



Muṇḍakopaniṣad Mantrā 5



(continued from the last issue)

In Vedic teaching, we observe certain holidays. On the prārthanā, first day, on the aṣṭamī, eighth day, on the caturdaśī, fourteenth day and on the pūrṇimā and amāvāsyā, fifteenth day, there will be no classes. So, in a fortnight we have four holidays. That means there is a long weekend in every alternate week. This is a good arrangement. Even today the orthodox people follow this system. All the time you have to look up to the sky. Certain configurations of planets in certain houses are very auspicious for spiritual pursuits. Those days are spent religiously. The whole Vedic life is connected to visible astronomy based on what is visible to the naked eyes in the sky. By looking at the calendar you are at once in touch with the whole cosmos, and your cosmic relationship is recognized. You are not just alone here fighting against the whole world. You are a part of the whole setu;p. Therefore, jyotiṣa is very important.

Jyotiṣa is predominantly astronomy. Its astrological aspect comes later. Astrology is useful not for looking at lyour birth chart and making decisions, it is useful only when things do not go well. You keep on doing things, and if you find that everything you do goes down the drain, then you look at the birth chart to find out whether you can do something more than your effort. As a vaidika, you are saying a general prayer, the broad-spectrum prayer, but sometimes the broad spectrum prayer is not adequate. So, you require a specific prayer. Jyotiṣa helps to find out what specific prayer can be said in a given situation.

Prayer is human effort and it is pragmatic. A person who is lost in the clouds does not say a prayer. It is said by a person who is rooted on this earth, who understands his limitations and who does not have this funny notion that he can achieve everything. One who seeks help at the right time is a pragmatic person. Seeking help swhen you need it is an intelligent way of living. The more you think this over, the more you will understand that there is no better definition of 'intelligent living'.

The above six disciplines of knowledge are called ṣaḍ aṅgās, the six limbs with the help of which one understands the aṅgi, that is, the Veda and Vedanta. To understand the meaning of the Veda, you require to study these disciplines of knowledge. They stand for all other disciplines of knowledge—mathematics, biology, geology, botany, medicine, and so on. Anything that you can learn or know by perception or by inference, or through both, is aparā vidhyā. Anything

that the knower learns is aparā vidhyā. Even the knowledge of Vedic mantras is aparā vidhyā.

If you analyse all the disciplines of knowledge listed here, you understand that all of them give you education. Jyotiṣa gives you your place in the scheme of things. Vyākaraṇa provides linguistic education. Through grammar, the style of teaching is unfolded. Paṇini introduced a meta language in order to unfold a language. That naturally implies a lot of logic and reasoning. In the process of understanding the meta language, you develop intellectual discipline. The study of Paṇinian grammar helps you in honing your acumen, and of course memory. Memorising has been a regular part of learning for Indians. They used to repeat the whole Veda. From a young age they used to memorise entire books, such as dictionaries. Memory power is there in everyone. The more you use it, the more of it there is. There is no other way to develop memory than to keep on memorising more things.

The list of aparā vidhyā reveals something significant. There is nothing more sacred for a Vedic person than the Vedas. He accepts the Vedas as body of sacred knowledge. We in fact worship the Vedas. The Arya Samaj people do not have a temple. They have only the Book of Vedas, which they call Veda Bhagavān. The Veda itself is Bhagavān. All secular disciplines of knowledge are in the same category as the Vedas, which are the most sacred. Therefore, everything is sacred for us and nothing is secular. We do not have the word 'secular' because everything is Īśvara. There is no equivalent for the word 'secular' in Sanskrit. We have two words: laukika and vaidika. Vaidika is that which is purely connected to Veda like rituals and so on. All other things are laukika, meaning, vyavahārika, worldly. But that does not mean laukika is secular. We do not have a sacred-secular concept. People use the word 'secular' in a different sense. By secular they mean not connected to religion; in government, it means non-interference in religion, allowing people to follow whatever religion they want to follow. In our tradition there is nothing secular, everything is sacred. Money is Lakṣmi, marriage is Lakṣmi, children are Lakṣmi, wealth is Lakṣmi, land is Lakṣmi, produce is Lakṣmi, success is Lakṣmi; everything is Lakṣmi. Everything is Īśvarā. Now parā vidhyā is defined.

Yadā tad akṣaram adhigamyate : that by which the akṣara is gained, by which Brahman is understood as non-separate from ātman. Tad means Brahman that is akṣara. It means that which does not undergo any kind of loss or decline, that which is always the same.

Adhigamyate means 'is gained'. The root 'gam' preceded by the prefix 'adhi' has the sense of 'gain' most of the time.¹ Why do we give this meaning here? Parā vidhyā is defined here as that knowledge by which one knows Brahman.

This is not right because knowledge itself is Brahman. Therefore, we have to say 'it is that knowledge by which one gains Brahman'. Gaining Brahman is only in terms of knowledge. The self is always self-revealing. It happens to be Brahman. I do not know that gfact. Therefore, the removal of ignorance of the self being identical to Brahman alone is para prāpti, gain of Brahman.² It is the gain of what is already gained. After knowledge, there is nothing else one has to do, as Brahman is an accomplished fact.

