

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE VEDAS are the basic scriptures of the Hindus and their highest authority in all matters pertaining to religion and philosophy. They are, moreover, the earliest extant Indo-Āryan literary monuments. The Hindus regard them as eternal, without beginning, without human authorship. The primary meaning of the name Veda is Knowledge, super-sensuous wisdom. The secondary reference is to the *words* in which that Knowledge is embodied. And so the term Veda denotes not only the orthodox religious and philosophical wisdom of India, but also the books in which the earliest utterances of that wisdom are preserved. The Hindus look upon these books with the highest reverence. They are known as the Word-Brahman, the Sabda-Brahma.

Knowledge is of two kinds. The first is derived from the sense-organs and corroborated by various evidences based upon the experiences of the sense-organs. This is the form of knowledge that falls within the scope of the physical sciences. The second, however, is transcendent and is realized through the mental and spiritual discipline of yoga. This is the subject matter of the Vedas. According to Patanjali, the traditional master of the yoga doctrine, it is not the words of the Vedas that are eternal, but the Knowledge or ideas conveyed through them. This Knowledge, also called the Sphota, has existed always. At the conclusion of a cycle both the Sphota and the created universe merge in the undifferentiated causal state, and at the beginning of the new cycle the two together again become manifest. The Lord brings forth the universe with the help of the Knowledge of the Vedas. He Himself utters the words that express this Knowledge and confers upon them their appropriate meanings. That is to say, it is the Lord, the Creator of the universe, who has determined the precise meaning that is to be attached to every Vedic word. He is the first teacher of Vedic truth. Though the words may be different in different cycles, the ideas conveyed through them remain unalterable: no human intellect can interfere with them. According to Vedānta, the words of the Vedas come from the Lord spontaneously, like a man's breathing.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* commences with the statement that, in the beginning of the cycle, the Lord taught the Vedas through Brahmā, the first created being. According to the Purānas, Brahmā had been absorbed in meditation on the Supreme Lord, when, through the Lord's grace, there arose in his heart an indistinct sound. This was followed by the sound Om, the Sound-Brahman, which is the essence of the Vedic wisdom. Then this sacred syllable transformed itself into the various vowels and consonants of the alphabet. With their assistance Brahmā uttered words, and these are what became known to the world as the Vedas. He taught the Vedas to his disciples Marichi, Atri, Angirā, and others, and thus mankind came to possess the Vedic revelation.

The Vedas are called Śruti (from *śru*, to hear), since they were handed down orally from teacher to disciple. The Hindus did not at first commit them to writing. Either writing was unknown to them at that early period of history or they considered the words of the Vedas too sacred to set down. Written words become the common property of all, whereas the Vedas were to be studied only by those who had been initiated by a qualified teacher. Such was the high esteem in which the Hindus held the words that they did not make the slightest change even in the pronunciation while passing them on from generation to generation. Hence, though committed to writing only many centuries after their composition, the Vedas as we now possess them contain the exact words and ideas that were known to the most ancient Hindus.

THE DIVISIONS OF THE VEDAS

The Vedas have been divided in various ways. The two most general divisions according to subject matter are known as the Karmakānda and Jñānakānda. The first deals with karma, ritualistic action, sacrifices, etc., the purpose of which is the attainment of material prosperity here on earth and felicity in heaven after death. The second is concerned with the Knowledge through which one is liberated from ignorance and enabled to realize the Highest Good.

In the Purānas it is stated that Vyāsa was commanded by Brahmā to make a compilation of the Vedas. Vyāsa is reputed to be the author of the *Mahābhārata*, of which the *Bhagavad Gītā* forms a part.¹ He

¹ The authorship of several Hindu scriptures is ascribed to Vyāsa. Either there was more than one Vyāsa, or other Indian writers, following a well-known custom by means of which importance was often given to books in ancient times, published or circulated their own works under the name of this great philosopher.

lived at the time of the battle of Kurukshetra. With the help of four disciples, so the tradition goes, this great saint and poet arranged the Vedas in four books, namely, the Rik, Yajur, Sāman, and Atharva. He was thus the classifier of the Vedas, though not their author. For many centuries before his time the Vedas had been known and their injunctions had formed the basis of all Hindu philosophic thought and all brāhminical ceremonial. But the texts had not existed in a systematic form. They had been revealed by the Lord to certain holy men of the remote past who had purified their minds by the practice of such spiritual disciplines as self-control and concentration—the great teachers known as the rishis, or seers of truth. The Vedas name both men and women among the rishis.

Vyāsa compiled the Rig-Veda by collecting the riks. Of the sāmans he composed the Sāma-Veda, while the Yajur-Veda he composed of yajus. The Rig-Veda, which may be called a book of chants, is set to certain fixed melodies. The Sāma-Veda has no independent value; for it consists mostly of stanzas from the Rig-Veda. The arrangement of its verses is solely with reference to their place and use in the Soma-sacrifice. The Yajur-Veda contains, in addition to verses taken from the Rig-Veda, many original prose formulas which may be called sacrificial prayers.² The Atharva-Veda consists of a special class of Vedic texts known as chhandas. These deal with spells, incantations, and kingly duties, as well as exalted spiritual truths. Western scholars sometimes exclude this compilation from their consideration of the Vedas; but according to the Hindu view it definitely belongs among them. The name Trayi, or Triad, often used to denote the Vedas, is collectively applied to the Rig-Veda, the Sāma-Veda, and the Yajur-Veda, the Atharva-Veda being excluded from the Triad because it has no application to sacrificial actions. Nevertheless, one of the four priests officiating in all Vedic sacrifices had to be thoroughly versed in the chhandas.

Each of the four Vedas falls into two sections: Mantra and Brāhmana. The Mantra is also called the Samhitā (from *sam*, together, and *hitā*, put), which means, literally, a collection of hymns, or mantras, used in the sacrifices. The offering of oblations for the propitiation of the devatās, or deities, is termed the sacrifice, or yajna. This was a highly important ceremony through which the ancient Indo-Āryans communicated with the gods, or higher powers. The Mantra comprises the

² See S. N. Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 12. Cambridge, London 1932.

prayers and hymns, while the Brāhmana contains the rules and regulations for the sacrifices, deals with their accessories, and also reveals the meaning of the Mantra, which otherwise would remain obscure. Therefore both the Mantra and the Brāhmana were indispensable for the orthodox worship and propitiation of the gods.

A further development of the Brāhmana, and included therein, was the Āranyaka, the so-called "forest treatise." This was intended for those people who had retired into the forest in accordance with the ideal of the third stage of life, and were consequently unable to perform in the usual way the sacrifices obligatory for all twice-born householders.² The sacrifices required many articles and accessories impossible to procure in the forest. Hence the Āranyaka prescribes symbolic worship and describes various meditations that were to be used as substitutes for an actual sacrifice. To give an illustration from the first chapter of the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*: instead of actually performing the Vedic Horse-sacrifice (Aśvamedha), the forest-dweller was to meditate in a special way upon the dawn as the head of the horse, the sun as the eye, the air as the life, and so on. The worship was lifted from the physical to the mental level.

THE FOUR STAGES

The full life-period of an Indo-Āryan was divided into four stages, namely, brahmacharya, gārhaṣṭhya, vānaprastha, and sannyāsa. The first stage was devoted to study. The celibate student led a life of chastity and austerity and served his teacher with humility. He learnt the Mantra and the Brāhmana sections of the Vedas. And when he left the teacher's house, after completing his studies, he was commanded not to deviate from truth and not to forget to persevere in the study of the Vedas. The second stage was devoted to household duties. The young man took a wife. Both together performed the Vedic sacrifice with the hymns of the Mantra and in accordance with the rules laid down in the Brāhmana. The third stage commenced when the hair turned grey and the face began to wrinkle. The householder consigned the responsibility of the home to his children and retired with his

² The members of the three upper castes in Hindu society—the brāhmins, the kshatriyas, and the vaiśyas—were called "dvija," twice-born. Their first birth refers to their coming out of their mother's womb; the second, which is a spiritual birth, to their initiation by a religious teacher, who invests them with the sacred thread, thus entitling them to study the Vedas and participate in the Vedic rituals.

wife into the forest. He was then known as a vānaprastha or āranyaka, a forest-dweller. The Āranyaka portion of the Vedas prescribed for him sacrifice by meditation and symbolic worship.

The final stage, called sannyāsa, was the culmination of the strictly regulated life of an Indo-Āryan.⁴ During this period, having totally renounced the world, he became a sannyāsin, or wandering monk, free from worldly desires and attachments and absorbed in the uninterupted contemplation of Brahman. It was no longer necessary to worship God by means of material articles or even mental symbols. One experienced directly the non-duality of God, the soul, and the universe—Spirit communing immediately with the Spirit. The sannyāsin took the vow of dedicating his life to Truth and to the service of humanity, and was honoured as a spiritual leader of society. And it was for him that the Upanishads (which are mostly the concluding portions of the Āranyakas) were intended. The Upanishads are concerned with the direct experience of Brahman, which liberates one from the bondage of the relative world.

Thus the Indo-Āryan seers arranged the Vedas to conform to the four stages of life. The brahmachāri studied the Samhitā, the householder followed the injunctions of the Brāhmana, the forest-dweller practised contemplation according to the Āranyaka, and the sannyāsin was guided by the exalted wisdom of the Upanishads. According to the Hindu view, all four portions of the four Vedas were revealed simultaneously and have existed from the very beginning of the cycle. They are not to be regarded as exhibiting a philosophical development or evolution in the processes of thought.⁵

⁴ According to a Vedic injunction, one can renounce the world whenever one feels distaste for it. Thus one can become a sannyāsin from any stage. The normal course, however, is to proceed through the series of the four stages.

⁵ Some Western scholars divide the Vedic age into four distinct periods. These are named the Chhandas period, the Mantra period, the Brāhmana period, and the Sutra period. According to this view, the mantras, or hymns, were composed during the Chhandas period and compiled during the Mantra period. During the first part of the Brāhmana period were composed the Brāhmanas, and during the second part, the Āranyakas and the Upanishads. During the Sutra period were written the well-known sutras, namely, the Kalpa, Gṛhya, Śrauta, and others. Then a decline began. There is some plausibility in this division into periods. Hindu scholars, however, challenge the categorical conclusion of Western scholars who claim that no Vedic literature but the Samhitā and Brāhmana existed before the Upanishads. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad* (II. iv. 10.) states: "As from a fire kindled with wet faggots diverse kinds of smoke issue, even so, my dear, the Rig-Veda, Yajur-Veda,

It has already been stated that Vyāsa systematized the Vedas in four books. He taught the Rig-Veda to his disciple Paila, the Yajur-Veda to Vaiśampāyana, the Sāma-Veda to Jaimini, and the Atharva-Veda to Sumanta. Among the disciples of Vaiśampāyana was the celebrated Yājñavalkya, one of the great teachers of the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*. A legend states that this disciple became so vain of his knowledge that he incurred the displeasure of his guru and was expelled from the hermitage, with the command that he should leave what he knew of the Veda behind. The proud disciple spat out everything that he had learnt and went away. But some other disciples of the sage Vaiśampāyana were grieved at the sad plight of the Vedic lore and so, assuming the forms of partridges (*tittira*), they swallowed it, and later on taught that Vedic knowledge to their own disciples. Since then that portion of the Vedas has been known as the Black Yajur-Veda (Krishna Yajur-Veda) and also as the *Taittiriya Samhitā* (from *tittira*). Yājñavalkya, however, worshipped the sun god, who was so pleased with his devotion that he appeared before him in an equine form. The god committed to him the Vedic knowledge that later on became known as the White Yajur-Veda (Sukla Yajur-Veda) or the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* (from *vāja*, meaning energy, strength). This was the version of the Veda that Yājñavalkya taught to his disciples.

The four basic Vedas gradually branched off into many recensions, or *sākhās*, at the hands of various teachers, after whom they were named. Thus the *Satapatha Brāhmana* of the White Yajur-Veda survives in the Kāva and Mādhyandina recensions, according to the two disciples of Yājñavalkya. They differ from each other greatly in content as well as in the number and arrangement of the sections and chapters, the former having seventeen and the latter fourteen sections. The concluding portion of the last book of both recensions is the

Sāma-Veda. Atharva-Veda, history, mythology, arts, Upanishads, verses, aphorisms (sutras), elucidations, and explanations are like the breath of this Infinite Reality. In the *Chhāndogya Upanishad* (VII. 1. 2.) Nārada gives an account of various subjects studied by him prior to his coming to Sanatkumāra. They include—besides the Vedic texts—history, mythology, the lore of portents, logic, ethics, and various other sciences. Similar instances can be given from the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* and other scriptures. All this shows that the Vedic literature was extremely various even before the compilation of the Upanishads. It may be admitted, however, that during the four periods recognized by the Western scholars, the various designated portions of Vedic literature came in sequence to the fore.

Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad; but here again the two versions often differ. Śankarāchārya based his commentary on the Kāva recension.

Each of the Vedas contains its own Brāhmanas, which, as already stated, provide instructions regarding the procedures of sacrifice and also, through the *Āitaryas*, meditations and symbolic worship for the forest-dwellers. The *Āitareya* and *Kaushitaki Brāhmanas* belong, for example, to the Rig-Veda; the *Taittiriya* and *Maitrāyani*, to the Black Yajur-Veda; the *Satapatha*, to the White Yajur-Veda; the *Chhāndogya* and *Tāndya*, to the Sāma-Veda; and the *Gopātha Brāhmana*, to the Atharva-Veda.

