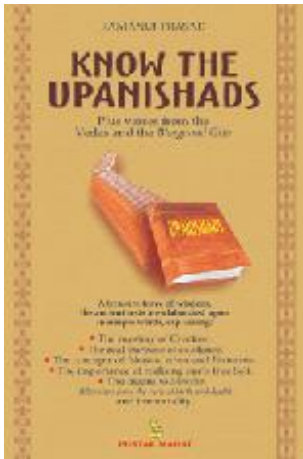




## Know The Upanishads



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Like the proverbial fish that has heard a lot about the Great Ocean and spends an entire lifetime searching for it, not realising it has always been an inseparable part of the ocean, man spends his lifetime searching all around for God.

All man has to do, in fact, is simply turn his gaze inwards to realise that God or the Self has always been an inseparable part of him.

The Upanishads tell man that he is not a mere mortal, but a part of the Immortal One.

This book shows you just how to go about uncovering the layers of ignorance and illusion to realise your true nature - the Self.

This is the path to moksha or nirvana (liberation), which every seeker wishes to tread upon in order to break the cycle of birth and death.

With pearls of wisdom from the Upanishads, the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita, this book could transform your way of life forever, teaching you the true meaning of existence.

### Highlights:

- \*A detailed account about how many Upanishads are there (Isavasya Upanishad, Kathopanishad, Mandukya Upanishad etc.), and an overview of what they contain
- \*Explanation of basic concepts like Ishwar, Atma, Paramatma
- \*To whom the Upanishads are addressed
- \*Brief outlines of different Upanishads

### About the author:

Born in 1936, Ramanuj Prasad has been associated with spiritual houses such as the Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Arsha Vidya Gurukula, Narayana Gurukulam and Yogoda Satsang Society.

Introspection and logical thinking led to the author producing many professional papers and case studies.

An ardent believer in Vedanta, Vedantic Truth Revealed was his first book, published by Pustak Mahal. He has also composed



about a dozen poems on Vedantic themes.

The author has been blessed with multi-discipline academic records in Economics, Engineering and Management. Having served government and public sector institutions for around 40 years, he retired as a senior executive in 1994.

## PREFACE:

There is a verse signifying that most of the functional instincts between human beings and animals are common - such as hunger, thirst, fear and procreation. What is exclusive to humans is the power of thought. Human beings can think clearly, analyse a situation objectively and take appropriate measures for a better future, whereas animals have no faculty to think and choose. Their behaviour is programmed and no improvement is possible under the laws of nature.

If one interviews people at the New Delhi Railway Station or the inter-state bus terminus and asks what made them come there at that point of time, there will be as many answers as the individuals questioned. One may say he is going to the office, another to the Parliament session, the third to meet the President or to visit the RTO office, hospital, school, library, Rajghat and so on and so forth. It will appear that there are innumerable objectives being pursued by human beings. But if little more thought is given to these multifarious activities, one can see that all lead to one common goal - the perennial search for happiness.

Without any doubt, all activities are means to happiness and may not be pursued if they resulted in pain or discomfort. This is true even in the case of one's wife, husband, son, daughter and a host of other relatives and related objects who or which are all means only. The lineage of the family one proudly claims to belong to is also a means to happiness only. The objectives enumerated so far are external to one, come to join at a point of time and similarly leave too. Therefore, whatever happiness we get out of them is dependent on the source, which is not the inner part of the self as heat in the fire but like the heat of the water.

The happiness that comes from external objects is borrowed. The only internal happiness is the independent one, which is the very nature of human beings. Happiness that comes from external objects will certainly vanish and this threat always exists. The external sources of happiness are governed by many conditions that have to be fulfilled for enjoying happiness. One has to work hard to fulfil them in order to be happy occasionally. Whenever the conditions are not fulfilled, they leave a trail of pain proportional to the happiness one got out of it. In actual fact, there is no pleasure from external sources but simply a rearrangement of the problem, much like the relief felt after shifting a load from one shoulder to the other.

