

Chapter 2: “tadetad akṣaram brahman” – Akṣarabrahman

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2.1 Siddhāntasamāmnāya

Akṣarabrahman Guru, HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj, wrote a proclamation of the Vedāntic principle, Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. This opening of the chapter is the Sanskrit version as presented by Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami in his Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā. As these words fulfill the role of serving as both an abstract and introduction of the chapter, commencing with insightful and compact contemplation of the subject matter – Vedāntic principles – holds excellent value. At the forefront of this declaration lies the Sanskrit rendition of the authoritative philosophical letter penned by His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, expounding on the principles of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. Next, the Sanskrit is presented in the Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā¹ authored by Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami. Then, an English translation, based on the translation presented at the beginning of the Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā², follows the Sanskrit text.

- अक्षरं ब्रह्म परब्रह्मणो भिन्नं परब्रह्मेव नित्यमेकं त्रिगुणातीतं चेतनं च तत्त्वम् । तत् सदा दिव्यमनन्तकल्याणमयगुणैर्युक्तं मायिकगुणैश्च रहितं सदा निर्दोषम् । अस्य चाऽक्षरब्रह्मणः स्वरूपगुणैश्चर्यादिकमेकमात्रपरब्रह्माऽधीनमेव । परब्रह्मणश्च नित्येच्छया तज्जडचिदात्मकसकलसृष्टेः कारणमाधारं व्यापकं नियामकं शरीरि च ।
- एतदक्षरं ब्रह्म तत्त्वत एकमेव सदपि चतुर्भि रूपैर्विभिन्नसेवारूपं करोति कार्यम् ।
- अक्षरब्रह्म चिदाकाशरूपेणाऽनन्तकोटिब्रह्माण्डानाम् अन्तर्बहिश्च व्याप्याऽवतिष्ठते धरति च तानिति।

¹ Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā 1.6.4, pp. 10-14

² Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā, pp. xxxi-xxxiv; See Appendices 1.A and 1.B for a photocopy of the original Gujarati text in HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s handwriting.

- अक्षरब्रह्म धामरूपेण परब्रह्मणस्तत्सेवायामवस्थितस्य मूर्तिमतोऽक्षरब्रह्मणस्तथाऽनन्तकोट्यक्षरमुक्तानां दिव्यं निवासस्थानम् । एतदक्षरधामैकमेव, नित्यं सदा त्रिगुणातीतं च। अक्षरब्रह्मसाधर्म्यमाप्ता मुक्ता एव शक्नुवन्ति तस्मिन् प्रवेष्टुमिति ।
- अक्षरं ब्रह्म सेवकरूपेण तस्मिन्नेवाऽक्षरधामि परब्रह्मेवैव दिव्यद्विभुजादि-सर्वाङ्गसम्पूर्णपुरुषाकारेण सदैव परब्रह्मणः सेवायामक्षरमुक्तानामादर्शरूपेण रममाणमवतिष्ठत इति ।
- पुनस्तदेवाऽक्षरं संसारे बद्धान् जीवानीश्वरांश्च स्वदिव्यप्रसङ्गेन ब्रह्मरूपान् कृत्वा परब्रह्मोत्तमनिर्विकल्पनिश्चयं कारयितुं, तदात्यन्तिककल्याणाय, कारयितुं च सदैव परमात्मप्राकट्याऽनुभूतिं, परब्रह्मणः सम्यगखण्डं च धारकेण गुरुरूपेण तत्तद्ब्रह्माण्डेषु परमात्मना साकं मनुष्यरूपं धृत्वाऽवतरति, रक्षति सम्प्रदायपरम्पराम्, अनुभावयति च सर्वान् परमसुखम् । अक्षरब्रह्मस्वरूपाणां गुणातीतगुरूणां परम्परायामस्यां गुणातीतानन्दस्वामिमहाराजो भगतजीमहाराजः, शास्त्रिजीमहाराजस्तथा योगिजीमहाराजः प्रकटिताः । परम्परा चेयमखण्डिततया प्रचलत्येव । एकस्मिन् काल एतादृशैकेनैव गुरुणाऽऽत्यन्तिककल्याणमार्गः प्रचलितो वर्तत इति ।

“Akṣarabrahman is distinct from Parabrahman, and like Parabrahman, it is eternal, one, beyond the three *guṇas* (qualities), a *cetana* (sentient) entity, and forever divine. Replete with infinite liberating virtues and devoid of all māyic qualities, it is eternally without faults. This Akṣarabrahman’s form, qualities, powers, etc., depend only on Parabrahman. By Parabrahman’s eternal wish, it is the cause, support, pervader, controller, and *śarīrin* of all creation, which is *jaḍacidātmaka*³.”

“Although Akṣarabrahman is metaphysically one entity, it serves in different ways through four forms.”

“In its Cidākāśa form, Akṣarabrahman pervades within and outside infinite *brahmāṇḍas* and upholds them.”

³ Creation, made of *jada* (insentient) māyā, also contains *cetana* (sentient) beings, therefore it is called *jaḍacidātmaka*. The entity is also called *jadacidātmikā*.

“As the abode (Akṣaradhāman), Akṣarabrahman is the divine abode of i) Parabrahman; ii) the *mūrtimān* form of Akṣarabrahman, who is in his (Parabrahman’s) service; and iii) infinite akṣaramuktas (released jīvās and īśvarās). There is only one such Akṣaradhāman. It is eternal and forever beyond the three *guṇas*. Only muktas, who have attained qualitative similarity⁴ to Akṣarabrahman, can enter it.”

“In that same Akṣaradhāman, Akṣarabrahman’s form as the personal attendant has, like Parabrahman, a divine human form complete with two arms and all other features. As the ideal for *akṣaramuktas*, he forever remains engrossed in Parabrahman’s service.”

“That very Akṣarabrahman manifests in human form, in each *brahmāṇḍa* along with Parabrahman, as the Guru, who is the complete and uninterrupted vessel of Parabrahman. Akṣara can make bound jīvas and īśvaras of the world *brahmarūpa*,⁵ have them attain *uttama nirvikalpa niścaya* (the greatest unwavering conviction) of Parabrahman, attain ultimate liberation, and forever experience the manifest presence of Paramātmā through his (Akṣara’s) divine association. He protects the traditions of the *saṃpradāya* and causes all to experience the supreme bliss. Guṇātītanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, and Yogiji Maharaj have appeared in this succession of *Guṇātīta* Akṣarabrahman Gurus⁶. This succession will continue uninterruptedly. At any given time, the path of ultimate liberation remains open through only one Guru.”

2.2 Opening

This chapter analyzes an entity described in the Prasthānatrayī, yet largely neglected by the commentarial traditions until the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. This entity is a second Brahman, a lower Brahman, or as the Praśna Upaniṣad says – अपरं ब्रह्म⁷ (PU 5.2). The *apara* Brahman is also called Akṣarabrahman. A further way of referring to Akṣarabrahman is by using either of the two words comprising the compound: i.e.,

⁴ This refers to a body *made up* of Akṣarabrahman.

⁵ ‘Brahmarūpa’ refers to a state in which one possesses qualities similar to those of Akṣarabrahman.

⁶ This succession of Akṣarabrahman Gurus continued through Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the author of this letter, and continues today through Mahant Swami Maharaj.

⁷ *aparaṃ brahma*

Akṣara and Brahman. It is, however, essential to note that Brahman used alone could mean Parabrahman, the Brahman higher than the lower Brahman, in addition to meaning Akṣarabrahman. Akṣarabrahman is a part of the system of five entities, of which a coherent study of the Prasthānatrayī allows an appreciation. Jīvas and īśvaras find themselves perpetually ensnared within the illusion-casting sway of māyā. Though inherently radiant and potent, this bondage obscures their awareness even of their true selves as ātman. Parabrahman extends benevolence by fashioning countless universes and bestowing the outcomes of their karma, facilitating their journey towards liberation from the relentless cycle of births and deaths. Simply existing within the world, however, does not suffice for attaining ultimate liberation. Parabrahman grants humanity its association and continues to remain present through a lineage of manifestations of Akṣarabrahman Gurus. Through association with Akṣarabrahman, which entails not mere co-existence in close proximity but, for example, listening to and contemplating the words of the Akṣarabrahman Guru, a jīva or an īśvara realizes their true self, realizes its relationship with Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman, and most importantly, realizes the form of Parabrahman in its heart. At their ultimate nature, these realizations are mukti – freedom from the deluding clutches of māyā, to use metaphoric language. Once liberation is achieved, the emancipated jīvas and īśvaras forever break free from the entanglements of māyā. They are eternally bestowed with the serenity and bliss emanating from Parabrahman, residing perpetually within Akṣaradhāman – the divine abode of Akṣarabrahman in its essence. We shall explore further in this chapter Akṣarabrahman: its characteristics, its relationship with other entities, and its depiction in the Upaniṣads, Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, and Brahmasūtras. This depiction ultimately supports the thesis of consistency between these three texts.

This entity is called Akṣara or Brahman; alternatively, as noted, Akṣarabrahman is one compound word. It is called Akṣara because i) it never diminishes, distorts, or decays – न चेदं क्षीयते, नाऽपि क्षरति...⁸; ii) it pervades everywhere and thus is the beholder of everything at once; it sees everywhere – व्याप्नोति च सर्वत्र, भवति च सर्वनिवासः सर्वाक्षश्च

⁸ Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā 2.3, p. 19; *na cedam kṣīyate, nā'pi kṣarati* |

वर्तते⁹, as Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadresdas Swami expounds. This is the same Akṣarabrahman that, in its form, characteristics, knowledge, and other divine features, is beyond and above all jīvas and īśvaras. Even when these two entities become liberated, Akṣarabrahman remains superior to them – being māyā’s controller along with Parabrahman. More significantly, in this regard, Akṣarabrahman is more excellent and more prominent than all except Parabrahman and beholds and supports them. The Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā says:

- एतदेव पुनर्नित्यं स्वरूपस्वभावगुणतश्च निखिलजीवेश्वरमायातन्मुक्तेभ्यो बृहत्त्वाद्
बृहणत्वाच्च ब्रह्मेत्यभिहितम् ।¹⁰

A note of emphasis important to provide here is that Parabrahman is supreme. Even as we singly exalt the magnificence of Akṣarabrahman, the overarching understanding endures that Parabrahman reigns supreme, transcending Akṣarabrahman in every dimension. Parabrahman’s superior nature is reflected well in the appellation Parabrahman itself: beyond (*para*) Akṣarabrahman.

Both the words “Akṣara” and “Brahman” are abundantly used in the Prasthānatrayī for Akṣarabrahman. Some such references are provided below.

- एतद्ध्येवाऽक्षरं ब्रह्म...¹¹ (KU 2.16)
- तदेतदक्षरं ब्रह्म...¹² (MU 2.2.2)
- ब्रह्मविदाप्नोति परम् ।¹³ (TU 2.1.1)
- सर्वं ह्येतद् ब्रह्माऽयमात्मा ब्रह्म ।¹⁴ (MaU 1.2)

⁹ Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā 2.3, p. 19; *vyāpnoti ca sarvatra, bhavati ca sarvanivāsaḥ sarvākṣaśca vartate* |

¹⁰ Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā 2.3, p. 19; *etadeva punarnityaṃ svarūpasvabhāvagūṇataśca nikhilajīveśvaramāyātānmuktebhyo bṛhattvād bṛṃhaṇatvācca brahmetyabhihitam* |

¹¹ *etaddhyevā ’kṣaraṃ brahma*

¹² *tadetadākṣaraṃ brahma*

¹³ *brahma vidāpnoti param*

¹⁴ *sarvaṃ hyetad brahmā ’yamātmā brahma*

- एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः...¹⁵ (BG 2.72)
- ब्रह्मार्पणं ब्रह्म हविर्ब्रह्माग्नौ ब्रह्मणा हुतम् ।¹⁶ (BG 4.24)
- किं तद् ब्रह्म...¹⁷ (BG 8.1)
- अक्षरं ब्रह्म परमम्...¹⁸ (BG 8.3)
- अथातो ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा ।¹⁹ (BG 1.1.1)
- अक्षरमम्बरान्तधृतेः ।²⁰ (BS 1.3.10)

This Akṣarabrahman is separate from Parabrahman and dependent on it. Akṣarabrahman is eternally singular, the one and only one, eternally transcending of the *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* constituents of *māyā*, the master of *māyā*, sentient, always divine, endowed with all infinite goodness and divinities, and devoid of *māyic* traits and flaws. It is forever unchanging, unaffected, stable, real, true, and the knower. Also, this same Akṣarabrahman is *saguṇa* in its being greater than everything and all except Parabrahman. It is *nirguṇa* in its being the minutest of all that is minute and, thus, pervasive of everything, including most minuscule sub-atomic and elementary particles. These two terms, *saguṇa*, and *nirguṇa*, are also used respectively in the sense of being filled with all divine characteristics, on the one hand, and being devoid of all features and effects of *māyā*, on the other. Akṣarabrahman's nature, form, qualities, opulence, and other characteristics are only less to Parabrahman, and because of Parabrahman's eternal will, it is also the cause, the basis, the pervader, the regulator, and the embodier of all.

As described in the Prasthānatrayī, Akṣarabrahman has four different forms – all being the same singular Akṣarabrahman. That Akṣarabrahman has four forms does not mean that Akṣarabrahman is four and not singular; the same singular entity has taken four

¹⁵ *eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ*

¹⁶ *brahmārpaṇam brahma havirbrahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam*

¹⁷ *kiṃ tad brahma*

¹⁸ *akṣaram brahma paramam*

¹⁹ *athāto brahmajijñāsā*

²⁰ *akṣaramambarāntadhṛteḥ*

forms. While exploring these forms, I also investigate other notable qualities of Akṣarabrahman that the Prasthānatrayī identifies. These four forms are i) Cidākāśa, an all-pervading divine space that pervades inside and outside of all, even the subtlest of the subtle; ii) Akṣaradhāman, the divine abode in which resides Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman (as *Sevaka*), and the infinite muktas; iii) the third form is Akṣarabrahman of a *Sevaka* in Akṣaradhāman, the ideal servant of Parabrahman that eternally offers loving devotion to Parabrahman; iv) the Brahmasvarūpa Satpuruṣa, or the Akṣarabrahman Guru, is the fourth form that continues the legacy of Parabrahman Swaminarayan, and is the being through which Parabrahman remains manifest in the world blessing all with the opportunity to become liberated. Before diving deeper into the nature and four forms of Akṣarabrahman, it is essential to differentiate it from Parabrahman, jīvas and īśvaras, and māyā. The following study offers the relationship that these entities maintain amongst each other.

2.3 Relation with Parabrahman - Parādhikaraṇa

The Parādhikaraṇa of the Brahmasūtras is positioned within the heart of the second segment of the third chapter of the Brahmasūtras. It begins with an affirmation, provided by the Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyakāra Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami, that Parabrahman is beyond Akṣarabrahman. Scripture-based logic reaffirms this notion. Let us dig deeper into this discussion, as it helpfully clarifies the relationship between Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. The sūtra reads:

- परमतः सेतून्मानसम्बन्धभेदव्यपदेशेभ्यः²¹ (BS 3.2.30)

The sūtra explains, albeit in a succinct form that would not be immediately comprehensible without a thorough study of the Upaniṣads, that “Parabrahman is greater (*param*) than it (*ataḥ*)—namely, Akṣarabrahman—on account of the analogy of the bridge, measure, relation, and distinction (respective to this discussion).” Let us understand these connections one by one.

²¹ *paramataḥ setūnmānasambandhabhedavyapadeśebhyaḥ*

First, Akṣarabrahman is mentioned as a connecting medium – a *setu*, bridge, or a boat (connecting medium), to Parabrahman, the immortal, for all jīvas and īśvaras. More about this shall be discussed in the “Akṣarabrahman as Brahmasvarūpa Guru” section by the chapter’s end.

The second aspect of the relationship between Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman is *unmānam* (measure). Akṣarabrahman is greater, larger, beyond, and superior to *māyā*, all jīvas and īśvaras – regardless of their bound or liberated status. Still, Akṣarabrahman remains subservient to Parabrahman. The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad mantra below notes that Parabrahman is beyond that which is beyond (namely,) Akṣara.

- ह्यक्षरात् परतः परः...²² (MU 2.1.2)
- परात्परं पुरिशयं पुरुषमीक्षते...²³ (PU 5.5)

The third aspect that Vyāsa finds interesting to discuss is their relationship - *sambandha*. Indeed, when discussing the relationship between the two, it is necessary to discuss other related aspects, which is what the commentator intends to do. Here, the relationship that Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman share is discussed, with the following being especially emphasized: Parabrahman is pervasive, and Akṣarabrahman, while being pervasive of all, is pervaded by Parabrahman; Parabrahman is the controller of all including Akṣarabrahman, and the latter is the controller of all except Parabrahman. The references that explore this dynamic are as follows:

The pervasive-pervaded relation is established by these mantras from the Upaniṣads.

- दहरोऽस्मिन्नन्तराकाशस्तस्मिन् यदन्तस्तदन्वेष्टव्यम्²⁴ (CU 8.1.1) –
- “There is a minute space (Akṣarabrahman), and inside of it, there is that which is to be looked for (Parabrahman).”
- स य एषोऽन्तर्हृदय आकाशः । तस्मिन्नयं पुरुषो मनोमयः²⁵ (TU 1.6.1) – “He is the space inside of the heart. In it is he (Parabrahman) with divine *manas*.”

²² *hyakṣarāt parataḥ paraḥ*

²³ *parātparam puriśayaṃ puruṣamīkṣate*

²⁴ *daharo ’sminnantarākāśastasmin yadantastadanveṣṭavyam*

²⁵ *sa ya eṣo ’ntarhr̥daya ākāśaḥ | tasminnayaṃ puruṣo manomayaḥ*

- य एषोऽन्तर्हृदय आकाशस्तस्मिञ्छेते सर्वस्य वशी²⁶ (BU 4.4.22) – “He rests in it— in the space inside of the heart—as the controller of all.”

Parabrahman controls all entities, including Akṣarabrahman. The reference from the Gītā reveals this notion.

- ब्रह्मणो हि प्रतिष्ठाऽहम्²⁷ (BG 14.27) – “I (Parabrahman) am indeed the foundation of Brahman (Akṣarabrahman).”

Akṣarabrahman is in the eternal loving and devotional service of Parabrahman, and Parabrahman is the master of all, including Akṣarabrahman.

