

The Lamp Within

*A Guru's Teaching to a Disciple
on Living a Content, Peaceful, Meaningful and Happy Life
according to the Upanishads and Vedanta*



*pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇam idam pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate
pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate*

That is whole; this is whole. From the Whole the whole comes forth.
Take the whole from the Whole, and the Whole alone remains.

— Peace Invocation of the Isha Upanishad

Drawn from the Isha, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka and Svetasvatara Upanishads, with the translations and commentaries of Swami Paramananda, Swami Nirmalananda Giri (in the 108 Upanishads collection), F. Max Müller and Sri Aurobindo.

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A Word Before We Begin

My child, you have come to me as Nachiketas came to the house of Death, as Svetaketu came back to his father, as Narada came to Sanatkumara. You did not come with a small question. You came with the oldest question there is: *What is this life for, and how am I to live it?*

You tell me you are confused about meaning, purpose and direction. Do not be ashamed of that confusion. In the Chandogya Upanishad the great sage Narada, who had mastered the four Vedas, history, grammar, mathematics, logic, ethics, the sciences and the fine arts, comes to his teacher and says, in effect: *"Sir, I know the texts, but I do not know the Self. I have heard that one who knows the Self crosses beyond sorrow. I am in sorrow. Take me across."* (Chandogya 7.1.2–3). The greatest scholar of his age began exactly where you are now. That confusion is the real beginning. The Upanishads call it *jijñāsā*, the sincere wish to know. It is the first sign that the soul is waking up.

You have given me a great pile of books, the 108 Upanishads, Swami Paramananda's translations, Sri Aurobindo's commentaries and Max Müller's Sacred Books of the East, and asked me to give you their essence. Here it is. I have not written you a summary of each scripture. I have done what a teacher in the forest ashrams would have done: taken what the seers saw and arranged it as a path, so that you can walk it. Each teaching rests on the verses themselves, and I give you their references so that you can always go back to the source.

The book has seven parts:

- **Part One: The Question.** Why we suffer, and why the old answers to "what is life for?" fail us.
- **Part Two: The Ten Great Truths.** What the Upanishads reveal about who you are and what this world is.
- **Part Three: The Purpose of Life.** Why you are here, and what a meaningful life actually looks like.
- **Part Four: The Path.** The disciplines the seers prescribe, made practical.
- **Part Five: The Daily Life of a Seeker.** A day, a week, a year; how to meet anger, fear, grief, success, money, relationships, ageing and death.
- **Part Six: The Twenty-One Principles.** A creed to live by for the rest of your life.
- **Part Seven: Passing the Lamp.** How to share this knowledge with others rightly.

The appendices hold the verses to memorise, a glossary, a daily self-examination and a plan for reading the original texts.

How to use this book. Read it once straight through. Then read one chapter a week, slowly, and put its actions into practice before moving on. The Upanishads give three stages of learning: *śravaṇa*, hearing the truth; *manana*, reflecting on it until every doubt is answered; and *nididhyāsana*, living and meditating on it until it becomes your own seeing. Reading is only the first of these. The other two are your work, and they will take the rest of your life. That is good news: your life will never again lack a purpose.

One more thing before we begin. These teachings feed the spirit, but they do not replace the care of a doctor, a counsellor or the people who love you when life becomes very heavy. The seers themselves honoured the body and the community. Take help where help is needed. That too is wisdom.

Part One: The Question

1. The Boy Who Chose the Good

Let me begin with the story the seers loved most, the story of Nachiketas in the Katha Upanishad.

A rich man named Vajasravas performed a great sacrifice in which he was supposed to give away everything he owned. But he gave away only old, barren cows, animals that "have drunk their last water, eaten their last grass." His young son Nachiketas saw this and felt *śraddhā* enter his heart: faith, but also conscience and the courage of conviction. Gently he asked, "Father, to whom will you give me?" He asked twice, then a third time. In anger the father snapped: "To Death I give you!"

So the boy went to the house of Yama, the Lord of Death. Yama was away, and Nachiketas waited at his door for three days without food. When Yama returned he was ashamed that a guest had gone hungry, so he offered three boons. With the first, Nachiketas asked that his father be at peace and welcome him home. With the second, he asked to learn the sacred fire that leads to heaven. With the third, he asked the great question:

"There is this doubt about a man who has died. Some say he exists, others say he does not. This I want to know, taught by you. This is my third boon."

Katha Upanishad 1.1.20

Death tried to put him off. "Even the gods of old doubted this," Yama said. "Ask for sons and grandsons who will live a hundred years, for cattle, gold and horses, for vast lands, for as long a life as you wish. Be king of the wide earth. Take these lovely maidens with their chariots and music. But do not ask me about death."

And the boy answered with words that are the first lesson of this whole book:

"These things last only till tomorrow, O Death, and they wear out the vigour of all the senses. Even the longest life is short. Keep your chariots, your dancing and your music. Man cannot be satisfied by wealth."

Katha Upanishad 1.1.26–27

Because Nachiketas refused everything that passes, Death taught him what does not pass. The rest of the Katha Upanishad is that teaching, and much of this book is too.

2. The Good and the Pleasant

Yama's very first teaching is the key to your confusion:

"The good is one thing and the pleasant another. Both, with different aims, bind a person. It goes well with one who takes hold of the good. One who chooses the pleasant misses the goal. Both the good and the pleasant come to a person. The wise one examines them and tells them apart. The wise one prefers the good to the pleasant; the fool, for the sake of getting and keeping, chooses the pleasant."

Katha Upanishad 1.2.1–2

Every day, many times a day, two paths open in front of you. One is *preyas*, what pleases now: comfort, flattery, the easy word, the extra helping, the purchase, the argument you want to win. The other is *śreyas*, what is truly good and leads to lasting welfare. Sometimes they coincide. Often they do not.

Most of the confusion you feel about "meaning" comes from having chosen the pleasant again and again, as all of us have, and finding that it does not add up to anything. Pleasure is real, but it does not build. It is like writing on water. The good builds. Each choice of *śreyas* lays a brick in the house of your character, and in that house peace can come and live.

3. Why We Are Unhappy: The Diagnosis

A good physician diagnoses before prescribing. The Upanishads give a precise diagnosis of human unhappiness, and it has three layers.

First layer: we look outward

"The Self-existent pierced the openings of the senses outward; therefore one looks outward and not within. But a certain wise one, desiring immortality, turned the eyes inward and saw the Self."

Katha Upanishad 2.1.1

Our eyes, ears, tongue and hands are built to face outward. So by habit we look for happiness out there: in objects, people, positions, praise. We never think to look in the one place where it actually is.

Second layer: we seek the permanent among the impermanent

"Children run after outward pleasures and fall into the wide-spread net of death. But the wise, knowing what is immortal, do not seek the permanent among things that pass."

Katha Upanishad 2.1.2

We want security, but we try to build it from insecure materials: a body that ages, money that fluctuates, people who change and die, reputations that fade. It is like building a house on a river. The sorrow is not in the river. The sorrow is in expecting the river to stand still.

Third layer: we do not know who we are

This is the root. The Upanishads call it *avidyā*, ignorance. They do not mean a lack of information. They mean the mistaking of what we are. We take ourselves to be this body, these moods, this name, this history, this bank balance. So when the body is threatened we feel *we* are threatened, and when someone insults our name we feel *we* are wounded. The Mundaka gives the picture:

"On the same tree the individual self sits, drowned in grief, bewildered by its own helplessness. But when it beholds the other, the Lord, worshipped and full of glory, its grief passes away."

Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.2

That, my child, is the whole of the diagnosis. We suffer because we have forgotten what we are. The cure is to remember.

4. Where Meaning Cannot Be Found

Before showing you where meaning is, the seers patiently show you where it is not. This is not pessimism. It saves you decades of wasted searching.

