



कठोपनिषत्
Katopanishad
Volume 12
Chapter 2

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Lord यम is very pleased with Nachiketa for his firm commitment to the pursuit of श्रेयस्
- Total Fulfillment in Life, pursuit of सत्यं - pursuit of That Changeless Reality which is
behind all this world of changes, pursuit of आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge.

Lord यम is indeed so pleased with Nachiketa that he tells Nachiketa in the last verse

विवृतं सद्य, नचिकेतसं मन्ये

O! Nachiketa, I consider the doors of सद्य, ब्रह्म भवनं - the abode of ब्रह्मन् are wide open
to you. I look upon you as eminently well qualified for gaining आत्म ज्ञानं - Self
Knowledge.

While praising Nachiketa for his commitment to the pursuit of आत्म ज्ञानं, Lord यम has
also been teaching Nachiketa a lot about Vedanta - Upanishad knowledge, which has
helped Nachiketa to gain further clarity in his mind on what exactly he wants to learn
from Lord यम.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

Whether आत्मा exists or not, is no longer a question for Nachiketa. What exactly is the nature of that आत्मा, is his real question for which he seeks an answer from Lord यम. Therefore,

Nachiketa asks Lord यम

अन्यत्र धर्मात्, अन्यत्र अधर्मात्, अन्यत्र अस्मात्, कृत, अकृतात् ।
अन्यत्र, भूतात् च भव्यात् च, यत् तत्, पश्यसि, तत् वद ॥

Nachiketa says to Lord यम "If you consider that I am fit for gaining आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge, and if you are also pleased with me, then

तत् वद - Please tell That to me, namely

अन्यत्र धर्मात् - That which is other than, That which is different from धर्म - virtues, all scripturally ordained कर्मs and कर्म फलs - duties and their results. Also

अन्यत्र अधर्मात् - That which is other than, that which is different from अधर्म - all vices and also everything opposed to धर्म; therefore,

अन्यत्र धर्मात् अन्यत्र अधर्मात् - That which is above, That which transcends धर्म and अधर्म, and also

अन्यत्र अस्मात् कृत, अकृतात्

कृतं is कार्यं - an effect, whatever is done

अकृतं is कारणं the cause that which is not done

अस्मात् means अस्मात् कारण-कार्यात् from कारण and कार्य - cause and effect

अन्यत्र अस्मात् कृत-अकृतात् means That which is other than the effects and their causes, that which is above, that which transcends all causes and effects in this ever changing creation, and also

अन्यत्र भूतात् च भव्यात् च - that which is other than, that which is different from the past and the future, and hence the present as well. That which transcends time and space

यत् तत् पश्यसि - what you see, what you recognize as That

तत् वद - Please tell that to me.



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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

“What you see, what you recognize as That which is different from, which is other than, which transcends, धर्म and अधर्म - virtue and vice, कारण and कार्य - cause and effect, and काल and देश - time and space, please tell that to me” so asks Nachiketa

Is Nachiketa asking Lord यम to tell him about something that does not exist? No, because Nachiketa says:

यत् तत् पश्यसि, तत् वद

The word यत् points out a वस्तु - a Being that exists. That वस्तु - That Being, which transcends धर्म, अधर्म cause, effect, time, space, etc., please tell me about that वस्तु, That Being, so asks Nachiketa.

Nachiketa is seeking enlightenment on the nature of Absolute Reality in which alone there is True Life, True Freedom, True Happiness.

Vedanta declares that whatever is in the range of transient reality falls within the scope of माया - within the net of relativity and mutual dependence.

The essence of spiritual realization is not simply the realization of the knowledge that falls within the scope of माया, but it is also the realization of knowledge of Absolute Reality which transcends all that falls within the scope of माया - The inherent power of ब्रह्मन्

That knowledge of Absolute Reality is पर विद्या (spiritual knowledge - Self Knowledge - Higher Knowledge) and the knowledge of the changeful aspects of existence is अपर विद्या (objective knowledge - lower knowledge) as we have seen in the भगवत् गीता .

पर विद्या and अपर विद्या together constitute ब्रह्म विद्या, पूर्ण ज्ञानं - Totality of knowledge.

Even though Nachiketa asks specifically for पर विद्या, Lord यम imparts him the पर विद्या knowledge as ब्रह्म विद्या, as पूर्ण ज्ञानं, which makes his teaching complete.

