



मुण्डक उपनिषत्

Chapter 1

Section 2

Volume 8

16. प्लवाः हि एते अदृढाः यज्ञरूपाः
plavāḥ hi ete adṛḍhāḥ yajñarūpāḥ
अष्टादश उक्तं अवरं येषु कर्म ।
aṣṭādaśā uktam avaram yeṣu karma |
एतत् श्रेयः ये अभिनन्दन्ति मूढाः
etat śreyah ye abhinandanti mūḍhāḥ
जरा मृत्युं ते पुनरेव अपियन्ति ॥ 1 - 2 - 7
jara mṛtyuṁ te punareva apiyanti ||
17. अविद्यायां अन्तरे वर्तमानाः
avidyāyām antare vartamānāḥ
स्वयं धीराः पण्डितं मन्यमानाः ॥
svayaṁ dhirāḥ paṇḍitaṁ manyamānāḥ ||
जङ्घन्यमानाः परियन्ति मूढाः
janḡhanyamānāḥ pariyanti mūḍhāḥ
अन्धेन नीयमानाः यथान्धाः ॥ 1 - 2 - 8
andhena niyamānāḥ yathāndhāḥ ||
18. अविद्यायां बहुधा वर्तमानाः
avidyāyām bahudhā vartamānāḥ
वयं कृतार्थाः इति अभिमन्यन्ति बालाः ।
vayaṁ kṛtārthāḥ iti abhimanyanti bālāḥ |
यत् कर्मिणः न प्रवेदयन्ति रागात्
yat karmaṇiḥ na pravedayanti rāgāt
तेन आतुराः क्षीणलोका च्यवन्ते ॥ 1 - 2 - 9
tena āturāḥ kṣīṇalokā cyavante ||

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 *karmas* and their extraordinary usefulness for gaining heavenly pleasures and experiences of one's own liking, both



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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 *karmas* for reaching the ultimate goal of life, namely, gaining the परम पुरुषार्थ *param puruṣārtha*, which is मोक्ष *mokṣa* - Total Liberation (from all transient experiences of संसार *saṁsār*) and gaining Absolute Happiness - Total Fulfillment in life.

For a person who has no ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānaṁ*, ईश्वर ज्ञानं *īśvara jñānaṁ*, आत्म ज्ञानं *ātma jñānaṁ* - Self-knowledge, every Havan कर्म *karma* is a काम्य कर्म *kāmya karma* - a desire-propelled action for the elimination of the unwanted effects of one's पाप कर्मs *pāpa karmas* - improper deeds in daily life, and for accumulating पुण्यs *puṇyas*, 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 *svarga lok* - The Heaven. If such a person, a कामा कामी *kāmā kāmī*, has been doing all the prescribed Havan कर्मs *karmas* properly, in all respects, they certainly yield the fruits of such कर्मs *karmas* one has been praying for, as the Upanishad has already pointed out in the earlier verses. But one must understand clearly that in doing such desire-propelled Havan कर्मs *karmas* 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 *karmas* properly, in every respect, one does accumulate lots of पुण्यs *puṇyas* by which one does reach स्वर्ग लोक *svarga lok*, the Heaven, after death.

When the जीव *jīva* of such a person reaches स्वर्ग लोक *svarga lok*, what does the जीव *jīva* do? In स्वर्ग लोक *svarga lok*, all kinds of transient pleasures and experiences are said to be available for any जीव *jīva* in exchange for one's पुण्यs *puṇyas*. स्वर्ग लोक *svarga lok* is only a भोग भूमि *bhoga bhūmi*, and not a कर्म भूमि *karma bhūmi*, which means one cannot earn any new पुण्य *puṇya* in स्वर्ग लोक *svarga loka*. One can only spend one's previously accumulated पुण्यs *puṇyas* for enjoying whatever transient pleasures one wants to experience. Therefore, every जीव *jīva*, devoid of आत्म ज्ञानं *ātma jñānaṁ* - Self-knowledge, goes after different kinds of transient pleasures, pushed by one's own वासनs *vāsanās* residual tendencies born of one's prior mental disposition. Naturally, a time comes when the जीव *jīva* has



