



Prashna Upanishad

UNKNOWN

Plain English Translation

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Translated by Michael Berardi

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THIS EDITION

Independent machine-assisted translation from Sanskrit.

TRANSLATOR

Michael Berardi

THE WORK

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GAPS AND UNCERTAINTIES

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Contents



Invocation	1
Question 1	1
Question 2	3
Question 3	5
Question 4	6
Question 5	8
Question 6	9
Closing invocation	10

Invocation

Om. Gods, may we hear what is good with our ears.

You who deserve worship, may we see what is good with our eyes.

May we praise you with steady limbs and bodies and live out the lifetime the
gods have given us.

May Indra, whose fame is great, bring us well-being.

May Pushan, who knows everything, bring us well-being.

May Tarkshya, whose wheel-rim is undamaged, bring us well-being.

May Brihaspati bring us well-being.

Om. Peace, peace, peace.

Question 1

- ¹ Om. Sukeshā Bharadvāja, Satyakama Shāibya, Gargya Saurayāni, Kaushalya Ashvalayana, Bhargava Vaidarbhi, and Kabandhin Katayāna were devoted to Brahman and firmly grounded in Brahman. They were looking for the highest Brahman. Thinking, “He will explain all of this to us,” they went to the respected Pippalada, carrying firewood in their hands.
- ² The sage told them, “Live here for one more year with discipline, celibacy, and faith. Then ask whatever questions you want. If we know the answers, we will tell you everything.”
- ³ Then Kabandhin Katayāna came forward and asked, “Sir, where do all these living beings come from?”
- ⁴ He told him, “Prajapati wanted offspring. He practiced intense discipline. After doing so, he brought forth a pair: matter and life-breath. He thought, ‘These two will produce many kinds of offspring for me.’”

- 5 “The sun is life-breath, and the moon is matter. Everything here, with form or without form, is matter. So bodily form is matter.
- 6 “When the sun rises and enters the east, it gathers the life-breaths in the east into its rays. As it lights up the south, the west, the north, what is below, what is above, the directions in between, and everything, it gathers all life-breaths into its rays.
- 7 “This is Vaishvanara, the fire that belongs to everyone and takes every form. It rises as life-breath. A Rig Veda verse says this about it:
- 8 ““Taking every form, golden, knowing all that is born,
the final refuge, the one shining light that gives heat—
with a thousand rays, appearing in a hundred ways,
this sun rises, the life-breath of living beings.’
- 9 “The year is Prajapati. It has two courses, the southern and the northern. Those who regard sacrifices and public good works as the deed to be done win only the world of the moon. They return again. That is why sages who want offspring take the southern path. This path of the ancestors is matter.
- 10 “But those who look for the Self through discipline, celibacy, faith, and knowledge reach the sun by the northern path. This is the home of life-breaths. This is immortal and free from fear. This is the final refuge. From here they do not return. Here their return is stopped. There is this verse about it:
- 11 ““They call him the father with five feet and twelve forms,
full of water, in the farther half of heaven.
Others, though, call him the farseeing one,
set on seven wheels and six spokes.’
- 12 “The month is Prajapati. Its dark half is matter; its bright half is life-breath. That is why these sages offer sacrifices in the bright half. Others do so in the other half.

- 13 “Day and night are Prajapati. Day is life-breath, and night is matter. Those who have sex during the day waste their life-breath. Having sex at night is itself celibacy.
- 14 “Food is Prajapati. From it comes semen. From that these living beings are born.
- 15 “Those who follow this rule of Prajapati produce a pair of offspring. This world of Brahman belongs only to those who practice discipline and celibacy and in whom truth is firmly established.
- 16 “That stainless world of Brahman belongs to those who have no crookedness, no falsehood, and no deceit.”
Here ends the first question of the Prashna Upanishad.

Question 2

- 1 Then Bhargava Vaidarbhi asked him, “Sir, how many divine powers support a living being? Which ones make it function? And which of them is the greatest?”
- 2 He told him, “These divine powers are space, wind, fire, water, earth, speech, mind, sight, and hearing. They show themselves and declare, ‘We hold this body together and support it.’
- 3 “Life-breath, the greatest of them, told them, ‘Do not be mistaken. I alone divide myself into five parts, hold this body together, and support it.’ They did not believe him.
- 4 “Out of pride, he acted as though he were rising to leave. When he rose, all the others rose too. When he settled back, all of them settled back. All the bees rise when their king rises to leave, and all settle when he settles. In just this way,

speech, mind, sight, and hearing followed life-breath. Pleased with him, they praised him:

5 “He burns as fire; he is the sun.

He is Parjanya, the rain god; he is bountiful Indra; he is wind.

