

Katha Upanishad

The Katha Upanishad is probably the most widely known of all the Upanishads. It was early translated into Persian and through this rendering first made its way into Europe. Later Raja Ram Mohun Roy brought out an English version. It has since appeared in various languages; and English, German and French writers are all agreed in pronouncing it one of the most perfect expressions of the religion and philosophy of the Vedas. Sir Edwin Arnold popularized it by his metrical rendering under the name of "The Secret of Death," and Ralph Waldo Emerson gives its story in brief at the close of his essay on "Immortality."

There is no consensus of opinion regarding the place of this Upanishad in Vedic literature. Some authorities declare it to belong to the Yajur-Veda, others to the Sama-Veda, while a large number put it down as a part of the Atharva-Veda. The story is first suggested in the Rig-Veda; it is told more definitely in the Yajur-Veda; and in the Katha Upanishad it appears fully elaborated and interwoven with the loftiest Vedic teaching. There is nothing however, to indicate the special place of this final version, nor has any meaning been found for the name Katha.

The text presents a dialogue between an aspiring disciple, Nachiketas, and the Ruler of Death regarding the great Hereafter.

Katha Upanishad

Peace Chant

May He (the Supreme Being) protect us both, teacher and taught. May He be pleased with us. May we acquire strength. May our study bring us illumination. May there be no enmity among us.

OM! PEACE! PEACE! PEACE!

Part First

I

Vahasrava, being desirous of heavenly rewards (at the Viswajit sacrifice), made a gift of all that he possessed. He had a son by the name of Nachiketas.

II

When the offerings were being distributed, faith (Shraddha) entered (the heart of) Nachiketas, who, though young, yet resected:

III

These cows have drunk water, eaten grass and given milk for the last time, and their senses have lost all vigour. He who gives these undoubtedly goes to joyless realms.

In India the idea of sacrifice has always been to give freely for the joy of giving, without asking anything in return; and the whole purpose and merit of the sacrifice is lost, if the giver entertains the least thought of name, fame or individual benefit. The special Viswajit sacrifice which Vajasrava was making required of him to give away all that he possessed. When, however, the gifts were brought forward to be offered, his son Nachiketas, although probably a lad about twelve years of age, observed how worthless were the animals which his father was offering. His heart at once became filled with Shraddha. There is no one English word which can convey the meaning of this Sanskrit term. It is more than mere

faith. It also implies self-reliance, an independent sense of right and wrong, and the courage of one's own conviction. As a boy of tender age, Nachiketas had no right to question his father's action; yet, impelled by the sudden awakening of his higher nature, he could not but reflect: "By merely giving these useless cows, my father cannot gain any merit. If he has vowed to give all his possessions, then he must also give me. Otherwise his sacrifice will not be complete and fruitful." Therefore, anxious for his father's welfare, he approached him gently and reverently.

IV

He said to his father: Dear father, to whom wilt thou give me? He said it a second time, then a third time. The father replied: I shall give thee unto Death.

Nachiketas, being a dutiful son and eager to atone for his father's inadequate sacrifice, tried to remind him thus indirectly that he had not fulfilled his promise to give away all his possessions, since he had not yet offered his own son, who would be a worthier gift than useless cattle. His father, conscious that he was not making a true sacrifice, tried to ignore the boy's questions; but irritated by his persistence, he at last impatiently made answer: "I give thee to Yama, the Lord of Death." The fact that anger could so quickly rise in his heart proved that he had not the proper attitude of a sacrificer, who must always be tranquil, uplifted and free from egoism.

V

Nachiketas thought: Among many (of my father's pupils) I stand first; among many (others) I stand in the middle (but never last). What will be accomplished for my father by my going this day to Yama?

It was not conceit which led Nachiketas to consider his own standing and importance. He was weighing his value as a son and pupil in order to be able to judge whether or not he had merit enough to prove a worthy gift. Although he realized that his father's harsh reply was only the expression of a momentary outburst of anger; yet he believed that greater harm might befall his father, if his word was not kept. Therefore he sought to strengthen his father's resolution by reminding him of the transitory condition of life. He said:

VI

Look back to those who lived before and look to those who live now. Like grain the mortal decays and like grain again springs up (is reborn).

All things perish, Truth alone remains. Why then fear to sacrifice me also; Thus Nachiketas convinced his father that he should remain true to his word and send him to Yama, the Ruler of Death. Then Nachiketas went to the abode of Death, but Yama was absent and the boy waited without food or drink for three days. On Yama's return one of his household said to him:

VII

Like fire a Brahmana guest enters into houses. That fire is quenched by an offering. (Therefore) O Vaivaswata, bring water.

VIII

The foolish man in whose house a Brahmana guest remains without food, all his hopes and expectations, all the merit gained by his association with the holy, by his good words and deeds, all his sons and cattle, are destroyed.

According to the ancient Vedic ideal a guest is the representative of God and should be received with due reverence and honor. Especially is this the case with a Brahmana or a

Sannyasin whose life is wholly consecrated to God. Any one who fails to give proper care to a holy guest brings misfortune on himself and his household. When Yama returned, therefore, one of the members of his household anxiously informed him of Nachiketas' presence and begged him to bring water to wash his feet, this being always the first service to an arriving guest.

IX

Yama said: O Brahmana! Revered guest! My salutations to thee. As thou hast remained three nights in my house without food, therefore choose three boons, O Brahmana.

X

Nachiketas said: May Gautama, my father, be free from anxious thought (about me). May he lose all anger (towards me) and be pacified in heart. May he know and welcome me when I am sent back by thee. This, O Death, is the first of the three boons I choose.

