



कठोपनिषत्
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- हन्त ते इदं प्रवक्ष्यामि, गुह्यं ब्रह्म सनातनं ।
यथा च मरणं प्राप्य, आत्मा भवति गौतम ॥ 5-6

हन्त - In a conversational style, हन्त simply means - Well, now again.

ते इदं प्रवक्ष्यामि - I will explain this to you. Let me tell this to you again. "This" means what?

इदं (येद्यं) ब्रह्म - About ब्रह्मन्, which is to be known, which is to be discovered by oneself. I have been talking to you about ब्रह्मन् all along; now I wish to talk to you about ब्रह्मन् again, because it is important to know about ब्रह्मन्, to discover ब्रह्मन्, to recognize ब्रह्मन्, in yourself by yourself - for these reasons.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

सनातनं – That ब्रह्मन् is Eternal, Ever-present, in every self; in spite of that fact,

गुह्यं – The knowledge of ब्रह्मन्, ब्रह्मज्ञानं remains a great secret until one discovers ब्रह्मन् by oneself.

The Eternal ब्रह्मन् being the very nature of oneself, is not available for objectification by any means of knowledge. Even when pointed out by the words of the Upanishads, ब्रह्मन् is not easily comprehended, because the sense organs and the mind are naturally projected outward, towards the world outside of oneself, and not inward, towards the world inside of oneself. Consequently, the बुद्धि is never let to recognize the true nature of oneself – The Self “I”.

Gaining ब्रह्मज्ञानं is extremely valuable, because knowledge of ब्रह्मन् – Discovery of ब्रह्मन् already within oneself, by oneself, as oneself Itself, brings about संसार उपरम, which means the resolution of the mystery of this entire world of changes.

On recognizing one’s identity with ब्रह्मन्, one’s mistaken notion about this entire world of ever present changes disappears, just like the mistaken vision of snake disappears on gaining the true vision of the rope.

“That I am a संसारि – that I am caught up in this world of unpredictable changes”, that notion itself disappears on gaining ब्रह्मज्ञानं. That is why it is important for one to gain ब्रह्मज्ञानं. That is why I am talking about ब्रह्मन् again to you, says Lord यम by his words: ते इदं (वेद्यं) ब्रह्म प्रवक्ष्यामि – Further, by not knowing the Nature of ब्रह्मन्, by not being able to recognize one’s identity with ब्रह्मन्

मरणं प्राप्य – on meeting with death

यथा आत्मा भवति – what happens to the जीवात्मा, what happens to the सूक्ष्म शरीर – the subtle body on leaving the gross physical body, what happens when the body dies

प्रवक्ष्यामि च – About that also, I will tell you.

गौतम (श्रुणु) – O! Nachiketa, please listen

As we may recall, by his choice for his third वर (the 3rd Boon from Lord यम, Nachiketa wanted to know whether a person survives bodily death. Recalling here Nachiketa’s words (1-20)

येयं प्रेते विचिकित्स्या मनुष्ये अस्तीत्यके नायमस्तीति चैके ।

एतत् विद्यां अनुशिष्टः त्वयाऽहं वराणां एषः वरस्त्वृतीयः ॥

1-20



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

“When a person dies, there is this doubt. Some say the person exists and some others say the person does not exist. The truth about this matter is what I want to know, being taught by You, this is the 3rd Boon I seek”, so said Nachiketa.

Lord यम answers that request from Nachiketa briefly and precisely in the next verse.

योनिं अन्ये प्रपद्यन्ते शरीरत्वाय देहिनः ।

स्थाणुं अन्ये अनुसंयन्ति, यथा कर्म यथा श्रुतम् ॥ 5-7

देहिनः – Those who identify themselves with their physical bodies, with their body- mind-intellect complex assemblies, when they die

अन्ये योनिं प्रपद्यन्ते – their subtle bodies, their सूक्ष्म शरीर enter into the wombs of others in the form of seeds. What for?

शरीरत्वाय – only to be born again, each time with a new physical body.

The अन्ये योनिं – the other womb that a subtle body enters into, may be that of any other जीव – any other living being in this creation, including

स्थाणुं अन्ये अनुसंयन्ति (अनुगच्छन्ति) – the other womb a सूक्ष्म शरीर enters into may include also that of an immovable जीव such as a tree for example.

Now, what is the basis for such transmigration?

यथा कर्म यथा श्रुतं – each in accordance with one’s own past कर्म and one’s own cultivated levels of knowledge awareness and mental disposition. This is a famous Vedantic Declaration which essentially means “one can never escape the consequences of one’s past कर्मs, cultivated thought lives”. यथा कर्म means each in accordance with one’s own कर्म. कर्म here is कर्म फल – the fruit of one’s कर्मs – the result of one’s actions in life.

