



कठोपनिषत्
Katopanishad
Section 3
Volume 20

- उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान् निबोधत ।
क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता दुरत्यया, दुर्गं पथस्तत् कवयो वदन्ति ॥ 3 – 14
- अशब्दं अस्पर्शं अरूपं अव्ययं, तथा अरसं नित्यं अगन्धवत् च यत् ।
अनादि-अनन्तं महत् परं ध्रुवं, निचाय्य तत् मृत्यु मुखात् प्रमुच्यते ॥ 3 - 15
- नाचिकेतं उपाख्यानं, मृत्युप्रोक्तं सनातनं ।
उक्त्वा श्रुत्वा च मेधावी, ब्रह्मलोके महीयते ॥ 3 – 16
- य इमं परमं गुह्यं, श्रावयेत् ब्रह्मसंसदि ।
प्रयतः श्राद्धकाले वा तत्, आनन्त्याय कल्पते ॥
तत् आनन्त्याय कल्पत इति । 3 – 17
- इति तृतीया वल्ली ।
प्रथमोध्यायः ॥

As we saw last time, one gains Total Fulfillment in life only through आत्मज्ञानं – आत्म दर्शनं – Self Knowledge, recognition of the true nature of oneself as सत्य स्वरूप, ज्ञान स्वरूप अनन्त स्वरूप, प्रशान्त स्वरूप, पूर्ण पुरुष, The पुरुषोत्तम, The परब्रह्मन्, The परमेश्वर, The आत्मा “I”, already in oneself. Therefore, as a human being, it is one’s overriding duty to oneself to take the immediate steps necessary to learn to recognize the Truth of oneself to gain आत्म दर्शनं – to recognize the आत्मा “I” in oneself, by oneself, as oneself.

Our Upanishads give this message repeatedly. The बृहदारण्यक उपनिषत् says:

यः एतत् अक्षरं (आत्मानं) अविदित्वा
अस्मात् लोकात् प्रैति सः कृपणः ॥ (3-8 –10)



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

The one who departs from this world without gaining **आत्मज्ञानं** – Self Knowledge, that person is a **कृपणः** – a miser, one who has not made the best use of his life-time, which means one who has wasted one's life-time.

Again, the Kenopanishad says: (2 – 5):

इह चेत् अवेदीत् अथ सत्यं अस्ति, न चेत् इह अवेदीत् महती विनष्टिः ।

Here, in this world, while one is still living, where alone it is possible for one to gain **आत्मज्ञानं** – Self Knowledge, if one takes the necessary steps to gain Self Knowledge, then there is **सत्यं** – there is wisdom and purpose in life for that person. On the other hand, if one does not take the necessary steps to gain Self Knowledge in this life, if one chooses to dissipate one's life time without taking the steps necessary to gain Self Knowledge, then it is a great loss for that person. It is a loss, which one can never make up for ages to come, which again means that that person has simply wasted his life.

In the context here, the **कठोपनिषत्** gives the same message again in a very powerful manner:

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान् निबोधत ।

क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता दुरत्यया, दुर्गं पथस्तत् कवयो वदन्ति ॥

3 – 14

Nachiketa is listening and Lord **यम** roars with a resounding voice.

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत

उत्तिष्ठत – Get up, **जाग्रत** wake up. This is not simply a message for Nachiketa alone. This is a clarion call to every human being capable of listening. This is an urgent call to the hesitant as well as the daring, to the weak as well as the strong alike.

उत्तिष्ठत – Get up, you are still sleeping. You are still dream-walking

जाग्रत – Wake up. It is now time for you to wake up from your **अज्ञान निद्रा** – slumber of self-ignorance

For all your confusion, delusion, sorrow and distress, this **अज्ञान निद्रा** – slumber of self-ignorance is the root cause. Therefore, shake off this sleep, **उत्तिष्ठत** – uplift yourself from this life of self delusion in the world of **मिथ्या** – in the world of ever-changing appearances.

As we have seen in the **कैवल्य उपनिषत्** (कै – 14)



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

पुनश्च जन्मान्तर कर्मयोगात्, स एव जीवः स्वपिति प्रबुद्धः ।

Even when we are awake, as we think we are right now, we are not really awake, because we are not awake to Absolute Reality. Our waking state is only another kind of dream state, where we continue to be ignorant about the true nature of our own selves. An ordinary person is immersed in one's own sense life as if it is the be-all and end-all of human existence, being blissfully unaware of the triviality of one's hopes and achievements, and the immensity of the inner spiritual world lying in hand.

