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4835 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1X 1G8

ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

Introduction to Upanishads

Volume 2

We were talking about पुरुषार्थs and उपनिषत्s last time. Various kinds of human endeavors for gaining Happiness in life are called पुरुषार्थs, which are of four kinds, namely धर्म, अर्थ, काम, and मोक्ष.

The धर्म-अर्थ-काम happiness, which is always limited, arises from कर्मs - actions of some kind, whereas the मोक्ष happiness, which is unlimited, ever-existent, all inclusive and hence supreme, is revealed by ज्ञानं - knowledge only. That ज्ञानं is about Absolute Reality of All Existence, the nature of oneself - the nature of the Universe - the nature of the Lord of the universe, etc. – आत्म ज्ञानं, ईश्वर ज्ञानं, ब्रह्मज्ञानं - all these words indicating the same knowledge about that Absolute Reality of All existence which is beyond the scope of words, and beyond the reach of mind, but which is बुद्धि ग्राह्यं- which can be reached by one's बुद्धि - faculty of discrimination and judgment, with the help of appropriate प्रमाण - Means of knowledge.

That प्रमाण- Means of Knowledge is वेदान्त, which is the ज्ञान काण्ड, the concluding part in each major section in each of the four Vedas. That वेदान्त is also called उपनिषत्s. Thus उपनिषत्s are the प्रमाण- Means of knowledge for gaining ब्रह्मज्ञानं, which itself is मोक्ष - The state of total Fulfillment in Life.

Now the question is, why is वेदान्त called उपनिषत्. In other words, what exactly is the meaning of the word उपनिषत्? The word उपनिषत् is constituted of four parts, namely a root word शद् with two pre-fixes, उप and नि, and a formless and soundless suffix (called क्तिप् प्रत्यय) which transforms शद् into षत्, making it a कर्ता - the agent of the action - the Doer of the action - indicated by the meaning of the root verb.

The root शद् has two meanings, namely

- (1) to remove or to destroy, and also
- (2) to reach or to go to



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Both meanings are applicable in the context here.

When शब्द is transformed into षत् by the formless/soundless suffix, it means

- (1) that which does the job of removing or destroying; and also
- (2) that which reaches, or that which helps one to reach

In वेदान्त, we are talking about ज्ञानं- knowledge. Knowledge, by itself, can destroy or remove only ignorance and Knowledge, by itself, can reach, or help one to reach only knowledge, because knowledge, by itself, is its own destination.

Therefore षत् means that which does the job of destroying ignorance and helping one to reach knowledge. The nature of That Knowledge is indicated by the prefixes उप and नि. उप means "near". Here it means knowledge about that, which is absolutely near. That which is absolutely near to anyone is ONESELF. There is nothing nearer to anyone than oneself. Therefore उप here indicates knowledge about ONESELF - one's innermost SELF - which means the "I" in oneself. The other prefix नि stands for निश्चय ज्ञानं - knowledge which is definite, well-ascertained and certain.

Now, putting all four parts together, the word उपनिषत् means:

A definite and well-ascertained knowledge which does the job of destroying ignorance about oneself, and helping one to reach ONESELF - to recognize one's identity with one's own innermost SELF - with certainty.

That is precisely what वेदान्त is, and what वेदान्त does. When properly understood and assimilated, वेदान्त, the ज्ञान काण्ड of the Vedas, reveals, definite and well ascertained knowledge about ONESELF and helps the seeker of that knowledge, to reach ONESELF. To identify oneself with one's own innermost SELF - The प्रत्यग आत्मा - which is the destination of That Knowledge.

- That Destination Itself is मोक्ष - Total Fulfillment in Life. That is why वेदान्त is called उपनिषत्. More about उपनिषत् we will see as we progress.

The next topic is about वेद महावाक्य

Each of the four Vedas has a concise one-sentence expression, which conveys the essential message of the entire Veda. These sentences have been recognized as वेद



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महावाक्यस - Great Vedic Declarations of revealed Knowledge. They are great because what is revealed is great - indeed infinitely great - That which is indicated by the word ब्रह्म in all Upanishads. These महावाक्यस are the following:

प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म says the Rig Veda in ऐतरीय उपनिषत्
तत् त्वं असि - says साम वेद in छान्दोग्य उपनिषत्
अयं आत्मा ब्रह्म - says अथर्व वेद in माण्डूक्य उपनिषत्
ब्रह्मैवाऽहं अस्मि says यजुर् वेद in बृहदारण्यक उपनिषत्

All these महा वाक्यस are Words of Eternal Truth. They are words of Enlightenment. They have to be understood, experienced and realized. They all give the same message but the message is addressed to one at different stages of one's spiritual development; in particular,

प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म - Pure consciousness is ब्रह्मन् - that is just a definitive statement on the very Existence of ब्रह्मन्

तत् त्वं असि - That ब्रह्मन् you are - that is उपदेश, a teaching unfolding the very nature of oneself

अयं आत्मा ब्रह्म - This आत्मा, the self in oneself - is ब्रह्मन् - that is अनुभव- one's direct experience, as one strives towards realization of ब्रह्मन्; and

ब्रह्मैवाऽहं अस्मि - I am indeed ब्रह्मन् - that is self-awakening, Self-Discovery, Self-Realization, which is the ultimate goal of human existence.