With concern, compassion and love equal to that of thousands of mothers, the Veda (Scriptures) promises assistance for both types of happiness - that born out of external objects or that which is the intrinsic nature of every human being. The choice is left to the individual. The Veda never forces anyone to choose either, but cautions that all pleasures dependent on anything are temporary, unreal and also a source of pain in equal measure.

The first portion of the Veda contains rituals to attain worldly happiness and is capable of fulfilling whatever desire one has, be it for a son, wealth, wife, fame, complexion, etc, all of which can be attained through karma and rituals. However, the end part of the Veda insists on renunciation of all worldly possessions and desires - the 'less luggage, more comfort' principle. Its concern is in the discovery of the 'Self', just like the lost prince who was not aware of the fact that he was a prince and had to be told: You are a prince of this kingdom; arise to claim your own glory.

This is the wisdom of the Upanishads that we will study objectively in the subsequent pages, as the reward for this knowledge far surpasses the acquisition of the entire world's wealth. Such happiness lies in completeness, which external objects can never give one to feel complete, as they are all ephemeral in nature. Knowledge of the Upanishads is liberation - it leads to internal happiness, which is one's own nature.

A quotation conveys the fact that happiness is the very embodiment of a spiritual peak:

(He) knew Bliss as Brahman; for from Bliss, indeed, all these beings originate; having been born, they are sustained by Bliss; they move towards and merge in Bliss. This knowledge realised by Bhrgu and imparted by Varuna (starts from the food-self and) terminates in the Supreme (Bliss), established in the cavity of the heart. He who knows this becomes firmly established; he becomes the possessor of food and the eater of food; and he becomes great in progeny, cattle and the lustre of holiness, and great in glory.

-Taittiriya Upanishad (III, V-1)

The Upanishads are the basic foundation and the fountainhead of philosophical wisdom, the eternal truth and the religion of mankind. No other literature of the world can match the thoughts that are taught in the Upanishads and were accepted as the ultimate by the greatest thinkers of the time such as Sanatkumara, Yajnavalkya and Shankara. While the language of the Upanishads is rich in grandeur and sublimity, its simplicity and spiritual beauty also cannot be missed.

The idea and the concept that is very difficult even to imagine has been so successfully infused into one's mind that the student is hijacked from the lower self to the higher self, even before one can realise that one is not the old self. At times one is lifted to that height of poetic grandeur from where the finest music of the relative world remains only an irritating noise. Time has not been able to diminish the lustre of the Upanishads, as they remain ever fresh, sustaining their beauty as though they had just captured the fragrance of the flowers, the energy of the morning sun and the beauty of the full moon in winter.

The Upanishads take one by the hand to the other shore where immortality is waiting with a garland in its open arms. And the hand is gripped lest one may not fall back. Therefore, let that lead one so that one may not free the hand, as the guide is trustworthy and sincere to your cause alone.

This introductory volume focuses on the essentials of the Upanishads, along with a brief illustration of the content in the Mundakopanishad. A few parallel mantras are drawn from the other Upanishads, as an exercise to appreciate the universal



nature of the facts in Upanishadic teachings, since they belong to the Vedas, which is universal by implication.

Basic Upanishads

Amongst the Upanishads, there are many minor Upanishads dealing only with one or the other aspects of the principal Upanishads. Adi Shankaracharya and other acharyas have commented upon the ten principal Upanishads too.

These ten Upanishads are known by various names, such as 'Fundamental Upanishads', 'Old Upanishads', 'Genuine Upanishads' and so on, but whatever their name, these ten Upanishads are the very essence of the Vedanta philosophy contained in the Vedas.

