

**9Upanishads in English**

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# NINE PRINCIPAL UPANISHADS

With illustrations, abstract, explanatory rendering (**without Sanskrit verses**) of all verses in simple, modern English; copious notes and gloss on difficult verses and words; simpler important verses are printed in **Highlighted-bold** for the first time readers; 83 quotations from the Bhagavad-Gita; Chapter&Section headings, Glossary of Sanskrit words used, Cross reference and Appendixes

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### A Preview

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“... Dr. Prasad’s deft rendering of the nine principal Upanishads with illustrations and explanatory notes **makes an in-road and gives access to the magnificent conclusions of the ancient sages of India.** This book gives us a summary view of the information contained in the Upanishads.”

divulged by those teachers. It's easy to read and understand and will delve deeper into the subject matter.”

— Michael B.

## INTRODUCTION

The philosophical portion of the Vedas is called the Upanishads. The Upanishads are found mostly in the concluding part of the Vedas and are also called Vedānta (added at the end of the Vedas). They are found appended to all the four Vedas, and thus we have Upanishads belonging to all four Vedas: Rig, Yajur, Sāma and Atharva. Each Vedas reveals its contents under four sections: (1) The **Samhitās**, containing beautiful lyrical poems or **mantras** describing and adoring the beauty of nature and the power of the extraordinary forces. (2) The **Brahmanas** section containing the **ritualistic injunctions** and prescriptions for various ceremonies. (3) The Aranyakas, containing various methods of worship or **Upāsānās** and (4) The **Upanishads**, containing the philosophical discussions and sermons that had taken place at various periods of time between different teachers (Rishis) and their students, regarding Brahman, Eternal Purpose of creation and the goal of human life. While the hymns of the Vedas emphasize rituals and the Brahmanas serve as a manual for those Vedic rituals. The Upanishads are inherently opposed to rituals.

The name 'Upanishad' has a very purposeful meaning and deep significance. The Sanskrit word Upanishad translates to: "Upa (near) ni (down) shad (sit), sitting down near a teacher". The term 'Upanishad' literally means sitting near the enlightened Master and listening closely to the mystic doctrines of the spiritual teacher, who has grasped the fundamental truths of the universe. To Indian scholars 'Upanishad' also means a literature that destroys our present ignorance of Reality and helps the student to attain the Supreme Knowledge. There are more than 200 known Upanishads, one of which, Muktikā Upanishad, predates 1656 and contains a list of 108 authorized Upanishads, including itself as the last. The first dozen out of 108 Upanishads are the oldest and most

important known as the principal Upanishads. They all pre-date 6th century BCE. The top **Nine Principal Upanishads** are introduced in this book in simple, easy to understand modern English.

## 1. ISHĀVĀSHYA UPANISHAD

Om! purnamadah purnamidam,

purnāt purnam-udacyate.

purnasya purnamādāya,

purnam-eva-avashishyate.

**Om! Shantih! Shantih! Shantih!**

**Om!** The invisible Brahman is infinite; the objects of the visible Universe are also infinite. From infinite Brahman, infinite universes come out. The infinite Brahman still remains infinite, even though infinite universes come out of it.

*Read an explanation of this very important verse at the end of this book.*

**The Ishāvāshya Upanishad** is one of the shortest of the Upanishads. It is more like a short poem than a philosophical treatise, consisting of only **18 verses in poetry**. This Upanishad constitutes the final chapter of the Shukla Yajurveda. The study of Upanishads traditionally starts with this Upanishad and should go on in the sequence given in this book.

All is Brahman

Om! Ishāvāsyam idam sarvam, yatkincha jagatyām jagat.

Tena tyaktena bhunjithā, mā gridhah kasyasvid dhanam.

