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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

मुण्डक उपनिषत्

Chapter 1

Section 2

Volume 9

19. इष्टापूरुतम् मन्यमानाः वरिष्ठं

*iṣṭāpūrtam manyamānāḥ varīṣṭham*

न अन्यत् श्रेयः वेदयन्ते प्रमूढाः ।

*na anyat śreyaḥ vedayante pramūḍhāḥ ।*

नाकस्य पृष्ठे ते सकृते अनुभूत्वा

*nākasya pṛṣṭhe te sakṛte anubhūtvā*

इमं लोकं हीनतरं वा विशन्ति

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*imaṁ lokam hīnataram vā viśanti*

20. तपः श्रद्धे ये हि उपवसन्ति अरण्ये

*tapāḥ śraddhe ye hi upavasanti araṇye*

शान्ताः विद्वांसः भैक्ष्यचर्याम् चरन्तः ।

*śāntāḥ vidvāsaḥ bhaikṣyacaryām carantaḥ ।*

सूर्यं द्वारेण ते विरजाः प्रयान्ति

*sūrya dvāreṇa te virajāḥ prayānti*

य अमृतः स पुरुषः हि अव्ययात्मा ॥

1 - 2 - 11

*ya amṛtaḥ sa puruṣaḥ hi avyayātmā ॥*

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

The Upanishad says:



19. इष्टापूरुतम् मन्यमानाः वरिष्ठं  
*iṣṭāpūrtam manyamānāḥ variṣṭham*  
न अन्यत् श्रेयः वेदयन्ते प्रमूढाः ।  
*na anyat śreyaḥ vedayante pramūdhāḥ ।*  
नाकस्य पृष्ठे ते सकृते अनुभूत्वा  
*nākasya pṛṣṭhe te sakṛte anubhūtvā*  
इमं लोकं हीनतरं वा विशन्ति 1 - 2 - 10  
*imaṁ lokam hīnatarṁ vā viśanti*

इष्टापूरुतम् *iṣṭāpūrtam* is a combination of two words, इष्ट *iṣṭa* and पूरुत *pūrta*. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of पुण्य कर्म *puṇya karmas* - virtuous deeds, by doing which one can earn पुण्य *puṇya* in one's earthly life. पुण्य *puṇya* 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, and also thereafter in one's abode in any of the स्वर्गलोक *svarga lokas*, in any of the heavenly regions within this संसार *saṁsār*, within this world of transient existence.

These two kinds of पुण्य कर्म *puṇya karmas* are इष्ट कर्म *iṣṭa karma* and पूरुत कर्म *pūrta karma*. इष्ट कर्म *iṣṭa karmas* are वेद विहित कर्म *veda vihita karmas* such as all forms of Vedic rituals, including Havan कर्म *karmas* 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. पूरुत कर्म *pūrta karma* 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 पूरुत कर्म *pūrta karmas*.

All the Vedas glorify these इष्टापूरुत *iṣṭāpūrta* कर्म *karmas* - performance of Vedic rituals and participation in charitable activities as an essential part of one's growing up process.

इष्टापूरुतम् वरिष्ठं मन्यमानाः *iṣṭāpūrtam variṣṭham manyamānāḥ* - there are many people who consider that these इष्टापूरुत कर्म *iṣṭāpūrta karmas* - the virtuous deeds of the two kinds mentioned above are



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वरिष्ठं *variṣṭham* means श्रेष्ठं *śraṣṭham* - they are the most exalted among कर्मस *karmas*, and therefore, they are श्रेय साधनं *śreya sādhanam*, मोक्ष साधनं *mokṣa sādhanam* - they are the means for gaining मोक्ष *mokṣa* - total fulfillment in life.

अन्यत् श्रेयः न वेदयन्ते *anyat śreyaḥ na vedayante* - Such people do not know, do not recognize any other kind of कर्म *karma*, capable of leading one to मोक्ष *mokṣa* - Total Fulfillment in Life.

