


Sample Excerpts From Chapter 5 of
Children of Immortal Bliss:
A New Perspective on Our True Identity
based on the Ancient Vedanta Philosophy of India
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 The Swetasvatara Upanishad

The *Swetasvatara Upanishad* is a concentrated and detailed work that distills most of the vital thought of earlier Upanishads while, at the same time, making its own inimitable contribution—as each Upanishad does—to the rich tapestry of Vedantic philosophy.

“What is that, by knowing which, all other things may be known?” That is the basic question of the Upanishads. In one way or another each one endlessly works changes on that theme: “What is the cause of this universe? ... Whence do we come? ... Why do we live?”⁴ The *Swetasvatara* and other Upanishads begin in this simple, almost innocent way. They inquire about the cause: “Time, space, law, chance, matter, energy, intelligence....” Is it all chance? Is it all a blind fortuitous conflict of atoms? Is it energy? Is it mind? We are still asking ourselves these very questions.

The Upanishads conclude—sometimes cryptically, sometimes after developing the idea at length—that none of these possibilities can be the cause. They are all effects—creations of mind in some cases, of the cosmic will in others. Time and space are adjuncts of the human mind; they have no essential reality in themselves. It is equally obvious that matter or chance cannot be the cause.

What about energy? We hear much about this today. Electronics is today’s theme. At one time a computer company had a very effective advertisement that showed a picture of energy visualized, with the caption: “Think of the computer as energy—mental energy.” Some people identify energy with the Godhead itself because that is how we think in this age. It is a step forward, certainly. Two hundred years ago people regarded the Deity as a grand machine. This was the age of Newtonian physics, which presented an essentially mechanistic view of the universe, added to which was the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, the Machine Age. People were influenced intellectually by Newton’s conception of the world, and society itself developed corresponding views of the ‘good life’. “God is like that too,” they said. The result was a mechanical God that created the world and then stepped aside to watch it run perfectly like clockwork, without doing anything more about it.

Today, in the midst of a world focused on energy, we have made a big advance over that view, but perhaps not the final advance. We have yet, for instance, to reach the point where we think of things in terms of mind and live in a mental world. Some individuals have, though, and when greater and greater numbers of people begin to think in those terms, we’ll have the Deity as Mind—yet even that is not the ultimate goal.

Energy cannot be the cause because the first thing we are aware of when we search for the origin of things is something like ourselves, a knowing entity, a conscious being. Energy is nonconscious. The nonconscious cannot be the cause of the conscious. This is the way the sages reason in the Upanishads. Matter cannot be the cause, for the same reason. And mind (intelligence they equate with mental activity) cannot be the cause because it is changeable, fluctuating constantly. The rishis go deeper than matter, than energy, than mind. Notice the gradation: matter—energy—mind.

“They are effects and exist to serve the soul.”⁵ This is the view of Vedanta: the whole universe exists ultimately to serve the soul, to give it self-knowledge.

The soul is *entombed* in the body. Thus, it forgets its origin and true nature and gradually loses all sense of its own reality. So that when we say *self-knowledge* we really mean *soul-knowledge*, the soul coming into knowledge of its own divinity.

It is the Vedantic view that the human soul, the Self, the Atman, is identical with Brahman, the Godhead. In fact, the soul’s experience in mystical realization is the ecstasy of discovering its oneness with that from which it had thought itself so distant. That is the ineffable experience, according to Vedanta. The sages found the One, the Godhead, the transcendental reality called Brahman, dwelling within, indivisible—neither existence nor nonexistence—something indescribable.

ONE WITHOUT A SECOND

The seers, absorbed in contemplation, saw within themselves the ultimate reality, the self-luminous being, the one God, who dwells as the self-conscious power in all creatures. He is One without a second.⁶

One without a second—This phrase would serve as the whole of the Upanishads if we could read in it deeply enough. We have endless food for reflection in this single thought.

One without a second. There is only one—Brahman alone in his glory, in his majesty, in his uniqueness. He is the creator of everything, the encloser of everything. The Upanishads say not only that, but that He is the existence of everything—He is existence absolute, which is the first description of the Supreme.

That means not only does this Ultimate Reality exist: It *is* existence, so we partake of that same existence. We may have many differences between us, yet the one thing we all have in common is that each of us draws from the same hidden power within us. Again, the Upanishads say that this ‘otherness’ of the Deity is only a mirage. It’s hard to separate oneself from one’s own existence.

