



A General Introduction To

# UPANISHADS

with  
A Special Chapter:

"Ramanuja  
on  
Upanishads"

K.R. Krishnaswami

POCKET  
BOOK EDITIONS OF  
**KRK's**

Subject Familiarisation Series

Paduka Krupa  
A & K Prakashana

A  
*General Introduction*  
to  
UPANISHADS  
*with a Special Chapter :*  
Ramanuja on Upanishads

*K.R. Krishnaswami*

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A General Introduction to UPANISHADS and A Special Chapter 'RAMANUJA ON UPANISHADS' by K.R. Krishnaswami, Published by A&K Prakashana, Bangalore which is a non-profit making publishing venture.

First Edition : April 2002

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**Sri Mukund Nadipuram**  
**Smt. Nagaratna Nadipuram**  
Waterloo  
Iowa, USA

Price : Rs. 40/-

US \$ : 4

*Typeset by :*

**Sriranga Creations**

# 52, Netaji Road, T.R. Nagar

Bangalore - 560 028

Ph : 6763370, 6763380

*Printers :*

**Ganesha Maruti Printers**

Thyagarajanagar

Bangalore - 560 028

Ph : 6766342

*Cover Design : R. Kiran, Grafitek, Bangalore-560 004*

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this small effort on Upanishads to the 'Trinity' who have served / have been serving the cause of Srivaishnavism over the decades :

(Late) Prof. S.S. Raghavachar, an erudite scholar in many philosophies who spearheaded a revolutionary spirit to present to the world the contributions of our Poorvachaaryas in the right perspective. He wrote several books on Prasthaana Traya in both English and Kannada.

Dr. N.S. Anantarangacharya, a recipient of many awards and titles for his vast contributions through writings on a number of subjects about Vedanta and Srivaishnavism. He has written over 100 books of which mention should be made of those on Ramanuja's Gita Bhashya and Sri Bhashya, Upanishads, 4000 Divya Prabhandam, Vishistadvaita, Vedas, Sthavas etc. The books are mostly in Kannada, but he has also written some important books in English.

Dr. S.M. Srinivasa Chary could easily be described as our 'window to the outside world'. He is the author of well-researched treatises in English on Prasthana Traya (Gita, Brahma Sutras and Upanishads), Azhwars and Acharyas. His English style is lucid and goes well with readers living abroad.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book on Upanishads is the fifth in the series of books for familiarisation of religious classics and philosophical treatises. About the time I started writing the present book, a young gentleman, who was on a holiday in India, walked into my house and volunteered to sponsor this book. I was pleasantly surprised at the devotedness and interest shown by the young man on religious matters. The person I am referring to is one Sridhar Ranganath presently living in Plymouth, Minneapolis, USA.

The book is jointly sponsored by Sridhar Ranganath and his friends Mukund & Nagaratna Nadipuram (Waterloo, Iowa, USA). I thank them for this gesture and wish them well.

The book is as usual enriched by the scholarly suggestions from Vedanta Vidwan Dr. N.S. Anantarangacharya. I thank Dr. Acharya for his continued interest in my small efforts at wielding the pen on grandiose subjects.

I thank Mr. Shankar / Ms. Sudha of Sriranga Creations for the beautiful type-setting, Sri Kiran of Grafitek for front cover design and Sri Sharada Prasad for Printing.

*K.R. Krishnaswami*

## PREFACE

There is a well-meaning criticism from Vedantic scholars from time to time that the majority of our people are not interested to familiarise themselves with our fundamental philosophy and culture. At the same time, it should also be observed that efforts to popularise our Vedantic philosophy in a manner intelligible to a large number of people are not forth-coming. One could well ask which should precede, the interest or the response to it? The uniqueness of human birth and its evolution after a mind-boggling cycle of births and deaths (evolution of human life is said to take place after undergoing 8,400,000 lives of various types of species) needs to be understood, besides the fact that if one does not utilise this life to overcome further births, one will slide back requiring millenniums for one to come back to human life. Kenopanishad puts it succinctly (2.5) that a havoc befalls those who do not make efforts to realise Brahman in this life itself (Mahatii Vinashatthi).

The present effort is, at best, meant to create an awareness and interest in the subject. It is not from a scholar to a layman - it is from one aspirant to another. All the same, efforts have been made to bring together all the salient aspects of Upanishads in a condensed manner in this small pocket edition - size is very important in keeping reader's interest alive right through.

The special feature in this book is an effort to highlight Sri Ramanuja's vast use of Upanishads for writing Sri Bhashya, Gita Bhashya and Vedartha Sangraha.

It is hoped that at least a handful of readers will get interested to study bigger treatises on Upanishads with original in the language of their choice. In fact readers can choose any one Upanishad for detailed study, if possible, with the help of a teacher, and move in the direction of the 'realisation of Brahman'.

*K.R. Krishnaswami*

# **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

## **PREFACE**

## **CONTENTS**

### **CHAPTER I**

#### **Section 1 : Introduction**

##### **Prologue**

- i) Indian Philosophy - The Upanishads
- ii) Time - Honoured Treasures - Our Spiritual Heritage
- iii) Western Thinkers
- iv) Standardising Vedas and Consolidating Upanishads
- v) Non-Vedic Schools Too Owe their Heritage to Upanishads
- vi) Influence of Upanishads on Indian History and Culture
- vii) The Spiritual Crisis
- viii) The Level of Highest Excellence
- ix) Book of Knowledge vs Book of Work

#### **Section 2 : General Aspects**

- 1. Upanishads - A Broad Definition
- 2. Message of Upanishads
- 3. The Number of Upanishads
- 4. Fixing the Age of Upanishads

5. Structuring of Upanishadic Texts
6. Classification of Upanishadic Texts
7. Upanishadic Personages
8. Problems Faced by Upanishadic Seers
9. Commentaries on Upanishads
10. Upanishadic Language - A Cryptic Glance

### **Section 3**

1. Debut of Upanishads in the Western World

### **Section 4**

1. Sample Leaves from the Upanishads

## **CHAPTER II : Dashopanishads - a brief Survey 38-80**

1. Ishavasyopanishad
2. Kenopanishad 42
3. Mundakopanishad 55
4. Kathopanishad 48
5. Prashnopanishad 53
6. Aitareyopanishad 58
7. Maandukyopanishad 61
8. Taittireeyopanishad 63
9. Chandogyopanishad 67
10. Brihadaaranykopanishad 77



### CHAPTER III : Ramanuja on Upanishads

1. The Background
  - i) Bhashyas on Prasthaanatraya
  - ii) Ramanuja's theistic position and his influence
  - iii) Likely contents of a Separate Bhashya 85
  - iv) Survey of Texts used by Ramanuja
2. Expanse and Ground covered in Upanishads by Ramanuja 87
3. Eight Upanishads 88
4. Chandogya 92
5. Brihadaranyaka 102
6. Five Upanishads 117
7. Summing Up 121

### APPENDIX : NAMES OF 108 UPANISHADS <sup>125</sup>

### REFERENCES <sup>127-128</sup>

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **Introduction**

**(Sections 1 to 4)**

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# THE UPANISHADS

## (SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION)

### Prologue

Amongst nearly 2800 languages in the world, only a few have influenced the lives of large masses of people for millenniums. Sanskrit is one such language and probably the oldest of all languages. In the past the peoples' thoughts and the holy sayings used to be transmitted by the oral method - the Vedas, which are in sanskrit, were passed on from one generation to the next through aural reception, and even to-day the teaching of Vedas continues to be the same. The thoughts expressed in Vedas exercised an extraordinary power in the evolution of the intellectual, moral and spiritual life of mankind. The Vedas have been accepted as the oldest literature - they are in the form of prayers, hymns and litanies.

#### i) **Indian Philosophy - The Upanishads**

While Vedas are said to be authorless - 'apaurusheya' as they are known and said to have been *expired* by God Himself - the Upanishads are believed to be reflections of sages and seers; the rishis whose insights they embody remain in the background - impersonal as the truth they stood for, their individual lives and their names lost for ever. The said reflections came to the rishis 'totally unbidden' while they were in the exalted state - that is, the thoughts came to them without any effort on their part as they were 'uplifted' to the domains of ecstasy 'where the secret of the Universe and the riddle of existence were laid bare before them'. Fully deserving they were, as seekers of truth, for being chosen as 'Channels of revelations' - their genius being traced

to the inflow of divine energy into them.

## **ii) Time-honoured Treasures - Our spiritual heritage**

The Upanishads, representing the most brilliant utterances, have a poetic approach to reality and have been appropriately termed 'The Himalayas of the soul'. They are the records of mystical experiences and are a symbol of 'the heights to which the spirit of man soared in contemplation of the divine spirit.' They are cherished as the 'philosophic treasures and documents' - they indeed are the holiest literature 'preserved through the religious fervour of a highly sensitive people who paid the greatest attention' to the oral transmission, and they stand unique in the annals of the history of human culture.

## **iii) Western Thinkers**

In contrast to Indian Philosophy, known as Vedanta, which forms the final phase of the Vedas, Western philosophical thoughts used to be based 'on curiosity or wonder' - the knowledge for knowledge's sake has never been the aim of Indian Philosophy but it was aimed at 'overcoming the evils of life through philosophic enquiry'. Max Mueller wrote about Western philosophy : 'None of our philosophers *not excepting* Heraclitus, Plato, Kant or Hegel, has ventured to erect a "spire" such as Vedanta.'

The first-ever thinker to coin the word 'Philosopher' was Pythagoras who around 600 BC called himself a 'Philosophos' meaning a lover of wisdom and connoting a thoughtful and reflective attitude towards things and life in general. He was followed by Heraclitus, Descartes, Spinoza,

Leibnitz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schoepenhauer, Herbert and others. Over a period of time, the philosophy in the Western world made attempts to infer the character and content of the inner experience of the intuitive mind. Plato's 'Idea of Good' approximates to Upanishadic thoughts; in Spinoza's belief of 'God as the single infinite substance with mind and matter as two of His attributes', one finds similarity with Ramanuja's Vishistadvaita; Kant's Realm of Phenomena and admission of Ultimate Reality find echo in Advaita.

'Unlike Western Philosophy, Indian Philosophy had an outlook entirely different from the former. For us it was a quest after truth - truth not as a mere certitude (conviction) but as one which was closely related to the development of personality for attaining the highest freedom, bliss and wisdom. A philosophical discipline of our conduct and control of emotions and passions was quite distinct from other philosophies'.

#### **iv) Standardising Vedas and Consolidating Upanishads :**

— Vyaasa's epochal service

The credit for systematizing Vedas and Upanishads goes to Veda Vyaasa. The Vedas were in fragmented form and Vyaasa consolidated them and then divided into four standard categories or collections depending on the order, accent and cadence of the mantras. Thus standardised, they were named Rig, Yajur, Saama and Atharva Vedas. Each of these Vedas was further classified\* into Samhitas (hymns for rituals), Braahmanas (prose portion / performance details of rituals) and Aranyakas including Upanishads (with mystical elements / meanings of hymns).

Upanishads, owing their origin to a great number of rishis living at various periods, embody their utterances in regard to 'immortality, divinity or emancipation of soul', which formed the core theme. It was Vyaasa again, who with his genius for synoptic knowledge affirmed the unity and continuity of core thoughts of Upanishads by connecting selected texts through what are known as Brahma Sutras (the prefix connoting that the sutras pertain to Brahman, the Absolute, the ultimate Reality). In other words Brahma Sutras fashion the Upanishads into a coherent and unified treatise.

**v) Non-Vedic Schools Too Owe  
Their heritage to Upanishads**

It is indeed interesting to note that even those philosophic systems classed as non-vedic owe their origin and heritage to the Upanishads. The materialistic arguments stated and set aside by the Upanishads, form the corner-stone of Chaarvaaka school; similarly Buddhism draws inspiration from the law of Karma and transmigration of soul which is an Upanishadic heritage. Jainism's distinction of self and non-self runs parallel to Upanishadic conception of monism.

Of course all the Vedic systems like Nyaaya-Vaisheshika, Sankhya-Yoga, with the possible exception of Poorva Mimaamsa (Ritual portion of Vedas, while upanishads belong to Uttara Mimaamsa), acknowledge the authority of Upanishads.

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\* Yet another generic classification of Vedas broadly into 2 divisions is : Poorva Mimaamsa (ritual portions or Karma Kaanda) and Uttara Mimaamsa (Jnaana Kaanda comprising Upanishads)

## **vi) Influence of Upanishads on Indian History and Culture**

Someone rightly put it : "Without understanding the Upanishads it is impossible to get an insight into Indian history and culture. Every subsequent development of philosophy and religion in India has drawn heavily on the Upanishads. The path of bhakti or devotion to a personal God, the path of Karma or detached action, and the (comprehensive) synthesis of all spiritual paths expounded by the Gita, are all derived from Upanishads. There is no important form of Hindu thought, said Bloomfield, 'which is not rooted in Upanishads.' The constant summons of Upanishads to man are 'Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached' which are adumbrated in Kathopanishad : "Uthistatha, Jaagrata praapya varaan nibhodata".

## **vii) The Spiritual Crisis - Lead Kindly Light**

The modern man is caught up in the web of 'faster and still faster' economic development and industrial progress where *'his past is unrecoverable, his present uncertain and his future is an interrogation'*. The crisis, known as a spiritual crisis, is seeking for light to lead him 'out of the encircling gloom'. There is, however, hope for optimism and 'a twilight waiting to lead to a brighter dawn', as stated in the Upanishad :

'From unreal lead me to the real;  
From darkness lead me to light;  
From death lead me to immortality',

- a perennial message of hope and cheer to all humanity.

## **viii) The Level of Highest Excellence - Perfection**

What is the level of human excellence ? To this question in everyone's mind, an apt answer is provided by the Upanishadic thinkers. Endowed with clarity of mind and purity of living, these thinkers achieved the answer to this question through a life of self-discipline and meditation; and in beautiful exposition and impressive dialogues and fine snatches of poetry, they bequeathed it to posterity. That has made this literature of Upanishads immortal.

Man's level of supreme experience, say the Upanishads, consist in transcending (that is extending beyond this world) his limitation of the senses. Upanishads took up the challenge of 'higher levels of human evolution, deeper levels of human experience and they forged ahead to scale the peaks of thought and experience a realization of man's immortal divine nature.'

## **ix) Book of knowledge vs Book of Work - The track record**

It would be pertinent to consider briefly how Vedas and Upanishads have performed in the past. The Vedic hymns while being recognised as the supreme authority for knowledge initially, were increasingly being used for ritualistic aspirations like obtaining wealth, praise, food etc. i.e. for getting material benefits and possessions, victory, destruction of rivals, Vedas were being employed. That's why Vedas were classified as the 'Book of work'.

On the other hand 'Upanishads' came to be called as 'Book of Knowledge'. As Aurobindo put it "The Braahmanas (the ritual part of the Vedas) labour to fix and preserve the



minutiae (meaning minuteness) of the Vedic ceremonies ... and help us very little in our quest for knowledge. The rishis (on the other hand) followed another method. They sought to recover the lost or waning knowledge by meditation and .... they used the ancient mantras as a prop or an authority for their own intuitions and perceptions .... their real work was to found Vedanta rather than to interpret Vedas. The Vedantic movement (as it was termed) endeavoured to separate itself from the symbolic language .... the Upanishads became the fountainhead of the highest Indian Thought. The age of intuition was passing away into the age of Reasoning".

In support of the above view, we find reference in the Gita (II. 42-44). While regarding Vedas as the divine knowledge, yet it censured severely the champions of an exclusive Vedantism, all whose flowery teachings were devoted solely to material wealth, power and enjoyment.

## SECTION 2 : General Aspects

### UPANISHADS - a broad definition

The Amarakosha which spells out meanings and synonyms of words, terms Upanishad as 'Dharmarahasyopanishad'; the term means a 'secret'. Shankara in his commentary on Kathopanishad says 'Upanishadamabrooma' meaning that Upanishad is paramaatma vidya, and somewhere else he says that 'Upanishad' means 'knowledge'. This knowledge is further drawn to mean 'that which can destroy ignorance governing this samisaaara'. Sudarshana Suri says that 'knowledge which gives rise to Brahma Jnaana is Upanishad'.

Another way of defining Upanishad is by splitting the term into 'Upa-ni-shad' which means 'sitting down near' i.e., sitting down in close proximity to the teacher. Shankara in his Taittiriya Upanishad/bhashya says ".... it leads the pupil very near Brahman, or because therein the highest God is seated". What is implied in the definition is that there has to be a close examination of the worth of the recipient to receive instruction of a 'closely-guarded-secret' not because others should not know but because the recipients should possess necessary qualifications and some strict discipline before knowing it.

Upanishad as a text is steeped in Brahman, the Absolute and as sounded in 'eshaa vedopanishad' the secret knowledge is to be imparted in secret (quietude) with the pupil sitting close to the acharya. That is, Upanishad calls for the most intimate student-teacher communion : "higher the knowledge sought, greater is the communion and greater the silence accompanying the knowledge - communication of highest kind like Atma Jnaana or Brahma Jnaana."

### 3. THE MESSAGE OF UPANISHADS

The most famous statement in this regard is that of Swami Vivekananda :

"Strength, strength is what Upanishads speak to me from every page .... Oh man ! be not weak. It is the only literature in the world where you find the word 'Abhiih' meaning fearless, used again and again.... Upanishads are the great "mine of strength" (enough to invigorate the whole world)."

Upanishads teach the philosophy of absolute unity. By unity is meant the oneness of the subject. Experience implying consciousness, is the only reliable, self-illuminated, absolute factor of our knowledge.

Upanishads' teaching consists in 'inducing man to strive for liberation'. Lord Krishna says in the Gita that one among a large number strives for the attainment of liberation and one among such liberated ones knows His true nature'. This fact is not unique to the present age but such rare striving for liberation has all along been there through the ages. Upanishads do not call upon one 'to give up' material pleasures or pursuits although the ultimate aim is 'to secure liberation'.

