



Muṇḍakopaniṣad Mantrā 5



Of the two vidhyās, aparā vidhyā is described now.

तत्रापरा ऋग्वेदो यजुर्वेदः सामवेदोऽथर्ववेदः

शिक्षा कल्पो व्याकरणं निरुक्तं छन्दो ज्योतिषमिति ।

अथ परा यया तदक्षरमधिगम्यते ॥ १।१।५ ॥

tatrāparā ṛgvedo yajurvedaḥ sāmavedo'atharvavedaḥ

śikṣā kalpo vyākaraṇam niruktaṁ chando jyotiṣamiti ।

atha parā yayā tadakṣaramadhigamyate ॥ 1।1।5॥

tatrā – among the two; aparā – aparā; iti – is; ṛgvedaḥ – Rgveda; yajurvedaḥ – Yajurvedaḥ; sāmavedaḥ – Sāmavedaḥ; 'atharvavedaḥ – Atharvaveda; śikṣā – phonetics; kalpaḥ – know-how of the rituals; vyākaraṇam – grammar; niruktaṁ – etymology of Vedic words; chandḥ – prosody; jyotiṣam – astronomy; atha – and; parā – parā; yayā – by which; tad – that; akṣaram – akṣaram brahma; adhigamyate – is known.

Among the two, the aparā vidhyā is Rgveda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda, Atharvaveda, phonetics, know-how of rituals, grammar, etymology of Vedic words, science of meters, astronomy and astrology. And parā vidhyā is the one by which that imperishable Brahman is known'.

To get the parā vidhyā one has to acquire two types of qualifications. The first is cognitive skill or capacity to think properly, because the whole problem is due to aviveka, absence of ability to distinctly understand the real and the unreal. Therefore, the cognitive skill has to be honed. The second is that the life experiences should make one a complete person, in the sense of emotional maturity. Parā vidyā is meant for a complete person, a compassionate person. The compassionate person alone is a mature person. Compassion towards oneself and the world implies maturity. Since aparā vidyā gives viveka and maturity, it is presented first.

Aparā vidhyās are all the four Vedas— R̥G veda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda and Atharvaveda . Anything that one studies is aparā vidyā. It is not that one has to study all the four Vedas. Svādhyāyo'dhyetavyaḥ, everyone has to study the recension of the Veda to which one belongs. This is a common rule. If one has studied one Veda, one has aparā vidyā. But nowadays, even a brahmin does not study his Veda. So, when a person has been initiated into gāyatri-mantra, he can be taken as one who has studied the Veda because

gāyatri-mantra is the essence of all the Vedas. We have this kind of nice escape routes.

The teacher has not completed the list. The six-fold secondary disciplines of knowledge that help one to understand the Vedas are also aparā vidhyā. They are:

Śikṣā: Phonetics is important because it deals with the science of pronunciation of varṇās, letters. A script is different from sound. A letter that is written is called a script, which is purely a drawing—'a' is a drawing. It has nothing to do with what you pronounce. Śabda, word, is purely what is heard, while what is written is only a symbol for that sound. The sound is the varṇa letter. A varṇā is not what is written; it is what is spoken. Language is what is spoken and not what is written. The script is a symbol on which you superimpose the sound. That is why the script can be different. We use different alphabetical scripts for a particular sound in different languages. We have Sanskrit books in Devanāgiri script, in Telugu script, in Grantha script and so on.

Śikṣā deals with the pronunciation of the vowels, the consonants and the conjunct consonants. Pronunciation of the vowels involves knowledge of accents, what is anudātta what is udātta, what is svarita; knowledge of the length of the vowels, what is hrasva, a short vowel, what is dhīrgha, a long vowel, what is pluta, an elongated vowel. In Sanskrit, once you have learnt how to pronounce a varṇa, a letter, and an akṣara, a syllable, then you can read and write. You spell the word exactly as you pronounce it. In English you require to learn two things: one is how to write a word and the other is how to pronounce the word. There is double responsibility. That is why there is a spelling problem or a pronunciation problem for many people. You spell the word differently from the way you pronounce it. Pronunciation is very important in the study of Veda or language because if it is not proper, the meaning will become different.

Since Veda itself points out the discipline of śikṣā, it was there even before Pāṇini. Pāṇini and others presented it systematically. For a Pāṇini to have written his text, there must have been an audience even before him. Therefore, it is a tradition. The whole Veda is nothing but words. Naturally, knowledge of śikṣā must be there to study the Vedas.

Kalpaḥ: The word 'kalpa' is used for the book that gives the know-how of rituals and so on. There is a way of performing every ritual. There are different mantras in the Vedas, which are used for different occasions. One should know which mantra should be used for what ritual. Kalpa is connected to our religious life. It is a discipline of knowledge for developing cognitive skill. It provides the basis for a structured religious life—of rituals, of what is right and wrong, of what should be done and should not be done. Such a life makes a person maintain alertness

all the time. It also involves a lot of sacrifice. This makes the person mature in life. In the beginning the structure helps you to conform. Everybody else follows it, so you conform. Later you grow out of it. 'Growing out' means conforming becomes natural to you. You do not feel that you are being restricted by the structure. Dharmādharmā, right or wrong, become the guiding factors in life instead of rāga-dveṣās, likes and dislikes. When a person follows dharma, the unconscious gets released. That person gets out of the hold of the unconscious. In the process, the person grows and becomes ready to seek this knowledge. The religious life itself, thus creates a desire to gain parā vidhyā .

Vyākaraṇam : Grammar helps us to understand the words. You go inside the word and see what is its source, what is the suffix, how it has gained the form because of the suffix, what is its meaning and so on. One has to know all these things. The suffix reveals a variety of things like number, gender, tense, case-ending, voice and so on. The study of grammar gives you that kind of knowledge, and thereby, you cover the language completely.

Niruktam: This is a kind of dictionary of Vedic words showing their evolution from the grammatical roots. It is in the form of verses. It is definitely compulsory to know the meaning of specific words.

Chandaḥ: It deals with meters. Gāyatri, anuṣṭup, triṣṭup –all these are meters. These and other meters are used in the Veda as well as in the Sanskrit literature.

Jyotiṣam : The Hindu calendar itself forms half of jyotiṣa. How to read the Hindu calendar is a science. All the details will be in an abbreviated style. The life of a Vedic person is very much connected to the cosmic movements. Naturally, to read the Indian Lunar calendar, you require a lot of knowledge. It is not just knowing the day and date. One has to see what is the star of the day and what is the thithi, which is related to the moon. The Western calendar looks upon the month as consisting of four weeks or more. If you take a month as having four weeks, the error in determining the length of a year will be greater. But we count the month as consisting of two lunar fortnights of fifteen days each. One called the bright fortnight, in which the moon is waxing, and the other, the dark fortnight, in which the moon wanes. We are moving in fortnights all the time, not by arbitrary months. The first day of the waxing or waning moon is prathamā, the first thithi, the second day of the moon is dvitīyā, the second thithi, and the third day of the moon is trithīyā. The third thithi—what is how you start the fortnight. The 15th day is full moon or new moon. Again you start the first day, thithi, of the moon, and so on.