The Katha Upanishad
of the Black Yajurveda

THE FIRST CYCLE; FIRST CHAPTER

1. Vajasravasa, desiring, gave all he had. Now Vajasravasa had a son named Nachiketas.

2. As the gifts were led past, faith took possession of him who was yet a boy unwed and he pondered:

3. “Cattle that have drunk their water, eaten their grass, yielded their milk, worn out their organs, of undelight are the worlds which he reaches who gives such as these.”

4. He said to his father, “Me, O my father, to whom wilt thou give?” A second time and a third he said it, and he replied, “To Death I give thee.”

5. “Among many I walk the first, among many I walk the midmost; something Death means to do which today by me he will accomplish.”
6. “Look back and see, even as were the men of old, — look round! — even so are they that have come after. Mortal man withers like the fruits of the field and like the fruits of the field he is born again.”

His attendants say to Yama:

7. “Fire is the Brahmin who enters as a guest the houses of men; him thus they appease. Bring, O son of Vivasvan, the water of the guest-rite.

8. “That man of little understanding in whose house a Brahmin dwells fasting, all his hope and his expectation and all he has gained and the good and truth that he has spoken and the wells he has dug and the sacrifices he has offered and all his sons and his cattle are torn from him by that guest unhonoured.”

9. “Because for three nights thou hast dwelt in my house, O Brahmin, a guest worthy of reverence, — salutation to thee, O Brahmin, on me let there be the weal, — therefore three boons do thou choose; for each night a boon.”

1 Yama, lord of death, is also the master of the Law in the world, and he is therefore the child of the Sun, luminous Master of Truth from which the Law is born.
10. “Tranquilised in his thought and serene of mind be the Gautama, my father, let his passion over me pass away from him; assured in heart let him greet me from thy grasp delivered; this boon I choose, the first of three.”

11. “Even as before assured in heart and by me released shall he be, Auddalaki Aruni, thy father; sweetly shall he sleep through the nights and his passion shall pass away from him, having seen thee from death’s jaws delivered.”

12. “In heaven fear is not at all, in heaven, O Death, thou art not, nor old age and its terrors; crossing over hunger and thirst as over two rivers, leaving sorrow behind the soul in heaven rejoices.

13. “Therefore that heavenly Flame\(^2\) which thou, O Death, studiest, expound unto me, for I believe. They who win their world of heaven, have immortality for their portion. This for the second boon I have chosen.”

\(^2\) The celestial force concealed subconsciously in man’s mortality by the kindling of which and its right ordering man transcends his earthly nature; not the physical flame of the external sacrifice to which these profound phrases are inapplicable.
14. “Hearken to me and understand, O Nachiketas; I declare
to thee that heavenly Flame, for I know it. Know this to be
the possession of infinite existence and the foundation and
the thing hidden in the secret cave of our being.”

15. Of the Flame that is the world’s beginning he told him and
what are the bricks to him and how many and the way of
their setting; and Nachiketas too repeated it even as it was
told; then Death was pleased and said to him yet farther;

16. Yea; the Great Soul was gratified and said to him, “Yet a
farther boon today I give thee; for even by thy name shall this
Fire be called; this necklace also take unto thee, a necklace of
many figures.

17. “Whoso lights the three fires of Nachiketas and comes to
union with the Three and does the triple works, beyond
birth and death he crosses; for he finds the God of our

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3 The Divine Force concealed in the subconscious is that which has originated and built up the worlds. At the other end in the superconscious it reveals itself as the Divine Being, Lord and Knower who has manifested Himself out of the Brahman.

4 The necklace of many figures is Prakriti, creative Nature which comes under the control of the soul that has attained to the divine existence.

5 Probably, the divine force utilised to raise to divinity the triple being of man.

6 Possibly, the three Purushas, soul-states or Personalities of the divine Being, indicated by the three letters AUM. The highest Brahman is beyond the three letters of the mystic syllable.

7 The sacrifice of the lower existence to the divine, consummated on the three planes of man’s physical, vital and mental consciousness.
adoration, the Knower⁸ who is born from the Brahman, whom having beheld he attains to surpassing peace.

