

# Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad

(Kṛṣṇa Yajur Veda)

Commentary by Sri Rama Ramanuja Achari

*om atho puruṣo ha vai nārāyaṇo'kāmayata prajāḥ sṛje yeti | nārāyaṇāt prāṇo jāyate | manaḥ sarvendriyāṇi ca | khaṁ vāyur jyotir āpaḥ | pṛthivī viśvasya dhāriṇī | nārāyaṇād brahma jāyate | nārāyaṇād rudro jāyate | nārāyaṇād indro jāyate | nārāyaṇāt prajāpatayaḥ prajāyante | nārāyaṇād dvādaśādityā rudrā vasavas sarvāṇi ca chandāguṃsi | nārāyaṇād eva samutpadyante | nārāyaṇe pravartante | nārāyaṇe pralīyante | etad ṛg veda śiro'dhite || 1 ||*

*athaḥ* = then; *puruṣaḥ* = the Supreme Being. Lit. 'that which fills all'; *ha vai* = indeed; *nārāyaṇaḥ* = Narayana; *kāmayata* = desired; *prajāḥ* = offspring; *sṛje* = I shall project; *iti* = thus; *nārāyaṇāt* = from Narayana; *prāṇaḥ* = the Life Force; *jāyate* = was born; *manaḥ* = mind; *sarva* = all; *indriyāṇi* = senses; *ca* = and; *khaṁ* = ether; *vāyuḥ* = wind; *jyotiḥ* = energy; *āpaḥ* = water; *pṛthivī* = earth; *viśvasya dhāriṇī* = that supports everything; *brahmā* = the Creator; *jāyate* = was born; *rudraḥ* = Siva; *indraḥ* = King of the gods; *prajāpatayaḥ* = the Divine progenitors; *dvādaśa* = the twelve; *ādityāḥ* = Adityas; *rudrāḥ* – the [eleven] Rudras; *vasavāḥ* = the [twelve] Vasus; *sarvāṇi* = all; *chandāṃsi* = meters; *eva* = indeed; *samutpadyante* = do they arise; *nārāyaṇe* = in Narayana; *pravartante* = do they operate, have their being; *pralīyante* = they are absorbed, subside; *etat* = this; *śiraḥ* = head; *adhite* = teaches.

Then Narayana, the Supreme Being desired 'I shall project beings'. From Narayana emanates the pāṇa (Life Breath), mind and the sense organs, ether, air, fire, water, and the earth that supports all. From Narayana emanates Brahma. From Narayana emanates Rudra. From Narayana emanates Indra. From Narayana emanate the Prajapatis (The Divine Progenitors). From Narayana emanates the 12 Adityas, Rudras, Vasus and all the Vedic metres (chandās). From Narayana only do they proceed. Through Narayana do they prosper. In Narayana are they reabsorbed. This is taught as the head of the Rig Veda. 1.

## Commentary

**atha** — Then, at the end of the period of involution of the universe, **puruṣaḥ** — the Supreme Being, one of the derivatives of the word means “that which fills of pervades the entire universe”. **ha vai** — indeed,

**nārāyaṇaḥ** — derived from *nara* which refers to all beings both sentient and insentient, and *ayana* which means the “ground” that in which they inhere, have their being.

**Akāmayata** — He desired, in the R.V. 10:129 it says Desire in the beginning came upon That, that was the primal seed born of mind.

**Prajāḥ** — offspring, but in general it refers to everything that comes into being.

**Sṛjeya iti** — to produce. The Supreme Being does not create from nothing but rather “projects” from within his essential being. All matter is nothing but energy or *śakti*. Nārāyaṇa is *śaktimān* or the possessor of *śakti* — much like the relationship between the rose and its scent. The “Creation” of the universe is the metamorphosis of the Supreme Being by means of His Energy.

**Nārāyaṇāt prāṇa jāyate** — from Nārāyaṇa issued forth the “Life Force or the Universe”. Prāṇa doesn't refer to the act of respiration but rather the all-pervading life-force which energizes and enlivens every living thing, from plants to humans.

**Manaḥ sarvendriyāṇi ca** — then the *mahat-tattva* and all the *indriyas* arose. This principle which is called *Mahat-tattva*, the "Great Principle," or simply *Mahat* is used to connote *Cosmic Intelligence*. In this context, *intelligence* is understood as the capacity to expand, reveal, and ascertain, there is no association with ideation, relationship, or identity. The next ten principles are called *Indriyas* meaning “power”, “force” or “capacity”. They are divided into two groups — 5 Abstract Cognitive-Senses or capacities of knowing called *jñānendriyas* and 5 Abstract Motor-senses or capacities for action called *Karmendriyas*. These forces are evolved to construct a system of purposes or objects of desire. It must be kept in mind that these abstract sense powers are only the

inherent capacities in the Cosmic Mind (*Manas*) to cognise and to act. They are powers which need instruments through which to function. All the *Indriyas* (Sense-Powers) arise simultaneously within Mind.

