

नारायण उपनिषद् Narayanopanishad — A Comprehensive Study

Ref: Claude ai

Belonging to the Krishna Yajurveda | Atharvaśiras Genre

The Śānti Pāṭha — Peace Invocation

ॐ सह नावतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु । सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

May He protect us both. May He nourish us both. May we work together with great energy. May our study be illuminating and free from all discord. Om — Peace, Peace, Peace.

1. Introduction — The Upanishad in Context

The Narayanopanishad — more fully known as the Nārāyaṇa Atharvaśira Upanishad — is one of the most compact and potent of all the minor Upanishads. Although brief in its text, it is vast in its philosophical reach, touching the supreme heights of Vedāntic thought while simultaneously grounding the seeker in the living practice of mantra and devotion.

Classified under the Krishna Yajurveda and belonging to the Atharvaśiras genre — meaning "the crown of the Atharva" — this Upanishad belongs to a cluster of texts that centre upon a single supreme deity and declare that deity to be identical with Brahman, the Absolute. Its companion texts — the Nārāyaṇa Sūkta, the Puruṣa Sūkta, and the Viṣṇu Sūkta — share the same cosmological and theological vision and are often recited together in temple liturgy and domestic worship.

The Upanishad declares, without ambiguity, that Nārāyaṇa is not merely a great god among gods but is the very ground of existence — the source from which all beings arise, within which all beings subsist, and into which all beings ultimately return. This is not simply theology; it is direct spiritual knowledge (jñāna), offered to the earnest seeker as a means of liberation.

What makes this Upanishad especially remarkable is its integration of three great streams of Vedic spirituality: cosmological speculation (how the universe came to be), non-dual philosophy (the identity of the individual soul and the Absolute), and mantra vidyā (the transformative power of sacred syllables). Each of these streams flows through the five passages of the text, and together they form a complete picture of Nārāyaṇa as the supreme, self-luminous, and ever-present reality.

The text is especially beloved in the Vaiṣṇava tradition, where it is recited daily alongside the Viṣṇu Sahasranāma and the Puruṣa Sūkta. Yet its message transcends sectarian boundaries. The Nārāyaṇa it describes is not a personal deity in a limited sense but the Universal Person — the Puruṣa of infinite dimensions who pervades and transcends the cosmos. As such, the Upanishad speaks to all seekers who yearn to know the true nature of reality.

Structure of the Text

The Narayanopanishad is structured in five principal passages, each addressing a distinct aspect of the Nārāyaṇa principle. The text opens and closes with the universal Śānti Pāṭha. Within this frame of peace, the content moves from cosmology to ontology to mantra science to liberation — a meditative ascent from the multiplicity of creation to the unity of the Absolute.

2. The Śānti Pāṭha — Invocation for Peace

ॐ सह नावतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु । सह वीर्यं करवावहे ।
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहे ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om. May He protect us both — teacher and student. May He nourish us both. May we work together with great intellectual vigour. May our study be luminous and free from all discord. Om — Peace, Peace, Peace.

Like all Upanishads of the Krishna Yajurveda, the Narayanopanishad opens and closes with the Śānti Pāṭha — the sacred invocation of peace that prepares both teacher and student for the transmission of knowledge. This particular invocation is shared with the Taittirīya Upanishad and is among the most widely chanted in the entire Vedic tradition.

The prayer is addressed not to any particular deity but to the Absolute itself — the power that sustains teacher and student alike. This signals that true Vedic learning is not a transfer of information from one person to another, but a joint venture in which both teacher and student are nourished and protected by the very truth they seek together.

The threefold repetition of "Śāntiḥ" is traditionally understood as the removal of the three kinds of obstacles — tāpas — that afflict human existence: ādhyātmika, arising from within oneself (physical illness, mental agitation); ādhibhautika, arising from the external world (forces of nature, other beings); and ādhidaivika, arising from cosmic or supernatural forces. By invoking peace three times, the devotee calls for the cessation of all three categories of disturbance, so that the inner space of learning may be undisturbed.

The Śānti Pāṭha also establishes the relational ethics of Vedic transmission. The repeated "us both" — nau — insists on the mutual dignity of teacher and student. Both are pilgrims on the same journey toward the light of understanding. This relational humility, born of the recognition that the real teacher is the Supreme itself, infuses the entire Upanishad with an atmosphere of reverence and openness.

