



मुण्डक उपनिषत्

Chapter 1

Section 1

Volume 2

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The Upanishad opens with a brief statement on its own origin

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ब्रह्मा देवानां प्रथमः संबभूव
विश्वस्य कर्ता भुवनस्य गोप्ता ।
स ब्रह्मविद्यां सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठां



अथर्वाय ज्येष्ठपुत्राय प्राह ॥

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ॐ is मङ्गल वचनं - word of auspiciousness for beginning the Upanishad

ब्रह्मा देवानां प्रथमः संबभूव - the word ब्रह्मा refers to Brahmaji, the creator of all created existence. In the Upanishad, the words ब्रह्म and ब्रह्मा are distinct in their contents. ब्रह्म refers to सत्यं ज्ञानं अनन्तं ब्रह्म, which we call ब्रह्मन्, whose inherent power is माया. ब्रह्मन्, together with माया is परमेश्वर, The Lord of all created existence. Since ब्रह्मन् and Its inherent power माया are ever inseparable, ब्रह्मन् is परमेश्वर.

With reference to each cycle of creation, the same ONE परमेश्वर manifests Itself simultaneously as ब्रह्मा, the creator, विष्णु the sustainer of all created existence and शिव, the Ultimate Dissolver of all created existence, and at the same time, परमेश्वर Itself remains independent of Its inherent powers of creation, sustenance and dissolution, just as in ordinary life, the same one person is recognized by one name in one's professional life, by another name in one's social life, and yet another name in one's family life, and at the same time, the person himself or herself remains independent of all the three names, so does परमेश्वर.

Thus, let us understand clearly that ब्रह्मा, विष्णु and शिव are not three different परमेश्वरs. They are three distinct visions of an ईश्वर भक्त of the same ONE परमेश्वर. Consequently, with reference to any given cycle of creation, the ब्रह्मा - the creator is परमेश्वर Itself, manifested as The Creator for all created existence.

We must always remember Sri Krishna's words

भूतभर्तृ च तत् ज्ञेयं ग्रसिष्णु प्रभविष्णु च

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तत् ज्ञेयं - That अनादिमत् परं ब्रह्म The परमेश्वर must be recognized as



भूतभर्तृ - The विष्णु, ग्रसिष्णु, The शिव, and प्रभविष्णु The ब्रह्मा - the Creator all at the same time. In terms of the language of communication the word ब्रह्मा is masculine, while the word ब्रह्म is gender-free. This is just a matter of grammar for the purposes of communication only.

देवानां प्रथमः means "first among the Devatas". संबभूव means manifested Itself spontaneously and gloriously. Therefore, ब्रह्मा देवानां प्रथमः संबभूव means, at the same time of creation of this universe, ब्रह्मन् The परमेश्वर manifested Itself spontaneously and gloriously as ब्रह्मा - The Creator, before the appearance of all other Devatas. Why did ब्रह्मन् so manifest Itself?

Because, as the Taittiriya Upanishad says, सोऽकामयत - ब्रह्मन् so desired. It was the Will of परमेश्वर to so manifest Itself, to let the natural remanifestation and continued evolution of countless beings already in It, in the unmanifest state.

About That ब्रह्मा, the Creator, the Upanishad says

विश्वस्य कर्ता, भुवनस्य गोप्ता

विश्वस्य कर्ता - The ONE who is the creator for this entire Universe, including the पञ्चमहाभूतs - The Five great Elements, and also all beings arising from their inherent powers, attributes, qualities and their mutual interactions, and also

भुवनस्य गोप्ता - the One who is the protector of this entire universe by His unchanging laws of nature, including laws of कर्म.

Thus, विश्वस्य कर्ता, भुवनस्य गोप्ता is the लक्षण - the distinguishing mark of the unchanging, ever-existent manifestation of परमेश्वर as Brahmaji, the Creator. That



ब्रह्मा The Creator, appeared spontaneously and gloriously at the same time of creation of this Universe, before the appearance of all the other देवताs.

