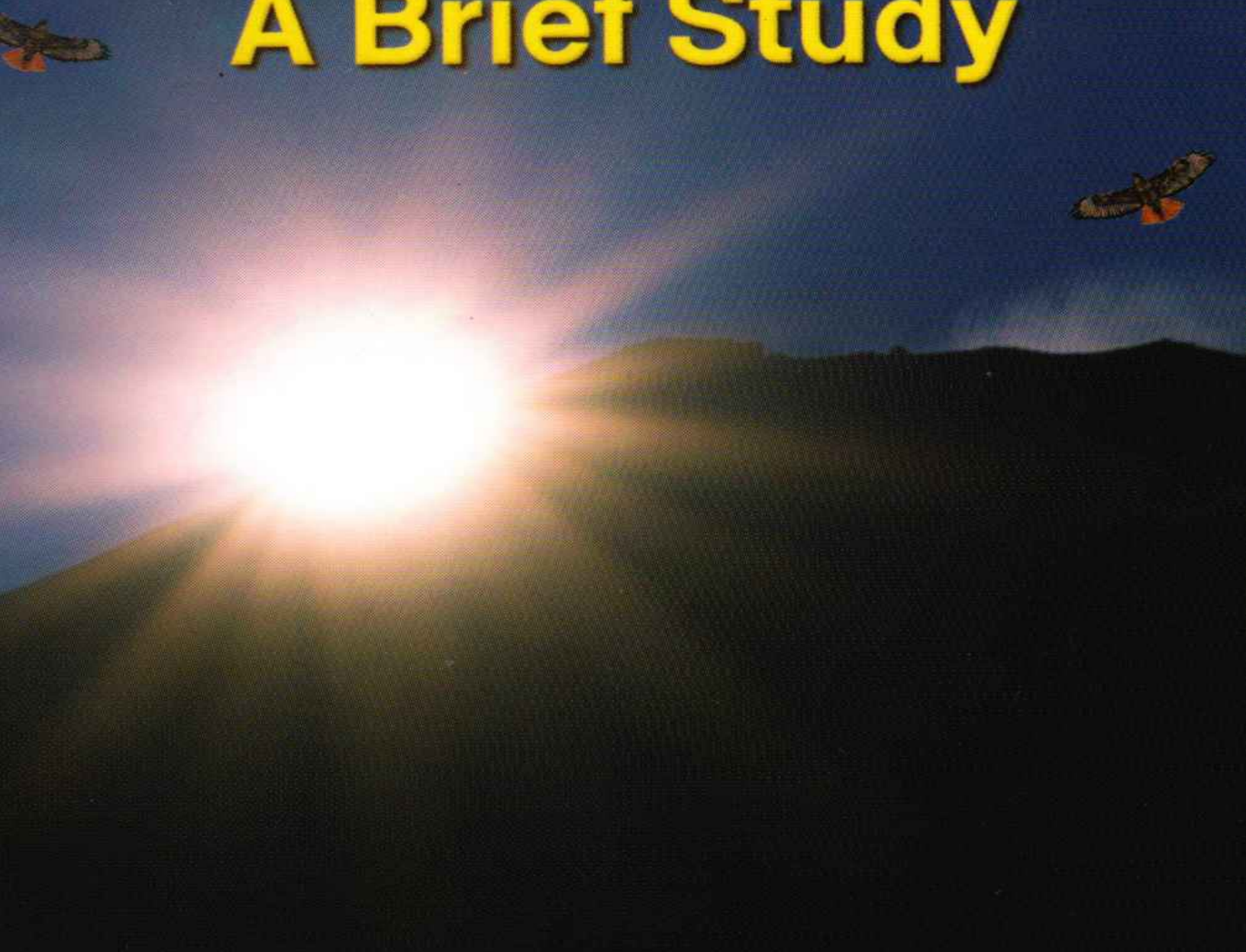


THE TEN CARDINAL UPANIṢADS

A Brief Study



SWAMI HARSHANANDA

The Ten Cardinal Upaniṣads

A BRIEF STUDY



Swami Harshananda



**Sri Ramakrishna Math
Mylapore, Chennai -600 004**

Published by
Adhyaksha
Sri Ramakrishna Math
Mylapore, Chennai-4

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II-2M 3C-12-2010
ISBN 978-81-7823-452-6

Printed in India at
Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press
Mylapore, Chennai-4

Preface

The Upaniṣads (as part of the Vedas) are the basic scriptures of Hinduism. The Vedānta philosophy with which the modern savants and philosophers are now fairly familiar, is based on them. Hence it is essential that every educated Indian, especially the Hindus, should have a basic knowledge of these wonderful works.

This book contains a brief study of the ten cardinal Upaniṣads. It is aimed at equipping an average student of religion and philosophy with a basic knowledge of the Upaniṣads in general and the ten in particular.

This book gives all the essential information needed to understand them along with the gist of the ten cardinal Upaniṣads arranged in the traditional order.

We hope that this book also will become popular like the other books published from here.

—S. H.



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Upaniṣads

Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad
Kena Upaniṣad
Kaṭha Upaniṣad
Praśna Upaniṣad
Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad
Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad
Aitareya Upaniṣad
Taittirīya Upaniṣad
Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
Chāndogya Upaniṣad

Key to Transliteration and Pronunciation

Sounds like

अ	a-o in son
आ	ā-a in master
इ	i-i in if
ई	ī-ee in feel
उ	u-u in full
ऊ	ū-oo in boot
ऋ	ṛ-somewhat between r and ri
ए	e-ay in May
ऐ	ai-y in my
ओ	o-o in oh
औ	au-ow in now
क	k-k in keen
ख	kh-ckh in blockhead
ग	g-g (hard) in go
घ	gh-gh in log-hut
ङ	ṅ-ng in singer
च	c-ch in chain
क्ष	ch-chh in catch him
ज	j-j in judge
झ	jh-dgeh in hedgehog
ञ	ñ-n (somewhat) as in French
ट	ṭ-t in ten
ठ	ṭh-th in ant-hill
ड	ḍ-d in den
ढ	ḍh-dh in godhood
ण	ṇ-n in under
त	t-t in French

थ	th-th in thumb
द	d-th in then The
ध	dh-the in breathe
न	n-n in not
प	p-p in pen
फ	ph-ph in loop-hole
ब	b-b in bag
भ	bh-bh in abhor
म	m-m in mother
य	y-y in yard
र	r-r in runhosts
ल	l-l in luck
व	v-v in avert
श	ś-sh in reich (German)
ष	ṣ-sh in show
स	s-in sun
ह	h-in hot
•	ṁ-m in sum
:	ḥ-h in half



“The Upaniṣads are the great mine of strength. Therein lies strength enough to invigorate the whole world; the whole world can be vivified, made strong, energised through them. They will call with trumpet voice upon the weak, the miserable and the downtrodden of all races, all creeds and all sects, to stand on their feet and be free; freedom, physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom are the watchword of the Upaniṣads.

—*Swami Vivekananda*



Introduction

1

Prologue

If there is one mass of scriptures that has inspired and sustained the Hindus over the millennia, it is the Upaniṣads. By advocating the ultimate triumph of the spirit over matter, of man over nature, the Upaniṣads have created, strengthened and preserved a great tradition of spirituality. This they have done, not only by a fearless spirit of inquiry to its logical conclusions, but also by intuitive mystical experiences beyond the ken of the intellect, these experiences almost always converging to a unitive principle. No school of thought, no religious movement, of the subsequent periods in the history of India has remained untouched by their influence, if not pervaded by them. In fact, many of these schools and movements could gain respectability or acceptance only because they trod the path lighted up by the Upaniṣads.

Research scholars of Indian thought have discovered the influence of the Upaniṣads on the religious-cultural life of other nations far beyond the boundaries of India, whether it is Japan, China and Korea in the East or Central Asia in the West.

Hindu religious tradition has always accorded the Upaniṣads the status of the highest authority since it has unquestioningly been accepted as Śruti, the Revealed Word.

Meaning of the Word ‘Upaniṣad’

The word ‘Upaniṣad’ is derived from the verbal root *sad* which has several meanings: loosening, movement and annihilation. Putting all these three senses together, the word ‘Upaniṣad’ refers to that divine knowledge or wisdom which loosens the bonds of saṁsāra (transmigratory existence) of a being, annihilates his ajñāna or ignorance of his real nature and leads him to Brahman or God, the Absolute. The book or the scriptural work that teaches this wisdom is also called ‘Upaniṣad.’

The word may also mean ‘sitting devotedly near.’ Hence it represents the ‘secret teaching, of spiritual wisdom’ imparted in private to worthy pupils, but jealously guarded from the unworthy ones.

The orthodox view is that the Upaniṣads are Revealed Word. They are revealed by God himself at the commencement of each cycle of creation to the worthy few. Hence they are eternal.

However, treating them as books of spiritual wisdom, can we assign any date or period, in relation to human history as known till now? Attempts in this direction have rather been frustrating, thanks to that peculiar trait of the Hindu mind which accords much greater importance to the principle than to the person or the period.

The Upaniṣads have been an integral part of the Vedas. Hence, a date assigned to them can as well hold good for the Upaniṣads also. The date of the *Ṛgveda* has varied from 4500 B.C (B.G. Tilak) and 2400 B.C (Hang) to 1200 B.C (Max Muller). Modern European scholars assign the period 700 B.C-600 B.C. to the Upaniṣads assuming a gradual evolution of the philosophical ideas from the period of the Vedic hymns to that of the *Āraṇyakas* and the Upaniṣads. B.G. Tilak, on the basis of an astronomical data provided in the *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad*, has however, assigned 1900 B.C. as the date of that Upaniṣad. Hence, according to him and the scholars that concur with him, the Upaniṣads belong to the period 2500 B.C.-2000 B.C.

From among the extant Upaniṣads, only ten to fifteen are considered to be the older ones. They are the basic sources of ancient Hindu philosophy.

However, do all these Upaniṣads teach a single system of philosophy? Or, do they contain several, mutually conflicting, systems?

The orthodox Hindu tradition has always considered the entire body of the Upaniṣadic literature as one unit (‘Śruti’) and hence teaching one philosophy. Though this philosophy may contain several aspects, they always form a homogeneous unit.

A look at the different and divergent teachings of these Upaniṣads does not easily convince us about the soundness of the orthodox standpoint. The traditional commentators have, however, solved this problem by sticking to one view as *the* teaching of the Upaniṣads and explaining (explaining away?) the others in a way that suits their interpretation.

Could it be that, over the centuries, many vital links have been lost and what we now have, are only fragments of the original works leading to this dichotomy of views? Though this is a plausible explanation, there is no clinching evidence to prove it.

Or, can we say that the various sages that we come across in the Upaniṣads—like Gautama, Āruṇi, Yājñavalkya, Śvetaketu or Raikva—were great thinkers and mystics in their own right, who have given independent views, based on their own logic and experience? The Truth, Brahman (the Infinite, the Absolute), is too great to be known exhaustively by anyone. One can get only a glimpse of the same, like the six blind men touching the same elephant. Hence, could it not be that the views of these sages, though apparently different, reflect the several facets of the same Brahman?

At the most, these are all intelligent guesses and may continue to remain so for quite some time!

Number and Classification

The number of works that go by the name ‘Upaniṣad’ and available in print today exceeds 200. The *Muktikopaniṣad* gives a list of 108 Upaniṣads. Śaṅkara (A.D. 788-820), the earliest commentator, has chosen only ten Upaniṣads to expound.

As regards the classification, different scholars have adopted different methods. Some have grouped them in the chronological order, considering the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, the *Chāndogya* and the *Taittirīya* as more ancient than the *Kaṭha*. Others have classified them according to the style of language, as Upaniṣads in prose or in poetry. Such methods of classification do not help us much in studying them.

Most of the Upaniṣads, outside the ten chosen by Śaṅkara belong to a much later period in our history and were written to propagate specific cults and sects. The nomenclature ‘Upaniṣad’ was conveniently added to them to gain respectability, acceptance and authority in the orthodox circles or among the followers. However, it must be conceded that these Upaniṣads also, though sectarian in character, have contributed quite a lot to the propagation of popular religion and ethics as also to the maintenance of the Vedāntic spirit among the people.

By its very definition, an Upaniṣad is an esoteric work, recondite in nature and spirit. The language is archaic. Many of these concepts, being closely allied to the sacrificial religion of the Saṁhitās and the Brāhmanas, are unintelligible to us, removed as we are by millennia, from those rituals or ideas. Hence, it is impossible to understand them, much less, get a consistent view of them, without an authoritative and reliable commentary. Śaṅkara is the earliest and the first to comment upon them. His bhāṣyas or commentaries, further elucidated by the ṭīkāś or glosses of Ānandagiri (13th century) are invaluable source books to unlock the wisdom of the Upaniṣads.

Rāmānuja has not commented upon any of the Upaniṣads though he has tried to amplify some of their concepts in his *Vedārthasaṅgraha*. Raṅga-rāmānuja (circa A.D. 1600) has completed the work by commenting on all the major Upaniṣads. Madhva (A.D. 1197-1276) has written brief commentaries on all the ten ancient Upaniṣads upon which some savants like Rāghavendra Tīrtha (A.D. 1595-1671) have written glosses.

Some commentators have chosen to write only on certain Upaniṣads. The *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad* has attracted the attention of many scholars like Brahmānanda Sarasvatī, Śaṅkarānanda (14th cent.), Uvaṭārya (11th cent.) as also Vedāntadeśika (A.D. 1268-1370) who have not chosen to comment on the other Upaniṣads. Rāghavendra Tīrtha has commented on the *Īśā*, *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Praśna*, *Muṇḍaka* and *Māṇḍūkya* following Madhva's line of interpretation.

Philosophy of the Upaniṣads

The thought current of the Upaniṣads is, in a way, continuation of that in the Brāhmaṇas and the Āraṇyakas. However, the trend is definitely against ritualism and strongly favours upāsana (meditation) and jñāna (knowledge).

In the more philosophical portions of the Upaniṣads, the discussions generally centre round the fundamental cause of the world, if there is one, and its nature as also its evolution into this world. This cause is usually called ‘Brahman.’

As against this, there is a parallel mode of enquiry, into the existence or otherwise, of a permanent subjective entity behind the body-mind complex. This is called ‘ātman’ (the Self or the soul).

Is this ātman one or many? Is it finite in size or infinite? Is it identical with Brahman or different? Though the Upaniṣads discuss these questions, there does not appear to be a single answer. Different view points seem to exist. However, the orthodox Vedāntic schools struggle to present only one view as the right view to the exclusion of the others.

Destiny of the living beings here and hereafter, including some eschatological questions, form another topic of the Upaniṣads.

Ignorance of one’s real nature as the cause of bondage and its eradication through the practice of certain virtues like self-control and speaking the truth are also touched upon.

A brief summary of these teachings may now be given.

BRAHMAN

The basic cause of the universe, the cause of all causes, is called ‘Brahman’ by the Upaniṣads. Ātman, Sat, Akṣara, Ākāśa and Bhūmā are the other appellations used for this Brahman. The world rises out of Him, is supported by him and gets dissolved back into him. He is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. He is greater than the greatest, smaller than the smallest and is also the inmost Self of all. He is immanent in this world even as salt is, in saline water. He is beyond all wants and limitations. He is the lord as well as the substratum of the whole creation. He sees, hears and knows although none can see or hear or know him. He is the very personification of all the great virtues to their perfection. It is he who responds to the prayers of his votaries and grants them whatever they seek. He is the ultimate goal of all.