1. Isavasya Upanishad: This is also known as Vajasaneyi Upanishad and has beautifully brought out the path of renunciation for sannyasis and for others with an active life-style who are not yet ready for sannyasa but want to worship Hiranyagarbha together with the unborn prakriti. Esoteric terms such as vidya, avidya, sambhuti and the like have been used at various points, which make the Upanishads not easily understandable, though apparently simple. The very first line of the first mantra is a very popular quotation Isavasyamidam Sarvam, "This whole world is covered by the Lord, which induces a thrilling inspiration in the mind of the student.

2. Kena or Talavakra Upanishad: Kena (by whom) has the essentials for comprehension of Brahman, who is behind all the instruments of knowledge, such as eye of the eyes, ear of the ears etc, and learning under the guidance of a preceptor has been emphasised. Liberation cannot be attained by karma or knowledge combined with karma. Knowledge of Atman is antagonistic to karma and cannot, therefore, co-exist.

Karmas are to be performed without expectation of fruits to purify the mind and to gain strong desire for the final emancipation. Karma alone cannot ensure immortality. The nature of Brahman is also dealt with, as Brahman is beyond the reach of the senses and the mind.

3. Kathopanishad: The most beautiful Upanishad that answers questions like "What happens when one dies? Is everything gone with death or does something survive? What is that beyond dharma and adharma, knowledge and ignorance and birth and death etc?" It is verily the Supreme Lord.

These and many other topics have been answered in a very natural manner for an easy understanding, through a dialogue between Lord Yama, the teacher and Nachiketas, a serious, honest and motivated student who has an understanding of the eternal and the ephemeral in full measure. He is a young boy of about 12 years, the son of Vajasrava, who once said in anger: I will give you to death.

The boy is very devoted to his father and society and has a strong desire for Self knowledge, which is the greatest of benefits one can imagine. When Lord Yama agreed to grant him three boons, the lad asked for (a) pacification of his father (b) a fire ritual to gain heaven and (c) knowledge of the Self.

This Upanishad is very popular not only in India but also abroad. In the elevation of thoughts, depth of expressions, and the beauty of its imagery, no Upanishad is equal to the Kathopanishad.

4. Prasnopanishad: This Upanishad is a commentary on the Mundakopanishad and the mantras dealt with in the Mundakopanishad have been dealt with more elaborately here. Six seekers of Brahman go to the teacher Pippalada and put six questions pertaining to cosmology, the devas, the nature and origin of prana, sleep and dream, Pranava or OM and Purusha of sixteen kalas or parts. One uniform idea runs through the Prasna, Mundaka and Mandukya Upanishads.

5. Mundakopanishad: The word Mundaka applies to its division (chapter) and the ritual of carrying fire on the shaven head. Its verses are in mantra form (sacred verses) meant for sannyasis (shaved head). This Upanishad makes a systematic approach to the topic of knowledge of the Self through discrimination and dispassion. The fitness of the student goes along with symbolic rituals presented before taking up the study. This ritual has significance to the disciplined body-mind complex.

6. Mandukyopanishad: Manduka means a frog. Lord Varuna assumes the form of a frog to reveal the significance and superiority of OM or Pranava or OMKARA, the only name and symbol of the Brahman. The importance of the name remains still alive though the person has gone, according to Rama, Shankara and others. The text of the Upanishad declares that OM, Brahman and Atman are all one and the same. OM is a word that stands for all sounds, words or names. The word akshara means that which is imperishable or immortal, which is of the same nature as the higher nirguna Brahman - Brahman without attributes, as well as saguna Brahman - the lower Brahman, that is, Brahman with attributes.

7. Aitareyopanishad: This Upanishad is attributed to Rishi Aitareya. It does not mean that this is his own philosophy, but simply that it was revealed to him by the Lord. It has three chapters.

Chapter I contains three sections dealing with Srishti Prakaranam - creation of the world, to show ultimately as mithya. The second chapter deals with various stages of Jiva, including its tenure in the womb of the mother. Adi Shankaracharya says this is to show the miseries the Jiva has to undergo so that the sadhaka gets vairagyam - total detachment. The third chapter deals fully only with Brahman, revealing the identity between the Jiva and Brahman. Out of the four important mahavakyas, prajnanam Brahma - awareness - is nothing but Brahman; the jagat karanam occurs in this Upanishad.

