



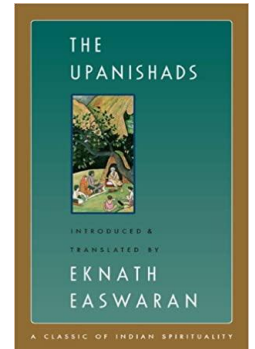
The Kena Upanishad-Who Moves the World?

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.

Introduction

The Kena Upanishad comes to us full of wisdom right from the start. It follows the Upanishadic convention of a dialogue between the teacher and student but this time the names are left out. Who were these powerful beings and what happened after this dialogue? We may never know but we can thank them by reading deeply with our hearts open to the wisdom herein. "Kena" in Sanskrit literally means "by whom, by what, whence, how, why, from what cause". The Kena Upanishad then is an expression, act or outpouring of self inquiry at its most profound. The Kena Upanishad asks this great question and also is the answer. What did this universe arise out of? What makes all this creation appear and disappear? By what power are human beings sentient? The Kena Upanishad has the power to answer these questions and more. Such questions are eternal and have been asked as long as there have been words to articulate them. These questions have been asked in every language, in every generation and will continue to permeate the minds of students seeking a clearer understanding of Reality. How lucky we are then that this student asked these questions of this teacher and that someone thought it worth preserving for all time. Enjoy the Kena Upanishad and may it awaken the spirit of inquiry within you.

This Upanishad appears in four main sections and we will look at each one in turn.

As usual we will begin with the invocation for this Upanishad:

Lead me from the unreal to the Real,

Lead me from darkness to light.

Lead me from death to immortality.

OM shanti shanti shanti

Let us speak these words with the certainty they convey. So shall it be.

Chapter 1

The student begins with direct questions, asking the teacher what power it is that makes our mind think, our body alive and is perceiving the world. What is it that is using the senses to explore the world? "Who is that invisible one who sees through my eyes and hears through my ears?" This question shows that the student is already able to notice that the Seer is in fact invisible to the eyes, it cannot be seen with our eyes, we know that something is enjoying whatever our eyes see and we cannot see that "something" with our eyes. We can only know it is here and it is watching. We can only know what it is not, It is not visible or audible. What sound does the listener make? It listens to sounds through the ears but does it make a sound? We can see, touch and taste the food we put into our mouth, we know if it is hot or cold, bitter or sweet. But what of the taster itself? Can we taste the taster with our eyes, hands or ears? This mysterious taster of food cannot be touched by our hands and it has no aroma, we can only know its presence. It silently watches and enjoys experiencing through the body and the senses. It enjoys thinking through the mind but it is not a thought. We call it "I" but do we really know what it is? How often do we confuse the One smelling with the nose that smells? Do we give the Seer a false identity as the eyes? What do we know about the One we cannot touch and yet touches all with the hands? (1)

The teacher answers these powerful questions by pointing to the Self that is the listener, the taster and the seer of all. "Rising above the senses and the mind and renouncing separate existence, the wise realise the deathless Self." What does it mean to "rise above the senses and mind"? Could it mean to realise they are not us but are tools that we are using? "Him our eyes cannot see, nor words express; He cannot be grasped even by the mind." What can we actually say about the invisible Self? There is no way to describe something that has no shape, form, colour or texture. All words are meant to compare one thing to another or even to compare invisible to visible. What can we say about that which is invisible only?

Quickly the teacher moves to deepen the seeing of the student. Instead of letting the student form a concept of the deathless Self, that he or she knows what it is, the teacher makes this profound statement: "We do not know, we cannot understand, because he is different from the known and he is different from the unknown. Thus we have heard from the illumined ones". It would be easy to say that we know what the Self is when we cannot see it with our eyes or touch it with our hands, we could say it is invisible and intangible, that it is unknowable. The teacher immediately points out though that is not the known or the unknown. Ultimately, we cannot ever really define what the Self is or isn't because it will always contradict us. The Self is invisible and yet it forms these eyes to see itself everywhere. The Self appears as the known (manifestation) and the unknown (the unmanifest) and yet it cannot be labelled as either. Even if we say it is both of these, the known and the unknown, we still aren't any closer to the Truth because in our labelling we have divided that which Is One into two categories. What can we say about it then?

