

ISAVASYA UPANISHAD
(from the Sukla Yajur Veda)
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1. All this...everything in this impermanent world...is pervaded by the Self, pure awareness. Protect the Self by renunciation. Don't lust after wealth.

The Upanishad begins by saying, "All this, whatever exists in the world, must be covered by the Lord. Protect (the knowledge) through renunciation of the three desires. Do not covet anybody's wealth". Whatever there is, is nothing but the Lord. Remove the superimposition of the apparent quality and appreciate the Lord who is the self of all beings. This is the truth to be discovered by enquiry - which will be effective only if the mind is free from the desires of wealth, comfort, progeny, etc. This mantra is meant for the *sannyasi*.

The first verse of this Upanishad confronts us with two seemingly irresolvable paradoxes.

First of all, it states that everything in this impermanent world is pervaded by the Self, pure awareness. But how can this be so? The Self, pure awareness, is by nature permanent, eternal, so how can it manifest as something subject to the law of time and the inevitable event of death?

In order to make sense of this enigma, we must cultivate a clear understanding of transformation and pervasion as these two concepts relate to the apparent act of creation.

Creation suggests the making of something entirely new; bringing something into existence that did not exist before. In a non-dual reality, of course, this is by definition impossible, for there is nothing other than awareness and hence nothing else that it can become or into which it can transform without violating its own nature, which is patently illogical...not to mention impossible. Any effect is only its cause in a different form. Even

modern science confirms that energy can be neither created nor destroyed, but only transformed.

The action of transformation does not destroy the essential nature of the subject undergoing the transformation; instead, the substance of the subject is simply reconfigured into an apparently different form. This is how the Self transforms into the apparently dualistic and impermanent world.

What is important to understand is that, strictly speaking, such a transformation does not constitute an act of creation. In fact, strictly speaking we can say there is no such thing as creation. This is why from the Self's point of view nothing ever happened, and why the wise are able to perceive inaction in action.

Nevertheless, there does exist an apparent creation, or at least a change, that needs to be explained. And here is where the concept of pervasion comes into play.

The Self does not become the world and all the apparent objects – gross and subtle – existing within it in the same way that milk becomes cheese. Through the fermentation process, milk loses its liquidity and becomes something wholly other than what it was. In other words, once the milk has become the cheese, we can't ever again get the milk back.

When, however, a brick of gold is transformed into a goblet it does not lose its essential nature as gold; it simply appears in a different form. And if we so choose, we can always melt the goblet down and reshape the gold into a ring, a bracelet, a necklace, an earring, a statue, a buckle, or whatever other ornament we might wish. In this case, the gold remains gold despite the form it has assumed. It is in this way that the all-pervasive Self whose nature is pure awareness appears as the world.

The second paradox with which we are faced is the idea that one needs to protect the Self by renunciation. In a non-dual reality, only the Self obtains. There is no other. This being the case, from what could the Self possibly

need protection, and who would there be in compliment to Itself to provide for Its safety?

Such unanswerable questions point out the danger of taking the words of the scriptures literally. The quandary in which one finds oneself mired when doing so is among the chief reasons that it is virtually impossible to crack the code of Vedanta without the aid of a qualified teacher who understands the true meaning of the scriptures and is able to effectively reconcile the apparent paradoxes therein presented.

Truly speaking, the Self needs no protection from any outside assailant, for of course there is no such thing. The only injury the Self can suffer, we might say, comes at the hands of ignorance. When the seeker is either not yet 'awakened' to his or her true nature, or if 'awakened' in those moments when he or she fails to maintain the vigilance that enables him or her to take a strong stance in awareness and claim it as his or her true identity, the Self is 'as though' injured in that Its omnipotent glory is not recognized, understood, and assimilated by the seeker, who continues to live a life that is but a pale reflection of the brilliant light of awareness that continuously illumines the inert body-mind-sense complex that he or she erroneously takes himself or herself to be. More accurately we might say that it is the ignorant apparent individual who suffers injury rather than the Self, which stands ever aloof, transcending the ups and downs, highs and lows, joys and sorrows inherent in the experience of duality.

At any rate, the point of the injunction to protect the Self is that the seeker – if he or she truly desires freedom – maintain a constant focus on the Self and exercise his or her discrimination between the real and the apparent, the Self and the not-Self, in each and every circumstance, situation, experience, and encounter.

The fundamental method of maintaining such a disciplined focus is, as the verse advises, through renunciation. Renunciation, however, is one of those tricky concepts that is open to various viable interpretations and helpful applications, but is more often than not misinterpreted and misapplied by those in the 'spiritual world', both novices and advanced practitioners alike.

Renunciation is most commonly interpreted in a decidedly materialistic way and taken to mean that one should give up most, if not all, material possessions and money, that one should eat sparingly, and that one should give up such gratuitous vices as caffeine and sugar, dairy and gluten, not to mention the more gravely deleterious indulgences such as meat, tobacco, drugs, and alcohol. This type of renunciation is undeniably valuable. When implemented gradually and with common sense, it can help one develop the necessary discipline and restraint with regard to one's appetites that will enable one to withdraw one's focus from extroverting distractions that and reorient one's attention inward toward the Self. As is the case with any action, however, such effort will not in itself grant one release from extroverting tendencies and desires nor will it remove one's ignorance and, thus, liberate one from the cycle of *samsara*. Only knowledge can do that. Moreover, if one is not ready for it or takes renunciation to an extreme, this type of renunciation can be frustrating and even dangerous in that it leads to repressed desires that disturb the mind and eventually worm their way to the surface and find expression through inappropriate behaviors that can lead to one's spiritual downfall. The extreme degree of asceticism with which the notion of renunciation is most often associated is really a viable lifestyle only for those rare individuals who are naturally drawn to embrace such austerity. In terms of the vast majority of spiritual seekers, the moderate application of this type of renunciation is a method of cultivating a simpler life with fewer distractions and responsibilities that interfere with self-inquiry. Worth noting, however, is that it doesn't serve to eradicate the root misunderstanding that impedes the assimilation of self-knowledge: the idea that one is a doer. It is this crack in the ceiling that allows the rainfall of misapprehension to flood the house. In other words, the ego co-opts one's spiritual practice and assumes credit where credit is not due. Such highjacking can play out in insidious ways. Though one may have few possessions, one remains attached to one's identification with the body-mind-sense complex that one continues to erroneously accept as one's self.

A more subtle type of renunciation is the renunciation of thoughts. Though there is a kernel of truth in it, this notion too is often misinterpreted as meaning that enlightenment requires or is characterized by the removal or annihilation of all thoughts. This misunderstanding is rooted in the idea of

experiential enlightenment. Because seekers have been told that the self is attributeless and have heard tales of great sages who 'entered the Void' never to return or abide in a realm that is prior to consciousness, they adopt the uninvestigated belief that when one realizes the self the world suddenly disappears or explodes into an indecipherable ocean of light. It is not exactly clear what such seekers think will happen upon becoming enlightened, but it is clear that they have neglected to think through the logic of their assumptions about the necessity of completely stilling all thought waves in the mind. Despite its suspect, if not altogether bad reputation among many in the spiritual world, the mind is not a villain. Quite to the contrary, it is the hero of the quest for enlightenment or self-knowledge.