Just as in the Kenopanishad, this Upanishad also declares: Who is he whom we meditate upon as Atman? That indeed is the Atman by which a living being sees form, hears sound, smells scent, articulates speech and discriminates between what is sweet and what is not. That which is the heart and the mind is the same as that. All are but names of Prajna or Consciousness. The whole world is formed in Prajna and, therefore, Prajna is Brahman.

8. Taittiriya Upanishad: This Upanishad is famous as it preserves the traditional recitation of the verses. Even today, it is often chanted during household rituals, though not necessarily in the proper context.

The words Satyam jnanam anantam Brahma declared in this Upanishad are a revelation of the relationship between the Jiva, jagat and Ishwara - the Infinite Lord. The Sikshavalli chapter is famous for its teaching to students who are leaving for home



after completing their studies. It teaches them values in life and how to conduct themselves in society and progress towards the goal of human birth.

This Upanishad has three parts under the titles Sikshavalli, Anandavalli and Bhruvalli. The second part, Anandavalli, deals exclusively with Brahma vidya. It declares that the Bliss perceivable on the perfection of desireless living is enjoyed by one who realises Brahman and that is the only real Bliss.

9. Chandogya Upanishad: The singer of Sama Veda (Chandas) is a Chandoga and the beliefs and practices are set forth in the Chandogya Upanishad.

The first five chapters of the Upanishad are about worship and meditation (duality). The Upanishad emphasises udgita, the recitation of OM as the means to purify the mind. It tells many stories in simple language to drive home the profound subject matter. The initial chapters advocate rituals and meditation for all material gains for ordinary people but also warns that they will not ensure liberation or immortality.

Chapter six is about Brahman and the famous statement Tattvam asi (That thou art) is from this Upanishad. This Upanishad sets our goal as 'Self knowledge' and not material pleasures and enjoyment.

10. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: Brihad means 'big' or 'great' and aranyaka denotes 'forest', the knowledge that is taught in the forest, the Brahma vidya. A ranking Upanishad, besides being the biggest Upanishad in size, the commentary, the substance, the theme, the voluminous subject matter and the explanation of Atman in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad are all great.

There is hardly any point that cannot be found here. Many doctrines like bheda-abheda, mimamsa, visishtadvaita etc (difference-cum-identity, analysis and qualified monism) have been discussed vis-vis the Vedanta. The madhukhanda and yajnavalkyakhanda are divisions giving many illumining illustrations of the Advaita doctrine and nature, upadesa and upasana. The presentation of adhyaropa and apavada is in full play to explain the real and unreal (mithya) substance. Many logical explanations, such as sambandha and vidya-avidya sutras are seen displayed throughout the glory of Adi Shankaracharya. The famous statement Aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman) of the Yajur Veda is found here. The verses are obscure and it would have been impossible to study these without the commentary of Adi Shankaracharya.

Some important concepts:

\*The infinite fullness (plenum) alone is bliss and there is no bliss in small finite things.

\*The infinite fullness is immortal and the finite mortal.

\*The infinite fullness is alone everywhere and it is all this.

\*In purity of food there is purity of nature.

\*Only the Self is dear and everything other than the Self comes and goes with time.

\*The Self is the Absolute and those who know as much become indestructible.

\*He who knows that God and he are different is a beast.

\*By knowing the Self as everything, everything becomes known, just as gold is the content of all ornaments and clay is of all pots.

\*Consciousness is Brahman and the world has Consciousness for its functioning. All this is Brahman - the ultimate reality, and knowing this is realisation. He who realises this becomes immortal.

\*Brahman is the only reality and all other things are ephemeral (mithya), which includes all the gross and subtle, micro and macro worlds.

