From the

UPANISHAD

ANANDA WOOD
## Contents

**Preface** .............................................................. vii

**From the Aitareya Upanishad**
- Self-questioning ........................................ 1
- Realization ..................................................... 2
- Consciousness .................................................. 3

**From the Katha Upanishad**
- Death and ‘the unconscious’ ............................. 5
- Self-discovery ................................................... 25
- Desire and enquiry ........................................... 26
- Perception ....................................................... 26
- Difference ....................................................... 27
- Dissipation and purity ..................................... 27
- The living self ................................................ 28
- The principle of individuality ............................. 30
- Living energy .................................................. 34
- Self-purification .............................................. 35
- Meditation ....................................................... 38
- Understanding truth ........................................ 39
- The ‘I’-principle ............................................... 40

**From the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad**
- Non-duality ..................................................... 41
- Prayer for truth ............................................... 42
- Self and the absolute ....................................... 43
- The source of experience .................................. 50
- Mind, speech and life ....................................... 52
- Names, forms and acts ....................................... 58
- Cosmic faith and truth ...................................... 59
- Immanent and transcendent ................................ 64
- Self and reality ............................................... 65
- A contest of learning ....................................... 67
- Light ............................................................... 80
- A last settlement .............................................. 92
- The essence of personality ................................. 97
## Contents

### From the Chāndogya Upanishad
- Change and space .................................. 98
- Personality and consciousness .................. 99
- The principle of light .................................. 100
- Reality and self .................................. 101
- Sacrifice .................................. 103
- Subjective and objective .......................... 104
- The self in everyone .......................... 105
- Where knowledge comes from .................. 107
- Learning and knowledge .......................... 112
- Change and self .................................. 116
- In search of self .................................. 121

### From the Kena Upanishad
- The unmoved mover .......................... 130
- Desire’s end .................................. 134

### From the Kaushitaki Upanishad
- For and against .................................. 135
- Each being’s self .................................. 136
- The basis of mind .................................. 157
- The living principle .................................. 138
- Continuing truth .................................. 140
- The knowing self .................................. 142
- Deep sleep and waking .......................... 153

### From the İsha Upanishad
- Centre and source .................................. 156

### From the Prashna Upanishad
- Matter and life .................................. 162
- Living faculties .................................. 163
- Learning from experience .................. 165
- What lives in sleep? .......................... 168
- Contemplation and its results .................. 172
- Human existence .................................. 175
Contents

From the Muṇḍaka Upanishad

Knowing and being .......................... 177
Complete knowledge ........................ 177
Good acts ................................. 181
The unborn source ........................ 183
The unmoved centre ......................... 185
Ego, self and truth ......................... 188
Attainment to the impersonal .......... 191

From the Māṇḍākyya Upanishad

The word ‘Om’ .............................. 195

From the Taittiriya Upanishad

Complete reality ............................ 200
Levels of appearance ....................... 204
Nothingness ............................... 209
The creator ............................... 212
Kinds of happiness ......................... 217
Non-dual consciousness ................... 219
Asking for truth ........................... 221
Sustenance ............................... 225

From the Shvetāśvatara Upanishad

Underlying Cause .......................... 226
Subtle powers ............................. 232
Mental discipline ......................... 233
Ego and self .............................. 234
The universal ‘Lord’ ....................... 236
The unborn ............................... 242
Universal and individual ................. 248
Immanent and transcendent ............. 253

From the Rig Veda

Creation ...................................... 261

Index ........................................... 267
Preface

Do we know anything that is plainly and simply true, without any of the ‘ifs’ and ‘but’s that complicate everything we perceive through our limited and uncertain personalities?

And is it thus possible to find any common basis of knowledge on which we can always rely, no matter what particular conditions and uncertainties surround our little bodies, senses and minds in a much larger universe?

The Upanishads are early texts that describe just such an enquiry into plain truth. However, there are two problems which complicate our understanding of these texts today.

First, they were composed at a time when knowledge was largely expressed in the imaginative metaphors of myth and ritual. Thus, along with their philosophical enquiry, the Upanishads also describe an archaic mythical and ritual context. It is from this archaic context that the enquiry was made, in times that are now long passed.

And second, as the founding texts of a very old philosophical tradition, they are expressed in a highly condensed way: which leaves them rather open to interpretation and explanation. The condensed statements of the Upanishads were called ‘shruti’ or ‘heard’; because they were meant to be learned by hearing them directly from a living teacher, who would recite and interpret the words. Having received such a statement of condensed philosophical teaching, a student was meant to think about it over and over again, through a sustained process of individual reflection and enquiry. Eventually, after passing through many stages of thinking and rethinking the questions involved, the student was meant to come at last to a thorough and independent understanding of the statement, in his or her own right.

In the two and a half thousand years or more since the Upanishads began to be composed, their original statements have been interpreted and explained in many different ways, through many different schools of thought. Some schools have emphasized a religious approach to truth, through devotion to a worshipped God. Some schools have emphasized a mystical approach, through exercises of meditation that cultivate special states of experience beyond the ordinary limitations of our minds. And some schools emphasize a philosophical approach, through reasoned enquiry into common experience.
This book is focused on the philosophical approach. It follows Shrī Shankara’s Advaita Vedānta tradition, as interpreted by Shrī Ātmānanda, a modern advaita philosopher who lived in Kerala State, India, 1883-1959.

The book is a collection of retellings from selected passages of the Upanishads. In these retellings, the rather compressed ideas of the original texts have been freely interpreted and elaborated, and often modified, to make them more accessible to a modern reader. Naturally, there is a price to be paid for such interpretation and modification. Since traditional ideas have thus been freely expressed in modern terms, the reader should understand that the retellings differ somewhat in their manner of expression from the traditional approach that is found in the originals.

For those who are interested in the original texts, a companion volume, called \textit{Interpreting the Upanishads}, shows how particular concepts and passages have been interpreted in the retellings. For each passage discussed in the companion volume, a cross reference is given in a footnote at the beginning of the relevant retelling.

Hence this book and its companion volume form a pair, with cross-references between them. However, each volume can be read quite independently of the other.

Like the original texts, the book is perhaps best read as an anthology of collected passages. Because of their condensed expression, the Upanishads are meant to be thought about selectively, concentrating attention on one passage at a time. In various different passages, the same fundamental principles are approached again and again, in various different ways. Thus, one is free to pick out a particular passage that suits one’s interests and one’s state of mind at the time.

The trick is to avoid confusing the differing approaches through which the Upanishads ask different questions about one common truth. Then one can concentrate on those particular passages and those particular questions that hold one’s attention sufficiently for the hard thinking that the subject requires.
Self-questioning

Without me here, to know experience, how could this experience be?
And how do I continue on?
If it’s by speech that words are said, if odours are perceived by smell …
if sights are seen by sense of vision, sounds are heard by sense of hearing, feelings felt by sense of touch, and thoughts conceived by changing mind …
if thoughts and sense-perceptions are absorbed within by understanding, and appearances are formed by mind’s expressive thoughts and acts …
then who, or what, am I? 

From the Aitareya Upanishad

1.3.11
Realization

That which was born sees many things; but what is here that's alien?

What does one really want to say?

By asking questions in this way, the principle we each call ‘I’ and absolute reality, pervading all experience, are realized as: ‘This alone from that, truly, I have always known.’

1.3.13
Consciousness

What is this self
to which we pay such heed?

Is it that which sees
or hears or senses
our perceptions
of the world?

Does it speak?
Does it tell taste
from tastelessness?

Or is it mind and heart:
which we describe as wisdom,
judgement, reason, knowledge,
learning, vision, constancy,
thought, consideration, motive,
memory, imagination, purpose,
life, desire, vitality?

These are but names
for consciousness.

Consciousness is everything:
God, all the gods,
the elements of which the world is made,
creatures and things of every kind,
however large or small,
however born or formed,
including all that breathes, walks, flies,
and all that moves or does not move.

All these are known by consciousness,
and take their stand in consciousness.

---

1See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 6-10, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
Coming after consciousness,  
the whole world stands in consciousness.  

_Consciousness is all there is._  

One who knows self, 
as consciousness,  
has risen from  
this seeming world  
to simple truth:  
where all desires  
are attained  
and deathlessness  
is realized.

_from_  

_3.1.3_  

_3.1.4_
From the Kaṭha Upanishad

Death and ‘the unconscious’ ¹

Naciketas was a young Brahmin, blessed with a bright and cheerful tempera-
ment. But, on occasion, he was given to moods of intense thought. During
one of these moods, when he was still a child, he had been asked what he was
thinking about. He had some difficulty replying, but after a while he said:
‘I don’t quite know. That’s what I keep trying to find out. But the harder I
try, the less I seem to know. In the end, it seems that my mind knows nothing
at all.’

It was this answer that earned him the name ‘Naciketas’, which means ‘the
unconscious’.

When Naciketas was on the verge of manhood, his father had become tired
of material possessions and wished for better things. So a great sacrifice was
held, to give all worldly wealth away.

As the family’s cattle were being taken away, Naciketas felt greatly dis-
turbed. He thought:
‘These cattle need water to drink and fodder to eat. They need to be milked.
And they aren’t quite able to look after themselves. Surely it’s we who should
be looking after them, and the rest of our family inheritance. Will it really
bring us happiness to give up our responsibilities like this? Perhaps father
wants no further responsibility for me either.’

So Naciketas went up to his father and asked quietly: ‘Father, to whom
will you give me?’

Naciketas’s father was busy with the well-wishers and admirers who sur-
rounded him, and the question went unanswered. So Naciketas repeated it, a
little louder. But now, as it became apparent that Naciketas was insisting on
saying something out of place, an awkward silence followed. In this silence,
Naciketas repeated his question a third time, with the most embarrassing
clarity.

In a fit of anger, his father replied: ‘So, young man, your ego has got the

¹See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 152-153, 197-198 and 138-141, for an in-
dication of how parts of this retelling interpret the original text (in particular: 2.1-2,
2.7-9 and 3.1,3-4, respectively).
better of you. There is only one thing to do with such an inflated ego. Go give it to death, where it belongs.’

At this, Naciketas turned round and walked away. He walked on for many hours, paying little attention to where he was going. Instead, he kept trying to make sense of his father’s enraged pronouncement, and how to act in accordance with it:

‘This little self that feels so young
now goes to death before its time,
ahead of those it knows and loves.…

‘But it is only one among
the many mortal things that are
inevitably going to die.…

‘What should poor mind and body do
when they are given up for dead?…

‘By looking back into the past
and looking on as time proceeds,
we see that personality,
like corn, grows up from seed, gets ripe
and dies; producing further seed
from which it is then born again….’

By evening, Naciketas had walked far from home, into a range of forested hills without fields or villages or any other sign of human habitation, except for the forest path along which he walked. He came upon a cave and entered inside, to rest the tired body that was now beginning to obtrude into his thoughts. The cave was comfortable, and he noticed that someone had been there before him; for three stones had been arranged to form a fireplace, with some burnt-out cinders and ash left in between. But such details passed only briefly before his mind. His overwhelming preoccupation was with death, to which he had been given.

He spent three nights alone in the cave, venturing out into the forests during the day. He bathed and drank at the forest streams, but made no effort to find food, for he was kept from hunger by the mounting intensity of his thoughts.

As the third night gave way to morning, he awoke in a curiously calm and composed state of mind. In the preceding days, his contemplation of death had been erratic: one moment shrinking away in fear and regret, another moment coming back resolutely to the inevitable subject. Gradually, the thought of death grew more and more continuous, until there seemed to be
nothing else but death. And then, finally, this all-embracing thought of death itself dissolved, into a state of consciousness where no perception, thought or feeling appeared at all.

When Naciketas came to, he felt a sense of radiant happiness that seemed to far outshine anything he had ever experienced before. But he soon noticed that there was someone else in the cave, looking at him with an inquisitive air of amused concern.

‘It's all very well,’ said the stranger, ‘to go off on such a high-flying trip; but you look as though you could do with a bite to eat.’

Naciketas was in fact both hungry and thirsty by now; so he gratefully accepted the food and the bowl of water that he was offered. When he had finished eating, the stranger asked who he was and what had brought him here.

As Naciketas told his story, the stranger listened with great interest. Then, when the story was told, he asked: ‘Well, what are you going to do now?’

‘I’m not sure,’ replied Naciketas. ‘Perhaps you can give me some advice.’

‘Perhaps I can. But first, it's best to be clear what you really want. Suppose you had three wishes. What would you choose? Take your time, and think carefully about it. After all, this cave is my home and you’re a welcome guest. I’ve been away, and haven’t been able to offer you any hospitality for the three nights you’ve been here, without any food. To make amends, I’ll help you with your three wishes. So choose them well.’

After a short silence, Naciketas said: ‘First, I wish my father peace of mind, and I wish that he should be reconciled with the son whom he has given to death.’

The stranger laughed: ‘You shouldn’t have much difficulty here. Your father must already have forgotten most of his anger; and it is only natural that he will feel relieved and pleased to have you back home again.’

Next, Naciketas described his second wish:

‘In dreams and visions, it is said, a heavenly state has been revealed:

where age and death and thirst and hunger don’t arise; where happiness becomes complete, unspoiled by any trace of fear or misery.

‘It’s further said this stainless state is reached by fire of sacrifice.

‘Here, though I feel it true on faith, I do not know quite what is meant.'
Can you, who have renounced the world, explain this sacrificial fire that leads from death to deathlessness?’

‘Alright,’ said the stranger, ‘I’ll tell you what I know. There are three ways in which this fire can be understood. First, as you’ve heard, it is a means of attaining the infinite. Second, it is the universal fire on which all creation is founded. And third, it is the individual fire within each person’s heart.’

He then explained to Naciketas the ritual of the fire sacrifice: showing how the various parts of the altar and the various actions of the ritual represent the elements and actions that make up the entire universe. In particular, he explained the fire on the altar as representing the creative energy that burns up the old and forms the new. After this, he paused a little and asked: ‘Well, do you understand what I’ve been saying?’

‘I think so,’ replied Naciketas. ‘You seem to be saying that the fire on the altar is a means for directing thought towards the infinite energy on which all creation is based.’

‘Yes,’ said the stranger, ‘this infinite energy is at once the highest goal of thought and the underlying foundation of all created things. But then, what could it be within each person’s heart?’

Naciketas thought a bit, and said: ‘Perhaps it is the energy that makes a person sacrifice one thing for another, which is somehow implied to be of greater value.’

The stranger was visibly pleased: ‘Yes, that’s very well put. It’s not for nothing that your name “Naciketas” means “the unconscious”. For that is what this three-fold fire is. It is the fire of “the unconscious”.

‘Seen from outside, through body, sense and mind, the heart seems dark within. For objects are all seen outside, and none appear within the heart.

‘Thus, in the heart, there only seems unconsciousness of outside things.

‘And yet, this same “unconsciousness” is all creation’s blazing source: of energy that forms the world, and light that shows appearances.

‘Now that you know this triple fire – above, below and deep within –
you hold the chain of happenings
that make world’s many-seeming forms.

‘When all appearances are burned
in sacrificial fire within,
what must be done has then been done
and unity has been attained.

‘Thus crossing over birth and death,
the unconditioned, stainless light
of all reality is known
and final peace is realized.

‘Whoever knows this inner fire
throws off all seeming bonds of death
and lives, untouched by pain and grief,
in unconditioned happiness.’

Neither spoke for a while, as Naciketas tried to absorb what he had just heard.
Then the stranger asked: ‘Well, what about your third wish?’
Naciketas wanted to know more:

‘When someone seems to pass away
beyond the world our senses see,
beyond the thoughts our minds conceive,
does that same person still exist?

‘Just how can someone dead and gone
continue to exist at all?
What in a person could exist
when mind and body have passed on?

‘How can experience carry on
where body does not speak or act,
where senses don’t perceive a world,
where mind no longer thinks or feels …

‘where differences, like birth and death
or pain and pleasure, don’t arise …
where all appearances dissolve
in what seems mere “unconsciousness”?’

The stranger replied: ‘Naciketas, think again. This is your last wish. Is this
all that you want? Must you go on asking these subtle questions that have
always been beyond the reach of all our physical and mental faculties? Why not ask for something else?’

‘As you say,’ said Naciketas, ‘I am asking for knowledge that is beyond the reach of all physical and mental capability. What more could I ask? And if I don’t ask you, whom else could I ask?’

‘Perhaps,’ said the stranger, ‘you don’t quite realize how far your capabilities extend. And so, perhaps you haven’t fully considered the choices that you can make.

‘In ordinary life, death is usually seen from a long way off, through an obscuring haze of fear and uncertainty. And then, of course, it seems that death is just a devouring beast, which only takes things away. But, seen from closer up, death turns out to be an overwhelmingly generous host. The more one overcomes one’s fears and the better one gets to know death for what it is, the greater become one’s powers and choices.

‘You’ve come a long way on this road, Naciketas; and that gives you great powers of will and choice.

‘You could put these powers to some constructive use: by gaining wealth and building a fine home; by having a family and bringing up children and grandchildren; by living a harmonious, prosperous life and influencing others to spread prosperity and harmony.

‘And further, you could seek fulfilment by cultivating your sensibilities and purifying your character. Thus, you would attain glorious experiences of imagination and beauty, and you would rise to elevated states of goodness and clarity: far beyond the gross superficiality of ordinary, material satisfactions.

‘There is so much in life from which to choose, by going out to meet the world and thus cultivating your interests and imagination. Why turn your back on all the good things of life? Why must you insist on asking questions about death?’

Naciketas was hardly able to contain himself:

‘All these “good things” belong to death; for each of them must change and pass. There’s death in every one of them.

‘If I choose any one of them, I’m choosing death, unknowingly. I can’t be satisfied with this.

‘When mind and senses fade and die, the world they see must disappear. No wealth, nor family, nor any
cultivation then appears,
nor anything that world contains.

‘All that we have is brought to us,
and taken back, by change and death.
It’s death that gives and death that takes;
all seeming life is ruled by death.
All is achieved by knowing death.

‘No object that the mind desires,
no pleasure that the mind enjoys,
no beauty that it seems to see,
can satisfy this restless mind.

‘For mind is changing all the time;
its nature is its restlessness.
If mind is stilled, thought disappears;
and then there isn’t any mind.

‘Why make believe that mind lives on;
when every moment thought must die,
as it gives on to further thought
which in its turn must die again?

‘As old things pass and new things rise,
what truly lives, through change and death,
that fresh, new life seems born again?

‘I have no choice. I have to ask
how death leads on to deathlessness.’

‘So,’ said the stranger, ‘you’ve made a distinction. On the one hand, body,
senses and mind are attracted by a variety of changing purposes and enjoy-
ments. On the other hand, as these changing attractions keep dying away,
they express a continuing principle of value: which is the final, undying ba-
sis of all physical, sensual and mental desires.

‘And what you want is to know this deathless basis of value, beneath the
changing desires that it motivates.

‘You’ve chosen well to seek this truth.
Not many hear it; and, of those,
not many rightly understand.

‘For precious few are blessed to find
a teacher who can show this truth.
‘And even when thus plainly shown, only a few want truth enough to overcome the fears that rise as ego’s self-deceptions die.

Truth is approached in different ways; and therefore it cannot be taught by one who does not know it well, beyond the ways that lead to it.

‘It’s subtler than the subtlest thing that any faculty perceives; and therefore it cannot be reached without the help of someone else who’s gone beyond all faculties of body or of sense or mind.

‘It’s known beyond all argument when it is shown by someone else, as nothing else but self alone: which different people share alike beneath all changing faculties of body and of sense and mind.

‘Found deep within each seeming thing, it cannot be itself perceived as any kind of seeming thing.

For it is all reality: the final, underlying base of everything we seem to see.

‘Beginningless, before all time, it is the timeless principle that stays the same through time and change, the background of each changing mind.

‘Here deep within each mind and heart, it is the final, inner core of unconditioned consciousness; beneath all feelings and all thoughts that motivate all living acts and qualify what is perceived.
'It’s known as knowing self alone, 
whose very being is to shine, 
self-evident, unlimited, 
unmixed with any alien thing.  \(2.12\)

‘When truth is heard and understood, 
the nature of reality 
is seen exactly as it is; 
and dying personality 
comes home in joy to deathless self, 
the source of peace and happiness.

‘As far as I can tell, this home 
is open to Naciketas.’  \(2.13\)

Naciketas asked:

‘Tell me this unconditioned truth: 
beyond what’s good or isn’t good, 
beyond what’s done or isn’t done, 
beyond what causes or is caused, 
beyond all past or future time.’  \(2.14\)

The stranger replied:

‘The self within each mind and heart 
is nothing else but consciousness.

‘It is not born. It does not die. 
It does not come from anything; 
does not give on to anything.

‘It simply is: before all time, 
without beginning, change or end. 
All thought of time depends on it; 
but it does not depend on time, 
and time does not apply to it.

‘Though body’s born, the self is not. 
Though body acts, the self does not. 
Though body dies, the self does not.  \(2.18\)

‘So, if a killer thinks “I kill”, 
or if a victim thinks “I’m killed”,
they neither of them think quite right.

‘Self does not kill, nor is it killed. from 2.19

‘Far subtler than all subtlety,
much greater than all magnitude,
the self is here within each heart.

‘It’s known where knowledge is detached from any kind of seeming act.

‘Its nature shines as happiness,
when restless mind has come to peace and, freed from grief and pain, dissolves in unconditioned consciousness. from 2.20

‘Unmoved, self ranges far and wide, throughout all space, throughout all time.

‘It’s here, in all experiences.
It’s there, throughout the universe, at every point of space and time.

‘What else but unconditioned self can know pure peace that does not change or fade or die, but always shines; thus motivating all that moves and lighting all that’s ever seen? from 2.21

‘Within each changing body, self is bodiless, pure consciousness:

‘the changeless, unconditioned base from which all changing things are known, the changeless, unconditioned base on which all changing things appear.

‘Whoever knows this simple truth cannot be harmed by grief or pain. from 2.22

‘This truth of self cannot be known by scholarship or intellect or any kind of discipline.
Since self is known by self alone, it’s found by merely choosing it.

‘To one who truly wishes it, the self reveals just what it is.

from 2.23

‘But egotism, ill intent, disharmony, distracted mind and restlessness are obstacles that must somehow be overcome, as self is sought and realized.

from 2.24

‘To one in search of final truth, accomplishment and learning are but nourishment, and death is but a stimulus, towards the goal.

‘Who knows where such a person is, or where indeed this person goes?

from 2.25

Ego and self

‘Within each heart, there seem to be two selves, experiencing the truth of moral action in the world.

‘Of these two selves, one is described as a mere shadow or reflection of the other self: the real self, which shines by its own light, by its own pure intensity.

‘The shadow self is seeming ego, acting in a world outside, enjoying good and suffering ill.

‘Behind appearances of ego, real self is consciousness: unmixed with personality, unconditioned by the world.

from 3.1

Personality as a chariot

‘If changing personality is thought of as a chariot, then self is living consciousness which rides within the chariot.
‘Seen from outside, the chariot takes
the knowing self from place to place;
and thus moves on, for sake of self,
expressing purpose and desire.

‘But, as it knows itself within,
the self remains unmoved, unchanged;
while world and chariot move and change.

‘As known from self, the world goes by
in changing scenes of passing show,
like scenes a chariot passes through.

‘Just as a chariot is but part
of changing world in which it moves,
so too each personality
is but an object in the world.

‘A moving chariot’s wheels turn round,
its body suffers strain and shock.
So too, a person’s body suffers
change and harm, and gets worn out.

‘Just as a chariot’s horses pull
it on to where it goes; so too
a person is pulled on by
sensual faculties and appetites,
towards the objects of desire.

‘Just as a chariot’s horses are
controlled by reins; so too, are
sensual faculties and appetites
controlled by the intent of will.

‘And as the driver of a chariot
pulls upon the reins, to guide
the chariot for the traveller’s sake;

‘so too, the intellect and heart
think thoughts and feel emotions that
direct the will, all for the sake
of knowing self that lives within.

‘The chariot’s body, horses, reins
and driver are all changing objects
acting in an outside world,
of which they are but little parts.

‘So too, a person’s body, senses,
will and intellect and heart
are changing objects, each of which
acts as a partial piece of world.

‘The self within is consciousness.
Known truly, as it knows itself,
it does not move; it does not change.
It is no part of changing world.
It only knows; it does not act.

‘Its knowledge is no kind of act;
its very being is to shine.
It shines itself, by its own light;
and it is nothing else but light.

‘It’s this pure light of consciousness
that lights up all appearances,
as body, sense and mind seem to
perceive a world of seeming things.

‘By false identity of self
as changing body, sense and mind,
the consciousness of knowing self
seems mixed with body’s sensual acts
and with the acts of thought and feeling
carried out by changing mind.

‘And thus, confusing changeless self
with changing personality,
experience seems conditioned by
a physical and mental world
of forms and names and qualities
that bodies sense and minds conceive.

‘Through such conditioned consciousness,
a person seems to taste the fruit
of good and bad experiences:

enjoying what seems to be good
and suffering that which seems ill.
Condit-
ioning
and
consc-
iousness

‘But can conditioned consciousness
be truly consciousness at all?

‘What seems conditioned consciousness
is not the light of knowing self,
but just the seeming, passing acts
of body, sense and mind in world.

‘Each seeming act is lit by self:
whose nature is pure consciousness,
unmixed with body, sense or mind.

‘This consciousness is always here,
in all of our experience.
It lights each seeming thing we see.

‘It is the knowing base that always
carries on; as changing objects
are perceived, and changing feelings,
thoughts, perceptions come and go.

‘It is the stable base on which
all variations are compared
and different things are told apart.

‘Beneath all change and difference
of objects that appear perceived
by body, sense and mind, it is
the background of experience:

‘where all appearances must rise,
on which each one of them depends,
and where they all are taken in.

‘Upon this base of consciousness,
all qualities and names and forms
appear, conditioning the world
perceived by heart and mind and sense.

‘It underlies conditioning.
Conditions can’t arise at all
unless they’re lit by consciousness;
‘unless they are related and
compared, upon the common basis
of continuing consciousness.
'Conditions don’t apply to it, 
nor qualities or names or forms, 
nor any change or difference.

‘All these arise from consciousness.

‘Like all appearances, they must 
depend on consciousness to be 
perceived; and then, as they are 
understood, they’re taken in, dissolved 
in consciousness from which they come.

‘Upon this base of consciousness 
all different-seeming things appear.

‘It is the common basis where 
such different-seeming things relate, 
as parts or part appearances 
of more complete reality.

‘It is the common principle 
that’s there in all experience, 
beneath all mere appearances 
of different things in seeming world.

‘It is complete reality: 
where all apparent things relate 
in underlying unity, 
beneath all mere appearances 
perceived by body, sense and mind.

‘On consciousness, all things are based. 
In consciousness, all things are found. 
Beneath what seems, all that is known 
is unconditioned consciousness.

‘Within each personality, 
all different-seeming faculties 
of sense and mind depend on this 
shared principle of consciousness.

‘In all our various feelings, thoughts, 
perceptions, purposes and acts, 
it’s consciousness that is expressed.
‘It is the common, stable base
on which our feelings, thoughts, perceptions,
purposes and actions are
co-ordinated and controlled.
On it depend all meaningful
coherence and integrity.

‘Wherever common consciousness
is found expressed in different parts
of personality, these parts
are thereby integrated in
one living, individual whole.

‘Thus it is consciousness that
unifies each individual life.
It is the essence of each
person’s individuality.

‘And yet, it is impersonal
within each personality.

‘Because it is the base on which
all personality appears,
it cannot be at all confined
in any personality.

‘Because it is the knowing base
of all experiences of time
and space and change and difference,
it cannot be confined by time
or space or change or difference.

‘Since quality and name and form
do not condition it at all,
there’s nothing to distinguish it
in different personalities:
whose only differences are those
of form and name and quality.

‘It is the same in all of us:
impersonal, the common base
on which we all rely, to put
together and communicate
our various different points of view.

Kaṭha
'If body is identified as knowing self, it seems that consciousness consists in body’s outward acts toward material things. And thus, an outward world seems known.

‘But body is itself an object. It is just an instrument through which the senses see the world.

‘If senses are identified as knowing self, it seems that consciousness consists in sense-perceptions of a world that’s shown by sights and sounds and smell and taste and touch.

‘But senses are themselves just objects. They are only instruments that bring sensations to the mind. Thus mind perceives a world outside, interpreting what senses show.

‘If mind is next identified as knowing self, it seems that consciousness consists in the perceptions, thoughts and feelings that appear and disappear within our minds.

‘And here, it seems, a world is known where meaning, thought and feeling are expressed by life in outward things.

‘But even mind is just an object. It is just an instrument by which appearances are formed in our experience of the world.

‘In everyone’s experience, only a part or aspect of the world appears at any time.

‘As time proceeds, the world seems known through a progressive stream of part appearances, formed by the mind as it perceives and thinks and feels.
‘At any given point of time, when only part of world appears, how can the rest of world be known and somehow taken into count?

‘That which appears seems known by mind. But knowledge which does not appear is taken to be understood, beneath the surface of attention, at the background of experience underlying seeming mind.

‘Such background understanding seems to comprehend far more than what appears to mind at any time;

‘and thus it seems a store of knowledge which can grow with time, so that we get to know more of the world.

‘If understanding is identified as knowing self, it seems that consciousness consists of knowledge which can be developed and increased: to know more of reality, beneath appearances.

‘But understanding too is just an object. It is just an instrument, assimilating different views and thus developing expanded, deeper views that seem to show more of reality.

‘As different views are understood, they each become absorbed into the background of experience, beneath the surface of the mind.

‘And from this background, understanding is expressed in feelings, thoughts and acts that lead to further views; which in their turn are taken in and add to what we understand.
‘What is this background, into which perceptions are absorbed, and from which understanding is expressed?

‘Here, at the background of the mind, appearances are not perceived. No object can appear at all.

‘This background is unmanifest. And thus at first it seems there’s nothing here, except unconsciousness.

‘But more exactly seen, what we have here, beneath the mind, is just unconsciousness of objects that appear perceived by changing mind.

‘Here, at the background of the mind, apparent objects aren’t perceived; but what we know continues on, while seeming objects come and go.

‘Here, at the background of the mind, where what we know is understood, there must of course be consciousness;

‘but it is not perception, thought or feeling of the seeming things that come into appearance at the changing surface of our minds.

‘Instead, it’s consciousness unmixed with any seeming object that appears and disappears in mind.

‘It is just consciousness, which knows only itself, just as it really is: beneath all mere appearances that come and go before our minds.