The type of उपाधि – the body vehicle one gets in each जन्म – in each birth, is determined by one’s own कर्मs in one’s previous lives. Whatever one does now, in one’s present life, is accounted for in one or more of one’s future lives. That does not mean that what I do in my present life will necessarily decide my immediate next life. I may have to go through a number of lives before the results of all my actions in my present life fructify for immediate manifestation. The nature of जन्म – birth and life, being what it is, all कर्म फलs – all पुण्य, पाप cannot be exhausted in any one given embodiment.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

The कर्म and their कर्म फलs are so varied and self-multiplying, that many physical forms and circumstances of life are generally needed for their manifestation and total exhaustion. The countless varieties of कर्मs and कर्म फलs account for the countless varieties of उपाधिs – forms, names, circumstances and experiences found in this creation at any given time.

The fact that one is a human being in this जन्म – in this birth, does not necessarily assure that one will be a human being in one's next जन्म also – in one's next birth also. In one's next जन्म one will have an उपाधि – form, name, circumstances and experiences, which is uniquely suited to one's needs in one's particular stage of spiritual evolution – That is what is indicated by the words

योनिं अन्ये प्रपद्यन्ते शरीरत्वाय देहिनः यथा कर्म यथा श्रुतं ॥

यथा श्रुतं literally means “each in accordance with what one has heard, what one has understood”, which means, what one had earned through one's education, knowledge, levels of awareness, and unique mental disposition. And that is the totality of one's thought-life cultivated throughout one's previous lives. Every action results in a change in the ratio of the forces operating on one's daily life, not only in the world outside of oneself, but also in the world inside of oneself.

Consequently, every action is an educational and character forming force. Such force may be wholesome or unwholesome, depending upon श्रुतं – one's totality of knowledge and level of mental maturity. It is wholesome if it helps in the manifestation of the Infinite and the Immortal Self behind the finite and mortal dimension of human personality. It is unwholesome if it only thickens the veil that hides the Infinite and the Immortal Self within oneself.

The human body is a क्षेत्र – the field in which one sows the seeds of one's desires and reaps the harvest of one's fruits. The harvest is in accordance with the nature and quality of the seed sown, and the subsequent care bestowed on its results. Such sowing and harvesting together constitute the never ending chain of cause and effect – and that is the chain of संसार by which one is bound to this ever changing world.

To gain release from the bondage of that chain of संसार is indeed the overriding goal of life for every human being, and it is here that ब्रह्मविद्या, भगवत् गीता and The Upanishads, come into the picture in one's every day life.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

Lord यम now returns to the Topic of ब्रह्मन्, the knowledge about which remains hidden as a secret गुह्यं for most people. In the next verse, Lord यम points out that there is really nothing secret about ब्रह्मन्. One can easily recognize ब्रह्मन् with some reflection on what one has seen in one's dream state of existence. Lord यम says:

य एष सुप्तेषु जागर्ति कामं कामं पुरुषो निर्ममाणः
तदेव शुक्रं, तत् ब्रह्म, तदेव अमृतं उच्यते ।
तस्मिन् लोकाः श्रिताः सर्वे, तद् नात्येति कश्चन ।
एतत् वै तत् ॥

5-8

सुप्तेषु - In one's dream state of existence, while one is still conscious, one's normal sense perceptions are totally resolved, which means one's body remains inactive, and one is totally unaware of one's surroundings, and one is experiencing some dream events in which,

कामं कामं निर्ममाणः - one goes on creating various कामविषयाः - various objects of desire and experiences;

यः पुरुषः जागर्ति - The Self, who is ever awake witnessing all these various dream events being experienced by the dreamer;

एषः पुरुषः - That SELF

तदेव शुक्रं - That is ब्रह्मन्

तदेव अमृतं उच्यते - That ever awake Pure Consciousness is called The Immortal Self - The Self I.

Let us understand the illustration here. I am fast asleep and dreaming, which means I am still a conscious person. I am unmoving, totally unaware of my surroundings, and I am enjoying so many things going on in my dream-world, of which I am conscious. In my dream, while still being in my bed, without any movement on my part, I travel in space, go to the moon, meet many people there, do many things, and finally return back safely. Now, I wake up from my dream, and I recall what had happened. I realize

- ✓ The moon in my dream was really Myself,
- ✓ The one who traveled to the moon was really Myself;
- ✓ The space - vehicle and the space itself were all really Myself.
- ✓ The driver of the space vehicle was really Myself,
- ✓ All the different people I met on moon, and all the objects I saw on the moon were all really Myself.
- ✓ The one who finally landed on earth safely was also really Myself.



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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

Now, who is that “Myself”? That is The Self “I” – The आत्मा – That is indeed ब्रह्मन्. So says, Lord यम.

The Message here is that ब्रह्मन् is ONE, Pure Consciousness, Ever-Awake and All-inclusive.

तस्मिन् सर्वे लोकाः श्रिताः – In that ब्रह्मन् – Pure consciousness exist all the लोकाः – all the worlds, and all the events and all the experiences, all being supported by That ब्रह्मन् only. Everything is in ब्रह्मन् and nothing stands apart from ब्रह्मन्. Certainly तत् न अत्येति कश्चन – Nothing in this creation can transcend That ब्रह्मन् एतत् वै तत् – That is indeed The आत्मा – The Self “I” you asked about, says Lord यम

Having thus revealed ब्रह्मन् through a common easily understandable human experience, namely a simple reflection of one’s own dream state of existence, Lord यम again points out through some additional illustrations the Nature of आत्मा – The Self “I”, the Nature of ब्रह्मन् as the ONE behind the many, The Eternal behind the non-eternals and The Light of Pure Consciousness lighting up the entire universe.

