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ब्रह्मविद्या Brahma Vidya

मुण्डक उपनिषत् Introduction Volume 1

यं ब्रह्म-चरुणेन्द्ररुद्रमरुतः स्तुन्वन्ति दिव्यैः स्तवैः
वेदैः साङ्गपदक्रमोपनिषदैः गायन्ति यं सामगाः ।
ध्यानावस्थित तद्गतेन मनसा पश्यन्ति यं योगिनः
यस्यान्तं न विदुः सुरासुरगणाः देवाय तस्मै नमः ।
हरिः ॐ

This Upanishad belongs to Atharva Veda. It has a total of 64 verses, divided into three chapters, with two sections in each chapter. Literally, the word मुण्डक indicates a person with a shaven head, which, in the context of Vedanta, indicates a संन्यासी, or a monk, belonging to some monastic order. It is often said that this Upanishad is particularly meant for such संन्यासीs or would be संन्यासीs. Whether or not that is true, we must understand that by simply shaving one's head and going through the ritual of taking some vows of self-discipline in some monastic order, one does not, and one cannot, become a संन्यासी. संन्यासी means renunciation, which really involves स्वकर्म त्याग - giving up all actions, including the action of "giving up" itself.

How can one give up all actions in that manner? That is possible only by totally uplifting oneself from the very notion of doership itself, uplifting oneself from the very notion of being the कर्ता of a कर्म - the doer of an action. If there is no doership in a person, there is no कर्म to give up. Such upliftment from the very notion of doership is possible only through विवेक ज्ञानं, cultivated and sustained कर्म योग बुद्धि, ज्ञान लक्षण, परम प्रेम स्वरूप अनन्य ईश्वर भक्ति, and पूर्ण ईश्वर शरणागति - the attitude of total surrender to परमेश्वर already in oneself, as Pure Consciousness itself. When that happens, one is already a true संन्यासी, whether or not the person is so recognized by the society, whatever be one's outward appearance, institutional affiliation, or the mode of every day life.

In our scripture readings here, we are concerned only with an understanding and appreciation of what exactly the Upanishad says. The knowledge communicated by



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this Upanishad is open to every person who sincerely and ardently seeks that knowledge. With this understanding, we now commence our readings on the Mundaka Upanishad.

Like all other Upanishads, this Upanishad also has its own style of communication and focus of attention. With absolute श्रद्धा and devotion to ब्रह्मविद्या- knowledge, we approach this Upanishad as it is. Our endeavour here is only to try to understand and appreciate, as much as we can, the content of this Upanishad in its entirety

As usual, the Upanishad opens with a peace invocation, in the form of a prayer, which, in this case, is a familiar one.

ॐ

भद्रं कर्णेभिः शृणुयाम देवाः
भद्रं पश्येम अक्षभिः यजत्रा ।
स्थिरैः अङ्गैः तुष्टुवाँसस्तनूभिः
व्यशेम देवहितं यदायुः ॥

स्वस्ति न इन्द्रो वृद्धश्रवाः
स्वस्ति नः पूषा विश्ववेदाः ।
स्वस्ति नः ताक्ष्यो अरिष्टनेमिः
स्वस्ति नो बृहस्पतिर्दधातु ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Addressing all the अधिष्ठान देवताs, the presiding deities of all of one's organs of perception and action, such as आक-श देवता, वायु देवता, सूर्य देवता, चरुण देवता, इन्द्र देवता, etc., addressing all these देवताs, all participants in the pursuit of this Upanishad knowledge, offer a prayer before they commence their Upanishad studies. The prayer is:

देवाः - O! Gods

भद्रं कर्णेभिः शृणुयाम - May we hear through our ears, words which are भद्रं - sacred and sanctifying.

भद्रं is an extraordinary Upanishad word. It is a कल्याण वचनं - a word of auspiciousness, Absolute Happiness, Absolute Goodness there is. Such words can only be those, which have the power to reveal Absolute Reality, and help one to recognize



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the true nature of oneself, namely The आत्मा, The Self I, The परमेश्वर already in oneself. Therefore,

भन्द्रं कर्णेभिः शृणुयाम means, may we hear through our ears those sounds and sanctifying words which reveal, and which help one to recognize आत्मा जीव, The Self I in every self, including oneself, which revelation and recognition give one मोक्ष - liberation, Absolute Freedom from all limitations.

That which manifests Auspiciousness, Happiness and Goodness is कल्याणं - the highest form of which is मोक्ष - Absolute Liberation. The word कल्याणं ordinarily means marriage. The highest form of marriage is only जीव-ब्रह्म-ऐक्यं - recognition of जीव-ब्रह्मन् Identity, which naturally brings Absolute Liberation. That कल्याण वचनं, may we hear. Further, may we have more and more opportunities to listen to Upanishad words which bring about जीव-ब्रह्म-ऐक्यं - recognition of one's true identity with The परमेश्वर already in oneself as ONESELF Itself.