But a time comes when one becomes ripe for awakeing, and at that time, a mere suggestion is enough to awaken the person from stagnation of sense life to the dynamism of spiritual life. That is the potential power of उत्तिष्ठ मन्त्र in Vedanta. It is That power that Lord यम uses here to awaken Nachiketa, who is absolutely ready for such awakenng.

Sri Krishna uses the power of उत्तिष्ठ मन्त्र on four different occasions to awaken and uplift Arjuna from the depths of his sorrow, depression, doubts and sense of helplessness. For those in similar situations, these timely words of Sri Krishna are of enormous significance in uplifting themselves and moving forward.

क्षुद्रं हृदय दौर्बल्यं त्यक्त्वा उत्तिष्ठ परंतप । G 2 – 3

Get rid of your fear and weak-heartedness. Stand up, wake up, grow up, live up to your real nature. Again

तस्मात् उत्तिष्ठ कौन्तेय युद्धाय कृत निश्चयः । G 2 – 37

Get out of this sense of depression, and do what needs to be done, as your immediate duty at this time and place. Again,

छित्त्वैनं संशयं योगं आतिष्ठ उत्तिष्ठ भारत । G 4 – 42

Get rid of your doubts, and योगं आतिष्ठ – uplift yourself in ज्ञानकर्मसंन्यास योग and उत्तिष्ठ – wake up to your Absolute Reality. Again,

तस्मात् त्वं उत्तिष्ठ यशो लभस्व । G 11 – 33

The only way by which you can befit your name, form and fame, is to wake up to your Absolute Reality by simply being an instrument to the serve the will of परमेश्वर already in yourself (निमित्त मात्रं भव, सव्यसाचिन्).

All the above words were spoken by Sri Krishna at different contexts which we must recall to fully appreciate the potential power of उत्तिष्ठ मन्त्र in one's spiritual progress.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

Having awakened a person by the उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत मन्त्र, such awakening has to be followed by a march to the top within oneself, namely, The विष्णोः परमं पदं – The परब्रह्मन् – The परमेश्वर The आत्मा “I” within oneself. But this spiritual path is not a familiar one, and one’s sense-bound intellect is never a reliable guide in this extraordinary field of spiritual endeavour. Therefore one has to seek the help and guidance from the experiences of one who has already travelled this path successfully, and discovered the TRUTH about oneself.

Such guidance is available to a seeker either occasionally from a living teacher or always from the living teachings of by-gone teachers, such as the Upanishads. Therefore, Lord यम urges the seeker

प्राप्य वरान् निबोधत –

निबोधत – Learn the path of spiritual life. Learn how to uplift yourself from

अज्ञान निद्रा – slumber of spiritual ignorance

प्राप्य वरान्, श्रेष्ठ आचार्यान् – approaching properly, with श्रद्धा and भक्ति the great teachers of spiritual knowledge.

One who is sleeping or dreaming cannot be awakened by oneself. Therefore, one needs somebody else who is awake to wake up the one who is sleeping or dreaming. That is why there is a need for one to seek external help from an आचार्य – a qualified teacher in one’s spiritual progress.

As for Nachiketa, there is no problem, because he is already getting the help of a great teacher – Lord यम, who is Himself a great ब्रह्मविद्याचार्य. As for people like us, we are free to choose the help of any one who may be able to help, but we must always remember that all help from external teachers is meant only to awaken oneself to the supreme teacher already within every one of us, namely, one’s own pure consciousness – The परमेश्वर already within oneself.

Living at this age, we are particularly fortunate. By reading the भगवत् गीता in its entirety again and again, with श्रद्धा and भक्ति, one gets all the help one needs to gain आत्मज्ञानं – Self Knowledge. Ultimately however, आत्मदर्शनं – recognition of the true nature of oneself has to take place by one’s own self only. As the Upanishad said earlier, to gain आत्म दर्शनं, one needs अतिसूक्ष्म बुद्धि – a बुद्धि cultivated and sharp enough to tread and cross the difficult path leading to the Destination आत्मा “I” within oneself.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

About that ज्ञान मार्ग – the path of Wisdom leading to आत्मा “I” within, Lord यम says:

क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता दुरत्यया ।
दुर्गं पथस्तत् कवयो वदन्ति ॥

दुर्गं पथस्तत्

तत् पथः - That ज्ञान मार्ग, that path leading to आत्मदर्शनं – that path leading to the destination आत्मा “I”

दुर्गं - is very difficult to tread

दुरत्यया - is very difficult to cross, because it is like

क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता - it is like walking on the sharp edge of a razor kept sharpened further and further (निशिता)

कवयो वदन्ति - so say the wise ones who have successfully travelled that path.