‘Viewed at the surface of our minds, it seems that consciousness is mixed with changing objects that it knows.

‘But as it knows itself within,
unchanged by mere appearances, it always is pure consciousness: unmixed with any other thing.

‘All feelings, thoughts, perceptions are appearances of consciousness.

‘All these appearances reflect its self-illuminating light, as they appear to show a world of many different-seeming things.

‘But no appearance can exist apart from knowing consciousness. Any appearance that departs from it immediately dissolves and is no longer there at all.

‘Thus no appearance has any existence outside consciousness. It is the sole reality that each appearance truly shows.

‘All the appearances we see are nothing else but consciousness. And all the world they seem to show is nothing else but consciousness.

‘It is complete reality that’s shown by all appearances.

‘As it illuminates appearances and thus appears to light the world, it only knows itself, unmixed with any alien thing. \[from\] 3.12

‘Where self is known as consciousness, all of reality is known as nothing else but knowing self.

‘Here, self is one with all that’s known, and unconditioned happiness of deathless truth is realized.’ \[from\] 3.15
Self-discovery

It seems our senses are created looking out: from self within towards a world that’s known outside.

And so, it seems we only see external objects in the world, as they appear to outward sense.

At first, it seems there is no way to see the self that knows within, the self from which all seeing comes.

But one brave person, seeking deathlessness, turned sight back in, towards the inner source from which sight comes; and thus the self was truly seen:

as unconditioned consciousness, from which all seeming things arise.

See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 119-120; for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
Desire and enquiry

Outward desires lead the mind into the widespread snare of death: which rules this world of seeming things that come to be and pass away.

But those of steadfast courage do not rest content with the pretence of relative stability, sought here among unstable things.

Instead, they question all pretence until true certainty is found: beyond the reach of change and death, beyond all trace of fear and doubt.

Perception

The self is that same principle of consciousness by which are known all forms, all tastes, all smells, all sounds, all feelings, pleasures we perceive; when we’re awake or when we dream.

With self thus known unlimited in everything, here at the centre of all life, throughout all time; how then can fear or grief arise?

3See Interpreting the Upanishads, page 153, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
Difference

What’s true in here is true out there.
What’s there, in truth, is also here.
Truth is the same, both here and there.

Wherever differences are seen,
perceiving ego suffers change
and thus goes on from death to death.

But when mind turns back to its source,
it knows itself as consciousness,
umixed with any other thing.
And then it is quite evident
that, though appearances differ,
reality remains the same.
No difference is really there.

Dissipation and purity

As water rained upon a height
flows down the mountain-sides, dispersed;
so too the ego dissipates,
perceiving different-seeming things.

As water poured into itself
retains its natural purity;
so also thought reflecting back
to consciousness, from which it comes,
retains the purity of self
which is at one with what it knows.
The living self

Within this personality,
of seeming body, sense and mind,
is consciousness that was not born
and can’t be twisted or deformed.

It is just that which does not grieve,
was always free, and is free now. \(5.1\)

It is just that which shines in light;
which carries on through space and time;
which is the goal of sacrifice;
which must be honoured in a guest;
which makes a home; which lives in men
and gods, in heaven’s justice, and
in nature’s ordered harmony.

It’s all that matters or is true
in anything that has been born:
whether arisen from the earth,
or formed in waters’ changing flow,
or manifesting nature’s laws,
or fallen from some higher state. \(5.2\)

All living action, outward-going
or reflecting back within,
must finally begin and end
with unconditioned consciousness:
which is expressed in every act
and is the cause of every change,
but never acts and stays unchanged
here at the heart of everything. \(5.3\)

When body dies and body’s acts
no longer seem to see a world,
nor tell the world what they have seen,
what then remains of that which lived and was expressed in body’s acts?

That which remains is consciousness: the unconditioned, inner self, unmixed with world’s appearances.

No dying thing can live through actions, outward bound or turned back in.

In outward and reflected acts, all life expresses consciousness:

from which all living actions rise, on which their meaning must depend, in which they end and come to rest.
The principle of individuality

What is the individual life principle that carries on behind the changing mask of seeming personality? It is just this: which always is awake, while other things dissolve in sleep.

From it arises each desire that seeks some narrow, passing goal, and thus clouds personality with incompleteness seeking change.

But in itself it’s always clear; for it is all reality: which stays the same, undimmed, unchanged, beneath all mere appearances.

It’s that alone which does not die.

In it, all seeming worlds are based. Apart from it, there’s nothing else.

Just as one common principle of underlying energy is there throughout the universe, appearing in the different forms that are so differently perceived in different objects and events;

so too, one common principle of underlying consciousness is here throughout experience, appearing in the different forms that are so differently perceived in different personalities.

See Interpreting the Upanishads, [pages 104-108], for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
This underlying consciousness, which different people share alike beneath all their conditionings, is every person’s real self.

It’s here in body, sense and mind and yet it is beyond them all.

Just as the sun lights what we see, quite unaffected by the failings of a person’s sense of sight;

so too, the self lights all experience, unaffected by the failings of perception, thought and feeling in our senses and out minds.

In course of time, as different actions, thoughts and feelings come and go, they are co-ordinated by this underlying consciousness of self, which is their common base beneath their seeming differences.

This is the common basis where all different persons, and the various objects that they see, relate.

It is from here that different things and different persons are seen functioning together, in an ordered and intelligible world.

And it is only this, one self of underlying consciousness, whose essence is made manifest in all the many forms of world.

By turning inwards, this one truth is seen, already standing here: as one’s own self. Just this, and only this, brings lasting happiness.
It is the continuity 
that is implied by changing things:
the changeless base of consciousness 
implied by changing mental states;
the changeless, partless unity 
which all diversity implies, 
and which alone fulfils desire.

*By turning inwards, this one truth
is seen, already standing here:

as one’s own self. Just this, and
nothing else but this, brings lasting peace.*  

It is conceived as ‘that out there’:
as all the world’s reality
beneath all mere appearances.

And it’s conceived as ‘this in here’:
as ever-present consciousness,
by which appearances are known.

But both of these, ‘this’ consciousness
and ‘that’ reality, are always
present here together: at all times,
in everyone’s experience.

Thus being always here together,
they can never be distinguished.
Though we call them by two names,
they are not two, but only one.

This final non-duality,
of knowing self and all that’s known,
is unconditioned happiness;
for here completeness has been found.

How then can it be truly known,
as it shines out from self within
and is reflected back from world?  

It does not shine by light of sun
or moon or stars or burning fire.
It shines alone, by its own light.
Without it, nothing else can shine; for it lights all appearances: which shine as its reflected light.

Thus all the world is nothing else but the reflected light of self.

As self illuminates the world, it just illuminates itself.

Through all the world’s appearances, this self-illuminating light remains always unchanged, unmixed from anything beside itself.

5.15
Living energy

The whole created universe
is made of living energy
that moves and oscillates and shines.

This boundless store of restless
cosmic energy has terrible
destructive power. It’s like an
upraised thunderbolt: to petty
ego’s fragile life, identified
with little body, sense and mind.

But if, transcending petty ego,
all the world is known as life –
as only living energy –
then how can death arise at all?

For one who knows the world like this,
as only life, there is no death.

In truth, there’s only deathlessness.

5See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 81–82, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
The senses that perceive the world are changing objects in the world. They are objective instruments through which the world is known by self. As objects acting in the world, they are a part of changing world. They are not part of knowing self.

Beyond the senses is the mind, to which the senses seem to bring sensations from an outside world. But mind, too, is an instrument that acts within the changing world, interpreting what senses see. As something acting in the world, mind is a part of changing world. It is not part of knowing self.

Beyond the mind is character which also acts within the world, to motivate both mind and sense towards the objects they perceive. Thus character, like mind and sense, is an objective instrument through which the changing world is known. It is not part of knowing self.

Beyond all varied character is universal principle, which different characters must share to make their differences relate. Such common principle as well, may be perceived as part of world: as an objective instrument.
that acts to put together world
from different appearances.

Perceived like this, as part of world,
it is not part of knowing self.

Beyond such common principle,
we think of the ‘unmanifest’:
as that which carries on unthought
beneath the surface of the mind,
through changing thought of seeming world.

But even this ‘unmanifest’
may be conceived as part of world,
as an objective instrument:

which acts unseen, here at the background
of all change, as the support
that must continue on through change,
to show the changes that take place.

And thus conceived, as part of world,
it is not part of knowing self.

Beyond this too, which is thus called
‘unmanifest’, is knowing self:
whose nature is pure consciousness,
unmixed with any part of world.

It is here in all experience,
always present everywhere:

quite unconditioned and unchanged
by changing world’s appearances
of name and form and quality.

‘Unmanifest’ to outward-going
mind and sense; it’s known through thought
that turns back in, and is dissolved
in unconditioned consciousness:

which simply manifests itself
as self and all reality.
They who know this find that they’re free, as they have always truly been, from beyond all thought of death and grief.  

*Kaṭha* 37

from 6.9
Meditation

When mind and senses cease to act, no seeming object can appear.

Then, consciousness shines out alone, unmixed with those appearances that make it seem what it is not.

This state of unmixed consciousness is said to be the highest state;

and meditation is the art of holding mind and senses back to reach this state by act of will.

Thus, turning will towards a state where all distractions are dissolved, attention turns to consciousness: which shines in all appearances, and shines alone when they dissolve.

But when this state has passed away, appearances return again;

and consciousness then seems obscured just as it seemed to be before.

How can pure consciousness be known for what it is, unmoved, unchanged:

no matter what distractions rise; no matter what is seen or heard, smelled, tasted, touched or thought or felt; no matter what seems to appear to changing body, mind and sense? from 6.10-11
Understanding truth

Mere talking cannot find out truth, nor can ideas conceived by mind, nor mere sensations of the world impressed on mind by any sense.

If not by finding out from one who knows it well, beyond all doubt, and shows exactly what it is, how else can truth be understood? from 6.12

Truth is approached by telling what is really there from what is not, beneath what merely seems to be.

When truth has thus been told apart from falsity, it’s understood as all that’s real everywhere in everything that seems to be. from 6.13

When all desires are released from ego’s false identity of self that is and mind that wants,

then truth shines here, within the heart, where all reality is found. from 6.14

Thus all the knots of heart are loosed; and that which seemed to die turns out to be, and to have always been, undying, unconditioned truth. from 6.15

See Interpreting the Upanishads, page 196, for an indication of how part of this retelling interprets the original text (in particular 6.12).
The ‘I’-principle

The real self, the inmost principle of personality, is always present here at heart in everyone’s experience.

Each petty ego lives in fear for its own false security that clings to passing attributes of changing personality.

But, putting ego’s fears aside with steadfast courage, one may choose from one’s own personality that inner, unconditioned core which does not fear or change or die from and is one’s true security.

\[6.17\]

\[\text{See Interpreting the Upanishads, page 116, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.}\]
Non-duality

That world out there, this self in here, each is reality, complete:

from which arises everything, to which all things return again, in which all seeming things consist;

which stays the same, unchanged, complete.

See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 1-5, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
Prayer for truth

As priests recite the chanted word, its meaning comes from prayer within:

‘From untruth, lead me on to truth. From darkness, bring me into light. From death, take me to deathlessness.’

Death is merely non-existence; truth is that which always is. Death is but a dream of darkness known by light that never dies. In all our prayers for truth and light, we seek no less than deathlessness.

Through many prayers and hymns of praise, a worshipper seeks sustenance and asks that wishes be fulfilled.

But, just to pray and understand, this in itself fulfils desire and finds unchanging deathlessness.

No want of world’s success can raise from false hopes, for one who prays and knows.  

*Brihadāranyaka*  

1.3.28
Self and the absolute

Right from the start, each person’s self is common, plain humanity: which different-seeming persons share through changing times and changing minds in different personalities.

Whatever sights a person sees, whatever may appear to mind, in all of our experiences, the self is always present there.

Thus nothing ever is perceived without the presence of the self. And nothing anyone perceives can ever be apart from self.

First and foremost, every person starts by thinking: ‘This is I.’ And so each person is called ‘I’.

When asked for one’s identity, what first response comes up at once, spontaneously, from deep within? One first identifies oneself as ‘I’, and only then come other names by which one is identified.

This, which comes first, before all things, burns up all misery and wrong. Anything that tries to push in front of plain humanity burns up, for one who knows just this. But people seem to have known fear: a lonely person feels afraid.

See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 35–48, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
When such a person, all alone, observes ‘Of what am I afraid, if there is nothing else but I?’, then with this thought fear vanishes. Without a second thing to fear, what is there to be frightened of? 1.4.2

And people also seem to feel unhappiness: a lonely person suffers want of warmth and joy. By longing for companionship, life in this world has taken shape as male and female intertwined. The self has thus been made to seem divided, fallen into two, as male and female have been formed: each one an uncompleted half. Each one then suffers emptiness, which must be filled by someone else. So male and female join in one, and from this match we all are born. 1.4.3

The knowing self in each of us is underlying consciousness from which appearances arise in everyone’s experience. Since everything comes out of it, it’s that which seems to have become this many seeming universe. It’s all creation in itself. To know it is to stand as self, which one has truly always been, at all creation’s timeless source. 1.4.5

The world we see is only this: which is itself unmanifest.
Only by name and form has this seemed to be manifest, as world.

The world seems manifested when some seeming name is used for this, some seeming form is seen in this.

This is that common principle which permeates the universe into each corner of the world;

just as a blade fits in its sheath, or as the energy which forms the universe lies there within all matter that is formed by it.

This universal principle cannot be known through force or power of life’s intentions, nor through speech, nor sight, nor hearing, nor through mind.

These are merely names of functions: each of which is incomplete.
Looking through such partial functions, all that’s seen is incomplete.

Such means can never quite know truth.

Reflecting on the self alone, all partial functions merge in one. In all the world that we perceive, this self is what we need to reach: for everything is known by this.

True honour, glory, grace, success arise unasked for one who knows all things as signs of only this. from 1.4.7

Beyond all else, it is the self that’s near and dear: more than all wealth, more than all friends and family.

When anything besides this self is thought an object of desire,
then desire turns to torment:
even desire for God himself.

In any object of desire,
self is all we wish to find.

Where self is truly seen in love,
there love is found to be complete,
for what is loved can never end.

By knowledge of the absolute,
a person hopes to be complete.

This absolute we thus invoke,
what does it know, as it creates
from its own self the world we see?

The absolute is only this,
which first and foremost knows itself.

It knows: ‘I am the absolute.’

And on this base appear from it
the many things we seem to see.

Whoever realizes this,
and knows ‘I am the absolute’,
becomes complete in everything.

The gods themselves cannot undo
one who has found identity
with that which is their very self.

But if one heeds an alien god
who seems apart from one’s own self,
truth can’t be known; for then one is
a beast of burden to the gods.

As beasts of burden have their masters,
so do people have their gods.

It is not liked when any beast
is taken from its master’s fold.
Nor is it liked when someone finds
this truth: that in each one of us
the self is absolute, and free.
It is this absolute that seems
to have evolved, through course of time,
as knowledge, power, enterprise
and service, in society.

We dream of gods to seek out worlds
of sublimated energy;
and in our waking life we seek
out knowledge of our universe.

For energy and learning are
both forms in which the absolute
has been expressed in what we see.

Blindness to our own existence
robs our lives of all reward;
every one of our achievements
must in time dissolve away.

But, if one only sees the self
absolute in all existence,
life’s reward can never die.

Everything that is desired
is produced from this same self.

The world of beings is this self.
It is the mythic world of gods
created by religious rite.

It is the fancied world of thought
created by an author’s words.

It is the world tradition makes
respecting past experience
and also seeking something new.

It is the world we humans make
from need for home and sustenance.

It is the world of animals,
where grass and water must be found.

It is the earth on which subsist
beasts, birds and other forms of life,  
in bodies that are homes of this.

One should wish well of one’s own world.  
At heart, all beings do wish well,  
seen in that light which knows just this.

Whatever anyone has known,  
whatever anyone has sought  
to know, is nothing else but this.  

In truth, there is one single self,  
with nothing else at all besides.

And yet, it seems that people seek  
out company of other selves,  
that people feel desire for birth  
and property and gainful work.

Such limited desires can’t  
grow to be more than limited,  
not even if one wants them to.

A lonely person wants to find  
companionship, wants a new life,  
wants things and looks for work to do.

And where such wishes aren’t fulfilled,  
a person does not feel complete.

How can a person be complete?

Through consciousness that’s known as self;  
through speech that’s married to the self;  
through purpose as its progeny.

Through property that, known by sight,  
is known as nothing else but sight;  
through worth that, known by sense, is known  
as only sensibility.

Through work that shows true purity  
of self, on which all life depends.
In all the multiplicity
of actions, persons, creatures, things,
throughout this many-seeming world,
the self is one and one alone.

All is reached, by knowing this.

from

1.4.17
The source of experience

No matter how much of experience is consumed by anyone, it always seems there’s something more: some new experience to be had, for those who are not satisfied.

But how is life thus infinite? As previous life gets tired and dies, what is the ever-living source from which new life is seen to rise?

This source is the ‘I’-principle: the principle of knowing self, within each personality.

It is the self that each calls ‘I’: the inner, knowing principle of unconditioned consciousness, unmixed with any alien thing.

It’s here in all experiences. It must be here before perceptions, thoughts or feelings can arise. It carries on while these perceptions, thoughts and feelings come and go. And it remains, self-manifest, when all of them have disappeared.

It’s from this changeless principle that all experiences arise. On this they stand and seem to change. And back to this they must return, as they’re consumed and taken in.

It is thus inexhaustible, as it gives rise, time after time, to all that’s thought, perceived or felt.

As every person knows experience in the course of passing time,
successive thoughts, perceptions, feelings come to end and disappear, each one succeeded by the next.

But consciousness is always here: as that which knows, no matter what seems to appear or disappear.

As feelings, thoughts, perceptions change, pure consciousness continues on: beneath all mere appearances perceived through body, sense and mind.

And here, beneath appearances, it knows things as they really are.

It does not know external things through intervening faculties of partial body, sense and mind, which are believed to tell a tale of some imagined world outside.

It knows directly, face to face; for all it knows is known as self that shines unmixed, by its own light.
Mind, speech and life

Each person’s self is manifested in three ways: mind, speech and life.

Mind is the faculty that takes attention out from consciousness to partial objects in the world.

Without the mind’s attention turned to some apparent part of world, no object could appear perceived, nor thought about, nor felt at all.

Thus, even though light from an object falls upon one’s open eyes and sharply focused images are formed upon one’s retinas, that object still cannot appear without attention from the mind.

If mind’s attention is elsewhere and does not turn to what eyes see, then what is seen does not appear.

So too, if mind’s attention does not turn to what is heard by ear, then what is heard does not appear.

Hence mind is that which makes appear those parts of world to which it turns.

And it does this not only through the body’s sensual faculties that see and hear, smell, taste and touch, but also through its own internal faculties that think and feel.

The mind directs attention by: the things it chooses to desire, how it conceives what’s been perceived, its doubts and pointed questioning, what it believes and disbelieves,
where it holds fast and where lets go,
its sense of shame for its own wrongs,
its contemplation of the truth,
the fear that makes it want to run.

All these are aspects of the mind:
which first goes out to seeming world,
discriminating differences;

but then reflects attention back
in order to discern the truth
that touches mind from deep within.

Speech is the faculty expressing
meaning in our words and acts:
thus rising up from consciousness
to actions in the world outside.

All that is said and done, and all
that happens in the world, can be
correctly understood as speech.

For everything is understood
by asking what it really means;

by asking what it says to us:
as we reflect back to the
underlying source of consciousness,
from which all meaning rises up
in everyone’s experience.

Thus, through conditioned words and acts
of seeming body, sense and mind,
the meaning that’s conveyed expresses
unconditioned consciousness.

Life is the faculty of
living on through passing time, as old
experiences give rise to new.
It’s life that lives, while time proceeds
and dying things all pass away.

As life goes on, its living acts
express undying consciousness,
out in the world of change and death.

Then, as the world reacts on life,
specific objects are perceived:
discarding waste from what is used
and thus creating partial views,
restricted needs and narrowed aims.

When different views have been perceived,
they are contrasted and compared:
disseminating information
and discerning what it means.

Discerning what has been perceived,
new meanings rise from consciousness:
expressed in new experiences,
as life aspires to better things.

As new experiences arise,
what has been learned is understood:
thus integrating past and future
and all different faculties
at the background of the mind,
where consciousness continues on
beneath all seeming change and death.

When someone says ‘I think’, ‘I feel’,
then self appears in seeming mind.
When someone says ‘I say’, ‘I mean’,
then self appears in speech and act.
When someone says ‘I’m still alive’,
then self appears in lasting life.

What is the common principle
of self that is thus manifest
in all these three: mind, speech and life?

This common principle of self
is unconditioned consciousness:
which lights all that appears through mind,
which underlies all words and acts,
which lives unchanged through change and death.  

1.5.3

Brihadāranyaka
Speech, as what’s said and done in world, makes up this world that’s known through mind. Mind is the movement back and forth between the world and consciousness. But life is not quite in the world, for it lives on in consciousness beyond the reach of changing mind.  

Speech, as expression in the world, is just what’s known through changing mind. And mind, in turn, is that which one should seek to know: reflecting back to consciousness, from which mind comes. But life cannot be known through mind; for mind depends on living on, to make the seeming world appear. Thus life appears as the unknown, beneath the surface of the mind.  

The various different faculties of changing personality are but the property of self: which lives within, unknown by mind. It’s only through these faculties that self appears to move or change, to grow, develop or decline. In truth, the self is motionless and does not change or act at all. It’s only faculties that act, move, change, develop or decline. The self is where they all are joined. It is as if a wheel turns round a centre: which remains unmoved, but which supports the wheel and rim from where the spokes all join in one. So too the self, here at the centre of all life, does not engage in any kind of changing act;
while it supports the faculties that join in it and radiate into a world of changing acts.

Just as the spokes and rim revolve about the centre of a wheel, so too all faculties and world revolve about the changeless self where all things join and find support.

Thus, all that can in truth be lost is only outward property. Whatever property is lost does not affect the living self, where all of life is to be found.  

As different faculties compete for the attention of the mind, they cannot all appear at once. Instead, they rise successively. Each one appears just for a while, becomes exhausted and subsides; so other faculties can rise. Speech does not go on speaking all the time; but speaks just for a while, before it tires and dies away. So too with sight and hearing and with various other faculties.

These intermittent faculties are all caught up in change and death. They do not last; and to connect they must depend on something else that carries on through passing time between their intermittent acts.

What is this continuity of life: that carries on, between our different, intermittent acts?
All faculties are only forms
of this one living principle
which does not change or die away.

Whatever moves or doesn’t move,
whatever change seems to take place,
it is quite inexhaustible.

It does not suffer loss or harm.
It’s not disturbed in any way.

No faculty compares with it.
Whoever goes against it gets
from cut off from life, dries up and dies.

This changeless, living principle
is not, in truth, a faculty
that carries out some kind of act.

Instead, it is the knowing base,
of unconditioned consciousness:
from which all mind and faculties
arise, and into which they set.

It is, as it has always been,
the base of all reality,
the underlying truth of life:
which all that happens must express.

To realize it needs complete
resolve; to understand, throughout
all that is done and seen and thought
and felt, just what it means to say:

‘I am this self which does not die.’

from 1.5.23
Names, forms and acts

Three aspects of experience are:
first, names identifying things;
next, forms through which these names appear;
and third, the acts by which each thing
is seen to act on other things.

All names arise from saying things.
Speech is the underlying source
that’s common to all different names.
It is their base, their ground support.

All forms arise from seeing things.
Sight is the underlying source
that’s common to all different forms.
It is their base, their ground support.

All acts arise from what self is.
Self is the underlying source
that’s common to all different acts.
It is their base, their ground support.

All three together are this self.
It’s one in three, and three in one.
It is the deathless principle
that’s here in all experience.

Found here within all name and form,
this principle is life itself,
from beyond the reach of seeming death.
Bālāki Gārgya was a learned scholar. One day, he came to Ajātashatru, King of Kāshi, and said: ‘I propose to speak with you about the absolute.’

Ajātashatru replied: ‘For this, I grant you a thousand cattle.’

Gārgya began: ‘I worship as the absolute that spirit which is seen in the sun.’

‘Perhaps this is a little misleading,’ replied Ajātashatru. ‘It seems to me that the sun is worshipped as a radiant god who lives in the sky, shining light and warmth upon living creatures. Surely, such worship serves only to awaken interest in the pursuit of excellence, thus encouraging people to start raising themselves from the apathy and ignorance of unquestioning habit.’

Gārgya went on: ‘I worship as the absolute that spirit which is seen in the moon.’

‘Perhaps this is misleading again,’ replied Ajātashatru. ‘It seems to me that the moon is worshipped as a mysterious, white-robed god of other-worldly experience. Surely, such worship serves only to provide a profusion of subtle experiences, of which there is no end.’

Gārgya persisted: ‘I worship as the absolute that spirit which is seen in lightning.’

‘It seems to me,’ replied Ajātashatru, ‘that lightning is worshipped for its brilliance of concentrated energy. Surely, such worship amounts to nothing more than cultivating qualities of brilliance and power, and passing these qualities on to succeeding generations.’

‘I worship as the absolute that spirit which is seen in the unbounded space of sky.’

‘It seems to me that the sky is worshipped for its all-transcending elevation and for the fixed regularity of its stars. Surely, such worship amounts to nothing more than looking for regular patterns and laws of nature, which somehow transcend and thus govern the variations and changes of the apparent world.’

‘I worship as the absolute that spirit which is seen in the invisible power of blowing wind.’

‘It seems to me that the wind is worshipped for its irresistibility as it blows round objects. Surely, such worship amounts to nothing more than cultivating a sensitive and flexible attitude, of feeling one’s way past obstacles that seem to come in the way of progress.’

---

3See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 26-27, for an indication of how the end of this retelling interprets the original text (2.1.20).
‘I worship as the absolute that spirit which is seen in burning fire.’

‘It seems to me that fire is worshipped for its all-consuming energy, as it burns up one object after another, until nothing remains to be burnt. Surely, such worship amounts to nothing more than cultivating an attitude of untiring persistence, which never gives up in the face of trouble, as one difficulty succeeds another in the course of life.’

‘I worship as the absolute that spirit which is seen in life-giving water.’

‘It seems to me that water is worshipped for its accommodating fluidity, whereby it flows into shapes that accord with its surroundings. Surely, such worship amounts to nothing more than cultivating an attitude of graceful adaptation to changing circumstances.’

‘I worship as the absolute that spirit of inward reflection which is embodied in a mirror.’

‘It seems to me that this spirit of reflection is worshipped for its clarifying radiance, whereby it shines with light reflected from within. Surely, such worship amounts to nothing more than cultivating clarity of mind and purpose, whereby a person shines out among friends and associates.’

‘I worship as the absolute that inner spirit of meaning which is expressed in living words and actions.’

‘It seems to me that this spirit of meaning is worshipped as the subtle breath of life, whereby an otherwise merely physical action is infused with life and meaning. Surely, such worship amounts to nothing more than the cultivation of intellect and sensibility, by which we try to make the most of our limited personalities in this conditioned world.’

‘I worship as the absolute that unifying spirit which reconciles different points of view.’

‘It seems to me that this unifying spirit is worshipped for its construction of order and system, by which society and learning are co-ordinated. Surely, such worship amounts to no more than the cultivation of tolerance and understanding, so that people can come together for mutual support, across personal variations and differences.’

‘I worship as the absolute that spirit which is seen in shadow and darkness.’

‘It seems to me that this spirit of darkness is worshipped as the death of passing things. Surely, such worship amounts to nothing more than the cultivation of a full and unflinching life, through the inevitable deaths and destructions of the passing world.’

‘I worship as the absolute that spirit which is seen in the living self of each individual person … and, indeed, in the universal self of the entire world.’

‘It seems to me that you are using the word “self” here to describe something seen. And thus, what you call “self” is worshipped as a personality that
is made up of body and mind. Surely, such worship amounts to nothing more than the cultivation of personal powers of body and mind.’

After this last reply from Ajātashatru, Gārgya remained silent.

‘Is this all?’ asked Ajātashatru.

‘Yes, it is all,’ Gārgya replied.

‘But it does not lead to the absolute,’ said Ajātashatru.

‘Then tell me what does,’ said Gārgya, in a moment of humility.

‘It isn’t usual for a learned scholar to seek the highest knowledge from a warrior-king,’ said Ajātashatru. ‘But I shall tell you what I know.’

Then Ajātashatru got up and took Gārgya for a little walk, through the palace grounds. Walking together, they came upon a sleeping man. Ajātashatru called out to the sleeper, addressing him as the ‘Great white-robed Soma, Lord of Dreams.’ But this did not wake him, so Ajātashatru put out his hand and shook the sleeper until he awoke and rose up.

Ajātashatru said to Gārgya: ‘Now that this man has been awakened, you see in him a manifestation of that underlying principle of consciousness which he shares in common with you and me and every other person. But where was this principle of consciousness during sleep? Where has it come from now?’

Gārgya could think of no reply.

Ajātashatru continued: ‘When a person is awake, consciousness appears in the outgoing faculties of personality, in the five senses and in outward actions, through which attention is turned to the external world. But when a person falls asleep, awareness is withdrawn from these outgoing faculties; and consciousness remains within mind and heart, whose very essence it is.

‘In the state of sleep, consciousness is evidently absorbed in itself. For in this state, all faculties of awareness have been drawn in. Vitality does not go outward in external action; meaning does not go outwards in speech or any other external expression; perception does not go outwards through the five senses; understanding does not go out towards the interpretation of external sensations; and the mind does not direct attention out to the external world.

‘In dreams, a person may seem to be a powerful king or a learned scholar or to have attained some high or low position in life. But, whatever worlds a person may pass through in dream, these are but worlds of the dreamer’s own consciousness. Just as a powerful king may take his retinue of followers and travel as he desires through his own country, so too a dreaming mind takes up its own internal faculties and moves as it desires through its own worlds of mental experience.

‘And further, when a person enters into a state of deep sleep, the mind ceases to be aware of anything at all, as it returns along the multitude of channels that are said to branch out from within the heart. As the mind thus
returns to its own centre, it comes to rest and dissolves entirely, in that under-
lying principle of consciousness which abides at the centre of each personal-
ity.

‘Like an innocent child who hasn’t a care in the world, or like some suc-
cessful person who has achieved all that’s desired, or like a discerning phi-
losopher who rests content in the unqualified joy of plain truth; so too a
person in deep sleep has come to the unconditioned happiness of pure peace,
at that same centre of life which is each person’s real self.