18. “When a man has the three flames of Nachiketas and knows this that is Triple, when so knowing he beholds the Flame of Nachiketas, then he thrusts from in front of him the meshes of the snare of death; leaving sorrow behind him he in heaven rejoices.

19. “This is the heavenly Flame, O Nachiketas, which thou hast chosen for the second boon; of this Flame the peoples shall speak that it is thine indeed. A third boon choose, O Nachiketas.”

20. “This debate that there is over the man who has passed and some say ‘This he is not’ and some that he is, that, taught by thee, I would know; this is the third boon of the boons of my choosing.”

21. “Even by the gods was this debated of old; for it is not easy of knowledge, since very subtle is the law of it. Another boon choose, O Nachiketas; importune me not, nor urge me; this, this abandon.”

⁸ The Purusha or Divine Being, Knower of the Field, who dwells within all and for whose pleasure Prakriti fulfils the cosmic play.
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22. "Even by the gods was this debated, it is sure, and thou
thou hast said that it is not easy of knowledge; never shall
I find another like thee, to tell of it, nor is there any other
boon that is its equal."

23. "Choose sons and grandsons who shall live each a hun-
dred years, choose much cattle and elephants and gold and
horses; choose a mighty reach of earth and thyself live for
as many years as thou listest.

24. "This boon if thou deemest equal to that of thy asking,
choose wealth and long living; possess thou, O Nachiketas,
a mighty country; I give thee thy desire of all desirable things
for thy portion.

25. "Yea, all desires that are hard to win in the world of mortals,
all demand at thy pleasure; lo, these delectable women with
their chariots and their bugles, whose like are not to be
won by men, these I will give thee; live with them for thy
handmaidens. But of death question not, O Nachiketas."

9 Yama is the knower and keeper of the cosmic Law through which the soul has to rise
by death and life to the freedom of Immortality.
26. “Until the morrow mortal man has these things, O Ender, and they wear away all this keenness and glory of his senses; nay, all life is even for a little. Thine are these chariots and thine the dancing of these women and their singing.

27. “Man is not to be satisfied by riches, and riches we shall have if we have beheld thee and shall live as long as thou shalt be lord of us. This boon and no other is for my choosing.

28. “Who that is a mortal man and grows old and dwells down upon the unhappy earth, when he has come into the presence of the ageless Immortals and knows, yea, who when he looks very close at beauty and enjoyment and pleasure, can take delight in overlong living?

29. “This of which they thus debate, O Death, declare to me, even that which is in the great passage; than this boon which enters in into the secret that is hidden from us, no other chooses Nachiketas.”

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10 Life being a figure of death and Death of life, the only true existence is the infinite, divine and immortal.
THE FIRST CYCLE; SECOND CHAPTER

Yama speaks:

1. One thing is the good and quite another thing is the pleasant, and both seize upon a man with different meanings. Of these whoso takes the good, it is well with him; he falls from the aim of life who chooses the pleasant.

2. The good and the pleasant come to a man and the thoughtful mind turns all around them and distinguishes. The wise chooses out the good from the pleasant, but the dull soul chooses the pleasant rather than the getting of his good and its having.

3. And thou, O Nachiketas, hast looked close at the objects of desire, at pleasant things and beautiful, and thou hast cast them from thee; thou hast not entered into the net of riches in which many men sink to perdition.

4. For far apart are these, opposite, divergent, the one that is known as the Ignorance and the other the Knowledge. But Nachiketas I deem truly desirous of the knowledge whom so many desirable things could not make to lust after them.
5. They who dwell in the ignorance, within it, wise in their own wit and deeming themselves very learned, men bewildered are they who wander about round and round circling like blind men led by the blind.

6. The childish wit bewildered and drunken with the illusion of riches cannot open its eyes to see the passage to heaven; for he that thinks this world is and there is no other, comes again and again into Death’s thraldom.

7. He that is not easy even to be heard of by many, and even of those that have heard they are many who have not known Him,—a miracle is the man that can speak of Him wisely or is skilful to win Him, and when one is found, a miracle is the listener who can know God even when taught of Him by the knower.

