



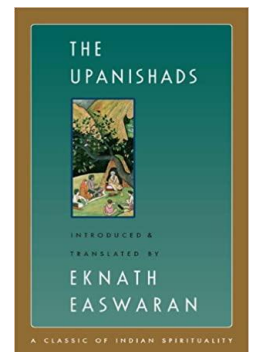
The Mundaka Upanishad - The Commentary

Introduction to the Upanishads

This is the edition I have and it has wonderful introductions on each chapter also. It is not necessary to get the same version (unless you want to). You can find it on Amazon and most major book stores:

The Upanishads (Easwaran's Classics of Indian Spirituality, 2) – by Eknath Easwaran [link](#).

There is also an abridged audio version available on Audible and Apple Books.



In the Bhagavad Gita, we find a more practical description of the natural state of human beings when they have realised the Truth. The Gita also describes the main pathways of meditation, devotion and wisdom as the fastest ways to Truth. By contrast, in the Upanishads we see a collection of writings that have much less instruction of how to actually realise what you are but are rich in descriptions of that essence of Truth and what it is like to live it. The Upanishads are some of the oldest scriptures known to us and they are so old we do not even really know who wrote them. We can place them in a different category to the Gita if we see their function is to inspire us, light a fire or even to make us jealous of the Rishis (ancient seers) who wrote them. If the Gita is here to help us understand the power of devotion to the Truth, then the Upanishads are here to make the flame of our devotion a raging fire.

We could think of the Gita as the “How to reach it and why it’s worth making the journey” and the Upanishads as the “Here’s what you are missing out on - Love letters from the Self” If we look at the meaning and etymology of “Upanishad” we will see it is describing a transmission from Truth directly into the illusion of our thoughts and penetrating it deeply. Infusing our minds and hearts with the power of Truth, the Upanishads are legendary in their power to pierce the veil of illusion. If we read them softly, gently and with reverence we will feel more focused, devoted and inspired that we too can live in freedom. The Upanishads are not to be read to try to understand or to achieve deeper knowledge (although that may happen) and are best taken in as if you are listening to some beautiful music that moves you. Simply letting them into your heart, they will work their magic on you.

Some of the Upanishads come in a story form and some are the records of a dialogue between teacher and student. Often the teacher can come in a very surprising form and so we can see immediately that the Upanishads are already pointing to a pivotal understanding that Truth can come from anywhere at any time and need not necessarily come in a formal way. Each Upanishad is complete on its own and does not rely on any other teaching or even any other Upanishad. We are going to study eleven main Upanishads and allow them to infuse us with their wisdom, power and love. You will notice there are some that you resonate more with and some you may feel an indifference to at first. I would urge you to pay special attention to the ones you do not feel a

resonance with at first as these will be the ones that have potential to provide the greatest breakthroughs. The spiritual power of these great writings is such that our mind senses it and may immediately offer resistance to the words. Your mind may say "I don't like the names and the language used" or it may think that this information is too old to be relevant today but let's not let this type of resistance stop us from reaping the rewards of diving deeper into this powerful body of scriptures.

The Upanishads are teachings based on the description of the One Being/Self of all/Noumenon and so whilst the Gods may be mentioned (such as Brahma, Agni and more) they are mentioned as individual aspects of this One Consciousness and are not to be taken to be separate entities. If we can see the Infinite Self can show itself in an infinite number of ways, we can come to think of these Gods (and even demons) as aspects of our own Divinity.

It is important to note also that whilst the Upanishads have often been associated with ritual and religion, they are describing the Reality that is beyond any such religion (and all religions). They are also beyond philosophy and mind and stand alone in their wisdom. The wisdom in these writings is powerful enough to cause a shift in our spiritual understanding of Reality (as is any authentic non-duality teaching) and as such can be as powerful as any teaching, teacher, retreat, prayer or otherwise. They are a true Darshan or blessing. We must read the words of each Upanishad and then meditate upon them until we bring them into our actual experience. It is with this in mind that I am offering these commentaries on this revered body of scripture, so that you may fall in love with the Upanishads as much as I have and maybe even more. I initially had resistance to these great teachings just like we may all do and I thought they would hold no relevance to me as a seeker of Truth and I am overjoyed to admit how utterly wrong I was. I would not be writing these words without the insight, inspiration and power of the Upanishads and they infused my being with love for the great Sages and Seers of ancient India that I will never know but will eternally offer my gratitude to.

