



Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton Inc.
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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

Introduction to Upanishads

Volume 1

Today, we formally commence Readings on Upanishads. As a general introduction to Upanishads, let us briefly focus our attention on a few topics, which are related to all Upanishads. These topics are

- ✓ पुरुषार्थs - The Goals of Life - human endeavors towards the various goals of life
- ✓ उपनिषत्s - The Vedic literature called Upanishads, and the meaning of the word उपनिषत् itself
- ✓ वेदमहावाक्यs - The Great and the concise Declaration of the Vedas
- ✓ ओं-कार ध्वनि - The sound OM, what It indicates ?
- ✓ शान्तिपाठs - Peace Invocations, especially those we recite and hear every week at this Temple; and
- ✓ वेदउपदेशs - The Basic Teachings of the Vedas - which we also recite and hear every week at this Temple. Let us talk about these six topics briefly.

First about पुरुषार्थs – Endeavors towards the various goals of life:

- Everyone wants to BE happy
- Everyone wants happiness
- In happiness the subject and object are ONE
- All human endeavors are directed towards gaining happiness
- Happiness is one, but endeavors for gaining happiness are many
- Such endeavors for gaining happiness in life are called पुरुषार्थs

These पुरुषार्थs are of four kinds. They are not mutually exclusive, but they are mutually distinct. The first three kinds are called धर्म, अर्थ, and काम.

धर्म - Dharma - Endeavors to be virtuous

अर्थ - Artha - Endeavors to gain wealth of various kinds

काम - Kama - Endeavors to accomplish various objects of desire



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All these three kinds may be called common endeavors. Everybody is engaged in such endeavors to different extents. Such endeavors are necessary for a good life, and they certainly contribute to one's happiness. However, one soon discovers that:

- however virtuous one is, one can be even more virtuous
- however wealthy one is, one can be even more wealthy
- however accomplished one is, one can be even more accomplished

With all of one's virtue, wealth and accomplishments, one still wants something more, or something different, to be happy, or to continue to be happy, or to be fully happy. There appears to be no end to one's wants, and hence perennial happiness appears elusive, and there is always some emptiness in life.

This Discovery gives rise to the fourth kind of endeavor for gaining happiness, namely the पुरुषार्थ, called मोक्ष. मोक्ष means Absolute Freedom - Everlasting Happiness - Eternal Peace - Total Fulfillment in life. In मोक्ष :

- there is no sense of emptiness, discontent or bitterness of any kind
- there is no sense of dependence on wants and desires of any kind
- there is no मोह or शोक - no delusion, confusion, sorrow or distress

Thus मोक्ष is Total Fullness and Perennial Happiness in every day life. Because of the extraordinary nature of मोक्ष, the endeavor for gaining मोक्ष is a class by itself. In fact, all the other three kinds of endeavors, namely the धर्म, अर्थ and काम endeavors are ultimately a part of this fourth kind of endeavor, namely मोक्ष.

The happiness gained through various kinds of धर्म, अर्थ and काम endeavors is called प्रेयस् and the happiness gained through मोक्ष endeavor is called श्रेयस्. प्रेयस् and श्रेयस् are mutually distinct. प्रेयस् is कर्म जनितं - born of कर्म. The happiness gained in प्रेयस्, the happiness gained through धर्म-अर्थ-काम pursuits is born of कर्म. Since every कर्म is limited, the happiness born of कर्म is also limited. Thus प्रेयस् is only limited happiness, still leaving some emptiness in life.

On the other hand, श्रेयस् is प्रमाणेन आत्मज्ञान जनितं - born of Self-Knowledge and gained through an appropriate means of Self-Knowledge. There is no कर्म involved, only Self-Knowledge is involved.



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If there is an appropriate means of Self-Knowledge and if the body-mind-intellect complex assiduously pursues that means of Knowledge, one gains Self-Knowledge, one gains श्रेयस् - one gains मोक्ष, naturally and spontaneously. आत्मज्ञानं - Self-Knowledge is never created. It is ever-existent and it is पूर्ण - Fullness in existence, fullness in every respect. It reveals Itself when self-ignorance is removed through प्रमाण, an appropriate means of Self-Knowledge.

Therefore the happiness gained in श्रेयस् is also ever existent and पूर्ण - fullness, with no emptiness of any kind, and That श्रेयस् is मोक्ष- Total Freedom and Perennial Happiness in life.

