



## Glory of Bharath » Atharva Vedic Upanishads - I

### Prasna Upanishad

In Sanskrit, "Prasna" means question. This text consists of six questions and their answers, hence the name. It is in the form of questions and answers. As narrated in the beginning of this Upanishad, Six pupils interested in knowing divinity or Brahman come to sage Pippalada and request him to clarify their spiritual doubts. Instead of answering immediately, Pippalada asks them to take up penance and Brahmacharya for one year at his place. Upon completion of one year, pupils ask the sage, and then the sage answers their questions.

The pupils who asked the questions were:

The son of Bharadwaja, Sukesha

The son of Shibi, Satyakama

The descendant of Garga, Sauryayaneer

The son of Ashwala, Kausalya

Bhargava of the country of Vidarbha belonging to Bhrigu Gotra

The son of Katya, Kabandhi

Each of them asks one question to Pippalada and answer(s) to it forms a chapter in the Upanishad.

### The Questions

The first question is asked by Kabandhi concerned with the root cause of the universe. The second question asked by Bhargava is concerned with the supremacy of vital Force of Life or Prana over other sense organs of human being. The third question asked by Kausalya is concerned with the origin and functioning of Vital Force of Life. The fourth question asked by Sauryayaneer of Garga Gotra is related to Dream world of the sleeping person. The fifth question is concerned with fruits one gets by meditating on holy syllable OM. The sixth and last question is concerned with the being by whom all this known and unknown universe got created and who has sixteen vital things (kala) or who is called as Shodashakala Purusha.

### First Question

First question asked by Kabandhi puts forth an important issue of spirituality. What is the root cause of this world? In fact, Kabandhi's question is literally "From where (which root) these people are born?" Pippalada answers as if the question were asked about the root cause of the world. He says that Prajapati created a union of Prana and Rayi in order to create world and their intermixing or mating produced all the things in the world. Term Rayi can be interpreted as all subtle and gross physical Matter and Prana can be taken as intangible spirit or active life force. Pippalada extols the greatness of Prana.

### Second Question

Second question is asked by Bhargava of Vidarbha. Question is concerned with relation between senses and Vital Life Force Prana in the body. Pippalada explains that Prana is the main sustainer of the body through an example. The question is "how many divine elements hold the body? which among them makes body living?, who is great among them?" As an answer, Pippalada says that once space, air, fire (heat), water & earth (gross matter) and speech, mind, eye & ear said in pride that they sustain and hold the body. Then Prana (Life Force) tells "Do not be proud, I hold and sustain the body by dividing myself as five forms". But other divine elements did not believe this, then Prana tried to stand up in anger, all other divine elements also rose along with Prana automatically, just like pulled up by string, as if when king bee raises all other worker bees also raise along with it. Then other divine elements realized who their master is and from who they derive their strength. They start pacifying Prana by praising. Rest of the answer tells about the greatness of Prana in the form of praise. Different forms of this "Vital Life Energy" (Prana) are described in the praise. Fire, Air, Indra, Rain, Earth etc. are told to be different forms Prana and is also told to be supporting outer world in the form of luminous Sun. Pippalada also tells that both inner and outer worlds are under the control of Prana.

### Third Question

After learning that Prana is the main sustainer of the body and universe, Kausalya the son of Ashwala, asks the third question about origin of Prana. The question is "From whom Prana originates? How does he come into body? How does he stay by dividing himself? How he leaves the body? How he supports outer and inner worlds?" Pippalada answers that Prana originates from Atman (soul), the way like shadow of the person originates. Prana comes to body by Atman's will. He divides himself into five forms called Ap?na, Vy?na, Ud?na, Sam?na etc. and performs various functions in the body. There are nadis (subtle channels of energy) in the heart in which Prana in the form of Ud?na circulates. Through one of the nadis, Ud?na carries life to heaven during death, if man has done punya (good deeds), and to Naraka (Hell) if he has done p?pa (sin), and to earth (human world) if both p?pa and punya are present. Being in the form of sun, Prana gives light to eye for seeing, thus he supports outer world by assuming form of Sun.

### Fourth Question

Asked by Sauryayaneer Gargya, this question is concerned with dream world of human being. Exact question is "Which elements in Human being actually sleep? Which are awake at that time (while sleeping)? Among these who sees the dream, who feels bliss in it? In whom all these elements merge finally as their final destination?" Following answer is given. The way all sun rays go back into sun at the time of sunset, so are all the senses of man go back into their master the Mind. But still the five Prana's (Vyana, Upana etc.) are awake. The one who sees the dream is mind. During dream less deep sleep this mind merges into Supreme Reality the Akshara, or Brahman. It is final refuge of elements, then Self feels bliss and harmonious.

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### Fifth Question

What fruit does one get who regularly meditates on holy syllable OM till his/her death is the fifth question of Shaibya Satyakama. Pippalada answers that OM indicates supreme reality the Para Brahman and one who meditates will merge into Para Brahman.

### Sixth Question











Final and last question asked by son of Bharadwaja the Sukesha, is about a vedic divine being called "Shodashakala Purusha" or "Person with sixteen divine attributes". Pippalada answers that Shodashakala Purusha is within the body and explains its greatness and says "So far do I know this Highest Brahman; there is nothing higher than it".

### Conclusion

The answers to each of the questions are developed by Pippalada, within a perspective of great depth. The language and concepts of the answers are often abstruse and esoteric, but one may get from them glimpses that are rational and perceptive. Thus, in answering the question on the origin of life, Pippalada starts with the origin of all existence in terms of matter and energy, and develops the answer step by step, till in the last one, he gives as the most direct and immediate origin of life, the sperm of the species. The answer to the last question is, that the ultimate supreme source of all existence is Brahman.

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