Since the self already knows it's the self, it has no need to get enlightened. For the apparent individual, however, it's another story. Though in a non-dual reality (which this is) there is only awareness, the apparent individual thinks it is somehow separate from this awareness. And where does this thought take place? In the intellect. And where must the knowledge that will remove this ignorance become established? In the intellect. This being the case, we need the mind and its thoughts in order to accomplish the mission. We need thoughts to remove thoughts, or in the words of a classic Vedantic analogy we use a thorn to remove a thorn. Admittedly, it is vitally important that one cultivate a quiet mind that is able to withdraw from extroverting distractions in order for self-inquiry to work, but this does not mean that one has to eradicate all thoughts entirely. Moreover, even a small dose of logical inquiry reveals the fact that thoughts do not hide or cover or otherwise obstruct our nature as awareness. Do you cease to exist when thoughts arise within you? And who is it that witnesses these thoughts? The bottom line is that enlightenment is for the mind; it is essentially a matter of replacing erroneous thoughts of incompleteness and inadequacy with thoughts that reflect a sound understanding of one's true nature as whole and complete, limitless, action-less, non-dual awareness.

Since one is actually awareness but is mistakenly identifying oneself as the body-mind-sense complex, one lives an inauthentic life, floundering in a dream as it were constructed out of the subtle building blocks of societal conditioning and binding vasanas. This state of perpetual disharmony with

one's true nature is characterized by the discontent and suffering that compels one to seek happiness in objects, a futile pursuit that serves only to create more desires and more seeking and thus keeps one continuously churning within the whirlpool of samsara.

Perhaps the most suitable interpretation of renunciation for the vast majority of seekers is the idea of renouncing the fruits of one's actions. This is the practice most appropriate for householders. Vedanta calls this practice *karma yoga* and advocates it as the bedrock for all spiritual practices aimed at purifying the mind in order to make it a suitable vessel in which to hold the nectar of non-dual wisdom and self-knowledge. Vedanta says that without the *karma yoga* attitude in place, a seeker's attempt to meditate or practice *jnana yoga* will not bear fruit.

So what is the *karma yoga* attitude and how is *karma yoga* practiced? *Karma yoga* is based on the simple understanding that although one cannot help but act while inhabiting a body - for even doing nothing is doing something - one has no right to the results of one's actions. The reason we have no right to the results of our actions is basically because there are too many factors influencing the outcome of any particular action for the individual, who has limited power and knowledge, to be able to assure that any given action will bring about the outcome he or she originally intended. Or in more impersonal terms, it is the macrocosmic causal body that controls the *dharmic* field that is the matrix of creation and manages all the factors within it in order to maintain the harmony of the whole. In short, the apparent reality is a vast machine functioning according to the laws that govern the actions of all its components and the consequences of those actions. This machine, however, though not sentient itself, is illumined or enlivened by consciousness, and inherent in its design are laws that ensure it functions in a manner that maintains the harmony of the whole. Hence, when any action is perpetrated in the field, the field must reconfigure itself in way that will accommodate that action and its consequences and simultaneously safeguard the overall well being of the field as a whole. In this way, even tragic events and heinous crimes produce results that serve the best interests of all beings. This is not to give license for people to act with selfish disregard for others and violate dharma, but to show the incomprehensible capacity of the field to

unerringly regulate itself by way of its own intelligent design. Once one understands the nature of the field, one is able let go of the sense of doership and consequent responsibility for results that serve only entrench one more and more deeply in the quagmire of desire and suffering. Moreover, once one has faith in the inherent benevolence of the grand cosmic machine, one is inclined to approach life with an attitude of gratitude, to offer one's actions to the field as a form of worship, and to accept whatever results ensue from his or her actions as a gift from God, trusting that whatever happens is for the best. In this way, the practice of *karma yoga* serves to cancel the sense of doership and neutralize the *vasanas*, the nagging desires that compel one to act according to one's likes and dislikes in an effort to complete oneself. Acting out one's *vasanas* disturbs the mind and reinforces self ignorance. *Karma yoga* is therefore the most powerful form of renunciation to prepare the mind for self-knowledge.

Another practical and eminently valuable type of renunciation is the practice of applying the opposite thought, which is one of the essential and most powerful practices of knowledge (*jnana*) *yoga*. This can be a challenging practice for householders or people who must function within the context of the workaday world because it requires that one pay vigilant attention to the thoughts that are constantly streaming through one's mind. This can be difficult when one is caught up in the hustle and bustle of professional, familial, and social responsibilities. The basic premise of this practice is that whenever a thought arises that suggests one is incomplete and inadequate, one must immediately negate that thought and replace it with a thought that reflects one's true identity as whole and complete, limitless, action-less, ordinary, unborn, non-dual, self-luminous awareness.

Anything of value is worth protecting, and since metaphorically speaking the self is the pearl beyond price, it is worth any effort required to keep it safe and maintain its luster. Though truly speaking the self can never be enhanced, diminished, changed, or in any way threatened, inattention on the part of the apparent individual due to ignorance render it seemingly endangered. The vigilance inherent in any practice of renunciation makes it one of the most powerful means to prepare for, cultivate knowledge of, and, thereby, protect the self.

The last sentence of this verse provides us with two important topics to explore. It's directive to not lust after wealth seems to advocate the eradication of desire. This is a theme that appears in one form or another in virtually every religious and spiritual tradition, for as the Buddha concluded desire is – or, according to Vedanta, seems to be – the cause of suffering. Despite its bad rap, however, desire is not the wholly demonic force it is often made out to be. Quite to the contrary, desire is actually a positive and necessary force within the field, for desire is what impels action. Though it does have a downside, desire is the impetus behind all the magnificent creative craftsmanship and artistry that make life in the apparent reality so exhilarating and entertaining, bounteous and beautiful. Desire is a natural and inherent part of every human being. In fact, given that it is rooted in the *vasanas*, desire is the very cause of the individual incarnation that provides the *vasanas* with a vehicle for expression. In other words, it is for the sake of the *vasanas* that one has a body. Accordingly, the body will last as long as one's desires do, and desire will last for as long as one's body does. Such being the case, we are seemingly left with yet another irresolvable issue on our path toward liberation. The problem with desires, however, is not desire itself, but attachment to satisfying them. It is always a dubious task at best, given that the one attempting to eradicate them has virtually no control over the results of his or her actions. In short, it is not desire itself, but the attachment to desire that produces suffering.