- **Not in wealth alone.** "Man cannot be satisfied by wealth" (Katha 1.1.27). In the Brihadaranyaka, Maitreyi asks her husband Yajnavalkya: "If this whole earth full of wealth were mine, would I be immortal?" He answers: "No. Your life would be like the life of the rich, but there is no hope of immortality through wealth." She replies with one of the great sentences of world literature: "*What shall I do with that which will not make me immortal?*" (Brihadaranyaka 2.4.2–3).
- **Not in learning alone.** Narada knew every science and was still in sorrow. Svetaketu came home after twelve years of study "conceited, arrogant, thinking himself learned," and his father asked: "Did you ask for that teaching by which the unheard becomes heard, the unthought becomes thought, the unknown becomes known?" (Chandogya 6.1.2–3). The Mundaka calls all book-learning, even the Vedas themselves, "lower knowledge" compared with the direct knowledge of the Imperishable (Mundaka 1.1.4–5).

- **Not in rituals and good works alone.** "Regarding sacrifices and good works as the highest, these deluded ones know nothing better. Having enjoyed heaven, the reward of their deeds, they return to this world or a lower one" (Mundaka 1.2.10). Good deeds are excellent and necessary, but finite actions bring finite results. The infinite cannot be bought with finite coins: "the Eternal is not gained by what is not eternal" (Mundaka 1.2.12; Katha 1.2.10).
- **Not in heaven.** Even heavenly worlds are temporary in the Upanishads. When the merit is spent, the soul returns (Chandogya 5.10.5–6).

When you see all this clearly you feel a kind of holy dissatisfaction. The Mundaka says: "Having examined the worlds gained by works, let the seeker arrive at dispassion" (1.2.12). That dispassion is not depression. It is like a traveller who has finally understood that the mirage is not water, and so stops chasing it and turns toward the real river.

Part Two: The Ten Great Truths

Now, my child, listen carefully. What follows is the vision of the seers. They did not arrive at these truths by argument. They saw them in the deep silence of meditation and handed them down from teacher to student. Do not merely believe them, and do not merely reject them. Hold them up like a lamp and test them against your own life. The Katha says this knowledge "is not to be attained by argument" (1.2.9), but it can be confirmed by experience, and that experience is open to you.

Truth One: There Is One Reality, and It Is Whole

"In the beginning, my dear, this was Being alone, one only, without a second."

Chandogya Upanishad 6.2.1

Behind the endless variety of the world, the seers saw a single Reality. They called it **Brahman**, from the root *br̥h*, "to grow, to be vast." Brahman is not a person sitting on a cloud, nor a force among other forces. It is the very being of whatever is. Uddalaka teaches his son with three examples:

"By knowing one lump of clay, all that is made of clay is known. The difference is only a name, arising from speech; the truth is that it is clay. By knowing one nugget of gold, all that is made of gold is known... by one nail-cutter, all that is made of iron is known."

Chandogya Upanishad 6.1.4–6

The pot, the cup and the brick are many names and forms, but one clay. The ring, the bangle and the necklace are many, but one gold. In the same way this tree, that star, your body and your neighbour's face are many names and forms of one Being.

The Mundaka gives the image of fire: "As from a blazing fire thousands of sparks fly forth, all of the nature of fire, so from the Imperishable, my dear, the many beings come forth and return to It again" (Mundaka 2.1.1). And of the spider: "As a spider sends out and draws in its thread... so from the Imperishable comes forth the universe" (Mundaka 1.1.7).

That is why the Peace Invocation says: *That is whole, this is whole*. The visible world is not a fall away from the Divine. It is the Divine's own fullness overflowing, and the Whole loses nothing by it.

What this means for your life: Nothing is truly separate from anything else. You are not a stranger in a hostile universe. You were made from the same "clay" as the stars and the saints, and you belong here.

Truth Two: You Are That (Tat Tvam Asi)

Now comes the teaching that is the heart of all the Upanishads. Uddalaka repeats it to his son nine times, each time with a new example:

*"That which is the subtlest essence, this whole world has That as its Self. That is the Real. That is the Self. **That thou art**, O Svetaketu."*

Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7 (repeated through 6.16.3)

Two of his examples are unforgettable.

The banyan seed. "Bring me a fruit of that banyan tree." "Here it is, sir." "Break it." "It is broken." "What do you see?" "These tiny seeds." "Break one of them." "It is broken." "What do you see?" "Nothing at all, sir." "My dear, from that subtle essence which you cannot see, this whole great banyan tree stands. Have faith, my dear. That is the Self. That thou art." (Chandogya 6.12)

The salt. "Put this salt in water and come to me in the morning." In the morning: "Bring me the salt." He cannot find it; it has dissolved. "Sip from the top. How is it?" "Salty." "From the middle?" "Salty." "From the bottom?" "Salty." "In the same way, my dear, you do not see Being here in the body, yet it is here indeed. That is the Self. That thou art." (Chandogya 6.13)

What is the "you" that is That? Not your body, not your personality, not your opinions. It is the pure awareness at your centre, which the Upanishads call **Atman**, the Self. The great sayings (*mahāvākyas*) of the four Vedas all declare the same identity:

Mahavakya	Meaning	Source
<i>Prajñānam brahma</i>	Consciousness is Brahman	Aitareya Upanishad 3.3 (Rig Veda)
<i>Aham brahmāsmi</i>	I am Brahman	Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10 (Yajur Veda)
<i>Tat tvam asi</i>	That thou art	Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7 (Sama Veda)

<i>Ayam ātmā brahma</i>	This Self is Brahman	Mandukya Upanishad 2 (Atharva Veda)
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What this means for your life: Your deepest identity is not small, fragile or lacking. The fullness you have been seeking outside is your own nature. You do not have to become worthy of God. You have to stop forgetting what you already are. Swami Paramananda uses the image of drop and ocean: as long as the drop thinks itself separate it is weak, but when it knows itself as ocean it has the ocean's strength.

Truth Three: You Are Not the Body, Not the Mind; You Are Their Witness

How can I be Brahman when I feel tired, irritated and small? Because what feels tired and irritated is not what you are. The Taittiriya Upanishad describes the human being as a series of five sheaths (*kośas*), each subtler than the last, like the layers of an onion:

Sheath	What it is	What it needs
<i>Annamaya</i> , made of food	The physical body	Clean food, exercise, rest
<i>Prāṇamaya</i> , made of vital breath	Energy, breath, vitality	Breath regulation, moderation, fresh air
<i>Manomaya</i> , made of mind	Thoughts, emotions, sense-impressions	Good company, good input, calm
<i>Vijñānamaya</i> , made of understanding	Intellect, discernment, will	Study, reflection, right decisions
<i>Ānandamaya</i> , made of bliss	The joy felt in deep sleep and deep meditation	Stillness, devotion, meditation

Taittiriya Upanishad 2.1–2.5 and 3.1–3.6

In the third chapter the boy Bhrigu goes to his father Varuna and asks, "Teach me Brahman." His father says only this: "That from which these beings are born, by which they live once born, and into which they enter at death: seek to know That. That is Brahman. Seek it through *tapas*, concentrated effort." Bhrigu meditates and concludes that food

(matter) is Brahman. Not satisfied, he meditates again: life-breath is Brahman. Again: mind is Brahman. Again: understanding is Brahman. Finally: **bliss (ānanda) is Brahman**. "From bliss all beings are born, by bliss they live, and into bliss they return" (Taittiriya 3.6). The father never gave him the answer. He gave him the method, and the son found the answer himself. That is how real teaching works.

Behind all five sheaths stands the Self, the pure witness. The Kena calls it "the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech of speech, the breath of breath, the eye of the eye" (Kena 1.2), and continues:

"That which cannot be thought by the mind, but by which the mind is able to think: know That alone to be Brahman, not this which people worship here."

Kena Upanishad 1.5 (cf. 1.4–1.8)

Notice: you can observe your body, so you are not the body. You can observe your thoughts and moods coming and going, so you are not your thoughts and moods. What is the one that observes? That observer is never itself observed, never ill, never insulted, never old. That is the Self.

The Mundaka's image of the two birds shows the same thing: "Two birds of beautiful plumage, inseparable companions, sit on the same tree. One eats the sweet and bitter fruits; the other looks on without eating" (Mundaka 3.1.1). The eating bird is the ego tasting pleasure and pain. The watching bird is the Self. When the first bird turns and sees the second, and recognises that they were never really two, grief ends.

