

Kaṭhopanishad
Text + Word by Word Meaning

PART ONE
CHAPTER ONE

ॐ उशन् ह वै वाजश्रवसः सर्ववेदसं ददौ ।
तस्य ह नचिकेता नाम पुत्र आस ॥१॥

*Aum Uśan ha vai vājaśravasaḥ sarvavedasaṁ
dadau; Tasya ha naciketā nāma putra āsa.*

Vājaśravasaḥ ha vai, in the line of the ancient sage Vājaśravāḥ; *uśan*, wishing for corresponding rewards in heaven; *sarva vedasam*, all he possessed; *dadau*, gave away [i.e., he performed the Viśvajit sacrifice, which required him to give away whatever he possessed]; *tasya*, of him [i.e., of that sage Vājaśravasa]; *ha naciketāḥ nāma*, named Naciketā; *putraḥ*, son; *āsa*, there was

1. Vājaśravasa [also called Auddālaka], in the line of the ancient sage Vājaśravāḥ [famous for his charity], performed a sacrifice [known as Viśvajit] in the hope of getting adequate rewards in heaven. The rule of this sacrifice was that he would give away in charity everything he possessed. Vājaśravasa had a young son named Naciketā.

There was once a sage bearing the name Vājaśravasa. He bore this name because his family was founded

by a great sage named Vājaśravāḥ, who spent much in charity. Vājaśravasa was also called Auddālaka—that is, the son of Uddālaka.

Vājaśravasa performed a sacrifice called Viśvajit, which required that he give away everything he possessed. He performed this sacrifice in the hope that he would get ample rewards for it in heaven.

तं ह कुमारं सन्तं दक्षिणासु
नीयमानासु श्रद्धाविवेश सोऽमन्यत ॥२॥

*Tam ha kumaram santam dakṣiṇāsu
nīyamānāsu śraddhāviveśa so'manyata.*

Dakṣiṇāsu, gifts; *nīyamānāsu*, being offered [Gifts are offered as part of the sacrifice. Here the gifts happened to be of the worst quality]; *tam kumaram santam*, the son, Naciketā, was young; *śraddhā*, faith; *āviveśa*, entered [i.e., faith entered his heart. He had faith in the scriptures]; *saḥ*, he; *amanyata*, pondered

2. Naciketā watched the kind of gifts his father was distributing. He was young, but he had faith in the scriptures. He pondered in the light of that faith.

Naciketā was young, but he knew what the scriptures taught and he had faith in the scriptures. He therefore judged his father's gifts in the light of that faith.

The word *śraddhā*, 'faith', is very significant. *Śraddhā* means faith in truth, faith in righteousness, faith in the scriptures. Faith also means self-confidence. Naciketā was a remarkable young man. Along with his many other virtues, he had much faith, and that is why he was able to see the wrong his father was doing. His father was performing Viśvajit, one of the most difficult sacrifices. A special feature of this sacrifice is that one who performs it must give away everything he has. But what was his father doing? He loved his father, so he could not help questioning his father's action.

पीतोदका जग्धतृणा दुग्धदोहा निरिन्द्रियाः ।
 अनन्दा नाम ते लोकास्तान् स गच्छति ता
 ददत् ॥३॥

Pitodakā jagdhatṛṇā dughdohā nirindriyāḥ;
Anandā nāma te lokāstān sa gacchati tā dadat.

Pitodakāḥ, have finished drinking water [i.e., have passed the age of being able to drink water]; *jagdhatṛṇāḥ*, have finished eating grass [i.e., now too feeble, due to age, to eat grass]; *dughdohāḥ*, cannot yield any more milk [i.e., reached the age of being permanently dry]; *nirindriyāḥ*, without organs [i.e., cannot breed anymore]; *tā*, such [i.e., such gifts]; *dadat*, gives; *saḥ*, he [i.e., he who gives]; *tān lokāḥ*, to those worlds; *gacchati*, goes; *nāma te*, those known as; *anandāḥ*, cheerless

3. There are old cows too feeble to eat, drink, give any milk, or breed. He who gives such cows as gifts to others goes to a cheerless world [after death]. That world is known as *Anandā* (cheerless).

Naciketā was shocked to see what his father was doing. It was not charity. It was a mockery of it. What is charity? Charity is giving away good and useful things to deserving persons. There is an element of sacrifice on the part of the giver in charity. In the act of charity the giver makes some sacrifice, as he needed the things he is giving but he felt he would rather forgo them for the sake of the other person. In charity, the manner in which you give is as important as what you give. You must give with humility and respect. And, of course, you must give only the best things you have.

Charity is an essential feature of a religious act. Without charity, no religious act is complete. Naciketā's father was performing the most ambitious sacrifice, *Viśvajit*, and this required that the performer give away everything he has. But what was Naciketā's father doing? He was giving away only worthless things, worthless to the giver as well as to the recipient. Naciketā, with his faith, dreaded to think of the penalty his father would have to pay: He would be condemned to live in the cheerless region, *Anandā*, after his death. ✓

स होवाच पितरं तत कस्मै मां दास्यसीति ।
द्वितीयं तृतीयं तं होवाच मृत्यवे त्वा ददामीति ॥४॥

*Sa hovāca pitaram tata kasmai mām dāsyasīti;
Dvītīyam tṛtīyam tam hovāca mṛtyave tvā
dadāmi.*

Saḥ ha uvāca, he [i.e., Naciketā] said; *pitaram*, to his father; *tata* [i.e., *tāta*], father; *mām*, me; *kasmai*, to whom; *dāsyasi*, will you give; *dvītīyam*, a second time [i.e., when the father did not reply]; *tṛtīyam*, a third time; *tam ha*, to him; *uvāca*, said [i.e., the father said to his son]; *tvā* [i.e., *tvām*], you; *mṛtyave*, to Death [i.e., to Yama]; *dadāmi*, will give

4. Naciketā asked his father, 'To whom will you give me?' He asked twice, even thrice [because his father did not reply]. Finally his father said, 'I will give you to Death.'

Naciketā asked this question because he had *śraddhā*, faith. He had studied the scriptures and had a good understanding of what they said. He was therefore convinced that his father was wrong in giving away worthless cows in charity. This was in violation of the very concept of charity, and it was also harmful to him. As his son, Naciketā felt that it was his duty to warn his father. He meant no offence when he asked his father to whom he was being given. He was also an asset and, as such, he should be given away too. This is why Naciketā put such a blunt question to his father. It was actually more of a sign of protest than anything else. His father was naturally offended, and his reply was just as blunt: 'To Death.' He was so disgusted that he would not even mind if Naciketā died.

बहूनामेमि प्रथमो बहूनामेमि मध्यमः ।

किं स्विद्यमस्य कर्तव्यं यन्मयाऽद्य करिष्यति ॥५॥

*Bahūnāmemi prathamō bahūnāmemi madhyamaḥ ;
Kiṁ svidyamasya kartavyaṁ yanmayā'dya kariṣyati.*

Bahūnām emi prathamah, I am first among many [i.e., in terms of qualities required of children and disciples]; *bahūnām emi madhyamah*, [failing that] I am second among many; *yamasya kim svit kartavyam*, what service does Yama need; *yan mayādyā kariṣyati*, that I can do for him

5. I am surely among the foremost of Father's children and disciples; if I am not among the foremost, I am at least among the second best. [I am by no means among the worst.] What service will Father render to Yama by sending me to him?

Naciketā was at first stunned by his father's reply, but it set him thinking: Obviously his father was offended. But why should he have been offended? Had he done anything wrong? This is where Naciketā's *śraddhā*, faith in himself, came in. He had studied the scriptures well, and he knew that he never did anything they forbade. His conduct as a son and disciple was far above average. By any standard he was among the best, and if not the best, he was among the second best. He could not be rated below that. What reason then had his father to be angry with him? Was he angry because he had pointed out his error? But if his father was committing an

error, should he not, as a dutiful son, point it out—especially when the error was a grievous one and was likely to cause him future suffering?

Naciketā also thought that his father was giving him to Yama because Yama might have some need of him. Whatever the reason, since it was his father's wish that he should go to Yama, Naciketā decided to go.

अनुपश्य यथा पूर्वे प्रतिपश्य तथाऽपरे ।
सस्यमिव मर्त्यः पच्यते सस्यमिवाजायते पुनः ॥६॥

*Anupaśya yathā pūrve pratipaśya tathā'pare ;
Sasyamiva martyaḥ pacyate sasyamivājāyate
punaḥ.*

Pūrve, ancestors [i.e., your ancestors]; *yathā*, how they were; *anupaśya*, consider, study; *tathā अपरे*, so also your contemporaries; *pratipaśya*, compare, observe; *martyaḥ*, mortal; *sasyam iva pacyate*, withers away like corn; *sasyam iva ājāyate punaḥ*, is reborn like corn

6. Consider how your ancestors [the great souls of the past] lived their lives. Consider also the lives of the great souls living now. Corn grows and dies. It is the same with human beings.

Naciketā's father had told him, 'I give you to Yama.' Whether he meant it or not, Naciketā took him at

his word, and he started to leave for Yama's abode. Naciketā's father was obviously upset by this, and he tried to dissuade his son. But Naciketā pointed out how the brāhmins of the past and of the present were true to their word. Again, it was Naciketā's *śraddhā* that prompted him to argue like this with his father. He reminded his father how everything in this world was perishable. Naciketā, too, would die someday or other. Truth alone would always prevail, so his father should never deviate from truth. Having said that he would give Naciketā to Death, he should not, as a brāhmin, go back on his word.

वैश्वानरः प्रविशत्यतिथिर्ब्राह्मणो गृहान् ।
तस्यैतां शान्तिं कुर्वन्ति हर वैवस्वतोदकम् ॥७॥

*Vaiśvānaraḥ praviśatyatithirbrāhmaṇo gṛhān ;
tasyaitāṃ śāntim kurvanti hara vaivasvatodakam.*

Brāhmaṇaḥ atithiḥ, when a brāhmin comes as a guest; *vaiśvānaraḥ gṛhān praviśati*, it is as if fire has entered the house; *tasya etāṃ śāntim kurvanti*, he is pleased if the prescribed things are presented to him; *vaivasvata*, O son of the Sun [i.e., Yama]; *hara udakam*, fetch him water

7. When a brāhmin comes to a house as a guest, he is to be treated as fire. To please him offer him the prescribed things. So, Vaivasvata, fetch him water.

At first Naciketā's father thoughtlessly offered the idea of Naciketā going to Yama's place. But he later said that it was never his intention to give him away to Yama. Then Naciketā argued that having once said it, even though inadvertently, his father, as a brāhmin, could not possibly go back on his word. Finally Naciketā's father had to let him go.

It so happened that when Naciketā arrived at Yama's place, Yama was not at home. For three days Naciketā stayed there without food and drink, presumably because the host was not at home. When Yama arrived, his courtiers told him about Naciketā. They reminded him that a brāhmin guest was like fire—that is, he could do much harm if he felt that he had not received due attention. They advised Yama to hurry and wash his feet with water. (This was the first thing a host should do with a brāhmin guest.)

आशाप्रतीक्षे सङ्गतं सूनुतां
 चेष्टापूर्ये पूत्रपशूंश्च सर्वान् ।
 एतद्वृङ्क्ते पुरुषस्याल्पमेधसो
 यस्यानश्नन्वसति ब्राह्मणो गृहे ॥८॥

*Āśāpratīkṣe saṅgataṁ sūnūtāṁ
 ceṣṭāpūrte putrapaśūṁśca sarvān;
 Etadvṛṅkte puruṣasyālpamedhaso
 yasyānaśnanvasati brāhmaṇo gṛhe.*

Brāhmaṇaḥ anaśnan, a brāhmin guest going without

food; *yasya gr̥he*, in someone's house; *puruṣasya alpamedhasaḥ*, of such a foolish person; *āśā*, hopes; *pratikṣe*, expectations; *saṁgatam*, results of good company; *sūnṛtām*, results of good speech; *iṣṭā-pūrte*, results of sacrifices and making gifts of wells and other such things; *putra-paśūn*, children and animals; *sarvān*, all these; *etat*, that [i.e., the guest not being fed]; *vṛṅkte*, destroys

8. If a brāhmin goes without food in someone's house, that man, a fool, will see all his hopes and expectations dashed to the ground. Merits of good company, good speech, performing sacrifices, providing wells and other sources of water for the benefit of others, as well as his cattle and children—all these are destroyed.

In every tradition it is required that guests be treated with great care. In India, brāhmin guests receive special attention, because as a class of human beings, they are the best. No one can compare with them in terms of moral virtues, and they are people's best guides and teachers. Every householder deems it a privilege to have a brāhmin guest at his house. But the householder is a fool if he neglects to look after his guest. It is as if he is playing with fire. Fire can destroy everything he has. The same thing happens if the brāhmin guest is offended. The householder may be a good person in every respect. He may have done many benevolent acts also. It is natural for him to expect rewards for all this. But if the brāhmin guest is offended, the householder gets

none—not only that, he loses all his wealth, including his children.

Not that Yama did not know all this. But his courtiers, his well-wishers, reminded him all the same, because a brāhmin guest remaining without food for three days was indeed a serious matter. This is what had happened at Yama's place, Naciketā having spent three days without food.

तिस्रो रात्रीर्यदवात्सीर्गृहे
 मेऽनश्नन् ब्रह्मन्नतिथिर्नमस्यः ।
 नमस्तेऽस्तु ब्रह्मन् स्वस्ति मेऽस्तु
 तस्मात् प्रति त्रीन् वरान् वृणीष्व ॥९॥

Tisro rātrīryadavātsīrgr̥he
me'naśnan brahmannatithirnamasyaḥ;
Namaste'stu brahman svasti me'stu
tasmāt prati trīn varān vṛṇīṣva.

Brahman, O Brāhmin; *atithiḥ*, guest [i.e., because you are a guest]; *namasyaḥ*, venerable [i.e., you are venerable]; *yat me gr̥he tisraḥ rātrīḥ*, because you [stayed] three nights in my house; *anaśnan*, without eating; *avātsīḥ*, stayed; *tasmāt*, therefore; *brahman te*, to you, O Brāhmin; *namaḥ astu*, my salutations; *me svasti*, may I prosper; *prati*, each [i.e., for each of the three nights]; *trīn varān vṛṇīṣva*, ask three boons [i.e., for each of the three nights you spent at my house]

9. [Addressing Naciketā, Yama said:] O Brāhmin, you are my guest, and you are also a brāhmin. I owe you much respect. I salute you. Please bless me that I may prosper. Brāhmin, you spent three days in my house without eating anything. Please ask three boons from me, one for each of the three nights you stayed in my house.

When Yama's courtiers told him about Naciketā's presence, he was naturally perturbed. A guest, and a brāhmin at that, being without food for three days! It was surely a great omission on his part. He hastened to where Naciketā was, and, as was the custom then, he first washed Naciketā's feet and then paid him due reverence in other ways. But he felt that this was still not enough. He must do something more in recognition of the fact that Naciketā had gone without food for three days at his house. To make amends for his lapse as a host, he decided to offer him some boons. So he told Naciketā that he would be glad to give him three boons of his choice for the three nights he had stayed at his house without food.

शान्तसंकल्पः सुमना यथा स्याद्-

वीतमन्युर्गौतमो माऽभि मृत्यो ।

त्वत्प्रसृष्टं माऽभिवदेत्प्रतीत

एतत् त्रयाणां प्रथमं वरं वृणे ॥१०॥

*Śāntasaṁkalpaḥ sumanā yathā syād-
vītamanyurgautamo mā'bhi mṛtyo;
Tvatprasṛṣtam mā'bhivadetpratīta
etat trayāṅām prathamam varam vṛṇe.*

Mṛtyo, O Death; *gautamo*, Gautama, my father; *śāntasaṁkalpaḥ*, free from worry; *sumanāḥ*, cheerful; *mā abhi*, towards me; *vītamanyuḥ*, well disposed; *yathā syāt pratītaḥ*, can readily recognize; *tvat prasṛṣtam*, when sent back by you; *mā abhi vadet*, talk to me, as usual; *etat trayāṅām*, of the three; *prathamam varam vṛṇe*, this is the first boon I wish to have

10. [Naciketā said in reply:] O Death, please grant that my father, Gautama, may be free from worry, that he may be in a happy mood, that he may no longer be angry with me, and that when I return from your place, he may readily recognize me and greet me as before. Of the three boons, this is the first I ask for.

This shows Naciketā's love and concern for his father. He knew his father had never meant to give him away to Death. If his father had said anything to that effect, it was because he had been angry at what he thought was impertinence on the part of Naciketā. He regretted his remark immediately after he made it, and he must have been regretting it ever since. He must also be worrying about Naciketā's fate. This is why the first thing Naciketā asked of Yama was that his father might stop worrying and

be free from anxiety about Naciketā. Naciketā was also not sure about how his father would receive him when he went back home. He might not recognize him at all, and he might not greet him in the usual way. Naciketā wanted an assurance from Yama about these things in his first boon from him.

यथा पुरस्ताद् भविता प्रतीत
 औद्दालकिरारुणिर्मत्प्रसृष्टः ।
 सुखं रात्रीः शयिता वीतमन्यु-
 स्त्वां ददृशिवान्मृत्युमुखात् प्रमुक्तम् ॥११॥

*Yathā purastād bhavitā pratīta
 auddālakirāruṇirmatprasṛṣṭaḥ ;
 Sukham rātrīḥ śayitā vītamanyu-
 stvām dadṛśivānmṛtyumukhāt pramuktam.*

Auddālakīḥ, Auddālaki [i.e., son of Uddālaka]; *āruṇīḥ*, son of Aruṇa [i.e., your father]; *purastāt*, as before [i.e., prior to coming to Yama's place]; *yathā pratītaḥ*, as affectionate as he was; *mat prasṛṣṭaḥ*, going back at my instance; *mṛtyumukhāt*, from the clutches of death; *pramuktam*, released; *tvām dadṛśivān*, when he sees you back; *vītamanyuḥ*, free from anger; *bhavitā*, will remain; *sukham rātrīḥ śayitā*, will sleep well at night

11. [Yama replied:] Your father, Auddālaki, son of Aruṇa, was affectionate to you before. You are now going back home at my instance, and he will be

equally affectionate and cordial to you. Till you return, he will have good sleep at night. He will not be displeased when he sees you back home, released from Death's clutches.

Naciketā was afraid that his father might not love him as before. He even may not be happy to see him back home, free from Death's hands. Naciketā was also worried that his father was spending sleepless nights thinking of him. Yama assured him that he need not worry about these things.

स्वर्गे लोके न भयं किञ्चनास्ति
 न तत्र त्वं न जरया बिभेति ।
 उभे तीर्त्वाऽशनायापिपासे
 शोकातिगो मोदते स्वर्गलोके ॥१२॥

*Svarge loke na bhayaṁ kiñcanāsti
 na tatra tvaṁ na jarayā bibheti;
 Ubhe tīrtvā'śanāyāpipāse
 śokātigo modate svargaloke.*

Svarge loke, in heaven; *kiñcana bhayam na asti*, there is no fear; *tatra*, there [i.e., in heaven]; *tvam*, you, O Death; *na ca jarayā bibheti*, no fear from old age, either; *ubhe aśanāyā pipāse tīrtvā*, overcoming both hunger and thirst; *śokātigo*, going beyond sorrow; *svargaloke*, in heaven; *modate*, enjoys himself

12. [Naciketā said:] There is nothing to be afraid of in heaven. You, O Death, have no influence there,

and thus there is no fear of old age. Hunger and thirst also do not trouble a person. Free from sorrow and mental anguish, he enjoys life in heaven.

Naciketā is now going to ask for his second boon. The first boon was for his father's peace of mind and his happy reunion with him. Now he is going to ask about Svarga-loka, or Brahma-loka, where one enjoys relative immortality. Naciketā wants to know about it, but he is not going to be content with this knowledge, as we shall see later. He has observed how short life is in the phenomenal world, and he has also observed how helpless human beings are against disease, pain, and sorrow. A person may have some pleasure for a while, but very soon pain comes. Everything is transitory. But the question is: is it possible to overcome sorrow and suffering? The Upaniṣad says that it is possible. If you know your true identity, the nature of your real Self, you are then free from all suffering. The Upaniṣad gives you that knowledge of your Self. Now you are an alien to your own Self. This Upaniṣad will introduce you to that Self. At Naciketā's request, Yama will describe that Self to him. Meanwhile, Naciketā has raised the question of how one can attain Brahma-loka. Brahma-loka is a place where you are close to liberation. But only Self-knowledge can give you liberation, so you should not be content with anything short of that. Brahma-loka may be attractive, but it is not permanent and therefore not the goal of life.

स त्वमग्निं स्वर्ग्यमध्येषि मृत्यो

प्रबुद्धिं त्वं श्रद्धधानाय मह्यम् ।

स्वर्गलोका अमृतत्वं भजन्त
एतद् द्वितीयेन वृणे वरेण ॥१३॥

*Sa tvamagnim svargyamadhyeṣi mṛtyo
prabrūhi tvam śraddadhānāya mahyam;
Svargalokā amṛtatvam bhajanta
etat dvitīyena vṛṇe vareṇa.*

Mṛtyo, O Death; *saḥ tvam svargyam*, the way to heaven; *agnim*, fire [i.e., the fire sacrifice]; *adhyeṣi*, know about; *śraddadhānāya*, possessing faith; *mahyam prabrūhi*, please explain to me; *svargalokāḥ*, those who are in heaven; *amṛtatvam*, immortality; *bhajante*, enjoy; *etat*, this [i.e., this knowledge about the fire sacrifice]; *dvitīyena vareṇa*, as my second boon; *vṛṇe*, I pray for

13. O Death, you know the fire sacrifice, which is the way to heaven. Please explain it to me. I have faith. Those who are in heaven enjoy immortality. This knowledge of the fire sacrifice is what I ask for as my second boon from you.

Yama had been a mortal himself, but by practising the fire sacrifice he became a god and now lives in heaven, also holding the office of Yama. Thus he was the most fit person to teach Naciketā the fire sacrifice. Naciketā knew this, and that is why he asked this boon of Yama.

According to the Hindus, the gods and goddesses were originally ordinary human beings, but they

improved in spiritual terms and became godlike persons. In mythology, it is such persons who, after death, go to the plane known as heaven—that is, Svarga-loka, Brahma-loka, or Deva-loka. By and large they live a very happy life. Some of them even hold offices as Yama did. Yama presides over death. Similarly, other deities preside over other phenomena. All this may be tempting, but the good things they enjoy are temporary. They may last for a million years, yet they come to an end sometime or other. Everything that forms part of the phenomenal world is perishable. Heaven is perishable, as well as heavenly things and the people who control them. When the gods and goddesses finish their tenure, they resume their life as mortals from where they left off. This goes on and on until they realize the futility of this so-called heavenly life and turn to Self-knowledge. Only Self-knowledge can give liberation and, therefore, immortality. Heaven promises immortality, but that is a relative immortality. Immortality in that context means only a long life. Similarly, every attractive thing that heaven offers is relative. Only what Self-knowledge gives is permanent.

प्र ते ब्रवीमि तदु मे निबोध
 स्वर्ग्यमग्निं नचिकेतः प्रजानन् ।
 अनन्तलोकासिमथो प्रतिष्ठां
 विद्धि त्वमेतं निहितं गुहायाम् ॥१४॥

*Pra te bravīmi tadu me nibodha
 svargyamagnirñ naciketah prajānan;*

*Anantalokāptimatho pratiṣṭhām
viddhi tvametaṁ nihitaṁ guhāyām.*

Naciketaḥ, O Naciketā; *svargyam agnim prajānan*, I know very well the fire sacrifice that leads to heaven; *te prabravāmi tat u*, I will explain it to you; *me nibodha*, listen to me attentively; *viddhi*, try to understand; *tvam*, you; *etaṁ*, this [i.e., this fire sacrifice]; *anantalokāptim*, the means of attaining heaven [i.e., immortality]; *atho pratiṣṭhām*, support of the universe; *guhāyām nihitam*, hidden in the caves [i.e., in the hearts of the wise]

14. [Yama said:] O Naciketā, I know well the fire sacrifice that leads to heaven. I will explain it to you in detail. Please listen carefully and try to understand it. Please remember, this Fire is the means of attaining immortality, and it is also the support of the universe. It lies hidden in the minds of the wise.

The word *Fire* means the essence of everything. This is why it is called the support of the universe. Hindus believe that if you worship something, you become one with it. If you worship Fire, you become one with Fire—that is, you become one with the essence of everything. And if you are the essence of everything, you are then immortal. That is why it is said here that by worshipping Fire you attain immortality.

The Ultimate Reality, according to Vedānta, is Pure Consciousness. What this Pure Consciousness is like, no one can describe. It is also known as Existence

Absolute, Intelligence Absolute, Bliss Absolute. Its other names are *Parama Brahman* and *Paramātman*. The use of so many names suggests how futile it is to describe the Reality. The fact is that the Ultimate Reality is beyond thought and speech. It is just One, and because it is One, who is there to describe it? And describe it in what terms? Any qualifying word you use with reference to the Reality will only distort it. If you say it is good, then what is bad? You must then assume that there is another Reality, and that is dualism. In nondualism there is only One and nothing but One. That One is everywhere and in everything.

We see diversity around us, but in reality it is not diversity. It is only One. We see diversity because of the many names and forms that the One assumes. This process of seeing the One as many is called *māyā*, or *avidyā* (ignorance). This diversity may not be real, but it has to be treated as real at the practical level. Through discrimination, by practising firm renunciation, and with the help of a good teacher, the wrong notions of 'I' and 'you', with all their concomitants, will go. What remains is one 'I', one Self, which is the common Self of all. This common Self holds together all that exists, like a thread holding together all the pearls in a necklace. It is this common Self that is called in this verse Agni (Fire). It is also called Virāṭ (the Cosmic Being), Hiranyagarbha (the Golden Egg), Īśvara (God), Prajāpati (the Lord of all beings), and Brahmā. It is the first manifestation of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, in association with māyā. Brahman, at this point, is *saguṇa* (with attributes).

Brahman as the Ultimate Reality—that is, as Pure Consciousness—is *nirguṇa* (without any attributes). There is no way of describing it.

लोकादिमग्निं तमुवाच तस्मै
 या इष्टका यावतीर्वा यथा वा ।
 स चापि तत्प्रत्यवदद्यथोक्त-
 मथास्य मृत्युः पुनरेवाह तुष्टः ॥१५॥

*Lokādimagniṁ tamuvāca tasmai
 yā iṣṭakā yāvatīrvā yathā vā ;
 Sa cāpi tatpratyavadadyathokta-
 mathāsya mṛtyuḥ punarevāha tuṣṭaḥ.*

Tasmai, to him [i.e., to Naciketā]; *loka*, world; *ādim*, the beginning [i.e., *loka-ādim*, the beginning of the world, or the first embodied existence]; *tam*, that [i.e., the subject under discussion]; *agnim*, about fire; *uvāca*, explained; *yāḥ*, the kind of; *yāvatīḥ vā*, or how many; *iṣṭakāḥ*, bricks [are to be used in the sacrificial altar]; *yathā vā*, and the manner in which [the fire has to be lighted]; *saḥ ca api*, he also [i.e., Naciketā also]; *tat*, the same; *yathā uktam*, as spoken [i.e., whatever Yama said]; *pratyavadat*, repeated; *atha*, then; *mṛtyuḥ*, Death [Yama]; *asya*, at this [i.e., at this correct repetition by Naciketā]; *tuṣṭaḥ*, pleased; *punaḥ eva*, further; *āha*, said

15. Yama told Naciketā that Fire was the first world—i.e., the first embodied existence. He then

described how the fire sacrifice was to be performed. He told him such details as how the sacrificial altar had to be built, what kind of bricks were to be used, and how they were to be arranged. He also told him how the fire was to be lighted. Naciketā correctly repeated each word Yama had spoken. This pleased Yama. He then said:

The first embodied existence is more often referred to as Hiraṇyagarbha, or Virāṭ. But it is also called Īśvara, Prajāpati, Agni, Vāyu, and Āditya. They all mark the beginning of the world. Each name has a different connotation, but they all mean the same thing.

Agni is fire, but not the fire we use. It is the source of everything, including ordinary fire.

