

Katha Upanishad

Om! May He protect us both together (by illumining the nature of knowledge).

May He sustain us both (by ensuring the fruits of knowledge).

May we attain the vigour (of knowledge) together.

Let what we learn enlighten us.

Let us not hate each other.

Om! Peace! Peace! Peace!

Chapter 1

1-1-1. Out of desire, so goes the story, the son of Vajasrava gave away all his wealth. He had a son named Nachiketas.

1-1-2. Though young, faith possessed him as presents were being brought; he thought:

1-1-3. Water has been drunk (for the last time by these cows), grass has been eaten (for the last time); they have yielded all their milk, and are devoid of (the power of) the organs. Those worlds are indeed joyless where he goes who offers these.

1-1-4. He then said to his parent, "father, to whom wilt thou give me?" A second time and a third time (he said it). To him he (the father) said, "To Death I give thee."

1-1-5. Of many I go the first; of many I go the middle most. What purpose of Yama could there be which (my father) will get accomplished today through me?

1-1-6. Think how your ancestors behaved; behold how others now behave. Like corn man decays, and like corn he is born again.

1-1-7. Like Vaisvanara (fire), a Brahmana guest enters the houses. Men offer this to propitiate him. O Vaivasvata (Yama): fetch water (for him).

1-1-8. Hope, expectation, association with the effects (of these two), pleasant discourse, sacrifice, acts of pious liberality, sons and cattle – all these are destroyed in the case of the man of little intellect in whose house a Brahmana dwells without food.

1-1-9. O Brahmana, since thou, a worshipful guest, hast dwelt in my house for three nights without food, let me make salutation to thee. O Brahmana, may peace be with me. Therefore, ask for three boons in return.

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1-I-10. O Death, let Gautama (my father) be relieved of the anxiety, let him become calm in mind and free from anger (towards me), and let him recognise me and talk to me when liberated by thee. Of the three boons, this is the first I choose.

1-I-11. Uddalaki, the son of Aruna, will recognise thee as before and will, with my permission, sleep peacefully during nights and on seeing thee released from the jaws of Death, he will be free from anger.

1-I-12. There is no fear in heaven; nor art thou there; nor is there any fear from old age. Transcending both hunger and thirst and rising above grief, man rejoices in heaven.

1-I-13. O Death, thou knowest the Fire that leads to heaven. Instruct me, who am endowed with faith, about that (Fire) by which those who dwell in heaven attain immortality. This I choose for my second boon.

1-I-14. I will teach thee well; listen to me and understand, O Nachiketas, I know the Fire that leads to heaven. Know that Fire which is the means for the attainment of heaven and which is the support (of the universe) and located in the cavity.

1-I-15. Death told him of the Fire, the source of the worlds, the sort of bricks (for raising the sacrificial altar), how many, and how (to kindle the fire) and he (Nachiketas) too repeated it as it was told. Then Death, becoming delighted over it, said again:

1-I-16. The exalted one, being pleased, said to him: "I grant thee again another boon now. By thy name itself shall this fire be known; and accept thou this necklace of manifold forms".

1-I-17. Whoso kindles the Nachiketas fire thrice and becomes united with the three and does the three-fold karma, transcends birth and death. Knowing the omniscient one, born of Brahma, bright and adorable, and realizing it, he attains to surpassing peace.

1-I-18. He who, knowing the three (form of brick etc.), piles up the Nachiketa Fire with this knowledge, throws off the chains of death even before (the body falls off), and rising over grief, rejoices in heaven.

1-I-19. This is the Fire, O Nachiketas, which leads to heaven and which thou hast chosen for the second boon. Of this Fire, people will speak as thine indeed. O Nachiketas, choose the third boon.

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1-I-20. This doubt as to what happens to a man after death – some say he is, and some others say he is not, – I shall know being taught by thee. Of the boons, this is the third boon.

1-I-21. Even by the gods this doubt was entertained in days of yore. This topic, being subtle, is not easy to comprehend. Ask for some other boon, O Nachiketas. Don't press me; give up this (boon) for me.

1-I-22. (Nachiketas said:) Since even by the gods was doubt entertained in this regard and (since) thou sayest, O Death, that this is not easily comprehended, no other preceptor like thee can be had to instruct on this nor is there any other boon equal to this.