To facilitate meditation upon him, the Upaniṣads sometimes describe him as a Puruṣa (the divine

being in the human form), bright and brilliant, of golden hue, with all parts of his body of golden colour and his eyes resembling a fully bloomed red lotus. Fire is his head, the sun and moon are his eyes, the quarters are his ears, the Vedas are his speech and the earth is his feet. Sometimes he is also described as having thousand heads, thousand eyes and thousand feet, thereby stressing his omnipresent cosmic form. This form recommended for meditation is the Aupaṇiṣada-Puruṣa (the Being described in the Upaniṣads).

ĀTMAN

When a person dies, is there anything in him that survives and continues to live on? What is that, impelled by which, the senses and the mind of a living person are active? Such inquiries by the sages of the Upaniṣads have led to the establishment of the ātman, the soul or the Self, as the abiding spirit behind the body and the mind of every living being.

This ātman is neither born nor does he die with the birth and the death of the body. He is unborn and eternal. He is different from the body, the senses, the vital airs, the mind and the ego-sense and is ever free. All of them are enlivened by him, made to work by him, for him. The defects and the infirmities in them, or even their loss, can never affect him.

However, it is also a fact of experience that this ātman has been encased and bound in this corporeal frame and has lost much of his freedom. In this state, he is called ‘jīvātman’ or simply as the ‘jīva.’ The answer to the question as to why and how he has come to such a pass is ‘karma,’ the inexorable consequence of his past actions. For the question, how and when the very first karma started this chain of bondage, there is no answer, since the Upaniṣads accept creation as an eternal process, without beginning or end.

His involvement in the cycle of birth and death, and consequent suffering, has been called ‘saṃsāra.’ Mokṣa or liberation from this bondage of saṃsāra has been presented before him as the goal of his life. And, this can be achieved by jñāna, or knowledge and, bhakti or devotion, which includes upāsanā or meditation. Karma or action as prescribed in the scriptures is an aid to this mokṣa.

CREATION

Though Brahman is the permanent substratum of this world and ātman is our essential nature, we cannot ignore this world in which we live and move and have our being as it were. For all practical

purposes it is very real to us. And, even our struggles or attempts for mokṣa have to take place only in this world. Hence, it is necessary to know about it, how it came into being, how it is sustained now and its ultimate destiny.

In the beginning, Brahman alone—also called ‘Ātman’ or ‘Sat’—existed, as the one without a second. He decided to become many. He then created out of himself, ākāśa (sky or space or ether), vāyu (air), agni or tejas (fire), ap (water) and pṛthvī (earth). A permutation and combination of these five elements, with Brahman associated at every stage, has resulted in this world. Later, Brahman entered into this creation as the antaryāmin or the inner controlling spirit.

According to other descriptions, the original substances created were only three (tejas, ap and anna or earth) or even two, rayi (moon or anna or matter) and prāṇa (sun or fire or energy or spirit). By a combination of these, in different proportions, this world came into being. It is ever under his control. Nay, it is non-different from him.

Even after being created out of, or, emerging out of, Brahman, this world continues to be in him. It will merge back in him at the time of pralaya or dissolution.

With regard to the relationship between Brahman and the world, two views seem to exist in the Upaniṣads. According to one view—known as Saprapañcavāda—since the world is an evolute of Brahman, it is also Brahman. The other view—called as Niṣprapañcavāda—denies the world an existence of its own and asserts the existence of Brahman alone.

BONDAGE AND LIBERATION

Some Upaniṣads picture the jīvātman and the Paramātmān (the Supreme Self, Brahman as the indwelling spirit) as two birds perching on the same tree (the body). The former eats the fruits of the tree (results of karma)—some sweet and some bitter—and experiences joy and sorrow. The latter is sitting majestically, ever calm and collected, never touching those fruits. When the jīvātman realises the greatness of the Paramātmān, he becomes free from all sorrow and suffering.

Though the question, how the ever free ātman became the jīva, has not been answered by the Upaniṣads, they have given several modes of sādhanā or spiritual exercises by which the jīva can recover his original state.

A sādhanaka or a spiritual aspirant should first cultivate certain moral and ethical virtues as the first step. Through discrimination he should understand that the Vedic rituals can never lead him to the eternal Truth and hence renounce them. He must be ever ready to reject the preyaṣ (the pleasant) and

choose the śreyas (the good). By eschewing evil conduct and by practising self-control, he should turn back his mind from outside, into himself, the region of the heart, the seat of ātman, and meditate on it. He should show compassion to all the living beings. He should try to give them what they need and should never be greedy. He must be vigilant forever and should always speak the truth and act according to dharma or righteousness, by following the scriptural injunctions. Study of the Upaniṣads, performing austerities and observing brahmacharya or celibacy are also invaluable aids in his sādhanā.

He should approach a competent guru or spiritual teacher in all humility and learn the truth about the ātman from him, through proper questioning and sevā or service to him.

The Upaniṣads make it incumbent on the guru to teach spiritual wisdom to a worthy disciple, after testing him if necessary.

The disciple should then practise manana (reflection) and nididhyāsana (meditation) on the ātman which will result in anubhūti or realisation.

What is the nature of the spiritual experience that an aspirant gets when he realises the ātman? He sees all beings in himself and himself in all. Hence he feels neither special attraction nor repulsion for others. Behind every thought of his, he is able to feel the power of the ātman, the pure consciousness. He clearly perceives that all the bonds of his heart which had him tied down to this mundane existence, have broken down. He experiences great joy and bliss within himself. When he directs his attention outside, there too he sees the same spirit, the ātman, the Brahman.

The bliss he experiences is incomparably superior to any other happiness one can get in this world. And he will never have any type of regret for anything in life. He may even roam about the world in a joyous state, declaring his experiences for the benefit of others.

When such a one, the jīvanmukta (one who is liberated even while living here in this body), gives up his body, what happens to him?

According to one view, his physical body and the subtle body disintegrate at death and get absorbed into the five elements. And, he gets merged in Brahman, like a river entering into the ocean. Losing his separate identity, he attains complete and perfect unity with Brahman.

However, a large body of the Upaniṣadic lore propounds the theory of the liberated soul travelling by the Arcirādimārga or the Bright Path (also called Devayāna and Uttarāyāna) to the Brahmaloaka (also known as Satyaloka) and reside there permanently in infinite peace and bliss. The various stations on the path, are fire, day, bright fortnight, the six months of the northern solstice, the year, the sun, the moon and the lightning. All these actually represent the guardian deities of these stations.

From the last station, the vidyut or lightning, an ‘amānava puruṣa,’ a non-human (divine) being, leads the liberated soul to the Brahmaloka.

Is the Brahmaloka a state of inner experience or an actual world to which the liberated soul repairs? Most of the Upaniṣads contain practically no or very scanty details. The *Chāndogya* (8.5.3) describes it as a world, third from this earth, wherein there are two huge lakes called Ara and Nya. There is also a smaller reservoir or food-juice known as Airammadiya. Somasavana, a peepul tree and a city called Aparājitā, containing a golden hall are also there. The *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇopaniṣad* (1.3, 4 and 5) gives a more picturesque description which adds a river Virajā, two doorkeepers (Indra and Prajāpati), a throne called Vicakṣaṇa and a couch by name Amitaujas. Five hundred celestial nymphs greet the liberated soul and adorn him. The fragrance and flavour of Brahmā enters him at the appropriate state of his entrance.

Anyone reaching Brahmaloka will not return to mundane existence.

ESCHATOLOGY

What happens to a person who dies without realising the ātman/Brahman? This question too has been discussed in the Upaniṣads.

Those who have performed sakāma-karmas (desire-motivated actions) or practised lower kinds of upāsanās get their desires fulfilled. Some of them go to svargaloka* (heaven) from where they will return to this world after exhausting the results of their good deeds. Sometimes, this movement is described as through the Dhūmādimārga (the path of smoke, also called Pitṛyāna or Dakṣiṇāyana) wherein the soul is led to the Candraloka (the world of moon) after passing through smoke, night, the dark fortnight and the six months of the southern solstice. After exhausting the result of meritorious deeds he returns again to this earth, through the sky, rain, vegetation and living beings.

Those who know neither of these two paths, return again and again and may even be reborn at the subhuman levels, as animals and worms.

As related to this topic, ideas about karma and rebirth are also found in the Upaniṣads here and there. A doer of puṇyakarma or good deeds attains good results and a doer of pāpakarma or sinful deeds gets bad results. Hence human beings are advised not to harm anyone.

VIDYĀS OR UPĀSANĀS

An important aspect of sādhanā as enunciated in the Upaniṣads is ‘vidyā’ or upāsanā. A man deeply devoted to—or even addicted to—the religion of yajñas or Vedic sacrifices, has got to be led gradually, first to contemplation and then to jñāna (knowledge or direct experience) of the ātman in course of time, because that is the ultimate goal of life. And, that is the only way to mokṣa.

These upāsanās have taken two forms. In the first group, the sādhanika is advised to imagine the various parts of a ritual and then superimpose certain ideas on them. For instance, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* advises one to meditate upon the horse, to be offered in the Aśvamedha sacrifice, by thinking that it is Prajāpati, the Lord of beings. This upāsanā, which can be practised even by those who are not competent to perform the Aśvamedha sacrifice, gives the same fruits as the real Aśvamedha itself.

In the second group of upāsanās certain known objects like nāma (name), vāk (speech), bala (strength) or manas (mind) are recommended to be meditated upon the Brahman, by imagining or discovering some similarity between that object and Brahman. Such upāsanās gradually help the aspirant’s mind to be raised to the highest level, Brahman, and give him the much needed spiritual experience.

The number of such vidyās or upāsanās which are spread out throughout the Upaniṣads is quite large and may be considered as 32.

These vidyās were taught privately to deserving candidates after testing them for their competence. That is why the information available either in the Upaniṣads or in their commentaries regarding them is very meagre. It is likely that they provided the basic materials for the later schools of various kinds of yoga.

* Strangely enough, though svarga is mentioned in the Upaniṣads several times, its opposite, naraka (hell), has not been alluded to, except in one minor Upaniṣad. A hell of the type met with in the purāṇas seems to be unknown to the Upaniṣads

Civilisation and Culture during the Age of the Upaniṣads.

Gleaning through the various Upaniṣads it is possible to have a fairly good idea of the type of society that existed during the period of the Upaniṣads.

The country extended upto Gāndhāra (Afghanistan) in the north-west, and included several kingdoms like Madra (Sailkot), Kuru (Delhi), Kekaya (Punjab), Pāñcāla (Bareilly, Kanauj in Uttar Pradesh), Kosala (Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh), Videha (Tirhut in Bihar), Kauśāmbi (Kosam in Uttar Pradesh) and Kāśī. The kings who ruled over these countries were all kṣatriyas who were experts in warfare and administration, as also in the Vedic lore. In fact, they were the traditional custodians of some types of esoteric sciences. They not only sheltered learned brāhmaṇas and sages but also strove to propagate the Vedic dharma. They were ruthless in enforcing the highest standards of satya (truth) and dharma (righteousness). The varṇa system was very much in vogue. As for the āśrama system, brahmacharya, gārhaṣṭhya and vānaprastha were more common, though there is enough reason to believe that sannyāsa was also being practised. Great stress was laid on the purity and integrity of personal life, irrespective of a person's station in life.

Apart from the religion, ethics and philosophy, a number of secular sciences like grammar, music, dance, archery, astrology, exorcising the evil spirits, preparing of perfumes, toxicology and so on, were also well known.

Vedic sacrifices were very common. If they provided an occasion for the kings to earn merit and show their generosity, it was also an opportunity to the scholars to display their knowledge and earn name and fame, as also some wealth.

On the whole, people seemed to be contented with whatever they could earn by right means. They believed that their sorrows and misfortunes were caused by their own karma in their previous lives and hence did not hold others responsible for the same.

The language of the Upaniṣads is closely allied to that of the Vedas. Hence it is not only archaic but also abounds in Vedic phraseology and symbolism.

Most of the Upaniṣads are in verses composed in standard Vedic metres. Some like the *Māṇḍūkya*, the *Taittirīya* and the *Aitareya* are completely in prose. Some have a mixture of both.

One of the striking features of the Upaniṣadic literature is its use of beautiful similes and examples. The simile of two birds (the jīvātman and the Paramātman) perching on the same tree (the human body) occurs in several Upaniṣads: *Kaṭha* (1.3.1); *Śvetāśvatara* (4.6) and *Muṇḍaka* (3.1.1). The *Muṇḍaka* gives the simile of the bow and the arrow (2.2.3,4) to explain meditation on the ātman. The *Kaṭha* compares the world to an inverted tree (6.1) and the human body to a city of eleven gates (5.1). The *Īśāvāsyā* compares the orb of the sun to a golden disc hiding the face of the Lord (15). The *Kaṭha* compares the body to a chariot, the senses to horses, the mind to reins, the intellect to the charioteer and the ātman to the owner of the chariot (3.3 and 4). The *Muṇḍaka* compares the evolution of the world from Brahman to a spider weaving the web and hairs growing on the body or vegetation appearing on earth (1.1.7). It also compares the Vedic sacrifices to a leaky raft since they are unable to give liberation (1.2.7). Rivers flowing into the ocean and becoming one with it is another simile given to illustrate the union of the ātman with Brahman (3.2.8). The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* abounds in many similes: The Vedas have come out of Brahman even as smoke comes out of burning wet wood (2.4.10). Just as spokes are fixed on the rim of a wheel, similarly all beings find their support in Paramātman (2.5.15). The jīvātman travels from the waking state to the dream state like a big fish swimming in water from one shore to the opposite shore (4.3.18). While dying, the jīva catches hold of the next subtle body even as a grasshopper catches hold of the leaf of the next nearby plant, before leaving the former support (4.4.3). A liberated soul casts off the body like a snake casting off its slough (4.4.7). The pitiable condition of an ordinary mortal leaving his body is compared to travelling in a heavily laden, but weak, cart (4.3.35).

The style of prose in the Upaniṣads, is not only simple and elegant but also quite powerful.

Strangely enough, the Upaniṣads, though teaching recondite philosophy, also give us some interesting stories. The *Kena* describes how the gods in heaven, under the leadership of Indra, were taught a lesson by Brahman in the guise of a yakṣa or demigod (3.1 to 11). Major part of the *Kaṭha* is devoted to the story of Naciketas and Yama. The *Chāndogya* contains the following stories: Dogs singing the udgītha (1.12); the king Jānaśruti learning from the sage Raikva (4.1 to 3); the story of Satyakāma Jābāla approaching Hāridrumata for knowledge (4.4 to 9); the story of Satyakāma and his disciple Upakosala (4.10 to 15); Śvetaketu the proud boy, his humble father Gautama and the king Pravāhaṇa Jaivali (5.3 to 10); Sanatkumāra teaching Nārada (7.1 to 26); Indra and Virocana approaching Prajāpati for the knowledge of the ātman (8.7 to 12).

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* too is not lagging behind. Its stories and legends are: the struggle between the devas (gods) and asuras (demons) to supersede each other (1.3); the proud Bālāki and the wise king Ajātaśatru (2.1); Maitreyī seeking spiritual wisdom from her husband Yājñavalkya (2.4 and 4.5); King Janaka and the great sage Yājñavalkya (chapters 3 and 4).

R̥sis or Sages of the Upaniṣads

We come across a good number of r̥sis or sages in the Upaniṣads. Some like Yājñavalkya are extraordinarily great geniuses. Others like Gautama Āruṇi are excellent teachers. A few others like Śvetaketu are hard task-masters. Sacrifices conducted by rich and powerful—but noble—kings provided opportunities to these sages not only to exhibit their skills but also earn wealth and fame.

