

उंरामः॥ ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यद्विज्जगत्प्राजगत्ते ज्ञानं तन्मे नमंतीत्यामायधः कस्यस्विहनं ॥ कु
वन्ते वेदुःकमीशिविजीविषेकृतं समाः शवंत्वपिनान्यथेतोस्तिनकर्म विप्यतेनरे १ अस्युष्याः नामैतौ
काश्चन्येनतमसावताः ॥ तां स्तेप्रेत्याभिगकृतिपेके चात्महनेजनाः ३॥ अनेजदेकं मनसो नुवी
येनितदेवाश्चापुवन्धर्वमशर तद्वावतौन्यातयेतितिष्ठत्स्मिन्तपोमातरिष्वाद्याति ४ तदेजित
नैजितितेदरेतदेतिकेचतदं तदस्य सर्वस्यतुसर्वस्यास्यवाद्यतः ५ यस्तुसर्वीशिश्रुतान्यात्मनेवा
नपश्यतिसर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुग्यसते ६ यस्मिन्सर्वीशिश्रुतान्यात्मनेवाभूद्विजानतः
तत्रकोहः कः शोकराकावमनुपश्यतः ७ सपर्यगाक्षुक्रमकायमब्रशामस्त्राविरथं ८ इमपाप
विहंकेविर्मनीषीपरिभूः स्वयंभूयथातथ्यतो ध्यानव्यदधाच्छाश्वतीभ्यः समाभ्यः ९ अन्धन्त
मः प्रविशान्ति ये विद्यामुसते ततोभयद्वतेतमोपडुविद्यायां रताः १० प्रन्यदेवाहविद्यया न्यस
इरविद्यया इतिष्नुश्चमधीशयायेनस्तदिचचक्षिरे १० विद्यां चाविद्यां चाविद्यां च यस्तदेदो
भयं सह अविद्यया मृत्युंतीर्त्वा विद्यया मृतमश्नुते ११ अन्धेतमः प्रविशान्ति ये संभ्रतिमुपा

Sanskrit Script of the Isha Upanishad

Meditation on the Upanishads

Swami Shraddhananda

Invocation

Subtler than the subtle and vaster than the vast
is Atman,
the unborn and undying consciousness
hidden in our heart.
Let us realize the majesty of this, our true
nature,
by controlling our desires
and making our mind and senses tranquil.
Then alone shall we be free from
the sufferings of relative existence.

Introduction

WE SHALL STUDY the Upanishads,
not from the beginning to the end,
but covering some of the important
themes. Taking each Upanishad one by one,
we will find that each one has its own specific
theme. We shall read certain passages and try
to study them deeply. The Upanishads are state-
ments of the deep facts of spiritual experience.
In these passages, the deepest experiences cannot
be communicated by words, but the sages of the
Upanishads have tried *to take our minds slowly*

to the actual experiences. The object of our study
is not academic discussion, but to understand
deeply so that our study is practical and helpful
in our spiritual experience. We have to go to the
depth of these truths.

Class 1: Brahman is Eternal Truth and Knowledge

We will study some passages of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* from our book, *The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal*, translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, (Holly-wood: Vedanta Press, 1975), starting at page 82:

He who knows Brahman attains the supreme goal. Brahman is the abiding reality, He is pure knowledge and He is infinity. He who knows that Brahman dwells within the lotus of the heart becomes one with Brahman and enjoys all blessings.

According to the Upanishad, all people are trying to find their true Self. We are the totality of everything, but because we do not know it, we run after desires, any kind of desires. We are running after desires because we do not know

our eternal reality, our perfection. All the time we are really seeking our Self. The goal is to know that we already *are* everything. In this verse it says, ‘He who knows Brahman.’ Here, *Brahman* is used in the sense of the greatest. To know the greatest is the supreme goal of life.

Even in our dreams we are seeking this goal. Ramanuja, a great sage of Hindu philosophy, said that the dream state is God’s way of helping us to pursue some of our unbearable desires—for example, a desire to kill a person. Psychology indicates the same thing. If we watch our minds, we shall see that we are always seeking and seeking, just as the leaves of a tree shake with the slightest breeze: ‘I have to go here. I have to write this. I have to eat this.’ We are incomplete as long as we do not know our true Self.

