



कठोपनिषत्  
**Katopanishad**  
**Section 1**  
**Volume 5**

त्रिणाचिकेतः त्रिभिरेत्य सन्धिं, त्रिकर्मकृत् तरति जन्म मृत्यू । ब्रह्मजज्ञं देवमीड्यं विदित्वा निचाय्य इमां - शान्तिं अत्यन्तं एति ॥	1 - 17
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एष ते अग्निः नाचिकेतः स्वर्ग्यो यं अवृणीथाः द्वितीयेन वरेण । एतं अग्निं तवैव प्रवक्ष्यन्ति जनासः तृतीयं वरं नाचिकेतो वृणीश्व ॥	1 - 19

As we may recall, for the second of the three वरs (a वर is a boon, which is a committed divine gift) of the three boons granted to him earlier by Lord यम, Nachiketa requested Lord यम to teach him a particular अग्नि विज्ञानं - knowledge about an exalted यज्ञ कर्म - the Vedic Havan ritual, capable of leading one to स्वर्ग.

Lord यम responded positively to Nachiketa's request and taught him all details about that अग्नि विज्ञानं, including the method of erecting the alter for the Havan and all the associated वेद मन्त्रs involved in the performance of the entire यज्ञ कर्म properly, effectively and with full understanding. At the conclusion of his teaching, Nachiketa, on his part, repeated word for word with full understanding, all the वेद मन्त्रs, and also all the other Havan details exactly as Lord यम had spoken. Lord यम was pleased at the extraordinary memory power and the sharp intellect exhibited by Nachiketa in learning that अग्नि विज्ञानं. In appreciation of his श्रद्धा and ability in gaining that knowledge, Lord यम, of his own accord, gave him another boon, in the form of naming that Vedic ritual as नाचिकेताग्नि, meaning a यज्ञ कर्म - a Havan ritual named after Nachiketa. In addition, Lord यम gave Nachiketa a garland, a necklace set with colorful precious stones as a present.



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Following the above expression of appreciation for Nachiketa's श्रद्धा and ability, Lord यम tells further the prior qualifications needed for a person to be able to reach स्वर्ग - Heaven by performing the नाचिकेताग्नि - Vedic Havan ritual - which he just taught Nachiketa. Lord यम says:

त्रिणाचिकेतः त्रिभिरेत्य सन्धिं त्रिकर्मकृत् तरति जन्ममृत्यू ।  
ब्रह्मजज्ञं देवमीड्यं विदित्वा निचाय्य इमां- शन्तिं अत्यन्तं एति ॥

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Who can, and who will, go to स्वर्ग - Heaven, after death? Lord यम says

त्रिणाचिकेतः तरति जन्ममृत्यू - Anyone who is a त्रिणाचिकेत, which means. anyone who has performed the नाचिकेताग्नि, the यज्ञ कर्म which has just been taught by Lord यम to Nachiketa, anyone who has performed that यज्ञ कर्म, three times in one's life, each time with full knowledge, understanding and appreciation, which means with clear and complete knowledge and full conviction, such a person, तरति जन्ममृत्यू goes to स्वर्ग after death.

तरति जन्ममृत्यू literally meaning "crosses birth and death". Such crossing, however, is not in an absolute sense, but only in a relative sense.

Crossing birth and death in an absolute sense means gaining मोक्ष, which is not the result of any कर्म. Gaining मोक्ष is possible only through gaining ब्रह्मज्ञानं, आत्मज्ञानं - Self Knowledge.

Here, Lord यम is talking about कर्म फल of a कर्म. Therefore, here तरति जन्ममृत्यू simply means "goes to स्वर्ग - goes to heaven". Therefore,

त्रिणाचिकेतः तरति जन्ममृत्यू - anyone who is a त्रिणाचिकेतः goes to Heaven after death.

But, for one to be a त्रिणाचिकेतः requires for that person to be well-brought up, well educated, well behaved and well disciplined with respect to one's basic values, knowledge and duties in daily life in accordance with Vedic tradition as indicated by the two Upanishad words त्रिभिरेत्य सन्धिं and त्रिकर्मकृत्. Only such a person will have the required mental disposition to perform the नाचिकेताग्नि ritual, with clear knowledge and full conviction, which is necessary for the successful performance of the नाचिकेताग्नि ritual.



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Now we must understand what is indicated by the two words त्रिभिरेत्य सन्धिं and त्रिकर्मकृत.

त्रिभिरेत्य सन्धिं - This expression refers to the process of one's growing up in one's formative years of life.