Thus the above four वेदमहावाक्यस simply reflect the different stages of spiritual growth of a human being. All the above वेदमहावाक्यस are epitomized, exemplified in the महावाक्य - The Great Declaration - of भगवत् गीता, in the words of Sri Krishna, namely

क्षेत्रज्ञं चापि मां विद्धि सर्वक्षेत्रेषु भारत ॥

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सर्व क्षेत्रेषु - In all क्षेत्रस - in all objectifiable entities - the क्षेत्रज्ञ- the knower of every such entity - is Myself - the परमेश्वर. In other words, The SELF within every self is indeed परमेश्वर

विद्धि - Please learn to understand and absorb the content of this statement - so says the भगवत् गीता.



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We will learn more about this महावाक्य in Chapter 13 of Bhagavat Geeta.

As we progress in our Upanishad-भगवत् गीता studies, we will understand and appreciate more and more the content of all the above five महावाक्यs.

By recalling and contemplating again and again all the above five महावाक्यs, to whatever extent one understands them, one moves closer and closer to the Best and the Highest in oneself. One moves closer and closer to परमेश्वर within oneself.

That is spiritual progress, and that is the relevance of the above five महावाक्यs to one's every day life. Therefore for purposes of meditation and contemplation, let us always remember these five महावाक्यs:

- ✓ प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म - Pure consciousness is ब्रह्मन्. नमस्कार् to Rig Veda
- ✓ तत् त्वं असि - That ब्रह्मन् You are. नमस्कार् to Sama Veda
- ✓ अयं आत्मा ब्रह्म - The Self in oneself is ब्रह्मन्. नमस्कार् to Atharva Veda.
- ✓ ब्रह्मैवाऽहं अस्मि - I am indeed Brahman. नमस्कार् to Yajur Veda
- ✓ क्षेत्रज्ञं चापि मां विद्धि सर्वक्षेत्रेषु भारत - In all objectifiable entities, the knower of every such entity is परमेश्वर, meaning that The SELF in every self is परमेश्वर. नमस्कार् to भगवत् गीता.

The next topic is about ओं-कार ध्वनि or ओं-कार शब्द - The Sound OM - The word OM

- ☀ ओं is मंगल वचनं. ओं is प्रणवमन्त्र
- ☀ The Sound OM is शिवं, Auspiciousness Itself
- ☀ The Word OM is Expression of the very glory of परमेश्वर - Glory of ब्रह्मन्

The Sound OM, when uttered with श्रद्धा, ईश्वर भक्ति, and ईश्वर ध्यानं invokes - meaning that it unfolds, brings up and sustains in one's mind and बुद्धि - an atmosphere of Absolute Happiness - Total God Consciousness, a sense of पूर्णत्व - Fullness, a sense of Total Fulfillment in Life.



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All वेद मन्त्रs and all उपनिषत् मन्त्रs start and end with the sound OM. All Vedic rituals and all forms of worship of परमेश्वर start and end with the sound OM. Indeed explicitly or implicitly, one's entire life of कर्म starts, remains and ends with the sound OM. Thus the sound OM is Great and sacred for all of us at all times. We must try to understand and appreciate this Greatness as well as we can.

The sound OM is the integrated expression of all possible speech sounds, which means every possible speech sound is only a partial derivative of the integrated phonetic structure of the sound OM.

The significance of sound OM is far more than a matter of human anatomy. The sound OM embodies within itself, all the sounds of the Vedas and the Upanishads, which means that OM is the integrated sound form of ब्रह्मज्ञानं- Totality of Knowledge, पूर्ण ज्ञानं - the combination of objective knowledge which is ever subject to change, and spiritual knowledge which is never subject to change, the Totality of which is the substratum of all existence, and Total Fulfillment in life.

Thus the entire ब्रह्मज्ञानं is locked up in this extraordinary sound OM. When that ब्रह्मज्ञानं is understood properly and clearly beyond doubt through the Upanishads and the भगवत् गीता, then the sound OM becomes the word OM, inseparable from That ब्रह्मज्ञानं - which is ब्रह्मन् itself.

Recognition of the connection between ब्रह्मन् and the sound OM requires an understanding of the Nature of ब्रह्मन्, and also the Nature of the sound OM.

First, about the Nature of ब्रह्मन्

ब्रह्मन् is beyond the scope of words and the reach of mind, but ब्रह्मन् can be reached and grasped by one's बुद्धि with the help of appropriate pointers.

ज्ञानं - Knowledge - not object knowledge, but Pure Knowledge is an appropriate pointer to ब्रह्मन्, because pure Knowledge is uncreated, ever existent and all inclusive, and so is ब्रह्मन्. Therefore Pure ज्ञानं is ब्रह्मलक्षणं.

