

KATHA UPANISHAD

This Upanishad uses a story (katha) involving a young Brahmin boy called Nachiketa to reveal the truths of this world and the other beyond the veil.

1. Three Gifts from Death
2. Realizing the Soul
3. The Chariot Analogy
4. This Truly is That
5. The Mystery of God
6. Immortality

Zealously Vajashrava gave away all his possessions. He had a son named Nachiketas. As the gifts were being offered, faith entered him, although he was merely a boy. He thought, "Their water drunk, their grass eaten, their milk milked, their organs worn out-- joyless surely are the worlds to which he goes who gives such." He said to his father, "Papa, to whom will you give me?" A second and third time he asked. To him then he said, "To Death I give you." "Of many I go as the first; of many I go in the middle. What has Death to do with me today? Consider how it was with those of old; look how it will be with those to come. Like grain a mortal ripens; like grain one is born again." "Like a fire a priest enters a house as a guest. Make a peace offering; bring water, son of the sun. Hope and expectation, friendship and joy, sacrifices and good works, sons and cattle, all are taken away from a person of little understanding in whose house a priest remains unfed." "Since you have stayed in my house as a sacred guest for three nights without food, I salute you, priest. May it be well with me. Therefore in return choose three gifts." "May Gautama with anxiety allayed and anger gone be kind to me, O Death, and recognizing me, welcome me when I am released by you; this I choose as the first gift of the three." "As before will Auddalaki, son of Aruna, recognize you, and by my power his sleep will be sweet at night without anger, seeing you released from the jaws of death."

"In the heavenly world is no fear whatever. You are not there, nor does anyone fear old age. Having crossed over both hunger and thirst, leaving sorrow behind one rejoices in the heavenly world. Death, you know that sacred fire that leads to heaven. Explain it to me who has faith how those in heaven gain immortality. This I choose as my second gift." "Knowing well that sacred fire which leads to heaven I will explain it to you. Listen and learn from me. Attainment of the infinite world and also its support, know this to be in the secret place." He told him of the fire of creation, what bricks, how many, and how laid. And he repeated it just as it was told. Then pleased with him, Death spoke again. Delighted the great soul said to him, "I give you here today another gift. By your name will this fire be called. Receive also this garland of many figures. Whoever has lit the triple Nachiketas fire, having attained union with the three, performing the triple work, crosses over birth and death. By knowing the knower born of God, the god to be praised, by revering one goes to eternal peace. Whoever has lit the triple Nachiketas fire, having known this triad, and so knowing builds up the Nachiketas fire, throwing off first the bonds of death and overcoming sorrow, rejoices in the heavenly world. This is the heavenly fire, Nachiketas, which you chose as your second gift. This fire people will call by your name. Choose now, Nachiketas, the third gift." "There is doubt concerning people who are deceased. Some say they exist, and others say they do not exist. Being taught by you, I would know this. Of the gifts, this is the third gift." "Even the gods of old had doubt as to this. It is not easy to understand, so subtle is this law. Choose another gift, Nachiketas. Do not press me; release me from this one." "Even the gods had doubt as to this, and you, Death, say it is not easy to understand. And another teacher of it like you is not to be found. No other gift is comparable to this at all."

"Choose sons and grandsons who shall live a century, many cattle, elephants, gold, and horses. Choose a great estate of land and live as many years as you want. If you think this is an equal gift, choose wealth and long life. Nachiketas, be the ruler of a great country; I will make you the enjoyer of your desires. Whatever desires are hard to get in the mortal world, request all those desires at your pleasure. Here are lovely maidens with chariots and music; these are not to be attained by anyone. Be served by these whom I give you. Nachiketas, do not ask about death." "Transient are the things of mortals, Ender, wearing away all the vigor of their senses. Even a full life is short. Yours be the chariots; yours be the dance and song. A person cannot be satisfied with wealth. Shall we enjoy wealth when we have

