



मुण्डकोपनिषद् Muṇḍakopaniṣad Mantra 1.2.4



The agni is the carrier of oblations and it should be well lighted. Otherwise the effort is abortive. Any effort that does not produce a result is *bhasmani hutam iva*, like the oblation offered unto ashes. It is a wasted effort. If you offer this great oblation in the ashes, these oblations do not get carried. '*Bhasmani hutam*' is a religious illustration drawn from the Vedfic ritual. The well-lighted fire implies effort. Therefore, the effort is pointed out here to make this agni flaming with all these tongues.

काली कराली मनोजवा च
सुलोहिता या च सुधूम्रवर्णा ।
स्फुलिङ्गिनि विश्वरुजी च देवी
लेलायमाना इति सप्तजिह्वाः ॥१॥२॥४॥

kālī karālī manojavā ca
sulohitā yā ca sudhūmravarṇā ।
sphuliṅgini viśvarujī ca devī
lelāyamānā iti saptajihvāḥ

kālī – the black; karālī – the terrible; manojavā – the swift; ca – also; sulohitā – the crimson; yā ca sudhūmravarṇā – the ash coloured one; sphuliṅgini – the sparkling; ca – and; devī – shining; viśvarujī – the one which is all over; iti – these are lelāyamānā – well-lighted; saptajihvāḥ – seven flames.

The black, the terrible, the swift, the crimson, the ash coloured one, the sparkling one and shining one which is all over – these are the well-lighted seven flames.

The well-lighted fire has saptajihvāḥ, seven tongues. So, the fire is called saptajihvā, the one who has seven tongues. These flames also have names. The Eskimos have many words for snow. No other language has so many words for snow. Eskimos live in the Arctic region where there is snow for months on end, so they can distinguish different types of snow and have different names for all of them. Similarly, when the people are always engaged in rituals, with fire in front of them, naturally they have all these nice names for the different types of flames that are compared to tongues.

Lelāyamānā saptajihvāḥ: seven well-lighted flames. The trembling seeventongues must be visible. Only then is the fire ready to swallow things. It is a very interesting imagery. When you are offering the oblation unto the fire, the fire should swallow it. So, it should have a tongue. Here, these flames are called tongues because they look like tongues.

Again like a tongue, they just swallow everything.¹

The seven tongues are: 1. Kālī, the blue flame in the midst of smoke. This is seen when the twigs have some moisture on them. 2. Karālī, 'the terrible one.' It shoots out so suddenly and forcefully that you instinctively back away. 3. Manojavā – the swift one, like the mind. This flame appears and disappears repeatedly like thought forms do. 4. Sulohitā, thick and red. It is red because of high carbon content in the twigs. 5. Sudhūmravarṇā - the ash coloured one. 6. Sphuliṅgini, the sparkling one from which small sparks shoot forth. This happens when there are many tiny, dry twigs. They are very momentary in nature like fireflies. 7. Viśvarucī, a flame which is multi-coloured. Rucī means colour. In one flame itself all colours are there. Or it is the flame that reaches out in all directions. It seems to be interested in everything.

Devī means the bright one, the shining one. Like the word 'lelāyamānā, dancing' is an adjective to the flames, devī also is an adjective to each one of the flames. Each one is devī, shining. These are the seven flames. When they are up, one offers the oblation. The fire has to carry that oblation and therefore it should be well lighted. Śaṅkara says that they are meant to swallow the oblations that are offered.² That means all of them should be out, and for that, great effort is required.

Mantra 5

एतेषु यश्चरते भ्राजमानेषु
यथाकालं चाहृतयो ह्याददायन् ।
तं नयन्तेताः सूर्यस्य रश्मयः
यत्र देवानां पतिरेकोऽधिवासः ॥ १।२।५।

eteṣu yaścarate bhrājamāneṣu
yathākālaṁ cāhutayo hyādadāyan |
taṁ nayantetaḥ sūryasya raśmayah
yatra devānāṁ patireko'dhivāsaḥ || 1|2|5|

¹ It is interesting to note that a flame is called 'tongue' in the English language.

² kaLyaXya ivṣiCyNta lelaymana Aḥe> hivrait-ṣsnawaR @ta> sLijKHa> - mu{fk Īa:ym!

eteṣu – in these; yaś bhrājamāneṣu – shining flames; yathākālam – at the right time; yaḥ - one who; carate – performs the rituals; ca – and; etaḥ – these; āhutayaḥ hi – very oblations; sūryasya – of sun; raśmayaḥ – the rays; ādadāyan taking; taṁ – him; nayanti – lead; yatra – where; devānām – of devas; paṭiḥ – the Lord (Indra) ekaḥ – one adhivāsaḥ – is the unrivalled ruler.

