspects are benevolent. We have to rigorously clear away the agony-brewing aspects of ignorance or selfishness. The selfishness which we speak of here is the bias which in every walk of life leads us away from that central benevolence to which we should gravitate every moment. (BU Vol. I, 635-6)

Volume II

The philosopher's main task is to harmonize duality wherever it tends to bring contradiction. (II. 1)

If there is no desire, there is no life, no manifestation, no world. (II, 67)

It is not with any word that we comprehend the Word, but with a total plunge into inexpressible wonder, to which we come with the canceling out of all the contradictions of this eternal paradox. After exhausting all possible complementarities and reciprocities, we come to grapple with the all-out contradictions. This gives us the secret of canceling out opposites to land in the neutral zero from which words recoil and the mind is melted away into oblivion. (II, 171)

The best cleanser of life is hot tears. (II, 247)

No physicist has ever seen an atom, much less a subatomic particle. But, like religious people who make icons, the physicist has also made conventional models of atoms and particles. Any person who has gone to school and studied the model of the atom cannot be dissuaded from that mental picture. In this way even scientific knowledge becomes a matter of belief. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad sweeps away all images born of mind. That is why a true Vedantin can never be a religious person. (575)

As we are used to accomplishing things and obtaining desirable ends by our actions, we entertain the false impression that for the self to become *brahman* there has to be some kind of process by which the part can evolve into the whole.... This is not so. We are always the whole. All that we need to do is forget the false notion that we are anything other than *brahman*. Realization is not accomplished by a forward march but by a regressive dissolution. Up to the last moment you have a choice to skip the whole process of samsara merely by accepting the fact that you are the Absolute. (II, 583)

The time span of human life, from infancy to old age, needs special value orientation, so it is generally marked into four parts; the period of learning, the period of earning, the period of furthering the culture of the race, and the period of gracefully withdrawing into oblivion. These are called *ashramas*. (II, 594)

Just as coffee is made with ground coffee beans, sugar, milk and water, heated into a solution, our consciousness, which is like pure water, is mixed with the poisonous coffee powder of memories, the sugar of libidinal urges, and the whitener of pretensions. (II, 607)

It is the Self that is to be seen, heard, meditated upon and realized. A person in the path of *brahmavidya* first comes to know about the Self from their teacher. What is heard is the exposition of the a priori teachings given in the scripture. After hearing it, the truth of what one has heard is fully brought out by engaging oneself in a positive dialogue with one's teacher. One has to apply one's own sympathetic and critical mind so the intention of the teachings can be fully appreciated and stabilized in one's life. (II, 625)

Volume III

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Although in principle Vedanta is supportive of the idea of the One without a second, in our daily life we always encounter the notion of the many. Therefore there has to be a continuous exercise of the mind to again and again find similitude between the seemingly diverse forms, names and functions. There is a central focal point to which all the pluralities are to be centripetally referred, to give full orientation to our understanding of brahman. This central focus is found in the heart. That is why prajapati is identified with the heart. (III, 53-4)

For each one of us there is only one world. That is what we each call “my self.” That world is an actualization of the total creative energy of one’s manifestation, i.e. the *prajapati*. In that, one cluster of attitudes makes one divine, another set of attitudes makes one a human, and a third set of primitive urges makes one a demon. However ugly those urges are, out of them the most sublime aesthetic sensibility and spiritual wisdom are to be evolved. Looked upon this way, there is no hell outside, no heaven outside, no world outside. All pluralities organically belong to the unity of one’s being.

Now we can see how the false fabrication of heaven and its denizens, the earth with its sociopolitical histories, and hell with its wildest screams of fear causes millions of people everywhere to undergo excruciating pain, shame and misery. All these are manmade hypotheses which have become the most deplorable concepts of theology, religion, science, sociology, political economy, and every kind of belligerency. To clear the board of all such misconceptions we should make a valiant attempt to go through the entire maze of conceptualized beliefs.