8. An inferior man cannot tell you of Him; for thus told thou canst not truly know Him, since He is thought of in many aspects. Yet unless told of Him by another thou canst not find thy way there to Him; for He is subtler than subtlety and that which logic cannot reach.
9. This wisdom is not to be had by reasoning, O beloved Nachiketas; only when told thee by another it brings real knowledge,—the wisdom which thou hast gotten. Truly thou art steadfast in the Truth! Even such a questioner as thou art may I meet with always.

Nachiketas speaks:

10. I know of treasure that it is not for ever; for not by things unstable shall one attain That which is stable; therefore I heaped the fire of Nachiketas, and by the sacrifice of transitory things I won the Eternal.

Yama speaks:

11. When thou hast seen in thy grasp, O Nachiketas, the possession of desire and firm foundation of this world and an infinity of power and the other shore of security and praise and scope and wide moving and firm foundation, wise and strong in steadfastness thou didst cast these things from thee.

12. Realising God by attainment to Him through spiritual Yoga, even the Ancient of Days who hath entered deep into that which is hidden and is hard to see, for he is established in our secret being and lodged in the cavern heart of things, the wise and steadfast man casts far from him joy and sorrow.

11 Or, “and great fame chanted through widest regions”.

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13. When mortal man has heard, when he has grasped, when he has forcefully separated the Righteous One from his body and won that subtle Being, then he has delight, for he has got that which one can indeed delight in. Verily I deem of Nachiketas as a house wide open.

Nachiketas speaks:

14. Tell me of That which thou seest otherwhere than in virtue and otherwhere than in unrighteousness, otherwhere than in the created and the uncreated, otherwhere than in that which has been and that which shall be.

Yama speaks:

15. The seat and goal that all the Vedas glorify and which all austerities declare, for the desire of which men practise holy living, of That will I tell thee in brief compass. OM is that goal, O Nachiketas.

16. For this Syllable is Brahman, this Syllable is the Most High: this Syllable if one know, whatsoever one shall desire, it is his.

17. This support is the best, this support is the highest, knowing
this support one grows great in the world of the Brahman.

18. That Wise One is not born, neither does he die; he came not from anywhere, neither is he anyone; he is unborn, he is everlasting, he is ancient and sempiternal, he is not slain in the slaying of the body.

19. If the slayer think that he slays, if the slain think that he is slain, both of these have not the knowledge. This slays not, neither is He slain.

20. Finer than the fine, huger than the huge the Self hides in the secret heart of the creature: when a man strips himself of will and is weaned from sorrow, then he beholds Him, purified from the mental elements he sees the greatness of the Self-being.

21. Seated He journeys far off, lying down He goes everywhere. Who other than I is fit to know God, even Him who is rapture and the transcendence of rapture?

22. Realising the Bodiless in bodies, the Established in things unsettled, the Great and Omnipresent Self, the wise and steadfast soul grieves no longer.
23. The Self is not to be won by eloquent teaching, nor by brain power, nor by much learning: but only he whom this being chooses can win Him, for to him this Self bares His body.

24. None who has not ceased from doing evil, or who is not calm, or not concentrated in his being, or whose mind has not been tranquillised, can by wisdom attain to Him.

25. He to whom the sages are as meat and heroes as food for His eating and Death is an ingredient of His banquet, how thus shall one know of Him where He abideth?

Yama speaks:

1. There are two that drink deep of the Truth in the world of work well accomplished: they are lodged in the secret plane of being and in the highest kingdom of the most High is their dwelling: as of light and shade the knowers of the Brahman speak of them and those of the five fires and those who have the three fires of Nachiketas.
2. May we have strength to kindle Agni Nachiketas, for he is the bridge of those who do sacrifice and he is Brahman supreme and imperishable, and the far shore of security to those who would cross this ocean.

आत्मानं रथिनं विष्णु शरीरं नमो तु।
बुझं तु साराथि विष्णु मनः क्राह्मणं च || ॥

3. Know the body for a chariot and the soul for the master of the chariot: know Reason for the charioteer and the mind for the reins only.

