

WHO ARE YOU?

**A Collection of Articles from *The Mystic's Vision*
by Swami Abhayananda
Dedicated to the Public Domain 2-25-18
(last revised, 2-22-22)**

If I Told You

If I told you that you are the one source of this universe and all beings in it,
what knowledge would you have gained?

If I told you that you are the divine Self of the entire universe, you would be
no wiser than before.

Words cannot reveal the truth to you; Self-knowledge is not made of words.
You will know the truth when it is revealed within, when the Self reveals
itself, and not before.

All my words can do is encourage you to look, to search, to examine who
you are at your subtlest core.

If the truth is to be found, it will be found in quietude at the highest reaches
of your heart and soul.

When you have surrendered yourself to the Self of all and received the
blessing of God,

Then you will know the truth of who you are. Then alone will you know the
truth of who you are.

On The Existence of God

No matter how far back in history we probe, we find that there have always
been people who have asserted the existence of a spiritual reality underlying
the apparent reality, and an equally insistent number of people who assert
that the physical appearance is all there is. They who assert the existence of
a Divine Mind of whom we all consist say that, while we each appear to be a
singular body and mind located temporarily in this particular historic place
and time, we are actually evolving manifestations of one all-pervading Spirit
or Mind, and that is ultimately who we are; That is our true Identity. It is a
question of whether we identify with the Form or the Substance: Your

physical form is the changing, evolving you; your substance is the one Spiritual reality. We might compare our situation to that of the ocean (the substance) and its waves (the forms). The distinction between the ocean and its waves is a distinction of appearance, because, in actuality, the ocean and its waves are not ultimately different. Likewise, the difference between the eternal Spiritual reality that constitutes your being, and the apparent ‘you’ that is a singular individual form is a mere distinction of appearance.

As in the case of the ocean and the waves, your form will continue to change and eventually decompose, while the substance—which is God's Energy, along with His pure, eternal Consciousness—will remain. That substance is who you are eternally, while the singular form is a transient appearance. What shall we call this eternal substance, this eternal you? We can call It God, the Divine Mind, the Self, or any number of other names. And regardless of what we call It, both the eternal substance and the transient appearance, like the ocean and its waves, are both the same stuff. The one reality is both the substance and the form, the real and the apparent, the eternal and the transient. They are different in appearance, but, ultimately, they are the same. The only real difference is that the substance is forever, while the form is but a fleeting appearance.

But how do we know that such an indivisible underlying Spirit actually exists? Many honest and intelligent people have claimed to have seen and experienced It while lifted to an elevated level of consciousness. Many others have not experienced It and can find no reason to believe that such a Spiritual reality exists. Ultimately, the answer to the question of the existence of an eternal spiritual reality underlying our individual identity lies in the content of our own personal experience. Many have not consciously experienced the reality of God during their lifetimes and remain unconvinced. Many others *have* experienced the presence of God to varying degrees through what they describe as a transcendent experience of divine Grace. Some have even experienced a clear and indubitable awareness of their eternal Identity. Ultimately, the truth becomes known, not through reason or logic, but by one's own personal experience. And that is determined, not by our own will, but by the will of the merciful One. May He grant that experience to you.

The Divine Self

We do not see the transcendent God, and yet we see His handiwork. It is only natural, therefore, that we think of God as being somewhere else, far above us, as a king is above his subjects. Since ancient times, when primitive men roamed the earth, God, the Supreme Being, has been regarded as a transcendent overlord, separate from this world and its creatures, who dwells in some distant yet ever-present heavenly realm. But what marvelous news! When He finally lifts the veil and reveals Himself to His devotee, God is seen to be all-pervasive! He is seen to be the very fabric of one's being, the sole Identity of everyone. It is this knowledge that illumined Jesus, prompting him to declare 'I and the Father are one!' This was not the result of Jesus having a unique paternity, nor was it some wild fantasy by which Jesus was deluded; it was the realization of the hidden truth by which Jesus became enlightened!

To a devoted person who calls out lovingly to His God, it is not immediately apparent that he himself is a manifestation of God; but when God reveals Himself within, that person knows his own deathless Self, his own oneness with God, and knows that nothing else exists in this world but that One. God has spread Himself out as this vast universe, and He is immediately present as our own selves, accessible through our own conscious minds. God is the life that lives you; He flows through that life in every breath. He is the joy that thrills your soul, and He is the sweet awareness of being that fills you. Remember Him and praise Him in every thought and word and know every moment that He is manifest as you, that you are nothing else but that one divine Self.

My Two I's (8-6-15, revised 9-11-21)

My present name is Swami Abhayananda, though I was given the name Stanley Ross Trout at birth. Both of these names refer to who I am as an individualized person temporarily existing in the grand illusion of time and space. But there is another 'I' that I claim as my *permanent* identity. That other *I* (what Vedantins call the *Atman* or Self) is the universal Consciousness that is the eternal foundation and support of all I's. If I refer to my temporal phenomenal self, 'I' means one thing; if I refer to my eternal

Self, ‘I’ means something else. So, as long as *I* exist in both the eternal and the temporal realm, it appears that there are two I’s. But that is only an appearance.

