

## MAHAAVAAKYAS OR GREAT MAXIMS FROM VEDAS AND UPANISHADS

Upanishads which contain the essence of the Vedas form the Jnaanakhaanda portion of the Vedas are the very foundation of vedanta philosophy. Upanishadic statements are enigmatic in character. They deal exclusively with the discovery of the fundamental Spiritual Truth. They enshrine the doctrine of 1) the Supreme Brahman 2) the individual Self 3) the ultimate goal of life 4) the way of attaining that ultimate goal of life and 5) the impediments on the way of that attainment.

Every individual soul is only a focus, as it were in one infinite Consciousness, referred to as Brahman in all the Upanishads. Upadhis are the limitations of our souls. They are in simple terms the physical, mental and moral conditions under which we have to work in life. When these upadhis are removed, what we call the individual soul is identical with the universal soul.

The great maxims contained in four Upanishads of the four Vedas describe Brahman as:

1. "Praajnam Brahman"—Aitreya Upanishad of Rigveda, meaning "Intelligence or Consciousness is Brahman."
2. "Aham Brahmaasmi"—Brihadaraanyaka Upanishad of Yajurveda, meaning "I am Brahman"
3. "Tatvamasi"—Chandogya upanishad of Saamaveda, meaning "That thou art"
4. "Ayam aatma Brahman"—Mandookya Upanishad of Atharvaveda, meaning "This Self or aatma is Brahman"

These four maxims are called as 'Mahaa vaakyas' or 'great maxims or mottos' which were direct revelations to the seers. Upanishads do not talk about personal God except Svetasvataropanishad, which mentions Rudra as Brahman. Etymologically the word Rudra in Sanskrit is derived as 'rutaat-kashtaata draavyati iti rudraha' meaning the chaser of tribulations, trials and torments of the devotees. According to Vishishtadvaita, Rudra signifies the supreme Paramaatman and not the well known Rudradeva, Siva. It is therefore proper to conclude that Upanishads dwell on superior and most difficult Jnaana yoga in the pursuit of the Absolute, which is the climax of the spiritual quest. Karma yoga and Bhakti yoga are the other paths of salvation which were not brought to light in Upanishads as such but are dealt at great length in Bhagavadgeeta, which are widely practiced in Kaliyuga and are more suited to the present

times. Bhaktimaarga maintains personal relationship with the Supreme in various forms and avataaras(incarnations). The Aranyakas shifted the emphasis from the ritualistic to philosophical thought which work was completed by the Upanishads. The Upanishads also develop the monistic ideas scattered in the Samhitas, as conveyed forcibly in the Mahavakyas. It is interesting to note that criticism directed against ritualism and ceremonialism are not directed against philosophical conception found in the Mantras which are faithfully acknowledged and vividly developed in the Upanishads.

The Upanishads were grappled with the problem of plurality of God (celestial) and came out with the solution of Advaita. The four Amnaya mathas(monastic centers) of advaita philosophy founded by Jagadguru Sankaraacharya have adopted these Mahaavaakyas as their mottos. Sri Sankaraacharya established his monastic centers in four corners of India—Dwaraka, Badrinath, Puri and Sringeri:

1. Dwaraka Kaalika Matha—“Tatvamasi”
2. Badrkashrama Jyotir Matha—“Ayamaatma Brahman”
3. Jagannaatha Govardhan Matha—“Praajnam Brahman”
4. Sringeri Saarada Matha—“Aham Brahmaasmi”

Eventhough not considered amongst four Mahaavaakyas, the following two oft-quoted maxims can be considered as Mahaa Vaakyas.

These are: “Satyameva Jayate” and “Eko vipraaha Bahudaa Vadanti”.

“Satyameva Jayate” is contained in the mantra 3-1-6 of Mundakopanishad, meaning ‘Truth alone wins’. The word Satyam contains three letters ‘sath’, ‘thee’ and ‘yam’. What is designated as ‘sath’ is immortal (the order of sentient). That which is designated as ‘thee’ is the mortal (the order of non-sentient). That which is designated by ‘yam’, is Brahman, because the two signified by the forms of sentient and non-sentient is regulated by the Supreme Brahman implying thereby that ‘satyam’ is Brahman (Chandogyopanishad 8-3-5).

“Ekam sat viprah bahuda vadanti’ is contained in Rigveda 1-164-46, meaning the Supreme or Brahman is addressed by many ways by the learned seers: “That which they call Indra, Mitra, Varuna and Agni, as also the celestial beautiful feathered eagle—that which is the ONE being, the sages call by manifold ways”.

Our scriptures have given further guidelines on the nature of Brahman, the Universal Self. These are:

Sarvam Kalvidam Brahman (Everything is, indeed, the Brahman)

Ekam Ewadwiteeyam (It is one, without second)

Satyam Jnaanam Anantam Brahman (The Brahman is Truth, Knowledge and is Infinite and Eternal)

One could see the upanishadic influence in ancient religions like the Jewish religion. The Jews were called Indians by the Greeks, Judea (yaudheyas) by the Syrians and Kalanis or orthodox people by the Indians. God is named “Jehovah” by the Jews, meaning ‘I am that’. Its close proximity to “Aham Brahmaasmi”, the Mahaavaakya from Brihadaraanyaka upanishad, meaning the same thing is worth noting.

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