

## 1 ☐ Lecture 2

Introduction to the  
Philosophy of the *Upanishads*

## 2 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- philosophical, but not exactly philosophy
- story of Naciketas's encounter with Yama, the god of death
  - the story of Abraham and Isaac "gone weird"

## 3 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- N's father has offered a sacrifice to the gods
  - henotheistic religious practice
- N is disgusted with the sacrifices

"This poor offering of cows that are too old to give milk and too weak to eat grass or drink water must lead to a world of sorrow."
- N suggests his father offer something valuable as a sacrifice – such as his son.

"Father, to whom will you give me? He asked once, and twice, and three times."
- Angry, his father decides to sacrifice N to Death

"I will give you to death."

## 4 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- N travels to the abode of **Yama**, the god of death.
- No one is home.
- N waits three days and nights without food.

## 5 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- Yama's lack of hospitality creates an obligation for Yama towards Nachiketas.

"How unwise is the man who does not give hospitality to a Brahmin! He loses his future hopes, his past merits, his present possessions: his sons and his all."
- He offers N three boons "Since you have come as a sacred guest to my abode, and you have had no hospitality for three nights, choose then three boons."

## 6 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- N's first boon concerns his present life

"May my father's anger be appeased, and may he remember me and welcome me when I return to him."

## 7 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- N's second boon concerns the after-life
  - **Agni** is the god of fire

"You know, O Death, that sacred fire which leads to heaven. Explain it to me, since I have faith."

## 8 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- N's third boon concerns what is beyond life and death

"When a man dies, this doubt arises: some say 'he is' and some say 'he is not'. Teach me the truth."

## 9 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- Death distinguishes two paths

"There is the path of joy, and there is the path of pleasure. Both attract the soul. Who follows the first comes to good; who follows pleasure reaches not the end."

10 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- Path of Pleasure (**kama** = pleasure)
- All pleasures are:
  - fleeting
  - produced by something external

11 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- Path of Joy
  - Joy comes from within
  - Joy is not dependent upon an external relation to things
- Joy can be an ultimate goal, because ...

12 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- How does one attain joy?
- By knowing what reality really is – by knowing the Atman.

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- Two Questions:
  - What is Atman?
  - How can it be known?

13 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- **Atman** is the "I".
  - superficial vs. deep sense of self

- *Basic Assumption of Upanishads:* Each of us has an Atman.

14 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- The only way to know Atman is through personal experience, because ...
  - **satya** = being or truth
  - transformation into the truth
- Teacher's role is to put the pupil inside the experience

15 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- Experience of the Atman is the goal of the path of joy, because ...
- Those on the path of pleasure allow horses to steer them
- Those on the path of joy steer the horses

16 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- The name for ultimate reality is **Brahman**
  - not to be confused with **Brahma** or **Brahmin**
  - Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are manifestations of a single underlying reality: Brahman (see next slide)
- "Brahman" = "that which makes things great"

17 ☐ Brahma / Vishnu / Shiva

18 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- Initial unclarity about nature of Brahman:
  - ultimate → not limited
  - all our experiences are of things that are limited
  - not limited → beyond our experiences

– beyond our experiences → beyond description

19 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- *Katha Upan.* suggests that Brahman can be experienced by coming to know one's Atman, because ...

- 
- This is the key philosophical discovery of the *Upanishads*.

20 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- Knowing Brahman has a practical upshot: one attains moksha from samsara
  - **samsara** = cycle of death and rebirth, of pleasure and frustration and boredom and suffering
  - **moksha** = freedom
- moksha is preferable to samsara, because ...

21 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

22 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- Knowledge of Brahman requires the practice of yoga, because ...
  - **yoga** = disciplined self-practice

23 ☐ *Katha Upanishad*

- Yoga points one in the right direction: like yoke on oxen.
  - many different kinds (more on this later)

24 ☐ *Mandukya Upanishad*

- Explicitly identifies Atman with Brahman
  - Identification in *Katha Upan.* is implicit

25 ☐ *Mandukya Upanishad*

- 1
- Also provides an analysis of **four kinds of consciousness**
    - *ordinary waking life*
      - outwardly directed to external objects
    - *imagination & dreaming*
      - inwardly directed to contents of one's thoughts

- 2
- *dreamless sleep*
    - conscious, but not conscious of anything
    - lacks an object; but self is present
  - *self-less awareness*
    - lacks an object
    - also lacks consciousness of oneself
    - this is Atman

26 ☐ *Mandukya Upanishad*

- Memory of the experience of self-less awareness is evidence for the existence of Atman
  - this makes claims about the existence of Atman *philosophical*, not merely faith-based.

27 ☐ *Mandukya Upanishad*

- Knowledge of Atman is similar to knowledge of love
  - only those who have experienced love know what it is
  - for the person having the experience, nothing could be more certain than the truth of the experience itself

28 ☐ *Mandukya Upanishad*

- Also identifies Atman with the Sanskrit word OM
  - think of sounds like "Brrrr", which have the power to convey how we are feeling
  - repeating "OM" should put you in touch with ultimate reality

## 29 ☐ How to Say "OM"

- Start in the back of the mouth with "ahhh"
  - this sound is made with your throat
- Slowly fill the mouth with "oo"
  - feel it resonating in your mouth
- Close the mouth with "mmm"
  - draw this sound out the longest
  - take a deep breath before beginning again

## 30 ☐ *Mandukya Upanishad*

- Symbolism: Sound
  - the first three sounds are the first three states of consciousness, respectively
  - the fourth state of consciousness is ...

## 31 ☐ *Mandukya Upanishad*

- Symbolism: Writing
  - large lower curve on right :: ordinary consciousness
  - upper curve on left :: dreamless sleep consciousness
  - lower curve on left :: consciousness of imagination & dreaming
    - connects ordinary consciousness & dreamless sleep consciousness
  - dot :: Atman
    - illuminates everything else
  - curve below dot :: maya
    - open on top because maya does not affect Atman
    - (more on Maya next lecture)

## 32 ☐ Reading for Next Time

- Kupperman: 3-21
- *The Upanishads*
  - Maitri Upanishad 2.3-5; 2.7: 99-100

## 33 ☐ Websites for Om Chanting

- Choir Chant (small): <http://www.selfasinstrument.com/products.html?gelid=CIXo8M6VhoYCFStzGgodeEW3iw>
- Chant: [http://www.thepurplepeople.com/room13\\_universal\\_om.mp3](http://www.thepurplepeople.com/room13_universal_om.mp3)
- Choir Chant (large): [http://www.thepurplepeople.com/room13\\_ultimate\\_om.mp3](http://www.thepurplepeople.com/room13_ultimate_om.mp3)