



मुण्डक उपनिषत्

Chapter 1

Section 2

Volume 8

16. प्लवाः हि एते अट्टुढाः यज्ञरूपाः
अष्टादश उक्तं अचरं येषु कर्म ।
एतत् श्रेयः ये अभिनन्दन्ति मूढाः
जरा मृत्युं ते पुनरेव अपियन्ति ॥ 1 - 2 - 7
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18. अविद्यायां बहुधा वर्तमानाः
वयं कृतार्थाः इति अभिमन्यन्ति बालाः ।
यत् कर्मिणः न प्रवेदयन्ति रागात्
तेन आतुराः क्षीणलोका च्यवन्ते ॥ 1 - 2 - 9

In the first six verses in this section, which we have seen already, the Upanishad has been glorifying the scope and power of Havan कर्मs and their extraordinary usefulness for gaining heavenly pleasures and experiences of one's own liking, both during one's life on earth and also thereafter. Now, the Upanishad proceeds to point out the utter futility, the utter uselessness of Havan कर्मs for reaching the ultimate goal of life, namely, gaining the परम पुरुषार्थ, which is मोक्ष - Total Liberation (from all transient experiences of संसार) and gaining Absolute Happiness - Total Fulfillment in life.

For a person who has no ब्रह्म ज्ञानं, ईश्वर ज्ञानं, आत्म ज्ञानं - Self-knowledge, every Havan कर्म is a काम्य कर्म - a desire-propelled action for the elimination of the unwanted effects of one's पाप कर्मs - improper deeds in daily life, and for accumulating पुण्यs, capable of yielding all heavenly pleasures and experiences of one's own liking, both in one's present life on earth and later, after death, in one's abode in स्वर्ग लोक - The Heaven. If such a person, a कामा कामी, has been doing all the prescribed Havan कर्मs properly, in all respects, they certainly yield the fruits of such कर्मs one has been praying for, as the Upanishad has already pointed out in the earlier verses. But one must



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understand clearly that in doing such desire-propelled Havan कर्मs no gain of Self-knowledge is involved. What is involved is only one's insatiable cravings for worldly pleasures and experiences of one's own likes and dislikes. As the Upanishad pointed out earlier, when a person does all the Havan कर्मs properly, in every respect, one does accumulate lots of पुण्यs by which one does reach स्वर्ग लोक, the Heaven, after death.

When the जीव of such a person reaches स्वर्ग लोक, what does the जीव do? In स्वर्ग लोक, all kinds of transient pleasures and experiences are said to be available for any जीव in exchange for one's पुण्यs. स्वर्ग लोक is only a भोग भूमि, and not a कर्म भूमि, which means one cannot earn any new पुण्य in स्वर्ग लोक. One can only spend one's previously accumulated पुण्यs for enjoying whatever transient pleasures one wants to experience. Therefore, every जीव, devoid of आत्म ज्ञानं - Self-knowledge, goes after different kinds of transient pleasures, pushed by one's own वासनs residual tendencies born of one's prior mental disposition. Naturally, a time comes when the जीव has exhausted all of one's पुण्यs, and there is no more पुण्य left in the जीव to be able to continue one's life in स्वर्ग लोक. Then what does the जीव do? Sri Krishna says:

ते तं भुक्त्वा स्वर्गलोकं विशालं क्षीणे पुण्ये मर्त्यलोकं विशन्ति ।

एवं त्रयीधर्मम् अनुप्रपन्नाः गतागतं कामकामा लभतन्ते ॥

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Such काम कामाः - cravings-propelled people, who reached स्वर्ग लोक as a result of the fruits of their Havan कर्मs, after experiencing their chosen varieties of heavenly pleasures,

क्षीणे पुण्ये - on spending and exhausting all their accumulated पुण्यs in the pursuit of such heavenly pleasures and experiences,

मर्त्यलोकं विशन्ति - they have to return to this mortal world again, to continue their worldly life, only to experience all the inevitable सुख दुःखs of संसार - pleasures and pains of worldly life, all over again, in the pursuit of their never-ending and ever-growing objects of desire. Therefore, what is accomplished by their Havan कर्मs is only to continue to remain in संसार for ever, caught in the wheel of कर्म and कर्मफल - actions and their result, thus subjecting themselves endlessly to पुनरपि जननं पुनरपि मरणं - a never ending succession of birth and death. Thus, Sri Krishna points out that one cannot



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achieve the overriding goal of human existence, the परम पुरुषार्थ namely, मोक्ष, Total Fulfillment in life, simply by doing all the appropriate Havan कर्मs properly, in all respects, which can only lead to repeated birth and death.

The Upanishad here communicates the same message in the next few verses.

