



कठोपनिषत्
Katopanishad
Section 2
Volume 14

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इति द्वितीया वल्ली

Lord यम is in the process of describing the nature of आत्मा and the means for recognition of आत्मा as It is. As we may recall the words of Lord यम last time:

अक्रतुः, धातु प्रसादात्, तं आत्मनः महिमानं पश्यति

The अक्रतुः - the one who has overcome the forces of one's object desires, through अन्तःकरण शुद्धि, that person gains the clarity of vision of one's बुद्धि to recognize the Glory of आत्मा as अन्तर्यामी अमृतः - as the Indwelling पर ब्रह्मन्, परमेश्वर within oneself, as one's own Immortal Self within every धातु, within every segment of one's शरीर, indeed, within every segment of everything that exists in this creation.

Such an अक्रतुः sees the Glory of आत्मा as It is.



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On the other hand, if one is not an अक्रतुः, if one is among ordinary people who are कामात्मानः - those who are totally wedded to their objective desires, such a person cannot see, cannot recognize आत्मा as It is. For such a person, all descriptions of आत्मा appear as a bundle of contradictions, providing no definite knowledge; referring to such people, Lord यम says:

आसीनो दूरं व्रजति, शयानो याति सर्वतः ।

कस्तं मदामदं देवं, मदन्यो ज्ञातुं अर्हति ॥

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आसीनः दूरं व्रजति

आसीनः - Remaining stationary, remaining motionless, दूरं व्रजति Atma travels far and wide

शयानः याति सर्वतः

शयानः - remaining in the deep sleep state

याति सर्वतः - Atma goes everywhere

मदं अमदं - आत्मा is both happiness and unhappiness

For ordinary people, for those who have no understanding and appreciation of Upanishad knowledge, for those who identify आत्मा – The Self with one's physical body and its attributes, for such people, statements such as

आसीनः : दूरं व्रजति - remaining stationary, Atma - The Self travels far and wide

शयानः याति सर्वतः - remaining in deep sleep state, आत्मा - The Self goes everywhere

मदं, अमदं - The Self is both happiness and unhappiness, etc. All such statements are so confusing, and mutually contradictory that they provide no definite knowledge about the true nature of आत्मा - The Self. Therefore, Lord यम adds

मदन्यः कः तं देवं (आत्मानं) ज्ञातुं अर्हति

मदन्यः - Other than myself, which means other than people like myself, who have undergone the discipline of Upanishad knowledge through श्रवणं, मननं and निदिध्यासनं

कः तं देवं (आत्मानं) ज्ञातुं अर्हति - who can know that Divine Self - The आत्मा



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It is not easy for people to understand and appreciate the true nature of आत्मा - The Self without adequate understanding and appreciation of Upanishad knowledge

Let us now try to understand Lord यम's words in terms of Upanishad knowledge to which we have already been exposed.

आसीनः दूरं व्रजति - Remaining stationary, आत्मा - The Self travels far and wide. This is true, because आत्मा is सर्वगतः, येन सर्वं इदं ततं, as the Gita says. आत्मा is all-pervading, ever existent and all-conscious. Being so, there is no place where आत्मा is not there, or where आत्मा can move into. On the other hand, one's thoughts and memories move far and wide instantly. But wherever one's thoughts and memories move, आत्मा is already there. That is why ईशावास्य Upanishad says that आत्मा appears to move even faster than the mind.

अनेजत् एकं मनसो जयीयो (ईशा, 4) which is same as what यम is telling here,

आसीनः दूरं व्रजति - remaining stationary, आत्मा - The Self, appears to travel far and wide. With such understanding, there is no contradiction in the vision of आत्मा, The Self. Again,

शयानः याति सर्वतः - Remaining in deep sleep state, आत्मा The Self goes everywhere.

This is also true, because in the deep sleep state of existence, one's entire world of objects and experiences disappears into one's own Pure Consciousness, namely आत्मा - The Self, which is Totality of all Knowledge. Therefore, in one's deep sleep state of existence, आत्मा - The Self, without going anywhere, appears to go everywhere in terms of knowledge. One's sense of awareness, being totality of all knowledge, appears to go everywhere. आत्मा is everywhere at all times. Again

मदं अमदं - आत्मा, The Self is both happiness and unhappiness. This is again true in terms of appearance. The true nature of आत्मा is always आनन्द, पूर्ण आनन्द - Total happiness, never subject to change. But the appearance of happiness and unhappiness is only the manifestations of one's माया गुणs and कर्मs arising from the power of आत्मा - The SELF, which is all-pervasive.



