

SUMMARY OF KATHOPANISAD

-N. Avinashilingam

INTRODUCTION: Kathopanisad belongs to Krsna Yajur Veda. It contains 2 adhyayas (chapters) . Each adhyaya contains 3 vallis (sections). It totally contains 119 mantras.

SANTIH MANTRA: The well known “**Saha nav vavatu**” is the **santih mantra**. The student prays that may the Lord protect both the Teacher and the Student and nourish their knowledge. May both of them put adequate effort so that the knowledge is effective. May there be no misunderstanding between them. May he be free of obstacles from himself, surroundings and from the environment.

ADHYAYA 1 : VALLI 1:

STORY: Vajasravasa performed visvajit yajna for gaining svarga. He gave away all his wealth to the Priests as daksina in this ritual. In the last stage he gave away his last possession of old cows. His son Naciketas felt that the gifting of useless cows was not proper. He asks his father to whom he will be given. In anger his father told that he will be given to Yama. Naciketas said that the word given in yajna must be upheld and goes to Yama loka.

Yama had gone out. Naciketas waited for three nights outside his house. Yama on returning found that a Brahmana had waited outside his house for three nights without food. To free himself from any papa due to this omission he gave three boons to Naciketas.

THREE BOONS: By the first boon, Naciketas asked that when we went back home, his father should recognize him and be kind to him. By the second boon, he asked for knowing the details of a ritual for gaining svarga. By **the third boon, he asked for knowledge of atma.**

TEST BY YAMA: Yama instead of atma jnana offered wealth, kingdom, family life, people, longevity, celestial women, dance and music. Naciketa rejected all of them as impermanent. He told that let the vehicles, dance and music remain with Yama himself. **Naciketas proved that he was a qualified student to receive atma jnana.**

ADHYAYA 1 : VALLI 2:

SREYAS & PREYAS: Yama praised Naciketa for choosing sreyas (permanent good) instead of preyas (temporary pleasure). **The message for spiritual seekers is that they should examine and choose sreyas.** The Guru, Sishya and atma vidya are all extraordinary. The indescribable is described.

ATMA TATVAM: Atma is of the nature of consciousness. Atma is birthless, changeless and deathless. Atma survives the death of the body. Atma is neither the doer nor the enjoyer. Atma is bigger than the biggest and subtler than the subtlest. **Omkaara upasana may be practiced to purify the mind.**

QUALIFICATIONS OF THE SEEKER: The seeker having the **four fold qualification** alone can gain this knowledge. The seeker should live a **dharmic life** and have **an integrated personality.**

ADHYAYA 1 : VALLI 3:

RATHA KALPANA: An analogy of travel in the chariot is presented. Life is compared to travel in the chariot, Jivatma is compared to the Master of the chariot, physical body is compared to the chariot, intellect is compared to the driver of the chariot, mind is compared to reins, senses organs are compared to the horses, sense objects are compared to the road and sreyas/ preyas is compared to the destination.

The driver holding the reins properly, will have the horses under his control and take the Master to the proper destination. **Similarly one having a discriminative intellect will have the mind and sense organs under his control and will reach the destination of sreyas in this life.**

In Bhagavat Gita, this is illustrated as Krishna Arjuna samvada in a chariot.

JNANA SADHANAM: 'UTTISHTA! JAGRATA!' QUOTED BY SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AS ARISE! AWAKE! IS WELL KNOWN. One should wake up from the sleep of self ignorance and make sincere efforts to gain atma jnana. Under the guidance of a traditional Guru one should do sravana, manana and nidihiyasana. One should understand that Brahman is not an object of sense organs like sound, touch, colour, taste and smell.

ADHYAYA 2 : VALLI 1:

ATMA SVARUPAM: The sense organs are made to perceive the external world. Hence majority of the people go for enjoying the sensory world. Only a discriminative person knowing that atma is changeless, does not desire changing things. **Atma as consciousness perceives all objects in all the three states.** Isvara wielding the power of maya and Jiva under the spell of maya are one. Isvara as the samasti principle of the subtle world known as Hiranyagarbha and Jiva are one. Isvara as the samsti principle of the gross world known as Virat and Jiva are one. The one who knows this does not desire to protect himself.

Atma jnana should be known through the mind. **Atma (as though of the size of the thumb) is (as though) located in the heart (buddhi).** Water rained on a mountain runs down the slopes and disappear. Similarly one who sees the apparent differences as real will be destroyed. Clear water dropped in clear water remains clear. Similarly atma remains pure although it resides in different bodies.

ADHYAYA 2 : VALLI 2:

JNANA SADHANAM: Atma is like a city with eleven gates. **When the wrong notion that I am the body is gone, one becomes free.** Atma is seated in the heart and makes one breath. When prana goes away nothing is left out. Jiva gets different births according to their karma and upasana. **The well known mantra “yathakarma yathasrutham” explains this principle.** Atma is wrongly identified as waker, dreamer or sleeper, while it is the consciousness during all these states. Fire and Air assume different forms in different objects. Similarly atma (as though) assumes different forms in different beings. Sun does not get affected by lighting up impure objects. Similarly atma remains as ananda, although it sustains dukha. **Non dual atma is the inner controller of all beings. Remaining formless it transforms into manifold forms.**

Atma cannot be illumined by sun, moon, stars, lightning or fire. Everything shines after the self effulgent atma. **The well known mantra “na tatra suryo bhati” explains this principle.** This mantra is chanted during arathi.

ADHYAYA 2 : VALLI 3:

ATMA JNANA PHALA: This jagat is like an asvatthah tree. Brahman is like the root of this tree. Just like the tree can be felled, samsara can be destroyed by atma jnana.

All sorrow is at vyasti level. When one looks at the samasti level, there is no difference and no sorrow. The one who knows atma has no grief. Brahman is manifest as various orders in this jagat. Brahman cannot be objectified by sense organs.

This upanisad mentions the word “dharana” and “dhyana”. These yogic practices help the seeker to get concentration during the study of the Sastra.

Avidya, kama and karma are the knots of the heart (mind). Atma jnana cuts these knots. **The one who gains this knowledge gains freedom from sorrow, binding desires and death. He gains jivan-mukti and videha-mukti.**

The one who does karma and upasana and who fails to get atma jnana in this janma, will go to Brahma loka. There he will be taught by Brahmaji and will get atma jnana.

CONCLUSION: Naciketas gained atma jnana from Lord Yama. Anyone else knowing atma can also gain this.