

# THE BHAGAVAD GITA, OR SONG OF THE BLESSED ONE

BY FRANKLIN EDGERTON

## CHAPTER III

### THE UPANISHADS, AND THE FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINES OF LATER HINDU THOUGHT

THE Upanishads are the earliest Hindu treatises, other than single hymns or brief passages, which deal with philosophic subjects. They are formally parts of the Veda,<sup>8</sup>—the last offshoots of Vedic literature. The dry bones of the Vedic ritual cult rattle about in them in quite a noisy fashion at times, and seriously strain our patience and our charity. But they also contain the apotheosis, the New Testament, of Vedic philosophy. In them the struggling speculations which we have briefly sketched in the last chapter reach their highest development. They do not, be it noted, receive any final, systematic codification. That came much later. They are still tentative, fluid, and, one may fairly say, unstable; they are frequently inconsistent with each other and with themselves. They contain no system, but starts toward various different systems. Later Hindu thought utilized these starts and developed them into the various systematic philosophies of later times—Sāṅkhya, Vedānta, and the rest. In fact, there are few important ideas of later Hindu philosophical or religious thought which are not at least foreshadowed in the Upanishads. They are the connecting link between the Veda and later Hinduism; the last word of the one, the prime source of the other.

In this chapter, I wish to deal with the Upanishads mostly from the latter point of view: to show how they reveal the early stages of the fundamental postulates of later Hindu thought. While the views reproduced in this chapter are all found in the early Upanishads (except where the contrary is stated), we also find in them

<sup>8</sup> At least the older and more genuine ones are that; we may ignore for our present purpose the numerous late and secondary works which call themselves Upanishads.

expressions of quite different views, which approach much more closely the older Vedic speculations. The relation of the Upanishads to those earlier speculations may, in general, be described by saying that while the Upanishads carry their inquiries along essentially the same lines, and are actuated by the same underlying idea of the mystic, magic power of knowledge, their thoughts become increasingly anthropocentric and less cosmo-physical or ritualistic. Explanations of the cosmic absolute in purely physical terms, and speculations about the esoteric meaning of ritual entities, while they still occur, are less prominent; speculations on the nature and fate of man, and explanations of the universe in human or quasi-human terms, increase in frequency. Thus one of the most striking ideas in the Upanishads is that the human soul or self *is* the Absolute ("that art thou";<sup>9</sup> "I am Brahman";<sup>10</sup> "it [the universal Brahman] is thy self, that is within everything";<sup>11</sup> "that which rests in all things and is distinct from all things, which all things know not, of which all things are the body [that is, the material representation or form], which controls all things within, that is thy self [*ātman*], the immortal Inner Controller"<sup>12</sup>). All that is outside of this Self is at times conceived as created by, or emitted from, It (as in dreams the Self seems to create a dream-world and to live in it).<sup>13</sup> At other times the sharp line drawn between the Self and material nature, that is all that is not Self, is made to preclude any genetic relation between the two.<sup>14</sup>

In any case, the attention of the Upanishadic thinkers is more and more centered upon the human soul. Other things are important as they are related to it. And—while its origin and past history remain objects of interest—we find an increasing amount of attention paid to its future fate. The practical purpose of speculation reasserts itself emphatically in the question, how can man control

<sup>9</sup> Chāndogya Upanishad 6.8.7, etc.

<sup>10</sup> Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10, etc.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.4.1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.7.15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.3.10. According to several Upanishad passages the soul performs this creative act by a sort of mystic, quasi-magic power, sometimes called *māyā*, that is, "artifice"; it is a word sometimes applied to sorcery, and to tricks and stratagems of various kinds. The Bhagavad Gītā similarly speaks of the Deity as appearing in material nature by His *māyā*, His mystic power. This does not mean (in my opinion; some scholars take the contrary view) that the world outside of the self is illusory, without real existence, as the later Vedānta philosophy maintains; *māyā*, I think, is not used in the Vedāntic sense of "world-illusion" until many centuries later.

