



कठोपनिषत्
Katopanishad
Section 1
Volume 4

स्वर्गे लोके न भयं किञ्चन अस्ति न तत्र त्वं न जरया बिभेति । उभे तीर्त्वा अशनायापिपासे शोकातिगो मोदते स्वर्ग लोके ॥	1 - 12
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Having gained the blessings of Lord यम, granting peace, happiness and a sense of fulfillment for his father through the first of the three चरs - three boons promised to him by Lord यम, Nachiketa now proceeds to ask for his second चर for which he seeks knowledge about a particular अग्नि – meaning, a particular Vedic Havan ritual - a यज्ञ कर्म doing which anyone can reach स्वर्ग.

Since many people in society want to go to heaven when they die, open knowledge about the Havan ritual capable of leading one to heaven - स्वर्ग, when one dies would be great boon to the society at large. In such a spirit of public service, Nachiketa asks Lord यम to teach him, in detail, how to perform that Havan कर्म, doing which anyone can reach स्वर्ग ultimately.

Seeking that knowledge as his choice for the second of the three चरs granted to him, Nachiketa tells Lord यम



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स्वर्गे लोके न भयं किञ्चन अस्ति न तत्र त्वं न जरया बिभेति ।
उभे तीर्त्या अशनायापिपासे शोकातिगो मोदते स्वर्ग लोके ॥ 1 - 12

स त्वं अग्निं स्वर्ग्यं अध्येषि मृत्यो प्रब्रूहि तं श्रद्धधानाय मह्यं ।
स्वर्गलोकाः अमृतत्वं भजन्ते एतत् द्वितीयेन वृणे वरेण ॥ 1 - 13

Nachiketa says

स्वर्गे लोके न भयं किञ्चन अस्ति

स्वर्गे लोके - in the world of heaven

भयं किञ्चन न अस्ति - there is no fear whatsoever. There is no fear about anything, such as fear of disease, etc.

न तत्र त्वं - तत्र त्वं न (असि) - O! Lord मृत्यु . You are not there, which means people in heaven need not be afraid of death. Further, unlike what happens in this mortal world
न जरया बिभेति - People in heaven are not frightened about old age. Moreover, there is no hunger or thirst in heaven. Therefore

उभे अशनाया-पिपासे तीर्त्या - Having crossed both अशनाय and पिपास - hunger and thirst, and also

शोकातिगः (सन्) - being beyond sorrow and distress of any kind being free from any kind of mental disturbances, unhappiness and anxieties, etc.

मोदते स्वर्ग लोके - one enjoys, one rejoices in स्वर्ग, in the world of heaven

In स्वर्ग, in the world of heaven, there is no fear of any kind, no fear of old age, no hunger, no thirst, no sorrow or distress of any kind, and no fear of death because you are not there. Therefore, in स्वर्ग - in heaven, life is one of pure joy for everybody. So have I heard about heaven. Therefore, Nachiketa continues in the next verse:

स त्वं अग्निं स्वर्ग्यं अध्येषि मृत्यो

मृत्यो - O! Lord मृत्यु, if there is such a heaven

सः त्वं - You being that, which means you being मृत्यु, you being what you are, you being the Lord of Death

अध्येषि - You certainly know, I am sure that you know

स्वर्ग्यं अग्निं - That exalted अग्नि, that exalted Vedic Havan ritual, capable of leading one to such heaven



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The ॐ कार शब्द for the अग्नि indicates that the Havan ritual that Nachiketa is talking about is not an ordinary one. It is not one of common knowledge, it is an exalted यज्ञ कर्म.

तं प्रब्रूहि - Here तं refers to अग्नि - That exalted यज्ञ कर्म. Therefore तं प्रब्रूहि means, please, unfold fully, in all details, तं - the means of performing that exalted यज्ञ कर्म - that exalted Havan कर्म.

श्रद्धधानाय मह्यं - to me who is full of श्रद्धा in gaining the knowledge of that हवन् कर्म by performing which

स्वर्गलोकाः अमृतत्वं भजन्ते - those who reach स्वर्ग - the dwellers in heaven, enjoy immortality

एतत् That अग्नि विज्ञानं -that knowledge about the technique together with the वेद मन्त्रा s associated with the technique of performing that exalted अग्नि - that exalted Havan कर्म, यज्ञ कर्म

द्वितीयेन चरेण वृणे - I seek through the second boon. I choose that knowledge for the second of the three boons, granted to me by you.

