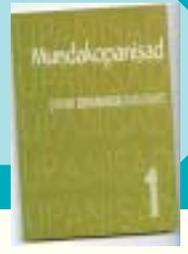# Muṇḍakopaniṣad

First Muṇḍaka
Section 2

In the first section of the first Muṇḍaka, it was initially stated that one must gain two types of knowledge. One is aparā vidhyā, which is preparatory; the other is parā vidhyā, which is to be accomplished. In this section aparā vidhyā is talked about in detail. Apara vidhyā is not just secular education, but also, the religious life. It includes the study of Vedas, śikṣā, kalpa, and so on and the performance of rituals. That means the person lives a religious life with the knowledge of all the karmas that he has to do. We look at the whole thing from the standpoint of the Veda. In the first portion of the Veda, which constitutes the bulk of the Veda, varities of rituals are mentioned. In performing these rituals, generally the three Vedas are involved. Ṛgveda provides mantras, Yajurveda tells ou the whole method of performing the rituals. Sāmaveda is the singing of Ṛg-mantrās in praise of Īśvara. By performing these rituals one can gain both the dṛṣṭa-phala, the result that one gains here, and also adṛṣṭa phala, the result that one gains hereafter. This is already said in the karma khāṇḍa. It is restated here for the purpose of introducing the adhikārin, qualified person, for this knowledge.

The introduction of the adhikārin is done elaborately. Quite a few mantras describe the nature of rituals and the results. Again, the mantras describe what happens to the results if the ritual is not done properly. In performing these rituals, a lot of effort is involved. If the rituals are not done properly, even though one may not attract any pāpa, definitely nothing good will happen for the person. The results of these rituals also are anitya lokās, temporary realms of experience. All these are aparā vidhyā and they are stated in order to introduce the prime qualification viz., vairāgya, dispassion, which is finally prescribed in the 12th mantra beautifully.

Karma can be converted into a yoga, a means, for purity of mind. Vairāgya towards karma is laziness, but Vairāgya towards karma phala is maturity. When one performs karma, it will produce phala even if one is not interested in it. One will get puṇya whether one likes it or not. But if one is not interested in phala, then it works in a different way, according to one's intention in doing the karma as revealed in the saṅkalpa: I do this karma to please the Lord by neutralising the pāpa.[1] It then neutralises one's pāpa. We generate thesee antibodies for neutralising the pāpa, which is getting unfolded in day-to-day life. Like this, there are special karmas that can help you gain antaḥkaraṇa śuddhi, purity of mind. Thus, the karma khāṇḍa becomes meaningful, and therefore it is discussed here in this second section. This is the basis for Lord Kṛṣṇa's teachings on karma-yoga in the Gītā. Being the Lord, Kṛṣṇa knows what he has been talking about there. He does not require a basis or thesis, but definitely this is the basis.

Mantra 1

तदेतत् सत्यं
मन्त्रेषु कर्माणि कवयो यान्यपश्यन्-
तानि त्रेतायां बहुधा सन्ततानि।
तान्याचरथ नियतं सत्यकामाः
एष वः पन्थाः सुकृतस्य लोके॥ १।२।१

tadetat satyaṁ
mantreṣu karmāṇi kavayo yānyapaśyan
tāni tretāyāṁ bahudhā santatāni |
tānyācaratha niyataṁ satyakāmāḥ
eṣa vaḥ panthāḥ sukṛtasya loke || 1|2|1

yāni – which; karmāṇi – rituals; mantreṣu – in mantras (in Vedas); kavayaḥ - the ṛṣis; apaśyan – saw; tat etat – it is; satyam – true; tāni – those (rituals); tretāyām – in the three Vedas; bahudhā – in many ways; santatāni – are explained; tāni – them; ācaratha –may you perform; niyatam – regularly; satyakāmāḥ – Oh! Seekers of

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[1] दुरित-क्षय-द्वारा ीपरमेश्वर-प्रीत्यर्थम् अहम् इदम् करिष्ये।
durita-kṣaya-dvārā śriparameśvara-prītyartham aham idam kariṣye|

karma-phala; vaḥ – for you; panthāḥ the means; eṣaḥ – this; sukṛtasya – of well-performed actions; loke – for gaining the results.

