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The Isha Upanishad

(The Mantras of the Isha Upanishad are presented here with my explanation, in an effort to simplify and connect them to the reality of our everyday lives - Pt. Jag B Mahadeo)

> Om purnam-adah purnam-idam purnaat purnam udachyate purnasya purnam-adaya purnam-eva-vashishyate Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

That One God is perfect, all-powerful, and almighty! This universe is also visibly perfect and this perfect universe was created from the perfect God. If perfect or full (anything) is taken out of the perfect or full (God), even then, the perfect remains forever full and perfect. He is never broken, truncated or fragmented. He remains forever the unbroken, perfect indivisible entity!

'That is *poorna*; this is *poorna*. *poorna* is taken from the *poorna*. Upon taking *poorna* from the *poorna*, what remains, too, is *poorna*.'

(This is full. From full, the full is taken, the full has come. If full is removed from full, the full alone remains)

(1) ईशा वास्यमिदँ सर्व यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् । तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम् ।।१।।

Om ishaa vaasyam-idam sarvam, Yatkincha jagatyaam jagat Tena tyaktena bhunjeethaa Maa gridhah kasya svid-dhanam

O men, all moving beings in this moving universe and the entire universe itself, are pervaded by God! Enjoy all the gifts of nature as gifts from God with a spirit of renunciation! Do not be attached to them! Do not covet the wealth of others. This verse says that there is not anyplace place where He is NOT present! He is all pervading.

Thus whatever we enjoy belongs to Him and is provided by Him. If one wants to realize God, then he should live in this Universe and enjoy but with detached mind and not become greedy for anything. We all want to become one with God. We want 'God realization '.

But where is he? He is everywhere. In everything you see, God is present in living and non-living things. Now even Science has said that the whole Universe is energy. We call that energy God.

Vedas say, "Isha vasya midam sarvam", Isha - by the Lord aavaasyam – is controlled by idam – this, sarvam – all, yat kinca – whatever, jagatyaam - within the universe and, jagat - all that is

animate or inanimate - everything. Meaning that the entire universe and all that is within the Universe, living or non-living; is pervaded by God.

O men, all moving beings and non-moving things in this moving universe and the entire universe itself, are pervaded by God! Enjoy all the gifts of nature as gifts from God with a spirit of renunciation! Do not be attached to them! 'tyaktena –meaning with renunciation, bhunjithah – meaning enjoy' maa – meaning do not, grdhah - endeavor to gain or covet, the 'dhanam – the wealth' of kasya svit - of anyone else. This verse says that there is not anyplace place where His presence is NOT! He is all pervading. In other words, God is everything and everything is God.

This is the only way of thinking which free us from the bondage of Karma!

(2) कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि जिजीविषेच्छतँ समाः । एवं त्वयि नान्यथेतोऽस्ति न कर्म लिप्यते नरे ।। २।।

> Kurvanne-veha karmani Jiji-vishey-chhatam samah Evam twayi nanya-the-tosti na karma lipyate nare

Only by performing detached and selfless noble deeds should man aspire to live in this world for a hundred years, without getting himself attached to the results of his actions! Let your actions not produce any attachment in you! May your actions not cling to you! There is no other way to salvation but this! The first shloka reminded us that entire Universe is God's abode and his creation and his property.

Only by doing karma indeed should one wish to live here for a hundred years. For a man such as you (who wants to live thus), there is no other way than this, whereby karma may not cling to you.

Here this verse from the Isha Upanishad tells us that while we wish, desire and pray to live '*jijeevishet* - one should desire to live' for *shatam* - one hundred; *samaah* - years or more, to do so while *kurvan* - doing continuously or performing our righteous duties ''evam tvayi'' meaning for you ''na-anyathaa – meaning there is no alternative and *itah* – meaning from this path and *asti* – there is no other way.... And to perform your duties with a completely detached mind! When we do this we will find that our actions would not bind us to this materialistic world because we will not be attached to the results of our actions.

