



God is One, without a Second

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The Chandogya Upanishad was written about 3,000 years ago. Its entire exposition can be boiled down to this fundamental realization: “God is One, without a Second.” What an eloquent expression of the Divinity in all of life. Isn’t it amazing that we hear the same thing from every great saint and in every spiritual tradition?

But, what is more astonishing is that we do not believe it; that something doesn’t explode in us saying, “That can be my experience.” It is always shocking to see how we can deny, day after day, the reality of our existence, instead of reaching inside to understand it.

What is really meant by the expression “God is One?” This is not a feel-good greeting card statement that “It’s a Small World After All.” Rather, it is the expression of a profound literal understanding—and a direct experience available to every human being—that all of creation is One Thing. Desiring to realize this, as one’s direct experience, requires a lifetime of transformation. It is a transformation that will fundamentally shatter every limited perception we have of life, because the experience of Oneness is so radically different from how we normally perceive and live in the world.

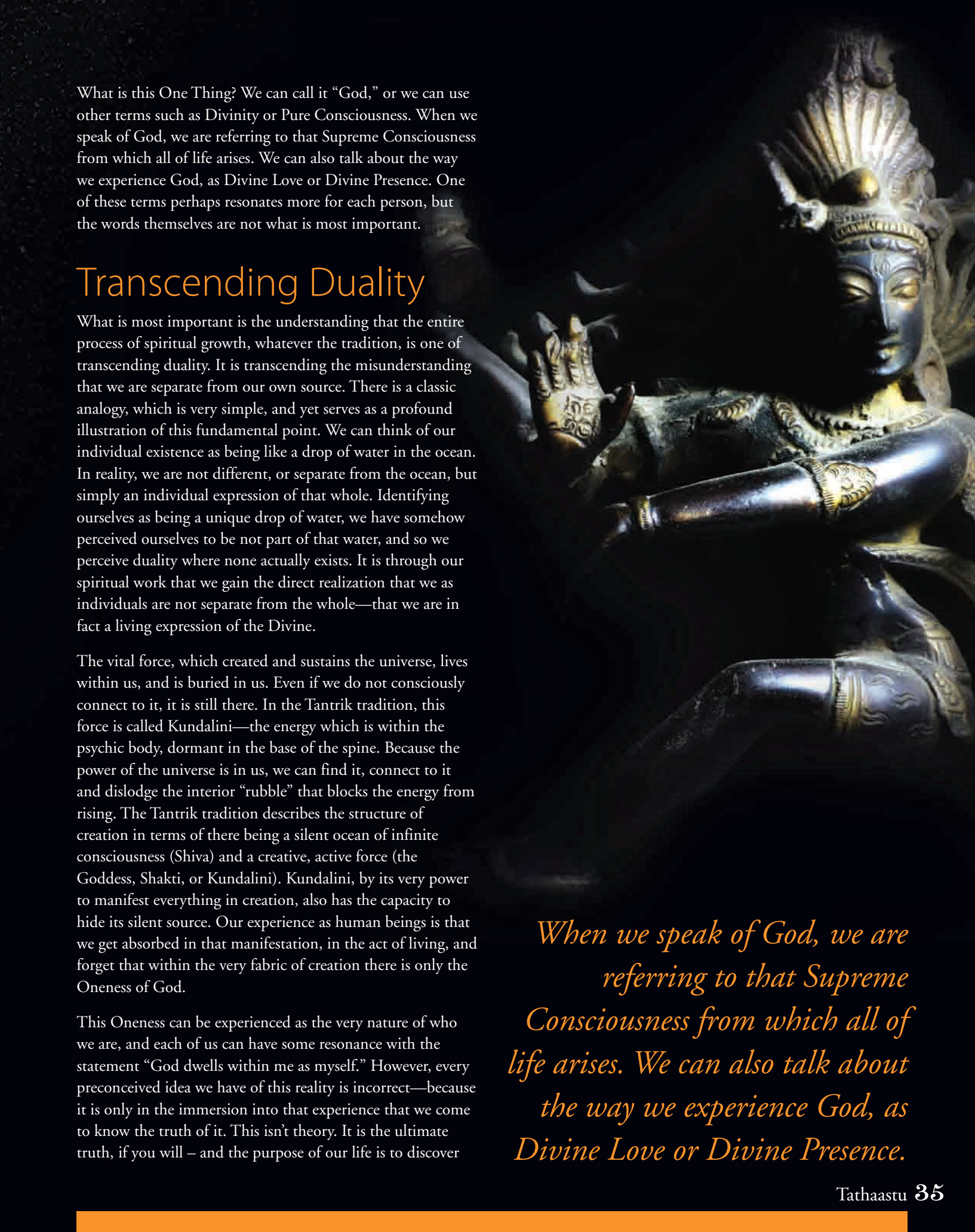
What is this One Thing? We can call it “God,” or we can use other terms such as Divinity or Pure Consciousness. When we speak of God, we are referring to that Supreme Consciousness from which all of life arises. We can also talk about the way we experience God, as Divine Love or Divine Presence. One of these terms perhaps resonates more for each person, but the words themselves are not what is most important.