As we ponder like this, we may notice a sense of frustration, anger or even hopelessness that we can never truly know who we are. Is there a part of us that loves to not know? What is it in us that revels in the mystery and would not even want to reach a final conclusion? It is the mystery itself of course. The Self recognises itself as the known and then the unknown. Finally, it recognises itself as that which is beyond all definition.

Over and over, we see the phrase "This Self is not someone other than you" repeated for the student. This repetition is vital and is very powerful when appearing in such a condensed way. The teacher describes all the ways the Self is recognisable in contrast to the body and mind and then reinforces the understanding that this is our very own Self. This repetition is needed because we tend to take something that we are looking for and place it outside of ourselves and begin to try to get to it. We imagine some future moment where we finally arrive at or become the Self which is impossible because it is what is already our very own Self. As this statement of fact is repeated for the student, it is beginning to cut through the layers of illusion and helping the student to slow down from the frantic forward motion of the egoic sense of self that is always trying to get somewhere other than where it is. The ego is sure that where we are right now is not where we need to be. The teacher's words here are a soothing balm for the student. As the words begin to penetrate the confusion, the student will experience a slowing down and an ability to rest in their own Self more often. The evolution in time of the body and mind of the student continues but without the suffering caused by the idea that there is somewhere to arrive at. The Self already IS and nothing we can do can make us more the Self than we are right now. Paradoxically, the more that we see this, the faster our body and mind can allow this to shine through as our life. (2-9)

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 turns up the intensity of the teaching and inquiry into the nature of the Self and although it is a very brief section it is perhaps one of the most powerful. The teacher's message has the ability to erase lifetimes worth of illusion. Perhaps even more powerfully, the student is able to receive this message and respond in kind. This is the highest use of a student and teacher relationship and something very powerful happens when an illumined teacher meets an open, ready and courageous student. The conversation between them uplifts them both and echoes powerfully down through the ages in scriptural form such as the Upanishads. Let's break down this immense section of the Kena so that we do not miss the sweet nectar it embodies.

The teacher says "If you think "I know the Self", you know not. All you can see is his external form. Continue, therefore, your meditation." It is impossible to really know the Self because of its invisible and intangible nature. Even if we take the physical form of our being, we still do not know it. In every moment our body, mind and life are changing; it never stays the same even for one moment. If we could somehow take a photograph of our life, including all that we are, the very moment we pressed the button the photo would be out of date. Even in your body as you read this sentence, cells have been born and some are dying, hair and skin is changing and your mind is changing content. Change is continuous and endless in the manifestation because it is the endless

expansion of the Self as our life, relationships and world. We cannot ever reach a final conclusion about the manifestation or the infinite invisible aspect. What can we know about the Self then? Only that it exists! Nothing else can be known other than this. No final conclusion can ever be formed because then we would have a concept of what the Self is. The teacher instructs the student that if it seems still that there is an endpoint to knowing, we should continue our meditation. The student replies with the humblest and yet insightful answer of all, showing that he has understood the teacher's words completely. "I do not think I know the Self, nor can I say I know him not." We cannot know the Self and we also cannot say that we do not know. Whichever position we stand in, we seem to create the opposite, whether we think we know or do not know we have not yet fully understood. The student rightly says that he cannot take any position regarding his understanding of the Self. It can be known by the mind and senses to a certain extent, the senses can perceive the objects and the mind can think that "these objects are the Self too" but this does not constitute a full knowing. To really know something is to BE it and the mind can never comprehend what the Self really is. The mind can be compared to a camera that can take a mental photograph of something and then it concludes this photograph is the totality of that thing. To form a mental image of the Self is simply that, an image in the mind. Whenever we form an image and think that we know what the Self is, life will be happy to give us situations that contradict that knowledge! (1-2)

The Self is only truly knowable by being it. We must come to realise that we are already the infinite Self that is everywhere. To really know the Self is to be it, just as to really know what another country is like, we would have to go live there, work there, speak the language and immerse ourselves in it. Reading about that country, meeting people who have lived there or even learning the language of that country whilst sitting in our own home is not going to allow us to know what it is like to live there. Nothing we can know about something is the same as actually being it. Nothing that we can learn about the Self will give us an experiential understanding of what it means to be it. Only the deep realisation that it is already what we are and have always been is going to change our lives, bring an end to suffering and allow peace to permeate our whole existence.