तमब्रवीत् प्रीयमाणो महात्मा
 वरं तवेहाद्य ददामि भूयः।
 तवैव नाम्ना भविताऽयमग्निः
 सृङ्गां चेमामनेकरूपां गृहाण ॥१६॥

*Tamabravīt prīyamāṇo mahātmā
 varam tavehādyā dadāmi bhūyaḥ;
 Tavaiva nāmnā bhavitā'yamagniḥ
 sṛṅkāṁ cemāmanekarūpāṁ gṛhāṇa.*

Prīyamāṇaḥ, delighted; *mahā-ātmā*, the great soul [i.e., Yama]; *tam*, him [i.e., Naciketā]; *abravīt*, said; *iha*,

this; *adya*, now; *tava*, to you; *bhūyaḥ*, again, another; *varam*, boon; *dadāmi*, I am giving; *ayam*, this; *agniḥ*, fire; *tava eva nāmnā*, by your name; *bhavitā*, become [i.e., become known]; *ca*, also; *imām*, this; *aneka-rūpām*, many-shaped, variegated; *sṛṅkām*, chain, necklace; *grhāṇa*, accept

16. That great soul, Yama, highly delighted, said to Naciketā: 'Here is another boon I want to give you: This fire [sacrifice] will henceforth be known by your name. Take also this multishaped necklace.'

Naming the fire sacrifice is the fourth boon that Yama offers. Earlier he had promised Naciketā three boons. Yama is given here the honorific 'the Great Soul'. In what sense is he a great soul? Or who is a great soul? A great soul is one whose mind always dwells on a high plane. Yama was surely one such person, being a god.

The word *sṛṅkā* has two meanings. One meaning is 'necklace'. Since it is called 'multishaped', it is a special kind of necklace. It may be a necklace of stones having different colours and shapes. It may also be one that makes musical sounds as one walks along.

Another meaning is that it is the path of doing work according to sacrifices and reaping the good fruits thereof. Yama promises to teach Naciketā about this path.

The second meaning appeals to Śāṅkara more than the first.

त्रिणाचिकेतस्त्रिभिरेत्य सन्धिं
 त्रिकर्मकृत् तरति जन्ममृत्यू।
 ब्रह्मजज्ञं देवमीड्यं विदित्वा
 निचाय्येमां शान्तिमत्यन्तमेति ॥१७॥

*Triṇāciketastribhiretya sandhim
 trikarmakṛt tarati janmamṛtyū;
 Brahmajajñam devamīdyam viditvā
 nicāyyemām śāntimatyantameti.*

Tribhiḥ, with three [i.e., with mother, father, and teacher]; *sandhim*, close contact; *etya*, having obtained [*tribhiḥ sandhim etya*, having studied the Vedas, first from one's mother, then from one's father, and finally from one's teacher; or, having studied the Vedas and the Smṛtis and having been under the influence of good people]; *tri-nāciketaḥ*, has performed the Nāciketa sacrifice thrice; *tri-karma-kṛt*, practises three things: performing sacrifices, giving in charity, and studying the Vedas; *janma-mṛtyū*, birth and death; *tarati*, crosses over, goes beyond

brahma-ja-jñam: *brahma-ja*, Virāṭ; *jñā*, all-knowing [*Brahmaja* is Virāṭ. He is born of Brahmā, also known as Hiranyagarbha. When Hiranyagarbha becomes gross, that is Virāṭ. That is why Virāṭ is said to be born of Hiranyagarbha. Virāṭ is all-encompassing. He is also *jñā*, all-knowing.]; *īdyam*, adorable; *devam*, one who reveals, or gives knowledge; *viditvā*, having known [i.e., known through the scriptures]; *nicāyya*, having realized one's identity with; *imām*, this [i.e., this,

through a direct experience]; *śāntim*, peace; *atyantam*, infinite; *eti*, attains

17. He who, properly instructed by his mother, father, and teacher, performs thrice the sacrifice named after Naciketā, and also practises the three things—i.e., performing sacrifices, giving in charity, and studying the Vedas—he goes beyond birth and death.

He first learns about Virāt from the scriptures—Virāt, who issues from Hiraṇyagarbha, who is all-knowing, radiant, and venerable. He next realizes that he is one with Virāt, and he attains infinite peace. This is not liberation, however. This is a long way towards liberation, as only Self-knowledge can give that. Nothing short of Self-knowledge can give liberation. Yet, if you can feel you are one with Virāt, you are close to liberation. You can feel sure that you are progressing towards it.

Śaṅkara is totally opposed to the idea of combining worship with Knowledge. Combining these two means combining two opposites: dualism and nondualism. But Śaṅkara concedes that there is such a thing as gradual liberation (*krama mukti*). This verse is a typical example of his attitude towards gradual liberation. He does not condemn it. Perhaps the reason for his attitude is that the disciplines involved for liberation proper and gradual liberation are almost the same: study, guidance, and meditation. Only in the case of gradual liberation you add worship. But the path to liberation proper does not need it. If there is meditation, it slowly replaces worship. Real worship

is meditation. Worship without meditation serves no purpose.

The present verse advocates gradual liberation when liberation proper is not possible.

त्रिणाचिकेतस्त्रयमेतद्विदित्वा
 य एवं विद्वांश्चिनुते नाचिकेतम् ।
 स मृत्युपाशान् पुरतः प्रणोद्य
 शोकातिगो मोदते स्वर्गलोके ॥१८॥

*Triṇāciketastrayametadviditvā
 ya evaṁ vidvāṁścīnute nāciketam;
 Sa mṛtyupāśān purataḥ praṇodya
 śokātigo modate svargaloke.*

Yah, he; *etat*, as mentioned earlier; *trayam*, the three things [i.e., the nature of the bricks, their number, and the modalities of performing the sacrifice]; *viditvā*, knowing; *triṇāciketaḥ*, has served the Nāciketas fire three times; *evam*, in this way [i.e., identifying himself with the fire]; *vidvān*, knowing, with this knowledge; *nāciketam*, the fire, Nāciketas; *cinute*, installs and worships; *saḥ*, he; *mṛtyupāśān*, bonds arising from ignorance, undue attachment, and other follies; *purataḥ*, even before death; *praṇodya*, having shaken off, having thrown away; *śoka-ati-gaḥ*, going beyond all mental agony; *svargaloke*, in heaven; *modate*, rejoices [i.e., rejoices in the consciousness that he is no other than Virāt himself]

18. He who knows [as stated earlier] the details of the fire sacrifice, such as the kind of bricks to be used in building the sacrificial altar, their number, and how the fire is to be installed, and who performs the Nāciketa sacrifice thrice [always meditating that he is one with Virāṭ]—such a person throws off, even before his death, all bonds of ignorance and other human weaknesses. Going beyond all mental suffering, he enjoys himself in heaven, being conscious all the time that he is one with Virāṭ.

The Nāciketa sacrifice derives its importance from the fact that it leads to the realization of one's identity with Virāṭ. The sacrifice by itself is not that important. It is the meditation preceding this realization that is important.

एष तेऽग्निर्नचिकेतः स्वर्ग्यो
 यमवृणीथा द्वितीयेन वरेण ।
 एतमग्निं तवैव प्रवक्ष्यन्ति जनास-
 स्तृतीयं वरं नचिकेतो वृणीष्व ॥११॥

*Eṣa te'gnirnaciketaḥ svargyo
 yamavṛṇīthā dvitīyena vareṇa;
 Etamagniṁ tavaiva pravakṣyanti janāsa-
 stṛtīyaṁ varaṁ naciketo vṛṇīṣva.*

Naciketaḥ, O Naciketā; *yam*, that [i.e., that boon relating to Agni]; *dvitīyena vareṇa*, as your second boon; *avṛṇīthāḥ*, you asked for; *te*, to you; *eṣaḥ*

svargyaḥ agniḥ, this sacrifice that leads to heaven [has just been given to you]; *janāsaḥ*, people; *etam agnim*, this fire; *tava eva*, by your name; *pravakṣyanti*, will call it; *naciketāḥ*, O Naciketā; *tr̥tīyam varam*, the third boon; *vṛṇīṣva*, ask for

19. O Naciketā, as your second boon you asked for knowledge about Agni. I have just given you that boon. People will call that Agni by your name. Now ask for your third boon.

The word *Agni* sometimes means Virāt, and sometimes the sacrifice that leads to union with Virāt. The former is the end; the latter is the means.

येयं प्रेते विचिकित्सा मनुष्ये-
 ऽस्तीत्येके नायमस्तीति चैके ।
 एतद्विद्यामनुशिष्टस्त्वयाऽहं
 वराणामेष वरस्तृतीयः ॥२०॥

Yeyam̐ prete vicikitsā manuṣye-
'stītyeke nāyamastīti caike;
Etadvidyāmanuśiṣṭastvayā'ham̐
varāṇāmeṣa varastr̥tīyaḥ.

Prete manuṣye, when a man dies; *yā iyam vicikitsā*, here is the common debate; *eke*, some [i.e., some people say]; *asti iti*, lingers [i.e., something pertaining to the dead man, such as the soul, lingers]; *ca eke*, and others say; *ayam*, this; *na asti iti*, does

not continue; *tvayā*, by you; *anuśiṣṭaḥ*, instructed; *aham etat vidyām*, I shall know this; *varāṇām*, of the boons; *eṣaḥ tṛtīyaḥ varaḥ*, this is the third boon

20. [Naciketā said:] When death occurs there is always the debate on whether anything [i.e., the soul] continues. Some say it does, and others say it does not. I beg to be enlightened by you so that I may know the answer. Of the boons this is the third I ask for.

What the Upaniṣad has so long taught us is peripheral. Even being in the position of Virāṭ is not enough. The summum bonum of life is Self-knowledge. Naciketā's question raises a host of issues, all eventually leading to what is crucial in Vedānta—namely, what is Self-knowledge, how can it be attained, and what are its benefits? Before Yama answers these questions, however, he tests Naciketā. He offers him all kinds of pleasurable things. But Naciketā spurns them. The only thing he wants is Self-knowledge. Yama is impressed and finally bestows on him the knowledge he is seeking.

The path to Self-knowledge is sharp like a razor's edge. Only the strongest, the bravest, and the most determined dare tread this path. But whatever the hazards, the reward is more precious than anything this world or the world beyond can offer. It is absolute freedom. It is absolute peace and happiness.

देवैत्रापि विचिकित्सितं पुरा
न हि सुविज्ञेयमणुरेष धर्मः ।

अन्यं वरं नचिकेतो वृणीष्व
मा मोपरोत्सीरति मा सृजैनम् ॥२१॥

*Devairatrāpi vicikitsitam purā
na hi suvijñeyamaṇuṣeṣa dharmah;
Anyam varam naciketo vṛṇīṣva
mā moparotsīrati mā sṛjainam.*

Atra, on this subject; *devaiḥ api purā vicikitsitam*, even the gods have had their doubts in the past; *hi*, because; *eṣaḥ dharmah aṇuḥ*, the nature of this Self is so subtle; [that is why] *na suvijñeyam*, not easy to understand; *naciketah*, O Naciketā; *anyam varam vṛṇīṣva*, ask for some other boon; *mā mā uparotsīḥ*, please do not press me; *mā enam atisṛja*, release me from this, spare me this question

21. [Yama said:] O Naciketā, formerly even the gods had their doubts about the question you have raised. The nature of the Self is a very subtle matter. It is difficult to understand. Ask for some other boon. Don't press me for this one. Release me from it.

For the second boon Yama had taught Naciketā about the fire sacrifice. If Naciketā performed that sacrifice thrice in the right manner and also with the appropriate meditation, he would be able to attain the status of Virāṭ. Being Virāṭ is good, but not good enough for Naciketā. After all, it is not a permanent position. It only lasts for some time. But even if it were a permanent position, Naciketā would not have accepted

it. Such a position is also a type of bondage, though it has much power. Naciketā wants liberation, and nothing short of that. That is why he wants to know about the Self. He wants to know if death is the end of everything—and if not, what remains? If there is such a thing as the Self, what is it? What is that Self like? This is the third boon Naciketā is asking for.

Yama first wants to test Naciketā, however. The *sine qua non* of Self-knowledge is renunciation. It is total renunciation—not renunciation of a thing or two. If you are ready to renounce *everything*, then you may attain Self-knowledge. Yama wants to see if Naciketā is prepared to renounce that far.

Another way Yama tests Naciketā is by discouraging him. He says that the subject is very difficult—difficult even for the gods. The Self is not like an object that can be seen, felt, or heard. It is too subtle a thing for sense perception.

Yama tests Naciketā in many ways, but Naciketā passes each test very well. This episode of Yama testing Naciketā is only to show how difficult the subject of the Self is and what sort of preparation one has to have in order to understand it.

देवैस्त्रापि विचिकित्सितं किल
त्वं च मृत्यो यन्न सुज्ञेयमात्थ ।

वक्ता चास्य त्वादृगन्यो न लभ्यो
नान्यो वरस्तुल्य एतस्य कश्चित् ॥२२॥

*Devairatrāpi vicikitsitaṁ kila
tvam ca mṛtyo yanna sujñeyamāttha;
Vaktā cāsyā tvādṛganyo na labhyo
nānyo varastulya etasya kaścīt.*

Devaiḥ, by the gods; *atra*, in this matter; *api*, even; *vicikitsitam*, had doubted; *kila*, indeed; *tvam*, you; *ca*, and; *mṛtyo*, O Death; *yat*, because; *na*, not; *sujñeyam*, well understood; *āttha*, are saying [i.e., you are saying]; *vaktā*, teacher; *ca*, and; *asya*, of this, regarding this; *tvādṛk anyāḥ na labhyaḥ*, no one like you is to be found; *na anyāḥ*, not any other; *varaḥ*, boon; *tulyaḥ*, equal; *etasya*, of this, to this; *kaścīt*, whatsoever

22. [Naciketā replied:] O Death, 'Even the gods debated about this in the past'—you yourself have said this just now. You further said that it was not easy to understand the Self. A teacher like you is not easy to find. Moreover, no boon is as precious as this.

Yama tried to discourage Naciketā by saying that the nature of the Self was a difficult subject to understand. To give him an idea of how difficult it was, Yama said that even the gods did not know exactly what it was. Yama was of course testing Naciketā. Naciketā, however, stood his ground. He said that if this were an easy subject, he would

not have troubled Yama about it. Furthermore, the subject was something connected with death. Did something called the Self survive after death? This is a question not only human beings but even gods debated about. Yama, the king of death, was surely the most fit person to answer this question. That is why Naciketā did not agree to Yama's request to ask for another boon. Moreover, Naciketā knew that what he was asking for was the best and the highest. There was no other boon to compare with Self-knowledge. What was remarkable about Naciketā was his tenacity of purpose.

शतायुषः पुत्रपौत्रान् वृणीष्व
 बहून् पशून् हस्तिहिरण्यमश्वान् ।
 भूमेर्महादायतनं वृणीष्व
 स्वयं च जीव शरदो यावदिच्छसि ॥२३॥

Śatāyusaḥ putrapautrān vṛṇīṣva
bahūn paśūn hastihiraṇyamaśvān ;
Bhūmermahadāyatanam vṛṇīṣva
svayam ca jīva śarado yāvadicchasi.

Śatāyusaḥ, living for as long as a hundred years ;
putra-pautrān, sons and grandsons ; *vṛṇīṣva*, choose ;
bahūn, many ; *paśūn*, heads of cattle ; *hasti*, elephants ;
hiraṇyam, gold ; *aśvān*, horses ; *bhūmeḥ*, in the earth ;
mahat, vast ; *āyatanam*, area, empire ; *vṛṇīṣva*, choose ;
svayam, yourself ; *ca*, and ; *jīva*, live ; *śaradaḥ*, autumn ;
yāvat, as long as ; *icchasi*, you wish

23. [Yama said:] Choose sons and grandsons, each of them living for a hundred years. Ask for many heads of cattle, elephants, horses, and a great quantity of gold. Ask for a vast empire. Live [with a healthy body] as long as you like.

Yama first tried to discourage Naciketā by telling him how difficult it was to know the Self. This served no purpose. He then tried another method: tempting him with things people crave for. This was his way of testing Naciketā. This is how a good teacher tests a good disciple.

एतत्तुल्यं यदि मन्यसे वरं
 वृणीष्व वित्तं चिरजीविकां च।
 महाभूमौ नचिकेतस्त्वमेधि
 कामानां त्वा कामभाजं करोमि ॥२४॥

*Etattulyam yadi manyase varam
 vṛṇīṣva vittam cirajīvikām ca;
 Mahābhūmau naciketastvamedhi
 kāmānām tvā kāmabhājam karomi.*

Etat, this; *tulyam*, equal to; *yadi*, if; *manyase*, you think; *varam*, boon; *vṛṇīṣva*, choose; *vittam*, wealth; *cira-jīvikām ca*, and a long life; *mahā-bhūmau*, an emperor; *tvam*, you; *edhi*, will be; *kāmānām*, of all covetable objects [divine and human]; *tvā*, you; *kāmabhājam*, fit to enjoy; *karomi*, make

24. If you can think of anything else as good as this boon, ask for it. Choose wealth; live a long life, and be an emperor. Ask for anything that gods or men covet. I will see that you enjoy it.

Yama is still tempting Naciketā. He says that he has offered him many good things, but if Naciketā can think of better things, he will be only too glad to give them. A long life, many sons and grandsons, wealth, the position of emperor—all these he has already offered. In short, anything that gods or men want to enjoy is Naciketā's for the asking. Furthermore, Yama guarantees that Naciketā will be able to enjoy each one of them.

ये ये कामा दुर्लभा मर्त्यलोके
 सर्वान् कामांश्छन्दतः प्रार्थयस्व ।
 इमा रामाः सरथाः सतूर्या
 न हीदृशा लम्भनीया मनुष्यैः ।
 आभिर्मत्प्रत्ताभिः परिचारयस्व
 नचिकेतो मरणं माऽनुप्राक्षीः ॥२५॥

*Ye ye kāmā durlabhā martyaloke
 sarvān kāmāṁśchandataḥ prārthayasva;
 Imā rāmāḥ sarathāḥ satūryā
 na hīdṛśā lambhanīyā manuṣyāiḥ;
 Ābhirmatprattābhiḥ paricārayasva
 naciketo maraṇam mā'nuprākṣīḥ.*

Ye ye, whatsoever; *kāmāḥ*, objects of desire; *durlabhāḥ*, difficult to get; *martyaloke*, in the mortal world; *sarvān*, all; *kāmān*, desires, or objects of desire; *chandataḥ*, as desired; *prārthayasva*, ask for; *imāḥ*, these; *rāmāḥ*, fair girls; *sa-rathāḥ*, with chariots [i.e., seated on chariots]; *sa-tūryāḥ*, playing musical instruments; *na*, not; *hi*, indeed; *īdrśāḥ*, like these; *lambhanīyāḥ*, to be got; *manuṣyaiḥ*, by mortals; *ābhiḥ*, by these [girls]; *mat prattābhiḥ*, given by me; *paricārayasva*, be served by them; *naciketāḥ*, O Naciketā; *maraṇam*, death [i.e., if anything, such as the soul, continues after death]; *mā anuprākṣiḥ*, do not ask

25. There are many pleasant things in the world. Some of them are almost unattainable, but if you so wish you can have them. Take, for instance, young girls seated on chariots and playing musical instruments. They are beyond the reach of ordinary men. But if you want I will give you such girls and they will be at your service. Don't, however, press me to answer your question about death [i.e., if death is the end of everything, or if something like the Self still continues].

Yama continues to tempt Naciketā. He offers him things most people would eagerly grab for. They are indeed very alluring and difficult to get. Against these, the answer Naciketā is seeking is useless. What good will it do Naciketā to know if there is a Self or not? It is an idle question. It is like wanting to know if crows have any teeth. Śaṅkara suggests that

this is the implication of the manner in which Yama is tempting Naciketā.

श्वोभावा मर्त्यस्य यदन्तकैतत्
 सर्वेन्द्रियाणां जरयन्ति तेजः।
 अपि सर्वं जीवितमल्पमेव
 तवैव वाहास्तव नृत्यगीते ॥२६॥

*Śvobhāvā martyasya yadantakaitat
 sarvendriyāṇāṃ jarayanti tejah;
 Apī sarvaṃ jīvitamalpameva
 tavaiva vāhāstava nṛtyagīte.*

Śvaḥ, tomorrow; *abhāvāḥ*, not lasting; *martyasya*, of the mortal; *yat*, all these; *antaka*, O Ender [i.e., O Death—Death is one who puts an end to everything]; *etat*, all this [children, etc.]; *sarvendriyāṇām*, all the senses; *jarayanti*, exhaust; *tejah*, vigour; *apī*, also; *sarvam*, all; *jīvitam*, life; *alpam*, short; *eva*, even; *tava*, your; *eva*, even; *vāhāḥ*, chariots; *tava*, your; *nṛtyagīte*, dancing and singing

26. [Naciketā said:] O Death, all these enjoyments are transitory, and they also exhaust the vitality of one's sense organs. Even what is considered the longest life is short. The vehicles, the dancers and singers—keep all these for yourself.

Now Naciketā shows his mettle. He promptly and emphatically rejects Yama's offer, and he gives his

reasons why he rejects them. He says that they are all *śvobhāvā*—that is, no one knows for certain how long they will last. They may not last till tomorrow. They are all transitory. Naciketā makes it clear that he is not interested in things that are transitory. If he wants anything at all, it must be permanent.

This is true renunciation and also true discrimination. Renunciation means that one rejects what is transitory. Discrimination means that one is able to decide what is permanent and what is not. Naciketā excelled in both renunciation and discrimination. He was firm in his resolve to know the true nature of the Self, and he would mercilessly sweep away anything that stood in the way.

न वित्तेन तर्पणीयो मनुष्यो
 लप्स्यामहे वित्तमद्राक्ष्म चेत्त्वा ।
 जीविष्यामो यावदीशिष्यसि त्वं
 वरस्तु मे वरणीयः स एव ॥२७॥

*Na vittena tarpaṇīyo manuṣyo
 lapsyāmahe vittamadrākṣma cettvā;
 Jīviṣyāmo yāvadīśiṣyasi tvam
 varastu me varaṇīyaḥ sa eva.*

Na, not; *vittena*, by wealth; *tarpaṇīyaḥ*, satisfied; *manuṣyaḥ*, man; *lapsyāmahe*, we will get; *vittam*, wealth; *adrākṣma*, when we have seen; *cet*, since [or if]; *tvā*, you; *jīviṣyāmaḥ*, we shall live; *yāvat*,

so long; *īśīyasi*, you are in power; *tvam*, you; *varaḥ*, boon; *tu*, only; *me*, to me; *varaṇīyaḥ*, desirable; *saḥ*, that; *eva*, truly

27. No one is satisfied with wealth. And since we have seen you, we will no doubt get wealth. We shall also live as long as you rule as Yama. Therefore, that alone is the boon I ask for. I do not want any other boon.

Naciketā explains further why he rejects Yama's offer. Yama had offered him wealth, but Naciketā says that a person can never be satisfied with wealth. A rich person is not necessarily a happy person. Naciketā has no delusions about material prosperity. He has already said that it is so uncertain, for by its very nature it is transitory. Every sense pleasure is transitory. Naciketā has no interest in such things. Only that which is permanent interests him.

Naciketā has another reason why he does not accept Yama's offer of wealth. Since he has seen Yama face to face, he can have wealth or anything else he desires. He knows Yama is pleased with him, and when Yama is pleased, everything is at his disposal. Moreover, as long as Yama is in power, Naciketā need not fear even death. Yama, it should be noted, was first a mortal. He became a god by virtue of his good work. As a god, he enjoys certain powers, but those powers are only for a stipulated period. That is why Naciketā says 'as long as you rule as Yama.'

अजीर्यताममृतानामुपेत्य
 जीर्यन्मर्त्यः क्वधःस्थः प्रजानन् ।
 अभिध्यायन् वर्णरतिप्रमोदा-
 नतिदीर्घे जीविते को रमेत ॥२८॥

*Ajīryatāmamṛtānāmupetya
 jīryanmartyaḥ kvadhaḥsthaḥ prajānan;
 Abhidhyāyan varṇaratipramodā-
 natidīrghē jīvite ko rameta.*

Kvadhaḥsthaḥ, of this earth and under the heaven [ku, the earth; *adhaḥsthaḥ*, down below—i.e., whoever, on this earth]; *jīryan*, suffering from decay; *martyaḥ*, subject to death; *ajīryatām*, never decaying; *amṛtānām*, immortals; *upetya*, having come in contact with; *prajānan*, having realized; *varṇa-rati-pramodān*, pleasures arising from physical beauty; *abhidhyāyan*, having contemplated; *atidīrghē*, long; *jīvite*, life; *kaḥ*, who; *rameta*, will enjoy

28. Who below on this earth, knowing that he is subject to decay and death and that all sense pleasures, no matter what their source, are bound to end soon, would deliberately choose a long life if he has come to know immortal beings who are able to give him higher things?

The answer is obvious: no one would. Naciketā again tells Yama why he does not want the things Yama is offering. Why does he not want them? Because he knows that they are transitory. As a mortal he has seen both decay and death. He knows he himself

will someday die. Similarly, everything he possesses will perish. The very nature of sense pleasures is that they are attractive but they do not last long. Naciketā knows this very well, and this is why he does not feel drawn towards them. Yama had offered him the rarest things among sense pleasures, but Naciketā had no hesitation in refusing them. His distaste for sensuous things has grown stronger since meeting Yama. For so long he had seen and lived among mortals. Now, for the first time, he is seeing an immortal, a god. Moreover, Yama is capable of giving him higher things than sense pleasures. Would it not be sheer folly on his part to ask for trinkets when it is possible for him to get precious jewels? After meeting an immortal and knowing the difference between what is transitory and what is eternal, Naciketā has no delusions about a long life on earth.

यस्मिन्निदं विचिकित्सन्ति मृत्यो
 यत्साम्पराये महति ब्रूहि नस्तत् ।
 योऽयं वरो गूढमनुप्रविष्टो
 नान्यं तस्मान्नचिकेता वृणीते ॥२९॥

*Yasminnidam vicikitsanti mṛtyo
 yatsāmparāye mahati brūhi nastat;
 Yo'yam varo gūḍhamanupraviṣṭo
 nānyam tasmānnaciketā vṛṇīte.*

Mṛtyo, O Death; *yasmin*, about which, about the question; *idam*, this [i.e., the question whether there is a Self or not]; *yat*, that; *vicikitsanti*, debate, people debate; *tat*, that [i.e., that matter about the Self];

mahati sāmparāye, the great otherworld; *naḥ*, to us; *brūhi*, explain; *yaḥ ayam varah*, that specific boon [i.e., the boon relating to the Self]; *gūḍham*, hidden, secret, profound; *anupraviṣṭaḥ*, unravelled with great difficulty; *tasmāt*, except that; *anyam*, any other [i.e., any other boon]; *naciketā na vṛṇīte*, Naciketā does not ask for

29. O Death, people have always debated about whether there is a Self or not. The question is very important, for it is linked to the question of liberation, or of the other world. It is also difficult and needs much investigation. It is a mystery. Please explain it to me. Naciketā wants no other boon.

Naciketā once again tells Yama why he is insisting on having the boon he has chosen. He had earlier told Yama, clearly and firmly, that he is not interested in sense pleasures or anything transitory. He only wants to know the mystery surrounding the real identity of man. Is death the end of man, or only a change? Naciketā wants an answer to this question. When he says 'Naciketā is not going to be satisfied with anything short of that,' he is not boasting. He is only expressing his keenness.

इति काठकोपनिषदि प्रथमाध्याये प्रथमा वल्ली ॥

Iti kāṭhakopaniṣadi prathamādhyāye prathamā vallī.

Here ends the first chapter of the first part of the Kāṭha Upaniṣad.

PART ONE

CHAPTER TWO

अन्यच्छ्रेयोऽन्यदुतैव प्रेय-
स्ते उभे नानार्थे पुरुषं सिनीतः।
तयोः श्रेय आददानस्य साधु
भवति हीयतेऽर्थाद्य उ प्रेयो वृणीते ॥१॥

Anyacchreyo'nyadutaiva preya-
ste ubhe nānārthe puruṣam sinītaḥ;
Tayoḥ śreya ādadānasya sādhu
bhavati hīyate'rthādya u preyo vṛṇīte.

