



Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton Inc.
4835 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1X 1G6

ब्रह्मविद्या Brahma Vidya

Introduction to Upanishads

Volume 4

Last time we read the first two of the four शान्ति पाठ्-s - Peace Invocations cited in our वेद मन्दिर - Temple of Vedic Knowledge, as initiation to studies on Upanishads. The first शान्ति पाठ् is from Rig Veda, and the second one is from Yajur Veda. The third शान्ति पाठ् is from Sama Veda and it reads as follows:

ओं

आप्यायन्तु ममाङ्गानि । वाक् प्राणः शक्षुः
श्रोत्रमथो बलं इन्द्रियाणि च सर्वाणि ।
सर्वं ब्रह्मोपनिषदम् । माहं ब्रह्म निराकुर्वाम्
मा मा ब्रह्म निराकरोत् ।
अनिराकरणं अस्तु
अनिराकरणं मे अस्तु ।
तदात्मनि निरते, य उपनिषत्सु धर्माः
ते मयि सन्तु, ते मयि सन्तु ॥
ओं शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

This Peace Invocation is a prayer at an intensely personal level.

As usual the शान्ति पाठ् starts with ओं शब्द, deliberately orienting one's mind and बुद्धि, and indeed, all of one's organs of perception and action towards ब्रह्मन् - परमेश्वर manifested in the sound ओं - then starts the prayer:

ओं - O! Lord,

आप्यायन्तु मम अङ्गानि वाक् प्राणः चक्षुः श्रोत्रं
अथ उ बलं इन्द्रियाणि च सर्वाणि ।

मम अङ्गानि - all my limbs, all my instruments of perception and action, all parts of my body



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आप्यायन्तु - may they become mature, healthy and strong

वाक् - my organs of speech,

प्राणः - my physiological functions,

चक्षुः श्रोत्रं - eyes and ears,

अथ उ, so too, indeed

सर्वाणि इन्द्रियाणि - all my instruments of perception and action, without exception,

बलं आप्यायन्तु become mature, healthy and strong, which means

Let, me enjoy good health so that all parts of my body may function in harmony and serve me well in my efforts to gain ब्रह्म ज्ञानं through this उपनिषत् study. Further, my knowledge of ब्रह्मन् is only through the words of the Upanishads. The Upanishads say:

सर्वं ब्रह्मोपनिषदम् which means उपनिषदम् ब्रह्म, सर्वं - That ब्रह्मन् revealed by the words of the Upanishads is सर्वं, Everything, including myself, the Universe and God, जीव जगत् and ईश्वर. I want to realize That Identity – That ऐक्यं – in this very life – That is my Goal.

माहं ब्रह्म निराकुर्याम्

अहं ब्रह्म मा निराकुर्याम् - May I not reject that ब्रह्मन्; May I not lose faith in God, simply because I have not yet been able to realize That ब्रह्मन् due to my own personal shortcomings. Let me not give up my Upanishadic studies in despair. Let me continue my efforts until I reach the Goal.

मा मा ब्रह्म निराकरोत्

मां ब्रह्म मा निराकरोत् - Let That ब्रह्मन् not reject me. Even with the best of means, I know that That Goal can be reached only by the Grace of God. May the Grace of God be ever with me in my endeavor. May the Lord be on my side, so that I may overcome all my obstacles.

अनिराकरणं अस्तु

Let there never be any rejection on the part of the Lord. Let me enjoy the Grace of God at all times.

अनिराकरणं मे अस्तु

On my part also, let there never be any rejection of ब्रह्मन् due to my failures, frustrations or shortcomings. Let my love of ब्रह्मन्, let my love for Upanishadic knowledge be ever steady, sure and firm. Because



तत् आत्मानि निरते

I am truly devoted to तत् आत्मानि - ब्रह्मात्मानि - Upanishad knowledge. I am sincere in my devotion to ब्रह्मन्. I also know, that sincere devotion alone is not sufficient to realize ब्रह्मन्.

