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## MAHAVAKYAS IN UPANISHADS: RELEVANCE IN YOGIC PRACTICE

Dr. Rajarshi Kayal

Assistant Professor, Department of Physical Education,  
Pingla Thana Mahavidyalaya, Maligram, Paschim Medinipur,  
West Bengal - 721140, India

**Abstract:** In Upanishads, there are some great sentences for contemplations. These great sentences are known as the *mahavakyas*. Similarly we can find such practices in yogic meditation, prayer and utterance of mantras. Both of these can be used as soul mate practice. But the practice never becomes fruitful only in believing; rather scholarly exploration helps in greater understanding. Then the perceived reflection transforms into insight. *Vairagya* and *abhyasa* in yogic practices help to transcend all levels of false identity of the human being and finally leads to '*Prajnanam Brahma*', '*Aham Brahmāsmi*', '*Tat Tvam Asi.*' and '*Ayam Atma Brahma.*'

**Index Terms:** *Mahavakyas*, *Upanishadas*, *Yoga*.

### Introduction

We know that the word 'yoga' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'yuj'. It means union, connection or relation. A popular definition of yoga describes that 'yoga is the union of *Jibatman* with *Paramatman*.' In this view, the experiencing self (*jivĀtman*) is in reality not different from *Ātman-Brahman* (Menon, 2012), the highest Self and ultimate Reality, and *jivatman* or individual self is a mere reflection or limitation of singular *Ātman* in a multitude of apparent individual bodies (Indich, 2000).

The experiencing self (*jīva*) and the transcendental self of the Universe (*ātman*) are in reality identical (both are Brahman), though the individual self seems different as space within a container seems different from space as such. These cardinal doctrines are represented in the anonymous verse "*brahma satyam jagan mithya; jīvo brahmaiva na aparah*" (*Brahman* is alone True, and this world of plurality is an error; the individual self is not different from Brahman) (Menon, 2012). Brahman (the Absolute) is alone real; this world is unreal; and the Jiva or individual soul is non-different from Brahman (Sivananda, 1993).

The non-difference existence is *A-davaita*. The interpretation of *advaita* that is the most common equates non-duality with monism and acosmic illusionism. Only the Absolute, or the paraa brahma, is said to exist; everything else is but an illusory appearance (*Malkovsky, 2000*). Literally the term Advaita means non-secondness, nondualism and equated with monism. Generally, monism states that all existing things go back to a source that is distinct from them; e.g., in Neoplatonism everything is derived from The One (*Brugger, 1972*).

### Quotations in Upanishadas

Some popular quotations of the Upanishadas are -

- *Brhma Satyam Jagan Mithya*
- *Ekam evadvitiam brahma*
- *Prajnanam brahman*
- *Tat tvam asi*
- *Ayam atma brahma*
- *Aham brahmasmi*
- *Sarvam khalidam brahma*
- *So 'ham*

According to the classical *Advaita* Vedanta, all in real world and everything that we can experience has its root in Brahman. The Brahman is the unchanging consciousness. There is no duality or separation between the Creator (*Strasta*) and the Created (*Srtisti*). This is the essence of the Upanishads. There are so many the great sayings in Upanishads supporting the insight that the individual self (*jiva*) is the manifestation of the whole (*Brahman*). Such Sentences, sayings or utterance for contemplation' are known as *Mahavakyas*. Among them, four (each one from each of the four Vedas) are described or discussed much as *Advaita* School of Vedanta.

### Upanishadic Mahavakyas

*Mahavakyas* are 'sacred sentences' in the 'Srutis'. These are:

#### ❖ 'Prajnanam Brahma'

- Source: Aitareya Upanishad 3.3 of the Rig Veda.
- Meaning: '*Prajnana*' means knowledge, wisdom, intelligence or consciousness and '*Brahma*' means 'infinite', The Absolute, The Highest Truth. Therefore, '*Prajnanam Brahma*' as a whole means '*Prajna*' or the wisdom is itself the '*Brahma*' or consciousness. The person is a truly wise who attains '*Prajna*' '*Brahmanhood*'. The knowledge of Brahman is not intuition of Brahman but itself is Brahman. (*Loy, 1997*).