Śreyaḥ, the good; *anyat*, different; *uta*, and; *preyaḥ*, the pleasant; *anyat eva*, different without doubt; *te ubhe*, those two; *nānā-arthe*, in different ways; *puruṣam*, man; *sinītaḥ*, bind; *tayoḥ*, between the two; *śreyaḥ*, the good; *ādadānasya*, he who chooses; *sādhu bhavati*, does well, prospers; *yaḥ*, he who; *preyaḥ u*, the pleasant only; *vṛṇīte*, prefers; *arthāt*, from the goal; *hīyate*, deviates

1. The good and the pleasant are two different things. They serve different purposes. Each is, however, a bondage, though not in the same sense. He who chooses the good does good to himself, but he who chooses the pleasant misses the purpose of life.

PART ONE

CHAPTER TWO

अन्यच्छ्रेयोऽन्यदुतैव प्रेय-
स्ते उभे नानार्थे पुरुषं सिनीतः ।
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1. The good and the pleasant are two different things. They serve different purposes. Each is, however, a bondage, though not in the same sense. He who chooses the good does good to himself, but he who chooses the pleasant misses the purpose of life.

What is the purpose of life? The purpose of life is liberation. We are now caught in a cycle of birth and death. We are born again and again, and we also die again and again. But why? Because of our ignorance. We do not know our real identity, and thus we constantly have a sense of want. We always want something or other. Maybe we already have enough, but we are not satisfied; we want more. And no matter how much we have, we still keep wishing for more. We are never happy. But in order to have our desires fulfilled, we have to have a body, and to have a body means we must be born. Then again, just as night follows day, death follows birth. Thus we helplessly keep swinging between birth and death till we realize that our Self is everything and we have nothing to wish for. Liberation follows when we know our Self. The goal of life is this Self-knowledge. This is the highest good (*puruṣārthaḥ*) for human beings. This is what Yama refers to as the good (*śreyah*).

There are some people who want nothing but Self-knowledge. They are not interested in what Yama calls *preyaḥ*, the pleasant. They are intelligent and thoughtful people who shun the pleasant because they know that the pleasant is pleasant only for a while. Their only concern is how to get the highest good. This preoccupation is also a bondage, but it is a bondage that finally liberates. The path is difficult, but they prefer it in order to get the true happiness that everyone wants—the happiness that is eternal.

The other group of people are those who prefer the pleasant. Such people are easily attracted by sense

pleasures. They become happy but only for a short while. The things they seek are ephemeral.

Naciketā belongs to the first group, yet Yama cautions him, for no one can be sure that he will not succumb to temptation. 'Eternal vigilance is the only price of liberty.'

श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यमेत-

स्तौ सम्परीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः।

श्रेयो हि धीरोऽभि प्रेयसो वृणीते

प्रेयो मन्दो योगक्षेमाद् वृणीते ॥२॥

*Śreyaśca preyaśca manuṣyameta-
stau samparītya vivinakti dhīraḥ;
Śreyo hi dhīro'bhi preyaso vṛṇīte
preyo mando yogakṣemād vṛṇīte.*

Śreyaḥ ca preyaḥ ca, the good and the pleasant [i.e., the spiritual and the secular]; *manuṣyam*, man; *etaḥ*, come together; *dhīraḥ*, a wise man; *tau*, those two; *samparītya*, closely examining; *vivinakti*, distinguishes; *dhīraḥ*, the wise person; *preyaśaḥ*, from the pleasant; *śreyaḥ-hi*, only the good; *abhi-vṛṇīte*, prefers; *mandāḥ*, the short-sighted; *yōga-kṣemāt*, addition and retention [of physical needs]; *vṛṇīte*, prefers; *preyaḥ*, the pleasant

2. The good and the pleasant are both open to man. A wise person prefers the good after closely examining the two and weighing their merits and

demerits. A short-sighted person, however, prefers the pleasant, for he is only concerned with increasing and preserving his physical comforts.

The difference between the two categories of people mentioned earlier is further explained. One category prefers moral and spiritual growth—*śreyas*, the good. It is called 'the good' because there is no doubt that it is *the* good ultimately. The path to the good is not at all easy. It is beset with hazards and hardships. But discriminating people prefer this path, for it is ultimately rewarding. It is the path that leads to moral perfection, and nothing is greater than that. No price is too high to pay for moral perfection.

The other group of people are more content with sense pleasure—that which is immediate and more attractive to them. Sense pleasure is immediate; moral perfection is remote. They cannot wait for the remote, and they are also not sure that the remote really exists and that it is that good. Therefore, they rush to enjoy sense pleasures, which are immediate and palpable.

The two categories are clear and distinct. Very few are in the first category, but they are the people who lead humanity. Their influence is felt even centuries after their death. Many are in the second group, but they are like bubbles on the sea. They are hardly remembered after their death.

स त्वं प्रियान्प्रियरूपांश्च कामा-
नभिध्यायन्नचिकेतोऽत्यस्राक्षीः ।

नैतां सृङ्गां वित्तमयीमवाप्तो
यस्यां मज्जन्ति बहवो मनुष्याः ॥३॥

*Sa tvam priyānpriyarūpāmśca kāmā-
nabhidhyāyannaciketo 'tyasrākṣīh;
Naitām sṛṅkāṁ vittamayīmavāpto
yasyām majjanti bahavo manuṣyāh.*

Naciketah, O Naciketā; *saḥ tvam*, that you [i.e., I have tempted you again and again, but you have rejected everything I have tempted you with]; *priyān*, near and dear ones; *ca*, and; *priya-rūpān*, attractive; *kāmān*, objects; *abhi-dhyāyan*, weighing how useless they are; *atyasrākṣīh*, totally rejected them; *etām*, this; *vittamayīm*, paved with gold, yielding pleasures; *sṛṅkāṁ*, the path of the world, the life of pleasure; *na avāptaḥ*, you have not chosen; *yasyām*, in which; *bahavaḥ*, many; *manuṣyāh*, people; *majjanti*, become mired

3. O Naciketā, I have tempted you again and again, but you have rejected everything I offered. Near and dear ones did not tempt you, nor even pleasant things. You were intelligent enough to understand that all worldly things are useless. You rejected them outright. Most people, however, are steeped in worldly life because they find it pleasant.

Saḥ tvam, 'that you'—the expression is a tribute to Naciketā. Yama means to say: 'What a wonderful person you are! I tried to tempt you in all manner of ways, but failed.' Yama offered Naciketā everything

worldly people run after, but Naciketā had no hesitation in rejecting them. The good and the pleasant can never go together. If you want moral and spiritual progress, you have to forgo sense pleasure. You have to practise self-discipline. A human being has a natural weakness for things that please his body and mind—food, drink, clothes; name, fame, and power; friends and relations; objects of luxury—in short, everything that satisfies his ego. His world is defined by his body and mind, and he cannot think that he is outside of this. But there are exceptions—Naciketā, for instance. These people have a natural aversion for gross physical pleasures. They do not like them because such pleasures are short-lived. They prefer moral and spiritual wealth because it is enduring. Somehow or other they know that moral and spiritual wealth is higher than material wealth, and that in order to get the former one must give up the latter. Thus, they gladly renounce ephemeral pleasures. Renunciation is giving up smaller things for higher things.

दूरमेते विपरीते विषूची
 अविद्या या च विद्येति ज्ञाता ।
 विद्याभीप्सिनं नचिकेतसं मन्ये
 न त्वा कामा बहवोऽलोलुपन्त ॥४॥

*Dūramete viparīte viṣūcī
 avidyā yā ca vidyeti jñātā;
 Vidyābhīpsinam naciketasam manye
 na tvā kāmā bahavo 'lolupanta.*

Yā avidyā, that secular learning [which gives us only gross sense pleasure]; *vidyā ca*, and that spiritual learning [which gives us perfection]; *ete*, these two; *dūram*, far; *viparīte*, apart; *viśūcī*, produce opposite results; *iti*, this is how; *jñātā*, they are known; *naciketasam vidyā-abhīpsinam manye*, Naciketā, I know you are intent on spiritual learning; *na tvā*, not you; *bahavaḥ*, many; *kāmāḥ*, attractive objects; *alolupanta*, tempted.

4. Secular learning and spiritual learning are at opposite ends of a pole. They are different and they have different purposes. This is well known. Naciketā, I have found you intent on spiritual learning. I have tested you by offering you all kinds of attractive objects, but you have not shown the least interest in them.

Literally, *vidyā* means knowledge and *avidyā* means ignorance. And knowledge here means Self-knowledge—that knowledge which leads to perfection, which liberates a person, and which also gives him peace and happiness, the highest good. You get this knowledge by practising discrimination and self-control. But *avidyā* is just the opposite. You do not discriminate, you have no self-control, and you run after sense pleasures, always driven by desires. You may be learned, but your learning is only for pleasure. You have no wisdom.

Yama is again praising Naciketā. This is only to emphasize the importance of renunciation. What Yama says is that you cannot worship both God and Mammon at the same time. If you want sense pleasures, you

cannot have the joy that communion with God gives. Spiritual joy and physical joy are two different things. If you want one, you have to give up the other. If you crave for money, name and fame, comforts, political power, a high social standing, and things of that sort, that means you are not interested in the pure joy of the company of God. You are following *avidyā*, the path of enjoyment. *Vidyā*, the path of renunciation, is a rather hard path, and it does not suit you.

Is no compromise possible? Yes, it is possible if you feel that whatever you have is for God—that is, if you feel that you are not the master, that God alone is the master. Non-attachment is the chief characteristic of this attitude. And non-attachment is only another name of renunciation, which Yama is praising in this verse.

अविद्यायामन्तरे वर्तमानाः

स्वयं धीराः पण्डितम्मन्यमानाः ।

दन्द्रम्यमाणाः परियन्ति मूढा

अन्धेनैव नीयमाना यथान्धाः ॥५॥

Avidyāyāmantare vartamānāḥ

svayaṁ dhīrāḥ paṇḍitammanyamānāḥ ;

Dandramyamānāḥ pariyanti mūḍhā

andhenaiva nīyamānā yathāndhāḥ.

Avidyāyām antare, steeped in ignorance [i.e., engrossed in worldly pleasures]; *vartamānāḥ*, staying; *svayam*,

themselves; *dhīrāḥ*, intelligent; *paṇḍitam-manyamānāḥ*, considering themselves well versed in the scriptures; *mūḍhāḥ*, fools; *dandramyamānāḥ*, going through all manner of vicissitudes; *pariyanti*, go round and round; *yathā*, like; *andhena*, by the blind; *eva*, truly enough; *nīyamānāḥ*, led; *andhāḥ*, blind people

5. Those who are steeped in worldly pleasure think they are intelligent and that they know the scriptures well. They are like blind people being led by other blind people. They go round and round, always pursued by sorrow.

Here the misery of worldly people is being depicted. Such people follow the path of *avidyā*, the path earlier described as the pleasant (as opposed to the good). They always think in terms of sense pleasure and are occupied with their material possessions, as if that is all life is for. They are fools, but they think they are very clever. They are ignorant, but they think they are learned and that they know the scriptures. They in fact grope in the dark—like blind people led by other blind people. How much they suffer! Death, disease, poverty, misfortune—all these stalk them at every step. Their journey through the world is full of hazards. The irony is that they still prefer it.

न साम्परायः प्रतिभाति बालं
 प्रमाद्यन्तं वित्तमोहेन मूढम् ।
 अयं लोको नास्ति पर इति मानी
 पुनः पुनर्वशमापद्यते मे ॥६॥

*Na sāmparāyaḥ pratibhāti bālam
 pramādyantaṁ vittamohena mūḍham;
 Ayam loko nāsti para iti mānī
 punaḥ punarvaśamāpadyate me.*

Pramādyantaṁ, enjoying themselves in their attachments; *vittamohena*, in the vanity of the wealth they possess; *mūḍham*, befooled; *bālam*, the immature; *prati*, to; *sāmparāyaḥ*, duties concerning the other world; *na bhāti*, never occur; *ayam lokaḥ*, this phenomenal world [alone exists]; *paraḥ*, any other [not seen]; *na asti*, does not exist; *iti*, this; *mānī*, anyone with this way of thinking; *punaḥ punaḥ*, again and again; *me*, my; *vaśam*, control; *āpadyate*, comes under

6. There are worldly people too attached to their families. They may also be very proud of their wealth. The world mesmerizes them and they become childish. They think that the world they see around them is the only world that exists, and they do not believe there is any other world. It therefore never occurs to them that they should perform duties preparatory to their journey to the next world. Such people come under my control again and again.

Some worldly people never think of their life after death. They may not even believe that there is such a thing, and they do not, therefore, make any preparations for it. They are only concerned with what is present. It is the world they see, feel, and live in that matters, and since they do not see any

other world, it does not exist and they do not worry about it. They have children; they have money. They have plenty of things to enjoy and they are happy. The world has so bewitched them that they have become thoughtless and childish. They do not recognize that life has a purpose, which is the attainment of Self-knowledge. Only a human being can attain Self-knowledge, for he can think, argue, and discriminate, and he can reject the pleasant for the good. If he does not try to attain Self-knowledge, then his life is in vain. By only living for sense pleasure, he commits suicide. He is born again and again and is completely at the mercy of Yama. A thoughtful person always keeps the goal of life in view—the attainment of Self-knowledge. Everything he does is directed to that goal. If a person does not direct his life that way, he is foolish and immature.

श्रवणायापि बहुभिर्यो न लभ्यः

शृण्वन्तोऽपि बहवो यं न विद्युः।

आश्चर्यो वक्ता कुशलोऽस्य लब्धाऽऽ-

श्चर्यो ज्ञाता कुशलानुशिष्टः ॥७॥

Śravaṇāyāpi bahubhiryo na labhyaḥ

śṛṇvanto'pi bahavo yaṁ na vidyuh;

Āścaryo vaktā kuśalo'sya labdhā'-

ścaryo jñātā kuśalānuśiṣṭaḥ.

Yaḥ, that [i.e., that Self]; *bahubhiḥ*, to many; *śravaṇāya*

api, even the opportunity of hearing; *nā labhyaḥ*, not available; *yam*, about whom; *śṛṇvantaḥ api*, even hearing; *bahavaḥ*, many; *na vidyuḥ*, do not understand; *vaktā*, teacher [i.e., the teacher of the Self]; *āścaryaḥ*, rare; *asya labdhā*, one who has realized the Self; *kuśalaḥ*, highly accomplished; *āścaryaḥ*, rare [i.e., few students]; *jñātā*, can attain [i.e., can attain Self-knowledge]; *kuśalānuśiṣṭaḥ*, taught by a highly accomplished teacher

7. It so happens that many do not have the opportunity to hear about the Self. Even among those who hear, many do not grasp what it means. In reality, very few persons are competent to teach about the Self, and accordingly, those who attain Self-knowledge have to be very accomplished. Thus, only a handful of persons attain Self-knowledge, having been taught by highly accomplished teachers.

We see in the world that most people are, after the pleasant (*preyas*). Few, very few indeed, care for the good (*śreyas*). And even among those who wish for the good, not many are qualified to attain it. How many are there like Naciketā, who would reject sense pleasure for the sake of attaining spiritual enlightenment? Most people are happy with their physical well-being. They do not—or, rather, cannot—think beyond the body. Even if you talk to them about the Self, they will either not believe you or soon feel bored. But this is not to say that those who hear about the Self understand what the Self is, let alone realize it. Only those who are able

to discriminate between the good (*śreyas*) and the pleasant (*preyas*), who have always chosen the good in preference to the pleasant and have thus acquired complete self-control, are fit to receive instructions about the Self.

These people then have to search for a competent teacher. Naturally a competent teacher is very hard to find, for he must have attained Self-knowledge himself; otherwise how could he teach about the Self? If a person himself is blind, how can he lead other blind people? Only a lighted lamp can light another lamp. Thus, teachers competent to impart Self-knowledge and disciples fit to receive that knowledge are both in a class by themselves. Their number is indeed very small. Most people are interested in the gross; few are interested in the subtle. And of all subtle things, the Self is the subtlest, for it has no attributes. The Self is the core of your being. How can you describe it? You can describe something outside of yourself, but you cannot describe your self. This is why the Self is so difficult to explain and so difficult to understand.

न नरेणावरेण प्रोक्त एष
 सुविज्ञेयो बहुधा चिन्त्यमानः ।
 अनन्यप्रोक्ते गतिरत्र नास्त्य-
 णीयान् ह्यतर्क्यमणुप्रमाणात् ॥८॥

*Na nareṇāvareṇa prokta eṣa
 suvijñeyo bahudhā cintyamānaḥ;
 Ananyaprokte gatrātra nāstyā-
 nīyān hyatarkyamaṇupramāṇāt.*

Avareṇa, inferior, materialistic-minded; *nareṇa*, by an individual; *proktaḥ*, taught; *eṣaḥ*, this Self; *suvijñeyah*, comprehensible; *na*, not; *bahudhā*, in many ways; *cintyamānaḥ*, capable of being interpreted; *ananya-prokte*: *ananya*, [a teacher who has had the experience that he is] not separate but identical [with the Cosmic Self, Brahman], *prokte*, if taught [by such a teacher]; *ātra*, about this Self; *gatiḥ*, wavering [of the mind about your identity]; *na asti*, does not exist; *aṇu-pramāṇāt*: *aṇu*, fine, *pramāṇāt*, established by reason; *aṇīyān*, finer [can become even finer, again by reason]; *hi*, as a matter of fact; *atarkyam*, beyond reason [the Self is beyond reason]

8. If a person with a materialistic bent of mind teaches about the Self, the Self will never be understood. There are many misconceptions about the Self. The right teacher is he who sees himself as Brahman. When such a teacher teaches, the disciple has no more conflicting thoughts in his mind. Otherwise, if someone, by reasoning, establishes the Self as fine, another person, in the same process, can establish it as still finer. But the Self cannot be known this way—by reasoning.

Unless the teacher himself has had a direct, personal experience, he is not competent to teach about the

Self. He may be intelligent otherwise, but without direct experience he cannot know about the Self, which is outside the world of sense experience. The subject of the Self is very controversial. There are many views about it: One view is that the Self is the body. Another view is that it does not exist. Yet another view is that it is the active agent in a person. There are thus many conflicting ideas. Then how can one know the Self? One has to go to the right teacher. But who is the right teacher? The right teacher is one who knows that his Self is the Self of all, that he is no other than Brahman. This is what the scriptures teach. And he realizes this from his own experience. When he has this experience, all doubts about the Self are dispelled from his mind. He knows that he is Brahman. It is a conviction that nothing can shake. The whole world may laugh at him, but he knows what he is. It is not an intellectual conviction—it is a transformation of his personality. The same change takes place in the disciple when he is taught by such a teacher. No wonder such a teacher is rare to find.

The existence of the Self is not a matter of argumentation. It is a matter of realization. It is a direct and personal experience. Arguments can lead to one kind of conclusion about the Self, but more arguments may follow that will completely demolish the conclusion arrived at earlier. Once and for all, it has to be understood that the Self is beyond all argumentation.

नैषा तर्केण मतिरापनेया
 प्रोक्तान्येनैव सुज्ञानाय प्रेष्ठ।
 यां त्वमापः सत्यधृतिर्बतासि
 त्वादृङ् नो भूयान्नचिकेतः प्रष्टा ॥१॥

Naiṣā tarkeṇa matirāpaneyā
proktānyenaiva sujñānāya preṣṭha;
Yām tvamāpaḥ satyadhṛtirbatāsi
tvādṛiṅ no bhūyānnaciketah praṣṭā.

Preṣṭha, O dearest; *tvam*, you; *yām*, that [that insight into the Self]; *āpaḥ*, have got; *eṣā matiḥ*, this knowledge; *tarkeṇa*, by reasoning; *na āpaneyā*, not to be gotten; *anyena eva*, only by another [sort of person who not merely argues but has studied the scriptures and has realized the Truth they speak of]; *proktā*, explained [that knowledge]; *sujñānāya*, easily grasped; *naciketah*, O Naciketā; *satya-dhṛtiḥ*, concept of the Truth; *bata asi*, [you are] endowed with; *naḥ*, to us; *praṣṭā*, seekers; *tvādṛik*, like you; *bhūyāt*, are welcome

9. O dearest, you have a fine insight into the Self, but you have not arrived at this through reasoning. You have attained this from instructions you received from someone who did not depend upon reasoning but studied the scriptures and then realized the Self. Naciketā, you have truly understood the nature of the Self. May we have more seekers like you!

In order to know the Self one has to go to a competent

teacher. But who is a competent teacher? He is one who has realized the Self. As mentioned in the scriptures, you cannot know the Self through reasoning. But neither can you disprove the Self through reasoning. Reasoning is good, but reasoning for the sake of reasoning is not good. Above all, reasoning should be constructive. Reasoning to understand the meaning of the scriptures is beneficial. The scriptures teach us truths explained by the greatest men. But in order to understand what those truths mean, they have to be experienced. Any fool can challenge those truths, but in doing so he may be talking nonsense. Is it necessary to take serious notice of what he says? Is it not a waste of time to counter his arguments? 'The test of the pudding is in the eating.' The Self has to be realized—not argued about. Yama has warned Naciketā about this. He is now satisfied to see that Naciketā has the right attitude. And Yama understands that Naciketā himself is a good student and has also had a good teacher. Any teacher is happy when he has a good student, and Yama is happy to have a student like Naciketā. That is why he says that more students like Naciketā would be welcome.

जानाम्यहं शेवधिरित्यनित्यं

न ह्यध्रुवैः प्राप्यते हि ध्रुवं तत्।

ततो मया नाचिकेतश्चितोऽग्नि-

रनित्यैर्द्रव्यैः प्राप्तवानस्मि नित्यम् ॥१०॥

Jānāmyaham śevadhirityanityam

na hyadhruvaiḥ prāpyate hi dhruvam tat;

*Tato mayā nāciketaścito 'gni-
ranityairdravyaiḥ prāptavānasmī nityam.*

Śevadhīḥ, treasure [fruits of work]; *anityam*, transitory; *hi*, because; *adhruvaiḥ*, not lasting [transitory objects]; *tat*, that; *dhruvam*, lasting [the Self that is eternal]; *na prāpyate*, not obtainable [cannot be achieved]; *itī*, this [this fact]; *hi*, therefore; *aham*, I; *jānāmi*, know; *tataḥ*, so [in spite of my knowing this]; *mayā*, by me; *anityaiḥ*, transitory; *dravyaiḥ*, objects [anything, even animals, used for ritualistic worship]; *nāciketaḥ*, named after Naciketā; *agniḥ*, fire [the fire sacrifice that can lead to heaven]; *citaḥ*, performed; *nityam*, eternal [relatively eternal, such as being in heaven and occupying the position of Yama, with authority over the destiny of human beings]; *prāptavān asmī*, have attained

10. I know that wealth as well as all fruits of work are transitory. And you cannot attain the eternal Self by using such transitory things. I knew this, yet I performed Nāciketa sacrifices and was rewarded with this position of Yama. This position is eternal only in a relative sense.

Yama narrates how he attained a place in heaven and also how he acquired the position of Yama. He had performed the fire sacrifice, which he has just named after Naciketā. This sacrifice involves the use of many transitory objects, including animals. The use of transitory means, however, can produce only transitory results. The Nāciketa sacrifice can admit

you to heaven and also qualify you for some special powers, but these are only pseudo-eternal gains. They are not really eternal. Sooner or later your tenure as Yama, or even the period of your stay in heaven, comes to an end. Yama now regrets that he had at one time aspired to being in heaven or being in the position of Yama. Such temporary rewards are nothing compared to Self-knowledge. Yama is sorry that he preferred such small things. In comparison, Naciketā is more judicious. He has rejected everything that is short-lived. Yama compliments Naciketā for not having been tempted by heaven or the position of a god. Naciketā has consistently stuck to his request for Self-knowledge, and this is proof of the kind of person that Naciketā is.

कामस्याप्तिं जगतः प्रतिष्ठां

क्रतोरानन्त्यमभयस्य पारम् ।

स्तोममहदुरुगायं प्रतिष्ठां दृष्ट्वा

धृत्या धीरो नचिकेतोऽत्यस्राक्षीः ॥११॥

Kāmasyāptim jagataḥ pratiṣṭhām

kratorānantyamabhayasya pāram;

Stomamahadurugāyaṁ pratiṣṭhām dṛṣṭvā

dhṛtyā dhīro naciketo'tyāsraḥkṣīḥ.

Naciketah, O Naciketā; *kāmasya*, of desire; *āptim*, the limit [i.e., that marks the limit of human desire]; *jagataḥ*, of the world [all objects—human, animal, and environmental]; *pratiṣṭhām*, support; *kratoḥ*,

results obtained from sacrifices; *ānantyam*, infinity [infinity as represented by Hiranyagarbha, the first physical existence of Brahman]; *abhayasya*, fearlessness; *pāram*, the highest [the highest state of fearlessness. This is not to be taken literally. You still have fear, but comparatively, it is as if you have gone beyond fear.]; *stoma-mahat*, highly adorable [states in which you can, at will, shrink or expand or make things happen]; *urugāyam*, vast as well as lasting [like Hiranyagarbha]; *pratiṣṭhām*, state; *dhṛtyā*, with patience; *dr̥ṣṭvā*, having carefully considered; *dhīraḥ*, as a thoughtful person; *atyasrākṣiḥ*, rejected

11. O Naciketā, you are indeed very thoughtful. That is why you are able to reject things that human beings desire most. For instance, you rejected whatever may be said to be the support of the world, inclusive of its human, animal, and environmental constituents. Sacrifices entitle you to many covetable things, including the status of Hiranyagarbha [the creator, supporter, and destroyer of worlds], and also lead you to regions where you are temporarily free from fear, and to the acquisition of supernatural powers [such as growing or shrinking at will, influencing things to happen, controlling people, and so on], and similar covetable things. You rejected each of them because you were intelligent enough to realize that they were all perishable.

तं दुर्दर्शं गूढमनुप्रविष्टं
गुहाहितं गह्वरेष्ठं पुराणम् ।

अध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन देवं
मत्वा धीरो हर्षशोकौ जहाति ॥१२॥

*Tam durdarśam gūḍhamanupraviṣṭam
guhāhitam gahvareṣṭham purāṇam;
Adhyātmayogādhigamena devam
matvā dhīro harṣaśokau jahāti.*

Durdarśam, difficult to see [i.e., difficult because it is very subtle]; *gūḍham*, subtle; *anupraviṣṭam*, lying deep within [everyone]; *gahvareṣṭham*, in the deepest recesses [beyond the grasp of the senses]; *guhāhitam*, hidden in the intellect [as if inside a cave]; *purāṇam*, timeless; *tam*, that; *devam*, that which reveals [the radiant Self]; *adhyātma-yoga-adhigamena*, by practising adhyātma yoga [the yoga in which you think that the Self is in yourself]; *matvā*, meditating [on the radiant Self]; *dhīraḥ*, a wise person; *harṣa-śokau*, pleasure and pain; *jahāti*, overcomes

12. Difficult to see, lying deep within everyone, hidden in the intellect, and beyond the reach of the sense organs is the timeless Self. A wise person, realizing this Self within himself, goes beyond pleasure and pain.

The Self is not easily seen. In fact, it is not at all attainable by sense perception. You must work very hard to realize it, such as practising self-discipline for years together. The experience of the Self is not like seeing an object. You and the object you see are two separate things. But the Self is not separate

from you. It is your inmost being. You do not see the Self—rather, the Self reveals itself to you. It is like seeing yourself in a mirror. If the mirror is clean, then you can see yourself clearly. In the same way, you must have a clean mind—that is, you have to totally withdraw yourself from all sense pleasure. There may be a coin lying at the bottom of a lake. You can see that coin if the water is calm. Similarly, if the mind is calm you can see the Self. The Self is always there, but because the mind is disturbed you do not see the Self. How is the mind disturbed? It is disturbed by desires. If you can remove all desires from your mind and direct it constantly to the Self, then the Self reveals itself to you. This is what is called *citta-śuddhi*, purification of the mind. When you attain this, you have a direct experience of the Self within. It is this direct experience that takes you beyond pleasure and pain. You attain an equanimity that is never disturbed.