If such a स्वर्ग exists, you being the Lord of Death, I am sure that you know that exalted यज्ञ कर्म, that exalted Vedic ritual, capable of leading one to that स्वर्ग - Heaven. I have unqualified श्रद्धा in gaining the knowledge about that यज्ञ कर्म in full detail. Therefore, I request you to teach me, fully in all detail, the techniques, together with the associated वेद मन्त्रा s for the effective performance of that Vedic Havan capable of leading one to the joyful world of immortality in Heaven – in स्वर्ग. I seek that knowledge from you as the second of the three boons granted to me by you. So saying, Nachiketa is looking up to Lord यम to respond.

Before we go to Lord यम 's reply, we must note that in Nachiketa's notions about स्वर्ग, there are two popular misconceptions about life in स्वर्ग - life in heaven.

In the last verse, Nachiketa said:

स्वर्गलोकाः अमृतत्वं भजन्ते - The dwellers in Heaven enjoy अमृतत्वं Immortality

We must understand that such immortality is only relative immortality, relative to the length of human life time. It is not absolute immortality. Absolute immortality is only



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gained through ब्रह्म ज्ञानं - not through यज्ञ कर्म. Those who reach स्वर्ग लोक as the result of one's यज्ञ कर्म, they are always subject to return to मनुष्य लोक - the world of human beings, and start life all over again. Sri Krishna says that clearly in the following words

ते तं भुक्त्वा स्वर्ग लोकं विशालं क्षीणे पुण्ये मर्त्य लोकं विशन्ति ।

एवं त्रीयी धर्मं अनुप्रपन्नाः गतागतं कामकामा लभन्ते ॥ G 9 - 21

ते - Those people, those काम कामाs those who reach स्वर्ग by performing desire-prompted यज्ञ कर्म

तं विशालं स्वर्ग लोकं भुक्त्वा - after experiencing the wide variety of enjoyments available to them in स्वर्ग लोक

क्षीणे पुण्ये - on exhausting all their accumulated पुण्यs, in the pursuit of such heavenly enjoyments

मर्त्य लोकं विशन्ति - they have to re-enter the world of human beings to continue their life all over again

एवं त्रीयी धर्मं अनुप्रपन्नाः - In this manner, performing the rituals enjoined by the three Vedas, the Rig, Yajur and Sam Vedas, for gaining their various objects of desire

काम-कामाः गतागतं लभन्ते - the काम-कामा s those who are prompted to perform यज्ञ कर्मs by their never ending desires, gain only गतं and आगतं, going to स्वर्ग लोक and returning to मनुष्य लोक, again and again, which means that they continue to remain in संसार, caught in the wheel of कर्म and कर्म फल. They never gain मोक्ष - Absolute Immortality.

Again, in the earlier verse, Nachiketa said

न तत्र त्वं - O! Lord यम, you are not there in स्वर्ग लोक. This is not true. स्वर्ग लोक is also within the संसार, and the entire world of transient existence is within the jurisdiction of Lord यम, which means that Lord यम is there in स्वर्ग लोक as well.

The above clarifications are necessary in view of what we are going to read further in this Upanishad as we progress. Now we return to the Upanishad.

Responding to Nachiketa's request for that अग्नि विज्ञानं capable of leading one to स्वर्ग लोक as his second boon, Lord यम replies as follows:



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प्र ते ब्रवीमि तदु मे निबोध स्वर्ग्यं अग्निं नचिकेतः प्रजानन् ।
अनन्त लोकाप्तिं अथो प्रतिष्ठां विद्धि त्वं एतं निहितं गुहायाम् ॥

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नचिकेतः - O! Nachiketa

स्वर्ग्यं अग्निं प्रजानन् - I being the one who knows That अग्नि - that Vedic ritual - that यज्ञ कर्म for which the कर्म फल is स्वर्ग्यं , meaning स्वर्ग फल प्राप्ति - gaining the enjoyments of life in स्वर्ग, therefore

प्रते ब्रवीमि meaning ते प्रब्रवीमि - I will tell you clearly and fully what?