A deep psychological analysis is to be made to understand the images we generate inside, the emotional energy source that

generates imaginations that can foster sustaining faith in us, the energizing value which is fed into images, and the shifting values that intrinsically belong to the inner dynamism of personality formation. (III, 40-41)

Do not mistake the *deva* for any fanciful angel in some paradise of comic book stories. It's just you—your ability to see, think, formulate words, structure sentences, give to every sentence a logical relevancy, and, at the other end, to give each thing or concept a use, a value, a meaning. Such is the function of the *deva* in you. You adore what you conceive, and you adore when someone passes to you an image they have perceived or a description of what they have conceived. (III, 75)

On hearing the word 'sacrifice' those who are familiar with old texts will think of tragic pictures of innocent animals butchered and burned in the leaping flames of a sacrificial pit. We have to forget the ancient connotation of sacrifice and revalue it as the continuous process of making and remaking this universe so that all shades of its imperfections are corrected and new possibilities proclaimed. (III, 138)

Every concept is a confection of the form, name and functional properties of what is seen. (III, 143)

When we sit to meditate on *aum tat savitur varenyam*, we should not call to mind the image of the sun in the sky, or anything that has a name or form. Anything which is presented to the mind formally or nominally is an *adhyasa*. Only when all *adhyasas* are transcended can one come to the pure essence, which is *satya*. It is not through any drill or exercise of repeated chanting that we can get over the hurdles placed before us by the conceptualizing of the mind. So in one sense, all religious rituals are deceptive in their dynamics.... Religion itself has become the greatest snare to stop a person from the vertical ascent of spiritual pursuit. (III.172, 174)

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Any person who turns to the Khila Khanda of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is assigned a duty which will benefit all blessed people who are endowed with pure intelligence to decipher the paradoxes and enigmas of life, and at the same time, to be deeply devoted to the Cause beyond causes. The message of this mantra is that the Supreme is in love with every part of itself, and every part has to reciprocate that love by furthering the message of the Vedas, which can bring one to the silence of wonder that washes away the bitterness of the phenomenon which is superimposed on the noumenon. (III, 183-4)

Hiranyagarbha... symbolizes the island of hope to which we come in the ocean of desolation. Everything is dark, and in the middle of that darkness there is a spark of light. That spark, however meager, is more meaningful than the infinitude of the blindness caused by darkness and chaos. Hence it is to be treated as the little pearl of priceless worth. Its light beckons to the hopeless to become hopeful. The ideas of God, the savior, the grace-giving fountain-source of life, and of all such epithets come from the envisioning of a spark of hope. (III.190)

The second model [of Darsanamala] that Narayana Guru gives is to think in terms of the continuation of life from seeds or genes which have come from a family tree. People are happy when they have innate talents and are able to live a successful life in society. Many mourn that they came from seeds of an inferior quality. They want to think that they are lost people who have been crippled even from the level of genes. They are not thinking of God: they are thinking of fate, a crazy superpower planning a destiny for all, and fashioning beings to go through predetermined paths of little joy and much misery. They think that once life is initiated in a

body/mind complex there is no return and the destined path is to be tread. This gives the impression that life on earth is an imprisonment arranged by the caprice of an unknown overseer. (III.213)

We have to choose between the duality of appearance, and reality. (III.214)

This work is not meant to be a code of ethics, and is to be kept free from degenerating into a mere dharma shastra (textbook on right conduct) or *smriti* (remembered application of heard wisdom) which would belong more to the side of action rather than to understanding. The present work is devoted mainly to Self-realization, and should be free from the social and obligatory aspects of morality. Therefore the author contents himself with broad generalizations which have more of a wisdom interest than one of social action. (III.157)

This way of confronting the problem of evil, which puzzles theologians and philosophers equally, is the prerogative of the dialectical, as against the merely rational approach. Steeped in scientific or unilateral rationalism, modern philosophers in the West have forfeited their more ancient heritage of wisdom. (III.158)

The ambivalent aspects of the same Self can be conceived unitively or dualistically, the former resolving conflict and the latter accentuating it. (III.159)

The Gayatri mantra makes a special appeal: *bhargo devasya dhimahi*. The shining aspects of our physical reality are the senses, called the devas. The conceptual dross that has gone into them is to be burnt away. *Bharga* has two meanings. One is the all-filling transparency of vision which transcends space, time, mass and motion. The other is the total burning away of the irrelevant. Only

when all the aspects of the *antakarana*—that is, the interrogative mind, memory recall, rationalizing intellect, and the affective ego—are gotten over, do we receive the senses in their most pure forms. Thereafter they are not sense organs at all: we are one with the Self. Meditation commences only from there. (III, 172-3)

