

Isha Upanishad

Subhash Mittal

Integral Yoga Studio

www.integralyogastudio.com
www.yogawithsubhash.com

919-926-9717 ♦ subhash@yogawithsubhash.com

What are Upanishads?

- Literal meaning – “sitting near” – implying sitting near a teacher to get knowledge; upanishad=knowledge
- Represent an earnest quest for Truth
- End part of the Vedas – Vedanta
- Each Veda has four sections – Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka, Upanishad
- Two major sections of Vedas – ritualistic part and knowledge part
 - Ritualistic part for personal and material gains - lower knowledge
 - Upanishadic knowledge: higher knowledge - of self and transcendent states of awareness.
 - Some Upanishads attack the ritualistic practices of the Vedas (explicitly and implicitly)

What are Upanishads (cont.)

- Vedas are without beginning – they contain eternal spiritual laws discovered by sages
- No human author attributed to the Vedas – called Shruti (“heard” during meditation)
- Subsequent texts like Puranas, Mahabharat, Ramayana etc called Smritis (created by human)
- Religion and philosophy of vedas called Sanatana Dharma (Eternal Religion)

What are Upanishads (cont.)

- 108 Upanishads are well known
- 10 considered most significant: Isha, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, MandUkya, Taittirlya, Aitareya, Chandogya, and Brihadaranyaka
- Not well organized - not a product of human intellect
- Contain knowledge revealed to rishis in deep meditation states – called Shruti (heard)
- No coherent or definitive philosophy; thus open to interpretation and difference of opinion
- Brahmasutra and Bhagavad Gita – organized and coherent formulation of Vedanta philosophy

Upanishads – basic information

- Shankaracharya wrote commentary on ten principal upanishads from Advaita viewpoint
- Main theme: discuss Brahman, cosmic soul – impersonal, mysterious, and supreme being
 - fit for contemplation, concentration, speculation and philosophical enquiry - not devotional or ritual worship.
 - non-communicable and unapproachable in ordinary state of consciousness

Upanishads – basic info (cont.)

- Atman – individual soul – suffers from impact of Maya
- Two 'mahavakyas' (great sayings) define the link between Brahman and Atman
 - "tat tvam asi" (you are that)
 - "aham brahmasmi" (I am Brahman)
 - These represent the oneness of God and soul

Upanishads – basic info (cont.)

- Result of tireless and bold adventure into human depth
- Not done under coercion or force, but as free pursuit of truth
- Living philosophy, open for verification in any time and place

Isha Upanishad Introduction

- One of the shortest of the Upanishads, is also one of the most profound. (Mandukya is the shortest with 12 mantras)
- Explanation of cosmic and personal consciousness, illusion and reality, ignorance and knowledge
- Practical application of spirituality and the preparation for one's final journey.
- How to attain immortality – freedom from the cycle of birth and death

Isha U. Mantra 1

“Whatever moves in this world is enveloped by Isha. Enjoy it with renunciation; do not covet any man’s wealth for whose wealth it is.”

- Whole universe is immersed in God. Through attachment, we create our own world, not seeing the presence of God everywhere. We suffer the five kleshas listed in YSP.
- Enjoy pleasures while giving up all attachment to them, and to face what's pleasant or unpleasant, in the spirit of detachment.
- Non-covetousness, non-greed (niyama Aparigraha in YSP)
- Non-stealing (niyama Asteya)
- All wealth is perishable, so no one really "owns" the wealth.
- See spouse, wealth and property as all belonging to God. Use them as means for realization God.

Isha U. Mantra 2

“Only through doing actions here, and in this way, one should desire to live a hundred years. There is no other way karma will not taint a man.”

- This is also the path of Karma Yoga as mentioned in the Gita - doing one's duty, as prescribed in the scriptures, with total dispassion and without worrying about the result of actions.
- Follow the edicts of the scriptures in determining one's duty. Acting in this manner we will not accrue bad karma.
- Recommended for those who are not able to follow the path of total renunciation as mentioned in mantra 1.
- If a man wishes to live a hundred years, he should do so performing duties and going toward the supreme goal.

Isha U. Mantra 3

“Asurya (devilish) is the name of worlds covered over with blind darkness; to them pass those who slay the Self.”

- Those who are ignorant of the Self are full of the guna 'tamas'.
- Those who are only given to sensual enjoyment are reborn into devilish births - insects, animals or bad families.
- Always perform your duties, ever doing so without desire for personal reward.
- Always think, speak and act according to the dictates of conscience and the call of the higher Self.
- Do not slay your higher Self by selfishness, sensuality and lack of sadhana, otherwise you will descend to lower states here and hereafter.

Isha U. Mantra 4

“The Self is one and unmoving, swifter than the mind: the devas (the senses) cannot overtake It as It darts before them. Remaining motionless It passes the running ones. Through It the wind carries the clouds”.

- The Self cannot be reached through the mind or the senses. It can be reached only by calming the mind and subduing the senses.
- The Self is all pervasive, omnipresent, and hence doesn't need to move to get anywhere.
- It is One, ever changeless.
- All the functions of the universe are carried out because of the existence of the Self.

Isha U. Mantra 5

“It moves and moves not. Far away, It is near. Within all, it is yet outside.”

