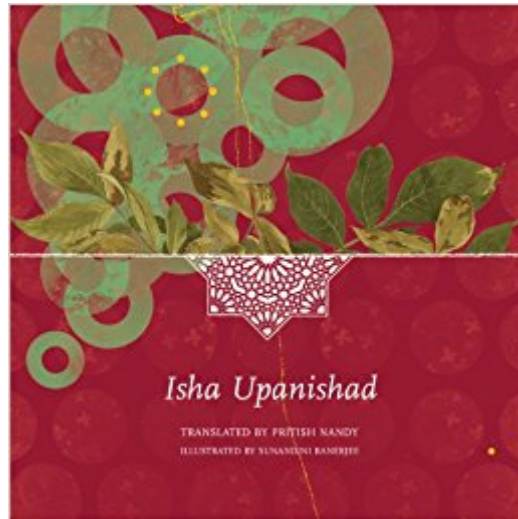




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Isha Upanishad



Synopsis

That is full. This is full. From the full comes the full. Remove the full from the full and what remains? The full. This first line of the Isha Upanishad, one of the most powerful ancient books of faith, is so profound that Mahatma Gandhi famously said, "If all the Upanishads and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the Isha Upanishad were left in the memory of the Hindus, Hinduism would live forever." • One of the shortest collections of texts, consisting of seventeen or eighteen verses, the Isha Upanishad is significant because of its explanation of man's relationship with nature and God. However, it also goes beyond all faiths and religions to help people look within and without themselves to answer questions that have existed and persisted from the dawn of civilization. This beautifully crafted edition of the Isha Upanishad has been translated in clear and vivid language by Pritish Nandy, renowned poet, painter and filmmaker. And for the first time the powerful scripture is accompanied by brilliant illustrations by accomplished artist and designer, Sunandini Banerjee. Together the crisp passages and glowing illustrations manifest the thread that connects all that exists and chronicle mankind's search for the true meaning of life.

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Customer Reviews

"[This] vision of the Isha Upanishad is a dream. A fountain of life witnessed by a bird." (Dominique EddÃ©, author of Kite)

Pritish Nandy is an Indian journalist, poet, painter, filmmaker, and author. Sunandini Banerjee is

an editor, designer, and graphic artist based in Calcutta, India. She has illustrated Thomas Bernhard's Victor Halfwit and Ivan Vladislavic's Loss Library and Other Unfinished Stories, both published by Seagull Books.

The dust jacket of this book cites Gandhi as having said, "that if all scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes and only the first verse of the Isha Upanishad was left in our memory, Hinduism would live forever." The jacket description continues, "But this Upanishad goes beyond all faith, all religion to help all people look within and without themselves to answer the questions that have swirled in and round them since the dawn of civilization." The poetic presentation of Pritish Nandy's translation and Sunandini Banerjee's visual imagery of nature, symbolism and icons from various religions does seem to capture the universality of the "immanent, transcendent." There is another anecdote regarding Gandhi and the Isha Upanishad. When a journalist wanted to know his secret of life, Gandhi replied with the first verse of the Isha, "Renounce and enjoy!" (cited in Eknath Easwaran's translation of The Upanishads, p. 53). The Isha Upanishad is the shortest of the Upanishads (Easwaran translates the meaning of Upanishad as "sitting down near the feet of an illumined teacher"), yet Pritish Nandy's translation stretches out the 468 words to 54 pages of text (although there are, fittingly, no page numbers in this book). Easwaran uses 4 pages, and Mascaro's translation fits it all in 2 pages. Comparing these three translations, Nandy's is the most modern, the least "religious text-like" and is presented more as universal divine poetry. Sunandini Banerjee's collages incorporate Buddhist, Hindu and Christian iconography, along with drawings and paintings of flowers and birds and stylized symbols of stars and circles. The collages call to mind a more coherent and spiritual Max Ernst, the surrealist and Dadaist artist. The use of collages of photographs, iconography, drawings, paintings and symbols captures the multi-dimensional truth of the text. The text appears within circles, usually white text emerging from the blackness of the circle. While you could read the text quicker than the time it takes for your cup of tea to cool, it is well worth lingering over and returning to "again and again and again," as the text itself states. It is a beautiful book that speaks to the depths with simple words and complex imagery. It almost has the feel of a children's book, yet it doesn't have a "story" the way that Peter Sis' The Conference of the Birds does (which has a similar message of the unity of all things and is a nice companion to this book). Still, all ages can appreciate the art work and the message of unity of the Self that is "everywhere and in everything." Juan Mascaro, in the introduction to his translation of

The Upanishads, writes that, "In theory, an Upanishad could even be composed in the present day : a spiritual Upanishad that would draw its life from the One source of religions and humanism and apply it to the needs of the modern world," (p.8). Nandy and Banerjee's work offers such a modern Upanishad, through a new translation and presentation of the old.

The translation is clear, concise, useful in understanding the ideas and to contrast with other translations I have. The art work accompanying the translation is both aesthetically appealing and helpful in grasping the ideas of the Upanishad. I find myself opening the book every few days to read the text slowly and meditately. The book is well made and not too big, not too small to hold.

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