ब्रह्मविद्या is not for the weak in body, or the weak in mind. If the body is weak, it has to be taken care of immediately. If the mind is weak, the intellect loses its capacity to absorb Upanishad-knowledge. The only way to strengthen the mind is to cultivate the required disciplines, moral values and virtues in every aspect of daily life.

Therefore, O! Lord:

य उपनिषत्सु धर्माः ते मयि सन्तु

ये उपनिषत्सु धर्माः - whatever disciplines, moral values and virtues are necessary for gaining Upanishadic knowledge,

ते मयि सन्तु - may those disciplines, moral values and virtues be with me.

ते मयि सन्तु

Let me repeat my request - may those disciplines, moral values and virtues be in me, in abundance, and for ever, by Thy Grace, O! Lord.

ओं शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

Again नमस्कार to ओं ब्रह्मन्, ओं परमेश्वर, ओं शान्तिः. Thus ends the शान्ति पाठ from साम वेद . नमस्कार to साम वेद

य उपनिषत्सु धर्माः ते मयि सन्तु - ते मयि सन्तु - Whatever personal qualifications are needed for gaining ब्रह्म ज्ञानं - Knowledge of ब्रह्मन् - through उपनिषत् studies - O! Lord - let me be blessed with those qualifications. That is the prayer.

Now, what are those personal qualifications necessary for gaining ब्रह्म ज्ञानं? Whatever be those personal qualifications, let us always remember Sri Krishna's unqualified assurance in the भगवत् गीता namely,

श्रद्धावान् लभते ज्ञानं



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The one who has श्रद्धा – abiding faith – faith in oneself – faith in the pursuit of ब्रह्म ज्ञानं and faith in one's ability to gain that ब्रह्म ज्ञानं, does ultimately gain that ब्रह्म ज्ञानं, That is certain.

The fourth शांति पाठ cited in our वेद मंदिर is from Atharva Veda and it reads as follows

ओं

भद्रं कर्णेभिः शृणुयाम देवाः
भद्रं पश्येम अक्षभिः यजत्राः ।
स्थिरैः अङ्गैः तुष्टुवांसः तनूभिः
व्यशेम देवहितं यदायुः ॥

स्वस्ति न इन्द्रो वृद्धश्रवाः
स्वस्ति न पूषा विश्ववेदाः ।
स्वस्ति नस्तार्क्ष्यो अरिष्टनेमिः
स्वस्ति नो बृहस्पतिर्दधातु ॥
ओं शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

ओं - O! Lord

Here the Prayer is to याम देवाःs and यजत्राःs. याम देवाः s are अधिष्ठान देवताs – the presiding Deities of Natural Laws, governing all actions of our body, and, यजत्राःs are the देवताs whom we generally invoke and worship in all our Vedic Rituals. Addressing all these देवताs in particular, the Prayer is:

भद्रं कर्णेभिः शृणुयाम - May we hear, by our ears, that which is भद्रं – manifestations of Ever Auspiciousness – Absolute Happiness – Absolute Goodness – Total God Consciousness. That is what is indicated by the word भद्रं ; Similarly,

भद्रं पश्येम अक्षभिः - May we see by our eyes That which is भद्रं the manifestations of Ever Auspiciousness - Absolute Happiness - Absolute Goodness - Total God Consciousness.

Here the words “ears” and “eyes” are उपलक्षणस – illustrations for all organs of perception and action, including अन्तःकरण – mind and बुद्धि.

Therefore the Prayer is:



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O! Gods, we are about to begin a study of Upanishads. We seek your Grace, so that, by your Grace, every part of our body, each doing its natural function may remain in **भद्रं** - may remain in harmony and peace with each other, to remain firmly in Total God Consciousness, enjoying the grace of **परमेश्वर**, every function of this entire body-mind-intellect complex flowing towards, entering into, and becoming ONE with **परमेश्वर** Itself. (**मद् व्यपाश्रयः** in the words of Sri Krishna). That is the Prayer.