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Thus all apparent contradictions on the true nature of आत्मा arise only from अविद्या - from one's inability to recognize the fact that all नाम रूपs- names and forms, in the entire world of transient reality are only superimpositions (अध्यास) on the ONE Absolute Reality, namely आत्मा, The Self.

We must first understand this problem of अध्यास - superimpositions on आत्मा, The Self. The problem is this. The wanting person wants to know about the want-free person, who is none other than the wanting person. There are no two persons here. The wanting person is an अध्यास - a superimposition on the want-free person.

What is superimposed on what, how the superimposition occurs, and what is the means of transcending such superimposition and reach one's own true self is the subject matter of the भगवत् गीता and the Upanishads, including Lord यम's current discourse on आत्म विद्या - Self-knowledge. Continuing His discourse, Lord यम says:

अशरीरं शरीरेषु, अनवस्थेषु अवस्थितं ।
महान्तं विभुं आत्मानं, मत्वा धीरो न शोचति ॥

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The true nature of आत्मा is pointed out here by a set of three words. अशरीरं शरीरेषु, अनवस्थेषु अवस्थितं, and महान्तं विभुं .

अशरीरं शरीरेषु - that which exists within all शरीरs - all physical bodies, Itself being bodiless, that is the true nature of आत्मा - The Self; the ँकार in अशरीरं refers to आत्मा.

आत्मा remains in every physical body as अन्तरात्मा, अन्तर्यामी आत्मा - as the Indwelling पर ब्रह्मन्, परमेश्वर in oneself, as अमृत आत्मा - as one's own Immortal Self, as प्रत्यग आत्मा - as one's own innermost Self. Again, more generally

अनवस्थेषु अवस्थितं - That which exists as ONE and changeless in all objects of transient existence in this creation - that is the true nature of आत्मा - The Self. As the Gita says:

अविभक्तं च भूतेषु, विभक्तमिव च स्थितं (G 13-16)



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That which exists undivided in all things apparently divided, That is the true nature of आत्मा. Again, the true nature of आत्मा is

महान्तं विभुं - महान्तं is unqualified greatness which means limitless, because it is विभुं, सर्व व्यापकं - All-pervasive. Therefore, the true nature of आत्मा is महान्तं विभुं - Limitless All-pervasive

अन्तर्यामी अमृतः आत्मा - The indwelling

पर ब्रह्मन् The परमेश्वर - The Immortal Self in oneself, and in every self. Therefore,

आत्मानं मत्वा, धीरः न शोचति

आत्मानं मत्वा means आत्मानं आत्मत्वेन ज्ञात्वा. Recognizing आत्मा - The Self as the Self in oneself, recognizing आत्मा as महान्तं विभुं ज्ञात्वा - recognizing The Self in oneself as ब्रह्मन् Itself, धीरः न शोचति a wise person does not come to grief, does not experience any sorrow or distress. ब्रह्मन् is उपलक्षण for संसार, sorrow and distress stand for life bound to the world of transient realities.

We are part of this world of transient realities, and we must know how to live a meaningful life of joy and enthusiasm in this world. But we need not get bound to this ever changing world. Therefore,

आत्मानं मत्वा धीरः न शोचति - recognizing the Self in oneself as सत्, चित्, आनन्द स्वरूप ब्रह्मन् Itself, a wise person never gets bound to this world of transient realities. The whole संसार सुख and दुःख, all the transient सुख and दुःख in this worldly life arise from कर्तृत्व भावं - the notion that I am the doer of my actions;

धीरः न शोचति - a wise person never entertains the notion of ever being the कर्ता of any कर्म - the doer of any action.

Lord यम continues

नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यः, न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन ।

यं एव एषः वृणुते, तेन लभ्यः तस्य एषः आत्मा, विवृणुते तन्नू स्वाम् ॥

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न अयं आत्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यः -प्रवचन literally means teachings on the words of Vedas, Upanishads and sacred books in general. Lord यम says:

अयं आत्मा प्रवचनेन न लभ्यः - The knowledge on the True nature of आत्मा - The Self, cannot be gained merely by listening to प्रवचन - teachings of all kinds of sacred literature.