In terms of this verse, lust is a name denoting the type of desire that is driven by attachment and, in extreme cases, addiction or what Vedanta calls binding *vasanas*. Lust is the immoderate degree of desire that is evident when one's choices and behaviors are compelled by one's likes and dislikes rather than one's intellect. Such immoderate desire causes *adharmic* behavior because one is willing to disregard his better judgment and do even what he knows is not right in order to fulfill his desires.

Such intense desire is rooted in ignorance. Because one doesn't know he is whole and complete but instead feels incomplete and inadequate, one seeks for joy in objects, which are in this verse denoted by the term 'wealth'.

The second important topic suggested by the admonition to not lust after wealth is its allusion to one of the essential qualifications of a sincere seeker: *svadharma*.

Intrinsic to the concept of *svadharma* is the idea that one should not try to live up to an ideal, but should instead accept oneself as one is and live in accordance with one's relative nature as it is reflected through the expression of the *vasanas* within the context of the apparent dualistic world. In other words, one should refrain from trying to fix or heal or be better than or different from what one is.

Contrary to the notions that are pounded into us by our parents, teachers, the church, the advertising industry, etc., all beings are the self and, as such, all beings are perfect exactly as they are. There really are no 'good' or 'bad' personalities. Everyone has a particular nature that has been determined by their *vasanas* and which has a particular role to play and contribution to make in maintaining the harmony of the dharma field as a whole. If one tries to uphold another's *dharma* or mimic another's way of being and isn't true to his own nature or predisposition, he will suffer and, consequently, the whole will suffer.

When one knows who he really is, he won't be bothered by his apparent persona for he will know that it really has nothing to do with his true identity as the self. And therefore, he won't try to live up to some unrealistic ideal. He will know that no matter how he might appear on the surface, his essential nature is the ideal.

This realization does not preclude the individual's right to work on himself and try to improve himself, or to work through his old baggage and let it go; he simply won't feel he has to do this in order to be worthwhile and/or happy. He will know that he is not his personality but is rather That by which his personality is known. With this understanding he is, ironically, free to be himself, knowing all the while that this apparent person is not who he really is. Though it is him (i.e. awareness), he (i.e. awareness) is ever free of it, for truly speaking he is That which transcends all.

That said, the most important aspect of both the second and the third sentences of this verse are their indirect advocacy of the practice of *karma yoga*, which is the fundamental means of purifying the mind. In this regard, the word 'wealth' in the third sentence denotes the fruits of one's actions. Through irrefutable logic based on direct experience Vedanta clearly points out, however, that as long as one seeks joy in objects, one will never be free. Taking oneself to be an individual doer/enjoyer maintains one's identification with the likes and dislikes, desires and fears that compel one to act and keep oneself churning in the whirlpool of *samsara*, constantly seeking completion, perpetually dissipated by what Swami Dayananda refers to as "the disease of constant becoming." The practice of *karma yoga* is, therefore, the foundational practice for initiating the removal of ignorance through the assimilation of self-knowledge.

The real significance of this verse is that it encapsulates the essence of Vedanta in a nutshell by expressing the fundamental non-dual nature of reality and pointing out the two practices through which one can cultivate an unshakeable understanding of truth: *karma yoga* (the path of action) and *jnana yoga* (the path of knowledge).

2. If you see yourself as a human being and wish to live a long life you should perform action without concern for the results; there is no other way to keep action from clinging to you.

The second *mantra* is meant for a *karma yogi*. It says, "By performing karma indeed should one desire to live for hundred years. For an individual such as you (who wants to live thus) there is no other way than this whereby *karma* may not bind you". Desire to live for a hundred years includes other desires also. If one has the three-fold desires of wealth, progeny and the other world, one should seek to satisfy them by performing *karma*. And by *karma* is meant *vihitakarma* or the actions enjoined by the scriptures.

The great irony of life is that almost every person thinks he or she is a person. It is the foremost symptom of the worldly person's (i.e. *samsari's*) condition.

Virtually everyone wants to live as long, prosperous and pain-free a life as possible. Even 'spiritual' people. In some cases, especially 'spiritual' people. Hence, the popularity of the 'spiritual materialism' spouted in such books as "The Secret," "Creative Visualization," etc.

The Upanishads, however, are texts whose wisdom is directed toward inquirers (i.e. *mumukshus*), those people who have seen through the sheer veneer of worldly life and realized that there is no object that can promise permanent joy, those people whose most ardent desire is to access directly the happiness that is the inherent nature of their own heart.

Though most *mumukshus* have had an epiphany of one degree or another through which they experienced a more expansive notion of themselves and/or the non-dual nature of reality, almost invariably the knowledge contained in the experience failed to crystallize into the rock-solid understanding of their true identity as whole and complete, limitless, action-less, non-dual awareness. Consequently, though such a person is now inspired to seek the truth, he still takes himself to be a human being. Due to years of intense conditioning from parents, teachers, friends, the advertising industry, the church, and the state, dropping this identification is difficult, and except in extremely rare cases does not occur overnight. In most cases, sustained effort over a long period of time is required in order to eradicate the ego's grip on the psyche.

As previously discussed, the first step in the process of purifying the mind of its erroneous notions about one's identity is cultivating the *karma yoga* attitude and applying it within the context of one's daily activities.

The practice of *karma yoga* will not itself produce liberation, for no limited action performed by a limited entity can produce an unlimited result – not to mention the fact that no action can give someone something they already have. It will, however, facilitate the neutralization of one's binding *vasanas* and, thus, calm the roiling waves of one's mind, making it an instrument capable of more accurately reflecting the true nature of pure awareness, the witnessing of which might give rise to the appearance of the notion that "I am whole and complete, limitless, action-less, non-dual

awareness” that when fully assimilated sounds the death knell on one’s sense of doership and, thereby, closes one’s *karmic* account.

It is important to note that one does not stop accruing the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ *karma* of one’s actions by ceasing to act. Rather, the non-doership that closes one’s *karmic* account is a matter of understanding that one’s true identity is action-less awareness and not the apparent individual (*jiva*) with which one has for so long identified. With the dawning of this knowledge, the notion of doership drops away and with it all sense of being an independent entity that executes actions and then enjoys or suffers their consequences. Thereafter, despite the romantic characterization of non-doership as being a permanent holiday during which one lounges around in a loincloth and rarely lifts a finger, the apparent person continues to execute apparent actions only now due to knowledge there no longer remains any identification with being a discrete entity erroneously recognized as a doer to whom the *karma* can stick.

3. Those who live out of the light of Awareness slay the Self and go to dark worlds when they die.

Though nothing can actually live out of the light of Awareness, one who does not understand his true nature lives ‘as though’ he were out of the light of Awareness.