In response to the most difficult metaphysical questions (whence we were born, where do we go etc.) Upanishads provide the most inspiring explanations (exegesis). Upanishads are like avenues leading to immortality, the road of knowledge known only to a few over the world : the central message is : 'Brahman is the ultimate reality, the ultimate good and the ultimate power effectuating the realization of the Ultimate Good'.

#### 4. THE NUMBER OF UPANISHADS

There has been no close agreement amongst scholars about the exact number of Upanishads. It is mentioned that there were 1180 Vedic shaakas, and with one Upanishad attached to each shaaka, there was a like number of Upanishads, Saama Veda alone accounting for 1000 numbers. Most of these have been lost.

It is however believed that there were more than 207 Upanishads and we have got presently 108 Upanishads whose names are given in Appendix. Although 22 Upanishads are considered as authentic, the major Upanishads are only ten in number. These, together are known as Dashopanishads, and the names are mentioned in a couplet in Muktikopanishad —

Isha Kena Katha Prasna Munda Maandukya  
Tittirih / Aitareya cha Chandogya Brihadaaranyaka dash.

The larger list comprising 22 main Upanishads is as follows :

i) Isha 2) Kena 3) Katha 4) Prasna 5) Mundaka  
6) Maandukya 7) Taittiriya 8) Aitareya 9) Chandogya  
10) Brihadaaranyaka 11) Kaushitaki 12) Svetaasvatara  
13) Agnirahasya 14) Naaraayanopanishad  
15) Subaalopanishad 16) Atharvatikha 17)  
Mantrikopanishad 18) Atharvasiras 19) Mahopanishad 20)  
Maitraayaneeya 21) Narasimhataapaneeya and  
22) Brahmabindu.

## 5. FIXING THE AGE OF UPANISHADS

Going by the fact that the Upanishads do not limit their antiquity, scholars feel that it is not possible to hazard guessing the periods to which the Upanishads belong. The origin and the teaching of these holy texts should have existed ages before they assumed the written form. In some texts, quotations are there from earlier scriptures, 'now totally unknown to us'. The great philosopher Max Mueller put it succinctly : 'One feels certain that behind all these lightning flashes of religious and philosophic thoughts there is a distant past;.... we shall never know the beginning.'

Some scholars, however, make bold to accept the broad dates as follows :

Early Upanishads - 1000 BC to 300 BC

Later Upanishads - 400 BC to 300 BC

(the Vedic period itself gets slotted to 5000-4000 BC).

→ The ten oldest Upanishads are mainly in prose. The ascending order of placing the major Upanishads from earlier time to later dates is indicated as follows :-  
↓

Aitareya; Kaushitaki; Taittiriya; the Chandogya; parts of Brihadaranyaka; parts of Kena; followed by parts of Kena; parts of Brihadaranyaka; Katha; Maandukya being the last.

It must however be stressed that the value of Upanishads does not rest on their antiquity but upon the vital message they contain for all times and for all peoples. There is nothing peculiarly racial or local in them.

## **6. STRUCTURE OF UPANISHADIC TEXTS**

The Upanishadic topics/texts as such are not quite systematized, for they were merely jotted down without any attempt at arrangement. However the ideas being wonderful and always progressive, it took one to higher and higher stages of spiritual realization - we get by and by an insight into the mind of the sages and the thoughts gradually become finer and finer.

As ideas were never 'set down', there is no set form either. There are prose and verse forms, discourses between persons or teacher and pupil, and discussion among groups "bearing evidence of a serious effort at convincing by arguments and counter-arguments indicating that they have solely depended on reasoning as the essential method in the development of their ideas".

Style and manner vary widely, often within the same Upanishad - being now simply and concretely narrative, now subtly and abstractly expository, often assuming in either case a dialogue form. Their tone too fluctuates.

## CLASSIFICATION OF UPANISHADIC TEXTS

Basically there are three types of texts and different commentators have shown preference to certain texts which they thought would serve their way of thinking. The three types of texts/shruthis are —

**i) Abhedha Shruthis :** These shruthis uphold the identity of jiva and Brahman. Shankara accords great importance to such shruthis;

**ii) Bheda Shruthis :** These shruthis proclaim difference amongst Brahman, jiva and matter, each being independent but Brahman has supremacy over the other two. Madhva accorded great importance to these shruthis; and

**iii) Ghataka Shruthis :** The jiva derives its form and function from Brahman and exists for His aesthetic satisfaction and is therefore His Sarira. It is different from Brahman in the denotative aspect as it is a unique individual; and one with Him it connotes Him as His Self — the concept is known as that of Prakaara (jivas) and (He the) Prakaarin.

The famous set of texts proclaiming Sarira-Sariri (or body-soul) relationship are known as Ghataka Shruthis / mediating texts and comprise Antharyami Braahmana texts of Brihadaaranyaka and Svetaasvatara Upanishads.

Ramanuja not only recognised the correct interpretations of bheda and abhedha shruthis but also used Ghataka Shruthis to great advantage in reconciling all types of texts, (which may not have been interpreted by other commentators) to suit his way of thinking.

## 8. UPANISHADIC PERSONAGES

As mentioned earlier one does not find the names or personal histories of rishis who gave us the Upanishads, but we do have the names of those who taught or interpreted the Upanishads. As we course along from one Upanishad to the next, we find famous characters who were either unaware or not particular about themselves while spreading the greatest truths or talking about their heroes or Vedic deities (like Prajaapathi, Indra, Naarada, Sanath Kumara who all figure as dialecticians).

Following are the names of Upanishadic characters which are outstanding in furthering the cause of Upanishads :

Mahidaasa,	Raikva,	Satyakaama
Aitareya,	Shandilya,	Jaabaala
Jaivali,	Uddhaalaka,	Svetaketu
Bhaaradwaja,	Gaargayaayana,	Pratardana
Baalaaki,	Ajaatashatru,	Varuna
Yajnavalkya,	Gargi,	Maitreyi

Two young characters who are quite famous and attract our attention are Nachiketas and Bhrigu. While Nachiketas cornered Yama on 'the secret of life', Bhrigu asks his father about the knowledge of Brahman.

Even wise men like King Janaka crave for more knowledge.



## **9. PROBLEMS FACED BY UPANISHADIC SEERS**

The seers believed that our body was a veritable prison and the people often mistook physical body for the soul. They knew that the level of understanding of the vast majority of human beings was not of a high order; they had perforce to come down from the heights to teach the people 'the lofty truths'. In order to achieve this, they had to develop strange and unique methods like suggestiveness, communication through a mass of myths and legends, tales, anecdotes and parables concerning the nature and origin of the Universe, soul's immortality, Brahman's nature etc.; in short, an intelligible body of verified and verifiable insights.

As someone put it : "The great thinkers of ancient India tackled the problem of life not solely to discover its relation to our conduct and happiness, but also to derive that supreme satisfaction, namely, that of having realized the enduring bottom (the spiritual terra-firma) on which the phenomenal Universe takes its stand".

Upanishadic seers have presented what they experienced, and for ordinary people to benefit from it; it is essential that one should develop 'a thirst for the eternal' : "Hard it is for many even to hear about it (The Supreme Spirit); hearing about it many do not comprehend. A marvel is he who can teach it, and able is who finds it (that marvel); and a marvel is he who knows it, taught by an able teacher". It is also mentioned that one may meet such marvels at ordinary and unexpected places ! Let us hope at least some of the readers happen to meet those marvels !

## 10. COMMENTARIES ON UPANISHADS - BHASHYAS

Without a commentary, it is practically impossible to understand either the spirit or inner meaning of the Upanishads. They were never designed as popular scriptures and called for 'bhashyakaaras' to provide the right medium. Being transmitted orally from teacher to disciple, the style was necessarily condensed and in the form of aphorisms. The language also was of the metaphysical type and obscure. Therefore for Upanishads to be accessible or intelligible to a wider audience', a commentary was absolutely necessary.

Among the latter day 'bhashyas', those by Shankara, Ramanuja (a separate chapter is appended) and Madhva are talked about. There are differences in interpretations by the commentators and someone observed thus : "Upanishads proclaim a single coherent doctrine of Brahman, which unfortunately gets broken up to primary and secondary teachings of commentators sponsoring their views.... (in the process of offering solutions to the problem) they introduce a divergence which is not there; *they surrender themselves to the texts imperfectly and attempt to extract support for their pre-formed views*".

'Yet if one has perseverance to perforate beneath these mere surface difficulties, one is repaid a hundred-fold, for these ancient sacred books contain the most precious gems of spiritual thought'.

## **11. UPANISHADIC LANGUAGE - A cryptic glance**

In order to appreciate the exegesis\* found in Upanishads, one needs to equip and train himself in regard to the style and language adopted by them :

### **a) Introductory Narratives**

Frequently 'truth concerning meditation and knowledge' is introduced through certain narratives to the disciple by the spiritual teachers :

- i) Yajñavalkya taking on (or talking to) each wise man in the assembly of King Janaka. In the subject of conducting a sacrifice. (Br. Up)
- ii) Yajñavalkya's initiation of his wife Maitreyi on the noble journey to Immortality. (Br. Up)
- iii) Varuna teaching his son Bhrigu (Tait. Up).

### **b) The word 'Upanishad' Itself**

Depending on circumstances, it may denote a doctrine, a significant term, a secret, or stand for wisdom concerning 'Brahman'.

### **c) An Illustration**

Uddalaka gives this comparison to the son : just as salt dissolved in water is not visible, so also Brahman's presence is ingrained in everything and one cannot see Him.

### **d) Parable**

Prajapati, conveys significant meanings using a single syllable 'Da' thrice, while teaching the devas; 'da' in daamyata

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\* Lightly translated means 'interpretation/explanation'

(Self-control), dattha (Charitableness), dayedvam (mercifulness), etc. They refer to the gods, the man and the Asuras respectively. It is referred to as the triad of restraint / liberality / clemency.

**e) Epigrams**

The famous Neti, Neti (not this, not this) - Br. Up.

**f) Metaphors and Similes**

Metaphors and similes abound in Upanishads. "Seeker of truth is like a traveller - like aatman being the master of the Chariot (Ch. Up. 8.4.1). Aatman is the driver leading across immortality."

Just as policemen, Village Chiefs and others gather around a king when he wishes to depart, so do the sense organs (Praanas) gather round the aatma (the individual soul) at the time of death (when he begins breathing upwards) - Br. Up.

**g) Symbols / fanciful derivatives / recapitulation etc.**  
are widely used to drive home the truth.

**h) Frequently appearing phrase : Ya Evam Veda**

This statement meaning 'he who knows this' is the most frequently used phrase in The Upanishads.

He who knows that food which is established in food, becomes established. He becomes an eater of food, possessing food. He becomes great in off-spring, in cattle, in the splendour of sacred knowledge, great in fame (Tai. Up. 3.7).

Whatever conquest is Brahman, whatever the attainment Brahman - that conquest he conquers, that attainment he attains (whoever knows this - Kaushitaki - 1.7).

"So frequent are the statements describing the invulnerability and omnipotence of Him who is possessed of this magic talisman that 'Ya Evam Veda' becomes the most frequently recurring phrase in all the Upanishads.

## **SECTION 3**

### **DEBUT OF THE UPANISHADS IN THE WESTERN WORLD**

**-the Spiritual Commonwealth**

Seventeenth Century will go down in our history as the epoch-making century since it was during this period that the Upanishads registered an Universal appeal. For the first time the spiritual treasure chest of India was opened to the Western world. And that through a Persian translation ! A few decades after its appearance, a French scholar by name Anquetil Duperron translated the Upanishads into French and Latin and interestingly he presented to the Western world only the latter.

Despite distortions, which are to be expected in a translation of such lofty works, 'the light of thought still shone with such brightness' that the great German philosopher Schoepenhauer exclaimed : "How entirely does the Upanishad breathe throughout the holy spirit of Vedas.... how is to everyone by a diligent study of the Persian, Latin has become familiar with that book, stirred by that spirit to the very depth of his soul." Continuing further he said, "The access to the (Vedas) by means of Upanishads is in my eyes the greatest privilege which still this century (1820) may claim before all previous centuries."

Thoreau also expressed the same thought : 'what extracts from Vedas, I have read, fall on one like the light of a higher and purer luminary which describes a loftier course through a purer stratum - free from particulars, simple, Universal.

The credit of the first English translation of Upanishads, however, goes to Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1775-1833). Since then there have been scores of European translations in French, German, Italian and of course, English.

Speaking of translations as a whole the great German philosopher, Max Mueller, observed in a rather lighter vein : (however accessible) modern words are round, ancient words are square, and we may as well hope to solve the quadrature (!) of the circle, as to express adequately the ancient thought of the Vedas in modern English !

Despite the translational inadequacy expressed above, one feels great to hear the encomiums on Upanishads :

While, to Schoepenhauer Upanishads were the 'solace of life and 'solace of his death', Deussen, another German philosopher, found in them 'Parnenides, Plato and Kant' all in a nutshell.

Hume, who authored a major work on Upanishads, said 'Upanishads had exerted and continued to exert an influence on the monism of the West.'

## SECTION 4

### LEAVES FROM THE UPANISHADS

Let us look at an Upanishadic mantra and a famous dialogue as specimens and also list the mahavaakyas.

**A mantra** from Mundaka Upanishad

"Dwaa Suparnaa Sayujaa Sakaayaa  
Samaanam Vruksham parisha swajaate I  
Tayooranyah pippalam swaadhya -  
Thannashnamoh Abhichaakasheeti II

The literal meaning is :

Our body is like a tree and jeevaatma and Paramaatma are the two birds which are always together perching on it. The jiva enjoys/undergoes the 'Karma phala' whereas Paramaatma just sits with his 'prakaasha' which illumines it, as He does not have any touch of Karma.

#### **Ranga Ramanuja Muni's Commentary on this mantra**

Connecting it with the last mantra wherein it was said that since Paramaatma is the soul of the bodies, and when this house (body) is burnt, the inmates i.e., including Paramaatma should be affected - Since it is not so the following explanation is given for such an objection.

Located in the same body, one of the birds undergoes Karma while the other has no such compulsion. The two birds are Jivaatmaa and Paramaatma. Jivaatma has two wings viz Karma and Jnaana (Knowledge), and Paramaatma's two Wings are



sankalpa (will) and shakti (power). Although they are located inside like birds, only jivaatma is subject to karma accumulated earlier and its 'phala'. Since Paramaatma is free from any such Karma, He is shining everywhere. Thus it is demonstrated that Paramaatma is not affected by any sorrow.

## **b) A dialogue**

Let us cover a famous dialogue to see the tenor and form of questions and answers :

**Background :** Yaajnavalkya, a very famous sage with an original mind and great powers, had two wives : Maitreyi and Kaatyayini.... The former was conversant with Brahman and the other had the usual knowledge which women possess. Yaajnavalkya intended to enter Vaanaprasthashrama and told Maitreyi that he would make a settlement of wealth between the two wives. Hearing this Maitreyi questions him thus (the proverbially long dialogue starts) —

My Lord, if this earth, full of wealth, belonged to me, tell me if I would become immortal by it ?

*Yaajnavalkya :* No; like the life of rich people will be your life.... no hope of immortality from wealth.

*Maitreyi :* What should I do then .... explain to me.

*Yaajnavalkya :* You are dear to me.... I will explain to you. (Basing his further arguments on 'man's power to love, he goes on)

You love and therefore you are immortal. Verily, a husband is not dear, that you may have loved the husband; but that you

may love the Self, therefore a husband is dear. ....Verily wealth is not dear, that you may love Wealth; but that you may love self, therefore wealth is dear.

Verily cattle are not dear, that you may love cattle, but that you may love the Self, therefore the Cattle are dear.

Same style of argument follows in respect of Brahman class, Kshatriya Class, Devas, Vedas and Creatures.

And verily everything is not dear, that you may love everything, but that you may love Self, therefore everything is dear.

*Verily the self is to be seen, to be heard, to be perceived, to be marked; Oh ! Maitreyi ! When the Self has been seen, heard, perceived and known, then all this is known.*

Describing the Self (antaryaamin / Paramaatman), Yajñavalkya says : The Great Being has breathed forth "The four Vedas, Itihaasa, Puraanas, Vidyaas, Upanishads, Slokas, Aphorisms (Sutras), glosses and commentaries, sacrifices and offerings in fire and drink, this world and the other world and all beings. *All these are the effortless breath of this great being.*

For classification it should be mentioned here that since we know that Vyaasa and others are authors of Sutras, Smritis, Puraanas etc., it is to be understood that since Paramaatman inheres (lives/ indwells) in people like Vyaasa, He is responsible for the dissemination of Knowledge.

Yajñavalkya continues with his discourse of Aatma, the Imperishable, nature of jiva and concludes the term he repeated so many times viz 'dear one' as to mean 'Immortality'.

He then leaves behind his two wives and walks away as an ascetic to the forests.

### *Mahaavaakyas and double Negation*

Mahaavaakyas are those which convey in a nutshell great philosophic truths. We will be dealing with some of them as we course along the Upanishads one by one. However mentioned below are the Mahaavaakyas.

- i) Tattvamasi - Thou art That
- ii) Aham Brahmaasmi - I am Brahman
- iii) Prajnaanam Brahma - Brahman is Intelligence
- iv) So'ham asmi - I am He
- v) Ayam aatma Brahma - This aatman is Brahman

### *Double Negation :*

Neti, Neti - Not this, Not this.

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**CHAPTER II**  
**DASHOPANISHADS**  
**- A Brief Survey**

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## **CHAPTER II**

### **DASHOPANISHADS - A BRIEF SURVEY**

The goal of all Upanishads is realisation of 'Brahman' and it is the knowledge of the Supreme that removes all sorrow and delusion.

'The Upanishadic seers discovered through the objective method of extrospection that Brahman is the world-ground (the cause of origination, sustentation and destruction of Universe) and by the subjective method of introspection, they concluded, that the self of man (Aatman) is not to be confused with his psycho-physical trappings. Then through an intuitive flash, they identified the two and arrived at the principle of unity.'

Although each Upanishad has its own Uniqueness, on a closer scrutiny one finds the commonness of message about 'Brahman'.