\*Brahman is the intelligent and material cause of the world.

I convey my heartfelt thanks to Mr Ramamurthy for his assistance in preparing this work.

Hari Om!

-Ramanuj Prasad

## CONTENTS:

Foreword

Invocation

Preface

Shanti Patha

TOPIC - I

Upanishads Explained

TOPIC - II

Whom the Upanishad Addresses

TOPIC - III

Mundakopanishad

TOPIC - IV

Important Verses

TOPIC - V

The Minor Upanishads

TOPIC - VI

Upanishads in Vogue

Bibliography

Glossary



## EXCERPTS:

### Whom the Upanishad Addresses

The Upanishad undertakes the responsibility of spiritual welfare of each individual, who in turn serves, as per tradition, groups that form the society and the nation. Through this approach, Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharishi made a tremendous impact on the masses of their time and even today, decades after leaving their mortal body, there are deep imprints that perpetuate their teachings without any boundary.

Similarly, the Upanishads are a source of strength to mankind as it reveals that the children of the Omnipotent and Omniscient all-powerful God are not meek and weak creatures but have inherited the very nature of the Lord.

The Upanishad addresses them as immortal and all-powerful ones. It reminds them: "You are not a lamb but a lion and so, come and discover yourself. You do not have to lean on anyone and, in fact, the whole universe is leaning on your support - the support of all is Self-supported.

In the hour of relative uncertainty and distress, the Upanishad stands with us and inspires us to rise to the occasion with confidence and strength. It convinces us to demonstrate that one can live and help others to live without over-anxiety about the past and the future. The knowledge of the Upanishad presupposes the knowledge given by the Upanishad. The Upanishad is an instrument of knowledge and not conversion of knowledge at a later date. It imparts knowledge of the Absolute. It uses ingenious methods and peculiar language to convey that knowledge which is beyond description and comparison.

Also, the words have more than one meaning at times and, therefore, it becomes necessary to ascertain that particular meaning in the given context of the subject matter. So the import of the idea demands correct interpretation of the Veda of which the Upanishad happens to be a part and parcel. Though the Upanishad forms a part of the Veda, it differs sharply as the pursuits are different, the benefits derived are different and the method of study too is different.

Thus, the Upanishad aims at knocking out the duality by arriving at mahavakyas - statement of facts on the unity of Jiva and Ishwara. There are many ingenious techniques to prove the identity of Jiva with Ishwara. This assertion is combined with differentiation between the real and the unreal spirit and matter etc.

Some of the techniques are:

\*Discrimination through the five sheaths (Pancha kosa viveka) known as annamaya, pranamaya, manomaya, vijnanamaya and anandamaya kosas.

\*Three-body analysis (sharira trayam) - gross, subtle and causal bodies.

\*Three states of existence (avasta trayam) - waking, dream and dreamless sleep.

\*Subject-object division (drg-drshya viveka) - seer and seen analysis.

Mahavakyas are expressions of ascertaining the identity of the Jiva with Brahman. The Upanishads have many such expressions but four of them are given as representative from each Veda:

\*Prajnanam Brahman: - Perception, direction, understanding, knowledge, retentive power, vision, firmness, power of reflection, freedom of thinking, mental depression, memory, recollection, determination, vitality, desire, love - all these are but names of Prjnana or Consciousness. This is Brahman. (Aitareya Upanishad-3.1 - Rig Veda).

\*Tat tvam asi:- That which is the subtlest of all is the Self of all this. It is the truth. It is the Self. That thou art. (Chandogya Upanishad VI-VIII-7 - Sama Veda).

\*Aham Brahmasmi:- The sage Vamadeva, while realising this (Self) as 'That' knew, 'I was Manu, and the sun.' And to this day, whoever in like manner knows It as "I am Brahman" becomes all this (universe). (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad I-IV-10 - Yajur Veda).

\*Ayam Atma Brahma:- All this is Brahman. This Atma (the Supreme Self) is Brahman. (Mandukya Upanishad 2 - Atharva Veda).