<sup>14</sup> Thus foreshadowing the later dualistic systems, such as Sāṅkhya and Yoga, which recognize matter and soul as two eternal and eternally independent principles—a doctrine which is familiarly accepted in the Bhagavad Gītā.

his own destiny? What is man's *summum bonum*, and how shall he attain it? It is out of such questions and the answers to them that the basic postulates of later Hindu thought develop.

In early Vedic times the objects of human desire are the ordinary ones which natural man seeks the world over: wealth, pleasures, power over his fellows, long life, and offspring; and finally, since death puts an end to the enjoyment of all these, immortality. Immortality, however, can only be hoped for in a future existence, since all life on this earth is seen to end in death. So the Vedic poets hope for some sort of heavenly and eternal life after death. But presently they begin to be uneasy lest perchance death might interfere with that future life, also. The fear of this "re-death" becomes, in what we may call the Middle Vedic period (the Brāhmanas), a very prominent feature. Combined with this is the growing belief in the imperishability of the *ātman*, the Self or Soul, the essential part of the living being. These two ideas are not mutually contradictory. Death remains, as a very disagreeable experience—no less disagreeable if it must be undergone more than once—even though it does not destroy the Soul but only brings it over into a new existence. What pleasure can man take in wealth, power, and offspring, if this sword of Damocles is constantly hanging over him, threatening to deprive him of all, and to launch him upon some new and untried existence? Moreover, that future existence may be no better than the present one. Possibly under the influence of popular animism, which sees "souls" similar to the human soul in all parts of nature, the future life is brought down from heaven to this earth. And so, in the early Upanishads, we find quite definite statements of the theory of rebirth or transmigration, which was to remain through all future time an axiom to practically all Hindus. According to this, the Soul is subject to an indefinite series of existences, in various material forms or "bodies," either in this world or in various imaginary worlds. The Bhagavad Gītā expresses this universal Hindu belief in the form of two similes. It says that one existence follows another just as different stages of life—childhood, young manhood, maturity, and old age—follow one another in this life.<sup>15</sup> Or again, just as one lays off old garments and dons new ones, so the Soul lays off an old, worn-out body and puts on a new one.<sup>16</sup> One of the oldest Upanishads uses the simile of a caterpillar, which crawls to the end of a blade of grass and then "gathers itself to-

<sup>15</sup> 2.13.

<sup>16</sup> 2.22.

gether" to pass over to another blade of grass; so the Soul at death "gathers itself together" and passes over to a new existence.<sup>17</sup>

The Upanishads also begin to combine with this doctrine of an indefinite series of reincarnations the old belief in retribution for good and evil deeds in a life after death; a belief which prevailed among the people of Vedic India, as all over the world. With the transference of the future life from a mythical other world to this earth, and with the extension or multiplication of it to an indefinite series of future lives more or less like the present life, the way was prepared for the characteristically Hindu doctrine of "karma" (*karman*) or "deed." This doctrine, which is also axiomatic to the Hindus, teaches that the state of each existence of each individual is absolutely conditioned and determined by that individual's morality in previous existences. A man is exactly what he has made himself and what he therefore deserves to be. An early Upanishad says: "Just as (the Soul) is (in this life) of this or that sort; just as it acts, just as it operates, even so precisely it becomes (in the next life). If it acts well it becomes good; if it acts ill it becomes evil. As a result of right action it becomes what is good; as a result of evil action it becomes what is evil."<sup>18</sup> In short, the law of the conservation of energy is rigidly applied to the moral world. Every action, whether good or bad, must have its result for the doer. If in the present life a man is on the whole good, his next existence is better by just so much as his good deeds have outweighed his evil deeds. He becomes a great and noble man, or a king, or perhaps a god (the gods, like men, are subject to the law of transmigration). Conversely, a wicked man is reborn as a person of low position, or as an animal, or, in cases of exceptional depravity, he may fall to existence in hell. And all this is not carried out by decree of some omnipotent and sternly just Power. It is a natural law. It operates of itself just as much as the law of gravitation. It is therefore wholly dispassionate, neither merciful nor vindictive. It is absolutely inescapable; but at the same time it never cuts off hope. A man is what he has made himself; but by that same token he may make himself what he will. The soul tormented in the lowest hell may raise himself in time to the highest heaven, simply by doing right. Perfect justice is made the basic law of the universe. It seems hardly possible to conceive a principle of greater moral grandeur and perfection.