The Nature of pure ज्ञानं is चित् स्वरूपं - Pure consciousness, not consciousness of something. It is That consciousness, because of which alone all cognition - any



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cognition, is possible. Therefore such चित् स्वरूप ज्ञानं is ब्रह्मलक्षणं. That चित् स्वरूप ज्ञानं is सत्यं ज्ञानं, ever-present, unchanging, eternal consciousness. That चित् स्वरूप ज्ञानं is also अनन्तं ज्ञानं, limitless consciousness, which is all-inclusive, undivided knowledge. It is That ज्ञानं which is ब्रह्मलक्षणं.

Therefore the Nature of ब्रह्मन् is Absolute, Ever-present, Unchanging, Limitless, All-inclusive, Undivided Knowledge which is Pure consciousness, Pure Awareness, Eternally alive and dynamic. That is ब्रह्मन्.

Further, since I have a sense of Myself only in terms of awareness of Myself, what I recognize by the word "I" – अहं, or the SELF - the आत्मा is also That ज्ञानं – that चित् स्वरूप ज्ञानं – सत्यं ज्ञानं – अनन्तं ज्ञानं because, I am the only source for the consciousness of Myself.

Therefore if ज्ञानं – चित् स्वरूप ज्ञानं – सत्यं ज्ञानं – अनन्तं ज्ञानं is ब्रह्मलक्षणं, then the Knowledge of आत्मा, the Knowledge of "I" - knowledge of this entire creation is also ब्रह्मलक्षणं, which means that when the बुद्धि reaches ब्रह्मन्, through the Pointer Pure ज्ञानं, That Pure ज्ञानं is ब्रह्मज्ञानं, which itself is ब्रह्मन्.

At that state of existence, this entire creation, including oneself - which means this जीव-जगत-ईश्वर complex, becomes प्रत्यक्ष ब्रह्मन् - direct manifestation of ब्रह्मन् as ज्ञान स्वरूपं - in the form of ब्रह्मज्ञानं, knowledge of ब्रह्मन्.

Thus we understand:

- ज्ञानं (चित् स्वरूपं ज्ञानं- सत्यं ज्ञानं - अनन्तं ज्ञानं) such ज्ञानं is ब्रह्मलक्षणं - Pure knowledge is Pointer to ब्रह्मन्:
- जीव-जगत्-ईश्वर is प्रत्यक्ष ब्रह्मन् as ब्रह्मज्ञानं. All existence, including oneself, this entire creation and the Lord of this creation is direct manifestation of ब्रह्मन् as ब्रह्मज्ञानं, as knowledge of ब्रह्मन्.
- उपनिषत्s are the प्रमाण- Means for gaining ब्रह्मज्ञानं – Knowledge of ब्रह्मन् . And when ब्रह्मज्ञानं is realized, is gained by one's बुद्धि through the Upanishads, That ब्रह्मज्ञानं Itself is ब्रह्मन्



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Next About the Nature of SOUND - OM

शब्दं is प्रमाण for ज्ञानं - Sound is the means for the expression of Knowledge. This statement may appear obvious, but it must be understood properly.

For example, consider a pot-maker. Before the creation of the object POT, the pot-maker only had the sound "POT", meaning pot-knowledge. With that sound POT i.e. pot knowledge, he makes the object-pot.

Now, the object-pot becomes the expression of the Sound-"POT", and the sound-"pot" becomes the word "pot" meaning the object-"pot". The word and its meaning are inseparable. The sound "POT" is the Means for the expression of POT knowledge - in the form of object-POT

Thus शब्द - the sound, is the प्रमाण - the Means for the expression of ज्ञानं - knowledge. In a similar manner, ओं-कार शब्द is the प्रमाण for ब्रह्मज्ञानं. ओं-कार शब्द - the sound OM is the प्रमाण - the means for the expression of ब्रह्मज्ञानं - knowledge of ब्रह्मन्. ब्रह्मज्ञानं is पूर्ण ज्ञानं - totality of knowledge Itself, which is ब्रह्मन् Itself when realized, because, ब्रह्मज्ञानं is ब्रह्मलक्षणं.

Before this creation came into existence, the creator had only the sound OM, meaning ओं-knowledge, पूर्ण ज्ञानं - knowledge of ओं - totality of knowledge. - With that ओं sound, ओं knowledge, the creator created this universe in the form जीव-जगत्-ईश्वर.

That जीव-जगत्-ईश्वर form is now the expression of ओं-कार शब्द - the sound OM; and the sound Om becomes the word ओं - inseparable from the form जीव-जगत्-ईश्वर which is प्रत्यक्ष ब्रह्मन् - direct manifestation of ब्रह्मन् as ब्रह्मज्ञानं - knowledge of ब्रह्मन्.

Thus we understand that sound ओं is शब्द रूप प्रत्यक्ष ब्रह्मन्. OM is direct manifestation, direct experience of ब्रह्मन् in the form of sound, and That is the connection between the sound Om and ब्रह्मन्.

There is a lot more for us to learn about sound Om and the word Om from the Upanishads and the भगवत् गीता which we will see as we progress. The next topic in this general introduction to Upanishads is about शान्ति पाठ्स - Peace Invocations - which we will take up next time.