In most cases the concluding portion of the *Āranyaka* is the Upanishad—also called the *Vedānta* because in it the Vedic wisdom reaches its culmination (*ānta*). It shows the seeker the way to Liberation and the Highest Good. Usually there is a full series, from the *Samhitā*, or Mantra, through the *Brāhmana* and *Āranyaka* to the culmination in the Upanishad. For example, the *Taittiriya Samhitā* is followed by the *Taittiriya Brāhmana*, at the end of which comes the *Taittiriya Āranyaka*; and this is concluded by the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. But in rare instances an Upanishad may come directly at the conclusion of the *Samhitā*, as is the case with the *Īśa Upanishad*. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* forms the last three chapters of the *Taittiriya Āranyaka*; the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, the last six chapters of the *Satapatha Brāhmana*; the *Āitareya Upanishad*, the last five chapters of the *Āitareya Āranyaka*; and the *Kena Upanishad*, the ninth chapter of the *Tāitavākāra Brāhmana* of the White Yajur-Veda.

THE ANTIQUITY OF THE VEDAS

One hesitates to enter into a discussion of the time when the Vedas were collated. The compiler Vyāsa is reputed to have been alive at the time of the battle of Kurukshetra; but when was that battle fought? Some European Indologists assign the Vedas to the twelfth century B.C., others to earlier ages. Max Müller, for example, supposed the date to be about 1200 B.C., but Haug, about 2400. Neither believed, of course, in the divine origin of the hymns. Bāl Gangādhār Tilak, an eminent Indian scholar, calculated from astronomical data and suggested that the mantras of the Rig-Veda were brought together about five thousand years before the Christian era, while, according to the orthodox tradition, the texts, even before their compilation, had been

known to the rishis for unnumbered years. In short, the dates of the Vedic hymns and collections are far from clear.

One reason for the obscurity is that the ancient Hindus lacked the historical sense. They seldom kept records of the dates of their literary, religious, or even political achievements. The Vedas, furthermore, which had been handed down orally for so many centuries, were never believed by them to have had human authorship: they had either been taught to the sages by God or had become manifest of themselves to the primordial rishis, who were the seers of the mantras. Hence in India the tendency has always been to regard the Vedas as eternal, rather than as compositions of a certain historical moment. But even from the modern historical point of view it is not easy to determine the origin and trace the gradual development of the Vedic tradition. The Rig-Veda, which is generally recognized as the earliest of the four, contains lofty philosophical concepts, and sentiments of a monistic cast such as Western thinkers are inclined to assign to a later and highly developed stage of human thought. "The Reality is one," we read, for example, "but the sages call it by various names." Moreover, we find that a critical spirit has already developed. The ability of the gods—who themselves exist in time and space and are victims of causality—to create the universe is questioned. Such ideas indicate a maturity of philosophical insight and by no means the primitive infancy of thought.

Following their historical method, the European Indologists regard the Upanishads to be of later composition than the Mantras and Brāhmanas. They do not admit any of them to be earlier than the eleventh century B.C., while to many are assigned a much later date. In this respect the Hindu tradition, as we have seen, is totally different, the orthodox belief and teaching being that all parts of the Vedas were revealed at the same time, though the various collections might have been compiled in different periods.

THE UPANISHADS

Now about the number and divisions of the Upanishads. With the disappearance of many of the recensions of the Vedas, many Brāhmanas, Āranyakas, and Upanishads also disappeared.⁶ The fact that the sacred

⁶ The Rig-Veda is said to have existed in twenty-one recensions, the Yajur-Veda in a hundred, the Sāma-Veda in a thousand, and the Atharva-Veda in nine. But there are differences of opinion among the authorities on this subject.

books were not committed to writing in ancient times is partly responsible for this lamentable loss. Furthermore, among the works surviving, it is difficult to ascertain the exact number that should be regarded as authentic Upanishads. A religious system is considered valid in India only when it is supported by Śruti (the Vedas); hence the founders of religious sects have sometimes written books and called them Upanishads in order to give their views scriptural authority. The *Allāh Upanishad*, for instance, was composed in the sixteenth century, at the time of the Mussalmān emperor Akbar.

One hundred and eight Upanishads are enumerated in the *Muktika Upanishad*, which is a work belonging to the tradition of the Yajur-Veda. Among these, the *Aitareya Upanishad* and *Kaushītaki Upanishad* belong to the Rig-Veda; the *Chhândogya* and *Kena*, to the Sāma-Veda; the *Taittirīya*, *Mahānārāyaṇa*, *Katha*, *Svetāśvatara*, and *Maitrīyaṇi*, to the Black Yajur-Veda; the *Īśa* and *Bṛihadāranyaka*, to the White Yajur-Veda; and the *Mundaka*, *Prāśna*, and *Māndūkya*, to the Atharva-Veda. It may be stated, also, that these Upanishads belong to differing recensions of their respective Vedas. Thus, for instance, the *Mundaka Upanishad* belongs to the Saunaka recension of the Atharva-Veda, while the *Prāśna Upanishad* belongs to the Pippalāda recension. The *Brahma Sūtras*, which is the most authoritative work on the Vedānta philosophy, has been based upon the *Aitareya*, *Taittirīya*, *Chhândogya*, *Bṛihadāranyaka*, *Kaushītaki*, *Katha*, *Svetāśvatara*, *Mundaka*, *Prāśna*, and possibly also the *Jābāla Upanishad*. Sankarāchārya wrote his celebrated commentaries on the *Īśa*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Prāśna*, *Mundaka*, *Māndūkya*, *Aitareya*, *Taittirīya*, *Chhândogya*, *Bṛihadāranyaka*, and possibly also the *Svetāśvatara Upanishad*. These are regarded as the major works.

The teachings of the Upanishads, the *Brahma Sūtras*, and the Bhagavad Gītā constitute Vedānta. Three main schools of Vedānta exist: the Dualist, Qualified Non-dualist, and Non-dualist, their principal teachers being, respectively, Madhvāchārya (A.D. 1199-1276), Rāmānūjāchārya (A.D. 1017-1137), and Sankarāchārya (A.D. 788-820). Madhvāchārya has written commentaries on some of the major Upanishads according to Dualistic doctrines. Some of the disciples and followers of Rāmānūjāchārya have done likewise to prove that Qualified Non-dualism is the underlying philosophy of Vedānta. But neither of these systems has won such wide acceptance and prestige as that of Sankarāchārya.

Sankarāchārya's interpretation of the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gītā, and *Brahma Sūtras* is the supreme Hindu contribution to the philosophical wisdom of the world. This remarkable genius appeared at a critical period of Indian history. The sun of Buddhism had already passed below the horizon. Various invading peoples, such as the Saks, the Tartars, the Beluchis, and the Huns had entered India with their grotesque religious ideas and ceremonies and embraced Buddhism. At their hands the religion of Buddha had become greatly distorted. A Hindu revival was struggling into existence, and numerous Hindu sects, such as the old Vedic ritualists and the yogi ascetics, were asserting their contrary yet equally dogmatic views. A veritable babel was reigning in India when the youthful Sankarāchārya appeared on the scene.

According to his followers this great pillar of Hinduism was the perfect embodiment of the Vedic wisdom. Endowed with a keen intellect and with rare forensic powers, he courageously challenged all opponents. He cut through the cobweb of conflicting views with a direct and consistently rational interpretation of the authoritative texts, supported by his own profound spiritual experiences. Within the short span of a lifetime of only thirty-two years, he travelled the length and breadth of India, preaching his doctrines and reforming the sannyāsīn organizations. He founded four monasteries at the cardinal points of the country. And meanwhile he produced a body of literary work that includes not only his great Vedāntic commentaries but also many hymns addressed to the Hindu deities, through worship of whom the aspirant's heart is purified and his spirit qualified for the Knowledge of Brahman. When one considers the lofty height reached by Sankarāchārya in his philosophy, and at the same time the soul-melting love permeating his hymns, one cannot but marvel at the mighty sweep of his mind, the catholicity of his heart, and the austere purity of his intellect. He was indeed a saviour of the Hindu world.

The subject matter of the Upanishads is abstruse. Unwary students easily become confused by their apparent contradictions. Therefore, from ancient times, books have been composed to explain and harmonize their mysteries. Among these the Bhagavad Gītā and the *Brahma Sūtras* are the best known. The Gītā is compared to the life-giving milk of the great milk cow, which is the Upanishads; Arjuna is the calf, and Sri Krishna the milker. Sri Krishna, in His dialogue with Arjuna, presented through the Bhagavad Gītā the essence of the

Upanishads. The *Brahma Sūtras* (also known as the *Vedānta Sūtras* and *Sāriraka Sūtras*) formulates the teachings of the Upanishads in concise aphorisms which reconcile the many apparent contradictions. Vyāsa is the reputed author of these basic works. They, together with the Upanishads, constitute what are called the three Prasthānas, the canonical books, which form the foundation of the religion and philosophy of Vedānta.

Side by side with Śruti, or the Vedas, there exists another body of scriptural treatises known as Smṛiti. These works are regarded as having come into existence through human authorship. They derive their authority from the Vedas and include such majestic books as the *Mahābhārata*, the various Purānas, and the *Mānūsamihīā*. In ancient India only those people who belonged to the three upper castes were permitted to read the Vedas. The teachings of Smṛiti, however, were accessible to all. And they too opened the door to Liberation.

In A.D. 1650, fifty Upanishads were translated into Persian under the patronage of Prince Dārā, the son of Šajāhān, Emperor of Delhi. From the Persian they were translated into Latin, in A.D. 1801-1802. Schopenhauer read and studied this Latin translation and, in later years, declared: "In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life; it will be the solace of my death."

THE MEANING OF UPANISHAD

The word Upanishad has been derived from the root *śad*, to which are added two prefixes: *upa* and *ni*. The prefix *upa* denotes nearness, and *ni*, totality. The root *śad* means to loosen, to attain, and to annihilate. Thus the etymological meaning of the word is the Knowledge, or Vidyā, which, when received from a competent teacher, *loosens totally* the bondage of the world, or surely enables the pupil to *attain* (i.e. realize) the Self, or *completely destroys* ignorance, which is responsible for the deluding appearance of the Infinite Self as the finite embodied creature. Though the word primarily signifies knowledge, yet by implication it also refers to the book that contains that knowledge. The root *śad* with the prefix *upa* also connotes the humility with which the pupil should approach the teacher.

The profound Knowledge of Brahman has been described in the Bhagavad Gītā as the "sovereign science."⁷ It was considered a profound

secret and sometimes given the name of Upanishad.⁸ It is to be noted that the instructions regarding Brahman were often given in short formulas also known as Upanishads. "Its secret name (Upanishad) is *Satyasya Satyam*, the Truth of truth."⁹ "Now, therefore, the instruction [about Brahman]: *Neti, neti*—'Not this, not this.'"¹⁰ "That Brahman is called *Tadvana*, the Adorable of all; It should be worshipped by the name of *Tadvana*."¹¹ The books which contained the above-mentioned secret teachings and formulas were also called Upanishads.

QUALIFICATIONS OF STUDENTS

The later Vedānta teachers formulated the qualifications of the pupil entitled to study Vedānta. He must know, in a general way, the Vedas and their auxiliaries; must have attained purity of heart by freeing himself from sin, through an avoidance of selfish and forbidden actions as well as by the practice of daily devotions and obligatory duties, particular religious observances on special occasions, and the customary penances prescribed by religion. Further, he must discriminate between the Real and the unreal, and renounce the unreal. He must cultivate inner calmness and control of the senses, preserve the serenity of the mind and organs after they have been controlled, acquire such virtues as forbearance and concentration, and lastly, be possessed of an intense yearning for liberation from the bondages of worldly life. Such a one, and such a one alone, is qualified to receive from the teacher the profound knowledge of the Upanishads.

"This highest mystery of Vedānta, delivered in a previous cycle," we read, "should not be given to one whose passions have not been completely subdued, nor to one who is not a son or is not a pupil."¹² "A father may therefore tell that doctrine of Brahman to his eldest son or to a worthy pupil. But it should not be imparted to anybody else, even if he give the teacher the whole sea-girt earth full of treasure, for this doctrine is worth more than that. Yea, it is worth more."¹³ "One must not teach this to any but a son or a pupil."¹⁴

The custodians of the Vedic culture were the members of the

⁸ *Chh. Up.* I. i. 10; I. xiii. 4.

⁹ *Br. Up.* II. i. 20.

¹⁰ *Br. Up.* II. iii. 6.

¹¹ *Ke. Up.* IV. 6.

¹² *Svet. Up.* VI. 22.

¹³ *Chh. Up.* III. xi. 5-6.

¹⁴ *Br. Up.* VI. iii. 12.

brāhmin caste. That is why the brāhmins were held in the highest esteem by every section of Hindu society.