(3) असुर्या नाम ते लोका अन्धेन तमसाऽऽवृताः । ताँस्ते प्रेत्याभिगच्छन्ति ये के चात्महनो जनाः ।।३।।

Asuryaa nama tey loka Andhey na tamasaa-vretah, Taamste pretyaa bhi-gacchanti ye ke chaat mahano janah.

This shloka from the Isha Upanishad talks about the *Asuras* - who can be loosely described as the demons. Some may explain them to be a group of beings who were considered to be the opponents of God. But we know that God is all powerful and no one can oppose him.

This shloka from the Isha Upanishad refers to '*aatma-hanah* - the killers of the soul'. Saying that some of us are the killer of the soul!

But what does this mean?

We also know that the soul cannot die or cannot be destroyed because it is *jeeva-atma* which is a part of the *param-atma*. But what this mantra is saying is that the activities, choices and habits which does not use the unlimited potential of the soul. Those actions which are full of darkness and ignorance are in effect the killers of the soul – or more accurately, killers of the potential of the soul.

This mantra describes the destiny of those who indulge in unlawful or prohibited karma and are deliberately unrighteous. Those who cover themselves '*aavrtaah* - covered '*tamasaa* - by darkness;

When the spiritual understanding and vision of the 'Atma – soul' is achieved through knowledge, the entire secret of life becomes clear. The Vedas declares that those who only follow the physical and sensual desires, and bury themselves in the materialistic world to fulfill those desires, are in effect killing the value of the soul, or wasting the preciousness of life and the soul.

So whosoever gives importance only to material things and objects and ignores the divine presence within is an Asuraa.

Whosoever among us chooses to lose themselves in the darkness of ignorance is an Asura.

And this mantra say that where do they, the Asuras, go after '*pretya* - after death'? It says that they go to the world where no Sun Rises '*Asura*' and it is covered with darkness! They go into – '*asurya nama te loka*', worlds of Asuras (demons) which is completely engulfed in the darkness - ignorance.

This does not mean that there is a hell! This means that their own karmas causes them to *'abhigacchanti* - enter into' enter their life, next life or next lives in situations of darkness and helplessness, of sorrow and misery, of pain and hopelessness - of their own making.

(4) अनेजदेकं मनसो जवीयो नैनद्देवा आप्नुवन्पूर्वमर्षत् तद्धावतोऽन्यानत्येति तिष्ठत्तस्मिन्नपो मातरिश्वा दर्धाति ॥४॥

Ane-jadekam manaso javeeyo nainad deva aap-nuvan purvam arshat tad dhaa-vato 'nyan atye-titishthat tasminn apo maa-tarishva dadhaati

The self is one and unmoving, swifter than the mind. It does not move, yet the senses (the Devas) cannot surpass it as it moves before them. Although in one place, it passes the running ones. He surpasses all in excellence.

This Shloka from the Vedas describes the characteristics of Brahma or God within us:

That one *ekam* – meaning one, '*Ane'jat*' means fixed, not vibrating or that it is stationary and not moving. But it is also '*manaso javiyo*, which is the two words *manasah* - mind and *javeeyah* – more swift - together meaning faster than mind'. What does this mean? Faster than mind means that something cannot be perceived by mind and it is also eternal. Without it '*vaayu* – the breath' cannot stay within the body. This is how we determine a person no longer living! If soul leaves the body the person stops breathing!! This energy which keeps us alive is God's very presence within each of us.

(5) तदेजति तन्नैजति तद्दूरे तद्वन्तिके । तदन्तरस्य सर्वस्य तदु सर्वस्यास्य बाह्यतः ।। ४ ।।

Tad e-jati tan nai-jati tad dure tad vantike tad antar asya sarvasyaa tad-u sarvasyas-ya bahyatah

That moves, That does not move; That is far off, That is very near; That is inside all, and That is outside all.

This verse from Isha Upanishad tells us about God !

He '*ejati* – walks' and '*nai* - not - *ejati* – walks – and He does not walk', He moves and He does not move. He is '*doore* - far away' far away, but He is '*antike* - very near' as well. He is '*antah* – within' everything, and again He is '*baahyatah* - external to' outside of everything. ----- Just as a space.