It is only those who have become consciously aware of the eternal *I* who are able to recognize this apparent double-identity, and to distinguish between the two I’s. Jesus, for example, on whom the religious organization of Christianity was founded, spoke frequently from the individualized temporal identity, identifying with the personal being who was born as a Jew, and lived in the community of Nazareth; but he had known his eternal ‘I’, and he occasionally spoke from that universal Consciousness identity as well, such as when he said, “I am the Light; I am above all that is manifest. Everything came forth from me, and everything returns to me. Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift a stone, and you will find me there.”¹

Many of those who do not recognize the existence of two I’s in themselves are confused by the words uttered by Jesus. ‘Well, which is he?’ they ask, ‘man or God?’ And, of course, the answer is ‘He is both!’ They are the two aspects of his dual identity, as he hinted in his statement, “I am in the Father and the Father is in me.² I and the Father are one.”³ The same is true of you—except that you are as yet unaware of your greater identity. When you do become aware of that greater Self, you will declare, as Jesus did, “Before Abraham was, *I* am.”⁴

The dual identity of Jesus as man and God was much discussed by the early Church Fathers, but they did not understand that Jesus was disclosing, not just his own personal reality, but the divine nature of all men. Though he was treated as a common preacher, Jesus was a mystic, privy to the mysteries of the divine reality, and he was revealing a metaphysical truth universally applicable to everyone.

When I reflect back on my own “mystical experience,” I am inclined to say that the words I put to paper during that experience did not originate with me, were not uttered by me, but by a Divine Self. But then, that brings up the question ‘how is it that there are two beings speaking through this one

individual?’ The answer is that there are not two beings, but rather two perspectives: one being the perspective of this time-bound individual, and the other perspective—from the one who spoke through my pen on that fateful night—was the perspective of the all-inclusive One, the universal Consciousness that we refer to as ‘God.’ They are both ‘I’. It is just that ‘I’ am experienced as both this individual consciousness and as the universal, omnipresent, Consciousness.

It was that universal, omnipresent, Consciousness that somehow overrode my individual consciousness on that November night in 1966 (by a miracle called ‘Grace’), and it was the words of that universal Consciousness that sounded in my brain and was put to paper. “I am in the clouds, and I am in the gritty soil. In pools of clear water, my image is seen.” And again, “All things move together of one accord; assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain.” These are not *my* words; they are the words of the universal *I*.

At that moment, I was keenly aware that, even on the floor of the oceans, the current that moved the tumbling grains of sand was intimately connected to every other force and particle existing in the universe. As though by the functioning of one all-inclusive Mind, everything that occurred was seen to be connected to, and related to, everything else in the universe in an organic manner.

The only thing close to a rational explanation of this appears in the words of the twentieth century physicist, David Bohm:

“The world which we perceive cannot properly be analyzed into independently existent parts with fixed and determinate dynamical relationships between each of the parts. Rather, the ‘parts’ are seen to be in immediate connection, in which their dynamical relationships depend, in an irreducible way, on the state of the whole system (and indeed on that of broader systems in which they are contained, extending ultimately and in principle to the entire universe). Thus, one is led to a new notion of unbroken wholeness which denies the classical idea of analyzability of the world into separately and

independently existent parts. We have reversed the usual classical notion that the independent ‘elementary parts’ of the world are the fundamental reality, and that the various systems are merely particular contingent forms and arrangements of these parts. Rather, we say that inseparable quantum inter-connectedness of the whole universe is the fundamental reality, and that relatively independently behaving parts are merely particular and contingent forms within this whole.”⁵

It would appear that “the unbroken whole” has Its own conscious Identity and perspective, and that each of the “particular contingent forms” also has its own conscious identity and perspective. The particular contingent forms are *contained within* the whole, but both the particular form and the whole each has its own conscious awareness. They are two, but they are one. This is why the universal Consciousness experienced in the mystical vision seems to be ‘other’ than oneself, though It is in fact one’s own greater Identity, one’s universal Self.

The above statement of David Bohm also explains how, from the perspective of the unbroken whole, all things move together of one accord, while from the perspective of each of the particular contingent forms, each one’s movement occurs individually in accordance with its own spontaneous and unaided will.

From the perspective of the unbroken whole, causality is replaced by the “inseparable quantum inter-connectedness of the whole universe.” But from the perspective of the particular contingent forms (you and I), we appear to be entirely free to choose our own actions as we will.

The fact is, there are never really *two* I’s; every soul is a manifestation of the one universal Consciousness and has no other permanent identity. That One is the only true ‘I’. But, from the time we are born into this world, we begin fashioning a false separate personal self that exists only in our minds. At

birth, each of us is given a name to distinguish each of us as a unique being, with a distinct parentage. We each bear distinctive characteristics and distinctive histories, which in turn contributes to our distinctive personalities. In this way, a soul is established, giving us a strong sense of personal individuality and uniqueness. But the fact is that we are all manifestations of the one Self, the one Consciousness, from whom and in whom all beings exist, and to whom we all owe our being.

That one Being is everyone's true Self, but in order to become aware of that universal Self, it is necessary to give some time to meditation in which you can quiet the mental urging and clamoring of your fabricated personal identity. It will help if you can focus your mind instead on a phrase or mantra that brings silence and peace to your conscious awareness. Let the breath too be calmed, and devoutly invoke the Lord of all being. When you become aware of His presence, approach Him reverently. If He is favorable to you, He will merge your awareness into His own; all remnants of your limited personal being will fade away, and you will know yourself as the one illimitable Self of all.

NOTES:

1. *Thomas, Gospel of*, 114; (trans. by Thomas O. Lambdin), from Robinson, James M., ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, E.J. Brill and Harper & Row, 1977, p. 135.
2. *John, Gospel of*, 17:25, from the New Testament of the King James Bible.
3. *Ibid.*, 8:54.
4. *Ibid.*, 8:58.
5. Bohm, David and Hiley, Basil, “On The Intuitive Understanding of Non-Locality as Implied By Quantum Theory”, London, Foundations of Physics journal, Vol. V, 1975; pp. 96, 102.