XI

Yama replied: Through my will Auddalaki Aruni (thy father) will know thee, and be again towards thee as before. He will sleep in peace at night. He will be free from wrath when he sees thee released from the mouth of death.

XII

Nachiketas said: In the realm of heaven there is no fear, thou (Death) art not there; nor is there fear of old age. Having crossed beyond both hunger and thirst and being above grief, (they) rejoice in heaven.

XIII

Thou knowest, O Death, the fire—sacrifice that leads to heaven. Tell this to me, who am full of Shraddha (faith and yearning). They who live in the realm of heaven enjoy freedom from death. This I beg as my second boon.

XIV

Yama replied: I know well that fire which leads to the realm of heaven. I shall tell it to thee. Listen to me. Know, O Nachiketas, that this is the means of attaining endless worlds and their support. It is hidden in the heart of all beings.

XV

Yama then told him that fire—sacrifice, the beginning of all the worlds; what bricks, how many and how laid for the altar. Nachiketas repeated all as it was told to him. Then Death, being pleased with him, again said:

XVI

The great-soured Yama, being well pleased, said to him (Nachiketas): I give thee now another boon. This fire (sacrifice) shall be named after thee. Take also this garland of many colours.

XVII

He who performs this Nachiketa fire—sacrifice three times, being united with the three (mother, father and teacher), and who fulfills the three-fold duty (study of the Vedas, sacrifice and alms-giving) crosses over birth and death. Knowing this worshipful shining fire, born of Brahman, and realizing Him, he attains eternal peace.

XVIII

He who knows the three-fold Nachiketa fire and performs the Nachiketa fire-sacrifice with three-fold knowledge, having cast off the fetters of death and being beyond grief, he rejoices in the realm of heaven.

XIX

O Nachiketas, this is thy fire that leads to heaven, which thou hast chosen as thy second boon. People will call this fire after thy name. Ask the third boon, Nachiketas.

Fire is regarded as “the foundation of all the worlds,” because it is the revealer of creation. If there were no fire or light, no manifested form would be visible. We read in the Semitic Scriptures, “In the beginning the Lord said, ‘Let there be light.’” Therefore, that which stands in the external universe as one of the purest symbols of the Divine, also dwells in subtle form in the heart of every living being as the vital energy, the life-force or cause of existence.

Yama now tells Nachiketas how, by performing sacrifice with the three-fold knowledge, he may transcend grief and death and reach heaven. The three-fold knowledge referred to is regarding the preparation of the altar and fire. Nachiketas being eager to learn, listened with wholehearted attention and was able to repeat all that was told him. This so pleased Yama that he granted him the extra boon of naming the fire-sacrifice after him and gave him a garland set with precious stones.

Verses XVI–XVIII are regarded by many as an interpolation, which would account for certain obscurities and repetitions in them.

XX

Nachiketas said: There is this doubt regarding what becomes of a man after death. Some say he exists, others that he does not exist. This knowledge I desire, being instructed by thee. Of the boons this is the third boon.

XXI

Yama replied: Even the Devas (Bright Ones) of old doubted regarding this. It is not easy to know; subtle indeed is this subject. O Nachiketas, choose another boon. Do not press me. Ask not this boon of me.

XXII

Nachiketas said: O Death, thou sayest that even the Devas had doubts about this, and that it is not easy to know. Another teacher like unto thee is not to be found. Therefore no other boon can be equal to this one.

XXIII

Yama said: Ask for sons and grandsons who shall live a hundred years, many cattle, elephants, gold and horses. Ask for lands of vast extent and live thyself as many autumns as thou desirest.

XXIV

If thou thinkest of any other boon equal to this, ask for wealth and long life; be ruler over the wide earth. O Nachiketas, I shall make thee enjoyer of all desires.

XXV

Whatsoever objects of desire are difficult to obtain in the realm of mortals, ask them all as thou desirest; these lovely maidens with their chariots and musical instruments, such as

are not obtainable by mortals—be served by these whom I give to thee. O Nachiketas, do not ask regarding death.

The third boon asked by Nachiketas concerning the great Hereafter was one which could be granted only to those who were freed from all mortal desires and limitations, therefore Yama first tested Nachiketas to see whether he was ready to receive such knowledge. “Do not press me regarding this secret,” he said. “Even wise men cannot understand it and thou art a mere lad. Take, rather, long life, wealth, whatever will give thee happiness on the mortal plane.” But the boy proved his strength and worthiness by remaining firm in his resolution to know the great secret of life and death.

XXVI

Nachiketas said: O Death, these are fleeting; they weaken the vigour of all the senses in man. Even the longest life is short. Keep thou thy chariots, dance and music.

XXVII

Man cannot be satisfied by wealth. Shall we possess wealth when we see thee (Death)? Shall we continue to live as long as thou rulest? Therefore that boon alone is to be chosen by me.

XXVIII

What man dwelling on the decaying mortal plane, having approached the undecaying immortal one, and having reflected upon the nature of enjoyment through beauty and sense pleasure, would delight in long life?

XXIX

O Death, that regarding which there is doubt, of the great Hereafter, tell us. Nachiketas asks for no other boon than that which penetrates this hidden secret.

Part Second

I

Yama said: The good is one thing and the pleasant another. These two, having different ends, bind a man. It is well with him who chooses the good. He who chooses the pleasant misses the true end.

II

The good and the pleasant approach man; the wise examines both and discriminates between them; the wise prefers the good to the pleasant, but the foolish man chooses the pleasant through love of bodily pleasure.

III

O Nachiketas after wise reflection thou hast renounced the pleasant and all pleasing forms. Thou hast not accepted this garland of great value for which many mortals perish.