इद्ध्यात्मानः हृदयादिबिष्णूयांस्युः गोपाराः।
आत्माग्यात्मायांस्युः भोक्तात्मायथानारिमण: || ॥

4. The senses they speak of as the steeds and the objects of sense as the paths in which they move; and One yoked with Self and the mind and the senses is the enjoyer, say the thinkers.

यस्तविष्णवानुभवत्युक्तं मनसं सदा।
तस्योऽन्नाग्याप्रयात्यातं हुः साराथे: || ॥

5. Now he that is without knowledge with his mind ever unapplied, his senses are to him as wild horses and will not obey the driver of the chariot.

यस्तु विष्णवानु भवति युक्तं मनसं सदा।
तस्योऽन्नाग्याप्रयात्यातं हुः साराथे: || ॥

6. But he that has knowledge with his mind ever applied, his senses are to him as noble steeds and they obey the driver.

यस्तविष्णवानुभवत्युक्तं भवति सदाः शुचि: ।
न स तत्वदमानोति संसारं चाभिग्रह्यत् || ॥

7. Yea, he that is without knowledge and is unmindful and is ever unclean, reaches not that goal, but wanders in the cycle of phenomena.
8. But he that has knowledge and is mindful and pure always, reaches that goal whence he is not born again.

9. That man who uses the mind for reins and the knowledge for the driver, reaches the end of his road, the highest seat of Vishnu.

10. Than the senses the objects of sense are higher; and higher than the objects of sense is the Mind; and higher than the Mind is the faculty of knowledge; and than that is the Great Self higher.

11. And higher than the Great Self is the Unmanifest and higher than the Unmanifest is the Purusha: than the Purusha there is none higher: He is the culmination, He is the highest goal of the journey.

12. The secret Self in all existences does not manifest Himself to the vision: yet is He seen by the seers of the subtle by a subtle and perfect understanding.
13. Let the wise man restrain speech in his mind and mind in his self of knowledge, and knowledge in the Great Self, and that again let him restrain in the Self that is at peace.

उद्भिज्ञ जात्रायत ज्ञानः स्मरागितं।
शून्यः भावः निजित्स दर्त्यया दूरं प्रस्तवत् कवयो वदति || ५४||

14. Arise, awake, find out the great ones and learn of them; for sharp as a razor’s edge, hard to traverse, difficult of going is that path, say the sages.

अशीतकर्म्रुणस्मरणं तथारसं नित्यमथवच्छ यत्।
अनाज्ञतं महः: परं भूतं निवाद्य तमून्यम्यात् श्रमम्यते || ५५||

15. That in which sound is not, nor touch, nor shape, nor diminution, nor taste, nor smell, that which is eternal, and It is without end or beginning, higher than the Great Self and stable, — that having seen, from the mouth of death there is deliverance.

नाचिकेतसुपार्थानं गृह्युव्रेष्टं सनातनम।
उद्भिज्ञवा ज्ञातं च मेधावी भ्रातानं कहूँयथं || ५६||

16. The man of intelligence having spoken or heard the eternal story of Nachiketas wherein Death was the speaker, grows great in the world of the Brahman.

य इमं परमं गृह्यं ज्ञातं वे भ्रातामं समसंहरित।
ज्ञातं ज्ञातानं वा तदानन्त्याय कल्पने।
तदानन्त्याय कल्पनं इति || ५७||

17. He who being pure recites this supreme secret at the time of the Shraddha in the assembly of the Brahmins, that turns for him to infinite existence.
THE SECOND CYCLE; FIRST CHAPTER

Yama said:

1. The Self-born hath set the doors of the body to face outward, therefore the soul of a man gazeth outward and not at the Self within; hardly a wise man here and there desiring immortality turneth his eyes inward and seeth the Self within him.

2. The rest childishly follow after desire and pleasure and walk into the snare of Death who gapeth wide for them. But calm souls having learned of immortality seek not for permanence in the things of this world that pass and are not.

3. By the Self one knoweth taste and form and smell, by the Self one knoweth sound and touch and the joy of man with woman; what is there left in this world of which the Self not knoweth? This is the thing thou seest.

