

Gateway To The Upanishads

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Preface:

This book was authored in Kannada as "Upanishattugala Modalane Parichaya" by Sri Satchidanandendra Saraswati Swamiji in the year 1941 while he was known as Sri. Yallambalase Subrahmanya Sharma.

The irony of human birth is that man is unaware of his own true nature. His Self is a mystery to himself. Upanishads help in solving this mystery. The word **Upanishad** itself means 'mystery' or 'secret'. Due to lack of Sanskrit knowledge and general lack of interest in spirituality, the content of the Upanishads has actually remained a mystery to people of our times.

A good number of books based on the Upanishads are already available everywhere. But this book is like a prelude to those who want to study the Upanishads as per the tradition of Shaankarabhashyas, commentaries on Upanishads by Adi Shankaracharya. This book is most helpful to those who want to study the Upanishads for the sake of Self-inquiry. Others who want to read them as a part of the country's religious history or just for intellectual interest may also find the book useful.

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I. Introduction

'Hindus', the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, consider the Veda as the oldest among all the available spiritual texts. Vedas are of also paramount importance to those who want to study the history and progression of religions in the world. According to Hindus, the Vedas are believed to have no beginning, not to have been authored by mere mortal humans, and thus sacrosanct. Any literary work a man creates, despite using his highest intellectual capacity and interest, is bound to have errors. But Vedas are said to be a gift of Grace by the Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Omniscient Lord to humanity in which they believe that he has shown the form of Dharma & Adharma. Since the Upanishads are present usually at the end of the Vedas in the Aaranyaka section, they have been called Vedantas.

The Vedas have explained in detail our worldly duties (karmas) and worship of the Lord (dhyana). The nature of God and his relationship with us have also been elaborated in the Vedas. Though Upanishads mainly describe the nature of God, they have also explained the relation between karma and dhyana and how they help in reaching jnana, the Ultimate Realization. This makes Upanishads the most important of the *pramanagranthas*, the most valid means of knowledge to all those who follow Hindudharma. The word 'Upanishad' means "mystery". The only mystery man should unravel and

thereby make his birth fruitful is that of the Supreme Self. This justifies why Upanishads have been called mysterious or esoteric. As generations pass by, our men have been going far away from Sanskrit knowledge, making the Upanishads literally a hidden treasure. This book intends to be a preamble to beginners who want to explore the world of Upanishads.

Though the subject matter of all Upanishads is the same, it has been described in many ways in different Upanishads. Vedas are four in number, and each of them has many subdivisions. Each subdivision has a few Upanishads at the end. Hence, the exact number of Upanishads cannot be determined. So far, 108 of them are popularly known of which 50 have been translated to Persian by Dara Shukoh, the elder brother of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in the year 1656 AD. These were subsequently translated to Latin by the Westerners. That was how Europe was introduced to Vedanta, though, nowadays, there are direct translations made from Sanskrit. Out of the many Upanishads available, excerpts from ten or twelve chief Upanishads have been dealt with in this book, because these have been considered the most authoritative by all the scholars.

The Upanishads have conveyed in simple words and lucid style, the philosophy of the Self and karmic approach to God. Some of the Upanishadic literature is in poetic form and some in prosaic form. Whether poetic or prosaic, the style is very unique and simple. Several stories, analogies, conversations and illustrations have been used to convey the purported truths in simple manner. It is easy for interested people of all ages and genders to study and

understand them. This book contains some short stories of such type first. Then the underlying philosophy and basic analogies mentioned in the Upanishads are briefly explained .

II. Short stories from the Upanishads

1. The teaching is for the most deserving. (Chandongya)

Satyakama was Jabala's son. He wanted to study the Vedas as a Brahmacharin. He went to his mother, expressed his desire, and asked to which Gotra they belonged.

During those times, students would live with the Master (Guru) and learn their lessons. The Guru would perform Upanayana, the ceremony that signified formal beginning of education. Upanayana was for all three varnas (communities)- Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaishya. Each varna had a specific Gotra indicating the lineage of a single Rishi to which they belonged.

Jabala told her son, " I have been spending most of my life serving the guests and those who sought refuge in this house. You were born when I was too young. Your father passed away very early. I do not know the details of our Gotra. I am Jabala and you are Satyakama. Just mention to your Guru that you are *Satyakamajabala*."

The boy went to a master called Hãridramata of Gautamagotra and requested him to take him as a student. When asked about his Gotra details by the teacher, he repeated the words of his mother.

The Guru, upon hearing the boy's words, joyously uttered, " How can

someone who talks this way not be a Brahmana? Your truthfulness bestows the identity of a Brahmana on you. Bring the offerings for the sacred fire and I shall initiate you into Vedic education".

In the coming years, Satyakama served the Guru for a long time & learnt the Brahavidya of sixteen parts(kalas) under the Guru and eventually became a master himself.

This story gives us two important messages. One that only the truthful and honest deserve to get the teaching and another, methodic teaching under an able Guru is the best way to obtain knowledge.

2. The desire to learn should be strong. (Kathopanishad)

Vajashravasa once performed a yaaga called Sarvamedha where he had to donate all of his possessions as an offering to the yaaga. His son Nachiketa noticed that the cattle donated by his father were all old. They wouldn't eat grass and drink water, let alone producing milk. He had a doubt whether his father would ascend to the higher lokas after death by offering such cows. With the intention of helping his father incur punya, he asked him, " Father, to whom would you offer me?"

The father didn't take Nachiketa's words seriously, but as the boy insisted, he uttered angrily, "I will offer you to death". Anyone who takes the vow to perform a yaaga is supposed to keep up his word. He cannot utter a lie. Now Vajashravasa was in a fix whether to offer his son or not. Nachiketa quickly understood his father's mind and told him, " Father, none of our ancestors or elders has ever lied. They have lived up to their words. The cycle of birth and death is as good as a dried blade of grass giving rise to a fresh one. Please send me to Yama, the God Of Death without hesitation". Saying so, the boy walked away and reached the abode of Yama.

Nachiketa had to wait for three days for Yama to arrive at his place. Yama felt guilty for making a small boy wait without food for him and thus offered to grant three wishes of the boy for the three fasting days. Nachiketa asked his first wish as," Please grant mental peace to my father. Make him talk to me with a kind heart". His second wish was to know how to reach Brahmaloaka by means of karma and dhyana. The third wish to get knowledge about the Absolute Truth beyond names,forms,birth and death.

Yama then said, " The knowledge of the Absolute is beyond the understanding of even Gods. What is the use of that knowledge at all? Why don't you ask for a hundred-year life span filled with all the material possessions, kingdoms and good progeny?". The boy wasn't allured by all that Yama offered. He found material happiness to be pale and lifeless. He would not want money, kingdoms, music and dance. All he

wanted was the knowledge of the Self.

Yama was overjoyed by Nachiketa's commitment and dedication towards learning the higher truth. He happily accepted the boy as his disciple.

3. True Knowledge (Chandogya)

Once upon a time, sage Narada went to Sanatkumara and prayed, "Sir, please impart knowledge to me". Sanatkumara was a jnani who was well established in the Absolute Truth. He, in turn, asked Narada, "Please tell me what all you have learnt. I will teach whatever else is essential".

