



मुण्डक उपनिषत्

Chapter 1

Section 2

Volume 9

19. इष्टापूर्तम् मन्यमानाः वरिष्ठं
न अन्यत् श्रेयः वेदयन्ते प्रमूढाः ।
नाकस्य पृष्ठे ते सकृते अनुभूत्वा
इमं लोकं हीनतरं वा विशन्ति 1 - 2 - 10
20. तपः श्रद्धे ये हि उपवसन्ति अरण्ये
शान्ताः विद्वांसः भैक्ष्यचर्याम् चरन्तः ।
सूर्यं द्वारेण ते विरजाः प्रयान्ति
य अमृतः स पुरुषः हि अव्ययात्मा ॥ 1 - 2 - 11

In the verses we saw last time, the Upanishad has pointed out that any Havan कर्म, when performed purely as a काम्य कर्म - a कर्म seeking the help of परमेश्वर only to gain some objects of one's worldly desires, cannot lead one to the overriding goal of human existence - the परं पुरुषार्थं, namely मोक्ष - total Fulfillment in life. That such is the case with respect to any कर्म performed, with no roots in ब्रह्म ज्ञानं, ईश्वर ज्ञानं, आत्म ज्ञानं - Self knowledge, is pointed out in today's verses.

The Upanishad says:

19. इष्टापूर्तम् मन्यमानाः वरिष्ठं
न अन्यत् श्रेयः वेदयन्ते प्रमूढाः ।
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इष्टापूर्तम् is a combination of two words, इष्ट and पूर्त. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of पुण्य कर्मस - virtuous deeds, by doing which one can earn पुण्य in one's earthly life. पुण्य is a form of extraordinary wealth, by spending which one can enjoy any kind of pleasure, wealth, power, etc. one may desire, both in one's present life on earth,



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and also thereafter in one's abode in any of the स्वर्गलोकs, in any of the heavenly regions within this संसार, within this world of transient existence.

These two kinds of पुण्य कर्मs are इष्ट कर्म and पूर्त कर्म. इष्ट कर्मs are वेद विहित कर्मs such as all forms of Vedic rituals, including Havan कर्मs of all kinds, learning and teaching Veda mantras, reciting Veda mantras properly on different occasions, and ceremonial hospitalities such as welcoming guests, feeding animals and birds, etc. with proper attitude. पूर्त कर्म include all forms of charitable activities, such as building temples, roads, roadside resting places, building schools, hospitals, caring for the sick and the poor, sinking wells and constructing tanks for providing clean water to the public, and distributing food and essentials to the needy every day, etc. All these are पूर्त कर्मs.

All the Vedas glorify these इष्टापूर्त कर्मs - performance of Vedic rituals and participation in charitable activities as an essential part of one's growing up process.

इष्टापूर्तम् चरिष्ठं मन्यमानाः - there are many people who consider that these इष्टापूर्त कर्मs - the virtuous deeds of the two kinds mentioned above are चरिष्ठं means श्रेष्ठं - they are the most exalted among कर्मs, and therefore, they are श्रेय साधनं, मोक्ष साधनं - they are the means for gaining मोक्ष - total fulfillment in life.

अन्यत् श्रेयः न वेदयन्ते - Such people do not know, do not recognize any other kind of कर्म, capable of leading one to मोक्ष - Total Fulfillment in Life.

प्रमूढाः - The Upanishad describes such people as प्रमूढाः. मूढाः means deluded. प्रमूढाः means deeply deluded, drowned in delusion born of ignorance of the scope and power of such इष्टापूर्त कर्मs, with respect to पर विद्या - gaining ब्रह्म ज्ञानं, ईश्वर ज्ञानं, आत्म ज्ञानं - Self-knowledge.

Now, how can that be so. People who are committed to इष्टापूर्त कर्मs - Vedic rituals and charitable activities are not ordinary people. They are well-educated people, sincerely motivated to serve the essential needs of themselves and the society at large. They are doing virtuous deeds, which are good for their own mental disposition, and also good for the health and welfare of the society as a whole. When that is the case, how can they be called प्रमूढाः - "deeply deluded?"

