



मुण्डकोपनिषद् Muṇḍakopaniṣad



Mantra 1.2.12 (contd. From last issue)

Saḥ gurumevābhigacchet : may he go to a teacher. The word 'saḥ' indicates one who has doned the puruṣārtha niścaya, clear ascertainment of what exactly is desired by him or her in life. Every individual desires mokṣa. In order to fulfil that desire, he goes for knowledge. Puruṣārtha is not knowledge really; puruṣārtha is only mokṣa that is gained by the knowledge. So, one who desires to gain the knowledge becomes a jijñāsu. The word 'saḥ' refers to a jijñāsu. He is told to go to a teacher for the purpose of knowing that Brahman.

One who has to¹ go to a teacher. One may have all the disciplines of knowledge necessary for studying the Veda. One may know the language and the methodology of looking at the words of śruti also. So one may think, "I would like to study myself, I do not want a guru". But that does not work. Śaṅkara says anekaḥ vedāntāḥ saṁśayāḥ bahavaḥ. Vedānta vākyāḥ being many, doubts are also many. So one has to approach a teacher. What type of teacher should one approach?

The teacher should be a śrotriya². A śrotriya is one who has studied the Veda and Vedanta, and who knows the sampradāya. One goes to such a person who has understood, and who is well informed about the scriptures. Again, the teacher should be brahmaniṣṭha, one who understands Brahman as non-separate from oneself, and one who has the commitment to know Brahman. But how would one ever know whether he is a brahmaniṣṭha?

There may be many people following many gurus. It is possible for one to select a guru who is a śrotriya. That also is possible only when there is āpatata jñāna, general knowledge of the scriptures. This is what the society can provide. It is like a person who wants to study higher Mathematics going to some one who has a doctorate in Mathematics. Some persons are recognised in the society as qualified to teach higher Mathematics because they have a doctorate. One can go to that person. One does not know whether he or she knows Mathematics or not, but then, the society has recognised the person. We have a means to know this by finding out the name of the university conferring this particular doctorate on this person. We know whether it is simply a doctorate of honour or a doctorate of real recognition. When someone has an accomplishment in a particular discipline, that is known to people, and one can go to him.

¹ शास्त्रज्ञऽपि स्वातन्त्र्येण ब्रह्मान्वेषणं न कुर्यादित्येतद् गुरुमेवेत्यवधारण-फलम् । मुण्डक भाष्यम्
² श्रोत्रियश्छन्दोऽधीते पाणिनिसूत्रे च ५ ॥२ ॥८४फ छन्दः अधीते वेत्ति वा इति श्रोत्रियः । छन्दो वेदः

But here, how does one know if the person is a śrotriya? If the society is gullible, ignorant, it can swallow anything. In such a society, there will be people who venture to teach self-knowledge without being śrotriyas. Teaching is not an ordinary thing. Unless one undergoes a certain education one cannot teach. There is a method of unfolding everything. This method comes down by sampradāya. If the gullibility is not there in the society, someone who is not a śrotriya will stand out. In an assembly of mathematicians, a fake is not going to pass. Similarly, in a society where there are scholars, one cannot pass as śrotriya unless that person is a śrotriya. So, if one is not gullible, one cannot select a śrotriya.

By the word 'śrotriya', what we are going to study is also made clear. It is nothing personally created by the person. He has nothing new to say. He is going to sway only what the śruti says. One may select a teacher and ask him, "Please teach me". The teacher may be a śrotriya, but may not teach. Why should that person teach? The question really is, why should he not teach? There is a reason why he should teach. There is no reason why he should not teach! Now one has to go to a teacher who is willing to teach. We only do salutation to those who do not teach and get blessings from them. So, it is pointed out that one should go to a teacher who is willing to teach.

But how will one choose a brahmaniṣṭha, the one who has clarity about Brahman, one whose commitment is to Brahman? Unless you have the knowledge of Brahman, you cannot know whether the other person has it. There is no other way of finding out who is a brahmaniṣṭha. To understand a brahmaniṣṭha is to be a brahmaniṣṭha. But we can say that the one who does not have commitment to anything else is a brahmaniṣṭha. One may be a śrotriya but he may not have commitment only to Brahman. So, the śrotriya must also be a brahmaniṣṭha. Visibly, the person does not have commitment to anything else. The guru must be like that. Brahmaniṣṭha really speaks of a life of sannyāsa, or a life similar to that of sannyāsa. Nothing other than Brahman is the goal to be accomplished. How a person should approach the teacher is said here now.

Samitpāṇiḥ san: by being the one who has samit in his hand. Samit means the twigs of the aśvattha, peepul tree. One picks up these dry sticks, makes a bundle of them, takes it in hand and goes to the teacher. So samitpāṇiḥ is upahāra pāṇiḥ, one who has a gift in hand.

The word 'samitpāṇiḥ' indicates that the student is one who has the willingness to serve the teacher. He is ready to do suśrūṣā. Suśrūṣā means the desire to listen to the śāstra. But the popular meaning of the word is service to the teacher. Any service is called suśrūṣā. The service to the teacher is part of learning the śāstra. The root meaning is wonderful. The suśrūṣā, desire to listen, is the real intention on the part of the student, in order to gain the knowledge from the teacher. At the same time, the word suśrūṣā means service to the teacher, and that is indicated by the word samitpāṇiḥ. Such a student, who is desirous of gaining this knowledge and is ready to do anything for that purpose, is told that he should select a teacher who is a śrotriya and brahmaniṣṭha.