Although the Brihadaranyaka teaches its votaries to transcend all fruition of one's karma, the Vedic tradition is also continued in the Upanishad, which mentions what one gains after the performance of a certain action or after acquiring knowledge of a certain kind. When we look into all the forms of sacrifice which are given to a particular presiding deity, there is an expectation that every karma should bear fruit. The propitiation of the deity is followed by requests or prayers, and there is an expectation that the deity who is propitiated will reciprocate with blessings. Thus there is a contract model implied in all Vedic rituals. Even when we go on from Veda to Vedanta, a ghost of the contract can still be seen. (III, 186)

When we think of our outgoing consciousness and the sublime consciousness that is being absorbed into the Self, each one has different kinds of freedom. One is the freedom to go by one's own will into the electromagnetic field of being, subjected to the continuous push and pull of psychosomatic urges. By our own free will, we barter our freedom forever. The other is losing our identity in the freedom of pure Being. In spite of the polemics between the outer and the inner, both are necessary and complementary to arrive at the final step of transcendence of the outwardly conditioned world and the inwardly conditioned states of mind. (III.201)

Nobody disputes that a book is a physical object, but the effect it has on one who reads its contents can bring about so many changes in a person that their meaning of life can be totally changed and their pursuit turned in an altogether different tangent. (III.260)

Even a thoroughgoing rationalist has no defense against habits, reflexes, prejudices, appetites, passions and emotions. (III.261)

The culminating conclusion of the Upanishad is that rote learning or parrot-like recitation of the Vedas and Upanishads will not lead us anywhere unless we live what we have understood. Thus the whole Upanishad is our *asvamedha*—our sacrificing of all tendencies to exaggerate. (III.288)

Praja is that which has within it the law of being, the law of fecundity, the law of propagation, the law of proliferation. So Prajapati is to be understood as an eternal cause, continuously projecting innumerable possibilities of which some become immediate probabilities, and a selected few probabilities become actualized. (III, 360)

The seeker and the seer are on the same path. All the same they are not the same kind of beneficiaries of wisdom. The seer has solved age-old riddles in his or her heart. The seeker again and again gets lost on the slippery pathway to certitude. The quality of life is decided by how happy you are, how consistently you are happy, and how you are established in that happiness. Those who lack this excellence are always haunted by the questions: “What next? Where should I turn? Who can I approach? How can it be accomplished? How can I know that what I seek is truly what I need or what I want?” From the examples of those who have gone before us, we discover that in most cases those who have succeeded had someone to guide them, someone to hold their hand with compassion. The successful have been led to the sanctuary of satisfaction where there is no longer any remorse or sense of inadequacy. The masters who lead the seekers are called preceptors of wisdom. (III, 433)

Yajnavalkya establishes that, as soon as it occurs, life correlates itself with tendencies which are detailed by religions as sins. With death, that tendency is overcome. This categorical recognition of sin as a phenomenon only pertaining to one life term dismisses a possible day of ultimate judgment and relegation of the individuated self to hell or heaven. This is the greatest contribution of Vedanta to humanity. We read “That very person, on being born or assuming a body, is conjoined with evils and on dying or leaving the body, discards those evils.” (IV.3.8) Even people outside the Semitic religions entertain the thought that sin is a phenomenon which is vicariously continued through generation after generation. It is this belief that the present mantra rules out.

Where there is no body, there are no sense organs. Where there is no sensation or sense data, there is no mind also. *Anna* (food), *prana* (vital breath) and *manas* (mind) all belong to nature and are governed and controlled by nature modalities. Extrapolating the mind into a non-physical, non-sensory world of abstraction is only a product of imagination. From wrong premises, most religions build up an imaginary world and threaten believers about the consequences of their actions as if they are deeply painted on the soul of a person. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the belief in a Day of Judgment is a cardinal article of faith. The votaries of these religions think that only such a belief will deter a person from indulging in evil. This is like adults trying to discipline innocent children by telling them stories of imaginary ghosts and goblins to tame them and make their minds submissive to the dictates of their elders. The havoc such a wrong faith does to a person, in principle as well as in practice, inflicts a deep mental injury on individuals which makes their bruised minds bleed with anxiety and pain all their lives. (III, 425-6)