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# UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE UPANISHADS

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit:

- you will become familiar with the general tenor of the *Upanishads*
- you are expected to recognize the differences between the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, not only in content but also in spirit
- you should be able to notice various philosophical and primitive scientific issues, which have found place in the *Upanishads*
- you should be in a position to understand that philosophy is not merely an intellectual exercise in India, but also a guiding factor in human life

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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The *Upanishads* mark the concluding parts of the *Vedic* literature. In two different senses the *Upanishads* are called ‘*Vedanta*’. The first statement is one meaning. *Vedanta* also means the culmination of the *Vedic* thought. In our study of Unit, we learnt that the *Vedic* thought began with the age of *Mantras* and in the course of evolution it passed through two more stages; the *Brahmanas* and the *Aranyakas*. While the text and the spirit of the *Brahmanas* did not really make any advance over the age of *Mantras*, the subsequent stage, i.e., the *Aranyakas* applied corrective measure. Introspection and self-correction paved the way for the evolution of the *Upanishads*. It is said that the *Vedic* thought matured and reached its culmination in the *Upanishads*. This is the second sense in which the *Upanishads* are regarded as the ‘end of the *Vedas*’.

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## 1.2 THE *BRAHMANAS* VS. THE *UPANISHADS* – CLASH OF CLASSES?

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An interesting aspect of the *Vedic* tradition is that the divergence in thought between these two stages reflects in a very subtle manner some kind of clash, if not clash, at least difference of opinion among Brahmins and *Kshatriyas*. The *Brahmin* class subscribed to the tradition of the *Brahmanas*, whereas the *Kshatriyas* denounced excessive emphasis laid on yagas which the *Brahmanas* specified. The origin of the *Upanishads*, therefore, is traced to the *Kshatriya* class. The opposition of the *Upanishads* to the *Brahmanas* is perceived as contempt, which the *Kshatriyas* had developed for the *Brahminical* tradition, if not *Brahmins*. It is not unlikely that they had contempt for Brahmins also. There are some *suktas* in the *Rigveda*, which refer to the ill-treatment meted out the *Brahmin* class by the ruling class. If this is true, then, the intellectual growth received impetus, not from the so-called intellectual class, but from the ruling class.

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## 1.3 MEANING OF THE *UPANISHADS*

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The commentators are not unanimous on this issue. When confronted with the question, what this term means, they came out with answers, mostly unacceptable. There are also instances in which some key statements found in the *Upanishads* were themselves regarded as the *Upanishads*. If this is true, then the rest of the text reduces to mere exposition of a single statement. So the best alternative is to start with etymological meaning. However, it should be remembered that mere etymological meaning will not take us too far. *Upa* (near), *ni* (devotion) and *sat* (sit), have together formed the word the *Upanishad*. When rearranged it only means to sit near (the Guru) with devotion. Here the word ‘near’ has an inner meaning, which is important. It shows that the *Upanishadic* teaching is not open to all. Only those who deserve shall receive the training. At any rate, in any system of education the capability of student is primary which decides what is to be taught. It may be noted that Pythagoras, in ancient Greece, strictly adhered to this restriction.

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## 1.4 THE FORM

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The *Upanishads* differ from the *Vedic* literature in terms of form also. A good number of the *Upanishads* are in the form of dialogue – dialogue between teacher and student. Dialogue indicates discussion. Proper study of philosophy is facilitated only by discussion. This particular style is noticeable in ancient philosophical literature. Further, its absence in still older literature indicates the absence of philosophy. It is not wholly incorrect to say that philosophy proper has its beginning in the *Upanishads*. Though the style suits philosophy, language does not. Since philosophy demands clarity of thought and expression, figurative expression and allegory are not generally welcome. But they characterize philosophical writings at early stage not only in India, but also in ancient Greece.

