



Prashna Upanishad

UNKNOWN

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Translated by Michael Berardi

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THIS EDITION

Machine-assisted translation directly from Sanskrit.

TRANSLATOR

Michael Berardi

THE WORK

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GAPS AND UNCERTAINTIES

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Invocation

Om. Gods, may our ears hear what is auspicious;
may our eyes see what is auspicious, you who receive our worship.
With steadfast limbs and bodies praising you, may we live out the lifespan the
 gods allot.
May Indra, whose fame is ancient, grant us well-being;
may Pushan, who knows all things, grant us well-being.
May Tarkshya, whose wheel is unharmed, grant us well-being;
may Brihaspati grant us well-being.
Om. Peace, peace, peace.

Question 1

- ¹ Om. Sukesha Bharadvaja, Satyakama Shaibya, Gargya Saurayani, Kaushalya Ashvalayana, Bhargava Vaidarbhi, and Kabandhin Katyayana were devoted to Brahman, grounded in Brahman, and seeking the highest Brahman. Thinking, “He will surely tell us all of this,” they approached the venerable Pippalada with sacrificial wood in their hands.
- ² The seer said to them, “Remain here another year in austerity, chastity, and faith. Then ask whatever questions you desire. If we know the answers, we will tell you everything.”
- ³ Then Kabandhin Katyayana approached and asked, “Venerable sir, from what are these creatures born?”
- ⁴ He told him, “Prajapati desired offspring and practiced austerity. Having practiced austerity, he brought forth a pair: matter and life-breath. He thought, ‘These two will produce manifold offspring for me.’”

- 5 “The sun is life-breath; the moon is matter. All this, both what has form and what has no form, is matter. Therefore form itself is matter.
- 6 “As the rising sun enters the eastern quarter, it gathers the eastern life-breaths into its rays. As it lights the south, the west, the north, what is below and above, the quarters between, and everything, it gathers all life-breaths into its rays.
- 7 “This is the fire common to all, taking every form, the life-breath that rises. This is declared in a verse:
- 8 “Taking every form, golden, knowing all that is born,
the ultimate refuge, the one light that gives heat,
with a thousand rays, abiding in a hundred ways,
this sun rises, the life-breath of creatures.
- 9 “The year is Prajapati. Its two courses are the southern and the northern. Those who revere sacrifices and works of public benefit as their accomplishment win only the world of the moon. They return again. Therefore seers who desire offspring take the southern course. This path of the ancestors is matter.
- 10 “But those who seek the Self through austerity, chastity, faith, and knowledge win the sun by the northern course. This is the abode of life-breaths, the immortal, the fearless, the ultimate refuge. From it they do not return. It bars the way back. Of this there is a verse:
- 11 “They call him the father with five feet and twelve forms,
rich in water, in the far half of heaven.
But others call him the discerning one,
set upon seven wheels and six spokes.
- 12 “The month is Prajapati. Its dark fortnight is matter; its bright fortnight is life-breath. Therefore these seers perform sacrifice in the bright fortnight; the others do so in the other.

- 13 “Day and night are Prajapati. Day is life-breath; night is matter. Those who unite in sexual pleasure by day spill away their life-breath. Union in sexual pleasure by night is itself observance of chastity.
- 14 “Food is Prajapati. From it comes seed, and from that these creatures are born.
- 15 “Those who keep this observance of Prajapati bring forth a pair. The world of Brahman belongs to those in whom austerity and chastity abide, in whom truth is firmly established.
- 16 “That stainless world of Brahman belongs to those in whom there is no crookedness, no falsehood, and no deceit.”
- Thus ends the first question in the Prashna Upanishad.

Question 2

- 1 Then Bhargava Vaidarbhi asked him, “Venerable sir, how many gods sustain a creature? Which of them make it manifest, and which is greatest among them?”
- 2 He told him, “Space is such a god, as are wind, fire, water, earth, speech, mind, sight, and hearing. Revealing themselves, they declare, ‘We support this body and hold it together.’
- 3 “Life-breath, the greatest among them, said, ‘Do not be deluded. I alone divide myself fivefold, support this body, and hold it together.’ They did not believe him.
- 4 “In his pride he seemed to rise and leave. When he rose, all the others rose; when he settled, all of them settled. Just as bees all fly up when their king flies up and all settle when he settles, so did speech, mind, sight, and hearing. Delighted, they praised life-breath:

