

May the Lord of Love protect us.
May the Lord of Love nourish us.
May the Lord of Love strengthen us.
May we realize the Lord of Love.
May we live with love for all;
May we live in peace with all.

o m *shanti shanti shanti*

II: *The Katha Upanishad*

PART I

[1]

¹ Once, long ago, Vajasravasa gave away his possessions to gain religious merit. He had a son named Nachiketa who, ² though only a boy, was full of faith in the scriptures. Nachiketa thought when the offerings were made: ³ “What merit can one obtain by giving away cows that are too old to give milk?”

⁴ To help his father understand this, Nachiketa said: “To whom will you offer me?” He asked this again and again. “To death I give you!” said his father in anger.

⁵ The son thought: “I go, the first of many who will die, in the midst of many who are dying, on a mission to Yama, king of death.

⁶ See how it was with those who came before,
How it will be with those who are living.

Like corn mortals ripen and fall; like corn
They come up again."

Nachiketa went to Yama's abode, but the king of death
was not there. He waited three days. When Yama
returned, he heard a voice say:

⁷ "When a spiritual guest enters the house,
Like a bright flame, he must be received well,
With water to wash his feet. ⁸ Far from wise
Are those who are not hospitable
To such a guest. They will lose all their hopes,
The religious merit they have acquired,
Their sons and their cattle."

YAMA

⁹ O spiritual guest, I grant you three boons
To atone for the three inhospitable nights
You have spent in my abode.
Ask for three boons, one for each night.

NACHIKETA

¹⁰ O king of death, as the first of these boons
Grant that my father's anger be appeased,
So he may recognize me when I return
And receive me with love.

Y A M A

¹¹ I grant that your father, the son of Uddalaka
and Aruna,
Will love you as in the past. When he sees you
Released from the jaws of death, he will sleep
Again with a mind at peace.

N A C H I K E T A

¹² There is no fear at all in heaven; for you
Are not there, neither old age nor death.
Passing beyond hunger and thirst and pain,
All rejoice in the kingdom of heaven.

¹³ You know the fire sacrifice that leads to heaven,
O king of death. I have full faith
In you and ask for instruction. Let this
Be your second boon to me.

Y A M A

¹⁴ Yes, I do know, Nachiketa, and shall
Teach you the fire sacrifice that leads
To heaven and sustains the world, that knowledge
Concealed in the heart. Now listen.

T H E N A R R A T O R

¹⁵ Then the king of death taught Nachiketa how to
perform the fire sacrifice, how to erect the altar for
worshipping the fire from which the universe evolves.

When the boy repeated his instruction, the dread king
of death was well pleased and said:

YAMA

¹⁶ Let me give you a special boon: this sacrifice
Shall be called by your name, Nachiketa.

Accept from me this many-hued chain too.

¹⁷ Those who have thrice performed this sacrifice,

Realized their unity with father, mother,

And teacher, and discharged the three duties

Of studying the scriptures, ritual worship,

And giving alms to those in need, rise above

Birth and death. Knowing the god of fire

Born of Brahman, they attain perfect peace.

¹⁸ Those who carry out this triple duty

Conscious of its full meaning will shake off

The dread noose of death and transcend sorrow

To enjoy the world of heaven.

¹⁹ Thus have I granted you the second boon,

Nachiketa, the secret of the fire

That leads to heaven. It will have your name.

Ask now, Nachiketa, for the third boon.

NACHIKETA

²⁰ When a person dies, there arises this doubt:

"He still exists," say some; "he does not,"

Say others. I want you to teach me the truth.
This is my third boon.

Y A M A

²¹ This doubt haunted even the gods of old,
For the secret of death is hard to know.
Nachiketa, ask for some other boon
And release me from my promise.

N A C H I K E T A

²² This doubt haunted even the gods of old;
For it is hard to know, O Death, as you say.
I can have no greater teacher than you,
And there is no boon equal to this.

Y A M A

²³ Ask for sons and grandsons who will live
A hundred years. Ask for herds of cattle,
Elephants and horses, gold and vast land,
And ask to live as long as you desire.