Narada then said, " Sir, I have learnt the following:

- The Rgveda, the Yajurveda, the Samaveda and the Atharvaveda
- Mythology and history
- Grammar that forms the basis of Vedic language
- Customs and rituals of funerals
- Mathematics
- The science of good and bad omens
- The art of debate and logic
- Political science
- *Nirukta* that describes nature of Gods and deities
- *Shiksha, kalpa, and Chandas* that are required for Brahmaveda
- The science of spirits
- Archery

- Astrology
- Toxicology
- Music and dance
- Architecture"

Narada had learnt all the Vedic and empirical sciences of those days. He knew every skill required for a man to live in the world. But, there was one type of knowledge which he lacked. He had come to Sanatkumara for the same.

He continued, "Swami, Despite all the education I have received, I am still suffering in the deep ocean of samsara. Please bestow upon me the knowledge of the Self and help me reach the shore".

In today's world, we know more about science and technology than Narada of the ancient times. We know the atomic and the subatomic worlds too. What we do not know is the Ultimate Knowledge that helps us transcend all the sorrow of the world. Our empirical knowledge might add to the sorrow too.

What we need is knowledge of the Absolute Truth which is the only true knowledge.

4. Complete Knowledge (Chandongya)

Svetaketu was the son of Uddalaka, who was the son of Aruna.

Uddalaka said to his son, " Dear Son, the time has come for you to study under an able Guru. All of our

ancestors have qualified to be Brahmanas not just by birth, but also education". In those days, fathers used to be the teachers to their sons. But Uddalaka must have travelled to a far off place from his town. So, he arranged for another teacher to his son.

Svetaketu was twelve years old. Brahmins had to initiate formal education before the age of sixteen according to shastra. Upon the father's orders, the boy learnt under the Guru till the age of twenty four and returned. He was brimming with pride that he had learnt all the Vedas and its branches.

Uddalaka asked, "Oh Svetaketu, you seem to have learnt a lot. But, have you learnt that by which we perceive what cannot be perceived, we know what cannot be known?"

Svetaketu, despite learning so many other vidyas, did not have the Ultimate Knowledge. His pride vanished and he humbly requested his father to impart the knowledge of the Absolute, by knowing which everything else would be known. Then the father taught him that great Vidya knowing by which everything else would be known.

5. Living with the Guru (Chandogya)

Once upon a time, Prajapati Brahma said, " Atman has no flaws. He does not die, does not undergo ageing; he has no sorrow, hunger, thirst. He is Truth; He manifests himself as all that He desires. Find Him so that all your wishes in all the worlds come true".

Gods and demons who heard this started their search for the

Atman to get all the worlds & all the desires. Indra, among the Gods, and Virochana, the demon went directly to Prajapati, carrying all the paraphernalia for initiation of education.

They served Prajapati for thirty two years sincerely. The Guru who was pleased with their services asked them why they have come to him.

They answered thus- " We are here to know the Atman, by knowing which we would be able to conquer all the worlds and possess all that we desire".

The conversation went thus, :

Prajapati: " The Purusha visible to your eyes right here is Brahman".

Disciples: " It's visible as a reflection both in water and mirror. Which is it?"

Guru: " He's visible everywhere. Look for Him in a tumbler of water. Ask me if you don't find Him. They did accordingly.

Guru- Now tell me what you found".

Disciples: " We saw everything from hair to nails."

Guru: " Now trim your nails, shave your head and beard, dress up well and look again."

Disciples: " We saw ourselves, neatly shaved and dressed up. We see the reflection exactly as we are".

Prajapati: " Okay. That's the imperishable and fearless Atman you saw there."

As both the disciples left, Prajapati thought to himself, " He shall be destroyed, whosoever is satisfied with the above words and never comes back." Virochana, who is now convinced that the body is Atman, preaches the same to the demons. Their motto becomes pleasing the body and its sense organs.

On the other hand, Indra thinks, " How can a mere reflection be the immortal Brahman that transcends all sorrows? The reflection is changing as the body changes. Of what happiness is this?" and goes back to the Guru.

Prajapati nows teaches Indra the means to Ultimate Realization.

While under tutelage, we should not settle for misconceptions as real knowledge. We should instead clarify our doubts and suspicions with the Guru. Patience and sincerity are necessary to gain the right knowledge.

6. One should not be desperate to be a Guru (Brihadaranyaka)

There once lived a Brahmin by name Balakigargya. He went to Ajatashatru, the king of Kashi, and asked, " May I teach you about Brahman?". King Janaka was very famous those days for his ability to felicitate *Jnanis* with material wealth and praises. Balaki was proud of his knowledge and wanted to teach Ajatashatru. The king offered a thousand to Balaki just for the words of his.

Ajatashatru was a Brahmajnani himself. On the other hand, Balakigargya was only capable of worshipping Sagunabrahman(the Lord with attributes)as the ruler of cosmos, senses and mind. When the King asked if this was all Balaki knew, he replied, "Yes. You should follow me". The king told him that he already knew Sagunopasana with their results and that there was much more to Brahmavidya.

Realising his state, Balaki humbly requested Ajatashatru to impart Self Knowledge to him. The king said, " A Krashtriya is considered subordinate to a Brahmin according to shastras. Nevertheless, I shall teach you Brahmavidya by holding you in a higher position."

A teacher becomes a Guru or master, neither because the disciple serves him, nor because of his caste. One should earn the position of a Guru by means of knowledge which alone makes him divine.

7. One should always be interested in True Knowledge (Prashnopanishad)

Sukeshabharadwaja, Shaibyasatyakama, Souryayanigargya, Kousala, Ashwalayana, Bhargavavaidarbhi, Kabandhikatyayana- these six were constantly in worship of the Lord. They were not satisfied with that. They wanted to know if there was something beyond the Lord with attributes. They went to Pippalada to seek knowledge, after being thoroughly convinced that he was the right Guru they were looking for. Pippalada told them, " Even though you have all followed Brahmacharya and penance for a long time, continue the same for another year. You may ask your doubts later. I will try solving them."

Later, all six of them asked a question each,

1. Why are *jeevas* born?
2. What are the elements that hold the body together? What

are those that light the *jeeva* and thereby exhibit their glory? Which of these is the most significant?

3. Where does the *prana* arise? How does He enter and operate inside the body? How does He move out of the body? How does He manage to live within and without the body?
4. What are the parts of the body that go to sleep? What are those that are awake? Who is the one who dreams? To whom does the bliss of sleep belong ? Where do all beings go while in deep sleep?
5. To which loka does the person who chants Om till death ascend?
6. Where is the Purusha who possesses the sixteen *kalas*?

Pippalada was able to answer all the questions convincingly. The six disciples called him their true father because he dispelled ignorance and bestowed True Knowledge upon them.

8. Discussion needs patience (Brihadaranyaka)

We have talked about King Janaka in a previous story. Very dedicated towards *dharma* and *jnana*, he once performed a big *yajna*. He had invited well-read Brahmins from many states like Kuru and Panchala to the *yajna*.

Janaka had a desire to know who among the invitees was the most knowledgeable of all. He placed ten gold bangles onto the horns of each of the thousand cows and told them, " The most knowledgeable one among you may carry these cows along

with you". No Brahmin had the courage to touch the cattle.