The Only One

The false ‘I’—the individual person we think we are—doesn’t really exist! It’s merely a mental phenomenon, an imaginary being. The true ‘I’—the only one who really exists—is the all-pervading Spirit. That is your only true Self, your true identity. You are That. I am That. We imagine that we have a separate and distinct identity, but it is the one Spirit alone who is living as you and as me. So—can you grasp it? When the sage asks you to inquire “Who am I?” he’s asking you to become aware of the divine Reality who is the true and everlasting identity of everyone.¹

Though you are unable at this time to know your Self as all-pervading, the truth is that you are in the clouds, and you are in the gritty soil. You are the pulse of the turtle; you are the clanging bells of joy that thrill the hearts of all who know joy. It is you that stirs in the heart as a rising song; it is your love that flows throughout the world. Here, there, everywhere, it is you alone who exists.

Whether you objectify that all-pervading Divinity as other—as ‘He’—or know that divine Self as ‘I’ within, the divine Reality is all there is in this world and beyond. ‘He’ and ‘I’ are the same. It’s true: ‘I’ and ‘the Father’ are one. Say it in your heart, and know it is true. Whatever name stirs you to remembrance of the one divine Spirit—sing that name in your heart and let the blissful awareness of His endless presence continually fill your soul.

NOTE:

1. It’s true that we come into this world individualized as separate and distinct souls. But all souls are composed of the one underlying Divinity, the all-pervading Spirit. And, in the unitive experience of the mystic, the veil of separateness is lifted, the distinct individuality of the soul is transcended, and the soul awakens to the awareness that its true and everlasting identity is the one all-pervading Divine Reality.

The I Between Us

When I first learned that God was within me, and that everything in the world around me was also God, it still seemed to me that, between the God within and the God without, there was an ‘I’, a ‘me’, that stood in the way of my vision of unity. I felt as though I was a pitcher of water in an ocean of water: there was water within and water without, but *I*, the pitcher, was there as a separate thing preventing my awareness of God. And I prayed that God would take away this *I* that veiled His omnipresence and let me know oneness in Him. And suddenly I was graced by God with the revelation that even this body, and even this *I*, is God’s own. It had been my owning of this *I* that prevented my realization that there is nothing anywhere but God. He creates the forms of this world, and He constitutes our awareness of this world. It is we who make the mistake of thinking that this body and this awareness of *I* belongs exclusively to ourselves, thus wrongly separating our perception of *I* from God.

This obscured perception is a blindness within us that tends us toward self-preference; we call it the *ego*, or ‘I’. It is a blindness that is built-in for self-protection, for self-preservation. But it blinds us to the vision of God’s all-encompassing presence, and it can only be healed with the help of God’s Grace. He reveals through divine vision that the One constitutes both *I* and God, both past and future, both life and death; and that all things move together of one accord, coordinated in God. It is this vision, born of His Grace, that rids us of the blindness under which we suffered for so long.

But beware! For this blindness—this *ego*—will continue to rise up in its attempt to corrupt your sight once again. At every corner, it awaits the opportunity to subtly reassert itself and leave you once again in darkness and confusion. Your only weapons against this enemy are silence and humility, and a constant diligence to remember the One in whom and by whom you are fashioned. Sing His name in your heart to remind you and rely on His help in your need. He will illumine your blindness, and restore you to sight, and eventually He will uplift you to wholeness in the sweetness of His eternal Light. There, no *ego* will threaten; there, you’ll need not struggle to remember. His peace and yours will be the same, all duality put behind.

As A Man Thinks

Anyone who is a student of religion is aware that, here in the West, we tend to *externalize* the Spirit, regarding God almost exclusively as 'Thou', a Being separate from and external to ourselves. But in the Eastern world, specifically in the ancient land of India, the Spirit is recognized to be the Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss that constitutes and sustains the being of every living soul; and while the Divine is often regarded in the popular Indian culture as an external Deity, and referred to as Brahman, Vishnu, or Shiva—or, generically, as *Bhagavan* (Lord), it is just as common to see the Divine *internalized* and referred to in Indian spiritual literature as the *Atman*, or the Self. This understanding of the Divine as one's deepest Self brings into clarity the necessity for the inner conformity of a man's heart and mind to that Divine Self within him and points the way to the actual spiritual realization of God as one's eternal Self.

The great Greek philosopher and mystic, Heraclitus, who lived over 500 years before the Current Era, expressed a profound truth in just three words. He said: "Character is destiny." The meaning, of course, is that we become what we become because of our good or bad qualities. Our lives are simply manifestations of our inner soul and reflect either the beauty or the ugliness of our character. In other words, we are what we think. This is a truth that has been expressed throughout the centuries; and it is a truth that has been elaborately treated in one particular Upanishad: The *Maitri Upanishad*. This Upanishad deals very thoroughly with this subject, and it explains also the nature of the soul and the means of its progress toward Self-realization. I'd like to share with you a few excerpts from this Upanishad in order to shed some light on the teachings of the ancient sages of India regarding these issues.

The *Maitri Upanishad*, like many others, is composed in the form of a dialogue. Now it should be clear that, if you're going to have a didactic dialogue, there must be one participant who is ignorant, and asks all the questions; and there must be one who is wise, to give all the answers to the questions. This dialogue is no different; it is between the wise god, Prajapati, and the ignorant, though sincere, angels who ask Prajapati:

"O Master, this body, without consciousness, is but a chariot without a driver. Who, then, is the Spirit by whose power it

becomes conscious? Who, in other words, is the driver of the chariot?"

And Prajapati answers:

"There is a Spirit who exists within the things of the world, and yet who is beyond the things of this world. He is pure Consciousness; He dwells in serenity as the Infinite, the Eternal. He is beyond the life of the body and the mind. He was never born, He never dies; He is everlasting, ever one, and self-sustaining. *He* is the Spirit whose power gives consciousness to the body. *He* is the driver of the chariot."

