



## मुण्डक उपनिषत्

### Chapter 1

#### Section 1

#### Volume 2

ॐ om

1. ब्रह्मा देवानां प्रथमः संबभूव  
*brahmā devānām prathamah sambabhūva*  
विश्वस्य कर्ता भुवनस्य गोप्ता ।  
*viśvasya kartā bhuvanasya goptā ।*  
स ब्रह्मविद्यां सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठां  
*sa brahmavidyām sarvai vidyā pratiṣṭhām*  
अथर्वाय ज्येष्ठपुत्राय प्राह ॥ 1 - 1 - 1  
*atharvāya jyeṣṭha putrāya prāha ॥*
2. अथर्वणे यां प्रवदेत ब्रह्मा  
*atharvaṇe yām pravadeta brahmā*  
अथर्वा तां पुरोवाच अङ्गिरे ब्रह्मविद्यां ।  
*atharvā tāṃ purovāca aṅgire brahmavidyām ।*  
स भारद्वाजाय सत्यवहाय प्राह  
*sa bhāradvājāya satyavahāya prāha*  
भारद्वाजः अङ्गिरसे परावराम् ॥ 1 - 1 - 2  
*bhārdvājaḥ aṅgirase parāvaram ॥*
3. शौनको ह वै महाशालः अङ्गिरसं  
*śaunako ha vai mahāśālah aṅgirasam*  
विधिवत् उपसन्नः पप्रच्छ ।  
*vidhivat upasannaḥ papraccha ।*  
कस्मिन् नु भगवो विज्ञाते  
*kasmin nu bhagavo vijñāte*  
सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवति, इति ॥ 1 - 1 - 3  
*sarvamidaṁ vijñātaṁ bhavati, iti ॥*



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## ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

The Upanishad opens with a brief statement on its own origin

ॐ om

1. ब्रह्मा देवानां प्रथमः संबभूव  
*brahmā devānām prathamah sambabhūva*  
विश्वस्य कर्ता भुवनस्य गोप्ता ।  
*viśvasya kartā bhuvanasya goptā ।*  
स ब्रह्मविद्यां सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठां  
*sa brahmavidyām sarva vidyā pratiṣṭhām*  
अथर्वाय ज्येष्ठपुत्राय प्राह ॥ 1 - 1 - 1  
*atharvāya jyeṣṭha putrāya prāha ॥*

ॐ om is मङ्गल वचनं *maṅgala vacanam* - word of auspiciousness for beginning the Upanishad

ब्रह्मा देवानां प्रथमः संबभूव *brahmā devānām prathamah sambabhūva* - the word ब्रह्मा *brahmā* refers to Brahmaji, the creator of all created existence. In the Upanishad, the words ब्रह्म *brahma* and ब्रह्मा *brahmā* are distinct in their contents. ब्रह्म *brahma* refers to सत्यं ज्ञानं अनन्तं ब्रह्म *satyam jñānam anantaṁ brahma*, which we call ब्रह्मन् *brahman*, whose inherent power is माया *māyā*. ब्रह्मन् *brahman*, together with माया *māyā* is परमेश्वर *parameśvara*, The Lord of all created existence. Since ब्रह्मन् *brahman* and its inherent power माया *māyā* are ever inseparable, ब्रह्मन् *brahman* is परमेश्वर *parameśvara* .

With reference to each cycle of creation, the same ONE परमेश्वर *parameśvara* manifests Itself simultaneously as ब्रह्मा *brahmā*, the creator, विष्णु *viṣṇu* the sustainer of all created existence and शिव *śiva*, the Ultimate Dissolver of all created existence, and at the same time, परमेश्वर *parameśvara* 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 *parameśvar*.



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## ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

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

We must always remember Sri Krishna's words

भूतभर्तृ च तत् ज्ञेयं ग्रसिष्णु प्रभविष्णु च ॥ 13-16  
*bhūtabhartṛ ca tat jñeyam grasiṣṇu prabhaviṣṇu ca ॥*

तत् ज्ञेयं *tat jñeyam* - That अनादिमत् परं ब्रह्म *anādimat param brahma*, The परमेश्वर *paramēśvar* must be recognized as भूतभर्तृ *bhūtabhartṛ* - The विष्णु *viṣṇu*, ग्रसिष्णु *grasiṣṇu*, The शिव *śiva*, and प्रभविष्णु *prabhaviṣṇu* The ब्रह्मा *brahmā* - the Creator all at the same time. In terms of the language of communication the word ब्रह्मा *brahmā* is masculine, while the word ब्रह्म *brahma* is gender-free. This is just a matter of grammar for the purposes of communication only.