प्रमूढाः *pramūḍhaḥ* - The Upanishad describes such people as प्रमूढाः *pramūḍhaḥ*. मूढाः *mūḍhaḥ* means deluded. प्रमूढाः *pramūḍhaḥ* means deeply deluded, drowned in delusion born of ignorance of the scope and power of such इष्टापूर्त कर्मस *iṣṭāpūrta karmas*, with respect to पर विद्या *para vidyā* - gaining ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānam*, ईश्वर ज्ञानं *īśvara jñānam*, आत्म ज्ञानं *ātma jñānam* - Self-knowledge.

Now, how can that be so. People who are committed to इष्टापूर्त कर्मस *iṣṭāpūrta karmas* - 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 *pramūḍhaḥ* - "deeply deluded?"

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

यामिमां पुष्पितां वाचं, प्रवदन्ति अविपश्चितः ।  
*yāmimām puṣpitām vācam, pravadanti avipaścitaḥ ।*  
वेदवादरताः पार्थ, न अन्यत् अस्ति, इति वादिनः ॥  
*vedavādaratāḥ pārtha, na anyat asti, iti vādinaḥ ॥*

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



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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 *param puruṣārtha*- the overriding goal of human existence, namely मोक्ष *mokṣa* - Total Fulfillment in life.

Performing पुण्य कर्मसु *puṇya karmas* as ईश्वर आराधन *ārādhana buddhi* - as worship of परमेश्वर *parameśvar*, with कर्मयोग बुद्धि *karma yoga buddhi*, for the only purpose of gaining चित्त प्रसादं *citta prasādaṁ* - restoration of the inherent purity of one's mind and बुद्धि *buddhi*, is quite different from performing the same पुण्य कर्मसु *puṇya karmas* - virtuous deeds simply as a means for gaining the objects of one's धर्म-अर्थ-काम *dharma-artha-kāma* pursuits, the perceived objects of one's progress in worldly life.

All इष्टापूर्त पुण्य कर्मसु *iṣṭāpūrta puṇya karmas* - all पुण्य कर्मसु *puṇya karmas*, do deal with कर्म *karma* and कर्मफल *karmaphala* associated with one's धर्म-अर्थ-काम *dharma-artha-kāma* 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 *dharma-artha-kāma* pursuits serve only a transient intermediate purpose in one's continuing spiritual development, unless one uses them as a vehicle for gaining मोक्ष *mokṣa*, and that is possible only when every कर्म *karma* is converted into an ईश्वर आराधन कर्म *īśvara ārādhana karma*, which means कर्मयोग *karma yoga* with ईश्वर प्रसाद बुद्धि *īśvara prasāda buddhi*.

In the absence of such ईश्वर आराधन बुद्धि *īśvara ārādhana buddhi* - कर्मयोग बुद्धि *karma yoga buddhi*, what happens to those who take delight in their इष्टापूर्त पुण्य कर्मसु *iṣṭāpūrta puṇya karmas* - Vedic rituals and charitable activities as their goal of life? The Upanishad says:

नाकस्य पृष्ठे ते सुकृते अनुभूत्वा



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*nākasya pṛṣṭhe te sakṛte anubhūtvā*

इमं लोकं हीनतरं वा विशन्ति

1 - 2 - 10

*imaṁ lokam hīnataram vā viśanti*

ते सुकृते *te sukṛte* - Those people (ते *te*), those इष्टापूर्तवन्तः *iṣṭāpūrtavantaḥ* - those people who take delight in their Vedic rituals and charitable activities with no ईश्वर आराधन बुद्धि *iśvara ārādhana buddhi* - no कर्मयोग बुद्धि *karma yoga buddhi*, such people, by virtue of their पुण्य कर्मसु *puṇya karmasu* (सुकृते *te sukṛte*) go to Heaven (नाकं *nākaṁ*) when they die. नाकं *nākaṁ* 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 *nākaṁ*.