The Self is not limited by any category and to realise it we must begin to let go of all definitions of ourselves that may obscure that realisation. As we read in verse 3, the Self is beyond categories such as known or unknown. We can realise that these are two ways the Self can appear but they are not actually two. Oneness means to realise I can appear as form or formlessness and they are not opposites but complementary expressions of the One Being. To realise the Self, we must first realise what we are not; we are not this mind and body only. This deepens into an understanding of what it means to be the formless Self, that all bodies are included inside the formlessness are our own Self. This is the only way to go beyond death and live without fear. (3-5)

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of the Kena Upanishad begins with a powerful instruction in the form of a parable or story about the gods. It is a tale of the victory of the gods over the demons which can be taken literally, metaphorically or both! The teaching is perhaps very subtle to us and so merits deeper investigation. The gods have just won a battle over the demons and are claiming victory for themselves although all power comes from the Self (here referred to as Brahman). The gods have forgotten this and believed that they won the battle as separate gods. Even the gods can forget Brahman and the warning is that nobody, whether human, god or demon is immune to the effects of illusion or Maya. If even the gods can forget that no separate entity is safe from the arrogant assumptions of pride or forgetfulness then perhaps we can forgive ourselves more easily when we forget too.

Brahman appears as a being to the gods but they do not recognise him due to their pride. Agni, Vayu and Indra all try to find out who he is but fail to do so because they cannot see Brahman whilst they are under the effects of illusion. Again we see a profound teaching that we can either see the separate self OR the infinite Self/Brahman but never both at the same time. We will not be

able to recognise Brahman if we insist on seeing ourselves as a separate person. The gods became powerless in their pride too, unable to blow or burn even a single straw because their power came from Brahman. Each one of us feels limited and separate at some points along our journey and this is what the gods are reflecting to us here. When we identify as a separate being we will lose all the privileges of being Brahman. We can identify as a separate “someone” in two ways and we may be used to one way more than the other. We can identify as separate from the prideful arrogance of rajas (doership) and the urge to claim responsibility for our actions as the doer of actions. This will feel energising and uplifting when we do it, claiming credit for our successful actions, based on what we think success looks like. We can also identify as a separate being as the one who failed to achieve successful results of their actions and rather than being driven by pride or arrogance, we will be driven by unworthiness. Imagine for a moment how the gods would have felt if they had lost the battle with the demons, deflated, unworthy and perhaps even shameful. Rajas is a two-sided coin and can pull us upwards or drag us down if we are subscribing to it. (1-12)

This tale continues to unfold in the final chapter of this Upanishad.

Chapter 4

When Indra tries to find out who this being is, Brahman disappears and in his place is the goddess of wisdom, Uma. Here is a powerful spiritual teaching in itself as it points to the fact that when we actually try to find Brahman/Self, we find the forms disappearing and merging back into the Brahman. This does not mean that our actual bodies will disappear upon Self-realisation but that the ideas we hold onto about all the phenomena disappear. We come to see that no matter whether Brahman appears as a shape or as the shapeless, it is still the same One. In the place of Brahman appears Uma who is the goddess of wisdom and she tells Indra, that the power of the Self is what helped them win the battle. From Brahman comes the power of intellect and the ability to meditate or focus on something. We are urged to meditate on Brahman to realise him because “He alone is worthy of our love”. This does not mean that nobody else is worthy of being loved but that there is nothing other than Brahman to love. (1-6)

The Kena finishes as it began, with a dialogue between teacher and student. The student asks to be shown more of the Self. The teacher responds with the beautiful analogy of the body being the spiritual practices, the scriptures are the limbs and the truth is the heart of this being. Seeing how they all come together to make a whole being is beautiful. (7-9)

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