This statement does not mean listening to discourses on आत्मा is useless. What is said here is that simply listening to such discourses alone, will not give one the ability to recognize आत्मा - The Self in oneself as ब्रह्मन्, as परमेश्वर Itself. Similarly

न मेधया - Nor can one gain knowledge of आत्मा by mere मेधा - memory of Upanishad words, or by sharp intellect.

न बहुना श्रुतेन - Nor can one gain knowledge of आत्मा by mere श्रवणं - listening to the words of the Vedas and the Upanishads many times from many sources.

The above statements must be understood properly. Sri Krishna says:

तत् विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया (G 4 - 34)

Learn आत्म ज्ञानं by listening to the words of the Upanishads from an enlightened teacher, by reflecting on that knowledge, and by living that knowledge in daily life. प्रवचनं studies and teachings on श्रुति, स्मृति, मेध, memory and sharp intellect on such teachings, and श्रवणं - listening to various discourses on Vedanta are extremely important for one's spiritual progress, but, they by themselves are totally insufficient for gaining आत्मज्ञानं - Self-Knowledge. Then, how can one gain आत्मज्ञानं ?

One can gain आत्मज्ञानं ONLY when one is ready by mental disposition for gaining आत्मज्ञानं . What does that mean? Lord यम says:

यं एव एषः वृणुते, तेन लभ्यः :

एषः The person who seeks आत्मज्ञानं - Self-Knowledge

यं (आत्मानं) एव वृणुते when that person seeks and ardently prays for आत्मज्ञानं only (एव) and nothing else, when that person is totally and exclusively committed to the pursuit of आत्मज्ञानं with unqualified श्रद्धा and reverential भक्ति - devotion



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तेन लभ्यः, तेन आत्मा लभ्यः - by that person, it is possible to recognize the true nature of आत्मा - The Self as ब्रह्मन् itself, as परमेश्वर itself, as the Immortal Self in oneself.

How does that become possible? Lord यम says

तस्य एषः आत्मा, विवृणुते, तन्नूँ स्वाम्

Let us digress here for a moment. Now, when will a person be able to seek and ardently pray, exclusively for आत्मज्ञानं ONLY? Only when that person becomes a जिज्ञासु - one for whom gaining आत्मज्ञानं is the ONLY desire in life. When will he get such a desire? Only when he is mature enough and convinced enough to realize that all other desires in life are essentially wasteful and meaningless. When the person is so convinced, what does he do?

He goes to an appropriate teacher seeking आत्मज्ञानं . (That is what Nachiketa is doing in the context here). What does the teacher do? The teacher simply points out the nature of आत्मा, The Self as It is, through the words of the Upanishad. (That is what Lord यम is doing right now). If the person is ready for such knowledge in terms of mental disposition, **then and then only, even as the teaching takes place, the self-effulgent आत्मा, which means ब्रह्मन्, The परमेश्वर, The Immortal SELF in oneself, shines forth, revealing Itself in all Its Glory to that person spontaneously, and That is what Lord यम says here.**

तस्य एषः आत्मा विवृणुते तन्नूँ स्वाम्
एषः (आत्मा) तस्य आत्मा

That आत्मा (The SELF) which is already in the person seeking Self-Knowledge

स्यां तन्नूँ (= स्व आत्मस्वरूपं) विवृणुते (प्रकाशयते) shines forth, revealing its true nature as ब्रह्मन् itself, as परमेश्वर itself, as the Immortal Self in oneself itself, to the person seeking आत्मज्ञानं - Self-Knowledge.

Such Self-revelation is possible only because आत्मा is not an object external to oneself. आत्मा is not an extra-cosmic Deity. आत्मा is one's own very self, The Immortal Self within. It is self-effulgent, self-shining, all-inclusive, ever-existent, Pure Awareness, Pure



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Consciousness in oneself. Such self-revelation, such God Realization is possible only if one is fit for gaining such Self-Knowledge. All of one's कर्मs are concerned only with getting fit for gaining आत्मज्ञानं. In the event of gaining आत्मज्ञानं - Self Knowledge itself, there is no कर्म involved. Therefore Lord यम says

न अचिरतो दुश्चरितात्, न अशान्तो न असमाहितः ।
न अशान्तमानसो वाऽपि, प्रज्ञानेन एनं आप्नुयात् ॥

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न अचिरतः दुश्चरितात्

न अचिरतः - Neither the one who has not totally withdrawn from

दुश्चरितात् - improper behaviour and पाप कर्मs - sinful actions of various kinds in daily life

न अशान्तः - nor the one who has no peace of mind because of negligence of duties to be done, or lack of discipline and self-restraint in daily life

न असमाहितः न अशान्त मानसः वा अपि - nor the one whose mind is full of distractions, a mind lacking concentration, in the pursuit of आत्मज्ञानं - SELF Knowledge, nor the one whose mind is restless because of cravings for the results of one's acts of concentration, such as meditation, contemplation, various acts of worship, etc.