If we want to understand the deeper truths of life, we have to understand that when we reach that infinite goal we will be satisfied. We will know that everything is inside us. How can we reach outside and grab it? It would be like trying to grab our own shadow. In this vast supermarket of life, everything on the shelves has been projected from our Self. The projections are one with us. They are already ours, so why should we try to grab them?

The literal meaning of the word *Brahman* is the greatest, the all-inclusive. We have the ability to reach Brahman. When we are eating or sleeping, we are on the same level as a dog or a cat. But on the level of our understanding and reasoning, we are able to reach this highest goal of life. The supreme goal is higher than any other goal. All lesser goals, such as a goal for a bachelor’s degree, being the best secretary or the best cook, are included in that supreme goal. As long as we are connected with a body and a mind, we have to pursue these lesser goals, but ultimately there is no running away from the supreme goal.

So what is Brahman? Brahman is the abiding

reality. *Satyam* is the Sanskrit for truth. Now what is real? Our ears are real, and the earth we are standing on is real. Everything we see and feel is real, but these things are a changing reality. Everything seems so real, *real*, real to us. If something strange comes, we are embarrassed: ‘What is this? What is this?’

Usually we are at peace with this changing reality. All the time real things pour into our experience. This is the experience of our reality. But then the Upanishad adds one adjective and that changes everything. That word is *abiding*—the *abiding* reality. If the experience of our normal reality is change, the Upanishad says there is a reality that does not change.

All that we experience brings us two things: one is knowledge and the other is joy. The quality and the intensity may differ, but we experience pieces of knowledge. Knowledge pours into us all the time. We use the word *conscious*. ‘I am *conscious* of the room. I am *conscious* of the table. I am *conscious* of this and that.’ Reality pours into us as knowledge, as something that exists. This existence comes to us as pieces of knowledge that we accept. As soon as we accept something there is a flicker of joy or gladness, otherwise we would have to run away from everything. Sometimes a mentally ill person says, ‘I can’t stand this. I can’t stand it!’ But for normal people, we accept this reality all the time.

Acceptance implies joy. If we watch our mind closely, we are aware of how much joy we have. There is joy always. When we walk on the road we have accepted the road, so there is joy. As soon as we accept a thing there is bound to be a subtle feeling of joy. In the things we dislike the joy is subdued. Any experience of reality is coming as a piece of knowledge. Side by side with this knowledge there is bound to be bliss or joy.

If we have accepted an experience, even looking at a rattlesnake, if we are at a safe distance,

brings us a feeling of joy. This procession of reality comes at us from all sides. Since we experience it in a piecemeal way, it seems like it is always changing.

The Upanishad tells us that our experience of brokenness is ignorance. Really speaking, reality cannot be broken. Knowledge cannot be broken. Bliss cannot be broken. We have to discover this great fact. All the time we experience reality, but because the experience seems broken, we do not reach the experience of unity. In a moment this insight can come, but it quickly goes. It has to be stabilized. If we develop our understanding we will see that at the back of change there is unchanging reality, unchanging knowledge and unchanging joy. That is Brahman.

Brahman is truth, a reality that does not change, that does not end. Brahman is an unchanging reality that is *satyam jnanam anantam*—eternal truth and knowledge. To find Brahman does not seem to be impossible because it is here all the time. We experience Brahman all the time, because Brahman is reality.

Unfortunately for us, Brahman seems to be changing. In outer space, where all the cosmic play occurs, planets and stars collide and dissolve—but is space disturbed? No, it is the silent witness. Something like that happens on the level of spiritual truth. Brahman is infinite reality. We have to understand that all these piecemeal experiences *are* that infinite reality.

As we proceed with our experiments in contemplation on Brahman, we have glimpses, and then we become brave. We say, ‘I am experiencing God when I touch this table because there cannot be anything other than Brahman.’