In Hinduism, Brahman has three irreducible attributes. He is *Sat-Chid-Ananda*: existence absolute, knowledge absolute, and bliss absolute. This theme is reflected throughout the Upanishads. The Supreme is pure existence, pure knowledge or, as Buddha might say, pure truth, and It is also pure bliss or pure love.

Whereas we think love as we know it is the highest thing, the Hindus say that although love is very high, it’s a lower form of bliss; bliss is higher. How can they say that? The love that we know or feel or project is always mixed with our personalities as they are at any given moment. So the love that we project or experience unfortunately is never pure, is never the

essential thing. In our best moments love may be particularly strong and pure, but those moments are rare—and they are usually moments when we are alone.

Even in its mixed form, love is still one of the most wonderful things we have. What would it be in its unmixed form? That's what the mystic wants; he or she wants the unmixed essence only. So the mystic turns away from the many faces of love and seeks Love Itself within.

The rishis in particular were powerful examiners, extreme analysts of everything to do with religion. They accepted this and other ideas that were later set down in the scriptures as being true to their experience—not only true of the Deity but true of themselves as well. How can they postulate a description of the Deity, which is unknown by most of us, unless they had a close relationship with and intimate knowledge of It? Where did they get that from? From their own experiences of the Divine.

These sages discovered the nature of the Deity by discovering the nature of the human being first. First man, then God. That is why they have this intimate way of talking about the Deity. They start with man and then they find God in man, but man in his true essence. [Pages 37-41]

BRAHMAN: THE ABSOLUTE

Brahman is the Godhead in Vedanta philosophy, the impersonal Absolute that has become the world.

This Brahman can't be located in one place in the universe, since It is indivisible. It is the support of the heavens and of all the worlds. It is Spirit, but It is also Energy; It is Mind, and something unknowable. It has its locus in the human heart—indeed, It exists everywhere. It can only be known, however, in a higher form of life—Its divinity sleeps in the stone and the plant, stirs in the animal, wakes in the human, and knows Itself in the awakened soul. In each evolving form of this hierarchy of consciousness, the Absolute Existence has more and more opportunity to know Itself. In fact, this is the only way It does know itself—through the mirroring soul of the saint. For It is the Eternal Knower, the Eternal Subject—It cannot be an object of anybody's knowledge. It is through the reflecting mirror of that awakened soul that It becomes known to Itself.

The truth is that you are always united with the Lord but you must know this. Nothing further is there to know.⁹

We feel separate from the Supreme, but we are one with It. We must realize this truth. Vedanta says that this Indivisible Reality has become everything and filled everything. Humanity is one with It and therefore is also divine. The purpose of life is to realize that divinity.

Vedanta accepts each religion as inspired because each is pervaded by Brahman. Vedanta also accepts all the divine incarnations and major prophets as inspired; they are the messengers of Brahman.

Buddha had an experience of It—the Unutterable—and chose not to talk about what he had encountered. There are two possible reactions after an experience of the Supreme. One is to do what the Upanishads attempt: try to communicate to those who have not had the experience, in such a dazzling and tireless way that we feel that there *must* be something there and we are led to try for it ourselves. The other

response is to say nothing: the experience is inexpressible. Such an experience is beyond the comprehension of those who have not had it. Buddha refused to talk about what he had experienced, deciding instead to discuss things we can understand. His was a different approach to the same reality, and both are valid.

There can't be two ultimates. We are looking for *the* Ultimate, and one personality experiencing It may have a different interpretation from another. A very devotional type of person may be driven to sing the glories of Brahman endlessly as the *Swetasvatara Upanishad* does: "I have known beyond all darkness that great Person of Golden Effulgence... He is the great Light shining forever."¹⁰ A more austere mind—imperturbable, analytical—will perceive the Light in another dimension and will announce It differently.

The Supreme is like the light that comes through the prism in a window. The prism is turned one way, and it is a white light; another way, and it is a blue light; a third way, and we find still another color. But chiefly we want to know—*is there a Light there to begin with?* And the Upanishadic sages affirm that there is. But depending on the culture, the prophet, the age, and on many other things, the Light coming through will be described in various terms. [Pages 48-50]

4. *The Upanishads, Breath of the Eternal*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1975), *Swetasvatara Upanishad*, 187.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., 187-188.

9. Ibid., 189.

10. Ibid., 195.