It is impossible to live out of the light of Awareness because Awareness is all there is. It is all-pervasive. It is the light that illumines or enlivens all that is and is not. It, of course, is not a physical light, but is That by which one knows what one knows and knows what one doesn’t know. Even so-called ‘nothingness’ or ‘emptiness’ is an appearance whose existence is illumined by awareness. In other words, Awareness is the only thing – though we must be clear that It isn’t really a ‘thing’, for it cannot be objectified – that is never absent and can never be negated; It is That which remains present even when all other objects cease to appear.

When mired in ignorance, however, one can live unaware of one’s own awareness, so to speak. Though Awareness is never unaware of Itself, due

to Its association with the incomprehensible power of *Maya* – which is actually not an association, for *Maya* or ignorance is ironically a power residing within Awareness Itself – It can apparently identify so ardently with the limited *upadhi* or the body-mind-sense complex of the apparent individual (*jiva*) that It seemingly forgets Itself. Under the spell of ignorance, the resultant *jiva* then takes itself to be real, considers itself incomplete and inadequate due to its apparently limited nature, chases joy in objects and experiences, and consequently enjoys limited happiness but inevitably suffers due to the time-sensitive nature of all objects in *samsara*.

An *upadhi* is a limiting adjunct. It is a conditioning factor that influences one's interpretation of experience or reality. For instance, if you were to set a red rose behind a clear crystal and then ask someone viewing the crystal from the other side to identify the color of the crystal, the person would say the crystal is red despite the fact of its transparency. In the same way as the *upadhi* of the rose 'colors' one's interpretation of the crystal, the *upadhi* of the body-mind-sense complex appears to cover, limit, and condition pure awareness.

Though Awareness is, truly speaking, unassailable, it is through Its inexplicable association with the limited *upadhi* of the *jiva* that it 'as though' slays itself. In other words, the apparent *jiva's* ignorance of its true identity acts as a sword that 'kills' Awareness or effectively renders It as good as dead in that the *jiva* has no understanding of the life-force by which it is animated.

The last phrase of this verse seems to quite directly state that those who remain ignorant of their true nature as Awareness or the Light, reap the consequence of having to inhabit some dark netherworld, perhaps much like the Christian concept of Hell, after they die.

This phrase, however, also lends itself to a more esoteric interpretation. Those *jiva's* who are mired in ignorance die time and time again with every thought of incompleteness and inadequacy with which they associate. And each of these 'deaths' resituates them in the dark world of *samsara* that is characterized by inevitable suffering.

4. Though it never moves, the non-dual Self is swifter than the mind. The senses can never catch it for it runs far in front of them. Though standing still, it passes everything that moves. The Self causes everything to live and move.

Vedanta is a *shabda pramana*, meaning that it is a means of knowledge whose vehicle or instrument is sound or words. In this context, words are to be understood to function in a specific way. In Sanskrit, words as they are used in Vedanta are termed *lakshanas*, meaning that they are indicators of that to which they refer. Because It is not an object that can be known through the usual subject-object transaction with which we are familiar, the Self or Awareness cannot be directly apprehended. Words, therefore, serve as pointers that reveal the nature of the Self to a qualified student possessing a purified and subtle mind.

It is only with such an understanding of the way words function in the Vedantic teaching tradition that any sense can be made of this verse. Though attributeless by nature, the Self or Awareness is anthropomorphized (i.e. given human qualities) that describe It as standing, moving, and running – not to mention causing, an action that will be further analyzed shortly. To confound matters more, one of the two basic actions attributed to It is seemingly paradoxical. How can something that is standing still pass everything that moves? Understanding the figurative use of language employed in this verse is the key to solving its apparent riddle. Because It is attributeless, Awareness cannot be described directly, so various figures of speech are utilized throughout the scriptures to imply Its nature. In this verse, the depiction of the Self as being faster than a speeding thought are meant to indicate Its all-pervasiveness or omnipresence. Since it is everywhere at once, it has ‘already arrived’ so to speak at any destination where one might be or to which one might go.

The idea that Awareness causes action is another tricky issue that needs to be sorted out. The Self is not a person and so does not cause action in the sense of It being an entity acting with intentional volition. The Self has no plan in accordance with which It is orchestrating the events that transpire in the universe. Awareness simply illumines the subtle body and

happenings occur. Figuratively speaking, this circumstance is similar to the way electricity works. Though by supplying the necessary energy it sets a variety of appliances to work according to their own unique design and function, electricity cannot be said to have any motivation or agenda of its own that it is choosing to express through these machines.

Through Its illumination of the causal, subtle, and gross bodies, however, and Its association with *Maya* or ignorance – which ironically is actually a power within Itself – Awareness does assume the role of *Isvara* or God, the Creator, and as such sets in motion the chain of myriad factors that effect creation. It is in this sense that Awareness as *Isvara* can be said to cause everything to live and move.

5. It moves and it moves not; It is far and near. It is inside and outside all this.

Again in this verse we are confronted with a series of seemingly irresolvable paradoxes. The fact that the Upanishads are sprinkled with myriad examples of such conundrums provides perhaps the strongest testament for why a living guru who is able to unfold the appropriate meaning of such verses is essential to a student's acquisition of self-knowledge. Without proper guidance, the student's ignorance will more than likely find such statements as those that comprise this verse completely incomprehensible, or perhaps worse will interpret Awareness as some 'thing' or object endowed with such attributes as motion and location.

As was the case with the previous one, the emphasis of this verse is placed upon on the apparent action or change that seemingly occurs within Awareness.

The underlying framework suggested by the figurative language in this verse is the concept of a space-time continuum. From the perspective of the individual functioning within the context of the apparent dualist world, of course, the parameters of time and space are taken to be real. Due to the cohering power of the mind, the sense data consumed by the individual is experienced holistically and a universe seemingly populated by

innumerable separate and autonomous entities appears and is assumed to be real. Despite all evidence elicited through direct perception to the contrary, one aspect of this cosmic mirage is the notion that each body is of the nature of a container. In other words, the mind presents us with an apparent reality presumed to have both 'inner' and 'outer' realms. Careful, clear-minded inquiry, however, reveals that there is no such thing as inside or outside, for even the penetration of any so-called outer shell or contact with any apparent inner content is invariably experienced as another surface from the perspective of the senses of the experiencer.

Along these same lines, there is no such thing as distance. Just as all the objects appearing to exist at different degrees of depth within a painting, photograph, or movie share a common ground, so the entire apparent three-dimensional universe exists within – and, moreover, is made of – nothing other than Awareness. In other words, nothing is apart from anything, for there is only one thing, which is not really a 'thing' at all.

Though in reality there is no far or near, no inside or outside, these pointers serve to reveal the infinite, all-pervasive nature of Awareness.

6. The wise behold all beings in the Self and the Self in all beings; for that reason they do not hate.

This verse continues the theme of the non-dual nature of reality. Though, as just discussed, there is really no inside and outside as we tend to think of these concepts from the dualistic perspective, Awareness might nevertheless be described as the open, spacious, brilliant clarity in which all objects or beings appear.