- अत्रैतत्समर्पितम्²⁸ (MU 2.2.1) – “Here, it (Akṣarabrahman) has surrendered.”

One of the four forms of Akṣarabrahman is the *Sevaka* that resides in Akṣaradhāman in the service of Parabrahman. The reference provided above mentions this form. Important to note is that this form is also whole-heartedly devoted to Parabrahman, and Parabrahman is the only one to whom Akṣarabrahman is devoted. The word – निष्ठम्²⁹ (MU 1.2.12) — reflects this notion contextually.

The clear difference between Akṣarabrahman from Parabrahman is, in essence, what Vyāsa means by the final aspect of the relationship between the two entities mentioned in the Parādhikaraṇa. The Upaniṣads and Gītā converge on this point; the references are as follows:

- परं चाऽपरं ब्रह्म³⁰ (PU 5.2) - “*para* (higher) and *apara* (lower; other) Brahman.” Here, the adjectives *param* and *aparam* speak of the distinction between Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.
- अव्यक्तात् पुरुषः परः³¹ (KU 3.11) – “Parabrahman is beyond *avyakta*.”

²⁶ *ya eṣo 'ntarhadaya ākāśastasmiñchete sarvasya vaśī*

²⁷ *brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhā'ham*

²⁸ *atraitatsamarpitam*

²⁹ *niṣṭham*

³⁰ *param cā'param brahma*

³¹ *avyaktāt puruṣaḥ paraḥ*

- उत्तमपुरुषस्त्वन्यः परमात्मेत्युदाहृतः।³² (BG 15.17) – “the Puruṣottama is different, (and) called Paramātman.”
- अक्षरादपि चोत्तमः³³ (BG 15.18) – “Superior to even Akṣara [is Parabrahman].”
- परात्परं पुरुषमुपैति दिव्यम्³⁴ (MU 3.2.8) – “(he) reaches divine Parabrahman, the one that is above, from that is beyond (Akṣarabrahman).”
- अव्यक्तात्तु परः पुरुषः³⁵ (KU 6.8) – “from *avyakta*, Parabrahman is beyond.”
- अनादि मत्परं ब्रह्म³⁶ (BG 13.12) – “Brahman is eternally devoted to me (Parabrahman).”
- ब्रह्मणो हि प्रतिष्ठाऽहम्³⁷ (BG 14.27) – “I (Parabrahman) am indeed the foundation of Brahman (Akṣarabrahman).”

In this manner, the relation of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman is discussed in the Parādhikaraṇa of the Brahmasūtras. Moreover, this study is also supported by the other two texts comprising the Prasthānatrayī as reflected by the references provided above from the respective texts. It is, thus, meaningful to consider their *textual* relationship in terms of consistency.

2.3.1 Brahmasūtras Speak: Relationship Between Akṣarabrahman And Parabrahman

An adhikaraṇa that brings new connections to the table in this regard is the one that precedes the Parādhikaraṇa, that is, the Ubhayavyapadeśādhikaraṇa. Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman are ontologically and eternally distinct. Therefore, relations that do not support this distinction are rejected within this adhikaraṇa. Two such metaphors that are unhelpful in understanding the relationship between Parabrahman and

³² *uttamapuruṣastvanyaḥ paramātmetyudāhṛtaḥ*

³³ *akṣarādapi cottamaḥ*

³⁴ *parātparam puruṣamupaiti divyam*

³⁵ *avyaktāttu paraḥ puruṣaḥ*

³⁶ *anādi matparam brahma*

³⁷ *brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhā'ham*

Akṣarabrahman are that of a snake-coil and luminous-luminosity. Vyāsa disagrees with the sūtras while presenting them objector's view.

- उभयव्यपदेशात् त्वहिकुण्डलवत्³⁸ (BS 3.2.26)

This sūtra can be understood in the following manner: Both the Brahman are referred to on various instances in the Upaniṣads, Brahmasūtras, and Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā,. What is their relationship? An opposing party in this conversation explains: one of the two in the relationship is like a snake, and another is the same snake, only in its coiled form.

A snake, even when coiled, is still the snake itself. Even when one says that the two entities are different, one can only speak metaphorically, not literally. A snake and its coils do not *become* different, even when described differently as a snake and its coils must be. An objector might say that Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman are one and the same in this way. Parabrahman, when described using a different word, is Akṣarabrahman, such an objector would hold. The objector might continue; some might refer to it as Parabrahman and others as Akṣarabrahman. The entity is one and the same, although it is described using different words. The change in shape (in the metaphor) or word (Parabrahman or Akṣarabrahman) does not establish the distinction, and thus, the entities are not two but one. The above-mentioned is all, of course, an objector's view.

This analysis refuted by the Sūtrakāra and the Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyakāra as Upaniṣadic references अक्षरात्परतः परः³⁹ (MU 2.1.2), ब्रह्मणो हि प्रतिष्ठाऽहम्⁴⁰ (BG 14.27) and others explicitly establish the difference between these two eternal realities. Moreover, Akṣarabrahman is considered eternally unchanging and supremely stable - नित्यं... तदव्ययम्⁴¹ (MU 1.1.6). If Akṣarabrahman is described as a snake, it can change from its

³⁸ *ubhayavyapadeśāt tvahikuṇḍalavat*

³⁹ *akṣarātparataḥ paraḥ*

⁴⁰ *brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhā'ham*

⁴¹ *nityam... tadavyayam*

elongated slithering form to a coiled and rolled-up form. Thus, the snake-coil metaphor fails to represent the relationship between Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.

Another proposed view, yet again of an objector, is presented in the sūtra here.

- प्रकाशाश्रयवद्वा तेजस्त्वात्⁴² (BS 3.2.27)

Because Parabrahman is luminous, Akṣarabrahman ought to be its light. However, Parabrahman produces this light from itself.

Unlike the snake and its coil form metaphor, this metaphor of a luminous being or object and its light allows for at least some difference. However, since light is ultimately not different from that from which it comes or its sources, Akṣarabrahman would merely be, under this view, something produced by Parabrahman and not an independently existing entity. Akṣarabrahman is indeed light – bright and light of all lights, as described in the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad – तच्छुभ्रं ज्योतिषां ज्योतिः...⁴³ (MU 2.2.9). Additionally, Parabrahman is luminous. एष वै सोम्य चतुष्कलः पादो ब्रह्मणः प्रकाशवान्नाम...⁴⁴ (CU 4.5.2), मम तेजोऽशसम्भवम्...⁴⁵ (BG 10.41), and other references reflect this point. However, this should not be misconstrued as suggesting that Akṣarabrahman is the radiance of Parabrahman. In actuality, Akṣarabrahman is a different entity in itself. Thus, this thought, too, falls short of accurately describing the Akṣarabrahman-Parabrahman relation. What, then, is this relationship like?

- पूर्ववद् वा⁴⁶ (BS 3.2.28)

This sūtra, translated as “or, as mentioned earlier” – reflects an answer that Vyāsa provides. What has come before? The Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyakāra comments: पूर्वमिहैव ‘शास्त्रदृष्ट्या तूपदेशः’ (ब्र.सू.१/१/३१) इत्यत्र निरूपितदिशा शास्त्रदृष्टिसमुल्लसितो

⁴² prakāśāśrayavadvā tejastvāt

⁴³ tacchubhram jyotiṣām jyotiḥ

⁴⁴ eṣa vai somya catuskalah pādo brahmaṇaḥ prakāśavānnāma

⁴⁵ mama tejom ’śasambhavam

⁴⁶ pūrvavad vā

नित्यसमुद्भासिताऽप्राकृतदिव्यस्वाभाविकनिरतिशयाऽनुरागरसितपरमोपासननिबन्धन-स्तत्परायणतारूप
उपास्यपरमोपासकभावलक्षणः सम्बन्धो वाच्य इत्यर्थः ।⁴⁷

The explanation provides a succinct expression of the *siddhāntapakṣa* of the Sūtrakāra and the Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyakāra while establishing it on the basis of a former sūtra – Brahmasūtras 1.1.31. It emphasizes grasping the connection between Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman as depicted in scriptures, drawing a parallel between them as the master and his ultimate devotee. In conclusion, this relation between Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman becomes easier to understand if we understand Parabrahman as supreme, superior even to Akṣarabrahman. The mantras below speak of Parabrahman as the one and only one, without a second, and nothing - neither similar nor superior to Parabrahman - is known.

- एकमेवाद्वितीयम् ।⁴⁸ (CU 6.2.1)
- न तत्समश्चाभ्यधिकश्च दृश्यते ।⁴⁹ (SU 6.8)

On another note, all these verses and mantras highlight the relation not just between Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. They also imply an understanding of Akṣarabrahman's relation with other entities.

- Akṣarabrahman is the embodier of all jīvas and īśvaras – who are bound and liberated - and māyā, that is, all except Parabrahman.
- Akṣarabrahman is the soul of all — bound or liberated jīvas and īśvaras and māyā - except Parabrahman.
- Akṣarabrahman pervades all, in its Cidākāśa form, including all jīvas and īśvaras – bound and liberated - and māyā, except Parabrahman.

⁴⁷ Brahmasūtras Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 3.2.28, p. 303; *pūrvamihaiva 'śāstradr̥ṣṭyā tūpadeśaḥ' (BS 1.1.31) ityatra nirūpitadiśā śāstradr̥ṣṭisamullasito*

nityasamudbhāsītā 'prākṛtadivyaśvābhāvikaniratiśayā' nurāgarasitaparamopāsanānibandhanas-
tatparāyanatārūpa upāsyaparamopāsakabhāvalakṣaṇaḥ sambandho vācya ityarthah|

⁴⁸ *ekamevādvitīyam*

⁴⁹ *na tatsamaścābhyadhikaśca dr̥śyate |*

- Akṣarabrahman controls all, in its Cidākāśa form, including all jīvas and īśvaras – bound and liberated - and māyā, except Parabrahman.
- Akṣarabrahman is the inspirer of all, in its Cidākāśa form, including all jīvas and īśvaras – bound and liberated - and māyā, except that of Parabrahman.
- Akṣarabrahman is the support or basis of all, in its Cidākāśa form, including all jīvas and īśvaras – bound and liberated - and māyā, except that of Parabrahman.
- Akṣarabrahman is the cause of all jīvas and īśvaras – bound and liberated, and māyā, that is, all except Parabrahman. In the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, jīvas and īśvaras are eternally existent. So, Akṣarabrahman is the cause of their bodies, not their eternal self.
- Akṣarabrahman is superior to all jīvas and īśvaras – bound and liberated, and māyā- that is, all except to Parabrahman.
- Akṣarabrahman is transcendent to all jīvas and īśvaras – bound and liberated, and māyā, that is, all except to Parabrahman.

Parabrahman’s eternal will eternally establishes all of these roles of Akṣarabrahman. The coherency offered by the Prasthānatrayī on the matter of the relation between Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman is what I wish to explore here. More about this relation and Akṣarabrahman’s relation with other entities are studied in several places in this project, with relevant quotes from the Prasthānatrayī provided to determine the texts’ consistency.

2.4 The Four Forms of Akṣarabrahman

The four forms of Akṣarabrahman are outlined in the three texts of the Prasthānatrayī on different occasions. Nevertheless, Akṣarabrahman is one and the same – the same reality even when involved in different actions in its four different forms. The forms are as follows:

As Cidākāśa, Akṣarabrahman is all-pervasive – within and outside the hearts of all jīvas and īśvaras, everywhere. Akṣarabrahman pervades everything. Parabrahman is, of course, the exception here; all apart from Parabrahman is pervaded by Akṣarabrahman.

In this form, Akṣarabrahman is also the cause, support, and basis of all jīvas and īśvaras and Creation, namely māyā.

As Akṣaradhāman, Akṣarabrahman is the divine, ultimate, and supremely transcendental abode of Parabrahman. Parabrahman, along with Akṣarabrahman and all of the infinite muktas – liberated jīvas and īśvaras, reside therein. The abode is infinitely finite (it is so great that it cannot be measured but is nevertheless a location), luminous, a place from which there is no fall or return, imperishable, and eternal. The throne of Akṣaradhāman is presided by Parabrahman.

As *Sevaka*, Akṣarabrahman resides in Akṣaradhāman (the abode) as the *Sevaka* or devoted servant of Parabrahman, perfectly subservient to Parabrahman, and eternally in Paramātman's devotional and loving service. This form of Akṣarabrahman also serves as an ideal for all the liberated jīvas and īśvaras, the Akṣaramuktas.

As Brahmasvarūpa Guru, Akṣarabrahman manifests in this world and offers the everlasting presence of Parabrahman. Akṣarabrahman is the being through whom Parabrahman accepts the devotion of aspirants and the being through whom Parabrahman remains manifest in the world, granting liberation and everlasting, true happiness and bliss. Spiritual association with Akṣarabrahman, involving the cultivation of the liberating virtues embodied by Akṣarabrahman, paves the way for jīvas and īśvaras to transcend and assume a likeness to Akṣarabrahman, ultimately attaining the liberated state that enables them to offer devotion to Parabrahman. The lineage of the Brahmasvarūpa Gurus remains unbroken.

These forms are discussed in the Upaniṣads in various instances. First, we see how they are presented in the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad as each of the two mantras discussed below speak of all four forms as Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadrashdas Swami interprets.

2.4.1 Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad Mantras

The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad presents two instances wherein all four forms are expounded within a single mantra. These mantras are situated in the second section of the second *muṇḍaka* of the Upaniṣad. The divine words of Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.2.7 and Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.2.1 are reproduced below:

- यः सर्वज्ञः सर्वविद् यस्यैष महिमा भुवि दिव्ये ब्रह्मपुरे ह्येष व्योम्यात्मा प्रतिष्ठितः ।
मनोमयः प्राणशरीरनेता प्रतिष्ठितोऽन्ने हृदयं सन्निधाय ।
तद्विज्ञानेन परिपश्यन्ति धीरा आनन्दरूपममृतं यद् विभाति ॥⁵⁰ (MU 2.2.7)
- आविः सन्निहितं गुहाचरं नाम महत्पदमत्रैतत् समर्पितम् ।
एजत्प्राणन्निमिषच्च यदेतज्जानथ सदसद्वरेण्यं परं विज्ञानाद् यद् वरिष्ठं प्रजानाम् ॥⁵¹
(MU 2.2.1)

The words that reflect each *svarūpa* – as consistently interpreted in the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam – can be found in the table below.

FOUR FORMS	Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.2.7	Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.2.1
Cidākāśa	अन्ने हृदयं सन्निधाय प्रतिष्ठितः { <i>anne hr̥dayaṃ sannidhāya pratiṣṭhitah</i> }	सन्निहितम् { <i>sannihitam</i> } गुहाचरम् { <i>guhācaram</i> }
Akṣaradhāman	ब्रह्मपुरे दिव्ये व्योम्नि { <i>brahmapure divye vyomni</i> }	आविः { <i>āvih</i> } महत्पदम् { <i>mahatpadam</i> }
Sevaka	एषः आत्मा प्रतिष्ठितः { <i>eṣaḥ ātmā pratiṣṭhitah</i> } मनोमयः प्राणशरीरनेता { <i>manomayaḥ prāṇaśarīranetā</i> }	आविः { <i>āvih</i> } अत्र एतत् समर्पितम् { <i>atra etat samarpitam</i> }
Brahmasvarūpa Guru	यस्य एषः महिमा भुवि { <i>yasya eṣaḥ mahimā bhuvi</i> }	आविः { <i>āvih</i> } एजत् { <i>ejat</i> }

⁵⁰ *yah sarvajñah sarvavid yasyaiṣa mahimā bhuvi divye brahmapure hyeṣa vyomyātmā pratiṣṭhitah | manomayaḥ prāṇaśarīranetā pratiṣṭhito 'nne hr̥dayaṃ sannidhāya | tadvijñānena paripaśyanti dhīrā ānandarūpamamṛtaṃ yad vibhāti ||*

⁵¹ *āvih sannihitam guhācaram nāma mahatpadamatraitat samarpitam |*

ejatprāṇannimiṣacca yadetajjānatha sadasadvareṇyaṃ paraṃ vijñānād yad varīṣṭhaṃ prajānām ||

		प्राणत् {prāṇat} निमिषच्च {nimiṣacca}
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Table 2.1: Four Forms of Akṣarabrahman From the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad

Akṣarabrahman is ontologically and eternally singular, the only one-of-its-kind entity dependent only on Parabrahman. Although Akṣarabrahman is one, Parabrahman’s eternal will is to perform four roles – hence, the four forms. A necessary clarification here to bear in mind is that the first three forms – Cidākāśa, Akṣaradhāman, and *Sevaka* – have only one manifestation (that is, only one form), and the Brahmasvarūpa Guru can be seen in multiple forms. Let us explore these four forms to examine the consistency of the Upaniṣads, Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, and Brahmasūtras – the Prasthānatrayī – on this matter.

2.5 The Sentient Space – Cidākāśa

The word “Cidākāśa” is made up of two words: “*cid*” means conscious, sentient, and “*ākāśa*” means space. This sentient space is the form of Akṣarabrahman that pervades māyā and all its products in the form of the infinite groups of infinite universes – everything inside and outside of Creation. Because it is luminous with consciousness and spreads through and resides in absolutely everything except Parabrahman, this sentient space – which is, it should be noted, different from common space or *ākāśa* – is called the Cidākāśa. This space is infinite, unlimited, eternal, not bound by the boundaries of area, time, volume, etc., is devoid of changes like expansion and contraction, and is devoid of any definite shape – it is shapeless. It can also not be cognized or comprehended by anything using instruments made of māyā. The defining features of Cidākāśa are that it pervades, controls, supports, and serves as the basis of all jīvas and īśvaras, and māyā. Let us further explore this concept from the teachings of the Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā, and Brahmasūtras.

2.5.1 “Dahara” of Chāndogya Upaniṣad

Cidākāśa Akṣarabrahman is known alternatively as *dahara*, or *daharākāśa*, meaning “small or subtle space”. This principle is first seen in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. The first mantra of the eighth and last chapter reads:

- ॐ अथ यदिदमस्मिन्ब्रह्मपुरे दहरं पुण्डरीकं वेश्म दहरोऽस्मिन्नन्तराकाशस्तस्मिन्यदन्तस्तदन्वेष्टव्यं तद्वाव विजिज्ञासितव्यमिति ॥⁵² (CU 8.1.1)

It can be translated as, “now, in this small space that is the place of Brahman is a small lotus-house. Inside it is a minute space (Akṣarabrahman), and inside it is that which is to be looked for (Parabrahman), which is to be sought to inquire.”

