



कठोपनिषत्
Katopanishad
Section 2
Volume 8

- अन्यत् श्रेयः अन्यत् उतैव प्रयः ते उभे नानार्थे पुरुषं सिनीतः ।
तयोः श्रेयः आददानस्य साधु भवति हीयते अर्थात् य उप्रेयः वृणीते ॥ 2 - 1
- श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यं एतः तौ सम्परीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः ।
श्रेयो हि धीरः अभि प्रेयसो वृणीते प्रेयो मन्दः योगक्षेमात् वृणीते ॥ 2 - 2
- स त्वं प्रियान् प्रियरूपांश्च कामान् अभिध्यायन् नचिकेतो अत्यस्त्राक्षीः।
नैतां सृङ्गां वित्तमयीं अवाप्तः यस्यां मज्जन्ति बहवो मनुष्याः ॥ 2 - 3
- दूरमेते विपरीते विषूची अविद्या या च विद्या इति ज्ञाता ।
विद्याभीप्सिनं नचिकेतसं मन्ये न त्वा कामाः बहवः अलोलुपन्त ॥ 2 - 4

As we saw last time, the first section of this Upanishad concluded with the statement

योऽयं चरो गूढमनुप्रविष्टो नान्यं तस्मात् नचिकेता वृणीते । 1 - 29

Apart from this चर relating to the inscrutable आत्मा, apart from आत्मविद्या - knowledge about आत्मा, Nachiketa does not ask for any other चर from Lord यम. Nachiketa's insistence on आत्म ज्ञानं - Knowledge of आत्मा for the third चर is not due to his adamance, but it is due to his विवेक बुद्धि, his व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धि (G 2-4), his cultivated well ascertained mind and बुद्धि with respect to gaining आत्म ज्ञानं as his overriding goal in life. Lord यम is therefore very pleased to discover that Nachiketa is indeed an अधिकारि, and he is indeed a worthy disciple for him to teach आत्मविद्या.

Accordingly, Lord यम now begins his teachings with an Introduction to Vedanta, which takes the extraordinary form of giving generous compliments to Nachiketa for his विवेक बुद्धि, and firmly rooted and unshakable commitment to the pursuit of आत्म ज्ञानं, and thereby welcoming Nachiketa as a worthy disciple for his teachings.



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Through such introduction to Vedanta, Lord यम also commends Nachiketa's श्रद्धा in आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge as worthy of emulation by all seekers of ब्रह्मविद्या. Throughout this Upanishad, Lord यम uses simple looking words to communicate messages of profound significance - We must listen to understand. This is how Lord यम opens his discourse on Vedanta:

अन्यत् श्रेयः अन्यत् उतैव प्रेयः ते उभे नानार्थे पुरुषे सिनीतः ।
तयोः श्रेयः आददानस्य साधु भवति हीयते अर्थात् य उ प्रेयः वृणीते ॥ 2 - 1

Lord यम's discourse on ब्रह्मविद्या starts with a clear statement on पुरुषार्थ - the goal of human existence. Lord यम says:

अन्यत् श्रेयः अन्यत् उत एव प्रेयः
श्रेयः अन्यत् एव - Indeed, श्रेयस् is distinctly different and
प्रेयः उत (=अपि) अन्यत् एव, प्रेयस् is also distinctly different
श्रेयस् and प्रेयस् are mutually exclusive, one different from the other, each leading to different ends.

Now, what is प्रेयस् and what is श्रेयस् ? Every person naturally seeks happiness. All endeavours for gaining happiness are grouped under four broad headings, namely धर्म, अर्थ, काम and मोक्ष as पुरुषार्था s - as "Goals of human existence"

Happiness gained through धर्म, अर्थ, काम, pursuits - which means happiness gained through living a life governed by धर्म - propriety, law and order, अर्थ - gaining wealth of all kinds through proper and legitimate means, and काम - accomplishing one's objects of desire, again through proper and legitimate means, such धर्म, अर्थ, काम pursuits of happiness are, together called the pursuit of प्रेयस् or simply प्रेयस् in life, which means कर्तृत्वं and भोक्तृत्वं - doing कर्मs and enjoying कर्म फलs.

प्रेयस् means प्रियतरं - that which brings a sense of pleasure for the time being. That pleasure is however a temporary one, and hence it can never give any sense of total fulfillment in life.



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On the other hand, श्रेयस् is the pursuit of मोक्ष - the परम पुरुषार्थ - The supreme Goal of Life, which is total fulfillment in life, independent of any कर्म or कर्म फल, Absolute Happiness, never subject to change, gained through कर्मयोग बुद्धि and ज्ञान लक्षण ईश्वर भक्ति, as we have learnt from the भगवत् गीता.