What this means for your life: When a strong emotion arises, do not say "I am angry" or "I am anxious." Say "Anger is arising; I am aware of it." This small change of words moves you from the eating bird to the watching bird. It is the beginning of freedom.

Truth Four: There Are Four States, and You Are the Fourth

The Mandukya Upanishad is only twelve verses long, yet the Mukhtika Upanishad says it alone is enough for liberation. (The opening page of your 108 Upanishads volume quotes exactly this.) It examines the three states every person passes through each day:

- **Waking** (*jāgrat*, called Vaishvanara): awareness turned outward, enjoying gross objects.
- **Dreaming** (*svapna*, called Taijasa): awareness turned inward, enjoying subtle mental objects.

- **Deep sleep** (*suṣupti*, called Prajna): no objects and no desires, a mass of undifferentiated awareness that "enjoys bliss."

Then there is the fourth, **Turiya**, which is not really a "fourth state" but the awareness present through all three: "not conscious of the inner, nor of the outer, nor of both... unseen, beyond dealings, ungraspable... the cessation of the world, peaceful, auspicious, non-dual. That is the Self. That is to be known" (Mandukya 7).

The sacred syllable **OM** maps onto these: A is waking, U is dreaming, M is deep sleep, and the silence after the sound is Turiya (Mandukya 8–12).

What this means for your life: Every night in deep sleep you lay down your name, your worries, your possessions and your history, and you are completely at peace. You do not need anything to be happy in deep sleep. That shows you that happiness does not depend on objects. Meditation is learning to rest in that peace while awake.

Truth Five: Happiness Lives Only in the Infinite

At the end of his long teaching, Sanatkumara tells Narada the secret of happiness:

"No one acts without finding happiness in it. One must seek to understand happiness. That which is infinite (bhūmā) is happiness. There is no happiness in the small. The Infinite alone is happiness."

Chandogya Upanishad 7.22–7.23

"Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, knows nothing else, that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, knows something else, that is the small. The Infinite is immortal; the small is mortal."

Chandogya Upanishad 7.24.1

This is a precise teaching. Every pleasure you have ever felt was a brief taste of the Infinite: the moment a desire is fulfilled the mind goes still, and in that stillness the joy of your own Self shines through. You then credit the object. So you chase the object again, and it works less each time. The Upanishads say the joy was never in the object at all.

Yajnavalkya teaches the same thing to Maitreyi in the most tender passage of the Brihadaranyaka:

"It is not for the love of the husband that the husband is dear, but for the love of the Self. It is not for the love of the wife that the wife is dear, but for the love of

the Self. It is not for the love of children, of wealth, of the worlds, of the gods, of beings... that they are dear, but for the love of the Self. The Self, my dear Maitreyi, is to be seen, heard, reflected upon and meditated upon."

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.4.5

This is not selfishness. It means that what you truly love in everything you love is the one Self shining there. Love your family and friends, but love them as faces of the One, and your love will become free of possessiveness and fear.

The Taittiriya even measures this bliss. It takes the happiness of a young, noble, learned, strong man who owns the whole earth as one unit. A hundred of those make one unit of the joy of the celestial beings, and so on upward through the gods to the joy of Brahman. And it adds, again and again, that all of this joy also belongs to "the one learned in the Vedas and **untouched by desire**" (Taittiriya 2.8). Being free of desire opens the door to a joy greater than that of a king of the world.

Truth Six: You Become What You Deeply Will

"A person is made of will (kratu). As one's will is in this world, so does one become on departing from it. Therefore let one fix one's will."

Chandogya Upanishad 3.14.1

"As one acts, as one behaves, so does one become. The doer of good becomes good; the doer of evil becomes evil... A person consists of desire. As is the desire, so is the will; as is the will, so is the deed; and whatever deed one does, that one reaps."

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.5

This is the law of **karma**, and it is a law of hope, not of fatalism. It means you are not a victim of your past. You are constantly creating your future through the quality of your desires, your will and your actions. Desire becomes will, will becomes action, action becomes habit, and habit becomes character and destiny. Change the desire at the root, and the whole chain changes.

The Katha says the same about rebirth: "Some souls enter a womb to take a body; others go into stationary forms, according to their deeds and according to their knowledge" (Katha 2.2.7). The Mundaka adds: "One who desires objects, brooding over them, is born here and there because of those desires. But for one whose desires are fulfilled, who has found the Self, all desires vanish even here" (Mundaka 3.2.2).

What this means for your life: Guard your desires as a farmer guards seed, because every desire is a seed of a future. Ask often: "If this desire grows into my whole life, what will I become?"

Truth Seven: Death Is Not the End

Here is what Death himself told Nachiketas:

"The knowing Self is never born, nor does it die. It did not come from anything, nor did anything come from it. Unborn, eternal, everlasting, ancient, it is not slain when the body is slain. If the slayer thinks he slays, or the slain thinks he is slain, neither of them understands. It does not slay, nor is it slain."

Katha Upanishad 1.2.18–19

"The wise one, knowing the Self as bodiless within bodies, as stable among the unstable, great and all-pervading, does not grieve."

Katha Upanishad 1.2.22

Swami Paramananda comments that death "is nothing more than the casting-off of a worn-out garment." What dies is form; what lives is the one who wore the form. The Isha's dying prayer is: "Let my breath return to the immortal Breath, and let this body end in ashes. O mind, remember what has been done, remember!" (Isha 17).

What this means for your life: Fear of death sits underneath most other fears: fear of loss, of illness, of being forgotten. When you know yourself as the deathless Self, fear loses its root. Then you can live boldly, love freely and grieve without despair.

Truth Eight: The Divine Is Here, in the World and in Every Being

Some people think the Upanishads teach that the world is worthless and should be fled. Read them carefully and you will find the opposite. The Isha, which Gandhi said would suffice even if every other scripture were lost, opens:

"All this, whatever moves in this moving world, is enveloped by the Lord. Therefore find your enjoyment in renunciation. Do not covet the wealth of anyone."

Isha Upanishad 1

Sri Aurobindo translates the first line as "All this is for *habitation* by the Lord," as if the world were a house in which God lives. He points out that the Isha is a reconciliation of apparent opposites: God and the world, renunciation and enjoyment, action and inner freedom, the One and the many. You are not asked to choose between spirit and life. You are asked to find spirit *in* life.

"One who sees all beings in the Self, and the Self in all beings, no longer shrinks from anything. For one who knows that all beings have become the Self, what delusion, what sorrow can there be, seeing oneness everywhere?"

Isha Upanishad 6–7

Here is the foundation of all ethics. Why should I not hurt you? Because you are my own Self in another form. Why should I be generous? Because what I give, I give to myself. As Paramananda writes, when a person sees God in all beings, "how can he hate any living thing?" Grief and hatred both rest on the belief that we are separate, and that belief leads to competition and selfishness. Seeing oneness removes the cause of misery.

Nirmalananda Giri, in your 108 Upanishads volume, retells a lovely story. A king demanded of a wise man: "Where is God? Why don't I see Him? What does He do all day?" The man's young son answered. He had milk churned into butter and asked, "Where was the butter before?" "In the milk." "In which part?" "In all of it." "Just so, God is in all things. You don't see Him because you have not churned your mind through meditation." Then he had the king change places with him, the boy on the throne and the king standing below, and said: "This is what God does all day. He lifts up and casts down."

Truth Nine: Action Done Rightly Does Not Bind

"Doing your work in this world, you may wish to live a hundred years. For you there is no other way than this: action does not cling to the person."

Isha Upanishad 2

Many people think spirituality means giving up work, family and responsibility. The Isha says no: live fully, act fully, for a hundred years, but act in such a way that the action does not bind. How? By acting without selfish craving for its fruit, as an offering. The commentary in your 108 Upanishads volume connects this with the Bhagavad Gita's teaching, which is the practical flowering of the Upanishads: "Your right is to the work alone, never to its fruits." Do your part with full skill and earnestness, and leave the results to the Divine.