TESTS BY TEACHERS

Aspirants desiring the knowledge of the Upanishads were subjected to severe ordeals by their preceptors. The *Katha Upanishad* describes the case of Nachiketā, who was tested in various ways by Yama, the god of death, to ascertain his fitness for the Knowledge of Brahman. He was offered horses, elephants, and cattle; children and grandchildren; rulership of the earth and many years of life; heavenly damsels and their music; and numerous other desirable things which do not fall to the lot of an ordinary mortal. But he spurned them all, understanding their transitory nature, and persisted in his prayer for the Knowledge of the Self. Pratardana was tested by Indra,¹⁵ Jānasruti Pautrāyana by Raikva,¹⁶ Āruni by Pravāhana,¹⁷ Janaka by Yājñavalkya,¹⁸ and Brihadraṭha by Śākāyana.¹⁹

In the *Pratya Upanishad*²⁰ the teacher Pippalāda demanded of his six disciples that they should spend one year practising austerities, continence, and faith. "Afterwards you may ask me any question you like; if I know the answer I shall give it to you." The *Chhāndogya Upanishad*,²¹ in a celebrated passage, tells how the teacher Prajāpati required Indra and Virochana to practise spiritual disciplines for thirty-two years. Even after that, Virochana, the king of the demons, who had not acquired the necessary purity of heart, went away satisfied with the erroneous idea that the Self was identical with the body, while Indra, the king of the gods, had to continue in the austere life of a brahmachāri for another seventy-three years (one hundred and five in all) before he could realize the true knowledge of the Self.

RECONCILING THE TEACHINGS OF THE UPANISHADS

One finds in the Upanishads various strands of thought: Dualism, Qualified Non-dualism, and Non-dualism. Further, the Upanishads describe both the Brahman with attributes (Saguna Brahman) and the attributeless Brahman (Nirguna Brahman). They also deal with

¹⁵ *Keu. Up.* III. 1.

¹⁶ *Chh. Up.* IV. i.

¹⁷ *Br. Up.* VI. ii. 6.

¹⁸ *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 1.

¹⁹ *Mat. Up.* I. 2.

²⁰ I. 1-2.

²¹ VIII. vii. 3; VIII. xi. 3.

the disciplines of philosophical knowledge (jñāna), divine love (bhakti), action (karma), and yoga. Sometimes contradictions appear. Hence the question arises as to whether the Upanishads present a single, consistent, coordinated system of knowledge or a mere conglomeration of unrelated ideas. The orthodox Hindu view is that the Upanishads are consistent, that they describe a single truth, namely, the reality of the non-dual Brahman, and furthermore, that this same truth is rendered in the Bhagavad Gītā and the *Brahma Sūtras*. The Vedāntic philosophers support this conclusion by certain accepted means of proof.

But the Western critics maintain that the Upanishads present inconsistent views and that conflicting doctrines may be found even in the same Upanishad. Such a conclusion, according to the Hindu philosophers, is the natural result of the inability of the Western Orientalists to find the thread of harmony. They place their emphasis on particular details and lack comprehension of the general trend. The subject matter of the Upanishads is Brahman, the Absolute, which transcends time, space, and causality and cannot be comprehended by human thought or rendered in words. Human language and reasoning can describe and interpret sense-perceived phenomena; but Brahman is beyond their grasp. Any presentation of this subject in finite and relative human terms cannot but contain seeming contradictions. Nevertheless, this does not vitiate the Absolute Itself. Further, the Hindu philosophers admit different degrees of power of comprehension on the part of various pupils and they formulate their instructions accordingly. But such differences do not affect Brahman Itself, which is the final object of Upanishadic knowledge.

According to Śaṅkarācārya, the sole purpose of the Upanishads is to prove the reality of Brahman and the phenomenality or unreality of the universe of names and forms, and to establish the absolute oneness of the embodied soul and Brahman. This Vedic truth is not a product of the human mind and cannot be comprehended by the unaided human intellect. Only a competent teacher, through direct experience, can reveal to the qualified student the true significance of the Vedas and the fullness of their absolutely consistent truth.

THE KSHATTRIYA INFLUENCE

A striking feature of the Upanishads is the part played in them by the kshatriyas, the members of the royal military caste. This fact has

given rise to certain interesting speculations. The Mantra and Brāhmaṇa portions of the Vedas treat of sacrifices in which the brāhmins serve as priests. They deal with ritualistic works, in which a diversity of the actor, the instruments of action, and the result is recognized, while the sacrifices themselves are performed with a view to reaping results either here on earth or in the afterworld. This multiplicity of elements and ends stands in contrast to the central theme of the Upanishads, which is Brahmvidyā, the unitive knowledge of Brahman and the oneness of existence, and to the Vedāntic condemnation of sacrifices as barriers to this unitive knowledge. The seeker for the Knowledge of Brahman is told in the Upanishads that he must renounce all actions calculated to bring fruits and eschew all desire for happiness either on earth or in heaven. Therefore several Western writers have contended that the Upanishads represent a protest of the kshatriyas against the influence of the brāhmins.²² They contend also that the Knowledge of Ātman, whatever its origin, was cultivated primarily by the kshatriyas and accepted by the brāhmins only later on. Hindu scholars, however, do not accept this view.

In reviewing the problem, let us first point out a few of the references to kshatriyas in the Upanishads.

One of the most important and ancient of the Upanishads now extant is the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka*, which frequently mentions an emperor of Videha whose name was Janaka. This imposing figure is described as a master of the Vedic knowledge (*adhita-veda*), endowed with a keen intellect (*medhāvī*), and familiar with the doctrines of the Upanishads. It is stated in the third chapter that on a certain occasion this great emperor "performed a sacrifice in which gifts were freely distributed. Vedic scholars from the Kuru and Panchāla countries were assembled." The emperor then expressed a desire to know which was "the most erudite of these Vedic scholars." And so he had a thousand cows confined in a pen, and on the horns of each cow were fixed ten pādas of gold.

Janaka said to the brāhmins: "Revered brāhmins, let him who is the best Vedic scholar among you drive home the cows." None of the brāhmins dared to accept the challenge except the sage Yājñavalkya, who asked one of his pupils to lead the cows home. This enraged the

²² P. Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 19. Clark, Edinburgh, 1908.

others. The chief priest of the court arose and said: "Are you, then, the best Vedic scholar among us?"

Yājñavalkya answered: "I bow to the best Vedic scholar. I only want the cows."

Thereupon the other brāhmins were determined to test his knowledge of Brahman. A learned debate ensued, and this was presided over by the kshattriya king.

In chapter four of the same work Yājñavalkya and the emperor Janaka again appear. This time the kshattriya is the disciple and the brāhmin the preceptor. Janaka receives from Yājñavalkya the supreme knowledge of Brahman and demonstrates his appreciation by making a suitable gift: "I give you, sir, the empire of Videha, and myself with it, to wait upon you."

At the conclusion of the fifth chapter, this wise emperor Janaka instructs Buḍḍila, the son of Aśvatarāśva, concerning the Cāyatri, a verse the knowledge of which consumes a man's sins and makes him "pure, cleansed, undecaying, and immortal."

Pravāhana Jaivali, another kshattriya king, appears in the eighth section of the first chapter of the *Chhândogya Upanishad*, where he is described as teaching the secret of the Udghita, discussed in the Sāma-Veda. He appears again in the third section of the fifth chapter of the same Upanishad, where he plays a more important role. In this case, the sage Āruni's son, Svetaketu, is having an interview with the king, and the king asks him if he has been instructed by his father. The youth replies that he has received instruction; whereupon Jaivali confronts him by asking a number of questions regarding a man's departure from this world, his return, the Way of the Gods, the Way of the Fathers, and the rebirth of the soul. When Svetaketu confesses that he does not know the answers, the king inquires: "Then why did you say that you had been instructed? How could anybody who did not know these things say that he had been instructed?" Svetaketu returned to his father sorrowfully and described to him what had taken place.

Then Āruni went to the king, who said to him: "Sir, ask as a boon such things as men possess." The brāhmin said to him: "May such things as men possess remain with you! Repeat to me those words which you addressed to my boy." The king was disturbed. He said to Āruni: "Remain with me for some time." Then he added: "As to what you have just asked of me, sir, this knowledge has not gone to any brāhmin before you. That is why, in ancient times, all over the world, the

kshattriyas were the sole instructors in this knowledge." Finally the king gave instruction to his brāhmin disciple in what is known as the "knowledge of the Five Fires," which deals with the soul's rebirth following death. This had hitherto been a secret confined to the kshattriyas. He who acquired this knowledge, said the king, was not defiled by association with vile persons; he remained pure and clean and would gain the world of the blessed.

Section two of the sixth chapter of the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* also tells of the teaching of the knowledge of the Five Fires by Pravāhana Jaivali to Āruni, and in the *Kaushitaki Upanishad*, chapter one, we read that the kshattriya king Chiira, belonging to the line of Gārga, imparted the same knowledge to the same brāhmin sage.

Let us now return to the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*. In chapter two, section one, the kshattriya king of Benares, Ajātaśatru, was approached by the proud brāhmin Bālāki, who said: "I will tell you about Brahman." The king begged him to go on. Bālāki described the attributes of Brahman as reflected in such objects as the sun, the moon, lightning, ākāśa, the wind, fire, water, and a mirror.

"Is this all?" Ajātaśatru asked.

"This is all."

"By knowing this much one cannot know Brahman," said the king. The brāhmin was humbled. "I approach you as a student," he said.

"It is contrary to usage," said the king, "that a brāhmin should approach a kshattriya with the thought that the latter might teach him about Brahman. However, I shall instruct you." Then the kshattriya Ajātaśatru taught the brāhmin Bālāki the oneness of jiva and Brahman by explaining the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep.

This story is repeated in the *Kaushitaki Upanishad*, chapter four.

In the *Chhândogya Upanishad*, fifth chapter, section eleven, the story is told of five great brāhmin householders, all well versed in the Vedas, and another erudite brāhmin, Āruni, who came to the kshattriya king Kaikeyi Aśvapati for the knowledge of Vaiśvānara Ātman (the Universal Self). When they arrived, the king showed respect to them separately, and next morning said to his honoured guests: "In my kingdom there is no thief, no miser, no drunkard, no brāhmin without a sacrificial altar in his house, no ignorant person, and no adulterer—not to speak of adulteress. Sirs, I am about to perform a sacrifice. Please remain with me, and I shall bestow on each of you as much wealth as I should give to a priest." They answered: "A man should

state the purpose for which he has come. At the present time, you are the one who possesses the knowledge of the *Vaiśvānara Ātman*. Please give us instruction." "Tomorrow," said the king, "I shall give you my reply." Next morning the brāhmins approached him, like disciples, carrying fuel in their hands, and received the instruction for which they had come.

One more illustration. It is told in the seventh chapter of the *Chhândogya Upanishad* that Nārada once came to the kshatriya Sanat-kumāra and humbly begged him for instruction. Sanat-kumāra said: "Please tell me what you know; after that I shall tell you what is beyond." The learned Nārada enumerated the subjects that he had studied. These included, among others, the Vedas, mythology, grammar, the science of numbers, the rules of sacrifice for the ancestors, the science of portents, logic, ethics, etymology, the science of pronunciation and prosody, the science of demons, the science of weapons, astronomy, the science of serpents, and the sciences of perfume-making, dancing, and singing. "But sir, for all of this," concluded Nārada, "I know only the mantras, the sacred words, and not the Self. I have been told by such men as yourself that he who knows the Self overcomes grief; I am in grief. Good sir, assist me beyond this grief." Thereupon Sanat-kumāra began to lead Nārada, step by step, to the Knowledge of Brahman. Sanat-kumāra said: "Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else—that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else—that is the finite. The Infinite is immortal; the finite, mortal."²³ "The Infinite," continued the king, "is, indeed, below, above, behind, before, to the right, and to the left. It is, indeed, all this."²⁴ Thus it was that the venerable Sanat-kumāra revealed to Nārada, when the impurities of his heart had been removed, "that which lies beyond darkness."²⁵

It is apparent from all of this (and this is not by any means an exhaustive list of the possible citations) that the kshatriyas exerted a profound influence on the teachings and teachers of the Upanishads. They were versed in rituals, in the mysteries of rebirth, in the identity of jiva and Brahman, and in the Knowledge of the Infinite, which is the culmination of the spiritual wisdom of the Indo-Āryans. This, as we have said, has led certain eminent Vedic scholars of the West to con-

²³ VII. xxiv. 1.

²⁴ VII. xxv. 1.

²⁵ VII. xxvi. 2.

clude that the Upanishads, containing the Knowledge of the Self, must be a later development by the kshatriyas in reaction against the rituals and sacrifices of the Mantra and Brāhmana portions of the Vedas: the brāhmins, occupied solely with the details and paraphernalia of sacrifice, were ignorant of the philosophy of the Self and so had to learn Self-Knowledge from the teachers of the military caste.

Such a conclusion, however, is hardly valid. It is true, indeed, that, according to Advaita Vedānta, the Knowledge of Brahman and the performance of sacrifices cannot coexist. They are incompatible. He who has realized the oneness of jiva and Brahman and the unreality of the relative world cannot participate in Vedic sacrifices, the aim of which is to enable the performer to enjoy happiness in heaven. However—and this is the great point—sacrifices and the Knowledge of Brahman are meant for two different classes of aspirants. A sannyāsin, who has experienced the transitory nature of enjoyment, is qualified for Self-Knowledge; but such enlightened ones do not constitute the major portion of society. It is the duty of others, who belong to the first three stages of life and who identify themselves with the body and mind and seek material happiness, to engage in sacrificial action. This is a basic principle, understood and taken for granted by every member of Hindu society. It is neither necessary nor possible for a sannyāsin to perform sacrifices. To suppose that there were among the brāhmins no sannyāsins who were endowed with Self-Knowledge would be wrong. The fact is that as there were both illumined and unillumined persons among the kshatriyas, so there were among the brāhmins those who were devoted to sacrifices and also those who cultivated the Knowledge of Brahman. The passages of the Upanishads that condemn sacrifices and other actions cannot possibly apply to the performers of sacrifices; for they are still householders. Such passages were directed to, and can apply to, sannyāsins alone.

