UNE ✦ SACRA

Hinduism

Prasna Upanishad

✦ ✦ ✦

Anonymous (English translation by F. Max Müller)

F. Max Müller (1884)

Credits

Author	Anonymous (English translation by F. Max Müller)
Date	c. 500–200 BC
Original language	Sanskrit
Version	F. Max Müller (1884)
Edition	1.2
Translation	Friedrich Max Müller
Source	Internet Sacred Text Archive — The Upanishads, Part II (SBE 15)
License	CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · original: Public domain

About:

The Praśna Upaniṣad, of the Atharvaveda, is the book of "questions": six seekers go to the sage Pippalāda, live with him for a year and then ask six questions — where creatures come from, what powers sustain the body, how the vital breath enters it, what sleeps and what wakes in sleep, what is reached by meditating on the syllable Om, and who is the Person of sixteen parts.

English translation by F. Max Müller (Sacred Books of the East, vol. 15, 1884). The Isha, Kena and Katha Upanishads are also in Une Sacra.

Source: https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/index.htm

Müller's introduction and footnotes are omitted. The verse numbers are his; each chapter is one section (khanda, adhyaya or question) of the original.

See the source listed above for the terms of use of this version. The design of this file belongs to Une Sacra (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0); the text keeps the license listed above.

Digital edition generated on November 26, 2026 by Une Sacra, an open library of sacred texts. · UneSacra.com

Contents

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

CHAPTER I

✦

1 Adoration to the Highest Self! Harih, Om!
Sukesas Bhâradvâga , and Saivya Satyakâma, and Sauryâyanin Gârgya, and Kausalya Âsvalâyana, and Bhârgava Vaidarbhi , and Kabandhin Kâtyâyana, these were devoted to Brahman, firm in Brahman, seeking for the Highest Brahman. They thought that the venerable Pippalâda could tell them all that, and they therefore took fuel in their hands (like pupils), and approached him.

2 That Rishi said to them: 'Stay here a year longer, with penance, abstinence, and faith; then you may ask questions according to your pleasure, and if we know them, we shall tell you all.'

3 Then Kabandhin Kâtyâyana approached him and asked: 'Sir, from whence may these creatures be born?'

4 He replied: 'Pragâpati (the lord of creatures) was desirous of creatures (pragâh). He performed penance' , and having performed penance, he produces a pair, matter (rayi) and spirit (prâna), thinking that they together should produce creatures for him in many ways. 5 . The sun is spirit, matter is the moon. All this, what has body and what has no body, is matter, and therefore body indeed is matter.

6 Now Âditya, the sun, when he rises, goes toward the East, and thus receives the Eastern spirits into his rays. And when he illuminates the South, the West, the North, the Zenith, the Nadir, the intermediate quarters, and everything, he thus receives all spirits into his rays.

7 Thus he rises, as Vaisvânara, (belonging to all men,) assuming all forms, as spirit, as fire. This has been said in the following verse: 8 . (They knew) him who assumes all forms, the golden , who knows all things, who ascends highest, alone in his splendour, and warms us; the thousand-rayed, who abides in a hundred places, the spirit of all creatures, the Sun, rises.

9 The year indeed is Pragâpati, and there are two paths thereof, the Southern and the Northern. Now those who here believe in sacrifices and pious gifts as work done, gain the moon only as their (future) world, and return again. Therefore the Rishis who desire offspring, go to the South, and that path of the Fathers is matter (rayi).

10 But those who have sought the Self by penance, abstinence, faith, and knowledge, gain by the Northern path Âditya, the sun. This is the home of the spirits, the immortal, free from danger, the highest. From thence they do not return, for it is the end. Thus says the Sloka :

11 Some call him the father with five feet (the five seasons), and with twelve shapes (the twelve months), the giver of rain in the highest half of heaven; others again say that the sage is placed in the lower half, in the chariot with seven wheels and six spokes.

12 The month is Pragâpati; its dark half is matter, its bright half spirit. Therefore some Rishis perform sacrifice in the bright half, others in the other half.

13 Day and Night are Pragâpati; its day is spirit, its night matter. Those who unite in love by day waste their spirit, but to unite in love by night is right.

14 Food is Pragâpati. Hence proceeds seed, and from it these creatures are born.

15 Those therefore who observe this rule of Pragâpati (as laid down in § 13), produce a pair, and to them belongs this Brahma-world here . But those in whom dwell penance, abstinence, and truth,

16 To them belongs that pure Brahma-world, to them, namely, in whom there is nothing crooked, nothing false, and no guile.'

Une Sacra · edition 1.2 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

CHAPTER 2

✦

1 Then Bhârgava Vaidarbhi asked him: 'Sir, How many gods keep what has thus been created, how many manifest this , and who is the best of them?'

2 He replied: 'The ether is that god, the wind, fire, water, earth, speech, mind, eye, and ear. These, when they have manifested (their power), contend and say: We (each of us) support this body and keep it . 3 . Then Prâna (breath, spirit, life), as the best, said to them: Be not deceived, I alone, dividing myself fivefold, support this body and keep it.