Thus, परमेश्वर, on manifesting Itself as ब्रह्मा, the creator

सः अथर्वाय ज्येष्ठपुत्राय प्राह

ब्रह्मा - That Brahmaji, the creator

अथर्वाय ज्येष्ठपुत्राय प्राह - revealed to His eldest son Atharva.

Brahmaji revealed to His eldest son Atharva. What He revealed, we will see. Here we must understand that Atharva was not a कर्म-born son to Brahmaji. He was a मानस पुत्र - he was born directly from the mind of परमेश्वर Itself. As we may recall Sri Krishna's words:

महर्षयः सप्तपूर्वे चत्वारो मनवस्तथा ।

मद्भावा मानसा जाता येषां लोक इमाः प्रजाः ॥ (गीता -10 - 6)

Seven great Rishis were born directly from the mind of परमेश्वर at the time of creation of this Universe. Atharva was the first among them. Therefore, the Upanishad says:

सः अथर्वाय ज्येष्ठपुत्राय प्राह - Brahmaji the creator revealed to His eldest son Atharva. What did He reveal?

ब्रह्मविद्यां सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठां - He revealed ब्रह्मविद्या - Knowledge about ब्रह्मन्, the सत्यं ज्ञानं अनन्तं ब्रह्म - The आनन्द स्वरूप आत्मा, The परमेश्वर, already in oneself as Oneself Itself. That Knowledge, The Nature of That ब्रह्मविद्या Knowledge is:

सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठां - It is the basis, It is the foundation, It is the very abode of all forms of knowledge. The knowledge of ब्रह्मन् and ब्रह्मन् are identical, because the knowledge of ब्रह्मन् is as true as ब्रह्मन् Itself.



Consequently, ब्रह्मवित् आप्नोति परं - The knower of ब्रह्मन् reaches ब्रह्मन् Itself, because, with respect to ब्रह्मज्ञानं, the knower and the known are identical, as Sri Krishna says

वेदैश्च सर्वैः अहं एव वेद्यो,
वेदान्तकृत् वेदविदेव चाहम् । (गीता 15 -15)

Further, ब्रह्मविद्या is that kind of knowledge, knowing which the true nature of the essential content of every other kind of knowledge becomes self-evident. According to Chandogya Upanishad (6-1-3), ब्रह्मविद्या is that kind of knowledge

येन अश्रुतं, श्रुतं भवति
अमतं, मतं भवति
अविज्ञातं विज्ञातं भवति

- what is unheard of, becomes heard of
- what is unthought of, becomes thought of
- what is not known clearly and definitely, becomes known clearly and definitely

Consequently, knowing ब्रह्मविद्या knowledge, the essential content of every other kind of knowledge becomes self-evident, and, in fact, the very purpose of gaining any kind of objective knowledge is only to gain the ability to pursue ब्रह्मविद्या Knowledge, because, ब्रह्मविद्या is सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठा. प्रतिष्ठा means The Ultimate source as well as The Ultimate End. ब्रह्मविद्या is the Ultimate Source as well as The Ultimate end, the Ultimate Destination, for both Self-Knowledge as well as all forms of objectives knowledge.

प्रतिष्ठा also means श्रेष्ठ - the most exalted. ब्रह्मविद्या is the most exalted among all forms of knowledge, as Sri Krishna says

ज्ञानानां ज्ञानं उत्तमम् (गीता 14 -1)



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

How can one say that? In the matter of knowledge, there is no such thing as superior or inferior. Being so, how can one say that ब्रह्मविद्या is the most exalted among all विद्याs?

It is still true, because ब्रह्मविद्या does not belong to the same class as all other विद्याs. ब्रह्मविद्या is a class by itself. It is not one of the many fields of objective knowledge. It is आत्मज्ञानं - Self Knowledge, परमेश्वर ज्ञानं. It is knowledge which reveals परमेश्वर itself. Being so, It is परमेश्वर itself. While It includes all forms of objective knowledge, being the very source for all of them, It remains totally independent of all forms of objective knowledge. That is why ब्रह्मविद्या is सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठा.

