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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 *puruṣārthas* - The Goals of Life - human endeavors towards the various goals of life
- ✓ उपनिषत्s *upaniṣats* - The Vedic literature called Upanishads, and the meaning of the word उपनिषत् *upaniṣat* itself
- ✓ वेदमहावाक्यs *veda mahavākyas* - The Great and the concise Declaration of the Vedas
- ✓ ओं-कार ध्वनि *om-kār dhvani* - The sound OM, what It indicates ?
- ✓ शान्ति पाठs *śānti pāṭhs* - Peace Invocations, especially those we recite and hear every week at this Temple; and
- ✓ वेद उपदेशs *veda upadeśas* - 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 *puruṣārthas* – 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 *puruṣārthas*

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

धर्म *dharma* - Dharma - Endeavors to be virtuous

अर्थ *artha* - Artha - Endeavors to gain wealth of various kinds

काम *kāma* - 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 *puruṣārtha*, called मोक्ष *mokṣa*. मोक्ष *mokṣa* means Absolute Freedom - Everlasting Happiness - Eternal Peace - Total Fulfillment in life. In मोक्ष *mokṣa*:

- 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 *moha* or शोक *śoka* - no delusion, confusion, sorrow or distress

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

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



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On the other hand, श्रेयस् *śreyas* is प्रमाणेन आत्म ज्ञानेन जनितं *pramāṇena ātma jñānena janitam* - born of Self-Knowledge and gained through an appropriate means of Self-Knowledge. There is no कर्म *karma* involved, only Self-Knowledge is involved.

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 *śreyas* - one gains मोक्ष *mokṣa*, naturally and spontaneously. आत्मज्ञानं *ātma jñānam* - Self-Knowledge is never created. It is ever-existent and it is पूर्ण *pūrṇam* - Fullness in existence, fullness in every respect. It reveals Itself when self-ignorance is removed through प्रमाण *pramāṇa*, an appropriate means of Self-Knowledge.

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

The प्रमाण *pramāṇ* - The appropriate means for gaining आत्मज्ञानं *ātma jñānam* - Self-Knowledge, for gaining मोक्ष *mokṣa* is the Upanishads. That is the connection between मोक्ष *mokṣa*, the पुरुषार्थ *puruṣārtha*, and the Upanishads, the प्रमाण *pramāṇ* for gaining मोक्ष *mokṣa*.

Now about उपनिषत्सु *upaniṣatsu*. Upanishads are part of Vedas, which are our ancient scriptures. वेद *veda* 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 *paramesvar* itself, because the ultimate source of all knowledge is only परमेश्वर *paramesvar*.

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 पुरुषार्थसु *puruṣārthas*: धर्म *dharma*, अर्थ *artha*, काम *kāma* and मोक्ष *mokṣa* is the subject matter of each Veda.



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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.

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

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

The कर्म काण्ड *karma kāṇḍ* of the Vedas deals with Knowledge about various कर्म *karmas* related to धर्म *dharma*, अर्थ *artha*, or काम *kāma* pursuits of Happiness. The ज्ञान काण्ड *jñāna kāṇḍ* of the Vedas, namely Vedanta, श्रुति *śruti* or Upanishads deals exclusively about the pursuit of मोक्ष *mokṣa*.

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

The कर्म काण्ड *karma kāṇḍ* of the Vedas always includes ईश्वर उपासन *īśvar upāsana* - ritualistic worship of परमेश्वर *parameśvar* in some Form and Name, which helps the person doing the कर्म *karma* to develop a reverential attitude and कर्म योग बुद्धि *karma yoga buddhi* in the pursuit of all कर्म *karmas* related to one's धर्म *dharma*, अर्थ *artha*, काम *kāma* pursuits. Thus the real purpose of the कर्म काण्ड *karma kāṇḍ* of the Vedas is to prepare the person to become fit for the ज्ञान काण्ड



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jñāna kāṇḍ, 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 *karma kāṇḍ*, and do not go in for the study of ज्ञान काण्ड *jñāna kāṇḍ* - 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 *karma kāṇḍ* of the Vedas; and, Vedas in their entirety are referred to as "Vedas and the Upanishads" and the words वेदान्त *vedanta*, श्रुति *śruti* and उपनिषत् *upaniṣat* refer exclusively to the ज्ञान काण्ड *jñāna kāṇḍ* of the Vedas.