**01. Whatever exists in this (transient) world is an abode of Lord of the universe (Isha, God). Enjoy whatever (wealth) is**

**allotted to you by the Lord with a spirit of renunciation (Samnyāsa) —that nothing belongs to you, but to God. Do not seek or covet any one else's wealth. (Also see BG 7.19)**

After many births, the enlightened one surrenders to My Will by realizing that everything is, indeed, My manifestation. Such a great soul is very rare. (BG 7.19) (Also see BG 7.07, 18.66)

Seven Sanskrit verses of the Vedas, called great sayings are: (1) All this is, of course, the Spirit because everything is born from, rests in, and merges into the Spirit (in ChU 3.14.01 of Sāmaveda). (2) All this is Spirit. The Spirit is everywhere. All this universe is, indeed, Supreme Brahman in MuU 2.02.11 of Atharvaveda. The Bible also says: You are gods (John 10.34). The Vedas and Upanishads declare: (3) Consciousness is Brahman (in AiU 3.03 of Rigveda). (4) I am the Spirit (in BrU 1.04.10 of Yajurveda). (5) You are the Spirit (in ChU 6.08.07 of Sāmaveda). (6) The individual Self (Jivātmā, Jiva) is one and the same as the Absolute (Brahman, Brahma) (in MaU 02 of Atharvaveda) and (7) That which is One has become all these (in Rigveda 8.58.02).

Because of being beginningless and unaffected by the three modes of material Nature, the eternal Supersoul—even though dwelling in the body as a living entity—neither does anything nor becomes tainted by Karma, O Arjuna. (BG 13.31)

The universe is made up of the Lord. He is the creator, operator and destroyer. The universe is made up of God, made by God, and made for God to reside, play and enjoy His own creation by becoming jivātmā.

### Live Like a Lotus Leaf

**02.** People should wish to live full life span **by doing their prescribed duty (without ego and attachment to results). There is no other way to avoid the bondage of karma.**

The Bhagavad-Gita also says:

One who does all work as an offering to God—abandoning attachment to results—remains untouched by karmic reaction or sin, just as a lotus leaf never gets wet by water. (BG 5.10)

### Destiny of the Ignorant

**03.** Those devoid of Self-knowledge, also called the slayers of Ātmā, are verily born in the wombs of evil beings, lacking Self-knowledge, after death.

I hurl these cruel, sinful, and mean people, into the cycles of death and birth in the womb of demons (or degraded parents) again and again, according to their karma. (BG 16.19)

### Description of the Un-Describable Ātmā

**04.** Ātmā appears Immovable, yet it remains in constant motion<sup>\*\*</sup>. It is swifter than mind and beyond the reach of intellect, always remaining ahead of mind and senses (*because it carries mind and senses with it*). Thus, Ātmā out runs all those who run. The cosmic energy of Ātman, the Prāna, sustains activities of all living beings; Ātman really does no action.

<sup>\*\*</sup>The electrons and protons are in constant motion. This motion is what we call 'RāsaLilā' of Krishna, the never ending dance of Prakriti and Purusha.

**05.** Ātmā moves and also does not move; it is very far as well as very near. It is both inside and outside all beings. (Also see **BG** 13.15)

### The Beauty of Advaita Philosophy

**06. The wise one perceives one's own higher Self in all, and all in one's own higher Self. Therefore, he does not hate or injure anyone. Such a person loves everybody as one loves God.**

**07.** The wise one who has realized that his own higher Self has become all, and sees the oneness of entire existence (non-dual), what sorrow and what delusion can overwhelm him?

One, who sees One in all and all in One, sees the One everywhere and in everything. To fully understand this and to experience the oneness of individual soul and the Supersoul, is the highest achievement and the only goal of human birth.

### How to Work and Worship

**08.** He (the Self) is all-pervading, radiant, bodiless, spotless, all-powerful, pure, untouched by sin, all-seeing, all-knowing, transcendent, and self-existent. He assigns duty and properly gives the fruits of one's karma.