## ❖ 'Aham Brahmāsmi'

- Source: *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad 1.4.10 of the *Yajur Veda*
- Meaning: Literally 'Aham' means 'I', 'Brahma' means 'Absolute' and 'Asmi' means 'being'. Therefore '*Aham Brahmāsmi*' refers to that identity which is cosmic. That means 'I am the Absolute Brahma'. Each one is a part of the absolute omnipresent almighty.

## ❖ 'Tat Tvam Asi.'

- Source: Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7 of the Sama Veda
- Meaning: 'Tat' means 'that', 'it', or 'absolute'; 'Tvam' means 'thou' / 'you'; and 'Asi' means 'art' / 'are'. Therefore '*tāt tvam āsi*' symbolizes 'That you are' / 'you are that'. That means the Supreme Being (*sat /satya*).

## ❖ 'Ayam Atma Brahma.'

- Source: Mandukya Upanishad 1.2 of the Atharva Veda
- Meaning: 'Aham' means 'I'; 'Atma' means 'Atman', 'self' or 'essence' and 'Brahma' means 'Absolute'. Therefore, the Self (Atman) is Brahman. Atman and Brahman are the same. *Brahman* is this self (*ātman*); that [*brahman*] is this self (*ātman*) consisting of four quarters (*Olivelle, 2008*).

Here

- i. The first one is *Lakshana Vakya* (definition of Brahman and imparts Tatbodha-Jnana)
- ii. The second one is an *Anubhava Vakya* (Sakshi-Jnana)
- iii. The third one is *Upadesha Vakya* (Siva Jnana)
- iv. The Fourth one is *Sakshatkara Vakya* (Brahma-Jnana) [www.sivanandaonline.org](http://www.sivanandaonline.org)

**Mahavakyas in Yogic Practices**

Once Swami Rama said that Meditation and contemplation are two different techniques, yet they are complementary to each other. Meditation is a definite method of training oneself on all levels – body, breath, conscious mind, and unconscious mind – while contemplation builds a definite philosophy. Without the support of a solid philosophy, the method of meditation does not lead to higher dimensions of consciousness. Contemplation makes one aware of the existence of the Reality, but Reality can be experienced only through the higher techniques of meditation. In the Vedanta system, meditation and contemplation are both used. When an aspirant tires of meditation because of lack of endurance, then he contemplates on the *mahavakyas* [great contemplations] and studies those scriptures that are helpful in the path of Self-realization and enlightenment. Contemplation, vichara, complements the Vedantic way of meditation, dhyana.

## Meditate on *Mahavakyas*

We can take any Mahavakya and meditate on it as you do on OM. For that we have to follow some stages. These are:

- I. Sitting on any comfortable position or siddhasana with spine erect.
- II. Listening to the sayings of Upanishadas attentively.
- III. Practicing contemplations or *vicharas*.
- IV. One-pointed devotion, full determination and dedication leads to higher state i.e. *nidhidhyasana*.
- V. Acquiring comprehensive knowledge of the ultimate Truth.
- VI. The highest state of contemplation is *sakshatkar*. Perfect self realization is accomplished.
  - i. Meditation on '*Prajnanam Brahma*' / Aham Brahma Asmi / '*Tat Tvam Asi.*' / '*Ayam Atma Brahma*' Practice concentration in a solitary room
  - ii. Mind purification
  - iii. Constant feeling of *Suddha Sat-chit-anand-vyapaka-atman* (Pure, Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute, All-Pervading Brahman).
  - iv. Mental repetition of '*Aham Brahmāsmi*'
  - v. *Becoming superconscious state of through deep feeling.*
  - vi. Attainment of Self-realization.

The feeling of association with infinity, eternity and immortality helps to negate or throw out the *koshas* and facilitate the identity with the essence behind that. At the same time, the feeling of 'I am not the body' and 'I am not the mind' always helps to attain realization of *sat-chit-ananda-swarup*.

## Conclusions

Mahavakyas can be used as affirmations to stabilize the mind on Brahman and self. Contemplation on Mahavakyas will lead to great insight and even transcendental experiences. It leads to purity and inner stability. It will elevate consciousness and keep us in a certain state of mind.

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