

The Upanishads



बृहदारण्यक उपनिषद्

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad

CHAPTER 2

1. Śvetaketu Āruṇeya came to an assembly of the Pañcālas. He approached Jaivali Pravāhaṇa, who was being waited on by his entourage. Seeing him, the prince called, 'Young man!'

'Sir?' he called back.

'Have you been educated by your father?'

'OM,' he said.

2. 'Do you know,' cried the prince, 'how people, when they depart, go in different directions?'

'No,' he said.

'And do you know how they come back to this world again?'

'No,' he said.

'And do you know how that world does not become full with the many people who depart to it again and again?'

'No' was all he said.

'And do you know how many offerings have to be offered before the waters take on a human voice, rise up, and speak?'

'No' was all he said.

'And do you know how to reach the path that leads to the gods or the one that leads to the ancestors — what they do to reach the path that leads to the gods or the one that leads to the ancestors? For we have heard the saying of the Ṛṣi:

I have heard of two ways for mortals,
To the ancestors and to the gods:
By them goes everything that moves
Between the father and the mother.'

'I do not know a single one of these things,' he said.

3. The prince invited him to stay with him, but the young man, not honouring his hospitality, ran away. He came to his father and said, 'Now, father, you said before that we had been educated!'

'What of it, clever one?'

'A princeling asked me five questions, and I do not know a single one of them.'

'What are they?'

'These' — and he told him the subjects.

4. He said, 'You should know me, son: whatever I know, I have taught you. But come, we two will go to him and live with him as his students.'

'You go, father.'

Gautama went to Pravāhaṇa Jaivali's house. The prince offered him a seat, had water brought for him, and welcomed him as an honoured guest. He said, 'We grant a boon to the blessed Gautama.'

5. He said, 'I accept the boon. Tell me the words you spoke in the presence of the young man.'

6. He said, 'Gautama, that falls among boons for the gods. Name something that belongs to human beings.'

7. He said, 'It is well known, that I have plenty of gold, cows and horses; slave-women, coverings and clothing. Sir, do not stint me of what is great, endless, unlimited.'

'Then, Gautama, you should ask for it in the proper way.'

The ancients used to go to their teachers by saying, 'I come to you, sir' : and so Gautama became his student by announcing that he was going to him.

8. He said, 'Gautama, may you not be displeased with us, nor your grandfathers either, but this knowledge has never before lived in any Brāhmaṇa. But I will teach it to you: for who could refuse you when you ask in this way?

9. 'That world is a fire, Gautama., The sun is its fuel; the rays its smoke; the day its flame; the directions its embers; the intermediate directions its sparks. In that fire the gods offer faith (*śraddhā*). From that offering King Soma arises.

10. 'Parjanya is a fire, Gautama. The year is his fuel; the clouds his smoke; the lightning his flame; the thunderbolt his embers; the hailstones his sparks. In that fire the gods offer King Soma. From that offering rain arises.

11. 'This world is a fire, Gautama. The earth is its fuel; fire its smoke; the night its flame; the moon its embers; the constellations its sparks. In that fire the gods offer rain. From that offering food arises.

12. 'A man (*puruṣa*) is a fire, Gautama. The open mouth is his fuel; breath his smoke; speech his flame; the eye his embers; the ear his sparks. In that fire the gods offer food. From that offering the seed arises.'

13. 'A young woman is a fire, Gautama. The loins are her fuel; the body-hairs her smoke; the vagina her flame; what one does inside, her embers; the pleasures her sparks. In that fire the gods offer the seed. From that offering a person arises. He lives as long as he lives, and when he dies —

14. 'They carry him to the fire. Then his fire becomes the fire; his fuel the fuel; his smoke the

smoke; his flame the flame; his embers the embers; his sparks the sparks. In that fire the gods offer the person. From that offering a person of the colour of light arises.

15. 'Those who know this, and those who in the forest worship faith as truth, go into the flame, from the flame into the day, from the day into the waxing fortnight, from the waxing fortnight into the six months in which the sun goes northward, from the months into the world of the gods, from the world of the gods into the sun, from the sun into that which is made of lightning. The person of mind goes to those beings of lightning and leads them to the world of Brahmā. Exalted, far above, they dwell in the worlds of Brahmā. For them there is no returning.