As already stated, according to the Vedic tradition, the Lord alone is the source of Vedic knowledge. He is, indeed, the embodiment of that knowledge. At the beginning of a cycle He reveals it for the protection of creation, making it known through the pure hearts of the rishis. Rishis, according to the Vedas, are highly spiritual beings who attained perfection in previous cycles but have assumed human bodies in the new creation to become divine instruments for the propagation of the wisdom of the Vedas. Kapila, Vyāsa, and Vaiśiṣṭha belong to this number. Then, as time goes on, the Vedic knowledge is dissem-

inated through a succession of competent teachers. The *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* supplies several genealogical tables of such Vedic seers.²⁶ There were a number of kṣatriyas among the rishis, and the brāhmins, eager to acquire their knowledge, accepted discipleship under them, in accordance with the well-known Hindu maxim that a superior knowledge should be learnt even from a person of inferior rank.

THE VEDIC KNOWLEDGE

The knowledge that was prized most in ancient India by the rishis was known as Vidyā. As a result of this Vidyā, or Knowledge of Reality, one attains Bliss and Immortality. It is quite different from ordinary knowledge, which is the product of the intellect. Vidyā is a supersensuous and supramental experience.

According to the *Mundāka Upanishad*, one should acquire two forms of knowledge: the aparā (lower) and the Parā (Higher). The lower consists of the four Vedas (that is to say, their ritualistic portions) and their six auxiliaries. It deals with the phenomenal universe. The importance of the lower knowledge was admitted by the rishis. It is conducive to a man's material welfare; but its results are impermanent.

The Higher Knowledge is that by which the Imperishable Substance is known. This Imperishable Substance was given the name of Brahman by the Indo-Āryan seers; hence the Higher Knowledge was also called Brahmanvidyā, the Knowledge of Brahman; and this is the knowledge to which was given the general name Upanishad. Brahmanvidyā was regarded as the foundation of all other forms of knowledge—*śarvavidyāpratiśthā*. Highly treasured by the rishis, it was zealously guarded by them; for they regarded it as more precious than the earth filled with riches. The secret of Brahman could be transmitted only to a qualified disciple. "He who meets with a teacher to instruct him obtains the true knowledge."²⁷ "Only the knowledge that is learnt from a teacher leads to the Highest Good."²⁸ The qualifications of the aspirant have already been described. "If these truths have been told to a high-souled person who feels supreme devotion for God, and for his guru as for God, then they will shine forth—then they will shine forth indeed."²⁹

The actual experience of Brahman, which is the culmination of the

²⁶ *Br. Up.* II. vi; IV. vi; VI. v.

²⁷ *Chh. Up.* VI. xiv. 2.

²⁸ *Chh. Up.* IV. ix. 3.

²⁹ *Śvet. Up.* VI. 23.

Higher Knowledge, requires extremely austere disciplines. Only the great renouncers known as paramahansas, belonging to the highest order of sannyāsins, can gain this complete Knowledge of Brahman. For Brahman cannot be perceived or comprehended by the senses or by the intellect that depends on them. Only yoga can give a man that subtle depth of understanding by which the supramental truths can be apprehended. The rishis were adept in yoga. That is why their hearts were open to the secrets of creation and the universe.

The methods of the modern physical sciences for the discovery of truth are based upon a different notion of how to search than that which directed the rishis in their realization of Brahman. A scientist seeks to understand the universe through reason based on the knowledge derived from the sense-organs. But the powers of the senses are limited. Therefore he utilizes the aid of various instruments. With the help of the telescope he brings a very distant object within the range of his vision; with the help of the microscope he immensely magnifies a minute object. Similarly other instruments come to the scientist's assistance. The technicians of science are busy, day and night, inventing new instruments by means of which to strengthen and intensify the powers of the senses.

But there exist minute things in the world that cannot be detected even by the most powerful electronic microscope. And the universe is so vast and widespread that its remotest objects would not come within a man's ken even if the largest telescope known to us were to be magnified a million times and directed toward them. The final secrets of the universe will for ever remain unrevealed to physical scientists; for intellect, aided by the senses, is the only means employed by them in their quest for understanding.

The rishis, on the other hand, did not entirely depend upon reason, as this word is usually understood. They developed another faculty of understanding, which is called bodhi, or deeper consciousness. The seeker of Brahmanvidyā awakened the subtle power of the mind and senses by means of concentration and self-control. By withdrawing the senses from outer objects, he made the scattered mind one-pointed. This practice of concentration presently endowed it with keenness, depth, and a new intensity, and as the power of concentration increased, the seeker became aware of deeper phases of existence. Instinct, reason, and intuition, or higher consciousness—the three instruments of knowledge—all are differing states of the same mind. Hence a lower state can

be developed into a higher. The means to this end, however, are not external instruments but appropriate disciplines directed within.

The Vedic teacher prepared the soil of his disciple's mind before giving him any instruction regarding Brahman. Moreover, there were occasions when the instruction given was not oral. An ancient Sanskrit text says: "The teacher explains in silence and the disciple's doubts are resolved." When a pupil approached the preceptor for instruction, often he would be asked to meditate on the problem and seek the answer from within his own self. And so we read in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*⁸⁰ that Bhṛigu came to his father Varuna and asked: "Revered sir, teach me Brahman." Varuna did not give him a direct reply; he asked the boy to practise meditation and austerities. Bhṛigu followed this advice and came to the conclusion that food alone was Brahman. He was asked to meditate again. This time he realized that prāna alone was Brahman. His father exhorted him to concentrate further. At last the nature of Brahman was revealed in Bhṛigu's heart and he realized that Brahman is Anandam, Bliss Absolute.⁸¹

The Upanishads teach the truth—unknown to the sense-organs—regarding living beings (jivas), the universe (jagat), and God (Ishvara). They describe the nature and attributes of Brahman, its reality and manifestations, its powers and aspects. They also describe the creation, preservation, and ultimate dissolution of the universe, and the changes and modifications of nature (prakriti). Furthermore, the Upanishads deal with the development of the individual soul (jiva), its evolution and its destiny, its bondage and its freedom. The relationship between matter and Spirit, between God, the universe, and living beings, also belongs to the subject matter of the Upanishads. These concerns relate to a supersensuous realm unknowable to a man's everyday state of consciousness. Yet the weal and woe and the good and evil of a man depend, in a special manner, upon his knowledge of these things. For man is rooted in a reality far deeper than is apparent to the senses. Just as only a small portion of an iceberg is visible, so only a small portion of man is available to the senses, no matter how they may be magnified. The solution of many of our most vital problems must come, therefore, from regions beyond the scope of the ordinary faculty of reason.

Is there a soul apart from the body? What happens to the soul after the death of the body? If a soul survives the destruction of the body,

⁸⁰ III. i.

⁸¹ *Tā. Up.* III. vi.

does it ever return to earth? Is a man responsible for his good and bad action? What is the goal and purpose of human life?

Our conduct and work depend upon our answers to these questions. And yet we cannot answer them intelligently with an intellect aided only by the senses.

Or again: Does God exist? Is God just and compassionate? Or is He unconcerned about man, regarding him with indifferent eyes? Is God endowed with a form or is He formless? Has He attributes or is He attributeless? Is He immanent in the universe or is He transcendent? Or is He both? Is the universe real or unreal? Does it exist outside man's mind or is it a figment of his imagination? Is the universe beginningless or has it a beginning? Has the Godhead become the universe or has He made it, like a watch, or is the universe a mere appearance superimposed upon the Godhead through an inscrutable illusion of some kind, like a mirage upon a desert? And if the universe is not unreal, is it finite or infinite?

An inquiring mind longs to find satisfactory answers to these philosophical questions; but there is no human means to satisfy such a longing. Only the Knowledge of Brahman can break the "fetters of the heart" and solve all doubts. This is the Hindu view. That is why the Lord Himself promulgated this Knowledge in the world through the rishis. The more a man's intelligence deepens, the more his heart is made pure and his mental horizon widens, the more will he understand and appreciate their teachings, as preserved in the Vedas and Upanishads.

One can hardly exaggerate the influence of the Vedas upon the individual and collective life of the Hindus. Since the days of their greatness, both the political and the religious life of India have undergone tremendous changes. Many aggressive races have entered the country from outside and been absorbed in this melting-pot; other powerful cultures have retained their individual traits, like the ingredients in a huge salad-bowl. Foreign conquerors have sought, by various means, to impose their customs and ideals upon Hindu society. Nevertheless, through all these vicissitudes, the Hindu world as a whole has retained its loyalty to the Vedas and still recognizes them as the highest authority in religious matters.

The outer forms of the Hindu religion have certainly changed. Modern Hindus do not perform sacrifices like their ancestors. The worship in the temples has been influenced by the Smritis and the Purānas.

Tantra has also left its impression upon the worship in many parts of the country. Yet underlying all of this there are certain fundamental truths, taught in the Upanishads, to which the Hindus have always adhered. It is this flexibility of the Hindu mind in adapting itself to the demands of changing circumstances, while remaining true to the immutable ideals of religion, that accounts for the marvellous vitality and the enduring character of the spiritual culture of India. Even now the Vedic rituals are observed at the time of birth, marriage, death, and other important occasions of a man's life. Every orthodox Hindu belonging to the three upper castes recites, three times a day during his prayers, the same selections from the Vedas which his forbears repeated five thousand years ago, while his daily obligatory religious devotions are the remnants of similar obligatory sacrifices of the Vedic period.

Indian philosophy is divided into two classes: orthodox and heterodox. The orthodox philosophy is, again, subdivided into six groups. These groups are called orthodox because they rest upon the Vedas, not because they accept the idea of a Creator God. The Sāṃkhya philosophy, one of the orthodox systems, does not believe in God as the Creator of the universe. Jainism and Buddhism, on the other hand, are called unorthodox because they do not accept the Vedas as their authority. Yet they, too, have incorporated in their systems many of the Vedic doctrines. Thus the Vedas have influenced every vital phase of Hindu life. The Smritis and other canonical laws, which govern the life of a Hindu, derive their validity from the Vedas. In Hindu society the laws that regulate the inheritance of property, adoption of children, and other social, legal, domestic, and religious customs, claim to derive their authority from the Vedas. Hindu society has always drawn its power and vision from the spiritual experiences of its ancient seers. Under the crust of the many superstitions of the present-day society, the penetrating eye can still discern the shining core of the Vedic wisdom.

Yet this wisdom, the Knowledge of Brahman, is not the monopoly of any country, sect, or race. It was developed in a special manner on the banks of the Ganges and the Indus by the Indo-Āryan seers; nevertheless, like Brahman Itself, Brahmanvidyā is universal. It belongs to all peoples and all times. It is the universal truth that is the common essence of all religions and faiths.

DISCUSSION OF BRAHMAN IN THE UPANISHADS

THE INDO-ĀRYAN THINKERS, as early as the times of the Rig-Veda, recognized the eternal Unity of Existence which "holds in its embrace all that has come to be." This Unity pervades the universe and yet remains beyond it. All objects, animate and inanimate, are included in It. Gods, men, and subhuman beings are parts of It. As the unchanging Reality behind the universe, It was called Brahman by the Hindu philosophers; and as the indestructible Spirit in man, It was called Ātman. Brahman and Ātman, identical in nature, were the First Principle.

Derived from a root which means "to expand," the word Brahman denotes the Entity to whose greatness, magnitude, or expansion no one can put a limit or measure. The word Ātman is used to denote the immutable inner Consciousness, which experiences gross objects during the waking state, subtle objects during the dream state, and during dreamless sleep, when the subject-object relationship ceases to exist, an ineffable bliss. This is the unchanging and transcendental Consciousness in man, present in his every act of cognition, no matter what the level or state of the experience.

Bādarāyana Vyāsa, in the *Brahma Sūtras*, describes Brahman as that "from which proceed the origin, the sustenance, and the dissolution" of the universe. He further states that the Vedas are the source of this Knowledge of Brahman, and that in Brahman all Vedāntic texts find their agreement and harmony. It is Brahman alone that appears as the universe. We read in the Upanishads: "All is, indeed, Brahman"; "The soul is Brahman"; "Brahman is Consciousness and Bliss"; "There is no multiplicity whatsoever."

THE TWO ASPECTS OF BRAHMAN

The Upanishads describe Brahman as having two aspects: the one devoid of any qualifying characteristics (*nirviśeṣa*) and the other

endowed with qualities (savīśha). The former is called also the Supreme Brahman (Para Brahman), while the latter is called the Inferior Brahman (Apara Brahman). The *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad* describes the two forms as "gross and subtle, mortal and immortal, limited and unlimited, defined and undefined."¹

When Brahman is said to be devoid of qualifying characteristics what is meant is that the Supreme Brahman cannot be pointed out or described by any characteristic signs; It is not to be comprehended by means of any attributes or indicative marks. For this reason It is called the unqualified (Nirguna) and unconditioned (Nirvikalpa) Brahman; It is devoid of any limiting adjunct (nirupādhi).