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

Because, as the Taittiriya Upanishad says, सोऽकामयत *so'kāmayata* - ब्रह्मन् *brahman* so desired. It was the Will of परमेश्वर *paramēśvar* 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 *brahmā*, the Creator, the Upanishad says

विश्वस्य कर्ता भुवनस्य गोप्ता *viśvasya kartā bhuvanasya goptā*



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## ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

विश्वस्य कर्ता *viśvasya kartā* - The ONE who is the creator for this entire Universe, including the पञ्चमहाभूताः *pañca mahā bhūtās* - The Five great Elements, and also all beings arising from their inherent powers, attributes, qualities and their mutual interactions, and also भुवनस्य गोप्ता *bhuvanasya goptā* - the One who is the protector of this entire universe by His unchanging laws of nature, including laws of कर्म *karma*.

Thus, विश्वस्य कर्ता *viśvasya kartā*, भुवनस्य गोप्ता *bhuvanasya goptā* is the लक्षण *lakṣaṇa* - the distinguishing mark of the unchanging, ever-existent manifestation of परमेश्वर *parameśvar* as Brahmaji, the Creator. That ब्रह्मा *brahmā* The Creator, appeared spontaneously and gloriously at the same time of creation of this Universe, before the appearance of all the other देवताः *devatās*.

Thus, परमेश्वर *parameśvar*, on manifesting Itself as ब्रह्मा *brahmā*, the creator

सः अथर्वाय ज्येष्ठपुत्राय प्राह *sah atharvāya jyeṣṭha putrāya prāha*

ब्रह्मा *brahmā* - That Brahmaji, the creator

अथर्वाय ज्येष्ठपुत्राय प्राह *atharvāya jyeṣṭha putrāya prāha* - 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 *karma* -born son to Brahmaji. He was a मानस पुत्र *mānasa putra* - he was born directly from the mind of परमेश्वर *parameśvar* Itself. As we may recall Sri Krishna's words:

महर्षयः सप्त पूर्वे चत्वारो मनवस्तथा ।

*maharṣayaḥ sapta pūrve catvāro manavastathā ।*

मद्भावा मानसा जाता येषां लोक इमाः प्रजाः ॥ (गीता *gītā* 10 – 6)

*madbhavā mānasā jātā yoṣāṁ loka imāḥ prajāḥ ॥*

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



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## ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

सः अथर्वाय ज्येष्ठपुत्राय प्राह *sah atharvāya jyeṣṭha putrāya prāha* - Brahmaji the creator revealed to His eldest son Atharva. What did He reveal?

ब्रह्मविद्यां सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठां *brahmavidyām sarva vidyā pratiṣṭhām* - He revealed ब्रह्मविद्या *brahmavidyā* - Knowledge about ब्रह्मन् *brahman*, the सत्यं ज्ञानं अनन्तं ब्रह्म *satyaṁ jñānaṁ anantaṁ brahma* – The आनन्द स्वरूप आत्मा *ānanda svarūpa ātmā*, The परमेश्वर *parameśvar*, already in oneself as Oneself Itself. That Knowledge, The Nature of That ब्रह्मविद्या *brahmavidyā* Knowledge is:

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

Consequently, ब्रह्मवित् आप्नोति परं *brahmavit āpnoti param* - The knower of ब्रह्मन् *brahman* reaches ब्रह्मन् *brahman* Itself, because, with respect to ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānaṁ*, the knower and the known are identical, as Sri Krishna says

सर्वस्य चाहं हृदि सन्निविष्टो मत्तः स्मृतिर्ज्ञानमपोहनं च ।

*sarvasya cāhaṁ hr̥di sannaviṣṭo mattaḥ smṛtirjñānamapohanam ca ।*

वैदैश्च सर्वैः अहमेव वेद्यो वेदान्तकृत् वेदविदेव चाहं ॥ (गीता *gītā* 15-15)

*vaidaiśca sarvaiḥ ahameva vedyo vedāntakṛt vedavideva cāhaṁ ॥*

Further, ब्रह्मविद्या *brahmavidyā* 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 *brahmavidyā* is that kind of knowledge