The Isha also warns against two one-sided paths (verses 9–11). "Into blind darkness enter those who worship ignorance (mere action); into greater darkness, as it were, those who delight only in knowledge." Mere worldly busyness is blind, and mere intellectual spirituality is blinder, because it adds pride. The seer says: "One who knows both together crosses death through action and attains immortality through knowledge." Use action to purify yourself and cross the troubles of mortal life, and use knowledge to reach the deathless.

Truth Ten: The Self Is Realised by the One Who Longs for It

"This Self is not attained by instruction, nor by intellect, nor by much hearing. It is attained by the one whom It chooses. To such a one the Self reveals Its own form."

Katha Upanishad 1.2.23; Mundaka Upanishad 3.2.3

And whom does It choose? Paramananda answers simply: "He who longs for God, him the Lord chooses." The next verse gives the conditions:

"One who has not turned away from wrong conduct, whose senses are not restrained, whose mind is not collected and calm, cannot attain this Self even by knowledge."

Katha Upanishad 1.2.24

"This Self cannot be attained by the weak, nor by the careless, nor by austerity without a goal. But the wise one who strives by these means enters the abode of Brahman."

Mundaka Upanishad 3.2.4

So realisation is both grace and effort. You prepare the ground with sincerity, purity, strength and attention, and the light comes on its own, as the sun shines on whatever window is opened. The Upanishads do not want weak, gloomy or careless seekers. They want people who are strong, alert, cheerful and wholehearted.

Part Three: The Purpose of Life

The One Purpose

Now I can answer your question directly. What is the purpose of human life according to the Upanishads?

The purpose of life is to realise who you truly are, the Self that is one with the Infinite, and to live from that knowledge in love and service to all beings, who are also that Self.

Everything else is in service of this. Your career, your family, your health and your relationships are not distractions from the purpose. They are the classroom in which you learn it. The Kena puts the urgency plainly:

"If one knows It here, that is the true goal of life. If one does not know It here, great is the loss. The wise, seeing the one Self in all beings, rise beyond this world and become immortal."

Kena Upanishad 2.5

Notice the word *here*: in this life, in this body. Not after death, not in heaven, not in some future birth. That is why your life is precious. A human birth, with a mind capable of asking "Who am I?", is the rarest opportunity there is.

The Four Aims of Life

Vedic tradition, building on the Upanishads, organises a meaningful life around four aims (*puruṣārthas*). They are not in conflict. They are rungs of one ladder.

Aim	Meaning	How to pursue it in the light of the Upanishads
Dharma	Righteousness, duty, the moral order	The foundation. "Speak the truth, practise dharma" (Taittiriya 1.11.1). Every other aim must stand on this.
Artha	Wealth, security, worldly means	Legitimate and necessary. Earn honestly and share generously. "Do not covet anyone's wealth" (Isha 1). Wealth is a tool, never the goal.

Kāma	Enjoyment, love, beauty, pleasure	Enjoy the world, "enveloped by the Lord," within dharma. Enjoy without grasping: "find your enjoyment in renunciation" (Isha 1).
Mokṣa	Liberation, freedom, Self-realisation	The supreme aim. Gives the other three their meaning and direction. "Know It here" (Kena 2.5).

A life of only artha and kama, money and pleasure, is the life Nachiketas refused. A life of dharma without the vision of moksha becomes dry and anxious. A spiritual life that ignores dharma, artha and kama becomes unbalanced and often hypocritical. The meaningful life holds all four, with moksha as the pole star.

The Four Stages of Life

The Upanishadic tradition also sees life as a pilgrimage in stages (*āśramas*). Wherever you are now, you can see your life's direction in them:

1. **Brahmacharya, the student:** learning, discipline, character-building. Svetaketu's twelve years; Bhṛigu's practice of tapas.
2. **Gṛhastha, the householder:** family, work, contribution to society. Most of the Upanishads' great teachers (Yajñavalkya, Uddalaka, King Janaka, King Ashvapati) were householders, and the Mundaka's questioner Shaunaka is called "the great householder."
3. **Vānaprastha, the forest-dweller:** gradual withdrawal from worldly ambition, handing on responsibility, more time for study and meditation. The Upanishads were called *Āraṇyakas*, "forest books," because they were taught to people in this stage.
4. **Sannyāsa, the renunciant:** complete dedication to the Self. In the Brihadaranyaka (4.5), Yajñavalkya leaves home for this stage after giving his wisdom to Maitreyi.

Where are you now? If you are in the middle of life, be a householder-seeker: fulfil your duties with excellence and inwardly turn more and more toward the Self. If you are past the heavy duties of mid-life, embrace the forest-dweller's spirit. You do not need to move to a forest. Simplify, hand over, study, meditate, guide others. Either way, your direction is clear: *from the outer toward the inner, from the many toward the One, from getting toward giving.*

What a Meaningful Life Looks Like

Drawing all this together, here is the portrait of a person living the Upanishadic vision. Hold it before you as the person you are becoming:

- **Contented**, because they no longer expect the finite to give infinite satisfaction.
- **Peaceful**, because they rest in the witness-Self, which nothing outside can disturb.
- **Meaningful**, because every act is an offering, and every encounter is a meeting with the One in another form.
- **Happy**, because they have found the source of joy within, and it cannot be taken away.
- **Fearless**, because "one who knows the bliss of Brahman fears nothing" (Taittiriya 2.9).
- **Loving**, because they see their own Self in everyone and hate no one (Isha 6).
- **Active**, because they work earnestly for a hundred years without being bound (Isha 2).
- **Truthful**, because "truth alone triumphs, not falsehood" (Mundaka 3.1.6).
- **Humble**, because "the one who thinks they know It, does not know It" (Kena 2.3).

Part Four: The Path

"Arise! Awake! Approach the great ones and learn. Sharp as a razor's edge, hard to cross, difficult to tread is that path, say the wise" (Katha 1.3.14). My child, this is not meant to frighten you. It is meant to make you serious. Now I will give you the practices. Take them one at a time.

1. Master the Chariot

This is the most practical teaching in all the Upanishads, so learn it by heart:

"Know the Self as the lord of the chariot, the body as the chariot, the intellect as the charioteer, and the mind as the reins. The senses, they say, are the horses, and the objects of the senses are the roads."

Katha Upanishad 1.3.3-4

"One who lacks discernment, whose mind is never steady, has senses that run wild like the bad horses of a charioteer. But one who has discernment, whose mind is always steady, has senses under control like the good horses of a charioteer... Such a one, with discernment as the driver and the mind as the reins held firm, reaches the end of the journey, the supreme abode of the All-pervading."

Katha Upanishad 1.3.5-9

Look at your life with this image. When you overeat, waste hours on your phone, explode in anger or lie awake chasing worries, it is because the horses are pulling the chariot wherever they like, the reins are slack, and the charioteer is asleep. The master in the back seat, your true Self, is carried off toward ditches.

Actions:

- **Wake the charioteer.** Before any significant choice, pause for one breath and ask: "Is this *śreyas* (the good) or only *preyas* (the pleasant)?"
- **Hold the reins.** Train the mind to stay where you put it. Begin with small things: finish what you start, keep your word to yourself, eat one meal a day in full attention.
- **Train the horses, don't kill them.** The senses are not enemies. They are powerful servants. Feed them good things (beauty, nature, uplifting music and words) and refuse them poison (gossip, violent or degrading input, excess).

- **Choose the roads.** You cannot keep the horses calm while driving them through a market of temptations all day. Arrange your environment so the right road is the easy road.

Katha 1.3.13 gives the inner order of control: "Let the wise one merge speech into mind, mind into the intellect, the intellect into the great Self, and that into the Self of peace." In practice: restrain speech by thought, thought by discernment, discernment by remembering who you are.

