

20 UPANISHADS

1. The Jnanakanda of the Vedas comprises the Upanishads and is known by the name of Vedanta, the pinnacle of the Shrutis, as it is called. Wherever you find the Acharyas quoting a passage from the Shrutis, it is invariably from the Upanishads, The Vedanta is now the religion of the Hindus. If any sect in India wants to have its ideas established with a firm hold on the people, it must base them on the authority of the Vedanta.
2. All the books contained in the Upanishads have one subject, one task before them-to prove the following theme: "Just as by the knowledge of one lump of clay we have the knowledge of all the clay in the universe, so what is that, knowing which we know everything in the universe?"
3. The Upanishads are the great mine of strength. Therein lies strength enough to invigorate the whole world; the whole world can be vivified, made strong, energised through them, They will call with trumpet voice upon the weak, the miserable and the downtrodden of all races, all creeds and all sects, to stand on their feet and be free, freedom, physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom are the watchword of the Upanishads.
4. In modern language, the theme of the Upanishads is to find an ultimate unity of things. Knowledge is nothing but finding unity in the midst of diversity. Every science is based upon this; all human knowledge is based upon the finding of unity in the midst of diversity, and if it is the task of small fragments of human knowledge, which we call our sciences, to find unity in the midst of a few different phenomena, the task becomes stupendous when the theme before us is to find unity in the midst of this marvellously diversified universe, where prevail unnumbered differences in name and form, in matter and spirit-each thought differing from every other thought, each form differing from every other form. Yet, to harmonise these many planes and unending Lokas, in the midst of this infinite variety to find unity, is the theme of the Upanishads.
- 5, In the Upanishads, we see a tremendous departure made. It is declared that these heavens, in which men live with the ancestors after death, cannot be permanent, seeing that everything which has name and form must die. If there are heavens with forms, these heavens must vanish in course of time; they may last millions of years, but there must come a time when they will have to go. With this idea came another, that these souls must come back to earth, and that heavens are places where they enjoy the results of their good works, and after these effects are finished they come back into this earth life again.
6. I want to bring to your notice one or two points in the study of the Upanishads. In the first place, they are the most wonderful poems in the world. If you read the Samhita portion of the Vedas, you now and then find passages of most marvellous beauty. For instance, the famous Sloka which describes Chaos: "When darkness was hidden in darkness' so on it: goes. One reads and feels the wonderful sublimity of the poetry. Do you mark this, that outside of India, and inside also, there have been attempts at painting the sublime. But outside, it has always been the infinite in the muscles, the external

world, the infinite of matter, or of space. When Milton or Dante, or any other great European poet, either ancient or modern, wants to paint a picture of the Infinite, he tries to soar outside, to make you feel the Infinite through the muscles. That attempt has been made here also. You find it in the Samhitas, the Infinite of extension, most marvellously painted and placed before the readers, such as has been done, nowhere else.

7. Just as the Greek mind, or the modern European mind wants to find the solution of life and of all the sacred problems of Being by searching into the external world, so also did our forefathers, and just as the Europeans failed, they failed also. But the Western people never made a move more, they remained there, they failed in the search for the solution of the great problems of life and death in the external world, and there they remained, stranded; our fore-fathers also found it impossible, but were bolder in declaring the utter helplessness of the senses to find the solution. Nowhere else was the answer better put than in the Upanishad! `From whence the word comes back reflected, together with the mind." "There the eye cannot go, nor can speech reach." There are various sentences which declare the utter helplessness of the senses, but they do not stop there, they fell back upon the internal nature of man, they went to get the answer from their own soul, they became introspective; they gave up external nature as a failure, as nothing could be done there, as no hope, no answer, could be found; they discovered the dull, dead matter would not give them truth, and they fell back upon the shining soul of man, and there, the answer was found.

8. The one central idea throughout all the Upanishads is that of realisation. (1) -"Know this Atman alone", they declared, "give up all other vain words, and hear no other." In the Atman they found the solution-the greatest of all Atmans, the God, the Lord of this Universe, His relation to the Atman of man, our duty to Him, and through that our relation to each other. And herein you find the most sublime poetry in the world. No more is the attempt made to paint this Atman in the language of matter. Nay, for it they have given up even all positive language. No more is there any attempt to come to the senses to give them the idea of the Infinite, no more is there an external, dull, dead, material, spacious, sensuous infinite, but instead of that comes something, which is as fine as even that mentioned in the saying: There the sun cannot illumine, nor the moon, nor the stars, there this flash of lightning cannot illumine; what to speak of this mortal fire! What poetry in the world can be more sublime than this! Such poetry you find nowhere else.

9. We now come to the teachings of the Upanishads. Various texts are there. Some are Monistic. But there are certain doctrines which are agreed to by all the different sects of India. First, there is the doctrine of Samsara, or reincarnation of the soul. Secondly, they all agree in their psychology; first there is the body, behind that, what they call the Sukshma-Sharira, the mind, and behind that even, is the Jiva. That is the great difference between Western and Indian Psychology; in the Western Psychology the mind is the soul, here it is not The Antahkarana, the internal instrument, as the mind is called, is only an instrument in the handset Jiva, through which the Jiva works on the body, or on the external world. Here they all agree, and they all also agree that this Jiva, or Atman, Jivatman as it is called by various sects, is eternal, without beginning; and that it is going

from birth to birth, until it gets a final release. They all agree in this, and they also all agree in one other most vital point, which alone marks characteristically, most prominently, most vitally, the difference between the Indian and the Western mind, and it is this, that everything is in the soul. There is no inspiration, but properly speaking, expiration. All powers and all purity and all greatness-everything is in the soul.

10. Thus it is that the Vedas proclaim not a dreadful combination of unforgiving laws, not an endless prison of cause and effect, but that at the head of all these laws, in and through every particle of matter and force, stands One, "By whose command the wind blows, the fire burns, the clouds rain, and death stalks upon the earth."