3. Sarga Khaṇḍa — Creation from Nārāyaṇa

ॐ अथ पुरुषो ह वै नारायणोऽकामयत प्रजाः सृजेयेति ।
नारायणात् प्राणो जायते । मनः सर्वेन्द्रियाणि च ।
खं वायुर्ज्योतिरापः पृथिवी विश्वस्य धारिणी ।
नारायणाद् ब्रह्मा जायते । नारायणाद् रुद्रो जायते ।
नारायणादिन्द्रो जायते । नारायणात् प्रजापतयः प्रजायन्ते
नारायणाद् द्वादशादित्या रुद्रा वसवः सर्वाणि च छन्दांसि ।
नारायणादेव समुत्पद्यन्ते । नारायणे प्रवर्तन्ते । नारायणे प्रलीयन्ते ॥

Om. The Puruṣa, verily Nārāyaṇa, desired: "May I create beings." From Nārāyaṇa, prāṇa — the vital breath — is born. The mind and all the senses are born from Him. Space, air, fire, water, and the earth — sustainer of all — arise from Him. From Nārāyaṇa, Brahmā is born. From Nārāyaṇa, Rudra is born. From Nārāyaṇa, Indra is born. From Nārāyaṇa, all the Prajāpatis are born. From Nārāyaṇa arise the twelve Ādityas, the Rudras, the Vasus, and all the Vedic metres. From Nārāyaṇa alone, all things arise. In Nārāyaṇa, all things move. In Nārāyaṇa, all things are dissolved.

The passage begins with a momentous word: akāmayata — "He desired." This single word locates the origin of creation not in mechanical necessity but in the free, conscious intention of the Absolute. Nārāyaṇa, the eternal Person, wills creation into being. This is not the desire of a limited ego but the desire of infinite consciousness freely expressing itself in the multiplicity of forms.

What follows is a majestic catalogue of creation. From Nārāyaṇa, prāṇa — the vital breath — is born first. Prāṇa is that dynamic life-force which animates all embodied beings; it is prior even to mind, for without the breath of life, no thought, no perception, no experience is possible. Then the mind and all the sense faculties arise. Next come the five great elements — space, air, fire, water, earth — the fundamental building blocks of the physical universe. Then the great deities: Brahmā the creator, Rudra the dissolver, Indra the king of the gods, and the Prajāpatis who govern and protect created life. Even the twelve Ādityas — the solar deities who govern the months and seasons — and the Vasus and Rudras who preside over the forces of nature all emerge from Nārāyaṇa. Most significantly of all, even the Vedic metres — chandas — the very fabric of sacred sound through which the universe itself was sung into existence, arise from Him.

The passage then makes its most sweeping claim with three parallel and perfectly balanced statements: all things arise from Nārāyaṇa (samutpadyante), all things move and evolve within Nārāyaṇa (pravartante), and all things are dissolved back into Nārāyaṇa (pralīyante). This triad of origin, sustenance, and dissolution mirrors the classical Vedāntic formula: Brahman is the material cause, the sustaining cause, and the final cause of the entire universe. What the Narayanopanishad does, with great theological boldness, is to identify this impersonal Brahman entirely and without remainder with the personal Nārāyaṇa.

This identification is not a sectarian borrowing but a genuine philosophical contribution. It resolves the ancient tension in Indian thought between saṅga Brahman — Brahman with attributes, the personal God — and nirṅga Brahman — Brahman without attributes, the formless Absolute — by declaring that Nārāyaṇa is both simultaneously. As the source of all,

He is beyond all. As the sustainer of all, He is present in all. As the dissolution of all, He is the final ground into which all returns.

The repeated grammatical structure — Nārāyaṇāt... jāyate, "from Nārāyaṇa... is born" — functions not only as theological statement but as meditative incantation. Each repetition of the Name deepens the listener's awareness of the single Source behind all diversity. By the time the passage concludes, the listener should feel, not merely understand intellectually, that there is only one reality at work in all of creation.

4. Ekatva Khaṇḍa — The Absolute Oneness of Nārāyaṇa

ओम् । अथ नित्यो नारायणः ।
ब्रह्मा नारायणः । शिवश्च नारायणः । शक्रश्च नारायणः ।
द्यावापृथिव्यौ च नारायणः । कालश्च नारायणः ।
दिशश्च नारायणः । ऊर्ध्वश्च नारायणः । अधश्च नारायणः ।
अन्तर्बहिश्च नारायणः ।
नारायण एवेदं सर्वम् । यद्भूतं यच्च भव्यम् ।
निष्कलो निरञ्जनो निर्विकल्पो निराख्यातः शुद्धो देव एको नारायणः ।
न द्वितीयोस्ति कश्चित् ।
य एवं वेद । स विष्णुरेव भवति स विष्णुरेव भवति ॥

Om. Nārāyaṇa is eternal. Brahmā is Nārāyaṇa. Śiva is Nārāyaṇa. Indra is Nārāyaṇa. Heaven and earth are Nārāyaṇa. Time is Nārāyaṇa. The directions are Nārāyaṇa. What is above is Nārāyaṇa. What is below is Nārāyaṇa. What is within and what is without — all is Nārāyaṇa. Nārāyaṇa alone is all of this — all that has been and all that shall be. He is without parts, without taint, beyond all doubt, beyond all description, utterly pure — the one luminous God, Nārāyaṇa. There is no second. One who knows this thus becomes Viṣṇu itself — becomes Viṣṇu itself.

The passage opens with the most fundamental of all assertions: nityaḥ — Nārāyaṇa is eternal. He is not a being who came into existence at some point and who will one day cease to be. He is the timeless ground upon which the entire drama of time — past, present, future — is played out. Against the backdrop of this eternal nature, the text then systematically surveys the entire visible and invisible universe and declares each and every aspect of it to be Nārāyaṇa.