In order to assimilate these mahavakyas and to bring them into the reality of understanding despite day-to-day transactions, this will continue to be different, just as we have the understanding that the sun does not actually rise, though in the relative plane, we do experience this. To know the Atma, the Self, one must resort to Jnana yoga. Jnana yoga is also known as Brahma vidya or adhyatma vidya and all mean the same Ā,Ā- knowledge of the Self.

The threefold practices in this knowledge are:

\*Sravanam - listening to the teachings of Vedanta through a guru.

\*Mananam - clearing of doubts arising during the course of listening.

\*Nidhidhyasanam - getting rid of the habitual tendency of slipping back.

Listening (sravanam) involves faith in the teacher and in the Scriptures - understanding the meanings of the Upanishadic interpretation of words and sentences, asking questions to clarify doubts and retaining what has been taught and the relationship of what is being repeated as an emphasis and the essence of the teachings.

Analytical thinking (mananam) is reflected in the teachings to have an objective perception. For example, the word 'I' has a different meaning when it is used in the transactional world than what the word means in Vedanta or in the real sense. The attributes of the body-mind complex should be separated from the real 'I', which is attributeless and is neither the 'doer' nor an 'enjoyer'.

A thorough understanding of Atma and anatma is known as contemplation (nidhidhyasanam). This involves a mind that is alert even while conducting day-to-day worldly activities. One is likely to miss the point and see the functions of anatma on Atma due to die-hard habits, which have to be corrected continuously till we get out of the hold of old habits and our understanding becomes firm. We may compare this to the burning of the boat after reaching the shore.



While sravanam is associated with the help of the guru and the Scriptures, mananam may be done by oneself or with the help of the guru or a person on whom we have confidence, whereas nidhidhyasanam is a self-effort totally.

In the words of the great sage Yajnavalkya:

The Self, my dear Maitreyi, should be realised, should be heard of, reflected on and meditated upon. By the realisation of the Self, my dear, through hearing, reflection and meditation, all this is known.

-Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.4.10

We have discussed the practice of knowledge of the Self, knowledge of the Atma, through sravanam, mananam and nidhidhyasanam, but it is not so simple, otherwise there would not have been any glory in its attainment. The fact is that the Upanishad takes it for granted that all those who come for knowledge of the Self are prepared students. It is assumed that the student has undergone all the necessary disciplines and has been equipped with a disciplined mind and sense. This is also known as spiritual values (daivi sampat), gained through karma, upasana or bhakti or through such practices like austerity, charity, and rituals.

Known as sadhana chatustaya sampathi, the outline of these qualifications is:

\*Discriminative knowledge between the timeless (nitya) and the time-bound (anitya).

\*Dispassion for the enjoyment of the objects that are the fruits (of actions) here (in this world) and there (in heaven).

\*The sixfold disciplines of mind and sense control.

\*Intense desire for liberation.

Now the sixfold wealth is detailed here as samah, damah, uparamah, titiksha, shraddha and samadhanam. They are briefly described:

\*Samah: Mastery over the mind, control over the way of thinking.

\*Damah: Control of external organs like the eyes, the ears, the nose and the like.

\*Uparamah: Observations of one's own duty (dharma).

\*Titiksha: Endurance of opposite qualities like cold-heat, pleasure-pain, happiness-sorrow etc.

\*Shraddha: It is trust in the words of the Vedas (Scriptures) and the teacher.

\*Samadhanam: This denotes having one object (of pursuit) in the mind. It is a distraction-free mind.

The Upanishad is an antidote to narrow outlooks, as it reminds one repeatedly: "O Immortal One, you do not have this body alone but all the bodies are your body. Leave the idea of the small family, as the whole world is your family. There is none for you to hate as you are in all, and all, including the plants and animal kingdom, exist because of you only."

Hari Om!

## About Pustakmahal Publishers

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