In this section , a systematic method of informing the reader about the basic and salient details on each Upanishad has been followed. The details given are — i) Vedic link ii) Composition and size, iii) Uniqueness iv) Significant aspects and the central Upanishadic message v) Peace Chant, and vi) Summary of the Upanishad.

## 1. ISHAVAASYOPANISHD

1. Vedic Link : Shukla Yajur Veda /  
Vajasaneya Samhita
2. Composition & Size : Though it is a principal upanishad, it has only 18 verses. This is the second smallest upanishad. It can be classified into 4 groups
3. Uniqueness :
  - a. It belongs to pre-Gita period
  - b. This Upanishad was selected by Vedanta Desika for a full-scale bhashya.
  - c. The first verse embodies the significant aspects of all upanishads - we shall examine it in some detail.
  - d. Derives its name from the first word 'Isha'
4. Significant Aspects/  
main Upanishadic message : While prescribing the path of the karma for those who are not initiated into jnaana, this upanishad brings out the nature of Brahman and the means to reach the goal of life (i.e. Hita for attaining purashaartha)
5. \*Peace Chant : The peace chant is as follows : All this is full; All that is full

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\* That the Invisible Absolute is whole. Whole is this - the visible phenomena. From the invisible whole comes forth the visible whole. Though the visible whole (the Universe etc) has come out of the Invisible Whole, yet the invisible remains unaltered.

From fullness, fullness comes  
When fullness is taken of fullness  
Fullness still remains.

Om Shanti, Shantih, Shantihi.

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**FIRST MANTRA** : Know that everything is and all that moves in this Universe is pervaded by the Lord - that is both chit (sentient) and achith (non-sentient) things are His property. Enjoy whatever He has allotted to you, and desire and covet not wealth that does not belong to you. Find enjoyment in renunciation (not the renunciation of action).

Desire is movement in the direction opposite to Truth. There are two sides of realization : the moral side (training oneself in being unselfish and exercising control) and the spiritual side (developing love and sympathy). They should go together.

A summary of **Vedanta Desika's** commentary on the rest of the mantras is as follows :

Only way open to individuals is carrying out one's action (without attachment). The nature of self (denoting Brahman, being present both inside and outside), is one of Omni-pervasiveness. The relationship of Self with creatures is one of supporter and supported (creatures). Hita or the way to realization of Purushaarta (The Lord in Vaikunta) is suggested.

Action or doing one's duty (Karma Yoga) without knowledge is considered 'foolish'. Vidya according to Vedanta Desika is 'Knowledge of the form of meditation' (Upaasanaatmaka Jnaana) and it leads to attainment of Brahman.

While the mantras 1-14 deal with instruction as above, the next four mantras 15-18, are for prayer to be repeated at the time of Upaasana. They are supposed to overcome obstacles. The 18th mantra\* can be used on all occasions including sacrifices.

\* Agne naya supatha raaye asmaan,  
Vishwaani deva vayunaani vidwaan I  
Yuyodhya smajjuhuraanamenoh  
Bhuyishtaam theh nama Ukthim vidhema II

Some aspects deduced by Aurobindo are :

- i) Man must reconcile knowledge and work, as they are inseparable
- ii) Neither Vidya (knowledge) nor avidya (nescience) is by itself the absolute knowledge.
- iii) The enjoyment of the infinite delight of existence free from ego, founded on oneness of all in the Lord, is what is meant by enjoyment.

## **The Mahavaakya**

'Sohamasmī', the advaitic mahavaakya which appears in the 16th mantra, means : (He who is that Purusha) he I am.

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### **\* The 18th Mantra/meaning :**

Guide us oh ! Agni by the good path to the enjoyment of the fruits of our deeds; guide us O God, who knowest all deeds. Remove the evil from within us so that we may offer thee our best words of adoration.



## 2. KENOPANISHAD

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Vedic Link                                  | Saama Veda/Talavakaara<br>(Jaimini) Braahmana   |
| 2. Composition & Size :                        | 4 parts (khaandas) comprising 35 mantras. - 2 parts as dialogue; 1 part allegory; 4th-meditation type.  |
| 3. Uniqueness                                  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Like Isha derives its name from the first word Kena (By whom), Kena-istritam meaning by whom directed.</li><li>2. Shankara has written two bhashyas on this Upanishad - Pada (word) and Vaakya.</li><li>3. Among the Upanishads, this is the most analytical and metaphysical.</li></ol> |
| 4. Significant aspects and Upanishadic message | This Upanishad lays great stress on the unique opportunity given to human birth in the spiritual evolution and unfoldment of the soul. It declares emphatically that self-realization is to be had in this very life - if we do not attain it now then there is going to be great destruction (Mahati vinashttihi 2.5).           |
| 5. Peace Chant                                 | 'Let my limbs grow strong; Let my speech, Praana, eyes, ears, vitality\ and all the senses increase in vigour.  |

May I never deny Brahman; may It never deny me.'

Let all virtues proclaimed in the Upanishads dwell in the Aatman; Let them take root and dwell in me. Om Shanti, Shanti, Shantihi.

### **The Querying (By whom) and the Answer :**

Q : 'From whom' comes life ? What enables man to speak, to hear and see ?

A : The Brahman resides in our hearts as Antaryaamin. Without his help, our limbs wouldn't move, hands wouldn't work, eyes cannot see, ears cannot hear. Even the mind requires to be actuated by him.

Q : Who gets the Indriyas (senses) to work ? Is it the mind ? or any agency far different from that ?

A : Sense organs, mind or jivaatma? None of these ! A totally different principle (Tattva) is the driving force (of the Universe as a whole comprising sentient and non-sentient beings).

Q : What about Brahman's nature ?

A : Brahman is not fully knowable but one requires to inquire into It. There is little truth if one says 'I know well' — which form he knows and which form exists among Gods. One cannot answer satisfactorily.

### **Summary of the Upanishad**

The first part highlights our inability to know Him through Indriyas, but Parabrahman is the base for all knowledge. It is not easy to comprehend Him or gain full knowledge about Him.

The second part says that even the most powerful devas were put in place by Parabrahman (the all-powerful) as the **I-factor** misled the Devas to believe that success comes to them because of their efforts (without Brahman's help).\*

The third and fourth parts contain an interesting dialogue between the Devas and an Yaksha - This is in an allegorical form and is known as YAKSHABRAHMOPAAKYAANA\*.

\* Once Brahman won a victory for the Devas (Gods) by defeating the Asuras. But the Devas thought that the victory belonged to them. In order to destroy their vanity and pride, He appeared as an Yaksha. Agni and Vaayu were sent by Devas to tackle Yaksha but they returned vanquished. Finally Indra came but little could he comprehend. At this point the Yaksha disappeared and in His place a goddess (Uma) appeared. She revealed the circumstances of Yaksha's appearance and how Parabrahman dealt with their pride. Here the devas represent the senses and Yaksha the spirit or the life-force — physical and mental powers are nothing in front of the spiritual power. BY THE SUBJUGATION OF MIND AND SENSES ALONE CAN THE SPIRIT BE COMPREHENDED : THIS IS THE TRUTH.

Indra obtains knowledge of Brahma-Swaroopa and the truthful ones who have studied Vedas and controlled the senses acquire Brahma Jnaana resulting in Brahma Vidya.

**There is a message for all of us here.** Strive in this life itself to acquire Brahma Jnaana. Otherwise a great destruction will befall us - an irreparable loss which may require millenniums to make good.

### 3. MUNDAKA UPANISHAD

1. Vedic Link Belongs to Atharva Veda / Shaunakeeya Shaaka.
2. Composition & Size : Comprises 3 parts with 2 chapters in each. It has a total of 65 mantras - in verse form.
3. Uniqueness Mundaka means a sannyasin who has a shaven head - probable reason for naming this Upanishad thus is either a sannyasin is the author; or just as a razor shaves off the hair covering the head so also the para vidya contained in the Upanishad can be used to remove the 'super-imposed veil of ignorance' obscuring the Aatman. However various interpretations are possible for 'Sirovrata' or 'observance regarding head.'
4. Significant aspects and Upanishadic message 'Bhadram Karnebhi Shrunuyama Devaaha .....Dhadhaatu' meaning 'May we with our ears hear what is auspicious ! May we with our eyes see what is auspicious; may we live our allotted span of life in perfect health and strength offering Him our praise !

Om Shanti, Shantih, Shantihi

Atharva who learnt both 'para' (higher knowledge) and apara (work-knowledge) vidyaas from his father Chaturmukha Brahma, hands it down to Angira, on to Satyavaaha and then to Angirasa from Satyavaaha. To Angirasa comes one Shaunaka and asks : 'By which is all the entire phenomena experienced through the mind and senses ? What is it if one knows he knows everything ?' As though to answer these questions, the Upanishad took shape. Some scholars say that this Upanishad comes next to Chandogya and Brihadaaranyaka which are considered to be very big and important Upanishads.

The first two kaandas talk about both 'para' and 'apara' vidyaas, the latter being talked about first. The type of Vedic knowledge which is useful for 'Lokavyvahaara' is known as 'apara vidyaa'. The other part of vedic knowledge which helps to know Brahman, is known as 'para vidyaa'. Brahman is 'divya mangala vigraha' of 'apraakritika type' - not the body comprising pancha bhutas which go to form our bodies. He alone can create, sustain and dissolve the world. Just as a spider weaves the web first and then enters it from outside, similarly God or Brahman creates the world of living and non-living matter and enters it. Brahman's thought process led to 'annam' from which praana, manas etc. and various worlds took shape.

The second kaanda elucidates Brahma Jnaana, consequences of not knowing it; how to acquire it, guru's ability to impart such knowledge. The spiritual aspirant should cultivate knowledge and austerity, and strive for the attainment of immortal and the imperishable.

The third kaanda describes 'Purusha', the Supreme Being by realising whom 'in one's heart', one breaks the shackles of ignorance.

The fourth kaanda gives details of the 'means of knowing in one's self' : like meditation with 'om', the pranava. Describing the Supreme Being as the blissful, immortal and as the one who 'encompasses' all - above, below and all round, we are led to the magnificent statement of 'the relation between jivaatman and Paramaatman'.

In the fifth kaanda we find the famous allegory or the example of two birds seated or perched on the self-same branch of a pippala tree - the one (jivaatman) eats the fruits (Karma) and the other (Paramaatman) just looks on as he has no touch of Karma (Dvaa Suparnaa ..... sheethi).

Overall, 'the mantras are varied and charming' in metre and diction and uniformly sublime.

Further highlights are : (i) the details of cosmic creation emanating out of Brahman, the Supreme. The first manifestations of cosmic creation are Agni (heat), rain which produce food and procreative energy - all this is directly connected with Him (His Sankalpa).

ii) Secondly it brings out the difference between jivaatman and Paramaatman.

iii) Ramanuja has utilised shruthis from this Upanishad to put forward his sarira-sariri bhaava - we, the chetanas are His Sarira and He the Saririn.

#### 4. KATHOPANISHAD

1. Vedic Link  
Yajur Veda / Taaittiriya Shaaka (more prominently in this branch. However some relate it to Saama Veda / some to Atharva and some others to Rig Veda).
2. Composition & Size : It has 2 chapters with each having 2 'vallis' - a total of 6 vallis.
3. Uniqueness
  - (i) Probably the first Upanishad to be translated into Persian and later to the European languages. Raja Ram Mohan Roy brought out an English version.
  - (ii) Sir Edwin Arnold popularised this Upanishad in metrical form under the title 'Secret of Death'.
  - (iii) R.W. Emerson's famous essay on 'Immortality' narrates its story.
  - (iv) Considered as the 'most perfect expression of the religion and philosophy of the Vedas'.
4. Significant aspects & Upanishadic message  
a) Considered as the most popular Upanishad - Nachiketas' story used to be included in school text books.

- b) The expressions in the Upanishads are unequalled for their elevation of thought, richness of expression, beauty of their imagery and poetry."
- c) Glory of Paramaatman is described in very vocal terms. Those only who try to know Him could become immortal.
- d) Strange and surprising it is, that a young lad goes in search of Brahma Vidya from the God of Death.

**Peace Chant**

Let Him Protect us both ! Let Him  
nourish us both; Let us acquire  
strength together; May our study  
be bright; May we never hate  
each other.

**Om Shantih, Shantih Shantihi**

## **Background**

Before we study the Upanishad, it is necessary to know the background to the origin of the Upanishad (this background is given in the Upanishad itself).

'Visvajit' is a sacrifice undertaken to obtain heavenly rewards and one is expected to give to the priests, as fee whatever one has. Vajasravas, Nachiketaas' father, undertook the sacrifice and he went on giving 'useless' things like barren cows etc. as fee to the priests. Observing all this the young Nachiketas asked his father



as to whom he was going to be gifted. On repeating it, Vajasravas told his son that he would gift him (Nachiketas) to Yama, the God of Death. Taking the statement literally to mean what he said, the young lad made his way to Yama Loka.

Arriving at the Yama loka, he had to wait for three nights for the arrival of the God, Yama. Observing that he had made the young lad wait for him, that too without food, for three nights Yama offers him three boons to match with 3 nights : The first boon concerns his father's disposition towards Nachiketas and return to his father and the second pertains to Agni Vidya aimed at obtaining 'svarga\*', which were immediately granted. The Third boon is the one which matters and has given rise to this Upanishad.

The third boon sought by Nachiketas is enlightenment in regard to 'the doubt as to what becomes of a man after death (in other words the fate of the atman) — some say, Nachiketas continued, he exists and some say he does not.' Yama did not like to grant this boon and tried to dissuade Nachiketas to asks him to name any other boon - unlimited wealth, longevity or all desires to be fulfilled. But Nachiketas would not give up. Finally Yama had to give in and tells the young lad about the metaphysical existence of man. Thus begins the great Upanishad comprising 'the states of man after death, the ultimate goal, the state of self-realization through the knowledge of Brahman.'

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\*In regard to Agnividya, Yama gives Nachiketas the details of fire which is the means of attaining the endless world and the support thereof; that which is dwelling in the secret peace of the heart of the learned. Yama also tells : Fire is the source of the worlds and gives the design for the sacrificial agni kundam. He also tells him that from then on it will be known as Nachiketas sacrifice. (That one who performs Nachiketas sacrifice thrice.... casts off the bonds of death even before the fall of the body itself.)

## 1. The True Nature of Aatman

The soul is neither born, nor does it die. 'It kills not, nor is it killed; It is smaller than the smallest, greater than the greatest. It dwells in the heart of every creation.

The knowledge of Aatman has to be sought from an able teacher. Yama brings in the concept of Pranava or Omkara to teach Nachiketas the true nature of Aatman as also nature of Paramaatman. Some of the adjectives used for Paramaatman or Parabrahman are : Asareeram (bodiless), Mahantam (supreme), Vibhu (all-pervading), Imperishable, eternal, immutable, Isanam - Lord of the Time (including past and future), Aditi (He is the Hiranyagarbha) - the first born who manifested Himself (along with elements and living creatures), Jyothi-swaroopa (peerless effulgence), Sarvavyaapi (omnipresent).

The Praana and senses all depend on Him. He is the Praana that vibrates, hence the creation.

He is not attainable through pravachana (discourse) or shravana (listening). *He is attainable by him whom he chooses.* There is importance attached to virtuous living, moral standards and ethical purity which are the pre-requisites.

### Body as Chariot and Sadhana

With body as chariot, soul as the master of it, intellect is the charioteer; mind is the rein, senses are the horses, roads are sense objects. The man who has intelligence as a charioteer with a well-controlled mind as the rein, attains the end of the journey, the supreme abode of Sriman Naarayana.

According to the law of Karma souls assume the forms of different bodies or animals or end up as vegetable strata. Therefore spiritual practices are recommended for salvation.

Thus ethical life is emphasized. Senses of perception should not function in an agitated state. One should behold the Self (Brahman) in everyone and in every kind of creation. One realises the relation between jivaatman and Paramaatman that Jivaatman's nature will be seen to approach or have similarity with Paramaatman's nature - like some pure water being added to the reservoir of pure water.

### **72,000 Nerves**

There are said to be 72,000 nerves in the human body and of these as many as 101 nerves are the most important. Of these 101, one psychic nerve goes to the crown of the head known as Sushumna naadi. If one's soul leaves through Sushumna it leads one to Vaikuntam, the abode of Parabrahman.

## 5. PRASHNAOPANISHAD

1. Vedic Link : PRASHNA belongs to Atharva Veda, like the other two viz Mundaka and Maandukyaa.
2. Coposition & Size : Six questions representing six sections comprising 16, 13, 12, 11, 7 and 8 passages respectively. It is in prose form.
3. Uniqueness : The whole Upanishad is in question-answer style.
4. Significant Aspects and Upanishadic message :
  - i) The only sage answering all the six questions from his disciples is Pippalaada.
  - ii) Evolution in this Upanishad is traced from the concept of time, that is, Sun and Moon as the first basis of evolution.
  - iii) Pippalaada is highly original, scientific in outlook and metaphysical in concept.
5. Peace Chant : Om! O Gods, May we with our ears hear what is auspicious ! May we with our eyes see what is auspicious ! May we live our allotted span of life in perfect health and strength offering Him our praise.

The names of 6 disciples of Pippalaada who ask him questions are : Sukesha, Satyakaama, Gargya, Kausalya, Bhaargava and Kabandhi.

When all the six approached Pippalaada, the latter sends them back saying that they observe in the coming year austerities, abstinence and faith and return for getting answers to all their questions. And so they did.

- 1) The first question was from Kabandi who asked him about creation. The answer given is - Prajapathi after observing austerity created a pair, Anna and Praana, with the aim of getting various creatures produced through them. The Sun is Praana and the Moon is Anna (Rayi) - or Life and matter. The teacher said that Sun and Moon are the origin of Life and matter in this world. He traces the sub-divisions of the Praanas and Indriyas from the Sun, and food and body from the moon. Evolution in this Upanishad is traced from Time (Sun and Moon). The year, months, fortnights (bright and dark), day and night, food and semen are all called Prajapathi.

*The Lord Assumes these forms when they come into existence. Bright fortnight and day are called Praana, Dark fortnight and night are called Rayi.*

- 2) The second question, by Bhargava, pertains to the creation of Devas who support the 15 Tattvas. All that exists in three worlds is under the control of Praana.
- 3) The third question by Kausalya pertains to the principle of Praana.