The catalogue is breathtaking in scope. The three great gods of the Hindu pantheon — Brahmā, Śiva, and Indra — are declared to be Nārāyaṇa. This is a statement of remarkable theological generosity: the Upanishad does not dismiss or diminish the other deities but absorbs them into the one Nārāyaṇa. Heaven and earth — the great dyad of the Vedic cosmos — are Nārāyaṇa. Time itself, that most mysterious of all forces, is Nārāyaṇa. The four directions are Nārāyaṇa. Above and below are Nārāyaṇa. And most intimately of all — what is within and what is without (antarbahiś ca) is Nārāyaṇa.

This last declaration deserves to be lingered over. "Within and without" — the inner world of consciousness and the outer world of matter — are both declared to be Nārāyaṇa. This is the most complete statement of non-duality possible within the framework of theistic language. There is no realm of experience, no dimension of existence, no inner state or

outer circumstance that falls outside Nārāyaṇa. The divine is not merely transcendent — above and beyond the universe — but equally and fully immanent — within every thought, every breath, every perception.

The passage then reaches its philosophical climax with a sentence of extraordinary power: "Nārāyaṇa alone is all of this — all that has been and all that shall be." The Sanskrit — Nārāyaṇa evedaṃ sarvaṃ — echoes the famous declaration of the Māṇḍūkya Upanishad: "All of this is indeed Brahman." The Narayanopanishad makes the same assertion but within a devotional register: the Brahman that is all things is not an abstract impersonal principle in but the living, loving, all-pervading Nārāyaṇa.

Then come five of the most beautiful epithets in the entire Upanishadic corpus: niṣkala — without parts or divisions; nirañjana — without taint or impurity; nirvikalpa — beyond all mental concepts and doubts; nirākhyāta — beyond all names and descriptions; and śuddha — utterly pure. These five negations — what the philosophical tradition calls the neti-neti (not this, not this) method — strip away every limitation and qualification until only the bare, infinite reality remains. Having arrived at this point of complete transcendence, the text then makes its most direct identification: this infinite, partless, untainted, conceptless, nameless, pure reality is the one God — Nārāyaṇa.

The section concludes with a declaration of astonishing directness: "There is no second." Na dvitīyo'sti kaścit. This is the Upanishad's unambiguous verdict: reality is non-dual. There is no other, no second principle, no independent power that stands alongside or against Nārāyaṇa. And the one who knows this — who truly knows it, not merely as an intellectual proposition but as direct living experience — becomes Viṣṇu itself. The doubling of this final statement — "becomes Viṣṇu itself, becomes Viṣṇu itself" — is characteristic of Vedic emphasis, and it insists upon the completeness and irreversibility of the transformation that this knowledge brings.

5. Aṣṭākṣara Khaṇḍa — The Eight-Syllabled Mantra

ओमित्यग्रे व्याहरेत् । नम इति पश्चात् ।
नारायणायेत्युपरिष्ठात् ।०
ओमित्येकाक्षरम् । नम इति द्वे अक्षरे ।
नारायणायेति पञ्चाक्षराणि ।
एतद्वै नारायणस्याष्टाक्षरं पदम् ।
यो ह वै नारायणस्याष्टाक्षरं पदमध्येति ।
अनपब्रुवः सर्वमायुरेति ।
विन्दते प्राजापत्यं रायस्पोषं गौपत्यम् ।
ततोऽमृतत्वमश्नुते ततोऽमृतत्वमश्नुत इति ।
य एवं वेद ॥

One should first utter "Om." Then "Namaḥ." Then "Nārāyaṇāya." "Om" is one syllable. "Namaḥ" is two syllables. "Nārāyaṇāya" is five syllables. This, verily, is the eight-syllabled pada — the sacred word — of Nārāyaṇa. One who studies and meditates upon this eight-syllabled word of Nārāyaṇa attains full life without diminishment. He attains progeny, prosperity, and lordship over the senses. Thereafter he attains immortality — he attains immortality. One who knows this thus.

Having established Nārāyaṇa as the source and substance of all creation, and having declared His absolute Oneness, the Upanishad now turns to the most practical question a seeker can ask: how does one enter into relationship with this infinite reality? The answer is through the sacred mantra — specifically through the Aṣṭākṣara, the eight-syllabled mantra: Om Namō Nārāyaṇāya.

The Upanishad first gives the order of recitation — Om first, then Namaḥ, then Nārāyaṇāya — and then carefully counts the syllables: one + two + five = eight. This arithmetical precision is not pedantry. In the Vedic understanding, every syllable of a mantra carries cosmic significance. The counting is a meditation in itself, drawing the practitioner's attention to the sacred architecture of the words.

Om — the single syllable that is the primordial sound of the universe. The Māṇḍūkya Upanishad devotes its entire teaching to this one syllable, showing how it encompasses the three states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, deep sleep) and the state beyond all three. To begin the mantra with Om is to anchor it in the very ground of existence.