### Reconciliation of Contradictions

**09.** Into the blinding darkness enter those who practice Avidyā (rituals, fruitive actions) only; and into greater darkness

those who practice Vidyā (or seek theoretical Knowledge of the Vedas) only.

He who worships deities (many gods) to fulfill material desires is in the mode of passion (Rajas). Such a person is ignorant like a child, because he thinks: I am different from God. Pursuit of only theoretical Vedic knowledge without any action is useless and is in the mode of greater ignorance (Tamas). There is no doubt that twelve years of Vedic study had left Shvetaketu both ignorant, proud and arrogant (**ChU 6.1.03**).

**10.** One thing, they say, is obtained from Vidyā (Jnāna) and another thing from Avidyā (karma). Thus we have heard from the wise who have taught us this.

**11.** One who pursues both Avidyā and Vidyā together, attains relative immortality—by going to heaven where there is no fear of death—by Avidyā or good karma, and obtains immortality by Vidyā, the Self-knowledge.

The idea behind verses 9, 10 and 11 is that one must not neglect either karma or Jnāna. The fruit of Jnāna can only come out from the soil of karma, therefore karma is better than mere book knowledge of the Vedas. (**BG 5.02**). Both are complementary and not exclusive or contradictory as some may believe. (Also see **BG 18.78**)

**12.** Into a blind darkness enter they who worship manifest god or a deity **only** (just to fulfill desires, without knowing that deities are not God). But into a greater darkness enter they who worship formless, Brahman **only**. (Also see KeU 1.05)

The Bhagavad-Gita says: Self-realization is more difficult for those who fix their mind on the impersonal and formless Absolute, because worship of the impersonal is difficult for ordinary human beings and the beginners. (**BG 12.05**). Shri Ramakrishna said: “Image worship is necessary in the beginning, but not afterwards, just as scaffolding is necessary during the construction of a building.”

**13.** One thing, they say, is obtained from knowledge of the manifest Brahman; another, they say, from Knowledge of the unmanifest Brahman. Thus we have heard from the wise who taught us this.

**14.** He who worships (realizes or fully understands) both the un-manifest and the manifest aspects Brahman, overcomes fear of

death in the heaven by the worship of deities (manifest) and obtains immortality by true Knowledge of the Absolute, formless, non-dual, Brahman (un-manifest).

To those who worship Me meditating on My personal form with unswerving devotion, setting Me as their supreme goal, offering all actions to Me—I swiftly become their savior from the world that is the ocean of death and transmigration. (Also see KaU 6.13, BG 12.06-07)

The ideas behind verses 12, 13 and 14 are that one must fully understand both aspects—the personal and the impersonal—of the coin of Reality. The Absolute Being is beyond the human conception of form and formless. It has a transcendental form beyond human conception of form and formless. (**BG 7.24**).

### Nirvāna by Giving Up the Ego

**15. The face of Truth is covered with a golden curtain of ego (maya, ignorance).** Uncover it, O God, so that I, who am devoted to the Truth, may behold it! (Also see APPENDIX 3 on ego)

**16.** O Pushan, the nourishing God in the form of Sun, O controller and supporter of all, withdraw your blinding radiance of ignorance; and focus your soothing rays of jñāna on me, so that I may be able to fully comprehend Your transcendental form. And realize that whosoever person is up there, that also I am.

### Always Remember God

**17.** Now, let my breath be merged in all-pervading immortal Prāna, and the body be reduced to ashes. O mind, remember Om, remember past deeds. The mind remembers all that I have done. (Also see BG 8.06–07)

During the last moment of our life, the mind automatically remembers what we have done during the entire life, as mentioned in **BG 8.06**.

Rishi Ghora Āngirasa, communicated the following teaching to his student, Krishna, the son of Devaki—and it quenched Krishna's thirst for any other knowledge. Rishi said: "When a man approaches death he should take refuge in these three last thoughts: "Om! Thou art indestructible," "Thou art unchanging," and "Thou art the subtle essence of Prāna." (ChU 3.17.06)

**18.** O Agni (the Bright Being)! Lead us to blessedness by the noble path—the **Northern path** of gods. O Lord! You know all our deeds, remove all evil and delusion from us. To Thee we offer our prostrations and prayers again and again.