- 5 “He burns as fire; he is the sun,
he is Parjanya, he is bountiful Indra, he is wind;
he is earth, matter, the god,
what is and what is not, and what is immortal.
- 6 “As spokes in a chariot’s hub, all things rest in life-breath:
the Rig verses, the Yajus formulas, the Saman chants, sacrifice, royal power, and
sacred knowledge.
- 7 “As Prajapati you move in the womb; you yourself are born anew.
To you, life-breath, these creatures bring their tribute,
to you who abide with the life-breaths.
- 8 “You bear offerings best to the gods, the first ancestral offering to the fathers;
you are the true practice of the seers, the Atharvans and Angirases.
- 9 “In splendor you are Indra, life-breath; you are Rudra, the protector.
You move through the middle sky; as the sun you are lord of lights.
- 10 “When you pour down rain, life-breath, these creatures of yours
stand filled with joy: ‘There will be food to our desire!’
- 11 “You are uninitiated, life-breath, the lone seer, the eater, the good lord of all.
We are givers of what you eat; you are our father, Matarishvan.
- 12 “That form of yours established in speech, in hearing, and in sight,
that which extends through the mind—make it gracious; do not depart.
- 13 “All this is under life-breath’s sway, all that is established in the third heaven.
Guard us as a mother guards her children; bestow prosperity and wisdom upon
us.”
- Thus ends the second question in the Prashna Upanishad.

Question 3

- 1 Then Kaushalya Ashvalayana asked him, “Venerable sir, from what is this life-breath born? How does it enter this body? How does it divide itself and become established? By what does it leave? How does it uphold what is outside,

and how what is within the person?”

- 2 He told him, “Your questions reach beyond the ordinary. You are firmly grounded in Brahman; therefore I will tell you.
- 3 “This life-breath is born from the Self. As a shadow depends upon a person, so this is spread upon the Self. It enters this body through the mind’s activity. “As a sovereign appoints officials, saying, ‘Govern these villages and those villages,’ so this life-breath assigns the other life-breaths, each to its separate station.
- 5 “The downward breath is in the organs of excretion and generation. Life-breath itself is established in the eyes and ears, and through the mouth and nostrils. In the middle is the equalizing breath: it distributes equally the food that is offered. From this arise the seven flames.
- 6 “The Self is in the heart. Here there are a hundred and one channels. Each has a hundred branches, and each branch has seventy-two thousand subsidiary channels. Through these moves the pervasive breath.
- 7 “Through one channel the ascending breath leads upward: to a good world through good action, to an evil world through evil action, and through both to the human world.
- 8 “The sun rises as the outward life-breath, for it favors the life-breath in the eye. The deity in the earth supports a person’s downward breath. The space between is the equalizing breath; wind is the pervasive breath.
- 9 “Heat is the ascending breath. Therefore one whose heat has subsided goes to another birth, the senses gathering into the mind.
- 10 “With whatever thought one has, one enters life-breath. Life-breath, joined with heat and accompanying the self, leads to the world shaped by that intention.

- ¹¹ “One who knows life-breath with this understanding suffers no loss of offspring and becomes immortal. Of this there is a verse:
- ¹² “Knowing life-breath’s origin, its coming, its station, its fivefold sovereignty, and its presence within the person, one attains immortality; one attains immortality.”
- Thus ends the third question in the Prashna Upanishad.

Question 4

- ¹ Then Gargya Saurayani asked him, “Venerable sir, what sleeps in this person, and what stays awake? Which god sees dreams? To whom does this happiness belong? In what do they all come to rest?”
- ² He told him, “Gargya, as all the rays of the setting sun become one in its luminous disk and spread out again when it rises, so all these become one in the highest god, the mind. Therefore at that time a person does not hear, see, smell, taste, touch, speak, grasp, enjoy sexual pleasure, discharge, or move about. People say, ‘He sleeps.’
- ³ “Only the fires of life-breath stay awake in this city. The downward breath is the household fire; the pervasive breath is the southern fire. The life-breath is the offering fire, since it is led forth from the household fire.
- ⁴ “The equalizing breath bears equally these two offerings, the out-breath and the in-breath. The mind is the sacrificer; the ascending breath is the very fruit of sacrifice. It brings this sacrificer to Brahman day after day.
- ⁵ “Here, in dream, this god experiences its greatness. What it has seen it sees again; what it has heard it hears again. What it has experienced in other lands and directions it experiences again and again. Seen and unseen, heard and unheard, experienced and unexperienced, real and unreal—it sees everything; becoming all, it sees.