A selected list of sages that occur in the major Upaniṣads may now be given just for the sake of information:

Āṅgiras, Bhṛgu, Gārgī, Ghora Āṅgirasa, Hāridrumata, Mahidāsa Aitareya, Nārada, Pippalāda, Raikva, Sanatkumāra, Śāṇḍilya, Satyakāma Jābāla, Uddālaka Āruṇi, Vāmadeva and Varuṇa.

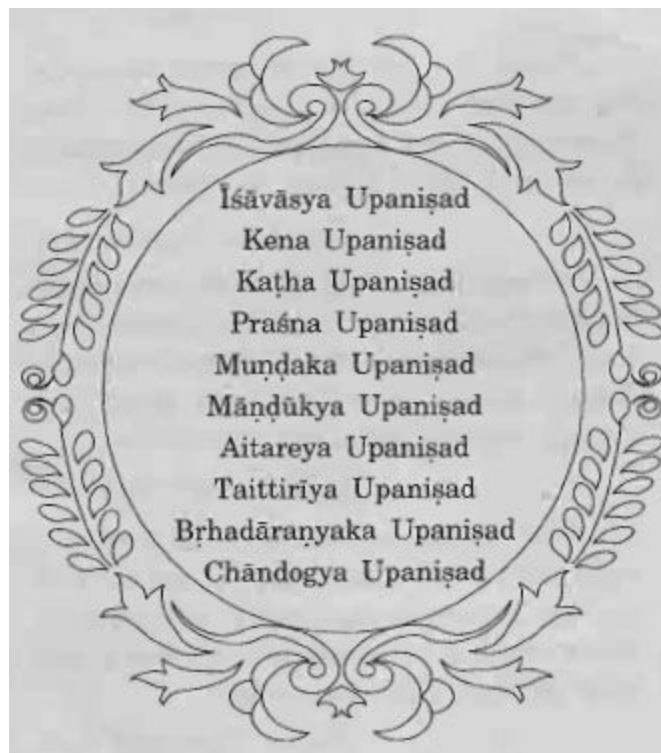
Yama, the god of death, Prajāpati, the creator, great kings like Janaka, Ajātaśatru and Pravāhaṇa Jaivali also appear in the role of teachers.

One thing that strikes us is that these teachers were revered for their knowledge and excellence, irrespective of their birth, caste or sex.

The Upaniṣads contain the quintessence of Vedic religion and philosophy. The Ṣaḍdarśanas or the six systems of Indian Philosophy derive their strength and inspiration from them. The Vedānta systems are entirely an outcome of their study. The idea of mokṣa as the primary goal of life, which has permeated the Indian religions and culture of the succeeding centuries, owes its origin entirely to the Upaniṣads. And, they are the basis of the *prasthānatraya* (the three foundational scriptures), the other two being the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Brahmasūtras*.

The depth as well as the catholicity of their thought has attracted the attention of the savants of other religions and societies also, resulting in their being translated into other languages too.

An earnest study of the Upaniṣads, without preconceived notions and prejudices, is bound to inspire one to aspire for the life of the spirit.



“Know that all this, whatever moves in this moving world, is enveloped by God. Therefore find your enjoyment in renunciation; do not covet what belongs to others.”

“When it is known through every state of cognition, it is rightly known, for (by such knowledge) one attains life eternal. Through one’s own self one gains power and through wisdom one gains immortality.”

Kena Upaniṣad 2.4

“Not he who has not desisted from evil ways, not he who is not tranquil, not he who has not a concentrated mind, not even he whose mind is not composed can reach this (Self) through right knowledge.”

Kaṭha Upaniṣad 2.24

“Taking as the bow, the great weapon of the Upaniṣads, one should place in it the arrow sharpened by meditation. Drawing it with a mind engaged in the contemplation of that (Brahman) O beloved, know that Imperishable Brahman as the target.”

“The syllable Om is the bow: one’s Self, indeed, is the arrow. Brahman is spoken of as the target of that. It is to be hit without making a mistake. Thus one becomes united with it as the arrow (becomes one with the target).”

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.2. 3, 4

“This is the lord of all, this is the knower of all, this is the inner controller; this is the source of all; this is the beginning and the end of beings.”

Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad 6

“Speak the truth. Practise virtue”

Taittirīya Upaniṣad 1.11

“What shall we do with offspring (they said), we who have attained this Self, this world. They, having risen above the desire for sons, the desire for wealth, the desire for worlds, led the life of a mendicant”

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.22

“The infinite is happiness. There is no happiness in anything small (finite). Only the infinite is happiness. But one must desire to understand the infinite. ‘Venerable Sir, I desire to understand the infinite.’ ”

Chāndogya Upaniṣad 7.23.1

Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad

Out of the six systems of philosophy of orthodox Hinduism, the Vedānta system is the most popular one. Its canonical works are: the *Upaniṣads*, the *Brahmasūtras* and the *Bhagavadgītā*.

Though the total number of Upaniṣads available in print today, exceeds 250, only ten out of them have been universally accepted as basic and authoritative, since Śaṅkara (A.D. 788-820), the earliest commentator, has chosen to write commentaries only on these ten. As he has quoted from another three or four more Upaniṣads, these too have been recognized as ancient and authentic texts.

The *Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad*—also spelt as *Īśopaniṣad*—is the first in this list. It gets this appellation since it begins with the word ‘*Īśāvāsyam*.’ It is sometimes christened as *Samhitopaniṣad* also, since—as a lone exception—it appears in the Samhitā portion of the *Śukla-Yajurveda* (as its 40th chapter), also called the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā*. Though a short work of only 18 verses, it has attracted the attention of many a scholar, resulting in the maximum number of Sanskrit commentaries on any single Upaniṣad. And, in spite of the strenuous efforts of these intellectual giants, the Upaniṣad continues to baffle the reader even today!

The first verse declares that the whole world is permeated by God—called Īśā here—and advises the human beings to enjoy it in a spirit of detachment since it belongs to God and not to them. Consequently greed for others’ wealth and possessions is forbidden.

The second verse advises all human beings to aspire to live for a hundred years but spend that life in working for the welfare—both temporal and spiritual—of the world. If life is spent in this way, karma or action can never taint and be a cause for suffering.

If on the other hand, this advice is not heeded, such transgressors—declares the third verse—will have to suffer in dark hellish worlds!

The next two verses describe, though in an enigmatic language, the nature of the ātman, the inner and the true Self of all.

Verses 6 and 7, portray the state attained by a person who has realized this ātman. Since he perceives the same universal Spirit in all, he loves all, thus transcending hatred, delusion and sorrow which are always caused by the seeing of duality.

The next, the 8th verse gives a highly poetical description of this ātman in its universal dimension, as all-pervading, effulgent, absolutely pure and as the Supreme Ruler.

The next six verses (9 to 14) have proved to be rather obscure and the traditional commentators

have differed widely in their interpretations.

The wise one declare that the end results of vidyā and avidyā are entirely different. However, a balanced combination of these two alone can lead to immortality.

Avidyā' has been interpreted as Vedic rituals, and 'vidyā' as the upāsanās (meditations) on the Vedic deities preceded by a jñāna (knowledge) about them. Mere Vedic rituals will lead to pitṛloka (the world of manes) and mere upāsanās on the Vedic gods, to devaloka (heaven). But one has to return to this world from both of them, after exhausting the religious merit. Since a taste of the pleasures of these worlds creates a strong tendency in one's psyche to try for them again, the person takes recourse to the same course—Vedic rituals for getting to pitṛloka or Vedic meditations to attain devaloka—thereby missing the royal path that leads to mukti or freedom from transmigratory existence. It is this spiritual tragedy that has been described by the Upaniṣad as 'entering into blinding darkness' (andham tamaḥ).

When a balanced combination of these two is practised, in the right spirit, the result will be entirely different. Performance of Vedic rituals and ordained duties of one's life will lead to the purification of the mind. Meditation on God (Īśa) practised by such a pure mind will lead ultimately to realising him, resulting in mokṣa (liberation or immortality).

Opinions of the commentators seem to be even more sharply divided with regard to the words sambhūti, asambhūti and vināśa, used in the verses 12 to 14.

Śaṅkara takes the words sambhūti and asambhūti to mean the Kārya-brahma (or Hiranyagarbha, the totality of creation, the First in evolution) and the Kāraṇa-brahma (Prakṛti or Avyākṛta, the subtle causal state before creation) respectively. Meditation on the former leads to the acquisition of the supernatural psychic powers and on the latter, to a state called 'prakṛtilaya,' a state in which the soul lies merged in Prakṛti, in a state of apparent stupor, free from all experiences of joy or sorrow. (c. f. *Yogasūtras* 1.19 of Patañjali). The former leads one astray from the spiritual path whereas the latter resembles inertness and consequently no effort is made in any direction.

Since both these results—from the standpoint of mokṣa or ultimate liberation—lead one away from the spiritual goal, they have been termed 'andham tamaḥ' or blinding darkness.

An interesting interpretation—which appears to be more convincing or reasonable—has been offered by Uvaṭācārya (11th cent.), the commentator on the *Mādhyandina* recension of the *Śukla Yajurveda*. According to him, sambhūti is Parabrahman (God, the Absolute) and vināśa (= asambhūti) is the body. Since continual hunger and thirst result in the death of the physical body which is an invaluable instrument of sādhanā (spiritual effort), they have to be transcended by suitable secular

activities. Then, through contemplation on Brahman, one can attain immortality. That is why a balanced combination of both is needed.

The verses 15 to 18 describe the prayers addressed to God, in and through the orb of the sun, by the earnest spiritual seeker who is on his deathbed.

In the verse 15, he requests God to remove the obstacle to his vision, the obstacle being the attractions of this material world which have hidden God's glorious face. In the next verse the same prayer is continued with a description of God's attributes and a hint of the experience of identity of the aspirant with him.

In the verse 17, the aspirant, becoming aware of the imminent death of the body prays to Agni, the presiding deity of his sacrificial fire—or the word 'kratu' here may mean God himself—to remember his good deeds and save him.

In the last verse, the 18th, he urges Agni to take him to Brahmaloaka or Satyaloka from which there is no return to mundane existence, by the Arcirādimārga or Devayāna, the path of light, believed to be leading the spiritually mature souls to that world.

At a time when there seems to have been a conflict between the concepts of work and worship, and, some sages were laying a greater emphasis on renunciation and monastic way of life, the teaching of this Upaniṣad must have come as a refreshing contrast for the ordinary, but earnest, sādhanas. Giving up selfish and desire-motivated actions, performing acts of charity and service, devotion to God and considering human life more as a blessing than a curse, are the central messages of this small but beautiful Upaniṣad.



Kena Upaniṣad

Like the *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad*, the first in the series of the ten Upaniṣads considered ancient and more important, the *Kena Upaniṣad* (which is the second) also derives its name from the very first word, 'kena' ('by whom') with which it begins. Since it belongs to the *Talavakāra Brāhmaṇa* of the *Sāmaveda*, it is also known as the *Talavakāra Upaniṣad*. The talavakāras were those who could sing the Sāmans with tāla or keeping time with regular beats of hand. (This seems to have gone out of

practice in later years.)

It has four kāṇḍas or sections, the first two being in poetry and the last two in prose. The total number of verses is 35.

The Upaniṣad opens with a question, perhaps by an inquiring disciple, whether there is any entity behind the sense-organs like the ear or the organ of speech or even the mind, that impels them to work. The teacher replies that there is, and that he is the eye of the eye, the ear of the ear, the speech of the speech and the mind of the mind. They are able to function because of his presence and power. They do not know him whereas he knows them all. He is Brahman. It is almost impossible to impart the knowledge concerning him to others since his characteristics are beyond the comprehension of the senses and the mind.

Since Brahman (as the ātman in us, our very Self) is the real knower of all that is known through the senses and the mind and itself is *not* an object of knowledge, one can never say that one has known him nor not known him. Awareness of Brahman is felt at every moment of our life. It is only the direct experience of this ātman that gives us real strength and immortality. If one misses the grand opportunity given through this human birth for getting that experience and immortality through it, it is a terrible loss. This is the gist of the teaching of the second section.

The third section teaches through an interesting story that Brahman is supreme and that even the gods in heaven, like Indra and Agni, could win their battles against the asuras or demons only because of the power imparted to them by Him. They were made to learn this bitter lesson after being humiliated by Brahman disguised as a yakṣa, a demigod, far inferior to them!

The fourth section is a continuation of the teaching of the third. It is the goddess Umā Haimavatī that is teaching Indra, the king of the gods. Brahman who appeared before Indra just for a moment like lightning is also the ātman, the Self in every one of us. One has to meditate upon him as ‘tadvana,’ ‘the one who is highly desirable.’ This is understandable since ‘he’ is really ‘me.’ One who realises him will therefore be liked by all beings.

The Upaniṣad ends with the declaration that tapas (austerity), dama (self-control) and karma (works and duties ordained by the scriptures) are the means of attaining Brahman. So also a study of the Vedas and their subsidiary sciences and satya or truth.

And, one who realises Brahman by these means, gets rid of his sins and is established in ‘svargaloka’ (the world of Brahman).



Kaṭha Upaniṣad

The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* belongs to the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*. Since it is included in the *Kāṭhaka* section of that Veda, it also called *Kāṭhaka Upaniṣad*.

The Story of Naciketas and Yama (the god of death) is very ancient and finds a mention even in the *Rgveda* (10.135). The *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (3.1.8) gives an outline of the same story. In this Upaniṣad, the story gets a fuller treatment. Actually the whole work is in the form of a dialogue between Naciketas and Yama. It is spread over six vallīs or sections and the total number of verses is 119.

First vallī (29 verses)

Vājaśravasa, also known as Auddālaki Āruṇi, was performing the Viśvajit sacrifice. He was, as per the rules of the sacrifice, to give away *all* his wealth. However, he had arranged to donate decrepit, useless cows as sacrificial gifts. This was observed by Naciketas, his young son in early boyhood. A precocious boy that he was, he sensed his father's motive in doing so. Wishing to draw his attention, to this lacuna, Naciketas asked his father as to whom he was being gifted away. Incensed by the repeated questioning the father shot back saying that he would be given to Mr̥tyu (Yama, the God of death). Though he repented for his intemperate reaction, he allowed Naciketas to go to the Yamaloka, the abode of Yama. When the boy reached there Yama was not in his house. So he patiently awaited the god's return, spending three days and three nights without accepting any hospitality. When Yama returned and learnt about the young guest, he regretted the inconvenience caused to him and offered him three boons to compensate for the same.

Naciketas asked, as the first boon, that his father regain his mental peace and balance and also recognize him (Naciketas) after returning from the abode of death.

As the second, he requested Yama to teach him the sacrifice by which one could go to svargaloka (heaven). Yama obliged and taught the process in detail. He even tested Naciketas at the end to know whether he had grasped all the intricacies of the ritual. Naciketas' reply so pleased him that he granted him (Naciketas) an additional boon in the form of a beautiful necklace. He also christened the fire-ritual as 'Nāciketāgni.'

As the last of the boons, Naciketas asked Yama whether a human being continued in existence even after the death of the physical body, or not. Since this question related to ātmajñāna or a knowledge of the divine Self which was extremely subtle and difficult to comprehend, Yama wanted to test the boy thoroughly before imparting the same. Acquisition of ātmajñāna has to be preceded by an intense spirit of renunciation and total dedication to its pursuit. Hence Yama tried to dissuade him by describing it as extremely difficult to comprehend and offered exceedingly attractive alternatives like immense wealth, intense pleasures and unimaginably long life. However, Naciketas being made of sterner stuff, rejected them all with disdain and insisted upon his original boon.

