



In the Temple of the City of Brahman

Chandogya Upanishad

In the center of the city of Brahman (the body) is a small temple in the form of a lotus flower (the heart). And within that temple can be found a very small space. We should search out what dwells within that space and should desire to understand it.

If a student should ask, “Who dwells in the small temple in the form of a lotus flower in the center of the city of Brahman? What is it in there that should be sought after and what is there that one should desire to understand?”

Then the teacher should answer, “That little space in the heart is as vast as the entire universe. Within that space are contained heaven and earth, fire and wind, sun and moon, lightning and stars, all that of this world and all that is not.”

If the student should ask, “If everything that exists is contained in that city of Brahman—all beings and all desires—then what remains of it when old age overcomes it or when it perishes?”

Then the teacher should answer, “That does not age when the body ages; That does not die when the body dies. This is the real city of Brahman. In it all desires are contained. That is the Self (*Atman*). It is free from old age, free from death, free from suffering, free from hunger and thirst. That Self is the fulfillment of all desires, the ultimate truth....

“Just as here on earth whatever is acquired through work perishes, so too whatever is acquired for the next world through good works perishes. Those who depart from this life without having realized the Self and what they truly desire—for them there is no true fulfillment here or in all the worlds. But those who depart from this life having realized the Self and what they truly desire—for them there is true fulfillment here and in all worlds....

“The Self is a bridge, a boundary for keeping these worlds apart. Neither day nor night can cross that bridge, nor old age, nor death, nor sorrow, nor good, nor evil. All evil is turned back from it, for evil cannot cross that bridge. That is why, when this bridge has been crossed, the blind are no longer blind, the sick no longer sick. And upon crossing that bridge the night turns to day, for there is no darkness there....”

“The Self is beyond all sin, beyond decay and death, beyond hunger and thirst, beyond all sorrow; it desires nothing that is not good. It is That which one should seek out and understand. He who has found out and understands the Self obtains all worlds and fulfills all desires.”

Chandogya Upanishad 8.1.1-7; 4.1-3; 7.1. Trans. by A.J. Grunthaler

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