Since every human being is born of कर्म and कर्म फल, every person, from the moment of birth, finds oneself naturally in the pursuit of प्रेयस् - transient happiness, by every means available to oneself. Only when the person grows up to sufficient maturity in mind and बुद्धि that प्रेयस्, as a goal of life, becomes meaningless and one deliberately resorts to श्रेयस् as one's overriding goal of life.

Lord यम points out here:

अन्यत् श्रेयः अन्यत् उत एव प्रेयः

श्रेयस् and प्रेयस् are mutually exclusive and distinctly different from each other. One cannot gain श्रेयस् through प्रेयस्. Simply by living a life of धर्म, अर्थ, काम pursuits one cannot gain मोक्ष. श्रेयस् and प्रेयस् are mutually exclusive, one different from the other, which means that they mutually lead to divergent ends. Yet

ते उभे नानार्थे पुरुषं सिनीतः

ते उभे - both of them

नानार्थे - leading to divergent ends as they do,

पुरुषं सिनीतः - bind the person in whichever pursuit the person is in.

पुरुषं refers to the person in the pursuit of प्रेयस् and पुरुषं refers to the person in the pursuit of श्रेयस्. Lord यम says "Both प्रेयस् and श्रेयस्, each leading to different ends, bind the person in either pursuit. The person in the pursuit of प्रेयस् - pursuit of transient happiness, gets bound to प्रेयस् and the person in the pursuit of श्रेयस् - gets bound to श्रेयस् - pursuit of total fulfillment in life.

The bondage here arises from one's स्वभाव - the impelling force within the person which makes the person remain in, or resort to, one or the other pursuit - प्रेयस् or



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श्रेयस्, according to one's own mental disposition. Since श्रेयस् and प्रेयस् lead to opposite ends, if a person is in one of them, he is automatically away from the other.

Pursuit of प्रेयस् is bondage to कर्म and कर्म फल, governed by one's राग-द्वेष forces - forces of likes and dislikes, leading ultimately to repeated births and deaths. Whereas pursuit of श्रेयस् is commitment to कर्म योग बुद्धि and ज्ञान लक्षण ईश्वर भक्ति, leading ultimately to मोक्ष - total release from birth and death.

ते उभे नानार्थे पुरुषे सिनीतः - Both प्रेयस् and श्रेयस्, each leading to divergent ends, bind a person in either pursuit. Every person has a choice between, and only between, प्रेयस् and श्रेयस् governing one's life. One can choose to remain in प्रेयस्, or reject प्रेयस् and take to श्रेयस् as one's way of life. But one cannot simultaneously be in the pursuits of both प्रेयस् and श्रेयस् at the same time.

प्रेयस् is अविद्या रूपं. it is the form of one's ignorance of आत्मा - one's inability to recognize the true nature of oneself, and श्रेयस् is विद्या रूपं. It is the form of आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge. Since अविद्या and विद्या are opposed to each other, प्रेयस् and श्रेयस् are also opposed to each other. Therefore Lord यम says:

तयोः श्रेयः आददानस्य साधु भवति

तयोः - Of the two

श्रेयः आददानस्य - the one who has undertaken the pursuit of श्रेयस्, deliberately rejecting the pursuit of प्रेयस्, that person

साधु भवति - becomes a साधु. That person was not a साधु before, while he was in the pursuit of प्रेयस्. But after becoming committed to the pursuit of श्रेयस्, that person progressively evolves into a साधु. The person becomes the very embodiment of auspiciousness and purity पूर्ण ब्रह्म ज्ञानं, ईश्वर ज्ञानं, आत्म ज्ञानं, leading ultimately to मोक्ष - total fulfillment in life. On the other hand

हीयते अर्थात् यः उ प्रेयः वृणीते

यः प्रेयः वृणीते - the one who chooses to continue to remain in प्रेयस्, the one who chooses to live in the pursuit of transient pleasures as one's way of life, the one who is overpowered by अविद्य रूपं, self ignorance - ignorance of आत्मा, that person



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उ - certainly

अर्थात् हीयते - falls away from the true goal of life, the supreme goal of life, which is

श्रेयस् - मोक्ष - total fulfillment in life.

That person who chooses to remain bound to प्रेयस्, completely misses one's opportunity to achieve total fulfillment in life, which is possible only by the pursuit of श्रेयस्, so says Lord यम.

If both श्रेयस् - the path leading to मोक्ष, and प्रेयस् - the path leading to only transient pleasures in life, are open to every person, then why do most people in the world stick to प्रेयस् only, and do not seek श्रेयस् ? The reason is, both श्रेयस् and प्रेयस् appear together in daily life, as though they are inter-mixed, and most people do not have the बुद्धि, mature, disciplined, cultivated enough to discriminate between them with respect to means and ends. Consequently, only those few, who have the capacity for such discrimination, reject प्रेयस् and choose श्रेयस्. The others stick to प्रेयस् for the sake of योग क्षेम - which means they are interested only in acquisition and preservation of their material needs for their continued worldly life. Lord यम gives this message in the next verse.