Mystical and grandiose as Awareness is made out to be, its all-pervasive nature is easily verifiable through clear-minded inquiry into one's own experience. Is there anything that exists outside Awareness? Even were one to answer in the affirmative, the idea of such an object would only appear within Awareness. It might be conjectured, of course, that despite the fact that the thought of the object appears in Awareness the object itself could be existing somewhere outside its scope. This objection,

however, fails to take into account the fundamental grounds upon which objects come to be known as such.

The sensory data perceived by means of the sense organs seems to provide the basis for determining the existence of objects. But is this the case? The sensations registered by the sense organs do not in themselves prove the existence of an independent object. Through the integrating function of the mind, the particular sensations gathered by each sense organ are 'glued together' by means of assumptions based on memory of similar experiences and are then cohered into the idea of an independent object. Upon closer examination, then, it can be seen that the only substance out of which the object can be said to be made is thought, and the only location at which the object can be said to exist is the mind (though really the mind has no location). The final step in this process of inquiry is to consider whether or not the mind is an independent object or entity. Just how far is the mind from Awareness? Obviously there is no gap. The mind is Awareness. Hence, the inevitable conclusion of this line of inquiry is that the essential substance of all the objects that so convincingly appear as independent components of the universe is in reality nothing other than non-dual Awareness.

Lest it be further conjectured that there must be some independently existent object from which the sense organs initially gathered data, a clarification is necessary concerning the difference between Isvara's creation and that of the apparent individual. The apparent reality of the physical universe and the subtle machinery through which it is experienced is Isvara's creation while the interpretations and consequent subjective experience of that creation can for the purposes of this inquiry be understood as the layer of creation for which the individual is responsible. From the individual's perspective, there can seemingly be objects that exist outside his awareness. For instance, a person in Los Angeles might say with full conviction that there are people living in New York City even if he is not there to directly verify the fact, for even though they do not exist inside the scope of awareness of the person living in Los Angeles, they do exist within the scope of someone's awareness or what we might call the scope of macrocosmic awareness (i.e. the aggregate of the awareness of all apparent beings). In other words, from the perspective of an individual

taking himself to be a particular mind-body-sense complex, there can be things that exist outside the limited scope of his awareness, but nothing can exist outside the scope of the limitless Awareness that is the fundamental 'substance' upon which all objects/beings depend for their perception and manifestation.

The nature of this dependency is also worth examining. In terms of Vedanta, this inquiry is a matter of discriminating between the real and the apparent or the cause and the effect. Consider the analogy of a clay pot. Though the pot has a practical purpose and is useful, it cannot be said to be real according to the Vedantic definition because it is impermanent. The pot might one day be dropped, shatter into pieces, and thus cease to be. Its demise, however, will have no effect on the clay whatsoever. The clay, therefore, represents in terms of this analogy that which is permanent (i.e. Awareness). Since no object can appear anywhere but in Awareness and all are, moreover, made of nothing other than Awareness, all objects are inherently dependent upon Awareness.

There is another analogy traditionally used in Vedanta that even more profoundly illustrates the nature of the relationship between awareness and the apparent reality appearing within It by placing it within the context of cause and effect and adding to it the component of intelligence. Just as a spider is both the intelligent and material cause of its web, so is Awareness (upon having assumed the role of *Isvara* or God the Creator through Its association with *Maya* or ignorance) both the intelligent and material cause of creation. In other words, the entire universe is nothing other than Awareness manifested.

It is for this reason that the wise behold all beings in the Self and the Self in all beings, and also for this reason that the wise do not hate.

In the context of this verse, the term 'hate' is not to be simplistically equated with the emotional response to a strong aversion or intense fear. Hate is rather that dualistic vision that sees all the apparent objects in creation as separate autonomous entities. It is the opposite of love. Despite being commonly misunderstood as some sappy state of desire-driven delirium, love is fundamentally the knowledge-based appreciation of

the non-dual nature of reality and the acknowledgment of Awareness or one's own Self as the seamless fabric of its apparent diversity. Steeped in the knowledge of reality, the wise one or *jnani* understands the whole universe to be nothing other than himself. And from this platform, hate is naturally renounced.

7. The one who sees, sees everything as Awareness. There is no suffering for the one with non-dual vision.

This verse continues the theme of the non-dual nature of reality. It is worth mentioning, however, that the reference to seeing does not imply experiential enlightenment. The one who sees is the one who knows, the one who understands that his true identity and indeed the true identity of the whole manifested universe is Awareness. All objects, both gross and subtle, are nothing but the Self.

The Self is thus full, complete, in need of nothing, desirous of nothing. Armed with this knowledge, one who stands fiercely confident in his identity as Awareness and knows there to be no other effectively commands the surrender of the demon of desire that is the cause of continual mental agitation and sustained ignorance. This is the reason that for one whose understanding enables him to recognize the non-dual nature of the universe there is no suffering.

8. It is pure Awareness, bright and bodiless and unaffected by evil that is the omniscient, transcendent and uncreated Seer. Awareness assigns the creators of the worlds their respective tasks.

Though It illumines all of manifestation, both gross and subtle, pure Awareness remains untouched by all the appearances within It. In other words, though the entire creation depends upon Awareness for its existence, Awareness remains wholly and forever free of it. In fact, Awareness depends on nothing other than Itself. It is self-luminous; It shines eternally without the aid of any external source. Moreover, Its brightness requires no bulb through which to shine.

Pure Awareness of Itself has no form. It is simply the light (though not a physical light) in which all forms appear. In this way, it can be understood that though all forms are illumined by and are indeed made of Awareness, Awareness remains ever independent of and therefore unaffected by evil, which despite its common association with immoral action, can be more universally defined as any thought, word, or deed rooted in ignorance of the truth.

Though all religions and virtually every spiritual aspirant places a great deal of emphasis on the eradication of evil, the truth is that Awareness is never threatened, diminished, slighted, or injured by any apparent evil perpetrated within Its scope, nor for that matter is it expanded, enhanced, empowered, or strengthened by an apparent good deed performed. Awareness witnesses and knows all that happens within Its scope, yet remains ever aloof from the phantoms appearing therein.

Indeed, from awareness' point of view, it can be said that no creation ever took place and thus none of the apparent actions that seemed to grace the screen of the divine imagination ever really occurred. In short, nothing ever happened. Though seemingly a rather far-fetched conjecture, an examination of the nature of action reveals this strange circumstance to be the truth.

Action is defined by change. For some action to be recognized as having taken place, there needs to be a distinction made between how things were before the action and how they are different as a result of it. Since, however, reality is non-dual and nothing exists that is not Awareness, the essential nature of reality is never affected by any apparent action that happens within Its being. Even though appearances reconfigure and realign continuously, the essential fabric of the universe remains ever the same. In this way, even the ultimate transitions of birth and death are negated by the immutable nature of Awareness. Though Awareness irrefutably exists, there is not a shred of evidence to suggest that It was ever created. Simply put, Awareness ever is.