16. 'But those who win worlds by sacrifice, giving and asceticism go into the smoke, from the smoke into the night, from the night into the waning fortnight, from the waning fortnight into the six months in which the sun goes southward, from the months into the world of the ancestors, from the world of the ancestors into the moon.

'Reaching the moon, they become food. There the gods partake of them, as they do of King Soma, saying, "Grow full!": "Wane!"

'When that passes away for them, they enter into space, from space into the air, from the air into the rain, from the rain into the earth.

'Reaching the earth, they become food. They are offered again in the fire of a man, and from that are born in the fire of a young woman, rising again to the worlds. So they circle around. But those who do not know the two paths become worms, flying things, and everything that bites.'



कठ उपनिषद्

Kāṭha Upaniṣad

BOOK I

1. OM. Uśan Vājaśravasa once offered a sacrifice entailing the giving away of all his possessions. He had a son called Naciketas.
2. Though he was just a boy, when the gifts of cattle were being led away, faith entered him and he thought:
3. 'They have drunk their water and eaten their grass,
Have given their milk, senseless ones:
"Joyless" are the worlds called
To which goes the one who gives these.'
4. And he said to his father, 'Daddy, to whom will you give *me*?' A second and a third time he said it.
'I give you to Death!'
5. 'First of many I go;
Midst of many I go.
What work has Yama to do
That he will be doing with me?'
6. 'Looking towards those before me
And looking back at those who come after.
Like the crops a mortal ripens
And like the crops springs up again.'
7. As fire a Brāhmaṇa
Guest enters a house,
And so they quench him.
Bring water, son of Vivasvat!
8. From that man of little wit
In whose house he stays, unfed,
A Brāhmaṇa takes hope and expectation,
Friendship, happiness, action and merit,
sons and cattle — everything.
9. 'Brahmā, since you, a guest to be honoured,

Have stayed three nights in my house, unfed,
Homage to you, Brahmā! May it be well with me!

Choose three boons.'

10. 'May Gautama, his mind at peace,
well-disposed,
His anger towards me gone, O Death,
Greet me, content, when I am released by you.
I choose this as the first of the three boons.'
11. 'Auddālaka Āruṇi, released by me,
Shall be content as before.
He shall sleep well nights, his anger gone,
Once he has seen you set free from the
mouth of Death.'
12. 'In the heavenly world there is no fear:
You are not there, nor does one fear old age:
Having crossed over both hunger and thirst,
One rejoices in that heavenly world beyond
sorrow.'
13. 'You teach me, Death, about the heavenly fire.
Tell it to me, who have faith.
The heavenly worlds share in immortality.
I choose this by way of my second boon.'
14. 'I will tell you, Naciketas, so listen to me
And learn of the heavenly fire.
Know of this, which is kept in a secret place —
How to win an endless world, and remain
there.'
15. He taught him of the fire, the beginning of the
world,
What bricks to use and how many, and how
to build it —
And he repeated it back as it had been told to
him.
Then Death, satisfied, spoke again.