We are always experiencing reality. The experience of Brahman is so common. If we want the experience of Brahman to remain with us, we must see that it is with us all the time, just like the hair on our head. We have to say that there is no manifold. There is one unbroken reality and that is Brahman. This is how we challenge our own ignorance.

We have become slaves of our ignorance. Our mind says, ‘This is all manifold.’ We must tell our mind that the manifold is ignorance. We have to practice this in deep contemplation. Even when we work, part of our mind must be on that knowledge. We must practice so this idea goes deep inside us.

We need to continually lift our mind by embracing this reality in a full way. Just as we love our children and can hold them to our breast and feel so happy, so we have to embrace this manifold and know it is Brahman—it is infinite. Do not be perplexed with questions like,

‘Where shall I place my mind during meditation?’ No! Wherever the mind goes, that is Brahman. We need not be afraid. We need courage, but most of all, we need to have real love for Atman, for our true Self.

We have pursued many loves, but none of them have removed our doubts. Now let us love our true Self. It is not like, ‘Oh, I am going to unity. What will happen to my child, to my piano, to my husband?’ No! Nothing will be lost; all will be there. Know that the highest goal is with us all the time. *Satyam jnanam anantam*—that eternal truth, that reality—is unchanging.

What we have to do in our contemplation is remove the notion of the manifold. It is neither



an impossible nor a difficult task for the mind because the mind is always experiencing reality. The mind has to be told that everything that it is experiencing is unbroken reality, which has no change. If we can do this, we can reach the goal. The goal is to find Brahman because Brahman includes everything. Brahman is not something strange; it is the most well-known experience of our life. It is knowledge and existence. Know that Brahman is *satyam anantam*, reality that has no end. *Satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman—Brahman is eternal truth and knowledge.

Class 2: Question: ‘Who am I?’

The emphasis of the Upanishads is on the direct knowledge of truth. ‘What is reality?’ is our topic in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. This question begins in childhood when the child asks, ‘What is this? What is that?’ It is a basic urge in the human mind to want to know what this is all around us. Our sense of reality is because we feel our existence. We open our eyes and a kind of experience comes. Then we touch something and smell something: ‘What is this? What is that?’ We ask even when we are grown. The scientist asks, ‘What is this?’ The physicist asks the same question. In each field there is someone asking questions and seeking answers. If you are an artist, you ask from the standpoint of beauty, from the aesthetic. If you are a poet, you ask, ‘Oh, is it a poem written in the vast waters? In the sky?’

The Upanishads give the spiritual answer: reality—at the highest level of *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman—is consciousness; it is knowledge. We are familiar with the experience of consciousness and of knowledge. There is a constant procession of knowledge passing through our mind. However, this procession of knowledge is not *anantam*, eternal knowledge—it is a broken knowledge. The Upanishad declares there is infinite knowledge that has the

characteristic of the knowledge we usually experience. But knowledge as we usually experience it is in pieces.

This broken knowledge is binding us and we want to get away from it. Just as ice cream is nice when it is fresh, but after three days of sitting out it is not good—we want to get rid of it. In this way, broken knowledge becomes a burden and does not bring us supreme peace.

The Upanishads say there is such a thing as infinite knowledge, where that light does not come and go. That infinite light of consciousness is reality. ‘What is this? What is that?’ The ultimate answer is everything is *anantam jnanam*—eternal knowledge—and that is Brahman. We are seeing only the outward forms when we are seeing the manifold.

Everything we see on the normal level is true on that level. But if we remain satisfied with that, we cannot reach the highest. That everyday level will leave many questions unanswered. When we take leave of this life, we will wonder if our whole life has been as a slave to some power. We will wonder, ‘Why did I come? Where am I going?’ We have to come to a level of spiritual inquiry, not because we think we will burn in hellfire if we don’t, but because we want to *know* reality. The Upanishad says that a time will come when we will have to ask the question: ‘Who am I?’

We are living with that answer all the time. We really are the infinite. Our true nature is infinite, but due to ignorance we remain satisfied with this little nature. The Upanishad says, ‘Okay, go on being happy like that, but the time will come when you will have to ask: “Who am I?”’ We have the potential to find that ultimate reality. That reality is infinite knowledge. When we say infinite knowledge, at once it becomes something very precious. We may work hard and spend four years in order to understand and research one little flower or a tiny rat that lives



in the desert. We have seen on television shows how scientists are spending three years in the desert chasing one tiny, little insect.