‘By looking back to dreamless sleep
where dreams and waking thoughts arise,
on one sees the depth of one’s own self
from which the seeming world is known.

‘At first this underlying depth
seems hidden in obscurity.
Dissolved in sleep, no feelings feel,
no thoughts conceive, no senses see
or hear or smell or taste or touch,
and no appearances appear.

‘Here only darkness seems perceived.

‘But darkness too is an appearance
that’s perceived by sense and mind.
It too dissolves in depth of sleep;
it can’t, in truth, be present here.

‘When darkness too is known dissolved,
there’s nothing left but consciousness:
not now reflected by appearances,
but shining by itself
as self-illuminating light.

‘Our minds and senses only see
appearances reflecting light.
When they look back to light itself,
they are immediately dissolved
and can’t see anything at all.

‘Thus dazzled by the very light
of consciousness by which they see,
it seems to them dark nothingness,
wherever sight has been turned back
from seeming things to look at it.

‘The seeming darkness of deep sleep
shows self, beneath all sense and mind,
as unconditioned consciousness:
where all the world dissolves in light.

‘As a spider from its body
sends out threads and weaves a web,
or as small sparks come forth from fire;

‘so too, from this same self come forth
all energies, all lives, all worlds,
all gods and all created things.

‘This is that final teaching
which is said to be the "truth of truth".

‘Truth is all things; and of all things,
self is the truth of each.’

from
2.1
Immanent and transcendent

Two aspects of reality result in two opposing ways through which it seems to be approached.

One aspect is its immanence:

as that which does not merely seem, but really is, in seeming things;

as that which is invariant through varying appearances;

as that which dying things express by living till they die away;

as that embodied principle within each body’s changing acts.

But this same immanent reality, existing here and now, also transcends all seeming things:

as that transcendent principle beyond all mere appearances;

as that which causes every change, by going on through everything;

as that which does not suffer death, while seeming things all die away;

as unconditioned consciousness, from unmixed with body’s seeming acts.  

2.3.1 Brihadāranyaka
Self and reality

All creatures feed on fruit of earth; and earth, in turn, is fed by them.

Both in earth and in each person, that which shines and never dies is our common ‘human-ness’.

This is the self each person is.

It is that same reality which always lives, unchanged, complete, in every partial-seeming thing.

This self is lord and king of all.

As in a wheel, all spokes are joined together at the hub and rim; so too, all things, all gods, all worlds, all lives, all separate-seeming selves are joined together in the self.

This, which lives in all our bodies, is our common ‘human-ness’.

Outside this, there’s no existence.

Nothing is, apart from this.

It is this that takes the likeness of each form that is perceived.

From appearance thus created come the many forms of God, harnessing those many different faculties of sense and action which create our seeming world.

All our senses, all our bodies, all the many, countless things

See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 93-96, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
they see and touch, are nothing but this one same self in each of us.

It is that all-containing truth with nothing else beside itself, with nothing else before itself, with nothing else that follows on, with no outside and no inside.

Thus it is taught: ‘This self is in itself complete. It knows all things, and all it knows is but itself.’

from 2.5.19
A contest of learning

Janaka, King of Videha, once performed a great sacrifice, at which much patronage was liberally distributed among the eminent men of learning who had travelled from their homes in many kingdoms to be present there. Curious to know who was the most learned among them, King Janaka assembled a herd of one thousand fine cattle, each with ten gold coins tied between the horns.

‘Honoured Sirs,’ he said to his illustrious guests, ‘may these cattle be led away by the most learned among you.’

At first, no one responded and there was an awkward, hesitant silence. Then Yājñavalkya said to one of his disciples: ‘Gentle Śāmarshavas, take charge of the cattle.’ And Śāmarshavas went forward to do so.

A wave of angry murmuring spread through the many other men of learning who were assembled there, for they felt: ‘Who is he to claim more learning than the rest of us?’

The first to speak out was Ashvala, one of King Janaka’s priests: ‘Yājñavalkya, how can you be so sure that you are more learned than everyone else who is present here?’

Yājñavalkya replied: ‘We all respect the most learned among scholars. We also all want the cattle.’

So Ashvala began his questioning: ‘Yājñavalkya, while all things in this world are caught up in death, and are overpowered by death, how can a worshipper transcend his own mortality?’

‘Through the invoking priest, through fire and through speech,’ Yājñavalkya replied. ‘Where the invoker, fire and speech are realized as one, there freedom is attained.’

‘Yājñavalkya, while all things in this world are caught up in the alternation of day and night, how can a worshipper transcend such passing periodicity?’

‘Through the priest who sees to the ritual actions, through the sun and through sight. Where see-er, sun and sight are realized as one, there freedom is attained.’

‘Yājñavalkya, while all things in this world are caught up in the waxing and waning of the moon, how can a worshipper transcend such tides of time?’

See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 60-67, for an indication of how a part of this retelling interprets the original text (in particular 3.8.3-5,7-11, where Gārgī questions Yājñavalkya a second time).
‘Through the chanting priest, through the air and through the breath of life. Where chanter, air and life are realized as one, there freedom is attained.’

‘Yājñavalkya, given that the sky seems to be held aloft without support, through what means of ascent may heaven be attained?’

‘Through the supervising priest, through the moon and through thought. Where supervisor, moon and thought are realized as one, there freedom is attained.’

Thus Yājñavalkya answered questions from Ashvala and from many others. At first, preliminary questions were asked, about ritual and cosmic symbols and about personality and mind. Then Ushasta, son of Cakra, began to question Yājñavalkya about the absolute.

‘Yājñavalkya, can you explain the nature of that all-comprehending reality which is immediately present and directly known, as the universal self in everything?’

‘This reality is your own self,’ said Yājñavalkya. ‘Your own self, just as you really are, is there in everything.’

‘But what is it, in everything?’

‘It is life, in living actions,
life drawn back in rest and peace,
life pervading different actions,
life raised up in happiness.

‘This is your self, in everything.’

‘But Yājñavalkya, by describing the absolute as “life”, you are only indicating that we might look for it in the outward manifestations of life: as for example in a horse or a cow, for these are both forms of life. What is the absolute in itself?’

‘The seeing principle
that sees all sights
cannot be seen.

‘The hearing principle
that hears all sounds
cannot be heard.

‘The thinking principle
that shines as meaning
in all thought
cannot be thought.
‘The knowing principle
that knows all knowledge
can’t be known
by body, sense or mind.

‘This is your self, in everything.
All else is misery and wrong.’

Ushasta was satisfied, and held his peace.

But Kahola, son of Kushitaka, did not quite understand what Yājñavalkya had said; and so he persisted with the same question: ‘Yājñavalkya, could you further explain to me the nature of this absolute reality which is always immediately present and directly known, as the universal self of everything?’

‘This reality is your own individual self. Your own individual self is always present, here and now, in everything.’

‘But what is it, in everything?’

‘It is beyond hunger and thirst, beyond grief and delusion, beyond decay and death. Realizing this self, men of knowledge rise above desire for family and wealth and worlds. And thus, they are naturally freed from the bondage of petty desires for the limited, passing objects of the apparent world. For they come to understand that all desires for objects are only varying manifestations of longing for the true happiness of unconditioned self.

‘A man of learning who has had enough of technical sophistication may seek a life of innocence and simplicity. When he has also had enough of innocence and simplicity, he may become contemplative. When he has had enough of contemplation and states beyond contemplation, then he may become a true man of knowledge.’

‘How may such a man of knowledge be?’

‘However he may seem to be, in that he is true to knowledge. All else is misery and wrong.’

And now Kahola held his peace.

Then Gārgi, daughter of Vacaknu, asked: ‘Yājñavalkya, what common basis can be found to underlie the different objects of the world?’

‘The different objects of the world are said to arise from the element called “earth”. This is the element of apparent solidity in the world, whereby each object has a separate identity of its own, separated from the rest of the world by recognizable boundaries in space and time. As clay is fashioned into different pots, so also all the different objects of the world are fashioned from the element called “earth”.’
‘But, on what basis do different objects come to acquire their separate identities?’
‘The separate identity of each “earth”-born object arises from its form, by which its parts are related together in a particular fashion that makes the object recognizable as a distinct entity. And this relationship of parts is a product of the transformations that have fashioned the object and have brought it into manifest existence. Thus, the separate identity of “earth”-born objects is fashioned on the basis of a further element called “water”, the fluid element of form and transformation. And, from this, it may be seen that the solid element, “earth”, is permeated by its underlying basis in “water”, the fluid element of changing form.’
‘But then, what is the basis of this fluid element, called “water”?’
‘The illuminating element of meaning, called “fire”. For it is on the basis of meaning that the changing forms of the world are known, as they shine with light from understanding.’
‘And what is the basis of this meaningful element, called “fire”?’
‘The element of quality, called “air”, which is not seen by the gross senses, but is more subtly felt by intuition and sensibility. For it is on the basis of their qualities that forms are able to express meaning.’
‘And what is the basis of this qualitative element, called “air”?’
‘The element of continuity, called “ether”, which pervades the differing objects, forms, meanings and qualities that are perceived in the apparent world. For it is on the basis of continuing principles that differing objects and their varying forms, meanings and qualities are related, compared and understood: as differing manifestations of common reality.’
‘And what is the basis of this continuing, pervasive element, called “ether”?’
‘The subtle worlds of celestial spirits, who live in the ethereal regions of the sky.’
‘And what is the basis of these celestial worlds?’
‘The worlds of radiant sun, above the sky.’
‘And what is the basis of these worlds of sun?’
‘The worlds of moon and stars, whose light shines when the sun has set.’
‘And what is the basis of these worlds of moon and stars?’
‘The worlds of gods, who govern the stars, the moon, the sun, the sky, and all the elements.’
‘And what is the basis of these worlds of gods?’
‘The worlds of Indra, Lord of gods, who rules the other gods.’
‘And what is the basis of these worlds of Indra, Lord of gods?’
‘The worlds of God the Creator, from whom all gods and all things else are born.’
And what is the basis of these worlds of God the Creator?

The great totality of all existence, called “brahman”, which includes all things.

And what about this all-including totality, called “brahman”?

At this point, Gārgi, your questioning is on the verge of becoming idle; and your reasoning is about to defeat itself. The great totality called “brahman” is the basis of all things, including reason and all its questionings. In order to find this great totality, reason must dig up the ground from under its own feet; and thus it must be absorbed and must dissolve into its own basis. There, it is meaningless to imagine any remaining faculty of reason that asks questions about some further basis.

Gārgi had to accept that she had come to the end of this particular line of reasoning. And so, for the time being, she remained silent.

Next, it was Uddālaka, son of Aruṇa, who took up the questioning: ‘Yājñavalkya, when my fellow students and I were studying sacrificial ritual under Patancala Kāpya of the Madra tribe, his wife was possessed by a celestial spirit. The spirit told us he was Kabandha, son of Atharvan, and he asked two questions:

“Do you know that thread by which all beings, all this world and any other worlds are strung together?

“And do you know that inner controller who controls all beings, all this world and any other worlds?”

Our teacher said he did not know.

The spirit said: “By knowing this thread and this inner controller, a person comes to knowledge of the absolute … of worlds, gods, scriptures, living beings, self, and everything.”

Yājñavalkya, do you know this thread and inner controller? If you do not, and if you still take these cows that have been dedicated to a knower of the absolute, then you will surely come to grief.’

Yes, I know the thread and the inner controller.’

Anyone can say: “I know, I know.” Tell us what you know.’

The thread you speak of is the subtle breath of life, which is manifested in the meaningful coherence that we find expressed in the functioning of the universe. By this thread of living breath, all beings, all the world and any other worlds are strung together. Thus, when a person dies, the body’s parts are no longer held together in meaningful coherence by living breath, and they are easily dispersed as lifeless earth.’

Yes, it is so. Now tell us of the inner controller.’

It is that inner principle
there in the earth, unknown by earth,
controlling earth as its own body.

‘It is the inner principle
of waters, fire, air and ether,
sky and sun and moon and stars.

‘It is the inner principle
of light and dark, and living things,
of living faculties and sense,
of mind and heart and consciousness.

‘Never seen, it is the see-er;
never heard, it is the hearer;
never thought, it is the thinker;
never known, it is the knower.

‘Nothing else can see or hear
or think or feel or understand.
Nothing else can know at all.

‘This is the inner controller.
It is your self, your very own;
and it is never touched by death.
All else is misery and wrong.’

Uddālaka was satisfied, and held his peace.

Now Gārgī spoke again: ‘Yājñavalkya, I have two further questions for you. They are all that I can ask.’

‘Yes, Gārgī. Ask.’

‘Yājñavalkya, when I was questioning you a short while ago, we proceeded along a tortuous path of cosmic elements and gods. Let me now try to proceed more directly. What is the substance of all that is said to be existence: above heaven, below earth, in earth and heaven and in between, in all that was and is and is to be?’

‘This all-pervasive substance is called “ether”. It is not a gross substance, like “earth”, which can be fashioned into separate objects, as a potter fashions clay into pots. Instead, this “ether” is the highly subtle substance of underlying continuity: which enables each object or event to be understood, in relation to other objects and events located elsewhere in space and time.

‘Through the limited perceptions of body, senses and mind, limited objects and events appear at the forefront of attention. Each particular object or event is thus a limited and partial appearance of a much larger world. Each such
limited appearance, of only one particular object or event, is understood in
relation to a background of experience which somehow comprehends other
objects and events that are not explicitly seen or thought of at the time.

‘As attention turns from one appearance to another, the background of
experience continues, enabling different appearances and different objects
and events to be related. In every object or event that appears in experience,
this continuing background is understood. Its continuity thus extends through-
out experience: through all space and time, through all relationships and
through all causes and effects.

‘The subtle substance “ether” is essentially unmanifest. Unlike gross mat-
ter, it is not manifested by its separation into different objects and events.
Instead, it underlies experience, as the continuing background that is implic-
itely understood in the perception of all objects and events. It is the continuing
background of the entire world: the complete background of all-containing
space, time and causality.’

‘Yes, this is a satisfying answer, and it leads to my second question. On
what basis does this continuing background pervade all of existence?’

‘The basis of all space, all time,
all cause, cannot itself be changed,
nor qualified, by changing
qualities of space and time and cause.
Thus, it is described as “changeless”.

‘It is not coarse, nor yet refined;
it is not long or short, nor wet
or dry; nor has it colour,
shade or darkness, taste or smell.

‘It is not “air”, nor “ether”:
for it has no qualities,
and it cannot be related
to anything besides itself.

‘It has no eyes, no ears, no speech,
no mind; it is not sharp, nor has
it vital force, nor face, nor measure.
Nor does it consume, nor is consumed.
It has no outside, nor inside.

‘Based on this changeless principle,
the sun and moon are kept on course,
and heaven and earth remain in place.
‘Moments pass in due succession,
    days give way to nights and nights to days,
    seasons alternate and years pass by.
    Rivers rise and flow from mountains.
    People work to seek reward.

‘Wherever there is ignorance
    of this one changeless principle,
    work but results in passing gain.

‘To leave the world in ignorance
    of changeless truth is misery.

‘But one who knows this changeless truth
    has reached the goal of all desire,
    and leaves the world in deathless peace
    with nothing further to attain.

‘This changeless principle
    cannot be seen:
    it is the see-er.

‘It can’t be heard:
    it is the hearer.

‘It can’t be thought:
    it is the thinker.

‘It can’t be known:
    it is the knower.

‘Nothing else can see or hear
    or think or feel or understand.

‘Nothing else can know at all.

‘Gārgī, this changeless, knowing principle is the basis on which stands the
    all-pervading continuity called “ether”. This is the ultimate basis of all ap-
    parent existence.’

    Now Gārgī turned to the learned assembly of her fellow priests and schol-
    ars. ‘Honoured Sirs,’ she said, ‘you should consider yourselves lucky if you
    can get away from him by paying nothing more than your respects. I cannot
    see how any of you will ever defeat him in exposition of the absolute.’

    Then Vidagdha, son of Shakala, asked: ‘Yājnyavalkya, how many gods are
    there?’
As stated in the invocation to the gods: three hundred and three, and three thousand and three.

So it is said. But, more correctly, how many gods are there?
Thirty-three.

So it is said. But, more correctly, how many gods are there?
Six.

So it is said. But, more correctly, how many gods are there?
Three.

So it is said. But, more correctly, how many gods are there?
Two.

So it is said. But, more correctly, how many gods are there?
One and a half.

So it is said. But, more correctly, how many gods are there?
One.

So it is said. But tell us, who are all these gods?
In effect, there are only thirty-three gods. The others are their manifestations.

Which are these thirty-three?
Eight gods that shine; eleven gods that wail; twelve gods that take away. And further, the Lord of gods and God the Creator.

Which are the gods that shine?
Fire, earth, air, sky, the sun, the heavens, the moon and the stars. All things are guided by these shining gods.

Which are the gods that wail?
A person has five faculties of sense: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. So also there are five faculties of action: expression, represented by the spoken voice; acquisition, represented by a person’s grasping hands; locomotion, represented by a person’s walking feet; expulsion, represented by the discharge of bodily waste; and regeneration, represented by the birth and bringing up of children. In addition to these ten faculties of sense and action, there is the inner faculty of mind; making eleven faculties in all. These eleven faculties are gods that wail, because they herald pain and misery, as they go out to an external world of conflict and destruction.

Which are the gods that take away?
The twelve months of the year, which represent the passing of time. As time passes, it takes all things away.

Who is the Lord of gods, and who is the Creator?
The Lord of gods is represented by the thunder-cloud, and the Creator is represented by the ritual of sacrifice.

How does the thunder-cloud represent the Lord of gods?
Through the brilliance of concentrated energy, in lightning.
‘How is the Creator represented in the ritual of sacrifice?’
‘Through the regeneration of life, in sacrificing the gross and subtle bodies.’
‘How then can all these gods be reduced to six?’
‘All of them may be reduced to fire, earth, air, the sky, the sun and the heavens. For, through these six gods of light and space, all other gods are known.’
‘And how may the gods be reduced further, to three?’
‘The world of earth consists of earth and fire. The world of sky consists of sky and air. The world of heaven consists of the heavens and the sun. Thus, these three worlds encompass all the gods.’
‘And how may this further be reduced to two?’
‘If we consider all the matter in the earth and sky and heavens, and if we consider all the energy in fire and air and sun; then all gods are reduced to matter and energy.’
‘And how may this be further reduced, to one and a half?’
‘The subtle breath of life, which is manifested in all the functioning of matter and energy, is one and a half.’
‘Why is it one and a half?’
‘Because all things appear through its manifesting energy, thus giving it an extra half existence: the extra half existence of partial manifestation, which it appears to possess, in addition to its own proper existence.’
‘Then how can there be one God, alone?’
‘That one God is life itself, unconditioned and unmanifest. It is the absolute, besides which nothing else exists. It is called merely: “That”.’
‘Yājñavalkya, you have out-argued other men of learning by your claim to know the absolute. But, what do you know about it?’
‘I know how the absolute may be represented in various directions, through various deities and the supporting foundations on which they depend.’
‘In that case, what is the deity of the east?’
‘The sun.’
‘On what does this deity depend?’
‘On sight.’
‘On what does sight depend?’
‘On the visual forms and qualities that are seen by sight.’
‘On what do these forms and qualities depend?’
‘On the heart, for forms and qualities are known and understood through the intuition of the heart.’
‘Very well, but what is the deity of the south?’
‘Death.’
‘On what does this deity of death depend?’
‘On sacrifice.’
‘On what does sacrifice depend?’
‘On offering.’
‘On what does offering depend?’
‘On faith. For offerings are made when there is faith.’
‘On what does faith depend?’
‘On the heart. For faith arises from the judgement of the heart.’
‘Very well. But what is the deity of the west?’
‘Rain.’
‘On what does this deity depend?’
‘On water.’
‘On what does water depend?’
‘On the fertility of creation.’
‘On what does fertility depend?’
‘On the heart. For creation grows from seeds of thought and feeling that emerge from the heart, as a child grows from its parents’ seed.’
‘Very well, but what is the deity of the north?’
‘The moon, god of mystery and imagination.’
‘On what does this deity depend?’
‘On initiation.’
‘On what does initiation depend?’
‘On truth, as when an initiate is enjoined to speak the truth.’
‘On what does truth depend?’
‘On the heart. For truth is known through purity of heart.’
‘Very well, but what is the deity of the upward direction, towards the zenith overhead?’
‘Fire.’
‘On what does this deity depend?’
‘On the meaningful expression of knowledge, as exemplified by speech.’
‘On what does meaningful expression depend?’
‘On the heart.’
‘On what does the heart depend?’
‘Now you have asked a foolish question,’ said Yājñavalkya. ‘If you think that your heart can be anything apart from your self, then you become a ghost: an empty shell of mere appearance which must disappear when properly examined in the sober light of day. Devoid of living self, there is no heart; and the body is nothing more than dead meat, fit to be eaten by dogs or torn apart by vultures.’
‘Since you make out that you are so clever, on what do you and your precious “self” depend?’
‘In each person’s body, an appearance of self is created by the outgoing
faculty of expression, which is projected from within the heart towards the external world.’

‘On what does this outgoing faculty depend?’

‘On the in-drawing faculty of observation, which takes perception into the mind.’

‘On what does this in-drawing faculty depend?’

‘On the discerning faculty of interpretation, which reflects back and forth between observation and understanding, thus interpreting the meaning of perceptions.’

‘On what does this discerning faculty depend?’

‘On the integrating faculty of understanding, which assimilates meaning into the heart, and which co-ordinates expression as it is projected outwards from the heart.’

Vidagdha remained silent now; so Yājñavalkya continued: ‘But surely, the enquiry doesn’t end here. A further question remains to be asked. What is that fundamental principle from which all experience is projected, and into which all perception and meaning are assimilated?’

Vidagdha was quite out of his depth, and could not answer. His reason clouded over and his manner became strangely awkward, as though his limbs and faculties no longer quite belonged to him. For it had turned out that he did not properly understand his own arguments, and he could no longer tell quite what to think or say.

Then Yājñavalkya said: ‘Honoured priests and scholars, do any of you wish to question me further? Or are there any of you who would be questioned by me?’

No one spoke out in reply, so Yājñavalkya continued: ‘Then I will put a question to all of you together.

‘A tree that’s cut sprouts up again from root, and thus it is reborn. But if a tree is pulled up by the roots, it is not born again.

‘A person is not born just once, for personality is changed; each passing moment of our lives. Each moment, we are born again.

‘What is the root from which a person is reborn, time after time?’
‘What is the ground which holds the root, the ground in which all life dissolves each time it dies and is reborn, the ground in which life comes to peace when the root has been pulled out?’

Again, no one answered. So Yājñavalkya said:

‘The root is ego’s ignorance, falsely identifying self as changing personality: as little body, born of flesh, or senses going out to world, or shifting mind that dies away with every thought that passes on.

‘The ground is what self really is, continuing through seeming change: the source and goal of everything, pure knowledge, unmixed happiness.’

from chapter 3
Light 6

One day, on a visit to King Janaka, Yājñavalkya remained silent. So Janaka asked:

‘Yājñavalkya, what is light?’

‘Light is the radiance of the sun, by which each person sees a world of sights and shapes and moving things, a world of colours, contrasts, shades.

‘By light a person sees a world outside, goes out into this world to get things done, and comes back home.’

‘But Yājñavalkya, when the sun has set and night has come, what then is light that shows us what we see?’

‘Light is the radiance of the moon, by which a person sees the world at night, goes out into this world to get things done, and comes back home.’

‘But Yājñavalkya, when both moon and sun have vanished from the sky, what then is light by which we see?’

‘When both the sun and moon have vanished, light shines out from burning fire. Thus, even on a moonless night a person sees the world, goes out to get things done, and comes back home.’

‘But Yājñavalkya, what is light when fire is burnt out and shines no more, so eyes no longer see?’

‘Then sight gives way to sound and smell

6See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 68-75, 162-163 and 167-168, for an indication of how parts of this retelling interpret the original text (in particular: 4.3.7-12,15-17 together with 4.4.16-22; 4.3.21; and 4.3.32; respectively).
and taste and touch; for by such light
of other senses even those
who have no eyes observe the world,
go get things done, and come back home.’

‘But Yājnyavalkya, in a dream
or deep in thought, when outward sense
has turned back in, when outward sight
and sound and smell and taste and touch
have disappeared, what then is light?’

‘Then thought and feeling shine with light
by which each person knows the world,
goes out, does things, and comes back home.’

‘But Yājnyavalkya, when the mind
is stilled, in dreamless sleep or in
deep meditation or between
successive thoughts, what is light then?’

‘Then light is shown for what it is,
unmixed with falsities of mind.

‘Light is the nature of the self;
for it is by the consciousness of
knowing self that everyone
makes observations, goes about
the world, does things, and comes back home.’

‘But then, what is this knowing self?’

‘It is the light of consciousness
within each living creature’s heart.

‘And though it seems to journey through
a waking world of outside things
or inner worlds of dreaming mind,
in truth, it always stays the same
through all appearances of change.

‘In depth of sleep, the self is shown
beyond all worlds of changing form.

‘Where this self seems born as body,
it seems to suffer body’s ills.
Each body dies, all ills must pass; that which remains, unchanged, is self. 4.3.8

‘There are two seeming states of self:
‘as body in an outside world;
‘or mind, conceiving subtle worlds made up of its own thoughts and dreams.

‘But, joining these apparent states, is that third state where seeming stops, where thoughts and dreams have all dissolved and no appearances remain.

‘This is the state of dreamless sleep; the timeless state that is achieved when meditation stills the mind; the state between successive thoughts, where previous thought has come to end and further thought has not begun.

‘Here, in this unconditioned state, self shines unmixed with alien things that make it seem what it is not.

‘Remaining always in this state of unconditioned purity, self lights the body’s waking world and worlds of mind that dreaming brings.

‘Whatever state seems to appear, all seeming ills and seeming joys are lit and known by self alone.

‘As mind withdraws from world in sleep, the whole created world dissolves in all creation’s shining source: where self is light which lights itself. 4.3.9

‘Here, where all dreams dissolve in light from which they come, there is no change, nor cause of change, nor place for change.
There is no need for fancy’s flight, there are no bounds, there is no pain. 4.3.10

‘When body sleeps, the body’s world dissolves in unmixed consciousness; as body’s seeming consciousness returns again to its true source in that unsleeping, deathless self which knows all worlds, all dreams, all sleep. 4.3.11

‘The body’s seeming life is bound to breath, to circulating blood, to many other vital needs that keep our bodies functioning.

‘But self is free, it has no needs; it is untouched by seeming change. As life itself, it cannot die.

‘Through passing states of wakefulness and dream and sleep, the self alone goes on from state to state, unchanged. 4.3.12

‘The wandering mind creates in dream a multitude of passing forms. It sometimes seems to laugh and play in company of pleasant friends. It sometimes seems beset by fear, caught up in pain and misery. 4.3.13

‘All this is but a fancied game created by our seeming minds. These minds, caught up in their own game, don’t see the source from which they come, where fancies rise and come to rest.

‘The waking state too can be seen as but a dream of fancied thought. There is no light outside the self, this self which is itself pure light. 4.3.14

‘In sleep, in dreams, in wakefulness,
the self is always free: unchanged by all the good and evil things that seem to pass before its light.

‘It only knows, it does not act; and so it cannot be attached.

Through subtle tricks of seeming mind, it may be ignorantly thought that self is in a fallen state, in bondage to an alien world. But, when mind clears and comes to peace, both self and world are seen as one.

‘When this plain truth is understood, all misery comes to an end and all desire is realized; for every object of desire is known as nothing else but self.

‘Self knows all things as consciousness, and consciousness is merely self. Self knows, but there is nothing else for self to know. All knowledge is no more or less than deathless self, which shines with light that is itself.

‘Self is, complete; because it knows, and all it knows is self alone.’

‘Then Yājnyavalkya, what is love that makes a person feel the need for unity with someone else?’

‘When unity has been achieved with someone who is truly loved, all care dissolves in love itself, which shines as peace and happiness.

‘Thus, happiness of love attained shows self and world as really one, beyond all false duality.'
‘In this true non-duality, there is no world outside the self.

‘A mother is none else than self; a father is none else than self.

‘A thief is nothing else than self; a murderer is only self.

‘All gods and demons are but self.

‘Self is beyond all good and ill, untouched by seeming loss and gain.

‘All that is seen is self alone. All that is heard is self alone. All that is smelled, or tasted, touched, or spoken of, or thought, or felt, is nothing else but self alone.

‘In each sensation, each perception, every thought and every feeling, self is that which only knows: unmixed with any kind of act.

‘It sees, without an act of seeing visualizing something else. It hears without an act of hearing listening to something else.

‘It senses odour as mere smell: as nothing else but consciousness, not as the object of an act.

‘It tastes, but all it tastes is flavour: nothing else but consciousness, not any object of an act.

‘It touches all, but in this touching stays unmoved and does not act. It does not go from “this” to “that”, but just remains exactly what it always is: pure consciousness.
‘It speaks, without an act of speaking saying words that represent something else besides itself.

‘It thinks, without mind’s outward acts: which start from mind and then go on to something that is thought about.

‘It thinks, without the mind’s reflective act: of thinking that it thinks, and falling back into itself.

‘It feels, without an act of feeling going out to something else and judging value in the world.

‘It feels, without an act of feeling changing from one state of mind to another state of mind that’s brought about by mind’s own actions and by changing circumstance.

‘In all that self experiences, it never puts on any act that starts from “this” and ends with “that”.

‘For there is nothing else to see or hear or smell or taste or touch or speak about or think or feel.

‘There’s nothing else but self alone.

‘As all waves are only water, so all seeming things are self, which knows all things as but itself, as undivided happiness.’

‘But Yājñavalkya, where is self when body perishes at death?’

‘Change and death pertain to body; they never can pertain to self. Though body changes, self remains; though body dies, the self lives on.”
‘Thus self, continuing unchanged, 
seems to move on from change to change, 
sees to live on from birth to death, 
from death to birth and death again.

‘In truth, the self is life itself, 
where death and time do not arise.  
It cannot die or move or change.  

‘The self in every one of us  
is all there is, all there can be.  
But this completeness is obscured  
by ego’s false identity:  
as self confused with partial things.

‘Thus, self appears as feeling heart,  
or thinking mind, or guiding will,  
or senses that perceive a world,  
or body acting in the world:  
bound by the world, by likes, dislikes,  
by forms and meanings, good and ill.