Second vallī (25 verses)

Yama does not directly answer the question of Naciketas but begins his long discourse by introducing some basic concepts as a background.

Human beings generally have two alternatives in life: the śreyas (what is really good in the ultimate analysis) and the preyas (what is momentarily attractive and pleasant, but ultimately disastrous). The wise ones with an intuitive insight choose the former whereas the dull-witted persons who lack even elementary sense of discrimination, fall for the latter. Having done so, these latter ones consider themselves as very intelligent and clever. Not only that, they even mislead the innocent persons. It is like the blind leading the other blind ones! Thus they get into the grip of the lord of death through repeated transmigrations.

Those who choose the path of śreyas will realize the ātman, the true self of all.

This ātman is beyond logic and reasoning and is difficult to comprehend by the ordinary run of mankind. But it can be understood if taught by a person who has realised his identity with it. It is hidden deep within oneself and can be attained by adhyātmayoga, Yoga of inner contemplation.

Yama then expounds the art of meditation on the ātman/Brahman with the help of Praṇava or Om. Om is the best symbol for Brahman and also the best means for attaining that Brahman.

Ātman/Brahman is smaller than the smallest and greater than the greatest. It is also established in the hearts of all. It can be realised by the pure, calm and controlled mind. One who realises it goes beyond death and rebirth.

Neither the study of scriptures and encyclopaedic knowledge nor the retentive power of memory can help in attaining the ātman. Only an intense desire to know it, can make the seeker succeed in his efforts.

Yama also stresses the importance of a clean moral life and of self-control in this endeavour.

Third vallī (17 verses)

The most important teaching of this section is the allegory of the chariot to describe the jīvātman, the individual soul enmeshed in the body-mind complex. The body is the chariot. The senses are the horses. The mind is the reins. The intellect is the charioteer. The Self is the master of the chariot. The objects of the senses are the road by which the chariot moves.

If the horses are controlled by an expert charioteer, he can take the chariot to the right destination. An inefficient charioteer and restive horses will lead the chariot astray into a ditch and endanger the life of its owner.

Similarly one who can control his senses through a disciplined mind will reach the final goal of his life, viz., the abode of Viṣṇu (i.e., liberation). On the other hand, a person of impure mind and uncontrolled senses will end up in saṁsāra or transmigration.

The ātman or the Self, also called ‘puruṣa’ (divine being), who is deeply hidden in one’s heart can be seen or realised by a person of refined and subtle mind through concentration. For this, one has to awaken to this reality and approach the great spiritual teachers, to learn from them, because, the path that leads to this ātman is extremely difficult to tread.

Fourth vallī (15 verses)

This vallī starts with a statement of fact that our senses always tend to go outwards and consequently we are interested in the outside world. However, once in a while, some wise person discovers that what is really worth knowing in life is the pratyagātman, the Self within. Hence he turns the gaze of the senses and the mind inwards and realises him there. But the ignorant, childish persons continue to revel in the outside world of sense-objects and get into the bondage of transmigration.

Yama then declares that it is possible to realise the ātman through the pure and refined mind.

Yama describes the ātman residing in the hearts of all, as the size of the thumb, since the heart is of that size. Even so, he is the lord of the past, present and future (because, in the ultimate analysis he is Brahman).

Once a person realises this ātman, he becomes united with him even as one pure water mixed with another pure water becomes identical with it.

Fifth vallī (15 verses)

This short section begins by describing the human body as a pura or city in which the ātman, its lord lives. Meditation on him delivers one from the bondage of transmigration.

Then comes an interesting, even poetical, account of that ātman: He moves every where. He is the sun and the moon. He exists in every object of the universe. He manages the biological functions of the body from inside. In fact, it is his residence in the body that makes it full of life and consciousness.

Then there is a description of the transmigration of the unredeemed souls. Their next lives are determined by their karma, good or bad. If some are reborn as living beings of the higher or the lower type, others may even enter inert objects!

Quoting the examples of fire, air and the sun, the Upaniṣad goes on to describe that Brahman as the inner Self (antarātman) of all beings, seems to appear in different forms, identifies with those forms, and also simultaneously exist in his own, outside them. Even as the sun, while shining on all objects—pure and impure—himself remains untainted, Brahman too remains untainted for ever.

Only those who realise this ātman/Brahman, succeed in attaining everlasting peace and not the others.

Sixth vallī (18 verses)

This last vallī sets out with the description of the saṁsāra vṛkṣa, the tree of the world, in a poetical language. It is an upside-down tree, with the root above and the branches below. This root is Brahman.

This Brahman, (also called Prāṇa here) the origin and power of sustenance of the whole creation, is so terrific that it strikes fear in the hearts of all, functioning as a part of this universe. The sun shines, the fire burns and the wind blows out of his fear. While Indra discharges his duties, Mṛtyu or the god of death just runs away!

The Upaniṣad then urges all human beings to realise this ātman/Brahman before the fall of the body. It also declares the superiority of the ātman over all other aspects of the body and the mind. It gives a brief account of yoga as self-control and concentration by which the ātman is realised. For this, it is necessary to conquer and destroy all the desires in the mind. Once this is done, man becomes immortal.

Here, the text brings in the idea well-known in the other Upaniṣads also, that the realised soul leaves by the nāḍī (subtle tubular structure) in the crown of the head, which is connected with Arcirādimārga (or the bright path, the path of light) and goes to Brahmaloka, the Abode of Brahman, never to return again to the mundane existence.

For this realisation, one must know the art of separating the Self from the body even as the stalk of

the muñja grass is drawn out of its sheath. This can be done by a direct experience of the inner Self, the ātman, through the knowledge that he is pure and deathless, immortal.

The last verse of the Upaniṣad gives us encouragement and hope, and also instils confidence in us. Brahmavidyā and mokṣa or amṛtattva (liberation and immortality) were *not* the special prerogative of Naciketas or persons like him (who had the courage and conviction to go to the world of Yama and return alive) but of all of us, provided we too can know the path from competent persons and practise adhyātmayoga properly.

From all standpoints this Upaniṣad has been quite popular. The philosophical concepts and the practical modes of sādhanā described here are reminiscent of the popular Hindu scripture, the *Bhagavadgītā*.



Praśna Upaniṣad

This Upaniṣad has been assigned by tradition to the *Atharva-veda*. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* which also belongs to the same Veda, has been called ‘Mantra’ and this Upaniṣad as ‘Brāhmaṇa’ by Śaṅkara (A.D. 788-820).

Considered as an ancient and authoritative scripture, it has been listed among the ten major Upaniṣads. Since it is in the form of six questions and their answers, it is called ‘*Praśnopaniṣad*’ or even ‘*Ṣaṭpraśnopaniṣad*.’ The total number of verses, all in prose, is 67.

First chapter (16 verses)

Six sages, all devoted to Brahman—Sukeśā, Satyakāma, Sauryāyaṇi, Kausalya, Bhārgava and Kabandhī—once approached the venerable sage Pippalāda, with the sacrificial fuel in hand (as per the prescribed traditional mode of approaching the spiritual teacher) and expressed their desire to know Brahman from him. Pippalāda advised them to live in his house for a year, doing tapas or austerity and observing brahmacharya (all the disciplines of studenthood). After completing their probation, they could approach him with their questions and doubts.

Having complied with his directions, they returned to him. Kabandhī was the first to ask: ‘O Venerable one! From where are all these creatures born?’

Pippalāda's reply may be summarised as follows: Prajāpati, the Lord of creation, desirous of offspring, performed tapas (austerity in the form of intense concentration on the process of creation as done in his previous existence) and brought out (of himself) a pair, the rayi and the prāṇa, which pair would produce the creatures on his behalf.

Rayi is matter and prāṇa is the sentient spirit. Rayi is identified with the moon and the prāṇa with the sun. The sun and the moon together are also responsible for the concept of time.

After briefly narrating creation, Pippalāda describes the two paths—the Uttarāyana and the Dakṣiṇāyana—by which human beings go to the higher worlds in accordance with their deeds. Those who are devoted to iṣṭāpūrta (Vedic rituals like the Agnihotra and public utility works like digging wells) will go to the pitṛloka (the world of manes) by the latter path. However they have to return to this world after exhausting their religious merit. Others devoted to tapas (austerity), brahmacharya (continence) and vidyā (contemplation on the deities) will go to the Ādityaloka (the world of the sun) by the former and will not return to this mundane existence.

Continuing his discourse, Pippalāda compares the saṁvatsara (the year with its two parts, the southern and the northern solstices), the month (with its dark and bright fortnights) and the day (with its day and night divisions) to Prajāpati. Even anna or food is Prajāpati, because, it is out of the semen, the product of food, that people are born; and, Prajāpati is the origin of all beings.

Second Chapter (13 verses)

The Second prāśna (= question) or chapter starts with the question of Bhārgava: Sir, how many devas (gods) are supporting this body? Who is illumining it? Among them who is the best?

In reply Pippalāda declares that it is prāṇa that is actually supporting the body. He narrates a brief story as to how the sense-organs like the eye or the ear claimed superiority but were silenced. When the enraged prāṇa moved as if he was getting up, all the other organs too were forced to rise up from their locations. It was like the queen bee rising, forcing all the ordinary bees also to rise. Then all the senses, understanding prāṇa's superiority started hymning, to him. In this hymn, prāṇa has been praised not just as the Self, the master of the body, but as the Supreme Self, Prajāpati himself. He is fire, sun, rain, Indra, Vāyu, the earth, in fact, the Supreme God. He is Paramēśvara or Rudra. He it is that receives all oblations given in sacrifices. In this body, it is he that functions as the sense-organs.

They request him to protect them even as a mother protects her children.

Third Chapter (12 verses)

Now, it is the turn of Kausalya to question Pippalāda. His question concerns the prāṇa or the vital

energy working inside the body. His questions are: Whence is this prāṇa born? How does he come into this body? How does he distribute himself and establish himself? In what way does he depart? How does he support the external world? How does he support what is inside oneself?

In the previous section though prāṇa's nature and greatness were described, his essential nature as the highest truth and his functions were not. They are now being delineated.

The Prāṇa is born or manifested from the Ātman (Paramapuruṣa or the Supreme Being). He comes into the body effortlessly like a shadow following a man, when the jīvātman (the individual Self) enters it. He appoints the five functional prāṇas (his own different aspects or parts) even as a king appoints his officers and apportions their duties. The five prāṇas are: prāṇa (secondary), apāna, vyāna, udāna and samāna. Their respective functions are: breathing and activating the eyes and the ears; excretion; general diffusing of the air inside the body; taking the jīvātman out of the body at the time of death; equitable distribution of the essence of food all over the body.

There are 101 nāḍīs (tube-like structures for the flow of prāṇic energy) in the region of the heart. The udāna takes the jīvātman through one of them, the suṣumnā, to either meritorious worlds or hell or back to the human world, depending on the karma of that individual—whether good or bad or mixed.

Āditya or the sun is the external aspect of prāṇa who is also supporting the power of the eye inside. The earth, the sky, the light (outside) and the air (outside) are the external aspects respectively of apāna, samāna, udāna and vyāna.

At the time of death, in whatever way the mind (of the dying person) works, the (chief) prāṇa takes him to the world appropriate to him.

The section concludes with the eulogy of the person who has mastered the knowledge of this prāṇa.

Fourth Chapter (11 verses)

Now Sauryāyaṇi questions Pippalāda: In this puruṣa (or body) what is it that sleeps? What is awake? Between these two, who sees the dreams? Who enjoys happiness? In whom are all united and dissolved?

When the sense-organs with their experiences become one with the mind, a person is said to be sleeping. Even then, the five prāṇas (compared to the five Vedic fires like gārhapatya by the Upaniṣad) are fully awake since they continue to function under the general guidance of the mind. It is this mind (or the jīvātman, the individual Self closely associated with it) that gets all the dream experiences.

However, when this mind (or the jīvātman) with the senses withdrawn into itself is merged in

Brahman (in deep sleep), there are no dreams. On the other hand, there is an experience of happiness. It is like the birds coming back in the evening to the tree where they live and be at peace. Thus, it is into Brahman (or Paramātmān, the Supreme Self) that all get united and dissolved.

The section ends with the eulogy that one who realises this truth becomes one with all.

Fifth Chapter (7 verses)

Then Satyakāma steps in to put the question: ‘What world does a human being, who has been meditating on Ōṅkāra throughout his life, even until death, gain?’

Pippalāda now discourses on the significance of Praṇava or Ōṅkāra, the method of meditating on it and the consequent fruits attained.

Ōṅkāra is (i.e., can be a symbol for) both Parabrahman and Aparabrahman, the unmanifested and the manifested aspects. Hence one can choose it as a symbol for meditation on either of these aspects.

Om has three parts, syllables, called ‘mātrās’: a, u and m. One who meditates on Brahman through the first syllable ‘a,’ attains a human birth that is conducive to a life of tapas (austerity) and brahmacharya (celibacy). If he meditates through the second syllable ‘u,’ he is reborn in the world of Soma or moon. After enjoying vibhūti (wealth and intense pleasures) there, he will return to the human world. But one who meditates on the third syllable, ‘m,’ will be freed from all sins, will go to Brahmāloka, the abode of Brahman and will not return to mundane existence.

Some commentators have interpreted the word ‘mātrā’ in the original not as ‘syllable,’ but as a unit of time. According to them, one who chants Om for one unit of time—say, for instance, one second—will go to the world of men, for two units of time, to the world of moon and for three units, to Brahmāloka. This of course applies to each repetition. And it must be accompanied by meditation on Brahman.

Sixth Chapter (8 verses)

Once, Hirāṇyanābha, the prince of Kosala had asked Sukeśā the question, ‘Do you know the Śoḍaśakala Puruṣa (the person with 16 aspects)?’ But he did not know the answer. Now Sukeśā is asking Pippalāda the same question.

Pippalāda replies that this Puruṣa is in one’s own body. He is the ātman. He is the creator.

He first created prāṇa or Hirāṇyagarbha, the primary Person (also called Sūtrātman) the totality of subtle creation. From this latter Prāṇa, these others were evolved: śraddhā (faith), ākāśa (ether or sky), vāyu (air), jyoti (light or fire), āpas (water), pṛthvī (earth), indriya (sense organs), manas

(mind), anna (food), vīrya (strength of body), tapas (austerity), mantras (Vedas), karma (Vedic rituals), lokas (the various worlds) and nāma (names of objects in creation).

All these aspects of creation depend upon the Puruṣa even as the spokes in a wheel, on its hub.

At the time of dissolution of the world all these get merged in the Puruṣa, even as rivers merge in the ocean.

The six sages then worshipped Pippalāda as their guru and returned to their homes.



Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad

The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* of the *Atharva Veda* (hence its other name, the *Ātharvaṇopaniṣad*) has been a popular work due to its attractive poetry, elegant expressions and sublime thoughts.

Since the word ‘muṇḍa’ means ‘a shaven head,’ the Upaniṣad was perhaps, meant to be specially studied by men of shaven heads, viz., the sannyāsins or monks. Or, like the shaving of one’s head, it was meant to ‘shave off’ all ignorance regarding the tattvas or higher truths taught in this work.

There are three muṇḍakas or chapters with two kāṇḍas or sections in each. The total number of verses is 65.

Division of all knowledge into two categories (the higher and the lower), eulogy of renunciation, a specific mode of meditation using Om and the method of liberation of a realised soul at the time of death are the special features of this Upaniṣad.

First Muṇḍaka (22 verses)

Once Śaunaka approached the sage Aṅgiras respectfully and put him the question: ‘O Venerable one! What is that, by knowing which everything else is known?’