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exhausted all of one's पुण्यs *puṇyas*, and there is no more पुण्य *puṇya* left in the जीव *jīva* to be able to continue one's life in स्वर्ग लोक *svarga lok*. Then what does the जीव *jīva* do? Sri Krishna says:

ते तं भुक्त्वा स्वर्गलोकं विशालं क्षीणे पुण्ये मर्त्यलोकं विशन्ति ।

te taṁ bhuktvā svargalokaṁ viśālaṁ kṣīṇe puṇye martyalokaṁ viśanti
एवं त्रयीधर्मम् अनुप्रपन्नाः गतागतं कामकामा लभन्ते ॥ 9 – 21

evaṁ trayīdharmam anuprapannāḥ gatāgataṁ kāmakāmā labhante ॥

Such काम कामाः *kāma kāmāḥ* - cravings-propelled people, who reached स्वर्ग लोक *svarga lok* as a result of the fruits of their Havan कर्मs *karmas*, after experiencing their chosen varieties of heavenly pleasures, क्षीणे पुण्ये *kṣīṇe puṇye* - on spending and exhausting all their accumulated पुण्यs *puṇyas* in the pursuit of such heavenly pleasures and experiences, मर्त्यलोकं विशन्ति *martyalokaṁ viśanti* - they have to return to this mortal world again, to continue their worldly life, only to experience all the inevitable सुख दुःखs *sukha duḥkhas* of संसार *saṁsār* - 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 *karmas* is only to continue to remain in संसार *saṁsār* for ever, caught in the wheel of कर्म *karma* and कर्मफल *karma phala* - actions and their result, thus subjecting themselves endlessly to पुनरपि जननं पुनरपि मरणं *punarapi jananaṁ punarapi maraṇaṁ* - a never ending succession of birth and death. Thus, Sri Krishna points out that one cannot achieve the overriding goal of human existence, the परम पुरुषार्थ *param puruṣārtha* namely, मोक्ष *mokṣa*, Total Fulfillment in life, simply by doing all the appropriate Havan कर्मs *karmas* 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 अदृढाः यज्ञरूपाः

plavāḥ hi ete adṛḍhāḥ yajñarūpāḥ

अष्टादश उक्तं अवरं येषु कर्म ।

aṣṭādaśā uktam avaram yeṣu karma ।



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एतत् श्रेयः ये अभिनन्दन्ति मूढाः
etat śreyah ye abhinandanti mūdhāḥ
जरा मृत्युं ते पुनरेव अपियन्ति ॥ 1 - 2 - 7
jarā mr̥tyuṁ te punareva apiyanti ॥

Those who perform Havan कर्मs *karmas*, seeking the help of परमेश्वर *parameśvar* only for gaining their own various objects of likes and dislikes, are called काम कामाः *kāma kāmāḥ*. Such people consider that एते उक्तं हि प्लवाः उक्तं *ete uktam hi plavāḥ* - एते उक्तं *ete uktam* - these Havan कर्मs *karmas*, by their proper performance, as prescribed in the Vedas प्लवाः हि भवन्ति *plavāḥ hi bhavanti* - they do indeed become the rafts (small boats) serving as aids to reach the various goals of life.

For काम कामाः *kāma kāmāḥ*, 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 *karmas* now and then. For them these Havan कर्मs *karmas* 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 *aṣṭādaśā plavāḥ*, अदृढाः प्लवाः *adr̥dhāḥ plavāḥ* and यज्ञरूपाः प्लवाः *yajñarūpāḥ plavāḥ*.

अष्टादश प्लवाः *aṣṭādaśā plavāḥ* - They are boats of 18 components each. A full हवन् कर्म *havan karma* involves 18 people, namely the performer of the Havan कर्म *karma*, 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 *karma* of any kind. The कर्मफल *karma phala* - the result of such Havan कर्म *karma* however, depends entirely on the mental disposition of the performer of the Havan कर्म *karma*, which is the primary component in each Havan कर्म *karma*. Thus, even with the above 18 people involved in each Havan कर्म *karma*,

अदृढाः प्लवाः *adr̥dhāḥ plavāḥ* - these boats, the aids provided by these boats, are