In response to Nachiketa's request Lord यम now begins his discourse on ब्रह्म विद्या.

Lord यम is talking. Nachiketa is listening. Let us also listen. Lord यम says:



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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

सर्वे वेदाः यत् पदं आमनन्ति तपांसि सर्वाणि च यत् वदन्ति ।
यदिच्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति तत् ते पदं संग्रहेण ब्रवीमि ॐ इत्येतत् ॥ 2-15

Nachiketa's request is तत् वद please tell me That, That which transcends all that is transient in this creation, please tell That to me.

Responding to Nachiketa's request, Lord यम says

संग्रहेण ब्रवीमि - First, let me tell you That briefly

ॐ इत्येतत्, ॐ इति एतत् That is ॐ

What you want to know is That which is revealed by the word ॐ, or indicated by the sound ॐ. That which is the state of Existence revealed by the word ॐ or indicated by the sound ॐ. That which is the goal of life (to be reached by knowledge, understanding, and realization) revealed by the word ॐ or indicated by the sound ॐ .

In other words, if Nachiketa's question is understood as "What is आत्मा ?" then Lord यम's brief answer is ॐ इत्येतत् - That is OM. आत्मा is ॐ.

आत्मा is That which is revealed by the word ॐ, or indicated by the sound ॐ. आत्मा is that which is the state of existence revealed by the word ॐ or indicated by the sound ॐ. आत्मा is that which is the goal of life (to be reached by knowledge, understanding and realization) revealed by the word ॐ or indicated by the sound ॐ.

Thus Lord यम opens his discourse on ब्रह्म विद्या with ॐ, ॐ शब्द वाच्यं, ॐ शब्द प्रतीकं च That which is revealed by the word ॐ and That which has for its symbol the sound ॐ.

Lord यम says something more about that ॐ शब्द, the word ॐ, the sound ॐ, before going into details on the Nature of आत्मा. Let us see the Upanishad words now.

सर्वे वेदाः यत् पदं आमनन्ति, ॐ इत्येतत् - The word पदं has three meanings – a state, a goal or a word; all the three meanings are applicable here, and,



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आमनन्ति means "declare". Therefore

सर्वे वेदाः : यत् पदं आमनन्ति means That which all the Vedas and Upanishads declare, unanimously, in one voice, without any conflict whatsoever as यत् पदं - as the state of Supreme Existence, as the Goal of Life to be reached by knowledge, understanding and realization, That Being you are asking about, ॐ इत्येतत् - That Being is what is revealed by the word ॐ, by the sound ॐ, in brief, by all the Vedas and Upanishads. Now, what do our Vedas and Upanishads declare about ॐ ? For example,

Sri Krishna says

प्रणवः सर्व वेदेषु - The प्रणव मन्त्र - The word of the glory of the Lord is ॐ. Therefore सर्व वेदेषु अहं प्रणवः means, I am ॐ in all the Vedas. When Sri Krishna says "I am ॐ" it means ॐ is परमेश्वर Itself in the form of the sound ॐ. When I hear the sound ॐ, what comes to my mind and बुद्धि is only परमेश्वर, in whatever Name and Form I wish to see.

The Taittiriya Upanishad says:

ॐ इति ब्रह्म -

The word ॐ is ब्रह्मन्, ॐ is the word and ब्रह्मन् is what It reveals. Just as a word and its meaning are inseparable, ॐ and ब्रह्मन् are inseparable. Further

ओमितीदं सर्वं, ॐ इति इदं सर्वं

ॐ The ब्रह्मन् is all this

ॐ The ब्रह्मन् is this entire creation

ॐ is शब्द रूप प्रत्यक्ष ब्रह्मन्, indicated by the pointer words सत्यं ज्ञानं अनन्तं ब्रह्म

ॐ is the ever-existent, all-conscious, all-inclusive ब्रह्मन् in the perceptible form of sound ॐ.

The sound ॐ is the means and the goal, for reaching ब्रह्मन्.

The माण्डूक्य उपनिषत् says:



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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

ॐ इति एतत् अक्षरं, इदं सर्वं, तस्य उपव्याख्यानं, भूतं, भवत्, भविष्यत्
इति सर्वं ओंकार एव । यत् च अन्यत्, त्रिकालातीतं, तत् अपि, ओंकार एव ॥
सर्वं हि एतत्, ब्रह्म, अयं आत्मा ब्रह्म ।

That monosyllabic word ॐ is a manifestation of this entire universe. It cannot be defined, but its close enough explanation is: The past, The present, The future - all that is verily ॐ, and, whatever there is beyond the three periods of time, beyond the hold of time, that also is verily ॐ.