त्रिभिः means " with the three"

एत्य means प्राप्य - gaining

सन्धिं means सम्बन्धं - proper connections, relationships or associations. Therefore

त्रिभिः : एत्य सन्धिं means, gaining one's basic values of life through proper connections with the set of three. According to our scriptures, there are three such sets of three. They are

मातृ-पितृ-आचार्य-सम्बन्ध, वेद-स्मृति-शिष्ट सम्बन्ध and/or प्रत्यक्ष-अनुमान-आगम सम्बन्ध

मातृ-पितृ-आचार्य सम्बन्ध - gaining one's sense of values, knowledge, discipline and duties for daily life through proper relationships with one's mother father and the teacher in the formative years of one's life. For example, for a boy up to the time of उपनयनं which means up to about age 7 or 8, the mother is the primary teacher. After उपनयनं, up to the age of about 10 or 12, until the boy goes to गुरुकुल, the father is the primary teacher, and after the boy goes to the गुरु कुल, at the गुरु कुल, the teacher-student family, - the आचार्य - the गुरु is the primary teacher for the boy. That is the Vedic tradition for proper upbringing.

वेद-स्मृति शिष्ट सम्बन्ध - means gaining one's sense of basic values in life through studying the Vedas and the Upanishads and also the स्मृति, which is exemplifying the knowledge of the Vedas and Upanishads, together with cultivating proper associations with the learned and wise people in the society who have already been well-brought up in the Vedic tradition indicated above

प्रत्यक्ष अनुमान - आगम सम्बन्ध means gaining one's sense of basic values in life by one's own self-effort through direct personal worldly experience followed by reflection and inference, supported by studies of the Vedas and the Upanishads as प्रमाण, as the means of knowledge governing all of one's actions in daily life.



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In all the above three modes of one's upbringing what is essentially accomplished is the assiduous cultivation of an abiding life-long शिष्य-शिक्षक भाव सम्बन्ध - a natural mental disposition of an attitude of student-teacher relationship conducive to gaining clarity of knowledge and commitment to propriety in daily life. In order to sustain that mental disposition throughout one's life, it is also necessary for one to be a त्रिकर्म कृत्.

त्रिकर्म कृत् - means one who does properly and diligently all the three kinds of कर्मs, namely यज्ञ कर्म, दान कर्म and तपस् कर्म every day throughout one's life. As Sri Krishna says in the भगवत् गीता

यज्ञ दान तपः कर्म न त्याज्यं कार्यं एव तत्

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The यज्ञ कर्म, दान कर्म and तपस् कर्म each one of them is कर्म to be done by everybody, every day, all through one's life. They should never be given up. That is the Vedic mandate, the teaching of the Vedas and the Upanishads.

- ✚ यज्ञ कर्म is any form of ईश्वर उपासन - worship of परमेश्वर, which includes all of one's duties arising from one's station in life.
- ✚ दान कर्म is maintenance of a charitable disposition, a disposition of giving and a willingness and readiness to help others in need in whatever way one can.
- ✚ तपस् कर्म is maintenance of a constant disposition of personal discipline at all the three levels - काय तपस्, वाक् तपस् and मानस तपस् - discipline at the body level, speech level and mind level. Reading one's scriptures every day like वेद अध्ययनं is also part of one's तपस् कर्म.

All the three kinds of कर्मs must be done with proper attitude, namely सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा फलानि च - totally giving up all मम बुद्धि - egoistic notions and also totally giving up all desires and expectations for the fruits of actions. That is the लक्षण of one who is a त्रिकर्म कृत्. Therefore,

त्रिणाचिकेतः त्रिभिरेत्य सन्धिं त्रिकर्म कृत् तरति जन्ममृत्यू means, any person who is already well brought-up and well educated in the Vedic tradition, and who has also been performing one's यज्ञ, दान, तपस् कर्मs daily, diligently and properly. If such a person



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performs the नाचिकेताग्नि ritual three times, each time with clear knowledge and full conviction, that person goes to स्वर्ग after death, so says Lord यम.

Our scriptures talk about several स्वर्ग लोका s, such as गन्धर्व लोक, देव लोक, इन्द्र लोक etc. all the way up to ब्रह्म लोक - the abode of ब्रह्माजी - the creator, in terms of different levels of शान्ति and आनन्द - peace and joy one experientially enjoys.

Lord यम now goes on to say how a त्रिणाचिकेत described above can gain such ब्रह्मलोक शान्ति - can gain the peace and joy of ब्रह्मलोक, even while still living in this world by combining the कर्म of नाचिकेताग्नि Havan ritual together with उपासन- meditation on the विराट्- पुरुष invoked in the अग्नि देवता of the Havan altar.

ब्रह्मजज्ञं देवमीड्यं विदित्वा निचाय्य इमां शान्तिं अत्यन्तं एति ॥

The त्रिणाचिकेत described above, even while he is performing the नाचिकेताग्नि यज्ञ कर्म Havan ritual

ब्रह्मजज्ञं देवं ईड्यं विदित्वा - knowing, recognizing - how? through the words of the Vedas and the Upanishads as

प्रमाण - means of knowledge, so knowing and recognizing, what?