²⁴ Or, if you can think of anything more
Desirable, ask for that, with wealth and
Long life as well. Nachiketa, be the ruler
Of a great kingdom, and I will give you
The utmost capacity to enjoy
The pleasures of life. ²⁵ Ask for beautiful
Women of loveliness rarely seen on earth,

Riding in chariots, skilled in music,
To attend on you. But Nachiketa,
Don't ask me about the secret of death.

NACHIKETA

²⁶ These pleasures last but until tomorrow,
And they wear out the vital powers of life.
How fleeting is all life on earth! Therefore
Keep your horses and chariots, dancing
And music, for yourself. ²⁷ Never can mortals
Be made happy by wealth. How can we be
Desirous of wealth when we see your face
And know we cannot live while you are here?
This is the boon I choose and ask you for.

²⁸ Having approached an immortal like you,
How can I, subject to old age and death,
Ever try to rejoice in a long life
For the sake of the senses' fleeting pleasures?
²⁹ Dispel this doubt of mine, O king of death:
Does a person live after death or does he not?
Nachiketa asks for no other boon
Than the secret of this great mystery.

[2]

Y A M A

¹ The joy of the spirit ever abides,
But not what seems pleasant to the senses.
Both these, differing in their purpose, prompt
Us to action. All is well for those who choose
The joy of the spirit, but they miss
The goal of life who prefer the pleasant.

² Perennial joy or passing pleasure?
This is the choice one is to make always.
Those who are wise recognize this, but not
The ignorant. The first welcome what leads
To abiding joy, though painful at the time.
The latter run, goaded by their senses,
After what seems immediate pleasure.

³ Well have you renounced these passing pleasures
So dear to the senses, Nachiketa,
And turned your back on the way of the world
That makes mankind forget the goal of life.

⁴ Far apart are wisdom and ignorance.
The first leads one to Self-realization;
The second makes one more and more
Estranged from one's real Self. I regard you,
Nachiketa, as worthy of instruction,
For passing pleasures tempt you not at all.

⁵ Ignorant of their ignorance, yet wise
 In their own esteem, those deluded men
 Proud of their vain learning go round and round
 Like the blind led by the blind. ⁶ Far beyond
 Their eyes, hypnotized by the world of sense,
 Opens the way to immortality.

"I am my body; when my body dies,
 I die." Living in this superstition,
 They fall life after life under my sway.

⁷ It is but few who hear about the Self.
 Fewer still dedicate their lives to its
 Realization. Wonderful is the one
 Who speaks about the Self. Rare are they
 Who make it the supreme goal of their lives.
 Blessed are they who, through an illumined
 Teacher, attain to Self-realization.

⁸ The truth of the Self cannot come through one
 Who has not realized that he is the Self.
 The intellect cannot reveal the Self,
 Beyond its duality of subject
 And object. Those who see themselves in all
 And all in them help others through spiritual
 Osmosis to realize the Self themselves.

⁹ This awakening you have known comes not
 Through logic and scholarship, but from

Close association with a realized teacher.

Wise are you, Nachiketa, because you

Seek the Self eternal. May we have more

Seekers like you!

NACHIKETA

¹⁰ I know that earthly treasures are transient,

And never can I reach the eternal through them.

Hence have I renounced all my desires for earthly
treasures

To win the eternal through your instruction.

YAMA

¹¹ I spread before your eyes, Nachiketa,

The fulfillment of all worldly desires:

Power to dominate the earth, delights

Celestial gained through religious rites,

Miraculous powers beyond time and space.

These with will and wisdom have you renounced.

¹² The wise, realizing through meditation

The timeless Self, beyond all perception,

Hidden in the cave of the heart,

Leave pain and pleasure far behind.

¹³ Those who know they are neither body nor mind

But the immemorial Self, the divine

Principle of existence, find the source

Of all joy and live in joy abiding.
I see the gates of joy are opening
For you, Nachiketa.