Another meaning for शृणुयाम is श्रोतुंसमर्था or श्रोतुंयोग्याः. May we become qualified to listen, may we enjoy all the four-fold साधन चतुष्टयं, the four-fold qualifications required for listening and grasping the content of the Upanishad words. Further

भन्द्रं पश्येम अक्षभिः यजत्राः - The word यजत्राः refers to those who are committed to the pursuit of ब्रह्मविद्या- Upanishad Knowledge, with श्रद्धा भक्ति and तपस् (discipline). Therefore, the prayer is:

यजत्राः - We, being committed to the pursuit of Upanishad knowledge

अक्षभिः भन्द्रं पश्येम - may we be able to see with our own eyes, what is भन्द्रं, which means, may we be able to recognize परमेश्वर through our own eyes. With our eyes kept open or closed, may we recognize परमेश्वर in everything in this creation, including in our own selves. Upanishads say that everything in this creation is ब्रह्मन्, The परमेश्वर. May we see this fact, recognize this fact, with our own eyes, in our own बुद्धि, through these Upanishad teachings.

स्थिरैः अङ्गैः तुष्टुवांसः तनूभिः

स्थिरैः अङ्गैः - With our body, limbs firmly held, free from restlessness and unnecessary motions



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तुष्टुवाँसः - may we praise the Glory of परमेश्वर. How?

तनूभिः - by words, and by our faculties of mind and बुद्धि. Therefore,

स्थिरैः अङ्गैः तुष्टुवाँसः तनूभिः means, may we praise the glory of परमेश्वर by words, keeping our body limbs (hands, legs, etc.) steady, free from restlessness and unnecessary motion. Keeping our mind and बुद्धि free from restlessness and distractions, may we praise by words, the glory of परमेश्वर. May we praise the glory of परमेश्वर by words which reveal the Nature of परमेश्वर.

The best form of prayer is simply to express in words the glory of परमेश्वर as it is. It is not mere singing some poetry. If I understand the glories of परमेश्वर, and then, if I simply state those glories of परमेश्वर as much as I can, it is an appreciation of ईश्वर विभूति. By words which reveal the glory of परमेश्वर, one becomes a ईश्वर भक्त. The सहस्र नाम अर्चन we do here is a form of such expression of the Glory of परमेश्वर.

व्यशेम देवहितं यदायुः - यदायुः means यावत् आयुः or यदा आयुः - as long as we live, or while we live.

व्यशेम means प्राप्नुयां - may we gain, or may we always engage ourselves in

देवहितं - means कर्मs which are proper, which are in accordance with the basic teachings of the Vedas, namely, सत्यं वद, धर्मम् चर, स्वाध्यायात् मा प्रमदः, etc. Therefore

व्यशेम देवहितं यदायुः means as long as we live, may we always engage ourselves in actions which are totally in accordance with the basic teachings of the Vedas, because, only then, one can really grasp Upanishad Knowledge.

देवहितं व्यशेम may also be understood as देव हितं व्यशेम - O! Lord, may we enjoy good health. हितं means adequate health to be able to pursue ब्रह्मविद्य- knowledge. Therefore, O! Lord, may we enjoy health good enough to be able to study Upanishads.

That is the content of the first verse. The second verse is a simpler form of the first verse. The essential content is the same.

स्वस्ति न इन्द्रो वृद्धश्रवाः - May Indra of great fame (वृद्धश्रवाः)

नः स्वस्ति दधातु - bless us with the exalted happiness (ब्रह्मानन्द)



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स्वस्ति नः पूषा विश्ववेदाः - may Lord Sun (पूषा) bless us with the ability to gain Upanishad knowledge. The word स्वस्ति has ब्रह्म लक्षणं - auspiciousness revealing ब्रह्मन्. Thus स्वस्ति is the same as भद्रं.

स्वस्ति नः ताक्षर्यः अरिष्टनेमिः

- ताक्षर्यः is गुरुड - the bird vehicle for महाविष्णु. Here ताक्षर्य stands for महाविष्णु नेमि - the path, the way

अरिष्टनेमिः ताक्षर्यः - the गुरुड bird whose paths are never hindered or obstructed. Therefore, स्वस्ति नः ताक्षर्यः अरिष्टनेमिः means May Lord Vishnu bless us all with a clear, obstruction-free path in our pursuit of ब्रह्मविद्य- Knowledge.

स्वस्ति नो बृहस्पतिर्दधातु - May बृहस्पति, the teacher for all the देवs, bless us all with a good teacher for our pursuit of ब्रह्म विद्य- knowledge.

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

This is a prayer for freedom from all three kinds of obstructions to the study of Upanishads, namely freedom from unknown and unpredictable obstructions over which we have no control, freedom from obstructions from our immediate surroundings over which we have no control, and also freedom from obstructions from within ourselves, such as ill-health, restlessness of mind, etc.

That is the prayer. Now the Upanishad begins.