***khaṃ vāyur jyotir āpaḥ pṛthivī viśvasya dhāriṇī*** | Space, air, fire, water, and the earth that supports all. The manifestation of the “instruments” are preceded by the *tan-mātras* - composed of the pronoun tad, "that," and the root mā "to measure," used here in the word *mātra*, meaning “an element or elementary matter or a measure” — it therefore translates as "thatness." These Subtle Associate Elements of the *Indriyas* (Sense-Powers) are the essence of Sound, of Touch, of Form, of Flavour, and of Odour. These 5 Subtle Elements (*Tan-mātras*) are the archetypal fivefold extensions of the formless manifestation of energy, the first conceivable division of matter, the subtlest prototype form of matter. From these 5 *tan-mātras* the universe evolves, continues and finally disappears. A further increase of the restraining aspect of the *Tamas Guṇa*, produces an accretion of mass in the five Subtle Elements (*Tan-mātras*) which forms the five Sense-Particulars or gross-elements (*Mahā-bhūtas*).

***nārāyaṇāt brahmā jāyate*** — From Narayana emanates Brahma the Creator the personification of the rajasic energy.

***nārāyaṇāt rudra jāyate*** — From Narayana emanates Rudra the transformative energy of the Cosmos, or the Tamasic energy.

***nārāyaṇāt indra jāyate*** — From Narayana emanates Indra. Indra is the chief of the devas.

***nārāyaṇāt prajāpatayah prajāyante*** — From Narayana emanate the *Prajāpatis*, — those divine beings who assist Brahma with the work of creation, like Daksha and the others.

***Nārāyaṇāt dvādaśa ādityāḥ*** — From Narayana emanates the 12 *Adityas*. The *Adityas* represent the sovereign principles, the personification of the laws that rule the universe and society. They are the pre-existent principles upon which the Universe is based. They are born from goddess Aditi which means the “Undivided Primordial Vastness”, the totality, the first Goddess.

These Principles rule the relationship between human beings as well as the relationship between human beings and the forces of Nature. Thus there are two corresponding sovereign principles one that rules this world and one the other. Thus there are 6 pairs.—

### The Six Major Sovereign Principles

Material World		Spiritual World	
<b><i>Mitra</i></b>	"Friendship", solidarity, sanctity of the promise.	<b><i>Varuṇa</i></b>	"The Binder" the mysterious laws of fate, the cosmic witness.
<b><i>Aryaman</i></b>	Chivalry, honour, the rules of society	<b><i>Dāta</i></b>	Cosmic Order
<b><i>Bhaga</i></b>	The inherited share	<b><i>Aṃśa</i></b>	The gods given share

### The Six Minor Sovereign Principles

<b><i>Tvaṣṭra</i></b>	The Shaper, craftsmanship	<b><i>Savitra</i></b>	The Vivifier, motivation, drive.
<b><i>Puṣan</i></b>	the Nourisher, Inner security, prosperity	<b><i>Indra</i></b>	The Mighty, courage, outer security, heroism
<b><i>Vivasvan</i></b>	The Resplendent, ancestral custom, morality, ethics, the law of righteousness, the traditional law	<b><i>Viṣṇu</i></b>	The Pervader, knowledge, the all pervading cosmic law.

***Rudrāḥ*** — Rudras are eleven in number and according to the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* they represent the 10 vital forces (*Prāṇas*) and the mind. They are called Rudras because they produce grief when they depart from the body. In the *Puranas* they are named as follows:— *Saṅkara*, *Vīrabhadra*, *Girīśa*, *Ajaikapāda*, *Bhuvanadīśvara*, *Ahīrbudhnya*, *Pināki*, *Aparājita*, *Kapāli*, *Sthānu* and *Bhaga*.

***Vasavaḥ*** — *Vasus* are the earth (*Dhara*), water (*Apāḥ*), fire (*Anala*), air (*Anila*), dawn (*Prabhāsa*), and twilight (*Pratyuṣa*) moon (*Soma*) and the pole star (*Dhruva*).

***sarvāṇi ca chhandāmsi*** — Every ṛk mantra is expressed through a *chhandas*. Popularly *chhandas* is translated as “metre”, such as *Gāyatri*, *Anuṣṭubh*, etc.; the type of metre is said to be determined by the number of syllables. For instance a mantra in *Gāyatri* metre should have 24 syllables; however the rule is not rigid, there are *mantās*

in Gāyatri with 22-25 syllables. Chhandas is associated only with Vedic mantrās. The metres of verses of poetry in classical Sanskrit are said to be *vr̥tta*.

Whenever a ṛk mantra is recited, the names of ṛṣhi, devata and chhandas have to be recited as well.

Most of the mantrās in RV are in 7 chhandas namely Gāyatri (24), Anuṣṭubh (32), Pañktiḥ (40), Jagatī (48), Uṣṇiḥ (28), Bṛhatī (36) and Triṣṭup (44), the number in parenthesis indicating the number of syllables. The remaining are in remaining 10 chhandas namely atijagatī (52), atīśakvarī (60), atyaṣṭiḥ (68), atidhṛtiḥ (76), ekapada (10), śakvari (56), aṣṭiḥ (64), dhṛtiḥ (72), dvipada (20) and pragātha.