देवं ईड्यं - the अग्नि देवता that is being worshipped in the Havan altar, is ब्रह्मजज्ञं, परमेश्वर itself as विराट्, the cosmic creation, the entire universe manifested in the समष्टि रूप - totality of all forms and names.

The word ब्रह्मजज्ञं is a combination of three words: ब्रह्म is the Unmanifest परं ब्रह्म, the परमेश्वर described in the भगवत् गीता as पुरुषोत्तम; ब्रह्मज is हिरण्यगर्भ, the entire creation in its undifferentiated, unmanifest form, born of परमेश्वर

ब्रह्मजज्ञं is विराट् - the entire creation manifested in the undifferentiated form born of हिरण्यगर्भ

परमेश्वर-हिरण्यगर्भ-विराट् that is the sequence in the process of creation. It is that विराट् समष्टि रूप जगत् - the totality of the entire creation that is invoked and installed (प्रातिष्ठा) in the अग्नि देवता in the नाचिकेता अग्नि Havan कर्म through वेद मन्त्रs.



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While performing that Havan कर्म, that यज्ञ कर्म with full knowledge and conviction, the त्रिणाचिकेत - the performer of the यज्ञ कर्म realizes that what he is worshipping in the Havan alter is indeed That चिराट् -परमेश्वर in the form of the entire creation.

चिदित्वा - so realizing and at the same time

निचाय्य - meaning आत्मभावेन निचाय्य

Meditating on that चिराट् as one's own self, which means totally identifying oneself with that चिराट्, there is no distance between the meditator and the meditated, such meditation is निचाय्य. With such meditation during यज्ञ कर्म, when the meditator performs the oblation in the अग्नि saying अग्नेः स्वाहा, meaning, for that चिराट् this is the oblation, what happens is, the अहंकार - the ego in the meditator is resolved and disappears into the अग्नि, leaving the meditator with शुद्ध अन्तःकरणं - purity of mind and बुद्धि. As a result the meditator doing the यज्ञ कर्म

इमां शान्तिं अत्यन्तं एति - एति gains, *please note the present tense here*

इमां शान्तिं - इमां स्वबुद्धिं प्रत्यक्षां शान्तिं - this directly experienced शान्ति - peace and joy which is also

अत्यन्तं शान्तिं - abiding, long-lasting शान्ति. This शान्ति, peace and joy, can be experienced as long as one's total identification with चिराट् is there in one's अन्तःकरण, mind and बुद्धि. Since चिराट् lasts till the end of this cycle of creation, which is indeed a very long time, this चिराट् शान्ति will also last for a very long time. So it is अत्यन्त

शान्ति - abiding, long-lasting शान्ति. The ईकार शब्द in इमां शान्तिं indicates gaining such शान्ति through one's total identification with चिराट् - is indeed a Divine Blessing.

Such इमां शान्ति is ब्रह्मलोक शान्ति peace and joy obtainable in ब्रह्मलोक. It can be enjoyed by a त्रिणाचिकेत even during his life time in this world of human beings through the combined result of नाचिकेताग्नि, यज्ञ कर्म and चिराट् उपासन during that यज्ञ कर्म. Such is the glory of नाचिकेताग्नि taught by Lord यम to Nachiketa.



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त्रिणाचिकेतः त्रिभिरेत्य सन्धिं त्रिकर्मकृत् तरति जन्ममृत्यू ।  
ब्रह्मजज्ञं देवमीड्यं विदित्वा निचाय्य इमां सान्तिं अत्यन्तं एति ॥

Let us remember this verse. It is a very important verse because it covers the essential content of the entire **कर्मकाण्ड** of the Vedas.

In the next verse, Lord **यम** summarizes his teachings on **अग्नि विज्ञानं** sought by Nachiketa as follows

त्रिणाचिकेतः त्रियमेतत् विदित्वा य एवं विद्वान्चिनुते नाचिकेतं ।  
स मृत्यु पाशान् पुरतः प्रणोद्य शोकातिगो मोदते स्वर्गलोके ॥ 1 - 18

**त्रिणाचिकेतः** - The one who has performed the **नाचिकेताग्नि** Havan ritual three times, each time with clear knowledge and full conviction

**त्रयं एतत् विदित्वा** - knowing fully, recognizing fully the mode and significance of all the three details involved in the design, construction and operation of the Havan alter as indicated earlier, namely

**या इष्टका यावतीः वा यथा वा** - the nature of the bricks involved, the number of such bricks needed, and all the techniques and **वेद मन्त्र**s involved, in getting the Havan alter fit for performing the oblations. By calling attention to these three details, Lord **यम** emphasizes the importance of these details for the ultimate success of the **यज्ञ कर्म** to yield the desired result.