IV

Wide apart are these two,—ignorance and what is known as wisdom, leading in opposite directions. I believe Nachiketas to be one who longs for wisdom, since many tempting objects have not turned thee aside.

With this second part, the Ruler of Death begins his instructions regarding the great Hereafter. There are two paths,—one leading Godward, the other leading to worldly pleasure. He who follows one inevitably goes away from the other; because, like light and darkness they conflict. One leads to the imperishable spiritual realm; the other to the perishable physical realm. Both confront a man at every step of life. The discerning man

distinguishing between the two, chooses the Real and Eternal, and he alone attains the highest, while the ignorant man, preferring that which brings him immediate and tangible results, misses the true purpose of his existence. Although Yama put before Nachiketas many temptations to test his sincerity and earnestness, he judging them at their real value, refused them all, saying "I have come from the mortal realm, shall I ask for what is mortal? I desire only that which is eternal." Then Death said to him: "I now see that thou art a sincere desirer of Truth. I offered thee vast wealth, long life and every form of pleasure which tempts and deludes men; but thou hast proved thy worthiness by rejecting them all."

V

Fools dwelling in ignorance, yet imagining themselves wise and learned, go round and round in crooked ways, like the blind led by the blind.

VI

The Hereafter never rises before the thoughtless child (the ignorant), deluded by the glamour of wealth. "This world alone is, there is none other": thinking thus, he falls under my sway again and again.

There are many in the world, who, puffed up with intellectual conceit, believe that they are capable of guiding others. But although they may possess a certain amount of worldly wisdom, they are devoid of deeper understanding; therefore all that they say merely increases doubt and confusion in the minds of those who hear them. Hence they are likened to blind men leading the blind.

The Hereafter does not shine before those who are lacking in the power of discrimination and are easily carried away therefore by the charm of fleeting objects. As children are tempted by toys, so they are tempted by pleasure, power, name and fame. To them these seem the only realities. Being thus attached to perishable things, they come many times under the dominion of death. There is one part of us which must die; there is another part which never dies. When a man can identify himself with his undying nature, which is one with God, then he overcomes death.

VII

He about whom many are not even able to hear, whom many cannot comprehend even after hearing: wonderful is the teacher, wonderful is he who can receive when taught by an able teacher.

Throughout the Vedic Scriptures it is declared that no one can impart spiritual knowledge unless he has realization. What is meant by realization? It means knowledge based on direct perception. In India often the best teachers have no learning, but their character is so shining that every one learns merely by coming in contact with them. In one of the Scriptures we read: Under a banyan tree sat a youthful teacher and beside him an aged disciple. The mind of the disciple was full of doubts and questions, but although the teacher continued silent, gradually every doubt vanished from the disciple's mind. This signifies that the conveying of spiritual teaching does not depend upon words only. It is the life, the illumination, which counts. Such God-enlightened men, however, cannot easily be found; but even with such a teacher, the knowledge of the Self cannot be gained unless the heart of the disciple is open and ready for the Truth. Hence Yama says both teacher and taught must be wonderful.

VIII

When taught by a man of inferior understanding, this Atman cannot be truly known, even though frequently thought upon. There is no way (to know It) unless it is taught by another (an illumined teacher), for it is subtler than the subtle and beyond argument.

IX

O Dearest, this Atman cannot be attained by argument; It is truly known only when taught by another (a wise teacher). O Nachiketas, thou hast attained It. Thou art fixed in Truth. May we ever, find a questioner like thee.

Knowledge of the Atman or Self cannot be attained when it is taught by those who themselves lack in real understanding of It; and who therefore, having no definite conviction of their own, differ among themselves as to its nature and existence. Only he who has been able to perceive the Self directly, through the unfoldment of his higher nature, can proclaim what It actually is; and his words alone carry weight and bring illumination. It is too subtle to be reached by argument. This secret regarding the Hereafter cannot be known through reasoning or mere intellectual gymnastics. It is to be attained only in a state of consciousness which transcends the boundary line of reason.

X

I know that (earthly) treasure is transitory, for the eternal can never be attained by things which are non-eternal. Hence the Nachiketa fire (sacrifice) has been performed by me with perishable things and yet I have attained the eternal.

XI

O Nachiketas, thou hast seen the fulfillment of all desires, the basis of the universe, the endless fruit of sacrificial rites, the other shore where there is no fear, that which is praiseworthy, the great and wide support; yet, being wise, thou hast rejected all with firm resolve.

The teacher, saying that the imperishable cannot be attained by the perishable, shows that no amount of observance of rituals and ceremonies can earn the imperishable and eternal. Although the Nachiketa fire-sacrifice may bring results which seem eternal to mortals because of their long duration, yet they too must come to an end; therefore this sacrifice cannot lead to the final goal. Yama praises Nachiketas because, when all heavenly and earthly pleasures, as well as knowledge of all realms and their enjoyments were offered him, yet he cast them aside and remained firm in his desire for Truth alone.

XII

The wise, who by means of the highest meditation on the Self knows the Ancient One, difficult to perceive, seated in the innermost recess, hidden in the cave of the heart, dwelling in the depth of inner being, (he who knows that One) as God, is liberated from the fetters of joy and sorrow.

XIII

A mortal, having heard and fully grasped this, and having realized through discrimination the subtle Self, rejoices, because he has obtained that which is the source of all joy. I think the abode (of Truth) is open to Nachiketas.

The Scriptures give three stages in all spiritual attainment. The aspirant must first hear about the Truth from an enlightened teacher; next he must reflect upon what he has heard; then by constant practice of discrimination and meditation he realizes it; and with realization comes the fulfilment of every desire, because it unites him with the source of all. Having beheld this, a man learns that all sense pleasures are but fragmentary reflections of that one supreme joy, which can be found in the true Self alone. Yama assures Nachiketas that there is no doubt of his realizing the Truth, because he has shown the highest discrimination as well as fixity of purpose.