‘Where self and body are confused,  
a person seems to reap the fruit  
of actions that are good or bad.  
Good actions lead to benefit;  
bad actions lead to loss and ill.

‘Gross body’s acts show mind’s desire;  
and thus the body’s outward acts  
show subtle mind, which thinks and feels  
and reaps the fruits of its desires.  

‘By desire for outward objects,  
mind is bound to outward acts.  
But when desires are fulfilled  
and turn back in, towards the self,  
all bonds dissolve and self shines out  
as free, unbounded consciousness.

‘All that is sought in happiness  
is just the nature of the self.’
‘But Yājñavalkya, happiness seems to be just a passing state of fickle, oscillating mind, which rises up to heights of joy and falls to depths of misery.

‘With states of joy but short relief from bondage to repeated grief, how then can anyone break free to lasting peace and happiness?’

‘Whoever lusts for passing things must suffer seeming loss and grief, as objects that seem loved pass on.

‘Whoever’s heart is free from lust knows here and now that self alone is source and goal of all desire.

‘As when a snake casts off its skin; so too this seeming shell of mind and body is cast off unmourned, when self is known for what it is.

‘Whoever realizes self as deathless light, lives here and now in lasting peace and happiness. This is the way to deathlessness, which everyone has always sought.

‘By realizing what self is, all bonds are loosed, all conflicts end, all pain burns up, no faults remain. All imperfections are dissolved in truth, as freedom is attained.

‘Lack of learning leads to blindness; pretended learning leads to worse. Unknowing, unenlightened life seems caught in death and joylessness.

‘When self is known for what it is, how can the body’s ills cause grief?
For self remains untouched, unbound, the unaffected depth within our bodily uncertainties.

‘Whoever knows and understands this real self gains all the world, for all the world is but this self.

‘The truth is here before our eyes: it’s ours to understand right now. If not, we suffer misery.

‘Those who are ignorant find loss; those who know truth find deathlessness.

‘When self is seen to be the source of all we seek or need or wish, transcending all that was or is or ever shall in future be, no reason can be left to shrink from facing plain reality.

‘Before the self, all moments pass, each day proceeds and turns to night, each season gives way to the next, and seasons cycle into years.

‘For self is knowing consciousness, which knows all time, all place, all things. It is the ever-present light that lights all lights in all we know.

‘Through all appearances that come and go in our experience, this knowing consciousness goes on from difference to difference, from change to change. And through all change it is the vital core of life, which lasts, as all else comes and goes.

‘This never-changing consciousness is that immortal absolute.
upon which all experience rests.  
Just knowing it brings deathlessness.  4.4.17

‘It is the living principle  
in all the various lives we lead.
It is the seeing principle  
in all the various sights we see.
It is the hearing principle  
in all appearances of sound.

‘It is the knowing principle  
in all our minds’ experiences:  
in all the meanings we perceive,  
in all the various thoughts we think,  
in all the feelings that we feel.  4.4.18

‘But, in this knowing principle,  
which knows all change and difference,  
no change or difference exists.

‘Whoever sees diversity  
and change sees but appearances,  
which only lead from death to death.  4.4.19

‘Self is that one unchanging truth  
which can’t be known by changing mind.
‘Shared in common by all difference,  
stainless through all imperfection,  
ever born in all creation,  
limitless through space and time;  
beyond all words, beyond all thought,  
beyond all forms and qualities;

‘sself is known by simply being,  
because its nature is to shine.  4.4.20-21

‘True self is unborn consciousness,  
the ground of all experience,  
from which appearances are born.

‘It is life in living function,  
source and aim of all intention,
untouched depth of all emotion, 
infinite, within each heart.

‘No action can affect this self: 
good actions cannot make it grow, 
bad actions cannot cause it loss. 
It is complete reality, 
beyond all partial-seeming things.

‘It is the underlying ground 
from which all difference seems to rise, 
on which all different things seem to 
exist apart, to which all 
seeming difference must return again.

‘It is the final goal we seek, 
through learning, love and sacrifice.

‘Those who renounce the world's desires, 
and wander far in search of truth, 
find what they seek when they find self.

‘It is described by negatives, 
as truth which is “not this, not that”; 
for it is nothing limited 
which mind or body can perceive.

‘Unperceived by partial senses, 
self can never be obstructed, 
can’t be bound like mind and body, 
can’t be fooled by lying ego making self seem incomplete.  

‘Whoever truly finds the self 
transcends all ego’s petty sense of seeming, partial separateness.

‘All ills burn up, all bonds are freed; 
all strife, all doubts give way to peace 
of deathless truth that never ends.’  

4.4.22

4.4.23-25
Yājñavalkya had two wives, Maitreyī and Kātyāyanī. Of the two, Maitreyī was interested in questions of ultimate truth. When the time came for Yājñavalkya to renounce the life of a householder, he said: ‘Maitreyī, I must leave. Let me make a last settlement upon you and Kātyāyanī.’

Maitreyī replied: ‘If this whole world and all its wealth were mine, would that make me deathless?’

‘No,’ said Yājñavalkya, ‘you would then lead the life of the wealthy. But you cannot hope to find deathlessness in wealth.’

Maitreyī said: ‘What should I do with things that do not lead to deathlessness? All I ask is that you teach me what you know.’

Yājñavalkya replied: ‘You have always been very dear to me, and what you say now makes you dearer still. Yes, if you like, I shall teach you. But you will have to think hard about it.

‘What does a wife love in her husband?
Is it just that he’s a husband?
If it’s that, it isn’t love.
All she can love in him is self.

‘And when a husband loves his wife,
is it love if she’s just a wife?
All he can love in her is self.

‘So also love of children, friends,
living creatures, places, objects,
love of power, love of knowledge.
All that’s loved is only self.

‘When this self is seen and known,
then all the world is truly known
and there is nothing else to know.

‘Where learning is not realized
as self, such learning cannot last.
Where power is not realized
as self, nor can such power stay.

See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 160-162 and 11-20, for an indication of how parts of this retelling interpret the original text (in particular: 4.5.6-7 and 4.5.13-15, respectively).
‘Where worlds or gods or living things or any other things are not realized as self; such alien things must part from self in course of time, must be obscured and disappear, must seem unstable, seem unsure, must seem to change and pass away.

‘In truth all learning, power, worlds, gods, living things and all things else are nothing other than the self.

‘Just as sounds of drum-beats, fanfare and plucked strings are understood only as music that expresses meaning from the player’s self;

‘just as fire when it burns produces different kinds of smoke;

‘so also, different kinds of scripture, verses, aphorisms, explanations, sacrifice, this world, the next, all life and all apparent things are but the breath of this great being.

‘Like waters merging in the sea, all colours merge in sense of sight, sounds are merged in sense of hearing, odours merge in sense of smell, flavours merge in sense of taste, felt sensations merge in touch;

‘actions merge in motivation, all expressions merge in meaning, thoughts and ideas merge in mind, and feelings are all merged in heart.

‘Salt that is dissolved in water cannot be picked out by fingers, can’t be held by grasping hands.
It’s not a separate lump of salt;  
it has no outside nor inside.

‘But it is there in every drop,  
for each drop tastes of saltiness.

‘So too, the self is everywhere;  
though it can’t be picked out by senses,  
cannot be conceived by mind.  
It’s not a bounded piece of world;  
it has no outside nor inside.

‘But it’s here, in all experience,  
always here, as consciousness.

‘All mind and sense, and all the objects  
they perceive, are formed from changing  
elements; in course of time,  
they all must change and pass away.

‘Wherever knowledge is attained,  
no such perception can remain.’

At this point, Yājñavalkya paused, with the remark: ‘Well, that’s what I say.’

Maitreyī said: ‘Just here, I am confused. Where knowledge is attained,  
how does perception cease? I can’t make sense of it.’

Yājñavalkya replied: ‘It isn’t really confusing, if you distinguish the changing perception of apparent objects from the continuing basis of consciousness into which each perception is absorbed.

‘As perceptions are absorbed,  
they’re known as mere appearances  
produced by acts of sense and mind  
that part reveal and part conceal  
the nature of reality.  
Thus understood, they are dissolved  
in underlying consciousness.

‘And consciousness is that which knows  
appearances, as mind and sense  
perceive a world of changing things.

‘But no appearance can exist  
apart from knowing consciousness.'
Any appearance that departs from consciousness must disappear at once, and is no longer there.

‘Thus, no appearance has any existence outside consciousness; and all of the reality that each appearance truly shows is nothing else but consciousness.

‘As consciousness illuminates appearances of seeming world, in truth, it only knows itself.

‘In it, there’s no duality of knowing self and object known. It is at once the self that knows and all that’s ever really known.

‘Duality seems to arise where it appears that something sees or hears or smells or tastes or touches something else besides itself;

‘or where it seems that something speaks about or thinks about or knows some object other than itself.

‘But when all things are realized as nothing else but self alone, by whom can what be seen? By whom can what be heard, smelled, tasted, touched, described, conceived, desired and known?

‘By whom is knowledge truly known?

‘The knowing self cannot be any kind of object in the world.

‘Not this, nor that, nor here, nor there in space or time, it never can be anything perceived through any faculty of any body or of any sense or mind.
‘It is unowned, can’t be possessed;  
it does not die, does not decay,  
is unattached, cannot be bound  
or limited or qualified;  
nor can it ever suffer harm  
or be disturbed in any way.

‘Thus, deathlessness may be attained  
by asking, till no lies remain:

“How can the self that knows be known?”

‘Maitreyī, this is the instruction that you asked. Such is the way to deathlessness.’

With these words, Yājñavalkya left home.
The essence of personality

The essence of this personality that seems to rise from mind is nothing else but light itself, found here within each person’s heart;

just as the essence of a plant that seems to rise and grow from seed is nothing else but life itself, somehow contained within each seed.

This inner principle of light guides all experience, and hence governs everything that we perceive, from beneath whatever seems to be.

8See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 103-104, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
From the Chāndogya Upanishad

Change and space

What is this change and movement that appears to form our world?

All seeming motion is but space; for everything is formed in space.
When formed, each thing is part of space; whatever moves, must move in space.
Contained in space, all forms arise and move and change and pass away.

All moving things and changing forms arise, take shape, continue on and come to end in space alone.

1The word ‘space’ here translates ‘ākāsha’, which also means ‘ether’ or ‘sky’. The underlying sense is that of pervasiveness and continuation. Accordingly, ‘space’ is not here conceived in a narrow sense: as the distance that separates particular objects. Instead, it is conceived in a more universal sense: as continuing space and time, which together contain the entire universe, and which thus connect different objects. In this conception, all of space and time are taken together, as the pervasive and unifying background of the world, in which each physical and mental thing must be located.

There is a striking correspondence here with modern physics. In the theory of relativity, Einstein conceived the physical world as a ‘space-time continuum’: where space, time, matter and energy are essentially inter-related and must be considered together, in order to understand an invariant and continuing reality beneath the variations and changes of relative appearance.

See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 59-60, for a further indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
Personality and consciousness

The living core of consciousness within each personality is greater than all outward acts.

The changing world of partial things and all appearances of mind are seeming parts of consciousness.

The greater, truer part is that illuminating principle which lights up all appearances, continuing through seeming change and knowing all experiences.

This is the unseen, common ground of self-illuminating light, which knows all difference and change. It cannot change or pass away.

It is the background of the world outside each personality. It is the core of mind and heart within each personality. It is found everywhere, complete, continuing through everything.

Who knows this achieves fulfilment, realizes deathlessness.
The principle of light

There is a light beyond all lights:
which lights up all reflected things,
which lights the dark of lightlessness,
which lights each shining source of light.

This light of lights and lightlessness is here within each one of us.

It’s seen in sight and sightlessness;
it’s felt through warmth of living touch;
it’s heard when hearing turns away from outward sounds, and hears instead the fire blazing here within.

Who heeds this light, in sight and sound and mind and all appearances,
sees beauty shining everywhere;
hears harmony in everything;
and realizes every thought and feeling as a seeming wave of unconditioned, changeless truth and unaffected happiness.
Reality and self\textsuperscript{2}

In truth, this many seeming world is only one reality, in which all things seem to be born, seem to live on and pass away.

For those who look, in tranquil peace, where all appearances arise, where all appearances are based, and where they all dissolve again, truth shines in all its clarity.

Each personality is made of inclinations, good and bad. Each person’s inclinations now build future personality.

By choosing to incline this way or that, each one of us builds up what later on our lives will be.

Through all the changes of our lives, in every personality, each one of us experiences a sense of self, that each calls ‘I’.

It is the knowing principle within our minds, the principle of life within all living things, the principle of consciousness that lights up all appearances.

In all conceptions it is truth: the background of reality in all the things we seem to see.

It is the ground on which we stand, the ground of all created things

\textsuperscript{2}See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 23-26, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
we see or hear, conceive or feel.
It is the basis of all sense,
all thought, all sensibility.

Beyond all partial, bounded forms
by which it seems to be expressed,
beyond all troubles of the mind
and body in this seeming world,
self is untroubled, always free.

This self within each person’s heart …

is smaller than the smallest thing
that eyes can see or mind conceive …

is greater than the whole wide earth
beneath our feet; is greater than
the sky’s expanse above our heads,
than any far-flung universe
that instruments can show to us,
than all the complex, subtle worlds
imagination can conceive.

In truth, this self within each heart
is absolute reality:
found everywhere, in everything,
beyond all things that seem to be.

Where outside things have been perceived
through body’s senses or through mind,
perception introduces doubt
that mind or body may be wrong.

But where the world’s appearances
are left behind and self is found,
there self directly knows itself.

It knows because it is itself,
and thus no room remains for doubt.

Whoever realizes self
knows finally, beyond all doubt,
unbounded, deathless certainty.
Life in this world is sacrifice. The years of youth are sacrificed to morning gods of waking earth. The years that follow youth are spent in sacrifice to midday gods of struggle to achieve success. Old age is spent in sacrifice to evening gods of glowing light, as body’s powers ebb away.

Hunger, want, unhappiness show us the need for sacrifice. Satisfaction, joy, success develop courage, lessen fear. Ethics, truth and discipline diminish petty selfishness. Laughter, love, vitality reduce our sense of separateness.

Life’s sacrifice begins with birth, goes on through every seeming breath and only ends at ego’s death; when self is truly realized as our changeless, deathless essence: sole source of life, pure consciousness.

Self is the ancient, timeless seed from which all life and world are born. Through all that seems obscurity, self shines undimmed as consciousness, the light that lights all other lights.

That light is self, and self alone.

See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 29-30, for an indication of how part of this retelling interprets the original text (in particular 3.17.7).
Subjective and objective

Subjectively, the thinking principle may be considered all reality, all that there is.

And then objectively, the background of the world, continuing through all appearances in space and time, may be considered all there is, all true reality.

Both of these meditations are advised: the first subjectively, \[3.18.1\] the second one objectively.  

\[4\]See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 67-68, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
The self in everyone

King Ashvapati Kaikeya was once approached by a small group of learned householders, who asked:

‘Sir, we have heard that you have knowledge of a “universal” self. Could you explain this self to us?’

King Ashvapati, in reply, said: ‘Tell me, first, just what you think this “universal” self might be.’

One thought this self was starry heaven, which rules what happens in the world.

Another thought this self was sun, illuminating world below.

A third believed this self was air, the subtle breath of qualities.

A fourth believed this self was space, pervading all that it contains.

A fifth believed this self was water, flowing into changing forms.

The sixth believed this self was matter, from constituting everything.

King Ashvapati said to them:

‘In all these different, partial views of one same “universal” self, you draw upon experience as if you know this self as something different from each one of you.

\footnote{See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 135-138, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.}
'But, surely, “universal” self is just that self which all of us see in ourselves in different ways.

‘Beneath these different points of view, just what is it that’s really here, shared in common by us all?

‘Beneath the many differences through which our bodies, minds and senses view the world, upon what common measure of all measured things do we rely, in order that such differences may be compared?

‘Our knowledge of the world is built by joining different measurements. But on what base? Is there in us one common base of measurement: to which each one of us refers for everything that’s measured here in anyone’s experience?

‘This common base of measurement is found by turning thought back in: to knowing self, from which thought comes. This is the self in each of us.

‘It’s the unmixed intensity of thought that’s known as thought alone: where knowing self is objectless, pure consciousness that knows all things as nothing else but self alone.

‘For one who knows this, all experience everywhere is drawn upon: whatever worlds may seem conceived, whatever beings may appear, however seen by seeming selves.’
Where knowledge comes from

Young Shvetaketu, twelve years old, was sent away from home to learn what custom said that he should know.

At twenty-four, his education seemed complete and he came back, proud of all that he had learned.

His father said: ‘But have you learned to question what you do not know?’

‘And have you ever asked yourself how you may learn what has not been already learned, how you may think of something that is yet unthought, how we may know reality beyond the bounds of seeming knowledge that our partial minds conceive?’

‘No, I have not been taught this way. I do not know quite what you mean.’

‘Consider, then, a piece of clay. Through it the substance “clay” is known. And thus, in knowing just this piece, the common nature of all clay is known, and tells of other things that also may be made of clay.

‘Through differences of name and form in different objects made of clay, one common substance, “clay”, is known. And thus, beneath appearances, we recognize reality beyond the bounds of name and form our changing minds appear to see.’

See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 27-29 and 198-200, for an indication of how parts of this retelling interpret the original text (in particular: 6.12.1-3 and 6.14.1-2, respectively).
Some say that all created things are only seeming names and forms that rise from empty nothingness.

But then, what are appearances? If they are names, what do they name? What is it that appears through all the many, changing forms we see? What is it that through different forms is shown by these appearances?

Appearances are nothing else but different forms of consciousness, which shines in every one of us and lights up all we seem to see.

Through seeming mind, this consciousness appears transformed in changing shapes that represent a varied world of forms and names and qualities.

But mind is partial; every shape it forms leaves something out, unformed, unnamed, unqualified.

Thus forms and names and qualities divide the world that mind perceives, and seem to show us separate things.

What are these separate-seeming things? They all arise in consciousness, continue on in consciousness, and come to end in consciousness.

They cannot rise, continue on or end, apart from consciousness. All that they are is consciousness.

Through all appearances of mind, reality is consciousness; for nothing else is ever known.

When mind dissolves in depth of sleep, no seeming object can remain and no reflected light is seen.
There, consciousness shines clarified,
unmixed with alien-seeming things.

‘To outward sight, deep sleep may seem
a state of empty nothingness;

‘but, seen itself, in its own sight,
deep sleep dissolves appearances
in self-illuminating light,
where all of being stands revealed
as unconditioned consciousness.

‘As honey holds within itself
sweet nectars drawn from many flowers,
and as these flower-nectars, merged,
have lost all sense of separateness;

‘so also consciousness contains
the essence of all sights, all sounds,
all thoughts and all appearances
that knowledge gathers from the world.

‘And these appearances of world,
when taken in and understood,
are merged as one in consciousness.

‘Flowing rivers are but water;
changing life is consciousness.
Mind and body change each moment;
objects seem to come and go.

‘Consciousness is always present,
always here in all experience;
it is that which never leaves us,
that which each of us calls “I”.

‘It is not a seeming object
mind or senses can perceive.
It cannot be a partial piece
of world, confined in space or time.

‘It is complete, here in each heart,
in every smallest particle
of everything we seem to see.
'And yet, all space, all time, all things, all minds are found contained in it.'

Then, Shvetaketu’s father led him to a spreading banyan tree, whose fruits had fallen on the ground.

‘Pick up a fruit…. Break it open…. Tell me what you see.’ ‘Tiny seeds.’

‘Break one of these…. What do you see?’ ‘Nothing. The seeds are much too small.’

‘And yet, within each tiny seed, there is a subtle something which your eyes don’t see, something unseen from which this spreading tree has grown.

‘So too, from unmixed consciousness, which mind and senses can’t perceive, arises this great-seeming world.

‘Pure consciousness, the essence of each mind and heart, is all the world’s reality. That is the truth. That is what you really are.’

Next, Shvetaketu’s father took some salt and gave it to his son:

‘Put this in a jar of water, leave it overnight and come back here again tomorrow morning.’

When Shvetaketu came again his father asked: ‘Take out the salt.’

‘I cannot, Sir. It has dissolved, and cannot now be seen at all.’

‘Then take a sip … a little sip, just from the top…. How does it taste?’

‘It’s salty, Sir.’ ‘Now pour out half,
and sip again…. How does it taste, now, at the middle of the jar?’

‘It’s salty, Sir, again.’ ‘Now pour out nearly all the water, taste the last bit at the bottom…. How does it taste now?’ ‘Still salty, Sir.’

‘Although you cannot see the salt, you find it present everywhere, throughout that water in the jar.

‘So too, though consciousness itself can never be perceived by mind or by the senses, it is here: self-evident in all we see, throughout this seeming universe.

‘Pure consciousness, the essence of each mind and heart, is all the world’s reality. It is the truth. That is what you really are.’

‘How can this truth be understood?’

‘Suppose a man, blindfolded, finds himself quite lost in a strange place and wanders, crying out for help.

‘Suppose that someone takes away the blindfold from his eyes, and shows him how to seek and find his way.

‘Then he can journey on, from place to place, and get back home again.

‘So too, a teacher shows you how to seek and find your way back home to your own self: where consciousness is unconditioned, simple truth at one with all reality.’
Learning and knowledge

Nārada, though greatly learned, found his mind consumed by doubt. So he asked Sanatkumāra:

‘What’s the use of sacred scriptures, all these sciences and arts? How am I to understand the many different points of view that learning endlessly debates?

‘If I don’t know quite what I am … if I don’t know quite where I stand … if I don’t know from where I see …

‘how can I tell what sense to make of all this seeming conflict and confusion of appearances that mind and senses bring to me?

‘I’ve heard it said that truth of self dispels all ignorance and doubt. But till I know this truth, it seems that all I learn will be just words.’

Sanatkumāra laughed, and said:

‘Well if you’ve learned the words, then all you have to do is understand these words, as names which represent the knowledge that you wish to know.

‘Senses see their own sensations, all contained in seeming mind.

‘Mind perceives its own perceptions, changing with each passing moment, each perception passing on and giving way to new perceptions:

‘thus creating time’s apparent stream of flowing restlessness.'
‘But, in this stream of changing sights
and sounds, sensations, feelings, thoughts,
interpretations, intuitions;

‘something makes this stream continue,
something which must carry on.

‘Each name we use must represent
something perceived in different ways:
through different sights and different thoughts,
in different minds, at different times.

‘And this, which each name represents,
continuing through differences
of personality and time,
is what we call “reality”.

‘In every object that we name,
reality remains the same
no matter how we look at it;
no matter how appearances
may seem to differ and to change,
through changes in our point of view.

‘Thus, every name we use must name
reality, which carries on
while mind and its perceptions change.

‘As mind’s perceptions come and go,
each one is known by consciousness:
which lights up all appearances,
in different minds, at different times.

‘This consciousness is always here,
continuing through differences
of personality and time,
through changing views, through passing time,
in everything we seem to see.

‘This common, changeless consciousness
is that reality which stays
the same, in every one of us;
while our minds and bodies vary,
changing what we seem to be.
‘Through all the claims that ego makes to be a body in the world, or a mind within the body, consciousness is what we are.

‘The self that each of us calls “I” is nothing else but consciousness.

‘In all experience, consciousness is that which knows appearances; reality is that which stays the same, while changing views give rise to different appearances.

‘Reality and consciousness are never separate; both are there throughout experience; neither can be known apart. In truth, they are but different names for one same thing.

‘Reality is nothing else but consciousness, the real self that each of us calls “I”.’

Though this made sense to Nārada, his mind again conceived a doubt:

‘How may such knowledge be applied, in practice, to a person’s life; when truth is known but mind returns to face the seeming world again?’

‘Where truth is rightly understood, it shines expressed in words and acts.

‘Unsought, unplanned by act of will, it rises up spontaneously and shines directly from within; because its nature is to shine.’

‘What do we seek in all our acts?

‘All that we seek is happiness; and happiness is found where self no longer seems at odds with world,
‘where separate-seeming self dissolves in fullness of reality.

7.22

‘All misery and want arise from incomplete experience, where self seems somehow incomplete for want of something it desires.

7.23

‘But where reality and self are realized as only one; there incompleteness can’t arise, nor misery, nor want, nor death.

7.24

‘Where it’s believed that alien objects are perceived, desired or known; there it must seem that self is ego, caught up in its limitations, hurt by pain, afraid of dying, born to live in pettiness.

7.25

‘But where the truth is understood that nothing else is seen or heard or thought or felt but self alone; there all ego is transcended, unmixed joy is realized.

‘When truth is effortlessly known in every sight and every sound, in each perception, thought and feeling; knowledge then has been applied.’

7.26
Change and self

Our bodies, senses and our minds keep changing in a changing world. And so, whatever they perceive is by its nature changeable.

But, as this change keeps going on, how is it known that things have changed? How can something be compared with what it was before it changed?

Where variation is perceived, what is it that knows the change of passing states which come and go?

It must be there before the change, to know the state that was before. And it must still be there when change has taken place, to know what has become of what was there before.

Wherever there is variation, that which knows must carry on through changing states that come and go.

Each state gives way to other states, but that which knows the change remains.

This knowing principle remains unchanged, unvarying: through all the change and all the variations body, sense and mind perceive.

Whatever is perceived must vary; that which knows is never changed.

As body, sense and mind perceive, appearances of world are formed.

7See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 75-80 and 163-166, for an indication of how parts of this retelling interpret the original text (in particular: 8.1.1.3-5 together with 8.4.1-2; and 8.1.5-6 together with 8.2.10 and 8.3.1-2; respectively).
And all of these appearances
are known by light of consciousness.

Perception isn’t that which knows;
it only forms appearances
through changing body, sense and mind.

That which knows is consciousness;
it lights up all appearances.
It’s always there, throughout experience,
always shines by its own light.

Perception changes every moment;
consciousness remains unchanged.

At the surface of our minds,
things appear and disappear:
as attention is directed
from one object to the next.

Beneath this stream of changing show,
different things must be related
at the background of experience,
where each thing is understood.

As mind’s outer surface changes,
consciousness continues on,
putting different things together
at the depth of understanding:
changeless background of experience,
in the from
inner basis of the mind.

This unchanging consciousness,
which shines within each mind and heart,
has neither magnitude nor form.

And yet, we find contained in it
everything we seem to see:
all the entire universe
of earth and sun and moon and stars,
all space, all time, all worlds, all minds.

If all existence is thus found
within each person’s mind and heart, what happens when a person dies?

Can all of being be destroyed, when some poor mind in little body suffers harm and passes on?  

In truth, as mind and body seem to suffer harm and die, such harm and death are mere appearances, which cannot rise or stand except as they are known by consciousness.

But consciousness illuminates itself; it shines by its own light. It does not rise or pass away.

It is the self, within us all, whose nature is to light itself, and thus to light appearances which are themselves but consciousness.

True self, as unmixed consciousness, depends on nothing else at all. It is untouched by seeming change or seeming harm or seeming death.

Ego claiming to be body lives in bondage to the world. Ego claiming to be mind lives in bondage to desire. All that mind and body do gets undone in course of time.

When an object is desired, ego feels that self is lacking something to be found outside. Consciousness thus seems divided; mind appears, dissatisfied.

When an object of desire is attained; then, for the moment, restless ego has subsided,
self seems to have been completed, consciousness seems unified. Thus, truth of self, within the heart, shines out as peace and happiness. But though achievement of desire brings a state of happiness, such happiness can never last; for ego rises up again, inherently dissatisfied, and seeks some further alien thing. All of ego’s life and actions are dependent on the self; which, through seeming self-deception, ego does not understand. Self is thus a buried treasure ego keeps on walking over, vainly feeling needs and wants for things that seem outside itself. Always seeking alien objects, ego does not understand that the goal of all desire is true self, within the heart; for all reality is here. Self is the continuity that lives unchanged through change; it is the bridge that joins all differences. And yet, it also is the basis of discrimination, by which different things are told apart. When understanding passes from appearance to reality, no day or night, no height or depth, no age, nor death, nor fear, nor grief, nor good or bad can pass to self;
for no conditioned quality from
of seeming world applies to it. 8.4.1

As truth of self is realized,
all blindness is removed from sight,
all wounds are healed, all pain dissolves,
all bonds are loosed, all lack is filled;

and darkness shines as dazzling light from
of unconditioned consciousness. 8.4.2
In search of self

‘The real self, in each of us, is stainless, undecaying, free from hunger, free from thirst, untroubled in the midst of grief.

‘It has no thought nor wish, but truth. This is the self we cannot help but seek, the truth we seek to understand.

‘Whoever sees and knows this self gains all the world, and finds the goal of all desires.’

These words, the gods and demons heard, were said by Lord Prajāpati, the Lord of all created things.

To seek this self that gains the world and finds the goal of all desire, the gods and demons sent their chiefs to question him that made the world.

Thus Indra, chief among the gods, and demon-king Virocana left home and came, in search of truth, before their Lord Prajāpati.

Each came with fuel grasped in hand, to show their wish that ignorance should burn in sacrificial flame.

They put aside their finery, their shining ornaments and crowns, their life of outward wealth and power.

Thirty-two years they lived instead the humble life of supplicants, who would prepare themselves to learn.

See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 120-135, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
Until at last Prajāpati asked: ‘What is it you wish to know?’

They said: ‘We’ve heard that you describe a stainless, undecaying self by which desires are attained. This self is what we wish to find.’

‘Then what you seek is close at hand,’ was the reply. ‘For self is seen where sight looks back into itself. It is the changeless absolute, where death and fear do not arise.’

‘But Sir,’ they asked, ‘what is it that a person sees reflected in the stillness of a shining pool or in a mirror’s clarity?’

‘See for yourselves,’ was the reply. ‘One same reality is seen in everything. Go look into a pool of water, and then say what you may find reflected there.’

Thus, Indra and Virocana went to a nearby pool and looked and said: ‘We see of course ourselves, down to our hair and fingernails.’

Prajāpati then said to them:

‘Now dress in all your finery, put on your crowns and ornaments; then look again into the pool and say what is reflected there.’

They dressed and looked and said with pride:

‘We see ourselves as we should be, dressed as befits our kingly state.’

Prajāpati’s reply was brief:
‘Whatever you may think you see,
all that you see is only self.
It is complete reality,
where death and fear do not arise.’

Then satisfaction seemed to dawn
on Indra and Virocana.
It seemed that there was nothing left
to learn; and so they took their leave
and made their way towards their homes.

