



मुण्डक उपनिषत्

Chapter 1

Section 1

Volume 3

4. तस्मै स होवाच । द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्ये, इति ह स्म ।
यत् ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति, परा च एव अपरा च ॥ 1 - 1 - 4
5. तत्र अपरा, ऋग्वेदः यजुर्वेदः सामवेदः अथर्ववेदः,
शिक्षा, कल्पः, व्याकरणं, निरुक्तं, छन्दः, ज्योतिषं, इति ।
अथ परा, यया तत्, अक्षरं अधिगम्यते ॥ 1 - 1 - 5
6. यत् तत्, अद्रेश्यं, अग्राह्यं, अगोत्रं, अचर्णम्
अचक्षुः श्रोत्रं, तत् अपाणिपादं ।
नित्यं, विभुं, सर्वगतं, सुसूक्ष्मं,
तत् अव्ययं, यत् भूतयोनिम्, परिपश्यन्ति धीराः ॥ 1 - 1 - 6

As we saw last time, शौनक approached Angiras in the proper manner as a recognized teacher for ब्रह्मविद्या, with श्रद्धा and devotion, and asked this question:

कस्मिन् नु भगवो विज्ञाते

सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवति, ईति - Knowing which, recognizing the true nature of which alone, the true nature of every object in this creation, including the creation itself, becomes known, becomes clearly and definitely recognized, becomes self-evident? "

That was शौनक's question. Now the Upanishad teaching begins.

4. तस्मै स होवाच । द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्ये, इति ह स्म ।
यत् ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति, परा च एव अपरा च ॥ 1 - 1 - 4

तस्मै स होवाच - Accepting शौनक as a worthy disciple for him to teach ब्रह्मविद्या

ह - indeed, reporting the event just as it happened, the Upanishad says

तस्मै (शौनकाय) सः अङ्गिरस् उवाच - to शौनक, the interested disciple, Angiras the teacher,



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उवाच - said as follows, meaning, Angiras taught the entire मुण्डक उपनिषत् to शौनक as follows.

Here Angiras, the teacher, talks, and शौनक the disciple, listens attentively with श्रद्धा and devotion. Angiras says:

द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्य

द्वे विद्ये - There are two distinct kinds of knowledge

वेदितव्य - both must be known, both kinds of knowledge must be acquired, understood, appreciated, realized and recognized, clearly and definitely by every discerning person.

द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्य is an expression of Vedic command, just like सत्यं वद धर्मम् चर स्वाध्यायात् मा प्रमदः etc. It is addressed to every person who wants to become a truly educated person, fit for gaining Total Fulfillment in life. What are those kinds of knowledge?

परा च एव अपरा च - They are (एव) indeed, certainly (because it is confirmed by all knowledgeable people) परा विद्या - the Supreme Knowledge, That Knowledge which is totally independent of every other kind of knowledge, and hence, the Higher Knowledge, and अपराविद्या - That Knowledge which is not Supreme Knowledge, that knowledge which is always dependent on some other knowledge, and hence, the lower knowledge. (We may note here, simply as a matter of grammar, अपराविद्या (two words) is same as अपराविद्या (one word). परा विद्या (two words) is the same as पराविद्या (one word))

इति ह स्म - as it is well known. Well known to whom?

यत् ब्रह्मविदः वदन्ति,

यत् वेदार्थयज्ञाः, परमार्थदर्शिनः वदन्ति - That is what the knowers of the content of all the Vedas, and those who have understood, appreciated, realized and recognized The Absolute TRUTH pointed out by all the Vedas and Upanishads say

परा विद्या is परमात्म विद्या - ब्रह्मविद्या - ब्रह्म ज्ञानं - ईश्वर ज्ञानं - The knowledge about the Supreme Being, the Self of every being in this creation, the Knowledge about the subject "I" Itself in every self, and That is "Higher Knowledge" - आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge.



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अपराविद्या is धर्म-अधर्म साधन तत् फल विषयाः - Knowledge about virtue and vice, means and ends, actions and their results, etc.; in brief, all forms of objective knowledge, all that is "Lower Knowledge."

How can there be such a thing as higher and lower with respect to knowledge? The words higher and lower refer only to their relative usefulness for any one to reach the highest destination in human life, to realize the highest purpose of human life, the परं पुरुषार्थं, The मोक्ष, Total Fulfillment in life. Therefore, the Upanishad says:

द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्ये - परा च अपरा च एव - There are two distinct kinds of knowledge, namely परा विद्या, and अपराविद्या, and both must certainly be acquired, understood, appreciated, realized and recognized for any person to be able to gain Total Fulfillment in life. This is the same message we have heard already in ईशावास्य उपनिषत्

विद्यां च अविद्यां च यः तत् वेद उभयं सह ।

अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा विद्यया अमृतं अश्नुते ॥

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Here विद्या refers to परा विद्या and अविद्या refers to अपराविद्या. A clear understanding and appreciation of some field of objective knowledge, followed by Self -knowledge, is absolutely necessary for anyone to make oneself fit for gaining Total Fulfillment in life. That is what is conveyed by the Upanishad words द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्ये.