This contemplation is a journey to seek something that is to be discovered that begins here. Akṣarabrahman is the small space that dwells within a heart – described here as a lotus and small. The two uses of the same word, *dahara*, should not confuse the reader. The heart corresponds to the “small home,” and the first *dahara* refers to it. The second *dahara* is referred to by the words “subtle and small” that refer, in turn, to Akṣarabrahman – appropriately reflecting on its subtleness in the Cidākāśa form. There is something in *that* space – that something is Parabrahman as per the interpretation provided by Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadrashdas Swami in the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad⁵³.

An elaboration of this two-way principle of *daharākāśa* – in which the small space inside the heart is Akṣarabrahman, and within the small space is Parabrahman – continues in the Brahmasūtras. The third section of the initial chapter of the Brahmasūtras is designated as the Daharādhikaraṇa. The first sūtra reads:

- स दहर उत्तरेभ्यः⁵⁴ (BS 1.3.14)

⁵² *Aum atha yadidamasminbrahmapure daharam puṇḍarīkaṃ veśma*

daharo ’sminnantarākāśastasminyadantastadanveṣṭavyaṃ tadvāva vijijñāsitavyamiti ||

⁵³ Chāndogya Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 8.1.1, p. 342

⁵⁴ *sa dahara uttarebhyaḥ*

The sūtra can be translated as “he is (the) small (space) because of the following (mantras and arguments).”

What is that small space in the residing place (lotus heart)? Someone said it is bhūta *ākāśa* – the insentient *mahābhūta*. Another says that it is Brahman. Vyāsa confirms this latter option because the mantras that follow indicate this. What follows Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.1.1? The mantras that follow are provided below, as they illuminate a complete and coherent contemplation of the *daharākāśa* and, in doing so, exemplify merely one teaching of others, on which the texts comprising the Prasthānatrayī cohere. Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.1.3 firstly establishes a clear distinction between the two *ākāśas* indicating that one is this *ākāśa* (the *mahābhūta*, insentient one) and the other is the one that resides in the heart.

- यावान्वाऽयमाकाशस्तावानेषोऽन्तर्हृदय आकाशः ॥⁵⁵ (CU 8.1.3)

The same mantra also establishes that everything resides in the *dahara ākāśa*, and thus, the *dahara ākāśa* is the basis of all.

- अस्मिन् द्यावापृथिवी अन्तरेव समाहिते उभावग्निश्च वायुश्च सूर्याचन्द्रमसावुभौ
विद्युन्नक्षत्राणि यच्चेहास्ति यच्च नास्ति सर्वं तदस्मिन् समाहितम् ।⁵⁶ (CU 8.1.3)

Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.1.5 and the following mantra mention the word ātman, without sin, death, grief, old age, hunger, and thirst. A soul, when connected with *dahara*, becomes one, resulting in all its desires and thoughts coming true. An important aspect here that Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadresdas Swami notes is that the last two qualities – सत्यकामः (*satyakāmaḥ* - one whose all desires come true) and सत्यसङ्कल्पः (*satyasankalpaḥ* - one whose all wishes/thoughts come true) can only be attained after becoming like Akṣarabrahman, i.e., *brahmarūpa*. Additionally, these two qualities are the fundamental nature of Akṣarabrahman, which comprises all the infinite qualities inherently found in Akṣarabrahman. Moreover, the other six qualities – like being without thirst and others, are also realized upon becoming *brahmarūpa*. These also

⁵⁵ *yāvānvā'yamākāśastāvāneṣo'ntarhṛdaya ākāśa ||*

⁵⁶ *asmin dyāvāpṛthivī antareva samāhite ubhāvagnisca vāyuṣca sūryācandramasāvubhau vidyunnakṣatrāṇi yacchēhāsti yacca nāsti sarvaṃ tadasmin samāhitam|*

imply that Akṣarabrahman is devoid of all māyic natures, forms, names, and circumstances. The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam explains: अत्राऽपिपास इत्यन्तेनाऽक्षरब्रह्मणः सकलहेयप्रत्यनीकत्वमुच्यते । सत्यकामः सत्यसङ्कल्प इति चाऽनन्तकल्याणगुणगणत्वम् । एते चाऽपहतपाप्मत्वादिगुणा अक्षरब्रह्मणः स्वाभाविका नित्या दिव्याश्च । इत्थं सकलप्राकृतगुणविवर्जितं सकलाऽनन्तदिव्यगुणोपेतं चाऽक्षरब्रह्माऽऽत्मानं...⁵⁷. The relevant mantras of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad in this context are as follows:

- एतत्सत्यं ब्रह्मपुरमस्मिन् कामाः समाहिता एष आत्माऽपहतपाप्मा विजरो विमृत्युर्विशोको विजिघत्सोऽपिपासः सत्यकामः सत्यसङ्कल्पः ॥⁵⁸ (CU 8.1.5)
- अथ च इहाऽऽत्मानमनुविद्य ब्रजन्त्येतांश्च सत्यान् कामान् तेषां सर्वेषु लोकेषु कामचारो भवति ॥⁵⁹ (CU 8.1.6)

A further discussion ensues in the following sūtra of the Daharādhikaraṇa.

- गतिशब्दाभ्यां तथा हि दृष्टं लिङ्गं च ।⁶⁰ (BS 1.3.15)

This sūtra can be translated as follows: “(the small space is Akṣarabrahman) because of the action of going and the word. (Also,) thus, it is seen and the sign.” Here the word, *gatiḥ* refers to going of liberated jīvas and īśvaras to Akṣaradhāman. Some of the mantras from the Upaniṣads that refer to the same are as follows:

- तद्यथापि हिरण्यनिधिं निहितमक्षेत्रज्ञा उपर्युपरि सञ्चरन्तो न विन्देयुरेवमेवेमाः सर्वाः प्रजा अहरहर्गच्छन्त्य एतं ब्रह्मलोकं न विन्दन्त्यनृतेन हि प्रत्यूढाः ॥⁶¹ (CU 8.3.2)

⁵⁷ Chāndogya Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 8.1.5-6, p. 347; *atrā'pipāsa ityantena'kṣarabrahmaṇaḥ sakalaheyapratyanīkatvamucyate | satyakāmaḥ satyasaṅkalpa iti cā'nantakalyāṇaguṇagaṇatvam | ete cā'pahatapāpmatvādiguṇā akṣarabrahmaṇaḥ svābhāvikā nityā divyāśca | itthaṁ sakalaprākṛtaguṇavivarjitaṁ sakalā'nantadivyaṅguṇopetaṁ cā'kṣarabrahmā'tmānaṁ...*

⁵⁸ *etatsatyam brahmapuramasmin kāmāḥ samāhitā eṣa ātmā'pahatapāpmā vijaro vimṛtyurviśoko vijighatso'pipāsaḥ satyakāmaḥ satyasaṅkalpaḥ ||*

⁵⁹ *atha ca ihā'tmāmanuvidya vrajantyetāṁśca satyān kāmān teṣāṁ sarveṣu lokeṣu kāmācāro bhavati||*

⁶⁰ *gatiśabdābhyāṁ tathā hi dṛṣṭaṁ liṅgaṁ ca |*

⁶¹ *tadyathāpi hiraṇyanidhiṁ nihitamakṣetraññā uparyupari sañcaranto na vindeyurevamevemaḥ sarvāḥ prajā aharahargacchantya etaṁ brahmalokaṁ na vindantyanṛtena hi pratyūdhāḥ ||*

- एतत्सत्यं ब्रह्मपुरम्...⁶² (CU 8.1.5)
- अपहतपाप्मा ह्येष ब्रह्मलोकः...⁶³ (CU 8.4.1)
- सकृद् विभातो ह्येवैष ब्रह्मलोकः...⁶⁴ (CU 8.4.2)
- तद्य एवैतं ब्रह्मलोकम्...⁶⁵ (CU 8.4.3)

Also, this “going into” Akṣarabrahman happens every day, although we are not aware of it. Here are some mantras that points toward *susupti* – the state of deep sleep in which one drifts into Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. Moreover, the word, *Brahmaloka* refers to Akṣaradhāman.

- एवमेव खलु सोम्येमाः सर्वाः प्रजाः सति सम्पद्य न विदुः सति सम्पद्यामह इति।⁶⁶
(CU 6.9.2)
- एवमेव खलु सोम्येमाः सर्वाः प्रजाः सत आगत्य न विदुः सत आगच्छामह इति।⁶⁷
(CU 6.10.2)
- यत्रैष एतत्सुप्तोऽभूद्य एष विज्ञानमयः पुरुषस्तदेषां प्राणानां विज्ञानेन विज्ञानमादाय य
एषोऽन्तर्हृदय आकाशस्तस्मिञ्छेते।⁶⁸ (BU 2.1.17)
- स सामभिरुन्नीयते ब्रह्मलोकम्...⁶⁹ (PU 5.5)
- एष ब्रह्मलोकः सम्राड्...⁷⁰ (BU 4.3.32)

These are the spots of consistency that coherently explore Cidākāśa Akṣarabrahman as *dahara*. Now, let us see how the word “*ākāśa*” is explored in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad.

⁶² *etatsatyam brahmapuram*

⁶³ *apahatapāpmā hyeṣa brahmalokaḥ*

⁶⁴ *sakṛd vibhāto hyevaiṣa brahmalokaḥ*

⁶⁵ *tadya evaitam brahmalokam*

⁶⁶ *evameva khalu somyemāḥ sarvāḥ prajāḥ sati sampadya na viduḥ sati sampadyāmaha iti |*

⁶⁷ *evameva khalu somyemāḥ sarvāḥ prajāḥ sata āgatya na viduḥ sata āgacchāmaha iti |*

⁶⁸ *yatraiṣa etatsupto 'bhūdy eṣa vijñānamayaḥ puruṣastadeṣāṃ prāṇānāṃ vijñānena vijñānamādāya
ya eṣo 'ntarhṛdaya ākāśastasmiñchet |*

⁶⁹ *sa sāmabhirunnīyate brahmalokam*

⁷⁰ *eṣa brahmalokaḥ samrāḍ*

2.5.2 “Ākāśa” of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.14.1

Another examination, focusing on the interpretation of “*ākāśa*,” surfaces once more within the same segment of the Brahmasūtras. The first sūtra of Ākāśārthāntaratvādhikaraṇa is as follows:

- आकाशोऽर्थान्तरत्वादिव्यपदेशात् |⁷¹ (BS 1.3.41)

The sūtra is translated as, “*ākāśa* is (Akṣarabrahman) as a different meaning is established.” The correlating mantra that acts as the subject at issue are as follows:

- आकाशो वै नामरूपयोर्निर्वहिता ते यदन्तरा तद् ब्रह्म तदमृतं स आत्मा...⁷² (CU 8.14.1)

On another instance, when asked what the support of all is – sentient and insentient – the word “*ākāśa*” comes as an answer. Nevertheless, what is this *ākāśa*? It cannot refer to physical, material space, as this space is brought into existence and sustained by Akṣarabrahman and does not hold anything beyond the other four elements - earth, water, light or fire, and wind. This argument with related mantras is found in the Akṣarādhikaraṇa. Another such adhikaraṇa, with relevant discussion, is the Dyubhvādyadhikaraṇa. It discusses Akṣarabrahman as the basis for all elements, entities, and realms. The first and establishing sūtras of these two adhikaraṇas are provided in the following. Further details about this discussion can, of course, be found in the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam of Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadrēśdas Swami.

- अक्षरमम्बरान्तधृतेः⁷³ (BS 1.3.10) – “It is Akṣara as it holds everything (including) space.”
- द्युभ्वाद्यायतनं स्वशब्दात् |⁷⁴ (BS 1.3.1) – “The realms of heaven (*dyu*) and earth (*bhu*) (is Akṣarabrahman) as it is said by “own” words.”

⁷¹ *ākāśo`rthāntaratvādivyapadeśāt*

⁷² *ākāśo vai nāmarūpayornirvahitā te yadantarū tad brahma tadamṛtaṃ sa ātmā*

⁷³ *akṣaramambarāntadhṛteḥ*

⁷⁴ *dyubhvādyāyatanam svaśabdāt*

These adhikaraṇas from the Brahmasūtras, along with related mantras from the Upaniṣads and supporting verses from the Gītā, reflect a consistent description of Akṣarabrahman as Cidākāśa. I provide below a list of some mantras where Akṣarabrahman is referred to by the word “ākāśa.”

- स य एषोऽन्तर्हृदय आकाशः । तस्मिन्नयं पुरुषो मनोमयः ।⁷⁵ (TU 1.6.1)
- य एषोऽन्तर्हृदय आकाशस्तस्मिन् शेते सर्वस्य वशी सर्वस्येशानः सर्वस्याधिपतिः⁷⁶ (BU 4.4.22)
- हृद्याकाशे परे कोशे दिव्योऽयमात्मा...⁷⁷ (Subāla Upaniṣad 4)
- यो हृद्याकाशे य एतस्मिन् सर्वस्मिन्...⁷⁸ (Subāla Upaniṣad 7)

Some Upaniṣadic words that refers to Akṣarabrahman as the one who pervades inside of all are provided below.

- आविः सन्निहितं गुहाचरम्...⁷⁹ (MU 2.2.1)
- अरा इव रथनाभौ संहता यत्र नाड्यः स एषोऽन्तश्चरते...⁸⁰ (MU 2.2.6)
- इहैव निहितं गुहायाम्...⁸¹ (MU 3.1.7)
- यो वेद निहितं गुहायाम्...⁸² (TU 2.1.1)
- हृदि सर्वस्य विष्ठितम्...⁸³ (BG 13.17)

An examination of all three texts of the *Prasthānatrayī* extends our understanding of Akṣarabrahman significantly in such a way as to render the understanding coherent,

⁷⁵ *sa ya eṣo 'ntarhṛdaya ākāśaḥ | tasminnayaṃ puruṣo manomayaḥ |*

⁷⁶ *ya eṣo 'ntarhṛdaya ākāśastasmin śete sarvasya vaśī sarvasyeśānaḥ sarvasyādhipatiḥ*

⁷⁷ *hṛdyākāśe pare kośe divyo 'yamātmā*

⁷⁸ *yo hṛdyākāśe ya etasmin sarvasmin*

⁷⁹ *āviḥ sannihitaṃ guhācaram*

⁸⁰ *arā iva rathanābhau saṃhatā yatra nāḍyaḥ sa eṣo 'ntaścarate*

⁸¹ *ihaiva nihitaṃ guhāyām*

⁸² *yo veda nihitaṃ guhāyām*

⁸³ *hṛdi sarvasya viṣṭhitaṃ*

supporting the idea that Akṣarabrahman is, through its Cidākāśa form, all-pervasive and the supporter of all.

2.5.3 “Sarvatra” of the Brahmasūtras

In this discussion of Akṣarabrahman as pervasive everywhere in the form of Cidākāśa, the Sarvatrādhikaraṇa also submits its efforts. The sūtra reads:

- सर्वत्र प्रसिद्धोपदेशात्⁸⁴ (BS 1.2.1)

The sūtra translates as “(Akṣarabrahman, is) everywhere, as it is well-known (in the Upaniṣads).” This adhikaraṇa describes both Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman as pervasive, and we can be confident of this because the subject of the noted sūtra is the first mantra of the Īśā Upaniṣad.

- ईशा वास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगद्⁸⁵ (IU 1)

This part of the mantra can be translated as follows: by Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman, all this, everything in the *jagat* of *māyā*, is pervaded. The word, *sarvatra*, literally, means everywhere. Here, the objector thinks that the pervasive entity could be *jīvas*, *īśvaras*, or even *prakṛti*, as all of them are pervasive in one or the other way. *Jīvas* and *īśvaras* pervade their bodies and sometimes a bit beyond it. *Māyā* pervades all creation and entities in it. Nevertheless, none of them is all-pervasive. Nonetheless, with robust backing from the Upaniṣads, the Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyakāra demonstrates these ideas to be contradictory, baseless, and unsupportive of supreme all-pervasive nature of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman because this has been articulated numerous times in the revelatory *śruti* texts. Some of the references that indicate Akṣarabrahman is all-pervasive are provided here.

- नित्यं विभुं सर्वगतम्...⁸⁶ (MU 1.1.6)

⁸⁴ *sarvatra prasiddhopadeśāt*

⁸⁵ *īśā vāsyamidam sarvaṃ yatkiñca jagatyām jagad*

⁸⁶ *nityaṃ vibhuṃ sarvagatam*

- ब्रह्मैवेदममृतं पुरस्ताद् ब्रह्म पश्चाद् ब्रह्म दक्षिणतश्चोत्तरेण ।
अधश्चोर्ध्वं च प्रसृतं ब्रह्मैवेदं विश्वमिदं वरिष्ठम् ॥⁸⁷ (MU 2.2.11)
- सर्वं ह्येतद् ब्रह्म ।⁸⁸ (MaU 1.2)
- सर्वमावृत्य तिष्ठति...⁸⁹ (BG 13.13)
- बहिरन्तश्च भूतानामचरं चरमेव च ।⁹⁰ (BG 13.15)

Akṣarabrahman is everywhere. It is near and far.

2.5.4 “taddūre tadvantike” From the Īśa Upaniṣad

One of the interesting facts that is attested in conjunction with, and indeed as a way of describing, Akṣarabrahman’s being all-pervasive is that Akṣarabrahman can be near and far simultaneously.