16. प्लवाः हि एते अट्टदाः यज्ञरूपाः
अष्टादश उक्तं अवरं येषु कर्म ।
एतत् श्रेयः ये अभिनन्दन्ति मूढाः
जरा मृत्युं ते पुनरेव अपियन्ति ॥

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Those who perform Havan कर्मs, seeking the help of परमेश्वर only for gaining their own various objects of likes and dislikes, are called काम कामाः. Such people consider that एते उक्तं हि प्लवाः उक्तं - एते उक्तं - these Havan कर्मs, by their proper performance, as prescribed in the Vedas

प्लवाः हि भवन्ति - they do indeed become the rafts (small boats) serving as aids to reach the various goals of life.

For काम कामाः, for such cravings-propelled people, the goal of life is only to gain their never-ending objects of immediate likes and dislikes by performing appropriate Havan कर्मs now and then. For them these Havan कर्मs serve only as rafts, as boats, with the aid of which they cross their own limitations and reach their multifarious goals of life. What kind of boats are they? They are अष्टादश प्लवाः, अट्टदाः प्लवाः and यज्ञरूपाः प्लवाः.

अष्टादश प्लवाः - They are boats of 18 components each. A full हवन् कर्म involves 18 people, namely the performer of the Havan कर्म, the spouse of the performer, together with 16 priests, including one chief priest, assisted by 5 priests for each of the three Vedas - The Rig, Sama and Yajur Vedas. Thus, there are 18 people involved in every full Havan कर्म of any kind. The कर्मफल - the result of such Havan कर्म however, depends entirely on the mental disposition of the performer of the Havan कर्म, which is the primary component in each Havan कर्म. Thus, even with the above 18 people involved in each Havan कर्म,

अट्टदाः प्लवाः - these boats, the aids provided by these boats, are



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अदृढाः - weak, fragile and impermanent, because the primary component involved in each of these Havan कर्मs is itself weak, fragile and impermanent, due to the absence of any spiritual strength in itself. Further

यज्ञरूपाः प्लवाः - such Havan कर्मs have only the form and appearance of यज्ञ कर्मs, while in fact, they are not, because, no काम्य कर्म, a craving-propelled ritual can be a यज्ञ कर्म.

यज्ञ कर्म means कर्म totally dedicated to परमेश्वर as pure ईश्वर आराधन - done for अन्तःकरण शुद्धि only, for restoration of the natural purity of one's mind and बुद्धि, to make oneself fit for gaining आत्म ज्ञानं - Self knowledge. Consequently

येषु अचरं कर्म - in such Havan कर्मs, propelled by one's likes and dislikes, the कर्म involved is अचरं - inferior, because it has no roots in ब्रह्म ज्ञानं, ईश्वर ज्ञानं, आत्म ज्ञानं - Self-knowledge. Therefore

ये एतत् श्रेयः (इति) अभिनन्दन्ति, ते मूढाः - those people, those काम कामाःs who take delight in their Havan कर्मs , thinking

एतत् श्रेयः - "this is श्रेयस् - this is the means for gaining श्रेयस् - मोक्ष. Doing हवन् कर्म is मोक्षसाधनं - helpful for gaining मोक्ष - those who think in that manner
ते मूढाः - they are deluded by their own ignorance.

The कर्म involved in their Havan rituals is अचरं कर्म - inferior कर्म, because it is कर्म with no roots in आत्म ज्ञानं - Self knowledge. Consequently, कर्मs it gets naturally destroyed along with its result, due to the fragility and weakness of the primary component involved in the performance of the Havan rituals. Being so, those non-discerning, ignorant, deluded people who take delight in thinking

एतत् श्रेयः - their sojourn (temporary stay) in Heaven, gained as a result of their Havan rituals, is indeed श्रेयस्, meaning मोक्ष - Absolute Happiness, Total Liberation, Total Fulfillment in life, soon realize that it is not so, because

ते अपि यन्ति - they still have to experience



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जरा मृत्युं - old age and death

पुनः एव - again and again, as Sri Krishna says

ते तं भुक्त्वा स्वर्गलोकं विशालं क्षीणे पुण्ये मर्त्यलोकं विशन्ति ।
एवं त्रयीधर्मम् अनुप्रपन्नाः गतागतं कामकामा लभतन्ते ॥

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as we saw earlier. The Upanishad continues.

17. अविद्यायां अन्तरे वर्तमानाः
स्वयं धीराः पण्डितं मन्यमानाः ॥
जड्घन्यमानाः परियन्ति मूढाः
अन्धेन नीयमानाः यथान्धाः ॥

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As we may recall, we have seen essentially the same verse in कठोपनिषत् (कठ 2-5)

अविद्यायां अन्तरे वर्तमानाः - Living a life depending on कर्म and कर्मफल, governed by अविद्या - spiritual blindness, self-ignorance, living a life depending on such Havan rituals for one's redemption from संसार, living a life governed by never ending longings for various objects of ever-changing likes, dislikes and expectations

स्वयं धीराः पण्डितं मन्यमानाः - the काम कामाःs, the cravings-propelled people look upon themselves as पण्डिताः and धीराः - they think they have expert knowledge and scholarship in all their chosen fields of activities (पण्डिताः) and therefore, they are people of wisdom, they are धीराः, they have all worldly wisdom there is.

