

The Upanishads (“In the world, there is no study so beautiful and so elevating as the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life, and will be the solace of my death,” from the great nineteenth-century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, paying homage to the sublime ideas that have been animating the Hindu tradition for almost three millennia. In the Upanishads, those majestic “Himalayas of the Soul,” we discover the pan-Indian diagnosis of the human condition as trapped in a ceaseless round of death and rebirth (*samsara*), due to the consequences of actions (*karma*) performed in ignorance of the divine ground of all life, the Infinite, the Pure Being (*Brahman*). We also hear of the path and prescription (*yoga*) for liberation (*moksha*) from this confirming ignorance through each individual’s realization of his or her inner spiritual nature, the Universal Self (*Atman* or *Purusha*), which is none other than *Brahman*. The Sanskrit word “upanishad,” literally means, “setting down beside,” referring to setting ignorance to rest and revealing wisdom. Among the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism, dating back to the 8th century B.C.E., the Upanishads are made up of the following books, Aitareya, Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya, Isa, Katha, Kena, Mandukya, Mundaka, Prasna, Svetasvatara, and Taittiriya. Source: Phillip Novak. *The World’s Wisdom*. Edison, NJ: Castle Books. 1994:9. The following selected texts are a translation by Swami Nikhilananda.)

Isa Upanishad (See All Beings in Your Own Self and Your Self in All Beings. While one of the shortest of the Upanishads [18 verses] and in poem form, the Isa is one of the most often quoted Upanishad. “Isa” refers to “inner ruler.”)

- 1 All this – whatever exists in this changing universe – should be covered by the Lord. Protect the Self by renunciation. Lust not after any man's wealth.
- 2 If a man wishes to live a hundred years on this earth, he should live performing action. For you, who cherish such a desire and regard yourself as a man, there is no other way by which you can keep work from clinging to you.
- 3 Verily, those worlds of the *asuras* (power-seeking spirit beings presiding over moral and social phenomena) are enveloped in blind darkness; and thereto they all repair after death who are slayers of *Atman*.
- 4 That non-dual *Atman*, though never stirring, is swifter than the mind. The senses cannot reach It, for It moves ever in front. Though standing still, It overtakes others who are running. Because of *Atman*, *Vayu*, the World Soul apportions the activities of all.
- 5 It moves and moves not; It is far and likewise near. It is inside all this and It is outside all this.
- 6 The wise man beholds all beings in the Self and the Self in all beings; for that reason he does not hate anyone.
- 7 To the seer, all things have verily become the Self: what delusion, what sorrow, can there be for him who beholds that oneness?
- 8 It is He who pervades all – He who is bright and bodiless, without scar or sinews, pure and by evil unpierced; who is the Seer, omniscient, transcendent and uncreated. He has duly allotted to the eternal World – Creators their respective duties.

Katha Upanishad Part 1 Chapters 1 and 2 (Seeking Wisdom from the King of Death, *Atman* – the Universal Self, and *OM* – the Sound of the Real. “Katha” refers to “death as teacher.” With some parallels with the *Bhagavad Gita* and one of the oldest of Upanishads, the Katha contains the famous story of Nachiketa, an earnest young yogi who ventures to the abode of Yama, the

God of Death, in order to learn from him the wisdom of life. Nachiketa arrives while Yama is away on business and spends three nights alone in his dwelling. Upon arriving, Yama apologizes for the inconvenience and offers Nachiketas three compensatory boons. Nachiketa's first wish is that his father suffer no anxiety about him and recognize him upon his return. His second wish is to know the secrets of the fire sacrifice. Then Yama tells Nachiketa, "Choose now thy third boon." And Nachiketa replies:)

20 Nachiketa said: There is this doubt about a man when he is dead: Some say that he exists; others, that he does not. This I should like to know, taught by you. This is the third of my boons.

21 Yama said: On this subject even the gods formerly had their doubts. It is not easy to understand: the nature of *Atman* is subtle. Choose another boon, O Nachiketa! Do not press me. Release me from that boon.

22 Nachiketa said: O Death, even the gods have their doubts about this subject; and you have declared it to be not easy to understand. But another teacher like you cannot be found and surely no other boon is comparable to this.

