

The Heart of the Upanishads.

~~~~~BY SWAMI SHUDDHANANDA BHARATI.

"The Self is always to be won; He is won by truth and self-discipline. He is won by a perfect and entire knowledge; He is won by divine living; for He is here bright and luminous in the inner body whom strivers and seekers by winning of human defect behold."

—*Mundaka*.

## THE SPIRIT OF THE UPANIṢADS

The Upaniṣads are the crest jewels of the Vedas. They are the milk of blissful Knowledge drawn from the four Vedic cows. Upaniṣad means, inner knowledge, the gospel of the inmost of things. It has its home in the truth of the Spirit and its highest goal is the realization of the Self as THAT, as the *Brahma*, the All-in-All, and all that is. The *Brahma*-knower gets to the highest—'ब्रह्मविदाप्नोति परम'. But a knowledge of *Brahma* is not the denial of life in the world, for the *Brahma* is the world too when it is the all; *Brahma* is Truth, Knowledge, Infinity—'सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म'. He is the truth of the objective as much as He is the truth of the subjective. "Let there be no denial at all" 'अनिराकरणमस्तु' is a significant command of the *Brahma-Vidyā* which the Upaniṣad is. *Om* is *Brahma*; *Om* is all; says the Upaniṣad. This important synthesis of *Brahma* in the Self and THAT in the world, is the beauty of the virile interpretation of the Upaniṣads by Sri Aurobindo. Out of the 108 Upaniṣads ten have been chosen

by commentators—*Īśa*, *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Praśna*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Māṇḍūkya*, *Taittirīya*, *Aitareya*, *Chhāndogya*, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*. Among these Śri Aurobindo has dealt with the *Īśa*, *Kena* and *Muṇḍaka* and the first stanza of the *Ānanda Vallī* of the *Taittirīya*. His commentary itself is another Upaniṣad.

## THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE BRAHMA

"*Brahma* is our real Self, the profounder, vaster and more puissant consciousness beyond our mental being. It is the mind of our mind, sense of our senses, speech of our speech, life of our life. *Brahma* is not expressed by speech which is only a shadow of the Divine Word, the omnipotent mantra AUM. *Brahma* is a sort of positive Zero, an  $x$  unknowable, which corresponds to no possible equation of physical or psychological qualities. He is the Supreme Self. *Brahma* is behind the mind which is composed of thought, will and sensation. Nothing is external to it, nothing is other than itself, it is the all-comprehensive self-awareness. It is *Brahma* that stands behind the victory of Gods."

The Gods of the Upaniṣads—Indra, Vāyu, Agni representing the cosmic Divine on the Mental, Vital and the Material planes could not know *Brahma*. Such is Its might. He was too immense even for the

all-devouring *Agni* who with all his might could not burn even a straw put before him by the Spirit. *Vāyu*, the Life-principle, could not seize even the frailest trifle so long as it was protected against him by the shield of the Omnipotent. Indra, the mind, which could not envisage what is limited by time and space, pursues its way through the highest ether of pure mentality. There he meets *Umā Haimavati*, the supreme Nature from whom the whole cosmic action takes birth. She has the knowledge and consciousness of the ONE. She explains to Indra "It is *Brahma*. It is through the victory of *Brahma* that you have attained glory." It is by coming into contact with the supreme consciousness and reflecting its nature and by elimination of the vital, mental and physical egoism that *Brahma* can be known and possessed.

The Self is not known by exposition and brain power and much sacred learning, but he alone whom the Spirit chooseth getteth the Spirit, and to him this Self discovers its own body. This Self is not got by one without strength, not by a confused and stumbling mind, nor by austerity without the mark of truth. Only when one with knowledge strives after it by all these means, his self enters into the *Brahma* and makes the Eternal his dwelling place. 'विद्वान् यत्तेजो तस्यैष आत्माविशते ब्रह्मधामा'. He that knows the supreme *Brahma* becomes *Brahma*. He crosses beyond grief and crosses beyond sin; he is released from the captivity of the heart-strings (ignorance) and becomes

immortal—'विद्युक्तो अमृतो भवति'. That is true existence, the Life from which our life proceeds; that is immortality; while what we cling to is "hunger, that is death". "By realization of *Brahma* as our Self, we find the divine energy which lifts us beyond the limitation, weakness, darkness, sorrow, and death of our mortal existence. The Self must be attained here in this body. If here one comes to that knowledge, one truly is; if here one comes *not* to the knowledge, then great is perdition. *Brahma* is in its nature all-blissful.