Yajnavalkya was the only man who spoke. He ordered his disciple Samashrava to carry the cattle along the way back home.

The other Brahmins present there started fuming and asked among themselves whether he was a better Brahmin than all of them. One Ashwalaya uttered, "Oh Yajnavalkya, aren't you the best of us all?"sarcastically.

Yajnavalkya humbly replied, " My prostrations to all the holy Brahmins. I just want the cows."

Later, all the Brahmins hurried to ask Yajnavalkya a variety of questions about Karma, meditation, philosophy, etc. He answered them very patiently.

Finally one Vigadhashakalya asked the most difficult question regarding the nature of the Self in a very rude manner. Yajnavalkya not only answered the question, but also cursed that the questioner got beheaded if he didn't know the answer himself. Since Yajnavalkya was a great sage,his curse materialised.

Vigadhashalaka lost his skull. The thieves carried away his bones thinking that they were precious.Hence, no last rites were performed.

This story tells us the importance of humility and patience in discussing philosophy. The focus should be on the subject, and opinions should not be based on individual likes and dislikes.

9. The wealth of knowledge is greater than the wealth of money. (Chandongya)

Janushrutipoutrayana was a king famous for charity. He used to serve food to thousands of needy people daily. He had built many halls just for his charity works.

Once, a group of Gods impressed by his works were flying over his palace in the form of swans. One of them told another, " Hey the one with a dim vision, don't you see that the light of Jaatashrutipoutra has spread all over the space? You might get burnt by its heat, be careful". So the other swan replied, " You speak as though he's greater than Raikwa who lives near the yoke!".

The first swan now wants to know more about Raikwa. The second swan continues, "Just like the proverbial game of dice where Treta, Dwapara and Kali are rooted in Krita, the good and evil of the citizens are rooted in Raikwa's being. He is established in the Absolute". Upon hearing this, Janushrutipoutrayana summons his servants and orders them to search for Raikwa. One of the kingsmen finds him after a long search scratching his wound under the yoke.He reported it to the king.

The king immediately offered six hundred cows, a necklace and chariot to Raikwa and pleaded with him to teach the nature of God and ways to worship Him. Raikwa immediately rejected all the wealth brought to him. Unfettered, the king further brought a bigger group of cattle and many more

valuables to please Raikwa. He also promised to marry off his daughter to him and granted a village for him to live. Raikwa was impressed and taught the king the method of 'Samvargavidya' to worship the Lord. The place where Raikwa lived came to be called Raikwaparna.

Though Janushrutipoutrayana was a wealthy and famous king, he accepted Raikwa as his Guru and learnt vidya from him. Though a poor and common man, Raikwa was rich in terms of knowledge which gave him the confidence to even talk to the king.

10. A Brahmajnani is holy whatsoever (Chandongya)

Once the Kuru kingdom experienced extreme famine due to hailstorm. Ushastrichakrayana, a Brahmin, along with his young wife, was wandering the place in search of food. One day he went to a mahout and begged for food.

There was a small amount of beans left in the plate from which the mahout was eating.

Chakrayana ate food from the same plate and shared with his wife. The mahout also offered some water. Chakrayana refused because the mahout had drunk water from that tumbler.

The mahout was surprised and questioned Chakrayana as to why he ate from the same plate but did not drink water from the same tumbler as him. Chakrayana replied, "Food is not available everywhere, but there will be sources of water somewhere".

Chakrayana's wife stored some beans for the next day.

The couple was unable to find a source of food on the next day also. The Brahmin said, " Let us eat the leftover food from yesterday and then head to the palace. The king is conducting a yajna there. I might be able to take part in the rituals and earn some food and money".

They went to the King's palace and the Brahmin took part in the yajna. He participated in debates with the scholars present there and exhibited his knowledge. The king recognized Ushastrichakrayana as a Brahmajnani and felicitated him.

The Brahmin committed two doshas(mistakes) - eating from another man's plate, and eating stale food. Despite that, he was honoured by the king. That was because he only observed *aapaddharma*, the rules of conduct applicable during emergencies. Also, a jnani deserves utmost respect in all situations.

11. Brahmajnana is greater than happiness of all worlds (Brihadaranyaka)

Yajnavalkya was a great man. Even King Janaka showed great reverence to him. His knowledge was unmatched. We have already talked about how he exhibited his knowledge in a yajna conducted by Janaka and won the cows. He had an ideal family life. His wife Katyayani was a good housewife. He had another wife called Maitreyi who was also knowledgeable.

Despite having all material comforts, Yajnavalkya wanted to

spend his time contemplating the Absolute Truth. He wanted to take up sanyasa. He told his decision of renouncing the world to both his wives. He also wanted to divide his property and give equal shares to them. Maitreyi was an intelligent woman. She asked if all the money in the world could grant liberation from the clutches of samsara, to which Yajnavalkya replied, "No. You can just be happy like most materialistic people". She continued, "I don't want money which can only give temporary happiness. I want that which liberates me forever from the cycle of birth and death".

Yajnavalkya, on Maitreyi's request, preached the science of knowing the Atman to her. He made her realise that relationships, wealth, caste, creed, religion, creatures, worlds, Gods are all manifestations of the same Self that resides inside everyone of us. These worldly names and forms appear to please us because of the love we have for our own self. There is no happiness independently in these objects outside of Atman.

12. All our power is derived from the Lord. (Kena)

Once upon a time, there was a war between Gods(devatas) and demons(rakshasas). The Gods won the war against the demons.

Everyone of the Gods held himself responsible for the victory and developed a sense of pride.

The Lord assumed the form of Yaksha, a demonic spirit and appeared in front of the devatas. They were astonished to see the Yaksha and wanted to know more about him.

First, Agni, the God Of fire, came forward and as he approached the Yaksha, he lost the essence of fire in him. When the Lord questioned him as to who he was, he replied, "I am Agni. I am also Omniscient and hence called Jatavedasa." The Lord further asked, " What is the power that you possess?" to which Agni replied, "I can burn down everything in the world". The Lord immediately materialised a stick of grass and asked Agni to burn it. In spite of using all his energy, Agni could not burn the stick. He was ashamed.

Then the Gods sent Vayu. Vayu also returned with shame when he couldn't move even a blade of grass.

Finally, when Indra himself went to test who the Yaksha truly was, the Lord totally disappeared!

Bewildered, Indra uttered, " Who is this powerful being who rendered even the Gods absolutely powerless? How did he disappear from my sight?". Then the Goddess Umadevi, the one with golden radiance, appeared at the same place and replied, " Oh Indra, do you still not know who appeared in the form of Yaksha? He is the all powerful Lord, Parameshwara, in whom is rooted the energy of all the Gods. It was His power that was responsible for your victory. You, instead, thought you were the one who won

the war. "

The energy that drives our bodies, senses, and minds comes from the Supreme Lord who is our True Self. We as individuals are nothing but His manifestations.

13. Single pointed contemplation is required to realise the Absolute. (Taittiriya)

Once Bhrgu went to his father Varuna and requested him to teach him Brahavidya, the science of the Self.

Varuna replied, " Dear son, the means to know the Self are - body, prana(the vital energy of life) and the sense organs. That from which the beings of the world are born and unto which they return is Brahman, the Self. You should contemplate on It with utmost concentration".