Our study here is for infinite knowledge, infinite consciousness. Where is that precious knowledge to be found? If we are prepared to dedicate the time and energy for this search, we will find *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman in our heart. If we ask this question, 'Who am I?', we have to dig into our heart. We have to use familiar words, and when the previously quoted verse says 'the heart', it means our inner space. There is an inner spiritual space within the heart, and it is there that we make our first exploration. The phrase, '*lotus of the heart*', is just a poetic way of saying it, although the word *lotus* is not in the Sanskrit of this Upanishad. When we try to explore that inner space, it must come closer and closer. Finally, we will completely identify with it.

There is no escape for us because that reality will just swallow our individuality. We will know that our true nature *is* that reality. At the back of the ocean, the mountain, the vast space, at the back of time, that reality is what we will know about our true Self. When we know *anantam jnanam*, the infinite light of knowledge, then our individuality will merge with that infinite reality. All of our questions will stop then because we will see that on the ultimate level, everything has merged. When we come back from that experience, we will not be fooled by broken knowledge. In the background of our mind that knowledge will be there. The goal is to strengthen that knowledge regularly by contemplation and make it our own. Functioning with that knowledge in the back of our mind, this everyday level of consciousness will no longer bind us.

The spiritual seeker must over and over

again try to concentrate on this. As soon as we close our eyes in meditation, we will feel: “Oh, ‘I’ consciousness is here. I am breathing. I am conscious of a thought. Consciousness has pervaded my mind.” While we are working, we are not always able to keep our mind on the infinite. We must keep up our regular practice of contemplation; then we will have a firm grasp of that consciousness.

Even though we are conscious all the time, we do not think about what consciousness is. In contemplation, think about that inner space and that light of consciousness. Just as there is one sun illuminating our whole world, in this way think about the consciousness that pervades our body and mind. Consciousness is inside our body and inside our mind. We must have an initial understanding of what is consciousness.

We need to have faith in the words of the *rishis*, the teachers of the Upanishads, just as we do when we are taking a laboratory class in a science college. The rishis declared consciousness *is*. This consciousness we have every day is really infinite. It is unbroken. It is truth. We have to try to imagine this more and more. We have to remember this. Do not be afraid. Be bold. This consciousness we feel inside the body is infinite consciousness. Consciousness is inside our body and it can project outside our body. This is what the teachers tell us.

Slowly by stages, we have to expand our understanding, and we have to know that this consciousness that is functioning in us is really everywhere. If we see the break, that is because of our ignorance. Meditate on the words of these great teachers. The doubts will melt away and we will feel the light of consciousness is really projecting everything. All this knowledge of the sun and the moon and the table and the chair is coming from that consciousness. As we carry on this inquiry, at first that small light will come within

our heart and it will grow and grow. We will discover that infinite light within and will know that we are that light.

Our text says, ‘*he who knows Brahman*’—definitely and without any doubt—that person enjoys all objects of desire. We have these childish *samskaras*, mental tendencies and ask such a small question: ‘What is the good of finding Brahman?’ It is a childish question, so a childish answer is given: ‘He enjoys everything.’ Are we enjoying our food? Are we enjoying sitting in our car? Always we evaluate our actions in terms of enjoyment. The answer is that all desires are with Brahman; Brahman enjoys everything. God is enjoying this creation, all the flowers and the people, everything. If we know that our true Self is that infinite light of consciousness, we know that all phenomena happen in us. We become cosmic. We no longer feel that we are just a little, individual being. It is the infinite that is holding everything.

When we come back from that *samadhi*, experience of knowledge, and as our *samadhi* becomes stronger, we will see this world as the poet William Blake wrote:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.¹

In the background of the mind, this experience will be there. That is *jivanmukti*, liberation. In our text, this paragraph gives the idea that whoever knows in their heart that infinite reality, they see joy and peace everywhere. The highest goal of life is to have that knowledge of the vast infinite within our heart. Such is the glory of the Self. The most important point to remember is that we *can* find it in our own heart. Not in one day; but if we go on probing day after day, bravely and with courage, identifying ourselves with that truth, we will reach the goal.

