



कठोपनिषत्
Katopanishad
Section 1
Volume 7

शतायुषः पुत्र पौत्रान् वृणीष्व बहून् पशून् हस्ति- हिरण्यं अश्वान् । भूमेः महत् आयतनं वृणीष्व स्वयं च जीव शरदो यावत् इच्छसि ॥	1 - 23
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Lord यम is in the process of finding out whether Nachiketa has the necessary mental fitness for gaining आत्मज्ञानं - Self Knowledge he seeks for his third वर, the third and final boon that is due to him.

First, Lord यम tells Nachiketa



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न हि सुविज्ञेयं अणुरेष धर्मः अन्यं वर नचिकेतो वृणीष्व ।

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The आत्मा about which you are asking is so subtle that it is not easily understandable. Therefore, O Nachiketa, please ask for some other वर, to which Nachiketa replies:

वक्ता चास्य त्यदृक् अन्यो न लभ्यो नान्यो वर स्तुल्यः एतस्य कश्चित् ।

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Some other वर equal to आत्म ज्ञानं does not exist, and there can be no other teacher like you, equal to you, who can teach this knowledge, because you are the Lord of Death itself.

So saying, Nachiketa stands firm on his request for आत्मज्ञानं. While Lord यम is impressed by Nachiketa's single-minded devotion to आत्मज्ञानं, he still wants to make sure that Nachiketa's interest in आत्म ज्ञानं is a genuine one, and not a tutored one.

Therefore now Lord यम is now tempting Nachiketa with suggestions for various alternatives from which to choose for his third वर. Lord यम tells Nachiketa:

For your third वर

शतायुषः पुत्र-पौत्रान् वृणीष्व बहून् पशून् हस्ति हिरण्यं अश्वान् ।
भूमेः महत् आयतनं वृणीष्व स्वयं च जीव शरदो यावत् इच्छसि ॥

शतायुषः पुत्र पौत्रान् वृणीष्व - Ask for children and grandchildren, each blessed with a life of 100 years

बहून् पशून् हस्ति हिरण्यं अश्वान् वृणीष्व - Ask for many cows, elephants, gold and horses, which means ask for wealth of all kinds

भूमेः महत् आयतनं वृणीष्व - ask for a vast kingdom on earth

स्वयं च जीव शरदो यावत् इच्छसि - and you yourself live with excellent health, for as many years as you like

एतत् तुल्यं यदि मन्यसे वरं वृणीष्व वित्तं चिरजीविकां च
महा भूमौ नचिकेतः त्वमेधि कामानां त्वा कामभाजं करोमि

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एतत् तुल्यं यदि (अन्यं) चरं मन्यसे (तं अपि) वृणीष्व - If you consider any other चर equal to all those I have suggested already, that also you can ask me. That does not mean that what I have already offered is excluded

वित्तं चिरजीविकां च वृणीष्व - Ask for wealth of all kinds and long and healthy life together with all that I have already suggested. Further

नचिकेतः O! Nachiketa

महाभूमौ त्वं एधि (त्वं भव) - May you become the king of a vast kingdom on earth, in which case

कामानां त्वा (त्वां) कामभाजं (कमार्हं) करोमि - the word काम indicates both the desire for objects and the desired objects themselves. Therefore

कामानां त्वा कामभाजं करोमि - I make you fit for the enjoyment of all your desires, and also, I make you the enjoyer of all your desires of earthly life.

So says Lord यम.

Noting that Nachiketa has exhibited no interest in anything Lord यम offered him so far, Lord यम now offers him something different, some pleasures of different kinds to test whether Nachiketa is attracted to such pleasures of life.

