



Muṇḍakopaniṣad



The ṛṣis saw these karmas as means for accomplishing ends. We cannot figure out why we should offer unto the fire this oblation only for this deity, why we should chant this mantra, why we should offer in this way and so on. These karmas have been revealed in that form and the ṛṣis saw these mantras dealing with these karmas.

Tāni tretāyam bahudā santatāni: these karmas are strewn all over in the three Vedas. Tretā is not tretā-yuga here. Tetārtām means in Ṛgvea, Yajurveda and Sāmaveda. They have been explained in many ways. Yajurveda specially talks about all these rituals in detail.

Tān ācarata satyakāamāḥ: oh! Seekers of the results of actions, may you perform them. Satyakāamāḥ are the people who are interested in satya, that is, karma-phala. Those who want karma-phala have to perform these karmas regularly following all the rules. Everyone, including the Lord, expects results for action. So, being desirous of the results of actions, may you all perform these karmas. Only then can you get the results. Since you are interested in karma-phalas, may you perform them properly. Why should I perform the rituals?

Eṣaḥ panthāḥ sukṛtasya loke: this indeed is the way¹ for gaining the results of karmas. Here loka means karma-phala. Merely knowing the karmas will not give the results. One has to do them to get the results. Vedic chanting will give both dṛṣṭa phala and adṛṣṭa phala in the form of puṇya. Vedic chanting will also give certain vak śuddhi, purity of speech, whether one knows the meaning or not. Again, when one repeats these mantras, it is a kind of prayer that gives some result. But if one repeats the mantras dealing with the karmas, the repetition will not give the karma-phala. One has to do the karma. Just as reading the recipe book will not produce the dish, merely reciting the mantras involved in karmas will not give the results of those karmas.

Sukṛtasya lokaḥ² is the result of the well-performed karmas. All the lokas that the śastra talks about are included in it. If the result is exactly what one wants in life, then, this indeed is the path. This is the only way one has to accomplish it. There is no other way of getting it. What is the use of having a desire for a karma-phala,

¹ पन्था अवश्य फल प्राप्ति साधनमित्यर्थः- मुण्डक भाष्यम्

² फलनिमित्तं लोच्यते भुज्यते इति कर्मफलं लोके उच्यते । मुण्डक भाष्यम्

and not performing the karma? May you fulfil all your desires through the karmas that the ṛṣis have revealed in the Vedas.

Thus, these karmas are the means of achieving desirable results. Performing the karmas keeps me within dharma. Īśvara is involved in the performance of every karma, so one's life is not away from Īśvara. Therefore, life becomes religious too. There is nothing wrong with going for a small result initially, until viveka takes place. The mantras, the karmas and the karma-phalas—all of them—come under aparā vidhyā.

Starting from the simple agnihotra karma, the śruti tells more about the nature of karma, how to do karma and so on. This agnihotra can be enhanced with additional karmas so that one gets higher lokas. How agnihotra is done is said now.

यदा लेलायते ह्यर्चिः समिद्धे हव्यवाहने ।
तदाज्यभागावन्तरेण आहुतीः प्रतिपादयेत् । १।२।२
yadā hyarciḥ samiddhe havyaavāhane lelāyate tadā
ājyabhāgāvantareṇa āhutiḥ pratipādayet
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samiddhe – in the well-lighted, avyavāhane – fire; yadā – when; hi arciiḥ – the flame; lelāyate – dances; tadā – at that time; ayyabhāgau – the left and right side; antareṇa – in the middle; āhutiḥ – oblations; pratipādayet – may one offer.

‘In the well-lighted fire, when the flame is up, may one offer theoblations right in the middle in between the left and right side.’

Arciiḥ means flame. For performing a ritual, a special place is created for lighting up the fire. When the fire is well lighted, and the flame is up, then you offer the oblation. This mantra must be referring only the agnihotra ritual. It talks about what kind of fire it should be before the oblation is offered. The fire should be well lighted, which involves great effort. During the rainy days, when the atmosphere is damp and the twigs are also wet, the flames do not come up. Only smoke comes out, and tears also come along with that. There is no agnihotra without tears. You can learn Sanskrit without tears, but there is no agnihotra without tears. It is very difficult to perform agnihotra. The mantra indirectly points out the difficulty by saying that one should offer oblations in the well-lighted fire in the right place. Sankara explicitly mentions the difficulty. He also says, there are a lot of dangers³ in the performance, like omissions and commissions in the mantras, in the actions and so on.

³ तस्य च् सम्यक्करणं दुष्करम् । विपत्तयस्त्वनेका भवन्ति । मुण्डक् भाष्यम् ।

Yada lelāyte: when there is an effulgent dancing flame. The śruti describes here the type of flame for offering the oblation. When the flame dances, trembles, oblations have to be offered. The flame has to be up, not down. At that time offer the oblation. Where should one offer the oblations?

Ājyabhāgau antareṇa ahutiḥ pratipādayet: may one offer the oblations right in the middle. The word ahutiḥ is plural in the number inasmuch as there are four oblations in a day. Śaṅkara explains⁴ that when one offers oblations day after day, the oblations become many.

Ājyabhāga means the left side or the right side of the fire where the ājya, ghee, is offered. In agnihotra that is not a problem, but generally, in other rituals, ājybhāga is there. This is discussed in great detail in purv-mīmāṃsā. Wherever the ritual is complex, the śāstra points out where exactly the oblation has to be offered. Sometimes you offer the oblation in the left side and sometimes in the right side. In the agnihotra, one offers right in the middle and not in the ājybhāga. The agnihotrin sits in front of the āhavaniya fire altar, facing east and offers oblations at a spot between the flames on the north and south sides. This spot is called āvāpsthāna.⁵

Havya-vāhana is the name for agni, fire. Agni has nice names based on rituals. He is called hutāśana, the one who consumes (āśana) all that is offered (huta). Another name is havya-vāhana, one who carries (vāhana) oblations (havya) that are offered. He is the vehicle, the carrier, like the postman. He carries the oblations to Indra and other Gods. You offer oblations unto the fire saying Varuṇāya svāhā, unto Varuna I offer. Varuṇa is the presiding deity of water. Agni receives the oblations, converts them into ashes and carries the subtle aspect of those oblations to varuna devatā. Therefore, he is called by the name havya-vāhana in the agnihotra ritual, one will get simple result that is the minimum for the karma.

This is agnihotra, the simplest of fire rituals. It is performed twice a day until one dies or takes sannyaśa. If it is not done properly, it becomes only labour. It will not destroy you, but it will not give you any result. So, it has to be done with certain other rituals and disciplines. The following mantra talks about this in detail.

To be continued

⁴ अनेकाह प्रयोगापेक्षय आहुतीः इति बहुवचनम्। मुण्डक भाष्यम्।

⁵ आहवनीयस्य दक्षिणोत्तर पार्श्वयोरायभगाविज्येते अग्नये स्वहा सोमय स्वाहेत् दर्शपूर्ण मासे। तयोर्मध्येऽन्ये यागा अनुष्टीयन्ते तन्मध्यमावापतामुच्यते। - आनन्दगिरि