NACHIKETA

¹⁴ Teach me of That you see as beyond right
And wrong, cause and effect, past and future.

YAMA

¹⁵ I will give you the Word all the scriptures
Glorify, all spiritual disciplines
Express, to attain which aspirants lead
A life of sense-restraint and self-naughting.

¹⁶ It is OM. This symbol of the Godhead
Is the highest. Realizing it one finds
Complete fulfillment of all one's longings.¹⁷
It is of the greatest support to all seekers.
When OM reverberates unceasingly
Within the heart, that one is indeed blessed
And deeply loved as one who is the Self.

¹⁸ The all-knowing Self was never born,
Nor will it die. Beyond cause and effect,
This Self is eternal and immutable.
When the body dies, the Self does not die.
¹⁹ If the slayer believes that he can kill
Or the slain believes that he can be kill,

Neither knows the truth. The eternal Self
Slays not, nor is ever slain.

²⁰ Hidden in the heart of every creature
Exists the Self, subtler than the subtlest,
Greater than the greatest. They go beyond
All sorrow who extinguish their self-will
And behold the glory of the Self
Through the grace of the Lord of Love.

²¹ Though one sits in meditation in a
Particular place, the Self within
Can exercise his influence far away.
Though still, he moves everything everywhere.

²² When the wise realize the Self,
Formless in the midst of forms, changeless
In the midst of change, omnipresent
And supreme, they go beyond sorrow.

²³ The Self cannot be known through study
Of the scriptures, nor through the intellect,
Nor through hearing discourses about it.
The Self can be attained only by those
Whom the Self chooses. Verily unto them
Does the Self reveal himself.

²⁴ The Self cannot be known by anyone
Who desists not from unrighteous ways,
Controls not the senses, stills not the mind,
And practices not meditation.

²⁵ None else can know the omnipresent Self,
Whose glory sweeps away the rituals
Of the priest and the prowess of the warrior
And puts death itself to death.

[3]

¹ In the secret cave of the heart, two are
Seated by life's fountain. The separate ego
Drinks of the sweet and bitter stuff,
Liking the sweet, disliking the bitter,
While the supreme Self drinks sweet and bitter
Neither liking this nor disliking that.
The ego gropes in darkness, while the Self
Lives in light. So declare the illumined sages
And the householders who worship
The sacred fire in the name of the Lord.

² May we light the fire of Nachiketa
That burns out the ego and enables us
To pass from fearful fragmentation
To fearless fullness in the changeless whole.

³ Know the Self as lord of the chariot,

The body as the chariot itself,

The discriminating intellect as

The charioteer, and the mind as reins.

⁴ The senses, say the wise, are the horses;

Selfish desires are the roads they travel.

When the Self is confused with the body,

Mind, and senses, they point out, he seems

To enjoy pleasure and suffer sorrow.

⁵ When a person lacks discrimination

And his mind is undisciplined, the senses

Run hither and thither like wild horses.

⁶ But they obey the rein like trained horses

When one has discrimination and

Has made the mind one-pointed. ⁷ Those who lack

Discrimination, with little control

Over their thoughts and far from pure,

Reach not the pure state of immortality

But wander from death to death; ⁸ but those

Who have discrimination, with a still mind

And a pure heart, reach journey's end,

Never again to fall into the jaws of death.

⁹ With a discriminating intellect

As charioteer and a trained mind as reins,

They attain the supreme goal of life,
To be united with the Lord of Love.

¹⁰ The senses derive from objects of sense-perception,
Sense objects from mind, mind from intellect,
And intellect from ego; ¹¹ ego from undifferentiated
Consciousness, and consciousness from Brahman.
Brahman is the First Cause and last refuge.

¹² Brahman, the hidden Self in everyone,
Does not shine forth. He is revealed only
To those who keep their minds one-pointed
On the Lord of Love and thus develop
A superconscious manner of knowing.

¹³ Meditation enables them to go
Deeper and deeper into consciousness,
From the world of words to the world of thoughts,
Then beyond thoughts to wisdom in the Self.