- तदूरे तद्वन्तिके...⁹¹ (IU 5)
- दूरात् सुदूरे तदिहान्तिके च ।⁹² (MU 3.1.7)
- दूरस्थं चाऽन्तिके च तत्...⁹³ (BG 13.15)

This discourse, affirming the harmony and uniformity of the Upaniṣads, Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, and Brahmasūtras concerning the principle of Akṣarabrahman as Cidākāśa, proceeds to expound that Akṣarabrahman functions as the overseer and sustainer of all. These principles – pervasion and being the controller and supporter – are intimately related. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad reads:

- एतस्य वा अक्षरस्य प्रशासने गार्गी सूर्याचन्द्रमसौ विधृतौ तिष्ठत एतस्य वा
अक्षरस्य प्रशासने गार्गी द्यावापृथिव्यौ विधृते तिष्ठत एतस्य वा अक्षरस्य

⁸⁷ brahmaivedamamṛtaṃ purastād brahma paścād brahma dakṣiṇataścottareṇa |
adhaścordhvaṃ ca prasṛtaṃ brahmaivedaṃ viśvamiḍaṃ variṣṭhaṃ

⁸⁸ sarvaṃ hyetaḍ brahma

⁸⁹ sarvamāvṛtya tiṣṭhati

⁹⁰ bahirantaśca bhūtānāmacaraṃ carameva ca |

⁹¹ taddūre tadvantike

⁹² dūrāt sudūre tadihāntike ca

⁹³ dūrasthaṃ cā’ntike ca tat

प्रशासने गार्गि निमेषा मुहूर्ता अहोरात्राण्यर्धमासा मासा ऋतवः संवत्सरा इति विधृतास्तिष्ठन्त्येतस्य वा अक्षरस्य प्रशासने गार्गि प्राच्योऽन्या नद्यः स्यन्दन्ते श्वेतेभ्यः पर्वतेभ्यः प्रतीच्योऽन्या यां यांच दिशमन्वेतस्य वा अक्षरस्य प्रशासने गार्गि ददतो मनुष्याः प्रशंसन्ति यजमानं देवा दर्वीं पितरोऽन्वायत्ताः ॥⁹⁴ (BU 3.8.9)

- तस्मिंल्लोकाः श्रिताः सर्वे तदु नात्येति कश्चन । एतद् वै तत् ॥⁹⁵ (KU 5.8, 6.1)
- ॐ इति ब्रह्म । ॐ इतीदं सर्वम् ।⁹⁶ (TU 1.8.1)
- भूतभर्तृ च तज्ज्ञेयं ग्रसिष्णु प्रभविष्णु च ।⁹⁷ (BG 13.16)

The same Akṣarabrahman that is near and far, creates.

2.5.5 “sambhavati” From the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad

Thus far, we have seen that Akṣarabrahman is all-pervasive and the support of all. Along with these features of Cidākāśa, Akṣarabrahman is also the creator of all creations. Some of the mantras from the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad that examine and confirm this fact are provided as follows:

- यथोर्णनाभिः सृजते गृहणते च यथा पृथिव्यामोषधयः सम्भवन्ति ।
यथा सतः पुरुषात् केशलोमानि तथाऽक्षरात् सम्भवतीह विश्वम् ॥⁹⁸ (MU 1.1.7)

Here, three examples explain how Akṣarabrahman is the cause or creator of all. The first example is that of a spider. After a spider transforms its food into the material from which webs are created, it makes something out of such material. Then, when the time is appropriate, it eats the web. Akṣarabrahman, utterly distinct from its creation,

⁹⁴ *etasya vā akṣarasya praśāsane gārgi sūryācandramasau vidhṛtau tiṣṭhata etasya vā akṣarasya praśāsane gārgi dyāvāpṛthivyau vidhṛte tiṣṭhata etasya vā akṣarasya praśāsane gārgi nimeṣā muhūrta ahorātrāṇyarthamāsā māsā ṛtavaḥ saṁvatsarā iti vidhṛtāstiṣṭhantyetasya vā akṣarasya praśāsane gārgi prācyo 'nyā nadyaḥ syandante śvetebhyaḥ parvatebhyaḥprāṭīcyo 'nyā yāṁ yāṁca diśamanvetasya vā akṣarasya praśāsane gārgi dadato manuṣyāḥ praśāsanti yajamānaṁ devā darvīm pitaro 'nvāyattāḥ* ||

⁹⁵ *tasmimllokāḥ śritāḥ sarve tadu nātyeti kaścana. etad vai tat* ||

⁹⁶ *Aum iti brahma | Aum itīdaṁ sarvam*

⁹⁷ *bhūtabhartr̥ ca tajjñeyam̐ grasiṣṇu prabhaviṣṇu ca*

⁹⁸ *yathorṇanābhiḥ sṛjate grhaṇate ca yathā pṛthivyāmośadhayaḥ sambhavanti | yathā sataḥ puruṣāt keśalomāni tathā 'kṣarāt sambhavatīha viśvam*

casually creates and dissolves everything. It is essential to note, as a way of reiterating that analogies are not meant, by definition, to demonstrate the complete similarity between the example and the phenomenon being compared, that Akṣarabrahman is an entity separate from all that it creates and does not change in the least during the process of creation, in the way that milk transforms into curd upon being mixed with a starter substance.

The second example is how herbs (or vegetation in general) form from the earth. A variety of seeds grow to become a variety of vegetation. Nonetheless, what ultimately grows does not depend on the soil; it depends on the seed. If the seed sown is of an avocado, the plant that will surely grow will be that of an avocado. Akṣarabrahman, like the earth, is the reason for the growth of all while being even and impartial.

The third example is of a living person and how hair grows on his/her body. The hair grows without any effort on the part of the person. Nonetheless, the person remains the cause of the hair. In the same way, like Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman is the cause of a *jagat* of infinite universes. All of this happens without any significant effort on the part of Akṣarabrahman, and the process of Creation, in no way, affects or detracts from the divinity of Akṣarabrahman.

It is vital to note that even though this mantra only talks about Akṣarabrahman, it does not suggest that Parabrahman is not the cause. Specific mantras speak specifically of Akṣarabrahman; others speak of Parabrahman, and others speak of them both. Parabrahman is the independent cause of all, as has been emphasized earlier, and Akṣarabrahman, too, is ultimately and eternally dependent on Parabrahman.

Another metaphor supporting the principle of Akṣarabrahman as the creator is also from the same Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad.

- तदेतत्सत्यं यथा सुदीप्तात् पावकाद् विस्फुलिङ्गाः सहस्रशः प्रभवन्ते सरूपाः ।
तथाऽक्षराद् विविधाः सोम्य भावाः प्रजायन्ते तत्र चैवापियन्ति ।⁹⁹ (MU 2.1.1)

⁹⁹ *tadetatsatyam yathā sudīptāt pāvakād visphuliṅgāḥ sahasraśaḥ prabhavante sarūpāḥ |
tathā 'kṣarād vividhāḥ somya bhāvāḥ prajāyante tatra caivāpiyanti |*

A flaming fire issues thousands and thousands of sparks. Similarly, Akṣarabrahman is also the cause of all creations. The notion of Akṣarabrahman as the source of all finds substantiation in numerous instances from the Upaniṣads, corroborating verses in the Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, and the arguments within the Brahmasūtras. Again, all three texts come together to provide a coherent understanding of a form of Akṣarabrahman.

This establishes consistency in the Vedāntic principle of all-pervasive Akṣarabrahman also being the creator.

2.5.6 “nāmadheyāni” of Akṣarabrahman

Because Akṣarabrahman pervades all except Parabrahman, and is the support and basis of all, and the creator of all, everything is *called* Akṣarabrahman. All are “names” of Akṣarabrahman. Noting this is another way of emphasizing the all-pervasiveness of Akṣarabrahman. This quality of Akṣarabrahman is described in the Aitareya Upaniṣad.

- यदेतद्भृदयं मनश्चैतत् । संज्ञानमाज्ञानं विज्ञानं प्रज्ञानं मेधा दृष्टिर्धृतिमतिर्मनीषा जूतिः
स्मृतिः संकल्पः क्रतुरसुः कामो वश इति । सर्वाण्येवैतानि प्रज्ञानस्य नामधेयानि भवति
॥¹⁰⁰ (AU 3.2)
- एष ब्रह्मैष इन्द्र एष प्रजापतिरेते सर्वे देवा इमानि च पञ्चमहाभूतानि पृथिवी
वायुराकाश आपो ज्योतीषीत्येतानीमानि च क्षुद्रमिश्राणीव । बीजानीतराणि चेताराणि
चाण्डजानि च जारुजानि च स्वेदजानि चोद्भिज्जानि चाश्वा गावः पुरुषा हस्तिनो
यत्किञ्चेदं प्राणि जङ्गमं च पतत्रि च यच्च स्थावरं सर्वं तत्प्रज्ञानेत्रं प्रज्ञाने प्रतिष्ठितं
प्रज्ञानेत्रो लोकः प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठा प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म ॥¹⁰¹ (AU 3.3)

All of the instances mentioned in the subsections above attest to the coherence that persists throughout and among the texts of the Prasthānatrayī. Akṣarabrahman, as

¹⁰⁰ yadetaddhṛdayaṃ manaścaitat | samjñānamājñānaṃ vijñānaṃ prajñānaṃ medhā
dṛṣṭirdhṛtimatirmanīṣā jūtiḥ smṛtiḥ saṅkalpaḥ kraturasuḥ kāmo vaśa iti | sarvānyevaitāni prajñānasya
nāmadheyāni bhavati ||

¹⁰¹ eṣa brahmaiṣa indra eṣa prajāpatirete sarve devā imāni ca pañcamahābhūtāni pṛthivī vāyurākāśa
āpo jyotīṣītyetānīmāni ca kṣudramiśrāṇīva | bījānītarāṇi cetarāṇi cāṇḍajāni ca jārujāni ca svedajāni
cobhijjāni cāśvā gāvaḥ puruṣā hastino yatkiñcedaṃ prāṇi jaṅgamaṃ ca patatri ca yacca sthāvaraṃ
sarvaṃ tatprajñānetraṃ prajñāne pratiṣṭhitam prajñānetro lokah prajñā pratiṣṭhā prajñānaṃ brahma||

Cidākāśa, is described as the *dahara* that resides in all hearts within which resides and can be beheld by Parabrahman. Akṣarabrahman is also described as *ākāśa* in the same context and to the same effect. Moreover, it is not just that Akṣarabrahman resides *in* hearts; it is also *outside*, namely, everywhere or *sarvatra*. Thus, Cidākāśa is also at once near to and far from us all, as Īśā Upaniṣad 5 and Bhagavad Gītā 13.15 teach us. However, it is not limited to that; this does not exhaust the qualities of Akṣarabrahman. Akṣarabrahman is, of course, more than something that resides inside and outside our hearts. It is also the pervader, creator, supporter, controller – of all that is, all that exists except Parabrahman. Parabrahman’s eternal wish allows Akṣarabrahman to be all of this alongside Parabrahman while being extremely engrossed in Parabrahman and nothing else. Finally, since Akṣarabrahman is indeed the foundation of all, everything names Akṣarabrahman, and Akṣarabrahman names everything. All names are Akṣarabrahman, and names say nothing but Akṣarabrahman. The Aitareya Upaniṣad offers this unique insight into the mantras mentioned above. More importantly, for the thesis of this work, these three texts of the Prasthānatrayī come together to produce, as noted, a coherent argument that Akṣarabrahman is Cidākāśa.

2.6 Akṣaradhāman

“*Dhāman*” is one of the many Sanskrit words used for a dwelling place, house, or abode. Because this place itself is Akṣarabrahman, it is called Akṣaradhāman. Parabrahman Swaminarayan is the sole and eternal presider of this divine abode. In this abode that is Akṣarabrahman, Parabrahman – in its all-opulent and infinitely luminous form – resides, along with Akṣarabrahman, in the form of the ideal *Sevaka*, offering its devotional, loving service and infinite muktas liberated of the bounds of *māyā* who have attained a body made of Akṣarabrahman. Akṣarabrahman and the muktas are focused exclusively on doing *darśana* in the form of Parabrahman while being extremely blissful, content, and fulfilled. Because this place holds these divinities in accordance with Parabrahman’s eternal will, it is a *dhāman*. This place is singular, a class by itself with a singular member, eternal, imperishable, stable, the best with absolutely nothing beyond it, luminous, beyond *māyā*, timeless, transcendent of the three *guṇas*, only attainable by those who attain qualities similar to Akṣarabrahman, the

destination at the end of the arcirmārga, and a divine place with no regression whatsoever.

It is known by different names – *Akṣaradhāman*, *Brahmadhāman*¹⁰², *Brahmapura*¹⁰³, *Brahmaloka*, *Paramapada*¹⁰⁴, *Svarga*¹⁰⁵, *parama vyoman*¹⁰⁶, and others. An important note of clarification to provide here is that when the word “brahman” refers to Akṣarabrahman, the compound is *karmadhāraya* – meaning both stand in the same case affixes. Thus, Akṣara itself is *dhāman*, and Brahman itself is *dhāman*, *pura*, or *loka*. If the word “brahman” means Parabrahman, then the compound is to be analyzed as are those which are (sixth) case *tatpuruṣa* compounds. It means the words “*dhāman*,” “*pura*,” and “*loka*” of Brahman (Parabrahman). Also, Akṣaradhāman is not the light of Parabrahman. Akṣaradhāman has a luminosity of its own that is different from Parabrahman’s form or luminosity.

In this portion of the chapter dedicated to Akṣarabrahman, let us explore how the Upaniṣads, Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, and Brahmasūtras elucidate Akṣaradhāman. Our objective is to discern the coherence in the distinctive attributes ascribed to Akṣaradhāman, the supreme abode of Parabrahman. A notable characteristic of Akṣaradhāman is that once it is attained, there is no regression. Unlike other realms, where jīvas or īśvaras may arrive but lack a guarantee of stability. Conversely, in other realms, there is an eventual descent to lower planes. This underscores the superiority of Akṣaradhāman, which holds Parabrahman and is devoid of any regressions, over all other abodes and realms. Moreover, it affirms that Parabrahman stands superior even to Akṣaradhāman. Another principle on which to focus to notice consistency is the finitude and infinitudes of Akṣaradhāman – particularly regarding time, not size. It is eternal and infinite, or timeless, in other words. Nonetheless, concerning area, it has a boundary (though being spatially infinitely finite) and is singular. The third point to be

¹⁰² Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 3.2.1, p. 291

¹⁰³ Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 2.2.7, p. 276; Chāndogya Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 8.1.5, p. 346

¹⁰⁴ Kaṭha Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 3.9, p. 127

¹⁰⁵ Kena Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 4.9, p. 60

¹⁰⁶ Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 4.8

discussed here to establish consistency is its superiority to all other realms and abodes. Lastly, Akṣaradhāman is self-luminous and illuminates everything luminous – the principle of luminosity. These are the principles discussed in detail in what follows.

2.6.1 Realm of “No-Return”

The Brahmasūtras, in the Parādhikaraṇa, demonstrate that Akṣarabrahman is a unique location while reiterating that the master of a place is separate and greater than the place itself. The Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, in both Chapter 8 – Akṣarabrahmayoga and Chapter 15 – Parabrahmayoga, describes it as the abode of Parabrahman from where one never returns. A quote from the Kaṭha Upaniṣad can also be found below. Note that the process of going back is called return. Therefore, when Parabrahman manifests while being in his supreme divine form on the throne of Akṣaradhāman, Parabrahman is not *returning* to a place. More importantly, he is also the master of Akṣarabrahman and all jīvas and īśvaras.

- आब्रह्मभुवनाल्लोकाः पुनरावर्तिनोऽर्जुन ।¹⁰⁷ (BG 8.16)

The verse indicates that one returns from every other realm or abode below Akṣaradhāman.

- अव्यक्ताद्व्यक्तयः सर्वाः प्रभवन्त्यहरागमे ।
रात्र्यागमे प्रलीयन्ते तत्रैवाव्यक्तसंज्ञके ॥¹⁰⁸ (BG 8.18)

“Everything and every realm perish and arises again from the “avyakta,” or Akṣaradhāman.” This also means that nothing is stable when compared to the eternal abode of Parabrahman.

- परस्तस्मात्तु भावोऽन्योऽव्यक्तोऽव्यक्तात्सनातनः ।
यः स सर्वेषु भूतेषु नश्यत्सु न विनश्यति ॥¹⁰⁹ (BG 8.20)

¹⁰⁷ ābrahmabhuvanāllokāḥ punarāvartino 'rjuna

¹⁰⁸ avyaktādvayaktayaḥ sarvāḥ prabhavantiyahaṛāgame |
rātryāgame pralīyante tatraivāvyaktasamjñake ||

¹⁰⁹ parastasmāttu bhāvo 'nyo 'vyakto 'vyaktātsanātanah |
yaḥ sa sarveṣu bhūteṣu naśyatsu na vinaśyati ||

“*Avyakta*” Akṣarabrahman is beyond “*avyakta*” *prakṛti* and is imperishable. This implies that everything created by *māyā* is perishable whether in the short or long term, while Akṣaradhāman is eternal. The mantra explains then that Akṣaradhāman has the distinguishing feature that it is unending, undying, and forever.

- यं प्राप्य न निवर्तन्ते तद् धाम परमं मम ॥¹¹⁰ (BG 8.21)
- यद् गत्वा न निवर्तन्ते तद् धाम परमं मम ॥¹¹¹ (BG 15.6)
- सोध्वनः पारमाप्नोति तद्विष्णोः परमं पदम् ॥¹¹² (KU 3.9)

Here, just the mention of the word “*viṣṇoḥ*” – “*viṣṇu*” in its genitive form – indicates the difference between the abode and its master. When one says this is Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s temple or a temple of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, it is clear that Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the temple are two different entities. The apostrophe or preposition “of” suggests a relationship, and thus, a noticeable difference, between the two entities in the discussion. Moreover, the pronoun “*sah*” at the beginning of the quote here clarifies that an ātman reaches the dhāman. Thus, the divine “home” – Akṣaradhāman is not the same as its master – Parabrahman, and the one who enters it, a liberated *jīva* or *īśvara*, are all distinct entities.

Some verses from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad and Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad describe the Akṣaradhāman as a place from which there is “no return” that is consistent with what we have already seen.

- तेषां न पुनरावृत्तिः¹¹³ (BU 6.2.15)
- यदेतदक्षरमेतदमृतमभयं तत्प्रविश्य देवा अमृता अभया अभवन् ।¹¹⁴ (CU 1.4.4)
- एतेन प्रतिपद्यमाना इमं मानवमावर्तं नाऽऽवर्तन्ते नाऽऽवर्तन्ते ।¹¹⁵ (CU 4.15.6)

¹¹⁰ *yaṃ prāpya na nivartante tad dhāma paramaṃ mama ॥*

¹¹¹ *yad gatvā na nivartante tad dhāma paramaṃ mama ॥*

¹¹² *sodhvanah pāramāpnoti tad viṣṇoḥ paramaṃ padam ॥*

¹¹³ *teṣāṃ na punarāvṛtṭiḥ*

¹¹⁴ *yadetadakṣarametadamṛtamabhayaṃ tatpraviśya devā amṛtā abhayā abhavan|*

¹¹⁵ *etena pratipadyamānā imaṃ mānavamāvartaṃ nā”vartante nā”vartante*

Thus, the Gītā and Upaniṣads come together to support the concept of Akṣarabrahman as Akṣaradhāman, namely, as a place from which there is no return. Therefore, once attained, no situation, entity, or time of infinite universes can seize the attainment of Akṣaradhāman from the attainer.