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## 1.5 HETEROGENEITY IN THOUGHT

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It is better to clarify this aspect in the beginning itself. When there are thirteen major *Upanishads*, which required a few centuries to acquire the present form, it

is meaningless to expect all of them to present identical thought. Identity in thought may be possible anywhere, but surely not in philosophy. The view that all the *Upanishads* are identical in their teaching was held by those who believed that the *Upanishads* also belong to the class of ‘*Shruti*’. In spite of their conviction, they could not succeed in providing a satisfactory account of what the *Upanishads* teach. Common sense suggests that the world does not need so many works propagating an identical thesis.

## 1.6 FAREWELL TO THE VEDIC GODS

As long as gods were entertained, there was need to propitiate them. Rituals became imperative. Reflection and introspection changed priorities. Comfort in life became secondary. Acquisition of knowledge became primary. The thinkers, who initiated the *Upanishadic* thought were not happy with ordinary knowledge. They argued that knowledge obtained from the *Vedas* was only lower knowledge (*aparaa vidyaa*), which is impermanent. What they sought was permanent knowledge (*paraa vidyaa*). Prolonged performance of *yagas* must have dented all hopes of seeking knowledge. With gods, rituals also made an unceremonious exit. To make qualitative distinction the *Upanishads* were called *Jnana Kanda* in contrast to the *Brahmanas*, which were termed *Karma Kanda*. This distinction could be achieved because of internal critical attitude.

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Explain briefly the meaning of the Upanishad

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2) What is the difference between *Para* and *Apara Vidya*?

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## 1.7 UNITY IN DIVERSITY

The *Upanishads* began with the hypothesis that there should be only one fundamental principle. The word ‘hypothesis’ must be noticed. Belief is not the word to be used. The monistic element in the *Nasadiya sukta* must have served as a springboard for the *Upanishads*. Monism was established in two stages.

First they achieved the unity behind diversity in external world and unity in diverse forms of life followed by identification of Brahman and Atman. In the second stage, *Brahman* and *Atman* were equated which resulted in monism.

In this connection, there are two questions, which have to be answered. An insight into the philosophy of *Upanishads* enables us to answer. The questions are as follows; (a). How did *Upanishads* establish the identity of *Brahman* and *Atman*? (b) Where was the need for them to establish such identity? Both questions are relevant. Let us take up the second question first. Philosophers did not seek to establish monism for the sake of monism. Any approach is rational, when there are satisfactory grounds to follow the same, not otherwise. The *Upanishadic* philosophers did have reasons to search for unity.

Indeed, as mentioned above, the pursuit of unity is not unique to philosophy. Any attempt to explain or discover the unifying force is inexplicably common to all intellectual endeavors. We can easily notice that every science has looked for the 'origin' of *explicandum* or *explicanda* as the case may be. For example, we have discussion on the 'origin of universe', 'origin of life', but we have not heard of 'origins.' It is true that there are several theories, which purport to explain. But all of them cannot be true though all of them can be false. Indeed, not even two of them can be true. Against this backdrop, we should try to understand the attempts of the *Upanishadic* philosophers. Further, it should be noted that correctness or wrongness of their answers is not important, but the endeavor is.

The *Upanishads* have synthesized or integrated the problems of two sciences; astrophysics and life sciences. Astrophysics aims at discovering the source of the universe apart from its age. When the *Upanishads* posited the idea of *Brahman*, they were only prelude to what astrophysics is doing today. Similarly, when the *Upanishads* traced the origin of life to the idea of *Atman*, they were, again, prelude to life sciences.

This explanation constitutes a part of the solution to the second question. Let us now consider the second part. It is better to begin the explanation with problem. It is what is known as the problem of self-identity. It is a well-known fact that any living being is born, grows and decays. The process is continuous. So far, there is no riddle. What, if the change is total? If change is just continuous, or total, then it will not give rise to any serious philosophic problem. But if it is total and continuous simultaneously, then we face a very difficult situation. What is it exactly that changes? If we suppose that what changes is 'A', then even before we began to answer the question it would have become something different and it is no longer 'A'. So, we do not know what changes, nor can we convincingly say 'nothing'. In that case, it is tantamount to saying that there is no change at all, which is equally absurd. Then, how do the *Upanishads* wriggle out of this issue?

