

STATEMENTS ON AND ABOUT POVERTY, HUNGER, HELPING AND CHARITY FROM THE UPANIṢADS

(To say that any single document represents the Hindu tradition is akin to suggesting that a tea cup of water represents the ocean. Where many religions unify around a single book, the epic Hindu literature of India can easily fill a library. But so as to have the Hindu tradition represented in this series we have reviewed 12 of The Upaniṣads as translated into English by F. Max Muller, Dover Publications, Inc.)

There are three branches of the law. Sacrifice, study, and charity are the first. - Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 2nd Prapāṭaka, 23rd Khāṇḍa: 1

Penance, liberality, righteousness, kindness, truthfulness, these form his Dakshinas. - Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 3rd Prapāṭaka, 17th Khāṇḍa: 4

There lived once upon a time Janaśruti Pautrayana (the great-grandson of Janaśruta), who was a pious giver, bestowing much wealth upon the people, and always keeping open house. He built places of refuge everywhere, wishing that people everywhere should eat of his food. Once in the night some Hamsas (flamingoes) flew over his house, and one flamingo said to another: 'Hey, Bhallakṣa Bhallakṣa (short-sighted friend). The light (glory) of Janaśruti Pautrayana has spread like the sky. Do not go near, that it may not burn thee.' - Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 4th Prapāṭaka, 1st Khāṇḍa: 1-2

But they who living in a village practice (a life of) sacrifices, works of public utility, and alms, they go to the smoke, from smoke to night, from night to the dark half of the moon, from the dark half of the moon to the six months when the sun goes to the south. But they do not reach the year.

From the months they go to the world of the fathers, from the world of the fathers to the ether, and from the ether to the moon. That is Soma, the king. Here they are loved (eaten) by the Devas, yes, the Devas love (eat) them. - Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 5th Prapāṭaka, 10th Khāṇḍa: 3-4

Those whose conduct has been good, will quickly attain some good birth, the birth of a Brāhmaṇa, or a Kṣatriya, or a Vaiśya. But those whose conduct has been evil, will quickly attain an evil birth, the birth of a dog, or a hog, or a Chandāla. - Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 5th Prapāṭaka, 10th Khāṇḍa: 7

The eighty verses (of the hymn) are alike food with reference to the gods as well as with reference to man. For all these beings breathe and live by means of food indeed. By food (given in alms, etc.) he conquers this world, by food (given in sacrifice) he conquers the other. Therefore the eighty verses (of the hymn) are alike food, with reference to the gods as well as with reference to man. - Aitareya-Āraṇyaka, 2nd Āraṇyaka, 1st Adhyāya, 2nd Khāṇḍa: 13

Now to that prāṇa, which is Brahman, all these deities (mind, speech, eye, ear) bring an offering, though he asks not for it, and thus to him who knows this all creatures bring an offering, though he asks not for it. For him who knows this, there is this Upaniṣad (secret

vow), "Beg not!" As a man who has begged through a village and got nothing sits down and says, "I shall never eat anything given by those people," and as then those who formerly refused him press him (to accept their alms), thus is the rule for him who begs not, but the charitable will press him and say, "Let us give to thee." - Kaushītaki Upaniṣad, 2nd Adhyāya: 1

He who has three times performed this Nāciketa rite, and has been united with the three (father, mother, and teacher), and has performed the three duties (study, sacrifice, almsgiving) overcomes birth and death. When he has learnt and understood this fire, which knows (or makes us know) all that is born of Brahman, which is venerable and divine, then he obtains everlasting peace. - Kaṭha Upaniṣad, 1st Adhyāya, 1st Vallī: 17

Death said: "The good is one thing, the pleasant another; these two, having different objects, chain a man. It is well with him who clings to the good; he who chooses the pleasant, misses his end. The good and the pleasant approach man: the wise goes round about them and distinguishes them. Yea, the wise prefers the good to the pleasant, but the fool chooses the pleasant through greed and avarice. Thou, O Naciketas, after pondering all pleasures that are or seem delightful, hast dismissed them all. Thou hast not gone into the road that leadeth to wealth, in which many men perish. Wide apart and leading to different points are these two, ignorance and what is known as wisdom. - Kaṭha Upaniṣad, 1st Adhyāya, 2nd Vallī: 1-4

Let him never turn away (a stranger) from his house, that is the rule. Therefore a man should by all means acquire much food, for (good) people say (to the stranger): "There is food ready for him." If he gives food amply, food is given to him amply. If he gives food fairly, food is given to him fairly. If he gives food meanly, food is given to him meanly. - Taittirīyaka Upaniṣad, 3rd Vallī, 10th Anuvāka: 1

That Self is indeed Brahman, consisting of knowledge, mind, life, sight, hearing, earth, water, wind, ether, light and no light, desire and no desire, anger and no anger, right or wrong, and all things. Now as a man is like this or like that, according as he acts and according as he behaves, so will he be: a man of good acts will become good, a man of bad acts, bad. He becomes pure by pure deeds, bad by bad deeds. And here they say that a person consists of desires. And as is his desire, so is his will; and as is his will, so is his deed; and whatever deed he does, that he will reap. - Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 4th Adhyāya, 4th Brāhmaṇa: 5

The threefold descendants of Prajāpati, gods, men, and Asuras (evil spirits), dwelt as Brahmakārins (students) with their father Prajāpati. Having finished their studentship the gods said: "Tell us (something), Sir." He told them the syllable Da. Then he said: "Did you understand?" They said: "We did understand. You told us 'Dāmyata,' Be subdued." "Yes," he said, "you have understood."

Then the men said to him: "Tell us something, Sir." He told them the same syllable Da. Then he said: "Did you understand?" They said: "We did understand. You told us, 'Datta,' Give." "Yes," he said, "you have understood."

The Asuras said to him: "Tell us something, Sir." He told them the same syllable Da. Then he said: "Did you understand?" They said: "We did understand. You told us, 'Dayadhvam,' Be merciful." "Yes," he said, "you have understood."

The divine voice of thunder repeats the same, Da Da Da, that is, Be subdued, Give, Be merciful. Therefore let that triad be taught, Subduing, Giving, and Mercy. - Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 5th Adhyāya, 2nd Brāhmaṇa: 1-3