श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यं एतः तौ सम्परीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः ।

श्रेयो हि धीरः अभि प्रेयसो वृणीते प्रेयो मन्दः योगक्षेमात् वृणीते ॥

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श्रेयः च प्रेयः च मनुष्यं एतः

श्रेयः च प्रेयः च - Both श्रेयस् and प्रेयस् together

मनुष्यं एतः - reach a person, come to a person. The pursuit of प्रेयस् and the pursuit of श्रेयस् are both available for every person. Every person is free to choose either श्रेयस् pursuit of मोक्ष - total fulfillment in life or प्रेयस् pursuits of various kinds of pleasures - transient happiness in life.

For one who has not cultivated विवेक बुद्धि, the capacity for discrimination through enquiry, analysis and clarity of understanding with respect to means and ends, श्रेयस् and प्रेयस्, appear to be so intermixed that one thinks that the pursuit of प्रेयस् leads to श्रेयस्, which is impossible. One can never get total fulfillment in life through pursuits of various kinds of transient pleasures in life. One needs wisdom, one needs विवेक बुद्धि to recognize this fact. Therefore, the Upanishad says:



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तौ सम्परीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः

धीरः - A धीमान् - संस्कृत बुद्धिमान् - A wise person, the one who has विवेक बुद्धि, the one whose बुद्धि has undergone the discipline of gaining clarity of understanding and vision, that person

तौ सम्परीत्य - properly analyzing and clearly understanding the nature and implications of both श्रेयस् and प्रेयस्

तौ विविनक्ति - he separates, he distinguishes clearly in his mind and बुद्धि what is श्रेयस् and what is प्रेयस्, and then

श्रेयो हि धीरः अभि प्रेयसो वृणीते -

धीरः - that धीर पुरुष, that wise person

हि - naturally, indeed

अभिवृणीते श्रेयः प्रेयसः - chooses deliberately, enthusiastically and unhesitatingly (अभिवृणीते) the pursuit of श्रेयस् instead of प्रेयस्, rejecting प्रेयस् as one's overriding Goal of Life.

Having clearly understood the nature and implications of the pursuits of श्रेयस् and प्रेयस्, a धीरः - a wise person, the one who has विवेक बुद्धि, naturally, deliberately, enthusiastically and unhesitatingly chooses the pursuit of श्रेयस् in preference to प्रेयस् as one's overriding Goal of Life. On the other hand

प्रेयो मन्दः योगक्षेमात् वृणीते

मन्दः - the one who has only मन्द बुद्धि, the one who has only असंस्कृत बुद्धि, uncultivated बुद्धि, the one whose बुद्धि has not undergone the discipline of enquiry, analysis and clarity of vision, the one who lacks discrimination, such a person

प्रेयः वृणीते - chooses the pursuit of प्रेयस् for one's way of life. Why? Because

योगक्षेमात् - that person is interested only in योग क्षेम, which means the pursuits of acquisition and preservation of one's material needs of worldly life. He cannot think of anything higher. That shows that the one who has only मन्द बुद्धि - uncultivated बुद्धि, simply does not understand clearly the nature and implications of श्रेयस् and प्रेयस्. He is still immature, and he has to grow up before he becomes fit for the pursuit of total fulfillment in life.



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Nachiketa is listening. Lord यम continues:

स त्वं, प्रियान् प्रियरूपांश्च कामान् अभिध्यायन् नचिकेतो अत्यस्त्राक्षीः ।
नैतां सृङ्गां वित्तमयीं अवाप्तः यस्यां मज्जन्ति बहवो मनुष्याः ॥

2 - 3

नचिकेतः - O! Nachiketa

सः त्वं - You are that kind of a person. What kind?

प्रियान् प्रियरूपान् च कामान् अभिध्यायन् अत्यस्त्राक्षीः - Even though you were tempted by me, again and again, by offering you

प्रियान् कामान् - various commonly sought objects of desire such as long and healthy life, wealth of all kinds, vast kingdom on earth, children, grandchildren, etc., and also

प्रियरूपान् कामान् च - pleasures of various kinds involving celestial girls, heavenly chariots, music, dance, entertainment, etc., still

अभिध्यायन् - not being infatuated by any of them, but clearly analyzing and understanding their real worth and their limitations and fully recognizing their ephemeral nature

अत्यस्त्राक्षीः - you rejected every one of them. You renounced all of them which were within your reach

सः त्वं - Such a person you are. You are indeed a wise and intelligent person. It may have been easy for you to do what you did, but that is not easy for most people, because most do not recognize श्रेयस्, and waste their lives in the pursuit of प्रेयस्, seeking transient wealth and ephemeral pleasures throughout their lives.