भद्रं कर्णेभिः शृणुयाम, भद्रं पश्येम अक्षभिः - May we hear by our ears what is **भद्रं**, and may we see by our eyes what is **भद्रं** - That which is the manifestation of Absolute Goodness.

This prayer does not mean that we want to hear only good things, and see only good things, ignoring or being insensitive to all the bad things which may be happening around us, that is not the meaning.

The meaning is, whatever may be our circumstances and the surroundings, O! Lord, may all our organs of perception and action, including mind and **बुद्धि** have the ability to abide in **भद्रं** - Total God Consciousness - Absolute Goodness.

Further, in the present context, we are all here only for the study of the Upanishads. At this time the **भद्रं** for the Teacher is to unfold the words of the Upanishads properly and fully; and **भद्रं** for the student is to listen and understand the teaching properly and fully.

Therefore, "May our ears hear what is **भद्रं** " means May the Teacher teach us well, and may the students listen well. Similarly, "May our eyes see what is **भद्रं** " means may the teacher and the student look upon each other only as such, as Teacher and student only, with respect to Upanishad knowledge, and let not other factors enter into the picture.

That is the meaning of **भद्रं कर्णेभिः शृणुयाम देवाः, भद्रं पश्येम अक्षभिः यजत्राः**

The **शांति पाठ** continues

स्थिरैः अङ्गैः तुष्टुवांसः तनूभिः व्यशेम देवहितं यदायुः

देवहितं यदायुः - Whatever life span has been allotted to each one of us,

व्यशेम - may we live that life fully - meaningfully



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स्थिरैः अङ्गैः तुष्टुवांसः तनूभिः - with all our limbs strong and healthy, and our mind and बुद्धि fully contended with whatever we are blessed with, ever enjoying the Glory of परमेश्वर in thought word and deed.

The last two lines of the Prayer are स्वस्ति वचनं - saying नमस्कार to the Devatas and seeking their Blessings.

स्वस्ति न इन्द्रो वृद्धश्रवाः
स्वस्ति न पूषा विश्ववेदाः ।
स्वस्ति नस्तार्क्ष्यो अरिष्टनेमिः
स्वस्ति नो बृहस्पतिर्दधातु ॥

नः स्वस्ति दधातु - May you all give us your Blessings

इन्द्रः वृद्धश्रवाः - नमस्कार to इन्द्र देवता - The Most Ancient and The Most Famous

पूषा विश्ववेदाः - नमस्कार to सूर्य देवता - who brings Enlightenment of all knowledge

तार्क्ष्यो अरिष्टनेमिः - नमस्कार to चायु देवता - who is ever free to move. - नमस्कार to

गरुड देवता - representing the All-pervading महाविष्णुः

बृहस्पतिः - नमस्कार to बृहस्पति - The Protector of the Spiritual Wealth in us.

नः स्वस्ति दधातु - May you all give us your Blessings

ओं शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

Again नमस्कार to ओं ब्रह्मन्, ओं परमेश्वर, ओं शान्तिः. Thus ends the शान्तिः पाठ from अथर्व वेद. नमस्कार to अथर्व वेद. नमस्कार to वेद मंदिर - Temple of Vedic knowledge

The four शान्ति पाठ s cited in our वेद मंदिर are extraordinary ones. Each one of them is appropriate to initiate a study on any Upanishad, from any Veda. One's choice of शान्ति पाठ for Upanishadic study depends entirely on one's own mental disposition at any given time.

Further, the depth and the significance of these शान्ति पाठ s will become evident only when they are recited in a contemplative mood, with understanding and dedication, in the context of one's own life, and one's own mental disposition, which are subject to change from time to time. So much about these Peace Invocations.



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The next and the last topic in this General Introduction to Upanishads is on वेद उपदेशs - the Basic Teachings of the Vedas - which we recite and hear, every week at this Temple. These Basic Teachings are both वेद मंत्रs as well as उपनिषत् मंत्रs, which means that they are extraordinarily meaningful and powerful teachings, both for success in one's धर्म अर्थ काम pursuits in worldly life and also in one's fruitful pursuit of Upanishadic knowledge - ब्रह्मज्ञानं, for gaining मोक्ष - Total Fulfillment in life.

