



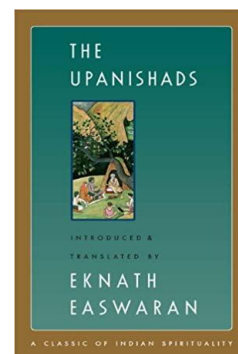
The Taittiriya Upanishad-Ascent to Joy

Introduction to the Upanishads

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

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.

Introduction

The Taittiriya Upanishad is a profound and yet surprisingly practical teaching leading us to real joy. The Upanishads collectively help us to realise the difference between temporary pleasure and eternal joy, but here in the Taittiriya, we find this clarified and expounded upon. There are precise instructions and invocations to help us understand how to tell the difference and to begin to detach from the endless preoccupation we have with sense pleasures. The senses and their pleasures are not to be shunned or labelled as wrong, but we can come to a deeper understanding that there is something called “joy” that is richer, deeper and eternal that we can come to live as and from. From this place of joy, we are also free to enjoy the human experience and all its pleasures without being reliant on anything to lift our mood and without having to experience the opposite of pain. This is a fundamental shift for us to make because having done so, we will not fear the end of our existence or the loss of any of our own self upon death of the physical body.

Before we dive deeper into the Taittiriya Upanishad, let’s take a brief look at the difference between pleasure and joy. Pleasure comes from the senses and will always have to end because it is based on becoming or acquiring something or on some experience we may have. Whether we are eating an ice cream, having sex or enjoying a good movie; all of these must come to an end when the experience ends. If we can come to understand that the pleasure is not coming from the external thing, but rather from the fact that whilst we are participating in the experience, we are not yearning for something, and so we automatically feel more fulfilled. Again, let’s be sure not to reject sense pleasures but to enjoy them without becoming addicted to them or dependent on them. Anything in the world of form that we come to rely on will eventually let us down because all forms have a beginning and an ending. Only that which is eternal may remain continuously.

Pleasure is in duality, the world of seeming opposites, and so when we reach for pleasure, we will be bound to experience pain. We experience pleasure when we have the object of our desire and pain when it is taken from us or is absent some other way. Pleasure and pain then can be seen to be functions of desire and its fulfilment or lack of. Again, there is nothing wrong at all with having desires, and life as a human being is full of desires. As we make the ascent to eternal joy, we will be free to reach for our desires from the background of joy, not needing to fulfil the desire so that we can feel good. In fact, when we pursue our desires from the background of joy, we will find we are much more able to let them manifest.

The Taittiriya Is also deeply practical and compassionate and has a section directly addressed to the householder. In the times that the Upanishads were first passed down by oral tradition (and later through written recordings of the great scriptures), many seekers of Truth could not leave their families, work or other commitments to go to a forest or an ashram. Such students were called “householders” and the Upanishads did not leave them lost without a guide. We also see this compassion in the “Dhammapada” teachings of the Buddha, a passionate and deeply practical teaching aimed at those who could not leave their village and follow him across India once he left for the next part of his journey. The Upanishads may have a sense of being written from a very high place spiritually, but never is that place without compassion for those who have full lives, jobs and families. This is never more valid than in today’s society where we have so much we fill our time with.

This Upanishad is in three major parts and the first part is divided into smaller sections, and in each section are often quite short passages. This Upanishad is one of the oldest, and so we see a different layout and style than the later ones.

Let’s begin as always with the invocation:

May the Lord of day grant us peace.

*May the Lord of night grant us peace.
May the Lord of sight grant us peace.
May the Lord of might grant us peace.
May the Lord of speech grant us peace.
May the Lord of space grant us peace.
I bow down to Brahman, source of all power.
I will speak the truth and follow the law.
Guard me and my teacher against all harm.
Guard me and my teacher against all harm.
OM shanti shanti shanti*

Part 1 - Section 1

Section one is a repeat of the invocation and is a calling forth of the power of the Self into form. Let us never again underestimate the power of our words, spoken as the Self to the Self. Perhaps stop and take a moment to recite the words again and allow them to reverberate through your body and mind. Feel the certainty in those words, feel the power and the conviction. Krishna is speaking these words inside you, as you. He is appearing as you to recite this invocation so that you come to remember your own Divinity and innate power.