As the first shloka 'Isha vaasyam idam sarvam' of the Isha Upanishad says, God pervades all and everything in the universe. This verse further explains the nature of God. It says that He moves, and also does not move not, He is close and yet far away, He is within and a part of the self, within and a part of the body. In short He is all pervading. This is the characteristic of Brahman or God. This is the reason it is said God is within us. One will not find Him if searching outside. One should always seek for God within.

(6)

यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मन्येवानुपश्र्यति । सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते ।।६।।

Yas tu sarvaani bhutanyaat Manye van-upashyati, Sarva-bhuteshu chaat-maanam tato na viju-gupsate

He who sees all beings in the Self, and the Self in all beings, feels no hatred (by that knowledge and realization).

He who understands and beholds all beings 'bhootaani - living entities' in his own self and perceives the reflection of his own self in all beings 'sarva-bhooteshu - in every living being', never hates another. - He who sees and understands everything in relation to the 'aatmaanam - the Greater soul' Omnipresent God, who sees all living entities as a piece of himself and himself as a part of the grander universe, and who sees and understand that the Supreme Lord dwells within everything, never 'vijugupsate - hates anyone' hates anything or any being.

The Isha Upanishad says that he who understands and beholds all beings in his own self and perceives the reflection of his own self in all beings 'sarvaani - all; bhootaani - living entities; aatmani - in relation to the Supreme Lord', never hates another. We have to think about Hate here in this manner. It is the beginning of the very thought of hate. A seed-thought of hate or dislike, if you will. Not just the intense and self-destructive feeling of hate but the beginning of the thought itself. Our minds should never open itself to the thought of hate. He who sees and understands everything in relation to the Omnipresent God 'sarva-bhooteshu - in every living being', who sees all living entities as a piece of himself and himself as a part of the grander universe, and who sees and understand that the Supreme Lord dwells within everything, never hates anything or any being 'vijugupsate - hates anyone'.

(7)

यस्मिन्सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मैवाभूद्विजानतः । तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः ।।७।।

> Yasmin sarvani bhutaany Aatmaiva-bhood vi-janatah tatra komohaha kaha-shoka ekat-vam anupash-yatah

When to the man of realization all beings become the very Self, then what delusion and what sorrow can there be for that seer of oneness?

The person who always sees all **'bhootaani** - living entities' – this includes all living plants and living animals, in all their forms as **'aatmaa** - the **chit-kana**, or spiritual spark' and as part of that divine being and having the inherent qualities of the Glorious God, becomes a true knower of things. This person indeed sees and he or she sees beyond the **'mohah** –illusion' of the world. He is **'anupasyatah** - of one who sees through and understands the authority of the Universe' He knows and understands the truth. What, then, can be illusion or anxiety for him? This person sees and understands beyond the **maya** or illusion of the world.

(8)

Sa parya-gaa chukram-akaa Yam-avran-nam asnaa viram shuddham apaapa-aviddham kavir manooshee pari-bhooh svayam-bhoor

yaathaa-that-yato thaan vyada-dhaach chaash-vatee-bhyah samaa-bhyahah

He is all-pervasive, pure, body-less, without wound, without sinews, taintless, untouched by sin, omniscient, ruler of mind, transcendent, and self-existent; he has duly allotted the (respective) duties to the eternal years (i.e., to the eternal creators called by that name).

When we become an enlightened person '*paryagaat* – a person who must know and is enlightened' to the fact that the Greatest of all is '*akaayam* - unembodied; *avranam* - without reproach; *asnaaviram* - without veins; *kavih* - omniscient;*maneesee* – philosopher, *paribhooh* - the greatest of all; *svayambhooh* – who is self-sufficient' When we become knowledgeable and enlightened and realize that God is radiant, formless, flawless and indivisible, beyond reproach, pure and uncontaminated by evil, the self-sufficient, all-knowing, without form and self-existent. This same great Omnipresent being has been granting righteous desires to the souls since '*saasvateebhyah* - immemorial; *samaabhyah* – time'. We ask O God that you grant us all our righteous desires which will help us to continue on that path to your abode.

