



## Muṇḍakopaniṣad



(continued from last issue)

Brahma vidhyā in the form of words and their meaning is 'given'. The ṛṣis are purely sampradāya kartṛs, those who perpetuate the sampradāya, the method of handling the words of śruti. A particular lineage is mentioned here that initiated and maintained the sampradāya. They have been mentioned in the Śāstrā only to indicate that there is sampradāya. Otherwise there is no need to talk about them. After all, upaniṣad is brahma-vidyā. It could have begun with the teaching straightaway, saying that everything that is here is one Brahman, which is ātman. But the names are mentioned because there is a method of imparting the knowledge. Later the Śāstrā will say:<sup>1</sup> "May one go to a teacher who is well versed in scriptures and who has clear knowledge." Śāṅkara says in his commentary<sup>2</sup> on this *mantra* that even though one is well informed in language and other disciplines of knowledge such as phonetics, grammar and

so on, still one should not inquire about Brahman without the help of a knower of sampradāya. This is not said with a view to make the *gurus* rare and respectable. One can say so if the *gurus* have invented this. But here the very upaniṣad presents the sampradāya and says that a sampradāyavit alone can handle these words.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Śāstrā introduces<sup>4</sup> in the beginning itself, the fact that this sampradāya is handed down through a lineage of teachers and students.

There is a method of making a person see what the Śāstrā reveals. That requires a total appreciation of the whole process of knowing. We also have texts dealing with the topics of how we know, how knowledge takes place and so on. For example, you look at the sky in the night. There are a lot of things in the night sky like the stars, the moon and so on. You ask your friend, "What is the moon?" He replies, "prakṛṣṭa

<sup>1</sup> तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् ॥ । श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम् । (मुण्डकोपनिषत् 1.2.12)

<sup>2</sup> शास्त्रज्ञोऽपि स्वातन्त्र्येण ब्रह्मान्वेषणं न कुर्यात् । (मुण्डकोपनिषत् भाष्यम् 1.2.12 )

<sup>3</sup> Asampradāyavit sarva śāstravid api mūrkhavat eva upekṣaṇīyaḥ, a teacher who does not know the sampradāya has to be ignored like a fool even though he is well-versed in many disciplines of knowledge (Gītā Bhāṣya 13.2)

<sup>4</sup> अस्याश्च विद्यासम्प्रदायकर्तृ-पारम्पर्य-लक्षणसम्बन्धम् आदावेवाह । (उपोद्घात भाष्यम्)

<sup>5</sup> श्रोत्रस्य श्रोत्रं मनसो मनो यत् । ( केनोपनिषत् 1.2)

prakāśaḥ candraḥ, the brightest luminary in the sky is the moon". You have already seen the brightest one; you do not see it after being told. What you see as the brightest is to be understood as the moon. Similarly, the Śāstrā says:<sup>5</sup> "The invariable in the ears and eyes, the invariable in the hearer, seer, thinker and knower is Brahman". The invariable is already there. Then only can it be said to be invariable. That invariable is revealed as Brahman that is the cause of the world. That Brahman is yourself. That is how you recognize. That is how you recognise yourself. That is how the sampradāya has worked on the teaching and it knows what it does. Sampradāya is very much alive. Therefore, Bhāṣyakāra Śāṅkara says that the ṛṣis mentioned here are sampradāya kartṛs. Just by mentioning their names the upaniṣad itself says you must go to a traditional teacher in order to know.

### Introduction to Prayer:

Traditionally, both the teacher and the student pray together before beginning the study of any upaniṣad. In fact every upaniṣad has a śānti pāṭha, a prayer invoking peace, in the beginning. It is in the form of chanting a *mantra* of the Veda to which the upaniṣad belongs.

Any undertaking whether building a house, writing a book or studying a text begins with a prayer. Any undertaking can have a number of obstacles. A prayer is said in order to ward off all the obstacles and to invoke the grace of the Lord for the success

of the undertaking. The prayer may be mental or may be in the form of so many words. All the upaniṣads have prayers in the latter form.

Any undertaking, in order to be successful, requires three factors: prayatna, kāla and daiva. Prayatna is a well-directed adequate effort, which signifies one's commitment to the pursuit. One may have a commitment to begin with, but it may slowly fade away. So, one must persevere and continue to be with the pursuit until it is accomplished. This perseverance is called prayatna. Kāla is time. Time is also an important factor in the successful completion of an undertaking because everything does not happen instantly.

The third factor is *daiva*, which is an unknown factor. Unlike prayatna and kāla one has no control over *daiva*. An undertaking does not succeed just because one puts forth adequate effort and gives oneself adequate time. There are hundreds of obstacles that could come in the way of accomplishing the goal, and one cannot totally overcome all of them. Human knowledge is very limited and one cannot visualise all the possible obstacles that may be there to be avoided. Even if one visualises them, one either does not have the powers to overcome these obstacles, or whatever powers one has are not adequate. This happens all the time in our life, whether the undertaking is eating, crossing the road or passing the examination. In all this there is a message: "the result of an undertaking

is not something predictable". That is what we call *daiva*. One may call it the law of karma, chance, luck, God or whatever. But everyone recognises, 'there is a factor that makes a difference between success and failure'.

The *daiva* may be called chance, which is something you cannot control. If you can control it, then it is not chance; it is a manageable fact. Though you cannot control chance, you can take it into account and do something to make it favourable. In that case, you are not that helpless, you can be hopeful. This hope has a basis. It is not based on your knowledge of what is happening or what will happen etc., but it is based on prayer. It is a prayerful hope. You become prayerfully hopeful to avoid helplessness. If you acknowledge the existence of this factor, then you are a very objective person; otherwise you are in a helpless situation. You are in for disappointment and would call yourself a failure and would have the feeling, "I am defeated all the time and smothered by situations. I have no control over anything." By being objective you discover in yourself a strength. The objectivity here is: "I have

some resources, some talents and some knowledge. With all these I plan for a particular thing to happen, but there is always one factor over which I have no control. I say a prayer to have that factor in my favour." A person who says a prayer is pragmatic. He knows that he does not call all the shots. When he does not call all the shots, then naturally, he takes into account the *daiva* factor and says a prayer to control the hidden variables.

This prayer, which is meaningful for the occasion, is not a broad-spectrum prayer; it is a specific prayer. When you pray to the Lord in general, without any specific purpose in view, then it is a broad-spectrum prayer. But we have specific prayers too, for every reason, for every problem, for each disease and so on. Here there are many obstacles in gaining self-knowledge. So, the specific prayer is for the successful study of the śāstra. But like the intake of medicine, mere prayer does not do the job. Prayer is to make *daiva* favourable. You have to put forth adequate effort for a length of time to make the undertaking successful.

*To be continued..*

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