All that stated above as ॐ is ब्रह्मन्. The Self in every being is ब्रह्मन्, and so is ॐ. आत्मा is ब्रह्मन्. आत्मा is ॐ.

Such is the content of Lord यम 's expression.

सर्वे वेदाः यत् पदं आमनन्ति, ॐ इत्येतत्

Further, Lord यम continues

तपांसि सर्वाणि च यत् वदन्ति, ॐ इत्येतत्

That ब्रह्मन् which all तपस् - all disciplines penances and austerities talk about in all the Vedas and the Upanishads as the means as well as the end to be reached, That ब्रह्मन् about whom you are asking, is ॐ इत्येतत्. That is what is revealed by the word ॐ, by the sound ॐ.

तपस् is any kind of self-discipline where one voluntarily and cheerfully gives up something to gain something, or to reach something that is higher in oneself. Such self discipline is enjoyment in life, as the ईशावास्य उपनिषत् says:

तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा : - Enjoy life through renunciation. Whether one knows it or not, whether it is so intended or not, the ultimate purpose of every kind of तपस् - self-discipline is only to reach the top, namely the supreme state of identity with the best and the highest in oneself, परमेश्वर in oneself, ब्रह्मन् in oneself.



ब्रह्मचिद्या **Brahma Vidya**

It is तपस् that bridges the gap between the secular and the sacred.

In the Taittiriya Upanishad, which we saw not too long ago, we may recall that भृगु asks his father, Lord वरुण, अधीहि भगवो ब्रह्मेति Please teach me what is ब्रह्मन्, and Lord वरुण says:

यतो वा इमानि भूतानि जायन्ते । येन जातानि जीवन्ति । यत्प्रयन्त्यभिसंविशन्ति ।

तत् विजिज्ञासस्य । तत् ब्रह्म इति ।

That from which all that is in this creation are born, That by which, those who are born live and grow, and that into which, all that live and grow ultimately go back, giving up their forms and names and become one with That from which they came, please find That out for yourself, तत् ब्रह्म That is ब्रह्मन्

Now, what did भृगु do on hearing this Truth? The Upanishad says: स तपोऽतप्यत । भृगु spontaneously resorted to तपस् as the means for gaining knowledge of ब्रह्मन्, though his father did not say anything about तपस्. Such spontaneous तपस् is tranquillization of the outer and inner sense organs. The concentration of the powers of one's mind, बुद्धि and the senses towards परमेश्वर, मत् व्यपाश्रयः, as Sri Krishna says, which is the necessary prerequisite for reaching ब्रह्मन् - the Highest in oneself. On gaining that ability for such concentration, when भृगु asks his father again अधीहि भगवो ब्रह्म Please teach me what is

ब्रह्मन्, Lord वरुण says:

तपसा ब्रह्म विजिज्ञासस्य, तपो ब्रह्म, इति

By continuing तपस्, gain knowledge of ब्रह्मन्, by yourself, beyond doubt. तपो ब्रह्म, तपस् is ब्रह्मन्, तपस् will lead you to ब्रह्मन्, until तपस् and ब्रह्मन् become one, when तपस् is ब्रह्मन् itself.

That is how तपांसि - all forms of self discipline become तपांसि - Means for knowing ब्रह्मन्, recognizing ब्रह्मन् as आत्मा - The Self in oneself, which is what Lord यम says here.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

तपांसि सर्वाणि च यत् वदन्ति - That ब्रह्मन्, which all forms of self-discipline declare as The Means as well as The End to be reached - ॐ इत्येतत् That ब्रह्मन्, That आत्मा, is what is revealed by the word ॐ, by the sound ॐ. Further

यदिच्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति, ॐ इत्येतत् - Desiring to reach which state of existence, desiring to reach which goal of life, people follow a disciplined life of ब्रह्मचर्य, ॐ इत्येतत्, that state of existence, That Goal of Life, That ब्रह्मपदं about which you are asking, is what is revealed by the word ॐ, by the sound ॐ .