Notes for reading these commentaries.

The numbers in brackets/parentheses refer to the verse numbers in the translation in the book itself. I have added comments on sections of each Upanishad that directly affected and inspired me when I have studied these and absorbed them, however this does not mean that if I have not commented on a particular verse that it contains no wisdom or something that may inspire you. For this reason, I would urge you to read each verse slowly and feel inside your body which ones feel most relevant. For some of the Upanishads that may be all or a lot of the text. For others it may be less. After some time has passed you may find you resonate with other sections that you did not before and so with such great works of scripture it is worth revisiting over time.

It has been the most beautiful opportunity for me to do the same in writing these commentaries and I am grateful.

The Mundaka Upanishad - Modes of Knowing

Introduction

The Mundaka Upanishad takes us back into the usual dialogue between teacher and student. In fact, the student, Shaunaka, asks only one question of the Sage Angiras and his answer forms the whole Upanishad. The Sage's answer is divided into three main sections and we will look at each one in turn. Many parts of this Upanishad have been quoted extensively over the years and by different sources and as such we may find a certain familiarity with parts of this text.

The main theme of this Upanishad is the same as we find in many scriptures and writings from across the aeons of spiritual searching for Truth. Truth exists and it is the only thing that exists. Untruth (non-reality) does not actually exist and illusion is simply that - illusion and unreal. We will hear this said many times over in this Upanishad and across all teachings and its precise and powerful meaning will continue to deepen as we expose ourselves to it again and again. If nothing unreal actually exists, then there is nothing for us to get rid of, merge or transcend. We only need to see clearly.

"A Course in Miracles" says it this way:

"Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God"

Here it is again said in a different way from "Vasistha's Yoga":

"This world appearance is a confusion: even as the blueness of the sky is an optical illusion. I think it is better not to let the mind dwell on it, but to ignore it"

Of course, both of these great spiritual works go on to say that at first it may be impossible to simply ignore the Illusion as unreal and non-existent and so that is why the longer body of scripture is also given. So, let's not worry if the world's appearance still seems extraordinarily real to us right now. Just reading, digesting and pondering what you read is enough. Applying what you understand where you can, opens and leads to greater understanding, which allows deeper application and recognition.

Let's begin with the invocation as always. As we read these words we can remember that they are spoken from the Self to the Self and as such they MUST manifest. The words are calling forth into form that which is already here and formless.

"OM

May we hear only what is good for all.

May we see only what is good for all.

May we serve you, Lord of Love, all our life.

May we be used to spread your peace on earth.

OM shanti shanti shanti"

Part 1 – Chapter 1

"From infinite Godhead came forth Brahma, first among gods. From whom sprang the cosmos." Brahma is the first among gods because he is the creator that creates the other gods, demons, humans and all other forms. It may be helpful to think of Brahma as the energy of creation rather than as a figurehead. All of the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon represent attributes of the Self that have come into form. Brahma is the creator and does so from the desire to create, he must be first among gods so that he can create all the others. Everything that is created is created in a shape of a form and then given a label or a name (such as Brahma, universe, tree, woman, rock etc). We can see that Brahma is an energy or a movement of the Stillness of the Self when

we recognise that nothing has actually been created in actuality, creation is the sculpting into a shape of that which is shapeless in its essence.

Shaunaka asks the sage Angiras “What is that by knowing which all is known?” This is a beautifully direct and intelligent question to ask as a seeker of truth. In effect, Shaunaka is asking “what is the thing that knows everything else?” or “What is the most important thing to know?” or perhaps even “What is it that is sentient in the universe?” Such a powerful question surely must call forth a powerful answer that has the power to illuminate the Truth. Only someone who is completely open and ready to see the Truth would ask such a question. Angira begins his answer by describing knowledge as being of two kinds; lower knowledge is the study of worldly disciplines such as science, mathematics but also includes religious texts and practices. It is important to note that “lower” does not mean bad or less than higher knowledge and all kinds of knowledge has its place in the world. Higher knowledge, explains Angiras, is that which leads to Self Realisation and peace. This knowledge is of a different kind to all the rest and results from the application of what we learn from such scriptures as the Upanishads. Higher knowledge comes from direct experience. (1-5)