XIV

Nachiketas said: That which thou seest, which is neither virtue nor vice, neither cause nor effect, neither past nor future (but beyond these), tell me That.

XV

Yama replied: That goal which all the Vedas glorify, which all austerities proclaim, desiring which (people) practice Brahmacharya (a life of continence and service), that goal I tell thee briefly—it is Aum.

What name can man give to God? How can the Infinite be bound by any finite word? All that language can express must be finite, since it is itself finite. Yet it is very difficult for mortals to think or speak of anything without calling it by a definite name. Knowing this, the Sages gave to the Supreme the name A-U-M which stands as the root of all language. The first letter "A" is the mother-sound, being the natural sound uttered by every creature when the throat is opened, and no sound can be made without opening the throat. The last letter "M," spoken by closing the lips, terminates all articulation. As one carries the sound from the throat to the lips, it passes through the sound "U." These three sounds therefore cover the whole field of possible articulate sound. Their combination is called the Akshara or the imperishable word, the Sound-Brahman or the Word

God, because it is the most universal name which can be given to the Supreme. Hence it must be the word which was "in the beginning" and corresponds to the Logos of Christian theology. It is because of the all-embracing significance of this name that it is used so universally in the Vedic Scriptures to designate the Absolute.

XVI

This Word is indeed Brahman. This Word is indeed the Supreme. He who knows this Word obtains whatever he desires.

XVII

This is the best Support, This is the highest Support; he who knows this Support is glorified in the world of Brahman.

This sacred Word is the highest symbol of the Absolute. He who through meditating on It grasps Its full significance, realizes the glory of God and at once has all his desires satisfied, because God is the fulfilment of all desires.

XVIII

This Self is never born, nor does It die. It did not spring from anything, nor did anything spring from It. This Ancient One is unborn, eternal, everlasting. It is not slain even though the body is slain.

XIX

If the slayer thinks that he slays, or if the slain thinks that he is slain, both of these know not. For It neither slays nor is It slain.

XX

The Self is subtler than the subtle, greater than the great; It dwells in the heart of each living being. He who is free from desire and free from grief, with mind and senses tranquil, beholds the glory of the Atman.

Although this Atman dwells in the heart of every living being, yet It is not perceived by ordinary mortals because of Its subtlety. It cannot be perceived by the senses; a finer spiritual sight is required. The heart must be pure and freed from every unworthy selfish

desire; the thought must be indrawn from all external objects; mind and body must be under control; when the whole being thus becomes calm and serene, then it is possible to perceive that effulgent Atman. It is subtler than the subtle, because It is the invisible essence of every thing; and It is greater than the great because It is the boundless, sustaining power of the whole universe; that upon which all existence rests.

XXI

Though sitting, It travels far; though lying, It goes everywhere. Who else save me is fit to know that God, who is (both) joyful and joyless?

The Self is all-pervading, hence It is that which sits still and that which travels, that which is active and that which is inactive. It is both stationary and moving, and It is the basis of all forms of existence; therefore whatever exists in the universe, whether joy or joylessness, pleasure or pain, must spring from It. Who is better able to know God than I myself, since He resides in my heart and is the very essence of my being? Such should be the attitude of one who is seeking.

XXII

The wise who know the Self, bodiless, seated within perishable bodies, great and all-pervading, grieve not.

Then a wise man through the practice of discrimination has seen clearly the distinction between body and Soul, he knows that his true Self is not the body, though It dwells in the body. Thus realizing the indestructible, all-pervading nature of his real Self, he surmounts all fear of death or loss, and is not moved even by the greatest sorrow.

XXIII

This Self cannot be attained by study of the Scriptures, nor by intellectual perception, nor by frequent hearing (of It); He whom the Self chooses, by him alone is It attained. To him the Self reveals Its true nature.

We may imagine that by much study we can find out God; but merely hearing about a thing and gaining an intellectual comprehension of it does not mean attaining true knowledge of it. Knowledge only comes through direct perception, and direct perception of God is possible for those alone who are pure in heart and spiritually awakened. Although He is alike to all beings and His mercy is on all, yet the impure and worldly-minded do not get the blessing, because they do not know how to open their hearts to it. He who longs for God, him the Lord chooses; because to him alone can He reveal His true nature.

XXIV

He who has not turned away from evil conduct, whose senses are uncontrolled, who is not tranquil, whose mind is not at rest, he can never attain this Atman even by knowledge.

Yama having first described what the Atman is, now tells us how to attain It. man must try to subdue his lower nature and gain control over the body and senses. e must conquer the impure selfish desires which now disturb the serenity of his mind, that it may grow calm and peaceful. In other words, he must live the life and develop all spiritual qualities in order to perceive the Atman.

XXV

Who then can know where is this mighty Self? He (that Self) to whom the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas are but food and death itself a condiment.

This text proclaims the glory and majesty of the Supreme. The Brahmanas stand for spiritual strength, the Kshatriyas for physical strength, yet both are overpowered by His mightiness. Life and death alike are food for Him. As the light of the great sun swallows up all the lesser lights of the universe, similarly all worlds are lost in the effulgence of the Eternal Omnipresent Being.

Part Third

I

There are two who enjoy the fruits of their good deeds in the world, having entered into the cave of the heart, seated (there) on the highest summit. The knowers of Brahman call them shadow and light. So also (they are called) by householders who perform five fire-sacrifices or three Nachiketa fire-sacrifices.