Lord यम tells Nachiketa:

ये ये कामाः दुर्लभाः मर्त्यलोके सर्वान् कामाँश्छन्दन्तः प्रार्थयस्व ।

इमाः रामाः सरथाः सतूर्याः न हि ईदृशाः लम्बनीयाः मनुष्यैः ।

आभिः मत्प्रत्ताभिः परिचारयस्व नचिकेतो मरणं मा अनुप्राक्षीः ॥ 1 - 25

ये ये कामाः दुर्लभाः मर्त्यलोके - whatever objects of desire, whatever pleasure are difficult to get in the world of mortals, in the world of human beings

(तान्) सर्वान् कामान् छन्दन्तः प्रार्थयस्व - ask for all those pleasures

छन्दन्तः - according to your own desires, with no restriction whatsoever

The ्रकार शब्द for कामान् (कामाँ) indicates that the objects of desire involved here are heavenly pleasures, not obtainable in the world of human beings. For illustrating such heavenly pleasures, Lord यम draws Nachiketa's attention to some very beautiful अप्सर girls, celestial girls, around there and says:



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इमाः रामाः (रमयन्ति इति रामा) - These are celestial girls, highly accomplished in dance and music, and very well versed in the art of pleasing men

सरथाः सतूर्याः - They come with their own heavenly chariots and musical instruments

हि - certainly

ईदृशाः रामाः मनुष्यैः न लम्बनीयाः - such charming celestial girls are not obtainable by men in the world of mortals, in the world of human beings, unless made available to them by divine beings like myself. Therefore

आभिः मत्प्रत्ताभिः - by these beautiful girls given to you by me

परिचारयस्व - get served by them as you like. You may enjoy their services to you as it pleases you, but

नचिकेतः - O! Nachiketa

मरणं मा अनुप्रक्षीः - Do not inquire, do not ask me, again and again about death. Do not ask me the question like "Whether आत्मा exists or does not exist after death. Because such knowledge is practically useless to you. Even if I tell you all about आत्मा, that knowledge will be useless to you because however much you search for आत्मा, you will not find it anywhere. Therefore, ask for something tangible which you can see, touch and enjoy by your own इन्द्रियाः, by your own organs of perception and action. But don't ask me anything about Death". So says Lord यम.

Now Nachiketa recognizes what Lord यम is doing to him. Lord यम is only trying to find out how deep is Nachiketa's desire for आत्म ज्ञानं. Nachiketa's अन्तःकरण - mind and बुद्धि remains unshaken by Lord यम 's arguments, and unstirred by all the alluring prospects and temptations held out before him by Lord यम. Yet he has to convince Lord यम that his overriding desire is only to gain आत्म ज्ञानं and nothing else.

Further, Nachiketa fully recognizes that it is his extraordinary good fortune to be face to face with Lord यम, with a commitment from Lord यम to give him the third boon of his own choice, and this is his only opportunity to gain पूर्ण आत्म ज्ञानं and thereby gain मोक्ष - total fulfillment in life. So realizing, now Nachiketa replies to lord यम in a voice low, soft, but sure.

श्वोभावाः मर्त्यस्य यत् अन्तक एतत् सर्वेन्द्रियाणां जरयन्ति तेजः ।

अपि सर्वं जीवितं अल्पमेव तवैव चाहाः तव नृत्यगीते ॥

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ब्रह्मविद्या Brahma Vidya

अन्तक O! Lord Death - O! Lord यम

श्चोभावाः - त्वया उक्ताः भोगविषयाः भोगाः च

श्चोभावाः - I recognize that all the objects of enjoyment and the enjoyments themselves mentioned by you are श्चोभावाः - they are ephemeral, they are transient in nature.

Whether or not they will continue to exist tomorrow is doubtful. They are अनित्य. Therefore I am not seeking such objects of enjoyments, and such enjoyments themselves. Moreover, all such enjoyments born of wealth, power and pleasures of various kinds only

जरयन्ति wear out - what?

मर्त्यस्य यत् एतत् सर्वेन्द्रियाणां तेजः - Whatever तेजस् - whatever vigor, brilliance, capacity, etc. there is in all the organs of perception and action of a human being, which means, all the objects of enjoyment and the enjoyments themselves, only wear out whatever strength and capacity one has for the pursuit of the only That which is eternal, namely आत्म ज्ञानं that I seek. Again, as for the long life you offered me, I realize

सर्वं अपि जीवितं अल्पं एव - The life of every person including ब्रह्माणि - the creator comes to an end one day. When that is the case, what to talk of the life of a human being. However long is human life, it is अल्पं - it is indeed trivial. Further

तवैव चाहाः तव नृत्यगीते

तव चाहाः नृत्यगीते - Regarding your celestial girls with their chariots and accomplishments in entertainment, dance and music

तवैव - तव एव तिष्ठन्तु - let them be with you only. Please keep them for yourself. I have no use for them

So saying, Nachiketa has politely and firmly rejected all the wealth, power and pleasures offered by Lord यम to him, in lieu of आत्म ज्ञानं he asked for as his third चर.