He is earth and matter, the divine power,

what exists, what does not exist, and what is immortal.

6 “Everything rests on life-breath, like spokes in the hub of a chariot wheel:

Rig Veda verses, Yajur Veda formulas, Sama Veda songs, sacrifice, ruling power,
and sacred knowledge.

7 “As Prajapati, you move in the womb; you yourself are born again.

Life-breath, these creatures bring offerings to you,

who are established in the life-breaths.

8 “You carry offerings to the gods better than anyone; you are the first food
offered to the ancestors.

You are the truth lived by the sages, the Atharvans and Angirases.

9 “Life-breath, in your power you are Indra; you are Rudra, the protector.

You travel through the sky. You are the sun, the lord of lights.

10 “When you pour down rain, life-breath, these creatures of yours

are filled with joy, thinking, “There will be as much food as we want.”

11 “Life-breath, you are uninitiated, the lone seer, the eater, the true lord of
everything.

We give you food to eat. Matarishvan, you are our father.

12 “That body of yours established in speech, in hearing, and in sight,
and extending through the mind—make it kind. Do not leave us.

13 “Everything here is under life-breath’s control, including all that is established
in the third heaven.

Protect us as a mother protects her children. Give us prosperity and
understanding.”

Here ends the second question of the Prashna Upanishad.

Question 3

- ¹ Then Kaushalya Ashvalayana asked him, “Sir, where does this life-breath come from? How does it enter this body? How does it divide itself and settle here? By what means does it leave? How does it support what is outside, and how does it support what is within a person?”
- ² He told him, “You are asking very deep questions. But you are firmly grounded in Brahman, so I will tell you.
- ³ “This life-breath comes from the Self. Just as a shadow depends on a person, life-breath depends on the Self. It enters this body through the mind’s activity. “An emperor appoints officials, telling them, ‘Take charge of these villages and those villages.’ In the same way, this life-breath assigns the other life-breaths to their separate places.
- ⁵ “It places apana, the downward breath, in the anus and the genitals. Life-breath itself settles in the eyes and ears and works through the mouth and nostrils. In the middle is samana, the balancing breath. It distributes evenly the food offered to it. From this come the seven flames.
- ⁶ “The Self is in the heart. Here there are one hundred and one channels. Each of them has a hundred branches. Each branch has seventy-two thousand smaller channels. Vyana, the spreading breath, moves through them.
- ⁷ “Through one channel that goes upward, udana, the rising breath, leads a person to a good world through good deeds, to a bad world through bad deeds, and to the human world through both.
- ⁸ “The sun is the outer life-breath. It rises and supports the life-breath in the eye. The divine power in the earth supports a person’s downward breath. The space between is the balancing breath, and wind is the spreading breath.

- 9 “Heat is the rising breath. So when a person’s heat dies down, the senses come together in the mind, and the person goes on to another birth.
- 10 “Whatever a person’s state of mind, with that they enter life-breath. Life-breath joins with heat and, together with the individual Self, leads them to the world they have in mind.
- 11 “When someone understands life-breath in this way, their line of offspring does not die out, and they become immortal. There is this verse about it:
- 12 “By understanding life-breath’s origin, arrival, place, and fivefold spread, and its working within a person, one gains immortality.
By understanding it, one gains immortality.”
Here ends the third question of the Prashna Upanishad.

Question 4

- 1 Then Gargya Sauryayani asked him, “Sir, which things in a person sleep, and which stay awake? Which divine power sees dreams? Who experiences this happiness? And in what do all of them come to rest?”
- 2 He told him, “Gargya, when the sun sets, all its rays come together in its circle of light. When it rises again, they spread out again. In the same way, all these powers come together in the mind, the higher divine power. Then the person does not hear, see, smell, taste, touch, speak, grasp, enjoy sexual pleasure, pass waste, or walk. People say, ‘The person is asleep.’
- 3 “Only the fires of life-breath stay awake in this city of the body. The downward breath is the household fire, Garhapatya. The spreading breath is the southern cooking fire, Anvaharyapachana. Life-breath is the offering fire, Ahavaniya, because it is taken from the household fire and carried forward.