Here the two signify the Higher Self and the lower self, dwelling in the innermost cave of the heart. The Seers of Truth, as well as householders who follow the path of rituals and outer forms with the hope of enjoying the fruits of their good deeds, both proclaim that the Higher Self is like a light and the lower self like a shadow. When the Truth shines clearly in the heart of the knower, then he surmounts the apparent duality of his nature and becomes convinced that there is but One, and that all outer manifestations are nothing but reflections or projections of that One.

II

May we be able to learn that Nachiketa fire-sacrifice, which is a bridge for those who perform sacrifice. May we also know the One, who is the highest imperishable Brahman for those who desire to cross over to the other shore which is beyond fear.

The significance of this text is May we acquire the knowledge of Brahman, the Supreme, in both manifested and unmanifested form. He is manifested as the Lord of sacrifice for those who follow the path of ritual He is the unmanifested, eternal, universal Supreme Being for those who follow the path of wisdom. The "other shore," being the realm of immortality, is said to be beyond fear; because disease, death, and all that which mortals fear, cease to exist there. It is believed by many that these two opening verses were a later interpolation.

III

Know the Atman (Self) as the lord of the chariot, and the body as the chariot. Know also the intellect to be the driver and mind the reins.

IV

The senses are called the horses; the sense objects are the roads; when the Atman is united with body, senses and mind, then the wise call Him the enjoyer.

In the third chapter Yama defines what part of our being dies and what part is deathless, what is mortal and what is immortal. But the Atman, the Higher Self, is so entirely beyond human conception that it is impossible to give a direct definition of It. Only through similies can some idea of It be conveyed. That is the reason why all the great Teachers of the world have so often taught in the form of parables. So here the Ruler of Death represents the Self as the lord of this chariot of the body. The intellect or discriminative faculty is the driver, who controls these wild horses of the senses by holding firmly the reins of the mind. The roads over which these horses travel are made up of all the external objects which attract or repel the senses:—the sense of smelling follows the path of sweet odours, the sense of seeing the way of beautiful sights. Thus each sense, unless restrained by the discriminative faculty, seeks to go out towards its special objects. When the Self is joined

with body, mind and senses, It is called the intelligent enjoyer; because It is the one who wills, feels, perceives and does everything.

V

He who is without discrimination and whose mind is always uncontrolled, his senses are unmanageable, like the vicious horses of a driver.

VI

But he who is full of discrimination and whose mind is always controlled, his senses are manageable, like the good horses of a driver.

The man whose intellect is not discriminative and who fails to distinguish right from wrong, the real from the unreal, is carried away by his sense passions and desires, just as a driver is carried away by vicious horses over which he has lost control. But he who clearly distinguishes what is good from what is merely pleasant, and controls all his out-going forces from running after apparent momentary pleasures, his senses obey and serve him as good horses obey their driver.

VII

He who does not possess discrimination, whose mind is uncontrolled and always impure, he does not reach that goal, but falls again into Samsara (realm of birth and death).

VIII

But he who possesses right discrimination, whose mind is under control and always pure, he reaches that goal, from which he is not born again.

IX

The man who has a discriminative intellect for the driver, and a controlled mind for the reins, reaches the end of the journey, the highest place of Vishnu (the All-pervading and Unchangeable One).

A driver must possess first a thorough knowledge of the road; next he must understand how to handle the reins and control his horses. Then will he drive safely to his destination. Similarly in this journey of life, our mind and senses must be wholly under the control of our higher discriminative faculty; for only when all our forces work in unison can we hope to reach the goal—the abode of Absolute Truth.

X

Beyond the senses are the objects, beyond the objects is the mind, beyond the mind is the intellect, beyond the intellect is the great Atman.

XI

Beyond the great Atman is the Unmanifested; beyond the Unmanifested is the Purusha (the Cosmic Soul); beyond the Purusha there is nothing. That is the end, that is the final goal.

In these two verses the Teacher shows the process of discrimination, by which one attains knowledge of the subtle Self. Beginning with the sense-organs, he leads up to the less and less gross, until he reaches that which is subtlest of all, the true Self of man. The senses are dependent on sense-objects, because without these the senses would have no utility. Superior to sense-objects is the mind, because unless these objects affect the mind, they cannot influence the senses. Over the mind the determinative faculty exercises power; this determinative faculty is governed by the individual Self; beyond this Self is the undifferentiated creative energy known as Avyaktam; and above this is the Purusha or

Supreme Self. Than this there is nothing higher. That is the goal, the Highest Abode of Peace and Bliss.

XII

This Atman (Self), hidden in all beings, does not shine forth; but It is seen by subtle seers through keen and subtle understanding.

If It dwells in all living beings, why do we not see It? Because the ordinary man's vision is too dull and distracted. It is visible to those alone whose intellect has been purified by constant thought on the Supreme, and whose sight therefore has become refined and sharpened. This keenness of vision comes only when all our forces have been made one-pointed through steadfast practice of concentration and meditation.

XIII

A wise man should control speech by mind, mind by intellect, intellect by the great Atman, and that by the Peaceful One (the Paramatman or Supreme Self).

Here Yama gives the practical method to be followed if one wishes to realize the Supreme. The word "speech" stands for all the senses. First, therefore, a man must control his outgoing senses by the mind. Then the mind must be brought under the control of the discriminative faculty; that is, it must be withdrawn from all sense-objects and cease to waste its energies on nonessential things. The discriminative faculty in turn must be controlled by the higher individual intelligence and this must be governed wholly by the Supreme Intelligence.

XIV

A rise! Awake! Having reached the Great Ones (illuminated Teachers), gain understanding. The path is as sharp as a razor, impassable and difficult to travel, so the wise declare.