As per father's orders, Bhrgu started his Tapas. Tapas is that where the senses and mind are not allowed to wander and are directed towards a single point. Bhrgu intensely inquired within himself as to where the *jivas* came from and into what they merged after death.

He started seeing the body,prana,mind and intellect as Brahman. With a single minded devotion, he realised the Absolute Truth, the Witness behind all the above forms.

|||. The Philosophy of the Upanishads.

We shall address three questions in this section.

1. What is the Supreme Truth that Upanishads talk about?
 2. What is Its relationship with us?
 3. What is Its relationship with the world around us?
- They are answered briefly here.

1. Names of Brahman.

The Absolute Truth has different names in the Upanishads.

- **Brahman**- That which is beyond everything and immeasurable.
- **Akshara**- That which cannot be destroyed.
- **Bhooma**- The transcendental truth.
- **Prana**- The vital force of life.
- **Akasha**- That which pervades everything and is eternal.
- **Jyoti**- The light of knowledge.
- **Deva/Devata**- The Supreme Glory.
- **Prajna**- The essence of knowledge.
- **Purusha**- That which is Complete.
- **Isha/Maheshwara**- The Eternally and completely free Truth.
- **Antaryami**- The Omnipotent Indweller.
- **Atman**- The true Self.
- **Sat** - Truth.

2. The two forms of Brahman.

There are two forms of Brahman. One is the transcendental form called *Parabrahman*. Another is a slightly subordinate form which can be understood by the mind. It is the one

which has to be worshipped, called *Aparabrahman*.

3. The nature of Parabrahman.

1. Know That from which everything is born, That in which everything is sustained, That into which everything merges as Brahman. (Taittiriya)
2. It is the essence of all existence, knowledge and happiness of the world. It is of the nature of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. (Taittiriya)
3. It is not visible, not tangible; It has no origin, colour, senses; It is Omnipotent, Omnipresent, and Omniscient; It is very subtle; It does not perish; It is the cause for everything. (Mundaka)
4. It can neither be described by words nor be perceived by the mind. (Taittiriya)
5. It is the Subject the shines through words, mind and senses, but they cannot perceive It. (Kena).
6. Just like fire and air (that pervade the world)seem to assume the shape of the object which contains them, Brahman, the inner Self of all beings seems to assume different forms. (Kathopanishad)
7. The same spirit shines through all beings. It is the source of all their karma, but is never tainted by it. It is the Eternal Witness, Consciousness which has no attributes. (Svetasvatara)
8. It is Brahman that is above us, below us, before us, behind us, to our left side, to our right side. It is Omnipresent. (Mundaka, Chandogya)

4. What's the relationship between *jivas* and Brahman?

1. Like a thousand sparks radiating from a single source of fire, the *jivas* emerge from Brahman and merge into Him. (Mundaka, Brihadaranyaka)
2. All creatures take birth from Being(Sat), exist in It, and merge into It. It is the Absolute Truth. It is the Self. You are That. (Chandongya).
3. Man unites with Brahman everyday in deep sleep. He comes to waking therefrom (Chandongya, Brihadaranyaka, Prashnopanishad, Kausheetaki, Mandukya). He unites with Brahman in death too. Upon realization, he becomes one with Brahman eternally. (Chandongya, Brihadaranyaka)
4. Gods, sages, humans are all Brahman. Whoever realises the Self become Omniscient. He becomes the Self of all beings. (Brihadaranyaka)

5. What is the relationship between Brahman and the world?

1. Like a spider that creates and absorbs its web into itself, like the earth from which plants grow and fall back to, like hair and nails that grow from the human body, the universe originates from Brahman. (Mundaka)
2. The Universe is Brahman. This is all indeed Brahman. (Chandongya)

IV. Certain spiritual practices mentioned in the Upanishads

Brahman who is of the nature of 'Existence-Consciousness-Bliss' has to be worshipped and meditated upon constantly. Meditation means constant thinking of Brahman. The object of this meditation is called 'Aparabrahman'. Though the word *apara* means inferior or subordinate, the context here is different. It does not mean Brahman is inferior to something else. It only means that the transcendental form of Brahman cannot be conceived by the mind. Hence, the transcendental is called Parabrahman. There are no two Brahman. It is the same Brahman- as conceptualised by the mind and beyond the mind.

1. How to meditate upon Brahman?

1. All this is Brahman. Everything takes birth from Him and dissolves into Him. He should be meditated upon with a calm mind. He is in an ever-meditative state. He should be meditated upon as the all pervasive One who takes the form of the mind, the vital force of life, the body; the ever shining One, the One in whom all good and evil is rooted; the One in whom arise all desires, fragrances, essences; the One who has no cause; the ever satiated. The meditator should have the thought, " He is the Self present in me; He is tinier than grains of rice, wheat and mustard; He is larger than the earth, outer space, the heavens and all worlds." The meditator should believe firmly that the Supreme Being is his own Self and that he dissolves into Him after death.

(Chandongya).

The above one is the best type of Upasana. There are some more of this type in the Upanishads. In them, Brahma is said to have some qualities & shape. For example,

2. Meditate upon that Supreme Light that shines through the Sun and human eyes. (Chandongya)

3. Sky/space, mind, names and such other prevalent objects are also to be meditated upon as Brahman (Chandongya).

Since everything is Brahman, we can chose an object that seems most significant to us and worship it as Brahman. Even objects not mentioned in the Upanishads can be worshipped and same results can be obtained. As one may learn arithmetic from a set of marbles, Brahman is learnt through objects of meditation. This form of worship is called *prateekopasana*.

Since the methods of meditation are supposed to be esoteric and learnt from an able Guru, we shall not talk about them extensively because, much will not be achieved just by reading.

B. Disciplines to be followed to attain the Ultimate Knowledge.

There are two kinds of disciplines. Some are to be followed internally. These are,

- *Shama*: controlling the mind.
- *Dama*: controlling the sense organs.
- *Uparati*: restricting external activity and delving into oneself
- *Titiksha*: forbearance or tolerating extremes (Eg., the pair of opposites like hot-cold, good-bad).
- *Shraddha*: Faith in the words of the Guru and Shastras.
- *Samadhana*: Not giving to mental upheavals.

The Self can be realised by practicing these disciplines. That the Self is everything is also understood. (Brihadaranyaka)

If food is pure, the mind gets purified. A clean mind effortlessly reflects on the Atman (Chandongya). Hence *sattvic* food should be consumed. Brahmacharya (celibacy) destroys sensual attachments. It opens the inner eye so that Atman can be visualised. Hence Brahmacharya should be followed. (Chandongya).

The study of the Shastras destroys ignorance. Hence the Vedas are to be studied and taught. (Taittiriya). The rituals and customs prescribed in the Vedas reduce attachment towards the physical body. The mind gets turned towards higher realms. Hence Vedic karmas should be sincerely practiced. These are all external practices/disciplines.