Prajapati continues:

"That infinite Consciousness becomes the finite consciousness of [each] man, possessing the power of discrimination and understanding, and also erroneous conceptions. He is, in truth, the great Lord, the Source of all creation, and the universal Self of all. This Spirit is Consciousness and gives consciousness to the body. *He* is the driver of the chariot."

What Prajapati says in answer to the questioning angels is not at all apparent to everyone. There are so many questions that arise in one's mind about the nature of existence, consciousness, the hereafter, etc., and where is one to find the answers? The Spirit is invisible, so how can one know that It even exists? By what means did the author of this Upanishad come by his knowledge? The Spirit cannot be seen, but It can be known by one who seeks It within his own consciousness. Prajapati explains to his listeners:

"Those sages who have known Him say that it is He who wanders on this earth from body to body, free from the good and bad effects of actions. He is free because He is free from the sense of *I*, and He is invisible, incomprehensible, concealed in His own mystery.

"He seems to act, but He does not act. He seems not even to exist; but He is Existence itself. He exists in His own being, pure, never changing, never moving, unstainable; and, in peace, beyond desires, He watches the drama of the universe. He is

hidden behind the veil of the universal appearance; but He is ever One in His own Bliss.

"The supreme Spirit is immeasurable, inapprehensible, beyond conception, never born, beyond reasoning, beyond thought. His vastness is the vastness of space. At the end of the worlds, while all things sleep, He alone is awake in eternity. Then, from His infinity, new worlds arise and awake, a universe which is an immensity of thought. The universe exists in the Consciousness of Brahman, and unto Him it returns."

This is an authentic representation of the Truth as It is seen in the mystical vision. All that Prajapati says here is correct and absolutely true; I add my verification to these declarations, for whatever it's worth, as one who has also realized their truth for himself. In the mystical experience of unity, the universal manifestation flows out from the Self and returns to the Self in a recurring cycle. It is similar to the inhalation and exhalation of a breath, which we, as humans, experience. This is the truth. One may search through all the accounts of all the mystics and find this same description given.

Apparently, the angels were completely satisfied with what Prajapati said about the supreme Spirit, for now they changed the subject, and questioned him about the individualized soul. "Master," the angel-spokesman said,

"You have spoken to us of the greatness of the Self (*Atman*), but what is the soul (*jiva*) who is bound by the good or bad effects of actions (*karmas*), and who, born again from these good or bad actions, rises or falls in its wanderings, under the sway of duality?"

Prajapati replies:

"Yes, there is indeed a soul, influenced by the elements¹, who is bound by the good or bad effects of actions, and who, born again from these good or bad effects, rises or falls in its wanderings under the sway of duality. This human soul [who is truly the eternal Self] falls under the influence of Nature (*Prakrti*) and its conditions, and thus it falls into confusion.

Because of this confusion, the soul is not aware of its own Divine nature which enables it to exist and to act. The soul is thus whirled along the rushing, muddy, stream of Nature, and becomes unsteady and uncertain. It is filled with confusion and full of desires, without concentration, and agitated with pride. Whenever the soul has thoughts of "I" and "mine," it binds itself to a limited sense of selfhood, a limited identity, just as a bird is bound in the net of a snare."

Prajapati is saying that, in truth, the Self alone exists; It is the absolute Reality. However, the Self has projected an imagined, illusory, reality ("an immensity of thought") known as *Maya* or *Prakrti*, in which the human *soul* exists. And, as the one Spirit is self-limited as an individual soul-form in this mirage, It loses the sense of Its all-pervasiveness, Its infinity, and becomes identified with an individual manifested form. Swayed by the conditions of Nature in which it finds Itself immersed, it imagines needs and desires, and becomes lost in imaginary justifications for its actions. Having lost all sense of Its unlimited Divinity, it feels enslaved and bound by Nature, which is truly Its own manifestation. Prajapati goes on to say:

"The mind of man is of two kinds: pure and impure. It is impure when in the bondage of desire, and pure when free from [worldly] desire... This entire world-illusion (*samsara*) takes place in one's own mind. Let one therefore keep the mind pure, for *as a man thinks, so he becomes*. This is the eternal mystery."

There is a very old story, which is meant to illustrate this proclivity of the Divine Self to place Itself in such an imaginary bondage; it involves the god, Indra, and the god, Shiva. According to this story, one day, Indra became bored with all the pleasures afforded him in heaven, and he decided to experience life on earth in the body of a pig. He found a large mud-hole, and he began snorting and cavorting in the mud as a pig. And he found so much pleasure in this pig-life that he mated with a sow, and he fathered a large litter of piglets. His life was very happy; he had his cool mud to lie in, and he had a mate and a lot of squealing piglets to fondly care for, and he was quite content.

Now, the other gods became upset when they learned that Indra had let all the affairs of heaven fall by the wayside while he enjoyed life as a pig on earth. So, they sent Shiva to persuade Indra to return to his rightful place in heaven. Indra refused, however; and told Shiva to mind his own business, that he was very happy where he was, thank you. Shiva tried again and again, with the same result. Finally, Shiva, in desperation, took his trident and split the pig-body of Indra from one end to the other, releasing Indra from his pitiful delusion. Immediately, Indra let out a sigh of joyful relief that he had been freed from bondage to the simple desires and satisfactions of his pig-life; and he expressed his gratitude to Shiva and the other gods too for bringing him out of that pitiable state.