2. Cultivate the Four Qualifications

The Vedanta tradition (Shankara's teaching, which underlies most of the commentaries you gave me) distils from the Upanishads four qualifications of a ready seeker (*sādhana catuṣṭaya*). Work on them all your life:

1. **Viveka, discernment** between the eternal and the passing, the Self and the not-Self, the good and the pleasant (Katha 1.2.2). *Practice:* Each evening, name one thing you chased today that will not matter in ten years, and one thing you did that will.
2. **Vairāgya, dispassion** toward what is passing (Mundaka 1.2.12). This is not hatred of the world. It is freedom from needing it. *Practice:* Once a week, voluntarily go without one comfort you are attached to, and watch the mind with amusement.
3. **Ṣaṭ-sampatti, the six inner treasures:**
 - *Śama*, calmness of mind
 - *Dama*, restraint of the senses
 - *Uparati*, withdrawal from the unnecessary, a simpler life
 - *Titikṣā*, forbearance, patiently enduring heat and cold, praise and blame
 - *Śraddhā*, faith in the teacher and the teaching, the quality that entered Nachiketas's heart
 - *Samādhāna*, one-pointedness, the mind gathered on the goal

The Brihadaranyaka (4.4.23) describes the knower of the Self as one who becomes "calm, self-controlled, withdrawn, patient and collected," which is nearly the same list.

4. **Mumukṣutva, burning longing for freedom.** Nachiketas would not take wealth, long life or kingdoms in place of truth. This longing is the fuel of the whole journey. *Practice:* Pray for it. Ask daily, "Lead me to the Real."

3. Hear, Reflect, Meditate

Yajnavalkya told Maitreyi: "The Self is to be seen, to be heard, to be reflected upon, to be meditated upon" (Brihadaranyaka 2.4.5). Paramananda's commentary on the Katha gives the same three stages: first hear the truth from one who knows, then reflect on it, then through constant discernment and meditation realise it.

- **Śravaṇa (hearing):** daily study of the scriptures and the words of realised teachers. Fifteen minutes every morning is enough to start.
- **Manana (reflecting):** turn the teaching over in your mind and question it honestly until every doubt is resolved. Keep a notebook. Write down your doubts and look for their answers.
- **Nididhyāsana (meditating):** dwell on the truth until it is no longer an idea but your own direct seeing.

4. Meditate: The Bow, the Arrow and the Target

"Take the great weapon of the Upanishads as your bow. Fit to it the arrow sharpened by constant meditation. Draw it with a mind absorbed in That, and strike the target, the Imperishable, my dear. OM is the bow, the self is the arrow, and Brahman is said to be the target. It is to be struck by one who is undistracted. Then, like the arrow, one becomes one with the target."

Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.3–4

Here is a simple daily meditation built from the Upanishads. Do it every morning, and if you can, every evening too:

1. **Sit** upright and still, spine straight, in a quiet clean place, at the same time each day. (The Svetasvatara, 2.8–10, advises a clean, level place, sheltered from wind and free of noise, pleasing to the mind.)
2. **Peace chant.** Recite a peace invocation, for example *Om saha nāvavatu* (Appendix A), to settle the heart.
3. **Breathe.** Ten slow breaths, gradually lengthening the out-breath. Feel the life-force (*prāṇa*) that the Prasna and Kena call "the breath of the breath."

4. **Om.** Chant OM aloud three to twelve times, feeling A-U-M dissolve into silence. Then repeat it mentally.
5. **Neti neti.** Gently reflect: "I am not this body, I am aware of it. I am not these thoughts, I am aware of them. I am not these feelings, I am aware of them." This is the method Yajnavalkya taught: *neti, neti*, "not this, not this" (Brihadaranyaka 2.3.6, 4.5.15).
6. **Rest as the witness.** Rest in the awareness that remains, the "light without smoke" (Katha 2.1.13), "the size of a thumb," dwelling in the heart. Let thoughts come and go like birds across the sky. You are the sky.
7. **Affirm.** Silently: *So'ham*, "I am That." Or *Aham brahmāsmi*. Or simply: "I am the Self of all."
8. **Close** with: *Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ*, and wish peace to all beings.

Begin with fifteen minutes and slowly increase toward forty-five. The Katha warns that "yoga comes and goes" (2.3.11), so be watchful and regular. Regularity matters more than length.

5. Work as Worship (Karma Yoga)

The Isha tells you to work for a hundred years without being bound (verse 2). Here is how:

- **Before the work:** offer it. "Lord, this is Your work done through me."
- **During the work:** give it full skill and earnestness. Nirmalananda Giri stresses that "carelessness and shoddiness" are not spirituality. Sri Ramakrishna said, "If you can weigh salt, you can weigh sugar."
- **After the work:** release the result. Success and failure both go back to the Lord. "Be even-minded in success and failure; that evenness is yoga" (Bhagavad Gita 2.48, quoted in the Isha commentary).
- **Choose the right work:** work that does no harm, serves others and uses your gifts. The Taittiriya says: "Those deeds that are blameless should be done, not others" (1.11.2).

6. Live the Teacher's Parting Instructions

When the student finished the Vedas, the teacher of the Taittiriya gave a final instruction, like a convocation address. Make it your code of conduct:

"Speak the truth. Practise dharma. Do not neglect your study. Do not neglect truth. Do not neglect dharma. Do not neglect your welfare. Do not neglect

*prosperity. Do not neglect learning and teaching...
Let your mother be a god to you. Let your father be a god to you. Let your
teacher be a god to you. Let your guest be a god to you.
Do those deeds that are blameless, not others. Follow our good conduct, not
our faults...
Give with faith. Do not give without faith. Give with grace, give with modesty,
give with awe, give with understanding.
If ever you are in doubt about what to do, act as those wise people would act
who are thoughtful, devoted, gentle and lovers of dharma.
This is the command. This is the teaching. This is the secret of the Vedas."*

Taittiriya Upanishad 1.11.1–6

Look how balanced this is. Do not neglect your welfare and prosperity, it says. Spirituality does not mean neglecting your health, your finances or your family. And look at its humility: "Follow our good conduct, *not our faults*." Even the teacher admits imperfection.

7. The Three Da's: Self-Control, Giving, Compassion

In the Brihadaranyaka (5.2), three groups of Prajapati's children (the gods, the humans and the demons) each ask the Creator for teaching. To each he says only one syllable: "**Da.**"

- The **gods**, who are inclined to indulgence, understood *dāmyata*: **control yourselves.**
- The **humans**, who are inclined to greed, understood *datta*: **give.**
- The **demons**, who are inclined to cruelty, understood *dayadhvam*: **be compassionate.**

"This very thing the divine voice of thunder repeats: Da! Da! Da! Control yourselves, give, be compassionate. Therefore one should learn these three." Nirmalananda Giri comments that all three groups are within each of us: the god-like, the human and the animal tendencies. So all three teachings apply to you. When you hear thunder, remember: *Da, Da, Da.*

8. Hold to Truth

*"Truth alone triumphs, not falsehood (satyam eva jayate). By truth is laid out
the path of the gods, by which the seers, their desires fulfilled, travel to the
supreme abode of Truth."*

Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.6

This is India's national motto, and it should be yours. Uddalaka's last example to Svetaketu (Chandogya 6.16) is of a man accused of theft who must grasp a heated axe. If he is guilty he "covers himself with falsehood" and is burned. If he is innocent he "covers himself with truth" and is not burned. Truth protects. Lies, even small convenient ones, fragment the mind, and a fragmented mind cannot meditate or know peace. Be truthful in speech, honest in dealings, sincere with yourself.

9. Seek the Company of the Wise

The Upanishads insist that this knowledge is best received from a living teacher, one who has realised it. "Wonderful is the one who can teach It, and wonderful the one who receives It" (Katha 1.2.7). "To know That, let the seeker go, fuel in hand, to a teacher learned in the scriptures and established in Brahman" (Mundaka 1.2.12).

Uddalaka gives an image of the teacher's role (Chandogya 6.14). A man is led blindfolded from his home in Gandhara and abandoned in a wilderness. He cries out in every direction. Someone removes his blindfold and says, "Gandhara is that way." Asking from village to village, using his own judgement, he reaches home. "In the same way, one who has a teacher knows."

Actions:

- Seek out a genuine teacher or a respected Vedanta organisation, such as the Ramakrishna Mission, Chinmaya Mission or Arsha Vidya, or a lineage you trust, and attend classes regularly.
- Test teachers by their life, not their words. The genuine teacher is humble, wants nothing from you, and points you to the Self, not to themselves. The Mundaka warns of "fools who think themselves wise, going round and round like the blind led by the blind" (1.2.8).
- Form a small *satsang*, a circle of friends who study and practise together (see Part Seven).
- Approach "with fuel in hand": with humility, service and readiness to learn.