To understand these ideas, we should move away from the simplistic definition of chhandas in terms of the number of syllables. Sri Aurobindo translates 'chhandas' as 'the poetic measure of the sacred mantrās'.

It may be recalled from the essay *Suparṇa* that various chhandas assume the form of birds and recover the Soma, the Delight of Existence from the Supreme place. Again TS (4.3.2) mentions that the ṛṣi Vasiṣṭha is born from the Rathantara sāman, Viśvāmītra from the Vairūpa, the ṛṣi Viśvakarma from the Śakvāra and Raivata Sāman etc.

TS (4.3.8) has a long list of stomās and their functions. According to Sri Aurobindo, stoma is a hymn of praise and God-affirmation.

Note that in the symbolic construction of the symbolic fire-altar mentioned in Kāṇḍa 4, chhandas plays an important role. One of the types of bricks used in the physical altar is called chhandas bricks. This is discussed in TS (5.3.8). This section has its own type of symbolism.

***nārāyaṇāt eva samutpadyante*** — From Narayana only do they proceed.

***nārāyaṇe pravartante*** — In Narayana do they operate

***nārāyaṇe pralīyante*** — In Narayana are they re-absorbed.

In Taittiriya Upanishad Brahman or the Supreme Reality is described in 3 ways:—

1. *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahmā* (2:1) — Brahman is existence, consciousness, infinity.

2. *yato vāco nivartante | aprāpya manasā saha | ānandaṃ brahmaṇo vidvān |* (2:4) — That from which speech recoils, along with the mind, incomprehensible, ineffable, that Supreme Bliss know to be Brahman.

3. *yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante | yena jātāni jīvanti | yat-prayanty-abhi-saṃviṣanti | tad-vijijñāsasva | tad brahmeti |* (3:1) That from which all beings arise, in which they exist and into which they are ultimately dissolved — investigate That, That is Brahman.

Narayana is identified with Brahman as the “Ground of Being” or the Field in which everything arises, exists and subsides. Just as the ocean is one, but within it arise tides, waves, ripples, tempests, whirlpools, currents, tsunamis etc., they all arise from the ocean, have their existence within the ocean and ultimately subside back into the ocean.

***etat ṛg veda śiraḥ adhite*** — This the Rig Veda teaches.

*om atha nityo nārāyaṇaḥ | brahmā nārāyaṇaḥ | śivaśca nārāyaṇaḥ | śakraśca nārāyaṇaḥ | dyāvā pṛthivyau ca nārāyaṇaḥ | kalaśca nārāyaṇaḥ | diśaśca nārāyaṇaḥ | ūrdhvaśca nārāyaṇaḥ | adhaśca nārāyaṇaḥ | antar bahiśca nārāyaṇaḥ | nārāyaṇa evedagum sarvam | yat bhūtaṃ yacca bhavyam | niṣkalo nirañjano nirvikalpo nirākhyātaḥ śuddho deva eko nārāyaṇaḥ | na dvitīyo'sti kaścit | ya evaṃ veda | sa viṣṇureva bhavati sa viṣṇureva bhavati | etad yajur veda śiro'dhīte || 2 ||*

*atha* – now, therefore; *nityaḥ* = eternal; *brahmā* = The Creator; *śivaḥ* = The Destroyer/Transformer; *ca* = and; *śakraḥ* = Indra, the King of the Gods; *dyāvā* = the Heavens; *pṛthivī* = the Earth; *kalaḥ* = Time; *diśaḥ* = the Directions; *ūrdhvaḥ* above; *adhaḥ* = below; *antaḥ* = within; *bahiḥ* = without; *evedam sarvam* = all this; *yat* = which; *bhūtaṃ* = was; *yat-ca* = and which; *bhavyam* = will be; *niṣkalaḥ* = without parts; *nirañjanaḥ* = immaculate; *nirvikalpaḥ* = inconceivable; *nirākhyātaḥ* = indescribable; *śuddhaḥ* = pure; *devaḥ* = Divine; *ekaḥ* = One; *na* = not; *dvitīyaḥ* = a second, another; *asti* = there is; *kaścit* = anything; *yaḥ* = whosoever; *evaṃ* = this; *veda* = knows; *saḥ* = he; *viṣṇuḥ* = Vishnu the all-pervader; *eva* = indeed, surely; *bhavati* = becomes; *etat* = this; *śiraḥ* = the head; *adhīte* = teaches.

Narayana is eternal. Brahma is Narayana. Siva is Narayana. Indra is Narayana. Time is Narayana. Space is Narayana, the intermediate quarters also are Narayana. That which is above is Narayana. That which is below is Narayana. That which is within and that which is without is Narayana. The entire Universe which existed and that which will exist is Narayana. Narayana is the only One that is partless, immaculate, inconceivable, indescribable, pure and divine. There is no second. Whosoever knows Him thus, becomes Vishnu. This the Yajur Veda teaches. 2.

### Commentary

**nītyo nārāyaṇaḥ** — *Narayana is eternal* — one should not think of 'eternal' as durability is time and space. Time and space are mentioned below as arising from Narayana – therefore He is, by definition unconditioned by them.