#### LIFE AND THE SPIRIT

The *Īśa Upaniṣad* is a synthetic Upaniṣad. It is the earlier Upaniṣad and has given much difficulty to commentators. Some have called it semi-worldly. None has brought out the gems of profound synthetic knowledge that this Upaniṣad contains as the deep-visions commentary of Sri Aurobindo.

The central idea of the *Īśopaniṣad* is a reconciliation of the Unity and cosmic multiplicity of the *Brahma*, the *Īśa*, God, whose habitation is the universe and who dwells in the sum as well as in the part, in the microcosm as well as in the macrocosm. Free enjoyment and possession of existence is the object of this habitation. Enjoy—but how? Not through vital desire, nor at the cost of others; but by the renunciation of all desires, by freedom from craving after form of things, by entire liberation from coveting another's possession, by being ego-free with the consciousness that everything is possessed by the one

Divine Existence. One must enjoy life here in cosmic consciousness devoid of lust, greed and envy. By renouncing one should enjoy—‘त्यक्तेन सुञ्जीथा’. Work in active existence must be done, done as a sacrifice. Doing works, verily, one should live a hundred years—‘कुर्वन्नेहेह कर्माणि जिजिविषत्’. Work binds only when *I* binds the motive, only when desire and selfishness taint the purity of offering. Action binds not when the act is done as a sacrifice to the Cosmic Divine, merging in Him all the separative ego. Work is a condition of self-fulfilment. Denying the Self is slaying it. From human to the Divine is the law of being. Self-immolation coerces self-fulfilment. Self-slaughter leads one to the sunless worlds—‘असुर्या नाम ते लोकाः’ enveloped in blind gloom.

#### UNITY IN THE COSMIC MULTIPLICITY

The next truth that the *Īśa Upaniṣad* declares is to see the One in the many, and the many in the One. That One is stable, unmoving—‘अनेजदेकम्’. “But His divine consciousness is swifter than the mind” (मनसो जनीयो). The world is a cyclic movement of the divine consciousness in space and time. Creation is a self-projection of *Brahma* into the conditions of space and time. The motion of the world works under the government of perpetual stability, and the ONE stable outstrips in the speed of its active consciousness (*Chit Śakti*) the others who run. *Brahma* is the eternal goal, beginning and the end; the gods who represent

the cosmic personalities of *Brahma* in labouring to reach him find him moving forward to a further and further realization. It progresses ever in front. Seeing of that One in the many and the many in that One is true seeing. Such a seer identifies himself with the Self in all existences. He who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self shrinks not thereafter from aught. He in whom the Self-being that has become all existences, that are becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness? This is verily the core of the heart of Upaniṣadic Truth.

यस्मिन् सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मैवाभूद्विजानतः ।  
तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः ॥

(*Īśa. 7*)

The realization of this essential oneness in the self of all, the vision of all in the self is the condition of peace, bliss, love and harmony in and out. “It is the *Brahma*, the *Sachchidānanda*, *Īśa* in his diffusive mood, active consciousness that has gone abroad, that has become all things. He is the Self, resplendent, bodiless, scarless, without sinews, pure, unpierced by evil; He is immutable, indivisible, defectless, unaffected, unmodified eternally pure. He is the Seer, Thinker, the One who becomes everywhere the self-existent. He is His own subject and the object. He is the Lord of *Vidyā* and *Avidyā*, unity and multiplicity, the twin powers of His Energy. In perfect accord between the *Vidyā* and the *Avidyā*

is human perfection. Exclusive devotion to multiplicity (*Avidyā*) leads one into blind darkness of ignorance. Exclusive hold to unity (*Vidyā*) without recognizing the integrality of *Brahma* also leads to greater darkness. By *Vidyā* one attains the silent, passive, *Akṣara Brahma* individually. By *Avidyā* one may attain the *Kṣara Puruṣa*, world-knowledge. But the highest goal of man is the *Uttama Puruṣa*; *Puruṣottama*, upholding both *Kṣara* and *Akṣara* as modes of His being. Not individual but collective realization in Him is the fullness of man's fulfilment. The office of *Vidyā* is not to destroy *Avidyā* but to draw it continuously towards itself—Unity fulfilling the multiplicity.