10. Purify the Food of the Mind

Uddalaka teaches that "the subtlest part of food eaten becomes mind" (Chandogya 6.5–6.6), and Sanatkumara says: "When food is pure, the mind becomes pure; when the mind is pure, memory becomes firm; when memory is firm, all the knots of the heart are loosened"

(Chandogya 7.26.2). Shankara reads "food" here as everything the senses take in, not only what passes the lips.

Actions:

- Eat simple, fresh, wholesome food in moderation, with gratitude, after offering it mentally. (The Chandogya 5.19–24 describes eating itself as an offering into the inner fire.)
- Guard the "food" of the eyes and ears: news, media, conversations. Ask: "Will this make my mind calmer and clearer, or more agitated and dull?"
- Keep the body strong and well. The Mundaka's peace chant prays for "a strong, well-poised body." The body is the temple of the Self, the "city of eleven gates" (Katha 2.2.1).

11. Surrender and Devotion

The Upanishads are mostly a path of knowledge, but they are full of devotion. The Isha ends with a prayer to Agni: "Lead us by the good path... remove from us the crooked sin. To you we offer our salutations again and again" (Isha 18). The Svetasvatara ends: "These truths shine forth to the great soul who has supreme devotion to God, and as much devotion to the teacher as to God" (6.23).

Knowledge without love becomes dry, and love without knowledge becomes blind. Let your understanding of the Self be warmed by love for the Lord who is that Self. Pray daily. Choose a form of the Divine that moves your heart, whether Krishna, Shiva, Devi or the formless Light, and offer everything to it.

Part Five: The Daily Life of a Seeker

Truth must be lived each day or it stays a beautiful idea. Here is a structure. Adapt it to your circumstances, but keep its spirit.

The Seeker's Day (Dinacharya)

Time	Practice	Upanishadic root
On waking	Before rising, remember: "I am the Self. This day is the Lord's." Give thanks for one more day of human life.	Isha 1; Kena 2.5
Early morning (ideally before sunrise)	Bathe. Sit for meditation (Part Four, §4): peace chant, breath, OM, neti-neti, rest as witness. 20–45 minutes.	Mundaka 2.2.3–6; Mandukya; Katha 2.3.10–11
After meditation	Study (śravaṇa): read one passage of an Upanishad or this book. Copy one line into your notebook to carry through the day.	Taittiriya 1.9 and 1.11: "do not neglect study"
Morning resolve	Set your <i>saṅkalpa</i> : "Today I will choose the good over the pleasant in ____." Recite the three Da's.	Katha 1.2.1–2; Chandogya 3.14.1; Brihadaranyaka 5.2
Meals	Eat mindfully. Offer the food first. Never waste. Share when you can. Treat every guest as God.	Chandogya 5.19–24; Taittiriya 1.11.2, 3.7–10
Work hours	Karma yoga: offer, excel, release. Every hour or so, pause for three breaths and remember the witness.	Isha 2; Gita 2.47–48
Dealings with people	See the one Self behind each face. Speak truth, gently. Help one person each day without being asked.	Isha 6–7; Mundaka 3.1.6

Evening	Lamp-lighting and prayer. Time with family, given fully. A walk in nature if possible.	Katha 2.2.15: "by His light all shines"
Before sleep	Self-examination (Appendix C). Forgive and ask forgiveness. Short meditation. Fall asleep resting in the Self: "into deep sleep I go, into my own nature."	Chandogya 6.8.1: in sleep one "attains one's own self"

The Week, the Month, the Year

- **Weekly:** one longer meditation (an hour); one meeting of your study circle; one act of voluntary simplicity or a fast; one act of service to someone who cannot repay you.
- **Monthly:** a day of relative silence and retreat. Review your progress against the Twenty-One Principles (Part Six). Give a fixed portion of your income in charity, "with faith, with grace, with modesty" (Taittiriya 1.11.3).
- **Yearly:** a retreat of several days at an ashram or quiet place. A pilgrimage, outer or inner. Re-read this whole book and renew your vows.

Meeting Life's Storms with the Upanishads

A teaching proves itself in difficulty. Here is how to meet each storm.

When you are angry

Remember the eating bird and the watching bird (Mundaka 3.1.1). Step back: "Anger is arising; I am its witness." Remember that the person you are angry with is your own Self in another form (Isha 6). Remember *dayadhvam*: be compassionate. Do not speak until the horses are calm (Katha 1.3.6). Note that Nachiketas's father cursed his son in anger, and the commentators say the anger itself proved he "had not the proper attitude."

When you are afraid

"One who knows the bliss of Brahman, from which words turn back along with the mind, fears nothing" (Taittiriya 2.9). Fear comes from feeling separate: "it is from a second that fear arises," says the Brihadaranyaka (1.4.2). When you feel fear, return to the oneness: nothing outside can destroy the Self. Repeat: "*It is not slain when the body is slain*" (Katha 1.2.18).

When you grieve a loss

Grief is natural; even sages weep. But the Upanishads offer consolation that goes deep. The one you loved was never only the body. "This body dies when the living Self leaves it; the living Self does not die" (Chandogya 6.11.3). Let your love continue as prayer and good deeds offered in their name. Remember that "it is for the love of the Self" that they were dear to you (Brihadaranyaka 2.4.5), and the Self is never lost. "The wise one, knowing the Self as bodiless within bodies, does not grieve" (Katha 1.2.22).

When you fail

Your right is to the effort, not to the fruit. Did you act with sincerity and skill? Then you succeeded at your part. Look honestly at what can be learned, and release the rest. The king and the Brahmin boy changed places on the throne: "God lifts up and casts down." Neither position is your true Self.

When you succeed

Remember the Kena's parable of the gods (Kena 3–4). After a great victory the gods boasted, "This victory is ours, this glory is ours." Brahman appeared before them as a mysterious spirit and placed a single blade of grass in front of them. Agni, the god of fire, could not burn it. Vayu, the god of wind, could not move it. They had no power of their own; their power came only from Brahman. Then the goddess Uma, embodying wisdom, revealed to Indra that the victory had been Brahman's. Success is a time for gratitude and humility, never for pride.

When you are confused about a decision

Use the Taittiriya's rule: "If you are in doubt about what to do, act as the wise would act, those who are thoughtful, devoted, gentle and lovers of dharma" (1.11.4). Ask also: "Which choice is *śreyas*, not just *preyas*? Which is more truthful? Which would I be glad of at the hour of death?" (Isha 17: "O mind, remember what has been done").

In your relationships

Love the Self in the other. Do not try to possess them, since you cannot own what is infinite. Honour parents and teachers as gods and treat guests as divine (Taittiriya 1.11.2). Pray with the Katha's peace chant: "May we never hate one another." Wish for others the good you want for yourself.

With money and possessions

Earn honestly; do not neglect prosperity (Taittiriya 1.11.1). Never covet what belongs to others (Isha 1). Remember Maitreyi: "What shall I do with that which will not make me

immortal?" Use wealth to support your family, your study and others' welfare. The rich man's sorrow is never having enough; the sage's joy is needing little.

With ageing and illness

The body is "the chariot" and "the city of eleven gates" (Katha 2.2.1). Care for it, but do not mistake it for yourself. "Knowing that the senses are separate from the Self, and that their rising and setting belong to them, the wise one grieves not" (Katha 2.3.6). As the body weakens, let the spirit grow brighter. Old age is the forest-dweller's season, a time to turn fully toward the Self.

Facing death, your own or that of others

Prepare your whole life, so that you are ready when it comes. Chant the Isha's closing verses (15–18). Keep the mind on the Lord, because "as one's will is in this world, so does one become on departing" (Chandogya 3.14.1). The Prasna (3.10) teaches that whatever thought one holds at death determines one's course. So make your habitual thought the thought of God, and the last thought will take care of itself.

Part Six: The Twenty-One Principles

My child, here is the creed I give you. It distils everything in this book. Read it every morning for the rest of your life. Each principle names its source so that you can always return to the scripture.