- 6 “When it is overwhelmed by light, this god no longer sees dreams. Then this happiness arises in the body.
- 7 “As birds, dear one, come to rest in their roosting tree, so all this comes to rest in the highest Self:
- 8 “Earth and the subtle element of earth; water and the subtle element of water; fire and the subtle element of fire; air and the subtle element of air; space and the subtle element of space; the eye and what is to be seen; the ear and what is to be heard; smell and what is to be smelled; taste and what is to be tasted; skin and what is to be touched; speech and what is to be spoken; hands and what is to be grasped; the organ of generation and what is to be enjoyed; the organ of excretion and what is to be discharged; feet and where they are to go; mind and what is to be thought; understanding and what is to be understood; the sense of ‘I’ and what is claimed as ‘I’; consciousness and what is to be perceived; light and what is to be illuminated; life-breath and what is to be sustained.
- 9 “For this is the seer, the toucher, the hearer, the smeller, the taster, the thinker, the understander, the doer: the person whose self is knowing. He comes to rest in the highest, imperishable Self.
- 10 “Whoever knows that shadowless, bodiless, colorless, pure imperishable attains the highest imperishable itself, dear one. He knows all and becomes all. Of this there is a verse:
- 11 “Where the knowing self, with all the gods,
the life-breaths and the elements, comes to rest—
whoever knows that imperishable, dear one,
knows all and has entered everything.”
Thus ends the fourth question in the Prashna Upanishad.

Question 5

- ¹ Then Satyakama Shaibya asked him, “Venerable sir, if a person meditates on Om until the end of life, what world does he win by it?” He told him:
- ² “Satyakama, this Om is both the higher and the lower Brahman. Therefore, knowing this, one reaches either through this support alone.
- ³ “If he meditates on one measure, enlightened by that alone he swiftly attains the earthly world. The Rig verses lead him to the human world. There, endowed with austerity, chastity, and faith, he experiences greatness.
- ⁴ “But if he attains it in his mind with two measures, the Yajus formulas raise him to the middle sky, to the world of the moon. Having experienced its splendor in the moon’s world, he returns again.
- ⁵ “But one who meditates on the highest Person through this very syllable Om with its three measures becomes one with the sun’s radiance. As a snake casts off its skin, so he is freed from evil. The Saman chants raise him to the world of Brahma. Beyond this aggregate of living beings, he beholds the Person who dwells in the city, higher than the high. Of this there are two verses:
- ⁶ “The three measures are subject to death; employed in union with one another, not separately, rightly applied in outward, inward, and intermediate acts, they leave the knower unshaken.
- ⁷ “Through the Rig verses, this world; through the Yajus, the middle sky; through the Saman chants, what the seers make known. The knower reaches it through Om alone as his support: that which is peaceful, ageless, immortal, fearless, and supreme.” Thus ends the fifth question in the Prashna Upanishad.

Question 6

- ¹ Then Sukesha Bharadvaja asked him, “Venerable sir, Hiranyanabha, a prince of Kosala, came to me and asked this question: ‘Bharadvaja, do you know the Person with sixteen parts?’ I told the prince, ‘I do not know him. If I knew him, how could I fail to tell you? Whoever speaks falsehood withers away, root and all; therefore I must not speak falsely.’ He mounted his chariot in silence and departed. I ask you: where is that Person?”
- ² He told him, “Here, within this very body, dear one, is the Person in whom these sixteen parts arise.
- ³ “He reflected, ‘When what departs will I depart? When what remains will I remain?’
- ⁴ “He created life-breath. From life-breath he created faith, space, air, light, water, earth, the senses, mind, and food; from food, strength, austerity, sacred formulas, action, worlds, and in the worlds, name.
- ⁵ “As these flowing rivers, bound for the ocean, reach it and disappear, their names and forms dissolve, and one speaks only of the ocean. So these sixteen parts of this seer, bound for the Person, reach him and disappear. Their names and forms dissolve, and one speaks only of the Person. He becomes partless and immortal. Of this there is a verse:
- ⁶ “As spokes in a chariot’s hub, the parts rest in him.
Know that Person who is to be known, so that death may not torment you.”
- ⁷ He told them, “This much alone do I know of this highest Brahman. There is nothing beyond it.”
- ⁸ Worshipping him, they said, “You are indeed our father, for you carry us beyond ignorance to the farther shore.” Homage to the highest seers! Homage to the highest seers!

Thus ends the sixth question in the Prashna Upanishad.

Closing invocation

Om. Gods, may our ears hear what is auspicious;
may our eyes see what is auspicious, you who receive our worship.
With steadfast limbs and bodies praising you, may we live out the lifespan the
 gods allot.

May Indra, whose fame is ancient, grant us well-being;
may Pushan, who knows all things, grant us well-being.
May Tarkshya, whose wheel is unharmed, grant us well-being;
may Brihaspati grant us well-being.

Om. Peace, peace, peace.