Replying to it, Aṅgiras first tells him that all knowledge in this world can be divided into two categories: The parāvidyā and the aparāvidyā, the higher and the lower knowledges respectively. Higher knowledge is that by which the indestructible Brahman (Akṣara) is realised. All other branches of knowledge, including the Vedas and their subsidiaries, are lower knowledge.

Then Aṅgiras describes the Akṣara as the spirit beyond the ken of the senses and the mind, all-pervading and eternal, inherent in all, but too subtle to be perceived easily.

This entire creation has been effortlessly projected by that Akṣara, even as a spider weaves its web or vegetation appears out of this earth or the hair grows on the body.

Creation proceeds from the Akṣara in an orderly way. The products are: Anna (avyākṛta, the first unmanifested aspect of Akṣara/Brahman), Prāṇa (or Hiraṇyagarbha, the world-soul), manas (mind-principle), satya (the five elements like the earth, water and so on), lokas (the seven worlds), karmas (living beings and their activities) and amṛta (results of karmas).

The second section gives some details about Vedic rituals at first. Then it goes on to condemn them as ‘leaky rafts’ (adr̥dhāḥplavāḥ) since they lead to transmigration and not to liberation. Those who praise them and advocate their performance, are like the blind persons trying to lead other blind ones.

On the other hand, those men of renunciation who live in forests and practise austerities (to realise the Akṣara), go to Brahmaloḥka by the Arcirādimārga or the bright path.

That is why a person seeking the Akṣara (brahman) should renounce the Vedic rituals and approach a competent teacher for the same. The teacher, on his part, should teach such a worthy disciple all that he knows.

Second Muṇḍaka (22 verses)

This chapter gives further details about the Akṣara from whom creation has proceeded.

All living beings come out of that Akṣara and return to it even as sparks spring from a blazing fire and then fall back into it.

The five elements like earth and water, mind and senses (at the cosmic level) as also prāṇa (vital air) are born out of that Akṣara Puruṣa.

The Virāṭpuruṣa (Akṣara in the manifested state, Cosmic Being) for whom fire is the head, the sun and the moon the two eyes, quarters the ears, Vedas the speech, the world the heart, the earth the feet, is the inner Self of all.

He is the origin of the Vedic mantras and the sacrificial rites as also the worlds attained through them.

All the living beings—from the gods right up to animals and even the inanimate objects—rivers, oceans, mountains and vegetation have been projected out of him.

Hence one who realises him, the highest Brahman, in one’s own heart, successfully destroys all

bonds of ignorance here and now.

But then, how to know this Akṣara Brahman, the brilliant one, who is subtler than the subtlest, in whom all the worlds and beings are established?

Now, the Upaniṣad describes this process of meditation with an interesting and picturesque analogy. An expert archer takes a good strong bow, fixes a sharp arrow and then with great concentration discharges it towards the target.

Similarly the seeker should take the bow of praṇava (Omkāra) given in the Upaniṣads, fix his Self as the arrow sharpened by the practice of meditation, and discharge it with vigilant concentration, towards the target, Brahman. In other words, the seeker has to concentrate his purified mind on Brahman (or Akṣara Puruṣa), repeating the praṇava in his mind and thus attain unity with him (Brahman).

The text then advises the seekers to know this Cosmic Being, to meditate upon him using Om and give up all other talk, not helpful in this. This is the bridge to immortality.

After describing this Being again, as all-pervading and as the light of lights the Upaniṣad declares that one who realises him will be freed from all the bonds of the heart (the mind and the intellect).

Third Muṇḍaka (21 verses)

This section starts with a graphic description of the jīva (individual soul) and Īśvara (the Supreme Soul) as two birds perching on the same tree (the human body). While the former is eating the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree, the latter is sitting majestically looking at the other bird, itself not eating any fruit.

When the first bird (the jīva) realises the greatness of the second (Īśvara), it becomes freed from all sorrow and suffering.

This Ātman (Īśvara, Supreme Self) can be attained by (satya) truth, (tapas) austerity and (jñāna) knowledge, as also by (brahmacharya) continence. He is realised in one's own heart as the divine light.

Then comes the famous declaration 'satyameva jayate' ('Truth alone triumphs'), 'na anṛtam' ('Not falsehood'). The path Devayāna to Brahmaloka is ever connected with truth.

After describing once again the nature of this Ātman as very subtle, but realisable through a pure mind, the Upaniṣad advises the ordinary seekers to worship and honour the knower of the Ātman to get what they want.

However, if they worship or honour him without any selfish motives, they can transcend even rebirth in this world.

Though intellectual pursuits and scholarship can be aids to the realisation of the Ātman at lower levels if utilised properly they do not directly help. In fact, Ātman can be realised only by him who diligently strives for it or to whom he (the Ātman) chooses to reveal himself.

It should also be known that the weak and the careless cannot attain him. However, those who are strong in faith and conviction, who are vigilant and are endowed with the spirit of renunciation can certainly attain him.

Such persons who have rightly understood the principles of Vedānta and become pure through renunciation and contemplation on the Ātman, will go to Brahmaloka and attain total liberation there. Even as the rivers flowing into the ocean lose their separate identity and get merged in it, the liberated soul gets merged in Brahman, the Supreme Person.

The Upaniṣad closes with a statement that this spiritual wisdom must be taught to the deserving seekers who have completed the special rite called ‘śirovrata’ current among the followers of the *Atharva-veda* and not to others.



Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad

This is the smallest of the ten Upaniṣads and belongs to the *Atharvaveda*. It has only twelve verses, all in prose. But, it has been considered as basic to the principles of Vedānta, especially the Advaita Vedānta. An analysis of the three states of consciousness viz., jāgrat (wakefulness), svapna (dream) and suṣupti (deep-sleep) and relating them to the three syllables a, u and m of Praṇava or Ōṃkāra and establishing the Turīya (literally ‘the fourth’) as the highest reality is the speciality of its teaching.

A brief account of the twelve verses may now be given here:

Verse 1 : All this (the manifested world) is the syllable Om. Whatever exists in time—the past, the present and the future—as also whatever is beyond it, that too is Om.

Verse 2 : All this is verily Brahman. This ātman (the individual soul) is Brahman. He has four aspects.

Verse 3 : Vaiśvānara, the ātman associated with the waking state, is the first aspect. He cognises external objects. He has seven limbs like the sun, the air, and the earth. He has nineteen mouths such as the sense-organs and the motor-organs. He experiences gross material objects.

Verse 4 : Taijasa, the second aspect is the ātman associated with the dream state and cognises internal objects. He too has seven limbs and nineteen mouths and experiences the subtle objects.

Verse 5 : The Prājña is the third aspect. He is the same ātman associated with the deep-sleep state, where there are neither dreams nor desires. He is a solid mass of cognition, full of bliss and enjoys bliss.

Verse 6 : He is the lord of all, the knower of all and the inner controller. He is also the origin of this world.

Verse 7 : The Turīya is the fourth aspect of the ātman as it were. He is different from the other three. He is indescribable since he is beyond the ken of all the senses. He is one without a second. He is the Ātman

(Universal Self) who should be known or realised.

Verse 8 : From the standpoint of the whole letter, the ātman is Om. The three syllables of Om are a, u, and m.

Verse 9 : Vaiśvānara is the first syllable a. One who knows him thus will be able to attain all desires.

Verse 10 : Taijasa is the second syllable u. One who knows him thus increases his knowledge. In his family only knowers of Brahman (=Ātman) are born.

Verse 11 : Prājña is the third syllable, m. He who knows this, knows all and gets merged in all.

Verse 12 : The Turīya—the ‘fourth’ as it were—is beyond all the three syllables. He it is into whom the world dissolves. He is one, beyond all dualities, and the very personification of auspiciousness. One who realises him, attains his own real self.

One of the four Mahāvākyas or ‘great sentences’ accepted by the Advaita Vedāntic tradition, viz., *Ayam ātmā brahma*, occurs in the second verse.

Proving the existence of the ātman as the pure conscious spirit, different from the body-mind complex, though existing in it or even identified with it, and, equating it with Brahman, the Absolute, the cause of and the spirit behind the universe is the main purpose of this Upaniṣad. The unique method used for this is the analysis of the three states of consciousness.

There is a long expository treatise on this Upaniṣad called *Kārikā* or *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā* by Gauḍapāda (A.D. 500), the teacher's teacher of Śaṅkara (A.D. 788-820).



Aitareya Upaniṣad

The Upaniṣads which usually forms the last part of the Vedas and hence known as Vedānta (anta = end) contain the quintessence of Hindu philosophy. They deal with certain fundamental questions of metaphysics: the Creator, process of creation, nature of the created world, true and apparent nature of the individual, relationship between this individual and the Creator, goal of life and the path that helps achieving it.

Out of the ten or twelve Upaniṣads considered more ancient and important the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* is also one. It forms part of the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* (adhyāyas 4 to 6 of the 2nd Āraṇyaka) of the *Rgveda*. Mahidāsa Aitareya who is mentioned in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (3.16.7) is the ṛṣi to whom this Upaniṣad was revealed.

The previous parts of Āraṇyaka contain instructions regarding karma (Vedic rituals) and prāṇopāsanā (meditation on prāṇa, the vital breath or energy). Anyone who has performed these two seriously and sincerely will become fit for ātmajñāna (self-knowledge). This has been expounded in the next three (4 to 6) adhyāyas or chapters and 6 kāṇḍas or subsections. The total number of mantras is 33.

The Upaniṣad starts with a description of creation. In the beginning the Ātman alone existed. He reflected: 'Let me create the worlds.' Then he created four worlds: ambholoka (supercelestial region of waters), marīciloka (the heavens with their celestial lights), maraloka (the mortal earth) and āpoloka (the subterranean region of waters). Desiring to create the protectors for these worlds, he proceeded to create first, Virāṭpuruṣa ('World-Person') an intermediate entity subsisting between the Ātman and the universe whom he fashioned out of the waters. From him proceeded the organs of senses, then their corresponding functions and lastly the deities or cosmic powers corresponding to such functions in the cosmos.

The Ātman who can now be called Īśvara, made the Virāṭpuruṣa subject to hunger and thirst. Consequently the deities born out of him also became subject to the same limitation. On the request

from the deities for a suitable locus from which they can act, he created the human body into which they gladly entered. Hunger and thirst which were left behind were also provided a place, but as an integral part of these deities.

On further reflection, realizing the need for ‘food’ by the Virāṭpuruṣa along with the deities, Īśvara created food articles like corn and animals. The Virāṭpuruṣa was able to grasp this food only with the apānavāyu (the prāṇic energy responsible for digestion and excretion) and not with the other deities (or indriyas, i.e., faculties).

Since the body of the Virāṭpuruṣa could not live without the presence of the Ātman or Īśvara, he entered into it through the brahmarandhra (the aperture in the crown of the head).

The Upaniṣad then describes how the jīvātman (the ātman bound in the body) transmigrates, conception, birth and rebirth being his three kinds of births. It also quotes the great sage Vāmadeva who realised his true nature as the ātman, free from the shackles of bodies and senses, even while he was in the womb of his mother.

The last section describes Ātman or Brahman as ‘prajñāna’ (consciousness) because of whose presence only all experience is possible. One of the four famous *mahāvākyas* (great dicta) of the Upaniṣadic literature viz., *prajñānam brahma* (‘Prajñāna is Brahman’) comes in this section (3.1.3).

Out of the several theories of creation given in the Upaniṣads, the one given here appears to be more enigmatic if not altogether inscrutable. However, a little reflection is enough to convince that it falls in line with the general philosophy of the Upaniṣads. The various accounts of creation given in the Upaniṣads normally fall into three categories: through trivṛtkaraṇa (triplication) as in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*; through pañcīkaraṇa (quintuplication) as in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*; and through the Virāṭpuruṣa (cosmic person) as here.

The purpose of creation is to give the unredeemed jīvas (individual souls) one more chance for redemption. This means that each of the jīvas must have a suitable body and a sphere of activity. The latter is provided by the various lokas or worlds, states of being, and the Virāṭpuruṣa forms the matrix as it were from which the former is shaped. Apart from the physical body, the sense-organs and the mind, located in it, form the basis of all activity. Hence their creation has also been described. The deities like Agni and Āditya mentioned here are the lokapālas, ‘protectors of the worlds.’ They are the entities endowed with the power of maintaining order in the created worlds. At the cosmic level, each of them represents the totality or essence of that particular power manifested in creation. At the individual level, it is the controlling power of the particular faculty. For instance, Agni at the cosmic level represents the fire-principle, whereas the same at the level of the individual body represents the power of speech which illumines the dark areas of unknown fields of knowledge.

The ‘hunger and thirst’ of the deities is a sign of their incompleteness and hence indicates that they too have fallen into the ocean of saṃsāra (transmigratory existence). This is but natural since the whole of the created world, starting with the Virāṭpuruṣa himself, is within the realm of saṃsāra. Their ‘food’ is the corresponding object of sense, united with which, the deities feel satisfied.



Taittirīya Upaniṣad

The *Yajurveda* is primarily a hand-book of Vedic rituals. It has two branches: the *Kṛṣṇa-Yajurveda* and the *Śukla-Yajurveda*. The former is also known as the *Taittirīya*, and has, like other Vedas, the Samhitā, the Brāhmaṇa and the Āraṇyaka sections.

The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* comprises the three chapters, 7 to 9, of the Āraṇyaka section. The 10th is the well-known *Māhānārāyaṇa* or *Yājñīkī Upaniṣad*.

These three chapters are called *Śīkṣāvallī*, *Brahmānandavallī* and *Bhṛguvallī* respectively.

Śīkṣāvallī (12 anuvākas or subsections)

It begins with the oft-repeated and well known śāntimantra (invocation for peace) *śanno mitraḥ*.

Then there is a reference to Śīkṣā or Śīkṣā, the science of phonetics.

Since the meaning of Vedic mantras is closely dependent on their correct pronunciation and intonation, a knowledge of this science is very necessary.

The Upaniṣad then describes five kinds of meditation, relating the letters of the Vedic mantras to things like pṛthvī or earth, agni or fire, ācārya or teacher, mātā or mother and so on. It also gives the special fruits accruing from such meditations.

To achieve anything worthwhile in life, a sound mind and a sound body are necessary. Hence, in the next anuvāka, certain japas of mantras and homas in consecrated fires are prescribed for the benefit of those desirous of wealth, learning, intelligence and wisdom. Towards the end, the teacher of the Vedic gurukula prays that a large number of students come to him for education since, it is through them that knowledge and culture will spread in the society later on.

Then is described the meditation on four vyāhṛtis—bhūḥ, bhuvah, suvah and mahah—as identified with the earth, the fire, the sky, the air, the sun, the Vedic mantras, the vital prāṇas in the body and so on, along with their fruits.

The fourth vyāhṛti, mahah, was discovered by the sage Māhācamasya, as identical with Brahman/Ātman.

The Vedic metre paṅkti has five lines. A Vedic sacrifice also has five parts. By considering the worlds such as the earth, the deities such as Āditya, the elemental objects such as water, the vital airs such as prāṇa and so on, as five fold (‘pāṅkta’) the contemplation gets elevated to the level of a Vedic sacrifice and results in the meditator getting identified with Hiranyagarbha (the World-soul, an aspect of Brahman). This is the gist of the seventh anuvāka.

The next anuvāka describes meditation on Om in various ways and the fruits there of.

Even after returning home and settling down as a householder, the Vedic student is expected to continue svādhyāya (self study) and pravacana (teaching the Vedas to worthy students). This helps in preserving and spreading dharma for the good of the society. This is the main purport of the ninth anuvāka.