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

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

यज्ञ कर्म *yajña karma* means कर्म *karma* totally dedicated to परमेश्वर *parameśvar* as pure ईश्वर आराधन *īśvara ārādhana* - done for अन्तःकरण शुद्धि *antaḥ karaṇa śuddhi* only, for restoration of the natural purity of one's mind and बुद्धि *buddhi*, to make oneself fit for gaining आत्म ज्ञानं *ātma jñānaṁ* - Self knowledge. Consequently

येषु अवरं कर्म *yeṣu avaram karma* - in such Havan कर्मs *karmas*, propelled by one's likes and dislikes, the कर्म *karma* involved is अवरं *avaram* - inferior, because it has no roots in ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānaṁ*, ईश्वर ज्ञानं *īśvara jñānaṁ*, आत्म ज्ञानं *ātma jñānaṁ* - Self-knowledge. Therefore

ये एतत् श्रेयः *ye etat śreyaḥ* (इति *iti*) अभिनन्दन्ति *abhinandanti*, ते मूढाः *te mūḍhāḥ* - those people, those काम कामाः *kāma kāmāḥs* who take delight in their Havan कर्मs *karmas*, thinking

एतत् श्रेयः *etat śreyaḥ* - "this is श्रेयस् *śreyas* - this is the means for gaining श्रेयस् *śreyas* - मोक्ष *mokṣa*. Doing हवन् कर्म *havan karma* is मोक्षसाधनं *mokṣa sādhanam* - helpful for gaining मोक्ष *mokṣa* - those who think in that manner ते मूढाः *te mūḍhāḥ* - they are deluded by their own ignorance.

The कर्म *karma* involved in their Havan rituals is अवरं कर्म *avaram karma* - inferior कर्म *karma*, because it is कर्म *karma* with no roots in आत्म ज्ञानं *ātma jñānaṁ* - Self knowledge. Consequently, कर्मs *karmas* it gets naturally destroyed along with its



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

ते अपि यन्ति *te api yanti* - they still have to experience

जरा मृत्युं *jarā mṛtyuṃ* - old age and death

पुनः एव *punah eva* - again and again, as Sri Krishna says

ते तं भुक्त्वा स्वर्गलोकं विशालं क्षीणे पुण्ये मर्त्यलोकं विशन्ति ।

te taṃ bhuktvā svargalokaṃ viśālaṃ kṣīṇe puṇye martyalokaṃ viśanti

एवं त्रयीधर्मम् अनुप्रपन्नाः गतागतं कामकामा लभतन्ते ॥

G. 9 – 21

evaṃ trayīdharmam anuprapannāḥ gatāgataṃ kāmakāmā labhante ॥

as we saw earlier. The Upanishad continues.

17. अविद्यायां अन्तरे वर्तमानाः

avidyāyām antare vartamānāḥ

स्वयं धीराः पण्डितं मन्यमानाः ॥

svayaṃ dhīrāḥ paṇḍitaṃ manyamānāḥ ॥

जड्घन्यमानाः परियन्ति मूढाः

jaṅghanyamānāḥ pariyanti mūḍhāḥ

अन्धेन नीयमानाः यथान्धाः ॥

1 - 2 - 8

andhena nīyamānāḥ yathāndhāḥ ॥

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

अविद्यायां अन्तरे वर्तमानाः *avidyāyām antare vartamānāḥ* - Living a life depending on कर्म *karma* and कर्मफल *karmaphala*, governed by अविद्या *avidyā* - spiritual blindness, self-ignorance, living a life depending on such Havan rituals for one's



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redemption from संसार *saṁsār*, living a life governed by never ending longings for various objects of ever-changing likes, dislikes and expectations

स्वयं धीराः पण्डितं मन्यमानाः *svayaṁ dhīrāḥ paṇḍitaṁ manyamānāḥ* - the काम *kāma* कामाः *kāma kāmaḥs*, the cravings-propelled people look upon themselves as पण्डिताः *paṇḍitāḥ* and धीराः *dhīrāḥ* - they think they have expert knowledge and scholarship in all their chosen fields of activities (पण्डिताः *paṇḍitāḥ*) and therefore, they are people of wisdom, they are धीराः *dhīrāḥ*, they have all worldly wisdom there is.