How and from when Praana comes and how he distributes himself into 5 parts and how does he go out ?

The answer given is -

This Praana is born of the Aatman. By the action of the mind it comes into this body. The Aatman dwells in the heart, while Praana\* itself dwells in the eye/ear/mouth/nose in the middle of which samaana is present. While 'samaana' distributes equally the food supplied to all parts, the 101 arteries located in the heart (x 100 branches x 72,000 sub-branches) have vyaana (air). One of these is known as Udhaana and it carries the soul to the higher world through 'Sushumna Naadi'.

'The source of Praana, its advent, location, all-pervasiveness, its five-fold distribution and its internal aspect :- knowing these, one attains immortality'.

- 4) Now it is Souryayani Gargya's turn to ask the fourth question. It pertains to sleep and dreams : which senses sleep and which senses are awake and which of these sees the dreams.?

In sleep all the Kalas are said to merge in the Kaarana Sareera (casual body) and become one in the highest sense the mind; one hears not, sees not, smells not, tastes not, feels not, speaks not, etc.

The fires of Praana alone remain awake ('Gaarahapatya' etc). In the dream state it is the jivaatman (also known as Kshetrajna) alone that sees the dreams.

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\*Praana is sub-divided into five praanas performing a specific function : Praana, Apaana, Vyaana, Udhaana and Samaana.

See Taaitireeya Up; Sheeksha Valli (15) : 'Praano Vyaanopaana Udaanassamaanaha'.

*In deep slumber the Jivaatman merges with Paramaatman (and thereon no dreams are seen) just as the birds return to their nests. Indeed it is He who sees, feels, hears, smells, tastes, thinks, knows. He is established in the supreme imperishable Aatman - in whom the knowing self with all the devas, the Praanas and elements are established, becomes omniscient and all is merged in Him.*

- 5) Then Satyakama asked him (the fifth question), Venerable Sir, "Who among men meditates on 'om' till death. What world does he attain by that?"

Omkaara primarily represents parabrahman, and secondarily Apra Brahman.

Comprising three 'maathras' (A,U,M) the benefits that flow from recitation are as follows :

Recitation of one maathra alone leads to - return to this world soon after death;

With recitation of two maathras, one goes to Chandra-loka but returns after enjoying the grandeur there; but when three maathras are connected with one another and properly recited (meditation), one becomes united with the bright Sun, one attains Brahmaloaka from where he beholds the Supreme Purusha residing in the heart.

- 6) The sixth and last question is asked by Sukesha 'where does He exist'?

His reply was 'Oh boy, here within this body itself, is that Purusha, from which arise the 16 parts (Kalas)\*. The 16 Kalas constitute macrocosm. Man is microcosm and comprises the 16 Kalas in a modified form - eleven senses

(the five Jnaanendriyas, five Karmendriyas and manas, the mind) and five subtle elements. The 16 Kalas disappear in Brahman when the seer merges in Brahman at the time of Mukti or liberation.

'Pippalaada thus based his theory of creation on the old siddhanta which says that first origin in creation is time. Creation means motion and motion means time. Sun and Moon representing days etc are the bases of Time.

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\* Purusha with 16 Kalas. They are 1) Praana-life, (2) Sraddha-faith (3) Kham-akaasha (4) Vaayu-air (5) Jothihi-fire (6) Apah-water (7) Prithvi-earth (8) Indriyam-senses (9) Manh-mind (10) Annam-food (11) Veeryam-strength (12) Tapah-ansterity (13) Mantrah-Vedas (14) Karma-work (15) Lokaha-worlds (16) Naama-name and form.



## 6. AITAREYOPANISHAD

1. Vedic Link : Belongs to Aitareya aranyaka of Rig Veda. It is named after its promulgator - Mahidaasa Aitareya.
2. Coposition & Size Including the peace chant it is divided into six sections and therefore it is known as 'Atma Shataka' - six-sectioned dissertation on the Aatman.
3. Uniqueness For this Upanishad the personal experience is the example. Vaamadeva, the great sage, is the example.
4. Significant Aspects and Upanishadic message
  - i) The Upanishad explains in a graphic manner the creation and Vedantic cosmology.
  - ii) The whole universe, it says, has emanated from the Supreme Brahman.
  - iii) The identity and unity of individual self with the Universal Self is emphasized.
5. Peace Chant My speech rests in the mind. Ye, mind and speech enable me to grasp the truth that Vedas speak. Let not my Vedic lore forsake me. I shall 'think' the truth and speak truth. May that protect me and my teacher.

Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantihi.

**I Chapter :** This gives graphic details of creation thus :

Section 1 : Aatman, the only existent entity, created-Ambhas (above Heaven/support), Marichi-Middle region; Mara-the earth; Apah - waters below the earth.

From the waters he then raised Purusha and fashioned him. Meditating on Purusha, Aatman's mouth burst when an egg came out and burst. Speech came out from the mouth and from it fire. Two nostrils burst giving rise to praana, from which came 'Vaayu'. Eyes burst when sight came and from it the Sun. Ears burst giving rise to hearing and from this the quarters; the skin burst giving rise to mind from which came the moon. The navel burst from which came 'down-going breath', and from down-growing breath, the death, The generating organ burst forth from which came semen.

Section 2 : The goals thus created required an abode. When He brought about the form of man (after a cow\* and a horse\*) they exulted !

The creator asked them to enter it : The fire (speech) entered the mouth. The Vaayu (Praana) entered the nostrils. The quarters entered the ears. The herbs and trees entered the skin as hairs. Death as the down-going breath entered the navel. The moon becoming the mind entered the heart. Water having become semen entered the generating organ.

Section 3 : The creator meditating on food created it but the food turned its back out of fear and began to fly. He tried to grasp it with various organs like eyes, ears, etc. but failed - but

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\* Cows eat only when hungry and horses drink only when thirsty;  
no limitations for man !)

finally succeeded with the down-going breath (known as Apaana). Apaana, verily the Vaayu, is the chief cause in supporting life by food.

## **II. Chapter / Section 1 (only) (Not to be read in front of pregnant women)**

He existed in man as seed and man holds this essence of his self.

The conception stage is called the first birth. When born it becomes the second birth. When one becomes old and goes out of this world and is reborn, it is the third birth.

The great sage Vaamadeva said "while dwelling inside the womb, I knew all births of these gods. A hundred bodies as strong as steel restrained me, but like a hawk I broke them by force and came swiftly from the bottom". Thus Vaamadeva became immortal.

## **III Chapter / Section 1 (only)**

'The Upanishad concludes by saying that Brahma, Indra, Hiranyagarbha, the gods, the five elements, all creatures including men, vegetables, the immovable objects, everything is Brahman. Knowledge is their basis. Knowledge/consiousness is Brahman : "Prajnaanam Brahma" — This is one of the Mahavaakyas of the Upanishads. This vaakya puts in a remarkable way the vedantic metaphysics of the whole existence.

One who knows Brahman as above becomes immortal.

## **7. MAANDUKYOPANISHAD**

1. **Vedic Link** : Belongs to Atharva Veda.
2. **Coposition & Size** : This is the smallest/shortest Upanishad. It has only 12 mantras.
3. **Uniqueness** : The first exponent of Advaita Philosophy Gaudapaada, who was the Acharya of Shankara, brought out a Kaarika on this Upanishad. This became the basis of Shankara's Advaita philosophy.
4. **Significant Aspects and Upanishadic message** :
  - i) The Omkara has four parts, the fourth, being the syllable-less aspect of 'om' It is verily the Aatman.
  - ii) The final teaching of the Upanishad - by Self one should enter Self.
5. **Peace Chant** : Om ! O Gods, may our ears hear what is auspicious ! May our eyes see what is auspicious ! May we enjoy our allotted space of life chanting your praise with steady limbs.

Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantihi.

1. 'Om' comprises 'all things in 3 states of time - past, present and future. It also embraces what is beyond all time.
2. The whole objective existence is Brahman; Aatman is also Brahman.
3. The 'Reality' manifests itself in the 4 states of consciousness- the waking state, the dreaming state, dreamless deep sleep and the superconscious state. These four states are called four feet of Brahman.
4. The inseparableness of the individual soul from the Supreme soul is contained in one of the Mahavaakyas - Ayam Aatma Brahma.
5. The four feet of Brahman referred to in (3) above are also designated by (i) Vaishwanara-waking state. (ii) Taijasa-jiva's dreaming state (iii) Prajna-deep sleep ('in-gathered' potential consciousness). He is the enjoyer of Bliss. (iv) Absolute aspect of Brahman - He is invisible, unrelated, unperceivable, un definable, of the nature of pure self-consciousness, peaceful, ever blissful, supremely auspicious, unitary and of the fourth state. The state is known as 'Turiya'.

The syllableless fourth aspect of Om - the state of supreme bliss transcending all phenomenal existence - is verily the Aatman. 'By Self one should enter self', which is the final teaching of the Upanishad.

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\* Shaantam, Shivam, Advitiyam, Chaturtham.

## **8. TAITTIREEYA UPANISHAD**

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|--|---|
| 1. Vedic Link  | Krishna (black) Yajur Veda /<br>Taittiriya Aranyaka. Origin of this<br>Upanishad narrated in<br>Mahabharata.  |
| 2. Coposition<br>& Size                              | It has three Vallis (parts)<br>comprising twelve, nine and ten<br>anuvaakas respectively.   |
| 3. Uniqueness  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) Its passing-out instruction,<br/>soon after completion of<br/>studies by the student, is<br/>applicable universally and at<br/>all times.</li><li>ii) It gives in a handy compass,<br/>many outstanding teachings<br/>on philosophy and religious<br/>discipline found in<br/>Upanishadic literature.</li></ul>  |
| 4. Significant Aspects<br>and Upanishadic<br>message | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) There is a significant<br/>declaration - 'The knower of<br/>Brahman attains the Highest',<br/>which is elaborated in the<br/>Upanishad.</li><li>ii) The science of SHIKSHA, (one<br/>of the six Vedaangas, a lesson<br/>or aid for study of the Vedas), is<br/>described. Pronunciation (the<br/>sound), accent, force,<br/>articulation etc. are covered.</li><li>iii) One of the most frequently<br/>recited Upanishads.</li></ul> |

5. Peace Chant

May Mitra be propitious to us !  
May Varuna be propitious to us !  
May Indra and Brihaspathi be  
propitious and grant us welfare and  
bliss etc. etc.

Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantihi.

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## 1. SHIKSHA VALLI

This part contains a beautiful address by the teacher to young students, as they leave the Gurukula after completing their studies (Brahmacharya Ashrama) - similar to to-day's Convocation Address.

The teacher invokes Brahman thus : "May I enter into Thee, may Thou enter into me." The significance of Vyaahritis (mystic syllables), which are *Bhuh*, *Bhuvah*, *Swah* and *Mahah*, is explained. *Bhuh* stands for the world, fire, the Rig (Veda), the Praana; *Bhuvah* is the sky, the air, the Saama (Veda), Apaana (a form of Praana); *Swah* is the heaven, the Sun, the Yajur (Veda), the Vyaana (another form of Praana); *Mahah* is the sun, the moon, the Brahman (by whom all Vedas are glorified) and the food.

We thus find sixteen aspects of Brahman, as above, which in fact correspond to 16 Kalas spoken of in Prashnopanishad.

The Vyaahritis are the Pratikas (symbols) on which the student is asked to contemplate.

The shruthi teaches that the Universe, classified into five fold divisions (Panktas) is Brahman and 'Om' is Brahman. All this universe is Om. Om, the first mantra in the Vedas, is Shabda Brahman and it is also the sheath of Brahman.

The teacher exhorts the students further : 'Speak the Truth. Perform dharma (righteous duty). Swerve not from the study of the scriptures. Let thy mother be a god to thee. Let thy father to thee be a god. Let thy teacher to thee be a god. Let thy guest to thee be a god.'

## **2. ANANDA VALLI**

'The knower of the Brahman attains the supreme state of realization.' 'Brahman is reality. He is knowledge. He is infinite. He who realises Him treasured in the secret place of the heart as the highest ether, enjoys all his desires as Brahman is omniscient.'

'From the Aatman have sprung all the subtle and gross elements - the vegetables, the food-stuff, and finally, man who is constituted of the essence of food. Life is nourished by food.' While life and breath form the basis for Tapas (austerity), food is the basis for life. This Upanishad recognises the importance of food and of the physical life, which is the vehicle for spiritual life.

There is description of the five sheaths enveloping the soul of man starting from the outer Annamaya Kosha or 'the gross body which is nourished by food; then comes the praanamaya kosha or the vital sheath; followed by Manomaya Kosha or the mental sheath; then comes Vijnanamaya Kosha or the intelligence sheath and finally the Aanandamaya Kosha or the sheath of bliss.'

Beyond the sheaths lies the Aatman within man. Bliss is the nature of Aatman and of Brahman too. The bliss of Brahman known as 'Brahmaanandam' is infinite Anandam.



The step-wise Anandam in the ascending order is - that of a strong young man, that of a Gandharva, that of the Devas, that of Indra, that of Brihaspathi and Prajapathi and then only the uncomprehendable Brahmaanandam.

The process of creation (evolution and cosmology) is also covered in this Valli. Brahman thought 'May I be many' and the world was evolved, Brahman having entered it; this explains the immanence of the God in the Universe.

### **3. BHRIGU VALLI**

This valli is so named because Varuna instructed his son Bhrigu in Sadhana or Brahma Vidya. There is an exposition of Tapas or austerity which is Sadhana itself.

The description of five Koshas covered earlier is also found here.

Bhrigu learns that beyond the Anandamaya Kosha is the Pratyagatman - the inner most self. That is Brahman; that is Brahman ! that is the basic principle of life and existence. This is realised in the form of bliss. Brahman, Ananda and Anandamaya are all the same.

Overall the Upanishad sums up by saying that 'BRAHMAN IS ALL IN MAN', that He is all in the Universe. One should contemplate him as such.

Ramanuja has extensively used this Upanishad, particularly in the interpretation of Brahma Sutras.

## 9. CHAANDOGYA UPANISHAD

1. Vedic Link : Like Kena this also belongs to Saama Veda.
2. Coposition & Size : It comprises 8 chapters (Prapaatakas) and a total of 152 Khaandas (13, 24, 19, 17, 24, 16, 26, 15)
3. Uniqueness : Chandogya being part of Saama Veda (which merited special recognition for its musical form and spiritual import), shares the authority and honour due to that Shruthi. Yaajnavalkya opines that heavenly melody lifts one to the highest divine experience.
4. Significant Aspects and Upanishadic message : Chandogya was a favourite Upanishad for Baadarayana Vyaasa while writing his Vedanta Sutras. He makes copious references to its topics and granted special esteem to it. It comprises the famous vidyas like Dahara Vidya etc. and probably the most famous Mahavaakya (Tattvamasi).  
  
Questions like 'What is that by understanding which one understands everything; what is there in the innermost recesses of the heart' etc. are answered in this Upanishad.

As in Brihadaaranyaka, in principle, the characterization of Ananda is settled satisfactorily.

If we know Brahman, we know all things; if we know what clay is, we know everything about pot, pans etc., Similarly if we know gold, we know all about jewelry products.

## 5. Peace Chant

Let my limbs grow strong ! Let my speech, Praana, eyes, ears, vitality and all senses increase in vigour ! Everything is Brahman of the Upanishads ! May I never deny Brahman ! May Brahman never deny me.

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## Chapter I : Omkara - Udgitha Upaasana

'Om' as single letter, is the symbol of Supreme spirit and an emblem of Supreme Being. It is also named Udgitha.

He who adores this syllable as Udgitha indeed becomes the gratifier of desires and promoter of prosperity.

'Om'; one who adores 'om', adores the Supreme - when the Devas progressively meditated on speech as Udgitha, eye as Udgitha, ear as Udgitha and on the mind as Udgitha, the asuras pierced it all with sin. But when the Devas meditated on the Praana in the mouth, asuras were annihilated just as a lump of clay hitting a rock.

One also meditated on Udgitha as connected with Gods. For example, Sun, the giver of heat is Udgitha. Indeed when he

ises, he sings for the welfare of creation. Indeed 'Praana in the nouth' and Sun are the same. One should meditate on both as Jdghita. 'Do thou sing praise of Mukhyapraana as manifold praanas, thou shall obtain numerous progenies' said Kaushitaki o his son.

Atidhanvan, son of Saunaka, said "The life... of your descendants .... who know Udghita will be 'higher' than ordinary lives. He who knows Udghita will become 'excellent' in this world and worlds to come.

The three persons who were proficient in Udghita, Silaka, Chaikityaana and Pravahana exclaimed that they mere willing o reveal knowledge about Udghita and after a discussion oncluded that if should be meditated upon as 'Paramaatmaka'.

## **Chapters II, III & IV : Dealing with Upaasanas**

Gaayatri is a very important and sacred form of prayer, essence of which is extolled in the Vedas. It is said that creation is Gaayatri, peeche is Gaayatri, Earth is Gaayatri. The creations constitute the glory of Gaayatri, to which the soul (Purusha) is superior. *Brahman which is indicated by Gaayatri is merely the space which exists within the heart of man.* He who knows this attains eternal treasures.

The space within the heart referred above has five gates; he who knows this 'obtains heaven'. The door-keepers of the five gates are -

- i) Praana, the eastern aperture : its deity - Sun,
- ii) Vyaana, the southern aperture : its deity - moon,
- iii) Apaana, the Western aperture : its deity - Agni (fire),
- iv) Samaana, the Northern aperture : the mind
- v) Udhaana, the upper aperture : wind (sky)

That which shines glorious in the heaven above this world and which shines within mankind is verily the Brahman. Man is a creature of reflections and he should reflect on Brahman. The sage Shaandilya said 'The soul within me is Brahman and I shall obtain it after my journey from this world. Similarly everyone that believes in this will get the fruit of his reflections'.