We too, Prajapati is telling us, are God; we are the Divine Self of the universe. But, through becoming deluded by *Maya*, we have come to believe that we are poor, limited, finite forms whose only satisfaction is in the pitiable pleasures of the flesh. We are in the same condition as Indra in the story. Our minds keep on having dreams and fantasies without end. No matter how many times a desire is fulfilled, the mind goes on increasing desires instead of diminishing them. The mind causes you to forget your true nature, and makes you think you're something else; but you must not be fooled. The mind may go on creating universes upon universes; So, what? Let it! Continue to remain in serenity, witnessing it. For those who have no understanding, it is the devil. But, for one who understands the nature of the mind, it is only the creative effulgence, the unceasing play, of the Divine Energy. This is what Prajapati says:

"The mind is indeed the source of bondage; but it is also the source of liberation. To be bound to the things of this world: this is bondage. To be free from them: this is liberation. Indeed, if men thought of God as much as they think of the world, who would not attain liberation?"

After this, Prajapati explained to the angels how to meditate on the one divine Self:

"When a wise man has withdrawn his mind from all external things, and when he is no longer attentive even to inner sensations, let him rest in peace, free from the movements of will and desire. Since the soul has come from That which is

greater than itself, let it surrender to its Source. For it has been said, 'There is something beyond our mind which abides in silence within our mind. It is the supreme Mystery beyond thought.' Let one's mind and one's subtle body rest upon that and not rest on anything else.

"When the mind is silent, beyond weakness or distraction, then it can enter into a world, which is far beyond the mind; that is the highest state. ... As a fire without fuel finds peace in its source, when thoughts become silent, the soul finds peace in its own Source. And when a mind, which longs for Truth finds the peace of its own Source, then those false inclinations cease which were the result of former actions done in the delusion of the senses. A quiet mind overcomes both good and evil actions; in quietude, the soul is one with the Self. Then one knows the joy of eternity. As water becomes one with water, fire with fire, and air with air, so the mind becomes one with the infinite Mind, and thus attains final freedom."

This is the teaching of all the ancient scriptures and all the seers of God. See how similar, for example, is the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* on this subject:

"When all desires are in peace, and the mind, gathering all the wayward senses, turns them within, then, with reason armed with a strong will, let the seeker quietly lead the mind into the Self, and let all his thoughts be stilled.

"And whenever the unsteady and restless mind strays away from the Self, let him always lead it again and again to the Self. Supreme joy thereby comes to the yogi whose heart is stilled, whose passions are quieted, who is pure from sin; for he becomes one with Brahman." ²

Prajapati says:

"Words cannot describe the joy of the soul whose impurities are cleansed away in deep contemplation, who is one with the

Atman, his own Self. Only those who experience this joy know what it is."

That is the end of Prajapati's speech, and the end of the *Maitri Upanishad*. Its message, though, has continued through the centuries, and is reflected in countless scriptures and scriptural treatises. Listen, for example, to this affirmation of its message from the *Ashtavakra samhita*, in which Ashtavakra tells his disciple, king Janaka:

"You are neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor air, nor ether; these are but the elements of which all created forms are made. In order to attain liberation, know the Self as the witness of all these; you are Consciousness itself. If you detach your identification from the body, and rest in Consciousness, you will at once be happy, peaceful and free from bondage. You are the one observer of all, and you are always liberated. In fact, it is only your imagining yourself to be other than the one observer that constitutes your bondage. One who considers himself free is, in fact, free; and one who considers himself bound remains bound. "As one thinks, so one becomes" is a popular saying in this world—and it is very true. The Self is all pervading, perfect, pure Consciousness; It is One, free, actionless, unattached, desireless and quiet. It is the Witness. It is only through delusion [Maya] that it appears to be an individual soul-entity." ³

NOTES:

1. Before the advent of science, and the discovery of atomic structure, learned men of both East and West believed that everything was made of a combination of five primary elements: earth, air, fire, water, and ether. But today we know, of course, that none of these are truly elemental, but each so-called 'element' consists of a combination of various elementary chemical molecules which are comprised of various sub-atomic particles. These, in turn, are composed of electrical impulses, which are manifestations of the energy of God's Thought.
2. *Bhagavad Gita*, 6:24-31.
3. *Ashtavakra Samhita*

The Appearance of Duality

It is well known that the Self of man and the ultimate and transcendent Reality known as God are not two. This is the perennially acceptable view of “Nonduality”. But it must also be acknowledged that there is an *apparent* duality which has a certain phenomenal reality to it as well. For, during the “mystical experience” one experiences a noumenal and eternal ‘I’ who manifests this universe in which lives a phenomenal and temporal ‘I’. The ‘I’ is the same, yet different. The difference between the two ‘I’s is that the eternal one projected Himself as the temporal one into this world of time and space; the temporal one did not project himself into eternity.

So, God by His very *projection* of this temporal universe, establishes an *apparent* duality for those living within this projection. This is not difficult to understand: If there is a dreamer and his dream, there *appears* to be two. But are there really two? The truth is that there is still only one; the other is only an imagination, and though the consciousness in the dream seems to be ‘other’ than the dreamer, it is in fact the consciousness of the dreamer. But some would argue that ‘Nonetheless, the other *exists* as a phenomenon, and therefore constitutes a second.’ It is a question of perspective, is it not? At least we may be certain that, once the dreamer awakes and the dream is no more, then only one remains. The Nondualist would no doubt remark that there was *always* only one.

We dream-images enclosed within this illusory universe of time and space, are similarly “phenomena”, and therefore *appear* to exist. And so, as *images* of God (who is our *true* Self), we regard God as separate, ‘other’. For, while *we* are enclosed within the world of time and space which is His projection made of His Consciousness, *He* is nonetheless entirely beyond it. He is the eternal Mind that projects this space/time continuum, this form-filled world, as a construct of thought. He is indeed the Consciousness which animates us, and which lends us consciousness. He is our very Self; He is the one and *only* Reality. But it is not wrong to acknowledge the *apparent* duality which He brings to pass in the act of projecting this world of beings within Himself.