It is That ब्रह्मविद्या Knowledge that परमेश्वर as ब्रह्मा, the creator, revealed to His मानस पुत्र - अथर्वा. Then what did अथर्वा do?

2. अथर्वणे यां प्रवदेत ब्रह्मा
अथर्वा तां पुरोवाच अङ्गिरे ब्रह्मविद्यां ।
स भारद्वाजाय सत्यवहाय प्राह
भारद्वाजः अङ्गिरसे परावराम् ॥

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अथर्वा is referred here as अथर्वण्. प्रवदेत is Vedic version of प्राविदत् revealed.

यां ब्रह्मविद्यां ब्रह्मा अथर्वणे प्रवदेत - which ब्रह्मविद्या knowledge, Brahmaji the creator, revealed to Atharva

तां ब्रह्मविद्यां अथर्वा पुरा अङ्गिरे उवाच - that same ब्रह्मविद्या knowledge, Atharva, taught to (his disciple) Angir, पुरा - long time ago.

सः (अङ्गिरः) भारद्वाजाय सत्यवहाय तां ब्रह्मविद्यां प्राह



Angir, in turn, taught the content of the same ब्रह्मविद्या knowledge, just as he received it from his Teacher (प्राह), to his disciple Satyavaha, born in the family of the great Rishi Bharadwaja.

भारद्वाजः अङ्गिरसे प्राह परावराम् - That Satyavaha - Bharadwaja, in succession communicated the same knowledge again to his disciple, named Angiras, परावराम्-in the tradition of गुरु-शिष्य परंपर - the teacher-disciple continuity of relationship. The one who gives the knowledge is called पर, the teacher, and the one who receives that knowledge with proper attitude is called अवर, the disciple. Thus, knowledge flows from the teacher to the disciple, in succession, spontaneously. परावराम् implies that, in such successive transmission of knowledge, there is no change, either in the content of the knowledge, or the traditional method of communicating that knowledge. (परावर has another meaning, which we will see later in verse 40) (2-2-8).

Following such tradition of communicating ब्रह्मविद्या knowledge, Angiras himself, in course of time, became a ब्रह्मविद्याचार्य - a recognized teacher of ब्रह्मविद्या knowledge.

3. शौनको ह वै महाशालः अङ्गिरसं
विधिवत् उपसन्नः पप्रच्छ ।
कस्मिन् नु भगवो विज्ञाते
सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवति, इति ॥

ह वै - As it happened. ह वै is just an expression to report some event, just as it happened a long time ago.

शौनकः महाशालः अङ्गिरसं विधिवत् उपसन्नः पप्रच्छ



शौनकः अङ्गिरसं पप्रच्छ - A person named शौनक (son of शुनक) approached Angiras, and respectfully asked a question, seeking an answer (पप्रच्छ). What he asked, we will see.

About the person शौनक, the Upanishad says:

महाशालः - A great householder, a गृहस्थ, which means he is a married man living a normal life. He is described here as "great" because he is well-versed in some parts of the कर्मकाण्ड of the Vedas, and he dutifully performs all Vedic rituals ordained in the Vedas for a householder. And, because of his own scholarship in Veda mantras and Vedic rituals, he has also become mature enough to seek ब्रह्मविद्या knowledge.

That शौनक approached Angiras as a recognized teacher for ब्रह्मविद्या knowledge. How did he approach?

