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Introduction to Upanishads Volume 2

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

The धर्म-अर्थ-काम *dharma-artha-kāma* happiness, which is always limited, arises from कर्मs *karmas* - actions of some kind, whereas the मोक्ष *mokṣa* happiness, which is unlimited, ever-existent, all inclusive and hence supreme, is revealed by ज्ञानं *jñānaṁ* - knowledge only. That ज्ञानं *jñānaṁ* 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. – आत्मज्ञानं *ātma jñānaṁ*, ईश्वर ज्ञानं *īśvara jñānaṁ*, ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānaṁ* - 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 *buddhi grāhyaṁ* - which can be reached by one's बुद्धि *buddhi* - faculty of discrimination and judgment, with the help of appropriate प्रमाण *pramāṇa* - Means of knowledge.

That प्रमाण *pramāṇa* - Means of Knowledge is वेदान्त *vedānta*, which is the ज्ञान काण्ड *jñāna kāṇḍ*, the concluding part in each major section in each of the four Vedas. That वेदान्त *vedānta* is also called उपनिषत्s *upaniṣats*. Thus उपनिषत्s *upaniṣats* are the प्रमाण *pramāṇa* - Means of knowledge for gaining ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānaṁ*, which itself is मोक्ष *mokṣa* - The state of total Fulfillment in Life.

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

The root शद् *śad* has two meanings, namely



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

Both meanings are applicable in the context here.

When शद् *śad* is transformed into षत् *ṣat* 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 *vedānta*, we are talking about ज्ञानं *jñānaṁ* - 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 *ṣat* 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 *upa* and नि *ni*. उप *upa* 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 *upa* here indicates knowledge about ONESELF - one's innermost SELF - which means the "I" in oneself. The other prefix नि *ni* stands for निश्चय ज्ञानं *niścaya jñānaṁ* - knowledge which is definite, well-ascertained and certain.

Now, putting all four parts together, the word उपनिषत् *upaniṣat* 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 *vedānta* is, and what वेदान्त *vedānta* does. When properly understood and assimilated, वेदान्त *vedānta*, the ज्ञान काण्ड *jñāna kāṇḍ* 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 *prtyaga ātmā* - which is the destination of That Knowledge.



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

The next topic is about वेद महावाक्यस *veda mahāvākyas*

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 महावाक्यस *mahāvākyas* - 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 *brahma* in all Upanishads. These महावाक्यस *mahāvākyas* are the following:

प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म *prjñānam brahma* says the ऋग् वेद *ṛg veda* in ऐतरीय उपनिषत् *aitarīya upaniṣat*

तत् त्वं असि *tat tvam asi* - says साम वेद *sāma veda* in छान्दोग्य उपनिषत् *chāndogya upaniṣat*

अयं आत्मा ब्रह्म *ayam ātmā brahma* - says अथर्व वेद *atharva veda* in माण्डुक्य उपनिषत् *māṇḍukya upaniṣat*

ब्रह्मैवाऽहं अस्मि *brahmaivā'ham asmi* says यजुर् वेद *yajur veda* in बृहदारण्यक उपनिषत् *brhadāraṇyaka upaniṣat*

All these महा वाक्यस *mahāvākyas* 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 *prajñānam brahma* - Pure consciousness is ब्रह्मन् *brahman* - that is just a definitive statement on the very Existence of ब्रह्मन् *brahman*

तत् त्वं असि *tat tvam asi* - That ब्रह्मन् *brahman* you are - that is उपदेश *upadeśa*, a teaching unfolding the very nature of oneself

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



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ब्रह्मैवाऽहं अस्मि *brhmaivā'ham̐ asmi* - I am indeed ब्रह्मन् *brahman* - that is self-awakening, Self-Discovery, Self-Realization, which is the ultimate goal of human existence.

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

क्षेत्रज्ञं चापि मां विद्धि सर्वक्षेत्रेषु भारत ॥ 13-2

kṣetrajñam̐ cāpi māṁ viddhi sarva kṣetreṣu bhārata ॥

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

विद्धि *viddhi* - Please learn to understand and absorb the content of this statement - so says the भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā*. We will learn more about this महावाक्य *mahā vākya* in Chapter 13 of Bhagavat Geeta.