But, as they left, Prajāpati
looked sadly after them and thought:

‘They haven’t understood at all.
Their faith clings on to false beliefs.
Whoever lives by such belief
stays caught in futile misery.’

Virocana, triumphantly,
go back into his demon world,
where he proclaimed: ‘Our selves come first!

‘Let us be strong, increase our power,
and take by force what we desire.
Let’s feed and clothe and arm ourselves,
to satisfy our needs and build
our strength to do just as we please.

‘For it befits our demon state
that world be bent to serve our needs
and wishes, as embodied selves.’

But Indra, on his way back home,
was troubled by a nagging doubt:

‘If self is body, it enjoys
good fortune as the body does.

‘When body is well-dressed … so too
is self; when body gains in wealth
and power and grace … so too does self.

‘But, when the body’s eyes are dimmed,
when body’s wealth and power fade,  
when grace departs; then it would seem …

‘that self, like body, must decay,  
that self, like body, suffers loss  
of sight and wealth and power and grace.

‘I can’t be satisfied with this.’

Thus Indra turned and went again  
before his Lord Prajāpati,  
again with fuel grasped in hand  
to show his unburned ignorance.

‘What brings you back? You seemed so pleased  
when, just a little while ago,  
you left with King Virocana.’

Indra explained his troubled doubt,  
and lived for thirty-two more years  
a student’s dedicated life;

until Prajāpati spoke out  
again, in different words, about  
the truth that Indra wished to learn:

‘Where body’s world  
dissolves in dream  
and mind is free,  
the self shines there.  

‘It is the deathless,  
fearless absolute.’

And now to Indra, once again,  
it seemed that he had understood.

He took his leave and started out  
towards his home. But on his way  
a further doubt disturbed his mind  
and brought him back to learn some more;  
again with fuel in his hand,  
by which he showed his wish to burn  
the ignorance that still remained.
Prajāpati asked: ‘What is it that brings you back again so soon?’

Indra explained: ‘The self in dream may not be bound to suffer those same ills that trouble body in the waking world of outer things.

‘When outward eyes no longer see and body has thus lost its sight, the self in dreams still seems to see. And when gross, outward body dies, perhaps the self lives on in dream.

‘But, even in the state of dreams, the self does not seem fully free. In many dreams, self seems to fear, seems to be driven, hunted down; it seems in pain, it seems to weep, it seems to suffer death and grief.

‘I can’t be satisfied with this.’

So Indra stayed for thirty-two more years again; and when this time had passed away, Prajāpati spoke out these words that he might learn:

8.10.1-4

‘In depth of sleep which knows no dream, self shines as peace.

‘It is the fearless, deathless absolute.’

Yet once again, it seemed that truth had dawned in Indra’s searching mind. But yet again, returning home, poor Indra’s mind was seized by doubt. And yet again, his wish to burn the ignorance that still remained was shown by fuel in his hand; as he returned, in search of truth, before his Lord Prajāpati.
He told his doubt: ‘The sleeping self can’t know itself by any thought that “I am this” or “I am that” …

‘Nor does it know any object other than itself; and, therefore, it seems quite annihilated …

‘In depth of sleep, there seems to be no self at all. Does this mean self is blank or empty nothingness? How can this be? There’s something here I don’t quite rightly understand.’

Prajāpati said: ‘If you wait another five years here, I shall explain again; though really there is nothing further to explain.’

So Indra lived there five years more; thus making it a total of one hundred and one years he lived a student’s life, instructed by his teacher, Lord Prajāpati.

When the time came, Prajāpati enlightened Indra with these words:

‘This body is mortal; it belongs to death. But in it lives the deathless self, which has no body.

‘Wherever life is mixed with body, like is followed by dislike, pleasure alternates with pain.

‘Whoever mixes life with body seeks escape
in passing pleasures, can’t escape from feeling pain.

‘The real self transcends the body, has no need for passing pleasures, is untouched by body’s pain.  

‘When morning wisps of mist and cloud rise up towards the peace and clarity of sky,

‘they shine revealed as bodiless, dissolving radiant into light.

‘So too, when forms of seeming mind approach the peace of dreamless sleep,

‘they are dissolved in unobscured, untroubled clarity;

‘revealing self for what it is:

‘pure, bodiless unfading light of unconditioned consciousness.

‘This is the real self, remaining always free:

‘untroubled by the body
where we falsely think
self has been born,

‘and where self seems
to laugh, eat, play,
to seek out pleasure,
love and happiness.

‘But where the self
is thought to be
encumbered by
the body’s needs,

‘there life seems caught
in bondage:
like a horse
that’s tethered
to a cart.

‘The eye is just
an instrument
for seeing sights.

‘The ear is just
an instrument
for hearing sounds.

‘The voice is just
an instrument
for speaking words.

‘The mind is just
an instrument
for thinking thoughts

‘and dreaming up
a subtle world
from feeling and desire.

‘But, in each one of us,
it is the self that knows

‘the sights that seeing sees,
the sounds that hearing hears,
the words that speaking speaks,
‘the thoughts that thinking thinks,
and all the subtle worlds
that dreaming dreams
from feeling and desire.

8.12.4-5

‘This knowing self,
this common core
of unconditioned consciousness
within each personality,

‘is that immortal absolute
to which the gods pay heed,
by which they gain their power.

‘This very self,
within us all,
is what we seek
in all of our desires.

‘Whoever sees and knows this self
gains all the world, and finds
the goal of all desire.’

8.12.6
From the Kena Upanishad

The unmoved mover

What motivates mind’s changing show of seeming objects, thoughts, desires?

What makes the mind go out to things that seem to be outside itself?

What sends the mind, in soaring flight, to search for freedom, happiness?

From what does mind come down again, to earth: where joy seems always bound to pettiness and suffering?

What joins together various acts – of body, sense and mind – to make each person’s individual life?

From what does meaning come: into the things we do, the words we speak, the gestures that our bodies make?

What common light co-ordinates our differing perceptions into fuller knowledge of the world?

One common, inner principle of consciousness is found in life, in mind and senses, words and acts.

Those who are brave break free from world’s appearances, and realize

1See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 112-115, for an indication of how part of this retelling interprets the original text (in particular 1.1-9).
that self is unmixed consciousness: from 1.2
beyond all seeming change and death.

This truth cannot be reached by mind or senses, nor described by speech.

Nor can such faculties explain from 1.3
the way in which it may be taught.

In truth, the self, as consciousness, is not an object that is known; nor is it anything unknown.
Its knowledge comes from ancient times.
Its knowledge comes before all time; for it must first be known before from 1.4
the very thought of time can rise.

It isn’t something conjured up by words and thoughts; instead, it is the ever-present, knowing ground:
from which all thoughts and words arise, on which all thoughts and words depend, to which all thoughts and words return. from 1.5

It isn’t something thought by mind; instead, it is the principle of consciousness that lights the mind: from 1.6
by which all mind and thoughts are known.

It isn’t something seen by sight, or heard by listening; instead, it is the knowing principle that lights all sight and sound and sense. from 1.7-8

It isn’t something breathed by breath or lived by life; instead, it is the living principle by which all breath and life are vitalized.
This knowing principle of life is not a partial object, not
some little part of world, to which our minds and senses can attend.

Instead, it is the common ground of all appearances that show some part of world, perceived by partial body, sense and mind.

This common ground is all there is. It is complete reality, which each appearance shows in part.

It’s known in full as knowing self: as pure, unchanging consciousness beneath all personality.

Wherever mind thinks that it knows, there truth itself cannot be known; but only partial forms appear, of personality and world.

Such partial forms mix truth with ignorance and falsity, thus distorting what they show and telling little that is true.

The question here to ask is what is meant, when someone says: ‘I know.’

Just what is it in us that knows?

It isn’t really mind, for all mind does is form appearances before the light of consciousness.

It’s only consciousness that knows: by lighting mind’s perceptions, thoughts and feelings, as they come and go.

It’s only consciousness that is the ‘I’ which knows experience.

Where mind presumes to know, it lies.

If ‘I’ is claimed to be the mind,
the thought ‘I know’ is treacherous; for then it must be compromised by also thinking ‘I don’t know’, to mitigate mind’s ignorance.

Pure consciousness, the real ‘I’, is that which knows, and only knows: it knows when mind appears to know and thus it lights all seeming things; it knows when mind seems not to know and thus it shows mind’s ignorance.

To think of it, mind must reflect back to the source from which thought comes, on which mind stands as thought appears, and where all thought returns, dissolved.

Where any thought of it remains, it cannot there be understood.

It can’t be learned by learned forms; it’s learned where learning is unlearned.

Through every changing state of mind consciousness continues on, the changeless base of seeming change, untouched itself by change and death.

When mind turns in towards the self, the source of every strength is found; and self is known as consciousness, life’s deathless, unconditioned ground.

If changeless consciousness is seen here in the world of seeming things, truth shines as peace and happiness.

If consciousness becomes obscured, unhappiness and loss result.

By seeing through appearances and finding truth in everything, deathlessness is realized.
Desire’s end

Objectively, seen from the world created by our faculties of outward sense, truth seems to shine only in blinding flashes of divine illumination that immediately dissolve all sense of the created universe, thus passing on from changing time.

Subjectively, seen where the mind turns back to self from which it comes, truth is at once both goal and base. It’s that to which all mind aspires, and that on which all mind depends:

as it appears to carry on through changing time, enabling world to be conceived by seeming mind from fragments of past memory.

Truth is just that which is desired beneath all seeming goals of mind. It’s that which all desire seeks, and it should thus be understood: beneath the many different forms imagined by our partial minds to represent the truth they seek.

Whoever knows this truth of love is loved, in truth, by everyone.

---

2See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 158-159, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
From the Kaushītaki Upanishad

For and against ¹

For knowledge that agrees, I am.
For knowing contrary, I am.

I am the knowing principle
that’s common to all different views
and carries on through changing time:

as differing perceptions join
in unity of single truth;
as differences are told apart,
thus knowing truth from falsity. ¹.2

¹This retelling is an interpretation of the following short passage that occurs towards the end of 1.2.

… samtad-vide’ham For knowing together with that, I am.
pratitad-vide’ham … For knowing contrary to that, I am.
Each being’s self

I’m here: in every passing season,
in the cycling of the seasons
risen from their background source,
continuing through space and time.

I am the seed of consciousness
that’s always here in all experience:
lighting every passing moment,
common to all different moments,
changeless through all changing time.

I am each being’s real self,
the truth of all reality.

This truth is immanent in all
that is perceived: as that which is,
unmixed with mere appearances
attributed by sense and mind.

This truth also transcends whatever
is perceived: as that which knows,
as unconditioned consciousness,
the common, knowing principle
from which all sense and mind arise.

Thus seen ‘out there’ and found ‘in here’,
truth is complete reality:
known everywhere, in everything.

1.6
The basis of mind

‘Just what enables thoughts, desires, and the objects that they seek?’

‘It’s nothing else but consciousness: pure, unconditioned consciousness, unmixed with any alien thing.’
The living principle

The living principle in each of us is all reality.

Mind is its intermediary towards our outward faculties: expression is its instrument of outward action in the world; perception is its outward watch; attention makes its presence known.

To find it, one must turn perception back from outward-going acts, to ask instead what acts express.

Behind all actions in the world are the perceptions they express.

Behind perceptions of the world is the attention of the mind, which turns from one thing to the next.

Behind the changing mind is this one living principle of truth:

one unconditioned consciousness, which stays the same while mind is changed from one appearance to the next.

This changeless principle of truth is always here, in each of us. It is the centre of all life, from which all seeming faculties of body, sense and mind arise.

It has no needs, makes no demands; it never suffers want or lack; it does not ask for anything.

And yet, spontaneously, unasked, all that is done is done for it.
To this sole centre of all life,
all faculties bring offering.
To this complete reality
all actions finally return;
and here they give themselves to peace,
dissolved at last in what they seek.

Where truth is found, all questions end
and there is nothing left to ask.

All comes unasked, spontaneously,
where truth has finally been found.

from
2.1-2
Continuing truth

When speech comes to an end, what then becomes of truth that has been told?

As speech dies off, perceptions rise, expressing truth that has been told; and truth is thus continued on….

But when perceptions end, what then becomes of truth that was perceived?

Perceptions die, but thoughts arise, expressing truth that was perceived; and truth is thus continued on….

Then in their turn, when thoughts pass on, where is the truth they thought about?

As thoughts die off, emotions rise, expressing truth to which thought led; and truth is thus continued on….

But when emotions end, what then becomes of truth that has been felt?

When feelings die, they are absorbed into that background consciousness which carries on through seeming change: as different feelings, thoughts, perceptions come and go in changing mind.

This is the background of all life, the changeless, living principle of underlying consciousness:

in which perceptions, thoughts and feelings are absorbed; from which new feelings, thoughts and actions are expressed.

And in this living principle of unconditioned consciousness which is each person’s real self,
truth always carries on unchanged: from
beyond all seeming time and death. 2.13-14
The knowing self

I am the living principle
of consciousness, the real self:
the subtle spirit of all life,
the spirit of each living breath,
expressed in every living act.

This principle is life itself,
beneath all thought of seeming death.
Where it is found, there is no death.

Wherever it is seen in body,
changing body seems to live.
But where it’s seen to leave the body,
body seems to die away.

It’s that which makes the body’s
actions seem to be alive: expressing
order, purpose, thought and feeling,
thus expressing consciousness.

Approaching it as life itself,
it’s understood as deathlessness.

Approaching it as consciousness,
it’s known as unconditioned truth.

By knowing self as deathless life,
the essence of all life is reached,
unchanged through seeming change and death.

Each living personality
seems made of different faculties:
each one expressing consciousness
in its own ways, at its own times.

And yet these different faculties
somehow express a unity
of knowledge that co-ordinates

See Interpreting the Upanishads [pages 89-92], for an indication of how parts of this retelling interpret the original text (in particular 3.2-3).
names that are known by speaking them,
sights that are known by seeing them,
sounds that are known by hearing them,
thoughts that are known by thinking them.

As different objects are thus known
in different ways, at different times,
through different seeming faculties,
these different ways of knowing things
reflect a unifying base
of underlying consciousness
on which each faculty depends.

Thus when speech speaks, all other
faculties are somehow understood
to be expressed in what is said.

Or when sight sees, all other
faculties are somehow understood
to be expressed in what is seen.

When hearing hears, all other
faculties are somehow understood
to be expressed in what is heard.

And when mind thinks, all other
faculties are somehow understood
to be expressed in what is thought.

Within these living faculties,
one common principle of life
is shared beneath their differences.

And this one living principle,
from though from within, contains them all.

What is essential to all life?

It cannot be the faculty
of speech; for there are those whom we
call ‘dumb’, who do not speak, but who
are still essentially alive.

Nor can it be the faculties
of sight or hearing; for we know
of those whom we call ‘blind’ or ‘deaf’,
who do not see or do not hear,
but who are still essentially alive.

And further too, we know of those
whose loss of outward sight or hearing
even strengthens inner life.

Nor can life’s essence be the mind.
For can we say that life has gone,
where understanding is attained
and all mind’s complex, changing acts
come to an end in simple truth?

Or can we say that life is missing,
where desires are achieved
and mind dissolves in happiness?

And can we say that life is absent
in the state of dreamless sleep,
where mind’s perceptions, thoughts and feelings
all dissolve in rest and peace?

Life is essentially the source
from which all living acts arise.
It is the ground on which they stand,
and into which they are absorbed
when they return to source again.

Thus truly known, life in itself
is consciousness, the real self:
which holds this body all around
and causes it to rise, alive.

Wherever life is seen in body,
consciousness is found implied.

Wherever consciousness is seen
expressed in body, so is life.

Thus ‘life’ and ‘consciousness’ are
different names for one same principle:
which makes this body seem alive,
and knows all that is ever known
in everyone’s experience.
As a sick person comes to death
all faculties of life dissolve.
Thus speech and hearing, sight and mind
no longer are attributed
to body when it dies away.

What happens to that person then?
What happens when perceptions, thoughts
and feelings pass away at death?

As when a person falls asleep,
so too at passing body’s death,
all different-seeming faculties
of life return to unity
of unconditioned consciousness:

the underlying source of life
from which all lives and minds arise.

Each name is just an act of speaking,
which once spoken comes to end
and is absorbed in consciousness,
the underlying source from where
all speaking and all names arise.

Each sight is just an act of seeing,
which once seen comes to an end
and is absorbed in consciousness,
the underlying source from where
all seeing and all sights arise.

Each sound is just an act of hearing,
which once heard comes to an end
and is absorbed in consciousness,
the underlying source from where
all hearing and all sounds arise.

Each perception is an act
which once enacted comes to end
and is absorbed in consciousness,
the underlying source from where
all senses and perceptions rise.

Each thought is just an act of thinking,
which once thought comes to an end and is absorbed in consciousness, the underlying source from where all minds and all their thoughts arise.

Here, at this underlying source of unconditioned consciousness that’s common to all different acts, no change or difference can apply.

All beings here are always one, beneath their seeming differences of changing body, sense and mind.

How then do differences appear?

They’re shown by various faculties, each of which starts from consciousness and acts towards divided objects of experience in the world.

Our various partial faculties thus radiate from consciousness to different parts of our experience, in a world that seems to be made up from many different things.

Our faculties of speech go out from consciousness: to say the names by which the world is then described.

Our faculties of choice arise from consciousness: to pick out things on which attention focuses.

Our faculties of sight go out from inner light of consciousness: to see appearances of world and objects thus made manifest.

Our faculties of hearing rise from consciousness: to hear the sounds whose meaning tells what world may be.
Our faculties of taste go out
from underlying consciousness:
to taste the flavours of experience
and to judge the qualities
of objects that are thus perceived.

Our faculties of management
arise from knowing consciousness:
to manage work towards the goals
that our intentions have prescribed.

Our faculties of body rise
from consciousness: to serve the needs
of seeking comfort, lessening pain.

Creative faculties emerge
from underlying consciousness:
expressing value and enjoyment,
thus creating useful things.

Our faculties of movement rise
from this same base of consciousness:
to take our bodies and our minds,
impelled by wish, from place to place.

Our faculties of mind arise
from this same common, knowing base
of unconditioned consciousness:
to think ideas and feel desires,
conceiving world and wishing change.

Thus every living faculty
has its objective counterpart:
of objects that it acts towards.

Since every object in experience
rises through some faculty
that rises up from consciousness,
each object and each faculty
depends on knowing consciousness.

From consciousness expressed in speech,
all speaking and all names arise,
describing what has been perceived.
From consciousness expressed in choice,  
al all choosing by our partial minds  
and all their chosen objects rise.

From consciousness expressed in sight,  
al all seeing and all sights arise,  
and thus all seen appearances.

From consciousness expressed in hearing  
and in our conceiving minds,  
arise all sounds and all the meaning  
that our minds conceive in them.

From consciousness expressed in taste  
and in our sensibilities,  
arise all flavours, qualities,  
and all the values judged in them.

From consciousness expressed in work,  
arise all working and all goals  
that are intended by our minds.

From consciousness expressed in body,  
comes all need for body’s comfort  
and for lessening body’s pain.

From consciousness creatively  
expressed, come entertainments and  
designs and what we thus create.

From consciousness expressed in movement  
of our bodies and our minds,  
arise all movements we experience  
through these bodies and these minds.

From consciousness expressed in mind,  
all feelings, thoughts, perceptions rise  
and hence all the apparent world  
that anyone experiences.

Without the light of consciousness,  
no name could be made known by speech.

Thus body’s voice may speak a name,
or body’s ears may hear a name, of which one honestly could say:

‘My mind was elsewhere at the time. I was not conscious of that name.’

Without the light of consciousness, no object of attention could be picked by choice and focused on; appearance could not be made known by any faculty of sight; no sound could be made known by hearing; taste could not make flavour known.

Without the light of consciousness, no management could make work known; no body could make comfort known, nor any needs, nor any pain; creative acts could not make known what they imagine or design, nor anything that they create.

Without the light of consciousness, no kind of movement could be known; and no perceptions, thoughts or feelings could arise in seeming mind.

Unlit by knowing consciousness, no object could appear at all.

If later told some object had been present to one’s faculties, one could in truth reply: ‘My mind was elsewhere at the time. That object just did not appear to me.’

Without the light of consciousness, no mind or world could be conceived.

Not even absence could be known. One could not know one’s ignorance, or know of something to be known.
Impartial truth cannot be found
by seeking partial faculties
or partial objects in the world.

It’s found by knowing that which knows.

It isn’t speech one needs to know,
but that which is expressed by speech:
the knowing self that lives in speech.

It isn’t choice one needs to know,
but for whose sake the choice is made:
the self that motivates the choice.

It isn’t sight one needs to know,
but just the seeing principle:
which lights all seeing from within.

It isn’t sound one needs to know,
but just the hearing principle:
which knows the meaning of all sound.

It isn’t taste one needs to know,
but just the tasting principle:
which discerns good taste from bad.

It’s not the act one needs to know,
but who is there beneath the act:
the changeless self that carries on
through different acts and knows them all,
the self for whom the acts are done.

It isn’t body’s pain or comfort
that one really needs to know,
but the knowing self within:
unchanged by what it knows of body,
or of comfort or of pain.

It isn’t value or enjoyment
or creation one should know,
but just the living source of value:
motivating all enjoyment
in creation’s changing shapes.

It isn’t movement one should know,
but just the moving principle:
unmoved within all moving things,
itself entirely unchanged
yet causing all apparent change.

It isn’t mind one needs to know,
but just the thinking principle:
the knowing subject of all mind.

In this subjective principle,
here at the centre of all life,
there’s no diversity at all.

It’s like the centre of a wheel
whose outer rim is fixed on spokes.
The spokes are fixed upon the hub,
right at the centre of the wheel.

Here, where the spokes are joined in one,
there’s no diversity, nor motion
as the spokes and rim turn round.

So too, the objects of the world
are fixed on various faculties
that radiate from knowing self,
in everyone’s experience.

Here, at the centre of each life,
where all our faculties are joined,
there are no different, changing things.

There’s just one living principle
of unconditioned consciousness,
which is each person’s real self.

It is the happiness we seek.
It does not change. It does not die.

It’s not improved by doing good.
It is not harmed by any ill.
It is the changeless, uncaused cause
of all our actions in the world.

All that is done, both good and bad,
is done for it, in search of it.

It is the final principle
that rules the outer universe
and guides each person from within.

It can be known by asking on,
until no trace of doubt remains:

‘What can I truly call “my self”? from
What is it that I really am?” 3.8
Deep sleep and waking

In depth of sleep, no mind appears conceiving different seeming things;
and mind’s attention does not direct living energy from consciousness to different seeming objects in some world that mind conceives.

Thus here, in dreamless sleep, all outward-seeming energies of life have been withdrawn, and differences are all dissolved in consciousness: which shines alone, by its own light, unmixed with any seeming thing.

Here, every day, unnoticed in the simple peace of dreamless sleep, all life attains to unity of underlying consciousness, from which all lives and minds arise.

Whenever someone falls asleep, attention is drawn in: from world of waking sense, through dreaming mind, to unconditioned consciousness, which shines unmixed in depth of sleep.

All speech, all words and all they mean, all seeing, hearing, sights and sounds, and all perceptions, thoughts and feelings then dissolve: absorbed again into their underlying base of consciousness, from which they rise.

But, when a person wakes from sleep, outgoing energies of life appear, through various faculties of mind and personality.

See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 48-51, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
As sparks come forth from blazing fire,
so too from consciousness come forth
the various energies of life
that mind and personality
disperse through their activities.

From these activities arise
appearances of mind and sense;
and thus, from these appearances,
the worlds that we perceive are born.

Beneath appearances of world
perceived by senses and by mind,
consciousness continues on
through every moment of experience:

lighting all appearances
that rise in dream or waking state;

and shining self-illuminated,
on its own, in depth of sleep.

It is each person’s real self:
the inner principle of life
that is expressed in every act
of mind and body in the world.

All seeming selves, of body or
of sense or mind, depend upon
this real self of consciousness.

Just as a chief is represented
by his followers, who act
with his support and for his sake;

so too, the real self is
represented by the seeming selves
of body, sense and mind: whose actions
all depend on its support
and are, unknowingly or
knowingly, done only for its sake.

On consciousness, the real self,
these seeming selves always depend
for all they do or seek to do.
But it does not depend on them; for it is there in depth of sleep, when seeming selves have all dissolved.

As long as this true self is not correctly understood and known, a person’s actions are not firmly anchored in the changeless ground from which they come, on which they stand and where they find all that they seek.

Thus, if this ground of self remains unknown, poor body, sense and mind keep being overcome by their own demons of uncertainty and partiality and ill.

But one who knows the truth of self has reached that certain, deathless ground of unconditioned consciousness: where ills have all been overcome and freedom has, at last, been won.

from 4.19\(\text{end}\) and 4.20
**From the Īsha Upanishad**

**Centre and source**

All this entire universe
belongs to God: who lives in it,
in every smallest bit of it.

Thus giving up all things to God,
whatever changes in this changing
universe may be enjoyed:
untainted by possessiveness,
uncompromised by wanting it.

Whatever there may be to claim,
to whom, in truth, does it belong?

As mind and body act in world,
a person seems to lead a life
that starts with birth and ends in death.

No other way appears than this,
where life seems bound to finite acts.

From blind obscurity of death
rise fearful, demon-haunted worlds,
wherever self seems to be killed.

But self, in truth, is life itself.
How then can death pertain to it?

It is unmoving unity;
yet mind and sense cannot catch up
with it. They always lag behind.

---

1See *Interpreting the Upanishads*, pages 176-181, for an indication of how part of this retelling interprets the original text (in particular 1, 4-8).
It is the unchanged base of change,
still centre of all happiness
which every action seeks to reach.
And yet, it always stays ahead.

Just by its nature, as it is,
unmoved itself by any act,
it is the source of energy
from which all seeming actions rise.

It does not move; yet it alone
is all that every movement is,
and it is all those many things
that we perceive to move and change.

To sense and mind, it’s far beyond
the furthest distances of space,
much prior to the early past,
more final than the end of time.
Yet nothing else can be so close.

It’s here and now: in every sight,
in every sound and smell and taste,
in every touch, in every thought
and feeling, in each mind and heart.

It is the only thing that’s known
immediately: because it is
the living centre of each heart:
the knowing self we each call ‘I’.

This knowing self is consciousness:
the background of appearances
that are perceived by sense and mind.

It stays through all experience,
as seeming objects come and go.

It is beyond all seeming things,
beyond the changing universe
that mind and senses seem to see.
And yet, it can be found within
each object in this seeming world.
Each seeming object that we know
is known combined with consciousness;
and thus combined with consciousness
is but a part of consciousness.

In truth, each object that we know
is nothing else but consciousness.

Though mind and sense seem to perceive
external objects in the world,
the self, in truth, knows everything
as nothing else but consciousness.

Thus, in each object, what we call
‘reality’ is consciousness:
which is the nature of the self.

As mind and sense see seeming things,
the self, in truth, knows but itself.

And that is plain reality:
which is beyond all seeming things;
yet always is, in every thing.

False ego is a seeming self:
a self that seems conditioned as
a little mind or body, which
is part of a much larger world.

Beneath this false identity,
of self with body or with mind,
the real self is utterly
impersonal; it is the base
of consciousness, upon which all
conditions are compared and known.

It is the unconditioned base
of all conditions in the world.

Where outward-seeming consciousness
is turned back in, towards its source,
it is dissolved in truth of self,
which is complete reality.
For everything is known in self, and self is known in everything.

When this plain truth is realized, what is there then to be renounced? How can disharmony arise?

Where knowing is identity of knowing self with what is known, there known and knower are but one; with nothing alien in between that could obscure plain simple truth: thus making knowledge incomplete, creating partiality, distorted views and nagging doubt.

For self, to know is just to be. Its very being is to shine.

Its nature is to light itself, without an intervening act that could divide it from itself or could obscure its clarity.

What grief, delusion can exist for one who knows true unity, where everything is one with self?

True self is pure, unbodied light of unconditioned consciousness, pervading all experience.

It has no organs, nor does it take part in any kind of act. No function can pertain to it.

Untouched by any harm or ill, unstained by misery and wrong, it is the living principle which lights perception, knows all thought and shines expressed as what we seek through all our feelings and desires.
Self-evident, beyond all things that may appear or disappear, it simply is, in its own right: completely known, beyond all doubt, as self-illuminating light.

Upon this changeless, certain base, each seeming thing pursues a course of seeming change through passing time that can’t be known with certainty.

Unconsciousness seems blind and dark; apparent knowledge can deceive. Yet each of these has its own use.

Unconsciousness of passing things can lead away from change and death, thus showing changeless consciousness.

With consciousness shown clarified, pure knowledge shines as deathlessness.

Nothingness seems blind and dark; apparent being can deceive. Yet each of these has its own use.

Nothingness of passing things can lead away from change and death, thus showing being’s changeless self.

Its changelessness shown clarified, pure being shines as deathlessness.

The face of truth seems veiled in light. But this apparent veil dissolves when light is known as truth itself.

From knowing light comes all control and progress in the seeming world. It is the single radiant source where outward-seeming rays are joined.
May I turn back from outward light,
to find this shining principle from
which is the truth I am within. 16

May mind and body be revealed
as object-things which have no life.

May life be truly realized
as unconditioned consciousness,
where self and world are known as one. 17

As seeming life pursues its course,
unknowingly or knowingly
in search of happiness and truth,

may mind turn back to its own source,
destroying ego’s pettiness from
to find the truth I really am. 18
Matter and life

From where does this creation rise?

In our experience, all creation
rises from duality
of matter known by knowing life.

These two are like the moon and sun.
The moon appears reflecting light
that comes from outside: from the sun.
But sun appears through burning light
that comes from its own source within.

So too, dead matter must be known
by light which shines from something else.

That something else is knowing life,
which shines by light from self within.

It’s from this inner source of light,
within each personality,
that all created things arise.

And where this inner source is found,
undying truth is realized.
Living faculties

Which faculties support creation?
Which illuminate experience?

Do they manifest a common, underlying principle, which is essential to them all?

In everyone’s experience, the whole created world depends:
upon identifying things, upon observing form and change, upon interpreting what’s meant, upon comparing qualities, on understanding time and space continuing through different things.

And all these faculties depend upon our senses, speech and minds, illuminating what we see.

Seen from the world, it thus appears that life and consciousness depend on various different faculties.

But truly seen, this is not so; for all illumination comes, through life, from consciousness within.

Wherever living consciousness is seen to leave this shell of body, so are mind and speech and senses and all living faculties: as though a swarm of bees were following their queen, out from a hive.