The Inferior Brahman, on the other hand, can be described by certain characteristic signs and recognized by virtue of its attributes and proper marks. "Brahman," states Sankarāchārya in his commentary on *Brahma Sūtras* I. i. 2, "is apprehended under two forms: in the first place, as qualified by limiting conditions owing to the multiformity of the evolutions of name and form; in the second place, as being the opposite of this, that is to say, as being free from all limiting conditions whatever. Compare," says he, "the following passages: 'For where there is duality, as it were, then one sees another; but when only the Self is all this, how should one see another?'² 'Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else—that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else—that is the finite. The Infinite is immortal; the finite, mortal.'³ The wise one who, having produced all forms and made all names, sits calling [things by their names].⁴ 'Who is without parts, without actions, tranquil, faultless, taintless, the highest bridge to Immortality—like a fire that has consumed its fuel.'⁵ 'Not this, not this.'⁶ 'It is neither gross nor minute, neither short nor long.'⁷ These passages, with many others, declare Brahman to possess two forms, according as It is the object either of Knowledge or of ignorance (avidyā)."

A striking passage regarding the attributeless Brahman declares: "It is neither gross nor minute, neither short nor long, neither redness nor

¹ *Br. Up.* II. iii. 1.

² *Br. Up.* IV. v. 15.

³ *Chh. Up.* VII. xiv. 1.

⁴ *Tat. Ar.* III. xi. 7.

⁵ *Svet. Up.* VI. 19.

⁶ *Br. Up.* II. iii. 6.

⁷ *Br. Up.* III. viii. 8.

moisture, neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor ākāśa, unattached, without savour or odour, without eyes or ears, without vocal organ or mind, non-luminous, without vital force or mouth, without measure, and without interior or exterior."⁸ The Inferior Brahman, Brahman with positive attributes, on the other hand, has been described as He "whose body is spirit, whose form is light, whose thoughts are true, whose nature is like ākāśa, from whom all works, all desires, all odours, and all tastes proceed."⁹ The Upanishads tend to designate Brahman with attributes by the masculine "He," and the attributeless Brahman by the neuter "It."

But what is the final conclusion of the Upanishads concerning the ultimate nature of Brahman? Is the ultimate Brahman devoid of attributes or is It endowed with them? Sankarāchārya affirms that the purpose of Vedānta is to establish the attributeless Brahman as Ultimate Reality. He states, in his commentary on *Brahma Sūtras* III. ii. 11, that though Brahman has been described in the Upanishads as both Nirguna and Saguna, yet the goal of the scriptures is to uphold the unconditioned and attributeless Brahman as the Supreme Truth, and not the other; for the Upanishads, everywhere, when attempting to describe the ultimate nature of Brahman, have spoken of It as free of all attributes—for example, in such passages as the following: "Which is soundless, intangible, formless, undecaying."¹⁰

Rāmānuja, the chief exponent of the Qualified Non-dualistic School of Vedānta, declares, on the other hand, that the goal of the scriptures is to demonstrate the ultimate reality of Brahman as endowed with benign qualities only and free from all blemish. Sankarāchārya, therefore, stands as the upholder of an unconditioned and attributeless Brahman, while Rāmānuja represents the belief in a Brahman abounding in blessed attributes.¹¹

Which is the true purport of Vedānta? We shall attempt to show, in the following pages, that Brahman is one and without a second and that the same Brahman has been described in two ways from two points of view. The one may be called the empirical or ordinary (vyāvahārika) point of view, and the other, the real or transcendental (pāramārthika).

⁸ *Br. Up.* III. viii. 8.

⁹ *Chh. Up.* III. xiv. 2.

¹⁰ *Ka. Up.* I. iii. 15.

¹¹ There are other schools of Vedānta. One, for example, propounded by Nimbārka, says that there are in Brahman both non-duality and duality (dvaitadvaita), and that the two aspects are equally real.

The first is upheld by those who regard the world as real and therefore describe Brahman as its omnipotent and omnipresent Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer, such a Brahman is, to be sure, Saguna, endowed with attributes. But according to the opposite opinion, the world of names and forms is finally unreal and only Brahman exists. All that is perceived anywhere is Brahman alone, and this Brahman is unconditioned, free from all qualities or attributes. Therefore there can be, in truth, no such thing as a Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer of the universe, endowed with omnipotence, omniscience, and other qualities. From this point of view Brahman is Nirguna. Thus the same indefinable Reality is described in two different ways according to the point of view of the perceiver.

In order to show that Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman refer essentially to the same Reality, the Upanishads sometimes use in the same verse both neuter and masculine gender in connexion with Brahman: "Which otherwise *cannot be seen or seized, which is without origin and qualities, without eyes and ears, without hands and feet; which is eternal and omnipresent, all-pervading and extremely subtle; which is imperishable and is the source of all beings.*"¹² The italicized words in the original text are in the neuter gender, and the rest are in the masculine.

What we shall see is that Brahman, in association with *mâyā*, which is its own inscrutable power, becomes the Creator of the universe and is then called Saguna Brahman. It is then also known as the Great Lord (Maheshvara) and Bhagavān. "The non-dual Consciousness, which the knower of Truth describes as the Reality (Tattvam), is also Brahman and the Supreme Soul (Paramātman) and God (Bhagavān)."¹³

NIRGUNA BRAHMAN

Nirguna Brahman, as has already been stated, cannot be characterized by any indicative marks, qualities, or attributes. Therefore it is not describable by words. "From whence all speech, with the mind, turns away, unable to reach it."¹⁴ Sri Ramakrishna has said that all the scriptures and statements of holy men have been polluted, as it were, like food that has come in contact with the human tongue; Brahman alone

¹² *Mā. Up. I. i. 6.*

¹³ *Bh. I. ii. 11.*

¹⁴ *Tat. Up. II. iv. 1.*

remains unpolluted, because no tongue has been able to touch it. Brahman "cannot be attained by speech, by the mind, or by the eye."¹⁵ That is why the attributeless Brahman is explained sometimes by silence. Sankara declares, in his commentary on *Brahma Sūtras* III. ii. 17, that Bādhva, being questioned about Brahman by Bāshkalin, explained it to him by silence. "He said to Bāshkalin: 'Learn Brahman, O friend,' and became silent. Then, on a second and third questioning, Bādhva replied: 'I am teaching you indeed, but you do not understand. Silence is that Self.'"

The impossibility of knowing Brahman by any human means has been most emphatically expressed in the famous formula employed by Yājñavalkya: *Neti, neti*—"Not this, not this." "He, this Self, is that which has been described as 'Not this, not this.'"¹⁶

In describing the attributeless Brahman, the Upanishads employ, usually, the technique of negation:

"Which otherwise cannot be seen or seized, which has no root or attributes, no eyes or ears, no hands or feet; . . . which is imperishable and the source of all beings."¹⁷

"Turiya (the attributeless Brahman) is not that which is conscious of the internal (subjective) world, nor that which is conscious of both, nor that external (objective) world, nor that which is conscious of both, nor that which is a mass of sentiency, nor that which is simple consciousness, nor that which is insentient. It is unperceived [by any sense-organ], not related [to anything], incomprehensible [to the mind], uniferable, unthinkable, indescribable."¹⁸

The Upanishads abound in passages like the above. They all mean that Brahman is totally indescribable by the tongue and incomprehensible to the mind. Ultimate Reality is neither sun nor moon, neither star nor planet, neither god nor angel, neither man nor animal; it is not earth, water, fire, air, or space; it is not an object of sensation; it is completely different from all that is expressed by the tongue or conceived of by the mind.

We read in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad* that the learned and proud Bālaki approached King Ajātaśatru and said: "I will tell you about Brahman." He gave twelve descriptions of Brahman as the Soul (Purusha) in the sun, the moon, lightning, space, the wind, fire, water,

¹⁵ *Ka. Up. II. iii. 12.*

¹⁶ *Br. Up. IV. iv. 22.*

¹⁷ *Mā. Up. I. i. 6.*

¹⁸ *Mā. Up. 7.*

and so on; but each time he was told that these deities occupy subordinate positions in the whole of nature. The king then instructed Balāki about Brahman through the illustration of deep sleep, which is the negation of all attributes and is, at the same time, the source of the positive experiences of the waking and the dream states.¹⁹

A great school of Buddhist philosophers has described Ultimate Reality as the Void (Śūnyam). A tangible object, a fruit for instance, is only a combination of attributes, such as colour, smell, taste, or touch. If these are eliminated, one by one, what remains is the Void of the Buddhists and the Brahman of the Vedāntists. Vedānta emphasizes the unknowability and indescribability of Ultimate Reality. Though unknown and unknowable, Brahman is yet the eternal "Knower of knowing" and also the goal of all knowledge. It is the Consciousness that functions through the senses but cannot be known by them. "How can you know the eternal Knower?" "It is different from the known; It is above the unknown."²⁰ Brahman is neither the subject nor the object; It is neither the knower nor knowledge nor what is known; It is neither the seer nor the seeing nor what is seen; It is neither gross nor subtle, neither great nor small, neither being nor non-being, neither happiness nor unhappiness, neither mind nor matter. It is beyond all notions of substance and attributes. Nothing whatsoever can be predicated of It. Yet the search for Brahman is not futile. The Upanishads reiterate that Its realization is the supreme purpose of life: "Having realized Ātman, . . . one is freed from the jaws of death."²¹ It is the Supreme Unity of all contradictions: in It alone all differences are harmonized. "That which you see as other than righteousness and unrighteousness, other than all this cause and effect, other than what has been and what is to be—tell me That."²²

Sometimes the Upanishads ascribe to Brahman irreconcilable attributes in order to deny in It all empirical predicates and to show that It is totally other than anything we know. "That non-dual Ātman, though never stirring, is swifter than the mind. The devas cannot reach It, for It moves ever in front. Though standing still, It overtakes others who are running."²³ "Though sitting still, It travels far; though lying down, It goes everywhere. Who but myself can know that luminous

¹⁹ *Br. Up.* II. i.

²⁰ *Ke. Up.* I. 4.

²¹ *Ka. Up.* I. iii. 15.

²² *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 14.

²³ *Ik. Up.* 4.

Ātman who rejoices and rejoices not?"²⁴ Brahman is often described as "subtler than an atom and greater than the great." The two attributes, though opposed to each other, are valid from the relative standpoint: Brahman is the essence of a subtle as well as of a gross substance. But these attributes do not apply to the Absolute Brahman.

The opposing predicates in the above-mentioned passages are ascribed to Brahman in such a manner that they cancel each other and leave to the mind the idea of an indefinable Pure Consciousness free of all attributes. Pure Consciousness in association with material upādhis appears to possess empirical qualities such as nearness and distance, or rest and movement, like a transparent crystal that assumes different colours in the presence of flowers of differing hue.

THE UNCONDITIONED (NIRUPĀDHKA) BRAHMAN

Brahman is devoid of upādhis, or limiting adjuncts. The entire phenomenal universe is subject to the categories of space, time, and causation; but Brahman, the Supreme Reality, is beyond. In contrast with phenomenal objects, Brahman is not in space but is spaceless. Brahman is not in time but is timeless. Brahman is not subject to causality but independent of the causal chain. "That which is not destroyed when the upādhis of time, space, and causation are destroyed, is Brahman, the immortal Reality." In describing Brahman as omnipresent, all-pervading, unlimited, infinitely great and infinitely small, the Upanishads only point out that It is absolutely spaceless.

"That, O Gārgi, which is above heaven and below the earth, which is this heaven and earth as well as what is between them, and which they say was, is, and will be, is pervaded by the unmanifested ākāśa (Brahman)."²⁵

"In the beginning Brahman was all this. He was one and infinite; infinite in the east, infinite in the south, infinite in the west, infinite in the north, above and below and everywhere infinite. East and the other regions do not exist for Him—no athwart, no beneath, no above. The Supreme Self is not to be fixed; He is unlimited, unborn, not to be reasoned about, not to be conceived."²⁶

What exists in space can be measured. But Brahman is beyond space, and therefore immeasurable. Hence It can be described equally as all-

²⁴ *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 21.

²⁵ *Br. Up.* III. viii. 7.

²⁶ *Mai. Up.* VI. 17.

pervading, great, and omnipresent, or as atomic (anu), small as the point of a needle or as "the hundredth part of a hair."

"He is my Self within the heart, smaller than a corn of rice, smaller than a corn of barley, smaller than a mustard-seed, smaller than a canary-seed or the kernel of a canary-seed. He is my Self within the heart, greater than the earth, greater than the sky, greater than the heaven, greater than all these worlds."²⁷

"The wise man, having realized the Self . . . as great and all-pervading, does not grieve."²⁸

"That living soul (Brahman) is to be known as part of the hundredth part of the point of a hair, divided a hundred times, and yet It is to be known as infinite."²⁹

Brahman, which is spaceless and immeasurable, is also indivisible. For the same reason Brahman is incorporeal and partless. "Who is without parts, without actions, tranquil, faultless, taintless, the highest bridge to Immortality—like a fire that has consumed its fuel."³⁰

All that exists in space is divisible and therefore subject to plurality. But the indivisible and incorporeal Brahman is free from plurality. "What is here, the same is there; and what is there, the same is here. He goes from death to death who sees any difference here."³¹

The timelessness of Brahman is indicated by stating that It is free from the limitations of past, present, and future. Sometimes It is described as eternal, without beginning or end; sometimes as momentary, involving no time at all. "Other than what has been and what is to be."³² "That which they say was, is, and will be."³³ "At whose feet, rolling on, the year with its days passes by—upon that immortal Light of all lights, the gods meditate as longevity."³⁴

Brahman is described as instantaneous duration, through the illustration of lightning: "They say lightning is Brahman."³⁵ "It is like a flash of lightning; It is like a wink of the eye."³⁶

Brahman is independent of causation. Causality is operative only in

²⁷ *Chh. Up.* III. xiv. 3.