Ultimately, when we pass from space-time to the unlimited Reality, we shall recognize the eternally inseparable oneness of God and our Self;

nonetheless, while living as separate beings within this worldly illusion, it is quite understandable if we call out to Him as though He were separate, or ‘other’, just as dream figures might call out within themselves in an effort to contact the dreamer, who is indeed their own essence, a one who becomes an *apparent* two.

Some hold exclusively to the eternal truth of unity, declaring their single and only identity to be ‘the One’; these are the *jnanis* (or “knowers”). Others, acknowledging the *apparent* duality between themselves and God, worship the One as other than themselves, as the Exemplar of which they are mere images. These are the *bhaktas* (or “lovers”). And both are perfectly correct and valid pathways to the *realization* of God, the direct knowledge of the eternal Self. The *jnani* says, “I am That”; the *bhakta* says, “O Lord, Thou alone art!”. And both arrive at the selfsame realization of the Real.

‘And what of the apparent duality of body and spirit?’ we may wonder. We all know what Descartes thought about it. But I would ask, ‘Have you ever seen ice cubes floating in water? Are they two things or one?’ There seems to be two different substances, since each is clearly separate from the other; but no, it is one substance in two different states. When I was immersed in the unitive vision, I wondered “Where is the temple (of the body)? Which the imperishable, which the abode?” For there was to be seen no separate body-temple with an imperishable soul within! There was no division to be found at all. All is Consciousness-Energy in this dream! And all of it is imperishable. It is only the various shapes that are so changeable, so very perishable; but their Source and Essence is one.

Think of your own dream-creations! Is your dream-character divided into a consciousness and a body-form? No. It is one thing: the form and its limited self-consciousness are one projected creative mind-stuff. Likewise, for us here on earth. We live and move and have our being within the Mind-stuff of God. It is His drama, and He is the Self-consciousness of each of us. When we ultimately awake, we shall know the Source of all selves, the Source of all forms; we shall know that we were, are, and ever shall be, the One who lives in eternal bliss.

But what of the separation between the ‘soul’ and the body at death? It seems quite certain that consciousness withdraws from the body when the heart stops beating, that consciousness and the solidified energy that is our body then go their separate ways. And that seems to imply a real, absolute, duality. But it is just the magic of the One. Think of what happens when you wake from a dream: Your own consciousness of Self remains even when the dream vanishes. Who you thought you were in the dream is seen to have been an illusory identity; but even after you awake, the real *You* remains. The dream scenery also vanishes when you awake. Where did it go? It never really was. It too was only your own consciousness, *appearing* as form. Likewise, in this universe, matter is consciousness appearing as energy, which in turn appears as form.

The universe itself is occurring *as a whole* within the one Consciousness. It is an integral dream-like phenomenon. He is always One, even while projecting the universal dream with His Consciousness-Energy. When each of the dream-like images awakes, they awake to the One. Then, at the end of the universal ‘dream’, all forms revert to Energy, which ceases its transformations and merges into the one Consciousness. Consciousness ceases its play, resolving quietly into Itself. Consciousness and Energy were never two; they are merely twin aspects of His projective Power. The Supreme Consciousness will rest now, prior to projecting once again an apparent universe of conscious forms, another seeming duality upon His oneness.

Keeping in mind this unity-in-duality, or duality-in-unity, please reconsider the remarkable text from the Gnostic seer, Simon Magus (*fl. ca. 40 C.E.*), entitled *The Great Exposition*, which so ably explains the apparent duality within the Nondual reality:

***The Great Exposition
of Simon Magus***

There are *two* aspects of the One: The first of these is the Higher, the Divine Mind of the universe, which governs all things, and is masculine. The other is the lower, the Thought

(*epinoia*) which produces all things, and is feminine. As a pair united, they comprise all that exists.

The Divine Mind is the Father who sustains all things and nourishes all that begins and ends. He is the One who eternally stands, without beginning or end. He exists entirely alone; for, while the Thought arising from Unity, and coming forth from the Divine Mind, creates [the appearance of] duality, the Father remains a Unity. The Thought is in Himself, and so He is alone. Made manifest to Himself from Himself, He appears to be two. He becomes “Father” by virtue of being called so by His own Thought.

Since He, Himself, brought forward Himself, by means of Himself, manifesting to Himself His own Thought, it is not correct to attribute creation to the Thought alone. For She (the Thought) conceals the Father within Herself; the Divine Mind and the Thought are intertwined. Thus, though [they appear] to be a pair, one opposite the other, the Divine Mind is in no way different from the Thought, inasmuch as they are one.

Though there appears to be a Higher, the Mind, and a lower, the Thought, truly, It is a Unity, just as what is manifested from these two [i.e., the universe] is a unity, while appearing to be a duality. The Divine Mind and the Thought are discernible, one from the other, but they are one, though they appear to be two.

[Thus,] ... there is one Divine Reality, [apparently] divided as Higher and lower; generating Itself, nourishing Itself, seeking Itself, finding Itself, being mother of Itself, father of Itself, sister of Itself, spouse of Itself, daughter of Itself, son of Itself. It is both Mother and Father, a Unity, being the Root of the entire circle of existence.¹

NOTES:

1. Simon Magus, *Apophasis Megale* (“The Great Exposition”), quoted by Hippolytus of Rome, in *Refutatio Omnium Heresium* (“The Refutation of All Heresies”), VI. 8; adapted from Roberts, Rev. A. &

Donaldson, J. (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Vol. VI; Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1892; pp. 208-210.

As this text is one of my favorites, it has been cited by me previously in Abhayananda, Swami, *History of Mysticism*, Olympia, Washington, Atma Books, 1987, 2000; p. 132; and again, with commentary, in Abhayananda, Swami, *Mysticism And Science*, Winchester, U.K., O Books, 2007; pp. 66-72.