**brahmā śivaśca śakraśca nārāyaṇaḥ** — *Brahma, Siva and Indra are Narayana* — Brahma and Siva are the personification of the creative and the transformative energies of the cosmos. Indra is the 'king of the gods' who rules the Universe. In Pauranic lore the trinity is composed of Brahma, Siva and Vishnu, but here because Vishnu is being identified with Narayana the Absolute, Indra has been substituted in his place.

**kalaśca nārāyaṇaḥ .... evedagum sarvam** — *Time is Narayana..... The entire Universe which existed and that which will exist is Narayana.* Narayana here is not being described as a “Personal Deity” but rather as the Absolute. The Veda says: *sarvam khalvidam Brahma* — “All this entire [expanding] Universe is Brahman!” Here Narayana is being equated with the Absolute all pervading Brahman which is the material as well as the efficient cause of the entire universe with its countless galaxies!

**Niṣkalaḥ** — The universe comprises 2 aspects of being — *sakala* and *niṣkala*. *Sakala* “with parts” refers to the universe that is subject to scientific investigation, it is the realm of 'Logos' and *Niṣkala* “without parts” refers to the realm of 'Mythos'.

There are 2 ways of thinking, speaking and acquiring knowledge - *sakala* and *niṣkala*. These are two complimentary ways of arriving at truth.

**Sakala** — 'Logos' is the rational, pragmatic and scientific thought that enables us to function well in the world. Logos relates to facts and figures and corresponds to the objective world of our common experience. Logos looks ahead and tries to improve and discover new ways of being, to achieve greater control over our environment and to invent and innovate. Logos cannot assuage human pain and suffering, it cannot answer questions about the ultimate value of human existence.

**Niṣkala** — 'Mythos' is primary as it is concerned with what is timeless and constant in our existence. Mythos is retrospective and deals with the origins of life, to the foundations of a culture and to the unconscious mind. It relates to the questions: who are we? Why are we here? And what do we do next? Mythos is not concerned with pragmatic day to day issues but rather with meaning. Mythos provides a spiritual context that helps us to make sense of our day to day lives. The mythological stories of the Purāṇas and Itihāsas deal with psychology and the unconscious mind.

Narayana is *niṣkala* in other words not the object of a scientific or logical quest.

**Nirañjanaḥ** — 'immaculate' – Narayana is free from every sort of conceivable blemish or moral stain. The moral stains to which we humans are subjected are: *kāma* — self-referent desire; *krodha* — anger, *moha* — delusion or ignorance of our true spiritual nature and identification with the mind and body; *mada* — arrogance, considering ourselves more important and more qualified than others; *lobha* — greed, stinginess, parsimony; *mātsarya* — malicious envy of the qualities or the achievements or possessions of others. Narayana is completely free from all of these character stains.

**Nirvikalpaḥ** — 'Inconceivable' — in order for us to be able to imagine something we need to know its type or genus — human, animal, vegetable, mineral etc. its qualities — tall/low, thick/thin, dark/light etc. its activities or motion — stationary, forward, upward, circular etc. Anything that is devoid of these qualifications is inconceivable.

**Nirākhyātaḥ** — 'inexpressible' — it stands to reason that if we cannot even conceive of anything then its description would also be impossible. Therefore, anything that Scripture says about the Supreme being is an approximation only and not to be taken as a literal and absolute fact.

**Śuddhaḥ** — 'pure' — the synonym 'immaculate' was a negative attribute in that it negated the possibility of Narayana being contaminated by any adventitious imperfection. 'Pure' here refers to Narayana's essential quality of absolute inherent perfection and grace.

**Devah** — 'God' — from the root *div* which means 'to shine'. It means Being of Light.

**eko nārāyaṇaḥ na dvitīyo'sti kaścit** — Narayana is One, there is no 'other' in any way whatsoever. Narayana has already been clearly defined and described as comprising of the entire Universe, and also pervading the entire universe, every particle is pervaded by Narayana, so by definition there can be nothing that is “other” than It.

*om ityagre vyāharet | nama iti paścāt | nārāyaṇāyetyupariṣṭāt | om ityekākṣaram | nama iti dve akṣare | nārāyaṇāyeti pañcākṣarāṇi | etad vai nārāyaṇasya aṣṭākṣaram padam | yo ha vai nārāyaṇasya āṣṭākṣaram padam adhyeti | anapabruvas sarvam āyur eti | vindate prājāpatyaṅ rāyas poṣaṃ gaupatyam | tato'mṛtatvam aśnute tato'mṛtatvam aśnuta iti | ya evaṃ veda | etat sāma veda śiro'dhīte || 3 ||*

