

THE UPANISHADS

Part-1

Each and every word of the Veda is adored as the personification of the Supreme Lord Himself. However special importance is attached to the *Upanishads*. They are often designated as the crown of the *Ve:das*. *Upanishads* are defined as “*Upanishi:dya gruhya ma:nathva:th Upanishad.*” Which means the knowledge, which is to be learnt by sitting down near the preceptor is known as *Upanishad*. The term *Upanishad* is split up as ‘*UPA*’ ‘*NI*’ ‘*SHAD*’. ‘*UPA*’ means sit, ‘*NI*’ means down and ‘*SHAD*’ means near. The *Upanishads* were closely guarded secrets and were revealed only to few selected disciples. The selected disciple or disciples were made to sit very close to the preceptor and these treatises were taught in a very low tone or whispered into the ears of the disciples. Hence these treatises are called *Upanishads*.

They are also defined as “*Upanishi:dathi ithi Upanishad.*” Which means that which takes one nearer to the Supreme Lord. The *Upanishads* loosen the bondage of *samsa:ra* i.e. the material world and thereby take us nearer to the Lord. The *Upanishads* are also called as

Veda:ntha. That which comes in the end of *Ve:das* is called as *Ve:da:ntha*. The *Upanishads* form the concluding part of the *Ve:das*, hence the *Upanishads* are called as *Veda:ntha*. The term *Veda:ntha* can also be explained as, that which is the conclusion of the *Vedas*. The *Upanishads* are said to be the culmination of the *Ve:das*, hence they are also called as *Ve:da:ntha*. The *Upanishads* tell us about the Self (individual Self and the universal Self). Hence they are also called as *a:thma vidya* or *adhya:thma vidya*. The term *Upanishad* is also used to denote “confidential knowledge”.

One can find more than two hundred *Upanishads*. However only hundred and eight of them are accepted in the tradition. Out of these only ten of them are honoured as the principal *Upanishads*. They are *I:sa*, *Ke:na*, *Kattha*, *Prasna*, *Mundaka*, *Ma:ndu:kya*, *Aithare:ya*, *Thaiththiri:ya*, *Chha:ndo:gya* and *Brihada:ran:yaka*. Apart from these *Upanishads*, the great spiritual preceptors have frequently referred to *Suba:la*, *Swe:tha:swathara*, *kaushi:thaki* and *Maho:panishad*. Hence these *Upanishads* are also accorded the status of the principal

Upanishads. All the traditions (schools of thought) accept these principal *Upanishads* as the most authoritative scriptures.

The most acclaimed *Bhagavad Gi:tha*, which was revealed by Lord Krishna to Arjuna, is also regarded as an *Upanishad*. It is said that The Lord revealed the essence of all the *Upanishads* to Arjuna in His *Bhagavad Gi:tha*. All the Ve:dic religions are said to have originated from the *Upanishads*. According to the prescribed standards, one has to explicate *Veda:ntha Su:thras* in accordance with the above mentioned *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gi:tha*, to establish a Ve:dic school of thought.

The *Upanishads* tell us about the three realities. They are *I:swara* (the Supreme Lord), *Ji:va* (the individual soul) and *Prakrithi* (material nature). The *Upanishads* tell us about the various aspects of the creation, purpose of the creation, source of creation, nature of the soul, auspicious qualities of the Supreme Lord, the means of attaining the Supreme Lord and the nature of the Bliss after attaining the Supreme Lord. The process by which one can reach the Supreme Lord is called as *Vidya* or *Bramha Vidya*. There are thirty-two *Vidyas* like *Karma*, *jna:na*, *Bhakthi* etc, mentioned in

the *Upanishads*. Most of these *Vidyas* are mentioned in the *Chha:ndo:gya* and *Brihad a:raryaka Upanishads*.

The *Upanishads* also tell us about the various aspects of human life. They describe the various duties and non-duties of a man. They explain the benefits of leading a righteous life through various allegories. For instance that of Nachikethas in *Katto:panishad*. The *Upanishads* are said to be eternal. The highest doctrine revealed in the *Upanishads* is applicable to all times. The benefits of practicing the science prescribed in the *Upanishads* are unlimited. However the *Upanishads* are liable to misinterpretations and misrepresentations. The most confidential knowledge mentioned in the *Upanishads* does not manifest to everybody. Hence more often than not they are misinterpreted. It is advisable to learn them from a Spiritual Master who is immersed in the tradition and well versed in the scriptures.

BHAKTHINIVEDANA will reveal the most confidential knowledge mentioned in the *Upanishads* in the coming issues.

