



Vineet Chander: On the Chariot of the Self: Understanding Embodiment by Unpacking a Wisdom Analogy



Vineet Chander discovered Bhakti yoga in his youth, and was a student of His Holiness Radhanath Swami for more than two decades. Currently the Director of the Hindu Life Program and Hindu Chaplain at Princeton University, Vinneet, a sought-after speaker and teacher guides you through an exploration of the famous “chariot analogy” found in the Katha Upanishad.

TOP EMBODIMENT TIP: In any challenging or stressful situation, take not a time out but a *time in*; close your eyes, take a moment, reconnect with the breath, think of this (chariot) analogy and take stock of where each piece of the analogy is and what the flow of alignment is. Then visualize and recommit to alignment.

The Paradox of Embodiment in the Vedantic Tradition: **A gift or a problem? A blessing or a curse?**

- In the Bhakti yoga tradition, embodiment is a gift and breathing, the most fundamental gift. Embodiment is also a problem, the root of which leads to misidentification or ignorance
- ‘We are not our bodies’ is only half of the story; the other half is that we are embodied beings. We are so much more than our bodies, and can also be observers of our bodies

The Katha Upanishad: **A new perspective on what we are doing when we sit down to meditate**

- Embodiment: a dynamic to be engaged with in alignment (yoga), a pathway to approach our own embodiment as well as the metaphysics of observing or transcending the limitations of embodiment
- The story is about a young boy who asks his teacher (i.e. death personified) about the secret of death. The short answer to that, is that to understand death, or life, one has to understand the embodied self

The Chariot: **Unpacking the parts of the analogy, moving from gross to subtle**

- Helps us to understand embodiment: How do we show up to all the spaces in our lives?
- How do we bring meditation to, while breathing in and through, all of those spaces?
- The Chariot: as a physical body (i.e. a vehicle)
- The 5 wild horses or the 5 senses: a way for the chariot to move forward, engage with the world around us
- The Reins: Manas (reactive mind, 6th sense) which breaks things into categories; has attachment & aversion, and is sense-driven
- Charioteer: Buddhi (the discerning mind) that uses the reins act as a tool to guide, steer and direct the Manas
- The Passenger (The Atman, Embodied True Self): as the one undergoing the journey, in whose service the rest act

Misalignment and Alignment:

- Misalignment happens when the external world overwhelms the senses and pulls the body along with them; or when there is ego justification. Alignment (or yoga) happens when senses and the body are taken as gifts and tools to mindfully navigate the world, or when there is intentional presence and equanimity
- Alignment of body and mind brings a greater experience of self, an awareness of the divine source and reconnection

Resources

- ❖ **Books:** *The Upanishads*, by Eknath Easwaran



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