The episode relating to Satyakaama, who approaches a tutor, gets 400 cows to tend during the tutor's pilgrimage after which he would teach him spiritual truths. Satyakaama managed to increase the herd to a thousand. A bull in the herd asked him if he would accept it as a tutor and when he agreed, taught him about Brahman. When the tutor returned, he was quick to make out studying Satyakaama's face that he has come to know Brahman. 'That being who is seen within the eyes is verily the soul. He is deathless and fearless. He is Brahman.'

*Thus anyone other than a human being can also become a teacher.*

## **Chapter V**

The highlights of this chapter comprise exposition of various 'maargas' or routes for journey after death, and Vaishvaanara Vidya.

Those who worship gods upto Hiranyagarbha go by the path of gods. They pass by the Sushumna naadi i.e., they leave by the crown of the head.

Those who worship ancestors, do charity etc. go to Pithru Loka and then on to Chandra Loka, and they will be reborn. Evildoers take the birth of lower creatures.

Worshippers of Brahman obtain immediate emancipation. Their aatmas become one with Brahman.

'Five scholars approach Uddalaka Aruni in regard to instruction on Vaishnaanara Vidya. As Uddalaka himself was not quite conversant with this Vidya, they all go to the King Asvapati Kaikaya. He who is declared by the wise man as having the heavenly world to be the head, the ether as navel, sun and moon as eyes, etc, and whose self is unfathomable is the 'Vaishvanaanara'. Vaishvanaanara being the cosmic cause of this Universe is to be meditated upon as characterised by all these attributes !

## **Chapter VI : Svetaketu and 'Tattvamsi'**

This chapter is the crowning essence of this Upanishad as it deals with nature of Universal Soul and the subject of creation and dissolution of all existence in this Universe, and this subject is known as SADVIDYA.

The main character in this Upanishad is one Svetaketu, the son of the sage Uddalaka, As a young lad Svetaketu was sent to a guru and returned home in his 24th year i.e., after a 12 year long study. He displayed a state of arrogance and appeared conceited; Being puffed-up he thought he knew a lot. Noticing this transformation Uddalaka asks his son : Have you enquired from your teacher about Brahman, through which what is unheard becomes heard, what is unknown becomes known". The son requests his father to tell him about the Supreme Brahman. Thus begins a very famous discourse which also contains a famous Mahavaakya (Tattvamsi). Uddalaka uses very apt similes to drive home his teachings.

'Sath' is that substance which is a mere being or existence. It is invisible, all-pervading, only one without a second; it is knowledge as revealed by the Vedantas. The school of Vaisheshikas does not uphold this doctrine that 'being one alone without a second existed before creation.' Bauddhas too assume a total absence of substance before creation.

The Being willed : 'I shall multiply and be born'. It created heat, water and so on and all creations came into existence.

Explaining the nature of sleep, he said one identified with the Universal soul in Swapiti (sleeping) and attains his Self. After a long question and answer session, he concludes 'All this Universe has the Supreme Deity for its Life... He is the Universal Soul. He tells him 'Tattvamasi'. Commentators have given different interpretations to this famous Mahavaakya as follows :

Shankara : That Thou art (are) : Thou art He

Ramanuja : You (The Soul) are the body of God.

Madhva : Thou art (His) as His daasa.

## **THE SIMILES USED BY UDDALAKA :**

### **Bees and Honey**

Honey's different constituent particles do not know the source (the flowers) when they become homogeneous as honey in the honey-comb. And we know that there is a basic source. That particle which is the soul of all this is the Universal soul. "You Svetaketu ! Tattvamasi !

### **Rivers**

Rivers rise or originate from vapours of the ocean. After raining they merge into the ocean again. They do not remember what they were. Similarly these created beings know not wherefrom they have been issued out.

### **Tree**

When the branches of a tree are cut or when a tree is felled they die by drying up, but life is different from the actual tree. When the body is forsaken by life, it dies. But life (jiva) itself does not.

That particle which is the soul in the body is the Universal soul. That is 'Sath' to which all jivas go and unite.

### Nyagrodha fruit

Uddaalaka asks Svetaketu to bring a fruit from the Nyagrodha tree. Asking him to break open the fruit, he asks his son to break one of the seeds. He asks him : what do you see in it ? The son said 'nothing'. Uddalaka exclaims : 'Ah, you see nothing in it ? There dwells invisibly ....a mighty Nyagrodha tree. That particle which is the soul of all is the Universal Soul.

### Salt

As instructed by the father, the son dissolves some salt in the water. He finds the taste to be the same all through the solution. The father says Though you do not perceive the Truth, it pervades his body. The particle is the Universal Soul.

### Blind-folded man

When way-laid in blind-folded condition, the man cries aloud, as he is direction-less. But if a good man unties the fold, he reaches his native place after making enquiries. Similarly a man can be rightly guided by a guru or acharya for achieving liberation.

*Āttvamsi (Tat Tvam Asi), the famous Mahavaakya appears 9 times - the instruction leading to the realization of Paramaatman.*

## Chapter VII

While the next chapter is devoted to 'Dahara Vidya' this chapter concentrates on Bhuma Vidya.

Sanatkumara teaches Naarada about Brahman, the Ultimate Reality : "Bhumaiva Sukam - in immensity there is felicity.... there



is no felicity in exiguity (scantiness). Verily that which is immensity is immortal. Sanath Kumara continues -

The vital airs proceed from the Soul.  
Desire proceeds from the Soul.  
Memory proceeds from the Soul.  
Space proceeds from the Soul.  
Heat proceeds from the Soul.  
Water Proceeds from the Soul.  
Birth and Death proceed from the Soul.  
Reflection proceeds from the Soul.  
Ailment proceeds from the Soul.  
Power proceeds from the Soul.  
Knowledge proceeds from the Soul.  
Sensitivity proceeds from the Soul.  
Will proceeds from the Soul.  
The mind proceeds from the Soul.  
Names proceed from the Soul.  
Mantras proceed from the Soul.  
Sacrifices proceed from the Soul.

*The man who knoweth this verse confronts neither death nor disease, pain or suffering.*

Thus Sanatkumara taught Naarada the hierarchy of tattvas until the last one was reached, the eternal immortal Soul from which everything proceeds. 'He glorified Praana as everything, declared Bhuma was 'sukha' and that alone had to be known. 'Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, knows nothing else, that is Bhuma.'

## **MAHARA VIDYA**

The human body is the habitation of Brahman, the Brahmapura. There is a small lotus-like chamber in it and inside that there is a minute Akaasha (vacuity). That vacuity and that which is within this vacuity are worthy of search. That vacuity known as Antaraakasha is verily the city of Brahman and eternal truth : It is free from evil, old age, death, affliction, hunger, thirst; its resolve is truth. The Antaraakasha is 'of the same vastness as of the space outside and within the space are included Heaven, Earth and the rest.'

## **RAJAPATHI'S TEACHING TO INDRA**

The highest conception in Vedic hymns is reality, philosophically termed Self, which is called Aatman. In Rig Veda it means breath or vital essence. In a dialogue between the teacher Prajapathi and the pupil Indra (Sections 3-12) we find a progressive development in the development of Self through 4 stages : i) the bodily self (ii) the empirical self (iii) the transcendental Self and (iv) the Absolute Self.

The teaching was initially for Indra and Virochana (the latter is the head of Rakshasas).

At the first instruction itself, (look at your selves in a pail of water or Mirror, the reflection you see is Self or Brahman) Virochana went away satisfied, but Indra persisted. Indra tells : The body is only an instrument used by consciousness, while consciousness is not a product of the body. And now Indra is told that the remaining subject is Self. Even this does not satisfy him. He keeps returning. Indra tells : The Self or aatman you have pointed out is not its own self that I am this, etc. Prajapathi explains

further : 'The body indeed is mortal and is subject to death. But it is the resting place of the immortal and bodiless Aatman and thus embodied there is no escape from pleasure and pain. Bodiless are the air, clouds, etc and are issued by the 'highest heat' from yonder Akaashas; they assume their respective forms.

Now with Akaasha, orbit is the eye and is intended for seeing. The mind is his celestial eye through which he sees all objects of desire. With the help of celestial eye the Aatman enjoys them all. (including smelling, speaking, hearing, thinking etc.).

Since the Devas worshipped that Aatman in the world of Brahman, they obtained all worlds and all their desires were fulfilled. He attains all worlds and has all his desires fulfilled who having duly enquired, knows the Aatman. So said Prajapati.

From Prajapati right up to Manu, and from Manu to mankind this teaching traversed progressively. One should live in a clean place studying Vedas, bringing up virtuous sons and disciples and devoting oneself to the Aatman. Having lived thus, one attains the world of Brahman and does not return again.

## **10. BRIHADAARANYAKOPANISHAD**

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| 1. Vedic Link                                  | This great Aranyaka imparted in forests, forms the last part of Shathapatha Braahmana/Shukla Yajurveda/Kanva Shaaka (for the purpose of commentary)  |
| 2. Composition & Size                          | It comprises 6 chapters, each chapter with several Braahmanas and subbraahmans. This is the biggest (Brihat) Upanishad both in size and contents. It is an 'old prose' composition.  |
| 3. Uniqueness                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) The core teachings of all the Upanishads seem to meet in this Upanishad.</li><li>ii) Some important texts from Isha, Kena and Katha form part of a braahmana known as Jyotir Braahmana.</li></ul>   |
| 4. Significant Aspects and Upanishadic message | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) Quite a large part of this Upanishad is considered 'hardly philosophical', being semi mythological cosmology, psychology and speculation on rituals etc. One can see the ancient people's capacity to observe in the simple phenomena / in things like fire, wind, sun, cows, bulls or horses, archtypal images of the entire Universe.</li></ul> |

- ii) The greatest of Upanishadic dialogues is found in this Upanishad.
- iii) Women of substance participate in dialogues.
- iv) The famous Mahavaakya 'Aham Brahmaasmi', and 'Neti Neti' appear in this Upanishad.
- v) The supremacy of Praana and the wisdom of The Supreme Reality are explained.

## 5. Peace Chant

The same one as in Isha - That is whole and this whole. After the whole is taken out of the whole, what remains is also whole.

Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantihi.

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## **Balaaki Braahmana :**

It comprises a dialogue between Balaaki Gaargya and Ajaatashatru. Balaaki thought he knew a lot on Brahman, and Self to be meditated upon in different entities like Sun, Moon etc., which was nothing new for Ajaatashatru. Gaargya realised his folly that is, he did not know enough 'to know about Brahman; he then becomes a disciple of Ajaatashatru.

'Just as sparks fly from fire in all directions, similarly from Self emanate all worlds, organs etc., Ajaatashatru tells Gargya. The double negation, 'Neti Neti' meaning 'not this, not this' (i.e. Brahman does not have any negative attributes) appears here.

## **Maitreyi Braahmana**

The famous dialogue between Yajnavalkya and his wife Maitreyi is given in this chapter. Yajnavalkya had two wives, Maitreyi and Kaatyaayini; the former despises wealth in preference to knowledge about Brahman. Yajnavalkya instructs Maitreyi in atma Jnaana opening up secrets of the soul and of the Supreme Lord of the Universe and the avenue for liberation. A summary of the discourse is given here : "Verily, a husband is not dear, that you may love the husband; but you may love the Self (Aatman), therefore a husband is dear : verily a wife is not dear, that you may love the wife; but you may love the Self, therefore a wife is dear : verily the sons are not dear; but you may love the sons, but you may love the Self, therefore sons are dear...." the same style of discourse goes on for things like wealth, cattle, Brahmin - class, Kshatriya class, worlds, Devas, Vedas, creatures and everything.

"Verily the Self is to be seen, to be heard, to be perceived, to be marked, O, Maitreyi ! When the Self has been seen, heard, perceived and known, then all this is known.

### **King Janaka's court - Yajnavalkya**

Gaargi Braahmana - King Janaka wanted to identify the greatest Brahma-Jnaani by offering 1000 cows and also gold. Only Yajnavalkya accepted the challenge to be questioned by all the wise men in Janaka's court. Among those were Ashvala, Aartabhaaga, Bhujya, Usasta, Kahola. A woman by name Gaargi also takes part in the debates. She asks about the support for the world :- The waters. If waters supported it, what supports water; thereon Vaayu etc. and finally Yajnavalkya cautions her that she should not overstep lest her head should roll. She stops.

However after a few sections in this Upanishad she returns with two more final questions. Promising to ask only two questions, she asks about the support for the Universe as a whole and the answer given is Akaasha. To the second question as to what the support for Akaasha was, the reply given is Akshara meaning Supreme Brahman Himself.

### **Antaryaami Braahmana**

The next Braahmana, known as Antaryaami Braahmana, relates to Antaryaami - the Inner Ruler who controls the world. Yaajnavalkya elaborates this to include the earth, water, fire, sky, air, heaven, sun, space, darkness, light, all beings. The life breath, speech, eye, ear, mind, skin, vijnana, etc.

Raamanuja has utilised Antaryaami Brahmana texts to advance his concept of Sarira-Sariri bhaava or body - soul relationship of Paramaatman and jivas. We are His body, He is our soul.

### **Instruction to Janaka**

Yaajnavalkya questions Janaka about the instructions he had received from various spiritual teachers and tells him that the instructions received had imparted partial knowledge only and were not enough for liberation. Janaka requests him to impart him spiritual knowledge : 'What serves as a light for a man?' Yaajnavalkya answers : 'The Self served as light. It is through the light of the Self that he sits, goes out, works and returns. This infinite entity that is identified with the intellect and is in the midst of the organs, *the self-effulgent light within the heart, is the Self*. Assuming the likeness of the intellect it moves between the two worlds. It thinks as it were and shakes as it were. Being identified with dream, it transcends this world, the form of death.'

# **CHAPTER III**

## **RAMANUJA ON UPANISHADS**

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## CHAPTER III

### RAMANUJA ON UPANISHADS

#### BACKGROUND

##### i. **Bhashyas on Prasthaanatraya**

It is rather unfortunate that there has been an unfair and a misplaced criticism in some quarters that since Ramanuja did not write a separate commentary (bhashya) on Upanishads, he fell short of the exalted position of an acharya. The criticism presupposes that in order to promulgate a new school of Vedanta, the concerned scholar should have written 'separate' bhashyas on all the three elements of 'prasthaana traya' comprising Brahma Sutras, Bhagavadgita and Upanishads. Considering that the first two are texts derived from Upanishads, the emphasis falls on a bhashya on Upanishads themselves.

Ramanuja has drawn profusely from Upanishads to promulgate his school of Vedanta known as Vishistadvaita and his bhashyas on Brahma Sutras and the Gita are masterly treatises; besides he has written a very important gloss on Upanishads known as Vedarthasangraha, which contains the central purport of Upanishads. Vedarthasangraha was aptly described as Ramanuja's philosophical debut by Buitenen, and is the nearest to a separate treatise on Upanishads.

##### ii. **Ramanuja's theistic position and his influence**

At this point one cannot but quote the famous Vedantin, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, to substantiate Ramanuja's theistic

position juxtaposed with the central teaching of Upanishads and its influence on later acharyas and vedantins :

“The uncompromising Advaitism of Shankara made it necessary for Ramanuja to reiterate the theistic view of Vedas.

Shankara admits (? would have admitted) the antiquity of the theistic tradition emphasized by Ramanuja. Accordingly we may count as the antecedents of Ramanuja's philosophy some of the theistic Upanishads, portion of the Mahabharata, including the Naarayaneeya section, and the Bhagavadgita, Vishnupuraana, the Vaishnava Aagamas, the work of the Azhwars and Achaaryas. His own works attempt to reconcile the thought of the Upanishads, the Gita and the Brahma Sutra with the faith and belief of the Vaishnava saints. Though it is not easy to decide the exact extent of his originality and independence, it must be said that his attempt in Sribhashya in substantial merit and completeness far outdid any previous effort to find in the Brahma Sutra a basis for monotheism (Keith in E.R.E. Vol. X). Ramanuja's faith is more restrained and more philosophical than that of some of his predecessors as well as successors. He did not show any anxiety to reject the ritual (Poorva mimamsa), nor did he make much of the mythology of the Puranas. His chief aim was to proclaim the central teaching of Upanishads, the Gita and the Brahma Sutra.

The influence of Ramanuja is visible throughout the later history of (13th Century) Hinduism. The movements of Madhva, Vallabha, Chaitanya, Raamananda, Kabir and Naanak, and reform organisations of Brahmoism are largely indebted to Ramanuja's theistic idealism.”

### **iii. Likely contents of a separate bhashya**

What is very interesting and extremely relevant is a comment made by a Western scholar by name Deussen. He said that the so called separate Bhashyas of Shankara and Madhva have such large parts or portions which 'one could easily wish away or do away with', as they do not contribute to the intended task and purpose of promulgating their respective school of Vedanta. One therefore fails to understand what Ramanuja would have achieved by putting his views in a separate book, the details of which were always there for everyone to see. Whether it is his views on mahaavaakyas or important Upanishadic topics like Vidyaas in Chandogya, special Braahmana texts in Brihadaaranyaka or important discourses and episodes in the major Upanishads, Ramanuja has not failed to come up and utilise these to establish his siddhanta. In fact he has covered much more than this when one critically examines his Sribhashya or his Gita bhashya. Anyway we shall not stop at this but go into details in order to highlight and bring the issue to a meaningful end.

### **iv. Survey of texts used by Ramanuja**

The work of assembling and aligning Ramanuja's use of Upanishads for writing Vedartha Sangraha, Sribhashya and Gita bhashya with a view to convincing those who might be feeling a sense of inadequacy was ably undertaken, a few decades ago, by a very erudite and well-known scholar by name Sri S.S. Raghavachar; it is indeed recognised that there have been previous efforts to present the upanishadic texts which went into presentation of Ramanuja's Vishistadvaita :

Vedanta Desika's commentary on Ishavaasyopanishad, and Ranga Ramanuja Muni's Vishaya-Vaakya-Deepika, a 17th century bhashya comprising all the texts used by Ramanuj in his bhashyas together with his own contribution. Sudarshana Suri who wrote a book on Ramanuja's Sribhashya gives explanations of crucial texts used by Ramanuja. One more work on this subject is by Kooranaarayana.