येन अश्रुतं, श्रुतं भवति *yena aśrutaṁ, śrutaṁ bhavati*

अमतं, मतं भवति *amataṁ, mataṁ bhavati*

अविज्ञातं विज्ञातं भवति *avijñātaṁ vijñātaṁ bhavati*

- 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



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## ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

Consequently, knowing ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* 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 *brahma vidyā* Knowledge, because, ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* is सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठा *sarva vidyā pratiṣṭhā*. प्रतिष्ठा *pratiṣṭhā* means The Ultimate source as well as The Ultimate End. ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* 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 *pratiṣṭhā* also means श्रेष्ठ *śreṣṭha* - the most exalted. ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* is the most exalted among all forms of knowledge, as Sri Krishna says

ज्ञानानाम् ज्ञानं उत्तमम् (गीता *gītā* 14 -1)  
*jñānānām jñānam uttamam*

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 *brahma vidyā* is the most exalted among all विद्याs *vidyās* ?

It is still true, because ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* does not belong to the same class as all other विद्याs *vidyās*. ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* is a class by itself. It is not one of the many fields of objective knowledge. It is आत्म ज्ञानं *ātma jñānam* - Self Knowledge, परमेश्वर *parameśvara* ज्ञानं *jñānam*. It is knowledge which reveals परमेश्वर *parameśvar* itself. Being so, It is परमेश्वर *parameśvara* 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 *brahma vidyā* is सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठा *sarva vidyā pratiṣṭhā*.

It is That ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* Knowledge that परमेश्वर *parameśvara* as ब्रह्मा *brahmā*, the creator, revealed to His मानस पुत्र *mānasa putra* - अथर्वी *atharvā*. Then what did अथर्वी *atharvā* do?

2. अथर्वणे यां प्रवदेत ब्रह्मा  
*atharvaṇe yām pravadeta brahmā*



## ब्रह्मविद्या Brahma Vidya

अथर्वा तां पुरोवाच अङ्गिरे ब्रह्मविद्यां ।  
*atharvā tāṁ purovāca aṅgire brahmavidyāṁ ।*  
स भारद्वाजाय सत्यवहाय प्राह  
*sa bhāradvājāya satyavahāya prāha*  
भारद्वाजः अङ्गिरसे परावराम् ॥ 1 - 1 - 2  
*bhārdvājaḥ aṅgirase parāvaram ॥*

अथर्वा *atharvā* is referred here as अथर्वण् *atharvaṇ*. प्रवदेत् *pravadeta* is Vedic version of प्रविदत् *pravidat* revealed.

यां ब्रह्मविद्यां ब्रह्मा अथर्वणे प्रवदेत् *yāṁ brahmavidyāṁ brahmā atharvaṇe pravadeta* - which ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* knowledge, Brahmaji the creator, revealed to Atharva

तां ब्रह्मविद्यां अथर्वा पुरा अङ्गिरे उवाच *tāṁ brahmavidyāṁ atharvā pura aṅgire uvāca* - that same ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* knowledge, Atharva, taught to (his disciple) Angir, पुरा *pura* - long time ago.

सः (अङ्गिरः) भारद्वाजाय सत्यवहाय तां ब्रह्मविद्यां प्राह *sah (aṅgiraḥ) bhāradvājāya satyavahāya tāṁ brahmavidyāṁ prāha*

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

भारद्वाजः अङ्गिरसे प्राह परावरं *bhārdvājaḥ aṅgirase prāha parāvaram* - That Satyavaha - Bharadwaja, in succession communicated the same knowledge again to his disciple, named Angiras, परावरं गुरु *parāvaram* - in the tradition of गुरु-शिष्य परंपर *guru-śiṣya parampara* - the teacher-disciple continuity of relationship. The one who gives the knowledge is called पर *para*, the teacher, and the one who receives that knowledge with proper attitude is called अवर *avara*, the disciple. Thus, knowledge flows from the teacher to the disciple, in succession, spontaneously. परावरं *parāvaram* 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 *parāvaram* has another meaning, which we will see later in verse 40) (2-2-8).