2.6.2 Finitudes and Infinitudes of Akṣaradhāman

This section discusses three infinitudes concerning time, space or area, and number. First, Akṣaradhāman is infinite with respect to time, as Akṣarabrahman is an eternal entity. The perpetuity of Akṣaradhāman signifies the eternal nature of Parabrahman, liberated souls (muktas), and the ongoing cycle of achieving liberation, breaking free from the grip of māyā, and transcending the unceasing cycles of birth and death. However, Akṣaradhāman is finite in space – area, and volume-wise. Although this divine abode holds infinite muktas, it is finite, infinitely finite, with boundaries. This finitude also suggests the principle of the place having a human-like shape. Incomprehensible under any māyic circumstances and through māyic instruments, it is the eternal home of Parabrahman. The third possibility of infinitude (or a state of being more than one) is of number. In number, Akṣaradhāman is, of course, not infinite; it is singular. This supreme realm is absolutely one and only one, one one-of-its-kind. In what follows, we explore the consistency of the Upaniṣads, Gītā, and Brahmasūtras with respect to the principle of Akṣaradhāman’s being eternal, vast, and singular.

2.6.2.1 Eternality

Akṣarabrahman is timeless. Akṣaradhāman is eternal. Time, the enigmatic river flowing from the depths of the past through the vibrant present, carving a path into the uncharted future, all the while echoing the cadence of unending change. Change is a ubiquitous phenomenon within the realm of māyā, where everything is subject to constant flux except for the five eternal entities. Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman too visibly accept, but are not in the least affected by, the fleeting nature of time only when they are manifest on earth. However, Akṣaradhāman is beyond māyā and time or death. The Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā says in the fourth chapter that Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) is

sanātana (one having neither a beginning nor an end) – यान्ति ब्रह्म सनातनम्¹¹⁶ (BG 4.31).

The Kaṭha Upaniṣad and Chāndogya Upaniṣad say:

- न तत्र त्वं न जरया बिभेति¹¹⁷ (KU 1.12)

Addressing Yama (the deity of death), the fearless child, Naciketas utters these words: “you (Death) are not there (in Akṣaradhāman), where the fear of aging is nonexistent.”

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad presents the same idea with a different context. The mantra from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad reads: न जरा न मृत्युर्न शोकः¹¹⁸ (CU 8.4.1) – “no old age, no death, no sorrow.” Among several profoundly interesting arguments that Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadresdas Swami presents in his Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā on this matter¹¹⁹, one of them concerns the fact that Akṣaradhāman has no beginning, as it has no end. The words from the Kaṭha Upaniṣad and Kena Upaniṣad suggest:

- अनन्तलोकाप्तिमथो प्रतिष्ठां विद्धि¹²⁰ (KU 1.14)
- यो वा एतामेवं वेदापहत्य पाप्मानमनन्ते स्वर्गे लोके ज्येये प्रतिष्ठति प्रतिष्ठति
॥¹²¹ (KeU 4.9)

The mantra reads: “the one who realizes this knowledge of the Vedas, having destroyed all vices and sins, is established in the infinite and largest Akṣaradhāman (*svarga loka*); he is established there.” The repetition of the word “*pratitiṣṭhati*” and the word itself are interpreted as indicating the quality of “no return” ascribed commonly to Akṣaradhāman.

The word “*jyeye*” is interpreted as meaning “in the most excellent” and “in the largest – larger than all other realms of jīvas and īśvaras.” Because this svarga is both *ananta* (timelessly infinite) and *jyeya*, the word *svarga* does not refer to heaven or the realm of celestial beings. It could only refer to Akṣaradhāman because all other realms perish

¹¹⁶ *yānti brahma sanātanam*

¹¹⁷ *na tatra tvaṃ na jarayā bibheti*

¹¹⁸ *na jarā na mṛtyurna śokaḥ*

¹¹⁹ Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā 2.15.2.4, p. 61

¹²⁰ *anantalokāptimatho pratiṣṭhām viddhi*

¹²¹ *yo vā etāmevaṃ vedāpahatya pāpmānāmanante svarge loke jyeye pratitiṣṭhati pratitiṣṭhati||*

and are not supreme. Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadresdas Swami adds: मायादुःखादिगन्धासंस्पृष्टे साक्षरपुरुषोत्तमसहजानन्दपरब्रह्मणस्तद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपभक्तानां च दिव्यनिवासभूतेऽक्षरधामाख्यदेशविशेष इत्यर्थः।¹²². Vastness and superiority imply the characteristics of Akṣaradhāman being spatially finite – infinitely finite and sovereign. Another mantra, from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, also reflects the same principle using the word “svarga” as follows:

- तेन धीरा अपियन्ति ब्रह्मविदः स्वर्गं लोकमित ऊर्ध्वं विमुक्ताः ।¹²³ (BU 4.4.8)

This meditative study concludes the discussion of Akṣaradhāman’s being supreme and eternal. In addition, this small part of the thesis also serves the bigger purpose of establishing and acknowledging consistency between the Upaniṣads, Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, and Brahmasūtras. A question persists - is Akṣaradhāman, the divine abode that supports all infinite Akṣaramuktas, infinite in size?

2.6.2.2 Vastness

Akṣaradhāman is immeasurably and infinitely vast, but it is still not *infinite*. This fact is crucial to understand because conceiving of Akṣaradhāman as being without boundaries and infinitely pervasive would be impermissibly problematic. So let us try to contemplate why.

If Akṣaradhāman is infinite, what would the distinction between this form of Akṣarabrahman and Cidākāśa be? Both are forms of Akṣarabrahman, yet they must be distinct insofar as they perform distinct services for Parabrahman. Not only can Akṣaradhāman not be infinitely pervasive in all directions, but it also cannot be infinitely pervasive just in the region above māyā. This is because, as the Upaniṣads establish it, Akṣaradhāman has infinite sets of infinite universes surrounding it in all directions. There is, of course, no sense of direction above māyā, but in order to clarify

¹²² Kena Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 4.9, p. 60; māyāduḥkhādīgandhāsamsprṣṭe sākṣarapurusoṭtamasaḥajānandaparabrahmaṇastadbrahmasvarūpabhaktānāṃ ca divyanivāsabhūte’kṣaradhāmākhyā-deśaviśeṣa ityarthah |

¹²³ tena dhīrā apiyanti brahmavidah svargaṃ lokamīta ūrdhvaṃ vimuktāḥ|

this principle, the statement is adduced. A few more considerations against the position that Akṣaradhāman is infinite are elaborated in the following.

If Akṣaradhāman is all-pervasive, then the *śruti* and *smṛti* that revere muktas as going to Akṣaradhāman and not returning from there would lose their relevance. If Akṣaradhāman is infinite, there is no going there; one is already in there. The mantras and *ślokas* are as follows:

- सोध्वनः पारमाप्नोति¹²⁴ (KU 3.9)
- तयोर्ध्वमायन्नमृतत्वमेति¹²⁵ (KU 6.16; CU 8.6.6)
- स सामभिरुन्नीयते ब्रह्मलोकम्¹²⁶ (PU 5.5)
- तस्यैष आत्मा विशते ब्रह्मधाम¹²⁷ (MU 3.2.4)
- अस्माल्लोकादुत्क्रम्य¹²⁸ (AU 3.4)
- एषास्य परमा गतिः¹²⁹ (BU 4.3.32)
- यं प्राप्य न निवर्तन्ते¹³⁰ (BG 8.21)
- यद् गत्वा न निवर्तन्ते¹³¹ (BG 15.6)

Moreover, a path described speaks of taking one to Akṣaradhāman. The path is called *arcirmārga*, and the final destination on the path is Akṣaradhāman. If Akṣaradhāman is unlimited and infinitely pervasive, any mention of a path getting one to the destination would be incoherent. Some mantras and *ślokas* that emphasize this *mārga* are listed below:

¹²⁴ *sodhvanah pāramāpnoti*

¹²⁵ *sodhvanah pāramāpnoti*

¹²⁶ *sa sāmabhirunnīyate brahmalokam*

¹²⁷ *tasyaiṣa ātmā viśate brahmadhāma*

¹²⁸ *asmāllokādutkramya*

¹²⁹ *eṣāsyā paramā gatiḥ*

¹³⁰ *yaṃ prāpya na nivartante*

¹³¹ *yad gatvā na nivartante*

- अग्ने नय सुपथा राये¹³² (IU 18)
- ते य एवमेतद् विदुर्ये चामी अरण्ये श्रद्धां सत्यमुपासते तेऽर्चिरभिसम्भवन्ति¹³³ (BU 6.2.15)
- तद्य इत्थं विदुर्ये चेमेरण्ये श्रद्धा तप इत्युपासते तेऽर्चिषम्¹³⁴ (CU 5.10.2)
- स एनान् ब्रह्म गमयत्येष देवपथो ब्रह्मपथ¹³⁵ (CU 4.15.6)
- अग्निर्ज्योतिरहः शुक्लः षण्मासा उत्तरायणम् । तत्र प्रयाता गच्छन्ति ब्रह्म ब्रह्मविदो जनाः ॥¹³⁶ (BG 8.24)

Additionally, words like “*pura*”, “*loka*”, “*dhāman*”, “*pada*”, etc. also signify a border. Having a border or boundary entails finitude. These words thus imply the finitude of the divine abode. Some mantras that make use of the abovementioned words are listed below:

- अनन्ते स्वर्गे लोके ज्येये प्रतिष्ठति¹³⁷ (KeU 4.9)
- सोध्वनः पारमाप्नोति तद्विष्णोः परमं पदम् ।¹³⁸ (KU 3.9)
- तेषामेव ब्रह्मलोको येषां तपो ब्रह्मचर्यं येषु सत्यं प्रतिष्ठितम् । तेषामसौ विरजो ब्रह्मलोको न येषु जिह्यमनृतं न माया चेति ॥¹³⁹ (PU 1.15-16)
- यथा पादोदरस्त्वचा विनिर्मुच्यत एवं ह वै स पाप्मना विनिर्मुक्तः स सामभिरुन्नीयते ब्रह्मलोकम् ।¹⁴⁰ (PU 5.5)

¹³² *agne naya supathā rāye*

¹³³ *te ya evametad vidurye cāmī aranye śraddhām satyamupāsate tesrcirabhisambhavanti*

¹³⁴ *tadya ittham vidurye cemeranye śraddhā tapa ityupāsate te'rciṣam*

¹³⁵ *sa enān brahma gamayatyeṣa devapatho brahmapatha*

¹³⁶ *agnirjyotirahaḥ śuklaḥ ṣaṇmāsā uttarāyaṇam | tatra prayātā gacchanti brahma brahmavido janāḥ ||*

¹³⁷ *anante svarge loka jyeye pratīṣṭhati*

¹³⁸ *sodhvanah pāramāpnoti tadviṣṇoḥ paramaṃ padam |*

¹³⁹ *teṣāmeva brahmaloko yeṣāṃ tapo brahmacaryaṃ yeṣu satyaṃ pratiṣṭhitam | teṣāmasau virajo brahmaloko na yeṣu jihyamanṛtam na māyā ceti ||*

¹⁴⁰ *yathā pādodarastvacā vinirmucyata evaṃ ha vai sa pāpmanā vinirmuktaḥ sa sāmabhirunnīyate brahmalokam*

- दिव्ये ब्रह्मपुरे ह्येष व्योमन्यात्मा प्रतिष्ठितः ।¹⁴¹ (MU 2.2.7)
- स वेदैतत्परमं ब्रह्मधाम यत्र विश्वं निहितं भाति शुभ्रम्¹⁴² (MU 3.2.1)
- एतैरुपायैर्यतते यस्तु विद्वांस्तस्यैष आत्मा विशते ब्रह्मधाम ।¹⁴³ (MU 3.2.4)
- स एतेन प्रज्ञेनात्मनाऽस्माल्लोकादुत्क्रम्याऽमुष्मिन् स्वर्गे लोके सर्वान् कामान्
आप्त्वाऽमृतः समभवत् ॥¹⁴⁴ (AU 3.4)
- एतत्सत्यं ब्रह्मपुरमस्मिन् कामाः समाहिताः¹⁴⁵ (CU 8.1.5)
- न जरा न मृत्युर्न शोको न सुकृतं न दुष्कृतं सर्वे पाप्मानोऽतो निवर्तन्तेऽपहतपाप्मा ह्येष
ब्रह्मलोकः ।¹⁴⁶ (CU 8.4.1)
- शरीरमकृतं कृतात्मा ब्रह्मलोकमभिसम्भवामीत्यभिसम्भवामीति ।¹⁴⁷ (CU 8.13.1)
- ब्रह्मलोकमभिसम्पद्यते न च पुनरावर्तते न च पुनरावर्तते ।¹⁴⁸ (CU 8.15.1)
- कस्मिन्नु खलु प्रजापतिलोका ओताश्च प्रोताश्चेति ब्रह्मलोकेषु गार्गीति ¹⁴⁹ (BU 3.6.1)
- अद्वैतो भवत्येष ब्रह्मलोकः सम्राडिति हैनमनुशशास याज्ञवल्क्यः । एषास्य परमा
गतिरेषास्य परमा सम्पदेशोऽस्य परमो लोक एषोऽस्य परम आनन्द
एतस्यैवानन्दस्यान्यानि भूतानि मात्रामुपजीवन्ति ।¹⁵⁰ (BU 4.3.32)

¹⁴¹ *divye brahmapure hyeṣa vyomnyātmā pratiṣṭhitah* |

¹⁴² *sa vedaitatparamaṃ brahmadhāma yatra viśvaṃ nihitaṃ bhāti śubhram*

¹⁴³ *etairupāyairyatate yastu vidvāṃstasyaiṣa ātmā viśate brahmadhāma*

¹⁴⁴ *sa etena prajñenātmanā 'smāllokādutkramyā 'muṣmin svarge loke sarvān kāmān āptvā 'mṛtaḥ
samabhavat*

¹⁴⁵ *etatsatyaṃ brahmapuramasmin kāmāḥ samāhitāḥ*

¹⁴⁶ *na jarā na mṛtyurna śoko na sukṛtaṃ na duṣkṛtaṃ sarve pāpmāno 'to nivartante 'pahatapāpmā hyeṣa
brahmalokaḥ* |

¹⁴⁷ *śarīramakṛtaṃ kṛtātmā brahmalokamabhisambhavāmītyabhisambhavāmīti* |

¹⁴⁸ *brahmalokamabhisampadyate na ca punarāvartate na ca punarāvartate* |

¹⁴⁹ *kasminnu khalu prajāpatilokā otāśca protāśceti brahmalokeṣu gārgīti*

¹⁵⁰ *advaito bhavatyēṣa brahmalokaḥ samrāḍiti hainamanuśāśāsa yājñavalkyaḥ | eṣāsyā paramā
gatiरेषास्य paramā sampadeṣo 'sya paramo loka eṣo 'sya parama ānanda etasyaivānandasyañyāni
bhūtāni mātrāmupajīvanti |*

- अथ ये शतं प्रजापतिलोक आनन्दाः स एको ब्रह्मलोक आनन्दो यश्च श्रोत्रियोऽवृजिनोऽकामहतोऽथैष एवं परम आनन्द एष ब्रह्मलोकः सम्राडिति होवाच याज्ञवल्क्यः।¹⁵¹ (BU 4.3.33)
- तेन धीरा अपियन्ति ब्रह्मविदः स्वर्गं लोकमित ऊर्ध्वं विमुक्ताः।¹⁵² (BU 4.4.8)
- तान्वैद्युतात् पुरुषो मानस एत्य ब्रह्मलोकान् गमयति ते तेषु ब्रह्मलोकेषु पराः परावतो वसन्ति तेषां न पुनरावृत्तिः ॥¹⁵³ (BU 6.2.15)

These are some logical arguments that also establish Akṣaradhāman's being finite, albeit infinite and incomprehensible from the perspective of anything but the two entities eternally above māyā, with solid backing of the Prasthānatrayī and the cogent interpretation of Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami thereon.

2.6.2.3 Singularity

In this last part, in which we discuss infinitudes related to Akṣaradhāman, we discuss singularity or the state of being only one – neither plural nor having anything comparable to itself. It has been demonstrated earlier that Akṣarabrahman is single and unique. This may seem to conflict with Akṣarabrahman's being Akṣaradhāman. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that Akṣarabrahman is ontologically one and the same as Akṣaradhāman. This statement is to clarify that Akṣarabrahman and Akṣaradhāman may be numerically different and play distinct roles, but both are the same entity. For example, Akṣarabrahman as Brahmasvarūpa Guru can have many forms while all being the same entity. In the time of Shastriji Maharaj (1865-1951), from 1933 to 1951, Yogiji Maharaj (1892-1971), Pramukh Swami Maharaj (1921-2016), and Mahant Swami Maharaj (b. 1933) – four Brahmasvarūpa Gurus – were residing in this world. Though the entity is one, one can see more than one form. This

¹⁵¹ *atha ye śataṃ prajāpatiloka ānandāḥ sa eko brahmaloka ānando yaśca śrotriyo 'vṛjino 'kāmahato 'thaiṣa evaṃ parama ānanda eṣa brahmalokaḥ samrāḍīti hovāca yājñavalkyaḥ*

¹⁵² *tena dhīrā apiyanti brahmavidāḥ svargaṃ lokamita ūrdhvaṃ vimuktāḥ |*

¹⁵³ *tānvaidyutāt puruṣo mānasa etya brahmalokān gamayati te teṣu brahmalokeṣu parāḥ parāvato vasanti teṣāṃ na punarāvṛtīḥ||*

analogy is, however, not perfect because, unlike the case of the Brahmasvarūpa Gurus, Akṣaradhāman is only one in number, and there are not multiple forms of Akṣaradhāman.

