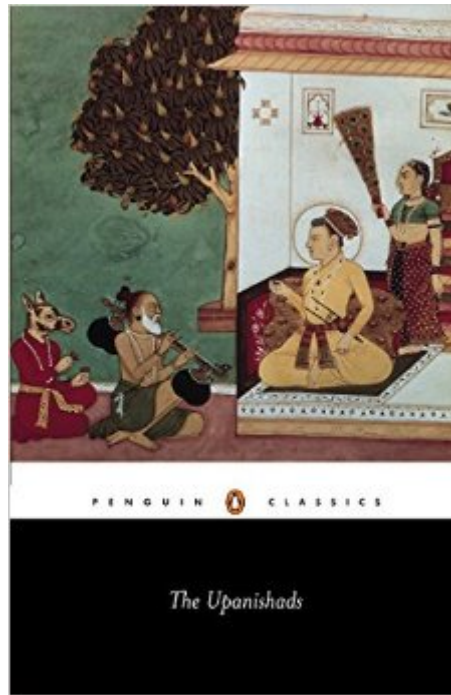


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The Upanishads (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

The Upanishads, the earliest of which were composed in Sanskrit between 800 and 400 bce by sages and poets, form part of the Vedas - the sacred and ancient scriptures that are the basis of the Hindu religion. Each Upanishad, or lesson, takes up a theme ranging from the attainment of spiritual bliss to karma and rebirth, and collectively they are meditations on life, death and immortality. The essence of their teachings is that truth can be reached by faith rather than by thought, and that the spirit of God is within each of us - we need not fear death as we carry within us the promise of eternal life. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Book Information

Series: Penguin Classics

Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: Penguin Classics; Reissue edition (November 30, 1965)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140441638

ISBN-13: 978-0140441635

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.3 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars See all reviews (37 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #43,357 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Hinduism > Sacred Writings > Upanishads #76 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Greek & Roman #495 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Bible Study

Customer Reviews

I first read the Upanishads at age 14, ploughing through the complete literal translation by Swami Nikhilananda with its incessant footnotes and daunting commentaries. I had heard that the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad was the oldest, so I thought I should read that first. Bad choice. All the older Upanishads are packed with unexplained references to Vedic ritual, to archaic

cosmologies and models of the body. I was fascinated but understood perhaps 1%. A year later I found the Penguin Classic translated by Juan Mascar  and light shone on my mind. I suddenly understood what it was all about. His eloquent words opened a door for me, I went through and I have never gone back. I now own 8 translations of the Upanishads, partial or complete, and I have read a number of others. Even with no Sanskrit, I can see Mascar 's versions for what they are: old-fashioned, Romantic, poetic paraphrases. My current Penguin says, First published 1965, but portions of these translations were printed under the title "Himalayas of the Soul" as early as 1938. Mascar  was writing in the era that gave us World War II, the Holocaust, Stalin's Purges, and yet in spirit he dwells with Wordsworth, Blake and Shelley, the Spanish mystics, Shakespeare and the translators of the King James Version. I am known as a purist, a stickler, a nit-picker. Take the Mundaka Upanishad, 3:1,1. Mascar  translates, "Two birds, two sweet friends, dwell on the self-same tree". Others have, "Two birds, always united..." or "Two birds, close companions..." Mascar  has merely added the unjustified, unnecessary, weak and gooey word "sweet"... yet somehow I don't mind. Useless for any scholarly purposes, this is still probably the best version for the general reader.

The Upanishads are spiritual/philosophical texts considered to be an early source of Hindu religion. More than 200 are known, of which the first dozen or so are the principal ones. Here are some quotations from this book: "Concealed in the heart of all beings is the Atman, the Spirit, the Self; smaller than the smallest atom, greater than the vast spaces. The man who surrenders his human will leave sorrows behind, and beholds the glory of the Atman by the grace of the Creator." (Pg. 59) "And in dreams the mind beholds its own immensity. What has been seen is seen again, and what has been heard is heard again. What has been felt in different places or far-away regions returns to the mind again. Seen and unseen, heard and unheard, felt and not felt, the mind sees all, since the mind is all." (Pg. 72) "As rivers flowing into the ocean find their final peace and their name and form disappear, even so the wise become free from name and form and enter into the radiance of the Supreme Spirit who is greater than all greatness. In truth who knows God becomes God." (Pg. 81) "When a man knows God, he is free: his sorrows have an end, and birth and death are no more. When in inner union he is beyond the world of the body, then the third world, the world of the Spirit, is found, where the power of the All is, and man has all: for he is one with the ONE." (Pg. 86) "Believe me, my son, an invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Atman. THOU ART THAT." (Pg. 117) "This universe is a trinity that is made of name, form, and action... Those three are one, ATMAN, the Spirit of life; and ATMAN, although one, is

those three." (Pg.

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