#### IMMORTALITY

Next the Upaniṣad speaks of immortality. Life in ego is mortality; that in the Spirit is immortality. The knot of birth is ego-sense and its dissolution brings us to non-birth. Birth and non-birth are not essentially physical conditions but soul states. Attachment to birth in the body leads to an endless round of egoistic births in lower forms. Exclusive attachment to non-birth leads to a dissolution into indiscriminate Nature, or into the Nihil, or void, instead of passing from a limited into an illimitable existence. The one is necessary to the other. Life enjoys its immortality by a free becoming in the universe. Linking this higher Divine state and the state in the lower planes of mind-life and body is the IDEA, GNOSIS—VIJÑĀNA, the

Vedic Truth, the self-vision and all vision of *Sūrya*. The face of this Truth is covered from human consciousness with a golden lid, brilliant formation of concepts and percepts, which *Sūrya*, the Supramental light, replaces by Self-vision. So the Vedic Ṛṣi invokes *Sūrya*:—"O Fosterer, O sole Seer, O Ordainer, O illuminating Sun, O Power of the Father of creatures, marshal thy rays, draw together thy light. The lustre which is thy most blessed form of all that in thee I behold, the *Puruṣa* there and there, *He I am*." This vision is the perfect seeing, the integral knowledge, expressed in the supreme mantra *So'ham*. Knowledge and action, Light and Energy, consciousness and life are included in the formula of immortality. *Sūrya* represents light and *Agni* energy, force, power, will. *Agni*, the Divine Will, enjoying and devouring things of life, generates the Maruts, nervous forces of life. They prepare the action of Indra, the luminous mind, who slays *Vṛtra*, the Coverer, dispels darkness and causes *Sūrya* to rise upon our being with the rays of truth. *Sūrya*, the Creator, dispels the evil dream of egoism, sin, suffering and transforms life into immortality, the good, the beatitude. The life principle, the immortal Breath—'अनिलममृतम्' is the thread upon which the continuity of our bodily lives is arranged. It carries forward the mental being, the *Puruṣa* in the mind upon his journey. We live in what we are doing and are controlled by the fruits of past actions instead of living in the soul and viewing the stream of action

from behind it. So the R̥ṣi invokes *Agni*, the will, the *Jātavedas*, to remember the things done—<sup>ॐ</sup> क्रतो सरं कृतं सरं—so that increasing knowledge and right action can lead us to felicity and immortality. “O Agni, knowing all things that are manifest, lead us by the good path to felicity—अग्ने नय सुपथारये अस्मान्.’ Remove from us the devious attraction of sin. To thee completest speech of submission we submit.”

This is the essence of the Upaniṣads, to see the *Brahma* in the self, and that in the world, to see THAT as the One that has self-manifolded through its creative energy, in the *Ānanda* of its creative play, into all that is in the Universe of becomings. There is nothing but That, and all is That. To dissolve

separative ego-individuality in this cosmic consciousness and live life in the knowledge of the Spirit, the One that is, always remember that immortal One in everything, everywhere, in all acts is the way to the bliss of existence here. It is self-slaughter to immolate active existence which is a necessary condition of self-fulfilment. Life must be *lived*, but free from the sins of the vital passions and the ego mentality as a pure consecration to the Divine that lords all existences. Life in *Sachchidānanda*, in Light, in Energy, in Brahmic consciousness is the central truth of the Upaniṣad so forcefully expounded by Sri Aurobindo from whose able commentaries these words have been extracted.

*Om Pūrṇamadah ! Pūrṇamidam !*

