



Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton Inc.
4835 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1X 1G8

ब्रह्मचिद्या **Brahma Vidya**

कठोपनिषत्
Katopanishad
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तृतीया वल्ली

ऋतं पिबन्तौ सुकृतस्य लोके, गुहां प्रविष्टौ परमे परार्थे ।
छायातपौ ब्रह्मचिदो वदन्ति, पञ्चाग्रयो ये च त्रिणाचिकेताः ॥ 3 - 1

यः सेतुः ईजानानाम्, अक्षरं ब्रह्म यत् परं ।
अभयं तितीर्षतां पारं, नाचिकेतं शकेमहि ॥ 3 - 2

As we may recall, Lord यम has been talking about प्रेयस् and श्रेयस् in the last Section.

प्रेयस् is exclusive pursuit of transient pleasures of life, and श्रेयस् is exclusive pursuit of मोक्ष. Both the paths of life are open to every person. प्रेयस् is संसार हेतु. It serves to keep the जीव - the individual person in the world of transient reality, and in a state of perpetual discontent, and श्रेयस् serves to uplift the person from the world of transient reality and lead the person to the world of Absolute Reality and Total Fulfillment in life.

प्रेयस् is अविद्या - path of अज्ञानं - spiritual blindness. It is the world of अपरं ब्रह्म, the world of माया, the world of कर्म and कर्म फल, and श्रेयस् is विद्या, path of ज्ञानं - spiritual knowledge. It is the world of परं ब्रह्म, the world of self-effulgent, ever-existent, all-conscious, all-inclusive परं ब्रह्म, परमेश्वर - The Immortal SELF in every self, including oneself.

Every person with one's own body-vehicle, is free to choose and go through either path of life.

The destination of प्रेयस् path of life is repeated birth and death in this ever changing world of सुख and दुःख, and the destination of श्रेयस् path of life is विष्णोः परमं पदं - as Lord यम says a little later - विष्णोः परमं पदं is The Abode of All-pervading ब्रह्मन्, the Immortal world of Being The True Self of oneself.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

To talk about these and related matters further, Lord यम introduces in this section a रथ कल्पना - an imagery in which one's body vehicle is compared to a chariot vehicle drawn by horses with a driver for the chariot and the Master of the chariot seated inside the vehicle. This imagery is only for ease of understanding of the message that is going to be communicated through the words of the Upanishad.

As an Introduction to this रथ कल्पना - chariot imagery, Lord यम says

ऋतं पिबन्तौ सुकृतस्य लोके, गुहां प्रविष्टौ परमे परार्थे ।
छायातपौ ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति पञ्चाग्रयो ये च त्रणाचिकेताः ॥

3 - 1

Let us understand the context here. Here I am, endowed with a body, capable of doing कर्मs of various kinds.

This body vehicle can take me through life either in the path of प्रेयस् or in the path of श्रेयस्. Through which path this body, by its actions, will take me through in life? That depends on who controls the actions of this body.

Suppose I say " I control the actions of my body" then the question is, Who is that "I"? Is that I the अहंकार "I" or The आत्मा "I"?

The अहंकार "I" is one's ego, and the आत्मा I is what the Upanishad has been pointing out as the अन्तर्यामी अमृत आत्मा -The Indwelling पर ब्रह्मन्, परमेश्वर in oneself - The Immortal SELF in oneself.

Therefore the question is, which I controls the actions of one's body. Is it the अहंकार I or the आत्मा I ?

I cannot give a definite answer to that question with respect to the actions of my own body. Why? Because sometimes it is the अहंकार I, which seems to control the actions of my body. On the other hand, even though I may not recognize आत्मा in myself in the manner indicated by the Upanishad, namely The आत्मा - The Self revealing Itself to oneself as पर ब्रह्मन्, परमेश्वर as the Immortal Self in oneself, still whenever I do any action totally in accordance with the dictates of my own consciousness, overriding my ego tendencies, I feel particularly uplifted, strong, happy and peaceful, which means I recognize the supremacy of आत्मा - Pure Consciousness in myself.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

What does that mean? Does it mean that there are two आत्माs, two “I” s controlling the actions of my body?