(9) अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति येऽविद्यामुपासते । ततो भुय इव ते तमो य उ विद्यायाँ रताः ।।९।।

Andhan tamah pravi-shanti Ye 'vidyaam upaasate Tato bhooya ivaa te tamo Yau vidyaa-yaam rataa-hah

Those who worship *avidya*, enter into blinded darkness; but into greater darkness than that, enter they who are engaged in*vidya*.

Those who are engaged in the culture of evil activities and '*andham* - gross ignorance' blindly devote themselves and worship '*upaasate* – worship' these illusions shall '*pravisanti* - enter into' into the darkest '*tamah* – darkness' region of ignorance'. Worse still are those who are engaged in the so-called culture of knowledge, the false knowledge'*vidyaayaam* - in the culture of knowledge; *rataah* – engaged'!

This verse, the ninth verse in the Isha Upanishad tells us about those who live their lives engaged in the culture of evil activities! It tell us what becomes of those of us who think in inhuman ways, in evil ways!

But what are these evil activities?

It is those activities which are not peaceful, loving, kind, tolerant, and helpful to others! This verse says that those of us who engage in hurtful behavior and who find pleasure in inflicting pain and hurt on others! *They shall enter into the darkest region of ignorance.* 'tamah – darkness'

- 2) Those of us who are selfish and uncaring towards the other children of God and our brothers, sisters, our mothers and fathers! *They shall enter into the darkest region of ignorance.* 'tamah darkness'
- 3) Those of us who abuse women and children!
- 4) Those who devote themselves to the illusions of the world and worship these illusions. *They shall enter into the darkest region of ignorance.* **'tamah darkness'**
- 5) And it says that worse still are those who are engaged in the so-called culture of knowledge, the false knowledge! Those who make themselves the slave to their egos and use knowledge not to enlighten themselves but to feed the ego! *They shall enter into the darkest region of ignorance.* 'tamah darkness'
- 6) Those of us who hate and dislike and engage in gossip and push people apart instead of bringing people together and promoting Love. *They shall enter into the darkest region of ignorance.* **'tamah darkness'**

(10)

अन्यदेवाहुर्विद्ययाऽन्यदाहुरविद्यया । इति शुश्रुम धीराणां ये नस्तद्विचचक्षिरे ।।१०।।

Anya devaa-hur vid-yaya anyada-ahur-avidya-yaa iti shu-shruma dheera-naam ye nas tad vi-cha-chak-shire

"They say that by *vidya* a really different result is achieved, and by *avidya* a different result." Thus have we heard (the teaching of) those wise men who explained that to us.

The wise sages and gurus have *chakshire* - explained to us that one result is derived from the practice of *'vid-yayaa* - by the true culture of knowledge', and that a different result is obtained from the culture of *'avidyayaa* - by culture of illusion and ignorance'. Meaning here that we expend energy in the thought and practice of knowledge. First, it is a waste of effort and energy in following false knowledge and doing things which leads to unrighteous ends and opposes our inner, inherent nature of righteousness. So, let us choose instead to expend our energy of thought and action in performing righteous duties and knowledge.

(11)

विद्यां चाविद्यां च यस्तद्वेदोभयँ सह । अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा विद्ययाऽमृतमश्नुते ।।११।।

Vidyaam cha-vidyaam cha yas tad vedo-bhayam sahah avidya-yaa mrityum teer-tvaa vidyaya mritam-ashnute

He who knows these two -vidya and avidya - together, attains immortality through vidya, by crossing over death through avidya.

Only one who can understand enough to be able to differentiate '*vidyaam* - knowledge in fact; and *avidyaam* -ignorance'. The person who understands the process of illusion and that of true knowledge '*saha* – simultaneously' side by side! He who can explain the difference between ignorance and who can use this knowledge of difference between the two will be able to choose the right path in life. Because of this knowledge, this person will transcend the influence of repeated birth and death, and eventually enjoy immortality.