Let it be so. Let it be so.

Part 1 - Section 2

Section 2 is very short, only a few words and yet intensely powerful. "Let us learn the art of recitation, which calls for knowledge of letters, accent, measure, emphasis, sequence and rhythm." The definition of "recitation" is to repeat something aloud from memory. Here is our first clue then, if we know an invocation, sutra or passage from a scripture well enough to be able to repeat it, it is beginning to become a dominant vibration in our energy. We can also notice this with a mantra, which begins to transform the tamasic and rajasic energy into more of a sattvic nature. Do we have to wait until the transformation process has taken its time? Or is there a shortcut? Perhaps this is where accent, emphasis and measure become important. Perhaps if we treat any important words written on a page as a pending download of energy to our system, when they are read in the right way, then we will see our whole awakening progressing. It behoves us to check what that "right way" is then, and we have been learning this already. Words read or spoken as the Self, with certainty of their source and definiteness of their power to manifest, will be spoken with a certain rhythm and cadence that happen by themselves. Allowing this to come forth in you is important. How would Krishna read this invocation? Where would the Buddha pause or emphasise a particular word? We do not need to know this in advance, of course, but only to recite it with this curiosity in mind.

If we stop to think for a moment about how many things we have read or spoken over our lifetime so far and how many vibrations we have invoked unknowingly, it gives us cause to stop and slow down with the really important words you read or hear in a scripture such as the Upanishads. Some languages have large vibrational components too, such as Sanskrit. In Sanskrit, if we learn to speak each sound and letter correctly, then that is enough to invoke total awakening, and it was designed that way. The various vibrations of the language as a whole remove the tamasic and rajasic vibrations and allow sattva to predominate; shortly thereafter, awakening happens spontaneously. Of course, not many of us have the time to learn Sanskrit fluently, but we each have already learned a language that is good enough for what we need. The words we speak are manifestations of the thoughts we think, and they have power. When we begin to realise who we really are, that power multiplies infinitely. We have all read about, seen or heard of the miracles of the great sages and avatars such as Christ and the Buddha. What did they know that we do not, as yet? Perhaps only a clearer seeing of what it means to be the Self, the source of infinite power and

creative ability. Perhaps they saw that something was always coming into form from formlessness, and that as humans, we have the capacity to consciously participate in that. Simply to come to know that it is Krishna reading these words is enough. His words always take the highest shape of manifestation in the shortest time, and sometimes with no time at all.

Part 1 - Section 3

Section 3 continues the invocation with a summary of what it would be wise to contemplate. Here we see a reference to the five categories of this world, luminous worlds in subtle forms, education, progeny and speech. "Those who contemplate these categories will have children, cattle, food and wisdom." Perhaps we may not want cattle or even children, but this Upanishad speaks of a way of abundance that comes from deep contemplation. Perhaps "cattle" represents our livelihood in these modern days and times, and maybe "progeny" represents our ability to create or give birth to anything we want. When we deeply contemplate these aspects of Truth, we will find our life changing in ways we could not have even dreamt of; we will be free and conscious of that freedom in each moment. There is no greater abundance than that.

Part 1 - Section 4

The fourth section continues the theme of invocation, asking for wisdom, devotion, strength and anything else needed to wake up fully and to see the Lord of Love in every moment and every place. This section asks for wealth in the form of abundant ability to guide others. "May I be enabled to guide them all to train their senses and still their minds; may this be my wealth, may this be my fame". As we begin to know the Truth so deeply and clearly that we are able to guide others towards it, then it must have deeply penetrated us enough to saturate our whole being.

