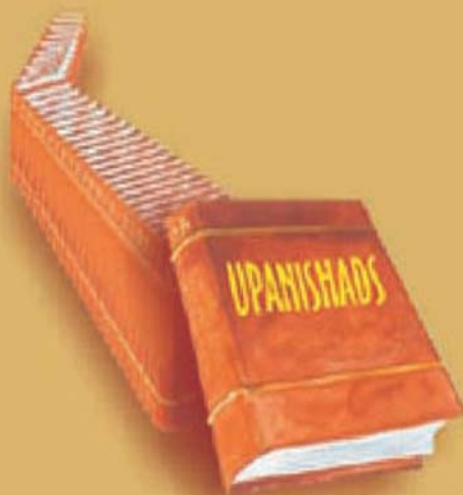


RAMANUJ PRASAD

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Dedication

*Dedicated to the service of
my teacher of Vedānta
H.H. Swāmi Paramārtānanda
196/A, St. Mary's Road,
Abhramapuram,
Chennai.*

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Foreword

The Upanishads are the very quintessence of Indian wisdom, the blossoms of the finest thoughts gleaned from the dialectical relationship of wisdom teachers and their diligent students – the *Guru shishya parasparyam*.

Though the Upanishadic lore has been known in India for centuries, it is only in recent times that the teachings came to be known to the non-Sanskrit-speaking world. One of the earliest translations of the Upanishads was into Persian with the assistance of pandits from Benares at the behest of Prince Dara Shikoh in 1657. The Persian version was subsequently translated into the Latin *Oupnek'hat* by Anquetil Duperron in 1802. The teachings of the Upanishads became known in Europe through the German translation done by Franz Mischel in 1882.

Today we live in an unprecedented age where knowledge has overcome all past boundaries. More people are educated now than ever before. But the complexities of life along with deep anxiety and uncertainty have vitiated the joy and new-found freedom. It is as if mankind is navigating through uncharted waters. These circumstances make the teachings of the Upanishads very relevant and

valuable to reorient our lives in a correct manner with a proper structure of values.

The teachings of the Upanishads clearly state the goal and purpose of life. They promise deliverance from ignorance and the associated pain and suffering. Unalloyed happiness is gained by the proper understanding of one's own true nature, as well as that of the world in which we live. The philosophy of Vedānta, which is based on the teachings of the Upanishads, begins with two questions: *Ko aham?* (Who am I?) and *Kuto jagat?* (Whence this world?). The teachings of the Upanishads give an enduring and convincing answer to these fundamental questions and bestow great peace of mind.

We are fortunate that in the author, Ramanuj Prasad, we have a well-disciplined academic mind along with mature understanding and original thinking. He has competently and systematically explained the teachings of the Upanishads by taking one of the finest, the *Mundaka*, as his theme. He has also given apt references from other major Upanishads like the *Brihadāranyaka*, *Kena*, *Svetāsvatara* and *Katha* to show the underlying unity of *Brahma Vidyā*, or the Science of the Absolute. The *Mundaka Upanishad* has evolved from the *Atharva Veda*, which is also the source of other highly mystical Upanishads like the *Prasna*. In the *Mundaka Upanishad* Guru Angiras instructs the ascetic Shaunaka on “***that knowledge on knowing which nothing remains to be known***”.

With this highest of teachings as his subject, Ramanuj Prasad has kept the common reader in mind. For centuries, the Upanishadic treasure

of wisdom has been confined to very few people. With its clear logical presentation, this book will render sterling service in spreading the sublime teachings of the Upanishads to all readers. The aspirant seeking wisdom as well as the scholarly person keen to deepen his or her understanding of the Upanishads will benefit from this book.

H.H. Swāmi Vyāsa Prasād
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Tamil Nadu.

Invocation

This is a prayer to the Lord for successful completion of a work undertaken and the work is offered to the Lord as service to Him. Therefore, whatever may be the credit that accrues, even in the future, it belongs to the Lord. The individual being an instrument in the hands of the Lord, one remains only an agent for name's sake; the actual work is done by Him and for Him.

In our tradition, all work is undertaken only after invoking the Lord's blessings. The very creator of the Universe Brahman also began the work of creation of the Universe after uttering the words *OM TAT SAT* (the triple designation of Brahman), which is the very essence of the essence. This is said to be the reason that creation is so perfect and flawless. The invocation stands on the same plane as that of a *shānti pātha* of the spiritual works. It is also a norm that we should not study any spiritual work that does not have the Lord's name or a prayer at the start. Auspiciousness is indicated through the invocation and without that, it is neither auspicious nor a fruitful work.

Thus, invocation of the blessings of the Lord for the work is through a prayer to Lord Krishna, who is the teacher of all teachers of spirituality,

which is the very goal of human life. Lord Krishna is the son of the Universal Mother Devaki, incarnated in the family of Vasudeva from the Vrishnis dynasty. Lord Krishna is the destroyer of Kansa and Chānoora, the enemies of virtuous thoughts and deeds.

The verse:

वसुदेवसुतं देवं कंसचाणूरमर्दनम्
देवकीपरमानन्दं कृष्णं वन्दे जगद्गुरुम् ।

I salute Lord Krishna, the world teacher, the son of Vasudeva and the supreme bliss of Devaki, the destroyer of Kansa and Chānoorā.

This is one of the verses in the *Gita dhyanam* and is chanted before the study of the same. As discussed later in the example of the Upanishad, normally *shānti pātha* is from that Veda to which that particular Upanishad belongs. Similarly, here it should have been from the *Mahābhārata* of which the *Bhagavad Gitā* is a part. But in this case it is not so, as the invocation was incorporated by the recent āchārya, Madhusudhana Saraswati, for the study of the *Bhagavad Gitā*.

Hari Om!



Introduction

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

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

Without any doubt, all activities are means to happiness and may not be pursued if they

resulted in pain or discomfort. This is true even in the case of one's wife, husband, son, daughter and a host of other relatives and related objects who or which are all means only. The lineage of the family, one proudly claims to belong to, is also a means to happiness only. The objectives enumerated so far are external to one, come to join at a point of time and similarly leave too. Therefore, whatever happiness we get out of them is dependent on the source, which is not the inner part of the self as heat in the fire but like the heat of the water.

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

With concern, compassion and love equal to that of thousands of mothers, the Veda (Scriptures) promises assistance for both types of happiness – that born out of external objects or that which is the intrinsic nature of every human being. The choice is left to the individual. The Veda never forces anyone to choose either, but cautions