Though it has already been established that Awareness is not a doer and therefore performs no actions, the last sentence of this verse asserts that It

assigns the creators of the worlds their respective tasks. Within this context, the word 'assigns' can be equated with both the illuminating factor of Awareness that sets into motion the functioning of the vast machinery of the field of existence and the inherent dharma or laws by which the operations of each and every component of that machine are regulated, harmonized, and balanced.

The creators who are illumined by Awareness and whose tasks are regulated by the inherent laws of the field of action are the 24 *tattvas* or principles that comprise the that field: the five elements, the five perceptive organs, the five active organs, the five physiological systems, the mind, the intellect, the ego, and the tendencies residing in the causal body which compel action. On a macrocosmic level, each of these principles creatively contributes to the manifestation of the universe; on a microcosmic level, each creatively contributes to the interpretation and consequent experience of that universe by the apparent individual person. In this way, myriad apparent worlds can be said to exist.

9. Those who devote themselves to religious rituals suffer the darkness of ignorance...even more so those whose understanding is confined to the knowledge of deities alone.

The purpose of this verse is neither to decry religious ritual and condemn those who perform them nor to disparage deity worship. Both the performance of religious ritual and deity worship have a definite value on the path to liberation when used as a means of cultivating and expressing *Bhakti* or devotional love for the Self. They are, in fact, the fundamental means of sublimating one's love for objects, which serves only to keep one bound to the wheel of *samsara*, and transforming one's emotion into devotion.

Most religious ritual, however, is not performed with such purity of intent. Rather, it is performed as a means of importuning God for various objects – either physical or circumstantial – that are believed to be sources of security or pleasure. In other words, most often people perform rituals in order to get God's stuff. Indeed, three quarters of the Vedas (i.e. the *karma khanda* portion) are devoted to describing the various rituals that

people can perform in order to get what they want from virtually every theater of life. There is nothing fundamentally bad about or wrong with this use of ritual, but it should be obvious that it is not a viable means of freeing oneself from the cycle of *samsara*. Quite to the contrary, unless performed by a highly evolved or fully mature individual with a *karma yoga* attitude, religious ritual will more than likely serve only to bind one more tightly to their desires and the belief that joy can be found through the acquisition of objects and thus cause one to suffer the darkness of ignorance.

Ironically, the worship of deities can be a source of bondage as well. If the worshipper considers the deity as little more than a cosmic Santa Claus whom one must please with good behavior and groveling in order to get the gifts one desires, then the worship is worthless – at least in terms of cultivating unconditional love and gaining liberation. A more self-effacing and seemingly humble approach can also render the worship ultimately ineffective in freeing one from *samsara*. If the worshiper remains mired in the delusion that the deity is some separate entity living in some heavenly abode far removed from himself rather than understanding it as a symbol of his own divine nature, the worship becomes a nothing more than a method of idolatry and fails to reveal the whole and complete, non-dual nature of the Self.

10. The fruit of knowledge and ignorance are quite different. Thus we have been taught by the wise.

The most important aspect of this seemingly simple and straightforward verse is the implication it makes concerning the nature of both enlightenment or liberation and ignorance or bondage. As Krishna tells Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, nothing purifies like self knowledge. Despite the commonly held view among the vast majority of spiritual aspirants and advisors that enlightenment is an experience that can be invoked through action, the continual revelation of the wise is that you as pure Awareness are already free and, therefore, no action can produce that freedom. Only through knowledge can you 'get' what you've already got.

It is furthermore suggested in this verse that both knowledge and ignorance bear fruit. This idea could be interpreted to mean that each is an experiential state of being in which one enjoys pleasure and suffering respectively. Though ignorance does have an end and thus might be defined as a state, self knowledge serves to liberate one from any and all identification with temporary phenomena. The freedom it facilitates is not a state in that it has no defining parameters. Though all objects depend upon Awareness for their existence, Awareness depends upon no object in particular nor even the collective of all objects together for its being. Awareness is ever free. Undeniably the knowledge that one is whole and complete, limitless, action-less, non-dual Awareness does affect one's experience, but Awareness itself is not defined by such affects. No matter what quality of experience one enjoys, all experience appears within the scope of and is essentially comprised of Awareness while Awareness remains ever free of any defining attribute.

Even the knowledge through which the individual understands his true nature is not necessary from the Self's point of view, for Awareness is already aware of itself. It should, therefore, be understood that while it is the only effective means by which to 'attain enlightenment,' knowledge itself is not the Self, for even knowledge is only an object to Awareness. Once the understanding of one's true nature is fully assimilated, even knowledge goes for there no longer remains any knower who knows.

11. Whoever understands both knowledge and ignorance overcomes death and obtains immortality.

This verse speaks to the idea that complete understanding of the Self encompasses both knowledge and ignorance. One must not only know what the Self is, but must also understand how through the power of ignorance (i.e. *Isvara* or *Maya*) the universe is projected upon the screen of Awareness. Understanding both aspects of being is essential if one is going to be able to discriminate between the real (i.e. Awareness or the Self) and the not-real (i.e. all of the objects – both gross and subtle – that constitute the apparent reality or not-Self). Vedanta refers to this discrimination as *atma-anatma viveka*, and it the very heart of self-inquiry. All of the teachings boil down to understanding this distinction.

According to Vedanta, all of existence can be organized into two ontological categories: subject and object. The subject, simply enough, is pure Awareness, the Self, me. The objects are the plethora of phenomena – both gross and subtle – appearing within me (i.e. within the scope of Awareness). While there is only one subject, the objects appearing within it are innumerable.

All objects, of course, are subject to change. In fact, the essential nature of the apparent reality is mutability. The entire creation is in a state of flux. Everything in the universe is undergoing constant change. The fleeting nature of thoughts and feelings, desires and fears is easy to detect, but even such seemingly solid physical phenomena as mountains are slowly eroding over epochs of time. Due to the temporality of their existence, every object and thus the entire manifested universe is, according to Vedanta, unreal.

Vedanta defines what is real as that which does not change. The Self, which is pure Awareness, is the only 'thing' that does not change, and therefore I am the only 'thing' that is real.

One who fully assimilates the knowledge of the immutable nature of pure Awareness, which is his very own Self, realizes that he is immortal. Though the body remains subject to death and dissolution, the pure Awareness out of which the mind-body-sense complex appeared, in which the mind-body-sense complex abided, and into which the mind-body-sense complex disappeared ever remains extant. It can thus be seen that immortality is a matter of knowledge. Rather than indefinite physical sustainability, eternality is a matter of understanding that one's true nature is ever-present, unchanging, limitless, action-less, timeless Awareness.

