

Report of the National Webinar on Ishopanishad organised on July 28 2020 @Google Meet

The Ishopanishad is the 40th chapter of shukla Yajurveda and is considered to be the shortest of Upanishads. The title is drawn from its first line of the first mantra, *Om īśāvāsyam idam sarvam yat kim ca jagatyām jagat* --everything in this universe is enveloped by `isa` or the supreme being. Atma is the focal point of this upanishad and hence it is considered as a philosophical text and its mantras are not used in rituals. It is also known as Ishavasya Upanishad and Vajasaneyi Samhita Upanishad.

The term, isha, refers to paramatma, the supreme being. The universe is the outcome of that supreme being's desire. Pandit Motilal Shastri has given a comprehensive account of these elements in his commentary on the Upanishad. (texts accessible on <http://shankarshikshayatan.org/resources/upanishadavigyanabhas-ha-bhumika>).

These references to Ishopanishad were made during the national webinar on Ishopanishad organised by Shri Shankar Shikshyatan.

Pandit Motilal Shastri was one of the illustrious disciples of the famous veda vijñana guru, Pandit Madhusudan Ojha. It is said that Ojhaji, before his demise, entrusted Shastriji with completing his life's singular mission--to present the true meaning of the Vedas to the world. Shastriji invented his own unique adaptation of Hindi to explain Vedic science to the lay readers, and he wrote about 80,000 handwritten pages on Vedic themes. Thus he not only made a great contribution to the exposition of the Vedas but also to the evolution of Hindi itself, vesting remarkable richness to the great language. He passed away at the age of 52.

In his introductory remarks, Prof. Santosh Kumar Shukla, convener, Shri Shankar Shikshayatan, pointed out that Shastriji's commentaries on Ishavasyopanishad contained two volumes, 900 pages in all. The first part is titled

Purushatma-adhikarana contains explanations of mantras one to three. The second volume contains discussion on mantras four to eighteen and is titled Prakratatma-adhikarana. The second volume is divided into three parts—Brahma, shukra and vishva (universe). Referring to Shastriji's explanation of mantra five, Prof Shukla quoted:

तदेजतत तन्नैजतत तद्दूरे तद्वतततके।

तदतरस्य तदु सर्वस्यास्य बाह्यतः॥

Tadejati tanneyajati taddare tadvantike

Tadantarasya tadu sarvasyasya baharantha

The meaning of this mantra is—the one which moves, does not move; it is far, it is close; it is inside all of us, it is outside of us. Shastriji has relied on veda vijñana to explain the mantra, offering two perspectives, one that of kṛitatma or vidvān (wise person) and another that of akṛitatma or normal person. According to the wise, Brahma is a static element, Brahma is near and Brahma is present inside and outside all of us. Normal people consider Brahma to be mobile, far from us and inside us. Prof Shukla threw light on other aspects of Shastriji's commentaries and pointed out how great German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer was influenced by Upanishads and how his writings on the subject had last influence on European literature and society.

Speaking as a chief guest, Prof. Chandra Panda, former Vice Chancellor, Maharshi Panini Sanskrit and Vedic University, Ujjain, said there were in all 40 chapters in the Yajurveda, of which 39 gave an insight into karma or action while the last chapter, Ishopanishad, contained gyaṇa or knowledge. Upanishad is Brahmavidya. The mantras in the Upanishad tell us how in this universe, conceived by the supreme being, we have to carry out our duties while leading a simple life. We should not be greedy for wealth, for wealth belongs to no one but the supreme being. Shastriji has explained many such concepts in his commentary on Isavasyopanishad.

Prof. Satyaprakash Dubey, former teacher of Sanskrit at Jainarain Vyas University, Jodhpur, said Ishavasyopanishad contained two types of knowledge—worldly and otherworldly. Shastriji has explained the meaning of various terms like

brahma-karma, jnana-kriya, rasa-bala and vidya-avidya, by drawing upon brahmanagranthas. He has also thrown light on the relationship between ishvara and living beings and the universe, Human body is earth, mana is moon, sun is buddhi or intellect, parameshti is omnipresent and svayambhu is formless. Ishvar thus resides in every living being.

Dr Vijay Shankar Dwivedi, Sanskrit department, Delhi University, in his address focused on the 18th mantra of Ishopanishad. This mantra comes in the section on sharira and atma. Ordinary people consider the body to be the truth and therefore believe enjoying the fruits of the body to be their ultimate goal of life. But sharira or body without atma is perishable and hence it is important to understand the elements other than the body.

Dr Ranjan Lata, Sanskrit department, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya University, Gorakhpur, in her presentation, talked about various interpretations of the eighth mantra of Ishopanishad given by Swami Dayanand, Max Mueller, Shankaracharya and Pandit Motilal Shastri. Acharya Shankar has offered a spiritual perspective on the upanishad, Swami Dayanand gave a practical interpretation and Max Mueller gave a literal meaning. Pandit Shastriji presented eight forms of Brahma Prajapati. Dr Dayal Singh Pawar of Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit University, said sharira or body was an instrument of many siddhis or accomplishments and was not merely a vehicle of pleasure.

Other speakers included Dr K S Satish, Head of Department, Advaita Vedanta, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit University, New Delhi, Acharya Sreyas Kuhrekar of Jagadguru Sridevanath Vedic Vigyan and Research Institute, Nagpur, Dr Ramachandra of Kurukshetra University and Dr Shweta Tiwari of Veda Vigyan Research Institute, Jaipur.

The speakers and other guests were welcomed by Dr Lakshmi Kant Vimal of Shri Shankar Shikshayatan who made a short presentation on the programmes and activities undertaken by the institute to spread the writings and teachings of Pandit Madhusudan Ojha, Pandit Motilal Shastri and Rishi Kumar Mishra. The note of thanks was offered by Dr Mani Shankar

Dwivedi of Shri Shankar Shikshayatan. The discussion, hosted on Google Meet, was attended by over 250 participants from different universities and institutions.