The *Upanishads* admitted that the change is continuous, but denied that it is total. If we consider the physical framework, viz., body, it changes continuously. If the 'individual' is associated with the body, then it is impossible to account for the identity amidst all changes. Common sense suggests that an individual, say, Einstein, remains Einstein only. He does not become somebody else despite all changes that took place. It shows that there is an element in man which remains unchanged from the moment of fertilization of ovum to the moment of death.

An unchanging element should be, obviously, distinct from the ever-changing component, viz., body. Always an individual is recognized and identified in virtue of this unchanging element. Therefore it alone constitutes the essence of man. This is what the *Upanishads* called ‘*Atman*’ or self. If life is common to all living beings, then, the essence of living beings must remain the same. So, there can be only one *Atman*.

One issue remains to be resolved. Between change and permanence, what deserves to be accepted? Instead, if we ask between the two, which is true or real, then the question becomes too complicated. Accepting something is a matter of convention, which cannot be easily challenged. Knowingly or unknowingly, the *Upanishads* chose the latter which became the root cause of all philosophical controversies. The reasons for this choice are psychological. Not only among *Aryans*, but also among ancient Greeks, the desire to achieve eternity or permanence is more than explicit. Hence not only *Atman* is one, but also it is permanent according to the *Upanishads*.

This is what precisely the *Upanishads* tried to establish. The visible world has a source and it is called *Brahman*. Now diverse objects, both living and non-living are traced two primal sources. *Brahman* and *Atman*. Any scientist, perhaps, would have derived satisfaction with this dichotomy but not the *Upanishadic* philosophers. In this sense, they were several steps ahead of science. They went on to identify *Atman* with *Brahman*. This will take us to the first question raised earlier.

While answering the manner in which the identity was established M. Hiriyanna argues that the analysis of *Atman* and *Brahman* are subjective and objective respectively. His argument is not tenable. Only systems stipulate that method adopted should match content. In other words, same method may not apply to two sciences, if they are well developed and systematized. Obviously, the *Upanishads* are not regarded as systems of philosophy. One more reason can be advanced against Hiriyanna’s argument. If the source of man and the universe is the same, it is unlikely that according to the *Upanishads*, we need one method to trace the source of human and another method to trace the origin of the Universe. If human is not distinct from the universe, then why do we need two different methods? There are *mantras* in the *rigveda*, which trace the origin of human to the universe. We can consider two examples ‘*chakshossuryo ajaayata*’ (from the sun is born the eye) is one *mantra*, which can be compared with another; ‘*suryam gacchatu*’ (let your eyes reside in the sun) a *manthra* from *aurdhva daihika*. Similarly, compare this *mantra* from *purusha sukata*, ‘*praanaat vayurajaayata*’ (from *vayu* is born the life or breath) with another *mantra* from *aurdhva daihika sukta*, ‘*vaatamaatmaadyancha gacchha*’ (Let your breath reside in *vayu*). It is interesting to note that both these *sukta* are found in the tenth *Mandala* of the *Rigveda*. Therefore it is difficult to conclude that the *Upanishadic* philosophers, consciously, pursued these two methods. For the same reasons, it is difficult to accept that *Brahman* is objective and uncertain whereas *Atman* is subjective and certain.

Let us start with the result achieved. Monism in the *Upanishads* consists in establishing the identity of *Brahman* and *Atman*. Secondly, it is idealistic. The second characterization is based upon the nature of *Brahman*. The *Taittiriopanishad* characterizes *Brahman* as *satyam*, *jnanam*, *anantam*. Since

*Brahman* and *Atman* are identical, whatever explanations apply to *Brahman* also applies to *Atman*, *Satyam* stands for certainty, *jnanam* to its spiritual nature and *anantam* to its infinite character. What is infinite is necessarily 'Absolute'.

This particular identity is of critical importance in the *Upanishads*. This is explicated in two ways; one affirmative and another negative. These two types developed into two important theories called *Brahma-Parinama Vāda* and *Brahm Vivarta Vāda*, which played critical role in subsequent philosophy. Hiriyanna calls first type cosmic or *saprapancha* and second type acosmic or *misrapancha*. Affirmative interpretation of *Brahman-Atman* identity can be traced to the *Chandogya Upanishad*. This theory developed by *Uddaalaka*, the main speaker, is called *Shandilya Vidya* whereas the second theory is developed by *Yajnyavalkya*, which is found in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.