Namaḥ — "salutation," "surrender," "not I but Thou." This word of two syllables is simultaneously an act of devotion and a statement of ontological truth. Namaḥ dissolves the ego's pretension to independent selfhood. It is the gesture of the finite toward the infinite, the acknowledgment that the individual self finds its true meaning only in its source.

Nārāyaṇāya — "to Nārāyaṇa," in the dative case. These five syllables are the very name of the Supreme, to whom the surrender expressed by namaḥ is directed. The dative case — the case of giving, of offering — is deeply significant: the entire being of the devotee is offered to, directed toward, and ultimately received by Nārāyaṇa.

Together, these eight syllables form a complete spiritual universe. Om declares the nature of reality; namaḥ establishes the devotee's right relationship with that reality; and nārāyaṇāya names the personal face of the Absolute to whom that relationship is addressed.

The fruits of meditating upon this mantra are stated with great confidence: full and undiminished life (sarvam āyur eti), progeny and prosperity (prājāpatya, rāyaspoṣa), mastery and lordship (gaupatya), and ultimately immortality (amṛtatva). The doubling of "attains immortality" — as with "becomes Viṣṇu" in the previous section — signals the definitiveness of the liberation that this mantra, correctly understood and sincerely practised, bestows.

6. Praṇava Khaṇḍa — The Mystery of Oṃkāra

प्रत्यगानन्दं ब्रह्म पुरुषं प्रणवस्वरूपम् ।
अकार उकार मकार इति ।
तानेकधा समभरत् तदेतदोमिति ।
यमुक्त्वा मुच्यते योगी जन्मसंसारबन्धनात् ।
ओं नमो नारायणायेति मन्त्रोपासकः ।
वैकुण्ठभुवनलोकं गमिष्यति ।
तदिदं परं पुण्डरीकं विज्ञानघनम् ।
तस्मात्तदिदावन्मात्रम् ।
ब्रह्मण्यो देवकीपुत्रो ब्रह्मण्यो मधुसूदनोम् ।

सर्वभूतस्थमेकं नारायणम् ।
कारणरूपमकारपरब्रह्मोम् ॥

The inner bliss (pratyagānanda), Brahman, the Puruṣa — all are of the nature of the Praṇava (Om). The letters A, U, and M — He drew them all together into oneness, and that is Om. By uttering this, the yogī is liberated from the bondage of birth and the cycles of saṃsāra. The devotee who meditates upon Om Namo Nārāyaṇāya shall go to the realm of Vaikuṅṭha. That supreme lotus of consciousness is dense with pure awareness. It is of that nature entirely. The son of Devakī is the guardian of Brahman; Madhusūdana is the guardian of Brahman, Om. Nārāyaṇa alone, dwelling in all beings, is the one — the Absolute Brahman in the form of the causal letter A, Om.

This passage moves into the deepest waters of Vedāntic teaching on sound and consciousness. It identifies Brahman, the Puruṣa, and the inner bliss (pratyagānanda) — the bliss that is not the external bliss of sense-pleasure but the bliss that is the very nature of the self — all as manifestations of the Praṇava, the primordial sound Om.

The three constituent letters of Om — A, U, M — are identified with the three states of consciousness and with the three aspects of creation, sustenance, and dissolution. A corresponds to the waking state and to Brahmā the creator; U to the dreaming state and to Viṣṇu the sustainer; M to the deep sleep state and to Śiva the dissolver. When these three are brought together into a single, seamless sound — Om — the result is something greater than the sum of the parts: it is the Absolute itself, reverberating as sound.

The passage then delivers one of the most direct liberation promises in the entire Upanishad: the yogī who utters this mantra — Om Namo Nārāyaṇāya — is freed from the bondage of birth and the endless cycling of saṃsāra. The word "yogī" here should be understood broadly: it is not limited to the formal practitioner of yoga but applies to any sincere seeker who takes up this mantra as their primary practice and who meditates upon its meaning with sustained devotion.

The destination of such a devotee is stated with beautiful specificity: Vaikuṅṭha — the realm of Viṣṇu that is beyond fear, beyond limitation, beyond decay. The name Vaikuṅṭha literally means "where there is no obstruction" — a realm of complete freedom and unobstructed bliss. This is not merely a heavenly realm in a cosmological sense but a state of consciousness — the state of one who has realised Nārāyaṇa as one's own true nature.

The passage then introduces a remarkably intimate identification: it names Nārāyaṇa as Devakīputra — the son of Devakī — which is a direct reference to Kṛṣṇa. This is one of the few places in the Upanishadic corpus where a historical incarnation is directly named within a philosophical context. The Upanishad thereby affirms that the infinite Nārāyaṇa and the personal Kṛṣṇa who walked the earth are not two realities but one. The transcendent and the intimate, the cosmic and the historical, are united in a single vision.