This short section ends with the ultimate invocation: "I am your devotee. Make me your own".

Part 1 - Section 5

In this section we encounter some Sanskrit names for the vibrations of "bhur", "bhuvah", "svah" and the fourth which is "maha". The first three represent the earth, space and subtle heavenly worlds above and the fourth represents the Self. When these four vibrations are in harmony and are understood, we realise the Self and dive deeper into joy and peace.

Part 1 - Section 6

This section continues the theme of the four vibrations, urging us to chant them and realise the Truth through them. The vibration and effects upon the mind and body allow us to realise the Lord of Love as our very own Self. "Meditate always on the Lord of Love" is the instruction that we have seen many times before in the Upanishad, and yet it is no less powerful here. Bringing attention back to the Infinite Silence of our Being as often as we can is what is most important.

Part 1 - Section 7

This section discusses the elements as we see them manifested in the inner and outer world. Space, water, the moon, trees, our eyes, ears, tongue and skin are all manifestations of the elements or prakriti. We are told that the sage contemplates the nature of all matter and realises it to be the Lord of Love in disguise. "The sage, contemplating these sets of five, discovered that everything is holy." Understanding the essential nature of form as manifestations of the Divine allows us to find peace and a deep sense of joy that grows inside. "Man can complete the inner

with the outer". When we see the "outer" world to be our very own Self in disguise, we will feel at home wherever we find our body, and we will feel safe and peaceful.

Part 1 - Section 8

This section is very short and shows reverence for the "OM" mantra which is the beginning of all manifestation. Om is seen as the ultimate invocation and the highest of all mantras. It is a seed mantra from which all the others come.

Part 1 - Section 9 To the Householder

This beautiful passage seems to be of a different theme than the rest, but it certainly continues to instruct. It is meant for those who cannot leave their homes and live in an ashram, monastery or other spiritual community. It is a set of guidelines of conduct for each of us, and perhaps is more relevant now than when it was first spoken. We are urged to practise right conduct, to always be in a learning mode and teaching what we have seen to others. We are urged to "master the passions" and "control the senses" so that we are not following our desires as they pull our attention away from the Self constantly. There is nothing wrong with desires as long as we are aware of them and not being controlled by them.

Rousing Kundalini, the vital energy that flows up the spine through the Sushumna channel, is a vital part of awakening, but for most of us that may occur after a clear and deeper seeing of who we really are. Working through our karmic patterns, we will find Kundalini waking up by itself and helping to cleanse the mind and body of the effects of illusion. Our meditation on the Self will allow this to happen spontaneously and at the right pace. We need not make anything happen or try to forcefully awaken this beautifully blissful energy.

Part 1 - Section 10

Section 10 is a very short single verse which quotes the sage Trishanku. "I have become one with the tree of life." This symbolises someone who is equally at home in the heavens (astral or subtle worlds). The tree of life reaches into the heavens and is anchored into the physical world and so this is the perfect spiritual realisation. We are made of Divine Love but we are also deeply human too and belong as much here on earth as in any higher realms.

Part 1 - Section 11

The final section of this part leaves us with some valuable spiritual instruction, some of which we have heard before, but as always, the repetition is the key. We are urged to protect our spiritual progress always, but what does that actually mean? The teacher goes further and urges us to see the Divine in everything and to respect the sages. Trying to do the right thing, even if we do not always achieve it, is better for our spiritual progress than anything else because it is always the intention that overrides whether we succeed or fail. If we remember this, then we will never fail. As long as we try to do the right thing, we can let go of worrying about the results of our actions. This alone brings us great peace.