जड्घन्यमानाः परियन्ति मूढाः

मूढाः - such people are really मूढाः - deluded people. Their delusion is caused by अविद्या - self ignorance, spiritual blindness, together with superimposed notions of scholarship and wisdom, which make them really foolish. Being so, what happens to them?

जड्घन्यमानाः - They continuously get hurt by a host of bodily sufferings like degradation, discontent, distress, disease, etc., and

परियन्ति - they continue to remain in the world of their own misconceptions about the true nature of themselves, and they live



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यथा अन्धाः अन्धेन नीयमानाः - just as, blind people being led by the blind move on an uneven road.

अविद्या or spiritual blindness is characterized by absence of चित्तेक बुद्धि, with or without learning or scholarship. If it is with learning and/or scholarship, it becomes even more regrettable, because, mere learning and/or scholarship without spiritual illumination only contributes to greater pride and vanity, resulting in increased spiritual blindness. Living in the midst of such ignorance, one yet considers oneself as wise (धीराः), while being जड्घन्यमानाः - while being continuously hurt by hosts of bodily and mental sufferings of various kinds. The Upanishad refers to such people as बालाः - people still in the childish state of maturity in the next verse.

18. अविद्यायां बहुधा वर्तमानाः

चयं कृतार्थाः इति अभिमन्यन्ति बालाः ।

यत् कर्मिणः न प्रवेदयन्ति रागात्

तेन आतुराः क्षीणलोका च्यवन्ते ॥ 1 - 2 - 9

अविद्यायां (अन्तरे) बहुधा वर्तमानाः - Steeped in spiritual ignorance, and living daily lives in multifarious ways, which means having no focus on the overriding purpose of life
बालाः - these काम कामाः - spiritually immature people

अभिमन्यन्ति, meaning अभिमानं कुर्वन्ति, they identify themselves with the thought

"चयं कृतार्थाः इति" - "We have done what needs to be done to reach the ultimate goal of life. We are fulfilled people on reaching Heaven by virtue of our पुण्य कर्मs" - so they think foolishly

यत् = यस्मात् - They think so because

कर्मिणः न प्रवेदयन्ति meaning तत्त्वं न जानन्ति - Those who are bound to काम्य कर्मs - desire-propelled actions to gain the objects of their transient likes and dislikes, such people can never know, can never recognize what is the overriding purpose of life, what is the true nature of all existence, what is मोक्ष. They cannot recognize that because

रागात् - their mind and बुद्धि are overpowered by राग passions and bondages of various kinds

तेन = तेन कारणेन - because of that reason, because of the forces of such passions and bondages



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आतुराः āturāḥ meaning दुःखार्ताः सन्तः - they become afflicted with sorrow and distress. When?

क्षीणलोका च्यवन्ते (सति) - क्षीण कर्मफल स्वर्गलोकाः च्यवन्ते सति - when such people get deprived (च्यवन्ते) of the pleasures and experiences of स्वर्गलोक - heaven, and have to get reborn on earth, on the exhaustion of their पुण्य कर्मs in Heaven.

Total fulfillment in life is possible only by gaining ब्रह्म ज्ञानं, ईश्वर ज्ञानं, आत्मज्ञानं - Self-knowledge. Such knowledge cannot arise in the mind and बुद्धि of a person until the person becomes totally free from worldly passions and bondages. We have heard this message already from Sri Krishna

भोगैश्वर्यं प्रसक्तानां तयापहृत चेतसां ।

व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिः समाधौ न विधीयते ॥

G 2 - 44

Sri Krishna is talking here about कामात्मानः - people who are driven by the forces of one's likes and dislikes, passions and bondages. Talking about such people, Sri Krishna says:

भोग ऐश्वर्यं प्रसक्तानां - they have surrendered to the Alter of भोग and ऐश्वर्यं. They have been overpowered by the forces of pleasures, wealth and power, and, as a result तया अपहृत चेतसां - their mind and बुद्धि have been snatched away by the forces of भोग and ऐश्वर्यं. In effect, they have lost their minds, which means their minds have lost their capacity for discriminative enquiry, because of their attachment to भोग and ऐश्वर्यं . When that happens,

व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिः - That एक बुद्धि, That सांख्य बुद्धि, That कर्मयोग बुद्धि, That single pointed endeavour in life for gaining the परं पुरुषार्थ, the मोक्ष

समाधौ न विधीयते - does not come into mind and बुद्धि of those कामात्मानः who have lost their capacity for enquiry on the overriding purpose of life, because they have become slaves to their insatiable desires and their fulfillment

The Upanishad message here is also the same. We will continue next time.