The reason for Lord यम’s repeated resort to illustrations to unfold the Nature of आत्मा is because Lord यम appreciates the difficulties ordinarily experienced by the human mind and बुद्धि in recognizing the true nature of oneself, due to distractions and distortions of one’s own sense organs, mind and बुद्धि, caused by the effects of false values and false reasoning commonly entertained in the society.

Now returning to the topic of ONENES of आत्मा Lord यम says:

अग्निः यथैको भुवनं प्रविष्टः रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव ।
एकस्तथा सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बहिश्च ॥ 5-9

Lord यम uses very simple looking words to communicate very profound knowledge. That is the distinguishing characteristic of this Upanishad. Illustrating the Nature of आत्मा Lord यम says

अग्निः एकः

अग्नि – Fire, The Nature of Fire is ONE

अग्निः प्रकाश स्वरूपः – Effulgence is the very nature of अग्निः – the Fire



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

प्रकाशात्मा अग्निः एकः - The Fire whose SELF is Effulgence, is one and the same, wherever It is.

यथा एकः अग्निः भुवनं प्रविष्टः - अनुप्रविष्टः सन् - Just as That ONE प्रकाश स्वरूप अग्नि - The Effulgent Fire, भुवनं प्रविष्टः - having entered into this creation (from ब्रह्मन् through आकाश and वायु)

रूपं रूपं means भेद रूपेण - in different forms and names, because Fire abides in the Sun and the Stars, and also in all different looking potentially combustible materials in this creation, including one's own शरीर. Thus, The ONE Fire having entered into this creation abides in all the different forms and names of effulgent beings and combustible materials of different kinds.

प्रतिरूपः बभूव means प्रतिरूपवान् बभूव - That Fire, without undergoing any change in its nature, has become ONE of many forms. Therefore, यथा एकः अग्निः भुवनं प्रविष्टः रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव means, just as ONE प्रकाश स्वरूप अग्नि having entered into this creation (भुवनं) abides in all the different looking effulgent beings and also in all the potentially combustible materials of different kinds, and thus had become ONE Fire of many Forms, without itself undergoing any change in its nature;

तथा - similarly,

एकः सर्वभूत - अन्तरात्मा - The ONE अतिसूक्ष्म अन्तरात्मा - The ONE most subtle and hence all pervasive Innermost Self, The Self "I"

भुवनं प्रविष्टः रूपं रूपं - having entered into this creation, abiding in all the different looking forms and names in this creation

प्रतिरूपः बहिः च means प्रतिरूपवान् बभूव, बहिः च which means

That अतिसूक्ष्म अन्तरात्मा - The Innermost Self, The Self "I", without Itself undergoing any change whatsoever in Its Nature - has become ONE आत्मा OF Many Forms - बहिः च, including and transcending the form of the formless space outside of every form in this creation including the creation itself.

Just as the space exists in all objects in space, and at the same time, it exists transcending all objects in space, so does आत्मा exist in all objects in this creation and at the same time आत्मा transcends all objects in this creation, including the creation itself.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

Just as ONE प्रकाश रूप अग्नि, having entered into this creation abides in all the different looking effulgent beings and also in all the potentially combustible materials of different forms and names in this creation, and thus has become ONE Fire of many forms, without itself undergoing any change in its nature, similarly, the ONE अतिसूक्ष्म अन्तरात्मा – The ONE utmost subtle all-pervasive, Innermost Self – the Self “I”, having entered into this creation abides in all the different looking beings in this creation and thus, without itself undergoing any change whatsoever in Its Nature, has become ONE आत्मा of many forms, including and transcending the form of the formless space outside of every form in this creation, including the creation itself. That is the Nature of आत्मा – The Self “I”.

In the next verse, Lord यम repeats the same illustration with respect to वायु instead of अग्नि. The वायु here is प्राण वायु, प्राण स्वरूप वायु – The air in the form of प्राण – the vital air. Therefore the verse says:

वायु : यथैको भुवनं प्रविष्ट : रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव ।
एकस्तथा सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बीश्व ॥

5-10

As we may note, this verse is exactly the same as the previous verse, except the word अग्नि is replaced by the word वायु – The Air. The वायु here is प्राण स्वरूप आत्मा – the vital air in the form of प्राण in every जीव – living being.

Air, in the form of प्राण in all the जीवs – in all the living beings, having entered into the body of the जीवs – assumes different forms in keeping with the forms of the bodies involved, because प्राण is all over the physical body. Similarly, the सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा – the same ONE Innermost SELF – The Self “I” exists in all the different जीवs, transcending all the individual forms of the जीवs themselves.

Such is the Nature of आत्मा – The Self “I”. So says Lord यम. We will continue next time.