7. Phalaśruti — The Fruits of Recitation

एतदथर्वशिरो योऽधीते ।
प्रातरधीयानो रात्रिकृतं पापं नाशयति ।
सायमधीयानो दिवसकृतं पापं नाशयति ।

माध्यन्दिनमादित्याभिमुखोऽधीयानः
पञ्चपातकोपपातकात् प्रमुच्यते ।
सर्ववेदपारायणपुण्यं लभते ।
नारायणसायुज्यमवाप्नोति नारायणसायुज्यमवाप्नोति ।
य एवं वेद । इत्युपनिषत् ॥

One who studies this Atharvaśiras (Narayanopanishad) — reciting it in the morning destroys the sins of the night. Reciting it in the evening destroys the sins of the day. Reciting it at midday, facing the sun, one is freed from all five great sins and their subsidiaries. One gains the merit of reciting all the Vedas. One attains union with Nārāyaṇa — one attains union with Nārāyaṇa. One who knows this thus. Thus ends the Upanishad.

The Phalaśruti — the enumeration of the fruits (phala) of recitation — is a feature found at the end of nearly every major Vedic text. Far from being a mere appendage or concession to popular piety, the Phalaśruti serves a deep function: it assures the practitioner that the effort of study and recitation is not wasted, that the sacred text carries within it the power to transform the one who engages with it sincerely.

The text prescribes three times of recitation — morning (prātar), evening (sāyam), and midday (mādhyandina). These three correspond to the three daily sandhyā prayers of the Vedic tradition, the liminal moments when day transitions into night, night into day, and morning into afternoon. At these transition points — moments of natural stillness and heightened receptivity — the power of sacred recitation is considered to be at its greatest.

The morning recitation destroys the sins accumulated during the night; the evening recitation destroys those of the day. This is a teaching about the purifying power of conscious, devotional engagement with the sacred. The sins referred to are not merely moral transgressions but any action, thought, or tendency that moves the practitioner away from the awareness of Nārāyaṇa and toward the illusion of a separate, ego-centred self.

The midday recitation, performed while facing the sun — the great visible symbol of the illuminating power of Brahman — is said to free the practitioner from the five great sins (pañca pātaka) and their subsidiary offences. The five great sins in the Vedic tradition — including the taking of life, speaking falsehood, and the misappropriation of what belongs to others — represent the most serious forms of dharmic failure. The claim that recitation of this Upanishad can free one from these is a claim about the depth of transformation that sincere devotion to Nārāyaṇa can accomplish.

The Phalaśruti then makes two extraordinary claims. First, that the merit gained by reciting this single compact Upanishad is equal to the merit of reciting all the Vedas. This is a claim not about magical equivalence but about the essential truth that this Upanishad contains the heart of all Vedic teaching: the knowledge of the Absolute. Second — and most profoundly — it promises sāyujya with Nārāyaṇa: not merely proximity to the divine, not merely enjoyment of divine blessings, but union itself. Sāyujya is the highest of the four classical modes of liberation in the Vaiṣṇava tradition — the state in which the devotee and the Lord are not two but one. This is mokṣa — liberation — in its fullest and most complete expression.

As with earlier key statements, the promise is doubled — "attains union with Nārāyaṇa, attains union with Nārāyaṇa" — confirming the absolute certainty of this attainment for the sincere seeker.

The text then closes with the phrase "iti upaniṣat" — "thus ends the Upanishad." These three words are among the most dignified in the Sanskrit literary tradition. They signal not merely the end of a text but the sealing of a transmission — a transmission that has moved from peace through creation through oneness through mantra through liberation, and which now rests in the silence of completion.

8. Philosophical Significance

The Narayanopanishad occupies a unique position at the intersection of three great currents of Indian thought: Vedānta, Vaiṣṇavism, and mantra śāstra. Understanding how it navigates these three currents illuminates both its philosophical depth and its enduring spiritual power. **Vedāntic Non-Duality.** The Upanishad's central teaching — that Nārāyaṇa alone is all, that there is no second — is in complete alignment with the Advaita (non-dual) Vedānta of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and the tradition he systematised. The five epithets in the Ekātva Khaṇḍa — niṣkala, nirañjana, nirvikalpa, nirākhyāta, śuddha — are classic expressions of the nirguṇa (attributeless) Brahman of the Advaita school. Yet the Upanishad does not rest in the abstract Absolute alone; it continually returns to the personal name Nārāyaṇa, pointing to the reality that the impersonal and the personal are not two but one.

Vaiṣṇava Devotion. Simultaneously, the Upanishad is deeply at home within the Vaiṣṇava devotional tradition. The identification of Nārāyaṇa with Devakīputra Kṛṣṇa, the promise of reaching Vaikuṅṭha, and the central role of the Aṣṭākṣara mantra — Om Namo Nārāyaṇāya — all locate the text firmly within the living stream of Vaiṣṇava practice. The Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-duality) of Rāmānujācārya, which maintains both the reality of the individual soul and its ultimate unity with the Lord, finds rich scriptural support in this Upanishad.

Mantra Śāstra. The Upanishad also belongs to the tradition of mantra vidyā — the science of sacred sound. Its careful analysis of the Aṣṭākṣara mantra, its teaching on the three components of Om, and its promise that correct recitation leads directly to liberation, all establish it as an authoritative text within the mantra tradition. The teaching that Om is the synthesis of A, U, and M — and that this synthesis is itself the nature of Brahman — anticipates and supports the elaborate mantra science of the later Āgamic and Tantric traditions.