4 They were incredulous; so he, from pride, did as if he were going out from above. Thereupon, as he went out, all the others went out, and as he returned, all the others returned. As bees go out when their queen goes out, and return when she returns, thus (did) speech, mind, eye, and ear; and, being satisfied, they praise Prâna, saying:

5 He is Agni (fire), he shines as Sûrya (sun), he is Parganya (rain), the powerful (Indra), he is Vâyu, (wind), he is the earth, he is matter, he is God—he is what is and what is not, and what is immortal.

6 As spokes in the nave of a wheel, everything is fixed in Prâna, the verses of the Rig-veda, Yagur-veda, Sâma-veda, the sacrifice, the Kshatriyas, and the Brâhmans.

7 As Pragâpati (lord of creatures) thou movest about in the womb, thou indeed art born again. To thee, the Prâna, these creatures bring offerings, to thee who dwellest with the other prânas (the organs of sense).

8 Thou art the best carrier for the Gods, thou art the first offering to the Fathers. Thou art the true work of the Rishis , of the Atharvâṅgiras.

9 O Prâna, thou art Indra by thy light, thou art Rudra, as a protector; thou movest in the sky, thou art the sun, the lord of lights.

10 When thou showerest down rain, then, O Prâna, these creatures of thine are delighted , hoping that there will be food, as much as they desire.

11 Thou art a Vrâtya , O Prâna, the only Rishi , the consumer of everything, the good lord. We are the givers of what thou hast to consume, thou, O Mâtarisva , art our father.

12 Make propitious that body of thine which dwells in speech, in the ear, in the eye, and which pervades the mind; do not go away!

13 All this is in the power of Prâna, whatever exists in the three heavens. Protect us like a mother her sons, and give us happiness and wisdom.'

Une Sacra · edition 1.2 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

CHAPTER 3

✦

1 Then Kausalya Âsvalâyana asked: 'Sir, whence is that Prâna (spirit) born? How does it come into this body? And how does it abide, after it has divided itself? How does it go out? How does it support what is without , and how what is within?'

2 He replied: 'You ask questions more difficult, but you are very fond of Brahman, therefore I shall tell it you.

3 This Prâna (spirit) is born of the Self. Like the shadow thrown on a man, this (the prâna) is spread out over it (the Brahman) . By the work of the mind does it come into this body.

4 As a king commands officials, saying to them: Rule these villages or those, so does that Prâna (spirit) dispose the other prânas, each for their separate work.

5 The Apâna (the down-breathing) in the organs of excretion and generation; the Prâna himself dwells in eye and ear, passing through mouth and nose. In the middle is the Samâna (the on-breathing); it carries what has been sacrificed as food equally (over the body), and the seven lights proceed from it.

6 The Self is in the heart. There are the 101 arteries, and in each of them there are a hundred (smaller veins), and for each of these branches there are 72,000 . In these the Vyâna (the back-breathing) moves.

7 Through one of them, the Udâna (the out-breathing) leads (us) upwards to the good world by good work, to the bad world by bad work, to the world of men by both.

8 The sun rises as the external Prâna, for it assists the Prâna in the eye . The deity that exists in the earth, is there in support of man's Apâna (down-breathing). The ether between (sun and earth) is the Samâna (on-breathing), the air is Vyâna (back-breathing).

9 Light is the Udâna (out-breathing), and therefore he whose light has gone out comes to a new birth with his senses absorbed in the mind.

10 Whatever his thought (at the time of death) with that he goes back to Prâna, and the Prâna, united with light , together with the self (the gîvâtmâ) leads on to the world, as deserved.

11 He who, thus knowing, knows Prâna, his offspring does not perish, and he becomes immortal. Thus says the Sloka:

12 He who has known the origin , the entry, the place, the fivefold distribution, and the internal state of the Prâna, obtains immortality, yes, obtains immortality.'

Une Sacra · edition 1.2 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

CHAPTER 4

✦

1 Then Sauryâyanin Gârgya asked: 'Sir, What are they that sleep in this man, and what are they that are awake in him? What power (deva) is it that sees dreams? Whose is the happiness? On what do all these depend?'

2 He replied: 'O Gârgya, As all the rays of the sun, when it sets, are gathered up in that disc of light, and as they, when the sun rises again and again, come forth, so is all this (all the senses) gathered up in the highest faculty (deva) , the mind. Therefore at that time that man does not hear, see, smell, taste, touch, he does not speak, he does not take, does not enjoy, does not evacuate, does not move about. He sleeps, that is what people say.

3 The fires of the prânas are, as it were , awake in that town (the body). The Apâna is the Gârhapatya fire, the Vyâna the Anvâhâryapakana fire; and because it is taken out of the Gârhapatya fire, which is fire for taking out , therefore the Prâna is the Âhavanîya fire .

3.2 Now the Apâna is identified with the Gârhapatya fire, no reason being given except afterwards, when it is said that the Prâna is the Âhavanîya fire, being taken out of the Gârhapatya, here called pranayana, in the same manner as the prâna proceeds in sleep from the apâna.

3.3 The Vyâna is identified with the Dakshinâgni, the Southern fire, because it issues from the heart through an aperture on the right.