¹⁴ Get up! Wake up! Seek the guidance of an
Illumined teacher and realize the Self.
Sharp like a razor's edge, the sages say,
Is the path, difficult to traverse.

¹⁵ The supreme Self is beyond name and form,
Beyond the senses, inexhaustible,
Without beginning, without end, beyond
Time, space, and causality, eternal,

Immutable. Those who realize the Self
Are forever free from the jaws of death.

¹⁶ The wise, who gain experiential knowledge
Of this timeless tale of Nachiketa,
Narrated by Death, attain the glory
Of living in spiritual awareness.
Those who, full of devotion, recite this
Supreme mystery at a spiritual
Gathering are fit for eternal life.
They are indeed fit for eternal life.

PART II

[1]

¹ The self-existent Lord pierced the senses
To turn outward. Thus we look to the world
Without and see not the Self within us.
A sage withdrew his senses from the world
Of change and, seeking immortality,
Looked within and beheld the deathless Self.

² The immature run after sense pleasures
And fall into the widespread net of death.
But the wise, knowing the Self as deathless,
Seek not the changeless in the world of change.

³ That through which one enjoys form, taste,
smell, sound,

Touch, and sexual union is the Self.

Can there be anything not known to That
Who is the One in all? Know One, know all.

⁴ That through which one enjoys the waking
And sleeping states is the Self. To know That
As consciousness is to go beyond sorrow.

⁵ Those who know the Self as enjoyer
Of the honey from the flowers of the senses,
Ever present within, ruler of time,
Go beyond fear. For this Self is supreme!

⁶ The god of creation, Brahma,
Born of the Godhead through meditation
Before the waters of life were created,
Who stands in the heart of every creature,
Is the Self indeed. For this Self is supreme!

⁷ The goddess of energy, Aditi,
Born of the Godhead through vitality,
Mother of all the cosmic forces,
Who stands in the heart of every creature,
Is the Self indeed. For this Self is supreme!

⁸ The god of fire, Agni, hidden between
Two firesticks like a child well protected

In the mother's womb, whom we adore
Every day in the depths of meditation,
Is the Self indeed. For this Self is supreme!

⁹ That which is the source of the sun
And of every power in the cosmos, beyond which
There is neither going nor coming,
Is the Self indeed. For this Self is supreme!

¹⁰ What is here is also there; what is there,
Also here. Who sees multiplicity
But not the one indivisible Self
Must wander on and on from death to death.

¹¹ Only the one-pointed mind attains
This state of unity. There is no one
But the Self. Who sees multiplicity
But not the one indivisible Self
Must wander on and on from death to death.

¹² That thumb-sized being enshrined in the heart,
Ruler of time, past and future,
To see whom is to go beyond all fear,
Is the Self indeed. For this Self is supreme!

¹³ That thumb-sized being, a flame without smoke,
Ruler of time, past and future,

The same on this day as on tomorrow,
Is the Self indeed. For this Self is supreme!

¹⁴ As the rain on a mountain peak runs off
The slopes on all sides, so those who see
Only the seeming multiplicity of life
Run after things on every side.

¹⁵ As pure water poured into pure water
Becomes the very same, so does the Self
Of the illumined man or woman, Nachiketa,
Verily become one with the Godhead.

[2]

¹ There is a city with eleven gates
Of which the ruler is the unborn Self,
Whose light forever shines. They go beyond
Sorrow who meditate on the Self and
Are freed from the cycle of birth and death.
For this Self is supreme!

² The Self is the sun shining in the sky,
The wind blowing in space; he is the fire
At the altar and in the home the guest;
He dwells in human beings, in gods, in truth,
And in the vast firmament; he is the fish
Born in water, the plant growing in the earth,

The river flowing down from the mountain.

For this Self is supreme!

³ The adorable one who is seated

In the heart rules the breath of life.

Unto him all the senses pay their homage.

⁴ When the dweller in the body breaks out

In freedom from the bonds of flesh,

What remains? For this Self is supreme!