4. The calm soul having comprehended the great Lord, the omnipresent Self by whom one beholdeth both to the end of dream and to the end of waking, ceaseth from grieving.
5. He that hath known from very close this Eater of sweetness, the Jiva, the Self within that is lord of what was and what shall be, shrinketh not thereafter from aught nor abhorreth any. This is the thing thou seekest.

6. He is the seer that seeth Him who came into being before austerity and was before the waters; deep in the heart of the creature he seeth Him, for there He standeth by the mingling of the elements. This is the thing thou seekest.

7. This is Aditi, the mother of the Gods, who was born through the Prana and by the mingling of the elements had her being; deep in the heart of things she has entered, there she is seated. This is the thing thou seekest.

8. As a woman carrieth with care the unborn child in her womb, so is the Master of knowledge lodged in the tinders, and day by day should men worship him who live their waking life and stand before him with sacrifice; for he is that Agni. This is the thing thou seekest.

9. He from whom the sun riseth and to whom the sun returneth, and in Him are all the Gods established,—none passeth beyond Him. This is the thing thou seekest.
10. What is in this world is also in the other, and what is in the other, that again is in this; who thinketh he sees difference here, from death to death he goeth.

11. Through the mind must we understand that there is nothing in this world that is really various; who thinketh he sees difference here, from death to death he goeth.

12. The Purusha who is seated in the midst of ourself is no larger than the finger of a man. He is the lord of what was and what shall be; Him having seen one shrinketh not from aught nor abhorreth any. This is the thing thou seekest.

13. The Purusha that is within is no larger than the finger of a man; He is like a blazing fire that is without smoke, He is lord of His past and His future. He alone is today and He alone shall be tomorrow. This is the thing thou seekest.

14. As water that raineth in the rough and difficult places, runneth to many sides on the mountain-tops, so he that seeth separate law and action of the one Spirit, followeth in the track of what he seeth.
15. But as pure water that is poured into pure water, even as it
was such it remaineth, so is it with the soul of the thinker
who knoweth God, O seed of Gotama.

THE SECOND CYCLE; SECOND CHAPTER

Yama said:

1. The Unborn who is not devious-minded hath a city with
eleven gates; when He taketh up his abode in it, He grieveth
not, but when He is set free from it, that is His deliverance.
This is the thing thou seekest.

2. Lo, the Swan whose dwelling is in the purity, He is the Vasu
in the interregions, the Sacrificer at the altar, the Guest in
the vessel of the drinking; He is in man and in the Great
Ones and His home is in the Law and His dwelling is in
the firmament; He is all that is born of water and all that is
born of earth and all that is born of the mountains. He is
the Truth and He is the Mighty One.

3. This is He that draweth the main breath upward and casteth
the lower breath downward. The Dwarf that sitteth in the
centre, to Him all the Gods do homage.
4. When this encased spirit that is in the body falleth away from it, when He is freed from its casing, what is there then that remaineth? This is the thing thou seekest.

5. Man that is mortal liveth not by the breath, no, nor by the lower breath; but by something else we live in which both these have their being.

6. Surely, O Gautama, I will tell thee of this secret and eternal Brahman and likewise what becometh of the soul when one dieth.

7. For some enter a womb to the embodying of the Spirit and others follow after the Immovable; according to their deeds is their goal and after the measure of their revealed knowledge.

8. This that waketh in the sleepers creating desire upon desire, this Purusha, Him they call the Bright One, Him Brahman, Him Immortality, and in Him are all the worlds established; none goeth beyond Him. This is the thing thou seekest.
9. Even as one Fire hath entered into the world but it shapeth itself to the forms it meeteth, so there is one Spirit within all creatures but it shapeth itself to form and form; it is likewise outside these.

10. Even as one Air hath entered into the world but it shapeth itself to the forms it meeteth, so there is one Spirit within all creatures but it shapeth itself to form and form; it is likewise outside these.

11. Even as the Sun is the eye of all this world, yet it is not soiled by the outward blemishes of the visual, so there is one Spirit within all creatures, but the sorrow of this world soils it not, for it is beyond grief and his danger.