23 Yama said: Choose sons and grandsons who shall live a hundred years; choose elephants, horses, herds of cattle and gold. Choose a vast domain on earth; live here as many years as you desires.

24 If you deem any other boon equal to that, choose it; choose wealth and a long life. Be the king, O Nachiketa, of the wide earth. I will make you the enjoyer of all desires.

25 Whatever desires are difficult to satisfy in this world of mortals, choose them as you wish: these fair maidens, with their chariots and musical instruments – men cannot obtain them. I give them to you and they shall wait upon you. But do not ask me about death.

26 Nachiketa said: But, O Death, these endure only till tomorrow. Furthermore, they exhaust the vigour of all the sense organs. Even the longest life is short indeed. Keep your horses, dances and songs for yourself.

27 Wealth can never make a man happy. Moreover, since I have beheld you, I shall certainly obtain wealth; I shall also live as long as you rule. Therefore no boon will be accepted by me but the one that I have asked.

28 Who among decaying mortals here below, having approached the undecaying immortals and coming to know that his higher needs may be fulfilled by them, would exult in a life over long, after he had pondered on the pleasures arising from beauty and song?

29 Tell me, O Death, of that Great Hereafter about which a man has his doubts.

Chapter 2

1 Yama said: The good is one thing; the pleasant, another. Both of these, serving different needs, bind a man. It goes well with him who, of the two, takes the good; but he who chooses the pleasant misses the end.

2 Both the good and the pleasant present themselves to a man. The calm soul examines them well and discriminates. Yea, he prefers the good to the pleasant; but the fool chooses the pleasant out of greed and avarice.

3 O Nachiketa, after pondering well the pleasures that are or seem to be delightful, you have renounced them all. You have not taken the road abounding in wealth, where many men sink.

4 Wide apart and leading to different ends are these two: ignorance and what is known as Knowledge. I regard you, O Nachiketa, to be one who desires Knowledge; for even many pleasures could not tempt you away.

5 Fools dwelling in darkness, but thinking themselves wise and erudite, go round and round, by various tortuous paths, like the blind led by the blind.

6 The Hereafter never reveals itself to a person devoid of discrimination, heedless and perplexed by the delusion of wealth. "This world alone exists," he thinks, "and there is no other." Again and again he comes under my sway.

7 Many there are who do not even hear of *Atman*; though hearing of Him, many do not comprehend. Wonderful is the expounder and rare the hearer; rare indeed is the experiencer of *Atman* taught by an able preceptor.

8 *Atman*, when taught by an inferior person, is not easily comprehended, because It is diversely regarded by disputants. But when It is taught by him who has become one with *Atman*, there can remain no more doubt about It. *Atman* is subtler than the subtlest and not to be known through argument.

9 This Knowledge cannot be attained by reasoning. *Atman* become easy of comprehension, O dearest, when taught by another. You have attained this Knowledge now. You are, indeed, a man of true resolve. May we always have an inquirer like you!

10 Yama said: I know that the treasure resulting from action is not eternal; for what is eternal cannot be obtained by the non-eternal. Yet I have performed the Nachiketa sacrifice with the help of non-eternal things and attained this position which is only relatively eternal.

11 The fulfilment of desires, the foundation of the universe, the rewards of sacrifices, the shore where there is no fear, that which adorable and great, the wide abode and the goal – all this you have seen; and being wise, you have with firm resolve discarded everything.

12 The wise man who, by means of concentration on the Self, realizes that ancient, effulgent One, who is hard to be seen, unmanifest, hidden and who dwells in the *buddhi* (feminine Sanskrit for "transpersonal faculty of the mind") and rests in the body – he, indeed, leaves joy and sorrow far behind.

15 Yama said: The goal which all the Vedas declare, which all austerities aim at and which men desire when they lead the life of continence, I will tell you briefly: it is *Om* (the four phoneme mantra, "Aum . . .").

16 This syllable *Om* is indeed Brahman. This syllable is the Highest. Whosoever knows this syllable obtains all that he desires.

