

The **Katha Upanishad** (Kathopanishad) - Complete

“Death as the Teacher”

Eknath Easwaran Translation

PART I

[1]

1. Once, long ago, Vajasravasa gave away his possessions to gain religious merit. 2. He had a son named Nachiketa who, 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, 8. With water to wash his feet. 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.

YAMA

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.

NACHIKETA

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.

YAMA

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.

THE NARRATOR

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.

YAMA

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.

NACHIKETA

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.

YAMA

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 25. The pleasures of life. 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 27. And music, for yourself. 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]

Having tested young Nachiketa and found him fit to receive spiritual instruction, Yama, king of death, said:

YAMA

1. The joy of the Atman ever abides, But not what seems pleasant to the senses. Both these, differing in their purpose, prompt Man to action. All is well for those who choose The joy of the Atman, 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. The wise recognize these two, 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 Which 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 his real Self. I regard you, Nachiketa, worthy of instruction, For passing pleasures tempt you not at all.

5. Ignorant of their ignorance, yet wise In their own esteem, these deluded men Proud of their vain learning go round and round 6. Like the blind led by the blind. 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. They 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

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 O M. 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. Those in whose hearts O M reverberates Unceasingly are 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 slay Or the slain believes that he can be slain, 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 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 learned discourses. 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 his senses, stills not his 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 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 one 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. Those who lack Discrimination, with little control Over their thoughts and far from pure, Reach not the pure state of immortality 8. But wander from death to death; 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 mind 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 Outside 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 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!

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 7. What befalls the Self after death. 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!

NACHIKETA

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

YAMA

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 himself?
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 To the crown of the head. This way leads To immortality, the others to death.
17. The Lord of Love, not larger than the thumb, Is ever enshrined in the hearts of all. Draw him clear out of the physical sheath As one draws the stalk from the munja grass. Know thyself to be pure and immortal! Know thyself to be pure and immortal!

THE NARRATOR

Nachiketa learned from the king of death The whole discipline of meditation. Freeing himself from all separateness, He won immortality in Brahman So blessed is everyone who knows the Self!

O M shanti shanti shanti

Selections From The *Chandogya Upanishad*

There was [a boy named] Svetaketu Aruneya, and his father said to him, "Svetaketu, go live as a seeker of Brahman! Verily, dear boy, in our family there is no one without learning, [no one who is but] a brahmin by virtue of birth only, as it were."

Having become a pupil at 12 years old and having studied all the Vedas, he returned [home] at 24, proud, conceited, thinking himself well-schooled. Then his father said to him:

"Svetaketu, since you are proud and conceited, dear boy, and consider yourself learned, did you ask for that instruction by which that which is not heard becomes heard, [that which is] not thought becomes thought, and [that which is] not known becomes known?" Svetaketu replied, "But in what manner, sir, is this teaching?"

"Just as from a single lump of clay, dear boy, one would know about everything made from clay, the difference being a mere verbal distinction, a name, the reality is only 'clay.' Just as from one lump of copper, dear boy, one would know about everything made from copper, the difference being a mere verbal distinction, a name, the reality is only 'copper.' As from a single nail-scissor, dear boy, one would know about all iron objects, the difference being a mere verbal distinction, a name, the reality is only 'iron,' this is that teaching, dear boy."

Svetaketu replied, "Indeed, those worthy men did not know this, for if they had known it why did they not tell me? Sir, please tell it to me."

"Certainly, dear boy," the father replied.

"In the beginning, dear boy, this world was Being--One only, without a second. To be sure, some say that in the beginning this world was only non-Being, one only without a second, and that from that non-Being Being was born. "But, dear boy, how could this be?" he said, "how could Being be produced from non-Being? In the beginning there was Being alone, one only, without a second."

[After this preliminary discourse on the nature of Brahman as that which is the source of all other things, we come back in the ninth chapter of book six, where Svetaketu's father talks of the relationship between Brahman and the individual human being.]

"As bees, dear boy, produce honey by gathering together the nectars from the flowering trees in every direction, those nectars become one single honey. And just as those nectars do not get the idea 'I am the nectar of this tree, I am the nectar of that tree,' indeed in the very same way, dear boy, all these beings, having sprung from Being, do not know 'We have sprung from Being.' Whatever they are in this world--tiger, lion, wolf, bear, worm, flying insect, biting insect, or mosquito--that they become. That which is the finest essence, the whole universe has That as its soul. That is Reality, That is the Self, and That is you, Svetaketu!"

"O Blessed One, instruct me further."

"Certainly, dear boy," he replied. "As these rivers flow, dear boy, the eastern ones to the east, the western ones to the west, they go from the sea to the sea alone, they become the sea itself. Just as there they do not know 'I am this one, I am that one...' In the same way, dear boy, all these beings, although they have come from Being, do not know 'We

have come from Being.' [Whatever] they are in this world--tiger, lion, wolf, bear, worm, flying insect, biting insect, or mosquito--that they become. That which is the finest essence, the whole universe has That as its soul. That is Reality, That is the Self, and That is you, Svetaketu!"

"O Blessed One, instruct me further."

"Certainly, dear boy," the father replied. The father said, "Bring a fig from over there."

"Here it is, sir."

"Divide it."

"It is divided, sir."

"What do you see there?"

"These rather small seeds, sir."

"Divide one."

"It is divided, sir."

"What do you see?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Dear boy," he said to him, "that finest essence which you do not perceive, from this very essence, dear boy, that great fig tree arises. Believe me, dear boy, that which is the finest essence, the whole universe has That as its soul. That is Reality, That is the Self, and That is you, Svetaketu!"

"O Blessed One, instruct me further."

"Certainly, dear boy," he replied. "Place this salt in water, and in the morning come to me." Svetaketu did exactly so, and the father said to him, "the salt that you put in the water last night, bring it hither." But while Svetaketu grasped for it he could not find it, since it had completely dissolved.

"Take a sip from the edge of it," said the father. "What is there?" "Salt." "Take a sip from the middle. What is there?" "Salt." "Take a sip from the far edge. What is there?" "Salt." "Set it aside and come to me." And [the boy] did exactly that, [saying] "It is always the same." He said to him, "Being is indeed truly here, dear boy, but you do not perceive it here. That which is the finest essence, the whole universe has That as its soul. That is Reality, That is the Self, and That is you, Svetaketu!"