In this context we can take note of the views of a cross section of the scholars :

- i) Ramanuja did not engage himself in detailed exegesis (interpretation) of the Upanishads on account of the impossibility of making them support his philosophic view based primarily on shrutis.
- ii) Ramanuja admits that all commentators of the Brahma Sutras, no doubt bring out the quintessence of the fundamental Upanishads ..... as such he legitimately presumed that production of independent glosses (commentaries) on several Upanishads was not much of a desideratum (something desired). (This view is further strengthened by the fact that there was no precedent even in Poorva Mimaamsa (ritual portions) either, as evidenced by the fact that a commentary came out on it in late 14th century written by one Saayanaacharya). Upanishads belong to Uttara Mimaamsa.
- iii) The vast elucidations and texts by Ramanuja on Upanishads used in Brahma Sutras and Vedartha Sangraha are very much in line with a separate bhashya had he written one

we shall elaborate this later. Sudarshana Suri has maintained that his handling of Upanishads in Vedanta systems amounts to 'extracting the nectar of Vedanta (Upanishads)'.

- ) There are important passages from Upanishadic texts in his Gita bhashya.
- ) Thus, though not in a formal way, Ramanuja has furnished his commentary on Upanishads, should one care to see and assemble.

## **EXPANSE AND GROUND COVERED IN UPANISHADS BY RAMANUJA**

As the arguments put forward and the survey undertaken by Sri S.S. Raghavachar in his lecture series, titled 'Ramanuja on Upanishads'\* is quite exhaustive, one would do well to follow closely the same tenor and line of approach, and extract the most lucid portions to present the viewpoints on the ground covered in Upanishads, appropriateness of selection of Upanishadic texts, cogency and masterly touch in interpretation of the texts and string them together in a summarised fashion. This is attempted in this section.

We shall follow the same headings and sub-titles to preserve the identity and authenticity of the author. The summarised version of the original will be woven in such a way that it will not be heavy but maintains the steady interest of the reader and retains the forceful rendering by the esteemed scholar. The headings are :-

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These lectures were later presented in the form of a book entitled 'Ramanuja on panishads' by Prof. M. Rangachar Memorial Trust, 1972.

Eight Upanishads  
The Chandogya  
The Brihadaaranyaka  
Five more Upanishads  
Summing up.

### **3 EIGHT UPANISHADS**

In this section we consider the following Upanishads - Isha, Kena, Kathaa, Prasna, Mundaka, Maandukya, Aitareya and Taittiriya.

#### **i. Ishavaasyaopanishad**

From Isha Ramanuja has used four texts in Sri Bhashya. The main message from this is : Brahman exercises cosmic sovereignty ; one should resort to contemplation of the Lord. Synthesis of Karma and Jnaana is brought out, and to realise Brahman, past karmas are to be eradicated.

#### **ii. Kenopanishad**

Three texts from Kena are used in Sri Bhashya; Brahman is infinite and inadequacy to know Him is discussed. A call, to change the direction of devotion other than what masses are used to for knowing Brahman, is given.

#### **iii. Kathopanishad**

Almost the entire upanishad is employed by Ramanuja in Brahma Sutras (I.2.9, I.3.23, I.3.40). The great Western scholar T.S. Rawson has opined that 'Ramanuja's interpretation is the best guide to its philosophy — Ramanuja does not think that the third boon received by

.

Nachiketas is 'enlightenment'. The Supreme Deity (Purusha or Vishnu) is man's highest goal and sole refuge, as expressed by the Vedic text - 'Tad Vishnoh Paramam Padam'. Priorities in moving towards God are laid down in the Upanishad and 'final feat in this process is the appropriation of God Himself as a means by way of surrender to Him.'

The conviction that by Him alone is He reached and not by meditation/reflection on Vedic teachings / hearing the scriptures, is also echoed in the Mundaka Upanishad.

### **Prasnopanishad**

The episode of six sages approaching Pippalaada, a preceptor for enlightenment and the latter asking them to stay for a year with him to get answers is the central aspect in this Upanishad. Amongst the sages were such greats as Satyakaama and Gargya.

Pippalaada's answer to Satyakaama is covered in Brahma Sutras (I. 3.12). While commenting on the meditation of 'om', the pranava, Ramanuja argues that the Brahman spoken of here is the Ultimate Self.

### **Mundakopanishad**

Every text of importance in this Upanishad is dealt with by Ramanuja. He manages to get the entire Upanishad for commentary on Brahma Sutras which are given in sections I.2.22 and I.3.1. The famous question 'By knowing what, all this is known?' is given a precise interpretation.

The oft-quoted picture of two birds sitting on the branch of a pipplala tree, one eating its fruit (the karma aspect) and the other not eating it (Paramaatman) is here : Brahman surpassing the individual is dealt with.

#### **vi. Maandookyopanishad**

It is rather surprising that this important Upanishad has not aroused interest with most of the commentators. Only the elaborated portion of this Upanishad authored by Gaudapaada, known as Kaarika has attracted attention; Shankara and Madhava have referred to the Kaarika portion. The renowned scholar Deussen has doubts about its genuineness and antiquity. No wonder it held no interest for Ramanuja for postulating his philosophy.

Be that as it may, the main subject dealt with by the Upanishad is the glorification of Pranava, that is 'OM' and its constituent 'maatras' viz a,u,m, as representing the three states of consciousness : waking, dreaming and deep sleep (i.e. the three sound elements of 'OM').

#### **vii. Altareyopanishad**

Ramanuja has used the opening passage of this Upanishad in his Vedarthasangraha : "All this was Aatman only in the beginning." He resolved : "Let me create the Worlds."\* It is felt that the central concept of the Upanishad concerning Prajnaana, meaning consciousness, has been dealt with by Ramanuja by also utilising the other Upanishads which define

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\* "Aatmaa Vaa idameka evagraa aasit. Naanyat kinchana mishat. Sa ikshata lokaannu srijaa iti" (1.1.1)



Brahman as Vijnana, Jnana, etc; and the purport from this Upanishad on Brahman's definition through Prajnaana did not call for exegesis by Ramanuja.

#### **viii. Taithireeyaupanishad**

One of the most popular Upanishads amongst persons engaged in Vedaadhyanam, Taithireeya has been extensively employed by Ramanuja in postulating his concepts on Supreme Reality. The core of his philosophical conception owes a lot to the most significant passages of this Upanishad. In particular, the second and third chapters (Anandavalli and Bhriuvalli) incorporating the essential philosophy in terms of Brahman Itself, knowing it, the highest good and Its attainment are dealt with at length. Similarly the aspects of reflection and devout meditation which are a part of Varunaa's exhortation to his son Bhriuv are also aptly utilised.

The definition of Brahman at first; 'as unconditionally existent, omniscient and infinite' and secondly 'as the nature of the Supreme Being by way of cosmic self-manifestation', received detailed interpretations by Ramanuja. The aspect of Brahman 'entering' the sentient beings and non-sentient beings enables it to be called 'Saarira aatma" (embodied spirit). He is food, life, mind, knowledge and bliss. Brahman is 'nihilam Guhayam' i.e. it dwells in the cave of one's heart.

The highlight of the interpretations, which is also echoed by Azhvans in Divya Prabhandam is that any break (antara) or interruption in our thinking or remembering God (meditation) causes fear and 'viraha' (Samshlesha' and 'Vishlesha' which are talked about by Azhvans).

In regard to this Upanishad, Ramanuja has achieved landmarks in his explanations.

#### **4. THE CHANDOGYA**

The Chandogya is a large and major Upanishad, and scholars feel that the entire Brahma Sutra Bhashya could well mean a bhashya on Chandogya itself, in spite of the fact that the first five out of a total of eight chapters of this Upanishad contain a good deal of non-philosophical matter. Deussen goes to the extent of saying that 'the sutras might have originated from systematizing the thoughts of this Upanishad alone'. A generic division of the Upanishad would comprise —

- i) Minor Passages
- ii) Shandilya Vidyaa
- iii) Sadh Vidyaa
- iv) Bhumaadhikarana, and
- v) Dahara Vidyaa.

Let us study them briefly in the same order with Ramanuja's interpretation :

##### **i. Minor Passages**

One of the main points which called for Ramanuja's attention is the interpretation of the term Shudra. He interprets it not in the conventional sense but in the etymological (word-formational) sense of one who "suffers" for want of knowledge of Brahman.

He comes to our rescue in regard to the term 'Brahma-Samstha' as to include all the four ashramas as being fit to attain the final liberation - Shankara had interpreted it to mean only Sannyasaasins. Just imagine the other ashramas (Brahmacharya, Grihastya and Vaanaprastha) being excluded from it. The meaning etched out is 'one who is established in Brahman, that is, 'devoted to Brahman'. There is also this possibility, thanks to Ramanuja, of 'self-surrendered being' being included in that all too-meaningful term (Brahma-Samstha).

In regard to life after or doctrine of death (eschatology), Ramanuja harmonises the flow of thought in the Upanishad. He also emphatically brings out the fact that the terms used viz. Aakaasha, Praana, Jyotis, Aatman and the person in the eye all stand for Brahman Himself. Similarly Ramanuja interprets the extensive dialogue Asvapati (King of Kekayas) and the six others (including Uddalaka) had concerning Vaisvaanara to mean the Ultimate Self (and no lower category).

There is this famous passage concerning the term 'Kapyasaam' on which, as a student he had earned the wrath of his then teacher, Yaadavaprakaasha; this term was interpreted by Ramanuja to mean that the eyes of God, the Absolute, are like the Lotus which is Kapyasaam. He also says in Vedartha Sangraha He has eyes, long and clear like the petals of the Lotus, unfolded by the rays of the sun — His infinite perfection and his creative self-manifestation. This 'aesthetic aspect of divine principle' is acknowledged by Shankara also.

## **ii. Shandilya Vidyaa**

It should be appreciated that although Shaandilya Vidyaa talks in an ambiguous manner about a 'determinate and cosmic Brahman' (before Ramanuja came on the scene) it had the stamp of Shankarite non-dualism purporting 'an attributeless and acosmic Brahman'. Ramanuja elucidates this section which says 'Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma'. Tajjalan iti shaanta upasita (iii.4.1) : "All this is verily Brahman, because all this originates from, ends in and sustained by Brahman". 'It is on the ground of Brahman being the source, the final resort and sustaining ground that the world is said to be Brahman'. 'Thus the Reality spoken of as Brahman is shown to be immanent (indwelling) in all existence as the sustaining ground and as characterized by exalted qualities constitutive of supreme perfection and dwelling in the heart of man in the subtlest form arising out of His compassion- this is for the purpose of redemption and resultant uplift of the individual'.

Unfortunately this subject of Shandilya Vidyaa is viewed as being 'inferior to the sixth and seventh chapters of the Upanishad on the ground that it pertains to the lower Brahman. It is relegated to the second status.'

## **iii. Sadhvidya**

Traditionally 'sath' is used to designate the Ultimate Reality and the entire 6th Chapter is devoted to the knowledge about it. This is the chapter in which, perhaps the most famous of the mahavaakyas "Tat-tvam-asi" appears, nine times, repeat nine times; and it forms the heart of the

conversation between Uddalaka and his son Svetaketu who returns 'all-puffed-up' with the pride of learning. Uddalaka wants to test his son's level of knowledge and puts a question : "Have you enquired about the 'Aadesha' by which the unheard becomes heard, the unthought about becomes the thought about the uncomprehended becomes comprehended', echoing the same message somewhat in the Brihadaaranyaka Upanishad about : "savana, manana, and nidhidhyaasana (Hearing, thinking and comprehending). We cherish and admire the statement made by Sri S.S. Raghavachar that *"it is in answer to this question all the mighty battles of Vedanta have been fought."*

For Ramanuja Aadesha stands for God Himself and in this, one should grasp the world of plurality in principle (i.e. Brahman appearing as 'Chith' and 'achith'). The knowledge of one thing 'Brahman', includes the knowledge of many. Svetaketu is at a loss to understand this concept.

To start with the Being was only one and without a second - It was itself the Supreme Conscious Self. Herein the material and cause (of the world) coincided. And the term Aadesha hinted this initially.

Creation proceeded step wise - Water first, followed by anna (food) and the earth. 'The Being called the Aadesha to start with comes to be described as the Deity now... which resolved to enter (elements created three-fold)... through this Aatman, the jiva and to differentiate 'names and forms' .... Names and forms just mean the changing of Its (Brahman's) Unmanifest being into clear manifestation in

the form of world of diversity. Eg. clay is unmanifest and pot or jug are its manifestations. The Deity resolved to enter the elements and did so through this Aatman, the jiva, .... The Supreme spirit enters clothed with the jiva as its own body, carrying within itself the Supreme Devata as its own soul. This Vedantic concept is also echoed by Taittiriya (II.6). The Chandogya statement runs thus : 'Sanmoolah somyemaah sarvaa prajah sadaayat naah satpratishtah (vi. 8.4.6) : 'It means that all these creatures have the 'sath', the Primordial Being as their source; have it as their sustaining principle when they are, and take shelter in It when they pass out of manifest existence'.

Here is a message to all of us : Just as salt dissolved in water cannot be seen but can be tasted, similarly to be able to acquire knowledge of the unseen 'Sath', one should approach Achaaryas. Further there is this doctrine of Vedanta that Praarabhda Karma is destructible only through its effect being undergone, while other forms of Karma are liquidated through the knowledge of Brahman.

The dialogue wherein 'tat tvam asi' appears is : Aitadaatmyam idam Sarvam (1) Tatsatyam (2) Se Aatma (3) Tattvamasi Svetaketu (4).

According to Ramanuja, the first sentence above means 'The world is the cosmic body of the Sath and has it as Its soul'.

The second sentence means 'It is only by virtue of this Immanence (permanently pervading the Universe as opposed to transcendence) that the World is real.

The third sentence means : “He, the Lord, the Aadsha, the Sath, the Supreme Deity who willed into existence and entered into it in order to impart to it consciousness of being, as its soul.”

As regards the concluding sentence ‘tattvamasi’, Ramanuja’s interpretation is in three parts : ‘The first word ‘Tat’ should be taken as signifying the supreme and primordial ‘sath’, which was one without a second before creation’ and brought forth the World, and ‘sustaining it from within in its manifested condition’. ‘Tat’ thus signifies the fact that it produces the world .... bears all this richness of connotation.

‘Tvam’, the second word refers to the Ultimate Self as “all names and forms are ultimately names and forms of the Supreme Self. The third word, the verb ‘asi’ meaning ‘art’ (thou art), effects the identification of the meaning of ‘tat’ and ‘tvam’. *The causal Brahman (meaning that responsible for creation) is identified with the indwelling or immanent Brahman.* SSR says ‘It is this level of self-knowledge that Uddalaka found wanting in his son, and he accordingly imparts it to him.’

Tattvamasi builds up the conjugation (fusion / joining together) of Brahman as the source and sustaining soul of the Universe.... arguments swell up here opposite Advaita and Ramanuja suggests that *that ‘tvam’ must not be mechanically understood as standing for the jiva but for the Supreme Self immanent in jiva.* Brahman which is the ground of the world is identified with Brahman, the Ultimate self of all individual selves (like Svetaketu’s).

In the view advocated by Ramanuja, Brahman retains all its cosmic operativeness; and the additional perfection of Brahman consisting of Immanence in the individual self as its inner soul gets affirmed .... it proclaims illimitable grandeur of Brahman as covered in the opening passage of Vedartha sangraha : Upanishads aim to bring out the Vaibhava or the glory of Brahman : “Tasya vaibhavapratipaadana paraassrutayah.”

#### **iv. Bhumaadhikarana (7th chapter)**

The uniqueness of the seventh chapter comprising Bhumaadhikarana is of great significance and use to Ramanuja since Shankara finds ‘higher Brahman’ in this chapter as opposed to ‘lower Brahman’ in the previous chapter of Shandilya Vidyaa. The main subject ‘Bhuma’ is introduced through a conversation between Naarada and Sanath Kumara and it is unveiled in various stages starting with Aatman. At the stage of Praana Ramanuja interprets that Praana could not be inanimate and non-sentient principle but should be identified with the jiva, the individual self.

Although Naarada does not go beyond Praana, Sanath Kumara continues himself and brings in the concept of ‘Satya’ which is of a higher order and indicates ‘the steps necessary’ for the attainment of ‘Satya’. When Naarada hears that ‘Satya’ brings ‘Sukha’, he gets interested in it. At this point Sanath Kumara introduces the concept of ‘Bhuma’ which he says is ‘Sukha’; in Taittiriya it is mentioned that Brahman is of the nature of ‘Sukha’ or Ananda, and therefore ‘Bhuma’ stands for it. Defining Bhuma further Sanath Kumara says : ‘Where one does



not see another, does not hear another, and does not know another, that one is the Bhuman'. Ramanuja interprets "where" as 'that in the experience of which'. Further interpretations follow and talking about 'experiencing Bhuman' it is said : 'The knower of Bhuman not merely knows It, but knows that from It originates the entire empirical world.' Ramanuja reads from it that Brahman is Infinite, as a consequence of which the joy that flows from 'Bhuman' is Infinite.

To Naarada's question as to how Bhuman is established Sanath Kumara answers thus : the creative self-manifestation of God is for imparting life out of His own, abundance.... He manifests Himself through eternity'. Naarada started the question with Aatman but is told that the Aatman is omnipresent .... Aatman will find in Aatman itself every type of joy. Aatman, called progressively Satya, Sukha, Bhuman, was to transcend Praana; Aatman will realise all those lower categories, beginning with Praana down to mantras and 'Karma' as coming into being from Brahman. The dialogue ends with a practical direction. 'In the purity of food inculcated in vii.26.2, Ramanuja sees the main principle of Karma Yoga as explained in his commentary on the Gita. In the pure mind, steady remembrance of the Lord arises. This is for Ramanuja 'bhakti' : 'when this bhakti is ripened into fullness, the fetters of the souls drop off. Such is Ramanuja's understanding of Bhuma-Vidyaa'.