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## ब्रह्मविद्या Brahma Vidya

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

3. शौनको ह वै महाशालः अङ्गिरसं  
*śaunako ha vai mahāśālah aṅgirasam*

विधिवत् उपसन्नः पप्रच्छ ।

*vidhivat upasannah papraccha ।*

कस्मिन् नु भगवो विज्ञाते

*kasmin nu bhagavo vijñāte*

सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवति, इति ॥

1 - 1 - 3

*sarvamidaṁ vijñātaṁ bhavati, iti ॥*

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

शौनकः महाशालः अङ्गिरसं विधिवत् उपसन्नः पप्रच्छ *śaunakah mahāśālah aṅgirasam vidhivat upasannah papraccha*

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

About the person शौनक *śaunaka*, the Upanishad says:

महाशालः *mahāśālah* - A great householder, a गृहस्थ *gṛhastha*, 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 *karmakāṇḍ* 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 *brahma vidyā* knowledge.

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

विधिवत् उपसन्नः *vidhivat upasannah* - He approached Angiras





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## ब्रह्मविद्या Brahma Vidya

विधिवत् *vidhivat* - 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 *śaunaka* showed Angiras the respect due to him as a recognized teacher for ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* knowledge, and at the same time exhibited his own श्रद्धा *śraddhā* - 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 *śaunakah mahāśālah aṅgirasam vidhivat upasannaḥ papraccha* - शौनक *śaunaka*, a great householder, having approached (उपसन्नः *upasannaḥ*) Angiras as ब्रह्मविद्याचार्य *brahma vidyācārya* - as a teacher for ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* knowledge, in the proper manner, respectfully asked him a question, sincerely seeking an answer. This is how शौनक *śaunaka* formulated his question

कस्मिन् नु भगवो विज्ञाते सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवति, इति *kasmin nu bhagavo vijñāte sarvamidam vijñātam bhavati, iti*

भगवः – हे भगवन् *he bhagavan*, O! Respected Sir

कस्मिन् नु विज्ञाते *kasmin nu vijñāte* means कस्मिन् एव विज्ञाते सति *kasmin eva vijñāte sati*

नु *nu* here means एव *eva* only, alone

विज्ञाते सति *vijñāte sati* - when clearly and definitely known, recognized. Therefore कस्मिन् एव विज्ञाते सति *kasmin eva vijñāte sati* - which is That वस्तु *vastu*, 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 *sarvam idam vijñātam bhavati* - all this, everything that can be objectified in this entire creation, becomes clearly and definitely known, clearly and definitely recognized.

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



## ब्रह्मविद्या Brahma Vidya

इति *iti* - That is शौनक's *śaunaka'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 *svarūpa* of अदः *adaḥ*, one immediately recognizes the स्वरूप *svarūpa* of इदं *idaṁ* as अदः *adaḥ* itself, from the prior knowledge पूर्णम् अदः *pūrṇam adaḥ*, पूर्णम् इदं *pūrṇam idaṁ*

इदं *idaṁ* knowledge, the object knowledge, by itself is endless. It is अपरा विद्या *aparā vidyā*. On the other hand, the अहं *ahaṁ* knowledge (The अदः *adaḥ* knowledge) is only One, and It is परा विद्या *parā vidyā*. शौनक *śaunaka* wants to know That परा विद्या *parā vidyā*. शौनक *śaunaka* 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 *śaunaka* wants to know the स्वरूप *svarūpa* of ब्रह्मन् *brahman*, The आत्मा *ātmā*, The परमेश्वर *parameśvar*, and That knowledge is ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā*.

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

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

1. शौनक *śaunaka* is a householder, and he is getting ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* knowledge from a recognized ब्रह्मविद्याचार्य *brahma vidyācārya*. That means, ब्रह्म विद्या *brahma vidyā* Knowledge is not restricted to संन्यासीs *sanyāsīs*. In fact, ब्रह्म विद्या *brahma vidyā* Knowledge is open to every person, without exception, provided the person is ready for this knowledge, and has the necessary श्रद्धा *śraddhā* in gaining this knowledge.



Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton Inc.  
4835 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1X 1G6

## ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

2. The very fact that शौनक *śaunaka* seeks knowledge about ब्रह्मन् *brahman* indicates, that he is already aware of the existence of ब्रह्मन् *brahman*, even though he does not know exactly what ब्रह्मन् *brahman* is. How does he know that ब्रह्मन् *brahman* exists? Because, every person who has gone through the discipline of Basic Vedic Education, is already familiar with the Veda Mantra ॐ *om*, and That ॐ *om* is ॐ इति ब्रह्म *om iti brahma*, ॐ इति सर्वम् *om iti sarvam*, etc., all of which confirm that ॐ *om* as ब्रह्मन् *brahman* exists

3. We have already seen how भृगु *bhṛgu* in Taittiriya Upanishad, Nachiketa in कठोपनिषत् *kāthopaniṣat*, and Arjuna in भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā* seek the same knowledge about ब्रह्मन् *brahman* 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.



Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton Inc.  
4835 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1X 1G6

## ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

### Senior's Day Message

On this Senior's Day at this temple, I have been asked to say a few words.

All I can say is simply this. To be a Senior, in the traditional sense, is enjoying the experience of Continuous Joy. In terms of Sanatana Dharma, The Eternal Order, The natural Order of human life is a sequential unity of four distinct stages of existence called आश्रमसु *āśramas*, namely ब्रह्मचर्य आश्रम *brahmacharya āśrama*, गृहस्थ आश्रम *gṛhstha āśrama*, वानप्रस्थ आश्रम *vānaprasatha āśrama* and finally अत्याश्रम *atyāśrama*, also called संन्यास आश्रम *sanyāsa āśrama*, leading to total liberation, Absolute Happiness, Total Fulfillment in life.

Let us call these आश्रमसु *āśramas* simply as the First, Second, Third and Fourth stages of life.

The First stage is preparation for the rest of one's life. At this stage, one goes through various levels of education, pursues various kinds of objective knowledge, develops personal disciplines of various kinds, recognizes basic values in life, gains proficiency and cultivates excellence in one's chosen fields of activity, and also gains a clear vision of one's career path in life. This is also the stage in life when one develops roots in one's heritage, family traditions, and learns to recite simple prayers, and meditate on परमेश्वर *parameśvara* in some form and name, and thereby learns to cultivate faith and confidence in oneself and respect for others.

Following this first stage of life is the second stage, which is relatively a long period of active family and professional life and all that implies. This is usually what is called one's work life, a life of धर्म-अर्थ-काम *dharma-artha-kāma* pursuits, which naturally includes earning wealth by proper means, striving for professional excellence and accomplishments, continued progress in one's career and other worldly ambitions, together with all enjoyments of family and social life, and at the same time, going through a variety of ups and downs in one's experiences of worldly life.

It is at this stage of life that one is expected to mature in wisdom through one's varied experiences in life. If one does not grow in wisdom, one simply ages; if one does grow in wisdom, then aging is only a small price to pay for the gain in maturity with respect to one's vision of life, and its overriding purpose.

After many years of such active work life, a time comes when one formally retires from work life. It is NOW when one formally enters into the Third Stage of Life. This Third Stage of Life is only a period of semi-retirement, or partial retirement from the former work life. Due to various bondages and attachments developed and cultivated



Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton Inc.  
4835 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1X 1G6

## ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

throughout the long years of the past work life, the person cannot fully overcome the forces of residual powers of one's past धर्म-अर्थ-काम *dharma-artha-kāma* pursuits, which now take only a different form and name. Nevertheless, the person still tries to live a life of relative peace, giving oneself more time and opportunity to reflect on the meaning of life itself, and its overriding purpose.

Even though the person's life now is much less hectic than what it was before, and the person has many reasons to feel happy about oneself, one's past life and accomplishments, and one's blessings in life, the person still lives with constant feelings of regrets, distresses and dissatisfactions of some kind or other, together with a continuing sense of unhappiness and unfulfillment in life. In the meanwhile, the person is simply and naturally aging every day.

Most people spend the rest of their lives being only in this Third Stage of Life. But still some people do succeed in uplifting themselves from this Third Stage of Life, simply by the strength of their own spiritual maturity.

This is when such upliftment happens. In the words of मुण्डक उपनिषत् *muṇḍaka upaniṣat*

परीक्ष्य लोकान् कर्मचितान् ब्राह्मणः  
*parīkṣya lokān karmacitān brāhmaṇaḥ*  
निर्वेदं आयत् नस्ति आकृतः कृतेन ।  
*nirvedaṁ āyata nāsti ākṛtaḥ kṛtena ।*

After analyzing all of one's worldly experiences, a discerning person, a person of insight, recognizes that no action whatsoever can bring Total happiness, Total Fulfillment in life. If such happiness, such Fulfillment in life does exist, it must be something uncreated, ever existent, all pervasive and limitless, and being so, it must already be in oneself, not because of any action on one's part, but because of its own very nature. That which is ever existent, That which always is, if That is what one seeks in life, then one can gain it only in terms of knowledge.