As we may recall, Sri Krishna also refers to such people as अविपश्चितः - meaning "short sighted" (G 2-42)



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यामिमां पुष्पितां वाचं, प्रवदन्ति अविपश्चितः ।
वेदवादरताः पार्थ, न अन्यत् अस्ति, इति वादिनः ॥

The short sightedness of such people is not with respect to the virtue of their इष्टापूर्त पुण्य कर्मs. पुण्य कर्मs are indeed पुण्य कर्मs for everybody. All पुण्य कर्मs will undoubtedly yield their beneficial and spiritually uplifting results in due course of time, in accordance with the unchanging laws of कर्म and कर्मफल.

We must understand clearly that the Upanishad does not in any way undervalue or underestimate the extraordinary need and the benefits of Vedic rituals and charitable activities for the continuing social, material and spiritual progress and upliftment of both, the individuals involved and the society as a whole. The short sightedness involved here arises from one's ignorance of the ONLY means available for gaining परम पुरुषार्थ - the overriding goal of human existence, namely मोक्ष - Total Fulfillment in life.

Performing पुण्य कर्मs as ईश्वर आराधन - as worship of परमेश्वर, with कर्मयोग बुद्धि, for the only purpose of gaining चित्त प्रसादं - restoration of the inherent purity of one's mind and बुद्धि, is quite different from performing the same पुण्य कर्मs - virtuous deeds simply as a means for gaining the objects of one's धर्म-अर्थ-काम pursuits, the perceived objects of one's progress in worldly life.

All इष्टापूर्त पुण्य कर्मs - all पुण्य कर्मs, do deal with कर्म and कर्मफल associated with one's धर्म-अर्थ-काम pursuits, pursuits of pleasure, wealth and power in worldly life. Such pursuits are certainly beneficial and uplifting for the time being, and they are naturally appropriate for those who are still in evolving stages of their spiritual development. When one becomes mature enough to assimilate the content of one's deeds, one certainly realizes that the same धर्म-अर्थ-काम pursuits serve only a transient intermediate purpose in one's continuing spiritual development, unless one uses them as a vehicle for gaining मोक्ष, and that is possible only when every कर्म is converted into an ईश्वर आराधन कर्म, which means कर्मयोग with ईश्वर प्रसाद बुद्धि.

In the absence of such ईश्वर आराधन बुद्धि - कर्मयोग बुद्धि, what happens to those who take delight in their इष्टापूर्त पुण्य कर्मs - Vedic rituals and charitable activities as their goal of life? The Upanishad says:

नाकस्य पृष्ठे ते सुकृते अनुभूत्वा



इमं लोकं हीनतरं वा विशन्ति

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ते सुकृते - Those people (ते), those इष्टापूर्तवन्तः - those people who take delight in their Vedic rituals and charitable activities with no ईश्वर आराधन बुद्धि - no कर्मयोग बुद्धि, such people, by virtue of their पुण्य कर्मs (सुकृते) go to Heaven (नाकं) when they die. नाकं is a place where one experiences consistently unobstructed pleasure of one's choice at all times. Only in Heaven such experience of pleasure is possible. Therefore Heaven is called नाकं.

नाकस्य पृष्ठे - The enjoyment of such pleasure to the peak of one's ability to enjoy is called नाकस्य पृष्ठे.

As we saw in Taittiriya Upanishad, there are several regions of Heaven in this संसार, such as पितृ लोक , गन्धर्व लोक, देव लोक, इन्द्र लोक, ब्रह्म लोक etc. Even though the absolute level of happiness available anywhere is unlimited, still there is a limit to the level of happiness one can enjoy any form of pleasure, because of the limitations of one's own mental disposition and cultivated level of awareness. Therefore,

ते सुकृते नाकस्य पृष्ठे - means those people who go to any region of Heaven by virtue of their इष्टापूर्त पुण्य कर्मs, experience consistent unobstructed pleasures of whatever kind they want to the peak of their ability by spending their accumulated पुण्य कर्मs currency. Then what happens to those people? The Upanishad says:

अनुभूत्या - having experienced all such pleasures in Heaven - that means the last penny of their पुण्य कर्म currency has already been spent, there is no more पुण्य left, and hence, they cannot remain in Heaven any longer. Therefore, what is it they have to do?