न एतां सृङ्गां वित्तमयीं अवाप्तः

न अवाप्तः - You have not taken

एतां वित्तमयीं सृङ्गां - that endless road leading nowhere, that endless path of ephemeral wealth and pleasures, commonly resorted to by ignorant people

यस्यां मज्जन्ति बहवो मनुष्याः - in which way of life many people get drowned, and come to grief. After due deliberation, you have wisely renounced the pursuit of प्रेयस्, the pursuit of everything that is अनित्यं - transient existence, and you have wisely chosen the pursuit of श्रेयस् - That which is Eternal Existence. What a wise person you are! So exclaims Lord यम in appreciation of the glory of Nachiketa's wisdom.

We may recall here the words of Sri Krishna singing the glory of such wisdom.



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शक्नोतीहैव यः सोढुं प्राक् शरीर विमोक्षणात् ।
काम क्रोधोद्भवं वेगं स युक्तः स सुखी नरः ॥

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The one who is able to control the power of the forces of काम desires, the tendency to go after transient pleasures, and क्रोध - the anger born of non-fulfillment of such काम desires, the one who is able to control the power of such काम, क्रोध forces, all through one's life, only that person is a युक्तः, सुखी, नरः. Only that person knows the art of living, can discover happiness in oneself, and is fit to be called a human being.

Thus Lord यम is now satisfied that Nachiketa is a proper अधिकारि, fit for receiving the knowledge he is seeking. Confirming this conclusion, Lord यम says:

दूरमेते विपरीते विषूची अविद्या या च विद्या इति ज्ञाता ।
विद्याभीप्सिनं नचिकेतसं मन्ये न त्वा कामाः बहवः अलोलुपन्त ॥

2 - 4

दूरं एते विपरीते विषूची

एते - These two, namely श्रेयस् and प्रेयस्

दूरं एते - these two remain far apart, far distant from each other. It is not merely a matter of physical distance, but they are

विपरीते - mutually exclusive, mutually contradictory, mutually opposed to each other like light and darkness, because they are of the nature of विवेक and अविवेक - ability to discriminate and inability to discriminate. Further

विषूची - they have divergent paths, leading to opposite ends. प्रेयस् is संसार हेतु. It serves to keep the person in संसार - in the world of birth and death - सुख and दुःख - perpetual discontent, whereas श्रेयस् is मोक्षहेतु. It serves as the means for one's emancipation from संसार. It leads to मोक्ष - total fulfillment in life.

अविद्या या च विद्या इति ज्ञाता

या ज्ञाता - These two, namely श्रेयस् and प्रेयस् are well known and well-understood by truly learned people as (इति)

विद्या अविद्या च - as विद्या - knowledge and

अविद्या - ignorance



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Lord यम identifies श्रेयस् with विद्या, meaning आत्म विद्या - Self-knowledge and प्रेयस् with अविद्या, meaning Self ignorance. Self-ignorance is not the ordinary ignorance of facts and formulae, but it is spiritual blindness, which cannot recognize the most primary datum of all personal experiences, namely the SELF.

"I know everything about myself except myself" - that is अविद्या - self-ignorance, the world of darkness described in the ईशावास्य उपनिषत् as असुर्या नाम ते लोकाः अन्धेन तमसा आवृताः. The path of अविद्या - spiritual blindness, leads to bondage, to the finite everchanging world, and the path of विद्या - self knowledge leads to the infinite eternal changeless world of oneself.

After identifying श्रेयस् and प्रेयस् with विद्या and अविद्या, Lord यम says:

विद्याभीप्सितं नचिकेतसं मन्ये

नचिकेतसं (त्वां अहं) मन्ये विद्या अभीप्सितं - I consider you, Nachiketa, as विद्या अभीप्सितं - as a true lover of विद्या, as a true seeker of आत्मविद्या - Self Knowledge, because

न त्वा कामाः बहवः अलोलुपन्त

बहवः कामाः - the very many objects of desire, pleasure and enjoyment which attract the mind and बुद्धि of people in the pursuit of प्रेयस्

त्वां न अलोलुपन्त - did not shake, confuse and distract your mind and बुद्धि from your firm pursuit of श्रेयस् - pursuit of आत्म विद्या.

Therefore, I consider your बुद्धि an appropriate receptacle, a proper container, a proper उपाधि for receiving and holding आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge that you seek.

Lord यम 's Introduction to Vedanta continues, which we will see next time.