16. The great-hearted (*mahātman*) one, pleased,
said,
 'Today I give you another favour:
This fire will be known by your name.
 Grasp this chain with its many forms.
17. 'The one of three Nāciketa-fires, who has
attained union with the three,
 Who does the three works, crosses over
 birth and death.
Knowing the god, worthy of offerings, who
knows all that is born from *brahman*,
 And building the fires, he reaches this
 surpassing peace.
18. 'The one of three Nāciketa-fires, knowing
this threesome,
 Who, knowing this, builds up the Nāciketa,
Thrusting Death's snares from before him,
 Going beyond sorrow, rejoices in a
 heavenly world.
19. 'Naciketas, since you chose the heavenly fire
 By way of your second boon,
Folk will speak of this fire as yours.
 Naciketas, choose your third boon.'
20. 'There is doubt concerning a man who has
departed.
 Some say, "He is", and others say, "He is
 not."
Taught by you, I would know this.
 This is the third of my boons.'
21. 'This was doubted here too, by the gods
before:
 It is a subtle *dharma*, not easily understood.
Choose a different boon, Naciketas.
 Do not, do not insist: release me from this.'
22. 'So this was doubted here too, by the gods!
 Since you, Death, tell me it is not easily
 understood,
And no one else can be found who can teach
this as you can,
 There is no boon to equal this.'
23. 'Choose a hundred years, sons and
grandsons,
 Many cattle, elephants, gold, horses:
Choose a great estate of land,
 And yourself live as many autumns as you
 will.
24. 'If you think fit, choose another boon, equal to
this,
 Wealth and long life too.
Naciketas, enter a great realm of desires:
 I will make you the enjoyer of your desires.
25. 'Whatsoever desires are hard to obtain in the
mortal world,
 Ask for them all, at your ill.
Here are fair ladies, with chariots, with
musical instruments,
 Their like not to be won by men.
Enjoy yourself with them — I give them to you
—Naciketas, but do not ask me about dying.'
26. 'Ephemeral things, Ender! Since they wear out
 The potency of all a mortal's faculties,
And all life is so short,
 The chariots are yours, the dance and song
 yours still.
27. 'A human being cannot be satisfied by wealth.
 Shall we get wealth if we have seen you?
We shall live just as long as *you* decree.
 That boon of mine is the only one to choose.
28. 'Once he has encountered the agelessness of
the immortals,
 How could the ageing mortal, dwelling on
 earth below, understanding this,
Contemplating their beauty, pleasures and
delights,
 Find pleasure in very long life?

29. 'Tell us, Death, what people are doubtful of
In the great matter of their passing away.
Naciketas chooses no other boon but this one
That is so deeply hidden.'

BOOK II

1. 'The better is one thing, the pleasanter another:
Both bind a man, to different ends.
Of the two, it is well for the one who chooses the better.
The one who chooses the pleasanter fails of his end.
 2. 'When both have examined the better and the pleasanter human course,
The wise one discriminates between the two.
The wise one chooses the better over the pleasanter;
The foolish one chooses the pleasanter, for the sake of getting and enjoying.
 3. 'You, Naciketas, contemplating desires
Both pleasant and pleasant-appearing,
have let them go.
You have not taken on this chain made of wealth
Into which many human beings have plunged.
 4. 'These two are far apart, disparate,
Ignorance and what is called wisdom.
I think Naciketas is a seeker of wisdom:
Many desires have not distracted you.
 5. 'Living in the midst of ignorance,
Wise in their own view, thinking themselves learned,
The foolish rush about,
Like blind men led by one who is blind.
 6. 'Intoxicated, deluded by the glamour of riches,
The childish one does not see that he must pass away:
Thinking, "This is the world:
there is no other",
Again and again he comes into my power.
 7. 'What many will not get the chance even to hear of,
What many, though hearing, do not know —
Wonderful is the speaker of it, skilled the winner of it,
Wonderful the knower of it, taught by a skilled one.
 8. 'Through the teaching of an inferior man it cannot easily be known,
Though it be thought about in many ways:
There is no way to it without another's teaching,
For it is subtler than the subtle, not to be reasoned out.
 9. 'This thought, which cannot be grasped by reasoning,
Yet is easily known when taught by another,
You, my dear, have grasped. How steadfast in truth you are!
May we find another questioner like you!
- [Naciketas:]
10. 'I know that what is called treasure is impermanent,
That what is constant cannot be got through inconstant means,
So I have built the Naciketa-fire:
Through impermanent objects I have won the permanent.'

[Yama:]

11. 'Fulfilment of desire, a firm foundation in the world,
Infinity of power, the further shore of fearlessness,
Greatness of praise, a wide-ranging foundation,
Naciketas, you have seen, and, being wise, have steadfastly let go.
12. 'By the study of the yoga of the self, the wise one knows as god
That which is hard to see, that is deeply hidden,
That lies in a secret place, that rests in the depths, ancient,
And abandons joy and sorrow.
13. 'Hearing and grasping this, a mortal,
Drawing out that which belongs to *dharma*, attains this subtle one.
Then he rejoices, for he has won what is worthy of rejoicing.
I consider Naciketas a fitting home for this.
14. 'It is different from *dharma*, different from *not-dharma*,
Different from this that is made and unmade,
Different from both past and future.
Tell me what you see!'
- [Naciketas cannot, so Yama continues:]
15. 'The word which all the Vedas recollect, .
Of which all ascetic practices speak,
Searching for which folk live as students of *brahman*,
I will tell you in brief.
It is OM.
16. 'This syllable is *brahman*.
This syllable is supreme.
Knowing this syllable,

Whatever one wishes for one has.