**Note 1:** The Northern path—the path of no return—has been also mentioned in the Upanishads (**ChU** 4.15.05, **BrU** 6.2.15, **BG** 8.24-26)

**OM TAT SAT**

## 2. KENA UPANISHAD

Om̐ saha nāvavatu

Saha nau bhunaktu

Saha vīryaṁ karvāvahai

Tejasvi nāvadhītam astu

Mā vidviṣāvahai

May He protect us both (the teacher and the pupil). May He nourish us both.

May we work together with great vigor.

May our study be thorough and fruitful.

May we never misunderstand each other.

**Om! Shantih! Shantih! Shantih!**

**The Kenopanishad** is one of the earlier primary Upanishads. It is associated with the Sāmaveda where it is found inserted into the last section of the Jaiminiya Upanishad Brahmana. It discusses how our senses get their power from Brahman. Brahman is the unknown and unknowable. Everything runs by the power of God, Devas (gods) also get their power from Brahman. The Sanskrit word 'Kena' means by whom. It has **35 verses written in prose**.



## CHAPTER 1. KNOWLEDGE OF BRAHMAN

**1.01.** The disciple asked: Om! By whose will does the mind proceed to its objects? At whose command does the Prāna do its duty? At whose will do men utter speech? Who directs the eyes and ears to function?

### Brahman Powers Our Senses

**1.02.** The teacher replied: it is the spirit (Ātmā) by whose power the ear hears, the eyes see, the tongue speaks, the mind understands and Prāna function. Having distinguished the Self (or Real) from the non-Self (unreal)—body, mind, sense-organs—the wise attains immortality.

**1.03-04.** The eye does not go there, nor speech, nor the mind. We do not know it, nor do we know any method of instructing about it. It is different from everything known; it is unknowable. Thus we have heard from the teachers who taught it to us.

**1.05.** That which cannot be expressed by speech, but by which speech is expressed, know that alone as Brahman, and not what people here worship.

Note 2: People worship deities or some extra-cosmic Being to fulfill desires. These deities are not Brahman. Lord Krishna said: O Arjuna, even those devotees who worship the deities with faith, they also worship Me, but without proper understanding (9.23).

**1.06.** That which cannot be comprehended by the mind, but by which the mind comprehends, know that alone as Brahman, and not what people here worship.

**1.07.** That which cannot be seen by the eye, but by which the eye sees, know that alone as Brahman, and not what people here worship.

**1.08.** That which cannot be heard by the ear, but by which the ear hears, know that alone as Brahman, and not what people here worship.

**1.09.** That which cannot be smelt by the breath, but by which the breath smells, know that alone as Brahman, and not what people here worship.

## CHAPTER 2. BRAHMAN IS UNKNOWABLE

**2.01.** The teacher said: If you think: "I know Brahman well," then surely you know very little about it. You only know it as perceived by human mind. Therefore you should enquire further about Brahman.

**2.02.** The disciple said: I think I know Brahman, but very little. I do not think I know it well, nor do I think I do not know it. He among us who knows the meaning of "Neither do I not know, nor do I know"—knows Brahman. (Jivātmā does has very limited Knowledge of Brahman.)

**Brahman is Unknown to the Wise**

**2.03. The teacher said: He by whom Brahman is not known, knows it; he by whom it is known, does not know it. It is unknown by those who know it; it is known only by those who do not know it.**

(Brahman is unknown to the wise and known only to the ignorant )

**2.04.** Brahman is known when it is realized as a witness in all the three (waking, dream and deep sleep) states of consciousness (see MaU 01-06); by such Knowledge one attains immortality and strength to face all difficulties and fear of death.