The Guru has to advise his disciple this way, after teaching the Vedas, " Speak the truth, follow dharma (righteousness), never forget to continuously study the shastras, give the Guru the money he requires, procreate to pass on your wisdom, never drift away from the path of dharma, never refrain from performing auspicious rituals, never stop progress in all walks of life. Never stop studying and teaching. Never fail in performing the due rituals towards the Gods and forefathers. See the Lord in your mother, father, master and guests. Only do the duties approved by the shastras, not otherwise. Follow the right conduct, don't misbehave. Always offer a seat to a Brahmin and serve him. Donate with faith, never give without faith. Donate according to the wealth that you possess. Always donate with a submissive

attitude. Donate as if the beneficiary is your own kin. If you are doubtful about what to follow in certain circumstances, always follow the strong-willed, upright Brahmins who always uphold Dharma. Follow such Brahmins and their actions while dealing with people who have a tainted image. This is the order. This is the advice. This is the crux of the Vedas. This is the ordinance. This is what one should follow. Always. (Taittiriya).

Whoever discards what's banned in the shastras, and does what's prescribed in them is considered eligible for Brahmajnana. This is the whole purpose of Sadhana.

V. Analogies mentioned in the Upanishads.

Upanishads have a unique way of teaching the higher truth by using simple illustrations and analogies from daily life with the only purpose of making the teaching simple. Let us see some such analogies here.

1. Fire, breath (Brihadaranyaka)

The Supreme Lord is the only truth. Everything is His manifestation. The world created by Him is of two types, that of objects; that of sounds. The Lord does not need any effort or thought for creation. Yajnavalkya uses the example of smoke and breath to explain this.

" Maitreyi, when you put a stick on fire, different types of smoke emerge from it. Similarly, all creation is the breath of the Supreme Entity. Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, Atharvaveda, history, mythology, various sciences, verses, formulae, treatises, subcommentaries, yajnas, homa, the acts of eating and drinking, this world, the other worlds, animals- all these are Its breaths.

Man breathes without any thought and conscious effort. Similarly all creation manifests from the Supreme without effort. This has been explained easily in a way that even common men and women can understand by using the example of fire which emits all forms of sparks and smoke. This analogy teaches that the Supreme Lord is Omnipotent and Omniscient.

2. Banyan seed (Chandongya)

The true nature of the Supreme Self is unfathomable to the mind and senses. This should not lead us to the inference that He doesn't exist. Generally that which cannot be grasped by the senses is thought to be non-existent. It should be assessed by its effect. With the analogy of the banyan seed, Uddalaka shows Svetaketu why such an assumption is incorrect.

"Svetaketu, bring a banyan fruit."

"Here it is."

"Break it."

"Yes, I did."

"What do you see in it now?"

"I see small seeds."

"Break one of the seeds."

"Yes, I did."

"What do you see in it?"

"Nothing at all!"

Uddalaka then said, " This subtle seed is the cause of this big banyan tree that is not visible to you. Similarly, the subtle invisible Being is the cause of all visible creation. That is the Self. You are That, O Svetaketu!"

The cause of a big banyan tree is a tiny seed. Similarly, the invisible Atman is the source of this large Universe.

3. Salt dissolved in water.

(Chandongya)

Though Atman is present everywhere, our limited minds cannot see Him. But we can know Him by employing one or the other device. This analogy establishes that fact.

Uddalaka: " Add these crystals of salt to water tonight. Come back to it tomorrow morning."

Svetaketu does as instructed. Uddalaka asks him the next morning to bring back the salt from water.

Svetaketu searches for the crystals of salt in water and does not find them.

Uddalaka: " The salt must have melted in water. Taste a sip of water from one side and tell me".

Svetaketu: "The water is salty."

"Sip from the centre of the glass."

"It's still salty."

" Sip from the other corner."

"This is also salty."

"Okay, throw away the salt and come back."

"I cannot. The salt has dissolved in the water."

"The salt has always been here with the water, but alas! You couldn't see it."

Uddalaka continues, " That which could not be seen with the eyes and grasped with the hands was sensed by the tongue. Likewise, the subtle entity called Atman cannot be perceived by the sense organs. But there are definitely other ways to find Him."

4. The man from the kingdom of Gandhara (Chandongya)

Once, a thief blindfolded a man who belonged to the kingdom of Gandhara and left him in a forest. The man was running amok in all directions, shouting "Please help me, I have been blindfolded." A man who came there untied the blindfold and showed him the direction towards his land. He diligently walked by asking for directions and finally reached his country.

Uddalaka gave this example and explained to Svetaketu, "The seeker is like the man in this story. He learns the path to the Truth from the words of the Guru. Once he is released from the blindfold of attachment towards the physical body, he will soon be liberated."

We are blindfolded by ignorance. Once the Guru shows the path of knowledge, we are free from the clutches of suffering. With the power of the words of Guru and by using our own intellect, we can realise the Absolute.

5. Two birds. (Mundaka)

We, the *jivas*, are bound by samsara and by the sorrow that comes with it. The Lord, Eshwara, is Omnipotent and Omniscient. He is free from the joy and sorrow of samsara. The *jiva* and *Eshwara* live in the same body. We can let go of ignorance and be eternally free and blissful as *Eshwara*. Sage Angirasa teaches this to Shaunaka using the analogy of two birds.

" There are two birds on the same tree. They always live together as friends. One of them eats and savours the fruits. The other just witnesses."

Similarly, man is bound by ignorance and is suffering without freedom. As soon as he realises the Supreme Eshwara by means of Sadhana, he is free from sorrow. The world is seen as the manifestation of the Lord. Such a jnani is not affected by the good and evil of the world. He unites with Eshwara."

6. Bow and arrow (Mundaka)

Man should make his birth fruitful by first knowing the primary goal of life and then by constantly striving towards it.

He should practice all spiritual exercises required for the same. He should feel satiated only after reaching the goal. Angirasa uses the metaphor of bow and arrow to illustrate this.

"Hold the bow of the Upanishads. Sharpen the arrow with Sadhana and nock it to the bow. Point it at Infinity and shoot! 'Om' is the bow; Self is the arrow. Brahman is the target. Shoot with caution. Shoot with one pointed, be embedded the tip of the arrow."

How beautiful is this metaphor! The arrow needs to be sharpened first. If not, it's of no use because it cannot hit the target. One should first sharpen his intellect by continuously meditating on the Lord. He should come out gradually from attachments towards the physical body and mind. The bow should be a good one too. Otherwise, the arrow will not hit the bull's eye. Hence, the sound of Om should be used as bow. Om is the best of all names of the Supreme. Mandukya Upanishad actually says that the sound of Om is not different from the Lord. They are both the same. The best way to reach Brahman is following the Vedas. One should prepare himself with the sound of Om to reach the Absolute which is his own Self. Man should reach Brahman and dissolve in Him like the arrow which unites with the target. This is the ultimate goal of life.

7. Chariot, Horse. (Kathopanishad)

The goal of human life is to unite with the Lord. Everyone

should live so as to reach this goal. One who uses his body and mind accordingly is said to be sensible. One who fails to do so is a fool. This is suggested by Yama to Nachiketa using the analogy of the chariot.

" Think of yourself as a traveller in a chariot. This physical body is the chariot. The intellect is the charioteer. The mind is the reign. The sense organs are the horses. Material objects are the roads for the horses. Whosoever does not use his intellect and loses control over the mind becomes victim of the sense organs which are like bad horses. The chariot of his life goes haywire. He who exercises the power of discrimination and controls the senses will have a smooth ride."