मुण्डक उपनिषत्

Chapter 1

Section 1

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1. ब्रह्मा देवानां प्रथमः संबभूव
विश्वस्य कर्ता भुवनस्य गोप्ता ।
स ब्रह्मविद्यं-सर्वविद्य-प्रतिष्ठां
अथर्वाय ज्येष्ठपुत्राय प्राह ॥ 1 - 1 - 1
2. अथर्वणे यां प्रवदेत ब्रह्मा
अथर्वा तां पुरोवाच अङ्गिरे ब्रह्मविद्यं- ।
स भारद्वाजाय सत्यवहाय प्राह
भारद्वाजः अङ्गिरसे परावरम् ॥ 1 - 1 - 2
3. शौनको ह वै महाशालः अङ्गिरसं
विधिवत् उपसन्नः पप्रच्छ ।
कस्मिन् नु भगवो विज्ञाते
सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवति इति ॥ 1 - 1 - 3

In these opening verses, the Upanishad says that this ब्रह्मविद्य- Knowledge was first taught by ब्रह्माजी - The Creator, to His eldest son Atharva, who, in turn, taught it to his disciple, Angir, who then taught it to his disciple Satyavaha, who then taught it to his disciple Angiras, who then taught it to his disciple Saunaka. What exactly Angiras taught to Saunaka is what we are going to hear in this Upanishad.

Before we go to the Upanishad words here in detail, let us understand the significance of this kind of Introduction to Upanishad Knowledge, giving details on who taught this particular knowledge to whom. Is such an introduction, Upanishad Knowledge? The answer is "Yes". The significance is three-fold.

(1) ब्रह्मविद्य- is परावर विद्य- It is knowledge transmitted always from a पर to an अवर - from a teacher to any interested person, seeking such knowledge with proper attitude. Such a person is a disciple. Such transmission of Upanishad knowledge involves certain methodology, which has the power to eliminate the limitations of words in communicating knowledge about the nature of That which is limitless, and this



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methodology has been maintained from generation to generation in the traditional teaching of Upanishad knowledge.

Just as water flows naturally from a higher level to a lower level, so does ब्रह्मविद्य- knowledge flow from a teacher to an interested person seeking this knowledge through the path of spoken words of the teacher, heard and listened directly by the interested person, the disciple. Such transmission of knowledge is called कर्ण परंपर - a succession of hearers, meaning a succession of listeners of Veda Mantras, the sounds of Vedas and the Upanishads.

(2) Every teacher of this knowledge had an earlier teacher to hear and listen from and the original Teacher is only परमेश्वर. That परमेश्वर is already in every person as The आत्मा, The Self I, The Pure Consciousness in oneself, because of which alone one is conscious of anything.

Upanishad knowledge is never gained simply by reading some books, however scholarly they may be. It is always gained only by hearing and listening to spoken words of a teacher, who had heard and listened the content of the Upanishad words involved from the spoken words of another teacher earlier.

All words in the भगवत् गीता and the Upanishads are spoken words of teachers and listeners. Listening such spoken words through hearing is श्रवणं, which must always be followed by मननं, repeated reflection of the content of the words heard, and निदिध्यासनं, a conscious and sustained effort to absorb the content of the teachings involved in one's own daily life.

In the world of today, one can also gain Upanishad knowledge by repeatedly hearing and listening the tape recordings of the spoken words of a teacher, or, if one can only read the transcript of such spoken words, one must hear those words, read by oneself or by someone else, loud enough and often enough, so that one can listen to those words again and again, with no mental or intellectual interference of any kind. मननं comes only after such listening.

(3) Upanishad knowledge is all about one's own self. It is not about any sectarian knowledge or philosophy, for any kind of ego dominated debate or discussion. Upanishad Knowledge unfolds the Eternal Truth about the nature of ONESELF Itself. Either you recognize yourself as you truly are, or you don't. There is



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absolutely no place here for any kind of sectarian philosophy on a matter of factual knowledge, which is totally verifiable by one's own inquiry.

In the process of one's own pursuit of Self-knowledge, while there can always be some doubts which have to be resolved through further inquiry by oneself only, there is nothing to debate about the very existence of Self-knowledge, simply because, I exist, you exist, and we see existence everywhere. That means one must have a valid reason for seeking Self knowledge in the first place, and then, after having chosen to seek such knowledge, one must have unqualified श्रद्धा and discipline in the pursuit of such knowledge through Upanishad teachings.

In this connection, one must clearly understand that the appearance of a particular teacher, for this knowledge at a particular place, at a particular time, is never a matter of accident. When you are ready for this knowledge, there appears a teacher, in a particular form and name. Whoever or whatever happens to be one's teacher for the time being in unfolding Upanishad knowledge, one's real Teacher is always The परमेश्वर, The आत्मा, The Self I, already in oneself, and there is really no other teacher for Upanishad knowledge. That means, one must learn to discover the real teacher already in oneself, and the means for such discovery is also the Upanishad Itself.

All that is indicated by the opening words of this Upanishad, and this becomes evident as we go through this Upanishad. With this understanding, we will see the opening words of this Upanishad in detail next time.