This is the eternal call of the wise: Awake from the slumber of ignorance! Arise and seek out those who know the Truth, because only those who have direct vision of Truth are capable of teaching It. Invoke their blessing with a humble spirit and seek to be instructed by them. The path is very difficult to tread. No thoughtless or lethargic person can safely travel on it. One must be strong, wakeful and persevering.

XV

Knowing That which is soundless, touchless, formless, undecaying; also tasteless, odorless, and eternal; beginningless, endless and immutable; beyond the Unmanifested: (knowing That) man escapes from the mouth of death.

The Ruler of Death defines here the innermost essence of our being. Because of its extreme subtlety, it cannot be heard or felt or smelled or tasted like any ordinary object. It never dies. It has no beginning or end. It is unchangeable. Realizing this Supreme Reality, man escapes from death and attains everlasting life. Thus the Teacher has gradually led Nachiketas to a point where he can reveal to him the secret of death. The boy had thought that there was a place where he could stay and become immortal. But Yama shows him that immortality is a state of consciousness and is not gained so long as man clings to name and form, or to perishable objects. What dies? Form. Therefore the formful man dies; but not that which dwells within. Although inconceivably subtle, the Sages have always made an effort through similes and analogies to give some idea of this inner Self or the God within. They have described It as beyond mind and speech; too subtle for ordinary perception, but not beyond the range of purified vision.

XVI

The intelligent man, who has heard and repeated the ancient story of Nachiketas, told by the Ruler of Death, is glorified in the world of Brahman.

XVII

He who with devotion recites this highest secret of immortality before an assembly of Brahmanas (pious men) or at the time of Shraddha (funeral ceremonies), gains everlasting reward, he gains everlasting reward.

Part Fourth

I

The Self-existent created the senses out-going; for this reason man sees the external, but not the inner Atman (Self). Some wise man, however, desiring immortality, with eyes turned away (from the external) sees the Atman within.

In the last chapter the Ruler of Death instructed Nachiketas regarding the nature and glory of the Self. Now he shows the reason why the Self is not seen by the majority. It is because man's mind is constantly drawn outward through the channels of his senses, and this prevents his seeing the inner Self (Pratyagatman); but now and then a seeker, wiser than others, goes within and attains the vision of the undying Self.

II

Children (the ignorant) pursue external pleasures; (thus) they fall into the wide-spread snare of death. But the wise, knowing the nature of immortality, do not seek the permanent among fleeting things.

Those who are devoid of discrimination and fail to distinguish between real and unreal, the fleeting and the permanent, set their hearts on the changeable things of this world; hence they entangle themselves in the net of insatiable desire, which leads inevitably to disappointment and suffering. To such, death must seem a reality because they identify themselves with that which is born and which dies. But the wise, who see deeper into the nature of things, are no longer deluded by the charm of the phenomenal world and do not seek for permanent happiness among its passing enjoyments.

III

That by which one knows form, taste, smell, sound, touch and sense enjoyments, by That also one knows whatever remains (to be known). This verily is That (which thou hast asked to know).

IV

That by which a mortal perceives, both in dream and in waking, by knowing that great all-pervading Atman the wise man grieves no more.

In these verses the teacher tries to make plain that all knowledge, as well as all sense perception, in every state of consciousness—sleeping, dreaming or waking—is possible only because the Self exists. There can be no knowledge or perception independent of the Self. Wise men, aware of this, identify themselves with their Higher Self and thus transcend the realm of grief.

V

He who knows this Atman, the honey-eater (perceiver and enjoyer of objects), ever near, as the lord of the past and future, fears no more. This verily is That.

VI

He who sees Him seated in the five elements, born of Tapas (fire of Brahman), born before water; who, having entered the cave of the heart, abides therein –this verily is That.

This verse indicates that He, the Great Self, is the cause of all created objects. According to the Vedas, His first manifestation was Brahma, the Personal God or Creator, born of the fire of wisdom. He existed before the evolution of the five elements– earth, water, fire, air and ether; hence He was “born before water.” He is the Self dwelling in the hearts of all creatures.

VII

He who knows Aditi, who rises with Prana (the Life Principle), existent in all the Devas; who, having entered into the heart, abides there; and who was born from the elements–this verily is That.

This verse is somewhat obscure and seems like an interpolated amplification of the preceding verse.

VIII

The all–seeing fire which exists hidden in the two sticks, as the foetus is well–guarded in the womb by the mother, (that fire) is to be worshipped day after day by wakeful seekers (after wisdom), as well as by sacrificers. This verily is That.

Fire is called all–seeing because its light makes everything visible. In Vedic sacrifices the altar fire was always kindled by rubbing together two sticks of a special kind of wood called Arani. Because fire was regarded as one of the most perfect symbols of Divine wisdom, it was to be worshipped by all seekers after Truth, whether they followed the path of meditation or the path of rituals.

IX

From whence the sun rises, and whither it goes at setting, upon That all the Devas depend. No one goes beyond That. This verily is That.

X

What is here (in the visible world), that is there (in the invisible); he who sees difference (between visible and invisible) goes from death to death.

XI

By mind alone this is to be realized. There is no difference whatever (between visible and invisible). He who sees difference here (between these) goes from death to death.

In the sight of true wisdom, there is no difference between the creator and the created. Even physical science has come to recognize that cause and effect are but two aspects of one manifestation of energy. He who fails to see this, being engrossed in the visible only, goes from death to death; because he clings to external forms which are perishable. Only the essence which dwells within is unchangeable and imperishable. This knowledge of the oneness of visible and invisible, however, cannot be acquired through sense–perception. It can only be attained by the purified mind.