एतच्छ्रुत्वा सम्परिगृह्य मर्त्यः
 प्रवृह्य धर्म्यमणुमेतमाप्य ।
 स मोदते मोदनीयं हि लब्ध्वा
 विवृतं सद्म नचिकेतसं मन्ये ॥१३॥

*Etacchrutvā samparigrhya martyaḥ
 pravṛhya dharmyamaṇumetamāpya;
 Sa modate modanīyaṁ hi labdhvā
 vivṛtaṁ sadma naciketasam manye.*

Martyah, [that] man; *etat*, this [i.e., this Brahman]; *śrutvā*, having learnt [from teachers]; *dharmyam*, that which sustains [i.e., always true to the principles that sustain the universe]; *aṇum*, subtle [the Self]; *pravṛhya*, distinguishing [the subtle Self from the gross sense objects]; *samparigṛhya*, having fully grasped [his unity with the Self, he attains this state]; *sah*, he; *etam*, this; *modanīyam*, the source of joy [the Self]; *āpya*, having attained; *modate*, enjoys; *hi*, for certain; *labdhvā*, being established [in this Self]; *naciketasam*, to you, Naciketā; *sadma*, the status of Brahman; *vivṛtam*, open; *manye*, [I] consider

13. A person has to hear about the Self from a competent teacher. But hearing is not enough. He has to attain that Self. He must also establish himself firmly in that Self, though the Self is very subtle. That Self, as dharma, is the support of the universe. A person has to remain true to dharma. When he knows that he is this Self, he feels that he has nothing further to achieve. He is fully content. He is happy and full of bliss, and the source of bliss is his own Self. I feel that Naciketā is now fit to merge with Brahman.

A human being is subject to birth and death because he does not know who he is. He thinks he is the body, and he uses the body to satisfy his many desires. And because of these desires, he has to be born again and again. But some people are very thoughtful. They are able to discriminate between the pleasant (*preyas*) and the good (*śreyas*), and

they prefer the good. Then they hear about the Self—that the Self is one, and that their real identity is that Self. They live with competent teachers, people who have themselves realized this truth. Under the guidance of these teachers, they go through long periods of self-discipline. Finally they reject all that is transitory and concentrate only on the Self, which alone is real and eternal. They realize that they are the Self.

According to Yama, Naciketā is now free from all desires and is on the verge of attaining that state.

अन्यत्र धर्मादन्यत्राधर्मा-
दन्यत्रास्मात्कृताकृतात् ।
अन्यत्र भूताच्च भव्याच्च
यत्तत्पश्यसि तद्वद ॥१४॥

*Anyatra dharmādanyatrādharmā-
danyatrāsmātkṛtākṛtāt;
Anyatra bhūtācca bhavyācca
yattatpaśyasi tadvada.*

Dharmāt anyatra, beyond dharma [i.e., beyond the religious rites and rituals prescribed by the scriptures]; *adharmāt anyatra*, beyond adharma [i.e., actions prohibited by the scriptures]; *asmāt kṛta-akṛtāt anyatra*, beyond visible causes and effects; *bhūtāt ca bhavyāt ca anyatra*, beyond past, [present,] and future [i.e., beyond time]; *yat tat*, whatever; *paśyasi*, you know; *tat vada*, please explain that

14. [Naciketā said: It is not necessary to praise me. If you are really pleased with me, and if you think I am fit to learn this, then] please explain whatever you can about that which is beyond what the scriptures tell us to do and not to do, that which is neither a cause nor an effect, and that which is beyond the past, the present, and the future.

Naciketā's question is about the Self. There is no way of defining this Self. It is both immanent and transcendent. It manifests itself in this world, but the world does not exhaust it. It is beyond the world and is unconditioned. No rules, prescriptive or prohibitive, can bind it. It is neither a cause nor an effect. And it is also beyond time—past, present, and future.

सर्वे वेदा यत्पदमामनन्ति
 तपांसि सर्वाणि च यद्वदन्ति ।
 यदिच्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति
 तत्ते पदं संग्रहेण ब्रवीम्योमित्येतत् ॥१५॥

*Sarve vedā yatpadamāmananti
 tapāṃsi sarvāṇi ca yadvadanti;
 Yadicchanto brahmacaryam caranti
 tatte padam saṅgrahena bravīmyomityetat.*

Sarve vedāḥ, all the Vedas [especially the Upaniṣads]; *yat*, that; *padam*, goal; *āmananti*, praise; *sarvāṇi*, all; *tapāṃsi ca*, austerities also [people undergo];

yat vadanti, for the sake of that; *yat icchantah*, desiring that; *brahmacaryam caranti*, practise self-discipline, especially continence; *te tat padam*, to you that goal; *samgrahaṇa*, briefly; *bravīmi*, I will explain; *aum iti etat*, Aum is that [goal]

15. [Yama said:] That goal which the Upaniṣads praise as the highest, which only austerities reveal, and which is won by those prepared to practise continence, I will briefly tell you what it is—it is Aum.

Aum (Om) is also referred to as *śabda Brahman*, or *praṇava*. It is the most sacred word to the Hindus. It is the most sacred because it is closest to Brahman.

There is no way of describing Brahman. Brahman is beyond thought and speech. It is through a symbol only that Brahman can be imagined. If Brahman manifests itself as a sound, Aum is that sound. It is the most appropriate symbol of Brahman that can be conceived of. The symbol and the substance it stands for are not the same thing, but they have to have something in common. Brahman includes everything in existence, and Aum includes everything relating to sound. It includes both divided and undivided sound. *AUM*—each of these letters stands for a particular aspect of existence: gross, subtle, and causal. Beyond *M* is unspecified existence, *turīya*. Aum represents both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* Brahman—that is, Brahman with attributes and Brahman without attributes.

Since Aum stands for Brahman, you meditate on

Brahman through Aum. As you do so, Aum is not a symbol to you. It is Brahman itself. And you try to feel that your Self and Brahman are one and the same. If Aum is only a symbol to you, by worshipping that symbol you are merely worshipping an idol.

एतद्ध्येवाक्षरं ब्रह्म एतद्ध्येवाक्षरं परम् ।

एतद्ध्येवाक्षरं ज्ञात्वा यो यदिच्छति तस्य तत् ॥१६॥

*Etaddhyevākṣaram brahma etaddhyevākṣaram param ;
Etaddhyevākṣaram jñātvā yo yadicchatī tasya tat.*

Etat, this ; hi, verily ; eva, that ; akṣaram, Om [literally, 'indestructible'] ; brahma, Brahman [with attributes] ; etat, this ; eva, that ; hi, verily ; akṣaram, Om ; param, Brahman [without attributes] ; etat, this ; eva, that ; hi, verily ; akṣaram, Om ; jñātvā, knowing ; yaḥ, he ; yat, whatever ; icchatī, wishes ; tasya, his [to him] ; tat, that

16. [Praising Aum and its worship, Yama said:] This *akṣaram* [Aum] is Brahman with attributes. This *akṣaram* [Aum] is also Brahman without attributes. He who knows this Aum can get whatever he wishes.

Brahman may be both with attributes and without attributes. With attributes, Brahman is the inmost being of everyone and everything. It then creates, sustains, and destroys. Īśvara, Hiraṇyagarbha, and Virāṭ are other names applied to Brahman, and they correspond

to Brahman's causal, subtle, and gross states. Brahman is one and the same. Attributes make no difference to it. They are only superimpositions. It is like a boy who wears one mask after another. The masks make him look different, but he is always the same.

Aum stands for both Brahman with attributes and Brahman without attributes. To know Aum is to know Brahman.

एतदालम्बनं श्रेष्ठमेतदालम्बनं परम् ।

एतदालम्बनं ज्ञात्वा ब्रह्मलोके महीयते ।१७॥

Etadāmbanam śreṣṭhametadāmbanam param;
Etadāmbanam jñātvā brahmaloke mahīyate.

Etat, this [Aum]; *āmbanam*, way [to Brahman with attributes]; *śreṣṭham*, the best; *etat āmbanam param*, this way [to Brahman without attributes]; *etat āmbanam jñātvā*, having known this way; *brahmaloke*, in Brahmaloḥa; *mahīyate*, flourishes [eventually attaining the same status as Brahman]

17. Aum is the best way to attain Brahman. It is the way to attain both Brahman with attributes [Aparā Brahman] and Brahman without attributes [Parā Brahman]. The first leads you to Brahmaloḥa, where you enjoy the same status as Brahmā. The second leads you to union with Brahman.

Earlier it was said that if you meditate on Aum, you get whatever you want. To further confirm this it is now being stated that of all the paths leading to Brahman, Aum is the best. Because through Aum you can attain both Parā Brahman (Brahman without attributes) and Aparā Brahman (Brahman with attributes), Aum is also referred to as Parā and Aparā.

'Parā' is the highest, and 'Aparā' is next to the highest. But it is difficult to think of Parā Brahman, which is without attributes. This is why most people prefer to think of Aparā Brahman, Brahman with attributes. The advantage of Aum is that you can get both Aparā and Parā Brahman through it. You may attain Aparā first—that is, Brahmaloḥa—but eventually you merge with Parā Brahman.

न जायते म्रियते वा विपश्चि-
 न्नायं कुतश्चिन्न बभूव कश्चित् ।
 अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो
 न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥१८॥

*Na jāyate mriyate vā vipaścī-
 nnāyaṃ kutaścinna babhūva kaścit;
 Ajo nityaḥ śāśvato'yaṃ purāṇo
 nā hanyate hanyamāne śarīre.*

Vipaścī, consciousness, which is the Self; *na jāyate*, is not born; [*na*] *mriyate*, does not die; *vā*, either; *ayaṃ*, this Self; *kutaścī*, from anything else; *na*

babhūva, not sprung; *kaścit na [babhūva]*, nothing [born] of it; *ayam*, this [Self]; *ajāḥ*, without birth; *nityaḥ*, eternal; *śāśvataḥ*, unchanging; *purāṇaḥ*, always present; *śarīre hanyamāne*, even if the body perishes; [*ayam*, this Self]; *na hanyate*, does not perish

18. The Self is not born; it does not die, either. It is not born of something, nor is something else born of it. It is without birth, eternal, unchanging, always present. The body perishes but the Self never perishes.

Earlier Yama explained how the worship of Aum could lead to Brahmāloka or to Brahman itself. Now he is trying to give Naciketā an idea about the Self. Brahman and the Self are one and the same, and to realize this oneness is the goal of life according to Vedānta.

Speaking about the Self, Yama says that it is Pure Consciousness. It is Knowledge itself, and therefore it is all-knowing (*vipaścit*). This Self is not born. When something comes into existence for the first time, that is its birth. But the Self has no such birth. It is always there, eternal; it is without beginning, without end.

The Self never dies. It does not die because it is not produced. And it is also not an effect of something. An effect has a cause on which it is dependent. If the cause is removed, the effect is gone. The Self has no such cause. It is the cause of all causes. It is the first cause.

Nothing is born of the Self. Only that which is subject to change can be the cause of something else. For instance, milk can change into yoghurt. But the Self never suffers such a change. It is always the Self—unchanging, unchangeable. It does not grow, nor does it decay. It is eternal and always the same. It is old as well as new. The body perishes, but the Self remains intact.

Naciketā had asked Yama if the Self continued after death. This is Yama's answer to the question.

हन्ता चेन्मन्यते हन्तुं हतश्चेन्मन्यते हतम् ।
उभौ तौ न विजानीतो नायं हन्ति न हन्यते ॥१९॥

Hantā cenmanyate hantum
hataścenmanyate hatam;
Ubhau tau na vijānīto
nāyam hanti na hanyate.

Hantā cet, if the killer; *hantum manyate*, thinks he is going to kill; *hataḥ cet*, if the killed; [*ātmānam*] *hatam manyate*, thinks [his Self] is killed; *ubhau tau*, both of them; *na vijānītaḥ*, do not know; *ayam na hanti*, this Self does not kill; *na hanyate*, does not get killed either

19. If the killer thinks he is going to kill, and if the person killed thinks he has been killed, then both of them do not know that the Self does not kill and is also not killed.

This verse further explains the nature of the Self. The Self is not subject to any modification, is unconditioned, and is without attributes. It is not an agent of any action. It is only the detached witness to all that happens in the phenomenal world.

If a person identifies himself with his body, he is ignorant. If a killer kills, it is only his body that is killing. The Self is not killing. Similarly, the Self of the person killed is not killed. It is his body that is killed. The Self, in either case, is unaffected. It is only a witness. Because of the presence of the Self, the body, with its organs, is active and life is possible. But the Self is impervious to anything that happens to the body.

अणोरणीयान्महतो महीया-
नात्माऽस्य जन्तोर्निहितो गुहायाम्।
तमक्रतुः पश्यति वीतशोको
धातुप्रसादान्महिमानमात्मनः ॥२०॥

Aṇoraṇīyān mahato mahīyā-
nātmā'sya jantornihito guhāyām;
Tamakratuḥ paśyati vītaśoko
dhātuprasādānmahimānamātmanah.

Aṇoḥ aṇīyān, smaller than the smallest; *mahataḥ mahīyān*, bigger than the biggest; *ātmā*, the Self; *asya jantoḥ*, of this being [from Brahman down to a shoot of grass]; *guhāyām nihitaḥ*, lying in the heart

[which is like a cave]; *akratuḥ*, having renounced all desires; *vīta-śokaḥ*, [the person] free from all worries; *dhātu-prasādāt*, due to the control he has gained over the mind and other sense organs; *ātmanaḥ*, of the Self; *tam*, that; *mahimānam*, greatness; *paśyati*, experiences

20. This Self is smaller than the smallest, bigger than the biggest. It lies deep in the heart of every being [as its own Self]. The person who has renounced all desires and has gained full control over the mind and other sense organs can see the greatness of the Self. He then becomes free from all worries.

All things, big or small, come from the Self. In fact, the Self has become all things. This is why the Self can be said to be smaller than the smallest and bigger than the biggest:

The Self is thus manifest in the whole universe. The same Self is again concealed in every being and everything. It is like something hidden in the darkness of a cave. Yogins perceive the Self in their heart, here described as a cave. They perceive it through their intellect, and they perceive it as light. Because the seat of the intellect is the heart, the heart is described as the seat of the Self.

This Self is very subtle. A person who is preoccupied with sense pleasures has no way of perceiving it. It is as if the Self is hiding from such a person. Only a person whose mind is calm can perceive

the Self. But when is the mind calm? When you renounce all desires. A mind free from desires is never disturbed. If you have desires, you are happy if they are fulfilled and unhappy if they are not. Either way your mind is disturbed. A disturbed mind is like a lake with ripples. If there are ripples, you cannot see what is below the surface of the water. But if the water is calm, you may be able to see even a small coin lying at the bottom of the lake. Similarly, the Self reveals itself when your mind is calm. It is like seeing yourself in a clean mirror.

When you have this revelation, you discover that your Self is also the Self of all. This is the highest spiritual experience a person can wish for.

आसीनो दूरं व्रजति शयानो याति सर्वतः।
कस्तं मदामदं देवं मदन्यो ज्ञातुमर्हति ॥२१॥

Āsīno dūraṃ vrajati śayāno yāti sarvataḥ;
Kastaṃ madāmadam devam madanyo jñātumarhati.

[This Self] *āsīnaḥ*, [though] seated [i.e., motionless]; *dūram*, far and wide; *vrajati*, can travel; *śayānaḥ*, lying in bed; *yāti*, can go; *sarvataḥ*, everywhere; *tam mada-amadam devam*, the Self who is at once joyful and joyless; *mat anyah kaḥ*, who besides me; *jñātum arhati*, is capable of knowing

21. This Self is motionless, yet it travels far and

wide—that is, it is inactive, yet it is most active. It is both joyful and joyless. Who can understand it except someone like me?

This verse is in praise of the Self, and it emphasizes its greatness and subtleness. The Self has two aspects: In one aspect it is motionless, fixed, static; but in another, it is mobile, active, far-reaching, and dynamic. It is both joyful and joyless. It is the meeting point of all opposites. As the common substratum on which everything rests, it is the unity in all the diversity that exists. It is like the screen on which a motion picture is projected.

The Self is Pure Consciousness. Here, *Pure* means without attributes (*nirguṇa*). You cannot say anything about the Self, yet it is everything. It is everything in the sense that it is the inmost being of everything. It is the common Self of all. It is one yet many—many in terms of names and forms. So the one becomes many only when associated with names and forms. But this is only an apparent change, not a real transformation.

Pure Consciousness is neither active nor inactive, but it appears active in the waking state of a human being. In the waking state a person is both physically and mentally active, and all he does then is attributed to the Self, as if the Self is doing everything. This is ignorance. The Self is doing nothing. It is merely standing as a witness. There is yet another state—that in which a person enjoys sound dreamless sleep. When he wakes up he says, 'I slept very happily.'

And for a time he is not able to make out where he is and what time of day it is. It is as if he had died and had just come back to life again! What actually happened was that consciousness—that is, the Self—became temporarily free from the superimpositions of the body and the mind. At this point the Self is 'motionless' (*āsīnaḥ, śayānaḥ*). When it is again linked to the body and the mind it seems to be able 'to travel far and wide' (*dūram vrajati*) and is also both 'joyful and joyless' (*madam amadam*). The Self, however, remains what it always is—pure, free from all attributes.

What does Yama mean when he says, 'Who can understand it except someone like me?' The meaning is that only a person who has truly satisfied the conditions laid down by the scriptures can attain Self-knowledge.

अशरीरं शरीरेष्वनवस्थेष्ववस्थितम् ।

महान्तं विभुमात्मानं मत्वा धीरो न शोचति ॥२२॥

Aśarīram śarīreṣvanavastheṣvavasthitam;

Mahāntam vibhumātmānam matvā dhīro na śocati.

Aśarīram, formless; [yet] *śarīreṣu*, in all forms; *anavastheṣu*, amidst impermanent things; *avasthitam*, the permanent being; *mahāntam*, big; *vibhum*, all-pervasive; *ātmānam*, his Self; *matvā*, thinking; *dhīraḥ*, a wise person [i.e., he is wise because he knows that he is this Self]; *na śocati*, never gives way

to sorrow [i.e., the question of his having any sorrow does not arise]

22. Present in all forms, yet itself formless, the only permanent entity amidst impermanent things—great and all-pervasive is this Self. Thinking of himself as this Self, a wise person goes beyond sorrow.

The praise of the Self continues. There are diverse forms in this world, and the Self is in each of them, but it itself is formless. It is like space. The forms are many, but the Self is one and the same. The underlying principle is 'unity in diversity.' The forms are all changeable and they perish, but the Self is unchangeable, eternal, always the same. It is free, independent, and not subject to any limitation. It is both immanent and transcendent. It is in everything, but that does not exhaust it. It is also outside everything. It is like a pitcher dipped in water. There is water inside the pitcher, but there is also water outside.

This verse says that a wise person 'thinks' of himself as this Self. But the idea is not that he merely thinks—he realizes it. He has to have a direct and personal experience that he is that Self. When a person has that experience, he is then liberated—that is, he then becomes one with the many. The individual Self merges with the Cosmic Self.

नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो

न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन।

यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्य-
स्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनूं स्वाम् ॥२३॥

*Nāyamātmā pravacanena lābhyo
na medhayā na bahunā śrutena;
Yamevaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhya-
stasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūm svām.*

Ayam ātmā, this Self; *pravacanena*, by scholarship; *na lābhyaḥ*, not attainable; *medhayā na*, not by intelligence; *bahunā śrutena na*, not by much hearing about it; *yam eva*, whomever; *eṣaḥ vṛṇute*, this [Self] accepts; *tena labhyaḥ*, is attained by him; *tasya*, to him; *eṣaḥ ātmā*, this Self; *svām tanūm*, its own identity; *vivṛṇute*, reveals

23. This Self cannot be grasped by scholarship, by the power of the intellect, or by hearing about it from many sources. Only he whom it chooses can understand it. To him does it reveal its identity.

The Self is formless, so the question is, how can it be known? This verse provides the answer.

You cannot have any idea about the Self from studying books. You may have a sharp intellect and may be good at reasoning, yet you still cannot understand the Self. And you may hear about the Self from many people, but even then it remains a mystery to you. This is not the way you can have direct knowledge of the Self. All these methods may at best give you an indirect conception but not a direct experience of the Self. The Self is not an object outside of yourself. It is your inmost being. Because of your ego this inmost being remains hidden to

you. But through years of strict moral disciplines and with the instructions of a competent teacher, the ego fades away. The veil that surrounded your inmost being is then removed, and that inmost being then reveals itself as your own Self. Not only that, it reveals itself as the Self of all. You feel that you are one with every thing and every being. You are all.

This experience comes to you as if someone were doing you a favour. Of course no one is doing you a favour. The Self was always within you, but now it has revealed itself to you. You see it now in its true grandeur. This revelation takes place automatically. It comes in a flash.

नाविरतो दुश्चरितान्नाशान्तो नासमाहितः ।

नाशान्तमानसो वाऽपि प्रज्ञानेनैवमाप्नुयात् ॥२४॥

*Nāvīrato duścāritānnāśānto nāsamāhitaḥ ;
Nāśāntamānaso vā'pi prajñānenainamāpnuyāt.*

Duścāritāt avīrataḥ, one who continues to misbehave; *na* [*āpnuyāt*], has no chance of attaining the Self; *āśāntaḥ na*, so also one inclined towards sense pleasure; *asamāhitaḥ na*, the same with a person whose mind is restless; *na vā api āśānta-mānasaḥ*, neither one also whose mind is always craving for the fruits of his actions; *prajñānena*, only by knowledge; *enam āpnuyāt*, can this Self be attained

24. One who is guilty of misconduct cannot realize the Self. The same is the fate of the person whose mind is restless because of his weakness for sense

pleasures, who is incapable of controlling his mind, or who is always looking for the fruits of his actions. The only way to attain the Self is through knowledge.

What are the qualities that make one eligible for Self-knowledge? First and foremost, you completely abstain from misdeeds. The scriptures tell you what misdeeds you must abstain from, and you strictly follow the instructions of the scriptures. The mind has a natural tendency towards sense pleasures, but you have to restrain yourself and turn your mind towards the Self. Sense pleasures are transitory. The joy you derive from the contemplation of the Self, however, is deep and enduring. Once you taste that joy, sense pleasures cease to attract you. So sense control is the key to spiritual progress. Somehow or other you have to be your own master. As you progress spiritually, you realize the difference it makes. Spiritual progress is its own reward.

When you live a pure life you have full control over your mind. Sense pleasures then do not attract you, and you think more of the Self and less of the world. Self-knowledge automatically follows.

यस्य ब्रह्म च क्षत्रं च उभे भवत ओदनः।
मृत्युर्यस्योपसेचनं क इत्था वेद यत्र सः॥२५॥

*Yasya brahma ca kṣatram ca
ubhe bhavata odanaḥ;
Mṛtyuryasyopasecanam ka
itthā veda yatra saḥ.*

Yasya brahma ca kṣatram ca, to that [i.e., the Self] brāhmins and kṣatriyas; *ubhe*, both; *bhavataḥ odanaḥ*, are like food; *mṛtyuḥ yasya*, to which Death is; *upasecanam*, a condiment; *saḥ yatra*, wherever it is; *itthā*, in this way [i.e., the way of a fully satisfied person, as described earlier]; *kaḥ*, who [i.e., an ordinary mortal]; *veda*, can know

25. Brāhmins and kṣatriyas are the best among all people, but even they are like food to the Self. Death overcomes everyone, yet even Death is a mere condiment for the Self. The Self is supreme. An ordinary mortal [with his limitations] cannot establish the greatness of the Self, at least not the way a self-disciplined person can.

The Self is supreme. To show how supreme it is this verse stresses that everything merges in it, as food merges in the body of the eater.

The Self is unique. It is beyond the reach of our sense organs. There is no way of perceiving it, and it is not possible to define it. It is one without a second, limitless, and without attributes.

इति काठकोपनिषदि प्रथमाध्याये द्वितीया वल्ली ॥

Iti kāthakopaniṣadi prathamādhyāye dvitīyā vallī.

Here ends the second chapter of the first part of the Kātha Upaniṣad.

PART ONE
CHAPTER THREE

ऋतं पिबन्तौ सुकृतस्य लोके
गुहां प्रविष्टौ परमे परार्धे ।
छायातपौ ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति
पञ्चाग्नयो ये च त्रिणाचिकेताः ॥१॥

*Ṛtam pibantau sukṛtasya loke
guhām praviṣṭau parame parārdhe;
Chāyātapau brahmadevā vadanti
pañcāgnayo ye ca triṇāciketāḥ.*

Loke, in this world; *sukṛtasya ṛtam pibantau*, enjoying the fruits of one's own actions; *parame parārdhe*, in this superior space of the heart; [*yau*, those two]; *guhām praviṣṭau*, present in the cave of the intellect; *brahma-vidāḥ*, knowers of Brahman; [*tau*, the same two]; *chāyā-tapau vadanti*, describe them as like shade and light; *ye ca*, also those; *pañcāgnayaḥ*, who worship the Five Fires; *tri-nāciketāḥ*, also those who perform the Nāciketa sacrifice thrice; [*te api vadanti*, say the same thing]

1. The two [the individual self and the Cosmic Self] enjoy the fruits of actions, residing in the cave of the intellect, which is the best place for Self-realization.

Those who know Brahman say that the individual self and the Cosmic Self are related to each other like light and shade. Those who, as householders, worship the Five Fires and have thrice performed the Nāciketa sacrifice also say the same thing.

Brahman has manifested itself as this universe, and it is, in a way, its creator. This is, of course, figurative. Brahman, as such, is never involved in any kind of activity. But Brahman is both the Cosmic Self and the individual self. As the individual self it has many roles to fill. It acts and it enjoys the fruits of its actions. But this process is possible only because the Cosmic Self is behind it.

The Cosmic Self and the individual self are always together. They are like light and shade. The Cosmic Self never acts, but because of this close relationship, it looks as if it were acting. This is only an appearance. The appearance is merely an empirical truth but not a reality. It is in the empirical sense that both the Cosmic Self and the individual self seem to be acting as well as enjoying the fruits of their actions. They are one and the same but empirically separate.

Ṛtam means 'Truth,' but it also means 'an infallible law.' Here the word is used to mean 'fruits of actions.' If you act, the fruits of your actions are bound to follow. This is why the word *ṛtam* is used to mean 'fruits of actions.'

Sukṛtasya—'of good work.' It also means 'of work done by oneself.' Any work done by divine will is

good. It produces joy. The Creator creates out of joy, and the result of such creation is also joy. If a person does anything as an instrument of God, the result is good. It produces joy for himself and for others. But if he acts independent of God, the result may be bad, for himself and for others also.

When the individual self acts, it would do well to remember that it is really the Cosmic Self. This will save it from having attachment to the fruits of what it is doing. This is the right attitude for the individual self to maintain regarding work.

Parame—‘superior.’ The space in the heart is considered superior to the space in any other part of the body or outside, for it is in this space that the highest spiritual realization takes place.

Parārdhe is the space in the heart where Brahman is realized. Literally it means ‘the better part of the body.’

यः सेतुरीजानानामक्षरं ब्रह्म यत् परम् ।
अभयं तितीर्षतां पारं नाचिकेतं शकेमहि ॥२॥

*Yaḥ seturījānānāmakṣaram brahma yat param ;
Abhayam titīṣatām pāram nāciketam śakemahi.*

Ījānānām yaḥ setuḥ, he who is like a bridge to those who wish to cross the ocean of life through sacrifices [work]; [*tam*] *nāciketam*, that sacrifice Yama dedicated to Naciketā; [*vayam jñātum*] *śakemahi*, we can

practise; *titīṛṣatām*, those who wish to cross over to the other shore; *abhayam pāram*, where there is no fear; [the way to reach that shore is open to the person] *akṣaram brahma yat pāram*, who accepts Brahman without attributes as his dearest

2. To those who wish to cross over the ocean of worldly experience through sacrifices, the Nāciketa Fire stands out as a fine bridge. We know of this fire, and we can also perform it. And we also know of the way that takes you to the other shore where you become one with Parā Brahman [Brahman without attributes] and you attain fearlessness.