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

ऐतरेय उपनिषत् *aitareya upaniṣat* in Rig Veda;

ईशावास्य उपनिषत् *īśāvāsyā upaniṣat*, कठोपनिषत् *kāthopaniṣat*, तैत्तिरीय उपनिषत् *taittirīya upaniṣat* and बृहदारण्यक उपनिषत् *bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣat* in Yajur Veda

केनोपनिषत् *kenopaniṣat* and छान्दोग्य उपनिषत् *chandogya upaniṣat* in Sama Veda

प्रश्न उपनिषत् *praśna upaniṣat*, मुण्डक उपनिषत् *muṇḍaka upaniṣat* माण्डूक्य उपनिषत् *māṇḍūkya upaniṣat* and कैवल्य उपनिषत् *kaivalya upaniṣat* in अथर्व वेद *atharva veda*.

All the Upanishads deal with the same topic - namely ब्रह्मज्ञानं - ईश्वर ज्ञानं - आत्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānam-īśvara jñānam-ātma jñānam* - 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 *mahābhārata* prior to the times of भगवान् व्यास *bhagavān vyāsa* - which means prior to over 5000 years. Since that time, भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gīta* 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 *samasta-veda-artha-sār-saṅgraha-bhūtam*

which means the essence of the entire teachings of all the Vedas and Upanishads put together. That is why, reading the entire भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā* is the core of our



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ब्रह्मविद्या *brahmavidyā* scripture readings program at this temple. In order to properly understand and appreciate the teachings of the भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā*, a meaningful familiarity with at least a few Upanishads is absolutely necessary. That is why reading ईशावास्य उपनिषत् *īśāvāsya upanaṣit*, केनोपनिषत् *kenopaniṣat*, कठोपनिषत् *kāthopaniṣat*, तैत्तिरीय उपनिषत् *taittirīya upaniṣat*, मुण्डक उपनिषत् *muṇḍaka upaniṣat* and कैवल्य उपनिषत् *kaivalya upaniṣat* 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 *karma kāṇḍ* of the Vedas
2. The अधिकारि *adhikāri* 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

We are all born of कर्म *karma*, and we do कर्म *karma* all our lives. We do feel that we are all Doers of कर्म *karma* and Enjoyers of कर्म फल *kama phala* - the results of कर्म *karma* - such feelings are natural. The Vedas, i.e. the कर्म काण्ड *karma kāṇḍ* of the Vedas - accept us as we are, as Doers of कर्म *karma* and Enjoyers of कर्मफल *karma phala*, 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 *karma*. Our गुणs - personal qualities and attributes, are the Doers of कर्म *karma*, and कर्मफलs *karma phalas* do not belong to us at all. Further, the कर्म *karma* that one does depends on one's गुण *guṇa*, and the गुण *guṇa* one has depends on one's कर्म *karma*, which means that neither कर्म *karma* nor गुण *guṇa* is truly independent. If so, what is truly independent?

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



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श्रद्धा भक्ति ध्यानयोगात् अवैहि *śraddhā bhakti dhyāna yogāt avaihi* - That which is truly independent - That, you have to learn to discover yourself through श्रद्धा *śraddha*, भक्ति *bhakti* and ध्यानयोग *dhyāna yogāt*, about which we will learn more from the भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā*.

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 *ātma vicār*. 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 *karma kāṇḍ* 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 *adhikari* - Who is qualified for Vedic Knowledge?

Every person is naturally an अधिकारि *adhikari* for the pursuit of knowledge in the कर्म काण्ड *karma kāṇḍ* of the Vedas - because, कर्म काण्ड *karma kāṇḍ* 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 *karma kāṇḍ* 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 *buddhi* are emotionally and spiritually ready for that kind of Knowledge and those who have श्रद्धा *śraddhā* in that kind of Knowledge.