That means the ज्ञान मार्ग – the path leading to आत्मदर्शनं by one’s बुद्धि is not an easy one to tread and to cross, because both the आत्मवस्तु – the destination to be reached, and the instrument that is needed to reach that destination, namely the सूक्ष्म बुद्धि, are of the utmost subtlety.

The सूक्ष्म बुद्धि, can be gained only through proper sense of values, the highest level of self-discipline, dedicated cultivation of पूर्ण ज्ञानं – both objective knowledge and Upanishad knowledge, and continued श्रवणं, मननं, निदिध्यासनं, श्रद्धा, भक्ति, ध्यान योग and त्याग संन्यास बुद्धि.

In the next verse, Lord यम points out how extremely subtle the आत्मा is:

अशब्दं अस्पर्शं अरूपं अव्ययं, तथा अरसं नित्यं अगन्धवत् च यत् ।
अनादि-अनन्तं महत् परं ध्रुवं, निचाय्य तत् मृत्यु मुखात् प्रमुच्यते ॥

3 - 15

The subtlety of आत्मवस्तु आत्मा “I” is निरतिशयं – beyond any comparison. How can one measure the utmost subtlety of आत्मा “I”? By merging, by absorbing, by resolving the गुण, the quality of an effect into that of its cause, the subtlety, the purity, the immensity, the pervasiveness of the cause are increased. That is understandable knowledge.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

For example, with reference to the five great primordial elements – the पञ्चमहाभूताः, the Upanishad says:

From आकाश (space) came वायु air. From वायु (air) came अग्नि (fire). From अग्नि (fire) came आपः (water), and from आपः (water) came पृथिवी (earth). In this sequence of creation, there is a progressive decrease in subtlety, purity, immensity and pervasiveness, as can be seen from their inherent qualities (गुणः). The qualities of these five great elements are respectively शब्द (sound), स्पर्श (touch), रूप (form), रस (taste), and गन्ध (smell).

The earth has all the five qualities, and hence, it is the least subtle among the five elements. The water has only the first four qualities, and hence it is more subtle than earth. The fire has only the first three qualities and hence it is even more subtle than water. The air has only the first two qualities, and hence it is even more subtle than fire. The space has only the first quality, and hence it is the most subtle, the most pure, the most immense, and the most pervasive among the five great primordial elements (the पञ्चमहाभूताः).

If there is something that is even more subtle, more pure, more immense, more pervasive than आकाश – The space, that something must be free from all the five qualities, and that is the case with respect to the आत्मवस्तु – आत्मा “I”. Indicating the subtlety of the आत्मा “I”, the Upanishad says:

अशब्दं अस्पर्शं अरूपं अरसं अगन्धवत् च The nature of आत्मा is:

अशब्दं – That which does not have sound as quality

अस्पर्शं – That which does not have touch as quality

अरूपं – That which does not have Form as quality

अरसं – That which does not have taste as quality

अगन्धवत् च – That which does not have smell as a quality

And yet, it is only because of आत्मा “I” that all these qualities are lighted up so that they can be experienced by one’s sense organs, and their knowledge can be gained by one’s बुद्धि. Thus आत्म चैतन्यं – the pure consciousness, the pure awareness – आत्मा “I” is the basis for the recognition of all गुणः, all qualities, without Itself being any of them.



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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

We must recall here what we have already heard in केनोपनिषत् (1 – 2)

श्रोत्रस्य श्रोत्रं मनसो मनो यत्
वाचो ह वाचं स उ प्राणस्य प्राणः ।
चक्षुषश्चक्षुः अतिमुच्यधीराः
प्रेत्य अस्माल्लोकात् अमृता भवन्ति ॥

The Supreme Being – the आत्मा “I” is not an ear, is not a mind, is not an organ of speech, is not प्राण, is not an eye, is not an इन्द्रिय of any kind. At the same time, That is all ears, all minds, all प्राणा s, all eyes, and indeed, all इन्द्रियs in ONE. That is the ONE source from which all इन्द्रियs derive their powers to function as they do. That इन्द्रिय of all इन्द्रियs is not an object possessed by the Supreme Being, That is Supreme Being Itself. That Supreme Being is Itself the subject आत्मा “I”.

Similarly, here, the आत्मवस्तु The आत्मा “I” is all गुणs in ONE – without Itself being any of गुणs themselves. As Sri Krishna says:

सर्वेन्द्रियगुणाभासं सर्वेन्द्रिय विवर्जितं ।
असक्तं सर्वभृच्चैव निर्गुणं गुणभोक्तृ च ॥ (G 13 – 14)

सर्वेन्द्रियगुणाभासं सर्वेन्द्रिय विवर्जितं – Without any इन्द्रिय whatsoever, That आत्मा “I” shines through all the इन्द्रियाs and all their गुणs in all beings in this creation
असक्तं सर्वभृच्चैव – That आत्मा “I”, while remaining uninvolved, unbound and independent, sustains every being in this creation; and
निर्गुणं गुणभोक्तृ च – That आत्मा “I”, while having no qualities or attributes, indwells, permeates, envelopes and sustains all qualities and all attributes in all beings in this creation.