Nachiketa's rejection of such wealth, power and pleasures is not a rejection born of ignorance of their values in life, but it is a rejection born of an analysis of their real worth to him in his present context. Giving his reasons for such rejection, Nachiketa says:

न वित्तेन तर्पणीयः मनुष्यः लप्स्यामहेवित्तं अद्राक्ष्म चेत् त्वा ।

जीविष्यामः यावत् ईशिष्यसि त्वं वरस्तु मे वरणीयः स एव ॥

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न वित्तेन तर्पणीयः मनुष्यः



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मनुष्य : - a human being

न तर्पणीयः - can never be satisfied

वित्तेन - by wealth and power

Man is never satisfied by wealth and power because it is well known, it is common knowledge, that however much one has wealth and power, one wants some more. Therefore, wealth and power never give a sense of fulfillment to a person.

Nachiketa says " I know very well that money and power do not satisfy anybody. Still money can buy a few things, and it is certainly useful. I understand that fully. In my case, if I really need money to do something that I need to do - I must do, I am sure that I will get that money, simply because that I have this good fortune to see you. To me you are परमेश्वर itself, as भगवान् मृत्यु as मृत्यु देवता. I am blessed to see you. With your blessings, I will never be a poor man. I will ever be blessed with all the wealth I need."

Nachiketa is mature enough to appreciate the value of money. He knows that money can buy a book, and he also knows that money cannot buy the capacity to read a book. Nachiketa understands both the value of wealth and its limitations. Therefore he says:

लप्स्यामहे वित्तं अद्राक्ष्म चेत् त्वा (=त्वां)

त्वां अद्राक्ष्य चेत् - If we, the human beings, have seen you, by your grace

वित्तं लप्स्यामहे - we will certainly get all the wealth we need

What Nachiketa means is that when he has such good fortune as to be graced by the sight of भगवान् यम he can by no means suffer for want of wealth thereafter. Similarly, by the very grace of Lord यम, he is certain also that he will live a long and healthful life, which he says in the next line

जीविष्यामः यावत् ईशिष्यसि त्वं

यावत् त्वं ईशिष्यसि - so long as you rule this world of human beings, so long as you remain as Lord यम

जीविष्यामः - we (the human beings blessed by you) will definitely live our full lives

Nachiketa says "As long as you are Lord यम, I will definitely live a long life, because I have already been released from the jaws of death once. Therefore, I am sure I am not going to live a short life. I will live a full life by your grace.



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A mortal like me, having come so close to you face to face, how can I go back with limited wealth and longevity. Your eyes have already fallen upon me. Your grace is upon me. Definitely I will be blessed with all the wealth and long life I need. I am sure about that. Therefore, I need not ask for such things, as wealth and long life, for my third boon, I will get them naturally by your blessings. That being so,

वरस्तु मे वरणीयः स एव

तु तस्मात् - therefore

वरः मे वरणीयः - The boon that is worth praying for by me is

सः एव - That only, namely आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge, already asked for

In the next verse, Nachiketa gives another reason why he seeks only आत्म ज्ञानं, and nothing less for his third वर. Nachiketa says:

अजीर्यताम् अमृतानां उपेत्य जीर्यन् मर्त्यः क्वधःस्थः (क्व तदास्थः) प्रजानन् ।

अभिध्यायन् वर्णरति प्रमोदान् अतिदीर्घे जीविते को रमत ॥

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अजीर्यतां अमृतानां उपेत्य - Having got the rare opportunity of reaching and meeting heavenly देवताs - celestial Gods like you who are

अजीर्यतां - never subject to aging and also

अमृतानां - who are immortal

जीर्यन् मर्त्यः क्वधःस्थः

क्वधःस्थः - a human being on earth being ever subject to

जीर्यन् मर्त्य - aging and death

In some versions the word क्वधःस्थः is replaced by the word क्व तदास्थः which means a human being absorbed in the worldly life of कर्म and कर्म फल.