- ⁴ “The balancing breath gets its name because it carries the two offerings, breathing in and breathing out, evenly. The mind is the person making the sacrifice. The rising breath is the sacrifice’s reward. Every day it leads the person making the sacrifice to Brahman.
- ⁵ “Here, in dreams, this divine power experiences its greatness. It sees again what it has seen. It hears again the very things it has heard. What it has experienced in other places and directions, it experiences over and over again. It sees what has been seen and what has not been seen, what has been heard and what has not been heard, what has been experienced and what has not been experienced, what is real and what is not real. It sees everything, being everything.
- ⁶ “When this divine power is overcome by light, it sees no dreams. Then this happiness arises in the body.
- ⁷ “My friend, birds settle in a tree where they roost. In the same way, all of this settles 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; wind and the subtle element of wind; space and the subtle element of space; sight and what can be seen; hearing and what can be heard; smell and what can be smelled; taste and what can be tasted; skin and what can be touched; speech and what can be said; hands and what can be grasped; the sexual organ and what can give sexual pleasure; the anus and what can be expelled; feet and where one can go; mind and what can be thought; understanding and what can be understood; the sense of ‘I’ and what can be taken as ‘I’; awareness and what can be noticed; light and what can be lit up; life-breath and what it supports.
- ⁹ “This is the one who sees, touches, hears, smells, tastes, thinks, understands, and acts: the conscious Self, the person. This one comes to rest in the highest, imperishable Self.

- 10 “My friend, whoever knows that shadowless, bodiless, colorless, pure, imperishable reality reaches the highest imperishable reality itself. That person knows everything and becomes everything. There is this verse about it:
- 11 “The conscious Self, together with all the divine powers,
the life-breaths, and the elements come to rest in it.
My friend, whoever knows that imperishable reality
knows everything and has entered everything.”
Here ends the fourth question of the Prashna Upanishad.

Question 5

- 1 Then Satyakama Shaibya asked him, “Sir, if someone meditates on Om until the end of life, which world do they win by doing that?” He told him:
- 2 “Satyakama, Om is both the higher and the lower Brahman. So a person who knows this reaches one or the other by this very support.
- 3 “If someone meditates on just one measure, that alone awakens them, and they quickly come to the earth. The Rig Veda verses lead them to the human world. There, with discipline, celibacy, and faith, they experience greatness.
- 4 “If someone brings two measures into the mind in meditation, the Yajur Veda formulas lift them to the middle region, the world of the moon. After experiencing the wealth and power of the moon’s world, they return again.
- 5 “But if someone meditates on the highest Person with this very syllable Om in its three measures, they reach the sun’s light. As a snake sheds its skin, they are freed from evil. The Sama Veda songs lift them to the world of Brahma. They see the Person who lives in the city of the body, higher than this high mass of living beings. There are these two verses about it:

- 6 “The three measures, when used, are subject to death.
When they are linked to one another, not kept apart,
and used properly in outer, inner, and middle activities,
the person who knows does not waver.
- 7 “Through Rig Veda verses, this world; through Yajur Veda formulas, the
middle region;
through Sama Veda songs, the world the sages know.
With Om alone as their support, the person who knows reaches
what is peaceful, ageless, immortal, fearless, and highest.”
Here ends the fifth question of the Prashna Upanishad.

Question 6

- 1 Then Sukesha Bharadvaja asked him, “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 young prince, ‘I do not know him. If I knew him, why would I not tell you? Anyone who speaks falsely dries up, roots and all. So I must not tell a lie.’ He got into his chariot without a word and went away. Now I ask you: where is that Person?”
- 2 He told him, “My friend, that Person from whom these sixteen parts arise is right here within the body.
- 3 “He thought, ‘What is it whose leaving will mean that I have left? What is it whose staying will mean that I stay?’
- 4 “He created life-breath, and from life-breath, faith, space, wind, light, water, earth, the senses, and the mind. He created food, and from food, strength, discipline, sacred verses, deeds, worlds, and names in those worlds.

- ⁵ “Rivers flow toward the ocean. When they reach it, they disappear. Their names and forms are lost, and people simply call it the ocean. In the same way, these sixteen parts of the one who sees move toward the Person. When they reach him, they disappear. Their names and forms are lost, and people simply call it the Person. He becomes without parts and immortal. There is this verse about it:
- ⁶ “The parts rest in him like spokes in the hub of a chariot wheel. Know that Person who is to be known, so that death may not trouble you.”
- ⁷ He told them, “This is all I know of this highest Brahman. There is nothing beyond it.”
- ⁸ They honored him and said, “You are indeed our father. You carry us beyond ignorance to the farther shore.”
- Respect to the highest sages. Respect to the highest sages.
Here ends the sixth question of the Prashna Upanishad.

Closing invocation

Om. Gods, may we hear what is good with our ears.
You who deserve worship, may we see what is good with our eyes.
May we praise you with steady limbs and bodies and live out the lifetime the gods have given us.
May Indra, whose fame is great, bring us well-being.
May Pushan, who knows everything, bring us well-being.
May Tarkshya, whose wheel-rim is undamaged, bring us well-being.
May Brihaspati bring us well-being.
Om. Peace, peace, peace.