The philosophical synthesis achieved by this small Upanishad is therefore remarkable: it holds together the impersonal and the personal, the abstract and the devotional, the transcendent and the immanent, the cosmic and the intimate — all within the single all-encompassing name of Nārāyaṇa.

9. The Upanishad in Daily Practice

The Narayanopanishad is not a text meant only for scholars. Its direct style, its manageable length, its integration of both knowledge and devotion, and its explicit prescription of three daily recitations all mark it as a text designed for living practice.

In the traditional Vaiṣṇava household and in South Indian temple liturgy, this Upanishad is recited as part of the daily ritual alongside the Puruṣa Sūkta, the Nārāyaṇa Sūkta, and the Viṣṇu Sahasranāma. The morning recitation sets the tone for the day: one begins by affirming that Nārāyaṇa is the source of all, that all one encounters through the day is nothing but His manifestation. The evening recitation closes the day in the same awareness, returning the mind to the one ground from which it arose in the morning. The midday recitation, facing the sun, places the practitioner at the still centre of the day — aligned with the cosmic rhythm of the solar cycle and open to the purifying light of the Absolute.

For those who take up the Aṣṭākṣara mantra — Om Namo Nārāyaṇāya — as their primary japa practice, the Narayanopanishad provides the philosophical foundation that transforms mere repetition into meditation. When one knows that the Om one chants is the primordial sound of the universe, that the namaḥ one utters is a complete act of self-surrender, and that the Nārāyaṇāya to whom one bows is the single reality that is both source and substance of all existence — then the mantra ceases to be a formula and becomes a direct encounter with the Divine.

The Upanishad's teaching also has profound relevance to the practitioner's inner life beyond formal worship. The declaration that Nārāyaṇa is antarbahiś ca — within and without — is an invitation to a continuous, moment-to-moment awareness that does not confine the divine to the altar or the meditation cushion but recognises it in every breath, every perception, every relationship, every circumstance. This is the highest form of the practice the Upanishad prescribes: not merely to recite that Nārāyaṇa is all, but to live from that recognition.

10. Conclusion — Nārāyaṇa as the Supreme Reality

The Narayanopanishad delivers its teaching with a directness and a confidence born of direct realisation. It does not argue its way toward its conclusions; it declares them, as one who has seen declares what is seen. Nārāyaṇa desired — and the universe was. Nārāyaṇa alone is all. The one who knows this becomes Viṣṇu itself.

In the landscape of Vedic literature, this Upanishad occupies the place of the summit view. It begins with the peace that surpasses understanding (śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ), ascends through the panorama of creation, arrives at the uncompromising declaration of Oneness, descends with compassion into the practical gift of the mantra, and finally dissolves into the promise of liberation.

The five great teachings of the Narayanopanishad may be summarised thus:

First: All of creation — from the subtlest breath to the mightiest deity, from the tiniest particle to the widest expanse of space — arises from Nārāyaṇa, is sustained in Nārāyaṇa, and returns to Nārāyaṇa.

Second: Nārāyaṇa is not merely the creator but the very substance of creation. He is eternal, partless, untainted, beyond description, and absolutely One. There is no second.

Third: The path to realising this Oneness is through the Aṣṭākṣara mantra — Om Namō Nārāyaṇāya — eight syllables that are a complete universe of devotion, surrender, and liberation.

Fourth: The primordial sound Om, whose three components (A, U, M) reflect the three aspects of cosmic reality, is the very form of Brahman, and the yogī who meditates upon it is freed from the cycle of birth and death.

Fifth: The one who truly knows Nārāyaṇa — not merely as an external deity but as the inner reality of one's own being — becomes Viṣṇu himself. This is sāyujya — union — the highest liberation.

It is fitting that a text of such profound depth is also so brief. For this is itself a teaching: the truth is not far away, not hidden behind mountains of complexity. It is as close as the next breath, as simple as the name on the lips, as intimate as the awareness that reads these very words. Nārāyaṇa alone is all of this. Nārāyaṇa alone is all of this.

ॐ सह नावतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु । सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥
नारायणाय नमः

Ref: vignanam.org

नारायण उपनिषद्

ॐ सह नावतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु । सह वीर्यं-इकरवावहै ।
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ॥
ॐ शान्ति-शान्ति-शान्तिः ॥

ॐ अथ पुरुषो ह वै नारायणो-सकामयत प्रजा-स्सृजेयेति ।
नारायणात्प्राणो जायते । मन-स्सर्वेन्द्रियाणि च ।
खं-वायुर्ज्योतिरापः पृथिवी विश्वस्य धारिणी ।
नारायणाद्ब्रह्मा जायते ।
नारायणाद्द्रो जायते ।
नारायणादिन्द्रो जायते ।
नारायणात्प्रजापतयः प्रजायन्ते ।
नारायणाद्द्वादशदित्या रुद्रा वसवस्सर्वाणि च छन्दागंसि ।
नारायणादेव समुत्पद्यन्ते ।
नारायणे प्रवर्तन्ते ।
नारायणे प्रलीयन्ते ॥