1-I-23. Ask for sons and grandsons who will live a hundred years. Ask for herds of cattle, elephants gold and horses, as also for a vast extent of earth and thyself live for as many autumns as thou desirest.

1-I-24. If thou thinkest any other boon to be equal to this, ask for wealth and longevity. Be thou the ruler over a vast country, O Nachiketas; I shall make thee enjoy all thy longings.

1-I-25. What all things there are in the human world which are desirable, but hard to win, pray for all those desirable things according to thy pleasure. Here are these damsels with the chariots and lutes, the like of whom can never be had by men. By them, given by me, get thy services rendered, O Nachiketas, do not ask about death.

1-I-26. These, O Death, are ephemeral and they tend to wear out the vigour of all the senses of man. Even the whole life is short indeed. Be thine alone the chariots; be thine the dance and music.

1-I-27. Man cannot be satisfied with wealth. If we need wealth, we shall get it if we only see thee. We shall live until such time as thou wilt rule. But the boon to be asked for (by me) is that alone.

1-I-28. Having gained contact with the undecaying and the immortal, what decaying mortal dwelling on the earth below who knows the higher goal, will delight in long life, after becoming aware of the (transitoriness of) beauty (Varian) and sport (rati) and the joy (pramoda) thereof.

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1-I-29. O Death, tell us of that, of the great Beyond, about which man entertain doubt. Nachiketas does not pray for any other boon than this which enters into the secret that is hidden.

1-II-1. Different is (that which is) preferable; and different, indeed, is the pleasurable. These two, serving different purposes, blind man. Good accrues to him who, of these two, chooses the preferable. He who chooses the pleasurable falls from the goal.

1-II-2. The preferable and the pleasurable approach man. The intelligent one examines both and separates them. Yea, the intelligent one prefers the preferable to the pleasurable, (whereas) the ignorant one selects the pleasurable for the sake of yoga (attainment of that which is not already possessed) and kshema (the preservation of that which is already in possession).

1-II-3. Thou hast relinquished, O Nachiketas, all objects of desire, dear and of covetable nature, pondering over their worthlessness. Thou hast not accepted the path of wealth in which perish many a mortal.

1-II-4. What is known as ignorance and what is known as knowledge are highly opposed (to each other), and lead to different ways. I consider Nachiketas to be aspiring after knowledge, for desires, numerous though they be, did not tear thee away.

1-II-5. Living in the midst of ignorance and deeming themselves intelligent and enlightened, the ignorant go round and round staggering in crooked paths, like the blind led by the blind.

1-II-6. The means of attaining the other world does not become revealed to the non-discriminating one who, deluded by wealth, has become negligent. He who thinks, ‘this world alone is and none else’ comes to my thralldom again and again.

1-II-7. Of the Self many are not even able to hear; Him many, though they hear, do not comprehend. Wonderful is the expounder of the Self and attainer, proficient. The knower (of the Self) taught by an able preceptor is wonderful.

1-II-8. This (Self), if taught by an inferior person, is not easily comprehended, for It is variously thought of. Unless taught by another (who is a perceiver of non-difference) there is no way (of comprehending It), for It is not arguable and is subtler than subtlety.

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1-II-9. This (knowledge of the Self) attained by thee cannot be had through argumentation. O dearest, this doctrine, only if taught by some teacher (other than a logician), leads to right knowledge. O, thou art rooted in truth. May a questioner be ever like thee, O Nachiketas.

1-II-10. I know that the treasure is impermanent, for that which is constant cannot be reached by things which are not constant. Therefore, has the Nachiketa Fire been kindled by me with impermanent things, and I have attained the eternal.

1-II-11. The fulfilment of all desires, the support of the universe, the endless fruits of sacrifice, the other shore of fearlessness, the extensive path which is praiseworthy and great, as also (thy own exalted) state – seeing all these thou hast, intelligent as thou art, boldly rejected (them).

1-II-12. The intelligent one, knowing through concentration of mind the Self that is hard to perceive, lodged in the innermost recess, located in intelligence, seated amidst misery, and ancient, abandons joy and grief.

1-II-13. Having heard this and grasped it well, the mortal, separating the virtuous being (from the body etc.), and attaining this subtle Self, rejoices having obtained that which causes joy. The abode (of Brahman), I think, is wide open unto Nachiketas.

1-II-14. Tell me of that which thou seest as distinct from virtue, distinct from vice, distinct from effect and cause, distinct from the past and the future.