#### **v. Dahara Vidyaa**

Studying Dahara Vidyaa one might be led to exclaim "Dahara Vidyaa is indeed the focal point of the entire lot of

*upanishadic literature; the conception of Brahman is transcendent but still living in the centre of the individual may even be claimed to be the fundamental doctrine of the Upanishads."*

Apparently embroiled in the higher and lower conceptions of Brahman, Shankara finds Dahara Vidyaa as answering or conveying the lower conception of Brahman — it is not so in Brihadaaranyaka. Scholars feel that this eighth chapter of Chandogya is comparatively free from controversies as they see in it only Saguna Brahman (i.e. Brahman with all the attributes or Kalyanagunas).

Ramanuja is quite active regarding this chapter, as demonstrated in Sribhashya and Vedarthasangraha, trying to identify the Dahara Akaasha - the subtle space in our hearts - and finds no higher principle or deity : in other words there is 'nothing higher' dwelling in our hearts than that in Dahara Akaasha.

'It is the Supreme Aatman which is Brahman and the abode of all. He has countless perfections - sinless, non-aging, deathless, sorrowless, free from hunger and thirst, self-fulfilled (Satyakaama) and self-fulfilling (satya sankalpa). The adjectives deny imperfections and negative qualities for the Ultimate Reality i.e. when it is said that Brahman is attributeless (Nirguna) it means that no negative attributes characterise It. Brahman's true nature remain concealed from us, according to Ramanuja, as a result of our Karma - 'He is the supreme treasure/hidden by our own unrighteousness. When the jiva approaches the supreme light of Brahman, he realizes his own true nature. To miss

Brahman is to miss oneself .... Brahman is beyond age, death / sorrow / law of Karma / any sins. On uniting with Brahman, the blind begins to see, sad ones rejoice, night can change to day, and perpetual illumination presents itself.

At this stage dealing with what initially appeared to be a new theme (eventually it will be integrally connected) wherein Indra and Virochana — the latter is the Lord of Asuras - approach Prajapathi for enlightenment on 'Aatman'. Prajapati asks them to regard their 'waking state' as aatman. Indra is satisfied momentarily, and Virochana fully satisfied with the answer never returns. But Indra returns again and again for clarification of doubts and it goes on until Prajapati comes out with his final doctrine. He tells Indra that so far the answers given were on a physical plane meaning that the body is mortal and perishable. The real self transcends the body, though it inhabits the body in the state of bondage which makes it subject to mundane pains and pleasures. When released this individual aatman, named samprasaada, ascends above the body, approaches the Supreme Light and comes to be revealed in its own form i.e., its essential nature gets actualized. On attaining the Supreme (light), he gets released into his own proper self-hood. While Shankara takes the Highest Purusha to be the Samprasaada, Ramanuja takes Him to be the Param-Jyothi — Shankara connects this passage with the Purushottama of the Gita (xv) who according to him is an unconditioned Purusha'. "The grammar of both is full of complications" (!) says one scholar.

The Purushottama of the Gita causes no difficulty for Ramanuja (!) for He is described there in specifically cosmic

terms. The Dahara Vidyaa is engaged in expounding the exalted perfections of Brahman. It details its attributes - such as freedom from sin, and the power of sustaining the cosmos. The discourse of Prajapati attributes to the liberated jiva many of the qualities ascribed to Brahman in Dahara Vidyaa. The approximation is a result of the jiva's communion with Brahman. Religiously speaking, 'Those who worship Him are taken into fellowship with Him in holiness ... thus they contemplate the Holy one.' Discussing III.3.52 Ramanuja includes jiva within the field of contemplation and the contemplating self is a part of the Divine Principle'. Becoming duly aware of the grace of God, it would be adequate devotion to God ... that could render the contemplating soul perfect and self-fulfilled. Thus Prajapati's instruction to Indra in relation to this conception of Brahman as seated in the heart (Dahara) is clearly established.

## **5. BRIHADAARANYAKA UPANISHAD**

Constituting the supreme utterance of Vedanta, the biggest of Upanishads, Brihadaaranyaka comprises crucial passages from Isha, Kena and Katha and the central teachings of all major Upanishads. The mahavaakya 'Aham Brahmasmi', and 'Neti, Neti', famous discourses like that of Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi, Yajnavalkya's exposition of Antaryamin / Akshara, the Dahara Vidyaa starting with the individual soul and concluding with Brahman (Chandogya's Dahara Vidyaa went the other way round) and concludes with the elucidation of Nidhidhyaasana. Scholars feel that this Upanishad 'exhibits' an overwhelming unity of thought.

## **i. Aham Brahmasmi**

Ramanuja discusses this mahavaakya many times and let us take a sample illustration. Just before this mahavaakya there is a passage which says “To contemplate the real as Aatman (i.e., as its body, the individual self) is the correct procedure ... All beings become unified in the Aatman (the Self of all), and in that unification lies the completeness of our understanding of them.” The sage Vaamaadeva is cited as an example for this mahavaakya and he located the plurality in the Aatman .... so as to unify them and obtain complete knowledge. Whenever this unified knowledge arises, the self that knows, cognises itself as falling within the object of its contemplation and has the experience : ‘I am Brahman’ (Aham Brahmasmi).

For Ramanuja plurality is not a fiction; it is a fragment of truth clamouring for completion in a comprehending integration. And ‘I’ in ‘I am Brahman’ finds itself inseparably lodged in that Infinite Reality.

## **ii. Neti, Neti (III.3.6)- ‘Not this, Not this’**

Both Vedarthasangraha and Sribhashya authored by Ramanuja elucidate this fundamental proposition. This mahavaakya occurs 5 times in the Upanishad.

According to Ramanuja the aesthetic form of Brahman is a vital part of the teaching of Upanishads. ‘Brihadaaranyaka is making a powerful affirmation of the aesthetic concept of the Divine Reality.’ Vedartha Sangraha discusses this aspect at length.

‘Neti, Neti’ means ‘not this, not this’. Sankara is at home when this is interpreted as ruling out the attribution of all conceivable forms of Brahman. He holds that the negative propositions such as ‘Neti, Neti’ culminate in being and not in non-being. The negation does not apply to Brahman, but only to superimposed forms. He takes shelter in the sentence that follows the mahavaakya viz. ‘Nahetasmaad iti Neti anyat peramasti’ meaning that ‘there exists nothing other than Brahman’.

Ramanuja is totally opposed to this interpretation and takes ‘Neti, Neti’ as signifying that the forms attributed to Brahman do not exhaust all the forms of Brahman .... *the inadequacy of our characterisation of Brahman in terms of the forms enumerated is the principal import of ‘Neti, Neti’*. The infinitude of Divine forms, the limitless glory of the Supreme Being, are brought out by this apparently negative assertion : not that of forms and attributes”.

**iii. Maitreyi Brahmana (II.4 & IV.5)**  
(Yajnavalkya - Maitreyi dialogue)

When Yajnavalkya offers half his wealth to his wife, Maitreyi (reserving the other half for the other wife, Kaatyayini), Maitreyi queries ‘whether even the greatest wealth could make her immortal?’ Just like Nachiketas in Kathopanishad, Yajnavalkya declares that ‘there is no hope of immortality through wealth’. The immortality spoken of here is ‘not survival after death, but the death of death itself (!)’.

The most famous conversation that ensues sets the pace by interpreting desire. The query : ‘who is this Aatman whose

desire is the cause of the fact that a certain object is dear'. The conclusion urges that the Aatman should be sought.

'Ramanuja takes the Aatman here as standing for the Supreme Self. It is His will or desire, in response to our devotion that lends attractiveness and desirability to the objects that happen to be dear to us, in proportion naturally, not to our devotion to the objects, but to our devotion to Him. If we wholly devote ourselves to the Aatman, it goes without saying that everything else brings us beauty and joy. The world becomes a 'mansion of delight' to one who is wholly after the Supreme'.

Dwelling further on Aatman : 'The Aatman has to be seen, heard about, reflected and meditated upon' - the vision of Aatman being the final phase. The implements for achieving this are : Sravana, Manana and Nidhidhyaasana .... the first two are preparatory and only meditation is the ultimate pathway....' : this is named as bhakti. An element of love is imparted into Nidhidhyaasana.

'Brihadaaranyaka has declared that Aatman is the most lovable of realities' the picture of the progress towards Aatman given here seems to be crying (!) for the right word - and that word is bhakti.

The entire world is to be seen as Aatman, the world is in the Aatman and not that it is unreal. 'It is unreal if viewed as independent. But as falling within Aatman, it is real and gets understood in our understanding of Aatman .... the world of scriptures and the world of actuality are breathed into existence of Aatman.'

'The idea of creation is being introduced and it is clear that by knowing Aatman we know the worlds and beings, precisely because the latter originate from that Fundamental Principle. The Supreme Self creates and sustains within Itself what It creates. It follows that to know It is to comprehend the multiplicity.

The self, that seeks Immortality as Maitreyi does and is exhorted to seek Aatman by way of seeing, hearing, reflecting and meditating, must also be correctly conceived.

Ramanuja while commenting on Yajñavalkya's 'topic on the nature of the individual self which is a mass of knowledge'.... says 'the substance of the nature of knowledge gets entangled in matter in the state of bondage, and its innate power of knowledge gets conditioned by this disabling alliance with what is material. The knowledge that arises in a soul by virtue of its mistaking itself to be the body must cease.'

Yet another thought which Yajñavalkya talks about is : 'since Aatman is the basic power supporting the self in all its knowing activity, .... no comprehension is possible of the Supreme and Ultimate Power Itself without Its own grace to that effect. Our knowledge of It is a gift and not an achievement through other aids'. Coming back to 'Neti, Neti', Yajñavalkya states 'negative statements of a general character regarding the Ultimate Principle do not mean that It is wholly attributeless, but that It is free from imperfections'.

The all-comprehending and self-sufficient knower is surely the Absolute Aatman, the source of all beings and worlds,



the knowledge concerning whom includes the knowledge of all else.... there is nothing more to be learnt concerning Immortality (as) attainment of this experience of Aatman is Immortality.

#### **iv. Madhu Braahmana**

Brahman is described as 'tejomaya' (shining with consciousness), amritamaya (free from death), and as 'Purusha'. He is dwelling in the entire Universe and the individual selves. In this Aatman (Supreme), all these souls are sheltered and, is beyond time and space, and He is Brahman.

According to Ramanuja the word 'maaya' used in the next passage points out that the quotation of Rig Veda using this term refers to 'one who is overcome by illusion, and not getting resplendent thereby.'

The mention of 'maaya' fails to support the later doctrine of 'maaya'.

#### **v. Aarthabhaaga, Ushasta, Kahola, Et al**

In the third and four chapters we have Maitreyi who gets instruction from Yaajnavalkya in the beginning and yet again at the end. In between there are the famous debates, discourses and challenges in King Janaka's court : those that participate include Jaraatkaarva, Aartabhaaga, Bhujya Lahyayaami, Ushasta, Kahola, Uddalaka, Gargi and Saakalya. One asks : 'What remains when a man dies ?' Yaajnavalkya's answer comprises secret of Karma doctrine which Ramanuja feels pertains not to release but to

transmigration of the un-enlightened soul (Sribhashya iv.2.12) Shankara also deals with this subject.

The next question is : 'Tell me of that innermost Aatman who is the primary Brahman and who is an immediate presence (aparoksha)'. The discussion on this question is long drawn out and according to Ramanuja, Yaajnavalkya's clarification is — 'The inner most Aatman is other than the individual self which is the immediate subject of experience like seeing. Brahman's transcendence of the jiva is the idea in the explanation'. To a further question on the same, Yaajnavalkya says 'Aatman is beyond hunger / thirst / age / death / sorrow / and delusion. Self in question is altogether transcendent of the individual self which is subject to these infirmities.'

Later 'the meditation on primary Brahman' is discussed : the spiritual necessity of renunciation, paanditya (learning), baalya (child-like nature), Mauna (silence) are mentioned as accomplishments but according to Ramanuja 'they do not connote.... nidhidhyaasana (the principal sadhana) which we have already discussed earlier - 'cultivating remembrance of god even outside regular and systematic meditation on God.'

#### **vi. Antaryaami Braahmana**

For developing the concept of Vishistadvaita, Ramanuja employed texts known as Ghataka Shruthis which comprise Antaryaami Braahmana. Shankara takes it as addressing to 'conditioned Brahman', though the condition is 'exalted'. The Antaryaami Braahmana cannot be evaluated as

'Lower'...(and) it gathers into itself the entire philosophy of the Upanishads in general and Brihadaaranyaka in particular. Ramanuja has said that 'the theism to which the Deity and the world of creatures are utterly separate and mutually isolated entities is giving up what all the Upanishads stand for .... the philosophical core of the Upanishads can be preserved only on condition that the idea embodied in the Antaryaami Braahmana is accorded centrality of significance.

As though to get confirmation of what he said about Tattvamasi (Svetaketu), Uddalaka tries to probe Yaajnavalkya about Tattvamasi. Yaajnavalkya gives an extensive and magnificent account of the Inner Ruler : He is said to be in the earth, water, sky, air, heavens, sun, space, darkness, light, all beings, the life-breath, speech, eye, ear, mind, skin, vijnana and the genetic principle - the inner ruler is in all these macrocosmic and microcosmic principles and entities and those mentioned in scriptures.

Subaalopanishad which has some more aspects to add, is utilised to describe even further the finite being : He is 'interior to', 'dwells' and 'is within'. 'That in which he dwells, and is said to be his body, does not know Him .... He rules what He pervades from within : The inner ruler is called Amrita (immortal) .... it signifies His transcendence of all evil and imperfection.' Yaajnavalkya declares to Uddalaka. He is your soul (Esha Atma). The discourse on inner ruler proceeds further. No one knows Him, He knows all. To the question whether this means that, there is only one knower Ramanuja provides the answer : 'There is no knower like God, a knower who holds what He knows as His body and

rules it from within .... *the Antaryaamin described has no further Antaryaamin in relation to Himself. He is the ultimate Antaryaamin.*

This is just what exactly Uddalaka proclaimed to Svetaketu in 'Tattvamasi'. Antaryaamin is the soul of all and all beings are His body .... All else is trivial (ato nyadaartam).

Thus this discourse expounds 'the cosmic role of Brahman; formulates the concept of the world as His body including the individual soul.'

## **vii. Akshara Braahmana**

Some scholars feel that it is rather odd that this Braahmana is placed at a higher pedestal than the Antaryaami Braahmana despite the fact that 'the teachings of both have precisely the same conclusion' : 'the unknown knower other than whom there is no knower'. In fact, they say, "this Braahmana is less committed to the doctrine of an 'Absolute Being concerned with the cosmos' than the thesis of Antaryaamin". Ramanuja is ill at ease seeing that the entire attempt to break up the integral doctrine propounded in these two discourses into the higher and lower conceptions of Brahman is wholly without any basis and text.

### *Warp and Woof*

The Akshara Braahmana embodies the enquiry of Gargi to Yajnavalkya on the 'Warp and woof' of the world. Although she accepts the answer to be the primordial Akaasha or space, she continues : what is the 'warp and woof' of the primordial Akaasha itself ? The answer given is 'Akshara'

which means Imperishable'. Here one has to exercise caution regarding the reply given by Yaajnavalkya. His answer amounts to attributeless reality i.e. without properties of matter / living beings known to us (Sarva Visheshanarahita). But the actual meaning would be 'it is only free from imperfections, and Akshara is not altogether 'Undistinguished'.

Proceeding with his delineation of Akshara as commanding the sun, moon, etc; time, rivers, the rest of the physical universe, he says it is the source of existence and functioning in the world of Nature. He makes a categorical statement : 'He who dies without understanding Akshara .... will inherit only transient felicity after death, but one who understands it, becomes a man of Brahman'.

He concludes just the same way he did in Antaryaami Braahmana : "Akshara is the unseen seer and unheard hearer / thinker / comprehender". Cumulatively characterising Akshara - the Supreme seer is the one commanding the Universe into being and order ....  *blessing those who know Him, He is the warp and woof of the entire Universe.*

The above para also implies that He is 'beyond all that is known' .... there is no higher being or entity commanding and sustaining the Akaasha itself, an emphatic manner of conveying the absolute Supremacy of Akshara.

All said and done, Akshara Vidyaa is said to omit to state an essential truth so well enunciated in the Antaryaami Braahmana, whose prominent element 'antara' meaning "in

the interior of” is completely absent. Even then Akshara Vidyaa is construed as advocating the thesis of dualistic theism.

Overall in this chapter the exposition brings out that Brahman is ‘Shaasta’ or rather prominently .... but it does not clearly say that Brahman is the ‘innermost core of all’. Antaryaami Braahmana does it !

#### **viii. Jyotir Braahmana**

Moving from a small chapter (ninth Braahmana) of the third chapter which incorporates a set of questions from Saakalya to Yajnavalkya who finally brings in the concept of the single Divine Principle (Aupanishada Purusha), we arrive at possibly the longest and greatest discourse in the Brihadaaranyaka known as Jyotir Braahmana. This discourse embodies the message of all other principal Upanishads.

Affirming the message of the philosophical passage ‘Aham Brahmaasmi’ and uniting the jiva with Brahman, it brings in ‘Neti, Neti’ with full emphasis. The famous passage ‘Vijnaaya Prajnaaya Kurvita’ meaning ‘having understood, let one practise supreme awareness’. Supreme Aatman as being the inner cover of all existents and particularly of the individual soul, ‘is part of the central doctrine’. An extremely important observation being made is ‘Jyotir Braahmana (alone) is sufficient to refute once for all the ill-conceived notion that the Upanishads contain divergent doctrines and that even in a single Upanishad there is no unified philosophy.’

To a question by Janaka on light, Yaajnavalkya finally arrives at the fact that aatman or soul is its own light and it is self-luminous. Nature of Brahman is brought out with a full statement besides the manner of achieving the direct experience of vision of that Supreme Reality. Parts of this discourse are contained in Vedaarthasangraha.

Like in Chandogya, here also we have Dahara Vidyaa, the difference being that in Brihadaaranyaka we start with the individual soul and conclude with Brahman while in Chandogya the order is reverse.