" He who does not control his intellect and mind, and thus remains impure will never reach his destination. He who uses his mind and intellect to properly reach the destination never returns back to the world of suffering. One who rides the vehicle of life intelligently will reach the holy feet of Vishnu and dissolve in Him."

8. The big fish (Brihadaranyaka)

Man is trapped in the transactions of the world. If he understands the root of suffering and the means to knowledge of the Self, he will be liberated from the cycle of samsara. Otherwise, he will be born again and again to undergo suffering.

If we inquire rightly, we will soon understand that the Self

transcends all worldly transactions. Yajnavalkya uses the analogy of 'the big fish' to explain this.

"Like a big fish that swims from one end of the shore to another, the *jiva* also is moving continuously between the two states of waking and dream".

The transactions of the world are constantly in fast motion, just like the flow of the river. The fish is not distracted by the force of water or direction of its flow. It just swims across the river. The *jiva* also drifts between waking and dream. The Self is unaffected by these states. He is the Witness who transcends all states.

9. The tied bird (Chandongya)

The *jiva* is not free. Though he is supposed to abide in the Absolute, he gets involved in material pursuits. He thinks he is independent of the Lord and is capable of living in the world freely. It is never a possibility. Uddalaka explains this with the analogy of the tied bird.

"A bird tethered to a post tries to fly in all directions. After multiple failed attempts, it returns to its original position. Likewise, O Svetaketu, man tries to fly in all directions using his mind. Once he is tired, he will come back to the Lord seeking refuge."

Like the bird and the post which are tied together, man and the Lord are always bound together. Even though it seems like man is drifting between the states of waking and dream, he is rooted in the Supreme Lord. He has to rest in the

Supreme Self during deep sleep.

10. Honey (Chandongya)

Every jiva should unite with the Supreme Being. There is no way to keep his 'jivahood' distinctly. Whoever realises Brahman becomes Brahman. Uddalaka uses the analogy of honey to illustrate this.

" Svetaketu, honeybees bring nectar from a variety of flowers and produce honey. Once honey is made, you cannot differentiate nectar of one flower from the other. Similarly, when all jivas merge into Brahman, they are not even aware that they have merged into Being."

In deep sleep, death and cosmic dissolution- we all dissolve into Brahman. We cannot retain our individuality at all. Even now, we are not separate from Brahman. We are brimming with pride and ego only because of ignorance which should be realised.

11. Sounds and 'sound from a common source' (Brihadaranyaka)

We are rooted in the Supreme Being even now. We are never separate from Him. How to know this truth? Here is an analogy taken from the conversation between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi:

" While playing the drum(instrument), a group of different

sounds are emitted outside. They cannot be identified separately. If you can first identify them as coming from a common source, i.e., the drum, you can only recognise each sound later. If you can recognize a group of sounds as coming from a conch(common source), you may know about each sound subsequently. Same goes for the sounds coming from a *veena*."

There are innumerable living and non living beings in the world. They all are identified both individually and in groups(example: animals belonging to a particular species). Finally, they all submerge in a common. It is by first knowing the common quality that we will be able to know individual qualities. All these groups with common factors originate from a single source ultimately. Like the sounds originating from the drum or the conch, all worldly beings originate from Brahman, the Supreme Consciousness. There are no forms, sounds, odours other than Brahman.

12. Crystal of salt (Brihadaranyaka)

We are all one with Supreme Self. We only feel we are apart from him because of our own ignorance. In reality, we are never apart from Him. This is realised only when we shed ignorance. We are always of the nature of the divine. This truth is explained by Yajnavalkya using the analogy of the crystal of salt.

"O Maitreyi, when a crystal of salt is thrown into water, it gets dissolved in water and becomes one in water itself. It can never be separated from water. The water also becomes salty. Like

the body of water, the Supreme Consciousness is infinite and limitless. It 'as if' takes the form of the *jivas* and then becomes dissolved. After giving up these forms, it is not different from the Grand Whole", said Yajnavalkya.

The crystal of salt arises from water. It looks like a solid mass because of the heat of the Sun. But, in reality, its nature is not different from that of water. Those who feel salt is different from water can take the examples of cube of ice or sugar syrup or rock sugar. Even if ice seems different from water, they are the same. Even if *jivas* seem distinct from Brahman, they are truly of the nature of Brahman. Once the Self is realised and ignorance is destroyed, everything is an ocean of bliss!

13. Rivers, sea (Mundaka)

Each *jiva* has a unique name and form. All *jivas* perform different duties in the world and seem to be different from each other. This is what is seen superficially. But they are all connected to a single source called Brahman. The analogy of the rivers and sea is used to explain this.

" Rivers ultimately give up their names and forms to merge with the sea. Likewise, a jnani sheds all names and forms to unite with the Supreme Self. Whosoever realises Brahman becomes Brahman Himself. No one born in his lineage goes without realising Brahman. He transcends grief and sin. He lets go of all knots of the heart and becomes immortal."

Names and forms are illusory. We are Brahman in reality.

VI. Epilogue

Certain spiritual exercises and subjects discussed in the Upanishads have been mentioned here. It is not possible to put forth the entire content of the Upanishads in a small book. That is not the intention of this booklet.

It is obvious to the readers of this book by now as to how Upanishads differ from the other religious texts of the world. That is, the Supreme Being is the Self of all *jivas*. He is the object of worship of all beings of the world. Everyone can realise Him and make this birth fruitful. The Supreme Self is not anyone's private property. He does not belong to any one time period or to people of one nation and race. He does not discriminate between people. He has no favouritism. He shows His true nature to whoever surrenders to Him with utmost sincerity. He does not expect any intellectual acumen and showers His Grace only upon dedicated and perseverant seekers. (Mundakopanishad).

Those who study Upanishads need not believe in anything blindly. The philosophy of the Upanishads is based on our day to day life experiences. They consist of simple and kind words of advice from father-to-son, husband-to-wife, Guru-to-disciple, King-to-citizen, etc. There are easy illustrations and metaphors which everyone can understand. Lord Krishna has explained the subject of Upanishads furthermore in the Bhagavadgita. Vedavyasa(Badarayana) has explored more on these in his Brahmasutras. Those who have written commentaries and treatises have discussed in more detail about the subject matter of Upanishads, Brahmasutras and

Bhagavadgita.

Upanishads have been revered by people of all countries, but it is of utmost reverence to Hindus of the Indian subcontinent. Hindu is not the name of their religion. It just indicates that they are followers of the ancient Vedas and the lifestyle suggested therein. The name Hindu was somehow coined! Whatever be the name, we should not step away from logical and philosophical thinking. Our sages have been advanced thinkers. If we do not understand Sanskrit, we should strive to understand the Upanishads by atleast studying translations. The purpose of this small book to instill the desire and interest in readers to study the original Upanishadic texts.

VII. Shantimantras

1. Sham no mitrah sham varunah (Krishnayajurveda; Taittiriya Upanishad)

(Shantimantras are chanted at the start of studying Upanishads and Sutrabhashyas. Their meanings are also given below. It is helpful to know the meaning rather than chanting blindly.)