²⁸ *Kat. Up.* I. ii. 22.

²⁹ *Śvet. Up.* V. 9.

³⁰ *Śvet. Up.* VI. 19.

³¹ *Ka. Up.* II. i. 10.

³² *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 14.

³³ *Br. Up.* III. viii. 7.

³⁴ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 16.

³⁵ *Br. Up.* V. vii. 1.

³⁶ *Ke. Up.* IV. 4.

the realm of becoming and cannot affect Pure Being. Brahman is not the Creator of the universe in the sense that a potter is the creator of a pot, nor the cause of the universe in the sense that milk is the cause of curds. No change is possible in Brahman; It is Itself—causeless. Therefore It is called the Imperishable (Aksharam). "It should be realized in one form only; [for] It is unknowable and eternal. The Self is taintless, beyond the [subtle] ākāśa, birthless, infinite, and constant."³⁷ In other words, Brahman is free from all the transformations of birth, death, growth, decline, increase, and decrease. "The knowing Self is not born; It does not die. It has not sprung from anything; nothing has sprung from It. Birthless, eternal, everlasting, and ancient, It is not killed when the body is killed."³⁸

BRAHMAN IS UNKNOWABLE

It has already been stated that the Supreme Brahman cannot be identified by any characteristic sign or attribute. Therefore It is declared to be indescribable in words and unknowable to the mind (avāngma-nasagocharam). How is an object known? Either by a sense-organ or by the mind. Form is the object of the eye; sound, of the ear; touch, of the skin; smell, of the nose; and taste, of the tongue. But Brahman is without form, sound, touch, smell, or taste. "His form is not an object of vision; no one beholds Him with the eye."³⁹ The mind is termed by some Hindu psychologists the sixth organ of perception; by means of it one experiences such feelings as pleasure and pain, elation and depression. The determinative faculty of the mind is called the buddhi. When an object is grasped by the buddhi, it is already conditioned by the buddhi. But the infinite Brahman is unconditioned. Therefore It is not grasped by the buddhi. The light of Brahman endows the senses and the mind with their sentience; they cannot enlighten Brahman.

To be known, a thing must be made an object. Brahman, as Pure Consciousness, is the eternal Subject; It cannot be made an object. One must presuppose Brahman in order to know objects; therefore one cannot know It as an object. Brahman, the substratum of all experience, cannot Itself be an object of experience. But, more properly, one cannot even say that Brahman is a subject; for a subject must have an object that it perceives. Nothing exists, however, except Brahman. All that can be said, then, of Brahman is that It is.

³⁷ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 20.

³⁸ *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 18.

³⁹ *Ka. Up.* II. iii. 9.

"How can It be realized in any other way than by the affirmation of him who says: 'He is?'"⁴⁰ "He by whom Brahman is not known, knows It; he by whom It is known, knows It not. It is not known by those who know It; It is known by those who do not know It."⁴¹ As long as one is conscious of the duality of subject and object, one does not know Brahman. The realization of this transcendent Absolute is an inexpressible experience in which the distinction between subject, object, and knowledge is annihilated and they become one.

Since Brahman, as the "Knower of knowing," can never become an object for us, It is called unknowable. "You cannot see That which is the Witness of vision; you cannot hear That which is the Hearer of hearing; you cannot think of That which is the Thinker of thought; you cannot know That which is the Knower of knowledge."⁴² "He is never seen, but is the Witness; He is never heard, but is the Hearer; He is never thought of, but is the Thinker; He is never known, but is the Knower. There is no other witness but Him, no other hearer but Him, no other thinker but Him, no other knower but Him."⁴³ "That which cannot be expressed by speech, but by which speech is expressed—That alone know as Brahman, and not that which people here worship. That which cannot be apprehended by the mind, but by which, they say, the mind is apprehended—That alone know as Brahman, and not that which people here worship."⁴⁴

Brahman is unknowable for still another reason: It is *bhumā*, infinite. "The Infinite (*bhumā*) is bliss; there is no bliss in anything finite. Infinity alone is bliss. This Infinity, however, we must desire to understand."⁴⁵

What is the Infinite? This is how It is described in the Upanishads: "Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else—that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else—that is the finite. The Infinite is immortal; the finite, mortal. Sir, in what does the Infinite rest? In Its own greatness—no, not even in greatness."⁴⁶

Brahman is "one and without a second"—*ekamevādvyayam*. The

⁴⁰ *Ka. Up.* II. iii. 12.

⁴¹ *Ke. Up.* II. 3.

⁴² *Br. Up.* III. iv. 2.

⁴³ *Br. Up.* III. vii. 23.

⁴⁴ *Ke. Up.* I. 5-6.

⁴⁵ *Chh. Up.* VII. xxiii. 1.

⁴⁶ *Chh. Up.* VII. xxiv. 1.

second part of this phrase ("and without a second"), qualifying the first ("one"), is important; for what it means is that Brahman is not one in the sense that the sun or the moon is one, or in the sense that the God of the monotheist is one. In such a case there is a perceiver of the oneness—which implies duality. When the non-duality of Brahman is completely realized, there is absolutely no consciousness of subject and object; the distinction between perceiver and perceived is annihilated and they become one.

Three kinds of difference are distinguished in the relative world: (1) A tree is different (*vijātya-bheda*) from a stone. (2) The oak is different (*svajātya-bheda*) from the poplar. (3) In the same tree, the blossom is different (*svagata-bheda*) from the leaf. All of these differences disappear in Brahman, which is homogeneous Consciousness without a break. That is why Brahman is unknowable.

"Because when there is duality, as it were, then one smells something, one sees something, one hears something, one speaks something, one thinks something, one knows something. [But] when to the knower of Brahman everything has become the Self, then what should one smell and by what means, what should one see and by what means, what should one hear and by what means, what should one speak and by what means, what should one know and by what means? By what means should one know That, owing to which all this is known—by what means, O Maitreyi, should one know the Knower?"⁴⁷

SACHCHIDĀNANDA (EXISTENCE-KNOWLEDGE-BLISS ABSOLUTE)

The Vedānta philosophy often describes Brahman by the term *Sachchidānanda*, a compound consisting of three words: *Sat* (Existence, Reality, or Being), *Chit* (Consciousness, or Knowledge), and *Ānandam* (Bliss). This term, however, does not appear in any of the principal Upanishads, though Brahman is often described in them by such separate terms as Reality, Consciousness, and Bliss. "He perceived that Bliss is Brahman, for from Bliss these beings are born; by Bliss, when born, they live; into Bliss they enter at their death."⁴⁸ "Brahman is Reality, Consciousness, and Infinity."⁴⁹ "Brahman is Knowledge."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Br. Up.* II. iv. 14.

⁴⁸ *Tat. Up.* III. vi. 1.

⁴⁹ *Tat. Up.* II. i. 1.

⁵⁰ *Tat. Up.* II. v. 1.

"Brahman is Knowledge and Bliss."⁵¹ The *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad* asks us to worship Brahman as Prajñā (Consciousness), as Satyam (Truth), and as Ānandam (Bliss). Nevertheless, it is only in the minor Upaniṣhads that the compound term Sachchidānanda occurs as an epithet of Brahman.⁵²

Is this epithet meant to apply to the unconditioned Nirguna Brahman, or to Saguna Brahman, Brahman with attributes? According to some, the words Sat, Chit, and Ānandam refer to Saguna Brahman; according to others, to Nirguna Brahman. The former group contends that the words are positive characterizing terms, and therefore cannot be employed in connexion with the Supreme Brahman, which is to be described, as we have already seen, only by negation. The Supreme Brahman is neither being nor non-being, neither consciousness nor matter, neither happiness nor unhappiness. "When the light has risen, there is no day, no night, neither existence nor non-existence; Siva (the Blessed One) alone is there."⁵³ Likewise, Consciousness is denied in the Supreme Brahman. It is one and without a second. Nothing exists besides. How, then, can Brahman be Consciousness, in the absence of an object? When there is duality, then one knows another; but when the Self alone is all, how should one know another?⁵⁴ In reply, it cannot be contended that the Supreme Brahman knows Itself, that It is both subject and object; for, as Sankarāchārya says, the non-dual Ātman cannot be, at the same time, both the knower and the object of knowledge, since It is partless; it is unreasonable to apply simultaneously the notion of knower and object of knowledge to what is incorporeal. And finally, for the same reasons, Ānandam cannot be an epithet appropriate to the Brahman without attributes. According to this school, therefore, the epithet Sachchidānanda can apply only to Saguna Brahman, the Great Lord (Mahēśvara), who, by means of māyā, becomes the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe.

But according to the other view, Sat, Chit, and Ānandam can very well refer to the attributeless Brahman; for these words are used, it is declared, in a negative sense. Sat indicates that Brahman is not non-

⁵¹ *Br. Up.* III. ix. 28.

⁵² *Nṛsīṃhastotaratāpini Up.* VI, VII; *Rāmānujotāpini Up.* V. 8; *Rāmānūtārāpini Up.* II; *Māt. Up.* III. 12. (The references in this note are taken from *The One Hundred and Eight Upaniṣhads*, published by the Nirnayasāgar Press, Bombay; third edition.)

⁵³ *Śvet. Up.* IV. 18.

⁵⁴ See *Br. Up.* IV. v. 15.

being; Chit, that Brahman is not nescient; and Ānandam, that Brahman is not a mere absence of pain. By such denial the positive nature of Brahman as the Absolute is affirmed.

Brahman does not exist as an empirical object—for instance, like a pot or a tree—but as Absolute Existence, without which material objects would not be perceived to exist. Just as a mirage cannot be seen without the desert, which is its unrelated substratum, so also the universe cannot exist without Brahman. Further, when the Vedāntic process of negation is followed, step by step, to its conclusion, there remains a residuum of existence, or being. No object, illusory or otherwise, could exist without the foundation of an immutable Existence; and that is Brahman. Therefore the term Sat, or Existence, as applied to Brahman, is to be understood as the negation of both empirical reality and its correlative, unreality.

The Chit, or Consciousness, of Brahman, unlike the consciousness of the mind, is not related to an object. That Chit is Absolute Consciousness, which illumines the activities of the senses and mind during their states of waking and dreaming, as well as their inactivity in dreamless sleep.

Likewise, Ānandam, or Absolute Bliss, must be understood as the negation of the happiness that we ordinarily know or experience from the contact of a sense-organ with its object. It may be likened to the bliss that accompanies deep sleep, when the distinction of subject and object is effaced and when, therefore, empirical consciousness itself ceases to function. The knower of Truth always experiences this Bliss devoid of the relationship of subject and object.

Sat, Chit, and Ānandam—Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss—then, are not attributes of Brahman, but Its very essence. Brahman is not endowed with them: Brahman is Existence itself, Consciousness itself, and Bliss itself. In the Absolute there is no distinction between substance and attributes. Sat, Chit, and Ānandam denote the same entity: when one of them is present, the other two are also present. Absolute Being is Absolute Consciousness and Absolute Bliss.

Let us see, therefore, what the Upaniṣhads have to say about these separate epithets of Brahman, since, as we have mentioned, the compound term does not appear until a later period of Vedāntic thought.

BRAHMAN AS SAT (EXISTENCE)

In describing the true nature of Brahman, the Upaniṣhads frequently use the term Satyam, which means Truth, Reality, Being,

Existence. "Brahman is Being, Consciousness, and Infinity."⁵⁵ "In the beginning, my dear, there was That only which is one only, without a second."⁵⁶ It is the True. It is the Self. And thou, O Svetaketu, art It."⁵⁷

There are, to be sure, passages in the Upanishads which state that non-being was in the beginning: "In the beginning all this was non-existent. It became existent; it grew. It turned into an egg."⁵⁸ "This universe, in truth, in the beginning was nothing at all. There was no heaven, no earth, no atmosphere. This being, that was solely non-being, conceived a wish: 'May I be.'"⁵⁹ As early as the Rig-Veda, it is said of the primeval condition of things that at that time there was *na asat, na u sat*, neither non-being nor being. But in these texts "non-being" is used in the sense of "non-manifestation." That is to say, before the creation of names and forms, these things existed only in an unmanifested state. The word *sat* (being) in the Rig-Veda signifies *empirical* being.

Non-being, in the absolute sense, cannot be in the beginning. "In the beginning, my dear, there was that only which is one only, without a second; others say, in the beginning there was that only which is not one only, without a second; and from that which is not, that which is was born. But how could it be thus, my dear? the father continued. 'How could that which is be born out of that which is not? No, my dear, only that which is was in the beginning, one only, without a second.'"⁶⁰

The word beginning (*agrē*) in the text quoted above does not denote time. It indicates Brahman in Its purest essence, unassociated with the upādhis of creation, preservation, and destruction. Brahman is beyond time. Time, space, and causality belong to māyā. Not only before creation, but always, Brahman is Pure Consciousness, one and without a second.

"Its secret name is *Satyasya Satyam*, the Truth of truth."⁶¹ This remarkable statement points out that Brahman alone is Ultimate Reality

⁵⁵ *Tat. Up.* II. i. 3.

⁵⁶ *Chh. Up.* VI. ii. 1.

⁵⁷ *Chh. Up.* VI. viii. 7.

⁵⁸ *Chh. Up.* III. ix. 1.

⁵⁹ *Tat. Br.* II. ii. 9. 1.

⁶⁰ *Chh. Up.* VI. ii. 1-2.