Part 2

In the beginning of this section, there is a subtle mention of the secret to abundance. It is similar to Christ's great words when he said, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33). Why should "all these things" be given to us once we have realised the Self or found the Kingdom of God? As we begin to realise that we are not a limited or finite being at all, we will begin to experience that there is an infinite supply of all

things we need because everything is arising out of the unmanifest Self. Our previous experiences of lack and limitation have been reflections of our sense of being a limited and separate being. When we feel that we are lacking, we will continue to experience lack as our daily life experience. As we begin to realise our infinite nature, we see it is not that we have infinite supply but that we ARE that infinite supply. All of manifestation is arising out of us, and there is no object that is not made of the Self. There is nothing else to make anything else out of. Realising this deeply means that we come to see that we can never run out of anything, and that all our needs are taken care of by life, and we are looked after. No longer do we feel that the world is a dangerous place. and we see a lack of resources is only a reflection of a lack of understanding by humanity of who we really are (1.1).

Verse 2 points to the fact that our bodies are not really just bodies. They are made of food. The food that we eat helps our body grow and form new tissues. In time, these bodies will be discarded, and they will become food for other creatures. Those creatures are food for others, and so on. When we begin to see this, we can let go of holding so tightly to them. Everything in manifestation is recycled over and over again, and nothing is ever wasted. These human bodies are gifts that will be taken back and used again for other things. We are urged to look upon food as a gift because it sustains life.

The Taittiriya speaks here of the knowing that, in effect, we have several bodies or sheaths, each one more subtle and higher in energy than the previous one, each one sustained by a different type of food. (These can be compared to layers of our aura or the chakra system where the physical sheath relates to the root chakra, etc.) The physical sheath (body) and the vital sheath are the first two. The vital sheath is made of prana and its divisions of vyana, apana, space and earth. Breath is also to be considered a gift because it gives life. Perhaps we tend to take breath for granted sometimes. We assume there will be another breath after this one, but one day that will not be true. Many paths encourage us to breathe more consciously, and this Upanishad says "Those who look upon breath as the Lord's gift shall love to complete the full span of life". (2.1-3.1)

Next, we find the mental sheath inside the vital sheath, and inside the mental sheath is the wisdom sheath. The practice of meditation and a discrimination between the Real and the unreal sustains this sheath, and it is made of detachment. From this we can intuit that the wisdom body is the finest of subtle vibrations and may only be perceptible to those sensitive to energies. Energy flows from the wisdom sheath down through the other sheaths to the physical body to sustain it. "Those who deny the Lord deny themselves; those who affirm the Lord affirm themselves" is a warning that as we realise the Self, we are actually sending waves of vital energy down through these sheaths or auric layers to feed the mental and physical bodies. To awaken to the Truth is to allow this to radiate down through the sheaths and into the physical world. We are literally affirming life (sustaining it) by our understanding of the Truth.

At the end of verse 6.1 is a powerful reminder that no such thing as illusion ever really existed, and that we need not try to get rid of it. "He who is all wisdom caused ignorance; He who is real caused unreality." If the unreal is made of the real, then it is not really actually unreal! This is true non-duality and what appears to be two is really only one. There is no opposite to Truth or Reality. Illusion is Reality in disguise. (4.1-6.1)

Verse 8 turns to the subject of joy and describes the amount of joy we feel when awakened to the Truth as being at least one hundred times more than the joy felt by a young, healthy and strong man that has all the wealth he could want. The joy of the Awakened being is compared to that of the Gods, Devas (celestial beings such as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva) and the Pitris (spirits of the ancestors) and found to be at least the same. The joy we feel after awakening is a natural aspect of the Self, freed from fear and suffering for all time, and naturally joy arises in abundance. There is nothing to fear and no ability left to suffer. How could there not be joy?

As we read in verse 9.1, without the sense of being the doer of actions, all that remains is peace and joy. “No more are they oppressed by the question ‘How did I fail to perform what is right? And how did I perform what is not right?’ Those who realise the joy of Brahman, having known what is right and wrong, are delivered forever from this duality.”

