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Hinduism

Kena Upanishad

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Vedic tradition (anonymous)

Swami Paramananda (1919)

Credits

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About:

The Kena Upaniṣad opens with the question kena, "by whom?": by whom does the mind think, by whom do the eyes see, by whom is speech uttered?

The answer is Brahman, "the eye of the eye, the ear of the ear", which cannot be known as an object. The second half tells the parable of the gods who, victorious, think they have won by their own power, until Brahman appears to them as a mysterious being and the goddess Umā reveals who it is. It belongs to the Sāmaveda (Talavakāra Brāhmaṇa).

The Upanishads are the closing part of the Vedas — the Vedānta — and the basis of Indian reflection on the Absolute (Brahman) and the soul (Ātman).

The Kena shows that the Absolute is not something seen or thought, but that which makes seeing and thinking possible.

Umā, "daughter of the Himalaya", who here teaches the gods, is one of the first appearances of the goddess later identified with Pārvatī, the wife of Śiva.

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PART 1

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ॐ May my limbs, speech, Prana (life-force), sight, hearing, strength and all my senses, gain in vigor. All is the Brahman (Supreme Lord) of the Upanishads. May I never deny the Brahman. May the Brahman never deny me. May there be no denial of the Brahman. May there be no separation from the Brahman. May all the virtues declared in the sacred Upanishads be manifest in me, who am devoted to the Atman (Higher Self). May they be manifest in me.

1 By whom commanded and directed does the mind go towards its objects? Commanded by whom does the life-force, the first (cause), move? At whose will do men utter speech? What power directs the eye and the ear?

2 It is the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech of the speech, the life of the life, the eye of the eye. The wise, freed (from the senses and from mortal desires), after leaving this world, become immortal.

3 There the eye does not go, nor speech, nor mind. We do not know That; we do not understand how It can be taught. It is distinct from the known and also It is beyond the unknown. Thus we have heard from the ancient (teachers) who told us about It.

4 That which speech does not illumine, but which illumines speech: know that alone to be the Brahman (the Supreme Being), not this which people worship here.

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

6 That which is not seen by the eye, but by which the eye is able to see: know that alone to be the Brahman, not this which people worship here.

7 That which cannot be heard by the ear, but by which the ear is able to hear: know that alone to be Brahman, not this which people worship here.

8 That which none breathes with the breath, but by which breath is inbreathed: know that alone to be the Brahman, not this which people worship here.

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PART 2

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1 If thou thinkest "I know It well," then it is certain that thou knowest but little of the Brahman (Absolute Truth), or in what form He (resideth) in the Devas (minor aspects of Deity). Therefore I think that what thou thinkest to be known is still to be sought after.

2 The disciple said: I do not think I know It well, nor do I think that I do not know It. He among us who knows It truly, knows (what is meant by) "I know" and also what is meant by "I know It not."

3 He who thinks he knows It not, knows It. He who thinks he knows It, knows It not. The true knowers think they can never know It (because of Its infinitude), while the ignorant think they know It.

4 It (Brahman) is known, when It is known in every state of consciousness. (Through such knowledge) one attains immortality. By attaining this Self, man gains strength; and by Self-knowledge immortality is attained.

5 If one knows It here, that is Truth; if one knows It not here, then great is his loss. The wise seeing the same Self in all beings, being liberated from this world, become immortal.

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PART 3

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1 The Brahman once won a victory for the Devas. Through that victory of the Brahman, the Devas became elated. They thought, "This victory is ours. This glory is ours."

2 The Brahman perceived this and appeared before them. They did not know what mysterious form it was.

3 They said to Fire: "O Jataveda (All-knowing)! Find out what mysterious spirit this is." He said: "Yes."

4 He ran towards it and He (Brahman) said to him: "Who art thou?" "I am Agni, I am Jataveda," he (the Fire-god) replied.

5 Brahman asked: "What power resides in thee?" Agni replied: "I can burn up all whatsoever exists on earth."

6 Brahman placed a straw before him and said: "Burn this." He (Agni) rushed towards it with all speed, but was not able to burn it. So he returned from there and said (to the Devas): "I was not able to find out what this great mystery is."

7 Then they said to Vayu (the Air-god): "Vayu! Find out what this mystery is." He said: "Yes."

8 He ran towards it and He (Brahman) said to him: "Who art thou?" "I am Vayu, I am Matarisva (traveller of Heaven)," he (Vayu) said.

9 Then the Brahman said: "What power is in thee?" Vayu replied: "I can blow away all whatsoever exists on earth."

10 Brahman placed a straw before him and said: "Blow this away." He (Vayu) rushed towards it with all speed, but was not able to blow it away. So he returned from there and said (to the Devas): "I was not able to find out what this great mystery is."

11 Then they said to Indra: "O Maghavan (Worshipful One)! Find out what this mystery is." He said: "Yes"; and ran towards it, but it disappeared before him.

12 Then he saw in that very space a woman beautifully adorned, Uma of golden hue, daughter of Haimavat (Himalaya). He asked: "What is this great mystery?"

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PART 4

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1 She (Uma) said: "It is Brahman. It is through the victory of Brahman that ye are victorious." Then from her words, he (Indra) knew that it (that mysterious form) was Brahman.

2 Therefore these Devas,--Agni, Vayu and Indra--excel other Devas, because they came nearer to Brahman. It was they who first knew this spirit as Brahman.

3 Therefore Indra excels all other Devas, because he came nearest to Brahman, and because he first (before all others) knew this spirit as Brahman.

4 Thus the teaching of Brahman is here illustrated in regard to the Devas. He dashed like lightning, and appeared and disappeared just as the eye winks.

5 Next (the teaching) is regarding Adhyatman (the embodied Soul). The mind seems to approach Him (Brahman). By this mind (the seeker) again and again remembers and thinks about Brahman.

6 That Brahman is called Tadvanam (object of adoration). He is to be worshipped by the name Tadvanam. He who knows Brahman thus, is loved by all beings.

7 The disciple asked: O Master, teach me the Upanishad. (The teacher replied:) The Upanishad has been taught thee. We have certainly taught thee the Upanishad about Brahman.

8 The Upanishad is based on tapas (practice of the control of body, mind and senses), dama (subjugation of the senses), karma (right performance of prescribed actions). The Vedas are its limbs. Truth is its support.

9 He who knows this (wisdom of the Upanishad), having been cleansed of all sin, becomes established in the blissful, eternal and highest abode of Brahman, in the highest abode of Brahman.

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