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

As we saw in Taittiriya Upanishad, there are several regions of Heaven in this संसार *samsār*, such as पितृ लोक *pitṛ loka*, गन्धर्व लोक *gandharva loka*, देव लोक *deva loka*, इन्द्र लोक *indra loka*, ब्रह्म लोक *brahma loka* 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 *te sakṛte nākasya pṛṣṭhe* - means those people who go to any region of Heaven by virtue of their इष्टापूर्त पुण्य कर्मसु *iṣṭāpūrta puṇya karmasu*, experience consistent unobstructed pleasures of whatever kind they want to the peak of their ability by spending their accumulated पुण्य कर्मसु *puṇya karma* currency. Then what happens to those people? The Upanishad says:

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

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



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वा vā - or

हीनतरं लोकं विशन्ति *hīnataraṁ lokaṁ viśanti* - they are reborn in a still lower world. This मनुष्य लोक *manuṣya loka* - this world of human beings is itself already हीन *hīnam* - 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 *hīnataraṁ lokaṁ* - in a world still lower than this मनुष्य लोक *manuṣya loka*, for example, in any of the पाताल लोकs *pātāla lokas*, life is said to be even more miserable.

Whether one's rebirth is in this मनुष्य लोक *manuṣya loka*, 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 *kathopaniṣat* is more specific on this matter, and says:

योनिं अन्ये प्रपद्यन्ते शरीरत्वाय देहिनः ।

*yonim anye prapadyante śarīratvāya dehinaḥ ।*

स्थाणुं अन्ये अनुसंयन्ति, यथा कर्म यथा श्रुतम् ॥ 5 - 7

*sthāṇuṁ anye anusamyanti, yathā karma yathā śrutam ॥*

What form one will take on rebirth in any of the लोकs *lokas*, depends on यथा कर्मs यथा श्रुतम् *yathā karmas yathā śrutam* - one's residual past कर्मs *karmas* and cultivated knowledge and awareness. One may even be born as a स्थाणु *sthāṇu* - a जीव *jīva* 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, इष्टापूरत पुण्य कर्मs *iṣṭapūrta puṇya karmas* by themselves cannot lead anyone to मोक्ष *mokṣa* - Total Fulfillment in life. One's पुण्य कर्मs *puṇya karmas* do not cancel one's पाप कर्मs *pāpa karmas*. The कर्मफल *karmaphala* of every कर्म *karma* has to be experienced until one gains ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānaṁ* through पराविद्या *parā vidyā*. Therefore, what is the net accomplishment of one's इष्टापूरत पुण्य कर्मs *iṣṭapūrta puṇya karmas* themselves - only a succession of birth and death, and no मोक्ष *mokṣa* - no real fulfillment in life. Continuing the same message, the Upanishad says:

20. तपः श्रद्धे ये हि उपवसन्ति अरण्ये



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*tapah śraddhe ye hi upavasanti araṇye*

शान्ताः विद्वांसः भैक्ष्यचर्याम् चरन्तः ।

*śāntāḥ vidvāsaḥ bhaikṣyacaryām carantaḥ ।*

सूर्य द्वारेण ते विरजाः प्रयान्ति

*sūrya dvāreṇa te virajāḥ prayānti*

य अमृतः स पुरुषः हि अव्ययात्मा ॥

1 - 2 - 11

*ya amṛtaḥ sa puruṣaḥ hi avyayātmā ॥*

Here, the Upanishad talks about two other group of people, people who are in the वानप्रस्त आश्रम *vānaprasta āśram* and संन्यास आश्रम *saṁnyāsa āśram* - 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 *vānaprasta āśram* - 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 surroundings away from the demands of crowded community life. Being in वानप्रस्त आश्रम *vānaprasta āśram*, what does a person do? The Upanishad says:

तपः श्रद्धे ये हि उपवसन्ति अरण्ये *tapah śraddhe ye hi upavasanti araṇye*

ये हि अरण्ये *ye hi araṇye* - Those who naturally live in a forest, taking to a life of

वानप्रस्त आश्रम *vānaprasta āśram*

(ते *te*) तपः श्रद्धे उपवसन्ति *tapah śraddhe upavasanti* - they deliberately resort to a

life of तपस् *tapas* and श्रद्धा *śraddha*. We must clearly understand what the words

तपस् *tapas* and श्रद्धा *śraddha* here indicate. तपस् *tapas* and श्रद्धा *śraddha* are both

कर्मस *karmas* - actions of two mutually distinct kinds. तपस् कर्मस *tapas karmas* are simply acts of personal discipline. They are three-fold in nature. They are