XII

The Purusha (Self), of the size of a thumb, resides in the middle of the body as the lord of the past and the future, (he who knows Him) fears no more. This verily is That.

The seat of the Purusha is said to be the heart, hence It “resides in the middle of the body.” Although It is limitless and all–pervading, yet in relation to Its abiding–place It is

represented as limited in extension, “the size of a thumb.” This refers really to the heart, which in shape may be likened to a thumb. Its light is everywhere, yet we see it focused in a lamp and believe it to be there only; similarly, although the life-current flows everywhere in the body, the heart is regarded as peculiarly its seat.

XIII

That Purusha, of the size of a thumb, is like a light without smoke, lord of the past and the future. He is the same today and tomorrow. This verily is That.

In this verse the teacher defines the effulgent nature of the Soul, whose light is pure like a flame without smoke. He also answers the question put by Nachiketas as to what happens after death, by declaring that no real change takes place, because the Soul is ever the same.

XIV

As rain water, (falling) on the mountain top, runs down over the rocks on all sides; similarly, he who sees difference (between visible forms) runs after them in various directions.

XV

O Gautama (Nachiketas), as pure water poured into pure water becomes one, so also is it with the Self of an illumined Knower (he becomes one with the Supreme).

Part Fifth

I

The city of the Unborn, whose knowledge is unchanging, has eleven gates. Thinking on Him, man grieves no more; and being freed (from ignorance), he attains liberation. This verily is That.

This human body is called a city with eleven gates, where the eternal unborn Spirit dwells. These gates are the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, the mouth, the navel, the two lower apertures, and the imperceptible opening at the top of the head. The Self or Atman holds the position of ruler in this city; and being above the modifications of birth, death and all human imperfections, It is not affected by the changes of the physical organism. As the intelligent man through constant thought and meditation realizes the splendour of this Supreme Spirit, he becomes free from that part of his nature which grieves and suffers, and thus he attains liberation.

II

He is the sun dwelling in the bright heaven; He is the air dwelling in space; He is the fire burning on the altar; He is the guest dwelling in the house. He dwells in man. He dwells in those greater than man. He dwells in sacrifice. He dwells in the ether. He is (all that is) born in water, (all that) is born in earth, (all that) is born in sacrifice, (all that) is born on mountains. He is the True and the Great.

III

He it is who sends the (in-coming) Prana (life-breath) upward and throws the (out-going) breath downward. Him all the senses worship, the adorable Atman, seated in the centre (the heart).

IV

When this Atman, which is seated in the body, goes out (from the body), what remains then? This verily is That.

V

No mortal lives by the in-coming breath (Prana) or by the out-going breath (Apana), but he lives by another on which these two depend.

VI

O Gautama (Nachiketas), I shall declare unto thee the secret of the eternal Brahman and what happens to the Self after death.

VII

Some Jivas (individual Souls) enter wombs to be embodied; others go into immovable forms, according to their deeds and knowledge.

This text shows the application of the law of cause and effect to all forms of life. The thoughts and actions of the present life determine the future birth and environment.

VIII

The Being who remains awake while all sleep, who grants all desires, That is pure, That is Brahman, That alone is said to be immortal. On That all the worlds rest. None goes beyond That. This verily is That.

IX

As fire, though one, having entered the world, becomes various according to what it burns, so does the Atman (Self) within all living beings, though one, become various according to what it enters. It also exists outside.

X

As air, though one, having entered the world, becomes various according to what it enters, so does the Atman within all living beings, though one, become various according to what it enters. It also exists outside.

By using these similies of fire and air, the teacher tries to show Nachiketas the subtle quality of the great Self, who, although one and formless like air and fire, yet assumes different shapes according to the form in which It dwells. But, being all-pervading and unlimited, It cannot be confined to these forms; therefore it is said that It also exists outside all forms.

XI

As the sun, the eye of the whole world, is not defiled by external impurities seen by the eyes, thus the one inner Self of all living beings is not defiled by the misery of the world, being outside it.

The sun is called the eye of the world because it reveals all objects. As the sun may shine on the most impure object, yet remain uncontaminated by it, so the Divine Self within is not touched by the impurity or suffering of the physical form in which it dwells, the Self being beyond all bodily limitations.

XII

There is one ruler, the Self of all living beings, who makes the one form manifold; the wise who perceive Him seated within their Self, to them belongs eternal bliss, not to others.

XIII

Eternal among the changing, consciousness of the conscious, who, though one, fulfils the desires of many: the wise who perceive Him seated within their Self, to them belongs eternal peace, not to others.

XIV

They (the wise) perceive that indescribable highest bliss, saying, This is That. How am I to know It? Does It shine (by Its own light) or does It shine (by reflected light)?

XV

The sun does not shine there, nor the moon, nor the stars; nor do these lightnings shine there, much less this fire. When He shines, everything shines after Him; by His light all is lighted.

Part Sixth

I

This ancient Aswattha tree has its root above and branches below. That is pure, That is Brahman, That alone is called the Immortal. All the worlds rest in That. None goes beyond That. This verily is That.

This verse indicates the origin of the tree of creation (the Samsara–Vriksha), which is rooted above in Brahman, the Supreme, and sends its branches downward into the phenomenal world. Heat and cold, pleasure and pain, birth and death, and all the shifting conditions of the mortal realm—these are the branches; but the origin of the tree, the Brahman, is eternally pure, unchanging, free and deathless. From the highest angelic form to the minutest atom, all created things have their origin in Him. He is the foundation of the universe. There is nothing beyond Him.

II

Whatever there is in the universe is evolved from Prana and vibrates in Prana. That is a mighty terror, like an upraised thunderbolt. They who know That become immortal.