Those who are inclined towards ritualistic worship can use the Nāciketa Fire as their bridge across the ocean of worldly experiences. Through it they eventually go to heaven where they become one with Virāt and hold an important position, such as that of Yama. But these people do not fully enjoy this position. They get tired of it after a while, and they struggle to become completely merged in Brahman. Sooner or later they succeed, and that is what is called liberation.

There is another group of people who do not like this roundabout way of getting liberation. They do not want to waste time going to heaven, for there is nothing in heaven or elsewhere that attracts them. They want to attain Self-knowledge right away. When they die they completely merge into Brahman. That is a state where there is only oneness. Since there is no duality they have nothing to be afraid of. They

therefore go beyond fear. They see only one Self everywhere.

This group meditates on Parā Brahman, Brahman without attributes. The former group meditates on Aparā Brahman, Brahman with attributes.

आत्मानं रथिनं विद्धि शरीरं रथमेव तु।
बुद्धिं तु सारथिं विद्धि मनः प्रग्रहमेव च॥३॥

Ātmānam rathinam viddhi śarīram rathameva tu;
Buddhiṁ tu sārathim viddhi manaḥ pragrahameva ca.

Ātmānam, the self; *rathinam viddhi*, regard as the master of the chariot; *śarīram*, the body; *ratham eva tu*, regard as the chariot; *buddhiṁ tu*, the intellect; *sārathim viddhi*, regard as the charioteer; *manaḥ*, the mind; *pragraham eva ca*, regard as the reins

3. Consider the embodied soul as the master of the chariot, the body as the chariot, the intellect as the charioteer, and the mind as the reins.

A fine analogy is introduced here to explain the relationship between the individual self, the mind, the intellect, and the body. The self is apparently doing nothing, but its presence is enough to make the body, the mind, and the intellect work. None of these are independent. They work according to the wishes of the self.

The self here is the *jīva*, the individual self. In the long run it is the same as the Cosmic Self, but until it is able to shake off *māyā*'s hold, it has many limitations. The individual self is free, but somehow or other it imagines that it is not free, that it is in bondage. And to get rid of this delusion it has to make a tremendous effort. Just as you can drive your vehicle to either a good place or a bad place, so also you can use your body either to attain liberation or to get further entangled in the world. The entire matter is in your hands. The driver—the intellect—is the key factor. If the intellect is alert, you will never get into trouble.

Each individual is an aggregate of the five organs of action (the hands, the feet, the tongue, and the organs of procreation and evacuation) and the five organs of perception (the eyes, the ears, the nose, the skin, and the tongue). Besides these, there are four inner organs (the mind, the intellect, the heart, and the I-consciousness). The mind is characterized by doubt and indeterminacy, while the intellect is determinative. The heart is the storehouse of past impressions, and the I-consciousness gives the embodied self the impetus to work. The intellect, however, is the mainstay.

इन्द्रियाणि हयानाहुर्विषयांस्तेषु गोचरान् ।
आत्मेन्द्रियमनोयुक्तं भोक्तेत्याहुर्मनीषिणः ॥४॥

Indriyāṇi hayānāhurviṣayāṁsteṣu gocarān ;
Ātmendriyamanoyuktam bhoktetyāhurmanīṣiṇaḥ.

Manīṣiṇaḥ, wise people; *indriyāṇi hayān āhuḥ*, regard the senses as horses; *teṣu viṣayān gocarān āhuḥ*, the objects [sounds, forms, etc.] as the roads for them; *ātmendriyamanoyuktam bhoktā*, the self, together with the body, mind, and senses, as the enjoyer

4. Wise people describe the senses as horses and the body as the chariot. Objects [sounds, forms, etc.] are like roads for the horses. The self, together with the body, mind, and senses, is the enjoyer.

If the body is a chariot, it has to have horses to pull it along. The senses are the horses. The comparison is apt, because as the horses are restless, the senses are also restless. Both are hard to control. The senses are easily attracted by things, regardless of whether they are good or bad. They are incapable of judging good from bad. But the mind can judge good from bad, and it is the mind that can control the senses. Just as the horses move along roads, so also do the senses run from one object to another.

The question is: Who is the doer? Who is the agent of all that the body does? Is it the body, the mind, or the senses? The answer is: It is the self associated with the body, the mind, and the senses who is the doer, the agent. This self is known as the *jīva*. It is also known as the individual self. The real Self is the Supreme Self, which is Pure Consciousness. This Supreme Self, under the influence of *māyā*, assumes various attributes and becomes an individual self. The attributes can be removed by spiritual disciplines. The mind creates those attributes

and again the mind destroys them. If the mind is properly trained, the illusion that creates the division between the Supreme Self and the individual self disappears. The mind is responsible for both bondage and liberation.

यस्त्वविज्ञानवान्भवत्ययुक्तेन मनसा सदा ।
तस्येन्द्रियाण्यवश्यानि दुष्टाश्वा इव सारथेः ॥५॥

*Yastvavijñānavānbhāvātyayuktena manasā sadā;
Tasyendriyāṅyavaśyāni duṣṭāśvā iva sārathēḥ.*

Yaḥ tu, that intellect [acting as a charioteer]; *ayuktena manasā*, connected with an uncontrolled mind; *sadā*, always; *avijñānavān*, not able to discriminate; *bhavati*, becomes; *sārathēḥ duṣṭaḥ aśvāḥ iva*, like a charioteer having to handle vicious horses; *tasya indriyāṅi avaśyāni*, his senses are uncontrollable

5. If the intellect is incapable of discriminating between right and wrong and is also connected with an uncontrolled mind, it is like a charioteer who has to deal with uncontrollable, vicious horses.

If a person cannot judge right from wrong, he is at the mercy of his impulses. He may then do things he should not do, things that are obviously wrong and are more likely than not to do him harm. If, on top of this, he has an uncontrolled mind, his misery will be endless. He will be like a charioteer who himself is silly and ignorant, and has, in addition,

to deal with very wicked and uncontrollable horses:

The emphasis here is on your judgement as well as your ability to control your mind. Woe to you if you lack in both.

यस्तु विज्ञानवान्भवति युक्तेन मनसा सदा ।
तस्येन्द्रियाणि वश्यानि सदश्चा इव सारथेः ॥६॥

*Yastu vijñānavānbhavati yuktena manasā sadā;
Tasyendriyāṇi vaśyāni sadaśvā iva sārathēḥ.*

Yaḥ tu, but whose intellect; *sadā*, always; *yuktena manasā*, connected with a mind under control; *vijñānavān bhavati*, becomes discriminating; *tasya indriyāṇi*, his senses; *vaśyāni*, are under control; *sārathēḥ sadaśvāḥ iva*, like a charioteer having good horses to deal with

6. When a person has a discriminating intellect and has that intellect always joined to a mind that is under control, and his senses are also under control, then he is like a charioteer who has well-trained horses to handle.

Self-control is the key to spiritual progress. First and foremost, you have to have a good, discriminating intellect. The next thing you need is a mind that is always under control. When a discriminating intellect works in conjunction with a controlled mind, you are like a happy charioteer having the services of

good, well-trained horses. Your mind and your senses can never mislead you, and your progress towards Self-knowledge is assured. Once you attain Self-knowledge, you are no longer a victim of worldly temptations. You are then the ideal person.

यस्त्वविज्ञानवान्भवत्यमनस्कः सदाऽशुचिः ।
न स तत्पदमाप्नोति संसारं चाधिगच्छति ॥७॥

*Yastvavijñānavānbhavatyamanaskaḥ sadāśuciḥ ;
Na sa tatpadamāpnoti saṁsāraṁ cādhigacchati.*

Yaḥ tu avijñānavān, the person whose intellect is not able to discriminate; *amanaskaḥ*; whose mind is uncontrolled; *sadā aśuciḥ*, always impure [i.e., always running after the wrong things]; *bhavati*, becomes; *saḥ*, that person; *tat padam na āpnoti*, does not attain that goal [i.e., Self-knowledge]; *saṁsāraṁ ca adhigacchati*, on the other hand, gets caught in the world—i.e., the cycle of birth and death.

7. He whose intellect is not able to discriminate between right and wrong, and whose uncontrolled mind lets his senses run after impure things [i.e., things detrimental to spiritual progress]—such a person can never attain Self-knowledge. On the contrary, he gets caught in the cycle of birth and death.

This verse discusses what happens when a person is not able to decide between what is right and what is wrong. That means he has a weak intellect.

Invariably such a person cannot control his mind. He is not his own master. His mind is his master, and thus he will always run after things that will hurt him spiritually. He cannot help it. His ambition at one time might have been to attain Self-knowledge, but with such a weak intellect and consequent preoccupation with sense pleasures, he will drift away from his original goal. He will move in the other direction—to the world. Birth and death will thus be his destiny.

यस्तु विज्ञानवान्भवति समनस्कः सदा शुचिः।
स तु तत्पदमाप्नोति यस्माद् भूयो न जायते ॥८॥

Yastu vijñānavānbhavati samanaskaḥ sadā śuciḥ;
Sa tu tatpadamāpnoti yasmād bhūyo na jāyate.

Yaḥ, who; *tu*, however; *vijñānavān bhavati*, is discriminating; *samanaskaḥ*, with a controlled mind; *sadā*, always; *śuciḥ*, pure; *saḥ*, he; *tu*, surely; *tat padam*, that goal; *āpnoti*, attains; *yasmāt*, from where; *bhūyaḥ*, again; *na jāyate*, is no longer subject to birth

8. The person who has a discriminating intellect and also has a controlled mind is always pure [in thought, speech, and action]. Such a person is sure to attain his goal [of Self-knowledge]. [Having once attained that goal] he will not be born again [i.e., be subject to birth and death again].

Here is what a person gains when he is able to discriminate between good and bad. He then tries to direct his mind to what is good, avoiding bad as far as possible. It may be difficult to begin with, but by sustained efforts he finally gains full control over his mind. When he has the mind under control, the goal is not far away. Self-control is the beginning and end of religion. The Self spontaneously reveals itself to a mind that is pure.

विज्ञानसारथिर्यस्तु मनःप्रग्रहवान्नरः ।

सोऽध्वनः पारमाप्नोति तद्विष्णोः परमं पदम् ॥९॥

Vijñānasārathiryastu manaḥpragrahavānnaraḥ;
So'dhvanaḥ pāramāpnoti tadviṣṇoḥ paramam padam.

Yaḥ naraḥ tu vijñāna-sārathiḥ, the person who has reason as his charioteer; *manaḥ pragrahavān*, has a mind with reins on it [i.e., a controlled mind]; *saḥ adhvanaḥ pāram āpnoti*, he attains a state where there is no more going about [i.e., no birth and death]; *tat viṣṇoḥ paramam padam*, that state which is the highest [as it marks the merging of the individual self with the Cosmic Self]

9. He whose intellect, like a good charioteer, takes him along the right path, whose mind is under the control of the intellect, and who, by virtue of such a combination, can direct his senses as he thinks best, he can go to the other side of the world where

he attains the highest goal, union with the Cosmic Self.

Here an imagery is used to show how we can shape our own destiny. We have to be our own master. The intellect, the mind, and the senses—these are the tools we use for good or for ill, as we like. We must have full control over them. It is not that they will guide us. We will guide them. We will make them work for our good. We will use our intellect to show us the right path. The intellect may err sometimes, but we will urge it to be vigilant so that it may not repeat the same mistakes. We will ask it to make the mind behave in the right manner. The mind may sometimes revolt, but an alert intellect can soon bring it under control. The mind is the chief of the senses. If the mind is under control, the senses can pose no problem. Thus, if the intellect, the mind, and the senses work in unison, the goal can easily be attained.

But what is the goal? The goal is to get to the end of the path. We are now on the part of the path where there is bondage, where we are caught in the cycle of birth and death, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow. We want to go to the other end of the path where there is liberation, no more birth and death, no more coming and going. Liberation means liberation from the feeling of being separate from others. When we attain liberation we feel one with all. The individual self becomes the Cosmic Self. The drop of water falls into the sea and becomes the sea. There is then uninterrupted happiness.

Liberation and bondage both are conditions of the mind. If we are masters of our minds, we are free; otherwise we are in bondage. We are happy if we are free; we are unhappy if we are not free. We may be in the midst of temptations and yet be free if we can control the mind. Religion is this control of the mind.

इन्द्रियेभ्यः परा ह्यर्था अर्थेभ्यश्च परं मनः।

मनसस्तु परा बुद्धिर्बुद्धेरात्मा महान्परः॥१०॥

Indriyebhyaḥ parā hyarthā arthebhyasca param manah;
Manasastu parā buddhirbuddherātmā mahānparaḥ.

Indriyebhyaḥ arthāḥ hi parāḥ, superior to the senses are indeed their [corresponding] objects; *arthebhyaḥ ca manah param*, superior to the objects is the mind; *manasaḥ tu buddhiḥ parā*, superior to the mind is indeed the intellect; *buddheḥ mahān ātmā paraḥ*, superior to the intellect is the Great Self

10. Superior to the sense organs are their corresponding objects; superior to these objects is the mind; superior to the mind is the intellect; superior to the intellect is the Great Self [the Collective Intellect].

Here the word *superior* is used to mean 'subtler', 'more extensive', and 'closer to the Self'.

There are two kinds of sense organs: the organs of perception and the organs of action.

By the word *objects* is meant 'the elements in their subtle and rudimentary form.' The objects have an independent existence, but they need the help of the gross senses to be identified—as if the objects created the senses only for this purpose! The relation between the objects (i.e., the elements in their original state) and the senses is like that between the cause and the effect. The effect owes its existence to the cause, and therefore the cause is superior to the effect. In this sense the objects are superior to the senses.

By the same logic, the mind is superior to the objects. Like the objects, the mind is also made of the elements, but it is superior because it is subtler. And because it is subtler, it is more extensive and closer to the Self. This is another reason why the mind is superior to the objects.

The intellect, however, is superior to the mind as it is determinative. The mind wavers and cannot decide what to do, but the intellect tells the mind what to do. Since it guides the mind, it is superior.

The mind, the intellect, the heart, and 'I-ness'—all these come under the generic term *mind-stuff*. They are different only when they have different functions. The mind, as stated earlier, wants to do something but cannot decide what to do, so the intellect decides for it. The function of the heart is to produce emotions and feelings and also to store memories. 'I-ness' is

something that runs through all the activities of the mind-stuff. It is the ego.

The Great Self is superior to the intellect. What is this Great Self? It is the Collective Intellect. It is the first manifestation of Pure Consciousness (Brahman) within the phenomenal context. It is also known as Hiraṇyagarbha.

महतः परमव्यक्तमव्यक्तात् पुरुषः परः ।

पुरुषान्न परं किञ्चित् सा काष्ठा सा परा गतिः ॥११॥

Mahataḥ paramavyaktamavyaktāt puruṣaḥ paraḥ;
Puruṣāna paraṁ kiñcit sā kāṣṭhā sā parā gatih.

Mahataḥ avyaktam param, the Unmanifest [i.e., nature, prakṛti, māyā] is superior to Hiraṇyagarbha, the Great Self; *avyaktāt puruṣaḥ paraḥ*, the *puruṣa* [i.e., Brahman, the Cosmic Self] is superior to the Unmanifest; *puruṣāt na param kiñcit*, there is nothing superior to the *puruṣa*, the Cosmic Self, Brahman; *sā kāṣṭhā*, that is the limit of growth; *sā parā gatih*, that is also the highest goal attainable by anybody

11. The Unmanifest is superior to the Great Self; the Cosmic Self is superior to the Unmanifest. There is nothing higher than the Cosmic Self. That marks the end of all growth. That is the highest goal anyone can attain.

Our progress should be from a lower truth to a higher truth, from the gross to the fine, from the effect to the cause. The present verse and the verse immediately before it indicate this. Somehow or other we have to go to the origin of everything, and that is Brahman, the Cosmic Self (*paramātmā*). We have to realize that we are the Cosmic Self, that we are Brahman.

We know nothing about Brahman because it is without attributes. It is everywhere, in everything. It is everything. If anything exists, it is because of Brahman. It is not that Brahman creates anything; Brahman manifests itself as everything. And Brahman does this with the help of its own power, which is known as *māyā*. Brahman and *māyā* are inseparable, just as milk and its whiteness are inseparable.

Māyā is the active principle of Brahman. No manifestation is possible without *māyā*. *Hiraṇyagarbha*, or the Great Self (*Mahat*), is said to be the first manifestation of Brahman. *Māyā* makes this first manifestation possible, so *māyā* is superior to *Hiraṇyagarbha*.

But *māyā* by itself cannot do anything. Brahman must be there as the witness. Therefore Brahman is superior to *māyā*. Brahman is the greatest, subtlest, and inmost. It is the highest point in growth. It is the Cosmic Self. The goal of life for an individual is to attain union with this Cosmic Self. By this union the individual self becomes the Cosmic Self.

एष सर्वेषु भूतेषु गूढोऽऽत्मा न प्रकाशते ।
दृश्यते त्वग्रघया बुद्ध्या सूक्ष्मया सूक्ष्मदर्शिभिः ॥१२॥

*Eṣa sarveṣu bhūteṣu gūḍho'tmā na prakāśate ;
Dṛśyate tvagryayā buddhyā sūkṣmayā sūkṣmadarśibhiḥ.*

Eṣaḥ ātmā, this Self; *sarveṣu bhūteṣu*, in all beings; *gūḍhaḥ*, hidden; *na prakāśate*, is not seen; *sūkṣma-darśibhiḥ tu*, but by discerning seers; *agryayā sūkṣmayā buddhyā*, through their sharp, penetrating intellects; *dṛśyate*, is perceived

12. The Self is hidden in all beings. It is not noticed. Only the discerning seers, through their sharp, penetrating intellects, can perceive it.

To attain the Cosmic Self has been described as the highest goal of life. The Self is in every one of us, yet we do not see it. Why? Because we only see what is on the surface—not what is beneath. Whatever we do we attribute to our body, mind, and intellect. But these are mere tools. There is an invisible agent making them do whatever they are doing. In a puppet show you see puppets acting, but the puppets do not act. There are strings attached to their limbs, and someone pulls those strings so that you have the impression that the puppets are acting. It is the same with us: We see our organs acting, but they do not act. The Invisible Self within, by its mere presence, makes them work. This is why at death all our organs may remain intact, yet

they cannot work. This is because the Self has left the body. The presence of the Self makes the organs function. It is like a magnet making iron filings follow it wherever it goes.

The Self reveals itself only to those who have keen and discerning minds. Such people can look into the heart of a thing. They are not deceived by how something looks. Rather, they judge it by how far it can help them towards their goal, which is Self-knowledge. They know that gross sensuous pleasure is a hindrance, and they reject it outright. Their minds are on higher things. They place perfection above everything else. They live austere lives, suffering any hardship necessary for the sake of their spiritual and moral well-being. Self-restraint is their motto. Nothing that the world can offer will distract them from the path they have chosen. They have iron wills. Such people develop the capacity to judge what is good for them spiritually and what is not. Almost instinctively they run away from the latter. To them the Self is manifest.

यच्छेद् वाङ् मनसी
 प्राज्ञस्तद् यच्छेज्ज्ञान आत्मनि ।
 ज्ञानमात्मनि महति नियच्छेत्
 तद् यच्छेच्छान्त आत्मनि ॥१३॥

*Yacched vāṅ manasī
 prājñastad yacchejjñāna ātmani;*

*Jñānamātmani mahati niyacchet
tad yacchecchānta ātmani.*

Prājñāḥ, the wise person; *vāk manasī yacchet*, should merge his speech into his mind; *tat*, that mind; *jñāne ātmani yacchet*, merge into his enlightening self [i.e., the intellect]; *jñānam mahati ātmani niyacchet*, merge that intellect into the Collective Intellect, the Great Self [i.e., Hiranyagarbha, the first manifestation of Brahman]; *tat*, that [Great Self]; *śānte ātmani yacchet*, merge into the Self that is peaceful [because it is unconditioned]

13. A wise person makes all his organs go back into the mind, the mind into the enlightening intellect, the enlightening intellect into the Collective Intellect [i.e., the Great Self, Hiranyagarbha], and the Collective Intellect into the Pure Self.

Please note that here speech stands for all the organs.

This verse describes the yogic process of tracing the organs back to the Self. The Self is the ultimate. The Self is the master, and the organs are its servants, so the Self makes the organs work as it wishes. There is a complete hierarchy here: The Self controls the intellect, the intellect the mind, and the mind the organs. The Self is the real Being, while the rest are attributes. Some attributes are gross, and some are fine, but you have to reject all of them. The process of rejection should be from gross to fine, from effect to cause. Finally you end up in the Self, which is the first cause. When you reach

that point, you find you are one with the Self. You realize that the same Self is within and without. You are All. Then you are completely at rest. There is nothing more to seek. You are *śānta*.

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत

प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता दुरत्यया

दुर्गं पथस्तत्कवयो वदन्ति ॥१४॥

*Uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varānnibodhata ;
Kṣurasya dhārā niśitā duratyayā
durgam pathastatkavayo vadanti.*

Uttiṣṭhata, arise ; *jāgrata*, awake ; *varān prāpya*, meet wise people ; *nibodhata*, learn from them [about the Self] ; *kṣurasya niśitā dhārā*, the razor's sharp edge [like that] ; *duratyayā*, hard to tread ; *tat pathaḥ*, that path ; *kavayaḥ durgam vadanti*, scholars describe similarly as hard to tread

14. O people! Arise, awake! Meet wise people and learn from them about the Self. Scholars say the path to Self-knowledge is as hard to tread as walking on a razor's sharp edge.

This is a call to people steeped in sense pleasure. They know nothing better than that. Taking pity on them, the Upaniṣad is asking them to arise and shake off their delusion. They think that which is gross

and immediate is everything. This is a mistake. There are higher things—not easily perceptible, perhaps—that give more joy, and more enduring joy also. Seek the highest, the best, and the greatest. Seek that which will never perish. Such a thing is there, but you do not know it. Go to people who know and ask them. Hurry! Do not waste time, thinking that what you have now is all that exists by way of pleasure. It is a delusion you are suffering from. Shake off that delusion.

Go to the right teachers and they will direct you. They will show you the path to Self-knowledge. It is a difficult path—as difficult as treading a razor's sharp edge. But never mind. If some people have gone along that path and reached the goal, surely you can do it also. Ask the teachers and they will tell you the secret of their success. The secret may be zeal, hard work, and perseverance. Whatever the price, be ready to pay it. Why should Self-knowledge be simple and easy to attain? The Upaniṣad nowhere says that it is easy to get. Rather, it says again and again that it is difficult. It is, in fact, the most difficult of all things to attain. And because it is difficult, it is more precious and satisfying than anything else. But, though difficult, everyone can attain this Self-knowledge—given the right kind of zeal and hard work and aided by the guidance of a good teacher. Who cares for trash when a pure diamond is available? It is simply a question of making the right choice and working hard enough to get it.

The delusion referred to in this verse is that of

taking unreal things to be real—for instance, mistaking a mirage to be real water or mistaking a rope to be a snake in a dark place. This is how ignorant people mistake sense objects [such as youth, beauty, wealth, etc.], which are perishable, to be imperishable. Their misery is because of this delusion.

अशब्दमस्पर्शमरूपमव्ययं

तथाऽरसं नित्यमगन्धवच्च यत्।

अनाद्यनन्तं महतः परं ध्रुवं

निचाय्य तन्मृत्युमुखात् प्रमुच्यते ॥१५॥

Aśabdamaśparśamarūpamavyayaṁ

tathā'rasaṁ nityamagandhavacca yat;

Anādyanantaṁ mahataḥ paraṁ dhruvaṁ

nicāyya tanmṛtyumukhāt pramucyate.

Yat, that Self; *aśabdama*, soundless; *aśparśama*, touchless; *arūpama*, formless; *avyayama*, undecaying; *tathā*, similarly; *arasaṁ*, tasteless; *nityama*, eternal; *agandhavat*, odourless; *anādi*, without beginning; *anantaṁ*, without end; *mahataḥ param*, superior to Mahat [i.e., Hiraṇyagarbha]; *dhruvama*, constant; *tam*, that Self; *nicāyya*, having known [the individual self]; *mṛtyumukhāt*, from the jaws of death; *pramucyate*, gets free

15. That which is soundless, touchless, formless, and odourless, that which is eternal, undecaying, which is without beginning and without end, superior even

to Hiranyagarbha, and constant—having known that Self, one can be free from death.

The goal of life is to know the Self. But what is the Self like? It is difficult to describe it because it is without attributes and it is not like anything else we know. This is why nothing positive is said in describing it. Only negative terms are used—formless, soundless, tasteless, and so on. It is, in fact, beyond thought and speech. The Self is described as superior to Hiranyagarbha (Mahat) because the Self is the cause and Hiranyagarbha is the effect. The effect is always dependent on the cause, so this is why the latter is superior to the former.

The way to Self-knowledge is difficult, but both the Upaniṣads and the ancient sages say it is attainable. And by attaining it, one becomes free from birth and death.

नाचिकेतमुपाख्यानं मृत्युप्रोक्तं सनातनम् ।

उक्त्वा श्रुत्वा च मेधावी ब्रह्मलोके महीयते ॥१६॥

*Nācīketamupākhyānaṁ mṛtyuproktaṁ sanātanam;
Uktvā śrutvā ca medhāvī brahmaloke mahīyate.*

Mṛtyu-proktaṁ, told by Death; *nācīketam*, about Nacīketā; *sanātanam upākhyānam*, the eternal story; *uktvā śrutvā ca*, talking and hearing; *medhāvī*, a thoughtful person; *brahma-loke*, in the world of

Brahmān; *mahīyate*, is adored as Brahman itself

16. If a thoughtful person keeps hearing and narrating this eternal story that Death told Naciketā and that Naciketā heard, he is elevated to the status of Brahman and is respected as such.

The present verse, like the foregoing verses, is a eulogy of Self-knowledge. In fact, the story of Yama and Naciketā is included only to emphasize the importance of Self-knowledge and its benefit. The story is eternal because it deals with the eternal Self. It is as if Yama has been explaining Self-knowledge to Naciketā from time immemorial.

But it is not that everyone can benefit from the story of Death and Naciketā. Only a serious-minded person who is capable of discriminating between right and wrong can be benefitted when he hears it from someone who has already realized the Self. Such a person then becomes transformed and attains the status of Brahman.

य इमं परमं गुह्यं
 श्रावयेद् ब्रह्मसंसदि ।
 प्रयतः श्राद्धकाले वा तदानन्त्याय कल्पते ।
 तदानन्त्याय कल्पत इति ॥१७॥

*Ya imam paramam guhyam
 śrāvayed brahmasamsadi;*

*Prayataḥ śrāddhakāle vā tadānantyāya kalpate;
Tadānantyāya kalpata iti.*

Yaḥ, he; *prayataḥ*, with a pure mind attained through austerities; *paramam guhyam imam*, this supremely secret story; *śrāvayet*, narrates; *brahma-saṁsadi*, in an assembly of brāhmins; *vā*, or; *śrāddhakāle*, at the time when relatives offer gifts to the departed as a token of respect and gratitude; *tat*, this dissertation; *ānantyāya kalpate*, will bring infinite reward to all concerned, those who explain and those who hear.

17. If a person whose mind is pure and clear recites the story of Naciketā and Death in an assembly of brāhmins [or persons seeking Brahman] or at the time when relatives are offering gifts as a token of their respect to a departed person—then that hearing will bring infinite reward to all concerned, those who explain and those who hear. Indeed, it will bring infinite reward.

The repetition at the end of the verse is only to emphasize that this *shall* happen.

The nature of the Self is a difficult subject. It is difficult and also mysterious. Thus, it should not be talked about everywhere. One may talk about it only to self-disciplined persons; otherwise it may create confusion in people's minds.

The story of Naciketā and Death is basically a discourse on the Self. If you recite this discourse as Death told it to Naciketā, it will do you immense good,

and it will also do good to those who listen. But both the speaker and the listeners should be self-disciplined people. Through self-discipline people's minds become pure and clear, and those with such minds can easily grasp the subtle nature of the Self.

इति काठकोपनिषदि प्रथमाध्याये तृतीया वल्ली ॥

Iti kāṭhakopaniṣadi prathamādhyāye tṛtīyā vallī.

Here ends the third chapter of the first part of the Kāṭha Upaniṣad.