Accordingly, in this opening section of this Upanishad, the teacher introduces briefly both अपराविद्या and परा विद्या in that order. We must note here that even though शौनक himself did not ask for अपराविद्या, and he only asked for परा विद्या, the teacher does not straight away talk about परा विद्या. Instead, he introduces the परा विद्या itself by saying "there are indeed two distinct types of knowledge to be gained. One is अपराविद्या and the other is परा विद्या "

He does so because he wants to distinguish परा विद्या from every other kind of knowledge, since there can always be some doubt in one's mind whether knowledge such as परा विद्या does really exist. If it does, it is surely a matter for wonder. Anybody will wonder, how, knowing one kind of knowledge, every other kind of knowledge becomes known. In order to eliminate that doubt, he makes it clear, at the outset, that there are indeed two mutually distinct kinds of knowledge.



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In the pursuit of अपरा विद्या - objective knowledge, whatever you know, it is only that much you know, and nothing more. Again, whatever you know is only about a few of the infinite number of objects in this creation. Even with respect to an object, which you think you know very well, there are many components, many aspects of that object about which you are ignorant. The more you enquire about what you think you know, you only end up recognizing more objects of ignorance. Thus, continued pursuit of any area of objective knowledge leads you only to more and more objects of ignorance, and nothing more.

In the pursuit of परा विद्या, the situation is entirely different. The subject matter of परा विद्या is ब्रह्मन्, The परमेश्वर, The आत्मा, The Self I, in every self there is. That ब्रह्मन् is not one of the objects in this creation. That ब्रह्मन् includes all objects in this creation, including the creation itself, and at the same time, It transcends all objects in existence. Thus, the continued pursuit of परा विद्या, ब्रह्म ज्ञानं, ईश्वर ज्ञानं, आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge, leads naturally to the all-inclusive Pure Knowledge, transcending all forms of ignorance. It is That परा विद्या that is unfolded by every Upanishad, including this Upanishad, which we will see as we progress.

The Upanishad continues. First it points out what is अपरा विद्या, and then, it points out what is परा विद्या. The Upanishad says:

5. तत्र अपरा, ऋग्वेदः यजुर्वेदः सामवेदः अथर्ववेदः,
शिक्षा, कल्पः, व्याकरणं, निरुक्तं, छन्दः, ज्योतिषं, इति ।
अथ परा, यया तत्, अक्षरं अधिगम्यते ॥

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तत्र - Of these two kinds of knowledge

अपरा - ऋग्वेदः, यजुर्वेदः, सामवेदः, अथर्ववेदः - the अपरा विद्या is every kind of objective knowledge indicated in कर्म काण्ड of Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda, which include very many areas of knowledge such as:

शिक्षा - phonetics, correct pronunciation of Vedic words, and early training in Vedic life

कल्पः - the know-how, the proper techniques for the effective performance of Vedic rituals

व्याकरणं - grammar of Vedic language helpful for gaining शब्द ज्ञानं - word meaning of Vedic sounds (Vedic language is spoken Sanskrit)

निरुक्तं - Etymology, the Vedic lexicon (such as अमर कोश)



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छन्दः - metrics, prosody, the laws governing the setting up of words in the form of verses
ज्योतिषं - astronomy and mathematics helpful for predicting the movements of planets, and their effects
इति - etc., all these constitute अपरा विद्या forms of objective knowledge, or the "lower knowledge" or the "pre-requisite knowledge" helpful for a person in one's pursuit of ब्रह्म ज्ञानं, परा विद्या.

The areas of objective knowledge indicated above do not exhaust all areas of अपरा विद्या. They are just meant to illustrate that only all areas of objective knowledge unfolded in the कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas constitute अपरा विद्या, and, even though the Upanishads also form part of the Vedas, learning to recite the words of the Upanishads correctly, simply as an assemblage of words, without any real understanding and appreciation of their contents, is also only अपरा विद्या.

In this connection, we must also clearly understand that all areas of objective knowledge recognized in the past and variously elaborated in the कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas, and, in addition, all areas of objective knowledge recognized at present and extensively elaborated and practically used in our present day educational, professional and worldly life, and, also, in addition, all further areas of objective knowledge which will be recognized in the future, all of them are only the manifold manifestations of the ever evolving and ever expanding nature of the कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas, which is endless, by its very nature. Consequently, every one of us is an active pursuer and practitioner of some little segment of the कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas in our own every day life.