For example, building the Havan Alter for the **नाचिकेताग्नि यज्ञ कर्म** is not simply a matter of collecting some bricks and arranging them according to convenience. The whole process here is a scripturally ordained one. Elsewhere it is stated that the Havan Altar for this **यज्ञ कर्म** involves a total of 720 bricks, each to be purified and subsequently sanctified by **वेद मन्त्र**s and carefully arranged in a prescribed manner. The sanctifying **वेद मन्त्र**s are different for each brick. All these details are to be very strictly followed even before commencing the oblation and **उपासन मन्त्र**s. Therefore **त्रयं एतत् विदित्वा** means recognizing fully the mode and the significance of all the above details, the one who performs the **यज्ञ कर्म** and also

**यः एवं विद्वान् चिनुते नाचिकेतं** - **विद्वान्** here is the **त्रिणाचिकेत** - the performer of the **नाचिकेताग्नि**, who also (**आत्म रूपेण**) **चिनुते** does the **Upasana**, which means, who also



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meditates on the चिराट् अग्नि, totally identifying oneself with the चिराट् invoked into the अग्नि देवता as pointed out earlier

सः - that person

मृत्युपाशान् पुरतः प्रणोद्य

प्रणोद्य -being released from मृत्यु पाशान्, all bondages to death, all obstructions to gain identity with चिराट्

पुरतः - even before the death of the physical body

शोकातिगः (सन्)- having become one who has crossed, who has become free from sorrow and distress of all kinds

मोदते स्वर्गलोके - enjoys the Peace and Joy of स्वर्गलोक. स्वर्गलोक here is ब्रह्मलोक.

That त्रिणाचिकेत enjoys the peace and joy of ब्रह्मलोक even before the death of his physical body. Such is the glory and power of नाचिकेताग्नि यज्ञ कर्म when combined with चिराट् उपासन during the performance of the यज्ञ कर्म.

This verse completes Lord यम's teaching on अग्नि विज्ञानं to Nachiketa.

We must understand here that the शान्ति - peace and joy obtained by a त्रिणाचिकेत by the combination of यज्ञ कर्म and चिराट् Upasana is only अनुभव शान्ति, which means शान्ति gained by a कर्म. Even though it is an exalted शान्ति gained by an exalted कर्म, it is still bound by time, which means that it is not the eternal स्वरूप शान्ति. It is not मोक्ष. It is not ॐ शान्ति. It is not सत्य स्वरूप-ज्ञान स्वरूप-अनन्त स्वरूप शान्ति which is obtainable only through आत्म ज्ञानं-ब्रह्म ज्ञानं-ईश्वर ज्ञानं.

Now, concluding his response with respect to Nachiketa's request for his second boon, Lord यम tells Nachiketa:

एष ते अग्निः नचिकेतः स्वर्ग्यो यं अवृणीथाः द्वितीयेन वरेण ।

एतं अग्निं तवैव प्रवक्ष्यन्ति जनासः तृतीयं वरं नचिकेतो वृणीष्व ॥

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नचिकेतः - O! Nachiketa



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एषः स्वर्ग्यो अग्निः ते (तुभ्यं) - This अग्नि विज्ञानं - this knowledge about that यज्ञ कर्म that leads to स्वर्ग - Heaven, is for you, is now yours

यं अवृणीथाः द्वितीयेन वरेण

यं - which knowledge,

अवृणीथाः - you asked for

द्वितीयेन वरेण - by your second boon

The knowledge that you asked for as your second boon has now been given to you in full. Moreover, hereafter

एतं अग्निं तव एव प्रवक्ष्यन्ति जनासः

जनासः - People in the world

एतं अग्निं प्रवक्ष्यान्ति - will talk about this

अग्नि विज्ञानं knowledge about this यज्ञ कर्म gloriously

तव एव means तव नाम्ना एव - by your name only, which means henceforward, this अग्नि विज्ञान will become well-known in the world as नाचिकेताग्नि - the अग्नि विज्ञानं named after Nachiketa. This additional boon I am giving you of my own accord, in appreciation of your श्रद्धा and ability with respect to this अग्नि विज्ञानं . Now,

नचिकेतः O! Nachiketa

तृतीयं वरं वृणीष्व - Please ask for the third boon that I granted you.

Thus Lord यम reminds the boy Nachiketa to ask for the third boon. The reason is obvious. Lord यम feels that he is obliged in terms of his own conduct to give Nachiketa the third boon which he still owes to Nachiketa. Until the third boon is given, Lord यम is not free from his own obligations. Lord यम calls upon Nachiketa to ask for his third boon as he likes.

Nachiketa is ready to ask for his third and the final boon, which he asks in the next verse. Before I conclude, I would like to say: Let us not get impatient with the details of Nachiketa's story. The Upanishad is not just telling us a story. The Upanishad is communicating a message, which we will see next time.