1-II-15. The goal which all the Vedas expound, which all austerities declare, and desiring which aspirants resort to Brahmacharya, that goal, I tell thee briefly: It is this – Om.

1-II-16. This syllable (Om) indeed is the (lower) Brahman; this syllable indeed is the higher Brahman; whosoever knows this syllable, indeed, attains whatsoever he desires.

1-II-17. This support is the best; this support is the supreme. Knowing this support one is magnified in the world of Brahman.

1-II-18. The intelligent Self is not born, nor does It die. It did not come from anywhere, nor did anything come from It. It is unborn, eternal, everlasting and ancient, and is not slain even when the body is slain.

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1-II-19. If the slayer thinks that he slays It and if the slain thinks of It as slain, both these do not know, for It does not slay nor is It slain.

1-II-20. The Self that is subtler than the subtle and greater than the great is seated in the heart of every creature. One who is free from desire sees the glory of the Self through the tranquillity of the mind and senses and becomes absolved from grief.

1-II-21. While sitting, It goes far, while lying It goes everywhere. Who other than me can know that Deity who is joyful and joyless.

1-II-22. The intelligent one having known the Self to be bodiless in (all) bodies, to be firmly seated in things that are perishable, and to be great and all-pervading, does not grieve.

1-II-23. The Self cannot be attained by the study of the Vedas, not by intelligence nor by much hearing. Only by him who seeks to know the Self can It be attained. To him the Self reveals Its own nature.

1-II-24. None who has not refrained from bad conduct, whose senses are not under restraint, whose mind is not collected or who does not preserve a tranquil mind, can attain this Self through knowledge.

1-II-25. The Self to which both the Brahmana and the Kshatriya are food, (as it were), and Death a soup, how can one know thus where It is.

1-III-1. The knowers of Brahman and those who kindle the five fires and propitiate the Nachiketa Fire thrice, speak of as light and shade, the two that enjoy the results of righteous deeds, entering within the body, into the innermost cavity (of the heart), the supreme abode (of Brahman).

1-III-2. May we be able to know the Nachiketa Fire which is the bridge for the sacrificers, as also the imperishable Brahman, fearless, as well as the other shore for those who are desirous of crossing (the ocean of samsara).

1-III-3. Know the Self to be the master of the chariot, and the body to be the chariot. Know the intellect to be the charioteer, and the mind to be the reins.

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1-III-4. The senses they speak of as the horses; the objects within their view, the way. When the Self is yoked with the mind and the senses, the wise call It the enjoyer.

1-III-5. But whoso is devoid of discrimination and is possessed of a mind ever uncollected – his senses are uncontrollable like the vicious horses of a driver.

1-III-6. But whoso is discriminative and possessed of a mind ever collected – his senses are controllable like the good horses of a driver.

1-III-7. But whoso is devoid of a discriminating intellect, possessed of an unrestrained mind and is ever impure, does not attain that goal, but goes to samsara.

1-III-8. But whoso is possessed of a discriminating intellect and a restrained mind, and is ever pure, attains that goal from which he is not born again.

1-III-9. But the man who has a discriminating intellect as his driver, and a controlled-mind as the reins, reaches the end of the path – that supreme state of Vishnu.

1-III-10. The sensory objects are subtler than the senses, and subtler than the sensory objects is mind. But intellect is subtler than mind and subtler than intellect is Mahat (the Hiranyagarbha).

1-III-11. The unmanifested (avyakta) is subtler than Mahat (Hiranyagarbha) and subtler than the unmanifested is Purusha. There is nothing subtler than Purusha. That is the end, that is the supreme goal.

1-III-12. This Self hidden in all beings does not shine. But by seers of subtle and pointed intellect capable of perceiving subtle objects, It is seen.

1-III-13. Let the wise man merge speech in his mind, merge that (mind) into the intelligent self and the intelligent self into the Mahat. (Let him then) merge the Mahat into the peaceful Self.

1-III-14. Arise, awake, and learn by approaching the exalted ones, for that path is sharp as a razor's edge, impassable, and hard to go by, say the wise.

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1-III-15. By knowing that which is soundless, touchless, formless, undecaying, so also tasteless, eternal, odourless, beginningless, endless, subtler than Mahat and constant, man is liberated from the jaws of death.

1-III-16. Narrating and hearing this eternal story of Nachiketas told by Death, the intelligent man attains glory in the world of Brahman.