इमं लोकं विशन्ति - They enter, they have to re-enter this world, this मनुष्य लोक. They are re-born in this world of human beings again; but the Upanishad hastens to add:

वा - or

हीनतरं लोकं विशन्ति - they are reborn in a still lower world. This मनुष्य लोक - this world of human beings is itself already हीनं - a lower world compared to Heaven, because in this world of human beings, one can never experience consistent unobstructed pleasure. One can experience some form of pleasure, only now and then. On the other hand, in a हीनतरं लोकं - in a world still lower than this मनुष्य लोक, for example, in any of the पाताल लोकs, life is said to be even more miserable.



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Whether one's rebirth is in this मनुष्य लोक, or in any of the lower worlds, is there at least some surety that the person will be reborn again as a human being? No, there is no such surety. The Upanishad leaves the question open.

As we may recall, कठोपनिषत् is more specific on this matter, and says:

योनिं अन्ये प्रपद्यन्ते शरीरत्वाय देहिनः ।
स्थाणुं अन्ये अनुसंयन्ति, यथा कर्म यथा श्रुतम् ॥ 5 - 7

What form one will take on rebirth in any of the लोकs, depends on यथा कर्मs यथा श्रुतम् - one's residual past कर्मs and cultivated knowledge and awareness. One may even be born as a स्थाणु - a जीव in the form of even a tree on earth, or in any of the lower worlds, only to go through the ups and downs of life all over again. That simply means, इष्टापूर्त पुण्य कर्मs by themselves cannot lead anyone to मोक्ष - Total Fulfillment in life. One's पुण्य कर्मs do not cancel one's पाप कर्मs. The कर्मफल of every कर्म has to be experienced until one gains ब्रह्म ज्ञानं through पराविद्या. Therefore, what is the net accomplishment of one's इष्टापूर्त पुण्य कर्मs themselves - only a succession of birth and death, and no मोक्ष - no real fulfillment in life. Continuing the same message, the Upanishad says:

20. तपः श्रद्धे ये हि उपवसन्ति अरण्ये
शान्ताः विद्वांसः भैक्ष्यचर्याम् चरन्तः ।
सूर्य द्वारेण ते विरजाः प्रयान्ति
य अमृतः स पुरुषः हि अव्ययात्मा ॥ 1 - 2 - 11

Here, the Upanishad talks about two other group of people, people who are in the वानप्रस्त आश्रम and संन्यास आश्रम - the third and fourth stages of life. We talked briefly about these stages of life, not too long ago.

After many years of active work life, with all its experiences of ups and downs, one formally retires from work life, and moves one's residence deliberately to a more peaceful place, away from the pressures of one's past work life. The person is not yet totally free from the bondages of one's past work life, but still does try to live a more self-disciplined life. This is the वानप्रस्त आश्रम - the third stage of life for the person. In olden days, such a person naturally set one's residence in some forest area with perfect



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surroundings away from the demands of crowded community life. Being in वानप्रस्त आश्रम, what does a person do? The Upanishad says:

तपः श्रद्धे ये हि उपवसन्ति अरण्ये

ये हि अरण्ये - Those who naturally live in a forest, taking to a life of वानप्रस्त आश्रम

(ते) तपः श्रद्धे उपवसन्ति - they deliberately resort to a life of तपस् and श्रद्धा. We must clearly understand what the words तपस् and श्रद्धा here indicate. तपस् and श्रद्धा are both कर्मs - actions of two mutually distinct kinds. तपस् कर्मs are simply acts of personal discipline. They are three-fold in nature. They are

- शारीर तपस् - discipline at the body level in general
- वाक् तपस् - discipline at the level of speech, and
- मानस् तपस् - discipline at the level of mind, meaning faculty of thinking and judgment

Sri Krishna talks about these aspects of तपस् कर्मs in Chapter 17 (14, 15, 16) which we will see a little later. All these three aspects of self-discipline are not mutually exclusive. They always go together. One cannot have one without the other, naturally, because body, speech and mind are all components of one and the same person.