The tenth anuvāka is a mantra (a sacred text meant for meditation) discovered by (or attributed to) the sage Triśaṅku. It gives a description of the experience of the spiritual oneness with creation.

The next anuvāka, practically the last in this *Śīkṣāvallī*, contains the famous advice of the ācārya (Vedic teacher of the gurukula) to a disciple who has completed his training and is about to depart for home. The gist of this (convocation) address may be given as follows:

Speak the truth and follow dharma in your life. Treat your parents, the teacher and the guests that come to you, as if they are gods. Practise the good and abhor the evil. Imitate only the good conduct even from me. Treat the sagacious brāhmaṇas with respect and honour them properly. Give gifts to the needy, considering it as a sacred duty. When in doubt about actions or behaviours seek the guidance of the wise elders. Treat the transgressors of dharma with a balanced attitude of firmness and kindness. This is the command.

Brahmānandavallī (9 anuvākas)

This chapter starts with the two well-known śāntimantras or peace invocations—śaṁ no mitraḥ and saha nāvavatu—as part of the Upaniṣadic text.

‘Brahmavid āpnoti param,’ ‘One who knows Brahman attains the Supreme’—this is the primary teaching of this chapter. This Brahman is satya (truth), jñāna (knowledge) and ananta (infinite). One

who realises it in his own heart, will become omniscient and will get all his desires fulfilled.

Then there is a description of the evolution of this world from the Ātman (same as Brahman) through the five elements, food and up to the human being.

In the anuvākas 2 to 5, there is a description of the five types of ātmās or puruṣas (individual beings) called respectively—annamaya, prāṇamaya, manomaya, vijñānamaya and ānandamaya (ātmās or puruṣas). They are actually the five aspects of the jīvātman (the individual Self in bondage) associated with the five kośas or sheaths, viz., the physical body, the vital airs and sense organs, the mind, the intellect and ajñāna (nescience, responsible for bondage and transmigration). One has to transcend them to realise one's true nature, i.e., Brahman/Ātman.

The Ātman (or Brahman)—according to the sixth anuvāka—created this world out of himself and also entered into it as its inner Self. Hence, all that exists here is he, the Ātman or Brahman.

Therefore, one who gets established in Brahman as his own Self, attains fearlessness. He enjoys bliss since Brahman is bliss. This is the main purport of the seventh anuvāka.

The next anuvāka describes that all the activities in this created world, like the sun rising or the wind blowing, take place by being strictly regulated by Brahman, of whom even the god of death is afraid!

Then there is—in the eighth anuvāka—a very interesting calculation of brahmānanda (the bliss of attaining Brahman) by taking the mānuṣa-ānanda (ideal happiness of an ideal human being) as the base. According to this, brahmānanda is 10^{20} (i.e. 1 followed by 20 zeros!) times that of ideal human happiness. In effect it just means that the bliss of attaining Brahman is infinite.

The last anuvāka of this chapter declares how the knower of Brahman is freed from all fears and apprehensions. Nor is he subject to regrets and self-condemnation.

Bhṛguvallī (10 anuvākas)

This chapter starts with the request of Bhṛgu-Vāruṇī to his father Varuṇa to teach him Brahman. Stating that Brahman is that from which all beings are born, in which they live and to which they ultimately return, Varuṇa advises his son to find it out through tapas (inner peace and concentration of mind).

Every time Bhṛgu returns, after a brief period of tapas, with a solution, he is sent back by Varuṇa, since what he has discovered is only the lower truth. After thus eliminating anna (food), prāṇa (life-force), manas (mind), and vijñāna (intellect), he finally arrives at ānanda (bliss) as Brahman, the ultimate cause of the world.

The text then expatiates upon the importance of anna or food. It must not be derided. It should not be refused when offered. It should be increased so that it can be offered to the hungry souls. Similarly when someone asks for shelter, it must not be denied.

This is followed by some more meditations on the internal organs like the hands and feet or the external objects like rain or animals, as Brahman, which results in the acquisition of fame or intellectual faculties or even objects of luxury and enjoyment.

The Upaniṣad closes with a beautiful description of a knower of Brahman freely roaming about the worlds and bursting with joyous songs.



Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad

Introduction

Out of the three basic scriptures of Hinduism known as the *Prasthānatraya*, the Upaniṣads rank first. In the group of the ten Upaniṣads, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and the *Chāndogya* occupy a unique place since they not only delineate the fundamental principles of Vedānta but also describe a number of upāsanās or meditations technically called *Vidyās*.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, as its very name suggests, is quite a large work (bṛhad = large, big) and forms an integral part of the well-known *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* which itself belongs to the *Śukla-Yajurveda*. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* has two recensions- the *Kāṇva* and the *Mādhyandina*. The former has 17 kāṇḍas or sections whereas the latter has only 14. The six adhyāyas or chapters of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* actually form chapters 3 to 8 of the 17th kāṇḍa in the *Kāṇva* recension and chapters 4 to 9 of the 14th kāṇḍa of the *Mādhyandina* recension.

The adhyāyas are divided into kāṇḍas or brāhmaṇas, which again are subdivided into kaṇḍikās (similar to mantras). There are 435 kaṇḍikās distributed among the 47 brāhmaṇas of the 6 adhyāyas of this Upaniṣad.

There is another way of dividing this Upaniṣad. The first two adhyāyas form the *Madhukāṇḍa*, the middle two, the *Munikāṇḍa* or the *Yājñavalkyakāṇḍa* and the last two, *Khilakāṇḍa*. These kāṇḍas respectively deal with upadeśa (the teaching), upapatti (the argument) and upāsanā (the meditations

and rites).

By far, the *Munikāṇḍa*, which accounts for almost half the number of kaṇḍikās, is the most important part of this Upaniṣad. The sage Yājñavalkya, who is the principal person that appears here, has expounded brilliantly the philosophy of Ātman/Brahman as also several subtle aspects of related teachings. He can easily be classified among the greatest thinkers of the world of any age.

A chapterwise summary of the work may now be attempted.

First Chapter

The first brāhmaṇa known as the *Aśva-brāhmaṇa*, describes a special process of meditation wherein the various aspects of Prajāpati, the Creator, like kāla (time), loka (the various worlds) and devatā (the various deities) are advised to be superimposed on the different limbs of the horse chosen for the Aśvamedha (horse-sacrifice). This can transform in a spiritual sense—the horse into Prajāpati himself. The ritual of the Aśvamedha itself can lead the performer to Brahmaloḥa or the world of Brahmā, also known as Hiranyagarbha. Though only kings are competent to perform this sacrifice, even others can attain to the same result by imagining themselves to be the horse and superposing the various items on themselves as described.

Agni-brāhmaṇa is the second section of this chapter. It deals with the manifestation of agni or fire from Prajāpati and the method of contemplation on it as Prajāpati himself. This leads to the fruit of mṛtyujaya or conquest of death.

The third is the *Udgītha-brāhmaṇa*. The udgītha is the second and the most important part of a sāman sung by the priest ugdātṛ in a Soma sacrifice. In this brāhmaṇa, the importance of prāṇa, the vital force, has been brought out by an allegorical story. The devas or gods wanted to conquer the asuras or demons by performing the Jyotiṣṭoma sacrifice. They employed sense-organs like the speech, the eye, the nose, and also the mind to sing the udgītha for them. The asuras, however, succeeded in contaminating them through selfishness, thereby defeating the purpose of the devas. However, when these asuras rushed towards the prāṇa, the chief vital force, they were destroyed. By meditating on one's prāṇa, which is not only the real power behind the sense-organs but also the essence of the Vedas and a replica of the cosmic prāṇa (also known as Prajapāti or Hiranyagarbha) one can attain to the world of Prajāpati. The speciality of this upāsanā or meditation is that it does not involve any rites or rituals.

The fourth kāṇḍa is known as the *Puruṣavidha-brāhmaṇa*. Before creation, the entire universe was within the body of Puruṣa or Prajāpati or Virāj, undifferentiated from him. He desired for a mate. As a result of his will, he projected out of himself another entity which split into two, the male part being

Manu and the female Śatarūpā. By their union, not only in the human form, but also in various other forms, all the living beings, up to an ant, were created. He, however, remained as he was, unaffected. He then realized that the created universe of beings was also himself. Later, he created the gods like Agni.

Since the Puruṣa, the Supreme Self, has entered into the whole creation and exists in it like a sword in its sheath or fire in the wood, it is he who is being manifested through all the activities of the body-mind complex. However, the activities like speaking and the names like speech, are only nomenclatures born out of the various types of functioning. He is the inmost self in us and is unaffected by the sense of doership or actions or their fruits, which have been superimposed on him by avidyā or ignorance of his real nature. The sage Vāmadeva and many others like him, realized that they were in the ultimate analysis, the Supreme Self.

Then comes a classification of the gods. Agni is brāhmaṇa. Indra, Varuṇa, Soma, Yama and Īśāna are kṣattriyas. Vasus, Rudras and Ādityas are vaiśyas. Pūṣan is a śūdra. The human beings were born out of these four classes of gods. The Puruṣa or the Supreme Being also created dharma or righteousness (the Cosmic Law) to regulate them all. However, it is declared that an ajñāni or an ignorant person becomes an object of enjoyment for all. These ignorant ones are advised to discharge their debts to the gods and the others through the pañcayajñas or the five daily sacrifices. The Upaniṣad also says that it is desire that binds a person and it is meditation on the Ātman or the Self alone that can deliver him from bondage. One who fails in this has to suffer much.

The next kāṇḍa is known as the *Saptāna-brāhmaṇa*, the Brāhmaṇa of seven foods. The first anna or food is the usual physical food upon which all living beings sustain themselves. Human beings have to consume food so that they can perform the prescribed religious rites which can give them the unseen results later on. If they do not perform these rites, they will be eating only sin. The second and third annas are the huta and the prahuta, sacrificial oblations and gifts given during the sacrifices. They are sometimes, identified with the two sacrifices Darśa and Pūrṇamāsa, meant for the gods. Milk is the fourth anna, specially meant for the animals.

The last three annas or foods, were kept by Prajāpati for himself. They are: vāk (speech), manas (mind) and prāṇa (vital force). Since they help him to create the worlds and sustain them, they are called ‘anna.’ These three are then identified with the three worlds, the three Vedas, the three beings (gods, manes and human beings) and so on. In fact they comprise the whole world. One who meditates upon them as limited, attains the finite world. If he meditates upon them as unlimited, he obtains the infinite world.

This Prajāpati or the Hiranyagarbha is himself the time. The Upaniṣad describes how the various

organs like vāk or speech, competed against one another but were overcome by fatigue. However, prāṇa or the vital force was not affected by it. Hence, the organs identified themselves with it and became immortal. Among the gods like Agni (fire), Āditya (Sun), and Candra (Moon), only Vāyu (air), the cosmic counterpart of prāṇa, could sustain itself in its work. If a person can meditate on the organs like speech which exist in all living beings and the elements like fire, which exist in this world, as identified with his own Self, he attains identity with Hiranyagarbha and live in his world.

The sixth and the last kāṇḍa, which is sometimes called the *Uktha-brāhmaṇa*, declares that the whole universe is nothing but nāma (name), rūpa (form) and karma (action). Like the three mutually supporting sticks, these three support one another and also help in manifesting one another. Since this universe is only an upādhi or limiting adjunct to Paramātmā (the Supreme Self), anyone who is interested in it, will not be inclined to meditate on him.

Second Chapter

This chapter, comprising six brāhmaṇas, is more directly concerned with ātmatattva or the knowledge of the Ātman. The well-known discourse by the great sage Yājñavalkya to his wife Maitreyī—which, incidentally, appears in the fourth chapter also, though shorter—forms the core of this chapter.

The first brāhmaṇa known as the *Ajātaśatru-brāhmaṇa* starts with the legend of Bālāki the proud one, a descendant of Garga and Ajātaśatru, the king of Kāśī. Bālāki proposed to Ajātaśatru, to teach Brahman. , However, what he taught was elementary and concerned only with the conditioned Brahman, like the Being residing in the sun, the moon, the lightning, the ether, the air and so on. But Ajātaśatru knew better. He had realized the unconditioned Brahman. So, he taught this to Bālāki: In deep sleep, all the sense organs like speech, are absorbed in their sources, the individual self is merged in the Supreme Self, the unconditioned Brahman. It then resembles a child or a great king or a worthy brāhmaṇa, having reached the acme of bliss. The teaching ends with a statement that all the beings, all the worlds and all the gods emerge out of the Ātman, the Supreme Being, even as sparks spring from fire.

The next is the *Śīśu-brāhmaṇa* and it speaks of the prāṇa or the vital force as a calf. Its body is its abode, the head is its special place, the vigour generated by food and drink is its post and the food itself is its tether. Seven deities like Rudra and Āditya are praising this prāṇa. One who knows thus, will never be without food.

The third is the *Mūrtāmūrta-brāhmaṇa* and it is devoted to the description of the two forms of Brahman. One form is gross, mortal, limited and perceptible. The other is subtle, immortal, unlimited

and imperceptible. By superimposing these two forms, the Supreme Brahman is made conceivable. The words ‘neti,neti’ (‘not this, not this’) deny all limitations to Brahman and reveal its essential nature.

Next comes the *Maitreyī-brāhmaṇa* which starts with the story of Yājñavalkya and his two wives, Maitreyī and Kātyāyanī. It stresses the need for sannyāsa or monastic life, to attain the Self. The sage Yājñavalkya, intending to embrace the monastic life, wants to divide his wealth between the two wives. However, Maitreyī, after learning that the wealth, and the Vedic rites performed with the help of wealth, cannot give her immortality, rejects the offer of wealth and opts for ātmajñāna or the knowledge of the Self. Yājñavalkya responds by teaching her that all the beings here like husband or wife or children, as also wealth or the various worlds or the gods, are dear to us only because of the ātman or the Self in them and not by themselves. This ātman has to be heard of (from a qualified teacher), reflected upon and meditated upon—these three being called śravaṇa, manana and nididhyāsana—in order to be realized. As it is not possible to grasp the special sources of a drum or a conch or a lute without the grasping of sound in general, it is not possible to perceive anything in this world as different from Brahman, its basic reality. Yājñavalkya further asserts that even the Vedas have emerged out of it and that it exists in everything as homogeneous consciousness, even as salt exists everywhere in the water in which it has been dissolved. Perception of duality in this world is only apparent and has been caused by avidyā or ignorance of the Reality.

Madhu-brāhmaṇa, the fifth section, sums up the import of the first two chapters. There is an elaborate account of the Ātman or the Self which is the ruler and the King of all beings. Even as spokes are fixed in the nave and the rim of a chariot wheel, so are all beings, all gods and all worlds are fixed in the Supreme Self. The Sage Dadhyañ Ātharvaṇa taught this knowledge of the Self to the two Aśvins—the twin gods—through a temporary equine head. The brāhmaṇa ends with the essential teaching of all the Vedānta texts, viz., that the Self, though one, is perceived as manifold through māyā his inscrutable power.

Vamśa-brāhmaṇa, the last section of this chapter, gives the line of teachers beginning with Hiranyagarbha.

Third Chapter

Whereas the *Madhukāṇḍa*, comprising the first two chapters dealt with upadeśa or āgama (the teachings), the *Munikāṇḍa* (also called *Yājñavalkya-kāṇḍa*) consisting of the third and the fourth chapters, strengthens it through upapatti or yukti, or reasoning. There are nine brāhmaṇas in the third chapter.