<sup>17</sup> Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, 4.4.3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.4.5.

The Upanishads go farther than this in anticipating later Hindu views of the Soul's progress. One of the earliest of them contains this passage: "This Spirit of Man consists simply of *desire*. As is his desire, so is his resolve; as is his resolve, so is the deed (*karman*) that he does; as is the deed that he does, so is that (fate) which he attains unto."<sup>19</sup> The root of action, and so the determining cause of man's future fate, is his "desire." It follows that if man's desires can be properly regulated, he can be led to his true goal. This remains a fundamental tenet of later Hinduism.

It might seem that the glorification of the Soul as the center of the universe should be a comforting and inspiring thought. And, indeed, the Upanishads and later Hindu works describe the perfections of the Soul in inspiring and even ecstatic terms. But the practical effect of all this upon the Hindu attitude towards our present life was just the opposite. It only served to emphasize the contrast between the Soul and all that is not Soul, that is, all material or empiric existence. "Whatever is other than That (the Soul) is evil," says an early Upanishad.<sup>20</sup> Soon this crystallizes into a definitely and thoroughly pessimistic view of life. All existence, in the ordinary empiric sense, is inherently worthless and base and evil. Pleasures are both transitory and illusory. Death is not only an evil in itself, which threatens us at every moment, but also it leads only to further existence, that is, to further misery. True joy and peace can only be found in the Self.

Accordingly, the perfected man is he "*whose desire is the Soul, whose desire is satisfied, who has no desire*" (other than the Soul; that is, who is free from ordinary, worldly desires),<sup>21</sup> who "is beyond desire, has dispensed with evil, knows no fear, is free from sorrow."<sup>22</sup> As long as a man is affected by desire (other than the desire for the Soul's perfection, which, as just indicated, is the same as having *no* desire), this leads him to "resolve" and to "action," which must have its fruit in continued material existence; and all material existence is evil.

The estate of this perfected man is most commonly described as attainment of, going to, or union with the One—which may be called Brahman, or the Atman (the Self or Soul), or some synonym. It

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.4.5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.4.2.

<sup>21</sup> Which are defined by the Buddhists as including (1) desire for sensual pleasures, (2) desire for continued existence (in other incarnations), and (3) desire for prosperity in this existence. This classification may be regarded as typical for Hindu systems in general.

<sup>22</sup> Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, 4.4.6; 4.3.22.

is not non-existence, according to the Upanishads; for the soul is immortal, and cannot cease to be. It is sometimes even declared to be a conscious state; but this is immediately qualified by saying that though the soul still has the faculties of seeing, knowing, and so on, there is no object for these faculties to act upon, so that after all it is to all intents and purposes a state of unconsciousness.<sup>23</sup> As the soul is one with the universal subject, than which there is then no other, there can be no object, and hence no activity of the senses or mental faculties. So at other times the texts plainly say "there is no consciousness after death (for the perfected soul)."<sup>24</sup> They conceive it as similar to the state of deep and dreamless sleep, which is indeed at times thought of as a temporary union with the One, and so a foretaste of that perfected condition.<sup>25</sup> It is natural that such a state should be associated with bliss; for while the waking man has no recollection of consciousness or anything else as having existed in sound sleep, still he awakes from it feeling refreshed and often with a vague impression of having been in some sort of remote and happy state. At any rate, the Upanishads leave no doubt that there is in this union with the One a total cessation of desires, of evil, of sorrow—in short, of ordinary, empiric, worldly existence, which is characterized by desires, evil, and sorrow. But not content with that, they describe it as a state of pure and ecstatic bliss, infinitely surpassing all human joys, indeed far exceeding the power of mind to conceive it.<sup>26</sup>