Let us consider *Uddaalaka*'s theory. He begins with the statement, '*sarvam khalvidam brahma tadjalaaniti*' (all is *brahman* because it is *tajjalan*). *Tajjalan* is made up of the following words; *tat* (that), *ja* (generate), *li* (dissolve) *an* (sustain). '*Ja*' also means 'cause & birth'. After defining *Brahman* in this manner, *Uddaalaka* proceeds to establish the concept of "*Brahman-Atman*" as a single principle as against *Brahman* & *Atman* as different principles. The *Atman*, inside the heart, is much smaller than corn, but externally it includes and transcends even deep space and hence infinite. Theoretically, this is not something impossible, nor is it absurd. This is something analogous to a giant star becoming a dwarf. If we are ready to take one more step forward we can assert in this way. If all laws of nature, which hold good at the level of microphysics also hold good at the level of macrophysics, then, the nature of subatomic particles must be the same as the nature of celestial bodies. It should be noted that *Atman-Brahman* identity corresponds exactly to the equation between subatomic world and celestial world. What separates, then, *Atman* from *Brahman*? The Physical frame, which separates *Atman* from *Brahman*, is only artificial. So separation also is artificial. What is internal is called '*Antaryami*'. So *Atman* is *antaryami*. Another *Mantra* of *Shandilya Vidya* describes *Brahman* as '*Manomaya* and *Akashatma*'. *Manomaya* means that *Brahman* is spiritual; A *akashatma* means that it has the nature of *Ākāśa*. *Ākāśa* is formless. Therefore *Brahman* is formless. 'Immaterial' is understood as that which is spiritual and formless. If we should borrow from the *Vedic* language, then we can as well say that the Lord of this universe is immaterial principle. The same *Mantra* describes this principle as '*sarvakarma*'. This description comes very close to '*vishwakarma*' of monotheism. However, the difference is that monotheism has theistic element, whereas '*sarvakarma*' is free from it.

Philosophically speaking, *Uddaalaka* is in an advantageous position when he regards *Brahman* as spiritual. There is absolutely nothing wrong in admitting that life and spirit are co-extensive and co-terminus. It means that life and *Brahman* are identical because both are spiritual. If we accept this equation, then it is easy to explain the origin of the Universe. On the other hand, if *Brahman* is regarded as material then it becomes very difficult to trace the origin of the universe. How can life originate from non life? So we succeeded in avoiding this problem. Aristotle also faced a similar situation in order to explain the origin of motion he had to admit that there is 'unmoved mover'. Perhaps it is very difficult, if not impossible, to discover a satisfactory solution to the question; how can, what did not exist earlier, come into existence? Instead, if we assume

that all pervasive life is eternal, this problem does not arise. Even if we admit that matter is different from *Brahman*, we do not have to face the question; how can matter come out of life? We should notice some sort of asymmetry between life and matter. Though we can challenge the origin of life from matter, we do not challenge the origin of matter from life. For example, hair and nail do not possess life, though they are parts of living beings. If a nonliving entity like the one mentioned above grows out of a living entity, then according to Hiriyanna, perhaps *Tajjalan* implies cosmic view (all inclusive). *Brahman* is not only ‘*sarvakarma*’, but also is ‘*sarvam idam abhyattaha*’ (encompasses all). The last statement should be taken in literal sense. If *Brahman* encompasses ‘all’ then there is nothing exterior to it. If the word ‘philosopher’ is taken in a highly restricted sense, then *Uddaalaka* can be regarded as the first philosopher.

