



Glory of Bharath » Bharatheeya Samskrithi

Yajur Vedic Upanishads - I

The **Katha Upanishad** (Kathopanisad, also Kathaka), is associated with the Caraka-Katha school of the Black Yajurveda, and is grouped with the Sutra period of Vedic Sanskrit. It has some passages in common with the Gita. It propounds a dualistic philosophy.

The Upanishad uses as its base the story of Vajasravasa (alluded to in Rigveda), a poor and pious Brahmin who performs a sacrifice and gives away all his worldly possessions as reward to the priests, which included a few old and feeble cows. His son, **Nachiketa**, feeling disturbed by the inappropriateness of his father's observance of the sacrifice, proposes that he himself may be offered as payment. As he insisted, his father said in anger, "Unto Yama, I give thee.", whereupon Nachiketa goes to the abode of Yama, and, finding him absent, waits there for three days and nights. Yama on his return, offers to grant him three wishes.



Lord Yama with Nachiketa

Nachiketa wishes the following:

1. to be allowed to return to his father alive;
2. to be instructed as to the proper performance of Vedic fire-sacrifice in order to gain immortality;
3. to be given knowledge about life after death.

Yama grants the first wish immediately. In answer to Nachiketas' second question, Yama expounds the performance of a special fire-sacrifice, which he states is to be named after Nachiketa. Yama tries to avoid answering the third question and offers all sorts of worldly pleasures instead, but Nachiketa insists. The remainder of the text contains Yama's teaching concerning true immortality. It notably includes the parable of the chariot. Yama's parable consists of the following equations:

"**Atman**, the "Self" is the chariot's passenger, the body is the chariot itself, Consciousness (**buddhi**) is the chariot driver, the mind (**manas**) is the reins, the **five senses (indriya)** are the chariot horses and the objects perceived by the senses are the chariot's path"

The Katha Upanishad is also notable for first introducing the term **yoga** for spiritual exercise: "When the five organs of perception become still, together with the mind, and the intellect ceases to be active: that is called the highest state. This firm holding back of the senses is what is known as Yoga."

The **Taittiriya Upanishad** forms the seventh, eighth and ninth chapters of the Taittiriya Aranyaka of the Krishna Yajur Veda. These chapters are known as Siksha Valli, Ananda Valli and Bhriгу Valli, respectively.

The **Siksha Valli**, which is the first chapter of the Upanishad consists of twelve lessons or Anuvakas concerning various types of meditations and ethical rules to be practiced by the seeker to make his mind pure and fit to receive the teachings above the Supreme God contained in the next two chapters. Meditations of various types are suggested to help the mind to gain steadiness. The thought of the seeker entangled in the intricate domestic and religious rituals are lifted to the level of cosmic contemplation. Material rewards are also promised as aids to spiritual evolution. There is a prayer for prosperity, good health, mental efficiency, good memory, sweet speech and general fitness to receive the bliss of immortality. The ethical principles and practices necessary for the aspirant are clearly stated. The tenth lesson describes how the accomplished sage Trisanku narrates his experience of God-realisation.

The second chapter, **Ananda Valli**, declares that the knowledge of the Absolute God alone can destroy ignorance and thus remove the misery of trans-migratory existence. He who knows Brahman attains the Supreme. The all-pervading Brahman is also man's inner most self or subtlest essence within the cavity of the heart. But man is not conscious of it because the Self is covered or obscured, as it were, by many layers of ignorance in the form of sheaths or Kosas of varying degrees of subtlety and grossness. These sheaths constitute the gross, subtle and causal bodies of man. The same Brahman dwells in the hearts of all as consciousness and manifests itself in all acts of cognition. Brahman is also described as self-made, which means: It is both the material and the efficient cause of the universe. It is cause of everything but in itself without a cause. It is also defined as Existence, Knowledge and Infinite Bliss. He who realises his identity with God enjoys Supreme Bliss compared to which the happiness enjoyed on earth and heaven are nothing.

The third chapter, **Bhriгу Valli**, teaches knowledge of Brahman through a dialogue between teacher and

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disciple. The teacher tells his disciple to concentrate all his energies and inquire into the nature of the different sheaths to find out if any of them can be Brahman or God. The disciple is guided stage by stage through the different Kosas and finding everyone of them falling short of the ideal, he transcends all the Kosas and reaches the Atman at the innermost core.

In the later sections of this chapter are given meditations on food as Brahman. Food or matter is said to be the basis of all organic creation, and on the body, resulting from food, rests the final spiritual realisation. The contemplation of food as Brahman is eulogised in several lessons. It may be said that the Taittiriya Upanishad contains many outstanding teachings on philosophy and religious discipline, which deserve to be studied earnestly and meditated upon by all seekers of God.



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