Our faculties all shine by light of consciousness that lives within. It’s the essential principle on which, in truth, they all depend.
Prashna

But it does not depend on them, because it shines by its own light.

In truth, it manifests itself, and thus all seeming faculties, creating the apparent world.
Learning from experience

From where does sentient life arise?

How is it here within the body, how expressed in body’s acts?

How does it seem divided here in different living faculties?

How does it lead beyond the body? How does it go out to world?

And how does it come back to self?

Each person’s life is born from self, appearing like a moving image drawn by mind on consciousness.

Through this activity of mind, life is expressed in body’s acts.

As life expresses consciousness, it carries out its purposes through various different faculties that are divisions of itself.

One of these faculties reacts to objects that have been perceived: discarding waste, restricting aims, and thus creating partial views of world, as it appears perceived.

A second of these faculties looks on from what is now perceived: projecting choices, from the past, through life that carries on in time.

A third among these faculties assimilates perceptions and

\[1\] See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 82-89, for an indication of how most of this retelling interprets the original text (in particular 3.4-12).
interpretations into knowledge
at the background of the mind:
where what is known is understood.
There, silent understanding knows,
unmoved by passing wants and needs
noised out by wish and fantasy.

A fourth among the faculties
goes circulating back and forth,
contrasting and comparing things:
thus judging valued qualities
and spreading subtle influence.

A fifth among the faculties
expresses understanding which
has come from past experience: so
that learning may continue on.

These different faculties relate
to different aspects of the world
that everyone experiences.

External choice that’s mere reaction
corresponds to narrow objects
which attention has selected
from a world of many things.

Intention looking on through time
relates to processes of change,
by which all objects have been formed
and all objectives are achieved.

Understanding corresponds
to underlying principles,
continuing through change and difference
in the world’s appearances.

Discerning judgement corresponds
to qualities and values that
our feelings judge and thoughts compare
in the world that mind conceives.

Expression rising from within
is manifest in outer world
by living energy of change:
which burns what’s happened in the past,
thus forming new experiences.  \[3.8-9\]

Each moment of our changing lives,
we come to life conditioned by
those influences from the past
that lead on to our future lives.

Whatever’s learnt is thus reborn
from death of past experiences,
as seeming life keeps cycling on
from death to birth and birth to death.  \[3.10\]

But underlying seeming life
conditioned by appearances,
what is the unconditioned ground
where life arises and returns
and living truly is alive?

By questioning relentlessly
towards this unconditioned ground,
the self that knows all life is known
and deathless truth is realized.  \[3.11-12\]
What lives in sleep? ²

When waking world dissolves in sleep, how is a person still alive?

When waking senses fall asleep, what is it that remains alive:
perceiving dreams as they arise, and knowing unconditioned peace as dreams dissolve in depth of sleep?

What common ground of life is shared by all our different faculties?

What common, living principle continues on, through changing states of waking sense and dreaming mind, into the peace of dreamless sleep?

At evening, when the setting sun withdraws from sky, it takes its rays of light with it; so darkness falls, till morning, when the sun appears and brings its light again with it.

So too in sleep, when mind withdraws from outside world, it takes all sense of world with it; so that a sleeping person does not see or hear or smell or taste or feel the world in which the sleeping body lies.

Thus, when a person falls asleep, the senses are withdrawn in mind: which does not now go out to world, but only sees its own perceptions, thoughts and feelings in its dreams.

²See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 117-118, for indication of how part of this retelling interprets the original text (in particular 4.9-10).
Though outer senses are dissolved, the fires of mind may still be burning, forming dream appearances:

of seeming objects and reaction, processes and willed intention, qualities, interpretation, principles of understanding, living energy expressing learning from experience.

And here in dreams the mind expands:
recalling previous sights and sounds, imagining new sights and sounds; reliving past experiences, creating new experiences;

thus working out what carries over from the stores of past experience to the dream and waking worlds imagined and conceived by mind.

Within the world of dreaming mind, it’s only mind that dreams the world and mind is all the world that’s dreamt.

Mind dreams what’s seen and is not seen. It dreams what’s heard and is not heard. It dreams what’s felt and is not felt. It dreams what’s there and is not there.

The dreaming mind knows all it dreams, and it is all that’s known in dream.

In truth, it only knows itself, unmixed with any other thing.

Beneath each dream’s appearances, mind is in truth pure consciousness: whose only being is to know.

When mind returns to its own being underlying all its dreams,
it is dissolved in consciousness
where no appearances are found.

This is the state of dreamless sleep
and unaffected happiness:
where living actions come to rest,
absorbed into their common ground.

Like birds returning home to roost,
all living faculties return
to underlying consciousness:
the knowing self in each of us.

This underlying consciousness
is here in all experiences.

It is the principle that knows:
all objects, matter, forms and change,
all symbols, meaning, valued
qualities and character, all
principles and continuity;
all sight and what there is to see,
all hearing and what’s to be heard,
all smell and what there is to smell,
all taste and what there is to taste,
all touch and what is there to touch;
all speech and what there is to say,
all grasp and what is to be grasped,
all creativity and what
there is to make and to enjoy,
all waste and what must be disposed,
all movement and where it might go;
all sense of self and what there is
to be identified as self,
all will and what is to be willed,
all thought and what there is to think,
all feeling and what’s to be felt,
all life and all it can express.
All knowing and what’s there to know are known by light of consciousness.

It is the inner principle of all our different faculties.

It lights all seeing from within.
It’s that which is aware in touch.
From it, all meaning is expressed;
it shows all meaning heard in sound.
And it discerns all taste and smell.

It is the thinking principle, the knowing subject of the mind:
which carries on through passing states,
as thoughts and feelings come and go.

It is the common principle within a person’s changing acts.

And thus, for everyone, it is the changeless self that carries on through all the different acts it knows.

It’s for this self that acts are done.

This principle of knowing self is what each person really is.

It’s that which everyone calls ‘I’.

It has no image in itself.
Nor has it any kind of body, nor conditioned qualities.

As pure, unchanging consciousness, it is the unconditioned ground of all conditioned faculties and all the world that they perceive.

Whoever comes to know this self finds all the world’s reality and realizes everything.
Contemplation and its results

What is the use of contemplation?
In the end, where does it lead?

After so much time and effort
has been spent in search of truth,
what state of being is achieved?

There are three stages in this search,
described within the symbol ‘Om’.

The letter ‘a’ is first conceived
to represent the waking state:
where truth is sought outside, and leads
to body’s being in the world.

The letter ‘u’ is next conceived
to represent the state of dream:
where mind creates what it perceives,
located somehow in between
an inner self and outer world.

If ‘a’ and ‘u’ are spoken joined
together, the result is ‘o’.3

So too, when dream experiences
are taken into count, along
with waking sense of outside world,
then truth is sought in subtle mind;
thus leading to a mediating
state, of going back and forth
between what knows and what is known.

3In Sanskrit, the letter ‘a’ is pronounced as ‘-er’ in ‘father’, and the letter ‘u’ is pronounced as ‘u’ in ‘full’. If this short ‘a’ and short ‘u’ are first pronounced separately and are then progressively run together, it can be seen that they combine to form the sound ‘o’ (as in ‘home’). Hence, ‘o’ is conceived to be made up of ‘a’ and ‘u’.
The letter ‘m’ comes last, and represents the state of dreamless sleep: where neither world nor mind appears.

If ‘a’ and ‘u’ and ‘m’ are spoken joined together in one sound, the single word they make is ‘Om’.

So too, when our experience of deep sleep is taken into count, along with dream and waking states; then truth is sought in consciousness beneath all mere appearances of waking world and dream and sleep.

In depth of sleep, pure consciousness shines as it is: quite free of all appearances superimposed on it, by partial body, sense and mind, in waking state and dream.

This unconditioned consciousness, that’s seen unmixed in dreamless sleep, continues on through all experience:

lighting all appearances, and shining by itself, unchanged, when no appearances arise.

It is the deathless principle that lives in body, sense and mind; beyond all our conditioned lives, unaffected by all ills.

Whoever knows it sheds all ill, from just as a snake casts off its skin.

Each state of waking, dream or sleep gives on to other states and thus, in course of time, must change and die.

But something in us stays alive: continuing through changing states, co-ordinating different acts
that go outside or come back in
or cycle back and forth between.

By knowing this that lives in us,
a person finds stability
and is not shaken off from truth.  

Thus contemplation finally
leads on, beyond all changing states,
to unconditioned, timeless peace
untouched by fear or age or death.
Human existence

What is this human being that appears made up of different parts?  

Right here, in body, sense and mind, this human being can be found. In it, these different parts arise.

It seems to rise itself, through various outward-going faculties that form experience of the world.

But, seen more truly, it remains unchanged, as the established base on which all faculties depend, as they are seen to act and change.

From it comes life, from life belief, hence time and space, and quality, illuminating energy, transforming shapes, and different things perceived by body, sense and mind.

Thus body, sense and mind arise, and sustenance that they consume.

From sustenance come strength and purpose, means and actions, and hence worlds made up of different-seeming things identified by different names.

All flowing rivers are just water, like the sea to which they come.

But in the sea where they all join, their separate-seeming names and forms are all dissolved; and water is then manifest, just as it is: in its unconditioned state beneath all seeming name and form.
So too, all different-seeming parts of changing personality are nothing else but consciousness:

just like this human being that they’re understood to constitute, when they are seen as joined in one.

Here, in this common ‘human-ness’, their separate-seeming names and forms are all dissolved; and consciousness is manifest, just as it is:

in its unconditioned state beneath all seeming name and form.

Hence, that which first appears perceived as changing personality, made up of parts, turns out to be pure consciousness: which has no parts and does not suffer change or death.  

As moving spokes are joined and fixed just at the centre of a wheel;

so too all changing parts of personality are joined and fixed in unconditioned consciousness, here at the centre of all life.

In truth, each person is just this.

When this is known, there’s no more death and no disturbance can arise.

There’s only truth and nothing else.
From the Muṇḍaka Upanishad

Knowing and being ¹

The great householder Shaunaka was blessed with an enquiring mind, unsatisfied by partial truth.

He thought: ‘In this vast universe, there are so many different things our minds and senses seem to see.

‘In each perception we perceive, so little of the world seems shown.

‘As mind and sense perceive the world they show us small appearances, which change from changing points of view.

‘A mountain seen from far seems small; from closer up it grows in size.

‘A person on the lower slopes sees grass and trees, hears rustling leaves, smells flowers, feels the warmth of sun;

‘but higher up stark cliffs appear, with craggy shapes of barren rock, and eerie sounds of rushing wind, and scentless feel of chilly air.

‘And yet, these different seeming things are varying appearances through which one mountain can be known.

¹See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 30-35, 195-196, 108-112 and 141-144, for an indication of how parts of this retelling interpret the original text (in particular: 1.1.3-9, 1.2.12-13, 2.1.1-10 and 3.1.1-2, respectively).
'So too, in all experience,
the many things we seem to see
are differing appearances
through which we know one universe.

‘What is this one same universe
in which our minds and senses see
so many different seeming things?

‘Is there some way to understand
this one complete reality
we know through all appearances
of everything that seems to be?’

So Shaunaka, with due respect,
approached the teacher Angiras
and asked: ‘Can knowledge of the world’s
reality be so complete
that all the many things we seem
to see are understood in it?

‘Can something so complete be found
that knowing it knows everything?’

‘The truth you seek,’ said Angiras,
‘is plain to see, and can be found
by anyone who wishes it.

‘To know it you must go beyond
all scriptures, sciences and arts:
for these are mere constructions, made
by partial body, sense and mind.

‘Beneath all learned structures, built
of form and name and quality,
upon what basis do we join
the partial views of sense and mind,
to make our knowledge more complete?

‘This basis must be firm. It must
remain: while mind and body change,
and changing views give rise to sights,
sensations, feelings, thoughts that come
and go in our experience.
‘It is no object seen by mind and sense; for all such objects come into experience when they are seen, and go away again as our attention turns elsewhere.

‘Unseen by sense, unseen by mind, it is the knowing basis which must carry on, continuing through changing sense and changing mind, as seeming objects come and go.

‘It is not body, sense or mind, for these are merely instruments of change and action in the world.

‘It is no object that can act on other objects; nor can it be acted on, by anything.

‘It has no family, nor class; nor has it eyes that see, nor ears that hear, nor hands that touch or hold, nor feet that stand or walk or run.

‘It does not act; it only knows.

‘It is pure consciousness: which lights up all appearances that come and go in our experience.

‘All space, all time, all difference, all change are known by consciousness. Thus space and time and difference and change cannot apply to it.

‘It is the undivided base from which divided space is known, the unity in difference, the changeless continuity which knows all change and passing time.

‘It’s always here, in every one of us, each moment that we know;
‘whatever we may seem to know,  
whatever it may seem we do  
not know, or only know in part.

‘Upon this base of consciousness,  
all objects are perceived and thus  
are manifested in the world.

‘In consciousness, all seeming things  
arise, exist and come to end.

‘Beneath gross things of outer sense,  
beneath all subtleties of mind,  
it is creation’s changeless source:

‘from which all seeming things come forth,  
on which each seeming thing depends,  
to which each thing returns again.

‘As from a spider thread comes forth  
and is drawn in, or just as plants  
grow out of earth and when they die  
dissolve in earth again; so too  
all things that we perceive, throughout  
the manifested universe,

‘arise from changeless consciousness,  
are manifest as consciousness  
taking on apparent form,  
and when they end are shown dissolved  
as nothing else but consciousness.

‘Each moment of experience,  
a person’s mind and sense perceive  
a partial view that seems to show  
some object in the universe.

‘At different times, through different minds,  
through different capabilities  
of sense, we seem to see a vast  
variety of different things.

‘And thus it seems that we perceive  
a universe of vast extent,
containing more complexity
than sense or mind can comprehend.

‘In this vast-seeming universe, our little senses only see small objects, each a little piece of matter formed in space and time.

‘When objects interact, we see the energy that they exchange; and thus material things seem formed of subtle energy that flows, through space and time, to manifest the outward world our senses see.

‘If outward things are seen as forms of manifesting energy, then what is thus made manifest?

‘What do forms mean? How can they be interpreted, to understand more than our senses seem to see?

‘Forms are interpreted by mind: which is expressed in forms, and which reflects within itself to ask for truth that forms express.

‘Where mind turns back towards its source, it is dissolved in consciousness; which has no parts, nor suffers change.

‘There, partiality and change do not apply; and thus complete, undying truth is realized.

‘But where the mind is turned towards an outer world of seeming things, there only partial truths are seen, expressed by mind in outward acts.

Good acts

‘Through scriptures, sciences and arts, we learn good acts that lead to good results, for the prosperity of mind and body in the world.
‘But such prosperity is not complete, nor is it permanent;

‘for minds and bodies change and die, as limited, uncertain parts of a much larger universe.

‘Physical and mental acts, however good and wise they seem, are only passing means we use and leave behind, in search of truth.

‘Whoever looks for happiness in mind’s and body’s passing acts goes on to suffer age and death.

‘Whatever mind appears to know is never more than partly true.

‘Mind’s truth is mixed with ignorance, and thus seems changed as different things appear from different points of view.

‘When people pride their minds as wise, forgetting what mind does not know, they wander, blind to ignorance that leads them blindly on and on, from change to change, from death to death, from suffering to suffering.

‘When acts achieve desired goals, mind thinks it has achieved success. But such attachment to mere acts and their results does not bring truth.

‘When one desire is satisfied, the mind soon longs for something else;

‘and thus, new partiality again distorts what mind perceives, again taints truth with falsity, again makes life seem compromised by faults and wrongs and miseries.
'Attached to passing goals and acts, our minds seem bound to seek escape from one distraction to the next, from restlessness to restlessness.

But when our minds reflect on truth, we seek impartiality, beneath the partial points of view that vary with our changing acts.

Then, mind's distractions are restrained and faculties become composed; as mind returns, dispassionate, to that same source from where it comes, to its own base of consciousness.

From this impartial source of truth arises everything we know. To this we turn unknowingly for everything we wish to know.

Whoever seeks this common source must find a teacher who will show unchanging truth in seeming change, the deathless centre of all life that each of us experiences.

As sparks come forth from blazing fire; so too our many seeming lives arise from one same consciousness, shine out as only consciousness, and as they seem to fade away leave nothing else but consciousness.

This principle of unmixed light shines out unchanged from deep within each changing form of bodied life, gives life to every breath we take, and lights the seeming world outside.

It has itself no bodied form. It has no birth. It has no breath. It has no mind, nor faculties.
‘It is beyond all we conceive
as here or there, or anywhere.

‘From it is born all life, all mind,
all feeling, thought, perception, sense,
all principles, all qualities,
all meanings, all the changing forms
and all the many varied things
of which the universe seems made.

‘The world is known by consciousness;
the world is seen by consciousness;
all meanings are but consciousness;
all qualities are consciousness;
and everything that feelings feel,
or thoughts conceive, or senses see,
is nothing else but consciousness.

‘The world stands but in consciousness,
which is each person’s real self.

‘The blazing sun is consciousness;
the moon’s cool light is consciousness;
dark clouds and rain are consciousness;
the solid earth and all the crops
and food it bears are consciousness.

‘And all the many, varied forms
of life we creatures seem to lead,
here born and fed upon the earth,
are only forms of consciousness.

‘From consciousness comes all we say,
all that we do, all we express,
all speech, all poetry, all song,
all acts, intentions, purposes,
all we perceive or think or feel,
all energy, vitality,
all justice, truth and happiness.

‘Upon this base of consciousness,
great-seeming mountains are perceived,  
and different rivers seem to flow  
through different regions of the earth  
to join the oceans’ vast expanse.

‘In consciousness all forms arise:  
all object-forms, all forms of life,  
all solid things, all changing flow,  
all gross and subtle elements  
of body and of mind in which  
we seem to find our inner selves.

‘This principle of consciousness,  
this single principle alone  
is all there is: all of the world  
our outward senses seem to see,  
all action in this outside world,  
all purpose that may be expressed,  
all meaning that our thoughts conceive,  
all value that emotion feels.

‘This deathless, final principle  
of consciousness is here and now  
within each heart: for each of us,  
the centre of experience.

‘Whoever realizes it  
undoes all seeming ignorance.

The  
unmoved  
centre

‘Self-evident within the heart,  
as consciousness that carries on  
while thoughts and feelings come and go;  
it also is reality, which is the same  
no matter how it may be viewed.

‘It is complete reality,  
unlimited by time and space:  
the final, unconditioned base  
of all conditions in the world;  
still centre of all moving things,  
all living forms, all passing time.
Whatever seems reality,
whatever unreality,
al that you need to understand
is pure, unchanging consciousness:
the resting place on which you stand.

It is the centre of the heart:
which all our longings truly seek,
but cannot reach through sense or mind.

Self-luminous, subtler by far
than anything which mind can grasp,
it is contained entirely
in every smallest particle
that can be seen or be conceived.

And yet, it holds within itself
the whole expanse of seeming world:
including all that world contains,
all greatness, all complexity.

It is plain truth, uncompromised;
unshakable reality;
the common principle of life
that lives in every living breath,
that speaks in every word and act,
that knows each changing state of mind.

This deathless truth is what you are.

Where words are used to tell of truth,
they’re like a bow from which is sent
a seeker’s sharp enquiry.

To use the bow, the mind draws back
into itself, and aims itself
at its own source, where mind dissolves
in unconditioned clarity.

From consciousness is woven sky
and earth and everything between.
From consciousness is woven mind
and all life’s various functionings.

‘This is the bridge to deathlessness.

‘Beyond all else, cling on to truth: that self is unmixed consciousness.

2.2.5

‘As in a wheel whose spokes revolve about the centre where they join,
so too all feelings, thoughts and acts revolve about pure consciousness,
still centre where all joins in one.

‘It’s here that differences begin,
and here that differences must end.

‘It’s here that movement seems to start
and come to rest in peace again.

‘Think of this only as your self
and cross all dark to light beyond.

2.2.6

‘It is the knowing principle
in all that’s known, all that is learned:

‘source of all greatness in the world,
the shining background of the heart,
mind’s essence guiding body’s life,
standing firm as self within.

2.2.7

‘When mind dissolves in happiness,
the nature of the self shines clear:
as pure, unclouded consciousness.

‘The steadfast see it everywhere.

2.2.8

‘When it is seen in good and bad,
in high and low, in far and near;

‘all knots of heart become untied,
all doubts dissolve, no action binds.

2.2.9

Muṇḍaka
‘In every personality,
it is the shining inner core:
untroubled, partless, absolute.

‘Pure light that lights all seeming light,
It only can be known as self:
where known and knower are but one.

‘It is not lit by sun or moon
or stars or lightning in the sky
or any kind of alien fire.

‘It shines alone, by its own light.
Its very nature is to shine.

‘Whatever light is seen to shine
must shine by light of consciousness.

‘This one complete reality
of unmixed, deathless consciousness
is here in front; it is behind;
it’s on the right and on the left,
above, below, and everywhere.

‘It’s all there is, in all the world:
the final goal of all desire.

‘What really is a person’s self
that lives in body, senses, mind?

‘It seems to relish pleasant things;
it seems to suffer misery.

‘It seems a separate ego in
an outside world, conditioned by
the fruits of world’s activities.

‘Such ego, acting in the world,
enjoying pleasure, suffering pain,
is just a little piece of world,
consuming fruits of worldly acts.

‘It’s just an object in the world.
It cannot really be the self.
‘The self is that in us which knows.

‘When body seems to know the world, it is called “self”. But when it seems that body is an instrument through which perceiving senses know, then senses seem to be the self.

‘Next, when it seems that senses are but instruments of knowing mind, then mind appears to be the self.

‘And finally, when mind is seen to be a mere activity which forms appearances of world, the self is known for what it is: pure consciousness, which does not act but only lights appearances.

‘This light is no activity which starts or runs its course or ends or is conditioned by the world.

‘As world’s appearances are formed by changing mind, they come and go; but every one of them is lit by consciousness, which always must remain, throughout experience.

‘It is the nature of the self, from whose very being is to know.

‘Appearing caught in changing acts, a person gets depressed and suffers misery: misunderstanding as poor ego’s helplessness the non-possessing nature of the real self, which does not act and has no powers or faculties.

‘But where the self is truly seen, transcending ego: as the unconditioned centre of all life, all love, all happiness; there one
is free, from ego’s self-inflicted pettiness and misery. from 3.1.2

‘Where self is seen as consciousness, unfading source of all there is; there vice and virtue fade away, true unity is realized. from 3.1.3

‘When truth is known as life itself, which shines from every seeming thing; what need is there for argument?

‘All joy and love is found in self. from What else could be more practical? 3.1.4

‘This truth of self can be attained by plain and simple honesty, by purpose that will not give up, by turning mind back to its source where truth is known impartially.

‘In search of truth, all faults are burned; to show pure light, unstained within. from 3.1.5

‘Nothing else but truth prevails. Whatever fails cannot be true.

‘Truth is the way to reach the goal of each desire we seem to feel. from 3.1.6

‘Unlimited by any bounds, far subtler than all subtlety, self shines as unconditioned light, beyond the furthest reach of thought.

‘Yet it is here in every heart, immediate, in each of us. from 3.1.7

‘Unseen by eyes, unsaid by speech, unperceived by any sense, beyond the reach of any act
that any faculty performs
or any purpose mind intends;

‘this partless absolute is known
only by grace of truth itself,
through pure, impartial questioning. 3.1.8

‘True self is only known by its
own consciousness, which is itself.

‘The seeming consciousness of sense
is mixed with alien-seeming things.
The seeming consciousness of mind
seems mixed with changing qualities.

‘When consciousness is clarified,
by seeing it for what it is,
the nature of the self shines out. 3.1.9

‘In all desires for fortune, power,
prosperity, well-being, joy;
all that is sought is only self.

‘Whoever realizes self
attains to purity of truth,
sees shining light in everything,
attains the goal of all desire.

‘The way to true prosperity
is truth made plain by one who knows. 3.1.10

**Attainment to the impersonal**

‘Whoever knows plain truth has reached
the final ground on which we stand:
where world is seen as only light,
as nothing else but consciousness.

‘This consciousness is not the flux
of changing mind; it is the base
upon which changes come and go.

‘It is the changeless background of
all changing thought: the background that
continues on as things appear
and disappear, through all the
many differing appearances
that are perceived by shifting mind.

‘It is the common principle
which each calls “I”, impersonal
within each personality.

‘The steadfast seeker, undeterred
by petty ego’s foolish fears,
pays heed to this one principle,
becomes desireless and goes
beyond all birth and change and death.

‘By longing thought for things desired,
a person is born here or there.

‘But one who is established in
the real self is self-fulfilled;
and no desire for alien things
can any more cause misery.

‘This changeless self cannot be reached
by preaching words or learned forms,
nor by any mental act.

‘By simple love for truth alone
is self revealed for what it is.

‘It can’t be reached by giving up
brute force, nor by strength of purpose,
nor passionate intensity,
nor turning back from outward show.

‘Instead, all these are merely means
through which love leads to truth of self,
true home of all reality.

‘A sage is one who knows the self
for what it is, who has no trace
of ego that identifies
the self with body or with mind.

‘Fulfilled, content with what is known,
dispasionate, at peace, a sage
remains unshakably at one 
with self and all reality; 
wherever mind and body seem 
to be, no matter what seems known. from 3.2.5

‘An aspirant is one who won’t be satisfied with partial truths that rest on false identity of self with body or with mind.

‘Renouncing ego’s falsities, a seeker strives for clarity and certainty of final truth, beyond half-truths that ego knows.

‘Each seeker, in the end, breaks free to deathlessness, unlimited by seeming bounds of space and time. from 3.2.6

‘Where true reality is found, all seeming things are seen dissolved back in the ground from which they come.

‘This is the ground which is and knows: where all our many seeming acts are seen as only consciousness. from

‘To changeless self, all things are one. 3.2.7

‘As flowing rivers join the sea, where name and form become dissolved; so too, when self is realized, no bonds of name and form remain.

‘Beyond obscuring differences, the common, radiant principle of living freedom is attained. from 3.2.8

‘Whoever knows the absolute illuminates all those around from that one centre of all things, beyond all seeming sin and grief:
‘where knots of heart dissolve in light,
where final freedom is attained,
and deathlessness is realized. from 3.2.9

*Muṇḍaka*
From the Māṇḍūkya Upanishad

The word ‘Om’ ¹

The word that’s spoken out as ‘Om’, when rightly understood, shows all experience: all that is, all that ever was, all that will be.

And thus it shows unchanging truth; which stays the same, beyond all time, in everything that seems to be.

Within each person’s mind and heart, while objects seem to come and go, the self that knows all seeming change must carry on. It’s always here, in everything we seem to know.

This self is all reality.

Reality and self, though one, seem to appear as different things, in different states of consciousness.

The outside world seems to appear in what we call the ‘waking state’.

Here, consciousness seems outward bound: from self, through little body’s gross perceptions, out into a world containing all our bodies and the many other object-things our outward senses seem to know.

¹See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 169-175, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
But when attention seems to turn
back in, away from outside things,
to thoughts and feelings in our minds,
another state appears, called ‘dream’.

Here, consciousness remains within
our minds; and all that can appear
are subtle forms of changing mind,
created by imagining.

When mind subsides and dreams dissolve,
there comes a state we call ‘deep sleep’:
where seeming things do not appear.

Here, consciousness is shown for what
it is, unmixed with seeming things,
beneath all mere appearances
of name and form and quality.

In depth of sleep, all bonds are loosed.
All conflicts, all divisions end.

Thus, consciousness is clarified;
and its true nature shines as peace,
as undivided unity,
as unconditioned happiness.

All things are known by consciousness.

It is the underlying ground:
from which all seeming things arise;
on which they stand, relate together,
are controlled; and finally,
in which all seeming things dissolve.

Since consciousness continues through
all states that we experience;
it can’t in truth be called a state:
in which some seeming thing is known
or is unknown or partly known.

It is the background of all states:
the background of reality,  
against which seeming things are known.

And it is also knowing self:  
which lights all seeming things, by its  
own self-illuminating light.

Unseen by mind or any sense,  
it lights all mind and every sense,  
and all that is experienced.

It is itself pure knowing light.

This is its nature as it is;  
to know, it does not need to act.

Its knowledge is no kind of act:  
that may be started up or stopped,  
or be directed or attached  
to changing objects in the world.

It only knows. It does not act.  
Its knowledge is quite unattached.

It can’t be grasped, nor quite expressed,  
described, or pointed out, by  
any physical or mental act.

The only way it can be known  
is through its own self-evidence:  
as the essential basis where  
all differences must be resolved.

It is the source of peace and love,  
where self and world are known as one.

Three letters, joined in single sound,  
make up the word pronounced as ‘Om’.  
First comes the letter ‘a’, then ‘u’,  
then ‘m’; together, they form ‘Om’.\(^2\)

\(^2\)In Sanskrit, the letter ‘a’ is pronounced as ‘-er’ in ‘father’, and the letter ‘u’ is pronounced as ‘u’ in ‘full’. If this short ‘a’ and short ‘u’ are first pronounced separately and are then progressively run together, it can be seen that they combine to form the sound ‘o’ (as in ‘home’). Hence, ‘Om’ is conceived to be made up of ‘a’, ‘u’ and ‘m’.
‘A’ represents the waking world 
that body’s outward senses see.

This is the world of ‘common sense’, 
from which we start to look for truth 
that stays the same through changing views,

through various different sights and sounds 
and other such appearances 
perceived from different points of view.

‘U’ represents the subtle forms 
we dream within our changing minds, 
conceiving thoughts and fantasies 
urged on by feeling and desire.

Thus we imagine high ideals, 
in search of deeper, subtler truths 
beneath the gross appearances 
our outward senses seem to see.

‘M’ represents the merging place 
where consciousness shines out as peace, 
when dreams dissolve in depth of sleep.

From this pure ground of consciousness, 
all qualities, all names, all forms 
arise, and seem to show a world 
outside our senses and our minds.

Whenever anything appears, 
it must be known by consciousness.

Nothing ever can appear 
without support from consciousness.

Thus, each apparent object and 
the whole apparent universe 
must rest upon this knowing ground 
that’s here, in all appearances.

And then, as world’s appearances 
are understood, all forms and names 
and qualities return to ground, 
absorbed again in consciousness.
The whole word ‘Om’ continues on from ‘a’ to ‘u’ and then to ‘m’:
thus representing consciousness which carries on through changing states and so contains them all in one.
In this unchanging consciousness where all appearances dissolve,
no separate ego can remain and happiness is realized;
for self and world are known as one.
‘Om’ is thus non-duality:
where truth but merges self in self and self shines by itself, alone.
From the Taittirīya Upanishad

Complete reality

What could it mean to know complete reality, just as it is:

beneath the various partial views that each of us seems to perceive, through little body, sense and mind in a much larger universe?