*iti* = thus; *agre* = in front; *vyāharet* = place; *namaḥ* = salutations; *paścāt* = afterwards; *nārāyaṇāya* = to Narayana; *upariṣṭāt* = *ekah* = one; *akṣaram* = syllable; *namaḥ* = salutations; *dve* = two; *akṣare* = syllables; *pañca* = five; *akṣarāṇi* = syllables; *etat* = this; *vai* = indeed; *nārāyaṇasya* = Narayana's; *aṣṭākṣaram* = Eight-syllabled; *padam* = sentence; *yaḥ* = whosoever; *ha vai* = verily; *adhyeti* = recites, studies; *anapabruvaḥ* = free from infamy or disgrace; renown; *sarvam* = all, everything; *āyuh* = long-life, health; *eti* = arrives at, approaches; *vindate* = obtains; *prājāpatyaṅ* = procreative energy or power; *rāyaḥ* = regal wealth; *poṣaṃ* = growth, abundance; *gaupatyam* = possession of cattle, or “master of the senses” or hegemony; *tataḥ* = thereupon; *amṛtatvam* = immortality; *aśnute* = reaches, obtains; *etat* = this; *sāma-veda-śiraḥ* = the Sama Veda; *adhīte* = teaches.

One should utter **Om** first, then **namaḥ** and thereafter **nārāyaṇaya Om** is a single syllable. **Namaḥ** consists of two syllables. **Nārāyaṇaya** consists of five syllables. This is the mantra of eight syllables (*ashtakshari*) pertaining to Narayana. Whoever studies this mantra and chants it constantly, becomes free from all disgrace, attains full life and hegemony. He enjoys royal pleasures and attains self-mastery, thereupon He attains Liberation, yea Final Liberation. This the Sama Veda teaches. 3.

### Commentary

This verse gives the construction of the sacred Aṣṭākṣari mantra. Here we are introduced to the benefits which accrue from a regular and focussed recitation this mantra.

1. *Anapabruvaḥ* — Freedom from disgrace, in other words we will overcome all our past indiscretions and become well-renowned.
2. *Sarvam āyuh* — Health and a full life-span.
3. *Prājāpatyaṅ* — Procreative energy or power to become like Brahma in the ability to accomplish projects.
4. *Rāyas-poṣaṃ* — Increasing prosperity and wealth.
5. *Gaupatyam* — Mastery of the sense – freedom from all sensual conditioning.
6. *Amṛtatvam* — immortality.

Usually *amṛtatvam* is used to describe the state of *mokṣa* or final liberation. Śrīvaiṣṇavas don't accept the theory of *jīvan-mukti* or “liberation while still embodied” as taught in Advaita Vedānta. Now, interpreting the two terms juxtaposed: 'mastery of the senses' and 'immortality' the Śruti clarifies:—

*yadā pañcāvatiṣṭhante jñānāni manasā saha |  
buddhiś ca na viceṣṭate tām āhuḥ paramām gatim ||*

*When the five cognitive senses together with the mind cease (from their normal activities) and the intellect itself does not stir, that, they say, is the Highest State. (paramam gatim) Katha Up 4:3:10.*

This is also validated by the Purāṇa:—

*yadā sarve vimucyante kāmā yasya hrdisthitāḥ |  
tadāmṛtatvam āpnoti jīvanneva na saṃśayaḥ ||*

*When all the desires within the heart are annulled one becomes liberated, undoubtedly, even while living. Garuda Purana 1:236: 12*

Therefore, once we have achieved mastery of the senses and freedom from all sensual conditioning, and thus freedom from desires, craving and attachment, then we attain to a mental state of complete freedom from suffering<sup>1</sup> — this is what is termed here as *amṛtatvam* or immortality.

1. Even here and now Samsāra is overcome by those whose minds rest in equanimity. For the Brahman (individual Self), when uncontaminated by Prakṛti, is the same everywhere, therefore they are established in Brahman. (Bhagavad Gita 5:19)

*pratyag ānandaṃ brahma puruṣaṃ praṇava svarūpaṃ | akāra ukāra makāra iti | tan ekadhā samabhavat tad-etad oṃ iti | yam uktvā mucyate yogī janma saṃsāra bandhanāt | oṃ namo nārāyaṇāyeti mantropāsakaḥ | vaikuṅṭha bhuvana lokaṃ <sup>2</sup> gamiṣyati | tad idaṃ paraṃ puṇḍarīkaṃ vijñāna-ghanam | tasmād tadidāvan mātram | brahmaṇyo devakī putro brahmaṇyo madhusūdana oṃ | sarva bhūtastham ekaṃ nārāyaṇam | kāraṇa puruṣaṃ akāraṇam parabrahma oṃ || 4 ||*