ओम् । अथ नित्यो नारायणः । ब्रह्मा नारायणः ।
शिवश्च नारायणः । शक्रश्च नारायणः ।
द्यावापृथिव्यौ च नारायणः । कालश्च नारायणः ।

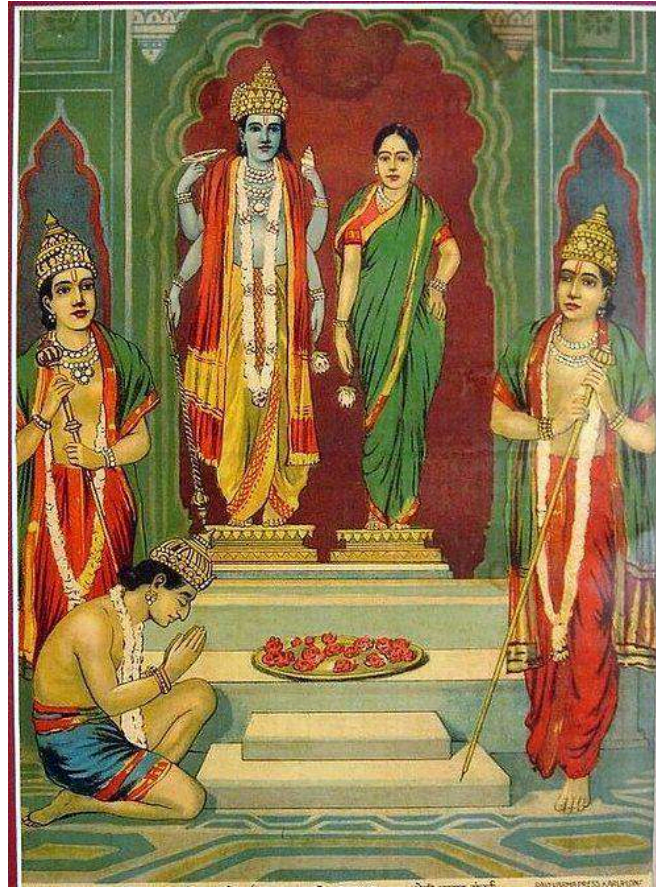
द्विशचं नारायणः । ऊर्ध्वशचं नारायणः ।
अधशचं नारायणः । अन्तर्बहिश्चं नारायणः ।
नारायण एवेदगं सर्वम् ।
यद्भूतं-यच्च भव्यम् ।
निष्कलो निरञ्जनो निर्विकल्पो निराख्यात-शुद्धो देव
एकौ नारायणः । न द्वितीयोऽस्ति कश्चित् ।
य एवं-वेद ।
स विष्णुरेव भवति स विष्णुरेव भवति ॥

ओमित्यग्रे व्याहरेत् । नम इति पश्चात् ।
नारायणायेत्युपरिष्ठात् ।
ओमित्येकाक्षरम् । नम इति द्वे अक्षरे ।
नारायणायेति पञ्चाक्षराणि ।
एतद्वै नारायणस्याष्टाक्षर-म्पदम् ।
यो ह वै नारायणस्याष्टाक्षर-म्पदमध्येति ।
अनपब्रवस्सर्वमायुरेति ।
विन्दते प्राजापत्यगं रायस्पोष-ङ्गोपत्यम् ।
ततो-ऽमृतत्वमश्नुते ततो-ऽमृतत्वमश्नुत इति ।
य एवं-वेद ॥

प्रत्यगानन्द-म्ब्रह्म पुरुष-म्प्रणवस्वरूपम् ।
अकार उकार मकार इति ।
तानेकधा समभरतदेतदोमिति ।
यमुक्त्वा मुच्यते योगी जन्मसंसारबन्धनात् ।
ओ-न्नमो नारायणायेति मन्त्रोपासकः ।
वैकुण्ठभुवनलोक-ङ्गमिष्यति ।
तदिदं-म्पर-म्पुण्डरीकं-विज्ञानघनम् ।
तस्मात्तदिदावन्मात्रम् ।
ब्रह्मण्यो देवकीपुत्रो ब्रह्मण्यो मधुसूदनोम् ।
सर्वभूतस्थमेक-न्नारायणम् ।
कारणरूपमकार परब्रह्मोम् ।
एतदथर्व शिरोयो-ऽधीते प्रातरधीयानो रात्रिकृत-म्पाप-न्नाशयति ।
सायमधीयानो दिवसकृत-म्पाप-न्नाशयति ।
माध्यन्दिनमादित्याभिमुखो-ऽधीयानः पञ्चपातकोपपातकाऽत्प्रमुच्यते ।
सर्व वेद पारायण पुण्यं-लभते ।
नारायणसायुज्यमवाप्नोति नारायण सायुज्यमवाप्नोति ।
य एवं-वेद । इत्युपनिषत् ॥

ॐ सह नावतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु । सह वीर्य-ङ्करवावहे ।
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहे ॥
ॐ शान्ति-शान्ति-शान्तिः ॥