Swami Vivekananda told a story of the tigress that gave birth to a cub and then she died. That cub was born in a field with a herd of sheep. The tiger cub grew up thinking that it was one of the sheep and ate grass like all the others. One day, a guru tiger saw the 'sheep' tiger with the herd and sought to illumine the 'sheep' tiger. He thrust some meat in the 'sheep' tiger's mouth. Then the tiger cub roared and knew it was a tiger! This story appeals to us because, really speaking, we are tigers. All our pride of individuality is vain, very vain. We are foolish to want to remain little when we can discover our Self as that infinite light.

Class 3: Brahman is Present Always, Everywhere

When we identify ourselves with that light of consciousness in our heart, then everything is connected to us as consciousness. When our mind is able to experience that through inquiry, contemplation and going inward, then everything disappears and what remains is the indescribable Brahman. The mind cannot stay there all the time. For some people, the memory of that experience is so strong that they feel that the manifold *is* consciousness. They are not really bound anymore, not affected by this changing world. We have to practice that samadhi as often as possible and go to where our personality has merged into infinite consciousness. When our knowledge is not very stable and comes down and sees this manifold, then our mind immediately goes to its regular nature and begins to ask, 'Why? Where? What is it?' The Upanishad will give us a clue to help us train our mind as a spiritual seeker. When we see this manifold, we must relate it to *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman. Never forget this fundamental truth. Everything has to be related to that truth.

From where did this manifold come? There is

no end to the mystery of this universe. The Upanishad brings an idea of creation. It is presented as a means to Self-knowledge. The Upanishad tries to affirm the fundamental proposition that everything is infinite consciousness. Remembering this, we can read the account of creation and we won't be confounded. If we forget that proposition, we will be lost in confusion. The goal of Self-knowledge is to somehow reach unity. When we have known unity, then the universe cannot confound us. It is all the play of consciousness. Really, that unity cannot be manifold; all forms are *not* really separate. However, the mind won't accept unity, because the mind loves this body and all the other separate forms of the manifold.

For Self-knowledge, one has to know that individuality is a shadow. Every moment everything is telling us that it is foolish to cling to this individuality. Why is it so precious? Each cat and dog has its own world. Each individual is in his or her own world. Everyone wants to write a book about their life, entitled *My Story*, recounting all the incidents of their childhood. Remember that each of us is just one grain of sand on the vast seashore of life. This is true! Think of humanity in the past, present and future—millions and millions of people. One individual is not very important. Why must we pay so much attention to our individuality? On the other hand, if we seek our true identity, our life will be blessed. We will find infinite consciousness. Everything that *is*, is in us. So the wise person looks deeper and tries to find his or her spiritual identity, that *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman.

Now comes the story of creation. Do not take these creation stories seriously, but *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman is important and does not change. Brahman is the unbroken light of consciousness. If we see actions and thoughts, it is nothing but the play of that

infinite Brahman. Here is this story of creation, but this too is Brahman. The Upanishadic ideal of evolution is given:

Out of Brahman, who is the Self, came ether; out of ether, air; out of air, fire; out of fire, water; out of water, earth; out of earth, vegetation; out of vegetation, food; out of food, the body of man. The body of man, composed of the essence of food, is the physical sheath of the Self.²

The phrase ‘out of Brahman, who is the Self, came ether’ means there was only the light of consciousness and then it appeared as space. When that experience of consciousness comes, within that experience is space. Really speaking, when we know the truth, there is no such thing as past or future. When that experience comes, the past and the future *are* the present. When we see *that* space, we know that it is our Self that is projecting space.