This divine singularity of Akṣaradhāman is expressed in several mantras. Some of them are as follows:

- अद्वैतो भवत्येष ब्रह्मलोकः¹⁵⁴ (BU 4.3.32)
- ब्रह्मलोकः¹⁵⁵ (PU 1.15, 16; BU 4.4.23)
- दिव्ये ब्रह्मपुरे¹⁵⁶ (MU 2.2.7)
- परमं ब्रह्म धाम¹⁵⁷ (MU 3.2.1)
- एकोऽधिवासः¹⁵⁸ (MU 1.2.5)
- तत्ते पदं संग्रहेण ब्रवीमि¹⁵⁹ (KU 2.15)
- एतत् सत्यं ब्रह्मपुरम्¹⁶⁰ (CU 8.1.5)
- ब्रह्मलोकम्¹⁶¹ (CU 8.13.1, 8.15.1)
- स्वर्गे लोके¹⁶² (AU 3.4; KU 1.12)
- परमं पदम्¹⁶³ (KU 3.9)
- अक्षरे परमे व्योमन्¹⁶⁴ (SU 4.8)

¹⁵⁴ *advaito bhavatyēṣa brahmalokaḥ*

¹⁵⁵ *brahmalokaḥ*

¹⁵⁶ *divye brahmapure*

¹⁵⁷ *paramaṁ brahma dhāma*

¹⁵⁸ *eko 'dhivāsaḥ*

¹⁵⁹ *tatte padaṁ saṁgrahaṇa bravīmi*

¹⁶⁰ *etat satyaṁ brahmapuram*

¹⁶¹ *brahmalokam*

¹⁶² *svarge loke*

¹⁶³ *paramaṁ padam*

¹⁶⁴ *akṣare parame vyoman*

- तद्धाम परमं मम¹⁶⁵ (BG 8.21, 15.6)

A seeming inconsistency arises here; one could object. Even though the affixes of singular number in the above references demonstrate that Akṣaradhāman is singular, there are, nonetheless, several quotes that attribute a plural number to Akṣaradhāman:

- ब्रह्मलोकाः¹⁶⁶ (BU 3.6.1)
- ब्रह्मलोकेषु¹⁶⁷ (BU 3.6.1, 6.2.15)

To resolve this apparent inconsistency, Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadrashdas Swami notes that the use of the plural in these and other quotes is not meant to denote plurality but respect for a singular entity, which is a commonplace practice in the Sanskrit language. The use of plural could also be taken to imply Akṣaradhāman's vastness but should not be taken to imply its plurality. In this discussion, along with the insightful exploration into Akṣarabrahman's being singular, and without a second, this study helped us illuminate an abiding consistency within the wisdom encapsulated in the Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā, and Brahmasūtras.

2.6.3 Luminosity

Akṣaradhāman is luminous. The light is *of* Akṣarabrahman. This divine realm serves as the illuminator for all other radiant entities in the universe, including the Sun, Moon, and lightning. This concept finds expression in the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, which affirms:

- तच्छुभ्रं ज्योतिषां ज्योतिः¹⁶⁸ (MU 2.2.9)
- न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न चन्द्रतारकं नेमा विद्युतो भान्ति कुतोऽयमग्निः ।
तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वं तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति ॥¹⁶⁹ (MU 2.2.10)

¹⁶⁵ *taddhāma paramaṃ mama*

¹⁶⁶ *brahmalokāḥ*

¹⁶⁷ *brahmalokeṣu*

¹⁶⁸ *tacchubhraṃ jyotiṣāṃ jyotiḥ*

¹⁶⁹ *na tatra sūryo bhāti na candratāraḥ nemā vidyuto bhānti kuto 'yamagniḥ |
tameva bhāntamanubhāti sarvaṃ tasya bhāsā sarvamidaṃ vibhāti ||*

The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad mantra can be translated as follows: “the sun does not shine there. Neither the moon, stars, nor lightning flashes; what to say of this fire? When it shines, everything shines afterward; through its light, everything is luminous.” Interestingly, this same mantra appears in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad (KU 5.15) and Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (SU 6.14). The Bhagavad Gītā also reiterates this Upaniṣadic principle when remembering the form and glory of Parabrahman in the fifteenth chapter. Since the sun, moon, and other “luminous” objects are under māyā, and Akṣaradhāman transcends māyā, they cannot illuminate it. On the contrary, by the divine light of that Akṣaradhāman, they attain the power of illumination.

- न तद्भासयते सूर्यो न शशाङ्को न पावकः।
यद्गत्वा न निवर्तन्ते तद्भाम परमं मम ॥¹⁷⁰ (BG 15.6)

This verse can be translated as “there (in Akṣaradhāman) the Sun, Moon, and fire do not shine, upon reaching where one does not return, is my (Parabrahman’s) supreme abode.” Moreover, the sun and other objects are māyic, and Akṣaradhāman is amāyic; therefore, they cannot exist in Akṣaradhāman, which is not only intrinsically amāyic but only contains amāyic entities. Akṣaradhāman is self-luminous: it illuminates itself even without these objects that are the paragons of illumination in our world. A point that Bhadrashdas makes in this regard is that, due to the extreme intensity of light of Akṣaradhāman, when it is compared to other luminous objects of this world, they become utterly insignificant like a firefly does when facing the sun:

- सूर्यादीनां लौकिकत्वात्तद्भाम्नश्चालौकिकत्वान्न तेषां तत्र प्रवेशार्हता ।
स्वयंप्रकाशत्वाच्च तस्य सूर्याद्यभावेऽपि सदा भासमानत्वमेव । अतिविपुलत्वाच्च
तत्प्रकाशस्य सूर्यादयस्तु तत्सन्निधौ सर्वथाऽभिभूय खद्योतत्वमपि जहतीति
ब्रह्मप्रकाशसमृद्धिः ।¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ *na tadbhāsayate sūryo na śaśāṅko na pāvakaḥ | yadgatvā na nivartante taddhāma paramaṃ mam ||*

¹⁷¹ *Kaṭha Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 5.15, p.156; sūryādīnāṃ*

laukikatvāttaddhāmaścālaukikatvānna teṣāṃ tatra praveśārhatā | svayamprakāśatvācca tasya sūryādyabhāve’pi sadā bhāsamānatvameva | ativipulatvācca tatprakāśasya sūryādayastu tatsannidhau sarvathā’bhibhūya khadyotatvamapi jahatīti brahmaprakāśasamṛddhiḥ |

Does it go without saying that if the luminosity of Akṣarabrahman has such intensity, then what could be said about Parabrahman’s luminosity?

2.6.4 Who Goes to Akṣaradhāman?

This supreme abode of Paramātman can only be achieved by jīvas and īśvaras that have become *brahmarūpa* – that is, possessing qualitative similarity with Akṣarabrahman, which includes possessing the quality of being entitled to offer *bhakti* eternally at the feet of Parabrahman, while being fully fulfilled and content owing to the enthralling *darśana* of the infinitely beautiful form of Paramātman. It is clear that without these qualities, a jīva or īśvara cannot reach Akṣaradhāman. Therefore, to achieve qualitative similarity with Akṣarabrahman, the constant association with the Brahmasvarūpa Guru, Akṣarabrahman itself, is prescribed. Clarifying the mode of association, Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadrashdas Swami defines “*brahmacarya*” in his Kaṭha Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam, saying:

- साक्षाद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरुप्रसङ्गेन तेन सहाऽऽत्मबुद्ध्या च
ब्रह्माहमहमक्षरमित्यादिरूपेणाऽनवरतं स्वात्मब्रह्मरूपत्वानुकूलश्चर्यात्मको व्याहारो
ह्यत्र ब्रह्मचर्यम् ।¹⁷²

These words of the commentator can be translated as: “here, *brahmacarya* means direct and unwavering association with the Akṣarabrahman Guru, developing a sense of oneness, and then, unceasingly contemplating “I am Brahman,” “I am Akṣara,” etc.” Some quotes from the Upaniṣads and the Gītā that articulate the qualifications required to reach Akṣaradhāman are listed below:

- स पर्यगाच्छुक्रमकायमव्रणमस्नाविरं शुद्धमपापविद्धम्¹⁷³ (IU 8)
- अनन्ते स्वर्गे लोके ज्येये प्रतिष्ठति¹⁷⁴ (KeU 4.9)

¹⁷² Kaṭha Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 2.15, p.102; *sākṣādbrahmasvarūpaguruprasaṅgena tena saḥā ’tmabuddhyā ca brahmāhamahamākṣaramityādirūpeṇā ’navaratam*

svātmabrahmarūpatvānukūlaścaryātmako vyāhāro hyatra brahmacaryam |

¹⁷³ *sa paryagācchukramakāyamavraṇamasnāviraṃ śuddhamapāviddham*

¹⁷⁴ *anante svarge loke jyeye pratīṣṭhati*

- सर्वे वेदा यत्पदमामनन्ति तपांसि सर्वाणि च यद् वदन्ति ।
यदिच्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति तत् ते पदं संग्रहेण ब्रवीम्यमित्येतत् ॥¹⁷⁵ (KU 2.15)
- सोध्वनः पारमाप्नोति तद्विष्णोः परमं पदम् ।¹⁷⁶ (KU 3.9)
- ब्रह्मप्राप्तो विरजोऽभूत्¹⁷⁷ (KU 6.18)
- तेषामेव ब्रह्मलोको येषां तपो ब्रह्मचर्यं येषु सत्यं प्रतिष्ठितम् ।
तेषामसौ विरजो ब्रह्मलोको न येषु जिह्ममनृतं न माया चेति च ॥¹⁷⁸ (PU 1.15-16)
- यथा पादोदरस्त्वचा विनिर्मुच्यते एवं ह वै स पाप्मना विनिर्मुक्तः स सामभिरुनीयते
ब्रह्मलोकम् ।¹⁷⁹ (PU 5.5)
- प्रणवो धनुः शरो ह्यात्मा ब्रह्म तल्लक्ष्यमुच्यते¹⁸⁰ (MU 2.2.4)
- स वेदैतत्परमं ब्रह्मधाम यत्र विश्वं निहितं भाति शुभ्रम्¹⁸¹ (MU 3.2.1)
- एतैरुपायैर्यतते यस्तु विद्वांस्तस्यैष आत्मा विशते ब्रह्मधाम¹⁸² (MU 3.2.4)
- स एतेन प्राज्ञेनात्मनाऽस्माल्लोकादुत्क्रम्यामुष्मिन् स्वर्गे लोके सर्वान् कामान्
आप्तवामृतः समभवत् समभवत् ।¹⁸³ (AU 3.4)

¹⁷⁵ sarve vedā yatpadamāmananti tapāṃsi sarvāṇi ca yad vadanti| yadicchanto brahmacaryaṃ caranti
tat te padam saṃgrahaṇa bravīmyomityetat||

¹⁷⁶ sodhvanah pāramāpnoti tadviṣṇoḥ paramaṃ padam|

¹⁷⁷ brahmaprāpto virajo 'bhūt

¹⁷⁸ teṣāmeva brahmaloko yeṣāṃ tapo brahmacaryaṃ yeṣu satyaṃ pratiṣṭhitam| teṣāmasau virajo
brahmaloko na yeṣu jihmamanṛtaṃ na māyā ceti ca||

¹⁷⁹ yathā pādodarastvacā vinirmucyate evaṃ ha vai sa pāpmanā vinirmuktaḥ sa sāmabhirunnīyate
brahmalokam

¹⁸⁰ praṇavo dhanuḥ śaro hyātmā brahma tallakṣyamucyate

¹⁸¹ sa vedaitatparamaṃ brahmadhāma yatra viśvaṃ nihitaṃ bhāti śubhram

¹⁸² etairupāyairyatate yastu vidvāṃstasyaiṣa ātmā viśate brahmadhāma

¹⁸³ sa etena prāññenātmanā śmāllokādutkramyāmuṣmin svarge loka sarvān kāmān āptvāmṛtaḥ
samabhavat samabhavat |

- यदेतदक्षरमेतदमृतमभयं तत्प्रविश्य देवा अमृता अभया अभवन् ॥
स य एतदेवं विद्वानक्षरं प्रणौत्येतदेवाक्षरं स्वरममृतमभयं प्रविशति तत्प्रविश्य यदमृता
देवास्तदमृतो भवति ।¹⁸⁴ (CU 1.4.4-5)
- न जरा न मृत्युर्न शोको न सुकृतं न दुष्कृतं सर्वे पाप्मानोऽतो निवर्तन्तेऽपहतपाप्मा ह्येष
ब्रह्मलोकः ।¹⁸⁵ (CU 8.4.1)
- अश्व इव रोमाणि विधूय पापं चन्द्र इव राहोर्मुखात् प्रमुच्य धूत्वा शरीरमकृतात्मा
ब्रह्मलोकमभिसम्भवामीत्यभिसम्भवामीति ।¹⁸⁶ (CU 8.13.1)
- ब्रह्मलोकमभिसम्पद्यते न च पुनरावर्तते न च पुनरावर्तते ।¹⁸⁷ (CU 8.15.1)
- एषास्य परमा गतिरेषास्य परमा सम्पदेषोऽस्य परमो लोक एषोऽस्य परम आनन्द
एतस्यैवानन्दस्यान्यानि भूतानि मात्रामुपजीवन्ति ।¹⁸⁸ (BU 4.3.32)
- तेन धीरा अपियन्ति ब्रह्मविदः स्वर्गं लोकमित ऊर्ध्वं विमुक्ताः ।¹⁸⁹ (BU 4.4.8)
- तान् वैद्युतात् पुरुषो मानस एत्य ब्रह्मलोकान् गमयति ते तेषु ब्रह्मलोकेषु पराः परावतो
वसन्ति तेषां न पुनरावृत्तिः ॥¹⁹⁰ (BU 6.2.15)

2.6.5 Akṣaradhāman in the Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā

Here are some of the references that speak of Akṣaradhāman from the Bhagavad Gītā.

¹⁸⁴ *yadetadakṣarametadamṛtamabhayaṃ tatpraviśya devā amṛtā abhayā abhavan| sa ya etadevaṃ
vidvānakṣaraṃ praṇautyetadevākṣaraṃ svaramamṛtamabhayaṃ praviśati tatpraviśya yadamṛtā
devāstadamṛto bhavati|*

¹⁸⁵ *na jarā na mṛtyurna śoko na sukṛtaṃ na duṣkṛtaṃ sarve pāpmāno 'to nivartante 'pahatapāpmā hyeṣa
brahmalokaḥ|*

¹⁸⁶ *aśva iva romāni vidhūya pāpaṃ candra iva rāhormukhāt pramucya dhūtvā śarīramakṛtātmā
brahmalokamabhisambhavāmītyabhisambhavāmīti|*

¹⁸⁷ *brahmalokamabhisampadyate na ca punarāvartate na ca punarāvartate|*

¹⁸⁸ *eṣāsyā paramā gatireṣāsyā paramā sampadeṣo 'sya paramo loka eṣo 'sya parama ānanda
etasyaivānandasyānyāni bhūtāni mātrāmupajīvanti|*

¹⁸⁹ *tena dhīrā apiyanti brahmavidāḥ svargaṃ lokamita ūrdhvaṃ vimuktāḥ|*

¹⁹⁰ *tān vaidyutāt puruṣo mānasa etya brahmalokān gamayati te teṣu brahmalokeṣu parāḥ parāvato
vasanti teṣāṃ na punarāvṛtīḥ|*

- एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थ नैनां प्राप्य विमुह्यति।
स्थित्वास्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति ॥¹⁹¹ (BG 2.72)
- योऽन्तः सुखोऽन्तरारामस्तथान्तर्ज्योतिरेव यः ।
स योगी ब्रह्मनिर्वाणं ब्रह्मभूतोऽधिगच्छति ॥¹⁹² (BG 5.24)
- लभन्ते ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृषयः क्षीणकल्मषाः ।
छिन्नद्वैधा यतात्मानः सर्वभूतहिते रताः ॥¹⁹³ (BG 5.25)
- कामक्रोधवियुक्तानां यतीनां यतचेतसाम् ।
अभितो ब्रह्मनिर्वाणं वर्तते विदितात्मनाम् ॥¹⁹⁴ (BG 5.26)
- यदक्षरं वेदविदो वदन्ति विशन्ति यद्यतयो वीतरागाः ।
यदिच्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति तत्ते पदं संग्रहेण प्रवक्ष्ये ॥¹⁹⁵ (BG 8.11)
- ॐ इत्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म व्याहरन्मामनुस्मरन् ।
यः प्रयाति त्यजन्देहं स याति परमां गतिम् ॥¹⁹⁶ (BG 8.13)
- अग्निर्ज्योतिरहः शुक्लः षण्मासा उत्तरायणम् ।
तत्र प्रयाता गच्छन्ति ब्रह्म ब्रह्मविदो जनाः ॥¹⁹⁷ (BG 8.24)

¹⁹¹ eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha naināṃ prāpya vimuhyati|

sthitvāsyāmantakāle 'pi brahmanirvāṇamṛcchati ||

¹⁹² yo 'ntaḥ sukho 'ntarārāmastathāntarjyotireva yaḥ |

sa yogī brahmanirvāṇaṃ brahmabhūto 'dhigacchati ||

¹⁹³ labhante brahmanirvāṇamṛṣayaḥ kṣīṇakalmaṣāḥ |

chinnadvaidhā yatātmānaḥ sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ||

¹⁹⁴ kāmakrodhaviyuktānāṃ yatīnāṃ yatacetasām|

abhito brahmanirvāṇaṃ vartate viditātmanām||

¹⁹⁵ yadaḥṣaraṃ vedavido vadanti viśanti yadyatayo vītarāgāḥ|

yadicchanto brahmācāryaṃ caranti tatte padaṃ saṅgrahaṇa pravakṣye||

¹⁹⁶ Om ityekākṣaraṃ brahma vyāharanmāmanusmaran|

yaḥ prayāti tyajandehaṃ sa yāti paramāṃ gatim||

¹⁹⁷ agnirjyotirahaḥ śuklaḥ ṣaṇmāsā uttarāyaṇam|

tatra prayātā gacchanti brahma brahmavido janāḥ||

- वेदेषु यज्ञेषु तपःसु चैव दानेषु यत्पुण्यफलं प्रदिष्टम् ।
अत्येति तत्सर्वमिदं विदित्वा योगी परं स्थानमुपैति चाद्यम् ॥¹⁹⁸ (BG 8.28)
- ततः पदं तत्परिमार्गितव्यं यस्मिन्नाता न निवर्तन्ति भूयः ।
तमेव चाद्यं पुरुषं प्रपद्ये यतः प्रवृत्तिः प्रसृता पुराणी ॥¹⁹⁹ (BG 15.4)
- निर्मानमोहा जितसङ्गदोषा अध्यात्मनित्या विनिवृत्तकामाः।
द्वन्द्वैर्विमुक्ताः सुखदुःखसंज्ञैर्गच्छन्त्यमूढाः पदमव्ययं तत् ॥²⁰⁰ (BG 15.5)
- एतैर्विमुक्तः कौन्तेय तमोद्वारैस्त्रिभिर्नरः ।
आचरत्यात्मनः श्रेयस्ततो याति परां गतिम् ॥²⁰¹ (BG 16.22)
- सर्वकर्माण्यपि सदा कुर्वाणो मद्ब्यपाश्रयः ।
मत्प्रसादादवाप्नोति शाश्वतं पदमव्ययम् ॥²⁰² (BG 18.56)

It is imperative to underscore that a comprehensive examination of the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gītā, and the Brahmasūtras reveals a conspicuous absence of any reference to an entity other than Akṣarabrahman as the designated divine abode of Parabrahman. Hence, a meticulous examination of the Prasthānatrayī affords us the opportunity to discern their inherent coherence and internal congruity concerning a range of subjects, exemplified in the foregoing discourse by the designation of Akṣaradhāman as the supreme, radiant abode with no regression, presided by Parabrahman.