Such a human being

प्रजानन् - knowing clearly that आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge leading to the highest goal of life, namely मोक्ष, can be gained from देवता s like yourself, and also

अभिध्यायन् - having analyzed all of one's experiences in life, and realizing the transient and essentially wasteful nature of pursuits of



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वर्ण-रति प्रमोदान् - the transient pleasures of music, dance and frivolous enjoyments of various kinds

अतिदीर्घं जीविते, को रमेत

कः रमेत - who can enjoy, which person who has विवेक बुद्धि can enjoy

अतिदीर्घं जीविते - in living a long life of such trivial and essentially wasteful pursuits. It would be absolute foolishness on the part of a person with विवेक बुद्धि to ask for ephemeral worldly enjoyments from immortal Gods like you, knowing that आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge leading to मोक्ष - the highest पुरुषार्थ of human existence can be gained from you. Naturally therefore, I must seek from you only आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge and nothing less, for my third चर, so says Nachiketa.

What Nachiketa tells here is what we have heard also in the भगवत् गीता. We may recall Sri Krishna's words here:

ये हि संस्पर्शजा भोगाः दुःखयोनय एव ते ।

आद्यन्तवन्तः कौन्तेय न तेषु रमते बुधः ॥

(G 5-22)

The enjoyments born of sense organs and contacts with sense objects are दुःखयोनयः. They are only causes for sorrow, because getting them is stressful, and afterwards, losing them is sorrowful. Consequently, the whole experience only ends up in sorrow and distress. Therefore बुधः तेषु न रमते - a wise person, one who has विवेक बुद्धि, does not rejoice in such experiences.

Thus, gently, respectfully, and firmly rejecting all the अनित्य कामाः - transient objects of desire offered by Lord यम in lieu of आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge, Nachiketa repeats his request for आत्म ज्ञानं for his third and final चर in the following words:

यस्मिन्नदं विचिकित्सन्ति मृत्यो यत् साम्पराये महति ब्रूहि नस्तत् ।

मृत्यो O! Lord मृत्यु - O! Lord यम! Please do not offer me any more अनित्य कामाः - transient pleasures of life. I definitely do not seek them.

ब्रूहि नस्तत् - तत् ब्रूहि नः - Please tell us, human beings, That which I prayed for already, namely



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यस्मिन् इदं विचिकित्सन्ति - यस्मिन् meaning यस्मिन् आत्मनि विषये - in which matter about आत्मा - The Self

इदं विचिकित्सन्ति - people entertain this doubt as to whether आत्मा exists or not, and साम्पराये meaning परलोक विषये about the matter concerning the world to which a person goes when one dies - about that world of आत्मा, because, unless there is an आत्मा other than one's physical body, there is no question of one going to another world after death. Therefore,

साम्पराये means आत्म विषये - about the matter concerning आत्मा

यत् महति - यत् meaning आत्मनः निर्णय विज्ञानं तत् - that which is well-ascertained and definite knowledge. तत् that knowledge which is महति exalted knowledge - supreme knowledge, because it leads to supreme state of existence, namely मोक्ष.

तत् नः ब्रूहि - please tell us human beings That knowledge for the good of the entire humanity.

O! Lord यम, please tell me, please tell us human beings, for the benefit of all humanity, about that supreme knowledge of आत्मा about which there is doubt among people.

So saying Nachiketa concludes what he has to say in response to Lord यम's offers.

Now summarizing Nachiketa's answer to Lord यम, the Upanishad says:

योऽयं वरो गूढमनुप्रविष्टो नान्यं तस्मात् नचिकेता वृणीते । 1 - 29

यः अयं (आत्म विषयः) वरः - This boon about knowledge of आत्मा

गूढं अनुप्रविष्टः - which remains a secret, because it is not available for direct perception or easy understanding

तस्मात् (वरात्) अन्यं वरं - another वर, other than knowledge of आत्मा,

नचिकेता न वृणीते- मनसा अपि, न वृणीते Nachiketa does not pray for, even in thought

Apart from this boon, which relates to the inscrutable आत्मा, Nachiketa does not pray for, does not ask for, any other boon. So concludes the first section of this Upanishad

इति प्रथमा वल्ली

Lord यम 's discourse on Vedanta starts with the next verse in Section 2 which we will see next time.