If all reality were known, there would be nothing left to know.

No trace of ignorance or doubt could then remain, to complicate the simple, unconditioned truth which would at last be realized.

Satyam – truth

Complete reality is thus plain truth, uncomplicated by the ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’ which must arise wherever incomplete perception shows some seeming, partial truth that’s mixed with partial falsity.

But what, in turn, is this plain truth?

It’s something that is always true, no matter what conditions or uncertainties may seem perceived in the apparent world around our partial personalities.

What’s always true is always real, beneath all mere appearances.

It is that common principle
which all appearances must share, beneath their seeming differences.

It’s where appearances differ that they betray their falsities.

What’s fully real and plainly true is shown by all appearances: as seen in common from all different points of view, no matter where or when perceived, by whom or through what faculty or state of mind.

This common principle of truth remains the same, through all the seeming differences and variations of experience: as perceptions, thoughts and feelings come and go, creating world’s appearances in a parade of changing show that passes through each person’s mind.

**Jnyānam**

– knowledge

What is this common principle of truth that all experience shares beneath the world’s appearances?

At different moments of experience, different objects are perceived in different ways; thus giving rise to differing appearances in different minds, at different times.

Whatever object may be known, however it may be perceived, it’s never there quite on its own, in anyone’s experience.

No object is experienced without some kind of consciousness, to light what it appears to be.

What is in fact experienced is not an object on its own, but object mixed with consciousness.
Hence, what’s *supposed* to be an object is, as *actually* experienced, knowledge of the object known.

In truth, the object is not there outside of consciousness at all. What’s there is knowledge, nothing else.

What seemed to be an object, thus, turns out to be pure consciousness: with nothing else mixed into it, beneath all mere appearances.

**Anantam**

This underlying consciousness is not an act of sense or mind, conditioned by the seeming objects it appears to act towards.

Unlike the seeming consciousness of partial body, sense and mind, it does not change in course of time.

As different things seem to be known, as different feelings, thoughts, perceptions change apparent consciousness of seeming objects in the world;

it is the underlying base of unconditioned consciousness that carries on through differences of time and personality.

It’s the essential base on which:

our lives continue on through time; our different acts, perceptions, thoughts and feelings can co-ordinate;

our different minds say what they mean, and understand what other people do or say or think or feel.

This is the base of consciousness that’s here in all experience; no matter what may seem perceived,
no matter how, no matter where, 
nor in whose mind, nor at what time.

It is the common principle 
of truth that all experience shows, 
the ground of all reality.

In space and time, it’s infinite:
continuing through everything 
quite unbegun and unconfined 
by any kind of bound or end 
or limit or conditioning.

And yet, to reason seeking truth, 
it is quite fixed and definite,
as the essential ground of all 
necessity and certainty:
first source, sole base, of all that’s known, 
and final end of questioning.

Complete reality is thus 
plain truth of unmixed consciousness, 
beyond all limiting conditions 
in the objects we perceive 
through partial body, sense and mind.

Known as the essence of the self 
within each person’s mind and heart, 
it is the highest, final goal 
that all desire truly seeks.

Just knowing it resolves all strife, 
frees all desire, fills all need, 
and realizes unity 
of separate-seeming self revealed 
at one with all reality.
Levels of appearance

How does the seeming world arise from underlying consciousness?

‘Ether’
- the pervading element (ākāsha)
It rises first through background continuity: enabling knowledge from the past to carry on, so that the qualities of world may be contrasted and compared.

‘Air’
- the qualitative element (vāyu)
Hence background continuity gives rise to quality and character: enabling judgement of perceived appearances, and thus interpreting what they might mean.

‘Fire’
- the illuminating element (agni)
Hence quality and character give rise to meaning that illuminates more than what is immediately perceived: enabling a variety of changing forms to be imagined and described.

‘Water’
- the transforming element (āpas)
Hence meaning in its turn gives rise to form and change: enabling objects in the world to be identified as separate bits of matter, each one formed in its own way.

‘Earth’
- the material element (prithivī)
Thus form and change give rise to matter, seen divided into objects that together constitute the world where body seems to live.

Living creatures (prajās)
Each living body is made up of matter organized to act towards the purposes of life.

Hence plants and living organisms
are produced, grow and subsist: consuming and transforming matter taken in from world outside.

Each body lives consuming food, and is itself potential food which in its turn may be consumed: for other bodies to be born, to grow, develop and subsist.

Our bodies use what they consume to act expressing consciousness.

It’s this expression that enables us to see our bodies as alive.

From this comes personality of living self seen from outside, as consciousness of self is seen expressed in outward forms and acts.

At first, this self seems to be body; made of food, and needing food to carry on its seeming life.

Food

(annam)

For body, food is sustenance found formed into the many different bodies that the world contains.

From food consumed, all bodies have been born; by food they live and grow; until they end themselves as food for other bodies to consume.

Where all the bodies in the world are seen as only sustenance thus taking many different forms, there all the world’s reality may be approached as sustenance found here within each person’s self.

But here within each seeming self of body made from food consumed, there is another, subtler self
that makes the body seem alive.

This is the self of energy that is expressed in living acts.

**Living energy (prāṇa)**

This self of vital energy sustains the body’s seeming life.

It drives the body’s acts toward their purposes; and thus enables body to continue as a living organism, functioning towards objectives of intention, meaning and desire.

All living acts, throughout the world, express this vital energy that forms our personalities.

And where all living acts are seen as its expressions in the world, there all the world’s reality may be approached as energy found here within each person’s self.

But what is vital energy? What makes it seem to be alive?

It only lives in that its acts express intention, meaning, wish, from thought and feeling in the mind.

Hence vital energy itself expresses life from mind within;

and thus it forms a seeming self in which another, subtler self – made up of mind that thinks and feels – is more essentially alive.

**Mind (manas)**

In everyone’s experience, as mind’s perceptions, thoughts and feelings come and go, they form a changing stream of world’s appearances.
But through this stream of passing show, there is an underlying consciousness that carries on; thus knowing change and difference, comparing and contrasting qualities:

discerning good from bad, and right from wrong, and truth from falsity.

All mind’s perceptions, thoughts and feelings rise expressing consciousness, with its discernment of what’s good and right from what is bad and wrong.

And this discerning consciousness is what gives value, meaning, life to the appearances mind forms.

So, just as vital energy expresses mind, the mind in turn expresses knowing consciousness that gives the mind its seeming life.

Thus mind too forms a seeming self in which another, subtler self – of consciousness that knows apart – is more essentially alive.

Discerning consciousness (vijñānam) in everyone’s experience, this consciousness continues on through all the world’s appearances.

Beneath these world appearances, it’s shared in common by them all:

the changeless common ground on which what’s known continues on through time, and different minds communicate.

It is the common principle of all experience: expressed in everything that we perceive, in everything we think and feel.
It is complete reality, 
beneath all mere appearances.

Thus known complete, quite unconfused 
with partial body, sense and mind, 
it leads to non-duality:

where separate-seeming self dissolves, 
and truth of self is realized 
at one with all reality. 

\textbf{Happiness} 
\textit{(ānanda)} 
Hence consciousness that knows apart 
leads finally to what self is:

pure, unconditioned happiness 
where lack and want cannot arise;

because the knowing self, in truth, 
is one with all reality, 
and there is nothing else besides.

Discernment, mind and energy 
and bodies’ actions all express 
this ultimate, non-dual self.

Within each personality, 
\textit{from 2.5} 
it’s the essential, living core 
\textit{and beginning} 
of unconditioned happiness 
\textit{of 2.6} 
that cannot change or pass away.
Nothingness

Since body, sense and mind are only partial instruments, they can’t perceive complete reality.

They can’t see everything at once, there’s always something left to see.

Each object that they see is part of something more than what is seen: part of a larger universe.

Each of their objects is thus always limited and incomplete.
It’s just a part appearance of a more complete reality.

No object then in truth exists, in its own right. It is a mere appearance, shown by partial sight that doesn’t fully see what’s there.

But does ‘complete reality’ itself exist? If it’s not seen by any body, sense or mind, how can we know it’s truly there?

Should we conclude that there is no reality at all, but only meaningless appearances that show us empty nothingness?

Such a conclusion would be wrong, for there’s a contradiction here.

If all reality is known not to exist, then that which knows does not exist and cannot know.

So nothingness refutes itself, and leads us on to ask again how we might know reality.
If all reality is known
as that which truly and completely
is, beneath what partially
appears; then that which knows this truth
must also be completely real.

The self which knows reality
cannot itself be just some part
appearance of what’s really there.
It must be all reality.

It is at once the knowing self
and all that’s ever truly known.

It’s that in us which knows itself:
pure consciousness, unlimited
by seeming objects in the world
perceived by body, sense and mind.

We often leave this seeming world:
not only when the body dies,
but also when we fall asleep;
or when desires are achieved
and world dissolves in happiness;
and even every moment of
our lives, as past thought dies away,
so that new thought may rise again.

When we thus leave this seeming world,
through death or sleep or happiness
or change of thought, what happens then?

At first it seems we enter in
a state of empty nothingness,
where consciousness has disappeared.

But if there were no consciousness,
this state could not be known at all.

In truth, there’s only consciousness;
it’s seeming objects that aren’t there.
The nothingness we seem to see
is nothingness of seeming world:
which is in truth pure consciousness,
at one with all reality.

Where there is ignorance, the world
is left behind unknowingly,
in fear of unknown nothingness
that seems to follow fading world.

Where truth is known, the world becomes
entirely irrelevant.
When it appears, it's known as only
unconditioned consciousness.

And when it disappears, it’s left
behind quite knowingly: as
disappearing back into this same
self-evident reality
of unconditioned, knowing light.
The creator

Creation is the work of ego, which desires to be more than what it thinks itself to be.

Creating ego is a self that seems somehow dissatisfied. It is a seeming consciousness that feels itself inadequate.

From this dissatisfaction, it feels need and want and loneliness.

Thus it desires to multiply, to issue forth as many things; so it might raise its self-esteem and cure its self-belittlement.

Because it’s sorry for itself, it starts to dream of better possibilities; and for a while it even cheers itself with the pretence of passing fantasy that’s somehow taken to be true; until the fancy passes on and brings more self-belittlement.

Thus ego’s fancied prospects only lure it on to feeling sorrier for what again it’s forced to take as its own present sorry state.

By feeding on its own frustrations, ego breeds upon itself with spiralling intensity; and thus, in everyone’s experience, ego’s fantasies create perceived appearances, expanding into the entire universe that seems to be perceived.
Creating the entire universe
from its own fantasies,
the self-deceiving consciousness
of restless ego permeates
the seeming world it thus becomes.

It is the stuff of which is made:

what’s present here to body’s senses
and what’s thought beyond by mind;
what seems defined or left unsaid;
what seems founded or unfounded;
what seems true or seems untrue
to seeming body, sense and mind.

The whole apparent world perceived
by seeming body, sense and mind
is only ego’s fantasy.

But then, what is the truth we seek
beneath the world’s appearances?

What is this ego that creates
the world? What truth is there in it,
beneath its many falsities?

For every person, ego is
a seeming self, identified
with little body, sense or mind.

It’s body, sense and mind that are
inherently inadequate.
They’re only little parts of world
that suffer lack and need and want.

Why then are they identified
as that which each of us calls ‘I’?
Why do they seem a person’s self?

In everyone’s experience,
the self called ‘I’ is that which knows.

Where sentient body seems to know
a world outside, it is called ‘I’.
But when the body’s seen to be
an instrument, through which the senses
see; then senses are called ‘I’.

And when in turn the senses are
regarded as mere instruments
through which the mind perceives; then it’s
the mind which gets to be called ‘I’.

And finally, when mind as well
is seen as just an instrument
that acts to form appearances
which consciousness illuminates;
then it is unconditioned consciousness,
unmixed with body, sense
and mind, that’s truly known as ‘I’.

Beyond this consciousness, there’s
nothing else; for it’s no instrument
that acts in any way at all.

It only carries on unchanged,
self-luminous, throughout the course
of all experience, as perceptions,
thoughts and feelings come and go.

It is the changeless base from which
appearances seem to arise,
on which they stand, and where they go
as they dissolve back in their ground
of self-illuminating light.

Thus it is consciousness that is
the true identity of self.

It’s just by falsely seeing
consciousness, confused with body, sense
and mind, that people call them ‘I’.

The ego is only a false
identity, a false appearance
seen by ignorant mistake.

The ego isn’t really there,
just like the world that it creates;
for ego is a part of world.

The seeming world is mere appearance,
risen up from mere appearance,
on the base of consciousness.

Effectively, the seeming world
creates itself; and in this sense
it may be called ‘spontaneous’.

Thus nature’s spontaneity,
its genuine, unprompted
‘naturalness’, is the essential
flavour of the whole created world.

Through all its many happenings,
the world spontaneously expresses
its own base of consciousness:
which does not act, but where all actions
rise, are based and come to rest.

Where this essential spontaneity
is understood, the world
is seen expressing consciousness:
which forces nothing, makes no effort,
does not put on any act,
and yet inspires everything.

Arriving at this spontaneity,
one comes to happiness:
where consciousness shines out, at one
with all that happens in the world.

If there were not this happiness,
here at the changeless, knowing background
of the changing object-world;
what reason could there be for
living on, or doing anything?

Without expressing consciousness,
what life or meaning could there be
in any act or happening?

It is the source of happiness:
from which all motivations rise,
on which each one of them depends,
and where they find what they desire
as they return to peace and rest.

It is each person’s true support:
unseen by any sense or mind,
entirely impersonal,
undefined by word or act;

quite independent of all else,
while everything depends on it.

Thus leaving ego’s fears behind
and finding one’s own true support,
one goes beyond the reach of fear.

But when a person’s ego picks
apparent holes in its own self;
then, for that person, there is fear.

And this is just the groundless fear
of unexamined prejudice:
of ego thinking that it knows
what it won’t look at, face to face,
for fear of its own ignorance.

For fear of simple truth, before
which all the complex capabilities
of body, sense and mind
seem so inadequate, the ego
drives the seeming world that it
creates from its own restlessness.

Hence it is said: ‘For fear of truth,
wind blows, sun rises, fire burns,
and lightning flashes from the sky;
as change and death drive all the world.’

But truth itself is not what’s blown
about, nor made to rise, nor burned,
nor flashed like lightning from the sky.

It’s unaffected happiness,
which does not change or fear or die.
Kinds of happiness

Imagine someone who is young, who’s open, honest, full of fun, well-educated, sensitive, alert, adjusted, healthy, strong, with all the comforts wealth can bring. Take this as ‘normal’ happiness.

Much more intense is happiness of celebration, breaking free from personal conditioning that limits ordinary life.

And more than this, there’s happiness of settled, long experience: which goes on bringing in rewards for relatively many years.

But this depends on happiness of cultivated faculties inherited through family and breeding in society.

And further, there is happiness of capabilities achieved by one’s own work and discipline.

Supporting this is happiness of mastering one’s faculties: co-ordinating and controlling them, towards one’s chosen goals.

All this is based on happiness of aspiration to the truth, beyond all mere appearances of seeming objects in the world.

1See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 154-158, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
And greater still is happiness
of coming to creation’s source
from which appearances arise.

But none of these compares at all
with unconditioned happiness:

where all desires are dissolved,
and simple truth is realized
that consciousness is all there is,
with self and object known as one.

– middle

2.8

from
Non-dual consciousness

It’s consciousness that lights appearances, here in a person’s mind.

And this same consciousness makes known all objects in the seeming world perceived by body, sense and mind.

Thus, inward consciousness of mind and outward consciousness of world, though seeming two, are only one.

As this is known, appearances of seeming world are left behind:

withdrawing first through body-self;

then through the self of living energy beneath the body’s acts;

then through the self of mind beneath the purposes of living acts;

then through discerning consciousness beneath the judgements of the mind;

and thus at last to unconditioned happiness of real self, from where changeless consciousness is known at one with all reality.

From this all words and thoughts turn back.

For it is not attained until they fall away, and only consciousness remains: unlimited by word or thought, with nothing to obscure complete reality where lasting happiness is found.

²See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 154-158, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
Whoever knows this simple truth
can have no fear of anything;
nor burn with the anxiety
of asking: ‘Why have I not done
what’s right?’ or ‘Why have I done wrong?’
Both these are only ego’s questions.
Neither can pertain to self.
One who knows truth is liberated
from all seeming good and ill,
superimposed by ego’s ignorance
upon one’s own true self.
Asking for truth

Young Bhrigu, son of Varuṇa, once asked his father: ‘Sir, what’s meant when people speak, not just of some particular apparent thing, but of “complete reality”? ’

His father said: ‘Complete reality is what appears in each particular apparent thing, no matter where or when perceived.

‘And thus appearing differently perceived from different points of view, it may be seen in different ways:

‘as food or sustenance, on which each life and all the world subsists;
‘as living energy expressed in every act and happening;
‘as sight or seeing, which perceives each of the world’s appearances;
‘as listening, which comprehends the meaning of what’s been observed;
‘as mind, which forms appearances that come and go through course of time, in everyone’s experience;
‘as speech or meaningful expression in all acts and happenings observed in the apparent world.

‘In all these ways of seeing it, reality is common ground beneath all seeming differences.

See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 21-23 and 166-167, for an indication of how parts of this retelling interpret the original text (in particular from 3.1 and 3.6 respectively).
‘The ground from which all things are born,
on which depends all that is born,
and into which all things return,
this ground is what you need to know.

‘This ground is all reality.’

Then Bhrigu thought about what had been said to him, and understood:

‘Food is complete reality.

‘For it’s from food consumed, and thus transmuted to some other form by some creative process, that all things are born into this world.

‘Through processes of time and change, it is by food consumed that things maintain their forms and functioning, by which they are identified.

‘And when they lose their separate identities, they come to end as food consumed for other things to be created and maintained.’

Reflecting thus, he asked his father to explain a little more.

His father said: ‘You need no further words from me. You only need to clarify what you already know: enquiring back into your mind with deepening intensity; until all fancies have been burned, and truth alone remains.

‘For pure intensity of truth itself is all reality.’

So Bhrigu thought a little more:

‘Perhaps it’s living energy that is complete reality.'
‘For all that happens in the world is born of motivating energy, depends on energy as long as it continues on, and comes to end as energy from which new happenings arise.’

He went back to his father with this thought, and once again was told to think some more. So now he thought:

‘Mind is complete reality.

‘For every motivating purpose and all meaning comes from mind, depends on mind to carry on, and comes to end in mind: from which new purposes and meanings rise.’

Again he went back to his father, and was told to go on asking what was more exactly true.

And now, reflecting hard, he knew:

‘Complete reality is consciousness:

‘which carries on through mind’s perceptions, thoughts and feelings; knowing change and difference, and thus distinguishing what’s false from what is true.

‘For all appearances arise from this discerning consciousness, depend on this same consciousness, and end returned to consciousness: where new appearances arise.’

Returning to his father with this knowledge, he was told: ‘Now ask:

“What is this truth of consciousness, when falsity has been removed?”’

Then Bhrigu realized at last:
‘Reality is nothing else
but unconditioned happiness:

‘where falsity has been removed
from consciousness, which is thus known
at one with all reality.

‘From unconditioned happiness,
rise all of our experiences.

‘On it, each one of them depends.
It’s what they want. It’s where they go.

‘It is the self that knows in us
and all we ever really know.’
**Sustenance**

I am the sustenance consumed by all the world of changing things.

Yet into me all changing things and all the world become consumed.

From me, each of them issues forth, with all their ordered functioning.

I am their deathless origin: their common, underlying source.

Whoever freely gives of me, is only thus accepting me.

I, who thus seem to be consumed, am just the unaffected ground where all consuming is consumed.

Transcending all the changing world, I’m unconditioned, knowing light.
From the Shvetāśvātara Upanishad

Underlying Cause

In what sense is reality
the underlying cause from which
perceived appearances result?

And who are we that thus perceive
appearances of seeming world?

From what do we ourselves result?

How do we live? Where do we stand?

What is our basis of support,
where all our differences are joined?

As changing life swings back and forth
through passing states of joy and pain,
what stands beyond and takes us on
through all our different-seeming states?  

Reality may be conceived:

as time, proceeding on through change
and thus transcending change and death;

as nature, immanent in things,
inherent in ‘things-in-themselves’;

as plain necessity, which can’t
be otherwise than what it is;

as spontaneity, occurring
of itself, here deep within;

as elementary principle,
of which the seeming world is made;
as the originating source
from which all seeming things are born;

as consciousness, the knowing
principle of personality.

But these are different approaches,
needing to be kept apart.
For their confusion breeds the false
appearances of unreality,

with self appearing
to become what it is not.

The self that knows possesses nothing,
has itself no faculties.
It’s that pure light of consciousness
which only knows and does not act.

Accordingly, it has itself
no powers or capabilities:
which act towards results that bring
us happiness or misery.

And yet, without itself performing
any act, it is the
underlying base of consciousness:
from which all capabilities
and powers rise, on which they stand,
and where they end and come to rest.

As different actions come and go,
it is their changeless, knowing base:
at once the ground from which they act
and their illuminating light.

Through meditation, harnessing
the capabilities of mind,
expanding powers are seen to rise
up from the self: which thus appears
as an almighty deity,
mysteriously concealed beneath
its own apparent qualities.
This deity is that one cause
which stands above all smaller causes,
binding things that change through time
back to their source in changeless self.

As in a wheel, the rim turns round
on moving spokes that radiate
from one, unmoving, central point;
so too this world of moving things
results from many moving causes
that themselves originate
from one, unmoving, central self.

The changing world of our experience
flows in many sensual streams,
made turbulent and tortuous by
the objects that they flow around.

And, agitated into waves
by many living energies,
this restless flow is driven on
through various faculties of mind,
unhappy and dissatisfied.

All of the lives we seem to live
and all the things that we perceive
are found contained within the flow
of passing time in our experience,
cycling round one changeless self.

In this great flow of cyclic time,
each person’s life of little ego
seems confused and tossed about,
by swirling change and driving forces
petty ego can’t control.

But once the knowing self is known,
distinct from that which acts in world,
then this distinction frees the ego
from the bonds that tie it down
to petty action and control.
With ego’s pettiness dissolved, the nature of the self shines out as unaffected happiness: where harm and death do not arise.

It’s this that’s worshipped as complete and ultimate reality.

In it, that which enjoys is one with that which is enjoyed; and both of them are thus revealed at one with that which motivates all change.

It is the changeless ground on which all life and all existence stand.

It’s known by those who’ve realized it here within; entirely dissolving all identity in it: as one’s own real self, as one’s own true reality.

Entirely intent on it, they’re freed from the constraining womb of circumstance, which limits all conditioned personality.

The worshipped deity who’s called ‘the Lord’ is that almighty power which brings forth all the universe: combining change with changelessness and what appears with what does not.

But self, possessing nothing, having in itself no capabilities that act in any way, is not the world-possessing ‘Lord’.

From its appearance as enjoyer non-possessing self seems bound to objects that appear enjoyed.

But, known as the illuminating principle that guides all things,
the self beneath appearances
is realized as always free; with
all the bonds that seem to tie it down.

Two principles are thought unborn,
by thinking of that consciousness
which in itself knows everything
and which knows nothing but itself.

One is ‘the Lord’, possessing all,
with power over everything.

The other has no ownership,
does not have any powers attached
performing any kind of act.

One single unborn principle
is thought beyond duality,
by thinking of experience where
enjoyer and enjoyed unite.

In truth, the self is three in one.

It is ‘the Lord’, the owner of
all forms appearing everywhere.

It’s also changeless consciousness,
unmixed with any kind of act.

And it is infinite, beyond
division and duality.

Here, where one finds this trinity –
of oneness holding everything,
of unconditioned consciousness,
and of non-dual happiness –
reality is known complete.

Change is the primal seed that forms
the seeming world’s appearances.

Unchanging deathlessness is the
destroyer of all ignorance.
The play of change about the self
is guided and inspired by
one principle of inner light
that’s called ‘divine’, and is in truth
the very nature of the self.

From contemplating that, from joining
into it, from truth appearing
more and more just as it is,
the world’s delusions cease at last
and are dissolved in peace and rest.

Where knowing light itself is known,
all ties and limits fall away.
There all dissatisfaction ends
and neither birth nor death arise.

This is a state transcending body,
touching base with everything.

Here self shines absolute, all by
itself, with all desire fulfilled.

Here, neither time nor change is known,
but only timeless constancy
that stands entirely in self.

Beyond this, there is nothing else.
Subtle powers

Just as the energy of fire is latent in a piece of fuel;

so too the subtle energies of life and mind are latent in gross forms of body, seen by sense as pieces of an outside world.

And just as fuel may be set alight, by focused friction or by concentrated sparks or flame;

so too the subtle powers of life and mind may be made manifest by meditative practices:

which concentrate intensity within, thus setting flame to latent energies that are not noticed in the ordinary course of outward life in seeming world.

These latent powers are called ‘divine’ when they are used to take the mind, beyond its usual limitations,

to that principle of light where every limit disappears and all the powers of mind dissolve, in unconditioned consciousness.

1.13-14
Mental discipline

The mind is harnessed to the senses
like a chariot pulled along
by untamed horses running wild.

And it can only be controlled,
held steady on an even course,

by one who stands as consciousness:
unexcited, undisturbed.

from

2.9
Ego and self

The surface of a mirror shows obscurity where it is stained by overlying dirt and dust.

But where it’s cleaned, it disappears: dissolved in its own clarity.

So too, each person’s ego shows up as an obstacle: where it is overlaid with the impurities of body, sense and mind, which it identifies with self.

But when this false identity is understood and cleared away; then no impurities remain and ego disappears, dissolved in unconditioned happiness: from where truth of self shines clarified.

A person’s body, sense and mind are only instruments through which perceptions of the world appear.

They do not know in their own right; for their perceptions shine by light of knowing self that lives within.

Light is the nature of the self. Its very being is to shine: as self-illuminating light.

It is the light of consciousness, which lights perceived appearances and thus illuminates the world.

\[1\text{See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 144-146, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.}\]
By looking back into the self, one joins one’s true identity: as consciousness that knows directly, face to face, in its own right.

And here, beneath all compromise with mediating instruments, one knows reality direct: from unborn, unchanging, absolute. 2.15
The universal ‘Lord’

God is conceived to hold the web of circumstance, thus ruling all the world, with powers over everything.

This universal principle, conceived as ‘God’, is one alone:
in all that is created and in all that happens in the world.  

It has no second, as it stands here facing everyone within.  

It is complete reality, unlimited and ultimate.

Found present individually within each body, it is known implicitly in everything.

And yet it is one single unity, containing all the world.  

This all-containing principle is consciousness, known pictured as the self-illuminating sun, beyond all dark obscurity. 

Beyond it, there is nothing else.

There’s nothing smaller, nothing greater.
Size does not apply to it, nor any kind of quality.

The manifested universe is like a tree which seems to grow

---

See *Interpreting the Upanishads*, pages 96-103, for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
a multiplicity of swaying branches, rustling leaves and flowering blossoms seen by outward sight.

But like a tree, examined at the trunk where it supports itself, the many-seeming world turns out to be a single unity, unmoving in the changeless ground.

This changeless ground is consciousness, where the entire seeming tree of universal happening dissolves in unconditioned light.

All things, in truth, are only light pervading all experience from the entire universe.

Transcending all appearances perceived by body, sense and mind, this principle of consciousness is unattached to any form and unaffected by all ill.

Whoever knows it does not die. All others lead a dying life that leads to pain and misery.

All faces, heads and bodies are mere instruments of consciousness, found here in every person’s heart.

It is the inner principle of spirit that pervades the world; and thus, it’s worshipped as ‘the Lord’.

It is the base of changeless light on which is founded order, justice, goodness, harmony, and guidance towards purity and truth.
Seen in each individual’s own experience, this principle of consciousness is inner self:

the living centre of each individual personality.

It’s always present, living here within each person’s mind and heart;

and it is found by turning thought to question back towards its source:

back from the world, through mind and heart, towards the source where thoughts arise.

As feelings, thoughts, perceptions change, pure consciousness continues on.

It is the underlying ground that’s common to each one of them, beneath their many differences of quality and name and form.

And it’s the same for everyone, the common ground that stays the same beneath all change and difference.

Because it underlies all differences of quality and name and form, there’s nothing to distinguish it from one experience to the next or from one person to the next.

It is the common ground on which we understand each other’s acts; as we communicate across our physical and mental differences, of body and of mind.

All hearts and minds and bodies, and all feelings, thoughts, perceptions, acts, express this common consciousness.

All of them are its instruments, expressing it and thereby acting
for its sake; while it remains beyond them all, the common background of the many-seeming world.

All that is known, throughout the world, is only known in consciousness.

Thus, all that’s known must be contained entirely in consciousness; and nothing really is outside.

Pure consciousness is all there is.

It’s all the world’s reality: including all that’s come to be and everything that’s yet to be.

It is at once the changeless light that guides us on to deathlessness, and the reality of world where everything that’s born and grows is fed by death of other things.

Whatever’s known expresses it, no matter where or when perceived.

All happenings are its faculties: expressing it and thereby acting for its sake; while it remains beyond them all, the changeless background of all changing happenings.

It lights all of the qualities that every faculty perceives:

but it is not itself attached to any faculty at all; for in itself it does not act.

All faculties and all their acts depend on it to be perceived, to focus and co-ordinate;

but it does not depend on them.
It is their central principle:
their origin and common ground,
their guiding light and stable base
enabling ordered harmony,
their final goal and place of rest.

The self that’s found embodied here,
within each person, is expressed
outside as well, in nature’s play
of circumstance and happening.

Remaining in itself unmoved,
it is the inner principle
from which all motivation comes.

All movements and all standing still,
no matter where or when perceived,
are understood expressing it;
reflecting back to self within.

It has no feet, yet it keeps up
with all that moves. It has no hands,
yet it grasps all experience.

It’s that which sees and hears; without
the faculties of seeing sights
and hearing sounds, of objects in
some alien world outside itself.

It’s that which knows whatever’s known.

But it is not an object known
by anyone who knows of it
through faculties and instruments
that act towards a world outside.

Conceived as the ‘I’-principle,
it’s what each person really is:

pure, unconditioned consciousness,
known prior to all attributes
superimposed by partial sight.
Far subtler than all subtlety, 
far greater than all magnitude 
that senses see or mind conceives, 
the self is found established here 
in every living creature’s heart.