The प्रमाण -The appropriate means for gaining आत्म ज्ञानं - Self-Knowledge, for gaining मोक्ष is the Upanishads. That is the connection between मोक्ष, the पुरुषाय, and the Upanishads, the प्रमाण for gaining मोक्ष.

Now about उपनिषत्s

Upanishads are part of Vedas, which are our ancient scriptures.

वेद means knowledge, all knowledge - both objective knowledge and spiritual knowledge. The Upanishads are concerned exclusively with spiritual knowledge. Knowledge is never created; when ignorance is removed, knowledge reveals itself. Such revelations of knowledge constitute our Vedas.

We worship all knowledge, both objective knowledge and spiritual knowledge as Saraswati - as परमेश्वर itself, because the ultimate source of all knowledge is only परमेश्वर.

For the convenience of preservation and practice in the community, Vedas were compiled in four groups, each complete in itself, under the names Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda. Knowledge about all four पुरुषार्थs: धर्म, अर्थ, काम and मोक्ष is the subject matter of each Veda.

Many parts of our ancient Vedas are said to have been lost in the march of time due to various reasons, but the essential parts of the Vedas, particularly those relating to some important Vedic rituals, and many Upanishads have been piously guarded by our forefathers, both against extinction and mutilation. We have, in turn, a collective responsibility for their preservation, not simply in our libraries but in our daily lives.



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Every major section of each Veda has two parts which are mutually independent. The initial part is called कर्म काण्ड, and it is followed by a relatively short discourse called ज्ञान काण्ड which is also called वेदान्त or श्रुति or Upanishad.

वेदान्त means the concluding part of the Veda, which is ज्ञान काण्ड of the Veda. श्रुति means the part one needs to listen and understand properly, through a teacher. Why it is also called उपनिषद्, we will see a little later.

The कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas deals with Knowledge about various कर्मs related to धर्म, अर्थ, or काम pursuits of Happiness. The ज्ञान काण्ड of the Vedas, namely Vedanta, श्रुति or Upanishads deals exclusively about the pursuit of मोक्ष.

The pursuit of Happiness is identical with Total Fulfillment in Life. This pursuit of Happiness, This मोक्ष मार्ग, is concerned with knowledge about the True Nature of Existence - Nature of Oneself - Nature of Universe - and Nature of The Lord - ब्रह्मज्ञानं - ईश्वरज्ञानं-आत्मज्ञानं- all these expressions indicating the same knowledge, which is the subject matter of the ज्ञान काण्ड of the Vedas, namely the वेदान्त, the श्रुति or the Upanishads, in all the Vedas.

The कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas always includes ईश्वर उपासन - ritualistic worship of परमेश्वर in some Form and Name, which helps the person doing the कर्म to develop a reverential attitude and कर्म योग बुद्धि in the pursuit of all कर्मs related to one's धर्म, अर्थ, काम pursuits. Thus the real purpose of the कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas is to prepare the person to become fit for the ज्ञान काण्ड, or the Upanishadic knowledge of the Vedas, for one's own total fulfillment in life.

Even though this is the case, most people who study Vedas stop with कर्म काण्ड, and do not go in for the study of ज्ञान काण्ड - or the Upanishadic part of the Vedas, which requires a higher order of mental maturity and personal discipline. Consequently, when people talk of Vedas - with no reference to Upanishads, what is usually understood is only the कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas; and, Vedas in their entirety are referred to as "Vedas and the Upanishads" and the words वेदान्त, श्रुति and उपनिषद् refer exclusively to the ज्ञान काण्ड of the Vedas.

There are many Upanishads in the Vedas and some of the well-known ones are



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ऐतरेय उपनिषत् in Rig Veda;
ईशावास्य उपनिषत्, कठोपनिषत्,
तैत्तिरीय उपनिषत् and बृहदारण्यक उपनिषत् in Yajur Veda
केनोपनिषत् and छान्दोग्य उपनिषत् in Sama Veda
प्रश्न उपनिषत्, मुण्डक उपनिषत्, माण्डूक्य उपनिषत् and कैवल्य उपनिषत् in अथर्व वेद.

All the Upanishads deal with the same topic - namely ब्रह्मज्ञानं - ईश्वरज्ञानं - आत्मज्ञानं - SELF - knowledge, Absolute Reality of All Existence. But every Upanishad is unique in terms of both style, content and focus.