While it is clear to my बुद्धि that there really cannot be two I s in myself, controlling the actions of my body, there does appear to be two I s, the अहंकार I and the आत्मा I, co-existing in my body.

Generally this is true for all people.

Therefore, the first step in one's spiritual progress is to recognize the apparent co-existence of two I s, the अहंकार I and the आत्मा I in one's body vehicle. These two I s are variously described as जीवात्मा and परमात्मा , मिथ्या and सत्यं , transient I and Eternal I, false I and Real I, etc.

Referring to these two I s in one's body, Lord यम says:

ऋतं पिबन्तौ सुकृतस्य लोके गुहां प्रविष्टौ परमे परार्थे

ऋतं here indicates कर्म फल - Fruits of actions. ऋतं ordinarily means सत्यं - Truth. For any कर्म, कर्म फल is certain. That is सत्यं - Truth, because That is the eternal law of कर्म. Therefore, here ऋतं indicates कर्म फल - fruits of one's actions.

पिबन्तौ drink, experience, enjoy

ऋतं पिबन्तौ the two co-existing I s exist enjoying the experiences of कर्म फल; कर्म फल of what कर्म ?

सुकृतस्य लोके - सुकृतस्य of the good कर्मs, पुण्य कर्मs done by oneself, लोके in one's शरीर in one's body. Therefore,

ऋतं पिबन्तौ सुकृतस्य लोके - In one's शरीर - in one's body vehicle, the two co-existing I s- the अहंकार "I" and the आत्मा "I" exist enjoying the experiences of the कर्म फलs of the good कर्म, पुण्य कर्मा s done by oneself. Actually, only the अहंकार I is the enjoyer of कर्म फल. The आत्मा "I" is neither a doer nor an enjoyer. It is simply a witness. But the Upanishad uses the dual verb पिबन्तौ, which means because of their apparent co-existence, both अहंकार I and आत्मा I together appear to enjoy the कर्म फल of the actions done by the person.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

गुहां प्रविष्टौ परमे परार्थे

गुहां means गुहायां बुद्धौ - in the cave of one's बुद्धि. As we have seen earlier (2-9), while one's बुद्धि includes all that is in one's intellect as वृत्तिस, as accumulated, differentiated and integrated thought forms, the totality of बुद्धि itself is infinitely far more than the content of one's intellect. What is in one's बुद्धि, independent of all वृत्ति forms is शुद्ध चैतन्यं - Pure Awareness, which lies hidden in the बुद्धि गुह - cave of the बुद्धि, "cave" meaning beyond the reach of ordinary intellect.

The स्वरूप - the nature of बुद्धि गुह is pointed out here as

परमे परार्थे - परमे refers to हृदय आकाश - the Divine Heart space, which is the Upanishad expression for शुद्ध चैतन्यं - The Infinite All-Inclusive Pure Awareness.

परार्थे refers to परं ब्रह्म उपलभ्यस्थानं - the place where परं ब्रह्म - the परमेश्वर - The Indwelling Immortal Self, The आत्मा "I" is available for recognition.

प्रविष्टौ - In that बुद्धि गुह, both अहंकार "I" and आत्मा "I" have entered, which means Pure awareness being All inclusive, both अहंकार "I" and आत्मा "I" are available for recognition in one's बुद्धि गुह.

While अहंकार "I" is easily recognized by one's intellect, आत्मा "I" can be recognized only in one's बुद्धि गुह - in the cave of one's बुद्धि, in the not-easily reachable part of one's बुद्धि .

Thus the Upanishad points out that one need not have to search for परं ब्रह्म परमेश्वर The Immortal Self in oneself, the आत्मा "I", anywhere outside of oneself. It is already available for recognition in one's own बुद्धि . Therefore,

ऋतं पिबन्तौ सुकृतस्य लोके गुहां प्रविष्टौ परमे परार्थे

Having entered the शुद्ध चैतन्यं - Pure awareness obtained in the बुद्धि गुह - in the cave of one's बुद्धि, both अहंकार I and आत्मा I appear to co-exist in the शरीर - in the body, enjoying the experiences of the कर्म फलs of one's good कर्मs- पुण्य कर्मs.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

Thus the Upanishad confirms the apparent coexistence of अहंकार I and आत्मा I in one's body. But are there really two I s - two selves in one शरीर? No, not really. Then how do they exist together?

