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Nachiketa Upakhyanam (from Katha Upanishad) - Discourse 2

We are discussing the Nachiketa Upakhyanam (Katha Upakhyanam). It gives the secrets of death, soul, and fulfillment of life. Here the Master is Yama, the Lord of death and disciple is a boy by the name Nachiketas.

Those who have realised themselves and attained immortality and working for the upliftment of others are the ones who we know as Grand Masters, Rishis and sages. All our Scriptures talk about the immortality of man and the way to attain that status.

Even all the intelligences do not know about the Lord. Lord Krishna tells the same in Bhagawadgita. Man has the capability to know God and become God.

To be born as a Nara is special. Nara is a higher state than the state of man. One who is born as a man should become a Nara by practice. So there is a difference between Man and Nara but only a Man can become a Nara. So being born as a man is a great opportunity but if you misuse it, you may not be given another opportunity.

The most important knowledge, as per Indian Scriptures, that one requires, is the knowledge of death. One should know how to overcome death and stay immortal. Then any number of sciences can be learnt because all the knowledge that you gain will fade away once you die and you have to start again fresh. But if you know to transcend death, your consciousness will remain continuous and all other knowledge remains without fading away.

The knowledge of death is given in many Scriptures. While they stand on one side, in this Scripture, the specialty is that it was given by the Lord of death himself. Who else can reveal the secret of death better than the Lord of death himself! So Kathopanishad (Katha + Upanishad) stands apart from all other Scriptures with regard to the aspect of death.

Do you know why it is called Katha? There is a secret in that. It starts with 'Ka' and ends with 'Tha'. There is a 12 petal lotus in our heart center and each petal relates to seed sound starting from Ka until Tha (for more detail please refer to Master's book On Healing)

In books they show this lotus in a circular fashion with 12 petals on its circumference. But in reality it is not so. It is a three dimensional structure where there are four layers of three petals each and arranged vertically one above the other and there is a center point above.

So this Katha Upanishad says "first travel from Mind to heart". For that practices are to be done, which requires spare time. So firstly, one should make some time. Those who reach heart, work from heart and not from mind and the values of heart are different from that of mind, in the sense they are of higher

value. So Katha Upanishad gives the knowledge required to travel from mind to heart and hence it is named so.

There is a Brahmin by name Uddalaka, who sees many people performing many different types of rituals. He gets excited and thinks that he should also perform some ritual. He thinks that if he does more pious work he would be more blessed and he can reach heaven, thinking like that he starts. We too are like that with God. Since we know that if we donate, we will receive, we start offering. So it is also like Business. That is what is called Business Management and Customer Service, now days. If customers are more satisfied he will get more business.

So thinking like this the Brahmin thinks of starting doing pious act of offering things to the needy. Nachiketa, five year old son of Uddalaka, watches what his father was offering many things. He comes to know that his father is expecting fruits and hence offering. He observes that his father is donating cows which cannot give anymore milk, which are weak, things which were useless to him, etc.

He feels sad that his father is doing a mistake, but what can a 5 year old do? So he thinks and wants to let his father know about the mistake. So he once asks his father "Father! you are donating everything, who will you donate me to?" His father was surprised but ignores his words. After sometime, he again asks his father and his father ignores him again. After sometime He again asks his father. Like this he keeps pestering his father, for a long time. His father gets very irritated with the son. The idea of the son was to inform his father that he should have been donating things which are valuable and dear and not those which he thinks are useless.

So when the son asks his father again and again, once his father loses his cool and in a fit of fury he says "I shall give you to Yama (Pluto), the Lord of Death." And Nachiketas immediately goes to Yama. See how great he is.

Similar to this, there is a story of yet another person. There was a baby boy in the womb of his mother and his father was discoursing on Brahman and Bhagavadgita, etc. The son was very disturbed by the teachings of his father, as he knew that what his father was teaching was not correct.

Like this, the baby in the womb keeps listening and feels very sad and once the baby could not contain any more and from within the womb he cries out "Father, stop speaking wrong things." The father gets angry and in his rage curses the baby to be born with 8 distortions (to the body). And the baby is born with 8 distortions. The boy was not at all perturbed by his father's curse.

When the boy was 5 years old, the father once goes to the court of Janaka to participate in the debates being done on Brahman. But he loses the debate in the hands of a scholar, who was the son of Varuna. All those who lose the debate are sent to the temple of Varuna as a punishment.

Learning about this punishment to his father, the son, who is still a 5 year old, immediately rushes to the court of Janaka. There, while entering the court, because of his 8 physical distortions, he moves in a very funny manner. Seeing this, all those learned scholars in the court of Janaka, who were participating in the debate, laugh at the boy. After they stop laughing, the boy, who has 8 distortions (because of which he is known as Asthavakra – Astha = 8 and Vakra = distortion) laughs much more loudly than all the scholars put together. Everyone is surprised that the boy, instead of getting angry, was laughing and ask him the cause for his laugh.

Then the boy says that those who came to discuss Brahman should have the vision of Brahman but if they were seeing the distortions in him and not the Brahman, it was evident to him that none of the assembled scholars are true knowers of Brahman and hence he laughed. Janaka, the king, comes and pay his respects to the boy.

So like this, we have stories of boys who are much more knowledgeable than their fathers.

Now coming back to the story of Nachiketa. Once the father says "I shall donate you to the Lord of Death," the son takes it literally and starts proceeding to the abode of the Lord of Death. He literally goes to the abode of Lord of Death. So how does he accomplish this?