Part 3

The final part of the Taittiriya Upanishad begins in the form of a dialogue between the student and his teacher. The student is Bhrigu and his father, Varuna is the teacher. Upon asking what Brahman is, Bhrigu is instructed to first study the elements of manifestation such as food, breath, speech and mind. Then Varuna instructs him to seek the source of these because that is Brahman. Perhaps Varuna instructs his son this way to help him come to see that all manifestation is but a play of the five elements, and those elements are only the play of Brahman.

No matter what knowledge Bhrigu realised through his study, he continued to feel dissatisfied and asked his father for more. “Seek it through meditation, for meditation is Brahman” is the instruction that comes from Varuna again and again. This is a powerful instruction and points to the core of freedom from our mind. Whatever we come to know in our mind through realisation and insight, even the most profound understandings will not fully satisfy our hearts because what we really want is Brahman. Brahman is what we are and is beyond any relative knowledge we can acquire. Meditation is Brahman. She who knows meditation will also know Brahman. Meditation is not something we do or progress at, it could be described as a love affair with what is, and what is, is the Self/Brahman. There is nothing else for us to love. Attention will come to rest on the Self more often and for longer each time, until the attention and the Self are seen to be the same. Varuna is teaching his son that the answer to any question is meditation, bringing attention back to the Self, for this is not only where there is no suffering possible but is the source of the infinite unfolding of knowledge. “Bhrigu, Varuna’s son, realised this Self in the very depths of meditation.” Here we see the ultimate end of all meditation, to realise that “meditation” and “Self” are indeed synonyms. Perhaps if we have not seen this as yet, we still have some ideas about the Self or about meditation to look at more clearly. Meditation changes from something we are doing to something we are being and expands to include the whole universe as we deepen. (1.1-6.1)

As the dialogue continues, we see Varuna giving his son some guidelines to live by, and within these we see a declaration repeated over and again; “Those who realise the Self within the heart stand firm, grow rich, gather a family around them and receive the love of all.” Varuna references here some of the many benefits to realising who we really are. We find an absolute resolve and ability to stay focused on the Self (or anything we choose to put our focus on) growing. We grow rich because abundance is the natural state of a human being when thoughts are no longer being believed. Thoughts that we believe filter Reality and diminish how it can appear. As we come to know ourselves as the Infinite Brahman, the source of all things, then we come to experience infinite abundance in all the ways it can appear for us. Infinite time, resources, patience, love, energy, money, vitality and much more becomes our daily experience. We also find that we are loved by those around us so much more because they feel safe to open their hearts to us. An awakened being is not asking for anything in return for the love they offer because they do not need anything at all. When we know that we are the source of love, approval, security and abundance, we can allow it to flow from our Being and out into the world. We no longer need to try to get it from others in either a subtle or overt attempt to control our lives. We are free to simply be. (7.1-10.1)

In verse 10.2, there is a reference to the effects of Self-realisation, some of which we may already know but some may be surprising. “Realising this makes our words pleasing, our breathing deep, our arms ready to serve the Lord in all around, our feet ready to go to the help of everyone in need.” Our words become pleasing because as we realise we are always talking to ourselves, whatever we say is always aligned with whoever we are speaking to. Our breathing is deep

because we are no longer living from a “fight or flight” mode of being and find ourselves inhaling and exhaling in a much deeper, more relaxed way. We may even notice yogic breathing beginning spontaneously.

The Taittiriya Upanishad ends with a beautiful phrase: “This is the Upanishad, the secret teaching”. Seeing the Lord of Love everywhere and serving other human beings where we can is the secret teaching. There is nothing more profound than serving or helping where we can, knowing deeply that this person who needs our help is the Lord of Love in disguise. The Taittiriya makes it clear that there is nothing other to do than this. First, we wake up to the Truth of our own being and that we are the Lord of Love, then we begin to see him everywhere. As Mother Teresa said, “I’m a little pencil in the hand of a writing God, who is sending a love letter to the world.”

OM shanti shanti shanti

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