छायातपौ ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति

ब्रह्मविदः - The knowers of ब्रह्मन् - the ज्ञानीs - people of wisdom

वदन्ति they describe the two I s, they compare the two I s to

छायातपौ, छाया and आतप - shadow and light.

Really there are no two selves in one शरीर. The people of wisdom compare the co-existence of अहंकार "I" and आत्मा "I" to the co-existence of shadow and light. We must understand that shadow is different from darkness. Shadow is when light is, and darkness is not when light is. That is the difference. Not only the ब्रह्मविदः, the ज्ञानीs - the people who have realized the Upanishad knowledge say so, but also,

पञ्चाग्नयो ये च त्रिणाचिकेताः - those who depend upon performing various Vedic rituals, यज्ञ कर्मs, Havans such as पञ्चाग्नि, नाचिकेताग्नि, etc. in the pursuit of their worldly desires, they also say so. They also compare अहंकार - "I" and आत्मा "I" to shadow and light, which means अहंकार "I", The ego "I", has no independent existence at all. Thus

छायातपौ ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति , पञ्चाग्नयो ये च त्रिणाचिकेताः

All Vedas, both the Upanishads and the कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas, confirm that the relationship between अहंकार I and आत्मा I is like the relationship between shadow and light. Only आत्मा "I" is real existence and अहंकार "I" is only a transient appearance.

All this is an introduction to अहंकार "I" and आत्मा "I", either of which may control the actions of one's body. The next verse is an introduction to the destination of this body vehicle in its path of life.

Lord यम says:

यः सेतुः ईजानानाम्, अक्षरं ब्रह्म यत् परं ।
अभयं तितीर्षतां पारं, नाचिकेतं शक्रेमहि ॥

3 - 2



ब्रह्मचिद्या **Brahma Vidya**

The destination for this body vehicle can be अपरं ब्रह्म or परं ब्रह्म

अपरं ब्रह्म means any destination one wants within संसार - this creation; all achievements, all kinds of prosperity, success, pleasure, objects of desire, etc. indeed, anything one wants within this creation comes under the scope of अपरं ब्रह्म. Thus the destinations in अपरं ब्रह्म are infinite in number, and the highest and the farthest destination in अपरं ब्रह्म is ब्रह्म लोक प्राप्ति - reaching ब्रह्म लोक .

Every destination in अपरं ब्रह्म is reached only by doing some कर्म, and the destination reached is कर्म फल - the result of कर्म. The कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas and all pursuits of objective knowledge which are only extensions of कर्म काण्ड of the Vedas, give information on कर्म s and their possible कर्म फलs.

For example, on the basis of what Lord यम has said already, performance of नाचिकेताग्नि Havan ritual with understanding and devotion, three times, together with चिराट उपासन can lead one to ब्रह्म लोक. Since that knowledge is already available, if one's ultimate destination is to reach ब्रह्म लोक, one can choose to do the कर्म of नाचिकेताग्नि ritual in the prescribed manner. Such option, with respect to any destination in अपरं ब्रह्म is open to everybody. That is what Lord यम says here:

यः सेतुः ईजानानां नाचिकेतं शक्रेमहि

यः सेतुः - that which is the bridge. सेतु is bridge, not only in a physical sense but also in a functional sense. That which serves to connect one with one's chosen destination in life is a सेतु - a bridge. For example

ईजानानां - for those who are qualified enough to perform Vedic Havans of various kinds such as

नाचिकेतं - the exalted नाचिकेताग्नि Havan कर्म in the prescribed manner, which serves as a bridge for one to reach ब्रह्म लोक

शक्रेमहि - sure, we can, says Lord यम. For those who choose reaching ब्रह्म लोक as their ultimate destination in life, and who are qualified enough to perform the



ब्रह्मचिद्या **Brahma Vidya**

नाचिकेताग्नि यज्ञ कर्म in the prescribed manner, surely they can reach ब्रह्म लोक using नाचिकेतै - that नाचिकेताग्नि Havan कर्म as the bridge to reach ब्रह्म लोक.