Before we learn more about *Uddaalaka*’s philosophy, we should consider *Yajnyavalkya*’s argument. His arguments constitute the main theme of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. In the eighth *Brahman* of *Munikanda*, *Gargi* confronts *Yajnyavalkya* with a series of questions. The purpose of the debate is to know the origin of the universe. While answering the first question, *Yajnyavalkya* states that *Ākāśa* is the source of the universe and to the next question he says that *Ākāśa* is covered by *Akshara*. *Yajnyavalkya* takes next step to describe *Akshara* in negative terms. While in Indian philosophy, in general, *Ākāśa* is regarded as one of the five elements, in this particular context; *Akshara* can be regarded as equivalent to space. Here positive description is conspicuous in its absence. Such description is possible only when attributes are admitted. *Akshara* is regarded not only as permanent but also as ‘*nirguna*’. In this respect, *Akshara* comes very close to ‘*Noumenon*’, which, in western tradition, means that which is beyond reason and experience. *Akshara* can be said to be the precursor to the *Advaita*’s ‘*nirguna brahman*’ concept. When attributes are discovered in anything or when we describe anything with the help of attributes, we impose restrictions on it. Hence what is infinite becomes finite. The ninth *Mantra* in this *Brahmana* asserts that order or ‘*Rita*’, a concept of the *Rig Veda* is possible because of the legislation, which is due to *Akshara*. But it does not establish *Atman* – *Brahman* identity. What the ninth *Mantra* further says also is irrelevant. But for us the eleventh *Mantra* is important. In this *Mantra* *Akshara* is regarded as ‘*SAAKSHI*’. *Saakshi* is described by *Yajnyavalkya* in this manner, ‘*na anyat ataha asti shrotru, ...mantru, ...vijnatru* (no other listener, no other spirit, which recollects or meditates and no other extraordinary knower). *Shrotru*, *Mantru* and *Vijnatru* correspond to *shravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasaua* respectively. *Yajnyavalkya* does not assert that *saakshi* is so. But he only denies that there is nothing else. It only shows that at a higher-level *saakshi* or *Akshara* remains elusive to thought. Let us juxtapose this particular *Mantra* with the seventh *Brahmana*. It asserts that *Atman* is ‘*antaryami*’, an extraordinary knower. Except *Atman*, there is none which is ‘*drishta* (one who sees) listener meditates and so on. If we integrate these two *Mantras*, then we will have positive and negative analysis, which completes description. This particular synthesis alone can be regarded as proof of *Brahman* – *Atman* equation. If *Atman* is *antaryami*, then, we can invent a word and claim that *Brahman* is *bahiryami*

However, this *antaryami-bahiryami* distinction itself is unwarranted, if the physical frame, i.e., body is not real or if the body is regarded on par with external world because the roots of external world are traced to *Brahman*. Then, there is no hurdle to equate *Atman* with *Brahman*.

The theories of *Uddaalaka* and *Yajnyavalkya* are of special importance for different reasons. While *Yajnyavalkya*'s theory is the precursor to the *Advaita*, *Uddaalaka*'s theory is a precursor to science. Hence his theory can be regarded as pre-science. In the second place, from these two expositions, two theories of causation developed. They are for all philosophical purposes the earliest theories of causation in Indian philosophy. *Brahma-Vivarta Vāda* and *Brahma-Parinama Vāda* developed respectively from the above-mentioned theories. A brief description of these theories is desirable.

*Brahma-Vivarta Vāda* regards *Brahman* as the cause, which is real and the world as the effect, which is merely an appearance. It means that *Brahman* does not really change but appears to change. Since apart from *Brahman* nothing else is real and the external world would not exist but for *Brahman*, the *Upanishads* regard *Brahman* as absolute. Such an argument demolishes any distinction between *Brahman* and the rest since 'the rest' is simply dissolved. It is in this sense that the notion of *Maya* enters Indian philosophy, which played key role in the *Advaita*. A theory of this type leads to a strange conclusion that while the cause is real, the effect is not real.

On the contrary, *Brahma-Parinama Vāda* regards the universe as real. Accordingly, cause i.e., *Brahman* and *Atman*, and effect is also real. This is possible because *Brahman* evolves into the physical world, which subsequently, reabsorbed into it. When *Brahman* is evolved into the physical world, it does not really go out of *Brahman*. It means that the evolution, which takes place, is wholly internal. While *Brahma-Vivarta Vāda* signifies that *Brahman* is transcendental, *Brahma-Parinama Vāda* signifies that *Brahman* is immanent in the world. No matter which theory is accepted, the world is not independent of *Brahman*.