Later Hindu religions and philosophies call this state by the well-known name of *nirvāna*. The word does not occur in the early Upanishads; but the idea is there. *Nirvāna* means "extinction," originally of a fire or flame; then of the flames of desire, as the cause of continued rebirth. To some later sects, such as the Buddhists, it means also literal extinction of life, of existence in any form; for Buddhism, in its original form, denies the existence of either world-soul or individual soul. Yet even in Buddhist texts *nirvāna* is described as a state of blissful ecstasy; so firmly established was this mode of thought. It makes equally little difference if, with the Sāṅkhya, one denies the world-soul and merely conceives the perfected individual souls as existing separately, independent of each other and of matter; still the same descriptions are used. All the later variations in metaphysical theory (some of them found already in the Upanishads) make no difference in the concept of the per-

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.5.15; 4.3.23ff.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.5.13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.3.19ff.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.3.32, 33.

fectured state as a kind of pure and—so to speak—unconscious consciousness, and transcendent bliss. The Bhagavad Gītā uses the word *nirvāna* several times, generally in the compound *brahmanirvāna*, “extinction in Brahman,” or “the extinction which is Brahman.” More commonly it uses vaguer terms to describe the goal which means salvation—such expressions as “perfection,” “the highest goal,” “the supreme state,” or “My (God’s) estate.” Or it simply says “he attains Me (God),” or “he attains Brahman”; that is, the perfected man becomes united with God or with Brahman. Details as to the nature of that state are wholly wanting in the Gītā, if we except such vague expressions as “that highest state of Mine, to which having gone one does not return, is not illumined by sun or moon or fire”<sup>27</sup>—implying that it shines by its own light. We get no idea of how the Gītā conceived the state of a man who had gained this position. All that seems clear is that it was conceived as some sort of real existence, not as total and absolute annihilation.

The way to attain this state of perfection, as to attain anything else, is, according to the usual Upanishad doctrine, by true knowledge. Knowledge is the magic talisman that opens all doors. He who knows anything, controls it; and so, he who knows the supreme truth, thereby becomes master of it, and gains the highest state. “He who knows that supreme Brahman, unto Brahman he goes.”<sup>28</sup> Similar expressions appear constantly throughout the whole Upanishad literature. This comes as near as anything to being a universal doctrine of the Upanishads. It is furthermore a doctrine which is of fundamental importance in all later Hindu thought. All the later systems make it their prime business to point the way to human salvation; and one may say in general that their methods are primarily and originally intellectual, or, perhaps better, intuitive. They teach that man shall be saved through the realization of the supreme truth. In their formulations of that truth they differ, of course, among themselves; that is the reason for the plurality of systems. But they usually state, or at least imply, the omnipotence of knowledge; and conversely they usually emphasize the fact that ignorance (*avidyā*) is the root of evil. Characteristic of them all is the Buddhist formula, which says that ignorance is the cause of desire; desire leads to action; and action must have its fruit, as we have seen, in continued existence, all of which is evil.

<sup>27</sup> 15.6.

<sup>28</sup> Mundaka Upanishad, 3.2.9; Kaushītaki Upanishad, 1.4.

Even *good* deeds are still deeds, and must have their fruit, according to the doctrine of "karma." And to attain the *summum bonum* man must get rid of all deeds, of all karma. Therefore, while most if not all Hindu systems teach a practical morality, they also teach that no degree of morality, however perfect, can lead to final salvation. In this, too, they are anticipated by the Upanishads. The perfect soul is "beyond good and evil."<sup>29</sup> Neither good nor evil can effect him. At times the Upanishads seem even to say or imply that when a man has attained enlightenment, he can do what he likes without fear of results. This somewhat dangerous doctrine is, however, not typical, and is probably to be regarded only as a strained and exaggerated expression of the idea that the truly enlightened soul cannot, in the very nature of things, do an evil deed. If he could, he would not be truly enlightened; for "he who has not ceased from evil conduct cannot attain Him (the Atman) by intelligence."<sup>30</sup> This is similar to the Socratic notion that the truly wise man must inevitably be virtuous. The difference is that the Upanishads regard even virtue, as well as vice, as transcended by perfect knowledge; the possessor thereof passes beyond both, and rises to a plane on which moral concepts simply have no meaning. Morality applies only in the world of karma, the world of ordinary empiric existence, which the enlightened man has left behind him. In the final state of the perfected man, as we have seen, there can be, strictly speaking, no action; so how can there be either moral or immoral action? The attitude of the Upanishads, and following them of most later Hindu systems, is then that morality has only a negative importance, and in the last analysis none whatever, in man's struggle for salvation. Immorality is a sign of imperfection; it can only be due to the prevalence in the soul of ignorance, causing desire, leading to action and rebirth. It must be got rid of. But it will fall away of itself with the attainment of true wisdom. And no amount of good deeds will bring that wisdom which alone can lead to release. Good deeds result in less unhappy existences, but that is all; salvation is release from all empiric existence. This does not prevent the teaching of a system of practical ethics, for the guidance of those who have not yet attained enlightenment. In actual practice, most Hindu sects inculcate very lofty moral principles; and many of them devote much attention thereto. But theoretically, at least, such things do not concern their fundamental aims.