17. 'This support is the best.
This support is supreme.
Knowing this support,
One is honoured in the world of Brahmā.
18. 'The wise one is not born, nor does it die.
It is not from anywhere, nor was it anyone.
Unborn, everlasting, eternal, primeval,
It is not slain when the body is slain.
19. 'If the slayer thinks it slays;
If the one who is slain thinks *it* is slain:
Neither of them understands.
It does not slay, nor is it slain.
20. 'Subtler than the subtle, greater than the great,
The self is hidden in the secret place of a being.
One without will, through the creator's favour,
Sees the greatness of the self, his sorrow at an end.
21. 'Sitting, it travels far.
Lying down, it goes everywhere.
Who else but I (*mad-*) is able to know
The god who is ever delighted (*madāmada*).
22. 'Knowing this great all-pervading self —
Bodiless among bodies,
Stable among the unstable
The wise one does not grieve.
23. 'The self cannot be won by speaking,
Nor by intelligence or much learning.
It can be won by the one whom it chooses.
To him the self reveals its own form.
24. 'Neither the one who has not ceased from wrongdoing,
Nor the unpeaceful nor the unconcentrated,
Nor the one of unpeaceful mind

Can win it through knowing.

25. 'The one for whom priesthood (*brahman*) and royalty (*kṣatra*),
Both, are the rice
And death is the sauce:
Who, truly, knows where he is?

BOOK VI

1. 'There is an eternal pipal tree
With its roots above, its branches below.
It is the bright; it is *brahman*;
It is called the immortal.
On it all the worlds depend:
No one goes beyond it.
This is that.
2. 'Whatever there is that moves,
The breath impels it as it is sent forth.
It is a great terror, an upraised thunderbolt.
They who know this become immortal.
3. 'From fear of it, Agni burns.
From fear, Sūrya shines.
From fear both Indra and Vāyu,
And Death, as fifth, run on.
4. 'If one has been able to wake up to it here
Before the break-up of the body,
One is fitted to attain a body
In the worlds of creation.
5. 'In oneself, it appears as though in a mirror;
In the world of the ancestors, as though in
a dream;
In the world of the *gandharvas*, as though it
appeared in water;
In the world of Brahmā, as though in bright
light and shadow.
6. 'Knowing the senses to be separate,
Likewise the rising and setting
Of things that arise separately,
The wise one does not grieve.

7. 'The mind is higher than the senses,
Being (*sattva*) higher than the mind:
The great self is above being,
The unmanifest higher than the great.
8. 'Above the unmanifest is the person,
Pervading and without mark,
Knowing which, a being is liberated
And reaches immortality.
9. 'Its form is not present to the sight
No one sees it with the eye.
The wise one, adept in mind, sees it in his
heart.
Those who know it become immortal.
10. 'When the five knowings cease,
Together with the mind,
And the intelligence does not stir,
They call that the highest bourn.
11. 'This steadfast control of the senses
Is known as "yoga" —
Then one becomes undistracted:
For yoga is the origin and the passing away.
12. 'It cannot be won
By speech or mind or eye.
How can it be grasped in any other way
Than by one saying, "It is!"
13. 'It can be grasped so: "It is!"
Through the real nature of both.
When it has been grasped so: "It is!"
Its real nature becomes clear.
14. 'When all the desires that dwell
In one's heart are let go,
Mortal becomes immortal:
One reaches *brahman* here.