At the highest level, when there is no space or time, God is *nirguna*, the formless aspect of Brahman without attributes. Akasha is Sanskrit for space-time in our modern terminology. If there is space there has to be time. Thus, the spiritual seeker says space-time, but we should have the ability to push back space and time into that consciousness. With concentration we merge that space-time back into Brahman. In the *Chandogya Upanishad* it is presented differently. It says, ‘At first there was only *sat*, truth.’³ In that instance, existence and consciousness are the same thing. When the question of creation comes, the formless *nirguna* Brahman becomes *saguna* Brahman with attributes, the Creator. When you think of Brahman as creating or projecting something, then he is God. The *Chandogya Upanishad* says, ‘Space is Brahman’ (4.10.4). In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* it says, ‘Brahman, after creating this universe, entered into this universe through and through.’⁴ Each of these

Upanishads wants us to keep in mind the fundamental truth that everything is Brahman.

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* indicates that Brahman projected space-time. But the Vedanta student should not forget that Brahman is present always, everywhere. No point of space or time can exist without Brahman. Just as the illusion of a snake exists for a moment in the rope, so we are experiencing space-time constantly. A seeker of the Self should never lose track of this fundamental truth. Just as a faithful wife never forgets that she is Mrs. Schubert, in the same way, a seeker of Self-knowledge should never forget the fundamental proposition *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman—everything is that fundamental consciousness.

The verse continues, ‘out of ether, air’ Then air came. It is gaseous. Brahman felt cold and wanted another coat, so he projected energy. That is fire. Fire, *agni*, or energy, is all the same thing. ‘Out of fire, water’—now comes the liquid state of nature. The mind will not rest until it has found a cause, so it is the job of philosophy in every age to provide answers that will satisfy the mind. When we are seeking spiritual knowledge, it is not materially caused, so this analogy of creation will be different from a scientific theory.

The seekers of spiritual knowledge accept these simple statements of creation because they understand that this manifold is just appearances. In this creation story the fundamental proposition has to stand, and everything else has to be adjusted to fit it. In the fields of science such as chemistry and physics, the story of creation is different. We have no fight with science because what they find is true on that level. Just as there is a difference between the waking state and the dream state, or if we go to Japan or Africa, everything is different. In the same way, we can function on the different levels of psychology or physics or in dream. We can function on many levels.

Slowly, this simple creation becomes more and more complex—first, ether, then air, then fire, then water, then earth. Out of earth comes vegetation from inorganic to organic. The object of this evolution is to satisfy the mind that this creation has come from God. We have to remember at every stage that *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman. It is Brahman who appears as all the different stages of this evolution. In order to go to the deeper meaning, we must have little glimpses of our spiritual nature as consciousness. When that glimpse comes, then the true explanation of this cosmology becomes clearer. We forget the past tense.

As the seeker, we have to realize that creation appears in us. We are always projecting space. Instead of thinking that creation has appeared in the past, try to feel that it is constantly appearing. We have to feel that all creation is within us and not just as this little individuality.

In the highest Vedantic understanding, meditation is ignorance. So how can that knowledge come? One has to wait until the mind has become free from body-consciousness. Then we will know the timeless spirit as the light of consciousness. We will feel this vast space is in us. We are projecting it. There is no question of the past—we are projecting it right now. This body is showing its teeth; this body does this or that. It is not the little individual.

As Shankaracharya, the great sage of the *Vivekachudamani*, *The Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, describes, 'Just as one sees the shadow, he does not identify with the shadow.'⁵ A student of Self-knowledge should always try to know that this body is like a dream body or like a shadow. These are the Vedantic disciplines. The knowledge will come that 'I am pure consciousness. Changes come to my body, but not to me, the timeless, infinite Self. I look to the ageless past and I am there. Again, I look into the future and

I am there.' When that kind of merging comes, then evolution has a different meaning.

As the infinite reality, everything is merging in us—the ether, the air, the fire. We are not afraid of Darwin or his theories. The scientists say that it has taken millions and millions of years for humanity to get here. That is all right, but the Vedantist says that time is a play; it is an illusion. We have had a glimpse of the ultimate reality as *satyam jnanam anantam* Brahman. The Vedantist never forgets that everything is really Brahman.

(To be continued)

References

1. William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*.
2. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.1.1.
3. *Chandogya Upanishad*, 6.2.1.
4. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.4.7.
5. Acharya Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*, 163.

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