<sup>29</sup> Kaushitaki Upanishad, 1.4; compare Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, 4.3'22, etc.



Yet at times morality is spoken of as if it had a positive, if only qualified, value in preparing the soul for the reception of enlightenment. The fact is that the strictly intellectual or intuitional position is hard for the ordinary man to master. He needs the encouragement of more concrete aims, or helps toward the final aim. Many of the later sects recognize this, either implicitly or explicitly, and so do not hold strictly to the position that "knowledge," that is, immediate perception of the metaphysical truth, is the sole and exclusive means of salvation. Even the Upanishads do not quite do this, though they come closer to it than many later systems. Despite the popular and even primitive background of their intellectualism, its relation to the old idea of the magic power of knowledge, the speculation of the Upanishads in its highest forms reached a point which must have placed it out of touch with the mentality of most of the people. "Knowledge" of the abstract truth about the Soul proves a very different matter from "knowledge" of the things which are the ordinary aims of magic, when the human mind tries to grasp it. Any man can "know" the "name" of his enemy, or of the disease which afflicts him, and by that "knowledge" can seek to cast a spell over them. But only a rare thinker can "know" the absolute metaphysical Truth, so that it is an ever-present illumination of his whole being,<sup>31</sup> and this is what he must do in order to have the true "knowledge" that brings control of his own soul, of his destiny—the "knowledge" that means salvation. For ordinary human nature, there is needed a process of education, of discipline, which shall lead up to this enlightenment. Various sects make use of morality in this way, as a preliminary help. It purifies the soul and prepares it for enlightenment. Many Upanishad passages imply such a position, at least by saying that the wicked cannot hope for true knowledge—even though other passages speak of knowledge as a sort of magic power by which one "sloughs off sin, as a snake sloughs off its skin."<sup>32</sup>

There are other preliminary steps or practices which various sects regard as useful in preparing the soul for the reception of the enlightenment which will finally bring release. And in some of the later Hindu sects these preliminary steps become so prominent that they obscure, or almost obliterate, what was originally the true goal—the attainment of metaphysical knowledge. Of these avenues of

<sup>30</sup> Kātha Upanishad, 2.24.

<sup>31</sup> "By a rare chance may a man see It (the Soul); by a rare chance likewise may another declare It; and by a rare chance may another hear It. But even when he has heard It, no one whatsoever knows It." Bhagavad Gītā, 2.29; quoted from Kātha Upanishad, 2.7.

<sup>32</sup> Prashna Upanishad, 5.5.

approach to knowledge, which however occasionally lead off into seductive bypaths, the chief, in addition to righteous conduct, are two. One is devotion to the personality of some god or prophet, who is regarded as a kind of personal savior or helper on the way to salvation. The other is the practice of asceticism in some form or other, regarded as an approach to a state of inaction (and so to the ideal, since all actions lead to rebirth), and also as helping to prepare for enlightenment by freeing the individual from attachment to the world, by gradually conquering the natural desires of the flesh.