PART TWO

CHAPTER ONE

पराञ्चि खानि व्यतृणत् स्वयम्भू-
स्तस्मात्पराङ् पश्यति नान्तरात्मन् ।
कश्चिद्धीरः प्रत्यगात्मानमैक्ष-
दावृत्तचक्षुरमृतत्वमिच्छन् ॥१॥

*Parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhū-
stasmātparāṅ paśyati nāntarātman;*
*Kaściddhīraḥ pratyagātmānamaikṣa-
dāvṛttacakṣuramṛtatvamicchān.*

Svayambhūḥ, the Self-created Lord; *khāni*, the sense organs; *parāñci vyatṛṇat*, made them outgoing [as if out of spite]; *tasmāt*, that is why; *parāṅ paśyati*, [a being] sees only things outside; *antarātman na*, not the inmost Self; *kaścit dhīraḥ*, some wise person; *amṛtatvam icchān*, wishing to get immortality; *āvṛttacakṣuḥ*, turning his eyes away from external objects; *pratyag-ātmānam aikṣat*, looks at his own Self within

1. The Self-created Lord has created the sense organs with the inherent defect that they are by nature outgoing. This is why beings see things outside and cannot see the Self within. Rarely is there found a wise person, seeking immortality, who can withdraw his

sense organs from external objects and see the Self within.

The Self is within us, yet we do not see it. This is because our organs are outgoing. They can see things outside but not inside. The Self is the real master of the body-mind complex, and it is within us, hidden. It is also very subtle. The organs can perceive gross objects outside but not the Self, which is our inmost being. The only way to reach the Self within is to withdraw the organs from external things and turn them inside. The process is like reversing the course of a river and pushing it back to its source. It is a hard task, but it can be done. It is a matter of practice. Those who succeed attain immortality.

पराचः कामाननुयन्ति बाला-
 स्ते मृत्योर्यन्ति विततस्य पाशम्।
 अथ धीरा अमृतत्वं विदित्वा
 ध्रुवमध्रुवेष्विह न प्रार्थयन्ते ॥२॥

*Parācaḥ kāmānanuyanti bālā-
 ste mṛtyoryanti vitatasya pāśam;
 Atha dhīrā amṛtatvaṁ viditvā
 dhruvamadhruveṣviha na prārthayante.*

Bālāḥ, children; *parācaḥ kāmān anuyanti*, run after external pleasures; *te vitatasya mṛtyoḥ pāśam yanti*,

they get caught in the widespread trap of death; *atha*, that is why; *dhīrāḥ*, wise people; *dhruvam amṛtatvam viditvā*, knowing what is true immortality; *iha*, in this world; *adhruveṣu*, with all its short-lived objects; *na prārthayante*, ask for nothing

2. Immature people run after external objects, and they invariably get caught in the widespread net of death. Wise people, however, know where true immortality is. That is why they reject everything in this world, knowing that these things are short-lived.

It is true there are many temptations in the world, and our sense organs are naturally attracted to them. But if we cannot control our sense organs we are lost. One temptation leads to another until there seems to be no way to escape. If there is such a thing as death, this is it. It is as if death has cast a net over us and we are caught in its meshes. This is the fate of people who are short-sighted. They are like children. They are carried away by impulses and do not consider the pros and cons of what they do. They invariably come to grief.

But there are some people who are thoughtful and discriminating. They know that the world, including everything it has to offer, is ephemeral, which is why they do not want anything of it. They do not want anything of this world or even of the other world, heaven. They know that the Self alone is real, and therefore they only want to know that.

When they know the Self, they know that they are the Self. The Self alone can give them peace and happiness, because peace and happiness are inside, in the Self, and not outside.

येन रूपं रसं गन्धं शब्दान् स्पर्शाश्च मैथुनान्।
 एतेनैव विजानाति किमत्र परिशिष्यते।
 एतद् वै तत्॥३॥

*Yena rūpam rasam gandham śabdān sparśāmśca
 maithunān;
 Etenaiva vijānāti kimatra pariśiṣyate;
 Etad vai tat.*

Yena etena eva, it is by this [Self]; *rūpam rasam gandham śabdān sparśām ca maithunān vijānāti*, one knows form, taste, smell, sound, touch, and sex pleasure; *kim atra pariśiṣyate*, what else remains [unknown to the Self]; *etad vai tat*, this truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about]

3. It is by this Self that a person knows form, taste, smell, sound, touch, and sex pleasure. What else remains that the Self does not know [i.e., because the Self is all-knowing]? This truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about].

People think the sense organs are independent. They are not. The whole body-mind complex is dominated by the Self, and the sense organs function because

of the Self. The mere presence of the Self is enough to make them work. When a person dies, all his sense organs may be intact yet they do not function as they derive their power from the Self, which is Pure Consciousness. Because the Self is Pure Consciousness, it is all-knowing. The Self is the subject, and everything else is the object. The function of the sense organs is to make us conscious of the things around us, but an object cannot know another object. Objects are all inert matter, and so also are the sense organs. Matter cannot feel or see, but associated with the Self it gives the impression that it is feeling or seeing. For instance, a heated iron ball can burn your skin, but the ball itself does not burn you. It is the heat in it that burns.

The Self is behind everything that happens in this phenomenal world. In fact, this world itself is a manifestation of the Self. Naciketā's subject of enquiry is this Self.

स्वप्नान्तं जागरितान्तं चोभौ येनानुपश्यति ।

महान्तं विभुमात्मानं मत्वा धीरो न शोचति ॥४॥

*Svapnāntaṁ jāgaritāntaṁ cobhau yenānupaśyati;
Mahāntaṁ vibhumātmānaṁ matvā dhīro na śocati.*

Svapnāntam, things experienced in sleep; *jāgaritāntam ca*, and things experienced in the waking state; *ubhau*, these both; *yena anupaśyati*, by the power of which [a person] is able to see [that]; *mahāntam vibhum*

ātmānam, the great omnipresent Self; *matvā*, realizing [his oneness with the Self]; *dhīraḥ na śocati*, an enlightened soul does not grieve [is beyond grief]

4. Whatever experiences a person has, whether in the sleeping state or in the waking state, are possible because of that great, all-pervasive Self. An enlightened soul realizes his oneness with that great Self and is no longer subject to grief.

We all experience three states: the waking state, the sleeping state, and the dreamless sleep state. In the waking state, both the mind and the body are active. The sense organs carry their impressions to the mind and the mind collates them—as if the mind is their master. The mind may be their immediate master but it is not the ultimate master. The ultimate master is the Self, for the mind derives its authority from the Self. When we sleep, the body is at rest but the mind is active. We dream we are travelling, meeting people, and doing things we normally do in the waking state. This shows that the mind is independent of the body. But the mind is dependent on the Self. When we have dreamless sleep, the mind is no longer active. This happens because the Self has temporarily withdrawn the power it had delegated to the mind. The body and the mind are both now seemingly dead—as if the Self has cast them away as useless adjuncts. After a while, when we wake up, we take time to recognize our surroundings and what time of day it is. We feel, however, highly refreshed. This is because during deep sleep the Self

went back to its real nature, even if only for a while. But ignorance drags us back to our waking state, and we are again caught in the whirlpool of life's struggles.

But there are discerning people who see the Self as the substratum of all the experiences they have in different states. These experiences are possible because of the Self, but they make no impression on the Self. The Self is the witness to the experiences. It is like a movie screen on which a series of events is projected without affecting the screen in the least. These discerning people also realize their oneness with this Self. They remain as witnesses to what happens to them, and this is why they are able to overcome sorrow.

य इमं मध्वदं वेद आत्मानं जीवमन्तिकात् ।
ईशानं भूतभव्यस्य न ततो विजुगुप्सते ।
एतद् वै तत् ॥५॥

*Ya imam madhvadam veda ātmānam jīvamantikāt;
Īśānam bhūtabhavyasya na tato vijugupsate;
Etad vai tat.*

Yah, the person; *madhvadam*, drinking honey [i.e., enjoying the fruits of action]; *imam jīvam ātmānam*, this individual self; *bhūta-bhavyasya īśānam*, the Lord of the past and the future [and, by implication, also the present]; *antikāt*, very close; *veda*, knows; [*saḥ*,

he]; *tataḥ na vijugupsate*, thereafter [i.e., after the knowledge] does not want to conceal anything; *etat vai tat*, this truly is that [Self about which Naciketā was asking]

5. The person who knows the individual self, in spite of its enjoying the fruits of its actions, to be the Lord of the past, present, and future, and who finds himself close to Him [i.e., realizes his unity with Him], has no reason to be afraid of anything. This truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about].

The idea here is that the individual self (the *jīva*) is none other than the Cosmic Self (Brahman). Apparently the individual self is caught in the meshes of life. He works and enjoys the fruits of his work, and though the fruits are not always good, he still clings to the work. It is like 'honey' to him. He loves to live that way. It is ignorance, but he is helpless. This, however, does not change his basic nature. He is Brahman (the Cosmic Self) and he remains Brahman. His attachment to the world is a temporary lapse, and he can correct himself any moment. Gold remains gold though it may be covered with dirt.

The goal of life is to realize that the individual self and the Cosmic Self are one and the same—that is, there is one Self everywhere and in everything. This one has become many—many in terms of names and forms. When you realize this oneness of things, you are no longer afraid of anything. You have no reason to hide yourself, because for you there is

no duality. There is one Self and you are that Self. The question of fear arises only if there is duality.

यः पूर्वं तपसो जातमद्भ्यः पूर्वमजायत ।
गुहां प्रविश्य तिष्ठन्तं यो भूतेभिर्यपश्यत ।
एतद् वै तत् ॥६॥

Yaḥ pūrvam tapaso jātamadbhyaḥ pūrvamajāyata;
Guhām praviśya tiṣṭhantam yo bhūtebhirvyapaśyata;
Etad vai tat.

Yaḥ, that [being]; *adbhyaḥ pūrvam*, before water [i.e., before water and the other elements]; *ajāyata*, was born; *pūrvam tapasaḥ jātam*, the First-born from Consciousness [the first manifestation of Brahman in the phenomenal world, Hiraṇyagarbha] through austerity [i.e., deep pondering]; *guhām praviśya*, entering the cave of the heart of every being; *bhūtebhiḥ tiṣṭhantam*, lying within the [five] elements; [*tam*, that being]; *yaḥ vyapaśyata*, he [the spiritual seeker] who sees [that being] distinctly; [*saḥ tat eva paśyati*, he truly sees that Brahman]; *etat vai tat*, this truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about]

6. He [the spiritual seeker] who is able to see distinctly that Being who preceded the elements, who is the First-born from Consciousness, who is in the heart of every being, in its body and organs [all products of the elements]—he truly sees that [Brahman]. This truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about].

This world is nothing but a manifestation of Brahman (Pure Consciousness). The first manifestation is Hiranyagarbha, and it is the sum total of all beings. It became manifest even before the elements. It is the self of every being and is in every part of the being—in its body as well as in its organs.

To be able to see the same Self everywhere is the goal of life. This Self is what Naciketā was asking about.

या प्राणेन संभवत्यदितिर्देवतामयी ।
 गुहां प्रविश्य तिष्ठन्तीं या भूतेभिरव्यजायत ।
 एतद् वै तत् ॥७॥

*Yā prāṇena sambhavatyaditirdevatāmayī;
 Guhām praviśya tiṣṭhantīm yā bhūtebhirvyajāyata;
 Etad vai tat.*

Yā devatāmayī aditiḥ, she who is Aditi, the soul of all deities [*aditiḥ*, the eater, the experiencer of all objects, i.e., Hiranyagarbha]; *prāṇena sambhavati*, who manifests herself as *prāṇa* [cosmic energy, i.e., Hiranyagarbha]; *yā bhūtebhiḥ vyajāyata*, who manifests herself in the form of the five elements; *guhām praviśya tiṣṭhantam*, is present in the hearts of all beings; *etat vai tat*, this truly is that [Self about which Naciketā was asking]

7. The self of all deities, Aditi, manifests herself as the cosmic energy. She is the sole eater, and she is also the five elements. She is present in the heart of every being. If a spiritual seeker identifies himself with her, he realizes Brahman. This truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about].

Here the suggestion is that a spiritual seeker should be able to see Brahman in the cosmic energy (*prāṇa*). This energy is in all deities, and not only in deities—it is also in all beings. This energy is Aditi (literally, 'the eater' because it 'eats up,' or consumes, everything). It is the destroyer.

But the elements (matter) are not separate from energy. They are always together. They work upon each other and then things happen in this world. This energy is in the heart of every thing and every being, and it is also known as Hiranyagarbha, the Cosmic Being.

If a spiritual aspirant can identify himself with this Hiranyagarbha, then he has reached his goal. This Hiranyagarbha, manifest as energy, is no other than Brahman.

अरण्योर्निहितो जातवेदा गर्भ इव सुभृतो गर्भिणीभिः ।
दिवे दिव ईड्यो जागृवद्भिर्हविष्मद्भिर्मनुष्येभिरग्निः ।
एतद् वै तत् ॥८॥

*Aranyornihito jātavedā garbha iva
subhṛto garbhīṇibhiḥ;*

*Dive dive īdyo jāgrvadbhir-
haviṣmadbhirmanuṣyebhiragniḥ;
Etad vai tat.*

Garbhīṅbhiḥ subhṛtaḥ garbhaḥ iva, like pregnant women taking good care of the child in their wombs; *aranyoḥ nihitaḥ*, the fire resting between the two fire-sticks; *jātavedāḥ agniḥ*, the sacrificial fire [which consumes everything offered to it as part of the sacrifice], Hiranyagarbha; *jāgrvadbhiḥ haviṣmadbhiḥ manuṣyebhiḥ*, by people who are alert about their religious duties and who are well provided with butter-oil and other materials used in sacrifices; *dive dive*, every day; *īdyaḥ*, object of worship [both by yogins in their hearts and by ritualistic householders performing sacrifices]; *etat vai tat*, this [fire] truly is that [Brahman Naciketā was asking about]

8. Like a pregnant woman taking good care of the child in her womb, those who are alert about their religious duties, and who are also well provided with butter-oil and other materials, take care of the sacrificial fire nestling between the two fire-sticks [used in lighting the fire]. They worship the fire every day. This fire is the all-knowing Virāt [Brahman]. This truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about].

In ancient India householders maintained a sacrificial fire in their home and kept it always ablaze by offering oblations. They took great care of the fire, as a mother takes care of a child in her womb. The fire was lit by rubbing two dry wooden sticks

together. When the fire appeared they placed one stick upon another and tended it carefully. This fire to them was symbolic of Virāṭ.

Yogins, however, worship this Virāṭ in their hearts. The internal fire to them is Virāṭ, and they meditate on that.

This Virāṭ is what Naciketā was asking about.

यतश्चोदेति सूर्योऽस्तं यत्र च गच्छति ।
 तं देवाः सर्वेऽर्पितास्तदु नात्येति कश्चन ।
 एतद् वै तत् ॥९॥

*Yataścodeti sūryo'staṁ yatra ca gacchati;
 Taṁ devāḥ sarve'rpitāstadu nātyeti kaścana;
 Etad vai tat.*

Yataḥ ca sūryaḥ udeti, from where the sun rises; *yatra ca astam gacchati*, wherein the sun sets; *sarve devāḥ tam arpitāḥ*, all gods are dependent on that [i.e., Brahman]; *kaścana tat u na atyeti*, no one can be independent of that; *etat vai tat*, this truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about]

9. That from where the sun rises and wherein it sets—all gods are dependent on that [i.e., Brahman]. No one can be independent of that. This truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about].

The idea in this verse is that everything in the

phenomenal world is dependent on Brahman. Here Brahman is not the unmanifest Brahman. The Upaniṣad is referring to the first manifestation of Brahman known as Hiraṇyagarbha, Prāṇa, or Virāt. It says that everything in this world arises from Brahman, rests on Brahman, and finally dissolves into Brahman. The sun is given as an example: The sun awes us by its powers, but even the sun is dependent on Brahman. Everything, however big or however small, is dependent on Brahman. Another example is the ocean and its waves, and still another is the hub of a wheel and its spokes. The waves cannot be independent of the ocean, and so also the spokes cannot be independent of the hub. Again, there is the example of the body and its organs. The organs cannot function without the body.

यदेवेह तदमुत्र यदमुत्र तदन्विह ।

मृत्योः स मृत्युमाप्नोति य इह नानेव पश्यति ॥१०॥

Yadeveha tadamutra yadamutra tadanviha;
Mṛtyoḥ sa mṛtyumāpnoti ya iha nāneva paśyati.

Yat eva iha, whatever is here; *tat amutra*, is also there; *yat amutra*, whatever is there; *tat anu iha*, the same is here; *yaḥ iha nānā iva paśyati*, he who sees a difference here; *saḥ mṛtyoḥ mṛtyum āpnoti*, travels from death to death

10. Whatever is here is also there; whatever is there

is the same here. He who sees a difference here travels from death to death.

It is being asserted in this verse that the world is not separate from Brahman. The world is 'the becoming of God [Brahman].' Nothing can exist without Brahman, as it is the warp and woof of everything.

To see the world as an independent entity is a fatal mistake. It means thinking of the world as *real* (i.e., permanent). One then becomes attached to all its allurements, and this attachment is a bondage. It makes it difficult to see anything beyond gross sense pleasures. Life then becomes stunted. Attachment is a kind of death—a spiritual death, which is worse than physical death. The joy that spirituality offers is enduring as well as uplifting. But when you become attached to sense pleasures, you miss that joy—and even worse, you remain a captive in the cycle of birth and death. You are thus doomed.

मनसैवेदमाप्तव्यं नेह नानाऽस्ति किञ्चन ।

मृत्योः स मृत्युं गच्छति य इह नानेव पश्यति ॥११॥

*Manasaivedamāptavyam neha nānā'sti kiñcana ;
Mṛtyoḥ sa mṛtyuṃ gacchati ya iha nāneva paśyati.*

Manasā eva idam āptavyam, by the mind alone this is to be realized; *iha kiñcana nānā na asti*, here nothing is separate; *yaḥ iha nānā iva paśyati*, he

who sees in this anything separate; *sah mṛtyoḥ mṛtyum gacchati*, he goes from death to death

11. By the [purified] mind alone this [Brahman] can be realized. Nothing is separate from this [Brahman]. He who thinks there is anything separate from this goes from death to death.

Nothing in this world is independent of Brahman. Rather, everything exists because of Brahman. Everything arises from Brahman, rests on it, and finally merges into it.

This fact, however, is not grasped by anyone having a gross mind. You have to be highly perceptive to understand it. The kind of mind you need is one sharpened and chastened by years of spiritual disciplines. When your mind has been thus purified, you realize the oneness of things, and you realize that the world is nothing but a manifestation of Brahman. The world by itself has no reality of its own.

If anyone thinks that the world is a separate entity from Brahman, he is ignorant, and he suffers on that account by being born again and again.

अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः पुरुषो मध्य आत्मनि तिष्ठति ।
ईशानो भूतभव्यस्य न ततो विजुगुप्सते ।
एतद् वै तत् ॥१२॥

*Aṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo madhya ātmani tiṣṭhati;
 Īśāno bhūtabhavyasya na tato vijugupsate;
 Etad vai tat.*

Aṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣaḥ, of the size of a thumb, Brahman; *madhye ātmani tiṣṭhati*, rests in the body; [it is the] *īśānaḥ bhūtabhavyasya*, Lord of the past, [present,] and future; *tataḥ*, when a spiritual aspirant knows this Brahman; *na vijugupsate*, he does not try to conceal himself; *etat vai tat*, this truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about]

12. Of the size of a thumb, Brahman resides in the body. It controls the past, the present, and the future. When a spiritual aspirant knows this Brahman, he does not want to conceal himself. This truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about].

This verse purports to show that the individual self and the Cosmic Self are one and the same.

The heart is supposed to look like a lotus, and inside that lotus there is a small empty space. Brahman, as the individual self, fills that empty space, assuming the size of a thumb. Brahman is in every being and is everywhere. It fills every space, and this is why it is referred to as *puruṣa* (because it 'fills'). Brahman, it should be noted, is both inside and outside of everything. Nothing can exhaust Brahman.

The goal of life is to know that the individual self and the Cosmic Self are one and the same. When you know this, you see yourself everywhere and in

everything. There is no sense of duality, as far as you are concerned. There is just One and that One is yourself. You have no reason to feel shy of anyone or anything, and that is why you do not feel the necessity of hiding yourself.

अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः पुरुषो ज्योतिरिवाधूमकः ।

ईशानो भूतभव्यस्य स एवाद्य स उ श्वः ।

एतद् वै तत् ॥१३॥

Aṅguṣṭha-mātraḥ puruṣaḥ jyotirivādhūmakah;
Īśāno bhūtabhavyasya sa evādyā sa u śvaḥ;
Etad vai tat.

Aṅguṣṭha-mātraḥ puruṣaḥ, that thumb-sized being; *adhūmakah jyotiḥ iva*, shines like a smokeless flame; *bhūta-bhavyasya īśānaḥ*, is the controller of the past, [the present,] and the future; *saḥ eva adyā saḥ u śvaḥ*, he is present [in all beings] now and will be present in the future also; *etat vai tat*, this truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about]

13. This thumb-sized being [*puruṣa*] is seen [by the yogins] as a smokeless flame [in their hearts]. This being controls time—the past, the present, and the future. It is always there, now as well as in the future. This truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about].

This verse again emphasizes the fact that the individual

self (*jīvātman*) is nothing but the Cosmic Self (*paramātman*). There is but one Self, and that Self is everywhere and in every being.

The Self is not visible to the physical eye. The yogins, however, meditate on it as a smokeless flame in the heart. It is 'smokeless' because it is pure, without any attributes. In fact, it is Brahman, Pure Consciousness. It is also said to be the size of a thumb, but that should not be taken literally. It is described thus because the space inside the heart is small, and this space is the seat of the Self in every being.

As Brahman (associated with *māyā*, i.e., *Hiraṇyagarbha*), the Self is supreme. It controls everything, large or small, in the phenomenal world. It is also the Lord of time, as it controls the past, the present, and the future.

यथोदकं दुर्गे वृष्टं पर्वतेषु विधावति ।
एवं धर्मान् पृथक् पश्यंस्तानेवानुविधावति ॥१४॥

*Yathodakam durge vṛṣṭam parvateṣu vidhāvati ;
Evaṁ dharmān pṛthak paśyaṁstānevānuvidhāvati.*

Durge, in inaccessible areas; *vṛṣṭam*, drenched with; *udakam*, rain-water; *yathā*, just as; *parvateṣu*, in the hills; *vidhāvati*, runs down [in scattered streams and gets lost]; *evam*, in the same way; *dharmān*, different qualities [in different individual selves]; *pṛthak paśyan*,

judging them to be really different; *tān eva anuvidhāvati*, he goes the same way as those qualities

14. When it rains in inaccessible hill areas, the rain-water runs down the hillsides in scattered streams. In the same way, a person may think each individual has a self of his own because each has a body with distinct features. But he who thinks thus goes the same way as those features [i.e., he perishes].

Once again the Upaniṣad emphasizes that the individual self and the Cosmic Self are one and the same. Pity those people who think they are separate. Such people are born again and again.

An illustration is given here to show the difference between appearance and reality: The rain-water that falls in different parts of the hills is pure. The source of that water is the same, but the water divides itself into different streams as it runs down the hills. Not only that, the water also assumes different colours—yellow, grey, and so on—because of its contact with the earth. The same water thus appears divided and separate. Similarly, it may appear that each individual has a self of his own because he has a body that is distinct from other bodies. But the Upaniṣad warns us that it is a mistake to attach any importance to the body and how it looks. The body is a superimposition and is therefore not real. It is perishable. If anyone thinks that the body is real and that each individual has a separate self, he is ignorant and he goes the same way as the body—that is, he perishes. Moreover, he is born again and again because of his attachment to the body.

The Upaniṣad forcefully asserts that the individual self is also the Cosmic Self. The individual self seems to be separate because of its association with the body, but this is merely an appearance, just as the same rain-water appears divided and separate, arising from its association with the hill and the earth.

यथोदकं शुद्धे शुद्धमासिक्तं तादृगेव भवति ।
 एवं मुनेर्विजानत आत्मा भवति गौतम ॥१५॥

*Yathodakam śuddhe śuddhamāsiktaṁ tādr̥geva bhavati;
 Evaṁ munervijānata ātmā bhavati gautama.*

Gautama, O Gautama; *yathā*, in the way; *śuddham udakam*, pure water; *śuddhe*, into pure water; *āsiktaṁ*, poured; *tādr̥k eva bhavati*, becomes one with it; *vijānataḥ muneḥ ātmā*, the self of the sage who has attained Self-knowledge; *evam*, the same [as Brahman]; *bhavati*, becomes

15. O Gautama, when pure water is poured into pure water, they become one. The same thing happens to the self of a sage who attains Self-knowledge—that is, he becomes one with Brahman.

Here is the difference between one individual who sees the same Self everywhere and another who sees a separate self in every separate being. The first person knows the Self, but the second has no idea about it. The second is enmeshed in the world. He thinks the world is real and he has to enjoy it.

He is incapable of thinking beyond gross sensuous things, and he is steeped in sense pleasure. But the first individual is discriminating. He rejects everything that is transitory and seeks only that which is immortal. In doing so he suffers much hardship, but he does not mind a bit. He stakes everything to get control over his mind. He wants his mind fixed on Self-knowledge, and he wants nothing but Self-knowledge. If there is no other desire in his mind except Self-knowledge, then his mind is pure, and with such a mind it is easy to attain Self-knowledge. At this point the individual self (*jīvātman*) merges into the Cosmic Self (*paramātman*).

इति काठकोपनिषदि द्वितीयाध्याये प्रथमा वल्ली ॥

Iti kāṭhakopaniṣadi dvitīyādhyāye prathamā vallī.

Here ends the first chapter of the second part of the Kāṭha Upaniṣad.

PART TWO

CHAPTER TWO

पुरमेकादशद्वारमजस्यावक्रचेतसः ।
अनुष्ठाय न शोचति विमुक्तश्च विमुच्यते ।
एतद् वै तत् ॥१॥

Puramekādaśadvāramajasyāvakracetasah;
Anuṣṭhāya na śocati vimuktaśca vimucyate;
Etat vai tat.

Ajasya avakra-cetasah, [of the Self] without birth, and which is Pure Consciousness, never changing in its character; *ekādaśa-dvāram puram*, the city [i.e., the body] with its eleven gates; *anuṣṭhāya*, putting it always in the service of the Self and always meditating on that Self; [a spiritual aspirant] *na śocati*, never grieves; *vimuktaḥ*, free from attachment; *vimucyate ca*, is also free from birth and death; *etat vai tat*, this is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about]

1. This body, with its eleven openings, is the abode of the Self, which is unborn and always the same Pure Consciousness. A spiritual aspirant uses this body only in the service of the Self [i.e., only for spiritual practices] and by doing so, realizes the true nature

of the Self. He then goes beyond sorrow. As he has overcome his ignorance and has stopped identifying himself with the body, he becomes [following his death] free from the cycle of birth and death. This truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about].

The Upaniṣad describes the body as a city. A city has to have some gates for entering and leaving, and the body also has such gates. It has, in fact, eleven gates—the two eyes, the two ears, the two nostrils, the mouth, the navel, the two lower organs, and the orifice at the crown of the head (through which a yogin leaves his body). There is always someone who controls a city, and in the case of the body, the self is the supreme authority. It controls everything the body does.

This self is, in fact, the Cosmic Self, Brahman. This is why it is without birth (and also without death). It is Pure Consciousness and never suffers any change in its character. But the individual self (the *jīva*) is ignorant, and because of its ignorance it thinks that it is the body. It suffers if the body suffers and attributes to itself all the limitations that the body has. Similarly, it is a victim of the caprices of the mind. The individual self is truly a slave to the body and mind.