The first is the *Aśvala-brāhmaṇa*. It starts with an interesting story. Janaka Vaideha, the great king, had just completed a big sacrifice—the Bahudakṣiṇa—to participate in which, a large number of brāhmaṇas from the countries of Kuru and Pāñcāla had come. The king proposed to give away as a gift, a thousand cows on the horns of each of which had been tied ten gold coins, to the Brahmiṣṭha (the most learned in Brahman or the Vedas) among them. Though none of the assembled dared to accept the challenge, Yājñavalkya did. He even ordered his disciple Sāmaśrava to drive the cattle home! Naturally the assembly fell into a rage and all started questioning him. Aśvala who was the first to pose eight questions to him, was easily vanquished by the satisfactory replies of Yājñavalkya.

The *Ārtabhāga-brāhmaṇa*, the next section, starts with another Vedic scholar, Ārtabhāga, shooting six questions at Yājñavalkya who answers them all to the satisfaction of the questioner. The last of these questions deals with the problem of the destination of the soul of a dead person. Yājñavalkya takes Ārtabhāga to a secluded place and the two finally conclude that it is karma that decides the future life of the soul of a dead person. Good karma leads to noble births and bad karma to ignoble ones.

Bhujyu-brāhmaṇa, the third, states that even the best of karmas or rites results in transmigration and that even karmas accompanied by upāsanā or meditation cannot give mokṣa or freedom.

The fourth is the *Uṣasta-brāhmaṇa*. Uṣasta questions Yājñavalkya to tell him about Brahman which is sākṣāt (immediate) and aparokṣāt (direct). Yājñavalkya replies that it is the ātman that works in the body through the five prāṇas or vital-airs. It is the seer and the knower and hence it cannot be seen or known like an external object.

The *Kahola-brāhmaṇa* follows next. A further description of the ātman is given here, as beyond hunger, thirst, sorrow, delusion, old-age and death. The wise ones realize this ātman and give up their desire for progeny, wealth and meritorious worlds. A realized soul is a realized soul irrespective of his conduct. His brahmajñāna or knowledge of Brahman never ceases.

The sixth section, named *Gārgī-brāhmaṇa*, deals with the questions posed by Gārgī, the daughter of Vacaknu, and the ready answers given by Yājñavalkya. The questions concerned with the relative subtlety of the pañcabhūtas or the five elements as also the worlds right up to the Brahmaloaka, the abode of Brahman. When she asks, ‘By what is the Brahmaloaka pervaded?’ Yājñavalkya warns her not to proceed further since the nature of Brahman can be known only through the scriptures and the preceptor and never through logic or inference.

The *Antaryāmi-brāhmaṇa* is the seventh in the series. It is now the turn of Uddālaka Āruṇi to question Yājñavalkya. It concerns the “antarātma-sūtra” or the inmost thread that passes through all

the worlds and all the beings, holding them together. Uddālaka also asks about the antaryāmin, the being that dwells in all and controls them all. Yājñavalkya replies that Vāyu is that Sūtra or thread. It is the Ātman that indwells all the worlds and all the beings. He resides in them and controls them whereas they know him not. He is the sākṣin or the eternal witness, the śrotr or the listener, the mantr or the thinker and the jñātr or the knower. However, he is not the object of cognition for any of the senses. He is the immortal Ātman. All else is perishable.

This is followed by the *Akṣara-brāhmaṇa*, the eight section, wherein Gārgī puts two questions to Yājñavalkya. The first question is: ‘What pervades that (the sūtra) which is above heaven and below the earth as well as between them, and which was, is and will be?’ Yājñavalkya replies that it is ākāśa, the unmanifested ether. In reply to her next question as to what pervades this ākāśa also, he answers that it is Akṣara, the indestructible. He describes it through several words revealing its unique qualities: It is asthūla (not gross), anaṇu (not fine), ahrasva (not short), adīrgha (not long), atamaḥ (not darkness), anākāśa (not ether), acakṣuṣka (without eyes), aprāṇa (without the vital force), amana (without mind) and so on.

It can be described only by such negative attributes since it can never be apprehended either by the senses or by the mind.

Yājñavalkya further avers that, verily under the command of this Akṣara (the Absolute) only the sun, the moon and all the heavenly bodies are held in their positions and perform their allotted duties. Rivers and mountains, quarters and directions and even time itself, keep to their duties. It is by the rule of this very Absolute that the lives of the human beings and the gods in heaven are being regulated.

He concludes by saying that the performance of any rite or ritual without knowing this Akṣara is a waste and that the condition of one who leaves this world without realizing this Akṣara will be miserable. But the one who leaves this world after knowing this Akṣara will be a knower of Brahman.

Śākalya-brāhmaṇa is the last section of this chapter. It conveys the immediacy and directness of Brahman by a reference to the different enumerations of the gods who are ruled by it. In reply to Śākalya’s question about the number of gods Yājñavalkya says that though there are tens or hundreds or thousands of gods, they are manifestations of but one God, Hiranyagarbha, who is the cosmic aspect of prāṇa or the vital force. This God is one and at the same time, the many. Hence, when the upāsaka (the worshipper) gets identified with Hiranyagarbha, he becomes all, the Self of all.

Finally Yājñavalkya asks the assembled brāhmaṇas whether they know the root from which a dead person is reborn, even as a tree that is cut off, springs up again from the original root. They were

ignorant of it. The Upaniṣad itself declares that this root is Brahman, the consciousness and the bliss, the ultimate resort of all the human beings, be they the performers of rituals or the knowers of Brahman.

Fourth Chapter

This chapter comprises six brāhmaṇas. In the first, known as the *Ṣaḍācārya-brāhmaṇa*, Yājñavalkya poses some questions to the king Janaka Vaideha. The king in his reply states the characteristics of Brahman as he had learnt from six of his teachers. He posits Agni, Vāyu, Āditya, Digdevatā, Candra and Prajāpati, the presiding deities of speech, vital air, eyes, ears, mind and intellect, as Brahman. Yājñavalkya rules them out as only partial manifestations of Brahman.

In the *Kūrca-brāhmaṇa*, the second, Yājñavalkya describes the avasthātraya or the three states of consciousness which the embodied ātman experiences. Jāgrat (waking state), svapna (dream state) and suṣupti (deep-sleep state) are the three states and the soul while associated with these three states is designated as Viśva (or Vaiśvānara), Taijasa and Prājña. Though the terms used in this section are different, the interpretation given by the commentators leads us to this conclusion.

The third section is the *Jyoti-brāhmaṇa*, a fairly voluminous one, comprising 38 kaṇḍikās. The avasthātraya or the three states of consciousness, mentioned in the previous brāhmaṇa, is discussed in detail through yukti or logic and reasoning. For an ordinary human being endowed with the body and the senses, what is it that acts as a jyoti or light?—This is the question that Janaka repeatedly asks Yājñavalkya. Yājñavalkya lists them one by one as: the sun, the moon, fire, speech and ātman, simulating the intellect, moves between the dream world and the waking world. Since the intellect is transparent and next to the ātman, it easily reflects the consciousness of the latter. Like a crystal glowing in the light of a lamp, the intellect also, though bereft of consciousness, appears to shine by the light or consciousness of the ātman, which alone is self-luminous. In fact the luminaries like the sun and the moon are able to shine only by the light of the ātman.

Then follows the conception of dream according to the Vedānta. In the dream state, the Self puts aside the gross body of the waking state and creates a dream-body comprising the impressions of the waking state. Dreams are not new experiences of the waking state. Sometimes they may reflect the experiences of the past lives also. The objects of the dream state are then and there created by the mind. Though the Self is dreaming, he has no direct connection with the physical body. Hence it is not advisable to suddenly wake up a sleeping person as that may endanger his life or senses. In dream, the Self merely witnesses the results of good and bad actions but does not actually experience them or do anything.

The ātman or the Self then enters the samprasāda or the suṣupti state, the state of deep-sleep. He

enjoys supreme peace and bliss in this state, since he has merged himself in the Supreme Self. This is the nearest approximation to the state of Brahman. However, avidyā or ignorance does persist even in that state, though in an unmanifested form.

Then follows a description of the sufferings of an aged or diseased body in order to rouse the spirit of renunciation in us. When the Self leaves the present body it takes up another, made ready by its own past work. This passing of the Self is analogous to the return of man from the dream to the waking state.

The *Śārīraka-brāhmaṇa*, the fourth section, gives a detailed description of the transmigration of the jīva or the Self. At the time of death it withdraws its sense-organs and comes to the heart. It then exits through one of the parts of the body. The potential results of upāsana (meditation), karma (good or bad deeds) and vāsanās (past impressions) follow the jīva in its onward journey. It creates for itself a new body, even as the goldsmith prepares ornaments out of gold. Once the results of past deeds are exhausted, it returns to this world for new work. It should be noted that only a person with desires and cravings transmigrates and not the one who has no cravings. The latter is merged in Brahman, after casting off his body even as the snake casts off its slough. The knowers of Brahman alone become immortal. The others are miserable.

There is no duality or multiplicity in Brahman. One who sees it otherwise, transmigrates from death to death. The seeker of Brahman should not reflect on many words which only cause exhaustion to the vocal cords. He should abjure all vain talk.

Other teachings given in this section are: The ātman in reality, is unaffected by good or bad deeds. Knowledge of this ātman alone can make a being a ‘muni’ or a sage. Seekers of liberation desire only the ātman and not the worlds of men, of the manes or of the gods. Hence they renounce their hearth and home and become monks. The ātman cannot be defined in positive terms. At best it can be described negatively as ‘neti’ (‘not this’). The knower of the ātman is never beset with the thoughts of rewards or punishments for his past actions. He is ever controlled, serene and free from desires. He sees the ātman in himself and all else also as his own Self. He is free from all doubts and evils, ever blessed and absolutely fearless.

The fifth brāhmaṇa—the *Maitreyī-brāhmaṇa*—is, for all practical purposes, a repetition of 2.4. The last section—the *Vamśa-brāhmaṇa*—traces the genealogy of the ācāryas or the teachers. As in the *Madhukāṇḍa*, here also, Hiraṇyagarbha is the primeval teacher.

Fifth Chapter

With this, begins the *Khilakāṇḍa*, the ‘supplementary book.’ The fifth chapter introduces some

auxiliary meditations which do not conflict with the rites but lead to worldly well-being and also kramamukti or gradual liberation.

The first brāhmaṇa starts with the well-known Śāntimantra (peace-chant) ‘pūrṇamadaḥ.’ The infinite universe has come out of the infinite Brahman. Even after realizing its identity with Brahman, Brahman alone is left, because the universe as sopādhika or conditioned Brahman, has no real existence. The latter half deals with praṇavopāśana or meditation on Brahman with the Praṇava or Oṃkāra.

Prājāpatya-brāhmaṇa, the second, prescribes the cultivation of the three qualities of dama (self control), dāna (giving gifts) and dayā (showing compassion) as a part of upāsanā or meditation by means of an interesting parable.

The third is the *Hṛdaya-brāhmaṇa* which eulogises the heart, the seat of the intellect. The fourth and the fifth brāhmaṇas enjoin meditations on the hṛdayabrahman as Satya (the Truth) and its eulogy. Meditations on the different parts of its body are also described. The akṣipuruṣa (the ocular being) or the jīva and the ādityapuruṣa or the solar being are aspects of Satya-brahman. At the time of death, the solar being withdraws his rays and hence the dying man sees the sun as an orb without its rays.

The sixth, called *Mano-brāhmaṇa*, enjoins a meditation on vidyut (lightning) and vāk (speech or the Vedas) as Brahman. The ninth recommends meditation on agni or fire as Vaiśvānara or Virāj. The tenth section known as the *Gati-brāhmaṇa* describes the goals of the above meditations, which is, residence in Brahmaloḥa throughout the life-time of Hiranyagarbha. *Tapo-brāhmaṇa*, the eleventh, advises us to look upon illness or being carried for the funeral after death, as a tapas or penance, since it can destroy our sins. The twelfth section enjoins that anna (food) and prāṇa (vital force) should be meditated upon as Brahman. The thirteenth brāhmaṇa recommends meditations on the prāṇa as uktha (a recitation connected with Somayāga), yajus, sāman and kṣattrā (the healer).

The *Gāyatrī-brāhmaṇa*, the fourteenth, describes a meditation on Brahman as possessing the Gāyatrī as the upādhi or limiting adjunct. The four pādas or quarters of the Gāyatrī are to be identified respectively with the three worlds, the three Vedas, the three prāṇas or vital-airs and āditya or the sun. This will result in various divine fruits.

The last section contains a prayer to Āditya or the sun and Agni or the fire by a dying man, who has combined meditation with rites (jñāna-karma-samuccaya), for the removal of the obstacles to his journey on the uttarāyaṇa or the northern path, after death.

Sixth Chapter

There are six brāhmaṇas in this chapter. *Prāṇasaṁvāda-brāhmaṇa*, the first one, demonstrates

through an allegory that the prāṇa or the vital force, is the eldest and the best of all organs. Once, a dispute arose among the sense-organs like the eye and the speech, as to which of them was the greatest. Prajāpati when approached by them for adjudication, ruled that the greatest among them was that organ by whose departure the body would be rendered more impure. The departure of vāk (speech), cakṣus (the eyes), śrotra (the ears), retas (organ of generation) and manas (the mind), one by one, did not make the body more impure. It continued to live. But, when prāṇa (also called mukhyaprāṇa) tried to depart, all the other organs also were pulled out of their places of residence. Hence it was decided that the prāṇa or the vital force was the best.

The second is the *Karmavipāka-brāhmaṇa* which teaches the *Pañcāgnividyā* or the Doctrine of the Five Fires. Śvetaketu, the proud son of the sage Gautama Āruṇi, goes to the court of the king Pravāhaṇa Jaivali to exhibit his learning. However, when the king puts him five questions, he is unable to answer any of them. Crest-fallen, he returns to his father and objects to his not having taught this subject. Since Gautama too did not know this science, he chooses to go to the king to learn it from him. The king teaches him *Pañcāgnividyā* or the Doctrine of the Five Fires. The five fires are: dyuloka (heaven), parjanya (rain), this loka or world, puruṣa (man) and yoṣā (woman). Householders who know this meditation on the Five Fires as also the hermits who meditate with faith on the Hiranyagarbha go to Brahmaloḥa by the Uttarāyaṇa, the northern path (also called Devayāna and Arcirādimārga) and will not return to this world again. But those who practise sacrifices and penances, and give gifts, will travel along the path of smoke (called Dhūmādimārga or the Dakṣiṇāyana or Pitṛyāna) to the Pitṛloḥa, the world of manes. After exhausting the results of their good deeds there, they return to this world. They rotate like a Persian Wheel in the circle of transmigration, till they attain the Devayāna or immediate liberation. The rest, the ignorant ones, are born as moths, insects and so on.

The third section called *Śrīmantha-brāhmaṇa* describes the rite of Śrīmantha (the paste for prosperity) as a means to attaining greatness and thereby, wealth, which is needed to perform the Vedic rituals. There is also the eulogy of this rite and the line of teachers.

The fourth section describes the Putramantha rite, by which a house-holder can get a worthy son or a worthy daughter. Only the performer of the Śrīmantha rite is eligible to conduct this rite.

The fifth, the last, section called *Vamśa-brāhmaṇa* describes the long line of teachers from Hiranyagarbha up to Pautimāśīputra.

Conclusion

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* occupies a pre-eminent place among the Upaniṣads, not only for its

size but also for its teachings. Almost all aspects of the teachings of Vedānta—Brahman/Ātman, creation, nature of the individual soul and its destiny, theory of karma, analysis of the three states of consciousness, various modes of Upaniṣadic meditations, characteristics of a liberated being—find a place in it.