The rest of this section and the whole Upanishad now forms the answer from the great sage Angiras. “The eye cannot see it; mind cannot grasp it. The deathless Self has neither caste nor race, neither eyes nor ears nor hands nor feet. Sages say this Self is infinite in the great and in the small, everlasting and changeless, the source of life.” Eyes cannot see the Self because it is invisible in its formless aspect and cannot be perceived by the senses. Even if we were to look at the forms the Self appears as and in, where could our physical body stand to see it all with our own eyes? Where in the universe could you stand in order to see it all? Mind cannot grasp the Self because the Self is not something that we can think about. How can mind think about or come to understand what it means to be omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient? Our mind's thoughts and perceptions are based on our experience from our corner of time and space and even if we could think about the Self we would each have a different perspective based on our unique individuality and previous experiences. There is no absolute or final understanding of the Self that can be reached through the mind. The Self is infinite and everywhere and yet it can appear to be very small and finite too. Every way that we could try to describe the Self will immediately be contradicted by our experience because the Self is able to appear as opposites when it takes a form or shape.

In verse 8 we see a clear description of the power of illusion (maya) and its ability to seem so real. We are convinced for so long that the One has actually broken into the many and it is the core of all suffering. “The deathless Self sees all, knows all. From him springs Brahma, who embodies the process of evolution into name and form by which the One appears to be the many.” The Self is easily able to see all of creation even when it appears as a human being, this is because no matter where we stand in the universe and whatever place we are looking from, when we see something we know what it really is. Each form is the Self and the awakened Self knows that everything it sees, could see or has seen is that very same Self.

Part 1 – Chapter 2

Angiras suggests that a sage is only one who has realised the lower knowledge is of no use to move beyond the effects of illusion. Only higher knowledge allows us to leave suffering behind once and for all. Angiras says that lower knowledge can even be detrimental to the genuine seeker of enlightenment because it can build a greater sense of a personal self, the one who is performing and receiving the benefits of rituals, practices and sacrifices etc. Angira points to the “pure of heart” as those who practise meditation on the Lord of Love and urges Shaunaka that this is the only way to freedom.

Angiras reveals that when a student who is full of love for the Self or has a pure heart seeks a realised teacher, that student must be shown a teacher that can help them. When it has not been

our experience that the help came in response to our plea to end our suffering, perhaps we can examine our motives for asking. Even if our heart wasn't totally pure but was tinged with personal desires, help will always come to us. When we seek only the Self, we have released any self centred desires and that teacher MUST appear to us in some form. Even more importantly perhaps, awakening MUST then occur because nothing in all the worlds can stop the Self when it wants to realise its own freedom, whilst appearing as a human being. "Pure heart" and "self centred" do not imply that these are wrong or to be labelled as unworthy. They simply mean that the student is still experiencing some mixed motivation for wanting to awaken. A large part of the call to awaken is coming from the Self wanting to recognise itself but there may also still be a slight trace of our selfish/self centred motivations for wanting to wake up. We may want to be free so we can be out of pain, experience abundance, feel safer, feel special or be loved by many beings. Whilst these reasons for wanting freedom are not wrong, they will still keep us lost in illusion because these desires benefit only one body and mind and not the whole.

Angiras reassures Shaunaka that such a student with a pure heart MUST come to freedom and quickly too. The Lord of Love can never be hidden to those that love the Self. It is not an "if" it will be revealed at all. It is a certainty. (1-13)

Part 2 – Chapter 1

"As from a blazing fire thousands of sparks leap forth, so millions of beings arise from the Lord of Love and return to him". This profound beginning to this second part of the Mundaka uses the brilliant analogy of sparks arising out of a fire. Each spark shoots off from the fire, taking its own shape and path from there and yet always made of fire. In a perfect analogy, these sparks would last forever and after travelling for a while would return and merge back into the fire itself. Angiras says the Lord of Love is above name and form, meaning that he ultimately has no name or form and yet can appear as all of them. He is unborn and the source of all that exists. (1-3)

In the next few verses, we are shown some of the possible ways the Lord of Love can manifest. "Fire is his head, the sun and moon his eyes, the heavens his ears, the scriptures his voice, the air his breath, the universe his heart and the earth his footrest. The Lord of Love is the innermost Self of all." (4-10)