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What are the two stages in which monism was established?

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2) How did Upanishads synthesize the problems of astrophysics and life-sciences?

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## 1.8 THE IRRELEVANCE OF *BHAKTI*

Designating *Brahman* as absolute is of strategic importance. Whatever fragile relation was there between philosophy and religion persisted till the *Upanishads* gained foothold. The advent of the 'Absolute' notion of *Brahman* became fatal to this relation. Any religion, as a matter of fact, remains influential if *bhakti* or devotion is recognized as a principal factor. And *bhakti* has a respectable place when *bhakta* (devotee) is distinct from God. When Absolute takes over the position of God, this distinction between God and devotee vanishes in which case, *bhakti* also collapses. Obviously, such a collapse renders religion wholly irrelevant.

Secondly, there are *Upanishads* like *Chandogya*, which deal with *upaasana* of various non-physical or non-empirical principles like '*Sama*'. The word *upaasana* can be taken to mean roughly, sustained pursuit of a spiritual goal unaffected by any factor. These goals are not merely non-empirical but should be regarded as metaphysical because they go beyond logic also. But the advocates of philosophy-religious nexus sidestep an important component, viz, *bhakti*. Devotion is invariably a bond, which relates the devotee only to personal god. Nowhere in the *Upanishads* is there any reference, whether direct or indirect, to personal god. When personal god has no place, devotion also loses its place. In the *Upanishads*, even *Brahmanic* rituals do not find any respectable place. Therefore even in that particular sense, the gods are not propitiated in the *Upanishads*. Mere reference to *Karma* or liturgy is not a significant ground because the *Upanishads* are called '*Jñāna Kānda*' contrary to the *Brahmanas*, which are called *Karma Kanda*. The relative position of *Karma* and *Jñāna* are important. The *Upanishads* cannot be treated on par with the *Brahmanas* because here *Karma* plays only second fiddle. Moreover, if we consider the spirit of the *Upanishads*, then we can safely conclude that the term '*Upanishad*' applies only to certain prominent, but very few, formula-type statements, like, '*ayamaatma brahma*' while the rest of the text has to be treated as appendices. They were appended by different people at different times for reasons best known to themselves. So the choice is between religion and philosophy or religion and spirituality. Surely, these two pairs are not mutually compatible, but philosophy and spirituality are compatible.

It is not that religion and philosophy are poles apart in Indian tradition. Theism did make inroads into philosophy. We have the *Bhagavadgita*, which glorifies theistic cult. Much later, two other schools, viz., the *Vishishtadvaita* and the *Dvaita* pursued the same trend. The point is that it is impossible to insulate philosophy from any such intrusion. This is a natural process. But it is an inaccurate judgment to generalize the characteristics, which are exceptions. However, this distinction between philosophy and religion offers little consolation. When we are interested in pure philosophy spirituality also takes back seat. Hence, need arises to distinguish in the *Upanishadic* thoughts which are philosophical from thoughts which are spiritual. Against this background, we should try to understand Hiriyanna's remarks, previously mentioned, with reference to the composition of the *Upanishads*.

We should also notice what is common to religion and spirituality. No matter which one is infused into philosophy, it neither gains nor loses by such intrusion.

Gain is possible, though, only marginally. Surely, there can be no loss. What is required is that we should be in a position to demarcate philosophy from what is not philosophy.