⁶¹ *Br. Up.* II. i. 20.

and that the reality of the tangible universe is only apparent and derivative. The empirical reality of things is derived from the Absolute Reality of Brahman, as the apparent reality of a mirage is derived from the reality of the desert. The universe is transitory, perishable, and changing. Brahman, on the contrary, is eternal, undecaying, and immutable. What is the meaning of empirical reality? An empirically real object is, indeed, non-real. Like a dream, it has not existed in the past, will not exist in the future, but exists only at the time it is perceived. Or it existed yesterday but does not exist now. Or it does not exist now but may come into being tomorrow. An object perceived in the waking state may not be seen in dreams; or what is seen in dreams may not be seen in the waking state or in deep sleep. Such an object is said to be empirically real; but it is ultimately unreal and non-existent. "That which does not exist in the beginning and in the end is necessarily so (non-existent) in the middle. Objects are like the illusions we see; still they are regarded as if real."⁶²

But Brahman alone, as Being, exists always—in the past, present, and future. "In the beginning all this was Ātman only, one and without a second."⁶³ "Ātman alone is all this."⁶⁴ The word *this* in the texts quoted above denotes the tangible universe. According to the Upanishads, this transitory and empirical universe, when free from māyā—which, as will be explained later, is the cause of the manifestation of the diversity of names and forms—is Brahman alone.

Brahman is the very root of the universe. "Seek after its root, which is the True. Yes, all these creatures, my son, have their root in the True, they dwell in the True, they rest in the True."⁶⁵ Everything perceived is, in essence, Brahman alone. "All this is verily Brahman."⁶⁶

The multiplicity that people take to be real is not truly so. "There is no second thing separate from It which It can see."⁶⁷ "Through the mind alone [purified by Knowledge] is It to be realized. There is no differentiation whatsoever in Brahman. He goes from death to death who sees in It, as it were, differentiation."⁶⁸

What, then, is this duality or multiplicity, whose reality the Upan-

⁶² *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā.* II. 6.

⁶³ *At. Up.* I. i. 1.

⁶⁴ *Chh. Up.* VII. xxv. 2.

⁶⁵ *Chh. Up.* VI. viii. 4.

⁶⁶ *Chh. Up.* III. xiv. 1.

⁶⁷ *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 23.

⁶⁸ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 19.

ishads so vehemently deny in order to demonstrate the sole Reality of Brahman? This duality is *māyā*. "If the manifold universe had real existence, one could then speak of its disappearance. This duality is only *māyā*; non-duality alone is real."⁶⁹ Duality is but an appearance, perceived as real when the Truth is hidden; but *jnāte dvaitam na vidyate*—"when the Truth is revealed, duality does not exist." All experiences in the empirical world are *māyā*. "When there is duality, as it were, then one smells something, one sees something, one hears something, one says something."⁷⁰ The phrase "as it were" (*iva*) is the very crux of the Upanishadic instruction regarding the universe and our daily life in it. Whenever the Upanishads seem to concede the reality of the world, even in the slightest degree, the phrase "as it were" is to be added; for anything "other" than Brahman is an appearance only.

In the *Chhândogya Upanishad* there is a celebrated scene in which the sage Āruni gives instruction to his son.⁷¹ "Svetaketu," says the father, "since you are so conceited, considering yourself so well read, and so stern, my dear, have you ever asked for that instruction by which we hear what cannot be heard, by which we perceive what cannot be perceived, by which we know what cannot be known?" "What is that instruction, sir?" asks the son. Āruni replies: "My dear, just as by one clod of clay all that is made of clay may be known, the difference (*vikāra*)⁷² being only a name, arising from speech, but the truth being that all is clay; and just as, my dear, by one nugget of gold all that is made of gold may be known, the difference being only a name arising from speech, but the truth being that all is gold . . . even so, my dear, is that instruction."

The effect, apart from the cause, is nothing but a name, a mere matter of words; it is, in essence, the same as the cause. We distinguish the effect from the cause by superimposing upon the latter a name and a form to serve a practical purpose of life in the empirical world. This name and form, apart from the substratum, is *māyā*. Practically, one may see a gold bracelet or a gold earring and the difference between them, but in truth they are only gold. It is the same with the ocean and its waves, which are identical in essence. Likewise, the non-dual Brahman alone appears as the universe and its objects. Just as, from

⁶⁹ *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā. I. 17.*

⁷⁰ *Br. Up. II. iv. 14.*

⁷¹ *VI. i. 3-5.*

⁷² I.e. the effect.

the standpoint of name and form, one distinguishes between a bracelet and an earring, so also, from the standpoint of name and form, one makes distinctions between the various objects of the world; yet all are, in reality, Brahman. For nothing whatsoever exists but Brahman. If a man believes that he sees something other than Brahman, he is being deceived by an illusion. What an ignorant person, a victim of *māyā*, regards as the universe, endowed with names and forms and characterized by the interplay of the pairs of opposites, is realized by the illumined soul to be the non-dual Brahman, just as the water of a mirage, which is seen by a deluded man, is realized by a knowing person to be dry sand. But *samsāra*, or the relative world, as such, the Upanishad warns, is not Brahman, or Ultimate Reality. Time, space, and causation, which are projected by *māyā*, create *samsāra* and account for its unreality. *Māyā* itself is unreal.

The perception of difference is the cause of fear and grief. "The brāhmin rejects one who knows him as different from the Self. The kshatriya rejects one who knows him as different from the Self. The worlds reject one who knows them as different from the Self. The beings reject one who knows them as different from the Self. The All rejects one who knows them as different from the Self. The All rejects one who knows it as different from the Self. This brāhmin, this kshatriya, these worlds, these gods, these beings, and this All are the Self."⁷³ "That which is the subtle essence (the root of all)—in It all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self. And thou, O Svetaketu, art It."⁷⁴

There are passages in the Upanishads which, in order to emphasize the sole reality of Brahman, describe all objects as Its manifestations or expressions. "As a spider moves along the thread [that it produces], and as from a fire tiny sparks fly in all directions, so from the Self emanate all organs and all the worlds, all gods, all beings."⁷⁵

"This Brahmā, this Indra, this Creator, all these gods, these five great elements—earth, air, space, water, fire—and all these small creatures, these other creatures, these seeds of creation, and these egg-born, these womb-born, these sweat-born, these earth-born, horses, cows, men, elephants, and whatever else breathes and moves, or flies—as well as whatever is immovable—these all are guided by Knowledge (Pra-

⁷³ *Br. Up. II. iv. 6.*

⁷⁴ *Chh. Up. VI. xii. 8.*

⁷⁵ *Br. Up. II. i. 20.*

jnānam) and supported by Knowledge. The universe has Knowledge for its eyes. Knowledge is the foundation. Knowledge is Brahman."⁷⁶ Since the apparent multiplicity is in essence Brahman, one must understand Brahman to understand the universe. "By the realization of the Self, my dear, through hearing, reflection, and meditation, all this is known."⁷⁷ The risbis of ancient times, endowed with the Knowledge of Brahman, confidently declared their omniscience. "Great householders and great knowers of the Vedas, of olden times, who knew this, declared the same, saying: 'No one can henceforth mention to us anything that we have not heard, perceived, or known.'"⁷⁸ Therefore Brahman, Absolute Being, is Ultimate Reality. "The whole universe is filled by this Person (Purusha), to whom there is nothing superior, from whom there is nothing different, than whom there is nothing smaller or larger, who stands alone, silent as a tree, established in His resplendent glory."⁷⁹

BRAHMAN AS CHIT (CONSCIOUSNESS)

Many philosophers in the East and the West have come to the conclusion that the soul is to be conceived of as something similar to reason, spirit, thought, or intelligence. The very conception of Ātman in the Upanishads implies that the First Principle of things must above all be sought in man's inmost self. The core of Yājñavalkya's teachings in the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* is that Brahman, or Ātman, is the knowing subject within us. In the fourth section of chapter three of this Upanishad, Ushasta challenges Yājñavalkya to explain "Brahman that is immediate and direct—the Self that is within all." Yājñavalkya replies with a reference to Ātman, which animates the activities of the prāna, or vital breath. Pressed further by his opponent, he answers: "You cannot see That which is the Seer of seeing; you cannot hear That which is the Hearer of hearing; you cannot think of That which is the Thinker of thought; you cannot know That which is the Knower of knowledge. This is your Self, that is within all; everything else but This is perishable."

How is the mental form of an object illumined by the light of Ātman? The image of an object is carried to the brain by a sense-organ,

for instance the eye. After passing through various sheaths (kośas),⁸⁰ it reaches at last, according to the Hindu psychologists, the sheath of the intellect. There the light of Brahman, or the Self, which is reflected in the intellect, illumines the mental state regarding the object, and thus one becomes aware of it. The mental image of the object is transformed into knowledge of the object. But this mental state is impermanent; therefore the consciousness—which in reality is Brahman—associated with the mental state appears to be impermanent.

A colourless crystal, as we have said, in the proximity of flowers of different hues appears to be blue, red, yellow, or pink. Likewise, Pure Consciousness, which is a man's inmost Self, when associated with the upādhis of different mental states, appears in different forms. One has the knowledge of a tree, a house, a stone, or any other object, and consciousness appears in association with these objects. Or one feels happy, unhappy, greedy, lustful, or angry, and again consciousness appears only in association. One believes that the Self is happy or unhappy. These emotions, however, do not pertain to the Self. They belong only to the mind, and the mind is not Ātman, though it is the instrument through which the Consciousness of Ātman manifests itself. Consciousness, which is a homogeneous entity, is in itself eternal, not discontinuous. It remains the same in past, present, and future. It does not come into existence, nor is it ever destroyed. This Consciousness is Brahman.

Generally the experiences in the waking state are different from the experiences of a dream, and these again from those of deep sleep. But the Consciousness that illumines all the three mental states never changes. The most graphic exposition of Ātman as the Knowing Subject, persisting without change through the states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, death, rebirth, and the final Liberation of the soul, is given in the third section of the fourth chapter of the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*. Here King Janaka asks of Yājñavalkya: "What serves a man for a light?" The sage first gives the simple answer that the sun serves a man for light: by the light of the sun he sits, goes out, works, and returns home. When, however, the sun has set? asks the king. The moon, replies the sage. And when the moon also has set?—Fire. And when the fire is extinguished?—The voice. But when the voice also is silenced? At last Yājñavalkya has to give the real answer. Then "the Self serves as his light. It is through the

⁸⁰ See *Self-Knowledge*, by Swami Nikhilananda, p. 81 ff.

⁷⁶ *At. Up.* III. i. 3.

⁷⁷ *Br. Up.* II. iv. 5.

⁷⁸ *Chh. Up.* VI. iv. 5.

⁷⁹ *See. Up.* III. 9.

light of the Self that he sits, goes out, works, and returns home." What is this Self? It is the infinite Consciousness dwelling within him, in the midst of his organs, and identified with his intellect. It is the light within his heart. It roams through the world of waking and dreaming, assuming the likeness of the intellect. It moves through this life and the hereafter and shares in their experiences of good and evil. In dreams it puts aside the waking body and creates a dream body. It creates dream objects: chariots, animals, and roads; pleasures, joys, and delights; lakes, pools, and rivers. The Self is the creator in the dream and Itself is the light to illumine the dream objects. It enjoys Itself in the company of women, laughing; sometimes It sees frightful things. Afterwards the Self moves into a state of deep sleep and there experiences complete rest and peace, owing to the absence of subject and object and of desires. Like a great fish swimming alternately to both banks of a river, the infinite Self moves to both these states, dreaming and waking; then, just as a hawk or a falcon flying in the sky becomes tired and, stretching its wings, proceeds, soaring, to its nest, so does the infinite Self proceed to the state of deep sleep, where It feels no desires and sees no dreams. In that state the Self has no consciousness of objects and yet is not unconscious.

But nevertheless, though moving—as it were—through the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, or through different births, the Self remains—in reality—untouched by their experiences; for "nothing cleaves to the Self."

It is the inner Consciousness, the Self, that is the real agent of perception; the senses are mere instruments. "He who knows: 'Let me smell this'—he is Ātman; the nose is the instrument of smelling. He who knows: 'Let me say this'—he is Ātman; the tongue is the instrument of saying. He who knows: 'Let me hear this'—he is Ātman; the ear is the instrument of hearing. He who knows: 'Let me think this'—he is Ātman; the mind is his divine eye."⁸¹ "Into Him, as eye, all forms are gathered; by the eye He reaches all forms. Into Him, as ear, all sounds are gathered; by the ear He reaches all sounds."

As Brahman is the essence of Being, so It is the essence of Consciousness or Light. Brahman needs no other light to illumine Itself. It is self-luminous. "It is pure; It is the Light of lights; It is That which they know who know the Self."⁸² All material objects, such as trees, rivers,

⁸¹ *Chh. Up. VIII. xii. 4-5.*

⁸² *Mu. Up. II. ii. 9.*

houses, forests, are illumined by the sun. But the light that illumines the sun is the light of Brahman. "The sun does not shine there, nor the moon and the stars, nor these lightnings, nor to speak of this fire. When He shines, everything shines after Him; by His light everything is lighted."⁸³

BRAHMAN AS ĀNANDAM (BLISS)

"He perceived that Bliss is Brahman."⁸⁴ The *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* describes Brahman as Consciousness and Bliss.⁸⁵ Bliss is not an attribute of Brahman; it is Brahman Itself. Brahman as Bliss means that Bliss is Its very being, as is Consciousness. Brahman is the immeasurable ocean of Bliss—the Bliss that knows no change. It is important to remember that no real Bliss is possible without Knowledge or Consciousness—*nātu jñānād bhinnam sukhamaṣi*.