Śaṅkara, in his commentary on this mantra, raises an objection³ and clarifies what is parā vidhyā. If all four Vedas are aparā vidhyā, and parā vidhyā is knowledge of Brahman, then parā vidhyā stands outside of the four Vedas. Then how can we say Brahman is known through veda pramāṇa? Definitely it becomes something that is known through other means of knowledge, such as perception and inference, like microbiology is known. That means Brahman becomes an object enjoying its own place and attributes like any other object in the world. Being other than the self, Brahman will become an object of aparā vidhyā. Therefore, the vidhyā by which Brahman is gained cannot be called parā vidhyā. It also cannot be the means of mokṣa.

Further Manu says⁴ that smṛtis, supporting books, that are outside the Vedas and whose vision is not in keeping with the Vedas, have to be discarded because their vision is distorted, and they will not produce results. They are only steeped in ignorance; one should not follow them. They should not even be considered for understanding. Being outside the Vedas, Brhma vidhyā or upaniṣad will have the same status as those smṛtis, and hence one cannot take to its study.

Therefore, the upaniṣads, should be included in the Veda. If the upaniṣads are included in Veda, then one part of the Veda will become aparā vidhyā and the other part will be parā vidhyā. This is similar to saying that half the egg is for hatching and the other half is for an omelette. Half the Veda is pramāṇa and the other half is not pramāṇa. This is not correct. The whole Veda should be accepted as pramāṇa. Again, if the upaniṣads are included in Vedas how can we separate parā vidhyā from the Vedas.⁵ This mantra says that all the Vedas are aparā vidhyā and parā vidhyā is that by which Brahman is gained. There is a clear separation seen here. This is the objection.

¹ अधि पूर्वस्यु गमेः प्रायश्ः प्राप्त्यर्थत्वात् । मुण्डक भाष्यम्

² न च पर प्राप्तेरवगमात्स्यु भेदोऽस्ति । अविध्याया अपाय एव हि पर-प्राप्तिः नार्थन्तरम् । मुण्डक भाष्यम्

³ ननु ऋग्वेदादि बाह्ये तर्हि सा कथं परा विध्या स्यान्मोक्ष साधनम् - मुण्डक भाष्यम्

⁴ यो वेदबाह्याः स्मृतयः याश्च कुदृष्ट्याः सर्वास्ता निष्फलाः प्रेत्य तमो निष्ठा हि ताः स्मृताः - मनुस्मृति १२।९ इति हि स्मरन्ति । कुदृष्टित्वात् निष्फलत्वाद् अनादेया स्यात् । उपनिषदां च ऋग्वेदादिबाह्यत्वं स्यात् । मुण्डक भाष्यम्

⁵ ऋग्वेदादित्वे तु पृथक्करणमनर्थकम् अथ परेति । मुण्डक भाष्यम्

Śaṅkara gives the answer now. He clarifies what is meant by parā vidhyā. It is not the words of upaniṣads that is parā vidhyā. If you ask a Vedic scholar to recite the Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda, he will chant the Taittiriyaopaniṣd, including the sentence satyaṁ jñānm anantam brahma. But he may not fully know what the sentence satyaṁ jñānm anantam brahma means. Whenever he is doing pūjā to the Lord, he will chant Taittiriyaopaniṣd during the abhiṣeka, offering water for bathing. When he studies the Vedas, he learns the upaniṣad mantrās also. That is only aparā vidyā. When he studies the pūrvamīmāṃsā, analysis of the section dealing with the rituals etc., of the Vedas that is also aparā vidyā. When he performs the rituals he is putting the aparā vidyā into practice.

Parā vidyā on the other hand refers to the cognitive vṛtti by which the akṣaram brahma is understood. The knowledge of the identity of the self with Brahman that takes place in the buddhi, on hearing the words of the upaniṣads, is called Parā vidyā. Brahman, the subject matter of the upaniṣads, is to be known. Here the knowledge of Brahman alone is desired to be called Parā vidyā.⁶ Even though one can have all the words of the upaniṣads in one's head, still one will not gain the knowledge of Brahman. Mere words of the upaniṣads are not Parā vidyā. One has to make an effort in going to a teacher and asking for this vidyā. Unless one chooses to know Brahman, this knowledge does not take place.⁷ With vairāgya, objectivity, gained by understanding the limitations of all one's other pursuits, when one exposes oneself to this teaching and understands "Ah! I am Brahman", that is called Parā vidyā.

Nārada knew all the disciplines of knowledge including the words of all the upaniṣads. But he did not know what it was all about, so he was in sorrow. He went to Sanatkumara and asked him for this knowledge to cross the ocean of sorrow. So, when we talk of Rig veda, Yajurveda and so on, we mean only the words of the Vedas⁸. The words of the upaniṣads stand in the same group. Therefore, there is a separation of para vidhyā from the Vedas and the words of the . The words of upaniṣads along with the tools like grammar, logic and so on to understand their meanings are the 'means' to gain that knowledge. Therefore, aparā vidhyā becomes part of the means for gaining parā vidhyā. This is the connection.

⁶ वेध्य विषय विज्ञानस्य विवक्षितत्वात् । उपनिषद्वेध्याक्षर विषयं हि विज्ञानमिह परा विध्येत् प्राधान्येन विवक्षितं नोपनिषच्छब्द राशिः । मुण्डक भाष्यम्

⁷ शब्दऽराश्याधिगमेऽपि यत्रान्तरमन्तरेण गुर्वभिगमनादि लक्षणं वैराग्यं च नाक्षराधिगमः सम्भवतीति पृथक्करणं बह्व विध्यायाः परा विध्येति कथं चेति । मुण्डक भाष्यम्

⁸ वेद शब्देन तु सर्वत्र शब्द राशिर्विवक्षितः । मुण्डक भाष्यम्