1-III-17. Whoso, becoming pure, causes this supreme secret to be recited before an assembly of the Brahmanas, or at the time of Sraddha, that (ceremony) secures for him infinite results, secures infinite results.

2-I-1. The self-existent damned the out-going senses. Therefore one sees externally and not the internal Self. Someone (who is) intelligent, with his eyes turned away, desirous of immortality, sees the inner Self.

2-I-2. The unintelligent go after outward pleasures; they fall into the meshes of wide-spread death. But the intelligent, having known immortality to be constant, never covet here objects that are inconstant.

2-I-3. By the self (a man knows) form, taste, odour, sound, touch, and the sexual joy. What remains here (unknowable to the Self)? This verily is that (thou seekest).

2-I-4. Knowing that great and all-pervading Self by which one sees (the objects) both in the sleep and the waking states, the intelligent man grieves no more.

2-I-5. Whoso knows the self closely, the honey-eater, the supporter of the vital airs and the lord of the past and the future, will not henceforward protect himself. This verily is that (thou seekest).

2-I-6. He who perceives the First-born that came into being from Tapas (Brahman) before the waters, and that, entering into the cavity of the heart, is seated there, he perceives that very Brahman. This verily is that (thou seekest).

2-I-7. (He who perceives) this Aditi that comes into being as the Prana, comprising all the gods, that is manifested along with the elements, and that, entering into the cavity of the heart, is seated there, he perceives that very Brahman. This verily is that (thou seekest).

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2-I-8. The (sacrificial) fire lodged in the two aranis, even as the foetus is carefully borne by the pregnant woman, is fit to be worshipped every day by men who are wakeful and possessed of oblation. This verily is that (thou seekest).

2-I-9. On that from which the sun rises and in which it sets, are fixed all the gods. None ever goes beyond that. This verily is that (thou seekest).

2-I-10. What indeed is here is there; what is there is here again. Whoso here sees as though different, passes from death to death.

2-I-11. By mind alone is this attainable; there is no difference here whatsoever. Whoso here sees as though different, passes from death to death.

2-I-12. The Purusha, of the size of a thumb, dwells in the body. (Realizing Him as) the Lord of the past and the future, one does not (henceforward) want to protect oneself. This verily is that (thou seekest).

2-I-13. The Purusha of the size of a thumb is like a smokeless flame and is the Lord of the past and the future. He certainly exists now and shall certainly exist tomorrow. This verily is that (thou seekest).

2-I-14. As rain-water fallen on a mountain ridge runs down the rocks, so does one seeing the selves differently run after them alone.

2-I-15. As pure water poured into pure water remains the same only, so does the Self of the thinker who knows thus become, O Gautama.

2-II-1. The city of the unborn whose knowledge is like the light of the sun, consists of eleven gates. Meditating on Him, one does not grieve and, becoming free (from bondage), one becomes liberated. This verily is that (thou seekest).

2-II-2. As mover (sun), He dwells in heaven; (as air), He pervades everything and dwells in inter-space; as fire, on the earth; as guest, in the houses; He dwells in men; dwells in the gods; dwells in truth and dwells in space. He is all that is born in water, all that is born on earth, all that is born in sacrifices and all that is born on the mountains; He is unchanging and great.

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2-II-3. (He) raises the prana upward and casts the apana downward. All the gods worship Him who is adorable and seated in the middle.

2-II-4. When this Self seated in the body is torn away and freed from the body, what remains here? This verily is that (thou seekest).

2-II-5. Not by prana, not by apana does a mortal live; but all live by something else on which these two depend.

2-II-6. I will describe to thee, O Gautama, this secret ancient Brahman and also what becomes of the Self after death.

2-II-7. Some jivas enter the womb for assuming bodies; others go into the unmoving, in accordance with their karma and with their knowledge.

2-II-8. This Purusha who is awake when all are asleep, creating all things cherished, is certainly pure; that is Brahman; that is called the Immortal. All worlds are strung on that; none passes beyond that. This verily is that (thou seekest).

2-II-9. Just as fire, though one, having entered the world, assumes a separate form in respect of every form, so does the in-dwelling Self of all beings, though one, assume a form in respect of every form, and is outside it.

2-II-10. Just as wind, though one, having entered the world, assumes a separate form in respect of each form, so does the in-dwelling Self of all beings, though one, assumes a form in respect of every form and is outside it.