I. Principles of Knowing

1. **I am the Self, not the body or the mind.** I am the awareness that witnesses all things, and I am one with the Infinite. (*Tat tvam asi: Chandogya 6.8.7; Kena 1.2; Mundaka 3.1.1*)
2. **All this is One.** Every being and every thing is a form of the one Reality. Nothing and no one is truly "other." (*Chandogya 6.2.1; Mundaka 2.1.1; Isha 1*)
3. **Happiness is within.** Joy lives only in the Infinite. I will stop seeking it among passing things. (*Chandogya 7.23; Katha 2.1.2*)
4. **I am deathless.** The Self is never born and never dies. Therefore I will not live in fear. (*Katha 1.2.18–22*)
5. **Knowing is humble.** The one who thinks they know does not know. I will remain a student all my life. (*Kena 2.3*)

II. Principles of Choosing

6. **I will choose the good over the pleasant,** again and again, in great things and small. (*Katha 1.2.1–2*)
7. **I will guard my desires and my will,** for as I will, so I become. (*Chandogya 3.14.1; Brihadaranyaka 4.4.5*)
8. **I will master my chariot:** discernment the driver, mind the reins, senses the horses, the Self the master. (*Katha 1.3.3–9*)
9. **I will speak and live the truth.** Truth alone triumphs. (*Mundaka 3.1.6; Taittiriya 1.11.1*)
10. **I will not covet.** I will enjoy the world as the Lord's, through renunciation, never through grasping. (*Isha 1*)

III. Principles of Acting

11. **I will work earnestly and skilfully all my life**, offering every act to the Divine and releasing its fruits. (*Isha 2*)
12. **I will control myself, give generously and be compassionate**: Da, Da, Da. (*Brihadaranyaka 5.2*)
13. **I will honour mother, father, teacher and guest as God**. (*Taittiriya 1.11.2*)
14. **I will give with faith, grace, modesty and understanding**. (*Taittiriya 1.11.3*)
15. **I will hate no living being**, for I see my Self in all and all in my Self. (*Isha 6–7*)

IV. Principles of Practising

16. **I will meditate every day**, the arrow of the self on the bow of OM, aimed at Brahman. (*Mundaka 2.2.3–4; Mandukya*)
17. **I will study every day** and reflect until my doubts are dissolved: hearing, reflecting, meditating. (*Brihadaranyaka 2.4.5; Taittiriya 1.9*)
18. **I will keep the company of the wise** and serve them with humility. (*Katha 1.3.14; Mundaka 1.2.12; Chandogya 6.14*)
19. **I will keep body and mind pure** through right food, right input and right living. (*Chandogya 7.26.2; Mundaka peace chant*)

V. Principles of Being

20. **I will remain even in success and failure, praise and blame, gain and loss**, resting as the witness that nothing outside can touch. (*Katha 1.2.12; Mundaka 3.1.2*)
21. **I will make Self-realisation the pole star of my life**, knowing It here and now, while there is time. (*Kena 2.5; Katha 1.3.14: Arise! Awake!*)

The Seeker's Vow

*I am not this body, not this mind, not this name.
I am the witness, the light, the Self of all.
I will choose the good over the pleasant.
I will speak the truth and practise dharma.
I will work without grasping and give without counting.
I will see the one Self in every face, and hate no one.*

I will control myself, I will give, I will be compassionate.

I will sit in silence each day and remember who I am.

Lead me from the unreal to the Real,

from darkness to Light,

from death to Immortality.

Om. Peace. Peace. Peace.

Part Seven: Passing the Lamp

You told me you wish to share this knowledge to help others live meaningful lives. That is a noble wish, and the Upanishads honour it: "May we never be careless about learning and teaching," says the Taittiriya (1.11.1), and it lists "learning and teaching" alongside truth, austerity, self-control and hospitality as duties never to be neglected (1.9). But the seers also give strong guidance about *how* to teach. Listen carefully, because teaching wrongly can do harm.

The Seven Rules for One Who Shares This Knowledge

1. **Live it first.** "Not by one of lesser understanding can this be truly taught" (Katha 1.2.8). Paramananda writes that in India "the best teachers often have no learning, but their character is so shining that everyone learns merely by coming in contact with them." Your life is your first and best scripture. People will learn more from your calm under insult than from a hundred lectures.
2. **Stay humble.** Remember the Kena: "The one who thinks they know It does not know It." Speak as a fellow student sharing what has helped you, never as one who has arrived. The Mundaka warns sharply against those "who imagine themselves wise and learned" yet lead others "like the blind led by the blind" (1.2.8).
3. **Share with those who ask.** The teachers of the Upanishads did not chase students. The student came "fuel in hand" with a sincere question. The Mundaka says: teach "the one who approaches properly, whose mind is calm, whose senses are controlled" (1.2.13). Do not force Vedanta on the unwilling. Be ready when someone is ready.
4. **Meet people where they are.** Prajapati said only "Da," and each group heard what it needed. Varuna gave Bhrigu a method, not an answer. A person in grief needs Katha 1.2.18–22. A restless person needs the chariot. A proud person needs the Kena's parable of the gods. Begin with the practical, then lead toward the profound.
5. **Point to the Self, not to yourself.** The Mundaka (3.1.10, with Paramananda's commentary) says a genuine knower "does not take any homage for himself; being free from egotism, he offers it all to God." Take no personal following, money or power from teaching. Point always to the teaching, to the scriptures, to God, and to the Self in the listener.

6. **Teach the balance.** Do not let people misunderstand Vedanta as escapism or as a reason to neglect duty. Teach the Isha's reconciliation: live a hundred years doing your work; enjoy through renunciation; act and know together. Teach the Taittiriya's "do not neglect welfare and prosperity."
7. **Begin and end with peace.** Every Upanishad begins with a peace invocation, and teacher and student pray together: "May we never hate one another." Teach in an atmosphere of love. Avoid argument and debate for its own sake; the Self "is not attained by argument" (Katha 1.2.9).

A Twelve-Week Study Circle

Here is a simple format for a small group of friends, family or community members to study this teaching together. Meet once a week for about ninety minutes.

Each meeting: (1) Peace chant together, 5 min. (2) Silent meditation, 10 min. (3) Reading of the week's passage, 15 min. (4) Discussion: "What does this mean? Where does it touch my life?" 35 min. (5) Each person names one action for the week, 10 min. (6) Sharing from last week's action, 10 min. (7) Closing prayer: *Asato mā sad gamaya...*, 5 min.

Week	Theme	Text and practice
1	The Question	Katha 1.1 (Nachiketas). Practice: notice moments of seeking lasting satisfaction in passing things.
2	The Good and the Pleasant	Katha 1.2.1–6. Practice: one conscious choice of śreyas each day.
3	One Reality	Chandogya 6.1–6.2 (clay, gold); Mundaka 2.1.1 (sparks). Practice: see the "clay" behind different "pots."
4	That Thou Art	Chandogya 6.12–6.13 (banyan seed, salt). Practice: five minutes daily of "I am That."
5	The Witness	Kena 1; Mundaka 3.1.1–2 (two birds). Practice: name emotions as "arising," and watch them.
6	The Five Sheaths	Taittiriya 3 (Bhrigu). Practice: care for one neglected sheath this week.

7	Happiness and the Infinite	Chandogya 7.23–24; Brihadaranyaka 2.4. Practice: in each pleasure, notice the stillness behind it.
8	The Chariot	Katha 1.3.3–14. Practice: one area of sense-discipline.
9	Work as Worship	Isha 1–2, 9–11. Practice: offer, excel, release in daily work.
10	Da, Da, Da and the Teacher's Instructions	Brihadaranyaka 5.2; Taittiriya 1.11. Practice: one act each of self-control, giving and compassion daily.
11	OM and the Fourth	Mandukya; Mundaka 2.2.3–4. Practice: daily OM meditation.
12	Deathlessness and Freedom	Katha 1.2.18–22, 2.3.14–15; Isha 15–18. Practice: write your own Seeker's Vow.