Transcending Duality

What is most important is the understanding that the entire process of spiritual growth, whatever the tradition, is one of transcending duality. It is transcending the misunderstanding that we are separate from our own source. There is a classic analogy, which is very simple, and yet serves as a profound illustration of this fundamental point. We can think of our individual existence as being like a drop of water in the ocean. In reality, we are not different, or separate from the ocean, but simply an individual expression of that whole. Identifying ourselves as being a unique drop of water, we have somehow perceived ourselves to be not part of that water, and so we perceive duality where none actually exists. It is through our spiritual work that we gain the direct realization that we as individuals are not separate from the whole—that we are in fact a living expression of the Divine.

The vital force, which created and sustains the universe, lives within us, and is buried in us. Even if we do not consciously connect to it, it is still there. In the Tantrik tradition, this force is called Kundalini—the energy which is within the psychic body, dormant in the base of the spine. Because the power of the universe is in us, we can find it, connect to it and dislodge the interior “rubble” that blocks the energy from rising. The Tantrik tradition describes the structure of creation in terms of there being a silent ocean of infinite consciousness (Shiva) and a creative, active force (the Goddess, Shakti, or Kundalini). Kundalini, by its very power to manifest everything in creation, also has the capacity to hide its silent source. Our experience as human beings is that we get absorbed in that manifestation, in the act of living, and forget that within the very fabric of creation there is only the Oneness of God.

This Oneness can be experienced as the very nature of who we are, and each of us can have some resonance with the statement “God dwells within me as myself.” However, every preconceived idea we have of this reality is incorrect—because it is only in the immersion into that experience that we come to know the truth of it. This isn’t theory. It is the ultimate truth, if you will – and the purpose of our life is to discover



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that truth. What we discover is that both Shiva and Shakti are present within us as our Self. We can leave behind the person we have been, and become a whole new person filled with God. Wouldn't that be amazing?

Shiva is that Supreme Consciousness and the foundation of all of existence. He knows who he is. He knows that he wants to create and he knows that he must have the power to do so. So from within that vibrating consciousness, a pulsation of consciousness comes into form; it turns into creation. In Tantrik language this is called dynamic stillness—"stillness" referring to consciousness and "dynamic" being Shakti, or energy. Traditionally, there has been endless discussion about who is more powerful, who came first, Shiva, or Shakti? The Shaktas say that Shiva is just inert consciousness. Of course, the Shaivites say that without awareness Shakti has no function.

In reality, that eternal consciousness and the power to create are not separate. Everything one can see through the Hubble telescope is the Goddess expressing Herself, manifesting through Her power to create. What is important is that we begin to tap into the understanding that if the Goddess dwells within us as ourselves, then all of that power exists within us—and this is the power we use every day to create our life.

So the question immediately arises, "If I have this power, what am I creating with it?" Of course that brings us to the reason why we do a spiritual practice, the reason we start to focus and clarify the intention of our life—so that we can tap into that God-given power within, to create the very life we say we want.

We open the door into inner stillness and Divine Presence through finding a place of profound simplicity within ourselves. This has nothing to do with how complex our life is. All of the diversity of the entire universe, all that complexity and multiplicity is an expression of One Thing, one single pulsation of the Divine. We seek to transcend our own duality and sense of separation from that source—and we do this through the expressed diversity in our lives, not by retreating into a cave. Although it is important to meditate regularly, we do not attain our realization just by spending time with our eyes closed. We must learn to extend what we find inside, out into the dynamics of our lives

The process of spiritual growth is to transcend perceived duality, and we can talk about that transformation as the dissolution of the ego. The ego is not our personality, but rather that aspect of us which adamantly believes we are separate from our source. Everything in life is part of that whole. The issue is, which part do we want to engage—the part that identifies itself as being separate, or the part that knows it is One with God? The reason spiritual "practices" are called such, is that the process is one of training our awareness and attention. We can also view this as re-training, because most of us have grown up projecting into the world, which is what happens when we believe we are separate. When we project that vital force into the world, it creates duality, but when we learn to project it inward, it brings us to the unity of life. Our work is to re-orient ourselves so that we function from a place of deep stillness within; a place which can transcend the grip of the ego.

The Choice is Ours

If we want to understand and experience the unity of life, we must put our energies inside our true Self and try not to get distracted by our superficial longings. Over and over again, we do not make that choice and then we wonder why we have not found what we are seeking. Ask to know God. Decide, that is what you want in your life. That profound experience and awareness is available to us all, and we should want it more than anything else. And really, unless spiritual growth is the single focus of our lives, it probably won't happen.

