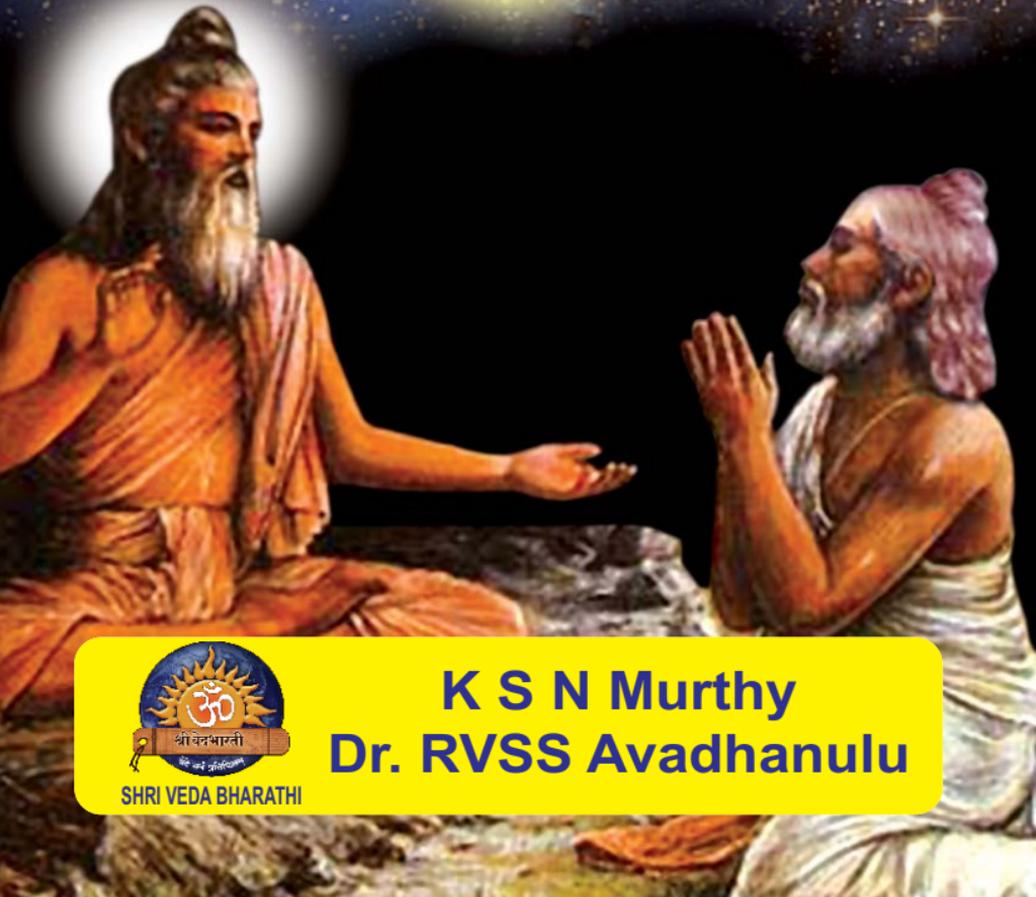


**A BRIEF INTRODUCTION
TO
UPANISHADS**



SHRI VEDA BHARATHI

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1. ISAVASYOPANISHAD

1Q. To which Veda does Isavasyopanishad belong?

Ans. It belongs to Sukla Yajurveda.

2Q. From where did it derive the name 'Isavasyopanishad' ?

Ans. It derived its name from the opening word of the Upanishad "Isavasyam".

3Q. How many mantras does it contain?

Ans. It has 18 *mantras*.

4Q. What is the significant message it conveys?

Ans. It teaches that this phenomenal world of objects is entirely enveloped by God. So one should shed the idea of 'I' and 'mine' and live with a sense of detachment. One should be satisfied with what one gets without greed and without coveting others' wealth and lead a life of rectitude. The Upanishad begins with this inspiring message.

5Q. What is that mantra which proclaims that God is all pervasive?

Ans. *Isavasyam idam sarvam yat kimcha Jagatyam Jagat.*

This saying is in the beginning of the Upanishad. It declares that this phenomenal world is covered by God – meaning that God is all pervasive.

Note: This idea occurs at various places in the Vedas. In the popular Narayana Sukta it is stated thus: *yacha kimchit jagat sarvam drisyate sruyate piva antarbhahicha tatsarvam vyapya Narayanaha stitah.* Narayana or Brahman is both immanent and transcendent in whatever is seen and heard in this world. So the message is that one should understand that this phenomenal world of name and form is nothing but Brahman and one should concentrate his mind on Him.

6Q. What is that mantra that advocates a sense of renunciation and not to covet other's wealth?