तत् उ - यत् त्वया प्रार्थितं तत् अग्नि-विज्ञानं - उ - precisely that अग्नि विज्ञानं requested by you

मे निबोध - Learn that अग्नि विज्ञानं by listening to my words with total attention. I being the one who knows that अग्नि - that Vedic ritual performing which, one can gain life in स्वर्ग

ते प्रब्रवीमि - I will tell you clearly and fully the exact अग्नि विज्ञानं requested by you

मे निबोध - learn that knowledge listening to my words attentively, so said Lord यम

Here the words ते प्रब्रवीमि and मे निबोध are appropriately those of an आचार्य - a teacher to शिष्य - a disciple. Up till now, Nachiketa was simply a guest. Now by seeking अग्नि विज्ञानं, knowledge of अग्नि ritual from Lord यम, Nachiketa has instantly become a शिष्य - a disciple, and Lord यम an आचार्य - the teacher. By the very nature of such a relationship, ते प्रब्रवीमि means "I will teach you" and मे निबोध means एकाग्रमनसः सन् श्रुणु-बुध्यस्य "Learn this knowledge by listening to my words with single-pointed attention. When you listen to my words, your mind should be totally absorbed in grasping my words, with no distraction whatsoever. Only then can you retain this knowledge, not otherwise". That is the meaning of निबोध here.

Having said that, Lord यम now prepares Nachiketa's mind and बुद्धि for the kind of knowledge he is going to teach. Lord यम says:

अनन्त लोकाप्तिं अथो प्रतिष्ठां

अनन्तलोकाप्तिं means स्वर्ग लोक फल प्राप्ति साधनं - I will teach you the knowledge which is the means for gaining the infinite varieties of स्वर्ग लोक फल - enjoyments



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available in स्वर्ग लोक. I will teach you the technique of performing That अग्नि ritual, the यज्ञ कर्म;

अथ means अपि, also प्रतिष्ठां meaning

आश्रयं जगतः विराट् रूपेण तं एतं अग्निं प्रतिष्ठां - I will teach you also the वेद मन्त्रs by the power of which, the entire जगत्, the entire universe is resolved into अग्नि देवता as विराट् - meaning समष्टि विश्व रूपं. The entire जगत् is invoked and installed in its all-inclusive विराट् form विश्वरूपं - समष्टि रूपं into अग्नि देवता through the power of मन्त्रा s, and then worshipping and seeking the blessings of that विराट् रूप अग्नि देवता in the Havan ritual for reaching स्वर्ग लोक. That is the यज्ञ कर्म here.

त्वं एतां अग्निं विद्धि - Please understand this knowledge of performing the Vedic Havan ritual you asked for from my teachings.

निहितं गुहायां अग्निं - This knowledge, this अग्नि विज्ञानं lies hidden in the बुद्धि. It abides only in the बुद्धि of men of knowledge and wisdom. It is not commonly available knowledge.

Thus, Lord यम committed himself to unfold this knowledge - this अग्नि विज्ञानं to नचिकेता as the second boon that he asked for. Now, the Upanishad says:

लोकादिं अग्निं तं उवाच तस्मै या इष्ट का यावतीः वा यथा वा ।

स चापि तत् प्रत्यवदत् यथोक्तं अथ अस्य मृत्युः पुनरेव आह तुष्टः ॥ 1 - 15

What Lord यम indicated in the last verse as प्रतिष्ठां अग्निं is referred here by the Upanishad as लोकादिं अग्निं. It is that Vedic Havan ritual in which all the लोकs, the entire जगत्, the entire Universe in its समष्टि रूपं - in its original, all-inclusive, undifferentiated form is invoked and installed (प्रतिष्ठां) into the अग्नि देवता in the Havan altar by वेद मन्त्रs. The Upanishad says

तं लोकादिं अग्निं तस्मै उवाच - As promised, Lord यम told Nachiketa all about that लोकादिं अग्निं - the Havan ritual, the knowledge for which he asked. Lord यम told Nachiketa all the details including all the Havan मन्त्राs involved in performing the Havan



कर्म he asked for, so says the Upanishad. The Upanishad does not say what the Havan मन्त्राः are, because that is not part of the Upanishad knowledge.

