



Report of the National webinar on Prashnopanishad-vijnana-bhashya May 29, 2020

Shri Shankar Shikshayatan organised a national webinar on Prashnopanishad-Vijnana-Bhashya of Pandit Motilal Shastri on May 29, 2020. Prashnopanishad is one of the important Upanishads. Pandit Motilal Shastri called it Pranopanishad and Pippaladopanishad. In his comprehensive commentary on the text in Hindi, Shastriji has explained six principle questions involving *parameshti mahan*, *saur vigyanatma*, *chandra-pragyanatma*, *parthiv pranatma*, *svayambhu-avyaykatma* and *purushatma*. This commentary is considered to be one of the finest works of Shastriji.

The meeting, which discussed many aspects of Shastri's commentary on Prashnopanishad, was attended by well-known vedic scholars from different universities and academic institutions. The meeting was chaired by Prof. Santosh Kumar Shukla, Convener, Shri Shankar Shikshayatan, Dean, School of Sanskrit and Indic Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi.

Opening the discussion, well-known vedic expert, Prof. Jwalant Kumar Shastri spoke about the first question contained in the Upanishad—about Prajapati. He explained that Pandit Shastriji had referred to *Svayambhu Prajapati* as the Prajapati, the supreme master of all beings. He said creation began when Prajapati, through *tapa*, merged *rayi* (material) with *prana* (life force). The special guest at the inaugural session, Prof. Lalit Kumar Gaur, acharya, Kurukshetra University, termed *samvatsar* (yearly solar cycle) as the basic cause of creation. He explained it through the concepts of *uttarayan* and *dakshinayan*.

Introducing the topic of discussion, Prof. Shukla said Prashnopanishad was related to Atharvaveda and it contained answers given by rishi Piplada to six fundamental questions raised by six rishis on Creation. The first question, raised by rishi Kabandhi, was: Who was the creator of all different living beings in this world? The second question, raised by rishi Bhargava, contained three questions within—how many *devatas* represent the living beings? How many of these *devatas* illuminate the mortal beings? Who is superior among these *devatas*? Rishi Piplada answered that *devatas* are the *pancha-mahabhutas* (five basic

elements), *pancha-jnanendriya* (five organs of knowledge) and *pancha-karmendriya* (five organs of action) and *mana* (intellect) and it was *prana* (life force) which was supreme.

In the third question, rishi Ashvalayan posed six queries—how did *prana* come about? How does *prana* enter a human body? How does *prana* establish itself in different parts of the body? How does *prana* leave one body and enter another? How does it become this *pancha-bhuta* body? How does *prana* become intellect and organs of sense and be present in material as well as spiritual world?

The fourth question was posed by rishi Gargya. It had five elements—When a man is in deep sleep, which *devatas* are present? How many of these *devatas* remain awake? When we are in a dream state, which all *devatas* are witness to our dreams? Who feels happy during sleep? Who does these *devatas* depend on?

The fifth question was posed by rishi Satyakam. It was about omkar. He asked: Which world does a person gain by meditating on omkar all through his or her life? The sixth question was posed by rishi Sukesha whose question related to a man endowed with sixteen skills. What is the form of such an individual self? Where does such an entity live? Rishi Piplada said the universe was the entity endowed with sixteen skills and that entity lived within our body. There was no need to search for it outside.

Prof. Shukla said Pandit Motilal Shastri had authored the *bhashya* or commentary on Prashnopanishad with the objective of explaining these questions and answers. His perspective on these questions related to the process of Creation was unique, inspired by his guru Pandit Madhusudan Ojha's articulation on veda vijnana.

Addressing the first session, Prof. Gopal Prasad Sharma, Head, Department of Veda, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University, New Delhi, said Prashnopanishad contained elaborate exploration of elements like *parameshti* and sixteen skills or arts. These have been explained with great clarity and depth by Shastriji.

The noted speakers included Prof. Jwalant Kumar Shastri, well-known vedic scholar, Prof. Lalit Kumar Gaur, Acharya, Sanskrit Department, Kurukshetra University, Haryana, Prof. Gopal Prasad Sharma, Head of Department, Department of Veda, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University, New Delhi, Prof. Vishnupad Mahapatra, Head of Department, Department of Nyaya, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University, New Delhi., Prof. Ramanuj Upadhyaya, Acharya, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University, New

Delhi, Prof. Suindar Narain Jha, Acharya, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sankrit Vidyapeeth, New Delhi, Prof. Sumar Kumar jha, Acharya, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University, New Delhi, Prof. Meera Dvivedi, Sanskrit Department, Delhi University, Prof. Ram Raj Upadhyaya, Acharya, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University, New Delhi, Prof. Markendeya Nath Tiwari, Head of Department, Department of Sankya-yoga, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University, New Delhi, Prof. Mahanand Jha, Acharya, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University, New Delhi, Dr Ramchandra Sharma, Acharya, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University, New Delhi, Dr Dhananjay Mani Tripathi, Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi and Dr Mamata Tripathi, Gargi College, Delhi University.

The vote of thanks was offered by Dr Laxmi Kant Vimal, Senior Research Fellow, Shri Shankar Shikshayatan, New Delhi. The meeting was coordinated by Dr Mani Shankar Dvivedi of the Shikshayatan.