That knowledge is only ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* Knowledge, Knowledge about अक्षर ब्रह्मन् *akṣara brahman* – The परमेश्वर *parameśvara*, The आत्मा *ātmā*, The Self I, already in oneself, and indeed in every self. On such recognition, a discerning person naturally sets one's mind and बुद्धि *buddhi* in seeking ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* Knowledge by every available means.



Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton Inc.  
4835 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1X 1G6

## ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

It is only at this point in time that a person naturally enters into the Fourth Stage of Life, which is truly the life of a senior, which is in the traditional sense, according to Sanatana Dharma, The natural order of human existence.

At this stage of life, one naturally frees oneself from any notion of playing any role in society. One is just ONESELF, and nothing more. One certainly does whatever is one's duty as कर्मयोग *karma yoga*, as ईश्वर आराधन *īśvara ārādhana* - as worship of परमेश्वर *parameśvara*, but one has absolutely no sense of identification with any role, any relationship or any possession. One spends one's time always contemplating on ब्रह्म विद्या *brahma vidyā* Knowledge by listening to the Gita Upanishad mantras again and again, understanding, reflecting, appreciating and absorbing the content of these mantras in the spirit of total commitment to knowledge and service at all times. Such total commitment to the pursuit of ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* knowledge and the attitude of service to परमेश्वर *parameśvara* is the process of Self-discovery, leading ultimately to Total Freedom, Absolute Happiness, Total Fulfillment in life.

Thus, we understand that being a Senior in the traditional sense is not a matter of age. It is entirely a matter of spiritual maturity, a matter of total commitment to the pursuit of Self Discovery - Self Recognition - through ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* Knowledge as unfolded by the words of the भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā* and the Upanishads.

That is why ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* scripture reading is an integral part of this temple services, which include reading भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā* together with ईशावास्य उपनिषत् *īśāvāsya upaniṣat*, केनोपनिषत् *kenopaniṣat*, कठोपनिषत् *kāthopaniṣat*, तैत्तिरीय उपनिषत् *taittirīya upaniṣat* and मुण्डक उपनिषत् *muṇḍaka upaniṣat*, all in their entirety, with some level of understanding and appreciation. All this is extraordinary Knowledge, already made available to anyone who seeks it.

What you learn from ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā* is truly amazing. For example, you first learn to recognize that you are not your body. Your body is just an inert housing which you must maintain in good repair, because you need it for the time being. Further,

- You always seek happiness. The Upanishad says: You are Happiness Itself. Discover yourself, and you will find the Absolute Happiness you are.



Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton Inc.  
4835 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1X 1G6

## ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

- You always seek freedom. The Upanishad says: You are already free. Discover yourself, and you will find the Absolute Freedom that you are.
- You always wish to live longer. The Upanishad says: You are already Immortal. Discover yourself, and you will recognize The very Immortality that you are.

You are always doing some कर्म *karma*, seeking some कर्मफल *karma phala*. The Upanishad says: Doing whatever कर्म *karma* you want is within your power, but the कर्मफल *karmaphala* arising from your कर्म *karma* is not within your power, because it does not belong to you. Then, what for is कर्म *karma*? The Upanishad says: The only purpose of doing any कर्म *karma* is to gain अन्तःकरण शुद्धि *antaḥ karaṇa śuddhi* - purity of mind and बुद्धि *buddhi*. When your mind and बुद्धि *buddhi* are absolutely pure, you will find that your mind is वेद स्वरूप *veda svarūpa*, and your बुद्धि *buddhi* is ज्ञान स्वरूप *jñāna svarūpa*, and you are already in भक्ति योग *bhakti yoga*, and that means you are in आनन्दमय *ānandamaya*, enjoying the experience of continuous joy.

All this is extraordinary knowledge, totally realizable and enjoyable by one's own efforts, through the vehicle of one's own body instruments that one is already blessed with at this time.

Every stage of life is a new creation, and before any creation can take place, there must always be some act of initiation for such creation. Let your visit to this temple today be that act of initiation for your joyful entry into the Enlightening world of seniors, in the traditional sense, whatever be your age.

ॐ *om*

पूर्णम् अदः पूर्णम् इदं पूर्णात् पूर्णम् उदच्यते

*pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇam idaṁ pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate |*

पूर्णस्य पूर्णम् आदाय पूर्णम् एवा वशिष्यते ॥

*pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādaya pūrṇam evā vaśiṣyate ||*

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

*om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ ||*