12. The minds of those who worship unseen gods as well as the minds of those who worship visible forms are shrouded in darkness.

Though this verse could be interpreted as referring to deity worship, the underlying idea here is that objects of worship are essentially one's desires, or the things one values in terms of security, pleasure, and virtue. Whether

one is praying to a disembodied or spiritual entity (i.e. a deity symbolic of the causal body in which are stored in unmanifest or potential form all the seeds for the vast array of objects that comprise the manifested universe) or is focusing one's attention on and effort toward the acquisition of physical and/or circumstantial worldly objects, it amounts to basically the same thing. One is acting with the intention of getting what one wants. Moreover, rather than simply choosing to pursue them, one's pursuit of worldly desires is invariably compelled by binding *vasanas* or 'unseen gods.' A 'god is something on which one depends. It 'rules.' In the same way, binding *vasanas* determine one's desires and drive one's actions.

There is nothing inherently wrong with or bad about trying to get what one wants, but as was previously discussed in reference to the performance of religious ritual, the desire that undergirds such worship or action is rooted in the erroneous belief that one is incomplete and inadequate and that some object will provide permanent fulfillment, joy, and peace. This is the fundamental ignorance that shrouds the mind and conceals the whole and complete, limitless, non-dual nature of one's true identity as pure Awareness.

13. One result is obtained from the worship of visible forms and another from the worship of unseen deities. Thus we have heard from the wise.

This verse continues the theme of worship as a means of acquiring objects that are believed to be the source of security, pleasure, and virtue. Though the concept of worship carries a connotation of religious devotion, here worship can be understood as referring to any focus of attention and application of effort.

The worship of visible forms can thus be taken to mean the pursuit of objects for the joy that it is believed they will deliver. If one executes timely and appropriate actions within the context of matrix of various factors that work together in such a way as to create a circumstance conducive to producing the particular result desired, it is possible to obtain what one wants from the field of the apparent reality. As long as one seeks fulfillment through action, however, there remains a sense of 'doership', a sense of being an individual who needs certain things in order to be okay

and undertakes actions in an effort to get these things. Moreover, inherent in this sense of 'doership' is the idea that one is responsible for effecting action and has a right to enjoy the results of one's actions. This erroneous idea lies at the heart of much of the stress that characterizes the experience of life in the apparent reality or dualistic world.

Though it can involve elaborately enacted ritual, the essence of the worship of unseen deities can be understood in most succinct terms as prayer. Any action – mental, verbal, or physical – performed with the intention of supplicating a higher power in order to win favor and increase the likelihood of securing a desired result is essentially a prayer. The added component prayer brings to the pursuit of objects is the recognition of and reliance on a power perceived as different from and greater than one's individual self. In this case, the responsibility and resultant stress of the individual has been reduced, but there still remains the identification with being a limited, incomplete, and inadequate person and the conviction that fulfillment can be found in objects.

Or, in keeping with the theme that desires are one's gods, you could also say that a person who believes that the objects of desire can make him or her happy 'worships' desire.

In either case, the only approach beneficial to the pursuit of liberation is the practice of karma yoga, which was discussed in reference to the first two verses of this Upanishad. Though it is still rooted in a sense of 'doership', the cultivation and application of the karma yoga attitude serves to effectively purify one's mind and neutralize one's compelling likes and dislikes, desires and fears enough to assimilate the knowledge that one is already whole and complete, limitless, action-less, non-dual Awareness, and that no particular object or discrete experience either outside or within oneself is needed to improve, perfect, or please oneself.

14. The one who knows that both the seen and unseen should be worshipped as one overcomes death and obtains immortality.

In this verse is effected the reconciliation of the Self and the not-Self that is the ultimate understanding intended to be assimilated by means of the traditional teaching methodology of Vedanta.

Throughout the three Vedantic canons, the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras, and the Bhagavad Gita, numerous teachings (*prakriyas*) are used to reveal the nature of and the relationship between the individual, the universe, and the Self. Basically, however, each *prakriya* employs the same fundamental teaching methodology: superimposition and negation or rescission.

Since the teachings of Vedanta serve as a roadmap intended to guide the student out of the cycle of *samsara*, they must meet the student at the point of understanding where he currently resides. All Vedantic *prakriyas*, therefore, begin by granting legitimacy to the erroneous beliefs one holds and assumptions one has made about the apparent reality based on one's conditioning as well as the deceptive nature of one's own direct but unexamined experience. Granting reality to the apparently real is called superimposition.

Throughout the Upanishad currently under consideration, reality has been divided into two distinctly different categories: the Self and the not-Self; the real and the apparent. This division is necessary at the outset of the Vedantic investigation of reality in order to facilitate the student's understanding of the attributeless nature of Awareness and to demonstrate the inherent limitation of all names and forms. If the student were simply told from the outset that the whole creation is nothing other than the Self, he would most likely see little value in undertaking a deeper inquiry into its nature. More than likely he would give little credence to the assertion that lasting joy cannot be found in objects nor would he be motivated to reduce the intensity of his desires in order to purify his mind. If all objects are nothing other than the Self, he would reason, then why not continue to pursue them? Such a rationalization, however, would obviously serve as a serious impediment on the path to liberation. It is, therefore, only when the student's understanding has matured that the superimposed separation of the Self and the not-Self, the discrimination between the real and the apparent can be negated and the entire manifest

creation and unmanifest causal body can be reunited through the acknowledgment of their common substratum, pure Awareness.

15. The door to the Self is covered by a golden disc. Remove it, O Nourisher, that I may behold the Truth!

The 'golden disc' refers to *Maya*, beautiful intelligent ignorance. *Maya* and its projection shines like gold, meaning it is attractive and valuable, and therefore obscures our self knowledge. So it must be removed. It can be removed by the self, the 'nourisher' in the form of self knowledge as revealed by the teachings of Vedanta.

A secondary interpretation of this verse is that it articulates the yearning to see or experience the Self directly. Since the Self, which is pure Awareness, has no attributes and cannot be objectified beholding it the way in which one beholds an object is not possible. The Self can be seen indirectly, however, by Its reflection in a pure mind.

In lieu of such an epiphany, a powerful means by which to help the mind focus on the Self is through the use of symbol. The characteristics and features of objects can serve as powerful means of inspiring inquiry. When one sees an image of the goddess Kali, for instance, wearing a belt of severed hands, one's initial stupefaction will eventually lead to an investigation into the meaning of this strange accessory. The resultant discovery that the hands represent the erroneous notion 'doership' that self-knowledge (represented in the form of Kali) lops off from one's psyche triggers in one a clearer understanding of one's true nature as action-less awareness. Such is the value of symbols.