2-II-11. Just as the sun, which is the eye of the entire world, is not tainted by the external impurities seen by the eyes, so also, the in-dwelling Self of all beings, though one, is not tainted by the sorrows of the world, It being external.

2-II-12. Eternal happiness belongs to the intelligent – not to others – who realize in their hearts Him who is one, the controller and the in-dwelling Self of all beings, and who makes the one form manifold.

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2-II-13. Whoso among the intelligent realize the Self in the (inner space of the) heart as the eternal among the ephemeral, the consciousness among the conscious, who, though one, dispenses the desired objects to many, to them belongs eternal peace, not to others.

2-II-14. How shall I know that indescribable and supreme Bliss which they think of as 'This'? Is It self-luminous or does It shine distinctly, (making Itself perceptible to the intellect), or does It not?

2-II-15. There the sun shines not, nor do the moon and the stars, nor do these lightnings. How (then) can this fire (shine)? Everything shines after Him that shines. By His light shines all this.

2-III-1. This peepul tree with root above and branches down is eternal. That (which is its source) is certainly pure; that is Brahman and that is called immortal. On that are strung all the worlds; none passes beyond that. This verily is that (thou seekest).

2-III-2. All this universe, evolved (from Brahman), moves in prana (in Brahman); the most frightful like an uplifted thunderbolt. Those who know this become immortal.

2-III-3. For fear of Him, fire burns; For fear of Him, shines the sun; For fear of Him, Indra and Vayu function; For fear of Him, death, the fifth, stalks on the earth.

2-III-4. If one could know here prior to the falling of the body, (one becomes liberated); (if not), one becomes fit to be embodied in the worlds of creatures.

2-III-5. As in a mirror, so in one's intellect; as in a dream, so in the world of manes; as seen in water, so in the world of the Gandharvas; as in the case of shade and light, so in the world of Brahma.

2-III-6. The intelligent man, having known the different nature of the senses originating separately (from their causes), as also their rising and setting, does not grieve.

2-III-7. The mind is subtler than the senses; subtler than the mind is the intellect; Mahat (Hiranyagarbha) is subtler than the intellect; subtler than Mahat is Avyakta (Unmanifested).

2-III-8. But subtler than Avyakta is Purusha, all-pervading and without a linga (distinguishing mark) indeed, knowing whom a mortal becomes freed and attains immortality.

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2-III-9. His form does not stand within the scope of vision; none beholds Him with the eye. By the intellect restraining the mind, and through meditation is He revealed. Those who know this become immortal.

2-III-10. When the five senses of knowledge are at rest together with the mind, and the intellect is not active, that state they call the highest.

2-III-11. That steady restraint over the senses they regard as yoga. Then one becomes vigilant, for yoga can indeed originate (in one) and can be lost (as well).

2-III-12. Not by speech, not by mind, not by the eye can It be attained. Except in the case of one who says, 'It exists', how can It be known to anyone else?

2-III-13. The Self should be apprehended as existing and also as It really is. Of these two (aspects), to him who knows It to exist, Its true nature is revealed.

2-III-14. When all longings that are in the heart vanish, then a mortal becomes immortal and attains Brahman here.

2-III-15. When all the knots of the heart are cut asunder here, then a mortal becomes immortal. Only this much is the instruction.

2-III-16. There are a hundred and one nerves of the heart. Of then, one goes out piercing the head. Going up through that, one attains immortality; the others serve for departing in different ways.

2-III-17. Purusha of the size of a thumb, the inner Self, is ever seated in the heart of all living beings. One should, with steadiness, separate Him from one's own body as stalk from the Munja grass. One should know Him as pure and immortal; one should know Him as pure and immortal.

2-III-18. Nachiketas then, having acquired this knowledge imparted by Death, as also the instructions on Yoga in entirety, attained Brahman having become dispassionate and deathless. So does become any one else also who knows the inner Self thus.

“Om Sri Lakshmi Narashimhan Nahama”

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Om! May He protect us both together (by illumining the nature of knowledge).

May He sustain us both (by ensuring the fruits of knowledge).

May we attain the vigour (of knowledge) together.

Let what we learn enlighten us.

Let us not hate each other.

Om! Peace! Peace! Peace!

Here ends the Kathopanishad, as contained in the Krishna-Yajur-Veda.

Reference

Vidyavachaspati V. Panoli. “Katha Upanishad.”