15. 'When all the knots of
The heart here are broken,
Mortal becomes immortal:
This is the teaching.
16. 'A hundred and one are the channels of the
heart.
Of them, one flows out through the head.
Going up by it, one reaches immortality.
Others, on departing, go in all directions.
17. 'The person, a thumb in length, in the midst
of the self,
Ever resting in the hearts of people,
One should by wisdom draw out from one's
own body
Like the cane from a *muñja*-reed.
One should know it as the bright, the
immortal.
One should know it as the bright, the
immortal.'
18. Naciketas, having received this knowledge,
taught by Death,
And the complete method of yoga,
Attaining *brahman*, became free of impurity,
deathless,
And so will any other who knows it in
relation to the self (*ātman*).

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छान्दोग्य उपनिषद्

Chāndogya Upaniṣad

BOOK VI

CHAPTER I

1. OM. There once was a boy called Śvetaketu
Āruṇeya . His father said to him, Śvetaketu, go
and live as a *brahmacārin*. Good lad, there is no
one in our family who is just a Brāhmaṇa by
birth, without learning.'

2. So at twelve years old he went, and at
twenty-four years old he returned, having learned
all the Vedas, haughty, proud of his learning, and
opinionated. His father said to him, Śvetaketu,
good lad, since you are haughty, proud of your
learning, and opinionated, did you ask for the
symbolic statement
3. 'by which the unheard becomes heard, the
unthought thought, and the unknown known?'
'Blessed one, what sort of symbolic statement
is that?'
4. 'Good lad, just as through one lump of clay
everything made of clay is known, so difference of
shape is just name,' dependent on speech: "clay" is
the reality.
5. 'Good lad, just as through one copper
ornament everything made of copper is known,
so difference of shape is just name, dependent on
speech: "copper" is the reality.
6. 'Good lad, just as through one nail-clipper
everything made of iron is known, so difference of
shape is just name, dependent on speech: "iron" is
the reality. Such, good lad, is the symbolic
statement.'
7. 'The blessed ones certainly did not know this,
for, if they had known it, how would they not
have told me? Blessed one, *you* tell me about it.'
'I will, good lad,' he said.

CHAPTER 8

1. Uddālaka Āruṇi once said to his son,
Śvetaketu, 'Good lad, learn from me about the
state of sleep. When a person "sleeps", as it is
called, then, good lad, he has entered into being;
he is merged with his own. That is why they say
of him, "He sleeps" (*svapiti*), for he is merged with
his own (*svam apīta*).
2. 'Just as a bird, tied by a thread, flies in every
direction but, failing to reach a home elsewhere,
returns to its bondage, so, good lad, the mind flies
in every direction but, failing to reach a home

elsewhere, returns to the breath. For, good lad, the mind is bound to breath.

3. 'Good lad, learn from me about hunger and thirst. When a person here "is hungry", as it is called, then water leads the food (*aśitam nayante*). So they call water "the leader of food" (*aśanāya* = hunger), just like a leader of cows (*gonāya*), a leader of horses (*aśvanāya*), a leader of men (*puruṣanāya*). Good lad, learn from me where this shoot has sprung from: it cannot be rootless.

4. 'Where else could its root be, but in food? Good lad, through food as the shoot seek for water as the root. Good lad, through water as the shoot seek for heat as the root. Good lad, through heat as the shoot seek for being as the root. Good lad, all creatures have being as their root, being as their home, being as their base.

5. 'When a person "is thirsty", as it is called "then heat leads the drink. So they call heat "leader of water" (*udanyā* = thirst), just like a leader of cows, a leader of horses, a leader of men. Good lad, learn from me where this shoot has sprung from: it cannot be rootless.

6. 'Where else could its root be, but in water? Good lad, through water as the shoot seek for heat as the root. Good lad, through heat as the shoot seek for being as the root. Good lad, all creatures have being as their root, being as their home, being as their base.

'Good lad, I have said before how those three deities each become threefold — each one threefold — when they come into contact with the person. Good lad, when the person departs, his speech enters into mind, his mind into breath, his breath into heat, his heat into the highest deity.

7. 'This subtle part is what all this has as self (*ātman*). It is truth: it is the self. *You are that (tat tvam asi)*, Śvetaketu.'

'Blessed one, explain it to me further.'

'I will, good lad,' he said.

