



Kathopanishad: Revelation of Axis Mundi of Atman Gyan with Nachiketa's Journey through Worlds

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ABSTRACT

Kathopanishad is significant for its philosophical dialogue about the Atman gyna revealed in Nachiketa's learning from Yama. Along with this, the initiation of Atman gyan initiates in the human world and gradually reaches the world of Yama. At the culmination of this journey of enlightenment reaches the heavenly world and culminates in the knowledge of Atman merged up with the Brahman world.

Keywords

Kathopanishad, Atman Gyan, Nachiketa, Worlds, Axis Mundi

Due to the discussion of Atman gyan contained in the Kathopanishad, it holds a special place in the series of Upanishads. It is a journey on the path of Atman that starts from Bhu Lok leading Nachiketa to take the journey to the world of Yama, which ascends to the world of Svarg Lok and finally mingling of Atman Loka with Brahman Loka. The end goal of human life is attained through the Upanishadic journey to the lower to upper realms of Brahman Loka. In this way, this Upanishad also shows man's gradual progress in attaining knowledge by going through other worlds before embarking on the path of Atman's knowledge.

Kathopanishad is one such Upanishad among the major Upanishads in which an enlightened childlike Nachiketa, with his curiosities, asked to Yamraj, also get the desired boon. In philosophical statements of this Upanishad, the path of knowledge from the earth to the Atman is contained, which starts with the Yagya performed by Nachiketa's father, in which Nachiketa's father, despite being knowledgeable, does not donate everything due to attachment like the ordinary inhabitants of the earth. Nachiketa with sattva buddhi, not knowing this behaviour to be correct, questioned his father, due to which he got angry and said about giving Nachiketa to Yama, which is not the behaviour of a truly enlightened person.

It can be said as stated in the Upanishads, but by following the knowledge given in the Upanishads, it becomes known that a truly enlightened person does not have any kind of attachment or sorrow. This shows

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the not knowing the truth by Vajsrava's son as inhabitants of the earth, in which the knowledge and actions of an ignorant person are without true knowledge.

After the Shanti Mantra of Kathopanishad, the opening of this Upanishad is about yagya performed by the Vajsravasa to perform good deeds. But the performance of such a desired action is not free from all kinds of ignorant deeds. But, this kind of sacrifice made young boy Nachiketa inquire about it. Nachiketa knew the essence of knowledge which caused him to think that there is some wrong practice in Yajna due to which even a child-like Nachiketa is forced to ask questions to his father. Nachiketa wished good for his father as this kind of Yagya of charity will lead his father to the bliss less realms.

“anandā nāma te lokās tān sa gacchata tā dadat” (Kathopanishad 1.1.3)

Instead of understanding the truth, Vajsravasah gave up on his patience when repeatedly questioned by Nachiketa and forgot the true nature of the seeker and in anger ordered Nachiketa to go to Yama,

“dvitīyaṁ ṛtīyam; taṁ hovāca: mṛtyave tvā dadāmi” (Kathopanishad 1.1.4).

Nachiketa goes to the world of Yama as per the order of his father which is out of rage. This kind of fault in human beings shows the shortcomings of human beings which keeps them devoid of the knowledge of Brahman Loka. His father shouldn't have behaved in anger because it would lead a person far away from the path of Atman Gyan. This kind of action will keep human beings in the cycle of death and birth in human instead of freeing them from the bondage of the earthly world. This is the initiation of Kathopanishad from Bhu Lok and Nachiketa's father's order makes him enter the world of Yama. Although Nachiketa goes to Yama's house as per his father's orders and with his self-confidence learns from Yam about the knowledge of Atman Loka which will lead finally to Brahman Loka.

Instead of being patience, Nachiketa's father got agitated which leads degradation of a sadhak. Nachiketa understood, even his father could not understand, that only through selfless action can one attain the Atman Loka.

The Yagya performed by Nachiketa's father's donation reflects the ignorant behaviour done by human beings in normal life in which humans do many such deeds which are not in harmony with knowledge. It is truly said in the knowledge of Upanishads that no action is complete without knowledge and no knowledge is complete without action, as Ishavasyo Upanishad also says, the one who knows about Vidya and Avidha simultaneously is the one who is free from the path of Karma. After crossing death, one attains the immortal world through knowledge,

“vidyāṁ cāvidyāṁ ca yas tad vedobhayam saha
avidyayā mṛtyuṁ tīrtvā vidyayāmṛtam aśnute” (Ishavasyopanishad, Mantra 11)

This Upanishad not only reveals the earthly knowledge but also presents Yama Loka, which shows in the dialogue of Nachiketa and Yamraj of this Upanishad in which the philosophical thinking of this Upanishad ranges from the earth world to the knowledge of the Atman traveling through Yama Loka.

Nachiketa asked for his father's happiness in the first boon which shows that even going to the Yam world he hasn't stopped thinking about his father who is residing on Prithivi Loka. Here is a picture of two worlds where at one time Nachiketa is in the world of Yam and his father is on the earth. This Upanishad is the emulation of the earthly world of Yam. Nachiketa is sure that he will go back and will meet his father.

“Śānta-saṁkalpaḥ sumanā yathā syād
vīta-manyur gautamo mābhi mṛtyo,
tvat-prasṛṣṭam mābhivadet pratīta,
etat trayāṇām prathamam varam vṛṇe.” (Kathopanishad 1.1.10)

In Nachiketa's first boon itself, while asking for the boon of happiness from his father who resides in the earth world, the scenario of the earth world is also presented along with Nachiketa who went to Yama world. Here the first boon asked by Nachiketa shows his confidence that he will go back from Yama Loka to Prithivi Loka.

