

Notes on the Upanishads
Chandogya Upanishad

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Four main themes from the Chandogya Upanishad: (I) All things originate from a single non-differentiated reality, called Brahman. (II) The Self of each person is identical with Brahman, (III) all things originate from the Self, and (IV) all of life is one.

I. Brahman is the Source of All Things

A. Brahman (lit. to expand or enlarge) is the name given to the ultimate reality, especially when viewed in relation to the universe as a whole. Brahman is the non-differentiated or non-dual reality, from which all the plurality or multiplicity of objects arises.

B. Brahman is said to me *sat-chit-ananda*. Sat = enduring being, chit = consciousness, ananda = joy or bliss. Ananda does not mean an emotion or elated feeling, but the fact of fulfillment or completeness that produces all such feelings or emotions.

C. All things come from Brahman and are made of Brahman. Just as different gold necklaces come from and are made of gold, and different pots come from and are made of clay, all objects of experience come from and are made of Brahman. In philosophical language, Brahman would be the material cause of the universe, that is, that out of which it is made, though some passages of the Upanishads also describe Brahman as an efficient cause, as an intelligent agent who makes it. They are therefore manifestations of Brahman.

D. Since Brahman is sat-chit-ananda, all objects come from and are made of being-consciousness, and bliss. Objects are essentially modes or modulations of enduring fulfilled consciousness, as ocean waves are modulations of the ocean. The wave and the ocean are both H₂O.

II. The Self is Identical to Brahman

A. Uddalaka's repeatedly tells his son Shvetaketu "you are that!" (tat tvam asi), Chan. 6.2.3, 6.8.7, 6.9.3, 6.10.3, 6.11.3, 6.12.3, 6.13.3, 6.14.3, 6.15.3. This is one of the most famous statements from *the Upanishads*. It's usually interpreted as, "You, atman, are that Brahman" or "You, Shvetaketu, are that Self, which is identical to Brahman." The context in each case antecedently refers to Brahman being the inner Self or the supreme Self, and then Uddalaka says to Shvetaketu, "you are that," that is, "you are the Self that is Brahman."

B. Like Brahman, the Self is one (non-dual), though it appears to be many. Chan. 6.26.2

C. Some Vedantin philosophers maintain that the essence of the Self is Brahman, but the Self is not *identical* to Brahman. On these views, the Self is distinct from Brahman, though intimately related to Brahman. The Self is related to Brahman as the waves of the sea are related to the ocean, or light rays are related to the sun, as modes, parts, or manifestations of the whole. Tat tvam asi = “You, atman, have Brahman (sat-chit-ananda) as your essence,” as in, “you, individual wave, are a part of the vast ocean whose essence you share.”

III. All Things Originate from the Self

A. If Brahman and Atman are identical, since Brahman is the origin of all things, all things originate from the Self. Chan. 6.26.1.

B. Like Brahman, all things are made of the Self, meaning that all things are modes or modulations of pure consciousness. The essence of everything is the very fulfillment every separate self is seeking. Hence, Uddalaka’s tells his son Shvetaketu “You are that!” That is, you already are that which you seek. Since everything in experience is of the Self, nothing is separate from you.

IV. The Unity of Life

A. The prior points entail the unity of life, another important theme in *the Upanishads*. Chan. 6.1.6, 6.24.1. The essence of every individual thing is non-separateness. The waves of the ocean may be viewed as separate from each other and the ocean, but they are in their essence non-different from each and all.

B. Uddalaka’s tells his son Shvetaketu that “all life is one” (Chan. 6.1.6). His basis for this is that Shvetaketu and every individual is to the Self what individual gold nuggets is to the gold of which they are made. They differ only in name and form, but they come from and are made of one and the same reality. All life is unified in that all things are sat-chit-ananda.

C. All things therefore also return to their source, just as the individual waves of the ocean arise from the ocean and return to it. Name and form are temporary. Only the Self is eternal (sat). Chan. 6.10.1-3

D. One who realizes the Self sees the Self in everything. Chan. 6.25.1