Now about श्रद्धा. In the context here, श्रद्धा indicates देवता उपासन - meditation on one's इष्ट देवताs - different forms of ईश्वर power. Every form of self-discipline involves श्रद्धा, concentration of one's mind. Meditation on any form of इष्ट देवता requires even more such concentration. The highest form of देवता उपासन is meditation on हिरण्यगर्भ - परमेश्वर as the creator, ब्रह्माजी. Any form of देवता उपासन, any form of such meditation is also a कर्म, a मानस कर्म - an activity of the mind on an object in one's mind.

Thus, people in the third stage of life - वानप्रस्त आश्रम, spend their lives dedicated to तपस् - self-discipline and श्रद्धा meditation on one's इष्ट देवताs, all of which also constitute कर्म, and hence अपराविद्या. In time, some of the above people uplift themselves to the fourth stage of life, called संन्यास आश्रम. Being in that stage, what do they do? The Upanishad says:



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शान्ताः विद्वांसः भैक्ष्यचर्याम् चरन्तः

शान्ताः - They now enjoy a higher level of tranquility of mind and बुद्धि, born of their earlier practices in self-discipline and meditation

विद्वांसः - they now become more well-informed in अपराविद्या - in worldly matters. They now have time and inclination to study various kinds of philosophy, and thus become better informed householders in family life.

भैक्ष्यचर्याम् चरन्तः - some of them may also choose to adopt the life style of आश्रम संन्यासीs, which means they may take some additional vows of self-discipline, and make some changes in their daily life style, such as changing one's name, dress and other forms of external appearance. They may also give up certain kinds of activities deliberately, and decide to live on भिक्षा - alms, relinquishing most of their personal possessions.

We must understand clearly that such आश्रम संन्यास is only कर्म संन्यास, and not कर्म योग or ज्ञान कर्म संन्यास, which Sri Krishna talked about in Chapter 4 of भगवत् गीता, but it is simply renunciation of certain actions as a matter of further self-discipline, accomplished purely by the force of will, devoid of any ब्रह्म ज्ञानं, ईश्वर ज्ञानं, आत्म ज्ञानं - Self knowledge.

What happens to the above two groups of people when they die? The Upanishad says:

सूर्य द्वारेण ते विरजाः प्रयान्ति
यत्र अमृतः स पुरुषः हि अव्ययात्मा ॥

ते - Those people who have been in वानप्रस्त आश्रम and/or संन्यास आश्रम as described above

विरजाः (सन्तः) - having become freed from the hold of their रजस् गुणs, by the power of the cultivated self-discipline

प्रयान्ति - they have naturally gained the ability to move forward, to move up, in their spiritual ladder. How?

सूर्य द्वारेण - through the bright path of the sun, which means, by virtue of their cultivated पुण्य कर्मs, they have gained the ability to go to Heaven, even up to ब्रह्मलोक

यत्र सः अमृतः अव्ययात्मा पुरुषः (अस्ति) - where is the One Immortal never changing आत्मा - The पुरुष, The परमेश्वर, manifested as हिरण्यगर्भ, ब्रह्माजी The Creator.



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That means, one can go to Heaven, even up to ब्रह्मलोक, without any ब्रह्म ज्ञानं - simply through तपस् - self-discipline and meditation on any form of ईश्वर power. But we must understand that even ब्रह्मलोक is within this संसार, and reaching ब्रह्मलोक is not gaining मोक्ष - Total Fulfillment in life for any जीव. Sri Krishna makes that clear (G. 8-16)

आब्रह्मभुवानाल्लोकाः पुनरावर्तिनोऽर्जुन ॥

All लोकs, and naturally all जीवs in all these लोकs, including ब्रह्म लोक, are by nature, subject to appearance, disappearance and reappearance, which means all जीवs in this entire संसार are ever subject to a never ending succession of birth and death. That is the nature of life in this संसार, in this world of transient existence. If that is so, what can one do to gain मोक्ष - Total Fulfillment in life? We will see next time.