'All the rituals which the sages saw in the Vedas are true. Those rituals are explained in many ways in the three Vedas. Oh! Seekers of results of actions, may you perform them regularly. For you, this is the means for gaining the results of well-performed actions.'

Tat etat satyam: that which is going to be said is true. Tat means *'that'*, which is going to be said. Etat means 'this', which is already in the mind of the teacher. In modern English we often use this expression. A person who is talking to me now says, "Swamiji, when I went to Chennai, I met this man". He has not mentioned anything about that man at all before. How can he use the pronoun 'this', without mentioning who that man is? This is grammatically incorrect, but it is the colloquial style in the English language. The meaning of the pronoun 'this' is in that person's head. It is not in my head. This style is also there in Sanskrit. Etat, this, is already loaded in the intellect of the speaker and it is going to come out. The topic that is going to be discussed by the speaker is already in his mind, and therefore, it is etat, this. It is still not known to you, the listener, and therefore it is tat, that.

What is that? The word 'tat' refers to the karmas, which are going to be talked about. Karmas are called satya. Satya[2] here means that which is definitely a means of achieving different ends in life. Because karma produces result without fail[3] it is called satya. The word 'ṛta' also is used in the same sense for referring to karma-phala. What are these karmas?

Mantreṣu karmāṇi kavayḥ yāni apaśyan: those are the karmas that the sages saw in the mantras. Kavi means one who is able to see through. A poet is called kavi because he is able to see more than what meets the eyes. The Lord who is sarvajña and sarvavit is also called kavi.

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[2] सत्यम् एकान्त-पुरुषार्थ-साधनत्वात्। (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

[3] कर्मफलं सत्यमुच्यते अवश्यंभावित्वात्।

Anyone who is able to see things properly is called kavi. Kavayaḥ means people who are well informed in the śāstra. Here the word kavayḥ means ṛṣayaḥ, sages. They use this word 'kavi' in all the four Vedas in the same sense as 'ṛṣi'.

The ṛṣis talk about a number of karmas starting from agnihotra and going to aśvamedha. Agnihotra to aśvamedha is a Vedic expression for 'A to Z'. The agnihotra is a very simple daily ritual. It has only two oblations in the morning and two in the evening. Before the oblation one has to chant some mantras[4]. In the morning the oblations are given to sūryā, sun, and prajāpati, Brahmaji. In the evening the oblations are given to agni, fire, and prajāpati. We start with agnihotra because there is no complexity involved in it.

For all the karmas agnihotra is the primary karma. One must get married before one can do agnihotra. After having performed the agnihotra, if one is still a kṛṣṇa keśa, one who has black hair, and is jāta putra, one who has a son, he is called upon to perform some other karmas enjoined in the Vedas. This is called adhikṛtasya adhikāraḥ, conditions prescribed for the one who has already become qualified. For instance, only graduates can qualify to join a postgraduate course. If there are conditions for graduates like age, performance and so on, the fulfilment of those conditions becomes adhikṛtasya adhikāraḥ. Already he has accomplished something, and so certain further qualifications are prescribed for him. Similarly certain karmas enjoined by the Vedas areonly for certain people. They have to fulfil a number of prescribed conditions before they can do these enjoined actions. One has to take the conditions into account before performing these actions. When you perform agnihotra, you become qualified for darśa and paurṇamāsa rituals. They go along with agnihotra.

Thus agnihotra becomes more and more complex later, when accomapnied by a few other rituals. If one wants to gain the complete result of agnihotra, one has to perform all these rituals. Otherwise agnihotra will give only simple puṇya. When agnihotra is followed by darśa and paurṇamāsa, then a big result will accrue. Beginning from agnihotra, varities of rituals are mentioned in the three Vedas - Ṛg, Yajus and Sāma.

To be continued..

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[1] सूर्याय स्वाहा। प्रजापतये स्वाहा। इति प्रातः। अग्नये स्वाहा। प्रजापतये स्वाहा इति सायम्।