Part 2 – Chapter 2

In this second chapter, we find reference to the Self being "Bright but hidden" (verse 1) and "The shining Self dwells hidden in the heart" (Verse 2). The Self is bright because it is all that there is and it is omnipotent. When our attention is on the Self, the formlessness that we are, then it will seem to be the most exciting and attractive thing ever; totally obvious to anyone who would want to find it. However, when our attention is on some thoughts or other objects, the Self will seem hidden and obscure. How can something that is powerful and ever present seem obscured? What power is it that seems to obscure the view of the Self from us even when we want it more than anything? It all depends on how we look for the Self, if we look as a separate being, a "someone" looking for something else we will not find the Self ever. The Self is not "out there" (or even "in here") as a subtle object and the very act of looking for an object will make that vast Self in which all objects appear seem hidden. When we begin to ask "What is it that all objects appear in?" we will see the Self come into view. We cannot see it as something separate to our own self but as That in which the idea of our own self appears.

"Take the great bow of the sacred scriptures, place on it the arrow of devotion; then draw the bowstring of meditation and aim at the target, the Lord of Love," Here we see the instruction again of how to realise enlightenment. Meditation without devotion to the Lord of Love is simply mechanical action and will yield little to no results. Devotion without knowledge of the sacred scriptures, that the Lord of Love is not a "someone" but is the ground of the universe, is directionless and spins in circles. When devotion to the Lord of Love is paired with meditation on

Him, this meditation must bear the fruit of Self realisation. What does it mean to be devoted to the Lord of Love though? What must we renounce in order to be devoted to Him? Renouncing twoness, duality and seeing that multiplicity and diversity are optical illusions and not an actual reality is needed. Just because all these seeming objects look, sound and appear to be very different, including our own bodies, they are all made of the same essence. The idea of multiplicity as an actual event or possibility can be released as we realise it is all the Lord of Love in disguise. The same cloud can take one thousand different shapes as it moves across the sky but it has not changed at all. Then we will “Realise Him as the One behind the many and stop all vain talk” because all talk of “other than me” is purely fiction. (1-6)

“When he is seen within us and without, he sets right all doubts and dispels the pain of wrong actions committed in the past”. The understanding that we are the Lord of Love, that there is only the one Self appearing inside us and outside, is vital to allow us to remove doubts and release guilt and shame. When we feel we are separate to others and that our own self is found only inside our body, we will feel guilt and shame for actions done to other beings. When we see that all that exists is the one Self appearing everywhere then nobody has any karma left. Cause and effect fall away and we realise we have only ever been interacting with our own Self in its many disguises. The end of this section confirms this for us and again declares the Truth. “The Lord of Love is before and behind. He extends to the right and to the left. He extends above; he extends below. There is no one here but the Lord of Love. He alone is; in truth, he alone is.”

Part 3 – Chapter 1

This section starts with the often quoted analogy of the two birds on the same tree. One of the birds is eating the sweet and sour fruits of the tree and this is the ego. The other bird is the Self and this one just sits and watches, it is detached. Observing and yet not bound to experience pain and pleasure in an endless cycle. The first bird has to keep experiencing pain and pleasure which are products of the mind. The ego/mind can only categorise or label good and bad and it is duty bound to keep experiencing pain or pleasure based on whether something is wanted or unwanted. By contrast, the Self is not limited to any categories and experiences pain and pleasure alike with great equanimity. It is not disturbed by any experience at all. (1-3)

“Seeing him in all creatures, the wise forget themselves in the service of all.” The wise are those who see the Lord of Love everywhere they turn and this has come to include even their own body and mind. They forget their separate sense of self and everything they thought they knew about themselves and are freed from suffering. We must forget our separate self to remember the Unitive Self, for both cannot exist together and either the Unitive Self or the separate self can be experienced at any one time. Whichever one we focus on will become more obvious to us. After we have seen that there is only One of us here, we must come to focus on that and forget all ideas of “me and other”. Then we will become like the sages who are free from self-will of the separate self. “Truth is the way; truth is the goal of life, reached by sages who are free from self-will.” (4-7)

“Beyond the reach of the senses is he, but not beyond the reach of a mind stilled through the practice of deep meditation.” We cannot perceive the Self with our senses because these can only see objects. Paradoxically, when we realise that the Self is everything we can perceive, even when our eyes see objects, our heart sees the Self. The mind that has been stilled by meditation is able to see the Self because it is no longer wasting energy thinking about all the other things and beings it used to feel existed. All the life force that is freed up by the recognition of the falsehood of all “other” things and beings collects and allows us to perceive the Self. Before we have practised meditation on the Self, our attention or mind is constantly pulled around by thoughts of one thing or another. When we realise that no matter what we seem to be thinking about, we are thinking about the Self then the mind loses its fascination with objects. In seeing the non-difference of any object, because we see its essence is always the same as all objects, we are free to let go of the need to think and the mind becomes quiet.