*pratyag ānandaṃ* = absolute Bliss; *brahma puruṣaṃ* = The Great Being; *praṇava svarūpaṃ* = who is embodied in OM; *akāra -ukāra -makāra iti* = which is comprised of the three letters AUM; *tat* = that; *ekadhā* = once; *samabhavat* = coming together, conformity; *etat* = this; *yam* = whoever; *uktvā* = having recited; *mucyate* = is liberated; *yogī* = the Yogi; *janma -saṃsāra-bandhanāt* = from the bondage of birth and repeated transmigration; *oṃ namo nārāyaṇāyeti* = om namo narayanaya; *iti* = this; *mantropāsakaḥ* = the one who meditates upon this mantra; *vaikuṅṭha -bhavanam* = to the realm of vaikuntha; *gamiṣyati* = attains, reaches; *idaṃ* = this; *paraṃ* = supreme; *puṇḍarīkaṃ* = lotus; *vijñāna-ghanam* = filled with transcendental wisdom, *tasmāt* = therefrom; *tat* = that; *idāvan-mātram* = as bright as lightning; *brahmaṇya* = religious, filled with greatness; *devakī putraḥ* = the son of Devaki; *madhusūdana* = the destroyer of the demon Madhu; *sarva bhūtastham* = situated within all beings, pervades all the five elements; *ekaṃ* = one only; *kāraṇa* = the cause [of everything]; *puruṣa* = that which fills everything; *akāraṇam* = uncaused; *parabrahma* = the Supreme Being.

The Yogi that recites the name of Him, who is Bliss Absolute, The Great Purusha, who is represented by Om comprised of the three letters A, U, and M, is released from the bondage of birth and repeated transmigration. He who chants the mantra **om namo narayanaya** reaches the realm of Vaikunta. That is this Lotus, it is replete with transcendental wisdom and bright as lightning. The son of Devaki (Krishna) is the Supreme, Madhusudana is the Supreme, Narayana who pervades all beings, who is ONE only, the Cause of all, being Himself causeless is the Supreme Being (parabrahman). 4.

### Commentary

**Yogī** = one who practices Yoga which is the path of unification with the Supreme. Yoga refers to all those methodologies which help us to rediscover our true nature and liberate us from suffering.

**Brahma-Puruṣa** — The spiritual aspirant who chants the name of the the 'Great Being' is liberated from rebirth. *Puruṣa* means either 'that which fills everything' or 'He who lies within the city of the heart' and is represented by the sound OM which is comprised of three letters. Each of these letters representing a state of consciousness:—

'A' indicates *jāgrata* — 'wakeful' consciousness in which we are engaged with, and interacting with the external world.

'U' indicates *svapna* — the 'dream state' of consciousness or the internal world of the emotions, ideas, memories etc.

'M' indicates *susupti* — 'dreamless sleep' an unconscious state in which there is no recollection of subject and object dichotomy.

OM represents *turiya* — the 'fourth state' of transcendental consciousness accessed only in very deep states of meditation and enlightenment.

**'reaches the realm of Vaikunta'**. — The ultimate outcome of the upāsana of this mantra is the attainment of Vaikuntha. This realm of Vaikuntha is then declared to be *here* within the lotus of the heart, filled with transcendental consciousness. The heart is said to be the seat of the mind, the inner spiritual realization comes as a flash of lightning. Let us now study the implication of this teaching.

### The Nature of Vaikuntha.

Many of the ācāryas following the Purāṇas have given elaborate material descriptions of Vaikuntha based upon Medieval Indian Aesthetics. Vaikuntha is said to be a 'world' (some say a planet) somewhere in space, higher than any other world. It has beautiful gardens and flower-beds, in the middle there is a huge and gorgeous temple (like Srirangam), with exquisite halls and pavilions, populated by beautiful birds, animals etc, angelic beings, people, gods, sages etc. There is music, singing dancing and so forth. But how realistic are these descriptions? According to the

<sup>2</sup> Some manuscripts have *bhavanam* instead of *bhuvana lokam*.

principles of Vedic hermeneutics all these descriptions are known as 'arthavāda' — their only value is to encourage less refined devotees in their Dharma practice.

*Vaikuṅṭha* means 'free from hindrances or obstacles'. It does not refer to a geographic location in space but is a *state of consciousness*! Rāmānuja in his *Vaikuṅṭha Gadyam*<sup>3</sup> says:—

“The universe consists of fourteen realms; beyond these, there are seven envelopes which are ten times the size of these Universes; Beyond all these realms based upon Cause and Effect; there exists *that* which is called “transcendental space” (*parama vyoman*) which cannot be comprehended nor expressed by Brahma and others — *That* is Sri Vaikuntam, the Divine Realm.”

He then goes on to give a very materialistic and aesthetic description of Sri Vaikuntha. But even here the acharya has introduced a paradox!

1. Firstly he says that Vaikuntha is beyond the realms of cause and effect — which means all the 14 realms of being which are subject to cause and effect.
2. He then says that it is in “transcendental Space” not the physical space that we know.
3. It cannot be comprehended nor expressed by Brahma and all the other gods.