All the four Vedas and Upanishads belong to the Vedic Age, prior to the times of महाभारत- prior to the times of भगवान् व्यास- which means prior to over 5000 years. Since that time, भगवत् गीता has become naturally, by far, the most important of all Upanishads, because of its source and content, and it has been recognized as

समस्त-वेद-अर्थ-सार-संग्रह-भूतं

which means the essence of the entire teachings of all the Vedas and Upanishads put together. That is why, reading the entire भगवत् गीता is the core of our ब्रह्म विद्या scripture readings program at this temple. In order to properly understand and appreciate the teachings of the भगवत् गीता, a meaningful familiarity with at least a few Upanishads is absolutely necessary. That is why reading ईशावास्य उपनिषत्, केनोपनिषत्, कठोपनिषत्, तैत्तिरीय उपनिषत्, मुण्डक उपनिषत् and कैवल्य उपनिषत् are part of our current scripture reading program.

With reference to the Upanishads one might ask why they are distinguished from the rest of the Vedas, even though they are part of the Vedas. There are three reasons and they are:

1. The subject matter of the Upanishads is distinctly different from that of the कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas
2. The अधिकारि for the pursuit of the Upanishadic knowledge is different - which means that the personal qualifications needed for the fruitful pursuit of Upanishadic Knowledge are different.
3. The result obtained from the study of the Upanishadic knowledge is also different.

These differences are unique. Let me illustrate these differences briefly.

Regarding Subject-Matter



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We are all born of कर्म, and we do कर्म all our lives. We do feel that we are all Doers of कर्म and Enjoyers of कर्म फल - the results of कर्म - such feelings are natural. The Vedas, i.e. the कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas - accept us as we are, as Doers of कर्म and Enjoyers of कर्म फल, and teach us what to do and what not to do, in order to live a happy life.

On the other hand, when we become mature enough to seek Upanishadic knowledge, the Upanishads teach us, that, in fact, we are not the Doers of कर्म. Our गुणs - personal qualities and attributes, are the Doers of कर्म, and कर्म फलs do not belong to us at all. Further, the कर्म that one does depends on one's गुण, and the गुण one has depends on one's कर्म, which means that neither कर्म nor गुण is truly independent. If so, what is truly independent?

On that the Upanishad says - as you may recall (from Kaivalya Upanishad):

श्रद्धा भक्ति ध्यानयोगात् अवैहि

That which is truly independent - That, you have to learn to discover yourself through श्रद्धा, भक्ति and ध्यानयोग, about which we will learn more from the भगवत् गीता.

Again, from the Upanishads we learn that

- One is always seeking happiness - why? because one's very nature is Happiness
- One is always seeking freedom - why? because one's very nature is Freedom
- One wishes to live a longer and longer life - why? because one's very nature is Immortality

In other words, what one really wants in life is only to **BE ONESELF** - nothing more - nothing less.

If so, what is that ONE SELF -That, one has to discover for oneself, by oneself, through enquiry – आत्मविचार. That is indeed the overriding purpose of life - so say the Upanishads.

All this knowledge is distinctly different from that gained from the कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas, and still there is no contradiction between the teachings of the Vedas and those of the Upanishads.

- It is a matter of understanding;
- It is a matter of Enlightenment



- It is a matter of Totality of Knowledge necessary for Total Fulfillment in life

Regarding अधिकारि - Who is qualified for Vedic Knowledge?

Every person is naturally an अधिकारि for the pursuit of knowledge in the कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas - because, कर्म काण्ड includes all areas of objective knowledge, and every person needs, and naturally seeks, directly or indirectly, some segment of objective knowledge for the maintenance of one's own daily life.

Thus the कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas is naturally open to every person, without any restriction. That is not so with respect to the Knowledge of the Upanishads. Pursuit of Upanishadic Knowledge can be fruitful only to those who are mature enough to seek that kind of Knowledge, whose mind and बुद्धि are emotionally and spiritually ready for that kind of Knowledge and those who have श्रद्धा in that kind of Knowledge.

Who are those people?

Four distinct qualifications called साधन चतुष्टयं - for those who naturally seek Upanishadic knowledge, have been identified. These qualifications are:

1. नित्य-अनित्य वस्तु विवेक Ability to discriminate between नित्य वस्तु and अनित्य वस्तु - That which is eternal existence and that which is transient existence.
2. इह-आमुत्र-अर्थफल-भोग-विराग Total dispassion to the enjoyment of the fruit of one's actions, here and hereafter.
3. शमादि षट्क संपत्ति One who is endowed with the six-fold virtues of शम etc. which means शम, दम, उपरम, तितिक्षा, श्रद्धा and समाधानं.