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## 1.9 THE ANALYSIS OF MIND

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There is a very clear difference between Indian and Western traditions. In the West, mind was regarded as independent of body but identical with soul. But in Indian tradition, mind or *manas* and soul or *Atman* are distinct, but mind and body are not distinct. This difference between *atman* and *manas* is very clear in the *Brihadaranyaka* and the *Taittiriya* '*ayamaatmaa vangmayo manomayaha,...*' means that *manas* is a state of *Atman*. *Prana* is another state of *Atman*. The same *Mantra* says what *manas* is; it is through *manas* that seeing and listening are possible; *manas* is desire, will and so on. Thinking, feeling and willing which are regarded as functions of mind are more or less endorsed by the *Brihadaranyaka*

*Manas* is one state of *Atma*. A state of *Atma* is called '*Kosha*'. If mind is one state, then body (*anna*) must be another state of *Atma*. The *Taittiriya* says '*purushaha annarasa mayaha*' (*Purusha* is the body-state). In this case, *purusha* is the off-short of *Atman*. If *purusha* is the body-state then, how can *Atman* also be in this state? The word off-short can be understood in this way. *Atman* is 'transformed' into *Purusha* or appears to have been transformed. This transformation is the 'birth' of *purusha*. When this change occurs, *Annamaya kosha* becomes the outer sheath of *Atman*. *Prana*, *manas*, *vijnana* and *Ananda* constitute the integrated sheaths. While the first *kosha* is at rudimentary level, the last one is at the highest level. In empirical sense, *Atman* is in bondage in all these five states. *Atman* should transcend the last state also to attain *moksha*. *Moksha* only means freedom from bondage. This is what is known as '*jivanmukti*' or liberation during this lifespan. This is what is called '*upashantoyam atma*'. Obviously; this is something outside pure philosophy. But then it is only through an intensive training in philosophy that *moksha* can be attained; not otherwise. But the point is that this is the view of Indian philosophers only. It cannot be regarded as a characteristic of philosophy in general.

Now, we shall turn to mind. The states of mind, very interestingly, correlate with the states of matter which physics recognizes today. We shall juxtapose them in the following manner.

Matter	Mind
1) Solid	Jagrut (Waking)
2) Liquid	Swapna (Dream)
3) Gas	Deep sleep (Sushupti)
4) Plasma	Turiya (Transcendental)

It should be noted that in both the cases (mind and matter) as we pass from the first stage to the last one, we realise that we pass from 'concrete' to 'abstract'. The last stages of both matter and mind defy description. With regard to mind it is sufficient to distinguish between first three states. In the first state both senses and motor organs are active. In the second state, sense organs become inactive and in the third both sense and motor organs become inactive. What is at the initial stage can be understood easily, but not what is at the final stage, because

the last stage is abstract. Same explanation holds good for matter also. The last states of both mind and matter fall outside the scope of common man. *Turiya* is inexplicable. It only has to be experienced. And the experience of *Turiya* is possible only for a select few. Consequently, it is something, which cannot be challenged.

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## 1.10 MOKSHA AND KNOWLEDGE OR REALIZATION

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Earlier (5.1.6) a reference was made to lower knowledge and higher knowledge. The main theme of the *Upanishads* is that only higher knowledge is the means to attain *moksha*. It is not just *avidya*, which is shunned but even *apara vidya* (knowledge of *Vedas*) is useless. The critically important point to be noted is that even *Vedanta* does not regard the *Vedas* as final authority. To say that the *Vedic* thought culminated in *Vedanta* is to assert that *Vedanta* is purged of the shortcomings of The *Vedas*. Contrary to widespread belief, it was neither *Buddhism* nor *Jainism*, which initially denounced the *Vedic* authority. The *Upanishads* initiated the process. It shows that critical appraisal is internal to philosophy, whether Indian or Western. This is an issue, which has been hardly recognized and admitted. So it has to be highlighted.

Let us return to *moksha*. The *Upanishads* recognize *videha mukti* (*moksha* after death) also. But *Jivan Mukti* deserves preferential treatment. To put *Upanishadic* approach to *moksha* in a nutshell, the *Upanishads* admit that ignorance is the source of evil. In this respect both Socrates and the *Buddha* concur with the *Upanishads*. What is *avidya*? According to the *Upanishads* (in this respect, of course, the *Upanishads* stand alone), seeing difference, where there is none, is *avidya*. It is also the cause for *ahamkara*. When *avidya* is dispelled *ahamkara* also vanishes. There are three stages to eliminate evil. *Shravana* (listen), *manana* (reflection) and *nididhyasana* (dhyana). So it is obvious that learning is only through 'Guru'. Not everyone may attain *moksha*. But there is no harm in regarding *moksha* as an ideal.

