



कठोपनिषत्
Katopanishad
Section 1
Volume 3

वैश्वानरः प्रविशति अतिथिः ब्राह्मणो गृहान् । तस्यैतां शान्तिं कुर्वन्ति हर वैवस्वतोदकम् ॥	1 - 7
आशा प्रतीक्षे संगतं सृनुतां च इष्टापूरते फुत्र पशूँश्च सर्वान् । एतत् वृङ्क्ते पुरुषस्य अल्पमेधसः यस्य अनश्नन् वसति ब्राह्मणो गृहे ॥	1 - 8
तिस्त्रो रात्रीः यत् अवात्सीः गृहे मे अनश्नन् ब्रह्मन् अतिथिः नमस्यः । नमस्तेऽस्तु ब्रह्मन् स्वस्ति मे अस्तु तस्मात् प्रति त्रीन् वरान् वृणीष्व ॥	1 - 9
शान्तसंकल्पः सुमनाः यथा स्यात् वीतमन्युः गौतमो माऽभि मृत्यो । त्वत् प्रसृष्टं मा अभिवदेत् प्रतीतः एतत् त्रयाणां प्रथमं वरं वृणे ॥	1 - 10
यथा पुरस्ताद् भविता प्रतीतः औद्दालकिः आरुणिः मत् प्रसृष्टः । सुखं रात्रीः शयिता वीतमन्युः त्वां ददृशिवान् मृत्यु मुखात् प्रमुक्तं ॥	1 - 11

As we saw last time, having heard the words of Nachiketa, and on his own further reflection, Nachiketa's father decided to keep the honour of his own words at the **यज्ञ कर्म**, and accordingly sent Nachiketa to the abode of Lord **यम**. Nachiketa reached the abode of Lord **यम**. The Upanishad does not say where Lord **यम**'s house was, and how Nachiketa reached **यम**'s house. Therefore, we need not dwell on such details. The Upanishad here is concerned only with what happened to Nachiketa at **यम**'s house.

At the time Nachiketa reached **यम**'s house, Lord **यम** was not at home. Therefore, Nachiketa had to wait there until Lord **यम** returned after three days. During these three days, Nachiketa chose to live without eating any food, because he felt that since he had already been given to Lord **यम**, it would be improper for him to eat any food without Lord **यम** 's permission.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

When Lord यम returned home, the people in the यम household told Lord यम about the guest Nachiketa, who had been waiting for him for the past three days, eating no food, and they urged Lord यम to attend to Nachiketa immediately.

The Upanishad now says exactly what the people in यम's household advised Lord यम. They told Lord यम

वैश्वानरः प्रविशति अतिथिः ब्राह्मणो गृहान् ।
तस्यैतां शान्तिं कुर्वन्ति हर वैवस्यतोदकम् ॥

1 - 7

वैश्वानरः - परमेश्वर manifested as अग्नि देवता - Lord Fire is called वैश्वानरः. Fire is also both Heat and Light. As heat, fire serves to cook the food to make it fit for eating, and the same fire, as the five प्राणाs, serves to digest and assimilate the food eaten by every being. The same fire can also burn and destroy the entire household if not handled properly. As light, fire makes it possible for one to gain, and also spread knowledge, and enlightenment. Such are the powers of अग्नि देवता called वैश्वानर.

अतिथिः - Nachiketa is an अतिथि - a guest, a temporary visitor to यम 's household, because Nachiketa's human life time is not yet over, and hence, he cannot normally be admitted to the abode of death. Having somehow come to Lord यम, Nachiketa can be welcomed properly only as a guest.

ब्राह्मणः - Nachiketa is also a ब्राह्मण both by गुण and कर्म

By virtue of his parentage (which means पूर्व कर्म संस्काराs, स्वभाव गुणाs, born of one's own कर्म s in one's past lives) and also, by virtue of his natural commitment to ब्रह्म ज्ञानं and लोक संग्रहं - welfare of the world in his present life, Nachiketa is a ब्राह्मण in the true sense of the word, which makes Nachiketa a highly respected guest to Lord यम's household at this time. Therefore the Upanishad says

वैश्वानरः प्रविशति अतिथिः ब्राह्मणो गृहान् - This is a statement of general Vedic knowledge which says

वैश्वानरः (इव) ब्राह्मणः अतिथिः गृहान् प्रविशति - Like अग्नि देवता - Lord Fire, a ब्राह्मण guest enters into households. Therefore the knowledgeable householders

तस्य एतां शान्तिं कुर्वन्ति - pacify him, make his visit auspicious

एतां शान्तिं - with this kind of peace offering. The Upanishad refers to that शान्ति as



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एतां शान्तिं - the षकार indicates that the kind of शान्ति appropriate for the guest is proper अतिथि पूजा - a worshipful way of receiving a ब्राह्मण guest

Advising Lord यम to do such अतिथि पूजा to Nachiketa, the people in the household of यम told Lord यम

वैवस्वत, उदकं हर - O! Lord यम, take water (उदकं) with you to do the अतिथि पूजा to Nachiketa.