As this section comes to an end, we see guidance that to find our own fulfilment we should love and honour the illumined sage. "Sages are granted all the help they need in everything they do to serve the Lord. Let those who seek fulfilment love and honour the illumined sage." In actuality, there is no difference between loving an illumined sage and the Lord of Love. The real sage is only an embodiment of the Lord of Love, having deeply realised it and allowed it to transform their entire lives. They are so transformed that every act or word they say is an offering to the Lord, from the Lord and therefore must come to pass. This is why they are granted all the help they need. When a sage helps a seeker to find the Truth, they do so from the knowledge that it must come to pass. That certainty, beyond all doubt, is vital to success.

Part 3 – Chapter 2

"Not through discourse, not through the intellect, not even through study of the scriptures can the Self be realised. The Self reveals Himself to the one who longs for the Self. Those who long for the Self with all their heart are chosen by the Self as his own." In verse 3 we see this powerful hint at how to realise the Self. What does it mean to want something with all your heart? Perhaps it could mean to want it more than anything else, or that it is the only thing that you want. This may seem like a very difficult thing for a human being to do when we have so many other things that we want from our lives too. Perhaps we want a better job, more money, to find the love of our life but whatever else we want, our focus and attention will be split over all the things we want, including the Self. When we come to realise that everything is the Self, even our wanted lover, the money or job we want or anything at all, then our desire becomes unified and focused. What we really want (and always have wanted but never noticed) is the Self, no matter what form it appears in. There is nothing we could ever desire that is not already our very own Self. This realisation does not mean we have to discard desires for a more abundant life, rather that we see all things arise out of our very own Self and there is no need to think endlessly how we will achieve the object of our desires. Our life is simply the unfolding expression of increasing abundance. (1-3)

Speaking of the sages, the Mundaka says in verse 6 "They have attained the summit of wisdom by the steep path of renunciation. They have attained to immortality and are united with the Lord of Love." Renunciation is a very steep path indeed but it is not difficult. It is simple to do but perhaps challenging to find the willingness to do. Renunciation means to give up the thoughts we felt were true as a separate person and this is most of our thoughts! How many thoughts are from the perspective of the Self already? Not many at all! When we look at it this way, we can see why the Mundaka says that renunciation is a steep path but perhaps not for the reasons we may think. We all have loyalty to our thoughts and it can be very hard to give them up whilst they feel true to us. Our identity as a separate being can be so convincing that we may not even want to question our thoughts, let alone give them up! Only once meditation on the Self is progressing for us will we be able to renounce these thoughts easily when we have seen they are not true. It is easy to give up something that seems of little use or value but hard to give up something we feel we may need. Renunciation is a natural effortless outcome of meditation upon the Self. Our meditation then deepens even more as we are giving up more and more thoughts and so the circle goes around, ever deepening into more peace, love and joy. (4-8)

"Those who know the Self become the Self. None in their family forgets the Self. Freed from the fetters of separateness, they attain to immortality." This powerful statement is pointing us towards the simplicity of Self realisation. To know the Self is to BE the Self. We cannot really come to know the Self deeply without our identity shifting over to living as that Self. If we come to see there is no separate self and that all apparent others are really our own self in disguise, it will have a profound impact upon us, leading to more peace and compassion for those others. We will find that just by seeing what the Self is again and again, we are actually starting to live as it, perhaps even without trying to. After all, we cannot hold tightly to our ideas about our lives as a "someone" moving towards the Self when we keep seeing that the Self is right here and now. It is right where we think we are standing and also right where we feel we are moving to.

We see a warning, before this Upanishad comes to a close, that we should not try to teach this to someone who has not devoted their life to awakening. Such a person may not only be unable to understand what this teaching is pointing to but may also find themselves greatly disturbed by such teaching. It is best to offer it to those who have shown a great love for the Lord of Love and opened their hearts to the Self. (9-11)

OM shanti shanti shanti

May the power of the Mundaka Upanishad take root in your heart and blossom into deep illumination. Let it be so.

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