In addition to *jñāna*, *vairagya* has to be cultivated. *Vairagya* in real sense means detachment or disinterestedness, which is not the same as indifference. It is possible to cultivate *vairagya* when generosity is cultivated. *Brahma jñāna* and unselfishness are equated. Generosity and unselfishness are meaningless if man is not a part of society. It means that *Jivanmukti* does not denounce social life.

### Check Your Progress III

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Substantiate the statement that 'critical appraisal is internal to philosophy.'

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2) What is *avidya* according to the Upanishads?

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## 1.11 LET US SUM UP

The *Upanishads* are called *Vedanta* because they constitute the culmination of the *Vedic* thought. The *Upanishads* developed in opposition to the spirit of the *Brahmanas*. The *Upanishads* provided the required breakthrough by introducing genuine philosophical concepts, viz., *Brahman* and *Atman* and discarding the *Vedic* gods. In addition, the *Upanishads* pursued the search for unitary principle behind the visible universe. The identification process was carried out by *Uddaalaka* in affirmative method whereas *Yajnyavalkya* did it through negation. *Uddaalaka*'s contribution is significant because he introduced to philosophy, for the first time, elements of science. Mind and soul are distinguished whereas mind and body are associated. Knowledge is of two types; higher and lower. Higher knowledge and *vairagya* together are precondition to the attainment of *moksha*.

## 1.12 KEY WORDS

**Monism and Idealism** : Monism is one doctrine of reality. According to this doctrine, what is ultimately real is 'one'. By saying so, it denies the reality of 'many'. Idealism is another philosophical doctrine, which is concerned with the nature of reality. This doctrine means that reality, which is one, is not physical or matter, but mind-dependent or mental.

**Brahman and Atman** : The significance of the *Upanishads* lies in introducing these terms. Etymologically, the term *Brahman* means to 'grow' or 'burst forth'. It is derived from the word '*Brih*'. Another meaning assigned to this term is prayer. *Atman* is another term, which was used as complementary to *Brahman* initially. It meant originally 'breath'. Later it came to mean the 'essence of human.'

## 1.13 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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## 1.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Answers to Check Your Progress I

- 1) *Upa* (near), *ni* (devotion) and *sat* (sit), have together formed the word the *Upanishad*. When rearranged it only means to sit near (the Guru) with devotion. Here the word 'near' has an inner meaning, which is important. It shows that the *Upanishadic* teaching is not open to all. Only those who deserve shall receive the training.
- 2) The thinkers, who initiated the *Upanishadic* thought were not happy with ordinary knowledge. They argued that knowledge obtained from the *Vedas* was only lower knowledge (*aparaa vidyaa*), which is impermanent. What they sought was permanent knowledge (*paraa vidyaa*).

### Answers to Check Your Progress II

- 1) Monism was established in two stages. First they achieved the unity behind diversity in external world and unity in diverse forms of life followed by identification of Brahman and Atman. In the second stage, *Brahman* and *Atman* were equated which resulted in monism.
- 2) The *Upanishads* have synthesized or integrated the problems of two sciences; astrophysics and life sciences. Astrophysics aims at discovering the source of the universe apart from its age. When the *Upanishads* posited the idea of *Brahman*, they were only prelude to what astrophysics is doing today. Similarly, when the *Upanishads* traced the origin of life to the idea of *Atman*, they were, again, prelude to life sciences.

### Answers to Check Your Progress III

- 1) To say that the *Vedic* thought culminated in *Vedanta* is to assert that *Vedanta* is purged of the shortcomings of the *Vedas*. Contrary to widespread belief, it was neither *Buddhism* nor *Jainism*, which initially denounced the *Vedic* authority. The *Upanishads* initiated the process. It shows that critical appraisal is internal to philosophy, whether Indian or Western.
- 2) According to the *Upanishads* (in this respect, of course, the *Upanishads* stand alone), seeing difference, where there is none, is *avidya*. It is also the cause for *ahamkara*. When *avidya* is dispelled *ahamkara* also vanishes.