But this need not be its fate always. The picture changes completely if the individual self once begins to assert itself, saying that it is the Cosmic Self. As the Cosmic Self, it is ever free and is the Lord

of everything. Thinking is the first step towards being, and if a person constantly thinks that he is divine, he becomes divine. The body and mind are tools that may work either way: they may cause bondage or they may bring about your liberation, depending on whether they dominate over you or you dominate over them. When the body and mind dominate over you it is because you are ignorant of your real nature. You identify yourself with them and are affected by anything that happens to them. But if you can realize that you are the Cosmic Self and therefore the Lord of the body and the mind, you become free. You live the remaining years of your life with the awareness of being the Lord of everything and you are happy. When you die you become free forever and there is no more birth or death for you.

हंसः शुचिषद् वसुरन्तरिक्षसद्
 होता वेदिषदतिथिर्दुरोणसत् ।
 नृषद् वरसदृतसद् व्योमसदब्जा गोजा
 ऋतजा अद्रिजा ऋतं बृहत् ॥२॥

*Haṁsaḥ śuciṣad vasurantarikṣasad
 hotā vediṣadatithirduroṇasat ;
 Nṛṣad varasadṛtasad vyomasadabjā gojā
 ṛtajā adrijā ṛtam bṛhat.*

[This Self] *haṁsaḥ*, goes everywhere; *śuciṣat*, rests

in heaven; *vasuḥ*, is the support of all; *antarikṣasat*, is in the space between the earth and heaven; *hotā*, the fire; *vediṣat*, on the earth; *duroṇasat atithih*, a brāhmin guest staying at a house [or, the intoxicating soma juice in a pitcher]; *nṛṣat*, in human beings; *varasat*, in gods and goddesses; *ṛtasat*, in Truth; *vyomasat*, in space; *abjā*, in aquatic animals and insects; *gojā*, things that grow on earth [wheat, barley, rice, etc.]; *ṛtajā*, as the items used in performing sacrifices; *adrijā*, rivers, streams, etc., coming from the hills and mountains; *ṛtam*, Truth as the Self of all; *bṛhat*, great, the cause of all

2. This Self is everywhere. It is the sun in heaven, and it is *vasuḥ* because it supports everything and is the air in the space between the earth and heaven. It is *hotā* because it is fire [in the sacrifices]. It is the fire on the alter [*vedi*], or it is the fire that has the whole earth as its altar. It is a brāhmin guest, or it is the *somarasa* [soma juice] in a pitcher. It is in human beings, in all good things, and in space. It is in water as fish and other aquatic animals, and it grows as paddy, wheat, and other plants on the surface of the earth. It is *ṛtajā* because it is the items used in sacrifices [*ṛta*]. Coming down from the mountains, it is the streams and rivers. This Self is the biggest of all things and is the Self in all.

As Truth, the Self is within all beings, but it is also outside. It is everywhere. It is in small things

as well as big things. It is the essence of everything and is both the cause and the effect. It is the warp and woof of the whole universe, and the universe exists because of it. It is variously known as the Law, the Truth, or the Self.

ऊर्ध्वं प्राणमुन्नयत्यपानं प्रत्यगस्यति ।
मध्ये वामनमासीनं विश्वे देवा उपासते ॥३॥

*Ūrdhvaṁ prāṇamunnayatyapānaṁ pratyagasyati ;
Madhye vāmanamāsīnaṁ viśve devā upāsate.*

Prāṇam ūrdhvam unnayati, [the Self] pushes upward the vital breath [*prāṇa*]; *apānam pratyak asyati*, pushes down the same vital breath [*apāna*]; *madhye āsīnam vāmanam*, in between is the Self [*madhye*, in the space within the lotus-shaped heart; *āsīnam*, manifest as intelligence; *vāmanam*, an object of worship—i.e., the Self]; *viśve devāḥ upāsate*, to whom all the sense organs pay their tribute

3. The Self directs the vital breath [*prāṇa*] upward; it also directs the breath [*apāna*] downward. This Self is in the heart, and the yogins meditate on it. All the sense organs perform their respective duties as if they are paying tribute to their master, the Self.

Once again it is being asserted that the Self is the supreme authority in the body. The sense organs

are all subordinate to it. *Viśve devāḥ upāsate*—people pay tribute to their ruler. Similarly, the sense organs perform their respective duties with meticulous care, as if they are paying tribute to their master, the Self.

अस्य विस्मंसमानस्य शरीरस्थस्य देहिनः।
 देहाद्विमुच्यमानस्य किमत्र परिशिष्यते।
 एतद् वै तत् ॥४॥

Asya visraṁsamānasya śarīrasthasya dehinaḥ;
Dehādvimucyamānasya kimatra pariśiṣyate;
Etad vai tat.

Śarīrasthasya asya dehinaḥ, [when] this embodied self; *visraṁsamānasya*, gets detached; *dehāt vimucyamānasya*, [and] leaves the body; *atra kim pariśiṣyate*, what remains there [in the body]; *etat vai tat*, this truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about]

4. When this embodied self gets detached [from the body] and leaves the body behind, what remains there? [Nothing remains.] This truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about].

The self controls everything in the body. If the body is compared to a city, the self would be its master. When the master leaves his city, there is chaos. Nothing seems to work. The same thing happens when the self leaves the body. The organs in the

body may all be intact, yet they do not function. The self was their source of strength. With the departure of the self, the body with all its organs becomes helpless.

न प्राणेन नापानेन मर्त्यो जीवति कश्चन ।
इतरेण तु जीवन्ति यस्मिन्नेतावुपाश्रितौ ॥५॥

*Na prāṇena nāpānena martyo jīvati kaścana ;
Itareṇa tu jīvanti yasminnetāvupāśritau.*

Kaścana martyaḥ, any mortal being; *prāṇena na jīvati*, cannot live by *prāṇa* [the inhalation of air]; *na apānena*, [similarly] not by *apāna* [the exhalation of air]; *itareṇa tu jīvanti*, but lives by something else; *yasmin etau upāśritau*, on which these two depend

5. No mortal being can survive by his vital breath, *prāṇa* or *apāna*. There is something else that sustains him. On this 'something' [i.e., the Cosmic Self] both *prāṇa* and *apāna* are dependent.

The vital breath is of five kinds, depending on the function it performs in the body. Many people think they live because of this vital breath, and they dismiss the idea that there is a Self that is independent of the body, the organs, and the vital breath. It is difficult for them to believe that this Self is the Lord of the whole body-mind complex. The body, the mind, the organs, and the vital breath—all these are dependent on the Self. At death, when the Self

leaves the body, the whole body-mind complex collapses. Its constituents may all be intact, yet they are useless, individually and collectively. This is because the Self was their source of strength and that Self is now gone. They had so long functioned as if they were serving their master, the Self.

हन्त त इदं प्रवक्ष्यामि गुह्यं ब्रह्म सनातनम् ।
यथा च मरणं प्राप्य आत्मा भवति गौतम ॥६॥

*Hanta ta idaṁ pravakṣyāmi guhyaṁ brahma sanātanam ;
Yathā ca maraṇaṁ prāpya ātmā bhavati gautama.*

Gautama, O Gautama; hanta, now; te, to you; idam guhyam sanātanam brahma, this subject of the secret and eternal Brahman; maraṇam prāpya, after death; ātmā yathā ca bhavati, also of what happens to the Ātman; pravakṣyāmi, I shall explain

6. O Gautama, I shall now explain to you this subject of the secret and eternal Brahman, and also of what happens to the self after death.

Yama (Death) is now going to explain to Naciketā two things: first, the nature of Brahman and how Brahman can be attained, and second, what happens to the self after the death of an individual.

Brahman is surrounded by mystery, and not many

people have any idea about it. Only a few specially trained persons can understand it. This is why it is described as 'secret'. But whether people know anything about it or not, Brahman is that which is eternal.

योनिमन्ये प्रपद्यन्ते शरीरत्वाय देहिनः ।
स्थाणुमन्येऽनुसंयन्ति यथाकर्म यथाश्रुतम् ॥७॥

*Yonimanye prapadyante śarīratvāya dehinaḥ ;
Sthāṇumanye 'nusaṁyanti yathākarma yathāśrutam.*

Anye dehinaḥ, some embodied souls; *yathā karma yathā śrutam*, depending upon their work and knowledge; *śarīratvāya*, to have a body again; *yonim prapadyante*, go through the process of birth; *anye*, other souls; *sthāṇum anusāmyanti*, become immobile [like trees]

7. Some embodied souls, depending upon their work and knowledge, have a body again, going through the process of rebirth. But in some cases the body may be immobile [such as a tree].

Here Yama is explaining to Naciketā what happens to an individual after his death. It is his work and knowledge that determine his destiny. He may again be born as a human being, or he may be born as something immobile, such as a tree.

य एष सुप्तेषु जागर्ति कामं कामं पुरुषो निर्मिमाणः ।
 तदेव शुक्रं तद्ब्रह्म तदेवामृतमुच्यते ।
 तस्मिँल्लोकाः श्रिताः सर्वे तदु नात्येति कश्चन ।
 एतद् वै तत् ॥८॥

*Ya eṣa supteṣu jāgarti kāmam kāmam
 puruṣo nirmimāṇaḥ;
 Tadeva śukram tadbrahma tadevāmṛtamucyate;
 Tasminllokāḥ śritāḥ sarve tadu nātyeti kaścāna;
 Etad vai tat.*

[When all beings] *supteṣu*, are asleep; *yaḥ eṣaḥ puruṣaḥ*, this being; *kāmam kāmam nirmimāṇaḥ*, goes on producing a series of desires [with their objects]; *jāgarti*, [and] is awake [all the time]; *tat eva śukram*, he is pure [i.e., without any attributes]; *tat brahma*, he is Brahman; *tat eva amṛtam ucyate*, he is also described as immortal; *sarve lokāḥ tasmin śritāḥ*, all the worlds are supported by him; *kaścāna tat u na atyeti*, no one can surpass him; *etat vai tat*, this truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about]

8. When all beings are asleep, there is one being who remains awake and who goes on producing one desire after another [along with their objects]. It is this being who is pure, who is Brahman, and who is also referred to as immortal. He is the support of all the worlds. Nothing can surpass him. This truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about].

Yama now starts to explain Brahman. He had promised

to Naciketā that he would do so and also tell him what happens to a person after death. Both questions are difficult, but the first is more difficult. This is why Yama has so long been discussing the second question. Now he turns to the first.

It is a common experience that when we sleep we have all kinds of dreams that make no sense at all. For instance, we dream we are being chased by a tiger and are running as fast as we can. Is this not an absurd experience? How can we be running when we are lying in bed? And how can there be a tiger in our room? These are all mental constructions. This shows that the mind can act independent of the body. But sometimes we also have dreamless sleep. What happens to the mind we do not know, but, obviously, the mind is at rest. And this shows that there is something beyond the mind that sustains the body-mind complex. This something is the self, which is always awake and which, in conjunction with ignorance, holds the body and mind together and makes them work at its will. In other words, the body and the mind are tools of the self.

This self, in its original state, is the Cosmic Self, Brahman. All the worlds rest on it, and nothing can surpass it. It is supreme. It is immortal.

अग्निर्यथैको भुवनं प्रविष्टो
रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव ।

एकस्तथा सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा

रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बहिश्च ॥९॥

*Agniryathaiko bhuvanaṁ praviṣṭo
rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo babhūva;
Ekastathā sarvabhūtāntarātmā
rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo bahiśca.*

Yathā, as; *ekaḥ agniḥ*, the same fire; *bhuvanam praviṣṭaḥ*, having entered the world; *rūpaṁ rūpaṁ prati-rūpaḥ babhūva*, assumes different forms [depending upon the inflammable object in which it is present]; *tathā*, in the same way; *ekaḥ sarva-bhūtāntaḥ-ātmā*, the same inmost Self in all beings; *rūpaṁ rūpaṁ prati-rūpaḥ*; is seen in different forms [depending upon the being in which it is found]; *bahiśca*, [is] also outside

9. The same fire, having entered the world, has assumed different forms [according to the inflammable object in which it is found]. Similarly, the same inmost Self is in all beings and is also outside of them.

The same Self is in every being, but the beings are many and they have different forms. Out of ignorance we think each being has a separate self. This is a mistake. As the Upaniṣad says, there is one common fire, but it appears to have many forms according to the object in which it is found. Fire, as such, has no form; it assumes the form of the object it burns. Similarly, the Self, as such, has no

form, yet it appears to have a form because of its association with a living being or an object. The Self is like space—everywhere, in everything, and always formless. And like space, the Self is both inside and outside of everything. It is all-pervasive.

वायुर्यथैको भुवनं प्रविष्टो
 रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव ।
 एकस्तथा सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा
 रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बहिश्च ॥१०॥

*Vāyuryathaiko bhuvanam praviṣṭo
 rūpam rūpam pratirūpo babhūva;
 Ekastathā sarvabhūtāntarātma
 rūpam rūpam pratirūpo bahiśca.*

Yathā, as; *ekaḥ vāyuḥ*, the same air; *bhuvanam praviṣṭaḥ*, having entered the world [as the primary vital breath]; *rūpam rūpam prati-rūpaḥ babhūva*, has assumed so many forms; *tathā*, in the same way; *ekaḥ sarva-bhūta-antaḥ-ātmā*, the one inmost Self in all beings; *rūpam rūpam prati-rūpaḥ [babhūva]*, assumes the form of each of the beings in which it dwells; *bahiḥ ca*, it is also outside each of them

10. The same air in the world is present in every being as its vital breath. Similarly, the same Self is in every being, assuming its form, and is also outside of it.

The Self is formless. Though it assumes forms, these forms do not affect it, as they are only superimpositions. The Self is both inside and outside of all beings. It is this Self that Naciketā is asking about.

सूर्यो यथा सर्वलोकस्य चक्षु-
 र्न लिप्यते चाक्षुषैर्बाह्यदोषैः ।
 एकस्तथा सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा
 न लिप्यते लोकदुःखेन बाह्यः ॥११॥

*Sūryo yathā sarvalokasya cakṣurna
 lipyate cākṣuṣairbāhyadoṣaiḥ ;
 Ekastathā sarvabhūtāntarātmā
 na lipyate lokaduḥkhena bāhyaḥ.*

Yathā, just as; *sūryaḥ*, the sun; *sarva-lokasya cakṣuḥ*, [in spite of its being] the only eye of all beings; *cākṣuṣaiḥ bāhya-doṣaiḥ*, [influenced] by external blemishes of the eyes; *na lipyate*, is not tainted; *tathā*, in the same way; *ekaḥ sarva-bhūta-antaḥ-ātmā*, the same inmost Self of all beings; *loka-duḥkhena na lipyate*, is not affected by the sufferings of others; *bāhyaḥ*, [because it is] outside

11. Just as the sun is the only eye of all and yet external blemishes [whether in the eyes of people or in the objects themselves] do not contaminate it, in the same way, the Self, though the Self of all, is not affected by the sorrows of those beings

in which it dwells, [because just as it is inside, it is also] outside.

The same Cosmic Self is in every being. This may lead one to think that whatever happens to the beings, good or bad, affects the Self. That is not the case. The example of the sun is cited to illustrate this: The sun is the common source of light for all, yet if the objects on which its light falls are dirty, the sun does not become dirty. In the same way, the Self is not affected by what happens to the beings in which it dwells. The beings may be happy or unhappy, but the Self is unaffected. The word *bāhyaḥ* here also means 'beyond'.

एको वशी सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा
 एकं रूपं बहुधा यः करोति ।
 तमात्मस्थं येऽनुपश्यन्ति धीरा-
 स्तेषां सुखं शाश्वतं नेतरेषाम् ॥१२॥

*Eko vaśī sarvabhūtāntarātmā
 ekaṁ rūpaṁ bahudhā yaḥ karoti ;
 Tamātmasthaṁ ye'nupaśyanti dhīrā-
 steṣāṁ sukhaṁ śāśvataṁ netareṣāṁ.*

Sarva-bhūta-antaḥ-ātmā, the inmost Self of all beings ;
ekaḥ vaśī, though one and the same, it controls all ;
yaḥ ekaṁ rūpaṁ bahudhā karoti, it makes one single

entity grow into many; *ye dhīrāḥ*, those wise men; *tam ātmastham anupaśyanti*, who can see it within themselves; *teṣām śāśvatam sukham*, they enjoy eternal happiness; *na itareṣām*, not anyone else.

12. The Cosmic Self is one, yet it controls all. It is the inmost Self of all beings, and it manifests itself as many. Those wise people who see that Self within themselves are eternally happy, and not others.

This verse states the relationship between Brahman and the world. It is Brahman that manifests itself as the world, and therefore Brahman is the essence of everything that exists. This manifestation is like a wave in an ocean. The wave rises from the ocean, rests on it, and finally dissolves into it. Without the ocean there would be no waves, and similarly, without Brahman there would be no world.

The aim of life is to know that the world is not the reality. The reality is Brahman, and that Brahman is one's own self. Once you know this, you are happy forever.

Your self is the self of everything. Your self is the Cosmic Self, and this Cosmic Self, or Brahman, controls everything. It is One, and it is Pure Consciousness. It is like space. By its own power it assumes diverse names and forms and then appears to be many. It is like a person surrounded by many mirrors. The person is one, yet the reflections are many. To see the one Self is knowledge. To see many is an error.

नित्योऽनित्यानां चेतनश्चेतनाना-
 मेको बहूनां यो विदधाति कामान्।
 तमात्मस्थं येऽनुपश्यन्ति धीरा-
 स्तेषां शान्तिः शाश्वती नेतरेषाम् ॥१३॥

Nityo'nityānām cetanaścetanānā-
meko bahūnām yo vidadhāti kāmān;
Tamātmastham ye'nupaśyanti dhīrā-
steṣām śāntiḥ śāśvatī netareṣām.

Yaḥ anityānām nityaḥ, he who is permanent among the impermanent; *cetanānām cetanaḥ*, consciousness among the conscious; [*yaḥ*] *ekaḥ* [*san*], though he is one; *bahūnām kāmān vidadhāti*, fulfils the wishes of many; *ye dhīrāḥ tam ātmastham anupaśyanti*, the wise men who see him within themselves [as their Self]; *teṣām* [*eva*] *śāśvatī śāntiḥ*, only such people have eternal peace [of mind]; *na itareṣām*, not others

13. He who is permanent among the impermanent, who is consciousness among the conscious, and who alone is able to fulfil the wishes of many—only those wise people who see him as their Self have eternal peace of mind, and none else.

Here the relationship between the individual self (*jīvātman*) and the Cosmic Self (*paramātman*, or Brahman) is being explained.

Only the Cosmic Self is eternal among all non-eternals.

What are these 'non-eternals'? The individual selves. Are they not eternal? By themselves they are not, but if they appear to be eternal it is because of the Cosmic Self. The Cosmic Self, associated with names and forms, becomes the individual selves. The individual selves have no independent existence. Similarly, if there are conscious beings in the world, they are conscious because of the Cosmic Self. The Cosmic Self is consciousness itself.

The individual selves have many desires and somehow or other they manage to get their desires fulfilled. But here again they have to depend on the Cosmic Self. The Cosmic Self, as Brahman, makes it possible for them to attain what they want.

Again and again the Upaniṣads declare that the goal of life for a human being is to realize that he is God Himself. That is to say, each individual self has to realize that it is the Cosmic Self. So long as this realization does not come, the individual self feels that it is small, weak, helpless, and therefore unhappy. There is a sense of void within it. But when it realizes that it is the Cosmic Self, it has a sense of fullness. It is then happy. It enjoys eternal peace and happiness, such as others can never enjoy.

तदेतदिति मन्यन्तेऽनिर्देश्यं परमं सुखम् ।
 कथं नु तद्विजानीयां किमु भाति विभाति वा ॥१४॥

Tadetaditi manyante 'nirdeśyam paramam sukham;

Katham nu tadvijānīyām kimu bhāti vibhāti vā.

[*Yat*, that]; *anirdeśyam paramam sukham*, indefinable great bliss; *tat etat*, it is this; *itī manyante*, they [i.e., the sages] thus think; *tat katham nu vijānīyām*, how shall I know this; *kim u bhāti vibhāti vā*, whether it is self-revealing, or it is revealed through the mind and the intellect

14. It is that indefinable great bliss which the sages are referring to when they say, 'It is this'—that is, 'Brahman is this bliss.' How can I know whether this bliss [Brahman] is self-revealing or it is to be grasped through the mind and the intellect?

In the previous verses, mention has been made of an eternal peace and happiness—that is, bliss. This bliss can never be defined. You can feel it within yourself, but you cannot share it with others or explain to them what it is like. It is too deep for words. You feel it only when you are in direct contact with the Self, or Brahman. The Self is the source of this joy.

The question is: How can we experience this bliss? Where does this bliss come from? Is it something lying within us that one day suddenly reveals itself? Or is it like any other object that we ordinarily miss seeing but one day suddenly notice? The answer is that this bliss is our own Self. It is always there, only we do not know it. We come to know it only after years of spiritual discipline.

न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न चन्द्रतारकं
 नेमा विद्युतो भान्ति कुतोऽयमग्निः ।
 तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वं
 तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति ॥१५॥

*Na tatra sūryo bhāti na candratārakam
 nemā vidyuto bhānti kuto'yamagniḥ;
 Tameva bhāntamanubhāti sarvaṁ
 tasya bhāsā sarvamidaṁ vibhāti.*

Tatra sūryaḥ na bhāti, the sun does not shine there [in the presence of Brahman]; *na candra-tārakam*, nor the moon and the stars; *imāḥ vidyutaḥ na bhānti*, nor do these flashes of lightning shine; *ayam agniḥ kutaḥ*, how can this fire shine; *tam bhāntam eva sarvaṁ anubhāti*, when it shines, following it, everything else shines; *tasya bhāsā sarvaṁ idam vibhāti*, by its light all these are lighted

15. In the presence of Brahman the sun does not shine, nor do the moon and stars, nor does lightning, let alone this fire. When Brahman shines, everything else follows. By its light all these are lighted.

In the previous verse it was stated that Brahman is present in every being as bliss. Now the Upaniṣad adds that Brahman is also light.

We see the light from the sun, the moon, the stars, etc., but their light fades away when they are in

the presence of Brahman. The implication is that they have no light of their own; they derive their light from Brahman. Brahman alone is the source of light, and it is also self-luminous.

Not only do the sun, moon, and stars derive their light from Brahman, but our sense organs also derive their power to reveal from Brahman (the Cosmic Self within). Thus, these sense organs cannot reveal the Self. The Self reveals itself when the mind is pure. What is meant by *pure*? The mind is pure when it is free from the idea of 'me' and 'mine'.

इति काठकोपनिषदि द्वितीयाध्याये द्वितीया वल्ली ॥

Iti kāṭhakopaniṣadi dvitīyādhyāye dvitīyā vallī.

Here ends the second chapter of the second part of the Kāṭha Upaniṣad.

PART TWO

CHAPTER THREE

ऊर्ध्वमूलोऽवाकशाख एषोऽश्वत्थः सनातनः ।
तदेव शुक्रं तद्ब्रह्म तदेवामृतमुच्यते ।
तस्मिँल्लोकाः श्रिताः सर्वे तदु नात्येति कश्चन ।
एतद् वै तत् ॥१॥

*Ūrdhvamūlo'vāksākha eṣo'svatthaḥ sanātanaḥ ;
Tadeva śukraṁ tadbrahma-tadevāmṛtamucyate ;
Tasminilokāḥ śritāḥ sarve tadu nātyeti kaścana ;
Etaḍ vai tat.*

Eṣaḥ aśvatthaḥ, this world, which is like a banyan tree; *ūrdhva-mūlaḥ avāk-śākhaḥ*, with its root above and branches pointing downwards; *sanātanaḥ*, eternal [timeless]; *tat eva śūkram*, that [root] is pure; *tat brahma*, that is Brahman; *tat eva amṛtam ucyate*, that is known as immortal; *tasmin*, in that [Brahman]; *sarve lokāḥ śritāḥ*, all the worlds rest; *kaścana tat u na atyeti*, nothing can surpass it; *etaḍ vai tat*, this truly is that [Self that Naciketā was asking about]

1. This world is like a big banyan tree that is rooted high above [in Brahman] and has its branches [such as men and women, animals, insects, and plants] spread out below. It [the phenomenal world] is timeless

[in the sense that it comes and goes again and again, like waves—i.e., in cycles]. And the root of this tree is Brahman. It is pure and, they say, immortal. All the worlds including this planet rest on it. Nothing can surpass it. This truly is that [Self that Naciketa was asking about].

This world is being compared to a banyan tree. An ordinary tree has its root below and its branches above. But this tree has its branches below and its root above. We cannot see that root, however. Where is it? That root is in Brahman. At first Brahman was not manifest; later it manifested itself as this world. The branches of this tree—that is, the animate and inanimate world—are all we see, and they were originally in Brahman.

Like a banyan tree, this world is also perishable. It changes, but it does not go out of existence altogether. It comes and goes in cycles, and in that sense it continues and is eternal. No one knows when this tree first appeared or when it will totally disappear.

The root of this tree, however, is Brahman, and that is unchanging and unchangeable. It is always the same. Nothing can affect it. It is pure and immortal. All things in this world are under the shelter of Brahman, and nothing can exist independent of it.

यदिदं किञ्च जगत् सर्वं प्राण एजति निःसृतम् ।
महद्भयं वज्रमुद्यतं य एतद्विदुरमृतास्ते भवन्ति ॥२॥

*Yadidaṁ kiñca jagat sarvaṁ
prāṇa ejati niḥśṛtam;
Mahadbhayaṁ vajramudyataṁ ya
etadviduramṛtāste bhavanti.*

Yat idam kim ca jagat, whatever exists in this world ; *sarvam*, all this ; [*prāṇebhya*, from *prāṇa*—i.e., Brahman associated with *māyā*] ; *niḥśṛtam*, emerged ; *prāṇe ejati*, on *prāṇa* all this rests and is able to function ; [*tat brahma*, that Brahman] ; *udyatam vajram*, is like a thunderbolt about to strike ; *mahat bhayam*, is a great terror ; *ye etat viduḥ*, those who know it [Brahman] ; *te amṛtāḥ bhavanti*, they become immortal

2. Whatever is in this world has come from *prāṇa* [i.e., Brahman associated with *māyā*, its own power]. Again, in *prāṇa* all this rests and functions. This Brahman is like a thunderbolt about to strike. It is a great terror. Those who know this Brahman become immortal.

That Brahman is the root of everything has already been stated. Everything in this world is from Brahman, in Brahman, and under Brahman. We see so much activity in this world. What provides the energy for all this activity ? Brahman. A simile is given here to illustrate how Brahman inspires and controls everything. Brahman is like a tyrant, making everything function according to its whims. It is like a king who holds a thunderbolt in his hand, ready to strike if there is any negligence of duty. It is a great terror to everyone. But those who know the supremacy

of Brahman as the creator and controller of everything attain immortality.

This verse, along with the preceding one, stresses the reality of Brahman. There must be something real behind this phenomenal world.

भयादस्याग्निस्तपति भयात्तपति सूर्यः ।
भयादिन्द्रश्च वायुश्च मृत्युर्धावति पञ्चमः ॥३॥

*Bhayādasyāgnistapati bhayāttapati sūryaḥ ;
Bhayādirindraśca vāyuśca mṛtyurdhāvati pañcamah.*

Bhayāt asya agniḥ tapati, from fear of it [Brahman], fire gives heat; *bhayāt tapati sūryaḥ*, out of terror the sun shines; *bhayāt indraḥ ca vāyuḥ ca pañcamah mṛtyuḥ dhāvati*, afraid of it, Indra, Vāyu [air], and the fifth, Death, rush to perform their respective duties

3. From fear of it [Brahman], fire gives heat. Out of terror, the sun shines. Afraid of it, Indra, Vāyu, and the fifth, Death, rush to perform their respective duties.

Fire, the sun, Indra (the god of rain), Vāyu (the god of air), and Yama (the god of death)—all these are powerful deities, yet they are nothing compared to Brahman. They are totally dependent on Brahman.

The idea that Brahman is almighty is again being stressed.

Yama (Death) is fifth in the order of deities mentioned in the verse: Agni, Sūrya, Indra, Vāyu, and Yama.

इह चेदशकद् बोद्धुं प्राक्शरीरस्य विम्रसः।
ततः सर्गेषु लोकेषु शरीरत्वाय कल्पते ॥४॥

Iha cedaśakad boddhum prākśarīrasya visrasaḥ;
Tataḥ sargeṣu lokeṣu śarīratvāya kalpate.