Katha Upanishad Part 1 Chapter 3 (The Path of Liberation Is as Narrow as a Razor's Edge; William Somerset Maugham opens his novel, *The Razor's Edge*, with the following quote: "The sharp edge of a razor is difficult to pass over; the wise say the path to Salvation is hard")

10-11 Beyond the senses are the objects; beyond the objects is the mind; beyond the mind, the intellect; beyond the intellect, the Great *Atman*; beyond the Great *Atman*, the Unmanifest; beyond the Unmanifest, the Purusha. Beyond the *Purusha* (Universal Self) there is nothing: this is the end, the Supreme Goal.

12 That Self hidden in all beings does not shine forth; but It is seen by subtle seers through their one – pointed and subtle intellects.

13 The wise man should merge his speech in his mind and his mind in his intellect. He should merge his intellect in the Cosmic Mind and the Cosmic Mind in the Tranquil Self.

14 Arise! Awake! Approach the great and learn. Like the sharp edge of a razor is that path, so the wise say – hard to tread and difficult to cross.

15 Having realized *Atman*, which is soundless, intangible, formless, undecaying and likewise tasteless, eternal and odorless; having realized That which is without beginning and end, beyond the Great and unchanging – one is freed from the jaws of death.

Katha Upanishad Part 2 Chapter 1 (Who Sees the Many and Not the One Wanders On from Death to Death)

4 It is through *Atman* that one perceives all objects in sleep or in the waking state. Having realized the vast, all-pervading *Atman*, the calm soul does not grieve.

10 What is here, the same is there and what is there, the same is here. He goes from death to death who sees any difference here.

11 By the mind alone is *Brahman* to be realized; then one does not see in It any multiplicity whatsoever. He goes from death to death who sees multiplicity in It. This, verily, is That.

14 As rainwater falling on a mountain peak runs down the rocks in all directions, even so he who sees the attributes as different from *Brahman* verily runs after them in all directions.

15 As pure water poured into pure water becomes one with it, so also, O Gautama, does the Self of the sage who knows.

Katha Upanishad Part 2 Chapter 2 (Eternal Brahman: Unmanifest Source of All Manifestation)

8 He, the *Purusha* (Universal Self), who remains awake while the sense – organs are asleep, shaping one lovely form after another, that indeed is the Pure, that is *Brahman* and that alone is called the Immortal. All worlds are contained in Him and none can pass beyond. This, verily, is That.

9 As the same non-dual fire, after it has entered the world, becomes different according to whatever it burns, so also the same non-dual *Atman*, dwelling in all beings, becomes different according to whatever It enters. And It exists also without.

10 As the same non-dual air, after it has entered the world, becomes different according to whatever it enters, so also the same non-dual *Atman*, dwelling in all beings, becomes different according to whatever It enters. And It exists also without.

11 As the sun, which helps all eyes to see, is not affected by the blemishes of the eyes or of the external things revealed by it, so also the one *Atman*, dwelling in all beings, is never contaminated by the misery of the world, being outside it.

12 There is one Supreme Ruler, the inmost Self of all beings, who makes His one form manifold. Eternal happiness belongs to the wise, who perceive Him within themselves – not to others.

13 There is One who is the eternal Reality among non-eternal objects, the one truly conscious Entity among conscious objects and who, though non-dual, fulfils the desires of many. Eternal peace belongs to the wise, who perceive Him within themselves – not to others.

Katha Upanishad Part 2 Chapter 3 (Roots Above, Branches Below)

1 This is that eternal *Asvattha* Tree (Holy Fig Tree of Eternity) with its root above and branches below. That root, indeed, is called the Bright; That is Brahman and That alone is the Immortal. In That all worlds are contained and none can pass beyond. This, verily, is That.

Katha Upanishad Part 2 Chapter 3 (Yoga and Immortality)

10 When the five instruments (senses) of knowledge stand still, together with the mind and when the intellect does not move, that is called the Supreme State.

11 This, the firm Control of the senses, is what is called *yoga*. One must then be vigilant; for *yoga* can be both beneficial and injurious.

12 *Atman* cannot be attained by speech, by the mind, or by the eye. How can It be realized in any other way than by the affirmation of him who says: "He is"?

