

Philosophy of Life: Perspectives from the Upaniṣads

MA (Sanskrit)

Course Category: [Core]

Schedule of Offering: Odd Semester

Course Credit Structure: [3]

- Lecture: [3]
- Tutorial: [0]
- Practical: [0]

Contact Hours per week: [3]

1. Introduction

In our life, it can be observed that all actions we take are for our happiness alone. Whatever we may pursue, desire, or reject, it is only for the sake of our happiness. But we find that after pursuing all objects of our desires, and even gaining them, we are still not happy. If this is the case, what should our mode of living be? How should we live our lives, to be fully happy? Is this even possible? Many philosophies claiming to answer this question have come in and out of fashion since human society began. But the question still remains a mystery. Is there really a way to remain happy in life? The ancient Vedic texts called the Upaniṣads can give us a new perspective on answering such questions. In this course, we inquire into their philosophy based on the teachings from one of the principal Upaniṣads commented on by Ādiśaṅkarācārya Bhagavān entitled Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad, about which Gandhi has said: "If all the Upaniṣads and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the Īśopaniṣad were left in the memory of the Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever." With this Upaniṣad, and help from parts of several other Upaniṣads, we ask the question: What is that life like, which is lived according to the Upaniṣads?

2. Course Objectives

- To understand the general discourse surrounding the question of "meaning" in life.
- To familiarize the students with the basic tenets and goal of Upaniṣadic philosophy.

- To inquire into 21st century life from the perspective of the Upaniṣads, and to assess their value in helping a modern person to live in today's society.
- To understand the importance of the values prioritized in the Upaniṣads for our lives today, such as *jñāna*, *vairāgya*, and *karma*.

3. Pre-requisites

None.

4. Readings

**Īśāvāsyopaniṣad with the commentary of Śaṅkara Śrī Śaṅkarācārya in Sanskrit Translated into English with Introduction and Notes* by M.Hiriyanna, Kavyalaya Publishers, Mysore, 1972.

**The Upaniṣads: A Complete Guide* ed. by Signe Cohen. Routledge, 2018. (Chapters 1, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 28)

**The Early Upanishads: Annotated Text and Translation*, Patrick Olivelle, Oxford University Press, 1998, Oxford University Press, 1998

**The Principal Upaniṣads*, S Radhakrishna, George Alwin and Unwin, 1968

5. Module-wise topics

Module 1 - Introduction (8 sessions)

- Lay of the land: What problems constitute "Philosophy of Life"
- Definitions of Life
- Meaning of life: Puruṣārtha
- Approaches to Life

Readings

"Philosophy and Life" by Pandit Shuklaji in *Indian Philosophy* by Pandit Shuklaji, Trans. by K.K. Dixit. L.D. Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad, 1977.

Introduction to *Discourses on Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad* by Swami Chinmayananda. Revised ed. Mumbai: Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 2007.

"Relationship is the mirror with which you discover yourself" by J. Krishnamurti in *On Self Knowledge* by J. Krishnamurti. Krishnamurti Foundation India, 2006.

"The Idea of Puruṣārtha" by M. Hiriyanna in *Art, Culture, and Spirituality*, ed. by Atmaramananda and Dr. M. Sivaram Krishna. Advaita Ashrama, 1997.

"The Means of Happiness" in *Dialogues With the Guru* compiled by R. Krishnaswami Aiyar. Chetana Publication, Bombay, 1935.

Yoga Sutra by Patanjali, trans. by Rama Prasad. Munshiram Manoharlal, 2002.

Module 2 - Introduction to Upaniṣadic Thought (6 Sessions)

- Upaniṣads and their place in Indic Knowledge Systems
- Common theme of the Upaniṣads
- Relevance of Upaniṣads to Philosophy of Life
- Central concepts in the Upaniṣads
 - Brahman, Atman, Jiva, Īśvara, Jagat, Karma, Mokṣa

Readings

“Central Ideas of Upaniṣad” in *Introduction to Comparative Philosophy* by P.T. Raju.

The Upaniṣads: A Complete Guide ed. by Signe Cohen. Routledge, 2018. (Chapters 1 and 14)

Module 3 - Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad (30 Sessions)

- Mantra 1
 - Jñāna as ultimate teaching
 - Non-covetousness as a virtue
- Mantra 2
 - Karma as teaching for those not yet ready for jñāna
 - Karma theory
 - Significance of doing one’s duty
- Mantra 3
 - Consequence of ignorance
 - Suicide
- Mantras 4-5
 - Nature of the Self
 - Ineffability
- Mantras 6-7
 - Result of knowledge of the Self
 - Mokṣa
- Mantra 8
 - Nature of Brahman

- Self as Brahman
- Mantra 9-14
 - Avidyā and the Manifest
 - Vidyā and the Unmanifest
 - Their roles in life
- Mantras 15-18
 - Prayer to the Gods for liberation
 - Giving up the sense of ownership of action (kartṛtva)

Readings

The Upaniṣads: A Complete Guide ed. by Signe Cohen. Routledge, 2018. (Chapters 11, 12, 13, and 28)

“The place of suicide in Indian culture and religions” by Yajneswar S. Shastri in *Traverses on Less Trodden Path of Indian Philosophy and Religion*. L.D. Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad, 1991.

Yoga Sutra by Patanjali, trans. by Rama Prasad. Munshiram Manoharlal, 2002.

“The Ineffable” by B.K. Matilal in *The Collected Essays of B.K. Matilal, Vol. 1: Mind, Language and World* ed. by Jonardon Ganeri. OUP, 2002.

Module 4 - Conclusion (3 Sessions)

6. Pedagogy

The lectures will be based on reading material mentioned above. The students are expected to go through the material before coming to class. As this is a Master’s-level course students must participate in discussion and critical analysis as much as possible. Since the course deals with existential issues much emphasis is placed on self-reflection. Assignments will encourage students to propose their own ideas on how to implement the philosophy of life espoused in the Upaniṣads for themselves.

7. Evaluation Pattern

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| • Assignments | - | 20% |
| • Mid-term exam | - | 25% |
| • Term Paper | - | 20% |
| • End-term exam | - | 35% |