⁵ We live not by the breath that flows in

And flows out, but by him who causes the breath

To flow in and flow out.

⁶ Now, O Nachiketa, I will tell you

Of this unseen, eternal Brahman, and

What befalls the Self after death. ⁷ Of those

Unaware of the Self, some are born as

Embodied creatures while others remain

In a lower stage of evolution,

As determined by their own need for growth.

⁸ That which is awake even in our sleep,

Giving form in dreams to the objects of

Sense craving, that indeed is pure light,

Brahman the immortal, who contains all

The cosmos, and beyond whom none can go.

For this Self is supreme!

9 As the same fire assumes different shapes
When it consumes objects differing in shape,
So does the one Self take the shape
Of every creature in whom he is present.

10 As the same air assumes different shapes
When it enters objects differing in shape,
So does the one Self take the shape
Of every creature in whom he is present.

11 As the sun, who is the eye of the world,
Cannot be tainted by the defects in our eyes
Or by the objects it looks on,
So the one Self, dwelling in all, cannot
Be tainted by the evils of the world.
For this Self transcends all!

12 The ruler supreme, inner Self of all,
Multiplies his oneness into many.
Eternal joy is theirs who see the Self
In their own hearts. To none else does it come!

13 Changeless amidst the things that pass away,
Pure consciousness in all who are conscious,
The One answers the prayers of many.
Eternal peace is theirs who see the Self
In their own hearts. To none else does it come!

N A C H I K E T A

¹⁴ How can I know that blissful Self, supreme,
Inexpressible, realized by the wise?
Is he the light, or does he reflect light?

Y A M A

¹⁵ There shines not the sun, neither moon nor star,
Nor flash of lightning, nor fire lit on earth.
The Self is the light reflected by all.
He shining, everything shines after him.

[3]

¹ The Tree of Eternity has its roots above
And its branches on earth below.
Its pure root is Brahman the immortal,
From whom all the worlds draw their life, and whom
None can transcend. For this Self is supreme!

² The cosmos comes forth from Brahman and moves
In him. With his power it reverberates,
Like thunder crashing in the sky. Those who
Realize him pass beyond the sway of death.

³ In fear of him fire burns; in fear of him
The sun shines, the clouds rain, and the winds blow.
In fear of him death stalks about to kill.

⁴ If one fails to realize Brahman in this life
Before the physical sheath is shed,
He must again put on a body
In the world of embodied creatures.

⁵ Brahman can be seen, as in a mirror,
In a pure heart; in the world of the ancestors
As in a dream; in the gandharva world
As the reflections in trembling waters;
And clear as light in the realm of Brahma.

⁶ Knowing the senses to be separate
From the Self, and the sense experience
To be fleeting, the wise grieve no more.

⁷ Above the senses is the mind, above
The mind is the intellect, above that
Is the ego, and above the ego
Is the unmanifested Cause.

⁸ And beyond is Brahman, omnipresent,
Attributeless. Realizing him one is released
From the cycle of birth and death.

⁹ He is formless, and can never be seen
With these two eyes. But he reveals himself
In the heart made pure through meditation
And sense-restraint. Realizing him, one is
Released from the cycle of birth and death.

¹⁰ When the five senses are stilled, when the mind
Is stilled, when the intellect is stilled,
That is called the highest state by the wise.

¹¹ They say yoga is this complete stillness
In which one enters the unitive state,
Never to become separate again.
If one is not established in this state,
The sense of unity will come and go.

¹² The unitive state cannot be attained
Through words or thoughts or through the eye.
How can it be attained except through one
Who is established in this state oneself?

¹³ There are two selves, the separate ego
And the indivisible Atman. When
One rises above *I* and *me* and *mine*,
The Atman is revealed as one's real Self.

¹⁴ When all desires that surge in the heart
Are renounced, the mortal becomes immortal.

¹⁵ When all the knots that strangle the heart
Are loosened, the mortal becomes immortal.
This sums up the teaching of the scriptures.

¹⁶ From the heart there radiate a hundred
And one vital tracks. One of them rises