III

From fear of Him the fire burns, from fear of Him the sun shines. From fear of Him Indra and Vayu and Death, the fifth, speed forth.

Just as the body cannot live or act without the Soul, similarly nothing in the created world can exist independent of Brahman, who is the basis of all existence. His position is like that of a king whom all must obey; hence it is said that the gods of sun, moon, wind, rain, do His bidding. He is likened to an upraised thunderbolt, because of the impartial and inevitable nature of His law, which all powers, great or small, must obey absolutely.

IV

If a man is not able to know Him before the dissolution of the body, then he becomes embodied again in the created worlds.

As soon as a man acquires knowledge of the Supreme, he is liberated; but if he fails to attain such knowledge before his Soul is separated from the body, then he must take other bodies and return again and again to this realm of birth and death, until through varied experience he realizes the nature of the Supreme and his relation to Him.

V

As in a mirror, so is He seen within oneself; as in a dream, so (is He seen) in the world of the fathers (departed spirits); as in water, so (is He seen) in the world of Gandharvas (the angelic realm). As light and shadow, so (is He seen) in the world of Brahma (the Creator).

When by means of a purified understanding one beholds God within, the image is distinct as in a polished mirror; but one cannot have clear vision of the Supreme by attaining to the various realms known as heavens, where one reaps the fruit of his good deeds. It is only by developing one's highest consciousness here in this life that perfect God-vision can be attained.

VI

Knowing that the senses are distinct (from the Atman) and their rising and setting separate (from the Atman), a wise man grieves no more.

A wise man never confounds the Atman, which is birthless and deathless, with that which has beginning and end. Therefore, when he sees his senses and his physical organism waxing and waning, he knows that his real Self within can never be affected by these outer changes, so he remains unmoved.

VII

Higher than the senses is the mind, higher than the mind is the intellect, higher than the intellect is the great Atman, higher than the Atman is the Unmanifested.

VIII

Beyond the Unmanifested is the all-pervading and imperceptible Being (Purusha). By knowing Him, the mortal is liberated and attains immortality.

This division of the individual into senses, mind, intellect, self-consciousness, undifferentiated creative energy and the Absolute Self is explained in the commentary of verse XI, Part Third.

IX

His form is not to be seen. No one can see Him with the eye. He is perceived by the heart, by the intellect and by the mind. They who know this become immortal.

The Supreme, being formless, cannot be discerned by the senses, hence all knowledge of Him must be acquired by the subtler faculties of heart, intellect and mind, which are developed only through the purifying practice of meditation.

X

When the five organs of perception become still, together with the mind, and the intellect ceases to be active: that is called the highest state.

The teacher now shows Nachiketas the process by which the transcendental vision can be attained. The out-going senses,—seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting; the restless mind and the intellect: all must be indrawn and quieted. The state of equilibrium thus attained is called the highest state, because all the forces of one's being become united and focused; and this inevitably leads to supersensuous vision.

XI

This firm holding back of the senses is what is known as Yoga. Then one should become watchful, for Yoga comes and goes.

Yoga literally means to join or to unite the lower self with the Higher Self, the object with the subject, the worshipper with God. In order to gain this union, however, one must first disunite oneself from all that scatters the physical, mental and intellectual forces; so the outgoing perceptions must be detached from the external world and indrawn. When this is accomplished through constant practice of concentration and meditation, the union takes place of its own accord. But it may be lost again, unless one is watchful.

XII

He cannot be attained by speech, by mind, or by the eye. How can That be realized except by him who says "He is"?

XIII

He should be realized as "He is" and also as the reality of both (visible and invisible). He who knows Him as "He is," to him alone His real nature is revealed.

This supersensuous vision cannot be gained through man's ordinary faculties. By mind, eye, or speech the manifested attributes of the Divine can be apprehended; but only one who has acquired the supersensuous sight can directly perceive God's existence and declare definitely that "He is," that He alone exists in both the visible and the invisible world.

XIV

When all desires dwelling in the heart cease, then the mortal becomes immortal and attains Brahman here.

XV

When all the ties of the heart are cut asunder here, then the mortal becomes immortal. Such is the teaching.

XVI

There are a hundred and one nerves of the heart. One of them penetrates the centre of the head. Going upward through it, one attains immortality. The other (hundred nerve-courses) lead, in departing, to different worlds.

The nervous system of the body provides the channels through which the mind travels; the direction in which it moves is determined by its desires and tendencies. When the mind becomes pure and desireless, it takes the upward course and at the time of departing passes out through the imperceptible opening at the crown of the head; but as long as it remains full of desires, its course is downward towards the realms where those desires can be satisfied.

XVII

The Purusha, the inner Self, of the size of a thumb, is ever seated in the heart of all living beings. With perseverance man should draw Him out from his body as one draws the inner stalk from a blade of grass. One should know Him as pure and deathless, as pure and deathless.

As has been explained in Part Fourth, verse XII, the inner Self, although unlimited, is described as "the size of a thumb" because of its abiding-place in the heart, often likened to a lotus-bud which is similar to a thumb in size and shape. Through the process of steadfast discrimination, one should learn to differentiate the Soul from the body, just as one separates the pith from a reed.

XVIII

Thus Nachiketas, having acquired this wisdom taught by the Ruler of Death, together with all the rules of Yoga, became free from impurity and death and attained Brahman (the Supreme). So also will it be with another who likewise knows the nature of the Self.

PEACE CHANT

May He (the Supreme Being) protect us both. May He be pleased with us. May we acquire strength. May our study bring us illumination. May there be no enmity among us.

OM! PEACE! PEACE! PEACE!

Here ends this Upanishad