प्रज्ञानेन एनं (आत्मानं) आप्नुयात् - can gain Self Knowledge - Self Revelation - God Realization through the teachings of Upanishad Knowledge from an appropriate teacher.

That means, only the person who is totally free from any kind of improper activity or misconduct in daily life, who has self-discipline and self-restraint, who has unqualified श्रद्धा and devotion in the pursuit of Upanishad Knowledge, and who is free from cravings for the results of one's actions - one's पुण्य कर्म s, and who has an enlightened teacher to teach him आत्मज्ञानं - only that person gains fitness for gaining Self Knowledge - Self Revelation - God Realization in the manner indicated in the last verse.

Besides the one who has the above mentioned qualifications, who else can know आत्मा, who else can gain self Knowledge - Self revealing Itself to oneself in the manner indicated above? Obviously no one else can. Lord यम gives this message in the next verse in a rather peculiar manner. Lord यम says:



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यस्य ब्रह्म च क्षत्रं च, उभे भवतः ओदनः ।

मृत्युः यस्य उपसेचनं, कः इत्या वेद यत्र सः ॥

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Let us first see the last part of this verse.

कः इत्या वेद, यत्र सः

कः इत्या वेद - Other than the person who has all the above mentioned qualifications

कः - who else

इत्या वेद - knows that आत्मा in this manner, namely as the self-effulgent Immortal Self within oneself, revealing Itself to oneself.

Obviously an ordinary person who does not have all the required qualifications can never know आत्मा - the true nature of आत्मा, The Self.

यत्र सः meaning यत्र सः आत्मा वर्तते इति Such an ordinary person will not know even where आत्मा is, where to search for आत्मा.

So saying Lord यम concludes this verse. Now let us see the earlier part of this verse.

यस्य ब्रह्म च क्षत्रं च उभे भवतः ओदनः, मृत्युः यस्य उपसेचनं

यस्य means यस्य आत्मा - For which आत्मा - The Immortal SELF within every self

ब्रह्म च क्षत्रं च उभे भवतः ओदनः - both the ब्राह्मणाs and the क्षत्रियाs in the society are the food , and

मृत्युः यस्य उपसेचनं - Death is उपसेचनं - some kind of pickle for that food, to help आत्मा eat that food.

Now what does that mean?

The ब्राह्मणा s and क्षत्रियाs are the protectors of धर्म in the Vedic society. It is the duty of the ब्राह्मणा s to cultivate and disseminate Vedic Knowledge in the society, and it is the duty of the क्षत्रिया s to maintain law, order and justice in the society. When धर्म is so protected, धर्म protects the entire society, both individually and collectively.



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धर्म is कर्म. The entire creation itself is only कर्म; कर्म, is of जीव and the कर्म फल is creation. The entire creation is born of कर्म and it is only for doing कर्म. Therefore the expression ब्रह्म च क्षत्रं च - ब्राह्मणाs and क्षत्रियाs - stands for everything in this creation, including this creation itself; everything in this creation, including the creation itself goes through a never-ending cycle of appearance and disappearance, and all disappearance is ultimately into the Infinite Ever-existent आत्मा only.

Therefore, Lord यम says that ब्रह्मणाs and क्षत्रियाs, meaning everything in this creation, including the creation itself, is food for आत्मा, and since the phenomenon of Death is a helper in this process of disappearance of transient appearances into आत्मा, Lord यम says, Death is only a pickle to help आत्मा devour the food, which means to help the process of disappearance of transient appearances into आत्मा. Such is the extraordinary nature of आत्मा,

कः इत्या वेद, यत्र सः - who else other than a properly qualified person knows that extraordinary आत्मा as the Self-effulgent Immortal Self within oneself, revealing Itself to oneself? The one who does not have the required qualifications, will not even know where आत्मा is, and where to search for that आत्मा.

With that statement, Lord यम concludes Section 2 of this Upanishad. We will go to Section 3 next time.