Needless to say, the Bliss that is the very substance of Brahman is not to be confused with the happiness that a man experiences when in contact with an agreeable sense-object. Worldly bliss is but an infinitesimal part of the Bliss of Brahman, the Bliss of Brahman coming through an earthly medium.

The Bliss of Brahman pervades all objects. Without it a man could not live. "He who is self-created is Bliss. A man experiences happiness by tasting that Bliss. Who could breathe, who could live, if that Bliss did not exist in his heart?"⁸⁶ For a more vivid description: "It is not for the sake of the husband, my dear, that the husband is loved, but for the sake of the Self that he is loved. It is not for the sake of the wife, my dear, that the wife is loved, but for the sake of the Self that she is loved. It is not for the sake of the sons, my dear, that the sons are loved, but for the sake of the Self that they are loved. It is not for the sake of wealth, my dear, that wealth is loved, but for the sake of the Self that it is loved."⁸⁷ The same formula is repeated in reference to the brāhmin and kshatriya castes, the worlds, the gods, created beings, and all things. Then the magnificent passage concludes with the following exhortation: "The Self, my dear Maitreyi, should be realized—should be heard about, reflected on, and meditated upon. By

⁸³ *Mu. Up. II. ii. 10.*

⁸⁴ *Tat. Up. III. vi. 1.*

⁸⁵ *III. ix. 28.*

⁸⁶ *Tat. Up. II. vii. 1.*

⁸⁷ *Br. Up. II. iv. 5.*

the realization of the Self, my dear, through hearing, reflection, and meditation, all this [world] is known."

Brahman is Bliss because in It there is an utter absence of sorrow and also because It is Infinity. Anything that is not Brahman is full of suffering—*ato anyad ārtam*. "The Self is free from sin, free from old age, from death and grief, from hunger and thirst, imagining nothing but what It ought to imagine, and desiring nothing but what It ought to desire. He is the Highest Lord, He is the supreme Master of all beings, the Guardian of all beings, a boundary keeping all things apart and in their right places."⁸⁶

Brahman is Bliss because It is Infinity. That which is Infinity is Bliss; there is no bliss in the finite. Of the blissful Ātman it is said: "Joy is His head, satisfaction is His right side, great satisfaction is His left side, bliss is His trunk, and Brahman is His support."⁸⁷ "He who knows the Bliss of Brahman—from which all speech, together with the mind, turns away, unable to reach It—fears nothing."⁸⁸

An experience known to all, which gives an idea of the Bliss of Brahman, is the state of deep sleep.⁸¹ At that time the Self remains bereft of desire, fear, and evil. It remains completely unrelated to the world. Its bliss is due to the absence of all consciousness of duality. "As a man fully embraced by his loving wife does not know anything at all, either external or internal, so does this Infinite Being (the Self) fully embraced by the Supreme Self not know anything at all, either external or internal. . . . In this state a father is no father, a mother no mother, the worlds are no worlds, the gods no gods, the Vedas no Vedas. In this state a thief is no thief, the killer of a noble brāhmin no killer, a chandāla no chandāla,⁸² a paulkasa no paulkasa,⁸³ a monk no monk, a hermit no hermit. [When in this form he] is untouched by good work and untouched by evil work, for he has then overcome all the sorrows of his heart (intellect)."⁸⁴

There is a difference, however, between deep sleep and the experience of Brahman. The infinite Bliss of Brahman simply cannot be conceived of by the finite mind.

⁸⁶ *Mai. Up.* VII. 7.

⁸⁷ *Tai. Up.* II. 5.

⁸⁸ *Tai. Up.* II. 9.

⁸¹ See pp. 93-94.

⁸² The son of a śūdra father and a brāhmin mother.

⁸³ The son of a śūdra father and a kshatriya mother.

⁸⁴ *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 21-22.

"Now this is an examination of what is meant by Bliss (Ānandam): Let there be a noble young man who is well read [in the Vedas], very swift, firm, and strong, and let the whole world be full of wealth for him—that is one measure of human bliss.

"One hundred times that human bliss is one measure of the bliss of human gandharvas, and likewise of a great sage [learned in the Vedas] and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the human gandharvas is one measure of the bliss of divine gandharvas, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the divine gandharvas is one measure of the bliss of the Fathers, enjoying their celestial life, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the Fathers is one measure of the bliss of the devas who are endowed with heavenly bodies through the merit of their lawful duties, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the devas is one measure of the bliss of the devas who are endowed with heavenly bodies through the merit of their Vedic sacrifices, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the sacrificial gods is one measure of the bliss of the thirty-three devas who live on the sacrificial offerings, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the thirty-three devas is one measure of the bliss of Indra,⁸⁵ and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of Indra is one measure of the bliss of Brihaspati,⁸⁶ and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of Brihaspati is one measure of the bliss of Prajāpati,⁸⁷ and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.⁸⁸

"One hundred times that bliss of Prajāpati is one measure of the Bliss of Brahman, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires."⁸⁹

⁸⁵ The king of the gods.

⁸⁶ The spiritual preceptor of the gods.

⁸⁷ The first manifestation of the Absolute, known as the World Soul.

⁸⁸ *Tai. Up.* II. viii. 1-4.

In other words, the Bliss of Brahman cannot be measured by any relative standard, human or otherwise. Through the performance of the sacrifices prescribed in the scriptures, one may experience, after death, measures of this bliss in ascending degrees in the different heavenly worlds. But if one assimilates the teachings of the Vedas and renounces desire through the practice of spiritual discipline, one can enjoy those measures of bliss here on earth. Moreover, if a sage is completely free from desires, and gains Self-Knowledge, he attains the full Bliss of Brahman before death. His mind has transcended the horizon of the finite and become identical with the Consciousness of Being.

The experience of deep sleep, which is free from desires, fears, and evils, is not a permanent realization. A man loses it on awaking, whereupon he returns to the world of the pairs of opposites. Through the practice of spiritual discipline, however, one can attain the Knowledge of Brahman permanently and enjoy without interruption that superlative Bliss.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION ON NIRGUṆA BRAHMAN

We have tried above to indicate something of the nature of Nirguna Brahman, the Unconditioned Brahman or Pure Consciousness, as discussed in the Upanishads. It is a negation of all attributes and relations. It is beyond time, space, and causality. Though It is spaceless, yet without It space could not exist; though It is timeless, yet without It time could not exist; though It is causeless, yet without It the universe, bound by the law of cause and effect, could not exist. Only if one admits the existence of Nirguna Brahman as an unchanging substratum can one understand proximity in space, succession in time, and the interdependence in the chain of causality. Without the unchanging white screen, one cannot relate in time or space the disjointed pictures in a cinema film. No description of It is possible except by the denial of all empirical attributes, definitions, and relations: *Neti, neti*—"Not this, not this."

Obviously Nirguna Brahman cannot be worshipped, prayed to, or meditated upon. No relationship whatsoever can be established with It. Yet It is not altogether detached; for It is the very foundation of relative existence. It is "the setu (dike) that keeps asunder these worlds to prevent their clashing together. This setu neither day nor night crosses, nor old age, nor death, nor suffering." It is the intangible Unity

that pervades all relative existence and gives a strong metaphysical foundation to fellowship, love, unselfishness, and other ethical disciplines. Being the immortal Essence of every man, It compels us to show respect to all, in spite of their illusory masks. Though It cannot be an object of formal devotion, yet It gives reality to the gods, being their inner substance, and thus binds together all worshippers in the common quest of Truth.

Nirguna Brahman is the basis of Saguna Brahman, or the Personal God, who is immanent in the universe and conditioned by māyā. Without compulsion from outside, Brahman imposes upon Itself, as it were, a limit and thus becomes manifest as God, soul, and world. Creation, preservation, and destruction are the activities of Saguna Brahman, mere waves on the surface of the ocean, which can never touch the serene depths of the attributeless Reality. It is Saguna Brahman by whom all things have been created, and by whom, after being created, they are sustained, and into whom, in the end, they are absorbed.

SAGUNA BRAHMAN

When Brahman becomes conditioned by the upādhi of māyā and shrinks, as it were, because of that māyā, It is called Saguna Brahman, the conditioned Brahman. It must not, however, be forgotten that the conditioning is not real, but only apparent. Māyā is conceived of as Brahman's inscrutable power; in association with māyā, Brahman becomes the dynamic Creator of the universe. Rāmānuja describes the world-bewitching māyā as "a screen that hides the true nature of the Lord." When the curtain of māyā is rung down, the effulgence of Brahman seems to be dimmed; when it goes up, Brahman shines in Its fullest glory. "That non-dual God, who spontaneously covers Himself, like a spider, with the web produced from His prakriti . . ." ⁹⁹ "Know prakriti (nature) to be māyā and the Great God its Lord."¹⁰⁰

Like the ocean, Brahman appears to us in two aspects. Nirguna Brahman is without a wave or ripple. Saguna Brahman is the ocean agitated by the wind, covered by foaming waves. The tranquil ocean is sometimes agitated. Brahman, too, in essence inactive and quiescent, sometimes—as it were—is active and turbulent. But Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman are not two realities. The sea is the same, whether it is peaceful or agitated. A snake is the same, whether it remains

⁹⁹ *Śoet. Up. VI. 10.*

¹⁰⁰ *Śoet. Up. IV. 10.*

coiled up or wriggles about. *Māyā*, as we shall presently see, has no independent reality. It inheres in Brahman, as the power of Brahman. Fire's power of burning cannot be conceived of as in essence different from fire.

MĀYĀ IN THE VEDAS

The doctrine of *māyā* can be traced to the Rig-Veda. The word actually occurs there and denotes a kind of magic: "Indra, through *māyā*, assumes various forms." In the Upanishadic philosophy this concept is applied to the sphere of metaphysics and thus enlarged. Without *māyā* such ideas as the unity of existence, the reality of *Ātman*, and the unreality of the universe independent of *Ātman*, as discussed in the Upanishads, become meaningless. It was, however, later Vedāntists, like Vyāsa, Gauḍapāda, Śaṅkara, and Rāmānuja, who fully developed the doctrine and embodied it in their respective systems of thought.¹⁰¹

The Rig-Veda speaks of two orders of experience. The one is that of duality, or multiplicity, which is known to us in our everyday life through the sense-organs. The other is that of unity or non-duality, which is direct, immediate, and intuitive, that is to say, comprehended without the instrumentality of sense-organs or discursive reasoning. Multiplicity is said to be impermanent, finite, and circumscribed by a beginning and an end. It is depreciated by the Vedic seers as the source of grief, evil, and suffering. Non-duality, on the other hand, is eternal, infinite, immortal, and everlasting. It is identical with Absolute Reality (*Sat*), Consciousness (*Chit*), and Bliss (*Ānandam*). It is praised as the bestower of Bliss and as the Highest Good. The attainment of non-duality is the goal of spiritual evolution. Whatever reality the manifold phenomena possess is empirical and illusory, *vyañahārika*; but non-duality is *pāramārthika*, absolute and immutable.

The Rig-Veda identifies non-duality with Reality, or the First Principle. "The Reality is one: sages call It by various names."¹⁰² The *Chhândogya Upanishad* describes multiplicity as a "mere matter of words." "The One besides which there is no other."¹⁰³ "The One, inserted into the everlasting nave, in which all living beings are

¹⁰¹ See *Self-Knowledge*, by Swami Nikhilananda, p. 45 ff.

¹⁰² *Ri. I. c*kv. 46.

¹⁰³ *Ri. X. c*xxix. 2.

fixed."¹⁰⁴ "This entire universe is the Purusha alone, both that which was and that which endures for the future."¹⁰⁵

The celebrated Hymn of Creation, known as the *Nāsadiya Sukta*,¹⁰⁶ indicates that the multiple names and forms of the visible universe, prior to the state of manifestation, were in a state of non-duality:

Then there was neither Aught nor Nought, no
air nor sky beyond.

What covered all? Where rested all? In watery
gulf profound?

Nor death was then, nor deathlessness, nor
change of night and day.

That One breathed calmly, self-sustained;
nought else beyond It lay.

Gloom hid in gloom existed first—one
sea, eluding view.

That One, a void in chaos wrapt, by
inward fervour grew.¹⁰⁷

The diversity or plurality that we encounter in our daily life is *māyā*, non-existent from the standpoint of Ultimate Reality.

MĀYĀ IN THE UPANISHADS

The Upanishads reveal a systematic search, on the part of the seers, to discover the essential nature, or First Principle, of the universe. They came to the decision that the essence of things is not given in the objects as they present themselves to our senses in space and time. The entire aggregate of experience, external and internal, shows us merely how things appear to us, not how they are in themselves. Like the Greek philosophers Parmenides and Plato, who asserted the empirical reality to be a mere show, or shadow of reality, the Upanishads declared that the world is only *māyā* and that empirical knowledge does not give true Knowledge, or *Vidyā*, but belongs to the realm of ignorance, or *avidyā*. The Upanishadic philosophers, through a rigorous process of discrimination, analysed both the individual and the universe. All that does not belong to the inalienable substance of things they considered as non-Self and stripped away. The conclusion arrived at was that the "great,

¹⁰⁴ *Ri. X. lxxvii. 6.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ri. X. xc. 2.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ri. X. cxxix.*

¹⁰⁷ Surendranath Dasgupta, *Indian Idealism*, p. 4. Cambridge, London 1933.