Nachiketa was able to proceed to that plane because of his Sraddha (deep intent & interest). He did not like the acts of his father and knowing that the offerings of his father are not being done with Sraddha, he goes to Yama for the sake of his father.

At the beginning of Kathopanishad, it is said "One who wants to come up in life, should visualize every work of his as divine and attend to it with Sraddha." Without Sraddha, the acts are not fruitful. More the Sraddha you have, more the body cooperates with you. There must be Sraddha in every small act like talking, eating, seeing, hearing, etc. When small acts are done without Sraddha, the results go wrong. If divine activities are done without Sraddha, it may result in severe fall backs. Sraddha keeps a man in present tense. There would be no forgetfulness. Generally people forget the most important things and remember all cheap things. Sraddha ensures that you remember the most important things. So without Sraddha, there is no moving forward in the path.

There was no Sraddha in the offerings given by Uddalaka, which may result in a fall. Nachiketas did not want that to happen. So he wanted to uplift his father, which is possible by offering him (Nachiketas).

On reaching the palace of Yama, he is stopped by the guards near the entrance gate as it was not a scheduled visit. The boy stays there for three days and three nights. Later Yama, through his ministers, comes to know that there is a Brahmin boy waiting for three days and nights without food, water and sleep.

We should know that in the plane of Pluto, our one year is equal to their one day, which means the boy was waiting at the entrance for three years without food, water and sleep.

Learning about this, the Lord of death is greatly surprised at the ability of the boy. On the first hand, it is not possible for someone on their own, to reach his abode. But here there is a boy who not only came but was also waiting there for 3 days. That boy came without any prior appointment. One who comes without any appointment is a guest. It is said "A guest is equivalent to the Lord." When a guest comes to our house, he should be respected like the Lord. It is for your benefit, not for the benefit of the guest.

The Lord of death is very pleased to see such a boy and he gets him called into the palace. The Lord of death says to the boy that, "You are very small, and I am very pleased by your efforts. I give you three boons to choose."

The boy says that, “When I return back to my father, please make sure that he is no longer angry with my past behaviour.” By this boon, we should understand that Nachiketa was very sure that he will return back from the abode of Pluto. Hearing this, Yama (Pluto) becomes much more pleased. Pluto says, “May it be so. Your father shall receive you well”.

As the second boon, Nachiketa asks, “There are many who aspire to become immortal and reach heaven. So please tell me the way to reach heaven.”

In heaven, there are all devas (cosmic intelligences). Worshipping all of them is one way. Another way; Agni (fire god) is the foremost for all Devas, so Pluto gives Nachiketa a procedure of worshipping Agni to reach heaven. The worship of fire can be done both outside and inside. When done outside, it grants us wealth. When done inside, it causes inner purification. So Pluto gives a procedure to worship the fire. It has to be done 3 times a day.

The secret here is, a day with 24 hours, when divided by 3 gives 8 hours, the worship must be done 3 times with an eight hour interval, may be inside or outside. Inner worship means an endeavour to see the light within. It can be done at 4 am, 12 noon and 8 pm or 6 am, 2 pm and 10 pm. To do this regularly, it requires lot of Sraddha. We should tune our lives accordingly. Master CVV instructed to do prayer at 6 am, 6 pm and 12 noon. This is also one way. Choose the way you like, but it has to happen 3 times a day.

Pluto gives him the secret of how many bricks are to be used in the Fire Ritual. 24 bricks are required. They can be arranged with 8 in three layers or with 6 bricks in 4 layers. The arrangement should not be in Circular. It should always be in Square. To manifest, it is the square, to de-manifest, it is the circle and to keep manifesting, it is the triangle over the square.

The inner worship/prayer must be done at least 24 minutes (in total) a day.

A strong brick is also called a clinker. Clink means to make a sound. Sound, when uttered properly, results in birth of fire within, which purifies us within. Just as bricks are required to construct a temple outside, sound (clink) is required to construct the temple within.

When this is done regularly, thrice a day, wealth is developed within. Here wealth does not mean money. According to Vedas, wealth is Agni (fire), Vayu(air), Surya(sun), Indra(Neptune), Brihaspati(Jupiter) and Varuna(Cosmic twin god). It means all these intelligences are activated in us. Then purification happens and then when you close your eyes, you can see bright light within.

So Yama gives this procedure and says that the worship has to be done 3 times a day. When once the inner wealth is developed, the outer wealth comes automatically when it is required. Here outer wealth does not mean only money, it also means peace and happiness.

Then Nachiketa asks the third boon, “Since you are the Lord of Death, can you please tell me what will happen to the person who dies?”

Pluto tries to avoid the question and asks Nachiketa to ask for something else other than that question. But Nachiketa persists for a long finally Pluto answers it. But since we have three more days, let us not hurry up now. There is more detail to what I told today. We will slowly go through their conversation.

The conversation is very interesting and it is in the final part that Pluto actually reveals the about Death. Pluto actually gives Nachiketas 2 more boons unasked, as he was very pleased with Nachiketas. When we read the story it appears that the secret is revealed but one would not understand. Only those who have experienced it can only understand it and communicate it.

What is the use by reading books on the taste of mango? Will you know the taste by reading books? We know the taste only by eating it.

There are actually 130 stanzas, but since we have 3 days, we will go through the important points in these three days. So try to practice what we discuss in these 3 days. For practice we require Sraddha. If we hear without any practice, all this is useless. Just hearing should not become a habit. That hearing should be put into practice and that should bring the related transformation in. The more you, the more transformation comes in us. Sraddha is the first thing given in Katha Upanishad. So we will start with it and continue.

-Swasthi.