Brahma and Shiva's intelligence is far superior to any human intellect, therefore if they, cannot understand and express it then there is absolutely no chance of any human being, no matter how enlightened of doing the same! If Vaikuntha is beyond cause and effect and therefore of the pairs of opposites and all the dichotomies of human existence then it is indeed incomprehensible and nothing intelligible can be predicated of it. After taking this position the acharya then continues with a poetic description of that indescribable place! How are we to resolve this paradox? Throughout the Sacred Literature of India we have declarations of something being incomprehensible and indescribable followed by a description. The reason being that the vague, the formless and the non-material have no attraction for the common people. They need images, ideas, rewards, punishments etc to motivate them to Dharma practice. So the purpose of these descriptions is only to motivate those of lesser intelligence, while indicating to those of higher intelligence that all this is provisional only and not the absolute Truth. The Vishnu Purana declares:—

Pradhāna-puruṣavyakta-kālānām paramam hi yat |  
paśyanti sūrayaḥ śuddham tad viṣṇoḥ paramam padam ||

*What is beyond matter, spirit, manifestation, and time; that pure [state] which sages behold that is the supreme abode of Vishnu. (Vishnu Purana 1.2.16)*

viśuddham bodhanam nityam aḥam akṣayam avyayam |  
avyaktam avikāram yat tad viṣṇoḥ paramam padam ||  
na sthūlam na ca sūkṣmam yanna viśeṣaṇa agocaram |  
tat padam paramam viṣṇoḥ praṇamāmaḥ sadāmalam ||

*That which is the Supreme State (Paramam Padam) of Vishnu is pure, conscious, eternal, unborn, undecayable, inexhaustible, unmanifest, immutable, It is neither gross nor subtle, nor capable of being defined, to that ever immaculate Supreme State of Vishnu I bow. Vishnu Purāṇa 1:9:50 - 51*

From these verses it is absolutely clear that what is meant by *param-pada* — is not a “place” but rather an existential transcendental state of being.

***brahmaṇyo devakī putro brahmaṇyo madhusūdana om*** — After indicating the incomprehensible inexpressible state of vaikuntha the Upanishad makes an oblique reference to Krishna the son of Devaki declaring him to be 'Brāhmaṇya' — worthy of veneration or worship. Krishna is the only pūrṇa-avatāra or complete incarnation of Lord Nārāyaṇa. In this Upaniṣad Nārāyaṇa is declared to be formless, all-pervading, absolute, incomprehensible and indescribable whereas Krishna has a definite form and a biography and is worthy of our devotion. He is qualified by the epithet “Madhusūdana” — which means the destroyer of the 'Honey-demon' — The Honey-demon is a metaphor for desire and craving for material enjoyments. It is desire which ensnares us and is the cause of our suffering and bondage to *samsāra*.

Nārāyaṇa as like water-vapour – present everywhere as humidity but having no definitive form, the avatāra is like the rain-cloud – consisting of water-vapour only but having a form and function and appearing and raining at a specific time and place. The *Arca-avatāra* or the sacred icon in the temple is like the water in a tap — available all the time.

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<sup>3</sup> Some scholars dispute the authorship of the Vaikuntha Gadya by Rāmānuja on the basis that it is a purely devotional and sentimental work unlike all the other strictly logical and scholarly writings of the acharya.

*sarva bhūtastham ekaṃ nārāyaṇam* — Narayana is present within all beings without exception.<sup>4</sup> The entire universe of animate and inanimate objects constitute his 'embodiment' or external manifestation.

*kāraṇa puruṣaṃ akāraṇam parabrahma om* — Narayana is the Supreme Being (Parabrahman) cause of all manifestation but He is the causeless-cause.<sup>5</sup> He is both the external manifestation (*phenomena*) and the underlying Reality (*noumenon*).

*etat atharva śiro yo'dhīte prātar adhīyāno rātrikṛtaṃ pāpaṃ nāśayati | sāyam adhiyāno divaskṛtaṃ pāpaṃ nāśayati | madhyandinam āditya abhimukho'dhiyānaḥ pañca pātaka upa pātakāt pramucyate | sarva veda pārāyaṇa puṇyaṃ labhate | nārāyaṇa sāyujyam avāpnoti nārāyaṇa sāyujyam avāpnoti | ya evaṃ veda | ityupaniṣat || 5 ||*

*etat* = this; *atharva-śiraḥ* = Atharva Veda; *yaḥ* = which; *adhīte* = teaches; *prātaḥ* = in the morning; *adhīyānaḥ* = whoever studies or recites; *rātri-kṛtaṃ pāpaṃ* = sins done at night; *nāśayati* = are destroyed; *sāyam* = in the evening; *divas-kṛtaṃ pāpaṃ* = sins that are done during the day; *madhyandinam* = at midday; *āditya* = the Sun; *abhimukhaḥ* = facing; *pañca pātaka* = the Five Great Sins; *upa pātakāt* = from minor sins; *pramucyate* = is liberated; *sarva* = all; *pārāyaṇa* = study; *puṇyaṃ* = merit; *labhate* = obtains; *nārāyaṇa sāyujyam* = unification or merging with Narayana; *avāpnoti* = obtains; *yaḥ* = whosoever; *evaṃ* = thus; *veda* = knows; *iti upaniṣat* = this is the secret teaching.

The Atharva Veda teaches that whoever recites this Upanisad in the morning destroys thereby the sins committed during the night. Whoever recites it in the evening destroys thereby the sins committed during the day. Whoever recites it at midday facing the sun is freed from the five heinous sins and all minor ones. He derives the same merit produced by the recitation of all the Vedas. Whoever knows this attains Union with Narayana. He attains Union with Narayana. This is the Secret Teaching. 5.