‘If a person performs rituals in these shining flames at the right time, these very oblations take him and lead him to the world where Indra, the Lord of devas is the unrivalled ruler.’

Eteṣu bhrājamāneṣu yaścarate : when all these tongues are out, when they are effulgent, a person performs the ritual. He has to make the flames shine, for which a lot of effort is involved. In the effulgent tongues of fire he performs agnihotra daily.

Yathākālam : without transgressing the time, that is, offering oblations at the right time. The word ‘yathākālam’ is an expression meaning when something is to be done at a particular time, it is done at that time. One should not offer the evening oblation in the morning itself. One has to strictly follow the enjoined time. In the USA, if a birthday falls during the week, they will postpone the celebration to the weekend. Indians there will not celebrate even festivals like Dipavali on the date on which it falls. They will wait for Saturday or Sunday. One cannot do that here. If tomorrow is Full Moon day, you cannot say, “I have some work tomorrow; let me do paurṇamāsa ritual today”.

The āhutiḥ, oblations offered into fire, which are in the form of puṇya³ become the rays of the sun, and lead the yajamāna, the one who had done the agnihotra ritual, to better lokas; they take him to svarga-loka, heaven. What is that heaven?

Yatra devānām paṭireko’dhivāsaḥ : where Indra is the ruler. Heaven is a place where Indra, the Lord of all the devas, lives. Devas are denizens of heaven. Indra is the unrivalled Lord of the heaven because he is adhivāsaḥ⁴, the one who lords over all the devas. He is on top of all of them and there is only one Indra. Ekaḥ means the one who does not have a second. There is only one post of Indra, like the President of the country. Even when one goes to heaven, one will only be a citizen there. One will not be Indra.

The oblations mentioned above lead the person to heaven through the rays of the sun. That indicates the path of travel. When a person who has done all these rituals, prayers and so on dies away, the soul has to reach this heaven. The route by which

³ Results of right action are called puṇya

⁴ सर्वानुपरि अधिवसतीति अधिवासः - मुण्डक भाष्यम्

he travels is called the solar route. There is another route, called the lunar route. Here, the soul is launched into the solar route, and it goes like a rocket. Led by the result of good karmas, he goes to heaven. It is all set-up—when to go, where to go and so on.

Really speaking, āhūtis, oblations, do not lead the person. The oblations produce puṇya and that puṇya leads the person to experience various results. There are two types of puṇya, also called apūrva. In an elaborate ritual, there are many satellite rituals. In that case a question arises as to which karma – a satellite ritual or the main ritual – produces that puṇya which leads one to the result promised by the śāstra. If a satellite ritual does not produce puṇya and the main ritual alone produces it, then why should one do the satellite ritual? The pūrvamīmāṃsā śāstra says that each satellite ritual produces a result known as utpatti-apūrva that is kept in suspense, to join later the phala-apūrva which is the result of the main ritual. It is the phala-apūrva that takes the person to lokas. What kind of karma it is, what is the level śraddhā, all these things are computed according to the law of karma. Here, the tātparya is not the type of loka that the person goes to, but that the person goes to a loka through the solar path. This path is also called the arcirādi mārga. The lunar path is dhūmādi-mārga, which will take one to pitṛ-loka, the world of the manes. It is definitely better than ours here, as far as the enjoyments are concerned, but in pitṛ-loka one cannot get mokṣa. That is possible only here.

One may note here that the karma like agnihotra enjoined in Veda can be substituted. Because it is karma, it is available for vikalpas, alternatives. The same result can be accomplished by doing the karma in some other form. Nowadays, only a rare few perform agnihotra. The rest of the people with śraddhā perform prayers like pūjā, pārayāṇa, kīrtana, japa and even meditation. This is said in a verse: “In Kaliyuga, hari-nāma, taking to Lord Viṣṇu’s name, alone is the means for the people whose minds are afflicted by pāpas, whose livelihood is not always earned by fair means and who do not perform the daily Vedic rituals⁵. When people do not have time to perform rituals enjoined in the Veda, the only way to get rid of the pāpā is to take to the name of the Lord. The Lord will help the person to gain the purity of mind necessary for gaining the knowledge that frees one from saṃsāra. Or, one can gain lokas also, and continue to be in saṃsāra.

The next mantra praises the yajamāna, the one who has performed rituals like agnihotra properly, by praising the karma and karma-phala. The karma-phalas give the doer of the karma a red carpet welcome in heaven. That is being said in the next mantra.

To be continued...

¹ kṛāE kLm;-icĀana< pap-ŌVyaepjIivna< ivix-i³ya-ivhInana< hrenaRmEv kevlm!,