While a significant level of proficiency in some field of objective knowledge is a necessary prerequisite for the successful pursuit of परा विद्या, ब्रह्म ज्ञानं, no field of objective knowledge can give a person परा विद्या, ब्रह्म ज्ञानं. Then, what is परा विद्या, ब्रह्म ज्ञानं? The Upanishad says:

अथ परा, यया तत्, अक्षरं अधिगम्यते

अथ - Then, after gaining adequate proficiency in one's chosen field of अपरा विद्या, objective knowledge, then

परा - one must undertake the pursuit of परा विद्या, because, as pointed out earlier



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द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्ये - both अपरा विद्या and परा विद्या must be known, both kinds of knowledge must be sought, acquired, understood, appreciated, realized and recognized, clearly, definitely, in order to gain Total Fulfillment in life. That परा विद्या is:

यया तत् , अक्षरं अधिगम्यते

तत् यया - That knowledge by which

अक्षरं अधिगम्यते - That which is अक्षरं, That which is never subject to change, decay or disappearance, That which is ever existent and immortal

अधिगम्यते प्राप्यते - is gained, is reached, is recognized as It is.

By the above statement, the Upanishad points out that from अपरा विद्या - from any field of objective knowledge, one gains only क्षरं ज्ञानं - knowledge about some thing which is ever subject to change, and only from परा विद्या, one gains अक्षरं ज्ञानं - knowledge about something which is ever- existent and never subject to change.

As we have seen already in भगवत् गीता (G 8 - 3), अक्षर ब्रह्म परं - That अक्षरं ज्ञानं is only ब्रह्म ज्ञानं - ईश्वर ज्ञानं - आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge. Again, as the तैत्तिरीय उपनिषत् says:

ब्रह्मवित् आप्नोति परं - gaining That ब्रह्म ज्ञानं, one gains, one reaches, one recognizes That अक्षर ब्रह्मन् Itself, one recognizes आत्मा, The Self I, as ब्रह्मन्, as परमेश्वर Itself.

Further, if That अक्षर ब्रह्मन् is only one of the many Beings which exist in this creation, then knowing the nature of That अक्षर ब्रह्मन् , one cannot know the nature of every other Being in this creation. On the other hand, if That अक्षर ब्रह्मन् alone is the true nature of every being in this creation, including this creation itself, which is indeed the case, then, by knowing the nature of That One अक्षर ब्रह्मन्, one knows the essential nature of every being in this creation, including the creation as a whole, which answers शौनक's question.

Therefore, in the next verse, the Upanishad unfolds the nature of what is indicated by the word अक्षरं in the expression यया तत्, अक्षरं अधिगम्यते



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6. यत् तत्, अद्रेश्यं, अग्राह्यं, अगोत्रं, अवर्णम्
अचक्षुः श्रोत्रं, तत् अपाणिपादं ।
नित्यं, विभुं, सर्वगतं, सुसूक्ष्मं,
तत् अव्ययं, यत् भूतयोनिम्, परिपश्यन्ति धीराः ॥

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यत् (अक्षरं) तत् धीराः परिपश्यन्ति

यत् yat -That which is अक्षर, That which is never subject to change, That ever existent, unchanging, unchangeable Supreme Being, That अक्षर ब्रह्मन्, The आत्मा, The Self I, The परमेश्वर already in oneself and indeed in every self, That अक्षर is what

धीराः- धीरपुरुषाः The Enlightened People, the ज्ञानीs

परि पश्यन्ति- परितः पश्यन्ति see very clearly in everything everywhere at all times.

यत् अक्षरं तत् धीराः परिपश्यन्ति - That which is indicated by the word अक्षरं, That अक्षर ब्रह्मन् is what the धीर पुरुषs - the enlightened people see very clearly in everything, everywhere at all times.

Such धीर पुरुषs are those who are Self-realized ज्ञानीs, who have अवृत्त चक्षुः

(कठ 4-1), who have the ability to turn all of one's sense organs and the mind, together with all actions governed by them, inwards, towards one's बुद्धि to explore the Absolute Reality of one's own self.

Such धीर पुरुषs, the ज्ञानीs endowed with शुद्ध अन्तःकरण - absolutely pure mind and बुद्धि, together with कर्म योग बुद्धि, ज्ञान लक्षण ईश्वर भक्ति and the attitude of पूर्ण ईश्वर शरणागति, and ever being in the state of ज्ञान निष्ठा - they do see very clearly everywhere at all times That अक्षर ब्रह्मन्, That परमेश्वर in everything, including themselves.

What exactly do they see? What exactly they see is indicated here by the following pointer words:

अद्रेश्यं, अग्राह्यं, अगोत्रं, अवर्णम् अचक्षुः श्रोत्रं, अपाणिपादं, नित्यं, विभुं , सर्वगतं, सुसूक्ष्मं, अव्ययं and भूतयोनिम् - That is what they see.

We will see these Upanishad words in detail next time.