13 He is to be realized first as Existence limited by *upadhis* (material body, senses, energy) and then in His true transcendental nature. Of these two aspects, *Atman* realized as Existence leads the knower to the realization of His true nature.

14 When all the desires that dwell in the heart fall away, then the mortal becomes immortal and here attains *Brahman*.

15 When all the ties of the heart are severed here on earth, then the mortal becomes immortal. This much alone is the teaching.

16 There are one hundred and one arteries of the heart, one of which pierces the crown of the head. Going upward by it, a man at death attains immortality. But when his *prana* ("breath," one's life force) passes out by other arteries, going in different directions, then he is reborn in the world.

17 The *Purusha* (*Atman*), not larger than a thumb, the inner Self, always dwells in the hearts of men. Let a man separate Him from his body with steadiness, as one separates the tender stalk from a blade of grass. Let him know that Self as the Bright, as the Immortal – yea, as the Bright, as the Immortal.

18 Having received this wisdom taught by the King of Death and the entire process of *yoga*, Nachiketa became free from impurities and death and attained *Brahman*. Thus it will be also with any other who knows, in this manner, the inmost Self.

Chandogya Upanishad Part 6 Chapter 1, 9, 10, 24 and 25 (“Chandogya” refers to “song and sacrifice,” and is considered one of the primary Upanishads, as well as one of the oldest. In this selection, the priestly Aruna tells his son Svetaketu a series of parables about the non-duality of the Self, the absence of individuality, and the nature of the Pure Being and the Infinite, of *Brahman/Atman*)

Chapter 1 4-6. "Just as, my dear, by one clod of clay all that is made of clay is known, the modification being only a name, arising from speech, while the truth is that all is clay; "Just as, my dear, by one nugget of gold all that is made of gold is known, the modification being only a name, arising from speech, while the truth is that all is gold; "And just as, my dear, by one pair of nail – scissors all that is made of iron is known, the modification being only a name, arising from speech, while the truth is that all is iron – even so, my dear, is that instruction."

Chapter 9 1-2. "As bees, my dear, make honey by collecting the juices of trees located at different places and reduce them to one form, "And as these juices have no discrimination so as to be able to say: 'I am the juice of this tree,' or 'I am the juice of that tree' – even so, indeed, my dear, all these creatures, though they reach Pure Being (*Brahman*), do not know that they have reached Pure Being.

3. "Whatever these creatures are, here in this world – a tiger, a lion, a wolf, a boar, a worm, a fly, a gnat, or a mosquito – that they become again.

Chapter 10 1-2. "These rivers, my dear, flow – the eastern toward the east and the western toward the west. They arise from the sea and flow into the sea. Just as these rivers, while they are in the sea, do not know: 'I am this river' or 'I am that river,' "Even so, my dear, all these creatures, even though they have come from Pure Being, do not know that they have come from Pure Being. Whatever these creatures are, here in this world – a tiger, a lion, a wolf a boar, a worm, a fly, a gnat, or a mosquito – that they become again.

Chapter 24 1. "Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else – that is the Infinite (*Brahman*). Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else – that is the finite. The Infinite is immortal, the finite mortal." "Venerable Sir, in what does the Infinite find Its support?" "In Its own greatness – or not even in greatness."

2. "Here on earth people describe cows and horses, elephants and gold, slaves and wives, fields and houses, as 'greatness.' I do not mean this," he said, "for in such cases one thing finds its support in another. But what I say is:

Chapter 25 1. "That Infinite, indeed, is below. It is above. It is behind. It is before. It is to the south. It is to the north. The Infinite, indeed, is all this. "Next follows the instruction about the Infinite with reference to 'I': I, indeed, am below. I am above. I am behind. I am before. I am to the south. I am to the north. I am, indeed, all this.

2. "Next follows the instruction about the Infinite with reference to the Self (*Atman*): The Self indeed, is below. It is above. It is behind. It is before. It is to the south. It is to the north. The Self,

indeed, is all this. "Verily, he who sees this, reflects on this and understands this delights in the Self sports with the Self, rejoices in the Self revels in the Self. Even while living in the body he becomes a self – ruler. He wields unlimited freedom in all the worlds. “But those who think differently from this have others for their rulers they live in perishable worlds. They have no freedom in all the worlds."