As we progress in our Upanishad-भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā* studies, we will understand and appreciate more and more the content of all the above five महावाक्यस *mahā vākyas*.

By recalling and contemplating again and again all the above five महावाक्यस *mahā vākyas*, 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 *parameśvar* within oneself.

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

- ✓ प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म *prajñānam̐ brahma* - Pure consciousness is ब्रह्मन् *brahman*.
नमस्कार *namaskār* to Rig Veda



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- ✓ तत् त्वं असि *tat tvam asi* - That ब्रह्मन् *brahman* You are. नमस्कार् *namaskār* to Sama Veda
- ✓ अयं आत्मा ब्रह्म *ayam ātmā brhma* - The Self in oneself is ब्रह्मन् *brahman*. नमस्कार् *namaskār* to Atharva Veda.
- ✓ ब्रह्मैवाऽहं अस्मि *brhmaivā'ham asmi* - I am indeed Brahman. नमस्कार् *namaskār* to Yajur Veda
- ✓ क्षेत्रज्ञं चापि मां विद्धि सर्वक्षेत्रेषु भारत *kṣetrajñam cāpi mām viddhi sarva kṣetreṣu bhārata* - In all objectifiable entities, the knower of every such entity is परमेश्वर *parameśvar*, meaning that The SELF in every self is परमेश्वर *parameśvar*. नमस्कार् *namaskār* to भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā*.

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

- ✳ ओं *om* is मंगल वचनं *maṅgala vacanam*. ओं *om* is प्रणव मन्त्र *prṇava mantra*
- ✳ The Sound OM is शिवं *śivam*, Auspiciousness Itself
- ✳ The Word OM is Expression of the very glory of परमेश्वर *parameśvar* - Glory of ब्रह्मन् *brahman*

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

All वेद मन्त्रs *veda mantras* and all उपनिषत् मन्त्रs *upaniṣat mantras* start and end with the sound OM. All Vedic rituals and all forms of worship of परमेश्वर *parameśvar* start and end with the sound OM. Indeed explicitly or implicitly, one's entire life of कर्म *karma* 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.



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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 ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānam* Totality of Knowledge, पूर्ण ज्ञानं *pūrṇa jñānam* - 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 *brahma jñānam* is locked up in this extraordinary sound OM. When that ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānam* is understood properly and clearly beyond doubt through the Upanishads and the भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā*, then the sound OM becomes the word OM, inseparable from That ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānam* - which is ब्रह्मन् *brahman* itself.

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

First, about the Nature of ब्रह्मन् *brahman*

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

ज्ञानं *jñānam* - Knowledge - not object knowledge, but Pure Knowledge is an appropriate pointer to ब्रह्मन् *brahman*, because pure Knowledge is uncreated, ever existent and all inclusive, and so is ब्रह्मन् *brahman*. Therefore Pure ज्ञानं *jñānam* is ब्रह्म लक्षणं *brahma lakṣaṇam*.

The Nature of pure ज्ञानं *jñānam* is चित् स्वरूपं *cit svarūpaṁ* - Pure consciousness, not consciousness of something. It is That consciousness, because of which alone all cognition - any cognition, is possible. Therefore such चित् स्वरूपं ज्ञानं *cit svarūpaṁ jñānam* is ब्रह्मलक्षणं *brahma lakṣaṇam*. That चित् स्वरूपं ज्ञानं *cit svarūpa jñānam* is सत्यं ज्ञानं *satyaṁ jñānam*, ever-present, unchanging, eternal consciousness. That चित् स्वरूपं ज्ञानं *cit svarūpa jñānam* is also अनन्तं ज्ञानं



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anantaṃ jñānaṃ, limitless consciousness, which is all-inclusive, undivided knowledge. It is That ज्ञानं *jñānaṃ* which is ब्रह्मलक्षणं *brahma lakṣaṇaṃ*.

