

Chapter I. The Upanishads

Humanity is essentially divine. However, one believes oneself to be an individual, limited and temporary, because one is entangled in the characteristics of the five elements: sound, touch, form, taste, and smell. This error brings about joy and grief, good and bad, birth and death. To escape from this association with the elements, to rid oneself of the pulls of their characteristics, is the sign of liberation, known as *kaivalya*, *moksha*, or *mukthi*. The names may change, but the achievement is the same.

While entangled in the five elements, one is attracted, distracted, or disappointed by them, all of which causes distress. Wealth, possessions —vehicles, buildings, etc.— are all transmutations of the elements. One craves them, and when one loses them or fails to get them, one spurns them.

Let us take the five elements, one by one. The living being has the first one, the earth, as its base. Water, the second, is the basis for the earth. Water is produced from fire, the third element, and fire itself emanates from wind (*vayu*), which is the fourth. Wind arises from ether (*akasa*). Ether emerges from the primal nature, and the primal nature is but the manifestation of one aspect of the majesty of God, or the supreme sovereign *Atma* (*Paramatma*).

Seeking to reach that supreme *Atma*, the source and core of the universe, the individual (*jivi*), who has entangled himself in the elements, has to overcome the bonds one by one, by discrimination and steady practice of detachment. One who does this is a spiritual aspirant, and one who wins in this struggle is liberated even while alive (is a *jivan-muktha*).

Study the Upanishads for higher spiritual wisdom

For the process of such discrimination and for the visualisation of one's innate reality, one has to study the *Upanishads*. Collectively called *Vedanta*, they form the section of the *Vedas* that deals with the higher wisdom —the *Jnana-kanda*. Liberation from the consequences of ignorance can be secured only by spiritual knowledge (*jnana*). The *Upanishads* themselves declare,

By knowledge alone can freedom be won
(*Jnaanaath eva thu kaivalyam*).

The *Vedas* are reputed to be “three-sectioned”, the three sections being spiritual wisdom (*jnana*), contemplation or worship (*upasana*), and dedicated activity (*karma*). These three are also found in the *Upanishads*; they provide the basis for the non-dualist (*a-dwaitha*), qualified non-dualist (*visishta-adwaitha*), and dualist (*dwaitha*) systems of philosophy.

The word *Upanishad* denotes the study and practice of the innate truth, *Brahma-vidya* denotes the supremacy of spiritual contemplation, and *Yoga-sastra* denotes the mental churning that brings success.

What is the fundamental activity that is required? What is the basic thing to be known? It is just one's real reality. The *Upanishads* describe the various stages and modes of this search.

The name *Upanishad* is full of significance. *Upa-ni* means the process of studying with steadfastness (*nish-ta*); *shath* means the attainment of the Ultimate Reality. The name *Upa-ni-shath* arose for these reasons. The *Upanishads* do not only teach the principles of knowledge of the supreme Reality (*Atma-vidya*), they also instruct in

the practical means of realisation. They point out not only the duties and obligations one has to bear but also tell us the acts to be done and those to be avoided.

Why, the *Gita* is but the essence of the *Upanishads*, isn't it? Arjuna acquired by the lessons of the *Gita* the fruit of listening to the *Upanishads*. The statement, "That thou art (*Thath twam asi*)" is found in the *Upanishads*. In the *Gita*, Krishna says to Arjuna, "I am Arjuna among the Pandavas," that is to say, "I and You are the same." This is the same as saying "Thou art That," that the individual and God (*jiva* and *Iswara*) are the same. So, whether it is the *Gita* or the *Upanishads*, the teaching is non-duality, not duality or qualified monism.

Develop purity of consciousness, moral awareness, and spiritual discrimination

The human eye cannot delve into the microcosm or the macrocosm. It cannot read the mystery of the virus or the atom or the stellar universe. Therefore, scientists supplement the eye with the microscope and the telescope. Similarly, sages are able to experience Divinity through the eye of knowledge gained by following the *dharm*a of moral conduct and spiritual discipline.

When the human eye needs an extraneous instrument to observe even the insignificant worm and virus, how can a person refuse to go through the process of *mantra* in order to see the omnipresent transcendent Principle? It is very hard to acquire the eye of wisdom. Concentration is essential for it. And, for concentration to develop and stabilise, three things are very important: purity of consciousness, moral awareness, and spiritual discrimination. These qualifications are difficult for ordinary folk to attain.

But humanity is endowed with the special instrument of discrimination, of judgement, of analysis and synthesis. Among the animals, only mankind possesses it. It has to be developed and utilised to the best purpose. Through this instrument, one can realise the immanent Divinity.

Instead, one pesters oneself and others with questions like: Where does God reside? If He is real, why isn't He seen? Hearing such queries, one feels like pitying the poor questioners, for they are announcing their own foolishness. They are like the dullards who aspire for university degrees without taking pains even to learn the alphabet. They aspire to realise God without putting themselves to the trouble of the required spiritual discipline. People who have no moral strength and purity talk of God and His existence and decry efforts to see Him —such people have no right to be heard.

