

An Overview of The Upanishads

The Vedas 'The Knowledge or Wisdom' (approx. 4000 to 2000 BCE)

There are four Samhitas written in the form of hymns, outlining ancient knowledge of the cosmos and metaphysical world, in form of myths, rituals and mantras to be performed. They are complex texts said to be written by the 'Gods', i.e. Sruti, which are still being decoded. There are four Samhitas, the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda & Atharva Veda



The Brahmanas (approx. 2600 to 1500 BCE)

Ritual texts full of metaphor, based on the Vedas, essentially acting as manuals for priests.



Aranyakas (approx. 2600 to 1500 BCE)

Also following the Vedas, as a continuation of the Brahmanas but now these 'Forest' manuals also include the spiritual experiences of the 'forest dwellers' where they often focused upon the inner meaning of outer ritual.



The Upanishads (approx. 500 BCE to 1200 CE)

Part of the Brahminic Lineage, i.e., accepting the truth of the Vedas but following on from the Aranyakas they constitute an ideological revolution where practitioners moved completely away from the mediation of the Brahmin priests to have a direct individual revelation of the truth. This was a truly mystical tradition where with the advent of the Upanishads **Vedanta** is born, translating as the 'Development or Culmination of the Vedas'

The word 'Upanishad' is translated as 'shad' to settle or sit, 'upa' near and 'ni' down where it is usually taken to mean 'settling at the feet of a teacher'.

The Upanishads are a movement away from **Smriti** (memory) towards **Sruti** (direct knowledge)

Traditionally the number of Upanishads is said to be 108 but, there are somewhere between 200 to 300. They span a long period of time from the Pre-Classical era (i.e. before Patanjali's Yoga Sutras) to the medieval period. They:

Are Metaphysical Texts

Concerned with discovering our deeper reality

Raise existential questions such as:

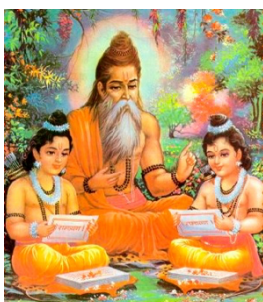
Why am here?
Who or what am I?
What is death?
What is my purpose?

Are Monistic (Monism)

All is One, where everything manifested is a modification of that One reality
'Wave on the ocean'

Utilise Jnana Yoga: Yoga of Wisdom

Knowing revealed via meditation and contemplation



Share the main themes of:

- Brahman is Atman
- We are subject to Karma
- We are on the Wheel of Samsara and subject to Reincarnation
- Moksha or Freedom is possible for us all.

From the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad:

**Om Asato Maa Sad-Gamaya |
Tamaso Maa Jyotir-Gamaya |
Mrtyor-Maa Amrtam Gamaya |
Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih ||**

Om, Lead us from Unreality (of Transitory Existence) to the Reality (of the Eternal Self),
Lead us from the Darkness (of Ignorance) to the Light (of Spiritual Knowledge),
Lead us from the Fear of Death to the Knowledge of Immortality.
Om, Peace, Peace, Peace.

*“Imperishable, is the Lord of Love.
As from a blazing fire thousands of sparks
Leap forth, so millions of beings arise
From the Lord of Love and return to him*

*The Lord of Love is above name and form.
He is present in all and transcends all.
Unborn, without body and without mind.
From him comes every body and mind.
He is the source of space, air, fire, water.
And the earth that holds us all.”*

Munduka Upanishad Part II v1-2

“As there can be no water without the sea, no touch without the skin, no smell without the nose, no taste without the tongue, no form without the eye, no sound without the ear, no thought without the mind, no wisdom without the heart, no work without the hands, no walking without feet, no scriptures without the word, so there can be nothing without the Self. “

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. 4 v11

For a moment, if you can, put aside your beliefs and imagine what it would feel like to know that everything is One, to experience everything as you.....