The first of these two secondary methods, as we may call them, plays a very small rôle in the older Upanishads. The Upanishads recognize no prophet who could occupy the place which the Buddha holds for his followers as a personal Savior, quite analogous to the places of Jesus and Mohammed in Christianity and Islam. And most of them, particularly the earliest, do not think of the One—Brahman, or Atman, or the Existent, or whatever they call It—in sufficiently personal terms to make it easy to think of It as exercising grace in saving men, or as the object of any very personal devotion on the part of men. But for the Bhagavad Gītā, which is frankly monotheistic,<sup>33</sup> the case is very different; and we shall find that in it the “grace of God” is repeatedly spoken of as singling out His elect and bringing them to salvation by His divine choice. And no means for attaining salvation is more emphasized in the Gītā than *bhakti*, “devotion” to God, or fervent love of Him. Originally, no doubt, this devotion was to lead to knowledge, intellectual enlightenment, and so to release. But the intermediate step is often lost sight of in the Gītā and in similar later works; they not infrequently think of ecstatic love of God as leading immediately to absorption in Him, which is their conception of salvation. It is interesting to note, then, that even this position, contrary though it is to the usual spirit of the Upanishads, finds expression in them, and precisely in two of them which were pretty certainly known to the author of the Gītā. One speaks of enlightenment as coming “by the grace of God,” and recommends “devotion” (*bhakti*) to Him as a means for attaining it.<sup>34</sup> The other speaks of “beholding the greatness of the Soul

<sup>33</sup> This is certainly a reasonable statement in dealing with a work in which the principal speaker is represented as an incarnation of the Supreme Deity; although there are not wanting in the Gītā, as we shall see in Chapter VI, passages in which the First Principle seems to be spoken of in impersonal, monistic terms.

<sup>34</sup> Shvetāshvatara Upanishad, 6.21, 23. This is a comparatively late Upanishad, probably not much older than the Gītā; there are various good reasons for believing that it was known to the Gītā's author.

(*ātman*) by the grace of the Creator (*dhātar*)," <sup>35</sup> and shortly after this the same text, not even using the term "Creator" or "God," or any other personal expression for the Supreme, says that "this Soul (*ātman*; here the Universal Soul) is not to be attained by instruction, by intellect, or by much holy learning; He is to be attained only by him whom He chooses; for him He reveals His own form." <sup>36</sup>

The other "secondary method" of gaining enlightenment, the method of withdrawal from the world by some form of asceticism, is more complicated in its history. In the oldest periods of Vedic speculation we hear much of a concept called *tapas*. Already in the great monistic hymn of the Rig Veda, 10.129, the One is produced out of the primal chaos by the power of *tapas*. The word means literally "heat," and in cosmogonic connections it undoubtedly suggests the creative warmth that is symbolized by the brooding of a bird over its eggs. The idea of the development of the universe out of a cosmic egg appears not infrequently in early Hindu cosmogonies, and with it is clearly associated the idea of *tapas*, warmth, as a force of cosmic evolution. But in religious language the same word had the figurative meaning of "religious, devotional fervor." It is the inspiration of the priest or holy man. It was thus nearly related to the concept of *brahman*, the holy word as the quintessence of religious spirit. It is possible that it had a partly physical connotation in this sense, too; the religious fervor probably was sometimes brought on or increased by physical exertion; and even the sacrificial ritual itself, being performed over the sacred fire, resulted in literal, physical "heat" for the officiating priests (the texts refer to this specifically). For these various reasons the power of *tapas*, "warmth" or "fervor," is prominently mentioned in early Vedic cosmogonies as a cosmic force. Sometimes it is made a sort of First Principle itself. More often the Creator is spoken of as "exercising *tapas*" in creating the universe.

But about the time of the early Upanishads the word *tapas* began to acquire a new connotation. From this period seems to date the development in India of a recognized class of hermits or monks, men who renounced the world and lived a life devoted to meditation or some form of asceticism. The prominence of such people in later India is well known. They do not appear clearly in the early Vedic texts; and their appearance in large numbers is certainly related to the growth of world-weariness among the Hindu intellectuals,

<sup>35</sup> Katha Upanishad, 2.20. The Gītā has several verbal quotations from this Upanishad.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.23.