Because of their above two-fold significance, with respect to success in one's worldly life, and also with respect to success in one's spiritual progress, it is important for every person to constantly remind oneself of these वेद -उपनिषत् मंत्रs on the Basic Teachings of the Vedas, whatever may be one's immediate interests.

Here, in this temple, we worship वेद as भगवान् because in our vision the वेद in its entirety is ब्रह्मणो मुखः - the Very Face of भगवान् - which means:

- the Words of the वेद are the Words of भगवान् ;
- when we see वेद, we see भगवान्;
- when we hear the words of the वेद, we hear भगवान्;
- when we do any कर्म in accordance with the Teachings of the वेद, we touch भगवान्, and we feel the presence of भगवान् in the कर्म we do.

We worship वेद means that we identify ourselves with the essential Teachings of the वेद in all our actions - thought, word and deed. That is our culture. Such worship of वेद is Itself ब्रह्म विद्या - the highest form of human endeavor, for gaining Total Fulfillment in life.

That is why, following the tradition of सनातन धर्म, we read these वेद उपनिषत् मंत्रs on the basic teachings of the वेद, as part of our devotional and dedicated participation in the regular ईश्वर पूजा schedule, every week at this temple.

It is naturally important for us to understand and appreciate what exactly is communicated by these वेद उपनिषत् मंत्रs so that we may constantly try to order, and re-order our daily lives so that we may remain true to ourselves - we may remain truly ourselves - which Itself is Total Fulfillment in life.



The वेद -उपनिषत् मंत्रs that we recite here at this Temple, at this time, every week, form the last section of the First chapter of Taittiriya Upanishad. The author of this Upanishad is currently in the process of delivering a summary of the essential message of the entire Veda. In this particular section, he calls attention to the वेद उपदेश मंत्रs - the most Basic Teachings of the Vedic Education in the following manner:

वेद - मनु च्याचार्यो -ऽन्तेवासिन - मनु शास्त्रि

वेदं अनूच्य - having taught the Vedas, having taught the कर्म काण्ड, or the pre-Upanishadic part of the Vedas

आचार्यः - the Teacher

अन्तेवासिनं अनुशास्त्रि - gives the following advice to the student inmates in a commanding voice. Here a brief introduction is called for.

In the Vedic age, students go to appropriate teachers, live in गुरुकुल - which means, live in the household of the teachers for several years, study those parts of the Vedas which give them proficiency in the professions in which they are interested, and when they finish such studies, they leave the गुरुकुल to start their careers, and get on with life. All such studies are from the कर्म काण्ड or the pre-Upanishadic part of the Vedas.

The context here is this. The students have now finished their studies of the chosen parts of the कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas. They feel educated enough to start their careers and get on with life. They also know that they have not yet been exposed to the Upanishadic part of the Vedas, but then, they have no compelling motivation to study any further. They have already been with the teacher for about 10 years, and they are already in their twenties, and they are anxious to graduate, leave the गुरुकुल start their own careers and get on with life.

Today is the last day of the class. Most of them will be leaving the गुरुकुल tomorrow. On this last day of the class, the teacher gives them his parting message, recalling and re-emphasizing the essential content of their Vedic education at the गुरुकुल.

The Teacher knows that these students have learnt enough to do well in their chosen careers; but they have not learnt enough - they are not yet mature enough to live their lives well. Therefore the teacher delivers his parting message in the form of अनुशासनं - which means both advice and command.



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Just as a mother advises the child with a commanding voice not to play with fire - to protect the child from possible dangers, similarly, the Teacher advises the students in an imperative language, under the authority of the Vedas, in the overriding interests of the students themselves.

Thus in order to protect the students from the possible dangers in everyday life, the teacher reminds them of the essential teachings of Sanatana Dharma - in the very words of the वेद itself. Now the teaching begins:

सत्यं वद । धर्मं चर । स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमदः ।

We will see these Teachings in detail next time.