Ans. The mantra that says that greed is detestable is this :

*tena tyaktena bhunjitha
ma gridhah kasyasviddhanam.*

This is the second part of the first mantra. When this moving and unmoving world is nothing but

2. KENOPANISHAD

1Q. To which Veda does the Kenopanishad belong and where is it found in that Veda?

Ans. Kenopanishad is an integral part of Talavakara Brahmana of Samaveda. For that reason it is also called Talavakara Upanishad.

2Q. How did it acquire the name 'Kenopanishad'? How many mantras does it comprise of?

Ans. It begins with the word '*kena*' meaning 'by whom?' and therefore it is named after the first word '*kena*'. The Upanishad comprises of 35 mantras divided into four parts.

3Q. With what peace chant the Upanishad begins?

Ans. It begins with the prayer "*apyayantu mamangani*" "O God the Almighty! May my organs of perception and organs of action be healthy and strong."

4Q. The Vedanta Philosophy holds that soul exists not only in human beings but also in the moving beings like animals and unmoving life forms like trees. That being the case, why is it that human being alone is capable of attaining liberation or *moksha*?

Ans. The answer is rather simple! Human beings alone are endowed with a mind, intellect and ego, that is awareness of one's own potentialities. To illumine these three entities a strong body is essential and therefore this prayer. Vedanta philosophy does not advocate indifference to physical body. What all it says is that one should not think that body alone is all that matters (as expressed by the materialists).

5Q. What is the first mantra in Kenopanishad? What questions does it raise?

Ans. "keneshitam patati preshitam manah
kena-pranah prathamah praiti yuktah |
keneshitam vuchamimam vadanti
chakshuh shrotram ka u devo yunakti || (1.1)

By whose directions the mind illumines the objects? By whose command does life, which is supreme, act? Goaded by whom the human beings speak? By whose command and strength the ear and the eye function?

6Q. What did the Upanishad say in answer to the above manifold questions?

Ans. The organs of perception, the organs of action and the mind are gross. So they can not act on their own. They are just like tools in the hands

3. KATHOPANISHAD

1Q. To which Veda Kathopanishad belongs?

Ans. Krishna Yajurveda.

2Q. How did it acquire that name?

Ans. One of the *sakhas* or branches of Krishna Yajurveda is *kathasakha*. This upanishad is found in the Brahmana belonging to this *shakha* and so it is called Kathopanishad.

3Q. How are the mantras in Kathopanishad divided?

Ans. They are divided into two chapters, each chapter consisting of three parts.

4Q. Who are the important characters in this Upanishad?

Ans. Nachiketa and Yamadharmaraja are the two important characters of whom the former is the disciple and latter the Guru or Master.

5Q. What is the core question in this Upanishad? And what precisely is the message handed down in answer to that question?

Ans. Nachiketa said to Yama: ‘some say that nothing remains when a man dies and some others say that death is only to the body and that Atman

4. PRASNOPANISHAD

1. Q. To which Veda Prasnopanishad belongs?

Ans. It belongs to the Atharva Veda.

2. Q. Why is it called Prasnopanishad?

Ans. Sukesa, Satyakama, Sauryayani, Kausalya, Bhargava and Kabandhi were all rishis. They approached Maharshi Pippalada and asked him three questions on the process of creation and other mundane matters and three questions on the eternal and Supreme Self. The answers given by Sage Pippalada to these six questions constitute the essence of this Upanishad. So this Upanishad is aptly called Prasnopanishad.

3. Q. In what manner the mantras in this Upanishad are arranged?

Ans. Each question and the mantras answering that question are together taken as a unit and the sequence of arrangement is so logical that there is continuity of thought, eventually solving the mystery of creation and the nature of man's psycho-physical functions.

4. Q. Who are the main characters in this Upanishad?

5. MUNDAKOPANISHAD

1. Q. To which Veda Mundakopanishad belong?

Ans. Mundakopanishad belongs to Atharvana Veda.

2. Q. Why is it called Mundakopanishad?

Ans. *Mundanam* means tonsuring the head, an act which is suggestive of shredding all desires as a first step to try to attain liberation and eventually moving forward in the direction of accepting *sannyasa*, that is, becoming a renunciate. As the central theme of this Upanishad is to show the way forward to those who have an ardent desire to attain liberation, it is called Mundakopanishad.

3. Q. How many mantras are there in this Upanishad and into how many Chapters it is divided?

Ans. This Upanishad contains 64 mantras divided into three Chapters.

4. Q. What question did Sounaka ask sage Angirasa?

Ans. Saunaka approached sage Angirasa in the customary way and asked him “*kasmin nu bhagavo vijnate sarvam idam vijnatam*”

6. MANDUKYOPANISHAD

1. Q. To which Veda does Mandukyo-panishad belong?

Ans. It belongs to Atharvana Veda.