> (12) अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति येऽसम्भूतिमुपासते । ततो भूय इव ते तमो य उ सम्भूत्याँ रताः ।।१२।

> > Andhan tamah pravi-shanti ye 'sam-bhootim upaa-sate tato bhooya iva te tamo yau sam-bhoot-yaam rataah

Those who worship the Un-manifested, enter into blinding darkness; but those who are devoted to the Manifest, enter into greater darkness.

This verse from Isha Upanishad says that those who are engaged in the worship of 'andham – of ignorance and of false Gods' will 'pravishanti - enter into, tamah - darkness' into the darkest region of ignorance. So too will those who'upaasate – worship, asambhootim - demigods' of the impersonal and false Absolute. This means that there are those of us who in the weakness of our human-ness, raise others to God-like status and then we worship them. To do this in and of itself is 'pravishanti - entering into, tamah – darkness of ignorance' How many times have you heard those who do drugs and smoke all kinds of things say that they feel some sort of 'peace or meditative' state? This shloka tells us that those who involves themselves in activities that somehow leads to that false 'peace of mind', like drugs and empty recitations of words without focus, which we then continue on to worship also exists in tamah – darkness of ignorance'!

Our Havan Sandhya and Meditation, when done with true focus on God is the shortest, most direct path to God!

(13) अन्यदेवाहुः सम्भवादन्यदाहुरसम्भवात् । इति शुत्रुमं धीराणां ये नस्तद्विचचक्षिरे ॥ १३॥

Anya-devaa-huh sam-bha-vaad Anyada-hur asam-bhavaat iti shu-shru-ma dheeraanaam ye nas tad vicha-chak-shire

"They spoke of different results from the worship of the Manifested, and they spoke of different results from the worship of the Unmanifested" – thus we have heard (the teaching of those wise men.)

This verse tells us that one result is obtained by worshiping 'sambhavaat - by worshiping the Supreme Lord, the cause of all causes', the true and Supreme God and that another and different result is achieved by worshiping 'asambhavaat - by worshiping what is not the Supreme', or the false Gods. All this is taught to us by the *dheeraanaam* - wise ones of clear undisturbed minds who *vicha-chakshire* -clearly explained it.

(14) सम्भूतिं च विनाशं च यस्तद्वेदोभयँ सह । विनाशेन मृत्युं तीर्त्वा सम्भूत्याऽमृतमश्नुते ॥१४॥

Sam-bhoo-tim cha vinaa-sham cha yas tad vedo-bha-yam sa ha vinaa-she-na mrityum teerth-tva sam-bhoot-yaam ritam ash-nutey

He who knows these two – the Unmanifested and Destruction – together, attains immortality through the Unmanifested by crossing death through Destruction.

One should *veda* – should know perfectly well that *sambhootim* - God and nature in both the *vinaa-aham* - the temporary material manifestation and the un-manifested forms, where *vinaashena* - with everything which not of material, tangible nature. When one knows these, he surpasses death and the cosmic manifestation with it. This person will find his place in the *sam-bhootyaa* – the eternal Kingdom of God and he will; *ashnute* – enjoy his *amritam* - eternal life of bliss and knowledge. This person enjoys immortality.

(15)

हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम् । तत्त्वं पूषन्नपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये ।। १४ ।।

Hiran-mayena paatrena Satyas-yaa pihitam mukham tat tvam pooshann-apaa-vrinu satya-dharmaa ya-drishtaye

The the face of the Truth (Brahman in the solar orb) is concealed with a golden vessel. Do thou, O Sun, open it so as to be seen by me, who am by nature truthful (or, who am the performer of rightful duties).

The real *mukham* – face of truth '*satyasya* - of the Supreme Truth' is '*apihitam* - covered' '*paatrena* – covered by a brilliant covering! It is covered by '*hiranmayena* - by a dazzling golden brilliance'. O Lord, O '*pooshan* - O sustainer we ask you to please *apaavrinu* - kindly remove' that covering and *drishtaye* - show Yourself to Your '*satya* - pure;*dharmaaya* - unto the devotee'.