Here उदकं - water, stands for everything necessary to attend to the immediate needs of Nachiketa, which means make Nachiketa feel welcome and comfortable, give him a proper seat to sit, water to drink, food to eat, etc. All this is part of अतिथि पूजा.

Therefore, the advice given to Lord यम is:

A ब्राह्मण guest has come to our house. He has not eaten for the past three days. His coming to our house is like अग्नि देवता - Lord अग्नि itself, entering into our house.

Therefore, please honour him with अतिथि पूजा, attend to all his immediate needs, and do everything possible to make his visit to our house auspicious. That is the right thing to do. If you neglect to do the right thing, it is a wrong action, which will certainly have many undesirable consequences because

आशा- प्रतीक्षे संगतं सूनृतां च इष्टापूर्ये फुत्रपशूश्च सर्वान् ।

एतत् वृद्धे पुरुषस्य अल्पमेधसः यस्य अनश्नन् वसति ब्राह्मणो गृहे ॥

1 - 8

This verse is again general Vedic knowledge, which is immediately relevant to the particular context here. The verse says:

यस्य गृहे, ब्राह्मणः अनश्नन् वसति - In whose house a ब्राह्मण guest stays without eating (तस्य) अल्पमेधसः पुरुषस्य - of that person, whose knowledge of धर्म and अधर्म is indeed poor, whose knowledge of what is proper and what is improper is indeed अल्पं - trivial, of that person of very limited knowledge

सर्वान् एतत् वृद्धे - all this is degraded or destroyed.

सर्वान् एतत् - "all this" means what? "All this" includes all the following

आशा प्रतीक्षे - आशा and प्रतीक्षा hopes and expectations. आशा means hopes, hopes for the gain of unknown objects such as heaven and heavenly enjoyments and प्रतीक्षा means expectations for the gain of known objects such as wealth and worldly enjoyments of various kinds, and



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संगतौ - संगतं means all merits one has already acquired by सत् सङ्ग, by associations with good people. With the addition of ँ कार, संगतौ, includes also merits gained through

ईश्वर ध्यानं, ईश्वर भजनं - meditations, prayers, etc. and also

सृनुतां च - whatever intellectual upliftments one has already gained by listening to learned discourses such as discourses on Vedas, Upanishads, etc. and also

इष्टापूर्ते - means इष्टं च पूर्तं च - whatever results one has already gained through the proper performance of इष्ट-कर्मs - Vedic rituals - यज्ञ कर्मs and also पूर्त कर्मs, proper performance of charitable activities for the general welfare of the community or society as a whole, all such results as well as

पुत्र पशू च - the word पुत्र meaning son, stands for all children in the family and the word पशु stands for wealth of all kinds. With ँ कार, the word पशू indicates that all such wealth has been earned through proper and legitimate means. Therefore

पुत्र पशू च means all children and all the well-earned wealth in the family

सर्वान् एतत् वृद्धे - all this is degraded or destroyed

All hopes and expectations, all merits already gained by association with good people, by meditations and prayers, all gains already made by listening to learned discourses, the पुण्य already gained through properly performed यज्ञ कर्मs and charitable deeds, all the children and wealth earned in the family - all this is degraded or destroyed for a person in whose house a ब्राह्मण guest is left to stay without food. This is Vedic knowledge.

We must understand the degradation and destruction indicated in the above verse is not brought about by the ब्राह्मण. It is the natural result of the act of obvious negligence, disrespect or disregard shown to the ब्राह्मण, and hence to the ब्रह्म विद्या itself, by a person of अल्पमेध - poor knowledge of धर्म - proper behaviour.

That being Vedic knowledge, Lord यम was advised to do अतिथि पूजा for Nachiketa and attend to all his immediate needs in accordance with धर्म to ward off any ill-effects in the context of what happened.



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Accordingly, Lord यम approached Nachiketa and offered him the traditional reception with अतिथि पूजा in the proper manner. After making sure that Nachiketa was fully at ease with himself, Lord यम said this to Nachiketa

तिस्त्रो रात्रीः यत् अवात्सीः गृहे मे अनश्नन् ब्रह्मन् अतिथिः नमस्यः ।
नमस्तेऽस्तु ब्रह्मन् स्वस्ति मे अस्तु तस्मात् प्रति त्रीन् वरान् वृणीष्व ॥

1 - 9

तिस्त्रः रात्रीः - For three nights

यत् अवात्सीः मे गृहे (मम गृहे) अनश्नन् - since you have lived in my house without eating, and also (अवात्सी = वसितवान् असि)

यत् ब्रह्मन् अतिथिः नमस्यः - since you are a ब्राह्मण guest, entitled to veneration, which means fit for worship

नमः ते अस्तु ब्रह्मन् - O! ब्राह्मण, नमः ते अस्तु - I do नमस्कार् to you. I seek your blessing.

ब्रह्मन्, स्वस्ति मे अस्तु - भद्रं मे अस्तु - O! ब्राह्मण may your visit to my house be auspicious. I realize that your spending 3 nights in my house without eating is a दोष - is a blemish to my household, which happened because I was away. Therefore

नमः ते अस्तु ब्रह्मन्, स्वस्ति मे अस्तु - O! ब्राह्मण, I seek your blessings, and by your blessings, let me be released from all blemishes to my household. May your visit to my household be auspicious.