which accompanied and signalized the general views of life outlined in this chapter. If all ordinary life is vanity and vexation of spirit, and the only hope of salvation lies in knowledge of the Soul, which is to be attained through mystic contemplation, naturally the intelligent man will be inclined to turn his back on the world and devote himself to a more or less hermit-like existence. There are, moreover, very special reasons for asceticism. Actions lead to rebirth; so inaction, or the nearest possible approach to it, withdrawal from the world, is desirable. Furthermore, as we have seen, desires are the root of evil, because they enchain man to the things of this life, and distract his attention from his true goal. He must, therefore, seek to overcome his desires. One way of doing this is to avoid the objects of desire as much as possible, by living a solitary life, preferably in the wilderness. Another way is by positive acts of self-repression, even self-torture, to "modify the flesh" and reduce it to subjection. Another is by means of self-hypnosis to induce a state of trance, or half-trance, in which one may attain nearly complete, if only temporary, freedom from the distractions of the world, and a sort of approach to the "unconscious consciousness" of union with the One. All of these varying forms of ascetic austerities have been more or less practised by many Hindu sects, sometimes in very extreme forms. They are all included under the concept of *tapas*, "heat, fervor," as it is used in the Upanishads and later. As so used the word contains both a physical and a spiritual connotation. Physical, in that many ascetics engaged in often very strenuous exertions, or deliberately subjected themselves to the heat of the sun and of fire, to subdue their physical passions. Spiritual, in that their theoretical aim, at least, was always to produce the desired religious fervor or ecstasy through which they hoped to gain enlightenment. In theory, all such practices were only a means, the end being enlightenment. They prepared the soul for this end by subduing desires and inducing a spiritual attitude favorable to the reception of enlightenment. But in this case, too, as in the case of the theory of divine grace and devotion to the Deity, the means became the end in some later sects, which came to think of salvation as resulting directly from asceticism, not from enlightenment brought on by asceticism. There are sects which teach that salvation is sure to come to one who starves himself to death—the *ne plus ultra* of ascetic practice. This extreme, however, is exceptional.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> In the popular mind ascetic practices came to be regarded as a means of acquiring all sorts of supernatural or magic powers; just as knowledge (the acquisition of which was the theoretical object of ascetic practices) was con-

We see, then, that the word *tapas*, "fervor," had both a physical and a spiritual aspect in both the early Vedic speculations and their later successors, but that there was a change in the connotation on each side. The Upanishads took up the early concept of "fervor" or "warmth" and reinterpreted it in terms of their own ideas. Common to both periods is the use of the primarily physical concept to characterize a certain type of religious life, though a different type in each period. The early use of the concept in cosmogonic connections may also be presumed to have contributed to the use of it in the Upanishads as a tentative definition of the First Principle, or a means of knowing it. ("Seek to know the *brahman* by fervor [austerity, *tapas*]; *brahman* is fervor [austerity]!"<sup>38</sup> Not a few Upanishad passages speak of attaining the *ātman* through *tapas*, either alone or in conjunction with other potencies. For them, however, it remains a subordinate concept, on the whole. The sentence just quoted is not at all typical of their general attitude. In this respect the Bhagvad Gītā agrees with them. Indeed, the usual attitude of the Gītā is definitely opposed to asceticism; it seeks to justify participation in normal, worldly life, though with qualification. Only rarely does it speak in terms which seem to recommend withdrawal from the world.<sup>39</sup>

To summarize this chapter: the Upanishads show us the beginnings of the fundamental principles of later, classical Hinduism. These may be grouped under three general headings. First, pessimism: all ordinary life is evil. Second, transmigration, with the doctrine of karma: living souls are subject to an indefinite series of lives, all more or less like this life, the condition of the individual in each being determined by his moral conduct in previous existences. Third, salvation: the only hope for release from this endless chain of evil existences is (primarily) by "knowledge," that is, intuitive realization of the supreme metaphysical truth; as preparations or aids to the attainment of this knowledge are recognized morality, devotion to a supreme personality, and ascetic austerities, although all of these are usually kept in a quite subordinate position in the Upanishads. In various later sects one or another of them at times assumes such importance as to obscure the original means of salvation, "knowledge." Except in this last respect, virtually all Hindu sects and philosophies agree regarding these basic postulates, however much they may differ on other matters.

ceived by the vulgar in terms of magic power. Some of the later systems of philosophy which attach great importance to austerities are not free from this degradation of the idea.

<sup>38</sup> Taittiriya Upanishad, 3.2ff.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter VII.