CHAPTER 9

1. 'Good lad, just as bees secrete honey by collecting the nectars from different kinds of trees, and combine the nectar into oneness,

2. 'and just as there they do not keep any distinction, so as to be able to say, "I am the nectar of that tree", "I am the nectar of *that* tree", so, good lad, all creatures, once they have entered into being, do not know that they have entered into being.

3. 'Whatever they are here — a tiger, a lion, a wolf, a boar, a worm, a flying thing, a gnat or a mosquito — they become *that*;

4. 'This subtle part is what all this has as self. It is truth: it is the self. *You are that, Śvetaketu.*'

'Blessed one, explain it to me further.'

'I will, good lad,' he said.

CHAPTER 10

1. 'Good lad, the eastern rivers flow east and the western rivers flow west, and from the sea merge into the sea: That is just sea. Just as there they do not know "I am that river", "I am *that* river",

2. 'so, good lad, all creatures, once they have come forth from being, do not know that they have come forth from being. Whatever they are here — a tiger, a lion, a wolf, a boar, a worm, a flying thing, a gnat or a mosquito — they become *that*.

3. 'This subtle part is what all this has as self. It is truth: it is the self. *You are that, Śvetaketu.*'

'Blessed one, explain it to me further.'

'I will, good lad,' he said.

CHAPTER 12

1. 'Bring a banyan-fruit from this tree.'

'Here it is, blessed one.'

'Break it.'

'I have broken it, blessed one.'

'What do you see there?'

'Tiny seeds, blessed one.'

'Now break one of them.'

'I have broken it, blessed one.'

'What do you see there?'

'Nothing, blessed one.'

2. He said to him, 'Good lad, on this subtle part — the subtle part which you do not see — rests the great banyan-tree. Good lad, have faith.
3. 'This subtle part is what all this has as self. It is truth: it is the self. *You* are that, Śvetaketu.'
'Blessed one, explain it to me further.'
'I will, good lad,' he said.

CHAPTER 13

1. 'Put this salt in water, and come to me in the morning.'
He did so. His father said to him, 'Now, bring me the salt that you put in water last night.'
He felt for it, but did not find it.
2. 'Quite,' said his father, 'for it has dissolved. But sip from the side of it. What is it like?'
'Salt.'
'Sip from the middle of it. What is it like?'
'Salt.'
'Sip from the other side of it. What is it like?'
'Salt.'
'Throw it away, then come to me.'
He did so, and said, 'It is there all the time.'
His father said to him, 'You do not see *being* here, but it *is* here.'
3. 'This subtle part is what all this has as self. It is truth: it is the self. *You* are that, Śvetaketu.'
'Blessed one, explain it to me further.'
'I will, good lad,' he said.

CHAPTER 14

1. 'Suppose, good lad, that someone were to lead a man blindfold from Gandhāra and then release him in a deserted place; and suppose that he were to be blown to east, north, south or west, crying, "I have been led blindfold and released blindfold!"
2. 'And suppose that someone were to undo the blindfold and tell him, "Gandhāra is in this direction. Walk in this direction." And he, being wise and intelligent, by asking from village to

village would reach Gandhāra. In the same way a person who has a teacher knows, "It is only so long until I am released. Then I will reach my goal."

3. 'This subtle part is what all this has as self. It is truth: it is the self. *You* are that, Śvetaketu.'
'Blessed one, explain it to me further.'
'I will, good lad,' he said.



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KEY TERMS

ब्रह्मन्

brahman

Brahman

आत्मन्

ātman

Atman

धर्म

dharma

Dharma

सम्सार

samsāra

Samsara

माया

māyā

Maya

कर्म

karma

Karma

मोक्ष

mokṣa

Moksha

योग

yoga

Yoga

QUESTIONS

1. What is the primary concern of the *Upanishads* which shapes the whole Indian philosophical tradition? How is this teaching expressed in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*?
2. What is the secret teaching Death tells Naciketas about what happens after death in the *Katha Upanishad*? What does Naciketas learn about the path to enlightenment?
3. What is the meaning of the famous utterance “*tat tvam asi*” in the *Chandogya Upanishad*? How does this phrase perhaps sum up the underlying “vision” of the *Upanishads*?