Those things that give us quick gratification come with a price—and that is suffering. Until we find a place of unconditional joy and fulfillment within, we will continue to find only temporary happiness. We hold onto things, and we hold onto the concept that some situation in our lives is not right. We keep waiting for circumstances to be perfect. We repeat those patterns over and over again as we keep looking for the same thing in the same place, from the same place in ourselves. Even if we regularly have the experience of making contact with a deeply profound, quiet, fulfilled place inside – all too often, we still gravitate back to looking for external satisfaction.

Although we can forget to focus within, we must keep coming back inside, again and again. We forget, and then we start rejecting ourselves, immediately reinforcing our perceived separateness. Without trying to deny the reality that we repeatedly misunderstand our experience, when this happens we do not need to beat ourselves up about it. Nor do we need to go to the opposite extreme and anesthetize ourselves with drugs, power, money, or sex. We are conscious people making conscious choices. We all know individuals who live in extraordinary drama, pain, tension and insanity on a day-to-day basis. Spiritual life is natural, but not normal. We have to make the conscious decision to focus on the part of us that remembers that we are God. If we slip from that resolution, we just sit down on a cushion, meditate, and start again.

Abhinavagupta, one of the great saints of Tantrik Shaivism, said that a person with earnest intent could sit down and find their own enlightenment in four forty-minute sessions. All one had to do is have enough depth to want it. Today, some teachers even say that you just need to open your heart and know reality without engaging in any other spiritual practice. Unfortunately, for almost all seekers, that is not their experience. Usually we must, through the power of own attention, choose our enlightenment over and over again until it actually happens. The real problem is getting past the moments that we do not choose it.

That is why I pose the question: Doesn't our realization ultimately depend on how much we want it, right here, right now? It is part of the extraordinary paradox of that unity, and of our own experience, that if we could sit right now and just reach into the depth of our heart, we would have that realization in a flash. Yet this happens for so few of us. The rest of us have to work at it and grind it out. Divine Presence, that radiating, pulsating pure love, is giving birth to us moment by moment eternally, beyond time and space. It is

always present in our lives. There is never a moment in which God's presence and love is not available to us. Do not think of realization as something which happens "later." It is something we must continually focus on, and our one-pointed devotion to finding that liberation is what will bear fruit over time.

Our longing is the thing that connects us to a concrete experience of God. It arises from our awareness and connects us to the Divine Consciousness, which is expressing Itself as us. As the Sufi poet Kabir said, "In the search for God, it is the intensity of the longing that does all the work. Look at me and you will see a slave to that intensity." It is this intense desire to know God that brings us to the place of practice every day, and it is what fuels the deepening of our practice over time. We cultivate that longing by breathing into it, expanding it, and allowing it to grow.

Some part of us remembers God and desires to be reunited with that Supreme Consciousness. We wish to grow, in order to tune more deeply into the Divine. This longing creates the fire, which burns up all the obstacles we come up against in our spiritual growth. Having a sense of profound longing means we are more pregnant with our wish to grow. The



intensity of the desire is so transformative because it brings us to a place in ourselves that wants something deeper than the mundane, surface experience of day-to-day living. Everyone has the wish to grow, because this longing is God wanting to know Himself again.

The Sufis also said that spiritual growth is not the journey to God, but the journey in God. This is such a powerful expression of simply being immersed and being expressed from that source. Shouldn't we just celebrate that? We want to find a deeper place of consciousness within ourselves—one that is always tuned into God. Otherwise we will spend a lifetime lamenting the fact that we are not experiencing Divinity. Lack of this experience really does boil down to the one simple fact that we don't choose it. We are either consciously choosing to be in that love, or we are unconsciously choosing not to be. That intense longing is the grace and love trying to help us remember our own source. So often we don't listen. The subject line of the email says "higher love." We get the email and delete it, marked as spam.

Deep within each of us is the knowledge that the Divine is the source of our lives. We know this because God dwells within us, as ourselves. Our spiritual work is to develop and refine the tuning mechanism, which can resonate on the same

frequency of that subtle Divinity that is expressing all life—to palpably connect to it. The psychic body and the chakra system function as that mechanism, and there are specific techniques we can use to unfold its potential. Everything we talk about, and all the practices that we do, relate to one single thing—that what we seek is the experience of God loving us.

We have to redirect the energy that we normally expend outward, in reaction to external circumstances. By tuning deeply into ourselves and living from that inner place we change from the inside out. We can waste time talking to ourselves all day about how miserable we are, complaining about our life, instead of finding a different resonance. What we want to discover is how we can let go of all the things that keep us separate; how we can empty ourselves of everything we are filled with, so that we can be filled with something higher. Meditation is tuning into our own source, and this is what allows a lightness and deeper understanding to begin to filter up through all the denser levels within us—so that these qualities can become manifest in our awareness. The only way we will know this is to experience it for ourselves, and so we must surrender, trust, and let God emerge and unfold from within us. Many people are called to spiritual work, but very few choose it. The gift is grace, the choice is ours. Choose carefully. ●



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