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Who are those people? Four distinct qualifications called साधन चतुष्टयं *sādhana catuṣṭayaṁ* - for those who naturally seek Upanishadic knowledge, have been identified. These qualifications are:

1. नित्य-अनित्य वस्तु विवेक *nitya-anitya vastu vivek* - Ability to discriminate between नित्य वस्तु *nitya vastu* and अनित्य वस्तु *anitya vastu* - That which is eternal existence and that which is transient existence.
2. इह-आमुत्र-अर्थफल-भोग-विराग *iha-āmutra-artha phala-bhoga-virāga* - Total dispassion to the enjoyment of the fruit of one's actions, here and hereafter.
3. शमादि षट्क संपत्ति *śamādi ṣaṭka saṁpatti* - One who is endowed with the six-fold virtues of शम *śama* etc. which means शम, *śama* दम *dama*, उपरम *uparama*, तितिक्षा *titikṣā*, श्रद्धा *śraddhā* and समाधानं *samādhānaṁ*.

शमः *śamah* means मनो निग्रहः *mano nigrahaḥ* 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 *śama*;

दमः *damah* means बाह्य इन्द्रिय निग्रहः *bāhya indriya nigrahaḥ* - control over one's external organs of perception and action, which means control over all levels of external expressions;

उपरमः *uparamah* means स्वधर्म अनुष्ठान *svadharma anuṣṭāna* - strict observance of one's own धर्म *dharma* - duty, the one who practices one's duties at all times, whatever they are.

तितिक्षा *titikṣā* - means शीतोष्ण सुखदुःखादि सहिष्णुत्वं *śītoṣṇa sukha duḥkhādi sahiṣṇatvaṁ* - 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 *titikṣā*.

श्रद्धा *śraddhā* means गुरु वेदान्त वाक्येषु विष्वासः *guru vedānta vākyeṣu viṣvāsaḥ* - 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 *śraddhā*; and

समाधानं *samādhānaṁ* means चित्त एकाग्रत *citta ekāgrata* - single pointedness of the mind or, to have the ability to bring the mind well and deeply in the pursuit of



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knowledge. The mind must have the capacity to abide in the pursuit of knowledge without distractions. That is समाधानं *samādhānaṁ* – संयक् आधानं *saṁyaka ādhānaṁ*.

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

4. मुमुक्षुत्वं *mumukṣutvaṁ* which is “मोक्षः मे भूयात् इति इच्छा *mokṣaḥ me bhūyātaḥ iti icchā* - "Let me be Free" - an overriding desire to BE Free.

Thus the above four distinct qualifications have been identified as necessary for an अधिकारि *adhikāri* - for a person to be fit for the successful pursuit of उपनिषत् *upaniṣat* 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 *bhagavat gītā* 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 *bhagavat gītā*

यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णो यत्र पार्थो धनुर्धरः ।

yatra yogeśvараḥ kṛṣṇo yatra pārho dhanurdharaḥ ।

तत्र श्रीः विजयो भूतिः ध्रुवा नीर्तिमतिर्मम ॥

tatra śrīḥ vijayo bhūtaḥ dhruvā nīrtimatirmama ॥

Wherever there is गीता-उपनिषत् *gītā-upaniṣat* 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 *karma kāṇḍ* and the Upanishad parts of the Vedas is with respect to फल *phala* - the ultimate result. कर्म काण्ड *karma*



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kāṇḍ gives knowledge of कर्म *karma*, and the result of कर्म *karma* is कर्मफल *karma phala*. Simply the knowledge of कर्म *karma* will not give कर्मफल *karma phala*. You have to do the कर्म *karma* in order to get the कर्मफल *karma phala*.

Further, since every कर्म *karma* is limited, the resulting कर्मफल *karma phala* is also limited. On the other hand, Upanishads give knowledge of ब्रह्मन् *brahman* - ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānam*, and the result of ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānam* is मोक्ष *mokṣa*. The beauty is that ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānam* itself is मोक्ष *mokṣa*. There is no कर्म *karma* involved between ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānam* and मोक्ष *mokṣa*.

ब्रह्मज्ञानं एव मोक्षं *brahma jñānam eva mokṣam* - ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānam* itself is revelation of ONESELF - Absolute Happiness - Total Fulfillment in life - which is the ज्ञानफल *jñāna phala* - the ultimate result of Upanishadic knowledge. Thus कर्मफल *karma phala* and ज्ञानफल *jñāna phala* are uniquely different.

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

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

That we will see next time.