12. One calm and controlling Spirit within all creatures that maketh one form into many fashions; the calm and strong who see Him in the self as in a mirror, theirs is eternal felicity and 'tis not for others.

13. The One Eternal in many transient, the One Conscious in many conscious beings, who being One ordereth the desires of many; the calm and strong who behold Him in the self as in a mirror, theirs is eternal peace and 'tis not for others.
14. “This is He,” is all they can realise of Him, a highest felicity which none can point to nor any define it. How shall I know of Him whether He shineth or reflecteth one light and another?

15. There the Sun cannot shine and the moon has no lustre; all the stars are blind; there our lightnings flash not, neither any earthly fire. For all that is bright is but the shadow of His brightness and by His shining all this shineth.

THE SECOND CYCLE; THIRD CHAPTER

1. This is the eternal uswattha tree whose roots are aloft, but its branches are downward. It is He that is called the Bright One and Brahman and Immortality, and in Him are all the worlds established; none goeth beyond Him. This is the thing thou seekest.

2. All this universe of motion moveth in the Prana and from the Prana also it proceeded; a mighty terror is He, yea, a thunderbolt uplifted. Who know Him are the immortals.
3. For fear of Him the fire burneth, for fear of Him the sun giveth heat, for fear of Him Indra and Vayu and Death hasten in their courses.

4. If in this world of men and before thy body fall from thee, thou art able to apprehend it, then thou availest for embodiment in the worlds that are His creations.

5. In the self one seeth God as in a mirror but as in a dream in the world of the fathers, and as in water one seeth the surface of an object, so one seeth Him in the world of the Gandharvas; but He is seen as light and shade in the heaven of the Spirit.

6. The calm soul having comprehended the separateness of the senses and the rising of them and their setting and their separate emergence putteth from him pain and sorrow.

7. The mind is higher than the senses, and above the mind is the thought, and above the thought is the mighty Spirit, and above the Mighty One is the Unmanifest.
8. But highest above the Unmanifest is the Purusha who pervadeth all and alone hath no sign nor feature. Mortal man knowing Him is released into immortality.

9. He hath not set His body within the ken of seeing, neither doth any man with the eye behold Him, but to the heart and mind and the supermind He is manifest. Who know Him are the immortals.

10. When the five senses cease and are at rest and the mind resteth with them and the Thought ceaseth from its workings, that is the highest state, say thinkers.

11. The state unperturbed when the senses are imprisoned in the mind, of this they say “it is Yoga”. Then man becomes very vigilant, for Yoga is the birth of things and their ending.12

12. Not with the mind hath man the power to see God, no, nor by speech nor with the eye. Unless one saith “He is,” how can one become sensible of Him?

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12 Shankara interprets, “As Yoga hath a beginning (birth) so hath it an ending.” But this is not what the Sruti says.
13. One must apprehend Him in the concept “He is” and also in His essential principle, but when he hath grasped Him as the Is, then the essential of Him dawneth upon a man.

γάρ σαν τον ναμβ εις κανά σαν τον κανά καταλήγει.

14. When every desire that harboureth in the heart of a man hath been loosened from its moorings, then this mortal putteth on immortality; even here he enjoyeth Brahman in this human body.

γάρ τα σαν τον ναμβ εις καταλήγει σαν τον ναμβ εις καταλήγει.

15. When all the strings of the heart are rent asunder, even here in this human birth, then the mortal becometh immortal. This is the whole teaching of the Scriptures.

16. A hundred and one are the nerves of the heart and of all these only one issueth out through the head of a man; by this the soul mounteth up to its immortal home but the rest lead him to all sorts and conditions of births in his passing.

17. The Purusha, the Spirit within, who is no larger than the finger of a man is seated for ever in the heart of creatures; one must separate Him with patience from one’s own body as one separates from a blade of grass its main fibre. Thou
shalt know Him for the Bright Immortal, yea, for the Bright Immortal.

18. Thus did Nachiketas with Death for his teacher win the God-knowledge; he learned likewise the whole ordinance of the Yoga: thereafter he obtained Brahman and became void of stain and void of death. So shall another be who cometh likewise to the science of the Spirit.