ब्रह्मचर्य is only a form of तपस्, self-discipline. Generally speaking, ब्रह्मचर्य refers to a strict life of celibacy in the first आश्रम or the student stage of life. Here ब्रह्मचर्य simply means Total commitment to the pursuit of ब्रह्म विद्या - totality of knowledge, at least for the time being, which means if you choose to listen to a discourse on ब्रह्म विद्या with total undivided attention, even for a few minutes, that is ब्रह्मचर्य तपस् - discipline of ब्रह्मचर्य. Now we go to the last line in the verse.

तत् ते पदं संग्रहेण ब्रवीमि ॐ इत्येतत्

Here पदं is ब्रह्म पदं - That exalted state of existence - That supreme goal of life to be reached by knowledge, that which is beyond all that is transient in this entire creation, That ब्रह्मपदं about which you are seeking knowledge

तत् ते संग्रहेण ब्रवीमि - Let me tell that to you briefly

ॐ इत्येतत् - That is ॐ That ब्रह्मपदं is what is revealed by the word ॐ, by the sound ॐ. Further, Lord यम continues

एतत् एव अक्षरं, ब्रह्म, एतत् एव अक्षरं परं ।

एतत् एव अक्षरं, ज्ञात्वा, यो यत् इच्छति, तस्य तत् ॥

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एतत् एव अक्षरं ब्रह्म



ब्रह्मचिदा **Brahma Vidya**

एतत् अक्षरं here is एकाक्षर वाचकं ॐ. That monosyllabic word ॐ is Itself indeed The All Inclusive ब्रह्मन् , which means that the word ॐ reveals both अपर ब्रह्म and पर ब्रह्म, both क्षेत्र and क्षेत्रज्ञ - both the known and the Knower, both the object and the Subject.

एतत् एव अक्षरं, परं

एतत् अक्षरं एव परं that monosyllabic word ॐ is indeed परं - परम पदं the exalted state of existence, the supreme goal of life to be reached by knowledge, through श्रवणं, मननं, and निदिध्यासनं - through listening, reflecting and absorbing the content of the words of the Upanishads.

एतत् एव अक्षरं, ज्ञत्वा - Knowing, recognizing That which is revealed by the word ॐ, by the sound ॐ

यो यत् इच्छति, तस्य तत् - One gets whatever one desires. How?

ॐ is ब्रह्मन्. Knowing ॐ is knowing ब्रह्मन् as It is, which means reaching ब्रह्मन् in oneself, recognizing oneself as ब्रह्मन् Itself. Being ब्रह्मन् means gaining सर्वात्मकं in oneself, being the आत्मा for everything that exists. It means that any object that a person desires, he is that object, any form of enjoyment that a person desires, he is that enjoyment. Thus, whatever the person desires, तस्य तत् - it is his. If it is परं ब्रह्म that he desires, परं ब्रह्म becomes knowable for him. If it is अपरं ब्रह्म that he desires, That अपरं ब्रह्म becomes attainable for him. (परं चेत् ज्ञातव्यं, अपरं चेत् प्राप्तव्यम्)

Further, Lord यम continues:

एतत् आलम्बनं, श्रेष्ठं, एतत् आलम्बनं, परं ।

एतत् आलम्बनं ज्ञात्वा, ब्रह्मलोके महीयते ॥

2-17

आलम्बनं is आश्रयं, the means of support for reaching a goal. परमेश्वर is the only means of support for reaching परमेश्वर. With respect to reaching परमेश्वर, the means and the end are the same. That is what is being told here.



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एतत् आलम्बनं श्रेष्ठं - That which is revealed, or indicated by the word ॐ , is the most exalted means of support, the surest and the best means of support for reaching the Goal. *What is the Goal?*

एतत् आलम्बनं परं - That which is revealed, or indicated by the word ॐ is परं -परम पदं The Goal to reach by ब्रह्म ज्ञानं -आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge.

एतत् आलम्बनं ज्ञात्वा - Knowing ॐ as such, reaching ॐ by knowledge, by श्रवणं मननं and निदिध्यासनं

ब्रह्मलोके महीयते - Here लोक means experience. ब्रह्मलोक is Experience of being ब्रह्मन् Itself. Therefore ब्रह्मलोके महीयते means that one experiences the Glory of ॐ, the Glory of oneself being ब्रह्मन् Itself. One realizes ब्रह्मन् in oneself and one enjoys ब्रह्मानन्द - The Supreme Joy of Being ब्रह्मन् Itself.

After this short exposition on the glory of ॐ - the word ॐ - the sound ॐ, Lord यम now proceeds to unfold the Nature of आत्मा directly in the next and the following verses, which we will see next time.