जड्घन्यमानाः परियन्ति मूढाः *jaṅghanyamānāḥ pariyanti mūḍhāḥ*

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

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

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

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

अविद्या *avidyā* or spiritual blindness is characterized by absence of चित्तेक बुद्धि *viveka buddhi*, 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 *dhīrāḥ*), while being जड्घन्यमानाः *jaṅghanyamānāḥ* - while being continuously hurt by hosts of bodily and mental sufferings of various kinds. The Upanishad refers to such people as बालाः *bālāḥ* - people still in the childish state of maturity in the next verse.

18. अविद्यायां बहुधा वर्तमानाः

avidyāyām bahudhā vartamānāḥ

वयं कृतार्थाः इति अभिमन्यन्ति बालाः ।

vayaṁ kṛtārthāḥ iti abhimanyanti bālāḥ ।



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यत् कर्मिणः न प्रवेदयन्ति रागात्
yat karmaṇiḥ na pravedayanti rāgāt
तेन आतुराः क्षीणलोका च्यवन्ते ॥ 1 - 2 - 9
tena āturāḥ kṣiṇalokā cyavante ॥

अविद्यायां (अन्तरे antare) बहुधा वर्तमानाः avidyāyām bahudhā vartamānāḥ -
Steeped in spiritual ignorance, and living daily lives in multifarious ways, which means
having no focus on the overriding purpose of life

बालाः bālāḥ - these काम कामाः kāma kāmāḥ - spiritually immature people

अभिमन्यन्ति abhimanyanti, meaning अभिमानं कुर्वन्ति abhimānaṁ kurvanti,
they identify themselves with the thought

"चयं कृतार्थाः इति vayam kṛtārthāḥ iti" - "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 puṇya karmas" - so they think foolishly

यत् yat = यस्मात् yasmāt - They think so because

कर्मिणः न प्रवेदयन्ति karmaṇiḥ na pravedayanti meaning तत्त्वं न जानन्ति tatvaṁ
na jānanti - Those who are bound to काम्य कर्मs kāmya karmas - 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 mokṣa. They cannot recognize that because

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

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

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

क्षीणलोका च्यवन्ते kṣiṇalokā cyavante (सति sati) - क्षीण कर्मफल स्वर्गलोकाः

च्यवन्ते सति kṣiṇa karmaphla svargalokāḥ cyavante sati - when such people
get deprived (च्यवन्ते cyavante) of the pleasures and experiences of स्वर्गलोक
svargaloka - heaven, and have to get reborn on earth, on the exhaustion of their पुण्य
कर्मs puṇya karmas in Heaven.



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Total fulfillment in life is possible only by gaining ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānam*, ईश्वर ज्ञानं *īśvara jñānam*, आत्मज्ञानं *ātma jñānam* - Self-knowledge. Such knowledge cannot arise in the mind and बुद्धि *buddhi* 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 तयापहृतं चेतसां ।

bhogaiśvarya prasaktanām tayāpahṛta cetasām ।

व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिः समाधौ न विधीयते ॥

G 2 - 44

vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ samādhau na vidhiyate ॥

Sri Krishna is talking here about कामात्मानः *kāmātmānaḥ* - 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 *bhoga aiśvarya prasaktanām* - they have surrendered to the Alter of भोग *bhoga* and ऐश्वर्य *aiśvarya*. They have been overpowered by the forces of pleasures, wealth and power, and, as a result

तया अपहृतं चेतसां *tayā apahṛta cetasām* - their mind and बुद्धि *buddhi* have been snatched away by the forces of भोग *bhoga* and ऐश्वर्य *aiśvarya*. In effect, they have lost their minds, which means their minds have lost their capacity for discriminative enquiry, because of their attachment to भोग *bhoga* and ऐश्वर्य *aiśvarya*. When that happens,

व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिः *vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ* - That एक बुद्धि *eka buddhi*, That सांख्य *sāṅkhya* बुद्धि *buddhi*, That कर्मयोग बुद्धि *karmayoga buddhi*, That single pointed endeavour in life for gaining the परं पुरुषार्थ *param puruṣārtha*, the मोक्ष *mokṣa*

समाधौ न विधीयते *samādhau na vidhiyate* - does not come into mind and बुद्धि *buddhi* of those कामात्मानः *kāmātmānaḥ* 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.