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



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Sri Krishna talks about these aspects of तपस् कर्मs *tapas karmas* 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 *śraddha*. In the context here, श्रद्धा *śraddha* indicates देवता उपासन *devatā upāsana* - meditation on one's इष्ट देवताs *iṣṭa devatāṣ* - different forms of ईश्वर *īśvara* power. Every form of self-discipline involves श्रद्धा *śraddha*, concentration of one's mind. Meditation on any form of इष्ट देवता *iṣṭa devatā* requires even more such concentration. The highest form of देवता उपासन *devatā upāsana* is meditation on हिरण्यगर्भ *hiraṇyagarbha* - परमेश्वर *parameśvar* as the creator, ब्रह्माजी *brahmājī*. Any form of देवता उपासन *devatā upāsana*, any form of such meditation is also a कर्म *karma*, a मानस कर्म *mānas karma* - an activity of the mind on an object in one's mind.

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

शान्ताः विद्वांसः भैक्ष्यचर्याम् चरन्तः *śāntāḥ vidvāṁsaḥ bhaikṣyacaryām carantaḥ*

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

विद्वांसः *vidvāṁsaḥ* - they now become more well-informed in अपराविद्या *aparā vidyā* - 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 *bhaikṣyacaryām carantaḥ* - some of them may also choose to adopt the life style of आश्रम संन्यासीs *āśram saṁnyāsīs*, 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





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also give up certain kinds of activities deliberately, and decide to live on भिक्षा *bhikṣā* - alms, relinquishing most of their personal possessions.

We must understand clearly that such आश्रम संन्यास *āśram sanyāsa* is only कर्म संन्यास *karma saṁnyāsa*, and not कर्म योग *karma yoga* or ज्ञान कर्म संन्यास *jñāna karma sanyāsa*, which Sri Krishna talked about in Chapter 4 of भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā*, 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 *brahma jñānaṁ*, ईश्वर ज्ञानं *īśvara jñānaṁ*, आत्म ज्ञानं *ātma jñānaṁ* - Self knowledge.

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

सूर्य द्वारेण ते विरजाः प्रयान्ति  
*sūrya dvāreṇa te virajāḥ prayānti*  
यत्र अमृतः स पुरुषः हि अव्ययात्मा ॥  
*yatra amṛtaḥ sa puruṣaḥ hi avyayātmā ॥*

ते *te* - Those people who have been in वानप्रस्त आश्रम *vānaprasta āśram* and/or संन्यास आश्रम *saṁnyāsa āśram* as described above

विरजाः *virajāḥ* (सन्तः *santaḥ*) - having become freed from the hold of their रजस् गुण *rajas guṇas*, by the power of the cultivated self-discipline

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

सूर्य द्वारेण *sūrya dvāreṇa* - through the bright path of the sun, which means, by virtue of their cultivated पुण्य कर्म *puṇya karmas*, they have gained the ability to go to Heaven, even up to ब्रह्मलोक *brahma loka*

यत्र सः अमृतः अव्ययात्मा पुरुषः *yatra saḥ amṛtaḥ avyayātmā puruṣaḥ* (अस्ति *asti*) - where is the One Immortal never changing आत्मा *ātmā* - The पुरुष *puruṣa*, The परमेश्वर *parameśvar*, manifested as हिरण्यगर्भ *hiraṇyagarbha*, ब्रह्माजी *brahmājī* The Creator.

That means, one can go to Heaven, even up to ब्रह्मलोक *brahma loka*, without any ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānaṁ* - simply through तपस् *tapas* - self-discipline and meditation on



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any form of ईश्वर *īśvara* power. But we must understand that even ब्रह्मलोक *brahma loka* is within this संसार *saṁsār*, and reaching ब्रह्मलोक *brahma loka* is not gaining मोक्ष *mokṣa* - Total Fulfillment in life for any जीव *jīva*. Sri Krishna makes that clear (G. 8-16)

आब्रह्मभुवानाल्लोकाः पुनरावर्तिनोऽर्जुन ॥  
*ābrahmabhuvānāllokāḥ punarāvartino'rjuna ॥*

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