शम: means मनो निग्रह: control over one's mind - control over one's ways of thinking. The one who is able to reduce one's mind to the level of an instrument only, that person has शम;

दम: means बाह्य इन्द्रिय निग्रह: - control over one's external organs of perception and action, which means control over all levels of external expressions;

उपरम: means स्वधर्म अनुष्ठान - strict observance of one's own धर्म - duty, the one who practices one's duties at all times, whatever they are.



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तितिक्षा- means शीतोष्ण- सुखदुःखादि सहिष्णुत्वं - Ability to endure heat and cold, pleasure and pain, etc. all pairs of opposites which one comes across in life. The ability to live with situations which one cannot change, happy endurance of whatever comes one's way and doing whatever needs to be done, that is तितिक्षा.

श्रद्धा means गुरु वेदान्त वाक्येषु विष्वासः - faith in the words of the teacher and in the words of the Upanishads, which means absolute faith in yourself, absolute faith in the knowledge you seek, and absolute faith in your ability to gain that knowledge and reach that goal - that is श्रद्धा; and

समाधानं means चित्त एकाग्रत - single pointedness of the mind or, to have the ability to bring the mind well and deeply in the pursuit of knowledge. The mind must have the capacity to abide in the pursuit of knowledge without distractions. That is समाधानं - संयक् आधानं.

Thus, one who is endowed with the six-fold virtues of शमः, दमः, उपरमः, तितिक्षा, श्रद्धा, and समाधानं is qualified for the fruitful pursuit of Upanishadic knowledge. Finally,

4. मुमुक्षुत्वं which is "मोक्षः मे भूयात्" इति इच्छा - "Let me be Free" - an overriding desire to BE Free.

Thus the above four distinct qualifications have been identified as necessary for an अधिकारि - for a person to be fit for the successful pursuit of उपनिषत् knowledge.

Having said that, the question arises - are we - all of us - qualified enough for the pursuit of Upanishadic knowledge?

The answer is "Yes" certainly. How? By the very fact of our presence here, at this temple at this time, listening to the words of the भगवत् गीता and the Upanishads, we are already qualified for the pursuit of Upanishadic knowledge, whatever may be our other shortcomings. Our presence here at this Temple at this time is not a matter of accident; it is not a matter of deliberate decision either. It is truly a matter of natural growth towards one's own Total Fulfillment in life.

Let us remember always the concluding words of Sanjaya in the भगवत् गीता

यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णो यत्र पार्थो धनुर्धरः ।
तत्र श्रीः विजयो भूतिः ध्रुवा नीर्तिर्मतिर्मम ॥



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Wherever there is गीता-उपनिषत् Knowledge in practice in one's daily life, there is prosperity, success, happiness, order and stability - That is certain.

Now the third difference between the कर्म काण्ड and the Upanishad parts of the Vedas is with respect to फल - the ultimate result. कर्म काण्ड gives knowledge of कर्म, and the result of कर्म is कर्म फल. Simply the knowledge of कर्म will not give कर्म फल. You have to do the कर्म in order to get the कर्म फल.

Further, since every कर्म is limited, the resulting कर्म फल is also limited. On the other hand, Upanishads give knowledge of ब्रह्मन् - ब्रह्मज्ञानं; and the result of ब्रह्मज्ञानं is मोक्ष. The beauty is that ब्रह्मज्ञानं itself is मोक्ष. There is no कर्म involved between ब्रह्मज्ञानं and मोक्ष.

ब्रह्मज्ञानं एव मोक्षं - ब्रह्मज्ञानं itself is revelation of ONESELF - Absolute Happiness - Total Fulfillment in life - which is the ज्ञानफल - the ultimate result of Upanishadic knowledge. Thus कर्मफल and ज्ञानफल are uniquely different.

Because of the above three differences - differences in subject matter, differences in the qualifications of the अधिकारि and the differences in the ultimate result, the कर्म काण्ड and the Upanishad parts of the Vedas are uniquely distinguished.

Finally we must know why उपनिषत्s are called उपनिषत्s. In other words, what exactly is the meaning of the word उपनिषत्?

That we will see next time.