¹⁹⁸ *vedeṣu yajñeṣu tapaḥsu caiva dāneṣu yatpuṇyaphalaṃ pradiṣṭam |*

atyeti tatsarvamidaṃ viditvā yogī paraṃ sthānamupaiti cādyam ||

¹⁹⁹ *tataḥ padaṃ tatparimārgitavyaṃ yasmingatā na nivartanti bhūyaḥ|*

tameva cādyam puruṣaṃ prapadye yataḥ pravṛtṭiḥ prasṛtā purāṇī||

²⁰⁰ *nirmānamohā jītaśaṅgadoṣā adhyātmanityā vinivṛttakāmāḥ|*

dvandvairvimuktāḥ sukhaduḥkhasaṃjñāirgacchantyamūḍhāḥ padamavyayaṃ tat||

²⁰¹ *etairvimuktaḥ kaunteya tamodvāraistribhirnaraḥ|*

ācaratyātmanaḥ śreyastato yāti parāṃ gatim||

²⁰² *sarvakarmāṇyapi sadā kurvāṇo madvyapāśrayaḥ|*

matprasādādavāpnōti śāśvataṃ padamavyayam||

2.7 Akṣarabrahman as Sevaka

The Akṣarabrahman that pervades infinite universes, all jīvas and īśvaras inside and out, and exists eternally as the divine abode of Parabrahman Swaminarayan, is in its third form, the ideal servant of Parabrahman, to whom Akṣarabrahman lovingly offers ultimate devotion as Parabrahman’s *Sevaka*. This same Akṣarabrahman in another form manifests in the world to grant *mokṣa* to infinite souls. The *Sevaka* form, just like Parabrahman, has a human-like shape with limbs and senses – all of which are divine – and is eternal and singular in number. Moreover, this form receives the glance of Parabrahman, who holds the will to create. In this section, we will encounter Upaniṣad verses and Brahmasūtras imparting a coherent understanding of this principle. In the following, I follow the path laid down by the Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā.

2.7.1 Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.2.1

The words of Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.2.1 were heard as follows:

- आविः सन्निहितं गुहाचरं नाम महत्पदमत्रैतत् समर्पितम् ।
एजत्प्राणन्निमिषच्च यदेतज्जानथ सदसद्वरेण्यं परं विज्ञानाद् यद् वरिष्ठं प्रजानाम् ॥²⁰³
(MU 2.2.1)

Here, the words “*mahat padam*” refer to Akṣaradhāman. The indeclinable following them is “*atra*,” meaning “here” or, more precisely, “here, in this Akṣaradhāman.” The word takes on this particular meaning since the ongoing discussion is of Parabrahman’s divine abode. The pronoun “*etad*” means “this,” and “*samarpitam*” means “dedicated in service.” Akṣarabrahman, in its *Sevaka* form, is lovingly dedicated to the service of Parabrahman. There is no entity greater than Akṣarabrahman except Parabrahman. The employment of the term “this” implies that Akṣarabrahman, in the role of a devoted servant (*Sevaka*), assumes a discernible form: a divine, human-like form replete with divine limbs and senses. The first word of the mantra, “*āviḥ*,” is interpreted by Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadrēśdas Swami to refer to all non-pervasive forms of

²⁰³ *āviḥ sannihitaṃ guhācaraṃ nāma mahatpadamatraitat samarpitam | ejaṭprāṇannimiṣacca yadetajjānatha sadasadvareṇyaṃ paraṃ vijñānād yad varīṣṭhaṃ prajānām ||*

Akṣarabrahman. There are three such forms of Akṣarabrahman that possess a human-like shape – the *Sevaka* form in Akṣaradhāman, Akṣaradhāman itself, and the Brahmasvarūpa Guru – the form manifests in the world. The three actions that follow in the first part of the next *pāda* are *ejat* (walking), *prāṇat* (breathing), and *nimiṣat* (blinking) – all of which are interpreted to apply to both the *Sevaka* and Guru. These actions also entail that Akṣarabrahman has a shape, and this shape resembles that of Parabrahman. We humans, too, get our bodily shape from the divine shape of Parabrahman. The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad supports the claim that Akṣarabrahman has a form.

- दिव्ये ब्रह्मपुरे ह्येष व्योमन्यात्मा प्रतिष्ठितः। मनोमयः प्राणशरीरनेता²⁰⁴ (MU 2.2.7)
- हिरण्मये परे कोशे विरजं ब्रह्म निष्कलम् । तच्छुभ्रम्²⁰⁵ (MU 2.2.9)

The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.2.1 clearly refers to the *Sevaka* form by its use of the pronoun “this.” A proximity similar to that conveyed in this verse is suggested in the Īśā Upaniṣad.

2.7.2 Īśā Upaniṣad 16

This mantra appears in the last part of the Īśā Upaniṣad. The relevant excerpt from it reads as follows:

- यत्ते रूपं कल्याणतमं तत्ते पश्यामि योऽसावसौ पुरुषस्सोऽहमस्मि ॥²⁰⁶ (IU 16)

It means: I see that form of yours, the most liberating one. He that is this, this Puruṣa, I am he. The first part of the excerpt quoted above is a prayer to Parabrahman to bless the spiritual aspirant with realizing its form. Here, “*paśyāmi*” means much more than mere beholding a form. Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadrashdas Swami interprets²⁰⁷ the verb as conveying the following idea: may I realize this most wonderful form of yours,

²⁰⁴ *divye brahmapure hyeṣa vyomnyātmā pratiṣṭhitah | manomayah prāṇasārīranetā*

²⁰⁵ *hiraṇmaye pare koṣe virajam brahma niṣkalam | tacchubhram*

²⁰⁶ *yatte rūpaṃ kalyāṇatamaṃ tatte paśyāmi yo 'śāvasau puruṣasso 'hamasmi*||

²⁰⁷ See, Īśā Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 16, pp. 23-24

Parabrahman, upon becoming *brahmarūpa*, i.e., like Akṣarabrahman. This prayer is offered to Parabrahman in Akṣaradhāman, and after it is offered, the one who prayed declares a statement, establishing oneness with Akṣarabrahman and attaining the divine features of Akṣarabrahman that allow one to experience the bliss of Parabrahman: योऽसावसौ पुरुषस्सोऽहमस्मि²⁰⁸.

The pronoun “*asau*” and its double usage suggest proximity and urgency. Akṣarabrahman, as *Sevaka*, is the closest to Parabrahman. Its being used twice indicates the excitement of having oneness with Akṣarabrahman and realizing the ultimate truth, Paramātmān. It could also suggest the necessity of becoming *brahmarūpa* to “see” the form of God.

An equally cogent reading of “*asau asau*” observes that it invokes an image of one pointing at the divine human-like shape – complete with two hands, two feet, nose, mouth, eyes, etc. – of Akṣarabrahman that is proximate to Parabrahman, to whom one was praying.

When it is said, “I am he” (*so’hamasmi*), it means that this Akṣarabrahman is my *svarūpa*, or I am this Akṣarabrahman. One is associating with Akṣarabrahman through one’s mind in a way identical to that described in the discussion of “*brahmacarya*” explored earlier.

The same idea encountered previously that one who is *brahmarūpa* attains Parabrahman, and with Akṣarabrahman enjoys the bliss and devotion of Parabrahman, is reflected in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad.

2.7.3 Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.1.1

This particular mantra also unveils the idea that those who become like Akṣarabrahman attain Parabrahman. It is articulated as follows:

²⁰⁸ *yo ’sāvasau puruṣasso ’hamasmi*

- ॐ ब्रह्मविदानोति परम् । तदेषाऽभ्युक्ता । सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म । यो वेद निहितं
गुहायां परमे व्योमन् । सोऽश्रुते सर्वान् कामान् सह ब्रह्मणा विपश्चितेति ॥²⁰⁹ (TU
2.1.1)

The mantra shares the wisdom that the one who knows Akṣarabrahman attains Parabrahman. Then, to offer a way of identifying Akṣarabrahman, it says that Akṣarabrahman is *satyam* (real), *jñānam* (knowledge), and *anantam* (eternal). Immediately upon establishing these qualities of Akṣarabrahman, it reveals that Akṣarabrahman is the entity that is located within the space inside of our hearts, i.e., Cidākāśa, and in the ultimate space, i.e., Akṣaradhāman. Regarding the *Sevaka* form of Akṣarabrahman, the mantra proceeds to describe an individual who has achieved the final level of qualitative similarity with Akṣarabrahman, rendering them qualified to engage in eternal service to Parabrahman alongside Akṣarabrahman. It is crucial to clarify that the term “*brahmavid*” does not pertain to one who contemplates on Parabrahman since there is nothing further to attain or comprehend once Parabrahman is known. Moreover, that also leads the part “*āpnoti param*” to lose significance.

This mantra adduces the existence of *brahmarūpa* muktas, Cidākāśa, Akṣaradhāman, and the *Sevaka* form of Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman as the ultimate attainment. The concept of mukti is also succinctly expressed in the words of this mantra.

An important distinguishing feature of the *Sevaka* form of Akṣarabrahman is that it receives the glance of Parabrahman, which holds the will to create. Akṣarabrahman receives this divine glance and will then select a mukta from infinite muktas engrossed in the divine *darśana* of Parabrahman to inspire the mukta to commence the creative process. Upon creating the world, Parabrahman bestows those dwelling within it a bridge or a boat to overcome māyā and join the infinite muktas in Akṣaradhāman. This bridge, or boat, is Akṣarabrahman. This form, known as the Brahmasvarūpa Guru, shows us through his life how to become one with him (that is, how to attain the virtues he perfectly exemplifies) and attain the state mentioned above. As we strive to establish

²⁰⁹ *Om brahmavidāpnoti param | tadeṣā'bhyuktā | satyaṃ jñānamanantaṃ brahma | yo veda nihitaṃ guhāyāṃ parame vyoman so'snute sarvān kāmān saha brahmanā vipaściteti ||*

the presence of consistency within the Prasthānatrayī – consisting of the Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā, and Brahmasūtras – we now turn our attention to the discussion of Akṣarabrahman as *Sevaka* in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad.

2.7.4 Kaṭha Upaniṣad 3.1

The Kaṭha Upaniṣad mantra discusses Akṣarabrahman as the one who enjoys the bliss of Parabrahman.

- ऋतं पिबन्तौ सुकृतस्य लोके गुहां प्रविष्टौ परमे परार्थे ।
छायातपौ ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति पञ्चाग्नयो ये च त्रिणाचिकेताः ॥²¹⁰ (KU 3.1)

As the mantra specifically mentions “*sukṛtasya loke*,” it refers to Akṣaradhāman. The form of Akṣarabrahman that resides in Akṣaradhāman, enjoying the divine bliss of Parabrahman while also being the ideal model for Akṣaramuktas, is the *Sevaka*. The words beginning the mantra also imply that jīvas and īśvaras enjoy this bliss while in their liberated state. The next part – “*guhām praviṣṭau*” – implies that the bliss of Parabrahman can also be experienced while being in this mortal body. What is the difference between the *Sevaka* and mukta if both experience the same bliss? Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami explains: तत्र जीवात्मनो तन्मुक्त्यवस्थाऽनन्तरप्राप्तमक्षरब्रह्मणस्तु नित्यमेवेति भेदः । सुखग्रहणप्रकारे गृह्यमाण सुखानुभूतिपरिमाणे च तदा न कोऽपि भेदः ।²¹¹ The only difference is that Akṣarabrahman has been experiencing this bliss since eternity, and Akṣaramukta began to experience it after first being in a non-liberated state. Both will experience this bliss forever while having no difference in how the bliss is received, perceived, or experienced. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad supports the ideas presented in this mantra. The mantra reads: ॐ ब्रह्मविदाप्नोति परम् । तदेषाऽभ्युक्ता ।

²¹⁰ *ṛtaṃ pibantau sukṛtasya loke guhām praviṣṭau parame parārthye |
chāyātapau brahmavido vadanti pañcāgnayo ye ca triṇāciketāḥ ||*

²¹¹ Kaṭha Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 3.1, p. 122; *tatra jīvātmano tanmuktyavasthā 'nantaraprāptamakṣarabrahmaṇastu nityameveti bhedaḥ | sukhagrahaṇāprakāre grhyamāṇa sukhānubhūtiparimāṇe ca tadā na ko 'pi bhedaḥ |*

सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म । यो वेद निहितं गुहायां परमे व्योमन् । सोऽश्नुते सर्वान् कामान् सह । ब्रह्मणा विपश्चितेति ॥²¹² (TU 2.1.1)

2.7.5 A Consistent Exploration

Akṣarabrahman as a *Sevaka* is described on many occasions in the Upaniṣads as one might deduce from the examples provided above. Some instances where, based on Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadrēśdas Swami's interpretation, we find the words to indicate the *Sevaka* form of Akṣarabrahman are as follows:

- यः पुनरेतं त्रिमात्रेणोमित्यनेनैवाक्षरेण परमपुरुषमभिध्यायीत स तेजसि सूर्ये सम्पन्नः। यथा पादोदरस्त्वचा विनिर्मुच्यत एवं ह वै स पाप्मना विनिर्मुक्तः स सामभिरुन्नीयते ब्रह्मलोकं स एतस्माज्जीवघनात् परात्परं पुरिशयं पुरुषमीक्षते तदेतौ श्लोकौ भवतः॥²¹³ (PU 5.5)
- स एतेन प्रज्ञेनात्मनाऽस्माल्लोकादुत्क्रम्याऽमुष्मिन् स्वर्गे लोके सर्वान् कामान् आप्त्वाऽमृतः समभवत्समभवत्॥²¹⁴ (AU 3.4)

In both mantras, a mukta goes to Akṣaradhāman and comes across the *Sevaka* Akṣarabrahman. With this form, as mentioned in the section above, the mukta has attained similarity in equally enjoying the *sukha* or bliss of Parabrahman. This *Sevaka* form is also discussed in the Brahmasūtras. Here, too, it is indicated that both – the *Sevaka* and mukta jīvas or īśvaras – experience the same bliss of Parabrahman. The penultimate sūtra of the Brahmasūtras reads:

- भोगमात्रसाम्यलिङ्गाच्च²¹⁵ (BS 4.4.21)

²¹² *Om brahmavidāpnoti param | tadeṣā 'bhyuktā | satyaṃ jñānāmanantaṃ brahma | yo veda nihitaṃ guhāyāṃ parame vyoman | so 'śnute sarvān kāmān saha | brahmaṇā vipaściteti ||*

²¹³ *yaḥ punaretaṃ trimātreṇomityanenaivākṣareṇa paramapuruṣamabhidhyāyīta sa tejasi sūrye sampannaḥ | yathā pādodarastvacā vinirmucyata evaṃ ha vai sa pāpmanā vinirmuktaḥ sa sāmabhirunnīyate brahmalokaṃ sa etasmājjīvaghanaṭ parātparam puriśayaṃ puruṣamīkṣate tadetau ślokaḥ bhavataḥ ||*

²¹⁴ *sa etena prajñenātmanā śmāllokādutkramyā 'muṣmin svarge loka sarvān kāmān āptvā 'mṛtaḥ samabhavatsamabhavat ||*

²¹⁵ *bhogamātrasāmyaliṅgācca*

The sūtra can be translated as “the similarity (between Akṣarabrahman and Akṣaramukta) only concerning (the experience of bliss) because of the indications (from the scriptures).” The Gītā, too, mentions this form when exploring the nature of Akṣarabrahman. The śloka expounds that “Akṣarabrahman exists inside and outside of jīvas and īśvaras. It is mobile (inside Akṣaradhāman and as Guru) and immobile (as Cidākāśa and Akṣaradhāman). It is also incomprehensible as it is subtle. It remains far and also near.” The term “*caram*” in this verse has a specific connotation, referring to the Sevaka-form of Akṣarabrahman. The verse in question reads:

- बहिरन्तश्च भूतानामचरं चरमेव च ।
सूक्ष्मत्वात्तदविज्ञेयं दूरस्थं चान्तिके च तत् ॥²¹⁶ (BG 13.15)

In this manner, the *Sevaka* form of Akṣarabrahman is explored here. The final form, essential for us in this world and seeking liberation, is the Akṣarabrahman Guru.

2.8 Akṣarabrahman as Brahmaśvarūpa Guru

Thus far, we have discussed three forms of Akṣarabrahman, namely, i) Cidākāśa – it is subtle, utterly incomprehensible by our human eyes and understanding; it is all-pervasive, beyond our grasp; no mundane *manas* or *buddhi* can ever fully contemplate this form. ii) Akṣaradhāman, the divine abode of Parabrahman, is similarly incomprehensible by māyic senses; it is beyond the darkness of māyā, extremely distant, and the place from which there is no return. iii) *Sevaka* – because Akṣarabrahman as the ideal devotee of Parabrahman, eternally in the service of Parabrahman, resides within Akṣaradhāman, all that applies to the forms that reside *in* Akṣaradhāman also apply to the *Sevaka* form: it can only be apprehended by Akṣaramuktas, or liberated jīvas and īśvaras, and is inaccessible to any and all jīvas and īśvaras that are still in māyā. What do we have for us? How can Akṣarabrahman still be the bridge for us who are not liberated and still within the clutches of māyā that leads to Parabrahman as described in Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.2.5 - अमृतस्यैष सेतुः²¹⁷, and the

²¹⁶ *bahirantaśca bhūtānāmacaram carameva ca|
sūkṣmatvāttadavijñeyaṃ dūrasthaṃ cāntike ca tat||*

²¹⁷ *amṛtasyaiṣa setuḥ*

Kaṭha Upaniṣad 3.2 - यः सेतुरीजानानामक्षरं ब्रह्म यत् परम्²¹⁸, or the raft that leads away from the dangerous currents of māyā as described in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 2.8 - ब्रह्मोडुपेन प्रतरेत्²¹⁹. The response to this query elucidates the existence of the fourth form of Akṣarabrahman, which, in the form of Akṣarabrahman Guru and absolute *dhāraka* of Parabrahman, materializes within our cosmos and safeguards the lineage of the *sampradaya*. More importantly, as Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadrashdas Swami explains in Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā: मातृसहस्रमिव पितृसहस्रमिव सुहृत्सहस्रमिव यथाऽस्मद्भावभावि भूत्वा सर्वेभ्यश्च परमसुखमनुभावयतीत्यकारणी करुणा²²⁰ meaning that “it is on account of the inexplicable compassion of (Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman) that the Guru, like a thousand mothers, like a thousand fathers, like a thousand friends, becomes like us and provides us the opportunity to eternally experience supreme bliss of Parabrahman.” This is why we have the Akṣarabrahman Guru, and an everlasting lineage of these Gurus, amongst us.