- Extension of the same idea as in mantra 4.
- It is far for those who are ignorant and are involved with the outside world.
- It is, indeed, very near as it resides in the heart of everyone.
- One has to stop going after the senses to realize the closeness of the Self.

Isha U. Mantra 6

“But he who sees all being in the Self and the Self in all beings ceases hatred.”

- Who sees all creatures, beginning from the unmanifest Prakriti down to the inert matter, all animate and inanimate creation, in the Self. Who also sees the Self in all creation does not develop ill-feeling toward anyone.
- Similar sense in Gita 6.30 “ - For one who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, I am never lost, nor is he ever lost to Me.”

Isha U. Mantra 7

“When one realizes that all beings have become the Self, what further delusion and sorrow can there be for him who sees that oneness?”

- Extension of the idea in mantra 6.
- Sorrow and delusion arise from ignorance which prompts the ego toward intense desire and action. This results in bouts of pleasure and pain but no permanent joy.
- A man of realization sees the same Self in all beings. Hence there is no reason for him to feel either attachment or hatred toward any one (raaga and dvesha of YSP).
- The same concept is also given in the BG.

Isha U. Mantra 8

“Pervading all, It is radiant and formless, flawless and indivisible, pure and unaffected by evil, all seeing and all-knowing, transcendent and self-existent. It oversees the karmas of all jivas forever.”

- The allotment of duties to the different divinities is done by Sutratma or Hiranyagarbha (golden egg) in accordance with the different stages of evolution experienced by the individuals with regard to whom the duties are performed by the divinities.
- Similar to the definition of Ishwara in YSP, "Isvara is the supreme Purusha, unaffected by any afflictions, actions, fruits of actions or by any inner impressions of desires. (Sutra 1.24)

Isha U. Mantra 9-11

“Into dense darkness they enter, who worship avidya, into greater darkness, as it were, they enter, who worship vidya. The results achieved through the worship of vidya and avidya are different from each other. One who knows vidya and avidya together crosses over death through avidya and becomes immortal through vidya.”

- These three mantras (and also mantras 12-14) are perhaps the most controversial and have widely divergent and opposing interpretations by various authors.
- Avidya implies ignorance - not knowing the truth about Brahman. It also means practicing the rites and rituals given in the scriptures for the personal gain.

Isha U. Mantra 9-11(cont.)

- Vidya means superficial knowledge of the Self and the scriptures and also abandonment of karmas as enjoined by the scriptures.
- Definition of Avidya as per Yoga Sutras “Ignorance is regarding the impermanent as permanent, the impure as pure, the painful as pleasant, and the non-Self as Self.” [Sutra 2.5]

Mantras 9-11, 12-14

- Various interpretations:

Author	Vidya	Avidya	Sambhuti	Asambhuti
Osho	Meditation	Action	Relative	Absolute
Agniveer	Scriptural knowledge	Ignorance	Creation	Prakriti
Prabhupada	Knowledge	Nescience	Absolute	Demigods
Krishnananda	Knowledge of divinities	Ignorance of Self	Manifest	Unmanifest
Sw Rama	Knowledge	Illusion	Manifest	Prakriti
Aurobindo	Unconditioned knowledge	Phenomenal ignorance	Mental Being	Self-being
Shankara	Meditation	Rites	Hiranyagarbha (manifest)	Prakriti

Isha U. Mantra 12-14

“Into dense darkness they enter, who worship the Unmanifest; into greater darkness, as it were, they enter, who worship the Manifest. The results of these two Upasanas are different from each other. When the knowledge of the Manifest and of the Unmanifest are combined, one crosses over death through the Unmanifest and becomes immortal through the Manifest.”

- The Unmanifest is the original condition of equilibrium of gunas, viz., sattva, rajas and tamas. This condition is the primordial matter that is the substance of the universe in its causal condition. This is the same as maya or prakriti.
- The Manifest is that which is produced from this Unmanifest. This is the same as Hiranyagarbha (the cosmic subtle body).

Isha U. Mantra 12-14 (cont.)

- The word "sambhuti" literally means birth. Thus "asambhuti" could mean to imply not believing in re-birth - which leads to blinding darkness (suffering due to ignorance).
- The opposite is when you believe in re-birth but don't know how to get out of this cycle of birth-rebirth - thus leading to even greater darkness.
- By worshipping the manifest (Hiranyagarbha) one may be able to attain supernormal powers etc (anima, laghima etc). By worshipping the unmanifest, you may become fully absorbed in prakriti, which will lead you to final liberation.

Isha U. Mantra 15-17

Like a lid, Thy shining golden orb covers the entrance to Truth. Please remove it, O Supporter, so that I who am devoted to Truth may behold That. O Nourisher, the sole Seer, O Controller, O Sun, the supporter of all. Gather thy brilliance, draw together thy light. Through your grace, I behold That which is beyond. I am That. Let my life force be merged in the all-pervading Life. Let the body be reduced to ashes. Om. Remember the goal. Remember the goal.

- This is the prayer at the time of death to that Sun which is truth to open the doorway to realize the Self
- Let my body be turned to ashes while remembering all that I have done throughout my life

Isha U. Mantra 18

*O Agni, lead us by the good path. You know all the ways.
Prevent all distractions from the goal. We salute you again and
again.*

- Good path implies path of no return back to the cycle of life and death (called the Northern Path); the Southern Path is supposed to lead to a state from which one has to return again into the cycle of life.