Even though by your very blessings, I will be released from all दोष - from the lapse of धर्म that happened in my household, still I wish to make amends and compensate for the दोष.

तस्मात्, प्रति, त्रीन् वरान् वृणीष्व - Therefore I give you three वरा s, three boons, प्रति one for each night that you spent in my household without taking any food. वृणीष्व - Please ask me for any three boons you wish, according to your own desires.

Since you have lived in my house for three nights without taking any food, and since you are a ब्राह्मण guest fit to be worshipped, O! ब्राह्मण - I do नमस्कार् to you. I seek your blessings. May your visit to my household be auspicious. I realize that your spending three nights in my household without eating is a दोष, a lapse of धर्म. That happened in my house because I was away. O! ब्राह्मण, I seek your blessings for the release of all



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दोष to my household on this account. Even though by your very blessings, I will be naturally released from the lapse of धर्म that happened in my household, I wish to make amends for the दोष. Therefore, I give you three चरस - three boons, one for each night that you spent in my house without taking any food. Please ask me any three boons you wish according to your own desires.

So said Lord यम to the young boy Nachiketa, and thus begins the dialogue between Lord यम and Nachiketa which constitutes this Upanishad.

Nachiketa is obviously happy at the turn of events. He finds that he is only a guest in the house of Lord यम, which means that he has already escaped the jaws of death and would soon be able to return home to his father. In addition, he got three boons from Lord यम which he can use as he likes. In the manner in which he uses these boons we will also see the extraordinary maturity of Nachiketa. Accepting the offer of Lord यम, Nachiketa responded to Lord यम by saying:

शान्त संकल्पः सुमनाः यथा स्यात् वीतमन्युः गौतमो माऽभि मृत्यो ।
त्वत् प्रसृष्टं मा अभिवदेत् प्रतीतः एतत् त्रयाणां प्रथमं चरं वृणे ॥

1 - 10

मृत्यो

हे मृत्यो - O! Lord of Death, O! Lord यम

गौतमः - My father गौतम. In this Upanishad Nachiketa's father is referred to by four different names वाजश्रवस, गौतम, औद्दालकि and आरुणि. Nachiketa says here

गौतमः यथा स्यात् - May my father गौतम be so that

शान्त संकल्पः - he is totally free from anxieties about myself, such as what will happen to me when I reach you, etc. and

सुमनाः means प्रीतमनाः - he is cheerful and happy as a fulfilled person, and also

वीतमन्युः मा अभि - meaning मां प्रति he is free from anger towards me.

त्वत् प्रसृष्टं - When I am released by you and am allowed to return home

मा (मां) अभिवदेत् - may my father welcome me and talk to me

प्रतीतः (सन्) - recognizing me that I am his son, which means, please let me go home, not as a ghost emerging from death, but in the same form as I came here, so that when



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I return home, my father may welcome me and talk to me, recognizing me, naturally as his son.

त्रयाणां - Of the three boons that you gave me

एतत् प्रथमं वरं वृणे - I ask for this, peace and happiness for my father, as the first boon.

Having said that, Nachiketa waited for Lord यम 's reply.

Granting the first boon that Nachiketa asked for, Lord यम replied

यथा पुरस्ताद् भविता प्रतीतः औद्दालकिः आरुणिः मत् प्रसृष्टः ।

सुखं रात्रीः शयिता वीतमन्युः त्वां ददृशिवान् मृत्यु मुखात् प्रमुक्तं ॥

1 - 11

मत् प्रसृष्टः means मया अनुग्रह संपन्नः सन् Being blessed by me

औद्दालकिः - The आरुणि - your father

त्वां ददृशिवान् means त्वां तत् दृशिवान् - दृष्टवान् सन् seeing you on your return, that

मृत्यु मुखात् प्रमुक्तं त्वां (दृष्टवान् सन्) तत् - seeing you on your return, that you have been released from the jaws of death, being blessed by me

यथा पुरस्तात् भविता (भविता - will become) your father will be full of affection for you as he was before. Your father will become शान्त संकल्पः - as you desire, also

प्रतीतः भविता - Your father will recognize you in the same form you left him to come here, just as you desire. Also

सुखं रात्रीः शयिता भविता - your father will sleep peacefully and happily for many nights.

He will live happily and peacefully for a long time. Again, by the ँकार शब्द added to the word सुखं Lord यम assures also that Nachiketa's father will live सुमनाः - happily and peacefully as a fulfilled person, fulfilled in the यज्ञ कर्म he did. Further, Lord यम assures Nachiketa

वीतमन्युः भविता - Your father will be totally free from any sense of anger towards you, again, just as you desire.

Thus responding positively to all of Nachiketa's wishes in the choice of his first वर, Lord यम blessed Nachiketa's father with शान्त संकल्पः, सुमनाः, वीतमन्युः and प्रतीतः - all that Nachiketa asked, for peace and happiness and fulfillment of his father.

Then Nachiketa proceeded to ask for his second boon, which we will see next time.