**Sham No Mitrah Sham Varunah | Sham No Bhavatvaryamaa |
Sham Na Indro Brhaspatih | Sham No Vishnururukramah |
Namo Brahmane | Namaste Vaayo |Tvameva Pratyaksham
Brahmaasi |
Tvameva Pratyaksham Brahma Vadishyaami | Rrtam**

Vadishyaami |

**Satyam Vadishyaami | Tanmaamavatu | Tadvaktaaramavatu |Avatu
Maam | Avatu Vaktaaram | Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih ||**

May Mitra (the God of daytime and pranavritti)be blissful towards us!
May Varuna (the God of night and apanavritti**) be blissful towards us!
May Aryama (the God of the organs of vision and Sun) be blissful
towards us! May Indra and Brhaspati(the God of speech and intellect)
be blissful towards us! May Vishnu, the one with big feet(the God of
feet) be blissful towards us!*

*Salutations to Brahma! Oh Vayu, Salutations to you! You indeed are the
Perceptible Brahman! I proclaim that you are indeed the Perceptible
Brahman! I proclaim the Divine Order, I proclaim the Truth! May that
(Brahman) protect me! May that (Brahman) protect the Master who
preaches the Truth! May that protect me and the Master. Om, Peace,
Peace, Peace!!*

According to the Vedas, natural order is maintained by supernatural beings- the Gods or deities. Each God presides over the functions of certain natural elements and organs of human body. The first part of this mantra invokes such deities. Here, when the mantra says, "May they be blissful towards us", it means "May they be pleased and thus be propitious towards us". It is believed that propagation of Brahmavidya becomes easier if these deities are pleased.

The second portion is to invoke the Supreme Self. He is the Indweller with whose Grace we speak truth and be

established in the Absolute Truth.

**pranavritti:* Prana is the vital force/air of life. *Pranavritti* is the process of inflow of energy to the physical body which includes functions like inhalation and intake of food.

***apanavritti:* Apana is the energy of outflow. *Apanavritti* includes functions like exhalation and defecation.

2. Saha navavatu

(Krishnayajurveda; Kathopanishad, Svetasvatara)

Saha Naavavatu |Saha Nau Bhunaktu |Saha Veeryam Karavaavahai

|

Tejasvi Naavavadheetamastu Maa Vidvishaavahai |Om Shaantih

Shaantih Shaantih ||

May we be protected together! May we be nourished together!May we perform (our studies) together with vigour! May what we study be filled with brilliance! May we not be hostile towards each other! Om, Peace Peace Peace!!

Here, the disciple is praying on behalf of both himself and the Guru. Since the Guru is already well established in Truth, this may be considered as the prayer of the student.

The disciple prays for the Supreme Lord for the welfare of both himself and the Guru. His attitude while praying should be such, "May I realise the Self. May the Lord be pleased by bestowing knowledge upon me." The third part of the mantra speaks of vigour or strength. By following the prescribed methods of teaching and by following the steps of

shravanam, mananam, etc., there will be sufficient strength (for the student) to overcome the cycle of samsara and abide in Truth.

The Guru might inadvertently commit errors while teaching. The disciple may not be able to follow the teachings. This should not be the reason for hostility between them. This is the crux of the fourth portion of the mantra.

'Shanti' is chanted thrice to dispel obstructions from the three realms called Adhyatmika, Adhibhoutika and Adhidaivika.

3. Yashchandasamrshabho vishwaroopah (Krishnayajurveda; Taittiriya)

**Yashchandasamrshabho Vishvaroopah | Chandobhyodhyamrutaat
Sambabhoova |
Samendromedhayaa Sprnotu | Amrutasya Devadhaarano
Bhooyaasam |
Shareeram Me Vicharshanam | Jihvaa Me Madhumattamaa |
Karnaabhyaam Bhoori Vishruvam | Brahmanah Koshosi Medhayaa
Pihitah | Shrutam Me Gopaaya |
On Shantih Shantih Shantih ||**

" May Om, the sound of the Supreme Lord, the most exalted sound of the Vedas, that which springs from the immortal

Vedas, bless me with intelligence! Oh Lord, May I be endowed with immortality! May my body be strong and fit! May my tongue speak sweet words! May I listen to good things often! You cover Brahman like a sheath! You are covered by worldly intelligence! Protect all that I hear! Om, Peace,Peace,Peace!!

Meditation upon Om is explained here. The Vedas are themselves called immortal because they lead the seekers towards immortality. Om is the most exalted of all Vedic sounds/mantras. Vedas proclaim that it is the source of all other sounds. We consider saligrama as Lord Vishnu Himself. Likewise, Om should be considered as the Supreme Self and meditated upon. By doing so and by following the methods of *shravanam, mananam, nididhyasanam*, we become eligible for Brahmajnana.

Om is of the nature of Brahman and is the source of this world. Hence this mantra is advisable to all seekers.

4. Aham vrkshasya rerivaa (Krishnayajurveda; Taittiriya)

**Aham Vrksasya Rerivaa | Kirtih Prshtham Gireriva |
Urdhvapavitro Vajineeva Svamrtamasmi | Dravinaḡm Savarchasam
Sumedhaa Amritoshitah | Iti Trisha~nkorvedaanuvachanam |
Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih ||**

I am the mover of the tree! (My) glory is like the peak of the mountain! I am lofty and immortal like the Sun! I am the

lustrous wealth! I am the One with the highest knowledge! I am immortal and eternal! This is Trishanku's word of Vedic wisdom! Om Peace Peace Peace!!

The mantra is self explanatory. It is obvious that these are the words of sage Trishanku upon attainment of Self Knowledge. He is speaking from that state which transcends the physical realm. It is the state of the Supreme Self.

I am the mover of the tree: Here, samsara is likened to a tree. It is ephemeral. It withers soon. So long as samsara (as if) exists, the Supreme Lord runs it as the Indweller of all beings.

My glory is like the peak of the mountain: The glory of the Lord is limitless. There is nothing glorier than Him.

I am lofty and immortal like the Sun: The Supreme Self is unaffected by the impurities of the world. He is also the Self of the Sun and shines through him. He is eternally pure and has no death or decay.

I am the lustrous wealth: Just like money and wealth are necessary for worldly happiness, the Grace of the Lord is required for liberation from the clutches of samsara. His lustre never fades. He is ever shining.

I am the One with the highest knowledge: The Lord is the only Omniscient Being who runs the cycle of cosmic birth, sustenance and dissolution.

I am immortal and eternal: The Self is limitless, immortal and always pure.

Having understood the meaning of the mantra, the seeker should chant it as an oblation to the Supreme Being. This removes negative impressions from his mind. By giving up material desires, one should perform his daily duties as ordained by the Vedas and inquire into the nature of the Atman. Such a person will attain realisation like Trishanku.

5. Bhadram karnebhih shrunuyama devaah (Atharvaveda; Mundaka, Prashna, Mandukya)

**Bhadram Karnebhih Shrnuyaama Devaah |Bhadram
Pashyemaakshabhiryajatraah
|Sthiraira~ngaistussttuvaagmsastanuubhih |Vyashema Devahitam
Yadaayuh |Svasti Na Indro Vrddhasshravaah |
Svasti Nah Pooshaa Vishvavedaah |Svasti Nastaarkshyo
Arishtanemih |Svasti No Brhaspatirdadhaatu ||
Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih ||**

O Devas, May we hear with our ears what is auspicious! May we see with our eyes what is auspicious! With organs steady and body praying, may we attain (i.e., spend) the lifespan allotted by the Devas. May Indra, whose glory the elders hear about, bestow well-being on us! May Pushan, who is all-knowing, bestow well-Being on us! May Tarkshya, who is a Circle of Protection, bestow well-

*being on us! May Brihaspati bestow well-being on us!
Om, Peace, Peace, Peace!!*

A seeker should worship the Gods/deities to grant him the right mindset and intellect to conduct self-inquiry. The Devas are capable of leading sincere seekers in the right direction and insincere ones towards unrighteousness. Gods are just different forms of the Supreme Lord. But they play various important roles in the life of an aspirant till the Ultimate Realization dawns in.