The three most crucial verses, from the Upaniṣads and Gītā, in this matter that appear also in the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam series are as follows:

- तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत्समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्म निष्ठम् ॥²²¹ (MU 1.2.12)
- तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया ।
उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥²²² (BG 4.34)
- यस्य देवे परा भक्तिर्यथा देवे तथा गुरौ ।
तस्यैते कथिता ह्यर्थाः प्रकाशन्ते महात्मनः ॥²²³ (SU 6.24)

²¹⁸ *yaḥ seturījānānāmakṣaram brahma yat param*

²¹⁹ *brahmoḍupena prataret*

²²⁰ Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhāntā-Sudhā 2.15.4, p. 75; *māṭṛsahasramiva pitṛsahasramiva suhṛtsahasramiva yathā śmadbhāvabhāvi bhūtvā sarvebhyaśca paramasukhamanubhāvayatītyakāraṇī karuṇā*

²²¹ *tadvijñānārtham sa gurumevābhigacchetsamitpāṇiḥ śrotriyaṃ brahma niṣṭham ॥*

²²² *tadviddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā*

upadekṣyanti te jñānam jñāninastattvadarśinaḥ ॥

²²³ *asya deve parā bhaktiryathā deve tathā gurau*

tasyaite kathitā hyarthāḥ prakāśante mahātmanah ॥

The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad mantra illuminates the characteristics of the Akṣarabrahman Guru as श्रोत्रियम् {śrotriyam} ब्रह्म {brahman}, and निष्ठम् {niṣṭham}. Here, śrotriyam means the one who has realized all the words of the Vedas and Vedānta; these realized words are reflected in the Guru's actions, and the Guru is aptly capable of imparting the divine wisdom of Brahmavidyā through his words and actions. Also, the Guru has to be Akṣarabrahman himself and is thoroughly and absolutely engrossed in Parabrahman. Such a combination of qualities is unique to Akṣarabrahman, in the form of the Guru. While elucidating each of these virtues, Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami notes that the fact that these virtues are unique only to Akṣarabrahman establishes that only Akṣarabrahman is worthy of being a Guru. अनेन नित्यं परमात्मनिष्ठः साक्षादक्षरब्रह्मैव ब्रह्मविद्यायाः विज्ञापयिता गुरुर्भवितुमर्हति नान्य इति सिद्धान्तितम् |²²⁴. The commentator furthers the conversation with a more precise and detailed picture of Akṣarabrahman as Guru, along with naming the Gurus in this divine lineage in the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam.

The existence of Akṣarabrahman Guru for us is, in fact, an ultimate blessing. Moreover, what adds to that is our association with the Guru to transpire the divine virtues of Akṣarabrahman. As one of the most crucial facts, all three original verses employed here speak of how the Guru should be approached and associated. The Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā verse focuses solely on that. The verse from Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā 4.34 emphasizes that to acquire the knowledge of Brahmavidyā, one should approach the Guru with profound humility, inquisitiveness, and a readiness to render service. The enlightened Guru will reveal the knowledge of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadreshdas Swami adds in his commentary that the question should not be asked to test the doctrine, examine the speaker's knowledge, or with suspicion. Instead, it should be asked to strengthen already faithfully accepted doctrines and further explore Brahman's knowledge. This process should be practiced with humility as a patient asks a doctor to be cured of his/her ailments. The words read as follows: परिप्रश्नेन न तु सिद्धान्तविचिकित्साबुद्ध्या नाऽपि वक्तृपरीक्षणार्थं न वा शङ्कयाऽपि तु श्रद्धया स्वीकृतस्यैव सिद्धान्तस्य दाढ्यर्थं विशेषतो बुभुत्सया च व्याधिमुक्त्यभिलाषिणो वैद्यं प्रतीव

²²⁴ Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 1.2.12, p. 254; *anena nityam paramātmaniṣṭhaḥ sākṣādakṣarabrahmaiva brahmavidyāyāḥ vijñāpayitā gururbhavitumarhati nānya iti siddhāntitam* |

भवमोक्षाभिलाषिणो नम्रतया प्रश्नकरणेनेत्यर्थः ।²²⁵. Moreover, this *śloka* also refers to the Guru in the future tense – *upadekṣyanti* implying that the Akṣarabrahman Guru, in whom the absolute presence of Parabrahman can be experienced, will be present for all those seeking mukti.

Additionally, one of Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā verses in the same context speaks of how one with total faith, complete focus, and sensory restraint attains the knowledge of Brahman and then blissful peace immediately. The verse reads:

- श्रद्धावाँल्लभते ज्ञानं तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः ।
ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परां शान्तिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥²²⁶ (BG 4.34)

This blessing of the Guru makes mukti available for all seeking it. As for being enlightened by Brahmavidyā, the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad says to possess the same staunch and unwavering faith in the Akṣarabrahman Guru as one has in Parabrahman. Those are great souls. This state is the result of associating with Akṣarabrahman Guru that forever blesses one and all.

The same process of approaching the Guru resonates in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad. Recognized as one of the significant mantras by many Vedānta practitioners, this mantra persuades us to leave our slumber and approach the great Akṣarabrahman Guru to learn Brahmavidyā. The Kaṭha Upaniṣad mantra reads:

- उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान् निबोधत ।
क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता दुरत्यया दुर्ग पथस्तत् कवयो वदन्ति ॥²²⁷ (KU 3.14)

²²⁵ Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 4.34, p. 109; *paripraśnena na tu siddhāntavicikitsābuddhyā nā'pi vaktrparīkṣaṇārthaṃ na vā śaṅkayā'pi tu śraddhayā svīkṛtasyaiva siddhāntasya dādhyarthaṃ viśeṣato bubhutsayā ca vyādhimuktyabhilāṣiṇo vaidyaṃ pratīva bhavamokṣābhilāṣiṇo namratayā praśnakaraṇenetyarthaḥ* |

²²⁶ *śraddhāvāṁllabhate jñānaṃ tatparaḥ saṃyatendriyaḥ | jñānaṃ labdhvā parāṃ śāntimacireṇādhigacchati ||*

²²⁷ *uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata | kṣurasya dhārā niśitā duratyayā durgam pathastat kavayo vadanti ||*

Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhadresdas Swami expounds the Guru should be Guṇātīta, eternally untouched by māyā, and proficient in doing *upāsanā* of Parabrahman, and possesses Parabrahman in his fullest. The eloquent words of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam are as follows: श्रेष्ठान् अनादितो मायासंसर्गरहितान् परमात्मपरमोपासनकुशलान् गुणातीतान्, परमात्मपरमदिव्यसुखातिमग्नान् स्वसङ्गेन परमात्मपरमदिव्यसुखप्रदान् परमात्मस्वरूपोपदेशकुशलान् श्रोत्रियान् साक्षादक्षरब्रह्मस्वरूपान् सदा परब्रह्मनिष्ठान् तत्त्वदर्शिनोऽनादितः परब्रह्मसहजानन्दस्य सम्यक् साक्षाच्च धारकान् परमात्मप्रत्यक्षताऽनुभावकान् सिद्धान्तपरम्परारक्षकान् गुरुवरान् प्राप्य विधिवत्तच्छरणं स्वीकृत्य तद्दृढतरप्रसङ्गं लब्ध्वेतियावद् ब्रह्मपरब्रह्मस्वरूपनिरूपणप्रधानां ब्रह्मविद्यां निबोधत...²²⁸.

All the mentions and explorations in the Prasthānatrayī and the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam come together to provide a coherent picture of Akṣarabrahman as Brahmasvarūpa Guru as the only and ultimate connection to mukti, and Parabrahman.

2.8.1 Akṣarabrahman Guru and Upaniṣadic Analogies

Akṣarabrahman is described as a bridge, or a boat (a connecting medium), to Parabrahman that all jīvas and īśvaras may use. This is to say that to reach or attain Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman is the essential medium or, more precisely, the only medium. This attainment does not just mean physical attainment. It is also the means for contemplating the form of Parabrahman and meditating on that form with the understanding of Parabrahman’s complete divinity. The references provided below reflect this notion, revealing coherence among the texts, in this case, the Upaniṣads, on a central principle, the nature of Akṣarabrahman.

²²⁸ Kaṭha Upaniṣad-Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam 3.14, p. 134; *śreṣṭhān anādito māyāsamsargarhitān paramātmparamopāsanakuśalān guṇātītān, paramātmparamadivyaasukhātīmagnān svasaṅgena paramātmparamadivyaasukhapradān paramātmavarūpopadeśakuśalān śrotriyān sāksādakṣarabrahmasvarūpān sadā parabrahmaniṣṭhān tattvadarśino ’nāditaḥ parabrahmasahajānandasya samyak sāksācca dhārakān paramātmpratyakṣatā ’nubhāvakān siddhāntaparāmrakṣakān guruvarān prāpya vidhivattaccharaṇaṃ svīkrtya taddṛḍhataraprasaṅgaṃ labdhvetiyāvad | brahmaparabrahmasvarūpanirūpaṇapradhānāṃ brahmavidyāṃ nibodhata ...*

The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad states that Akṣarabrahman is the bridge to the divine Parabrahman.

- अमृतस्यैष सेतुः²²⁹ (MU 2.2.5)

The Kāṭha Upaniṣad mentions the same idea regarding the jīvas and īśvaras.

- यः सेतुरीजानानामक्षरं ब्रह्म यत् परम् ।
अभयं तितीर्षतां पारं नाचिकेतं शकेमहि ॥230 (KU 3.2) – “This Akṣarabrahman is, for those who wish to progress, a bridge, the greatest, without fear, and the one who leads to Akṣaradhāman, that is the farthest shore.”

The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad says:

- ब्रह्मोडुपेन प्रतरेत् विद्वान् स्रोतांसि सर्वाणि भयावहानि ॥²³¹ (SU 2.8) – “The wise cross the terror-inspiring streams using the boat in the form of Brahman.”

When Akṣarabrahman is said to be a bridge connecting two plains or a boat connecting the two shores, this is not to be understood merely metaphorically (that is, as having no bearing on reality), as the metaphor conveys the absolute necessity of Akṣarabrahman. Without the support of Akṣarabrahman, crossing the terror-inspiring streams referred to by the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad is, as the texts proclaim, an impossible task. The endpoint to which Akṣarabrahman leads the liberation-wishing souls is Akṣaradhāman, the sacred and ultimate realm where Parabrahman dwells eternally. The following necessary clarification is warranted in this discussion: although a house stands as a separate entity from its owner when a guest articulates the intention of visiting a specific house, it signifies not only the desire to reach the physical house but, more pertinently, the aspiration to reach the master of that dwelling. What this example lucidly conveys is that saying that Akṣarabrahman leads to Akṣaradhāman is precisely to say that Akṣarabrahman is leading souls to Parabrahman. Thus, when an aspirant, who wishes for *mokṣa*, refers to seeking or attaining Akṣaradhāman, the meaning s/he conveys is that of attaining Parabrahman, who resides within the abode. The area below and

²²⁹ *amṛtasyaiṣa setuḥ*

²³⁰ *yaḥ seturījānānāmakṣaram brahma yat param |
abhayaṃ titīrṣatāṃ pāraṃ nāciketam śakemahi ||*

²³¹ *brahmoḍupena prataret vidvān srotāṃsi sarvāṇi bhayāvahāni ||*

surrounding the bridge, or the underside of the boat, is *māyā* that is terrifyingly dangerous and has bound all *jīvas* and *īśvaras* forever until they attain *Akṣaradhāman* and *Parabrahman*.

2.9 Closing

The chapter opens with the words of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj, explaining the nature and characteristics of *Akṣarabrahman*. Firstly, *Akṣarabrahman* is introduced as an entity different from and inferior only to *Parabrahman* and superior to all *jīvas* and *īśvaras*, bound or liberated, and *māyā*. Cultivating qualitative oneness with *Akṣarabrahman* leads to the *mukti* of *jīvas* and *īśvaras* while granting them the ability to worship *Parabrahman* perfectly. The etymology presented then makes the nature of *Akṣarabrahman* more apparent for us to proceed to multiple and consistent appearances of the words *Akṣara* and *Brahman* in the *Prasthānatrayī*. Having a better understanding of the etymological meaning of *Akṣarabrahman*, we first contemplate its relationship with *Parabrahman* through the *Parādhikaraṇa* of the *Brahmasūtras*. Various analogies employed there explore the nuanced depths of the relationship between the two divinities. On this note, the *Brahmasūtras* provide an interesting analogy of a coiled-up snake. If the coiled snake is a snake and coil simultaneously, could *Akṣarabrahman* and *Parabrahman* be thought of in that way – namely, as the same entity with different names? *Vyāsa* refuses that and other related views and refers the readers to *śāstras* for a more accurate perspective. The relationship between the two entities remains that of a master and a dependent. *Parabrahman* remains एकमेवाद्वितीयम्²³²(CU 6.2.1), while *Akṣarabrahman* remains in service of *Parabrahman* in four forms.

This segment of the chapter initiates with a succinct yet profound exposition on the four distinct manifestations of *Akṣarabrahman*. These manifestations include *Cidākāśa*, *Akṣaradhāman*, the *Sevaka* residing within *Akṣaradhāman*, and the pivotal role of *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru in orchestrating the liberation (*mukti*) of all earnest *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. This contemplation delves into the intricate dimensions of *Akṣarabrahman*'s multifaceted existence, illuminating the academic discourse on these profound

²³² *ekamevādvitīyam*

concepts. An exciting interpretation of Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad mantras 2.2.7 and 2.2.1 presents a vivid exposition of all four forms. We open our description of Cidākāśa with the exploration of the “*dahara*” of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. Dahara (Cidākāśa Akṣarabrahman) is a small space in a small lotus-shaped heart – *dahara*, again. Parabrahman, to be sought, is even subtler than Akṣarabrahman and resides within Akṣarabrahman. The Daharādhikaraṇa (BS 1.3.14-23), which is dedicated to the same Chāndogya Upaniṣad mantra, provides a new perspective on this discussion while also preparing the field for Ākāśārthāntaratvādhikaraṇa (BS 1.3.41-43) that follows. This discussion focuses on another of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad mantras (CU 8.14.1) as its subject, establishing the term “*ākāśa*” as the sentient space – Cidākāśa, instead of the elemental space, the fifth *bhūta*. Cidākāśa pervades and beholds all of creation inside and out, including all *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. Here the Akṣarādhikaraṇa and Dyubhvādyadhikaraṇa too provide aid in the discussion and further demonstrate the consistency between the three texts. The mantras from various Upaniṣads serve as further support for each of the following sub-sections. Another such adhikaraṇa using a different word – *sarvatra* (literally, “everywhere”) for the pervasiveness of Cidākāśa Akṣarabrahman – comprises Brahmasūtras 1.2.1, and is focused on the first mantra of the Īśā Upaniṣad. As a part of delving deeper into the conversation about Cidākāśa, the Īśā Upaniṣad speaks of it as being far and near - तदूरे तद्वन्तिके²³³ (IU 5). Such pervasion entails being near and far, everywhere, and controlling and supporting all. One of the other characteristics of Akṣarabrahman in its Cidākāśa form is to create. It creates the infinite universes so casually as a spider produces its webs, things on the earth grow, and hair grows on human skin; Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 1.1.7 provides such insightful analogies. Because Akṣarabrahman is the basis of all – while pervading it all, everything is *called* Akṣarabrahman as expounded in Aitareya Upaniṣad 3.2-3. This analysis of coherency in the Prasthānatrayī concludes the Cidākāśa section, and we transition into a discussion of the Akṣaradhāman or divine abode form of Akṣarabrahman.

Akṣaradhāman is known by different names, almost all referring to it as a final place, Parabrahman’s abode, or Akṣarabrahman in the form of an abode, Akṣaradhāman.

²³³ *taddūre tadvantike*

Parabrahman presides as the master of the abode, in which also resides Akṣarabrahman in its *Sevaka* form and infinite akṣaramuktas. It is a divine place of non-return and attained only by the grace of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. We explored how Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā and Kaṭha Upaniṣad presents a coherent picture of the realm of “no return.” Akṣaradhāman is eternal, vast, and singular – thus, opening a study of its infinitudes from the Upaniṣads, Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā, and Brahmasūtras. It is also the luminous place that grants to all else luminosity. Through its light, everything is luminous. Even in understanding this supreme abode, the question of who can attain Akṣaradhāman persists. This question is treated in detail in the chapter. As a conclusion to this part, we survey the mentions of Akṣaradhāman in the Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā.

The third part of the section is an exploration of Akṣarabrahman as *Sevaka* in Akṣaradhāman. For this section, we study, in some detail, four mantras from the Upaniṣads, namely, Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.2.1, Īśā Upaniṣad 16, Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.1.1, and Kaṭha Upaniṣad 3.1, establishing the nature of Akṣarabrahman as *Sevaka*, appreciating in doing so the coherence to be found among the three texts of the Prasthānatrayī.

The last part of the chapter comprises an exposition of Akṣarabrahman in the form of Brahmasvarūpa Guru, who is manifest before us. The Guru is established as the bridge to Parabrahman, or a boat to cross the torrential currents of māyā. The most crucial three verses to settle the understanding of the Guru are Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 1.2.12, Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā 4.34, and Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 6.24. These verses also offer a way of approaching and appreciating the Guru, thus allowing oneself to have an absolute association and mukti in return. We also encounter the analogies used in the Upaniṣads to realize better the significance of the Akṣarabrahman Guru in progressing toward mukti.