Ways to Share

- **In your home:** evening readings with family; teach children the stories of Nachiketas, Svetaketu, Bhrigu and the gods and the blade of grass. The stories carry the teachings into young hearts.
- **In conversation:** when a friend is suffering, do not lecture. Listen first. Then perhaps share one verse that helped you.
- **In writing:** share one verse a week with a short reflection on how it applies to modern life.
- **In service:** the most powerful sharing is service to the poor, sick, elderly and lonely, seeing God in them. That is Vedanta in action.
- **This book:** you may give it to anyone who sincerely asks. Encourage them to go back to the original Upanishads and to find a living teacher.

A Final Blessing

My child, I have given you everything I can. The rest is between you and your own Self.

You came to me confused about life's meaning, purpose and direction. Now you know:

- The **meaning** of life is that it is the play of the One appearing as the many, and you are That One.
- The **purpose** of life is to realise this truth here and now, and to live it in love and service to all.
- The **direction** of life is inward and upward: from the pleasant to the good, from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality.

Do not be discouraged by slow progress. The Katha calls this path a razor's edge, and you will slip many times. Each time, get up and walk again. The Self is patient. It has been waiting for you through countless lives, and it is not going anywhere. It is the light by which you read these words.

"The sun does not shine there, nor the moon and stars, nor these lightnings, much less this earthly fire. When That shines, everything shines after It. By Its light all this is illumined."

Katha Upanishad 2.2.15; Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.10

That light is in you. That light is you. Go and live in it.

*Om saha nāvavatu, saha nau bhunaktu,
saha vīryam karavāvahai,
tejasvi nāvadhītam astu, mā vidviṣāvahai.
Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ.*

May He protect us both. May He nourish us both.
May we work together with great energy.
May our study be enlightening. May we never hate one another.
Om. Peace, peace, peace.

Appendix A: Verses to Learn by Heart

1. The Great Prayer (Brihadaranyaka 1.3.28)

*Asato mā sad gamaya
Tamaso mā jyotir gamaya
Mṛtyor mā amṛtaṁ gamaya
Lead me from the unreal to the Real.
Lead me from darkness to Light.
Lead me from death to Immortality.*

2. The Peace of Wholeness (Isha, Brihadaranyaka 5.1)

*Pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇam idaṁ pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate
pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate
That is whole, this is whole. From the Whole the whole arises. Taking the whole
from the Whole, the Whole remains.*

3. Teacher and Student Together (Katha, Taittiriya)

Om saha nāvavatu... (see A Final Blessing)

4. The Master Verse of Life (Isha 1)

*Īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ yat kiñca jagatyām jagat
tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā mā gṛdhaḥ kasya svid dhanam
All this is pervaded by the Lord. Enjoy through renunciation. Covet no one's
wealth.*

5. The Call (Katha 1.3.14)

*Uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata
Arise! Awake! Approach the great ones and learn.*

6. Truth Alone Triumphs (Mundaka 3.1.6)

*Satyam eva jayate nānṛtam
Truth alone triumphs, not falsehood.*

7. The Teacher's Charge (Taittiriya 1.11)

*Satyam vada. Dharmam cara. Māṭṛdevo bhava. Pitṛdevo bhava. Ācāryadevo
bhava. Atithidevo bhava.*

Speak the truth. Practise dharma. Let mother be God to you; father, teacher and guest be God to you.

8. The Four Great Sayings

Prajñānaṁ brahma. Consciousness is Brahman.

Aham brahmāsmi. I am Brahman.

Tat tvam asi. That thou art.

Ayam ātmā brahma. This Self is Brahman.

9. Freedom (Mundaka 2.2.8)

"When That is seen, both high and low, the knot of the heart is cut, all doubts are dispelled, and all karma is exhausted."

10. Thunder's Teaching (Brihadaranyaka 5.2.3)

Dāmyata. Datta. Dayadhvam.

Control yourself. Give. Be compassionate.

Appendix B: Glossary

Term	Meaning
Ānanda	Bliss; the joy that is the nature of Brahman and the Self
Ātman	The Self; the innermost awareness in every being, identical with Brahman
Avidyā	Ignorance; mistaking the not-Self for the Self
Bhūmā	The Infinite, the Plenitude; that alone is happiness (Chandogya 7)
Brahman	The one infinite Reality: Existence, Consciousness, Bliss (<i>satyam jñānam anantaṁ brahma</i> , Taittiriya 2.1)
Dharma	Righteousness, duty, the order that sustains life
Karma	Action and its consequences; the law that we reap what we sow
Kośa	Sheath; the five layers of the person (Taittiriya)
Mahāvākya	"Great saying"; the four declarations of the oneness of Self and Brahman
Manana	Reflection; the second stage of learning
Mokṣa	Liberation; freedom from ignorance, sorrow and rebirth
Mumukṣutva	Intense longing for liberation
Neti neti	"Not this, not this"; the method of negating all that one is not
Nididhyāsana	Deep meditation; the third stage of learning
OM (AUM)	The sacred syllable; the sound-symbol of Brahman (Mandukya, Katha 1.2.15–17)

Prāṇa	Life-breath, vital energy
Preyas / Śreyas	The pleasant / the good (Katha 1.2.1–2)
Samsāra	The cycle of birth and death driven by desire and ignorance
Śraddhā	Faith joined with sincerity, conscience and conviction
Śravaṇa	Hearing the teaching; the first stage of learning
Tapas	Concentrated effort, austerity; the "heat" that purifies
Turiya	"The Fourth"; pure awareness underlying waking, dream and deep sleep
Vairāgya	Dispassion; freedom from craving for the passing
Viveka	Discernment between the real and the unreal

Appendix C: The Nightly Self-Examination

Before sleep, sit quietly for five minutes and ask yourself these questions honestly, without harshness. Be both strict and kind with yourself, as a good teacher is.

1. Did I remember today that I am the Self, and not only the body and mind? When did I forget?
2. Where did I choose the good over the pleasant? Where did I choose the pleasant over the good?
3. Did I speak the truth in everything? Was it spoken kindly?
4. Did I control myself (dāmyata)? Did I give (datta)? Was I compassionate (dayadhvam)?
5. Did I see the one Self in the people I met, especially in those I found difficult?
6. Did I do my work as an offering, with skill, and without anxiety about results?
7. Did I covet anything that belongs to another?
8. Did I meditate and study today?
9. What did my senses feed on today? Did it make my mind calmer or more agitated?
10. Whom do I need to forgive? From whom do I need to ask forgiveness?
11. What one thing will I do better tomorrow?

Then let it all go. Offer the day to the Lord, the good and the bad alike, and fall asleep resting in the Self.

Appendix D: A Plan for Reading the Original Texts

You gave me six volumes. Here is how to read them over the coming years, in order, so that each prepares you for the next.

Stage	Text	Where to find it in your books
1	Isha, Katha, Kena, Mundaka	Swami Paramananda , <i>The Upanishads</i> : the clearest and gentlest translation with commentary. Start here.
2	The same four, read again more deeply	Sri Aurobindo , <i>The Upanishads</i> : a profound reading that emphasises living the Divine in the world. Also contains readings in the Taittiriya.
3	The Ten Principal Upanishads with commentary	108 Upanishads volume, the first ten Upanishads with Swami Nirmalananda Giri's practical commentary: Isha, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka.
4	Chandogya, Kena, Aitareya, Kaushitaki, Isha in a scholarly translation	Max Müller , <i>Sacred Books of the East</i> , Vol. 1 (upanishadso1ml.pdf): literal and scholarly, good for checking meanings.
5	Svetasvatara, Kaivalya, Maitrayani, and the shorter Upanishads	108 Upanishads volume, items 11 onward. As the Muktika itself advises, read these after the ten principal ones.
6	Supporting texts	The Bhagavad Gita , the practical summary of the Upanishads, which the commentaries quote throughout; and Shankara's <i>Vivekachudamani</i> and <i>Atma Bodha</i> as companions to study.

The Muktika Upanishad's own advice, quoted at the start of your 108 Upanishads volume, is worth remembering: the Mandukya alone can suffice; if not, study the ten; if certainty still has not come, study thirty-two; and only then all one hundred and eight. Depth matters more than breadth. One verse truly lived is worth more than a hundred merely read.

ॐ Tat Sat ॐ

Hari Om. Peace be with you, and through you, with all.