### Commentary

This verse constitutes the *Phala-Śruti* or declaration of the fruits of the recitation of the Upanisad. It is common practice to append the Phala-Śruti to the end of every text that is used for practical liturgical purposes. It is important to appreciate that Sanatana Dharma does not teach about “forgiveness of sins by God” since sin is defined as follows:

*Paropakāra puṇyāya pāpāya para-pīḍanam*  
Virtue (*puṇya*) is benefiting other beings, Sin (*pāpa*) is causing harm to others.

So the remedy for *pāpa* is the opposite i.e. promotion of *puṇya*. If one has cause harm or pain to another being one rectifies it by either asking forgiveness from that person or performing acts of kindness and charity to others.

Sin is considered to be an obstacle to enlightenment<sup>6</sup> *not* an offence to God. Sinful acts are done either out of ignorance, stupidity or malice<sup>7</sup>. For maliciousness Karmic consequences are inevitable, for ignorance and stupidity the remedy is knowledge.

Even if you are the most culpable of all criminals, you will cross over all wrong-doing by the raft of knowledge alone.

Just as blazing fire turns fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of knowledge turn all Karma to ashes.

Verily, there is no purifier in this world equal to knowledge; one that is perfected in Karma Yoga discovers this (knowledge) spontaneously, in oneself in due time.

(Bhagavad Gita 4:36,37,38)

4. With the mind harmonised by Yoga one sees equality everywhere; one sees one's Self as abiding in all beings and all beings in one's own Self. He who sees Me everywhere and everything in Me; I am not separated from him and he is never separated from Me. (Bhagavad Gita 6:29,30)

5. [Akrūra said to Krishna:]— “I prostrate before Thee, the ultimate cause of all, beyond the cause-effect relationship. I prostrate before Nārāyaṇa the Primordial and Undecaying Person.” (Srimad Bhagavatam 10:40:1)

6 'But one who has not refrained from sinful conduct (*duscharitam*), who is not tranquil, is not composed, is not of peaceful mind, cannot obtain Him through wisdom' (Katha. Up., 1.2:24).

7 In the Shastras we have many lists of “sinful” behaviour for example from the Mahabharata we have a list of sinners as follows: — “Assertion of one's own superiority, cupidity [*lolupa*], inability to tolerate the slightest insult, bad temper, fickleness, neglect of protecting those who seek it. One who thinks only of sexual enjoyment, who is prejudiced, hubris, one who gives and then regrets it, the miser, one who praises power/wealth and pleasure, and misogynists these are included with the above.” — Udyoga Parva. 43:18,19

***pañca pātaka upa-pātakāt pramucyate*** — Through the study of this Upanishad one gains the knowledge and insight that destroys all sins even the five “Great Sins” which are:—

1. Stealing or destroying public property.
2. Killing an innocent person particularly one who has social value (Priest, doctor, nurse, social worker etc.)
3. Killing a child or having an abortion.
4. Addiction to mind-altering substances
5. Incest, including the seduction of one's teacher's spouse.

And association with the above criminals.

All these and any minor sins are effaced by the regular chanting this Upanishad while facing the Sun at midday.

***sarva veda pārāyaṇa puṇyaṃ labhate*** — “He derives the same merit produced by the recitation of all the Vedas”. if one does not have the ability to study the entire Veda then one should learn just this one Vedic text, the rationale being that the whole purpose of the study of the Veda is to gain knowledge of Brahman, and Brahman is revealed as Nārāyaṇa in this text in a very comprehensive way and therefore there is no need of further information about the Absolute Reality.

***nārāyaṇa sāyujyam avāpnoti*** — “He attains Union with Narayana.” The Veda gives 4 degrees of Mokṣa or Liberation.

*Sālokyam* — dwelling in the same realm as the Lord

*Sārūpyam* — similarity of form.

*Sāmīpyam* — proximity

*Sāyujyam* — unification or merging with the Lord.

The first two are Liberation with “Form” (*sarūpa*) the other 2 are “Formless” (*arūpa*). Some would see in these, four separate states of Liberation others would see a gradual progression each stage becoming more subtle than the preceding one.

These four states correspond to the four phases or poises of Reality — the Upanishads declare that Brahman is *catuspāt* — four-footed, and since Brahman/Nārāyaṇa is everything then we have to understand Mokṣa in terms of the totality of Being.

Poises of Reality		Stages of Enlightenment	
<i>jagat, virāj</i>	The manifest World	<i>Sālokyam</i>	The realisation that the universe is the 'body' — <i>śarīra</i> of Nārāyaṇa.
<i>Hiraṇya-garbha,</i>	World-spirit,	<i>Sārūpyam</i>	The realisation that all jīvas too are 'modes' — <i>prakāras</i> of the Divine and are all one organic being.
<i>Īśvara</i>	Creative Spirit	<i>Sāmīpyam</i>	The realisation that the World is projected, sustained and withdrawn by, and from the Divine for it's own joy ( <i>līla</i> )
<i>Brahman</i>	The Absolute	<i>Sāyujyam</i>	The final stage of loss of immersion into Nārāyaṇa