Set free from grief and misery 
by gift of grace transcending 
little ego’s petty purposes, 
one knows the self desireless:

as that which stands beyond all acts 
of power and greatness in the world. from 3.20

This same unaging, ageless self 
is all that’s ever truly known:

perceived extending everywhere 
through its pervading sovereignty.

It’s spoken of as ending birth; 
for where it’s known all time dissolves 
in deathless continuity. from 3.21
The unborn

That which is one cannot itself have any qualities or other attributes mixed into it.

And yet, through various energies and powers that we associate with it, one sole reality appears expressed in many different qualities and attributes, which are put forth for its own sake.

It is that principle of light in which all things are found dissolved: right at the start, where all perception must begin; and in the end, when everything is said and done.

It’s only from this light that mind expresses clarity of thought.

All burning fire, all shining sun, all subtle qualities of atmosphere, all silver radiance of the moon, are nothing else but this.

It’s pure, complete reality:

appearing changeless in the changing forms and states of waters’ flow;

appearing in creation as ‘the Lord’ of all that has been born.

It is each woman, every man, each boy, each girl: whether in crying infancy or curious childhood, restless youth or prosperous

---

3See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 141-142, for an indication of how part of this retelling interprets the original text (in particular 4.6-7).
maturity, or in old age
that needs a staff to totter on.

Within each body that’s been born,
it’s called the ‘individual self’.

Within all bodies, or within
the body of the universe,
it’s called the ‘universal self’.

It is expressed in every face:
all faces are its instruments,
displaying it for outward view
to show it living here within.

It is the dark blue butterfly;
the bright green parrot, with red eyes;
the lightning cloud; the passing seasons;
and the oceans’ vast expanse.

Through its pervading sovereignty,
it lives unborn in everything:

as that which has not been begun,
but where all that is born begins.

The principle of ‘nature’ is
conceived unborn, but somehow
manifesting different qualities.

One is described as coloured red,
for burning energy; another
is described as coloured white,
for clarifying purity;
a third as coloured black, for darkness
or for underlying depth.

As nature manifests itself,
the many objects of the world
are born: each one its offspring, formed
from its apparent qualities.

With nature thus conceived, as
manifesting world, another unborn
principle must be conceived
along with it: as inner ‘soul’
experiencing the good and bad
results of action in the world.

But then one final, unborn
principle remains to be conceived:
as consciousness which knows all change,
but is itself detached from change,
thereby illuminating good
and bad experiences that come
and go before its changeless light.

This principle of consciousness
is found entirely detached
from all the good and bad results
of nature’s manifesting acts.  \textit{4.5}

These principles, of inner ‘soul’
and consciousness, are like two birds
conceived to live together here,
on nature’s tree of happenings.

Of these two birds, one eats and tastes
the fruit, and thus becomes affected
by its qualities. The other
does not eat, but just looks on,
unmoved by nature’s changing acts.  \textit{4.6}

On this same tree, a person gets
depressed and suffers grief: deluded
by a sense of seeming helplessness,
and feeling thus quite dispossessed.

But when one sees what’s truly loved –
as that which stands beyond all else,
as one’s own boundlessness, from where
help comes, where everything belongs –
there one is freed from misery.  \textit{4.7}

What is the use of all the words,
techniques and capabilities
that formal learning passes on?
How can they truly be applied in ignorance of their supporting ground of changeless consciousness, from which all learning is expressed?

It’s only here, by knowing this unchanging consciousness, that lasting peace and unity are found.

All world’s appearances arise in consciousness; and none of them exists outside of consciousness.

Thus consciousness is that which holds, within itself, all the appearances that we perceive, of seeming world in our experience.

The whole apparent world, conceived through past or future thoughts and acts, is held contained in consciousness, from which conception seems to rise.

It’s just in consciousness that alienated ego seems to have confined itself, by a false world of its own fake imaginings.

Creating nature, bringing all things forth, may thus be known as forming the appearances of world that seems perceived by sense and mind.

And nature’s uncreated ‘Lord’, unlimited and infinite, is known as changeless consciousness: which in itself supports and holds all changing world’s appearances.

For all the world is made of things that are but part of consciousness.

The worshipped ‘Lord’ who grants desires is that single, common cause
which stands beyond each different cause.  
In it, all objects come together  
and disintegrate away.  

Discerning it, one reaches peace  
that passes limits, has no end.  

It is the central origin  
and basis of all faculties,  
the one transcending witness of  
the many-seeming universe.  

It sees creation being born,  
as world is seeded forth from light.  

Here, in the midst of a  
chaotic-seeming world of mixed-up things,  
it’s subtler than all subtlety:  
assuming a variety  
of different forms, to issue forth  
as everything that is perceived.  

Thus it is one reality  
containing all the universe.  

This all-creating principle  
of light is everyone’s own self:  
unlimited and infinite,  
found always present here at heart  
in all of those that have been born.  

It is conceived through mind and heart,  
by turning thought and feeling back  
towards the source from which they rise.  

Where no obscurity remains,  
there is no night and thus no day.  

No false appearances create  
an empty show of seeming things  
that are in truth not really there.
There is no nothingness, and thus
no being that’s opposed to it.
There’s nothing real that could be false.

There’s only changeless happiness,
uncompromised and absolute.

That’s what is sought of consciousness,
the self-illuminating sun
inspiring everything within.

From it, all knowledge has come forth,
right from the earliest of times.

Not going up or down, nor
across, nor anywhere between,
could anyone catch hold of it.

It has no likeness anywhere,
nor measure to compare with it;

for it can never be contained
within the range of partial sight
perceived by outward faculties.

It is not seen by any outward
faculty; but by reflecting
back to it, through heart and mind,
to find it standing here within.

Whoever knows it thus, unborn,
has come, at last, to deathlessness.
Universal and individual

Where knowledge is defined opposed to ignorance that does not know, duality is there implied:

superimposed in some mysterious, hidden way, upon unchanging, limitless reality.

Whatever’s real is the same no matter how it is perceived.

Thus, while appearances are changed by different ways of seeing things, what’s true and real does not change.

As limited appearances are changed by changing points of view, what changes is mere ignorance:

which only sees appearances and does not know reality, unchanging and unlimited.

True knowledge of reality, which knows beneath appearances, is never changed and does not die, no matter what appears perceived.

And here, where ignorance dissolves, there is no more duality of knowledge that’s defined opposed to thought of seeming ignorance.

There’s nothing else but consciousness, beyond all mind’s conditioning: beyond all mere appearances of knowledge or of ignorance.

4See Interpreting the Upanishads, pages 146-151, for an indication of how part of this retelling interprets the original text (in particular 5.7-14).
It is the unity that stands
beyond each individual cause,
beyond the whole totality
of forms and causes in the world.

Through various kinds of knowledge, it
is all creation’s ground support;

and it is also inmost light
that knows perception being born.

Web after web of manifold
illusion issues forth from it,
and is withdrawn back in again.

Thus emanating forth successively
all of creation’s powers,
it is the ‘Lord’ of everything,
the centre of all sovereignty,

unlimited and infinite.

Just as the sun lights all directions,
upwards, downwards and between;

so too, the principle of light
that’s worshipped as the highest God
is one, unchanging unity:

which stands beyond all nature’s causes
making different things result.

It is the self-becoming cause
from which all things are born, on which
they’re able to transform, and where
they all come to maturity.

Transcending world, it is the one
co-ordinating unity
that makes it possible for
different qualities to be arranged
among world’s many different things.

Each doer acts and meets reaction,
and thus gets to be conditioned by resulting qualities.

Each doing personality experiences conditioning that follows from its previous acts.

Accordingly, it’s the enjoyer of its past accomplishments, as it is shaped through various forms of seeming world that it perceives.

In every one of us, the doer is the ruling principle of life that journeys on through time from its own actions in the world.  \[5.7\]

The individual self appears, in every person, like the sun. It shines by its own light, and thus illuminates the seeming world.

As seen by virtue of the mind, it gets associated with false ego’s pettiness of thought and will and wishful fantasy.

As seen by virtue of itself, it’s like a point, dimensionless: beyond all measure and compare, with nothing else beyond itself. \[5.8\]

The living principle of personality may be perceived as quite infinitesimal:

as always fine enough to be completely present here within whatever finite littleness may be perceived by act of sense or be conceived by act of mind.

And yet, from it arise relationships and capabilities
extending to infinity, from beyond all bounds of space and time.

5.9 No gender qualifies its life.
It is not male. Nor is it female.
Nor has it some neuter gender in between, describing it as somehow lacking vital life.

But, through the personalities superimposed on it by us, it's what we cherish, what we care for, what we watch and look for with concern, in those we come to love.

5.10 Fooled by its own delusions of imagination, feeling, sight, the ego takes itself to be a personality that has been born and grows in many ways, through nourishment that it receives.

But self, in truth, is quite impersonal:
as the unborn, unchanging principle that’s always here, in everyone’s experience, within each personality.

As body journeys through the world, self carries on through states of change:
and thus appears to be a ‘soul’, successively assuming forms of changing personality that follow on from previous acts.

5.11 Seen through the changing attributes of mind’s and body’s various acts, it seems that the embodied self takes on a great variety
of gross and subtle qualities
to form a personality.

But, seen through its inherent nature,
as the changeless, common centre
where all attributes are joined;

the self is known beyond all else,

with nothing else beyond itself.

5.12

Here, in the midst of a
chaotic-seeming world of birth and death,
it’s unbegun and infinite:

as it appears to take on the
variety of changing forms
that seemingly condition it,
creating the appearances
of everything that seems perceived.

Thus it’s the one reality
containing all the universe.

5.13

It’s grasped only by being it:

by looking back into one’s self,
from where sight comes, and thus returning
to one’s own reality.

It is called ‘bodiless’; for it
is not attached or limited
to any body in the world.

It is the source of love, from which
all doing and undoing comes.

It is the principle of light,
from which creation issues forth.

Whoever knows it leaves behind
all petty personality.

5.14
Immanent and transcendent 5

Some speak of self-becoming nature, or of passing time, as causing all that happens in the world.

But seen more truly, all the happenings of time and nature act expressing unconditioned truth in the conditioned things of world. 6.1

This truth is all reality, containing the entire world.

And further, it’s pure consciousness: the changeless source of changing time, the unconditioned, knowing ground of all conditioned qualities.

As moments pass, it carries on: enabling different qualities to be compared in course of time, and lighting all that’s ever known.

Inspired by the unseen guidance of this unconditioned light, all world’s conditioned acts unfold.

It gets to be conceived as the solidity of earth, as water’s changing flow, as fire’s radiance, air’s conditioning, and as the continuity of space and time, pervading everywhere. 6.2

In everyone’s experience, the world is known through various acts of mind and body: rising up from underlying consciousness

5See Interpreting the Upanishads for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
to take attention out to world,
and then returning back again
to take in what is thus perceived.

Time and again, each person acts;
to learn a little of the world.

And every act ends in its source
of underlying consciousness,
as what was learned becomes absorbed.

Here, where all things are understood,
one comes through various partial truths
to unity of final truth,
beneath all difference and change.

6.3
It’s from this common, changeless ground
that all conditioned acts arise.

It is from here that different
occurrences co-ordinate.

But here itself, there are no acts
and no occurrences at all.
Here, all that has been done by doing
is entirely destroyed.

At doing’s end, the truth remains:
shown other than the changing world
of seeming acts and happenings.

6.4
It is the first, the unifying,
unmoved cause, of causes that
are moved to act towards results.

Thus it is seen beyond all time,
found undivided into parts;
the truth that has of old been heeded
as a worshipped God: who’s
manifested in all forms, who is
the happening of all that has
become, and who stands here within,
in everyone’s own mind and heart.

6.5
Seen through the tree of branching happenings that form in time, the truth is known as something else, beyond.

From it, the whole created world goes out and then returns, and is thus cycled and recycled round: as different appearances succeed each other in our minds.

The ‘Lord’ who’s worshipped with devotion cleanses sin, removes all ill, brings order, justice, harmony.

Thus known, He’s that in which all things come home. He is that principle abiding here in everyone: from the self which does not change or die.

That is the ultimate, great ‘Lord of Lords’, the ultimate divinity of all divinities, the ultimate controlling principle of all controlling powers.

It’s that which must be known beyond: as ‘Lord’ of the becoming world, the principle that is invoked and worshipped through the name of ‘God’. from

It has itself no faculty of doing anything; nor has it anything that it must do.

Nor is there anything that is its equal or superior.

Nor is there even anything that is additional to it.

As the transcendent source of all of nature’s energy, it is revealed in many different ways.
For it is also *immanent*: as the inherent principle of nature shared in common by all faculties that know the world, all capabilities of strength and all the world’s activities.

It has no ruler or controller anywhere, in all the world.

Not has it an exclusive sign whose absence shows it is not there; for it is present everywhere.

It is the underlying cause, the common guiding principle, of all our guiding faculties.

It has no further source of birth, nor any guiding principle, found anywhere beyond itself.

Just like a spider weaves a web born forth of its own inner substance, one sole principle of light seems to surround itself with an apparent universe that’s made of its own being, self-become.

To it, each one of us may turn, from compromise with outward show, to find all separateness dissolved in unobscured reality.

This single principle of light, pervading all the universe, is hidden in all beings: as the inner self in everyone.

It oversees all seeming acts: as that which lives in everything, observing all experiences,
itself completely unattached
to any kind of changing act.

Through all perceived appearances
of changing world, it is the witness:
unconditioned, absolute.

It’s that one principle of
activating will, among the many
that aren’t active in themselves.

And it’s the underlying base
on which one seed of all creation
is made manifold, thus
giving rise to the variety
of things that happen in the world.

Whoever sees it standing here
through all experiences, as one’s
own self, finds lasting happiness:
which can’t be found in alien things
that are not realized as self.

It’s the unchanging constancy
of constant things, the knowing core
of consciousness in conscious things,
the one reality among
the many seeming things of world,
the central principle of value
from which all desires arise.

And it’s the underlying cause
of all phenomena: approached
through analytic reasoning,
or through techniques and disciplines
that harness energy and power.

The sun does not shine here, nor do
the moon and stars, nor lightning from
the sky, nor any alien fire.
It shines alone, by its own light. 
Its very being is to shine.

All shines reflecting after it.
Whatever in the world appears reflects its light of consciousness.

Thus all the world is nothing else but the reflected light of self.

As self illuminates the world, it just illuminates itself. 

It is the one free spirit in the midst of a conditioned world.
And it alone is all the fire of energy that permeates the changes and the transformations of the world’s conditioning.

Just knowing it takes one beyond all seeming bonds, to deathlessness.

There is no other way than this.

It’s the originating cause of everything that’s known and done; the self-caused, knowing ground of learning and of all conditioned qualities; where all-destroying time originates and is destroyed.

It’s that which knows the primal field of everyone’s experience. From that one guiding principle comes order, meaning, quality. All things are ruled by it, within.

It is the cause of bondage, and of liberation from the cyclic processes of birth and death.
As deathless consciousness, pervading everywhere, it is the changeless witness of all happening.

It stands complete, as Lord and guardian of this changing universe.

From it, all order and all regularity originate.

There is no other cause of ordered regularity, enabling us to understand the world. 6.17

In all that is perceived or thought or felt within our changing minds, it is that inner principle of self-illuminating light:

which all creation must assume, from which all learning is brought forth, and for whose sake what’s done takes place. 6.18

It’s always peaceful: undivided into parts, and unaffected by all action in the world.

It’s free of blame, cannot be stained, the final bridge of deathlessness: just like a fire burning clean to leave no smoke or ash behind. 6.19

When humankind shall turn all space back on itself, and shall thus roll it up, just like an empty skin; then there shall be an end to grief for the agnostic about ‘God’. 6.20

The highest secret of philosophy, declared and handed down from times long past, is not passed on except to a disciple who thus finds true clarity and peace. 6.22
Where love for truth transcends all else,
so too does love towards a teacher:

who is living truth itself,
for one to whom the truth is shown.

All meanings that are told and heard
shine forth from unconditioned light
that is each person’s real self.  

\[6.23\]
From the Rig Veda

Creation

Before conception has appeared, no absence can arise at all; for objects have not been conceived that may be ‘there’ or be ‘not there’.

Nor yet can qualities arise, nor overarching principles pervading different-seeming things; for these too have not been conceived.

What is the base of consciousness from which conception must arise, before the world can be conceived?

Unmixed with seeming, doubtful things that rise from mind’s uncertainties, what does pure consciousness contain?

Where can such consciousness be found?

Whose is this unmixed consciousness?

How does its knowledge carry on, as things appear and disappear, conceived by doubtful, changing mind?

1The Rig Veda is not of course an Upanishad. Instead, it is an earlier text. The retelling below is an interpretation of the ‘Nāsadiya’ passage: one of the philosophical ‘hymns of creation’ which occur in the late Rig Veda, showing a transition of thought from the mythical imagination of the Vedas to the more abstract philosophy of the Upanishads.

2See Interpreting the Upanishads [pages 51-58] for an indication of how this retelling interprets the original text.
Just what provides stability, security and certainty, as consciousness continues on: through seeming things that come and go, appearing when they are perceived and disappearing when they’re not? Through changing mind’s apparent waves of form and name and quality, what really is the consciousness of which each seeming wave consists, just like the boundless depths below? Before conception rises up from unconditioned consciousness, there is no change nor difference; for time and space aren’t yet conceived. With nothing born, there is no death and so there can’t be deathlessness. Since world has not yet been conceived, there’s nothing that appears by day or disappears again at night. No world appears as we awake, nor disappears when we’re asleep. There is no night. There is no day. There is no waking state, nor sleep. Within the world that mind conceives, our bodies live by breathing air. So too, our minds breathe meaning out through words and acts, and breathe back in perceptions from an outer world. But consciousness is life itself, which lives by its inherent light that lights itself, without the need for any breathing out or in. In truth, as known by consciousness, what seems outside is known within.
There really is no outside world that’s separate from some inner mind. There’s no outside and no inside.

When mind looks down to its own depths from where conception seems to rise, a blinding darkness first appears concealed in its own ignorance.

Here, all seems primal, inchoate: with unseen powers surging up from depths of dark obscurity.

From this uncertain, shifting base, whatever truth may be conceived comes dressed in empty vanity: of mind that’s driven blindly on by energies and powers of will it doesn’t fully understand.

Desire turns on consciousness right from the start of seeming life: where mind is seeded by desire to form a stream of changing thoughts by which the world is then conceived.

When thought turns back to heart within, to clarify obscurities and search for undistorted truth, at first there seems blank nothingness where everything has disappeared.

What is this seeming nothingness? It is the absence of apparent things, not of reality.

In it, all seeming thought dissolves and what remains is consciousness, unmixed with any seeming thing.

As thought dissolves, pure consciousness shines out as all reality:
where different-seeming things are joined
as mere appearances of one.

Unseen by body, sense or mind,
the light of consciousness extends
through all the universe it shows:

through everything that seems to be
or not to be, through space and time,
through every state of changing mind.

Where mind completely disappears,
as in the peace of dreamless sleep,
there comes a state that mind conceives
as dark and empty nothingness.

But nothingness cannot seem dark
unless it’s known by consciousness:
whose light shines unconditioned here,
unseen by body, sense and mind.

Back in the world that mind conceives,
just where can consciousness be found?

Is it beneath appearances?
Is it above what mind desires?

Is it the subtle seeds of mind
from which creation is conceived?
Is it the energies and powers
that shape the world and get things done?

Is it the underlying power
that moves creation from the start?
Is it the drive that follows on
to look for better life beyond?

Who really knows? Just what is it
in each of us that knows the things
our minds conceive and senses see?

Just who or what in us can tell
from where appearances are born,
from where creation is conceived?
Our faculties of mind and sense
are part of the created world.
They cannot therefore come before
this world has been conceived by mind.

What then is prior to the mind?

Just who or what in us can know
from where conception rises up
to form the world we think we see?

From where does seeming world arise?

Does it in truth arise at all,
or does it only seem to rise
from incorrect appearances
mistakenly perceived by mind?

The changing things of seeming world,
and their conception in our minds,
are known by changeless consciousness:
which carries on, while seeming things
and mind’s conceptions come and go.

In everyone’s experience,
as feelings, thoughts, perceptions and
their seeming objects come and go,
pure consciousness alone remains:
continuing through time and change,
to know all these appearances.

It’s only from this final base,
of unconditioned consciousness,
that world’s conception can be known;
if it is truly known at all.

---

1.129.6

10.129.7
absence 261, 263-264. See also nothingness
absolute 46-47
acts 58, 85-87, 181-183, 249-250, 253-254. See also faculties, not acting
‘air’. See five elements
ākāsha 98n. See also ‘ether’
alien god 46
annihilation 126. See also nothingness
appearance and reality 107-108, 177-178, 248
appearances and consciousness 23-24, 94-95, 107-109
attention 52-53, 72-73
attributes 251-252
background of all states 196-197
background of experience 22-23, 72-73, 117
beyond argument 12
bodiless reality 126-128, 252
body and living principle 126-128, 144-145
body self 81-82, 122-124, 205-206
bondage 83-84, 118-119, 128
brahman 71
‘breath of life’ 71, 76, 262
change 98, 116-118, 265
changeless 73-74
chariot, personality as 15-17
cleansing the ego 234-235
coming home 111
common ground 131-132, 221-222, 236-237, 238-240
common ‘human-ness’ 43, 65, 175-176
common measure 106
complete 46
complete knowledge 177-181
complete reality 41, 177-178, 200-203, 221-222
conception 261-265
conditioned and unconditioned 253
conditioned consciousness 17-18
conditioned ego and unconditioned self 158-161
conditioning and action 249-250
conditioning and consciousness 17-20
consciousness 3-4
consciousness and mind 117, 132-133, 191-192
consciousness and perception 94-96
consciousness, the real self 31-33, 81-83, 142-144, 154-155
contemplation 172-174
continuity 32, 72-74, 116-118
co-ordinating different faculties 142-143
creation 44-45, 110, 153-154, 180, 245-247
creation from ego 212-216
creation from self 63, 103
creation of appearances 261-265
darkness 62-63, 263-264. See also nothingness
dead 5-11
deathlessness 34, 117-118, 126-129, 142
deep sleep 61-63, 82-83, 168-170, 173, 196, 198
deep sleep and waking 153-155
deep sleep self 125-128
demon state 123
desire 26, 45-46, 48, 87-88, 118-119, 134, 212-213, 263
difference 27, 89-91, 105-106, 179, 238-239
different approaches viii, 226-227
Index

differing faculties 142-143, 146-152.  
See also faculties

dimensionless 250-251
discerning consciousness (vijñānam) 207-208, 223-224
disciple 11-12, 39, 111
dissatisfaction 118-119, 212-213
diversity 89-91, 151, 236-237. See also difference
deer 249-250
dream 61-62, 82-84, 168-170, 172, 196, 198
dream self 124-125
duality 95. See also non-duality
‘earth’. See five elements
ego 87, 212-216, 228-229
ego and self 15, 79, 158-161, 188-190, 234-235, 251-252
energy 34, 181, 206
enjoyer 15, 17, 188-189, 229-230, 249-250
‘ether’ 70-71, 72-73, 74, 98n, 204
experience, process of 53-54, 165-167
expression 53-54, 142-143, 165-167, 253
faculties 52-57, 75, 142-152, 163-164, 165-167, 171. See also no faculty
false identity 214. See also ego
fantasy 83-84, 212-213. See also dream
fear 40, 43-44, 216
‘fire’. See five elements
fire, sacrificial 7-9
five elements 69-71, 204
five faculties of action 75
flow of passing time 112-113, 228-229
food 205-206, 222, 225
form 58, 70, 107-108, 181, 204
freedom 83-84, 126-128
God 65, 76, 156, 249. See also Lord, 254-255
gods 46-47, 70-71, 74-76, 129
good acts 181-183
ground of reality. See common
ground, underlying ground
happiness 31-32, 84, 86, 87-88, 114-115, 118-119, 208, 215-216, 224
happiness, conditioned and unconditioned 217-220
‘human-ness’ 43, 65-66, 175-176
‘I’ 43
‘I’-principle 40, 50, 171
identification with body 122-124
identity 43, 158-159, 234-235
identity, levels of 21-24, 188-189, 205-208, 213-214
ignorance 132-133, 248
immanent and transcendent 64, 136, 255-256
impartial. See partiality …
impersonal 20, 40, 105-106, 158, 191-192, 251-252
incompleteness 45, 115
individual approach 40, 238
individual self 68-69
inexhaustible 50, 56-57
infinite 202-203
infinitesimal and infinite 250-251
inner controller 71-72
inner light 97
interpretation of the Upanishads vii-viii
jñānam 201-202
knower 72, 74, 95-96
knowing and being 17, 84, 102, 159, 234-235
Index

knowing as identity 159, 235
knowing change 116-117, 178-180
knowing directly 51, 102, 235
knowing ground 131-132, 198-199
knowing principle 68-69, 131-132, 135
knowing subject 171
knowledge 177-181, 201-202
knowledge and ignorance 132-133, 248
knowledge as pure illumination 17-18, 189
learning 88, 107, 112, 133, 165-167, 178
leaving the world 210-211
levels of appearance 204-208
life 34, 53-55, 142-145, 165, 167. See also living ...
life and sleep 168-170
light 32-33, 80-81, 127, 257-258
light and darkness 264
light of consciousness 81, 148-149
light of lights 100
light within the heart 97
‘living breath’ 71, 76, 262
living creatures 204-205
living energy 34, 206, 222-223
living faculties 142-152, 163-164, 165-167
living principle 57, 131-132, 142-144, 150-152
looking back in 25, 27, 31-32, 133, 235, 238, 252, 263-264
Lord 229-230, 237, 242, 245-246, 249, 255. See also God
love 45-46, 84, 92, 260
manifest and unmanifest 36-37, 44-45, 76
matter and life 162
measure of all measures 106
mediating instruments 234-235
meditation 38, 232
mere appearance 214-215
mind, as directing attention 52-53, 117
mind, as driven by desire 182-183, 263
mind, as forming appearances 21-23, 82-84, 108-109, 168-170, 206-207
mind, as seeming knowledge 3, 132-133, 144, 181
modern physics 98n
motivation 130, 215-216
movement 98
multiplicity and unity 237
myth and philosophy vii
name and form 45, 107-108
names 58, 107-108, 112-113
Nāsadiya hymn, Rig Veda (10.129) 261-265
naturalness 215
nature 243-245, 253
no faculty 57, 179, 189, 227, 239-241
no gender 251
no outside, no inside 73, 93-94, 262-263
no powers or capabilities 189, 227, 229-230
no qualities 73. See also unconditioned ...
no second 236
no state 196-197
non-duality 23-24, 32-33, 84-86, 94-95, 199, 208
non-possessing 189-190, 227, 229-230
not acting 17-18, 55-57, 83-86, 179, 188-190, 197, 229-230
not an object 131-132, 179, 240
not found by speech 39
nothingness 126, 160, 209-211, 263-264
objective and subjective 104, 134
Om 172-174, 195-199
one among the many 257
one God 76
one living principle 151-152
outwards and inwards 25
pain and pleasure 126-127
partial functions 45
partiality 108, 150, 209-210
partiality and complexity 180-181
partiality and ignorance 131-133
passing states 116
‘Peace’ invocation 41
perceived universe 177-178
perception, as changing experience 116-117
perception, as part of learning 165-166
personality and ‘human-ness’ 65-66
personality and inclinations 101
personality and inner principle 40, 97, 130-132, 171
personality, as chariot 15-17
personality, superimposed on self 250-252
pleasure and pain 126-127
prāṇa 206
pure consciousness, beneath appearances 23-24, 201-202, 265
pure consciousness, in deep sleep 127-128, 169-170, 173, 196
pure consciousness, unmixed with actions 17-18, 227
pure consciousness, unmixed with objects 106, 261-262
pure consciousness, without appearances 210-211, 263-264
reality 101-102, 107-108, 177-178, 221-222, 248
sacrifice 7-9, 103
seed of creation 97, 110, 263
seeming selves 65, 106, 154-155, 205-208, 213-214. See also ego …
self 3-4, 15-17, 25, 81-91, 105-106, 121-129, 188-190, 234-235
self, impersonal in personality 40, 171, 250-252
self, levels of 21-24, 188-189, 205-208, 213-214
self, non-possessing 189-190, 227, 229-230
self, universal and individual 68-69, 105-106, 236-241, 242-243
self-belittlement 212
self-discovery 25
self-evident reality 160, 211
self-illuminating light 32-33
self-questioning 1, 3, 112
selves and self 65, 106, 154-155
sleep. See deep sleep, dream
smaller and greater 102, 186, 250-251
‘soul’ 243-244, 251
space 98, 98n
space-time continuum 98n
speech 53, 54-55
spider, simile of 63, 180, 256
spontaneity 114, 215
subjective and objective 104, 134
substance, beneath name and form 107
subtle and gross 12, 72-73, 82, 87, 110, 195-196, 198
subtle energies 232
sustenance 225. See also food
teacher and disciple 11-12, 39, 111, 183, 260
three states (waking, dream and sleep) 61-63, 81-84, 124-129, 168-170, 172-174, 195-199
tree of happenings 236-237, 244, 255
trinity 230
truth 39, 182-183, 190, 200-201
Index

turning back in 25, 27, 31-32, 133, 235, 238, 252, 263-264
unconditioned consciousness 18-20, 261-265
unconditioned happiness 208, 217-218, 219, 223-224
unconditioned truth 39, 253-254
unconsciousness 8-9, 23, 160. See also darkness, nothingness, unmanifest
underlying consciousness 3-4, 30-33, 227
underlying ground 196, 221-222, 238-239
understanding 22-23, 72-73, 165-166
universal and individual 68-69, 236-241
universal energy 8-9, 34
universal self 68-69, 105-106, 236-241
universe 177-178, 180-181
unmanifest 23, 36, 44-45
unmixed light 183-184
unmoved centre 185-188. See also wheel, simile of
unmoved mover 130-133
unseen 179
unseen powers 263
unsleeping 30, 83
value 11
variation 116-117. See also change, difference
vijñānam 207-208
vital energy 34, 181, 206, 222-223
vital faculties 142-152, 163-164, 165-167
waking from sleep 61, 153-155
waking state 61, 172, 195, 198
‘water’. See five elements
wheel, simile of 55-56, 65, 151, 176, 187, 228
witness 246, 256-257, 259
world 47-48. See also creation, universe