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

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

Therefore if ज्ञानं *jñānaṃ* – चित् स्वरूप ज्ञानं *cit svarūpa jñānaṃ* – सत्यं ज्ञानं *satyaṃ jñānaṃ* – अनन्तं ज्ञानं *anantaṃ jñānaṃ*, is ब्रह्मलक्षणं *brahma lakṣaṇaṃ*, then the Knowledge of आत्मा *ātmā*, the Knowledge of "I" - knowledge of this entire creation is also ब्रह्मलक्षणं *brahma lakṣaṇaṃ*, which means that when the बुद्धि *buddhi* reaches ब्रह्मन् *brahman*, through the Pointer Pure ज्ञानं *jñānaṃ*, That Pure ज्ञानं *jñānaṃ* is ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānaṃ*, which itself is ब्रह्मन् *brahman*.

At that state of existence, this entire creation, including oneself - which means this जीव-जगत-ईश्वर *jīva-jagat-īśvara* complex, becomes प्रत्यक्ष ब्रह्मन् *pratyakṣa brahman* - direct manifestation of ब्रह्मन् *brahman* as ज्ञान स्वरूपं *jñāna svarūpaṃ* - in the form of ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānaṃ*, knowledge of ब्रह्मन् *brahman*.

Thus we understand:

- ज्ञानं *jñānaṃ* (चित् स्वरूप ज्ञानं *cit svarūpa jñānaṃ* – सत्यं ज्ञानं *satyaṃ jñānaṃ* – अनन्तं ज्ञानं *anantaṃ jñānaṃ*); such ज्ञानं *jñānaṃ* is ब्रह्मलक्षणं *brahma lakṣaṇaṃ*, - Pure knowledge is Pointer to ब्रह्मन् *brahman*:
- जीव-जगत-ईश्वर *jīva-jagat-īśvara* is प्रत्यक्ष ब्रह्मन् *pratyakṣa brahman* as ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānaṃ*. All existence, including oneself, this entire creation and the Lord of this creation is direct manifestation of ब्रह्मन् *brahman* as ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānaṃ*, as knowledge of ब्रह्मन् *brahman*.



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- उपनिषत्स *upaniṣats* are the प्रमाण *pramāṇa* - Means for gaining ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānam* - Knowledge of ब्रह्मन् *brahman*. And when ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānam* is realized, is gained by one's बुद्धि *buddhi* through the Upanishads, That ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānam* itself is ब्रह्मन् *brahman*.

Next About the Nature of SOUND - OM

शब्दं *śabdaṁ* is प्रमाण *pramāṇa* for ज्ञानं *jñānam* - 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 *śabda* - the sound, is the प्रमाण *pramāṇa* - the Means for the expression of ज्ञानं *jñānam* - knowledge. In a similar manner, ओं-कार शब्द *om-kar śabda* is the प्रमाण *pramāṇa* for ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānam*. ओं-कार शब्द *om-kar śabda* - the sound OM is the प्रमाण *pramāṇa* - the means for the expression of ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānam* - knowledge of ब्रह्मन् *brahman*. ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānam* is पूर्ण ज्ञानं *pūrṇa jñānam* - totality of knowledge itself, which is ब्रह्मन् *brahman* itself when realized, because, ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānam* is ब्रह्मलक्षणं *brahma lakṣaṇam*.

Before this creation came into existence, the creator had only the sound OM, meaning ओं *om* knowledge, पूर्ण ज्ञानं *pūrṇa jñānam* - knowledge of ओं *om* - totality of knowledge. - With that ओं *om* sound, ओं *om* knowledge, the creator created this universe in the form जीव-जगत-ईश्वर *jīva-jagat-īśvara*.

That जीव-जगत-ईश्वर *jīva-jagat-īśvara* form is now the expression of ओं-कार शब्द *om-kār śabda* - the sound OM; and the sound Om becomes the word ओं *om* - inseparable from the form जीव-जगत-ईश्वर *jīva-jagat-īśvara* which is प्रत्यक्ष ब्रह्मन्



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pratyakṣa brahman - direct manifestation of ब्रह्मन् *brahman* as ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānaṁ* - knowledge of ब्रह्मन् *brahman*.

Thus we understand that sound ॐ *om* is शब्द रूप प्रत्यक्ष ब्रह्मन् *śabda rūpa pratyakṣa brahman*. OM is direct manifestation, direct experience of ब्रह्मन् *brahman* in the form of sound, and That is the connection between the sound Om and ब्रह्मन् *brahman*.

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