



The Unsteady Vessels of Rites

Mundaka Upanishad

This is the truth.

The sacrificial rites that the sages saw in the sacred hymns were described in many ways in the three Vedas. Perform them diligently, you lovers of the truth, for that is your path that leads to the world of good works. When the flames of the sacrificial fire begin to flicker, then place your offerings made in faith on that fire....

But these boats of sacrifice are unsteady vessels. Unsteady are the eighteen books which explain these lower ceremonial rites. The unwise who praise these rites fall victim again and again to old age and death. Dwelling in ignorance but believing themselves wise and learned, these fools stagger about aimlessly, like the blind leading the blind.

As they wander along the path of ignorance, like children they think to themselves, "We have accomplished our aim!" These performers of rituals do not realize the truth because of their desires, and thus they fall into misery when the rewards of their actions have been exhausted. Considering sacrifices and good works as the best, these foolish ones do not know of any higher good. They receive a heavenly reward for their efforts, but then are forced to reenter this world or even a lower one.

But those who practice austerity and faith, dwelling in peace in the forest, wise and freed from passions, pass through the door of the son to the immortal, imperishable Self.

Having discerned the worlds won by works, let the seeker renounce them. The world that was not made cannot be won by what is made (i.e., sacrifices). For that knowledge, let him go forth...to a teacher (*guru*) who is filled with wisdom and well-established in the realization of Brahman. To the seeker who has approached his teacher, whose thoughts are untroubled by desires, who has attained perfect peace, should the teacher impart the knowledge of Brahman, whereby one knows the eternal and the true.

Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.1-2; 7-13. Translated by A.J. Grunthaler.

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