Upanishads are the whisperings of God

Spiritual practice is based on the holy scriptures (*sastras*). They can't be mastered in a trice. They can't be followed through talk. Their message is summed up in the *Upanishads*, so they are revered as authoritative. They are not the products of human intelligence; they are the whisperings of God to man. They are parts of the eternal *Vedas*, and the *Vedas* shine gloriously through all their parts.

The *Upanishads* are authentic and authoritative, since they share the glory of the *Vedas*. They are 1180 in number, but, through the centuries, many of them disappeared from human memory and only 108 have survived. Of the 108, 10 have attained great popularity as a result of the depth and value of their contents.

The sage Vyasa classified the *Upanishads* and allotted them among the four *Vedas*. The *Rig-veda* has 21 branches, and each branch has one *Upanishad* allotted to it. The *Yajur-veda* has 109 branches and 109 *Upani-*

shads. The *Atharvana-veda* has 50 branches and 50 *Upanishads*. The *Sama-veda* has 1000 and 1000. Thus, Vyasa assigned the 1180 *Upanishads* to the four *Vedas*.

Sankaracharya raised the status of ten of the *Upanishads* by selecting them for writing his commentaries, so they became specially important. Humanity stands to gain or fall by these ten. All who seek human welfare and progress are now apprehending whether even these ten will be forgotten, because neglecting them will usher in moral and spiritual disaster. However, there is no reason for such fears. The *Vedas* can never be harmed. Pundits and those with faith should resolve to present at least these ten *Upanishads* before humanity. They are:

01. Aithareya	04. Isa	07. Prasna	10. Taithiriya
02. Brihadaranyaka	05. Kena	08. Mundaka	
03. Chandogya	06. Katha	09. Mandukya	

The remaining 98 are:

11. Adhyatma	36. Ganapathi	61. Muktika	86. Sathyayana
12. Adhvayatharaka	37. Garbha	62. Nadabindu	87. Savithri
13. Aksha-malika	38. Garuda	63. Narada-parivrajaka	88. Sita
14. Akshik	39. Gopalatapani	64. Narasimha	89. Skanda
15. Amritha-bindu	40. Hamsa	65. Narayana	90. Soubhagyalakshmi
16. Amrithanada	41. Hayagriva	66. Niralamba	91. Sukarahasya
17. Annapurna	42. Jabaladarshana	67. Nirvana	92. Sulabha
18. Aruni	43. Jabali	68. Nrisimhatapani	93. Surya
19. Atharvasikha	44. Kaivalya	69. Paingala	94. Swethasvatara
20. Atharvasira	45. Kalaagnirudra	70. Panchabrahma	95. Tejobindu
21. Atma	46. Katharudra	71. Parabrahma	96. Tharasara
22. Atmabodha	47. Katharudra	72. Paramahamsa	97. Thripura
23. Avadhutha	48. Kaushitaka	73. Parama-parivrajaka	98. Thripurathapini
24. Avyaktha	49. Krishna	74. Pasupatha	99. Thuriyatita
25. Bhasma	50. Kshithi	75. Pranagnihotra	100. Trisikhi-brahmana
26. Bhavana	51. Kshurika	76. Ramarahasya	101. Vajrasuchika
27. Bhavaricha	52. Kundiska	77. Ramathapani	102. Varaha
28. Brahmajabala	53. Maha-bhiksuka	78. Rudrahridaya	103. Vasudeva
29. Brahmana	54. Mahanarayana	79. Rudraksha	104. Yajnavalkya
30. Brahma-vidya	55. Mahavakya	80. Sandilya	105. Yogachudamani
31. Dakshinamurthi	56. Maitrayani	81. Sanyasa	106. Yogakundalini
32. Dattatreya	57. Maitreyi	82. Sarabha	107. Yogasikha
33. Devi	58. Mandala	83. Saraswathi-rahasya	108. Yogathathwa
34. Dhyana-bindu	59. Mantrika	84. Sariraka	
35. Ekakshara	60. Mudgala	85. Sarva-sar	

The *Upanishads* have inspired other works on geography, astronomy, astrology, and economic and political theory, as well as the eighteen *Puranas* comprising *Skanda*, *Siva*, *Garuda*, and others.

God is the prophet of the universal spirituality of the Upanishads

The *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* are the very foundation of the Eternal Religion (*Sanathana Dharma*). This

religion has no one founder, as do others. The invisible unknown founder is God, the source of all wisdom. He is the prophet of this eternal universal religion. His grace and inspiration manifested through pure sages, and they became the spokespersons of this *dharma*. When the moral purity of men degenerates, God takes form as grace and inspiration in sages and teachers. Through the *Upanishads*, He has also spoken the wisdom concerning the Supreme Reality.