4 Because it carries equally these two oblations, the out-breathing and the in-breathing, the Samâna is he (the Hotri priest) . The mind is the sacrificer, the Udâna is the reward of the sacrifice, and it leads the sacrificer every

day (in deep sleep) to Brahman.

5 There that god (the mind) enjoys in sleep greatness. What has been seen, he sees again; what has been heard, he hears again; what has been enjoyed in different countries and quarters, he enjoys again; what has been seen and not seen, heard and not heard, enjoyed and not enjoyed, he sees it all; he, being all, sees.

6 And when he is overpowered by light , then that god sees no dreams, and at that time that happiness arises in his body.

7 And, O friend, as birds go to a tree to roost, thus all this rests in the Highest Âtman,—

8 The earth and its subtile elements, the water and its subtile elements, the light and its subtile elements, the air and its subtile elements, the ether and its subtile elements; the eye and what can be seen, the ear and what can be heard, the nose and what can be smelled, the taste and what can be tasted, the skin and what can be touched, the voice and what can be spoken, the hands and what can be grasped, the feet and what can be walked, the mind and what can be perceived, intellect (buddhi) and what can be conceived, personality and what can be personified, thought and what can be thought, light and what can be lighted up, the Prâna and what is to be supported by it.

9 For he it is who sees, hears, smells, tastes, perceives, conceives, acts, he whose essence is knowledge , the person, and he dwells in the highest, indestructible Self,—

10 He who knows that indestructible being, obtains (what is) the highest and indestructible, he without a shadow, without a body, without colour, bright—,yes, O friend, he who knows it, becomes all-knowing, becomes all. On this there is this Sloka:

11 He, O friend, who knows that indestructible being wherein the true knower, the vital spirits (prânas), together with all the powers (deva), and the elements rest, he, being all-knowing, has penetrated all.'

Une Sacra · edition 1.2 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

CHAPTER 5

✦

1 Then Saivya Satyakâma asked him:—'Sir, if some one among men should meditate here until death on the syllable Om, what would he obtain by it?'

2 He replied: 'O Satyakâma, the syllable Om (AUM) is the highest and also the other Brahman; therefore he who knows it arrives by the same means at one of the two.

3 If he meditate on one Mâtrâ (the A) , then, being enlightened by that only, he arrives quickly at the earth . The Rik-verses lead him to the world of men, and being endowed there with penance, abstinence, and faith, he enjoys greatness.

4 If he meditate with two Mâtrâs (A + U) he arrives at the Manas , and is led up by the Yagus-verses to the sky, to the Soma-world. Having enjoyed greatness in the Soma-world, he returns again.

5 Again, he who meditates with this syllable AUM of three Mâtrâs, on the Highest Person, he comes to light and to the sun. And as a snake is freed from its skin, so is he freed from evil. He is led up by the Sâman-verses to the Brahma-world ; and from him, full of life (Hiranyagarbha, the lord of the Satya-loka), he learns to see the all-pervading, the Highest Person. And there are these two Slokas:

6 The three Mâtrâs (A + U + M), if employed separate, and only joined one to another, are mortal ; but in acts, external, internal, or intermediate, if well performed, the sage trembles not .

7 Through the Rik-verses he arrives at this world, through the Yagus-verses at the sky, through the Sâman-verses at that which the poets teach, —he arrives at this by means of the Oṅkâra; the wise arrives at that which is at rest, free from decay, from death, from fear,—the Highest.'

Une Sacra · edition 1.2 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

CHAPTER 6

✦

1 Then Sukesas Bhâradvâga asked him, saying: 'Sir, Hiranyanâbha, the prince of Kosalâ , came to me and asked this question: Do you know the person of sixteen parts, O Bhâradvâga? I said to the prince: I do not know him; if I knew him, how should I not tell you? Surely, he who speaks what is untrue withers away to the very root; therefore I will not say what is untrue. Then he mounted his chariot and went away silently. Now I ask you, where is that person?'

2 He replied: 'Friend, that person is here within the body, he in whom these sixteen parts arise.

3 He reflected: What is it by whose departure I shall depart, and by whose staying I shall stay?

4 He sent forth (created) Prâna (spirit) ; from Prâna Sraddhâ (faith) , ether, air, light, water, earth, sense, mind, food; from food came vigour, penance, hymns, sacrifice, the worlds, and in the worlds the name also.

5 As these flowing rivers that go towards the ocean, when they have reached the ocean, sink into it, their name and form are broken, and people speak of the ocean only, exactly thus these sixteen parts of the spectator that go towards the person (purusha), when they have reached the person, sink into him, their name and form are broken, and people speak of the person only, and he becomes without parts and immortal. On this there is this verse:

6 That person who is to be known, he in whom these parts rest, like spokes in the nave of a wheel, you know him, lest death should hurt you.'

7 Then he (Pippalâda) said to them: 'So far do I know this Highest Brahman, there is nothing higher than it.'

8 And they praising him, said: 'You, indeed, are our father, you who carry us from our ignorance to the other shore.' Adoration to the highest Rishis! Adoration to the highest Rishis! Tat sat. Harih, Om!

Une Sacra · edition 1.2 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0