The Upanishad simply says that Lord यम told Nachiketa everything involved in the effective performance that अग्नि, that Havan कर्म that Nachiketa asked for, including the following details

या इष्टकाः – the nature, the kind, the quality, the size, the form etc. of the bricks needed for building the Havan alter

यावतीः वा – the number of such bricks needed

यथा वा - the entire details on the proper performance of the Havan कर्म, such as the वेद मन्त्राः to be used for purifying those bricks before use, and then sanctifying each brick with its own specific वेद मन्त्रs, then arranging them in proper order to serve as the Havan alter, the manner of piling up the sacrificial wood, the manner of producing the fire, the manner of lighting up the fire in the alter, then the oblation मन्त्रs, etc. All these details Lord यम told Nachiketa clearly and completely.

Thereby the Upanishad points out that Lord यम gave Nachiketa the अग्नि विज्ञानं - the knowledge of the particular Havan ritual he asked for, in its entirety, as his second boon. As we may recall, earlier, in responding positively to Nachiketa's request for this अग्नि विज्ञानं – Havan knowledge, Lord यम told Nachiketa:

ते प्रब्रवीमि – yes, I will teach you

मे निबोध – learn this knowledge by listening to my words with undistracted attention, and

त्वं एतां अग्निं विद्धि – understand this knowledge. Nachiketa did exactly that. As a result now, after the teaching is over, the Upanishad says:

स च अपि तत् प्रत्यवदत् यथा उक्तं – On his part, Nachiketa also

तत् प्रत्यवदत् यथा उक्तं – repeated verbatim, word for word, with full understanding, all the मन्त्रs and all the other Havan details, exactly as Lord यम had spoken.

Lord यम told all the मन्त्रs and all the elaborate details about that Havan just only once, and this young boy, Nachiketa, could repeat all of them, exactly as spoken by Lord यम, just by listening to him. Lord यम was so amazed at the extraordinary memory power



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and the sharp intellect of Nachiketa, that He as the teacher, wanted to express his appreciation of Nachiketa's श्रद्धा in this अग्नि विज्ञानं. Therefore, the Upanishad says:

अथ अस्य तुष्टः (सन्) मृत्युः पुनः एव आह – Then being pleased with नचिकेता's श्रद्धा and ability, Lord यम of his own accord, spoke again to Nachiketa.

तं अब्रवीत् प्रीयमाणो महात्मा, चरं तव इहाद्य ददामि भूयः ।
तवैव नाम्ना भविता अयं अग्निः, सृङ्गां च इमां अनेक रूपां गृहाण ॥

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प्रीयमाणः (सन्) Being pleased with the श्रद्धा and ability of his disciple

महात्मा – Lord यम the महात्मा – the generous and magnanimous person that Lord यम was

तं (नचिकेतसं) अब्रवीत् – told Nachiketa as follows

चरं तव इह अद्य ददामि भूयः – इह Here, out of pure delight, I am pleased with you, so on this occasion

अद्य – right now, at this time today

तव ददामि भूयः चरं – I give you again another boon purely in appreciation of the श्रद्धा and ability you have shown in grasping my teachings. That boon is

तव एव नाम्ना भविता अयं अग्निः

अयं अग्निः – The अग्नि, the Havan कर्म the यज्ञ कर्म that I taught to you, will hereafter become well-known, being associated with your name. That यज्ञ कर्म will hereafter be called नचिकेताग्नि – a Vedic Havan named after Nachiketa. So it will become well-known in this world. In addition

सृङ्गां च इमां अनेक रूपां गृहाण – Please take इमां सृङ्गां this colorful garland set with precious stones of various kinds and forms, as a token of my appreciation of your श्रद्धा and ability.

The above sentence may also mean that Lord यम offered to teach Nachiketa various other Vedic rituals whose कर्म फलs are gaining worldly glories of many kinds. The reason for this meaning we will see later. (See verse 2 – 3).

Thus, having taught the अग्नि विज्ञानं that Nachiketa asked for as his second boon, Lord यम says something more about that अग्नि विज्ञानं in the next two verses, which we will see next time.