We pray O Lord to help us remove all obstacles, in whatever shape or form, so that we can realize our true self and the divinity within.

(16)

पूषत्रेकर्षे यम सूर्य प्राजापत्य व्यूह रश्मीन् समूह तेजः । यत्ते रूपं कल्याणतमं तत्ते पश्यामि योऽसावसौ पुरुषः सोऽहमस्मि ।।१६।।

Pooshan-ekar-she-yama soorya Praajaa-patya vyoohar ashmeen-samooha Tejo yat-te roopam kalyana-ta-mam tat-te pashyaami Yo saav-asau puru-shah soham asmi

O Thou, who art the nourisher, the solitary traveler, the controller, the acquirer, the son of Prajapati, do remove Thy rays, do gather up thy dazzle. I shall behold that form of Thine, which is the most benign. I am that very person that is yonder (in the sun).

O my Lord, you who are the supreme philosopher, and '*pooshan* – the maintainer' of the universe, you who controls all aspects of the Universe and who is the destination of the pure devotees. *O praajaapatya* - the well-wisher of the *prajaapatis*' the progenitors of mankind and '*soorya* - the destination of the *sooris* (all great devotees); I beg of you to please help me remove, to '*samooha* - kindly withdraw' the brilliance of your transcendental rays so that I can see Your '*roopam* – form' of bliss. This does not really mean that God removes his brilliance. This means that may God grant us the intelligence through the knowledge of the Vedas so that we may have the ability to see through the shroud of mystery and become one with God. May we become capable of identifying ourselves as one with God. Help me O Lord that '*pashyaami* - I may see' beyond, to understand the teachings of the Vedas and Help me O God to remove any veil of ignorance or false knowledge so that I may understand your true nature and by doing so, that I may understand my own true nature. '*sah* - myself; *aham* - I; *asmi* – am' – 'Soham – I am that'

You who are the eternal Supreme God, who is called 'that' and 'I am that'.

(17)

वायुरनिलममृतमथेदं भस्मांतँ शरीरम् । ॐ कतो स्मर कृतँ स्मर कतो स्मर कृतँ स्मर ॥१७॥

Vaayur-anilam-amritam-mathedam bhasmaantam shariram Om krato smara kritam smara krato smara kritam smara

Let my vital force, my *praana*, my *vaayuh* – my air of life go back to the *anilam* – the total reservoir of immortal air; and now let this *shareeram* – this body be *bhasmaantam* - reduced to ashes. O soul, *krato* – the enjoyer of sacrifices, – *smara*– please remember *kritam* - all that has been done for you. *smara* – and please remember OM!

We pray for the soul, that life giving vital force that sustains the body and is immaterial and immortal. At death even after the body is finally reduced to ashes, the soul which reaped the karma of that body and cannot die, we pray that you keep your vitality and your success for your future, and that you carry on and remember your past deeds and your errors and is motivated to become ever pure and pure. Remember God.

(18)

अग्ने नय सुपथा राये अस्मान् विश्वानि देव वयुनानि विद्वान् । युयोध्यस्मज्जुहुराणमेनो भूयिष्ठां ते नमउक्तिं विभेम ।। १८ ।।

Agne naya supathaa raaye asmaan vishwaani deva vayunaani vidwaan. Yuyo-dhyas-mai juhuraanam eno bhooyish-thaan te nama uktim vidhema

O *Agne* - brilliant Lord, thou art the knower of all our *vayunaani* – thoughts and deeds! And we pray to thee to lead us*naya* – to lead or guide us to walk along the *supathaa* – the righteous path for *raaye* – wealth and wisdom. We ask for your help to eliminate our bad habits and to guide us away from the *juhuraanam* – perverse crooked path in our lives! O Lord, we *vidhema* – offer to thee our *namah* – salutation, deep reverence and devout devotion!

O brilliant Lord, O Agne, thou art the knower of all our thoughts and deeds and we pray to thee to lead us along the righteous path for wealth and wisdom. You are the all-knowing One, you know all our vices. Help us eliminate our vices. We offer to thee our deep reverence and devout devotion.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om