Why We Are Here

Are we each responsible for our own decisions, and therefore responsible for the course of our own lives, with no one to blame but ourselves? Or is the good Lord who dreams up all these souls, and places us into this world with our individual proclivities, the ultimately responsible one? Well, I think you can see the answer to this question at once: Both of us are responsible. God is the ultimate cause, and we are the effective causes, being instrumental in bringing about the resultant effects. But of course, we and God are not separate. We souls are mere figments of His imagination; we exist in Him and are entirely governed by Him.

And, since ultimately there is only God, why do you suppose He continues to produce these apparent worlds and souls and all this hubbub? What does it really matter how each manifested soul passes the time in this essentially unreal tapestry of space and time? It matters to each of us, of course; but why does it matter to Him? Is He keeping score? Does He have some stake in the game? Perhaps He's simply making the most of His lonely omnipotence; He has certainly produced a magnificent show! No one would suggest that it would be better if He did nothing. Still, we can't help wondering what justifies for Him the putting on of this extravagant pageant? Perhaps, like us, He's simply susceptible to the appeal and satisfaction of artistic creation.

But, if you ask me, from a mystic's point of view, there's really nothing in it for Him. He remains blissfully the same, no matter what. So, what's His motivation? Could it be He's simply demonstrating by example the epitome of a perfectly selfless act? Is He giving tirelessly of His blessings, radiating

mercy to every creature, in order to show us the path of blessedness and joy? His own glory is mirrored in millions of Suns throughout the cosmos, and we, in imitation, reflect His intrinsic love in our lives; and we pray: Mercy, Mother, on all Thy children. Mercy, Mother, give mercy to all.

Of course, our Mother/Father loves His/Her mind-born children and wishes them well; for, after all, they're not truly *other* than Himself. But more than that, His very nature is love. And that love is expressed within us, His Mind-born creations, *compelling* us to His service. We have no other course; no one is able to escape Him. His love binds us in its tender grip, and we desire no other love. It is this love that leads us to selflessness, to the dissolution of the petty ego. This is His purpose and His motivation: to transform us into Himself, to return us to our original purity. Who knows why? It's simply what He does. And, therefore, I also know my *own* purpose, my journey's end: I live to do His will, to tell all I know of Him, to sing His praise. Clearly, I'm at His mercy. Like you, I receive only what He gives, and I give only what He enables me to give.

The Hindus call this creation, this repeated universal manifestation, "God's *lila*, His play". From the invisible *Unum*, a tangible *Pluribus* bursts forth. And each new manifestation culminates at last in the unification of opposites. Repeatedly, the illusion of chaotic multiplicity is happily burst! Suddenly, He and I are one—the same One! And then, after some inactivity, the game begins once again! Those who haven't seen it cannot appreciate the incredible wonder of it. And those who have seen it cannot tell of it, for, once seen, there's no one left to hear or tell. When all is said and done, there's nothing to lament, nothing to vanquish, nothing to pride oneself on; all is accomplished in an instant.

Karma

When someone says, "That's just your karma," what do they mean? *Karma* is a Sanskrit word, meaning "actions" or "the result of actions." And so, we can translate the above statement to "The present condition of your life is just the result of your previous actions." And if the statement seemed vague at first, it is now perfectly clear and acceptable. The current state of our

lives *is* the result of our karma. The sum of all those decisions and actions throughout our lives has resulted in our current life situation. It may also be assumed that our present karma determines what we are to become in a subsequent lifetime. In my own case, I see that my commitment to service in praise of God has focused my life in a particular direction, eliminating those commitments that appeared to conflict with that paramount commitment, and bringing me to a particular life situation: though my life is a solitary and somewhat penurious one, it is a life of great satisfaction, freedom, and contentment. All those conditions are karmic, i.e., they are, without a doubt, the results of *my own* actions.

However, we must delve a little deeper, and also ask ‘What is the underlying *cause* or *source* of the predominant life decisions that resulted in those actions that constitute our karma?’ In my own case, my overriding commitment to service in praise of God derived solely from the Grace of God that so strongly influenced—and can truly be said to have *caused*—my desire to praise Him. The point is that, although my actions are my own, and can be said to constitute *my* karma, all that has occurred in my life, including the sum of my decisions and my actions, is in fact the result of the actions of God. As the Godhead, He is the transcendent Absolute, the One without a second, completely unaffected by all the many activities occurring throughout the universe and remaining indivisible throughout eternity. But He is also the active Mind, the Creator, who is the source and initiator of our own activities and all the activities that make up our evolving universe. He cannot be limited to transcendence, for He is also immanent within our world of time and space, inspiring us, and guiding each of us in His wisdom.

The truth is: all that we do is *His* doing; He is responsible for everything, for we live *in* Him, and are constituted of His being. *He* is not only inspiring our actions, but He is performing all the actions in this world through these many bodies and minds; and so, in truth, our karma is *His* karma, though we, as individuals, appear to receive the results of our actions. We are recognized as independent individuals, but, at the same time, we are manifestations or incarnations of *His* being. All is He, and all that is done is done by Him. Know that He is your true being, your life and all existence, that nothing else exists but God. Know that He is your Creator and ever-present Benefactor, and continually praise Him in your heart of joy.

A Sense of Me

We know that we are grounded in and supported by God; we know
 That He is the eternal Reality underlying our very existence,
 And yet, in our minds we seem to be something other:
 An individual being with a sense of 'me'
 Who walks this earth in multitudes with its own separate will.
 And even though we know that God is our own higher Self, and not
 Separate from us, each 'me' is filled with an innate love for Him,
 As though He were something other than our own Self.
 We long to be enfolded in His embrace, to unite our awareness
 With His far greater awareness, but we can't do it without His grace.
 And so, day and night we lament that He so seldom reveals Himself,
 Though He knows full well that our only delight and desire is to know Him,
 To see the light of His eternal day and merge into His all-revealing light.