In the course of asking for his boon, Nachiketa, after getting the first boon from Yamraj, the lord of Yama, for the happiness of his father living on earth, asks for the second boon from Yamraj regarding the selection of fire for entering heaven. In Kathopanishad, successive worlds have been discussed, which makes it an object of philosophical discussion about many worlds. Before asking about the fire selection method of heaven, Nachiketa also tells about his understanding of heaven which is said to be a world where there is no fear of any kind., hunger, With old age, there is no fear of God Yam of death. This heavenly world is described as a place that is a state beyond all kinds of worldly sorrows.

Nachiketa is asked to take the vast earth before he can understand the secret of enlightenment.

“bhūmer mahad-āyatanaṁ vṛṇīṣva” (Kathopanishad 1.1.23)

Nachiketa understands that after knowing the immortal gods, no person would want to go back to the earth and suffer sorrow, rather Nachiketa remains determined to know the knowledge of the next world i.e. enlightenment.

Next Nachiketa starts to ask Yam Dev about the medium to reach the heavenly world. He wants to know about the selection of fire to enter the world of heaven. Kathopanishad leads the dialogue of Nachiketa and Yam from Earthly to Brahman Loka. Before requesting the second boon, Nachiketa exhibits his knowledge whatever he understood by the essence of Svarg Loka. It is a place that is free from all kinds of sadness, old age, and fear of death. This is such a place where the God of death Yama also doesn't have any control. Svarga Loka is thus described as a place that is free from all kinds of sorrows and mental worries.

Svarge loke na bhayaṁ kiṁ ca nāsti

na tatra tvaṁ na jarayā bibheti.
ubhe tīrtvā aśanāyā pipāse
śokātigo modate svarga-loke (Kathopanishad 1.1.12)

The knowledge of Agni selection, sought as the second boon, is said to be the cause of many worlds. Heaven is a state in which man goes beyond suffering and becomes situated in bliss. Svarga Loka is described as a place that can be known only through the Agni Chayan vidha method explained by Yama which can be understood only by a knowledgeable child-like Nachiketa.

Those people go to the world of Yama whose only selfish actions are performed without knowing the true knowledge. The ignorant person who hasn't understood the path of Atman gyan enjoys only worldly things and thinks that is everlasting,

“Na sāmparāyaḥ pratibhāti bālam pramādyantaṁ vittamohena mūḍham: ayaṁ loko nāsti para iti mānī, punaḥ punar vaśam āpadyate me.” (Kathopanishad 1.2.6)

Yamraj says to Nachiketa that these kinds of people are getting into his clutches repeatedly because they remain ignorant about the existence of Atman gyan which can lead them to Brahman Loka.

Nachiketa's father's purpose in performing the Yagya was virtuous, but the way he was donating did not seem selfless to Nachiketa. To save his father from such a knowledgeable act, a child with such a virtuous mind tried to do so. He expressed curiosity as to whom he would be given. A good seeker should never behave in an angry, impulsive manner. This is the reason that in Kathopanishad, the journey to Atman world is said a difficult one. The journey on the path of Atman is difficult so one should follow the sayings of Atman Gyani who has known the truth of Atman world.

“Uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata: kṣurasya dhārā niśītā duratyayā; durgam pathas tat kavayo vadanti” (Kathopanishad 1.3.14)

In Kathopanishad itself, two paths desired and followed by humans have been discussed. In Kathopanishad, a wonderful coordination of the world of transcendence and supreme knowledge is visible. It has been told about common and ascetic people who have adopted worldly and transcendent Brahman knowledge.

“Anyac chreyo anyad utaiva preyaste” (Kathopanishad 1.2.1)

Yamraj while giving Nachiketa the knowledge of Atman. He tells him it is not easy to realize the knowledge of Atman and meditation Upasna is a method to know Atman and reach the realms of Brahman Loka. of Atman. Aumkar which will lead to Sadhak to attain the Brahman Loka. The meditation omkar is said the source to reach the realms of Brahman Loka.

“etad ālambanaṁ jñātvā brahma-loke mahīyate” (Kathopanishad 1.2.17)

Describing Nachiketa as the result of Omkar worship, it is said that the one who adopts this path of worship attains Brahman Loka and becomes equal to Brahma. After hearing, practicing, and meditating about the true knowledge of Self one attains Brahman Loka.

Whoever understands this reality instead of being ignorant that kind of person will attain the brahman and becomes one with Brahman tattva.

“uktvā śrutvā ca medhāvī brahma-loka mahīyate” (Kathopanishad 1.3.16)

When describing Atman there is mention of many Lokas which means there are existence of these is supported. The essence of Atman is reflected in different worlds in spheres of consciousness,

Yathādarśe tathātmani, yathā svapne tathā pitṛ-loke, yathāpsu parīva dadṛśe, tathā gandharva-loka chāyā-tapayor iva brahma-loke (Kathopanishad 2.3.5)

Atman is said as the cause of all kinds of lights and enlightenment. This is the only element that makes other entities of the universe shine

Na tatra sūryo bhāti na candra-tāarakam,

nemā vidyuto bhānti, kuto'yam agniḥ;

tameva bhāntam anubhāti sarvaṁ

tasya bhāsā sarvaṁ idaṁ vibhāti (Kathopanishad 2.2.15)

Thus, the journey of Nachiketa began from earth and led to the house of Yama. In this conversation, many other realms are also crossed from Surya, Gandharva, pitṛ, and reach to the supreme realms of Brahman Loka. This philosophical journey culminates only in one element which is Atman.

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