The first part of the mantra is a general prayer.

May we hear with our ears what is auspicious. May we see with our eyes what is auspicious. With organs steady and body praying, may we attain (i.e., spend) the lifespan allotted by the Devas.

Only when man is physically strong, will he be able to perform his duties towards Dharma and attain happiness in this world and the higher worlds. With the grace of the Devatas, those who follow the Vedic duties will only hear spiritual things; will meet good and devoted people; will be able to conduct rituals that incur punya. Hence, we should pray the Devatas to only grant good things for us to hear and see; a longer lifespan; ability to perform auspicious rituals and thereby achieve purification of the mind.

The second part is invoking specific Devatas- Indra to facilitate listening and studying of the Vedas; Pushan to grant the right intellectual capacity to contemplate the higher truth; Tarkshya(Garuda) to dispel all worldly hindrances and

help us stay on the right path; Brhaspati to help in attainment of Brahmajnana.

Devas keep us sturdy and help us walk in the right direction of shravanam, mananam and nididhyasanam till the attainment of Brahmajnana. No force in the Universe can stop us if the grace of the Gods is with us. Therefore, we should worship and serve them.

6. Poornamadah poornamidam (Shuklayajurveda; Ishavasya, Brihadaranyaka)

**Poornamadah Poornamidam Poornaat Poornamudachyate |
Poornasya Poornamaadaaya Poornamevaavashishyate ||
Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih ||**

That is complete, This is complete. From completeness comes completeness. If completeness is taken away from completeness, only completeness remains.

Om Peace, Peace, Peace!!

Being is always Whole and Complete. It remains in this nature always. It does not expand or shrink or decay.

Here "Complete" means It is all pervading. It is not apart from anything. It is the Self of everything. Brahman is Complete by Its very nature. It is Complete even when It acts as the subject of names and forms or *upadhis* (limitary adjuncts). It

is Complete as both the cause and the effect. It is as if bound my names and forms when It is seen as the cause of the world. It is still Complete whatsoever.

Whoever understands that Being is Complete even when it is seen to be limited by attributes will go on to shed ignorance and get established in Brahman who is of the nature of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. The apparent incompleteness is only because of one's own ignorance. The Supreme Being is always Complete.

7. Apyayantu mamaangaani (Samaveda; Kena, Chandogya)

**Apyayantu Mamaangani Vakpranashchakshuh Shrotramatho
BalamindriyaaNi Cha Sarvaani |Sarvam Brahmopanishadam |
Maaham Brahma Nirakuryam Maa Maa Brahma
Niraakarodanirkaranamastvanirakaranam Me Astu Tadatmani
Nirate Ya Upanishatsu Dharmaaste Mayi Santu Te Mayi Santu ||
Om Shantih Shantih Shantih ||**

*May my limbs, speech, vital air, eyes, ears, strength, and all the senses be fully developed! All this is Brahman revealed by the Upanishads! May I never deny Brahman! May Brahman never disown me! Let there be no rejection to me (from Brahman)! May the dharmas of the Upanishads as revealed to the one in Self-Pursuit reside in me! May they reside in me!
Om Peace Peace Peace!!*

The most important prerequisite for liberation is Sadhana. By practicing the sixfold virtues of shama, dama, uparati, titiksha, shraddha and samadhana, equipped by other sets of sadhana, ignorance is dispelled and jnana is easily attained. Hence we should first pray for the spiritual tools and supreme devotion as prescribed by the Upanishads to dwell in us. We should also never forget to worship the Supreme Lord for his Grace to be bestowed upon us.

The sixfold virtues develop in a sattvic mind. Hence, one should always eat sattvic food and move around with sattvic people.

8. Vangme Manasi Pratishthita (Rigveda; Aitareya)

**Om Vaangme Manasi Pratishthitaa Mano Me Vaachi
Pratishthitamaaviraaveermaa Edhi Vedasya Ma Aanee Sthah
Shrutam Me Maa
Prahaaseernenaadheetenaahoraatraanstaandadhaami Rtam
Vadishyaami Satyam Vadishyaami Tanmaamavatu
Tadvaktaaramavatu Avatu Maam Avatu Vaktaaram Avatu
Vaktaaram ||
Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih ||**

May my voice be established in my mind! May my mind be established in my voice! Oh the Manifest One, reveal Thyself to me! O mind and speech, bring the Vedas to me! May not what I have heard forsake me! May all that I have learnt stay

*and night be retained in me! May I speak the R̥ta! May I speak the truth!
May That protect me! May That protect the Master! May That protect
me! May That protect the Master! Om Peace Peace Peace!!*

While studying the Vedas, the mind and speech should be aligned. Words and mind shouldn't flow in different directions. We shouldn't let sense organs and thereby the speech and mind outwards. This prayer invokes the Lord to grace us in this regard.

Atman is Self effulgent, ever shining. He has no two forms in reality- manifest and unmanifest. But we operate in the realm of ignorance and assume that He has two forms. Realising the Atman is likened to seeing Him. In that sense, He has been addressed to as "The Manifest One."

By properly aligning speech and mind, the Absolute Truth, R̥ta is realised. This R̥ta is expressed in our speech too. The third part of the mantra prays for this to happen.

The last part is invoking the Lord's Grace for the master to also have speech-mind synchrony while teaching and thereby help the student grasp the Truth. It is asking for both the teacher and student to be protected!

9. Om Namō Brahmadibhyo (Salutations to the Guru)

**Om Namo Brahmadibhyo Brahmavidyasampradayakartrbhyo|
Vamshrshibhyo Namoh Mahadbhyo Namoh Gurubhyah ||**

Om! Salutations to all the Gods starting from Brahma! Salutations to those sages who have set the tradition of imparting Brahmavidya, the science of Truth! Salutations to the great men! Salutations to the Guru!!

This prayer is chanted at the start and end of each session of Vedantic teaching.

Vamsharshis are the sages who belong to the lineage of those who have passed on Brahmavidya from generation to generation. They are all like branches arising from the same tree. The tradition starts from Hiranyagarbha to the last sage mentioned. The list of these lineages can be seen in the second, fourth and sixth chapters of Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. These sages are great and holy men. They have not only realised Brahman themselves, but have been torchbearers for many many seekers all over the world.

Starting from Brahma to our own Guru, all divine masters have passed on the holy teachings of Vedanta and graced us. But nobody is the creator/author of Vedanta. This is not a mere philosophy stemming from logical thinking and intellectual exercises of a genius. The science of Vedanta does not depend on any external human support. Gurus are but instruments in passing on the knowledge. The Absolute Truth is available for experience to everyone at all times. It validates itself.