The Upaniṣad also throws some interesting light on the contemporary society. Not only were there great sages and men of learning, devoted to their respective fields of knowledge, they would also meet occasionally, either for disputation or for exchange of ideas. Noble kings like Janaka, Pravāhaṇa Jaivali and Ajātaśatru, who were themselves eminent men of learning, provided opportunities for such sages to gather in their courts and also rewarded them generously. Women, earnestly interested in Vedic learning, austerity, or even self-knowledge had easy access to it, as shown by the instances of Maitreyī (a housewife) and Gārgī (a brahmavādinī, student of Vedic learning). The fact that Gārgī was also one among the sages that had assembled in the court of the King Janaka, and had dared to question Yājñavalkya, speaks volumes about the high status of women during the Vedic period. The myth that the ancient Hindus always craved for sons and looked down upon daughters has been exploded in the mantra 6.4.17 wherein the desire of the parents for a learned daughter (paṇḍitā duhitā) has been clearly stated.

The Upaniṣad also places frankly before us, examples of men of conceit, born out of their scholarship or high birth (e.g., Dṛpṭa Bālāki and Śvetaketu) on the one hand and persons of great humility and culture who were never averse to learning from the others even-though they may be inferior in the social hierarchy of those days (e.g., Gautama) on the other.

References to the powerful horses of Sindhu country, to the chariots, kings and their big retinue, cows and gold coins as also to the various kinds of spiritual sciences and rituals bespeak of a high degree of civilization and culture.

One can safely say that the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* represents a landmark in the development of early philosophical literature of India.



Chāndogya Upaniṣad

Among the six traditional systems of Hindu philosophy known as Ṣaḍ-darśanas, the Vedānta

system, undoubtedly, gets the pride of place. This system, which is very much alive even in the modern times and quite popular, is based entirely on the Upaniṣads, the predominantly philosophical sections of the Vedas. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* is one of the ten Upaniṣads considered to be ancient and authoritative, and on which Śaṅkara (A.D. 788-820) has written a voluminous commentary. Its importance can be judged from the fact that the work *Brahmasūtras* has drawn heavily upon it, for topics of discussion.

Though the word ‘chandas’ (‘that which exhilarates’) is one of the names of the Vedas in general, it is more particularly applied to the *Sāmaveda*, the third of the four Vedas wherein the mantras, known as ‘sāmans,’ are set to music and sung. Those who have specialized in the singing of these sāmans, are called ‘Chandogas’ and the Brāhmaṇa (liturgical section) pertaining to them is designated as *Chāndogya Brāhmaṇa*, which itself forms a part of the *Tāṇḍya* branch of the *Sāmaveda*. This Brāhmaṇa contains ten prapāṭhakas or sections out of which the first two form the *Mantra Brāhmaṇa* and the rest, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. It comprises eight chapters and each is subdivided into ‘kāṇḍas’ or sections (total number of kāṇḍas being 154) and contains 628 kaṇḍikās or mantras, all in prose.

The speciality of this Upaniṣad is that it describes a number of ‘upāsanās’ or ‘vidyās’ or meditations, based generally on Vedic rituals. Since the average spiritual aspirant has devoted the major part of his life to the performance of these rituals, it will be rather difficult for him to take to meditation on God straight away. Hence he is led to it gradually by a series of graded meditations on the rituals, each of the parts being substituted by appropriate symbols that elevate the whole process to spiritual levels. The entire first chapter is devoted to one such meditation, that on the ‘udgītha,’ the principal part of a sāman chant. Since the udgītha invariably starts with Om̐ and Om̐ is the best symbol of Paramātmā, the Supreme Self or God, the Upaniṣad begins with its upāsanā. The second section, with the help of an ancient anecdote, stresses the importance of meditation on the udgītha as identified with the mukhya-prāṇa, the primary life force within the body, which at the cosmic level, has manifested itself as the sun. Meditation on Om̐ in various aspects is continued till the 7th section. The twelfth section gives an amusing incident of dogs singing udgītha (hence called ‘śauva-udgītha,’ śauva=related to dogs) for obtaining food. Śaṅkara opines that some supernatural deities assuming the forms of dogs revealed this udgītha to the sage Baka-Dālbhya, and it helps a hungry person in securing food.

If the first chapter concentrated on prescribing meditation on the different parts or limbs of the sāman, the second chapter is devoted to meditations on the whole sāman. Sections 2 to 10 deal mainly with such meditations. Sections 11 to 21 deal with the meditations on certain special sāmans like the *Gāyatrī-sāman*, *Rathantara-sāman*, *Revatī-sāman* and so on. The twentythird section, which

mentions about the four āśramas or stages of life, deals with the result of meditating purely on Om, which is the attainment of immortality.

The first eleven sections of the third chapter deal with the meditation on the Āditya or the sun, who is the personification of the results of all sacrifices, as also the karmas of all beings. The whole series of meditations are called *Madhu-vidyā*, since Āditya has been compared to ‘madhu’ or honey. Sections 12 and 13 deal with meditation on Brahman through the Gāyātrī since that is the best among the Vedic metres. Meditation on Brahman in the space or ether of the heart, which is identical with the space or ether outside has also been described. The 14th section gives the famous *Śāṇḍilya-vidyā*. It prescribes meditation on the Ātman in the lotus of one’s heart, but as identified with Brahman, called here as ‘tajjalān.’ This leads to the attainment of Brahman, after the fall of the body. Sections 15 and 16 deal with *Kośa-vidyā* for the longevity of one’s son and *Puruṣa-vidyā* for one’s own longevity. The sage Mahidāsa Aitareya who discovered the latter vidyā is said to have lived for 116 years.

The fourth chapter describes four important vidyās: *Samvarga-vidyā*, *Ṣoḍaśakala -vidyā*, *Upakosala-vidyā* and *Akṣipuruṣa-vidyā*. Jānaśruti Pautrāyaṇa, a king wellknown for his generosity, comes to know of the spiritual eminence of the sage Raikva through the accidental hearing of a conversation between two swans flying over his palace. After a thorough search he discovers Raikva resting in the shade under a cart. Honouring him suitably with presents, the king seeks spiritual wisdom from him. Raikva teaches him to meditate upon Vāyu (cosmic wind) outside and the mukhya-prāṇa (chief life-force) inside, as ‘samvarga,’ i.e., one which absorbs and dissolves everything within itself. ‘Samvarga’ is Prajāpati, the Self of all gods. This is the subject-matter of the first three sections. The touching story of the young boy Satyakāma Jābāla and the *Ṣoḍaśakala-vidyā* he received directly from supernatural deities has been described in sections 4 to 9. Meditation on Brahman, the final cause of this world, through meditation on its 16 ‘kalas’ or parts or aspects, is the subject matter of this particular vidyā. Sections 10 to 14 deal with the story of Upakosala, a disciple of Satyakāma and his obtaining knowledge of Brahman from the three sacred fires in the house of his guru. This has been called *Upakosala-vidyā*. The fires taught that prāṇa or the chief life-force, manifesting in the heart as bliss, is Brahman. The teacher Satyakāma completed their teaching by imparting the knowledge of the ‘akṣipuruṣa,’ the power behind the senses, the ātman. One who realizes this ātman goes to the abode of Brahman after death and does not return to transmigratory existence.

The fifth chapter puts before us three kinds of destination for a soul after the death of the body: (1) Those practising *Pañcāgni-vidyā* (‘meditation on the five fires’) and similar other upāsanās will go by the ‘Arcirādimārga’ or the path of light, to Brahmaloaka, the abode of Brahman and will not return

to transmigratory worlds. (2) Those who perform only rituals without enlightenment will travel by the ‘Dhūmādimārga,’ the path of smoke, and attain the worlds like pitṛloka or the world of manes, from which they return to the human world after some time. (3) Those who lead a beastly life without practising either upāsanās or ritualistic karmas, will constantly go through the rounds of birth and death.

The first two sections prescribe meditation on the mukhya-prāṇa, the chief life-force, after establishing its superiority over other prāṇas (the sense-organs) through an anecdote. Sections 3 to 10 deal with the famous *Pañcāgni-vidyā* (‘the doctrine of the five fires’) and eschatology. Young Śvetaketu, puffed up with the pride of learning, goes to the court of the king Pravāhaṇa Jaivali, with a view to establishing the superiority of his learning but is rebuffed by the king who knew better. He returns crestfallen and angry to his father, the sage Gautama. Gautama approaches the king Pravāhaṇa Jaivali in all humility and requests him to teach the *Pañcāgnividya* about which he had questioned Śvetaketu earlier. In this vidyā, heavenly world, rains, earth, man and woman are to be contemplated upon as fire into which oblations of faith, subtle body (of the sacrificer), rain, food and semen are poured, the final oblation being responsible for the rebirth of the sacrificer. Those who know this science go to the world of Brahman after death and will not return here. The rest of the chapter (sections 11 to 24) deals with the *Vaiśvānara-vidyā*. Six sages under the leadership of Uddālaka Āruṇi obtain this vidyā from the king Aśvapati Kaikeya who was an adept in it. Vaiśvānara Ātman is Īśvara or the Cosmic Being, pervading the universe. He is also inside us as the chief life-force, mukhya-prāṇa. Hence the act of eating food should be contemplated upon as Agnihotra sacrifice. One who achieves perfection in this will become identified with the Cosmic Being. This is the gist of this vidyā.

The last three chapters, 6th, 7th and 8th, contain the quintessence of the Vedānta philosophy. The whole of the sixth chapter is devoted to a delineation of the *Sad-vidyā*, knowledge and meditation pertaining to Sat (the eternal Truth) or Brahman. It is in the form a dialogue between the son Śvetaketu and his father Uddālaka Āruṇi. When Śvetaketu returns home after completing a twelve year course in Vedic studies, the father Uddālaka Āruṇi notices his conceit born of that learning and questions him whether he has known that by which everything will be known. However, the boy had not known it and so requests his father himself to teach it to him. Citing examples of clay, gold and iron, and their products (like pot, ornament and nail-cutter) the father first draws the attention of his son to the identity between the cause and its effects, pointing out that names and forms are unreal, the substance alone being real. Applying this principle, he states that before creation, Sat (the eternal Truth) alone existed and that Sat evolved into this world of names and forms through the three primary elements; tejas (fire), ap (water) and anna (earth). All objects of creation including the bodies of living beings,

have come out of these elements through permutation and combination. This is the gist of the teachings of the first seven sections. Sections 8 to 10 deal with the merging of the individual self, the jīva, into Sat during the state of deep sleep. However, since ignorance persists, he comes back to its original state. The same logic applies in the case of rebirth after death also. But, those who attain knowledge will get liberated. The famous Vedāntic dictum *tat tvam asi*, ‘That thou art,’ appears for the first time in the eighth section and is repeated later, nine times. Sections 12 and 13 teach that Sat, the primary Cause of the universe, is too subtle to be perceived even as the seed of the banyan tree in which the whole tree exists in an involved state. But it pervades the entire creation like the lump of salt dissolved in a jar of water. To know this Sat, the help of a teacher, guru or guide, is necessary. It is like a blindfolded traveller, let off in a forest by robbers, finding his way out with the help of a kind soul. This is the teaching of the 14th section. Though the mode of death is similar to the ignorant as well as the enlightened souls, the latter will not transmigrate whereas the former do. This is explained in the last two sections with the help of an anecdote of the police catching a thief. The purport of the whole chapter seems to be to teach the identity of the jivātman or the individual Self with Brahman, the Cosmic Soul.

The seventh chapter teaches *Bhūma-vidyā*, knowledge of the Infinite. Nārada, though himself a great sage and a man of considerable erudition, approaches the distinguished sage Sanatkumāra with a heavy heart seeking peace and joy. Sanatkumāra takes him step by step through meditations on fifteen objects like name, speech, mind and so on, to Bhūman, the Infinite. The Bhūman which is everywhere, which is established in its own glory, by knowing which there is nothing else to be known, is the Self of all beings. One who realizes it, becomes ‘svarāt.’ Like a king, he will have full freedom in all the worlds. To obtain this knowledge, purity of mind got through purity of food and purity of sense-experience, is necessary. It is only a pure mind that can retain and realize spiritual truths.

It is rather difficult to comprehend and contemplate upon Brahman without qualities, described as Sat and Bhūman. It is easier to meditate upon the saṁḥa or qualified aspect of Brahman, as possessing of blessed qualities. The eighth chapter prescribes such a meditation on Brahman in the region of one’s heart, as also related disciplines like brahmacharya. The first two sections deal with the *dahara-vidyā*, meditation on Brahman in the ‘daharākāśa,’ the little space in the region of the heart. This ākāśa or space in the heart is itself Brahman. It is not limited to that spatial area nor does it get destroyed with the destruction of the body. One who realizes this obtains whatever he wants, in whichever world he contemplates. The next three sections extol and prescribe brahmacharya or celibacy and other related disciplines, for realizing the Ātman-Brahman, who like a dyke is protecting all the worlds. The sixth section describes the various nāḍīs or passages for the flow of prāṇic energy and how the soul of a man of knowledge, at the time of death, enters into suṣumnā nāḍī, departs

through the aperture in the top of the head and reaches Brahmaloka, the abode of Brahman, from which there is no return. Sections 7 to 12 deal with the teachings of Prajāpati to Indra and Virocana. Hearing from Prajāpati, the father of creation, that one who realizes the Ātman, the Self, who is sinless and beyond all limitations like hunger and thirst, old-age and death, Indra the king of gods and Virocana the king of demons decided to get that knowledge of the Ātman. After undergoing brahmacharya (disciplines necessary for spiritual studies) for 32 years, they both approached him for the teaching. When Prajāpati said, that the ‘person seen in the eye’ is the Ātman, Virocana understood it as the reflection seen in the eyeball, which again is the body. Fully satisfied with this understanding that the body is itself the Ātman, he returned to his tribe and taught it to them. Indra too took it that way; but very soon he got doubts since the body which is seen in the reflection, is subject to mutilation, disease and death, whereas the Ātman is not. He returned and expressed his doubts when Prajāpati instructed him, after a further period of brahmacharya for 32 years, that the ‘person who moves about in the dream is the Ātman.’ When Indra discovered the limitations of this teaching as also of the next that ‘the person in dreamless sleep is the Ātman,’ he was truly instructed (after further periods of brahmacharya totalling in all, 101 years) that the Ātman is the ‘seer’ behind the eyes and all other sense organs, is the witness of all the states and is the immortal spirit different from the mortal body. The last section gives the list of teachers of spiritual wisdom. It also adds that one who leads a life in accordance with dharma and meditates on Brahman in the heart, will reach Brahmaloka after death and will not return.

Apart from the fact this Upaniṣad is the second longest and one of the more ancient ones, it throws an interesting light on contemporary history and customs. It mentions many geographical names like Pāñcāla, Kuru, Naimiṣa, Gāndhāra and Kekaya. References to many sciences and arts, villages and towns, buildings and parts of buildings, tools of iron and other implements, different kinds of articles of food and drink, musical instruments, minerals and metals mentioned by name, carts and chariots, keepers of cows and horses, kings and law-enforcing agencies, several calendaric terms—all these indicate a fair degree of civilization. Family life was highly valued and social life was generally peaceful. Truth and righteousness were given the pride of place. For acquiring knowledge from competent teachers no sacrifice was considered too great. The teachers also enforced discipline strictly. Though ritualistic religion was very much in vogue, philosophical inquiry was considered a superior pursuit.

Thus, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* is a unique text of the Vedānta system giving an insight into a philosophical inquiry of the highest kind.