We have details of waking, dream and deep sleep - pleasures and pains are experienced in the waking state; dream state comprises unreality; karma in terms of punya and paapa, plays a part. Ramanuja says that the supreme law-maker of the Universe is the author of the dream-world.

The state of dreamless sleep which is wonderful in many ways has perennial fascination for Vedanta. He is unaware of the world order and of even the Supreme Self who is said to take possession of him for rejuvenating him after exhausting trials and tribulations of earthly life. He is embraced by the Supreme spirit : Praajna Aatmaana samparishvakta .... in deep sleep though he has not turned to God by a deliberate act of contemplation, the suspension of Godless experience of dream and waking releases the joy of union. This is a foretaste of the greater joy of union that would be man's, if only he too turns to God. As it is, the initiative in the Union is God's only.

Close to dreamless state but somewhat different is Aananda which is said to come to one 'who is enlightened by Vedas, sinless and desireless'. Brahman is the 'supreme refuge, the supreme treasure, the supreme world and supreme aananda for one who has conquered desire and is sinless and established in knowledge.'

At death 'the individual discards the body and passes beyond, carrying with him the effects of his previous vidyaa (loving meditation) and Karma; Poorva Prajna is carried forward and this accounts for the phenomenon of genius and prodigies (like in fine arts).'

At this stage the discourse touches on karma and rebirth only after reincarnation of the soul in another body, the former body is given up. The determining factor is Karma and Kama (desire) which in turn determines Kratu / rebirth.

While so far the soul caught up in the cycle of samsaara has been talked out, it is significant that there is no rebirth for one whose desires have left him and whose sole desire is the Aatman. He attains Brahman.

'There is no identity between Brahman and the Jiva' and it means *'Brahman is the inner soul of the jiva itself. Brahman who is also the soul of the Universe in its totality is the soul of the individual soul also.* The mahaan Aatman is said to reside in the interior space or Akaasha of the individual's heart. Which we have seen in Chandogya. Mahanaarayana Upanishad also talks of this Akaasha.

The individual self and the realm of the non-self constitute a part of the glory of God, 'the sarvasesha'. However 'to



picture Brahman on a grand scale and look forward to a vision of it' .... calls for a logical foundation .... This is a challenge that Upanishads must face at some stage or the other. Just pause and think on this : "The idea of the vision of Brahman would lose its claim to the ultimacy of truth, if it failed to provide answer to these fundamental facts. Brahman is real, because It is one, because it transcends the 'many', because It includes the 'many' and because It imparts systematic unification to the 'many'. There is an akaanksha (need or expectancy) for It on the part of many, It is 'apraapta' and has 'abaadhitva' (underived and uncontradicted or unstultified) .... It is the pooraka - or that which completes - all knowledge .... A critical analysis of the notion of reality, one can clarify is that Brahman of this nature can be real and nothing else and brahman is 'Satyasya Satyam' — the Real of the Real.

The next important element of teaching of Yaajnavalkya concerns path way to the attainment of Brahman and 'Ramanuja sees in the text a straight forward advocacy of Karma Yoga. Proceeding further the text calls for the seeker of Brahman to cultivate the attitude of conquering senses, restraint etc and Ramanuja sees an apparent difficulty which he solves by saying 'restraints relate to worldly activity and the Karma Yoga proper is devotion to liberating activity.' While on this, the subject of sannyasa comes up and Ramanuja affirms that sannyasa Ashrama is not absolutely necessary for spiritual progress. Formal sannyasa (renunciation and dedication) is an alternative and not an universal necessity.

The actual knowledge arises in two stages - attaining knowledge and practising meditation : 'Vijnaaya prajnaam Kurvita'. As per Dahara Vidyaa in both Brihadaaranyaka and Chandogya, locate the Supreme Aatman in the interior of the heart - Ramanuja says that the jiva is placed in the position of meditation - 'upaasya-koti-nikshipta'. The abridged injunction 'Aatmanyevatmaanam pasyeth' meaning 'one should see the self in the self'.

Recalling the nidhidhyaasana of 'Maitreyi Braahmana', Yaajnavalkya is holding forth the aatman as the supreme object of supreme love. 'Janaka is so overwhelmed by the mood of devotion that Yaajnavalkya sets up in him that he surrenders himself and all that belongs to him to that great teacher. This is surely guru-bhakti flowing from deva bhakti .... It is the culminating saadhana of this description that Ramanuja prays for in the opening verse of his Sribhashya, "Shemushi bhaktiroopa' that his understanding should assume the form of loving devotion to the Lord.

## 6. FIVE UPANISHADS

### i. Kaushitaki

Though it is not classified as a major upanishad, Ramanuja offers a very substantial interpretation of its philosophical contents. The first section in Brahma Sutras takes up an important chapter from this Upanishad (Ch. III). It compares with the best discourses in Chandogya and Brihadaaranyaka.

There is an interesting dialogue between Indra and Pratardana who approaches the former for advice on the 'highest good of man'. Surprising it is, initially Indra tells him to direct his devotion to Indra himself; and Indra starts glorifying himself and finally arrives at the subject of praana - *this is no simple breath but a cosmic principle*. Then comes the famous simile used by the Upanishad viz the wheel wherein as outer rim rests on the spokes and the spokes are held together by the axle, so also the selves are supported and held by the Praana. Refining further Praana as one of the nature of supreme consciousness /joy / non-aging/ immortal it is said that it is praana who protects the worlds; It is Aatman and one should meditate on Aatman.

Ramanuja is on familiar ground here - the material Universe is sub-servient to the finite self and the finite selves are based on the Supreme spirit .... The relation of the Universe and the finite selves together to Paramaatman is one of the body-soul relationship as propounded in Antaryaami Brahmaana.

Coming back to Praana there is nothing wrong if Indra directs Pratardana to meditate on Brahman as the soul of

Indra himself' as sometimes a physical principle may be chosen for focussing attention - through the cosmos also there runs a need to the Absolute Reality.

## **ii. Svetaasvatara**

Certainly a late Upanishad, it held lot of interest to both Shankara and Ramanuja. For the latter, the texts distinguishing the jiva from Isvara are clear instances of bheda shruthi (differentiating the individual self and Brahman).

Prakriti is identified with maaya, and Isvara wields the maaya. Ramanuja takes care to differentiate its philosophy (postulating Prakriti and Purusha). The Upanishad 'sets forth explicitly the pathway of surrender and bhakti, using the very words 'Sharanam Prapadhye' and parabhakti. Three types of meditation and three realities are 'propounded' - mainly the Supreme Being must be sought within the individual. The three entities are bhoktri (jiva enjoying and undergoing transmigratory existence), bhogya (jiva finds his joys and sorrows wielded by Isvara) and the third entity Isvara Himself 'who actuates all else.' He is known as the Prertri, the impeller. Brahman permits a three-fold presentation : Prertri - Supreme Actuator (bhogya) - Supreme Soul (indwelling matter) and bhoktri (the jiva himself).

That the theism taught in the Svetaasvatara is a monistic theism is the guiding thought of Ramanuja in his explanation of this and other similar passages of the Upanishad .... It is a significant unfoldment of the concept of Antaryaamin, so well presented in the other Upanishads also'.

## **Mahopanishad and Two Others**

Going by the foregoing it should be amply clear that Ramanuja has harnessed whatever is agreeable, lofty enough to convey a fundamental philosophical message; and he utilised them all in Sribhashya, Vedarthasangraha and Gita bhashya to promulgate his siddhanta. From Upanishad to Upanishad 'he scales new peaks'.

The ensuing three Upanishads are Mahopanishad, Subaalopanishad and Mahanaarayanaayopanishad. Mahopanishad is amply used as an authoritative text, says Vedanta Desika, by Yaamunaachaarya and others. All the texts talk of Naaraayana as the Supreme Deity. Thibaut notes that 'this is the only sectarian feature in the whole philosophy of Ramanuja'.

Mahopanishad designates the ground of the Universe (Kaarana) termed as 'Sath; Brahman and Aatman all as Naaraayana.' Since this has utmost particularisation, Ramanuja employs this upanishad for his doctrinal purpose.

Subaalopanishad like Antaryaami Braahmana speaks of Antaryaami, which in turn is identified with Naaraayana. According to Shankara also Antaryaami is construed as Naaraayana (Brihadaaranyaka). In fact Shankara in his Vishnusahasranama bhashya demonstrates that Naaraayana is in reality the Supreme Deity.

Mahanaarayanopanishad identifies the Highest Reality Naaraayana with terms like Akshara, Siva, Shambhu, Parabrahman, Param jyothis, Paratattva, Paraayana,

Paramaatman (Naarayana Anuvaaka of Taittireeya refers) — there is no other purport than the exact determination of this identity. *It connects with the Purusha Sooktha, unmistakably meaning ultimately that 'the Brahman of Upanishads is Naaraayana'.*

It must be remembered that the Vaishnavism steeped in the holy texts of Upanishads is 'something to which Ramanuja is driven by the Upanishads and not something he superimposes on them illegitimately. In Vedarthasangraha, Ramanuja says : "The Vedas with their auxiliaries, and amplified and supported by arguments from the utterances of the best among the Vedic scholars, speak of Hari as the cause of creation etc. of the world'.

## 7. SUMMING UP

Having gone through the entire gamut of major and five other Upanishads 'it is difficult to establish what remains over and what Ramanuja did not establish on the basis of Upanishads, excepting that he did not waste his energy to prove wrong the untenable and non-vedic considerations. Although Shankara has written a bhashya, ultimately according to scholars he has made two pronouncements. "Firstly, there are two kinds of statements in the Upanishads — one seeking the nature of Brahman and the other to reach the identity of individual self with the Supreme Self.'

The other pronouncement (appearing in his preface to *The Ananda mayaadhi karana\**) says "There are two forms in which Brahman comes to be understood - as characterized by adjuncts of the name and form entailing change in differentiation; and as the opposite of all this, transcending all adjuncts. In short it means 'an ultimate affirmation of the Upanishads concerning the nature of Brahman or the identity of the individual spirit with Brahman'. 'Ramanuja does not subscribe to this way of arranging the teachings of Upanishads. He does not admit that there are any texts preaching an attributeless Brahman .... To be real it is to be characterised by attributes .... The teaching of Brahman with attributes is not to present a 'conditioned' Brahman. The attributes, 'Visheshana' is not the same as Upaadhi (which is a limiting adjunct or curtailment of qualities) .... *Brahman with attributes is the only Brahman and the Upanishads in so far as they propound the conception, are addressed at the loftiest intellectual level.*

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Sri Bhashya

*The doctrine that the Upanishads present Brahman under two forms, nirguna and saguna, as attributeless and with attributes, and the view (or concept) relating Nirguna Brahman to Vidya or true knowledge and Saguna Brahman to avidya or ignorance is thus radically wrong."*

In the supposition that 'the statements of the Upanishads concern either the nature of Brahman or the identity of the individual self and Brahman, the latter is not a distinct theme' .... it is also too rough and incomplete an indication of the relation between the individual and the Supreme Reality, which, according to Ramanuja 'obtains an ampler and logically more satisfactory formulation in The Upanishads'.

*'The all inclusive theme of the Upanishads is Brahman alone. They discern the nature of Brahman being real, conscious, infinite, perfect and blissful. They declare that Brahman is characterized by infinite perfections by way of exalted attributes and is altogether free from imperfections ; technically called 'Ubhayalingatva'. The aspect of Brahman, described as the Ubhaya-Vibhuti (His glory of the mundane world and the higher realm of glory comprising individual souls in the state of perfection) is described as the two-fold glory of Brahman — this is proclamation of Supreme Brahman in all His inexhaustible perfections and glories forming the only purport of the Upanishads.'*

'For Ramanuja the core of the philosophy of Upanishads lies in *the declaration of Brahman in all Its perfections*. He is not particular about the categorisation of his position as propounding bheda (difference) or bhedaabheda (difference-cum-non-difference) or abheda (non-difference or oneness). He says in a truly grand passage of the Vedarthasangraha that he upholds all



the three (bheda, bhedaabheda and abheda) because such is indeed the synthetic position of the Upanishads’.

In its essential nature, the whole of the Vedarthasangraha is a statement of his interpretation of the Upanishads. But within the treatise there occurs the central part starting with ‘Atredam sarva-shaashtra-hridayam’ (the heart of all the shaastras is this) and in this part he contends that the Upanishads proclaim a single coherent doctrine of Brahman, which unfortunately gets broken into primary and secondary teachings by commentators who sponsor either an atheistic monism or a dualistic theism .... *they surrender themselves to the texts imperfectly and attempt to extract support for their pre-formed views.*’

‘Some commentators have rejected the entire sections of the Upanishads such as Shaandilya Vidyaa, the Dahara Vidyaa of the Chandogyaa .... substantial parts of even those discourses found in the Sadvidyaa, the Aksharabrahmanaa and the Jyotirbraahmana supposed to be expounding the higher Brahman.’

Ramanuja lists the varied types of texts and elucidates them, giving them their due weight of significance and demonstrates the resulting unity of doctrine .... As for passages that speak of Brahman as attributeless and refer to It in a negative way, they are to be understood as negating imperfections of Brahman. There is no going away from texts from here .... The formula for ‘Neti, Neti’ does either declare the inexhaustibility of the forms of Brahman or proclaim the fact of Its transcendence’.

When Brahman is said to be the Aatman and all else is Its body, what is perfectly right is being said; *as such a theistic monism is the final philosophy of the Upanishads .... Brahman is also the final redemptive power .... all attributes constitutive of grace are*

to be attributed to Brahman. In short Brahman of the Upanishads is the paratattva, parahita and paramapurushaarta - which are respectively the Supreme Reality, the Supreme way to redemption, and the Supreme goal.

‘It is interesting to note that Ramanuja’s findings on the Upanishads have come to stay in Indian philosophy and have passed into the structure of other Vedantic schools of interpretation .... *The perspective of Ramanuja concerning the Upanishads crystallizes itself in the subsequent evolution of Vedanta into a full-fledged formulation of their teachings; it is only his mode of interpreting them that would save a vedantin from doing violence to their import.*’

It was said that Brahman is the Ultimate Reality and there is nothing besides Brahman. Matter (non-sentient) and finite selves (sentient) are real only as adjectival to the Supreme. Their being does not constitute a limitation because they themselves are parts of the splendour of Brahman .... assimilation of the individual soul to God as a Prakaara (as a mode of God) does not entail the pruning away of the attributes of Godhead. On the contrary it enlarges our conception of Divine attributes, for the jiva himself is an attribute of Isvara.

Such is the final substance and the entire message of Upanishads according to Ramanuja. For his way of thinking the concept of Naaraayana, properly comprehended, embodies in itself this philosophy completely .... *‘The whole teaching of the Upanishads stands summed up in a supreme synthesis in the concept of Naaraayana.’*

Shubhamastu  
Srimathe Ramanujaya Namah

## APPENDIX : 108 UPANISHADS

### 1. MAJOR UPANISHADS

Shvasayopanishad

Kenopanishad

Kathopanishad

Khasanopanishad

Mundakopanishad

Mandukyopanishad

Āittriyaopanishad

Ītareyaopanishad

Chandogyaopanishad

Bṛihadaranyakopanishad

Īvetasvataropanishad

Āushitakyopanishad

### 1. MINOR UPANISHADS

#### 1. Samanyavedantopanishads

Īkshyaopanishad

Ādhyatmopanishad

Ānnapumopanishad

Ātmopanishad

Ātmaprabodhopanishad

Ākasharopanishad

Ārthhopanishad

Ālambanopanishad

Āngalopanishad

Ānagnihotropanishad

Āntrikopanishad

Āhopanishad

Āuktikopanishad

Āudgalopanishad

Āitrayanyupanishad

Vajrasuchikopanishad

Sarirakopanishad

Sukarahasyopanishad

Sarvasaropanishad

Savitryupanishad

Subalopanishad

Suryopanishad

Skandopanishad

### 2. Yogopanishads

Advayatarakopanishad

Āmritanandopanishad

Āmritabindupanishad

Kshurikopanishad

Tejobindupanishad

Trisikhibrahmanopanishad

Darsanopanishad

Dhyanabindupanishad

Nadabindupanishad

Pasupatabrahmanopanishad

Brahmavidyopanishad

Mandalabrahmanopanishad

Mahavakyopanishad

Yogakundalyupanishad

Yogachudamanyupanishad

Yogatattvopanishad

Yogasikhopanishad

Varahopanishad

Sandilyopanishad

Hamsopanishad

### **3. Samnyasopanishads**

Avadhutopanishad  
Arunyupanishad  
Katharudropanishad  
Kundikopanishad  
Jabalopanishad  
Turiyatitavadhutopanishad  
Naradaparivrajakopanishad  
Nirvanopanishad  
Parabrahmopanishad  
Paramahmsaparivrajakopanishad  
Paramahmsopanishad  
Brahmopanishad  
Bhikshukopanishad  
Maitreyyupanishad  
Yajnavalkyopanishad  
Satyayaniyopanishad  
Samnyasopanishad

### **4. Vayishnavopanishads**

Avyaktopanishad  
Kalisantaranopanishad  
Krishnopanishad  
Garudopanishad  
Gopalatapinyupanishad  
Tarasaropanishad  
Tripadvibhutimahannarayana  
dattatreyaopanishad  
Narayanopanishad  
Nrisimhatapinyupanishad

Ramatapinyupanishad  
Ramarahasyopanishad  
Vasudevopanishad  
Hayagrivopanishad

### **5. Saivopanishads**

Akshamalikopanishad  
Atharvasikhopanishad  
Atharvasira - Upanishad  
Kagnirudropanishad  
Kaivalyopanishad  
Ganapathyupanishad  
Jabalupanishad  
Dakshinamurthyupanishad  
Panchabrahmopanishad  
Brihajjabalopanishad  
Bhasmajabalopanishad  
Rudrahridayopanishad  
Rudrakshajabalopanishad  
Sarabhopanishad

### **6. Saktopanishads**

Tripuropanishad  
Tripuratapinyupanishad  
Devyupanishad  
Bahvrichopanishad  
Bhavanopanishad  
Sarasvatirahasyopanishad  
Sitopanishad  
Saubhagyalakshmyupanishad

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