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Mundakopanishad [Upanishad Vahini]

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MUNDAKOPANISHAD

This Upanishad begins with an Invocation, praying that the eye may see auspicious things, the ear may hear auspicious sounds, and that life may be spent in the contemplation of the Lord. The teaching of this Upanishad is referred to as Brahma Vidya, either because it describes first the message of Hiranyagarbha, the causal Brahma, or because the message relates the glory of Brahmam. This Upanishad speaks of Brahma Vidya as the mystery which only those with shaven heads and those who go through a rite of having Fire on the shaven head can understand. So, it is called Mundaka, or Shaven Head. Apart from this, this Upanishad is honoured as the crest of all, since it expounds the very essence of *Brahma Jnana*. It is assigned to the Fourth Veda, the Atharvana.

This knowledge has been handed down from teacher to pupil by word of mouth, enriched and confirmed by experience. It is also called Paravidya, the knowledge of the Other when it deals with the attributeless Principle. When it deals with the attribute-full, the *Saguna*, the materialised Principle, it is called Aparavidya, the knowledge of the Immanent, not the Transcendent aspect. These are the two that are found in this Upanishad. They were taught by Saunaka to Angirasa. That is what the text announces. The Vedas and the Vedangas deal with Aparavidya. The Upanishads deal specifically with Paravidya. But the interesting thing is: the Aparavidya leads on to the Para, the knowledge of Brahmam, which is the goal.

The spider evolves out of itself the magnificent manifestation of the web. So too, this *jagath* (moving, changing world) is manifested from the causative Brahmam. The jagath or *samsar* is the product of creator-creation complex. It is true and factual and useful, so long as one is unaware of the Reality. The utmost that one can gain by activity, that is to say holy or sacred activity, is Heaven or *Swarga*, which has a longer lease of life, but which has an end in spite of it. So, the seeker loses all yearning for Heaven. He approaches an elderly teacher full of compassion, who instructs him in the discipline for realising the Brahmam.

All beings are Brahmam and no other. They all do emanate from Brahmam. As sparks emanate from fire, as hair grows on the skin but is different from it, so too beings originate from Brahmam. Brahmam causes the sun, moon, stars and planets to revolve in space. Brahmam grants the consequence of all the acts of beings. The Jivi and the Easwara, the Individual and the Universal are two birds sitting on the same tree i.e., the human body. The Jivi acts, and suffers the consequences of those acts. The Easwara sits quiet, as a witness of the other bird. When the Jivi looks at the Easwara and realises that it is but an image, it escapes from grief and pain. When the mind is drawn by yearning to know the Easwara, all other low desires diminish and disappear. Then, knowledge of Atma is attained. The last manthra of this Upanishad declares that its aim is to make man attain that Jnana. *Munda* means head. This Upanishad is the Head of all Upanishads, we can say. So even the Brahma Suthra devotes two chapters to elaborate the inner meaning of the manthras of this Upanishad.

It has three sections, with two chapters in each. In the first section, the Aparavidya, and in the second, the Paravidya and the means of mastering it are dealt with. In the third, the nature of the Reality and of the release from bondage, is defined. The Karma that helps attain the Brahmam is denoted in the manthras. That is why this Upanishad is respected as very sacred.

The spider, as already indicated, spins out the web from itself without any extraneous agency. It also takes in the web it has spun. So too, Creation was effected without an agent and the Universe emanated. This Nature or *Prakrithi* is but a transformation of the basic Brahmam, like pot from mud, cloth from cotton, jewels from gold. So Brahmam is called the *Upadana* cause of Prakrithi. It is also the *Nimiththakarana* (predetermined cause), or the *Nimiththa* (efficient) cause. For, this Universe can only be the result of a High Intelligence, an Intelligence that is all-comprehensive, a *Sarvajna.* Heaven is the highest attainable stage through Karma. Of such Karmas or rites, the worship of Fire called *Agnihotra* is the chief. The performance of such rites contributes to the cleansing of the mind. Such cleansing is a necessary preliminary to Paravidya. The flames that rise high from the sacrificial altar of fire appear to the performer as if they are hailing him on to realise the Reality or Brahmam. He who does the rite with full awareness of the significance of the manthra is able to reach the Solar Splendour, through the offerings made. They take him to the region of Indra, the Lord of the gods.

The Vedas recommend two types of obligatory Karmas: *Ishta* and *Poortha.* The rite of Agnihotra, adherence to Truth, *Thapas* or Asceticism, *Vedaadhyayanam* or study of the Vedas, the service offered to guests in one's home—these are Ishta;

construction of temples, caravanserais, rest-houses, tanks, planting of avenue trees—such acts are Poortha. These give consequences that are beneficial; but all such cause-effect chains are transient. They are fundamentally defective.

The entire Creation is bound up with name and form and so, unreal. It can be described in words and so, limited and circumscribed by the intellect and the mind. The *Paramapurusha*, the Supreme Person alone is eternal, real, and pure. He is the prompter of activity and the dispenser of consequence. But He is beyond the eye, beyond the intellect. Like the spokes of a wheel that radiate from the hub, that lead from all directions to the centre, all creation radiates from Him.

To reach the central hub and know that all spokes radiate from it, the mind is the instrument. Brahmam the target is to be reached by the arrow-mind. Have your mind fixed on the target and using the Upanishadic teaching as the bow, shoot straight and hard, to hit the Brahmam and master. That is to say, the Pranava or the OM is the arrow. Brahmam is the target.

The Brahmam illumines the Jivi by getting reflected in the inner consciousness or *Antahkarana*. One has only to turn that consciousness away from the objective world, contact with which contaminates the mind. Now, train the inner consciousness to meditate on

the OM with single-pointed attention. Meditate on the Atma as unaffected by the Jivi, though in him and with him and activating him. Meditate on Him in the heart, from which radiate countless nadis, subtle nerves, in all directions. If this process is followed, one can attain Jnana or Wisdom

The Universe is an instrument to reveal the majesty of God. The inner firmament in the heart of man is also equally a revelation of His Glory. He is the Breath of one's breath. Since He has no specific form, He cannot be indicated by words. Nor can His mystery be penetrated by the other senses. He is beyond the reach of asceticism, beyond the bounds of Vedic rituals. He can be known only by an intellect that has been cleansed of all trace of attachment and hatred, of egoism and the sense of possession.

Jnana alone can grant self-realisation. *Dhyana* (meditation) can confer concentration of the faculties. Through that concentration, Jnana can be won, even while in the body. The Brahmam activates the body through the five vital airs or *Pranas*. It condescends to reveal itself in that same body as soon as the inner consciousness attains the requisite purity. For the Atma is immanent in the senses, inner and outer, as heat in fuel and as butter in milk. Now, the consciousness is like damp fuel, soaked in the foulness of sensory desires and disappointments.

When the pool in the heart becomes clear of the slimy overgrowth, the Atma shines in its pristine splendour. He who acquires the knowledge of this Atman is to be revered. For, he is liberated. He has become Brahmam, that which he strove to know and be.