But be assured: He will not always remain hidden!
 One not too distant day or night He will still your breath,
 And your mind will become absorbed in Him alone;
 And whatever this thing called 'me' is will disappear in one
 Unending conscious light, and we will know in fullest clarity
 That, all along, it was only Him, the one never-ending Light,
 Who walked this earth pretending to be a 'me.'

They Ask Me

They ask me, "How can man and God be one?
 It makes no sense; it can't be understood."
 I answer, "He is all, and all are He!
 No other exists but Him; so, who are you?"
Becoming one with God is just the realization
 Of what is and has always been true.
 The self you think you are, is only a mirage;
 The Self you've always been, is that eternal One.

We go about in our illusory shells,

Identifying with the dance of atoms,
 A mere framework of form and ideas.
 But only when He opens wide our inner eye
 Is it revealed that we are Him and He is us.

This truth is not so easily perceived;
 It's hidden by the power He wields.
 And even when it's once revealed,
 It's hard to hold; it slips away.

We pray, we concentrate our minds on Him,
 And search our inner sky for that all-revealing Sun.
 We shut out all distracting thoughts,
 And open up our souls to Him.
 Yet rarely does the clear light dawn
 That shows our own eternal face.

More often we rely on thoughts inspired
 That come to us as wisdom from on high.
 Our prayers, our yearning hearts, uplift us
 To that place where thought runs pure and clear;
 And, in this way, we come to know His presence deep within.

But those who've gained His favor know a higher vision still;
 His Grace reveals the truth of truths:
 The Self of all is I!

They ask me, "How can man and God be one?"
 I ask them, "In the Unity that is His all-inclusive Self,
 How can you imagine there are two?
 If nothing else exists but God,
 Then who, on earth, are you?

Look, the Source is one and all that is;
 But It has imaged forth within Itself a second: this cosmic array.
 Eternally the one great Mind exists alone;
 Its universal picture-show comes and goes,

An image on the screen of time.

Eternally, even as the stars play out their birth and death,
 The One is undiminished, undivided, undismayed.
 For, since the universal drama exists within the one great Mind,
 There is no separation, no duality at all.

And yet, while we live and dance in time and space,
 We inhabit an imaginary bubble of non-eternity,
 Of transient bodies and volitional activities,
 A secondary world, unreal.

For “real”, by definition, refers only to the Permanent,
 The Eternal, the Mind unmanifest and clear.
 So, what is this unseemly show, this conjured art,
 This Mind-dreamt castle-in-the-air
 In which we’re sentenced to abide?

Alas, it’s smoke and mirrors, a magic show,
 Of no account, unworthy of note.
 For the fact is we’ve never left our eternal realm;
 We delight there even now.

The timeless Self we know as “we” was never
 Imprisoned in a bodily shell;
 That’s but an illusion, a paltry spell that binds us
 To the dream of separate personality.

Once freed of duality’s deception,
 We realize we’ve never left eternity’s bliss.
 We’re one unparcelled Self, unbound, unsnared forever,
 Complete in the completion of the boundless One,
 A “we”, an “I” that stands triumphantly free, beyond imagined time.

None Else

When you're drawn up to the One,
 You'll find yourself alone.
 There's no female at His side,
 No attending angels round about.
 There's no Son sitting nearby,
 And no congregation of saints standing there.
 Even "He" is not there.
 Only You are there.

Not this little form of you,
 But You as you never knew you were,
 A nothing Mind, containing all.
 Nothing else is there but You.
 There is no Shakti there but You.
 There is no Shiva there but You.
 Purusha as well as Prakriti are You.
 The throngs of souls are You.
 The powers that be are You.
 Wherever You look,
 You see none else but You.

"Alone at last!" You sigh.
 If there is to be an 'other,'
 You must imagine him or her.
 The universe you project is You,
 And all the people in it are You.
 There's only ONE, and You are it.

The devotees who chant the name are You,
 The universal choir of angels, You.
 Whatever *is* is You, conjured by You.
 There's none else but You anywhere.
 In such a lonely timeless life,
 What else is there to do but dream

Up worlds and populate them
 With imaginative forms caught up
 In crazy, impossible plots and toils?

What else would You do
 When there's none else but You?

Look Around You

Without any doubts, this world, this vast universe, is made *by* God, *of* God, and resides *in* God. For there is no other Reality but Him. God is the one all-inclusive Spirit, or Mind, in whom everything and everyone has its being. This truth has been clearly revealed through Grace to countless individual souls in an enlightening inner vision. If there was something else—something other than Him, it is in that divine inner vision that we would learn of it. But it is there, in that divine revelation, that we learn that we are made of God-stuff, that there is nothing else! We learn that it is the One Great Mind who brings all to light, and that it is He in whom everything resides and of whom everything consists. There, by His Grace, we learn our oneness with Him. There, two-ness cannot even arise as an imagination.

You will be happy to know that, by searching for Him within, you too can experience His Grace. You too can know Him as the one and only Reality and solve this great riddle of Nonduality conclusively for yourself. Look around you! Do you not see that every blade of grass is bursting with Consciousness? Do you not see that every chunk of gravel is alive with Consciousness? Do you not see how perfectly timed the planets move, how the Sun and moon tell the unveiling of the moments in your life?

O what good fortune is this—to see with the eyes of the Divine, to bathe in the bliss of His living presence, to delight in the heavenly breezes wafting in the summer light! Look around you!