

CHAPTER 5

EXCERPTS FROM THE PRINCIPAL UPANISHADS

The *Isavasya Upanishad*, so titled because it begins with the word 'Isavasyam', states, analyses and discusses that whatsoever moves on this earth is covered by the Lord and that we should protect ourselves through that detachment and that we should not covet anybody's wealth or that simply we should not covet, (because) for whose is wealth? This thundering admonition is then lucidly explained in the remaining seventeen verses of this Upanishad. This first line of this Upanishad contains the essence of Hinduism and the central theme of all Upanishads, namely, the spiritual unity of all existence.

The *Kena Upanishad*, so named because it poses questions like: By whom (*Kena*), willed as it were, does the directed mind go towards its object? By whom (*Kena*), directed as it were, does the vital force proceed to do its duty? By whom, willed as it were, is this speech being uttered? By whom (*Kena*), directed as it were, are the eyes and ears directed to do their functions? Of course, these questions, their answers, and brief anecdotal stories demonstrating the removal of the pride of Gods are described beautifully in this Upanishad.

The *Katha Upanishad* discusses the conversation between a young boy, Nachiketas, highly evolved and determined to learn the secrets of Life, Self, Death and matters connected with these, entering into a dialogue with Yama, the Lord of Death. The sheer elegance of the questions put forward by Nachiketas and the beauty of the answers, and ways of answering them, will captivate any reader. The dialogue, as well as the attempts by the Lord of Death to test, and ensure, that Nachiketas is, indeed, firm in his quest of finding answers to the very difficult, secret and sacred teachings – answers that are known principally only to Yama - make for excellent reading. Anyone is likely to be very moved by this wondrous and wonderful dialogue.

The *Prasna Upanishad* describes the questions posed by six devotees and seekers of knowledge to their Sage who, in turn, tells them to practice austerity, brahmacharya (celibate life) and faith for a year and then ask whatever questions they wish to ask him. Teacher wants to ensure that the devotees have the burning desire, and the quest, to seek answers to their questions so as to undergo the rigors prescribed by the teacher. Questions are all related to the Self and the simple, yet detailed, manner in which the Sage answers their questions is worth pondering over.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* discusses the question of a householder to a realized soul 'by knowing which all else will be known'. It is such a beauty that the reader of Upanishads often encounters, where the questioner, question, teacher and the answers are all so elegantly described.

The *Mandukya Upanishad* describes the waking, dream, deep sleep and the fourth stages of a person. The mystic, the all powerful symbol and signifying everything in this world,

AUM or as it is sometimes written as OM, is connected with these various stages of a person's life.

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* is simply elegant. It is said that Adi Sankara has referred to, and commented upon, this Upanishad over one hundred and forty three (143) times. The three sections, the Siksha Valli, the Brahmananda Valli and the Brigu Valli are so beautifully presented that however number of times one has read this text, one continues to find inspiration the next time around one reads it. Siksha valli talks about phonetics, grammar and instructions, Brahmanandavalli talks about bliss and Bhruguvall discusses the 'pancha kosa' – the five sheaths – food, prana (or life energy), mind, intellect and bliss. Brugu realizes that he is not food or prana or mind or intellect but existence-consciousness-bliss (sat-chit-ananda).

The *Aitareya Upanishad* describes the story of creation. How the One, Brahman, became many. Brahman, the pure consciousness or spirit, was the only One in the beginning. Nothing else whatsoever ever winked. Brahman wanted to create the worlds. The five elements, the Purusha from the waters, the organs, food, humanbeings and all were created. Into the human being, Brahman entered as the Self. The three births fo the person and the creation of food are explained.

The *Chandogya Upanishad* states that Brahman is everything and is all. To realize Brahman, one must experience the identity between him and the Self or Brahman dwelling within one's heart. That Upanishads do not distinguish between the student's caste or creed but only the fitness of the student for such knowledge is demonstrated by the story of Satyakama Jabala. Many simple illustrations to explain the teachings are always provided in all Upanishads and this Upanishad also contains many such instances.

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* as the name implies is Brihath, very big, and is very lengthy. It states that the Self is the origin of all finite happiness but itself is pure bliss transcending definition. The dialogues between Gargya and Ajatasatru as well as that between Yajnavalkya and his wife Maitareyi, and Yajnavalkya and amongst many others are beautiful, elegant and elevating.

The *Swetasvatara Upanishad* describes Brahman, Self, Maya and Meditation. The insights provided therein are very valuable.

The *Kaivalya Upanishad* suggests that the person who by faith, devotion and meditation has realized the Self and its oneness with Brahman and reaches such state by experience and realization is released from sorrow, death and rebirth. The simplicity of its teachings and pronouncements are simply wonderful.