विधिवत् उपसन्नः He approached Angiras

विधिवत् - in the proper manner, as a disciple, which means, with the proper attitude and respect, both for the teacher and for the knowledge he is seeking, which again means शौनक showed Angiras the respect due to him as a recognized teacher for ब्रह्मविद्या knowledge, and at the same time exhibited his own श्रद्धा - unqualified interest, devotion and readiness for the knowledge he is seeking, in response to the question he is going to ask. Thus

शौनकः महाशालः अङ्गिरसं विधिवत् उपसन्नः पप्रच्छ

शौनक, a great householder, having approached (उपसन्नः) Angiras as ब्रह्मविद्याचार्य - as a teacher for ब्रह्मविद्या knowledge, in the proper manner, respectfully asked him a question, sincerely seeking an answer. This is how शौनक formulated his question

कस्मिन् नु भगवो विज्ञाते सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवति, इति

भगवः - हे भगवन्, O! Respected Sir



कस्मिन् नु विज्ञाते means कस्मिन् एव विज्ञाते सति

नु here means एव only, alone

विज्ञाते सति - when clearly and definitely known, recognized. Therefore

कस्मिन् एव विज्ञाते सति - which is That वस्तु, That Absolute Reality alone, when clearly and definitely known, clearly and definitely recognized, when one is awake to which Absolute Reality alone

सर्वम् इदं विज्ञातं भवति - all this, everything that can be objectified in this entire creation, becomes clearly and definitely known, clearly and definitely recognized.

Recognizing the स्वरूप - the true nature of which Absolute Reality alone, the स्वरूप - the true nature of every object in this entire creation, including the creation itself (इदं सर्वम्) becomes clearly and definitely recognized, becomes self-evident.

इति - That is शौनक 's question.

Just as, for example, knowing the true nature of clay, one immediately recognizes the true nature of every clay pot as clay itself; knowing the true nature of gold, one immediately recognizes the true nature of every object made of gold as gold itself; knowing the स्वरूप of अदः, one immediately recognizes the स्वरूप of इदं as अदः itself, from the prior knowledge पूर्णम् अदः, पूर्णम् इदं

इदं knowledge, the object knowledge, by itself is endless. It is अपरा विद्या. On the other hand, the अहं knowledge (The अदः knowledge) is only One, and It is परा विद्या. शौनक wants to know That परा विद्या. शौनक wants to know the true nature of That Absolute Reality, recognizing which, the true nature of every kind of object in this creation becomes self-evident. In other words, शौनक wants to know the स्वरूप of ब्रह्मन्, The आत्मा, The परमेश्वर, and That knowledge is ब्रह्मविद्या.



Thus शौनक seeks ब्रह्मविद्या Knowledge from a recognized teacher of ब्रह्मविद्या, namely अङ्गिरस्. Angiras accepts शौनक as his disciple for teaching ब्रह्मविद्या Knowledge. The rest of this Upanishad is his answer to शौनक's question, which starts from the next verse.

Before we go to the next verse, let us take note of the following:

1. शौनक is a householder, and he is getting ब्रह्मविद्या knowledge from a recognized ब्रह्मविद्याचार्य. That means, ब्रह्मविद्या Knowledge is not restricted to संन्यासीs. In fact, ब्रह्मविद्या Knowledge is open to every person, without exception, provided the person is ready for this knowledge, and has the necessary श्रद्धा in gaining this knowledge.
2. The very fact that शौनक seeks knowledge about ब्रह्मन् indicates, that he is already aware of the existence of ब्रह्मन्, even though he does not know exactly what ब्रह्मन् is. How does he know that ब्रह्मन् exists? Because, every person who has gone through the discipline of Basic Vedic Education, is already familiar with the Veda Mantra ॐ, and That ॐ is ॐ इति ब्रह्म, ॐ इति सर्वम्, etc., all of which confirm that ॐ as ब्रह्मन् exists
3. We have already seen how भृगु in Taittiriya Upanishad, Nachiketa in कठोपनिषत्, and Arjuna in भगवत् गीता seek the same knowledge about ब्रह्मन् in different ways, and how the ways in which That Knowledge is imparted to each one of them are also different. So is the case in this Upanishad also, as we will see, as we progress. We will continue next time.