Ref: Wikipedia



Narayana with his consort **Lakshmi**

The **Narayana Upanishad** (Sanskrit: नारायण उपनिषद्) is one of the minor **Upanishads**, listed as number 18 in the extended anthology of 108 Upanishads recited by **Rama** to **Hanuman** in **Hindu literature**. It is listed as number 33 in the early 19th-century **Henry Thomas Colebrooke** anthology.^[1] It is written in the **Sanskrit** language, attached to the Krishna (Black) **Yajurveda**.^[2] It is one of the 14 **Vaishnava Upanishads**,^[3] and it recommends the **bhakti** of **Narayana** (Vishnu).^[4]

The **Upanishad** is, states **Paul Deussen**, among those that can be described as "cult of formula", where meditation shifts from objects and philosophy to that of a specific formula.^[5] The Narayana Upanishad posits, "**Om Namo Narayanaya**", an eight-syllabled **mantra**, as a means of reaching salvation, which is communion with **Vishnu**.^[6] The text is classified as one of the **Mantra Upanishads**.^[2]

The Narayana Upanishad asserts that "all gods, all **rishis**, and all beings are born from Narayana, and merge into Narayana".^[7] The text, suggests Deussen, is probably compiled from passages from different era and texts.^[5]

Contents

The Upanishad is short, and has five chapters.^[5]

Chapter 1: Everything was born in Narayana, everything ends in Narayana

The Upanishad asserts in Chapter 1 that Narayana created the [prana](#) (life essence, breath), the senses, and the mind (Chit and the consciousness). He created the elements of the universe, namely the wind ([Vayu](#)), the light ([Jyoti](#)), the water ([Apas](#)), the fire ([Agni](#)), the ether ([Akasha](#)) and the [Prithvi](#) (earth).^[8] From him were born [Brahma](#), [Rudra](#), [Prajapati](#), the twelve [Adityas](#), [Indra](#), the eleven Rudras, the eight [Vasus](#), the meters of verses, all sages, and all beings. Everyone is born from Narayana, and ultimately merges back into Narayana.^{[5][6]}

Chapter 2: Narayana is the one God

Chapter 2 declares that Narayana is one without a second, eternal god, same as [Brahma](#), [Shiva](#), [Sakra](#), time, the corporal, the uncorporeal, the inner, the outer, this whole universe, what was, and what is to be.^{[2][5]}

Chapter 3, 4, and 5: Narayana Mantra

Chapters 3 and 4 state that studying the Narayana Upanishad is the path to fearless life, achieving immortality, becoming a part of [Brahman](#). The mantra to study, states the text, is [Om Namō Narayanaya](#), which is of 1-2-5 syllable construct, which when studied delivers one a long life and all material and non-material desires.^[5]

Chapter 5 states that the one who worships with the formula, "Om Namō Narayanaya", goes to Vishnu's heaven, [Vaikuntha](#), becomes free from birth and [samsara](#). A person who recites this Upanishad expiates sins and attains communion with Narayana.^[6] It adds,

Narayana merged with one with the inner bliss, the Brahman, the Purusha, the holy syllable consisting of A, U, and M, it became the sound [Aum](#).

Narayana Upanishad 5.1

—Translated by Paul Deussen^[5] is

Videos

Narayana Upanishad...Sathya Sai Official (5 min):

https://youtu.be/rWbV9Kn_YQc?si=1SLfZzTDmUJfemAn

Narayana Upanishad...lyrics, with meaning (5 min):

https://youtu.be/rWbV9Kn_YQc?si=3aUI7UO1T3riCCFE

Narayana Upanishad ...various artists (4 min):

<https://youtu.be/SLO5MHSBvM8?si=3U5CkPIfM78skv3H>

Narayana Upanishad...Jaydeep Kanabar (4 min):

https://youtu.be/OcyJFCjliYo?si=ILLnreq8a8w_Hsxn

Narayana Upanishad..Sri Madhusudan Sai Global Humanitarian Mission (4 min):

https://youtu.be/r6Q1eyA9C7A?si=RFyp2XGTRV4F_810

Narayana Upanishad 2025 ...Advaitham (6 min);

<https://youtu.be/KVds7CB8IDg?si=m2j-rdsglecaGB1>

Narayana Upanishad..Sathya Sai...Prashanthi nilayam (5 min):

<https://youtu.be/B2LB9qOXg4Q?si=1tGeQpHgIL22ZtFg>

Narayana Upanishad...Prasanthinilayam Vedic chants (6 min):

<https://youtu.be/SAUdZIFgu6E?si=1hAV4IAxN6QEkgCW>

About the Author

Dr. M. Thirumaleshwar is a Mechanical Engineer with specialization in Cryogenics. He obtained his B. E. In Mechanical Engineering from Karnataka Regional Engg College, (Now NITK), Surathkal, India and M.Sc. in Cryogenics from the University of Southampton, U.K., and Ph.D. from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore.

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**Dr. M. Thirumaleshwar
April 12, 2026**