2. Q. How did it acquire the name Mandukyopanishad?

Ans. The subjects discussed in this Upanishad do not seem to have been arranged in a systematic sequential order; rather it looks as though there is leap-frogging from one to the other. So it is called Mandukya Upanishad.

3. Q. How many mantras does this Upanishad contain?

Ans. This Upanishad is the smallest of the principal Upanishads with just 12 mantras. But their philosophical depth and terseness defies even a scholarly mind to understand. Realising this Sri Gaudopada (7th century AD) wrote Karikas (expository verses) in four chapters.

4. Q. What distinguishes this Upanishad from others?

Ans. The *bhashyakaras* -commentators opined that a study of this Upanishad makes the way to liberation easier. To explain the existence of

7. TAITTIRIYOPANISHAD

1. Q. To which Veda and to which branch (sakha) does the Taittiriya Upanishad belong?

Ans. Taittiriyanopanishad belongs to Krishna Yajurveda. This Veda several branches like Taittiriya, Katha etc. This Upanishad belongs to the former branch.

2. Q. Why is it called Taittiriyanopanishad?

Ans. Vaisampanyana, a disciple of Vedavyasa taught a branch of Krishna Yajurveda to Yagnavalkya. One of the disciples, Tittiri by name, propagated this branch far and wide in the world. As this Upanishad belongs to Taittiriya branch of that Veda, it is known as Taittiriya Upanishad.

3. Q. How many Chapters are there in Taittiriyanopanishad and what are they?

Ans. It is divided into 4 sections known as Sikshavalli, Anandavalli, Bhriguvalli and Mahanarayanopanishad.

4. Q. What are the important subjects dealt with in Sikshavalli?

Ans. Sikshavalli mainly lays emphasis on the six important disciplines to be followed as a student

8. CHANDOGYOPANISHAD

1. Q. In which Veda and where, Chandogyopanishad is found?

Ans. It is found in Talavakara Brahmana of the Sama Veda.

2. Q. Why is it called Chandogyopanishad?

Ans. '*chandamsi gayanti iti chandogas*' – the singers of Veda (chandas) are called *chandogas* or *chandamsi adhiyate iti chandogas* – those who study the Vedas are called *chandogas*. '*chandoganam idam chandogyam*' since it belongs to the singers of Veda (chandogas) it is known as chandogyam.

Though the word 'chandas' is also used to mean Veda, its usual meaning is Samaveda. So the Talavakara Brahmana in Samaveda is also called Chandogy Brahmana and as this Upanishad is part of that Brahmana, it is called Chandogy Upanishad.

3. Q. Into how many parts the mantras in this Upanishad are divided?

Ans. They are divided in to eight parts.

4. Q. It is said that the 'great sentence' or mahavakya belonging to Samaveda is in

9. AITAREYA UPANISHAD

1. Q. To which Veda Aitareyopanishad belongs?

Ans. It belongs to Rigveda.

2. Q. Why is it called Aitareyopanishad?

Ans. Aitareya is the son of a woman named 'itara'. Some say that his full name is Mahipala Aitareya, while some others say Mahidasa Aitareya. As Aitareya is credited as the seer of this Upanishad, it is known as Aitareya Upanishad.

3. Q. Into how many chapters the mantras in this Upanishad are divided?

Ans. The 4th, 5th and 6th chapters of Aitareya Aranyaka constitute this Upanishad and the said chapters are numbered as 1st, 2nd and 3rd chapters of this Upanishad. The 1st chapter is divided into 3 sections, 2nd and 3rd chapters have only one section each. So the Upanishad consists of 5 sections.

4. Q. It is said that a mahavakya belonging to Rigveda is in this Upanishad. What is that mahavakya? What does it convey?

Ans. '*Prajnanam brahma*' (3.1.3) is the mahavakya in this Upanishad. It means that the pure

10. BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

1. Q. To which Veda Brihadaranyaka Upanishad belongs and where it is found in the Veda?

Ans. It belongs to Sukla Yajurveda and it is in Satapatha Brahmana of that Veda.

2. Q. Why is it called Brihadaranyaka Upanishad?

Ans. The literal meaning of the term ‘Brihadaranyaka Upanishad’ is ‘Great Forest Upanishad’. ‘Brihat’ means great – great not only because of its length but also because of its profundity of thought and comprehensive coverage of all important philosophical issues of Vedanta. The term ‘Aranyaka – forest book’ refers to the fact that it was taught in a forest. It is the lengthiest of all Upanishads and has acquired an unrivalled philosophical and religious importance in Hindu sacred literature.

3. Q. How are the mantras in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad arranged?

Ans. The mantras in this Upanishad are divided into six chapters. 1st and 2nd chapters are called madhukanda, 3rd and 4th chapters are called

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