**2.05.** If a man knows Ātmā in this life, he then attains the true goal of human birth. If he does not know it in this life, a great calamity awaits him. **Having realized the Self in every being, the wise mentally renounce the illusory world and become immortal.**

## CHAPTER 3. BRAHMAN RUNS THE UNIVERSE

**Everything Runs by The Power of God**

**3.01.** Brahman, according to the story, got a victory for Devas over Asuras (demons); and by that victory (of Brahman) the gods became elated. They said to themselves: "Verily, this victory is ours; verily, this glory is ours only."

**All actions are actually performed by various forces (or Gunas) of Nature, but due to delusion of ego or ignorance, people assume themselves to be the sole doer and get bound by karma. (BG 3.27)**

**3.02.** Brahman—knowing their pride born out of ego (The ego is a notion that oneself, instead of God, does all works!) —appeared before them as a male Spirit. But gods did not know who that adorable Spirit was.

**3.03-06.** They said to Agni (Fire god): "O Agni! Find out who this Great Spirit is. "Yes," he said, and hastened to find out. Brahman asked him: "Who are you?" He replied: "I am known as Agni." Brahman said: "What power is in you?" Fire replied: "I can burn all—whatever there is on earth." Brahman put a dry straw before him and said: "Burn this." He rushed toward it with full force but could not burn it. When he returned from the visit with this Spirit and said to the other gods: "I could not find out who this Spirit is."

**3.07-10.** Then they said to Vāyu (Air god): "O Vāyu! Find out who this Great Spirit is. "Yes Sir," he said and hastened to find out. Brahman asked him: "Who are you?" He replied: "I am known as Vāyu." Brahman said: "What power is in you that make you great?" Vāyu replied: "I can carry off all—whatever there is on earth." Brahman put a dry straw before him and said: "Carry this." He rushed toward it with full force but could not move it. Then he returned from the Spirit and said to the gods: "I could not find out who this Spirit is."

**3.11-12.** Then the gods said to Indra: "Indra Bhagavān! Find out who this Great Spirit is. "Yes," he said and hastened to find out. But the Spirit disappeared from him. Then Indra saw in that very region of the sky a Woman highly adorned. She was Umā Devi, the daughter of the King of Himalayas. He approached Her and said: "Mother, who that Great Spirit could be?"

## CHAPTER 4. THE GLORY OF BRAHMAN

### Devas Get Power from Brahman

#### Devi instructs Indra about Brahman

**4.01.** Mother replied in great detail: "It was, indeed, Brahman. Through the victory of Brahman alone you have attained glory." After that Indra understood that it was Brahman and realized his mistake and learned a lesson from Mother.

**4.02.** Since these Devas came very near Brahman and were the first to know Brahman. These three Devas, namely: Indra, Agni, and Vāyu excelled the other gods.

**4.03.** Since Indra approached Brahman and he was the first to know Brahman, Indra excels the other gods and is considered the King of gods.

**4.04. This is the description of Brahman with regard to the gods: Devas get power from Brahman. Brahman is behind every form of power, movement and life (Prāna) in the universe.**

**4.05.** Now the description of Brahman with regard to the individual self: **Because of the powers of Brahman, the mind knows the external world, remembers, creates and imagines things.**

**4.06.** That Brahman is called the adorable of all; it should be worshipped by all. **All creatures love him who worships (or realizes) Brahman.**

### The Teachings of Upanishad Lead to Liberation

**4.07.** The disciple said; "Teach me, sir, the Upanishad." The teacher replied: "I just now told you the Upanishad about Brahman." But I will repeat again:

**4.08.** Austerities, self-restraint, and sacrificial works are its feet, and the Vedas are all its limbs. Knowledge is its abode.

**4.09. He who thus knows this Upanishad shakes off all sins and becomes firmly established in the Infinite. He reaches the main goal of human birth.**

**OM TAT SAT**