Cet, if; *iha*, in this world; *śarīrasya visrasaḥ prāk*, before the dissolution of the body; [*jīvaḥ*, anyone]; *boddhum aśakat*, is able to attain the knowledge of Brahman [he gets liberation in this very life; otherwise, i.e., if he does not attain the knowledge of Brahman]; *tataḥ*, then; *sargeṣu lokeṣu*, in this world and other worlds; *śarīratvāya kalpate*, tends to have bodies again

4. If anyone is able to attain the knowledge of Brahman before death, he gets liberation in this very life; otherwise he is born again and again in this world and other worlds.

According to this verse, the goal of life is to know Brahman and it is possible to attain that goal in this very life. Each of us should, therefore, concentrate on attaining it.

What is the result of knowing Brahman? The result is that you see your own self as Brahman, and you also see that your own self is the self of everyone and everything. In other words, you are one with everything. The true object of life is to realize this oneness of things. It is not an intellectual apprehension; it has to be a direct, personal experience. And this experience is such that it totally changes your personality. You become a new person altogether. You become a 'universal person,' going beyond the barriers of race, religion, and country. You become Brahman.

यथादर्शे तथात्मनि

यथा स्वप्ने तथा पितृलोके ।

यथाप्सु परीव ददृशे तथा गन्धर्वलोके

छायःतपयोरिव ब्रह्मलोके ॥५॥

Yathādarśe tathātmani

yathā svapne tathā pitṛloke;

Yathāpsu parīva dadṛśe tathā gandharvaloke

chāyātapayoriva brahmaloke.

Ādarśe, in the mirror; *yathā*, just as [i.e., just as a reflection]; *tathā ātmani*, in the same way, in your 'pure' mind [you see Brahman]; *svapne yathā*, as in a dream; *tathā pitṛ-loke*, similarly, in the world of your ancestors; *apsu yathā*, as on the water; *tathā gandharva-loke*, so also in the world of the

gandharvas [gandharvas are higher than mortals but lower than gods and goddesses, and they are good musicians]; *paridadṛṣe iva*, [the Self] is seen; *brahma-loke*, in the world of Brahman [i.e., Brahmā]; *chāyā-tapayoḥ iva*, [the Self is seen as distinctly] as light and shade

5. Just as a clear reflection is seen in a clear mirror, so also the Self is seen in a pure mind. In the world of the ancestors you see your Self hazily, as you see things in a dream. In the world of the gandharvas you see the Self as you see a reflection in water—i.e., again hazily. But when you see your Self in the world of Brahmā, you see it as clearly as you see light and shade.

The importance of being born as a human being is stressed here. It is a great good fortune to be born as a human being, for the best Self-realization is possible only when you attain it as a human being. When you attain it then, with the help of your clear intellect, it is as clear and convincing as seeing your reflection in a clear mirror. But you can have a clear and pure intellect only at the end of a long period of spiritual discipline. Among other things, you first have to live an austere life, avoiding self-indulgence as far as possible. You must also cultivate a spirit of discrimination, always choosing those things that will help accelerate your spiritual growth. And it is of great benefit if you can have a good teacher to guide you. The study of the scriptures is also helpful. But most important, you must try

to have a pure mind, a mind free from desires, free from ego. A pure mind is like a clear mirror. Self-knowledge is already within you, and it reveals itself when your mind is pure. This is possible because the Self is self-luminous.

You may also have Self-realization after death, in the world of your ancestors, but it would be like seeing things in a dream—everything is unclear and mixed-up. Similarly, you can have the experience after death if you go to the world of the gandharvas. The experience in this case would be better but still not clear enough. It would be like seeing your reflection in water. But if you go to Brahma-loka, the world of Brahmā, or Īśvara, the experience is very good. There you can see your Self as distinctly as you see the difference between light and shade. It is not easy to get into that world, however. You have to combine work with knowledge and push both to the highest level. But why should you not take full advantage of being born as a human being? Why not use this opportunity to realize the Self so that you attain liberation in this very life? Why wait till you die?

इन्द्रियाणां पृथग्भावमुदयास्तमयौ च यत्।
पृथगुत्पद्यमानानां मत्वा धीरो न शोचति ॥६॥

*Indriyāṅāṁ pṛthagbhāvamudayāstamayau ca yat;
Pṛthagutpadyamānānām matvā dhīro na śocati.*

Prthak utpadyamānānām, having originated separately [derived separately from the five elements]; *indriyāṇām pṛthag-bhāvam*, the sense organs are distinct [from the Self]; *udayāstamayau ca yat*, [and therefore their] rise and fall [i.e., rise in the waking state and fall in the sleeping state]; [*etat*, this]; *matvā*, knowing; *dhīraḥ na śocati*, a wise man does not grieve [because he knows the Self is Pure Consciousness and is totally independent of the sense organs]

6. The sense organs have a separate origin in that they are products of the elements. They are active when an individual is awake; they are idle when he is asleep. A truly wise person knows that the Self is independent of the sense organs, and he is therefore no longer susceptible to sorrow.

An ignorant person thinks that his body, along with its organs, is his Self. This, of course, is a mistake. The Self has nothing to do with the body and its organs except that they are its tools and it may sometimes use them. The Self is always independent.

The organs are derived from the five elements. Space, air, fire, water, and earth have provided, in that order, the organs: hearing (the ears), touching (the skin), seeing (the eyes), tasting (the tongue), and smelling (the nose). The corresponding organs represent the elements in their *sāttvic* (subtle) form. These organs are all organs of perception (*jñānendriyas*). The elements in their *rājasic* (grosser) form are represented by: speech (*vāk*), hands (*pāṇi*), feet (*pāda*), the organ of evacuation (*pāyu*), and the organ

of procreation (*upastha*). These are the organs of action (*karmendriyas*). The mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) is, however, produced by all the elements combined in the *sāttvic* form.

The organs are all inanimate because they are derived from the elements. For the same reason they are also perishable. They have a beginning and an end. Moreover, when an individual is awake the organs are active; when he is sleeping they are all inert.

It must be clearly understood that the Self is independent of the organs. The Self is Pure Consciousness, but the organs are inanimate. They can work only if the Self wishes them to. If the Self leaves the body, which it does when death overtakes a person, the organs may all be intact but they do not function. This shows that the organs are helpless without the Self.

The Self has no beginning or end, as the organs do. It is always the same. An ignorant person thinks that the body-mind complex is his Self. The body-mind complex is subject to pain and pleasure, and because a person identifies himself with the body-mind complex, he is also subject to pain and pleasure. But a wise person knows that he is the Self, always the same and beyond pain and pleasure. He is therefore never susceptible to sorrow.

इन्द्रियेभ्यः परं मनो मनसः सत्त्वमुत्तमम् ।

सत्त्वादधि महानात्मा महतोऽव्यक्तमुत्तमम् ॥७॥

*Indriyebhyaḥ param mano manasaḥ sattvamuttamam;
Sattvādadhi mahānātmā mahato'vyaktamuttamam.*

Indriyebhyaḥ manaḥ param, the mind is superior to the sense organs [including the objects they perceive]; *manasaḥ sattvam uttamam*, the intellect is superior to the mind; *sattvāt mahān ātmā adhi*, superior to the intellect is the Great Self [Hiraṇyagarbha, the first manifestation of Brahman, and also the sum total of all intellects]; *avyaktam mahataḥ uttamam*, the Unmanifest [*prakṛti*, or *māyā*] is superior to the Great Self [Hiraṇyagarbha]

7. The mind is superior to the sense organs; the intellect is superior to the mind. Superior to the intellect is the Great Self [Hiraṇyagarbha]; superior to the Great Self is the Unmanifest [*avyakta*].

The mind is superior to the sense organs in the sense that the mind is subtler, though they are all products of gross matter. The intellect is superior to the mind because it is again subtler and it is also determinative in character—that is, it is capable of deciding what is right and what is wrong. The mind, however, lacks that capacity. It wavers and suffers from indecision. The Great Self, Hiraṇyagarbha, is the first manifestation of Brahman, the Self, and it is seen as the individual self of all. *Avyakta*, the Unmanifest, is also known as *prakṛti* or *māyā*. It is superior to Hiraṇyagarbha, again in the sense of being subtler.

Earlier it was stated that the Self is separate from

the sense organs. This does not mean that while the sense organs are within the body, the Self must be somewhere outside. For, if the Self were somewhere outside, one would have to look for it outside. That is not what is intended here. It is like this: The Self is supreme. Everything is derived from it. Because the Self is there, the body and the mind both have a semblance of reality. The illusion of seeing a rope as a snake is possible only if there is a rope. Similarly, the Self is the reality, and though the body and the mind are mere superimpositions on the Self, they appear to be real. But they are real only in appearance. The Self, however, is real and is entirely separate from the body and the mind.

अव्यक्तात्तु परः पुरुषो व्यापकोऽलिङ्ग एव च ।
यं ज्ञात्वा मुच्यते जन्तुरमृतत्वं च गच्छति ॥८॥

*Avyaktāttu paraḥ puruṣo vyāpako'liṅga eva ca ;
Yaṁ jñātvā mucyate janturamṛtatvaṁ ca gacchati.*

Vyāpakaḥ aliṅgaḥ eva ca puruṣaḥ, the Being [*puruṣaḥ*, the inmost being of everyone and everything] who is all-pervasive and formless; *avyaktāt tu paraḥ*, is superior even to the Unmanifest [Brahman associated with *māyā*]; *yaṁ jñātvā*, knowing him; *mucyate jantuḥ*, everyone gets liberation; *amṛtatvaṁ ca gacchati*, also attains immortality

8. The *puruṣa* [the Cosmic Self, or Brahman] is all-pervasive and formless [so there is no way of

knowing it]. If anyone knows it, he is liberated [from the cycle of birth and death] and attains immortality [even when he is alive].

The *puruṣa* is all-pervasive—even space derives itself from it. And as it is formless, there is no way of knowing it. It is beyond thought and speech, beyond the senses. The Unmanifest is Brahman associated with *māyā* but without manifestation. When manifestation takes place, it is Hiranyagarbha.

From the gross to the fine—that is how we progress. At first the gross body and its organs appear to be the reality. But the mind is finer than the body and its organs, as we find that the mind controls the body and organs. Finer than the mind is the intellect. It controls the mind. Still finer is the individual self, which controls the intellect. Then finer than the individual self is Hiranyagarbha, the Cosmic Intellect, the first manifestation of the Self, or Brahman. And still finer is the Unmanifest, *avyakta*, which is also called *māyā* or *prakṛti*. The finest is the *puruṣa*, the Cosmic Self (*paramātman*), Parā Brahman, the Absolute.

The goal of life is to know one's identity with this Parā Brahman. When a person knows this, he is free—free even in this life.

न संदशे तिष्ठति रूपमस्य
न चक्षुषा पश्यति कश्चनैनम्।

हृदा मनीषा मनसाऽभिक्लृप्तो
य एतद्विदुरमृतास्ते भवन्ति ॥१॥

*Na saṁdr̥ṣe tiṣṭhati rūpamasya
na cakṣuṣā paśyati kaścānainam;
Hṛdā manīṣā manasā'bhikṣpto
ya etaviduramṛtāste bhavanti.*

Asya rūpam, its form; *saṁdr̥ṣe na tiṣṭhati*, is not an object of vision; [*ataḥ*, therefore]; *na kaścānainam cakṣuṣā paśyati*, no one can see it by the eyes; *hṛdā manīṣā*, in the heart with the help of the [pure] intellect; *manasā*, by [constant] thinking; [*saḥ*, he, i.e., Brahman]; *abhikṣptaḥ*, is revealed; *ye etat viduḥ*, those who know it; *te*, they; *amṛtāḥ bhavanti*, become immortal

9. The Cosmic Self [*puruṣa*] is not an object of our vision. No one can see it by his eyes [or perceive it by any other sense organ]. It reveals itself in the heart only when the mind is pure and constantly thinks of it. Having realized it properly, one becomes immortal.

The Cosmic Self, referred to in the last verse, is not perceived by the senses. No one can see it or experience it by any sense organ. It reveals itself in the heart when there is great concentration of the mind and when the mind is also pure. Discarding everything else as a hindrance, the intellect directs the mind to the Self. The mind attains one-pointedness,

and then the Self, which is always within, reveals itself. This revelation takes place independent of the sense organs. When the clouds move away, the sun reveals itself. It is like that. Our desires are the clouds that hide the Self. By practising discrimination and constantly thinking of the Self, our desires are dispelled. The mind is then like a clean mirror, and the Self is seen as you see yourself in that mirror.

यदा पञ्चावतिष्ठन्ते ज्ञानानि मनसा सह ।
बुद्धिश्च न विचेष्टति तामाहुः परमां गतिम् ॥१०॥

*Yadā pañcāvatiṣṭhante jñānāni manasā saha ;
Buddhiśca na viceṣṭati tāmāhuḥ paramām gatim.*

Yadā, when; *pañca jñānāni*, the five organs of perception [namely, *cakṣu*, the eyes; *karna*, the ears; *jihvā*, the tongue; *nāsikā*, the nose; and *tvak*, the skin]; *manasā saha avatiṣṭhante*, stay with the mind [inactive]; *buddhiḥ ca na viceṣṭati*, the intellect is also idle; *tām* [*paṇḍitāḥ*] *paramām gatim āhuḥ*, [scholars] refer to as a high [spiritual] state

10. When the five organs of perception stop working, having merged with the mind, and the intellect too has retired from its work, that is a state scholars describe as being the highest spiritual state.

Here is a state anyone practising yoga will try to attain. He will turn his organs of perception inward

and make them merge with the mind. He will also give the intellect complete rest. This is described by the yogins as the highest spiritual state.

तां योगमिति मन्यन्ते स्थिरामिन्द्रियधारणाम् ।
अप्रमत्तस्तदा भवति योगो हि प्रभवाप्ययौ ॥११॥

*Tām yogamiti manyante sthirāmindriyadhāraṇām;
Apramattastadā bhavati yogo hi prabhavāpyayau.*

Tām sthirām indriya-dhāraṇām, keeping the organs still; [*yoginaḥ*, the yogins]; *yogam iti manyante*, does it as yoga; *tadā*, in that state; [*yogī*] *apramattaḥ bhavati*, [a yogin] never errs [i.e., is never again under the influence of *māyā*, mistaking the unreal for the real]; *hi*, for; *yogaḥ prabhava-apyayau*, this yogic state can rise [and] can fall [also]

11. According to the yogins, the state in which all the organs are at complete rest is yoga. In that state a yogin never makes a mistake [for instance, he is not attracted by sense pleasures because he is one with the Self]. But this yogic state may have its fall just as it has its rise.

This and the preceding verse give a definition of yoga. Yogins say that yoga is that state in which all the organs, including the mind and the intellect, are at complete rest. In that state a yogin is united with the Self, and he is then safe from worldly

temptations. But this state may not last long. The yogic state has its end just as it has its beginning. One has to be careful that when the yogic state ends, one is not trapped by the guiles of the world. One has to keep strict watch over one's thoughts and actions. The practice of discriminating between things conducive to spiritual life and things detrimental to it should always be maintained.

नैव वाचा न मनसा प्राप्तुं शक्यो न चक्षुषा ।
अस्तीति ब्रुवतोऽन्यत्र कथं तदुपलभ्यते ॥१२॥

*Naiva vācā na manasā prāptuṁ śakyo na cakṣuṣā ;
Astīti bruvato'nyatra katham tadupalabhyate.*

[*Saḥ*, that Self]; *vācā prāptum na śakyaḥ*, not anything that words can explain; *manasā na*, not conceivable by the mind; *cakṣuṣā na*, not visible to the eyes; [*saḥ*, it]; *asti*, exists; *iti bruvataḥ*, [some people] say this; *anyatra katham tat upalabhyate*, [but] how can it be demonstrated to others [i.e., to non-believers]

12. The Self [Brahman] is beyond speech and thought; the eyes [and other organs] cannot perceive it. [Yet] some people [having been inspired by the scriptures and their teachers] believe that it exists. But how can it be demonstrated to those who do not believe?

Brahman is beyond thought and speech. No sense organ can perceive it, but still some people believe

that it exists. They do so under the influence of their teachers and the scriptures they have studied. But what about the non-believers? They may very well reject the theory that Brahman exists, since there is no tangible proof of it. Is there any way of demonstrating the existence of Brahman to such people?

No, Brahman is not like an object that can be demonstrated. But that does not mean that it does not exist. Where else did this world come from? It came from Brahman. Brahman is the root of everything that exists. It is the First Cause. If there is a tree, it is to be presumed that it came from a seed, whether that seed is visible or not. Something cannot come out of nothing. Only something can produce something else. And if the world is real, it must have come out of something that is real. Unreality cannot produce reality. Brahman is therefore real, whether it is perceptible or not. The phenomenal world may totally disappear, but its support, that is, the consciousness underlying the world, will continue. Brahman is the source of all consciousness, and thus Brahman will continue. Brahman is the cause; the world is the effect. The effect may disappear, but the cause will continue. The effect will go back to the cause. As it says in the Bible, 'For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.'¹

1. Genesis 3:19.

अस्तीत्येवोपलब्धव्यस्तत्त्वभावेन चोभयोः ।

अस्तीत्येवोपलब्धस्य तत्त्वभावः प्रसीदति ॥१३॥

*Astītyevopalabdhavyastattvabhāvena cobhayoḥ ;
Astītyevopalabdhasya tattvabhāvaḥ prasīdati.*

Asti iti eva upalabdhavyaḥ, [first and foremost] that the *paramātman* [the Cosmic Self] exists has to be realized; *tattva-bhāvena ca [upalabdhavyaḥ]*, [later] its true nature has to be realized; *ubhayoḥ*, between these two [categories of people]; *asti iti upalabdhasya eva*, to those who realize that the Cosmic Self exists; *tattva bhāvaḥ prasīdati*, it reveals itself in its true nature

13. First and foremost, one has to have the realization that the Cosmic Self [the *paramātman*] exists. Next, one must try to realize the true nature of that Self. Between the two categories of people—i.e., those who have the conviction that the Cosmic Self exists and those who lack that conviction—[the chances are that] the Self will reveal itself to the former.

First one must intellectually have the conviction that the Cosmic Self exists. But this is only the beginning; one has to go much further. After this conviction, one has to intensify one's spiritual efforts so that the Self finally reveals itself. The revelation comes as an experience, direct and personal, and it takes place independent of the sense organs. With this experience, one realizes the true nature of the Cosmic Self, that the Cosmic Self is attributeless.

यदा सर्वे प्रमुच्यन्ते कामा येऽस्य हृदि श्रिताः।
अथ मर्त्योऽमृतो भवत्यत्र ब्रह्म समश्नुते ॥१४॥

Yadā sarve pramucyante kāmā ye'sya hṛdi śritāḥ;
Atha martyo'mṛto bhavatyatra brahma samaśnute.

Ye kāmāḥ, [all] those desires; *asya hṛdi śritāḥ*, [now] resting in the heart of an individual; *sarve yadā pramucyante*, [when they] all are destroyed; *atha*, then; *martyaḥ amṛtaḥ bhavati*, the mortal man becomes immortal; *atra*, in this very life; *brahma samaśnute*, attains [i.e., becomes one with] Brahman

14. When a person has all his heart's desires destroyed, he attains immortality and becomes one with Brahman in this very life.

The Kāṭha Upaniṣad again and again says that the goal of life is to attain immortality. But how can one attain it? There are some obstacles in the path, and these obstacles are desires. A person is pushed around by his desires, and he has to get rid of them. When these desires are gone, the Self reveals itself automatically. It is like removing the dirt from a mirror. When the dirt is gone, the mirror clearly reflects your face. In the same way, when your desires are gone you recognize your true identity. You recognize that you are 'the Self'. By this recognition you know that you are immortal and that you are none other than Brahman. You have this experience in this very life. It is a matter of discrimination and renunciation. By discrimination you decide what

is good for you and what is bad, and you renounce the bad. Then the mind becomes pure, and when this happens the Self automatically reveals itself.

यदा सर्वे प्रभिद्यन्ते हृदयस्येह ग्रन्थयः।

अथ मर्त्योऽमृतो भवत्येतावद्ध्यनुशासनम् ॥१५॥

*Yadā sarve prabhidyante hṛdayasyeha granthayaḥ;
Atha martyo'mṛto bhavatyetāvaddhyanuśāsanam.*

Iha, in this [very] world; *yadā*, when; *hṛdayasya sarve granthayaḥ*, the twists and turns of the mind [arising from ignorance]; *prabhidyante*, are disentangled; *atha*, then; *martyaḥ amṛtaḥ bhavati*, the mortal man becomes immortal; *etāvat anuśāsanam*, such is the message of the Vedānta scriptures; [there can be nothing higher than this]

15. When, in this very world, the mind gets rid of all its vagaries [which are products of ignorance], the mortal man begins to feel he is immortal. This is the message of the Vedānta scriptures. [There can be nothing higher than this.]

Man's trouble is with his desires. They never let him be in peace. If one desire is fulfilled, another soon takes its place, and they keep multiplying. These desires together constitute our bondage. We are like a larva caught within a cocoon of its own making. These desires arise from our ignorance—our ignorance of our real identity. We think we are the body,

and all our activities centre round it. The body is, however, a superimposition. Somehow or other we have to detach ourselves from it. We have to remind ourselves all the time that our real Self is ever free, without any entanglements. It is supreme and not subservient to anything. It is the Self of all. It is in everything, in everybody. It is all. There can be no sense of want in it. Our desires are all due to ignorance, and the best way to tackle them is to uproot them totally. If we can get rid of our desires we will be free in this very life. Because of our desires we are born again and again, so if there are no desires there will be no more birth and death. That is what is called immortality.

शतं चैका च हृदयस्य नाड्य-
स्तासां मूर्धानमभिनिःसृतैका ।
तयोर्ध्वमायन्नमृतत्वमेति
विष्वङ्ङन्या उत्क्रमणे भवन्ति ॥१६॥

*Satam caikā ca hṛdayasya nādyā-
stāsām mūrdhānamabhiniṣṛtaikā;
Tayordhvamāyannamṛtatvameti
viṣvaṅṅanyā utkramaṇe bhavanti.*

Hṛdayasya śatam ca ekā nādyah, the [human] heart has as many as one hundred and one veins [connected with it]; *tāsām ekā*, one of them; *mūrdhānam abhiniṣṛtā*, penetrates the crown of the head; *tayā*

ūrdhvam āyan, [the mortal man] going upwards along that [vein]; *amṛtatvam eti*, attains immortality; *viṣvak anyāḥ utkramaṇe bhavanti*, [but] if he goes through other veins he is reborn in different forms [not necessarily human, but even as an animal, an insect, or a plant]

16. There are one hundred and one veins connected with the human heart. One of them passes through the crown of the head. When the self of an individual goes out along this vein, the individual attains immortality. If, however, he goes out through other veins he is reborn, and his rebirth may be in a human or a subhuman form.

A person who has realized his identity with Brahman is no longer subject to birth and death. He is now free. But how does his death take place? There is one special vein attached to the heart which passes through the crown of the head. At the time of death the self travels along this vein, which is known as the *suṣumnā*. Only those who are highly advanced spiritually can die in this manner. They are people who have no attraction for things on earth or in heaven. They have totally uprooted their desires.

Other people, however, die only to be reborn, as they have many desires in their minds that are still unfulfilled. They may be reborn as humans or as animals or plants. When they die they leave their bodies through other veins.

अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः पुरुषोऽन्तरात्मा
 सदा जनानां हृदये सन्निविष्टः ।
 तं स्वाच्छरीरात्प्रवृहेन्मुञ्जादिवेषीकां धैर्येण ।
 तं विद्याच्छुक्रमृतं तं विद्याच्छुक्रमृतमिति ॥१७॥

Āṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo'ntarātmā
sadā janānām hṛdaye sanniviṣṭaḥ ;
Tam svāccharīrātpravṛhen-
muñjādiveṣīkāṁ dhairyena ;
Tam vidyācchukramamṛtam tam
vidyācchukramamṛtamiti.

Āṅguṣṭhamātraḥ antarātmā puruṣaḥ, the inmost being of the size of a thumb; *sadā janānām hṛdaye sanniviṣṭaḥ*, always lying in the hearts of all; *muñjāt iṣīkāṁ iva*, like [separating] the tender shoot from the muñja stalk; *svāt śarīrāt dhairyena tam pravṛhet*, patiently separating it from one's own body; *tam śukram amṛtam vidyāt*, know it to be pure and immortal

17. There lies in everyone's heart the inmost Self, which is the size of a thumb. Just as a tender muñja stalk is taken out of its sheath with great care, so also a person [seeking liberation] should, with the help of his discrimination, learn to separate the Self from the body and also learn to regard the Self, thus separated, as the pure and immortal Cosmic Self.

This verse says that there is one common Self everywhere and in every being. As this Self 'fills'

everything, it is called *puruṣa* [that which fills].

This Self lies hidden in the heart of every being. It is hidden by the body, the organs, and their collective activities. Here it is compared to the tender stalk within the muñja grass, which is hidden by its sheath. In order to take the stalk out of the grass, you have to separate it from the sheath with great care. Similarly, you have to separate the Self from the body and the organs. The body and the organs are all superimpositions on the Self. They are dependent on the Self, for without the Self they are dead. The Self animates them and so they work. In fact, the Self is the sole authority under whose command everything in the world moves and acts. The Self is the inmost being of everything. That is why it is not seen. As you remove the sheath of the muñja grass to get to the stalk, so also you reject the apparent self, saying, *neti, neti*—it is not this, not this. You have to exercise your power of discrimination to the utmost to get to the real—the Self. Only then do you discover the Self and realize that this Self, pure and immortal, is the common Self of all. It is also your own Self. In other words, you are one with all. When you realize this, you are free.

मृत्युप्रोक्तां नचिकेतोऽथ लब्ध्वा
 विद्यामेतां योगविधिं च कृत्स्नम्।
 ब्रह्मप्राप्तो विरजोऽभूद्विमृत्यु-
 रन्योऽप्येवं यो विदध्यात्ममेव ॥१८॥

*Mṛtyuproktām naciketo'tha labdhvā
vidyāmetām yogavidhiṁ ca kṛtsnam;
Brahmaprāpto virajo'bhūdvimṛtyu-
ranyo'pyevam yo vidadhyātmameva.*

Atha, thus; *naciketaḥ mṛtyu-proktām*, Naciketā was taught by Death; *etām vidyām* [i.e., *brahma-vidyam*] *kṛtsnam yoga-vidhiṁ ca*, this knowledge of Brahman and the whole of yoga; *labdhvā*, having attained [this knowledge]; *brahmaprāptaḥ*, became one with Brahman; *virajaḥ vimṛtyuḥ [ca] abhūt*, also became spotless and immortal; *anyaḥ api yaḥ*, similarly any other person; *adhyātmam evam vit*, who attains such knowledge [becomes the same]

18. Naciketā thus received from Death the knowledge of Brahman [i.e., that Brahman is his own Self and the Self of all] as well as the knowledge of yoga [including its rules and practices]. This helped him to attain union with Brahman and become pure and immortal. Anyone else who attains such knowledge becomes the same [i.e., pure and immortal].

The Upaniṣad gives here a eulogy of the knowledge of Brahman (which is also the knowledge of the Self), and also states the benefits of such knowledge: You become free, pure, and immortal. You realize that your self is the Cosmic Self and that you are one with everything, from Brahman down to the tiniest blade of grass. You realize the oneness of things. As there is none else but you, you are free from

fear, free from attachment, free from desires. You are then really free. You are pure; you are also immortal.

Naciketā attained this state, and anyone who follows in his footsteps can also attain it.

इति काठकोपनिषदि द्वितीयाध्याये तृतीया वल्ली ॥

Iti kāthakopaniṣadi dvitīyādhyāye tṛtīyā vallī.

Here ends the third chapter of the second part of the Kāṭha Upaniṣad.

ॐ सह नाववतु। सह नौ भुनक्तु। सह वीर्यं
करवावहै। तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै॥

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः॥

Aum Saha nāvavatu; Saha nau bhunaktu; Saha vīryam karavāvahai; Tejasvi nāvadhītamastu mā vidviṣāvahai. Aum Śāntiḥ Śāntiḥ Śāntiḥ