The above statement is likewise applicable to all other destinations within this creation, because here नाचिकेतै - stands for any कर्म capable of leading one to the desired destination in अपरं ब्रह्म in this entire creation, and ईजानानां - stands for those who are qualified enough to know, and then, to do, the कर्म that needs to be done, to reach the desired destination. Therefore,

य : सेतु : ईजानानां नाचिकेतै शक्यमहि - If any destination in अपरं ब्रह्म in this creation is the ultimate choice in one's life, one can certainly reach that destination by knowing and then doing what needs to be done to reach that destination.

But one must also understand the implications of the choice of अपरं ब्रह्म as one's ultimate destination in life. The implications are two-fold.

1. By such choice, one is only seeking happiness and security in something external to oneself. All such happiness and security is always limited, because
2. Such destination, however exalted it may be, can never give a person total freedom from fear of some kind or other, some time or other, in life.

On the other hand, the destination for this body vehicle can also be the परं ब्रह्म itself.

The destination of परं ब्रह्म is विष्णोः परमं पदं - The Abode of All-pervading, All-inclusive, अक्षरं - Imperishable ब्रह्मन् - The Infinite Immortal world of being the True Self of oneself, recognition of परं ब्रह्मन् - the परमेश्वर - The अमृत आत्मा - The Immortal Self as oneself, in oneself, and in every self there is. This destination is पूर्णं - ONE and all-inclusive, there is nothing higher or lower in this destination. There is no कर्म or कर्म फल involved in this destination. This destination is अभयं - Fearlessness Itself, संसारस्य पारं - beyond the shores of all transient existence. It is पुराणं, सनातनं, सत्यं, ज्ञानं अनन्तं - ever-new, ever-ancient, never subject to change, all-knowledge and all-inclusive. It is not a place to reach. It is knowledge to be gained (ज्ञातव्यं). Is it possible for everyone to gain that knowledge?



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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

शक्यमिति sure, we can, says Lord यम. This is how He says that

अक्षरं ब्रह्म यत् परं अभयं तितीर्षतां पारं शक्यमिति

पारं तितीर्षतां means संसारस्य पारं तितीर्षतां For those who wish to cross the world of transient realities, for those who wish to be liberated from the bondages of संसार

यत् परं means यत् आश्रयं, यत् आलम्बनं the means for such liberation is

अक्षरं परं ब्रह्म - Knowledge of, recognition of that imperishable परं ब्रह्म, सत्यं ज्ञानं अनन्तं ब्रह्म The परमेश्वर - The अमृत आत्मा - The Immortal Self in oneself, which is

अभयं - Fearlessness Itself, because it is पूर्ण - Totality of all existence.

That परं ब्रह्म - That परमेश्वर - That - अमृत आत्मा - is not a place to go - It is ज्ञातव्यं Knowledge to be gained. Can anyone gain that knowledge?

शक्यमिति - Yes we can, says Lord यम, meaning that anyone who is ready for that knowledge can gain that knowledge by Self-revelation - The Immortal Self in oneself revealing Itself to oneself as oneself, as Lord यम said earlier (2-23):

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

When a qualified person seeks and ardently prays for आत्मज्ञानं only, and nothing else, which means when a qualified person is totally and exclusively committed to the pursuit of आत्मज्ञानं, with unqualified श्रद्धा and भक्ति - devotion, for that person, the आत्मा - The Self already in oneself, shines forth revealing Itself to oneself as ब्रह्मन् Itself - as परमेश्वर Itself, as the Immortal Self in oneself.

With the above Introduction to the "I" - the Self in oneself, and the destination to be reached in one's journey to fulfillment in life through one's body vehicle, Lord यम now continues His discourse on ब्रह्म विद्या in terms of the रथ कल्पना - chariot imagery in which one's body -vehicle is compared to a chariot vehicle - which we will see next time.