It must be born in mind, however, that while symbols are powerful pointers toward the ineffable Truth, they are not the Truth Itself. The various conflicts we see erupting between religions the world over are a testament to the dangers of the literal interpretation of symbols. It is in light of such understanding that the speaker in this verse implores *Isvara*, here referred to as both Nourisher because of Its equation with the sun which nourishes all life on the planet, to remove the gleaming veil of gross light (i.e. the

symbolic 'golden disc' or sun) that prevents one's direct perception of the Light of Awareness.

Awareness, of course, cannot be seen experientially the way objects are seen, but It can be known, for it is self-evident. Moreover, the word 'behold' in this verse suggests that enlightenment is a matter for the intellect because the Self already knows Itself. The source of this request is the *jiva* and it is the *jiva's* mind that this symbolic request is meant to satisfy.

16. O sun, lone traveler of the sky, child of the creator and controller of everything on earth, gather your rays and withdraw your light that I might see that form of yours which is the fairest. Indeed, I am that Being who dwells there!

The sun is an apt symbol for the Self because it is a self-dependent source of light and impersonally illumines and thereby provides the foundation for the life of all animate beings in creation. As powerful as the sun is, however, it is only an object within Awareness.

In this verse, the speaker begs the sun for the withdrawal of the physical light, which can be interpreted as the name and form that serves to symbolize Truth, in order that the form 'which is the fairest' (i.e. pure Awareness) can be 'seen' (i.e. understood or known by the intellect).

The speaker's final assertion that 'I am the Being who dwells there' is a direct acknowledgement of the identity of *Atman* and *Brahman*, the individual and the Self, the apparent person and the supreme Reality that is of the nature of being, consciousness, and bliss (i.e. pure Awareness). This is the statement of true knowledge. When uttered with hard and fast, unshakeable conviction it indicates that one has realized the Truth and understands that the limited individual entity, the person one has been conditioned to believe oneself to be and fully accepted oneself as is nothing more than an erroneous notion arising in and constituted of nothing other than pure Awareness.

This verse converts the indirect knowledge of the self presented heretofore into direct knowledge.

The limitless, attributeless nature of pure Awareness, of course, cannot be confined to any discrete location, and therefore the 'there' referred to as its dwelling place is to be understood as beyond the parameters of time and space. Indeed, it can be said that rather than Awareness dwelling in any place, It is the residence of all time and space.

17. Now may my breath merge into the universal life breath. May this body be burnt to ashes! Om! O mind, remember, always remember, what you have realized!

Though the first two ideas expressed in this verse suggest an experiential view of enlightenment, the last idea reaffirms the central notion that lies at the heart of this Upanishad: Reality is non-dual awareness, which is a fact to be known rather than an object to be acquired or attained.

Breath is *prana* (i.e. the life force that animates all beings), and *prana* is essentially awareness, for awareness is that which illumines and thereby activates the entire creation – both gross and subtle. Moreover, given the non-dual nature of reality, awareness is in fact both the intelligent and material source of creation. It is all that is (and all that is not, for that matter). The merging of the individual's breath with that of the universal, therefore, is only a metaphor for the understanding that they are already one.

The idea of the body being burnt to ashes is a metaphorical expression of the withdrawal of the speaker's identification with the three bodies (i.e. the gross, subtle, and causal bodies) that constitute the mechanism of the *jiva* or embodied consciousness. As a result of understanding his true nature to be whole and complete, limitless, action-less, ordinary, unborn, non-dual awareness, the speaker now recognizes the gross elements and physiological systems that constitute the gross body; the mind, intellect, ego that constitute the subtle body; and the storehouse of past impressions and consequent desires and fears that constitute the causal body are nothing more than ephemeral, transitory, apparent objects arising, abiding,

and subsiding in pure awareness. The speaker knows that as manifestations of awareness these phenomena depend upon him for their existence, but that he is ever independent of them. As pure awareness, he is self-dependent and therefore has no need of a body in order to be.

The next utterance, '*Om*', seems simple enough at first glance, and yet it too encapsulates a figurative meaning that is worthy of deeper consideration. The Sanskrit word for '*Om*' consists of three letters that are often translated in English as A-U-M. These three letters represent the three states of consciousness in which all experience of the apparent reality take place. A represents the waking state, U represents the dream state, and M represents the deep sleep state. As was the case with the three bodies examined in the previous paragraph, these three states and all the phenomena that appear within their parameters are nothing more than temporary appearances within the scope of pure awareness. The utterance of '*Om*' might be interpreted as either an affirmation of the speaker's disengagement from the three states due to his understanding of their impermanent and thus hollow nature, or as an acknowledgement of the fourth factor that is the substratum and eternal witness of all three states – limitless, action-less, non-dual awareness.

The final sentence of the verse delivers yet another tribute to knowledge. The speaker's admonition to the mind to always remember what it has realized suggests an understanding of the paramount role knowledge plays in self-realization.

18. O Fire of Awareness, lead us by the good path to the enjoyment of the fruits of our actions. You know, O Self, all our deeds. Destroy the sin of deceit. We offer, in words, our salutations to you.

Awareness is here equated with a fire. This metaphor is appropriate in that Awareness is the Light that illumines the entirety of the three bodies and three worlds that constitute the apparent reality and enlivens the play of the three *gunas* that transpires within it. Moreover, Awareness is that eternal factor that is the substratum of all beings and whose metaphorical quest to 'reunite' with Itself through knowledge is enacted through them. Because Its zeal for self-realization cannot ultimately be denied – for truly

speaking there exists nothing other than Itself to deny it – Awareness is like a fire that over time burns away the ignorance that has seemingly enshrouded it.

The speaker's appeal that Awareness 'lead us by the good path' is a refers to the idea of following *dharma*, or living in harmony with the physical, moral, and spiritual laws that govern the field of experience. In other words, it is a reference to surrendering to God's will. This, of course, is a reaffirmation of the importance of practicing *karma yoga* in order to purify the mind and prepare it for the assimilation of the knowledge of the Truth. Though a desire is voiced for 'the enjoyment of the fruits of our actions', which would seemingly run contrary to the dispassion inherent in the *karma yoga* attitude, it should here be understood as a desire for liberation. As Krishna tells Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, "I am the desire that does not oppose *dharma*." In this case, the actions and deeds spawned by that desire are to be understood as the *yogic* practices and self-inquiry that removes ignorance and reveals the Self. Thus is the 'sin of deceit' destroyed. Sin in this case does not refer to the perpetration of specific behaviors prohibited by religious dogma, but to any belief that one is small, weak, inadequate, and incomplete. Once such sins are destroyed by the fire of knowledge, one stands with unshakeable conviction in the understanding of his true nature as whole and complete, limitless, actionless, ordinary, unborn, non-dual awareness. In short, having had his ignorance completely consumed by the Fire of Awareness, one now realizes his true identity as the Light.

The Peace Chant

**Om. The unseen Self is full; this visible Self full.
This fullness has been projected from that fullness.
When this fullness merges in that fullness,
all that remains is fullness.
Om. Peace! Peace! Peace**