Such is the nature of the आत्मवस्तु आत्मा “I”.

Further, the nature of आत्मा “I” is अव्ययं, नित्यं, अनादि-अनन्तं, महत् परं, ध्रुवं

अव्ययं – means न व्येति = न क्षीयते. आत्मा “I” does not decay, diminish or change in any way, and therefore,

नित्यं – It is Eternal



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

अनादि and अनन्तं – आत्मा is beginningless and endless. आत्मा has no cause, and it is not the direct cause for any effect either. There being no cause for ब्रह्मन्, आत्मा “I”, it cannot be resolved in something else. One cannot resolve Awareness anywhere, or in anything. आत्मा “I” is where everything is resolved and आत्मवस्तु itself cannot be resolved in anything. Similarly, for the आत्मवस्तु, there is no end anywhere, which means that for the आत्मवस्तु there is no effect.

We must understand this clearly – आत्मा “I” has neither cause nor effect. This entire creation is indeed an effect, but immediate cause for this effect is माया, constituted of माया गुणs, मायां तु प्रकृतिं विध्यात् – The nature of this creation is only माया.

महतः परं

महत् is हिरण्यगर्भ, which is समष्टि बुद्धि – the totality of all बुद्धिs in this creation. Therefore, महतः परं means

आत्मा “I” transcends हिरण्यगर्भ.

आत्मा “I” exists as शुद्ध चैतन्यं – Pure consciousness, Pure Awareness.

आत्मा “I” is always पूर्णः – All inclusive. It is called साक्षि स्वरूपं – as Witness, only with reference to something that is seen as an object. With reference to anything that is seen, आत्मा “I” is the Seer (क्षेत्रज्ञः)

ध्रुवं – आत्मा “I” is Absolute Eternity, not bound by time - कूटस्थः

Thus, the nature of आत्मा “I” is अशब्दं, अस्पर्शं, अरूपं, अरसं, अगन्धवत् च, अव्ययं, नित्यं, अनादि-अनन्तं, महतः परं, ध्रुवं – It is that आत्मा one discovers in oneself, by oneself, as oneself, reaching the final step of अध्यात्म योग.

निचाय्य तत् मृत्यु मुखात् प्रमुच्यते

तत् निचाय्य – Recognizing That आत्मा “I” in oneself, by oneself, as oneself,

मृत्यु मुखात् प्रमुच्यते – one is released from the jaws of death, which means one is released from अविद्या काम कर्म लक्षणs – all manifestations and consequences of self-ignorance, desires and actions.

So saying, Lord यम concludes his Discourse in this section of the Upanishad. As we may recall, it is कठ महर्षि who is presenting this Upanishad to his disciples in यजुर



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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

चेद्, long after the event had taken place. Obviously, this Upanishad is being presented in two sessions. The first session is now over.

It is usual practice in such presentations to conclude the session with a फल श्रुति eulogizing the benefits one derives by teaching or listening to such discussions. The following two verses constitute the फल श्रुति for what has been covered thus far in this Upanishad.

नाचिकेतं उपाख्यानं मृत्युं प्रोक्तं सनातनं ।

उक्त्वा श्रुत्वा च मेधावी ब्रह्मलोके महीयते ॥

3 – 16

Any wise person who recites or listens to this discourse on this ancient knowledge as spoken by Lord यम to Nachiketa, that person

ब्रह्मलोके महीयते – that person experiences the immense joy of being in the company of the highest within oneself.

य इमं परमं गुह्यं, श्रावयेत् ब्रह्मसंसदि ।

प्रयतः श्राद्धकाले वा तत्, आनन्त्याय कल्पते ॥

तत् आनन्त्याय कल्पत इति ।

3 – 17

Any person who, with a clean body and mind, with श्रद्धा and devotion, reads and makes others listen to this sacred Upanishad, either in the assembly of people who appreciate ब्रह्मविद्या knowledge, or at the time of श्राद्ध ceremonies, which means annual ceremonies for the immediate past ancestor, that person makes oneself fit for gaining समस्त मङ्गलं ईश्वर कटाक्षं - all divine blessings and happiness. Again, that person makes oneself fit for gaining divine blessings and happiness. The repetition here is to indicate the conclusion of this session.

Thus ends section 3 of कठोपनिषत्. There are still three more sections in this Upanishad. We will start with section 4 next time.