seen you? Shall we live so long as you are in power? This is the gift to be chosen by me. Having approached undecaying immortality, what decaying mortal on this earth below that understands, that contemplates the pleasures of beauty and enjoyment, would delight in an over-long life? This about which they doubt, Death, what there is in the great passing-on—tell us that. This gift that penetrates the mystery, no other than that does Nachiketas choose." 2 "The good is one thing, and the pleasant quite another. Both of these with different purposes bind a person. Of these two, well is it for the one who takes the good; failure of aim is it for the one who chooses the pleasant. The good and the pleasant come to a person. The thoughtful mind looking all around them discriminates. The wise chooses the good in preference to the pleasant. The fool out of getting and having prefers the pleasant. You, Nachiketas, having examined desires that are pleasant and that seem to be pleasing, have rejected them. You have not taken that chain of wealth in which many mortals sink down. "Opposite and widely divergent are these two: ignorance and what is known as knowledge. I think Nachiketas desires knowledge, for many desires do not distract you. Those who are in ignorance, thinking themselves wise and learned, running here and there, go around deluded like the blind led by one who is blind. "The passing-on is not clear to the childish or careless or those deluded by the glamour of wealth. Thinking 'This is the world; there is no other;' they fall again and again into my power. This which cannot even be heard of by many, that many even hearing do not know, wonderful is the one who can teach this, and skillful the one who can learn it, wonderful the one who knows even when proficiently taught. This taught by an inferior person is not well understood, being considered in many ways. Unless taught by another, there is no going to it, for it is inconceivably more subtle than the subtle. Not by reasoning is this thought to be attained. Taught by another, it is well understood, dear friend. You have obtained it, holding fast to the truth. May we find an inquirer like you, Nachiketas." "I know that riches are impermanent, and that stability is not attained by the unstable. Therefore the Nachiketas fire has been laid by me, and by sacrificing the impermanent I have reached the eternal." "The obtaining of desire, the foundation of the world, the endlessness of power, the other shore of fearlessness, the greatness of fame, the wide expanses, the foundation, you, wise Nachiketas, have steadily let them go. That which is hard to see, entering the hidden, set in the secret place, dwelling in the primal depth, by meditating on this as God through the uniting of the soul, the wise person leaves joy and sorrow behind. Hearing this and comprehending, a mortal extracting what is concerned with virtue, and subtly taking this, rejoices, having attained the source of joy. I know that such a home is open to Nachiketas." "Aside from virtue and aside from vice, aside from what is done and what is not done here, aside from what has been and what is to be, what you see as that, tell me that." "The word which all the Vedas glorify, and which all austerities proclaim, desiring which people live as holy students— that word I tell you briefly is AUM. This word truly is God; this word is supreme. Knowing this very word, whatever one desires is gained. This support is the best; this support is the highest. Knowing this support, one becomes great in the world of God.

"The wise soul is not born nor does it die. This one has not come from anywhere nor has it become anyone. Unborn, eternal, constant, primal, this one is not killed when the body is killed. If the killer thinks to kill, if the killed thinks oneself killed, both of these do not understand. This does not kill nor is it killed. "Smaller than the small, greater than the great, is the soul set in the heart of every creature. The one who is not impulsive sees it, freed from sorrow. Through the grace of the creator one sees the greatness of the soul. Sitting one travels far; lying one goes everywhere. Who else but myself can know the god of joy and sorrow. The one who is bodiless among bodies, stable among the unstable, the great all-pervading soul— on realizing this, the wise grieve no longer. "This soul cannot be attained by instruction nor by intellectual ability nor by much learning. It is to be attained only by the one this one chooses. To such a one the soul reveals its own self. Not those who have not ceased from bad conduct, not those who are not tranquil, not those who are not composed, not those who are not of a peaceful mind, can attain this by intelligence. The one for whom the priesthood and the nobility are as food, and death is as a sauce, who knows where this one is? 3 "There are two who drink of justice in the world of good works. Both are lodged in the secret place and in the highest plane. Knowers of God speak of them as light and shade, as do those who maintain the five sacrificial fires, as those also who perform the triple Nachiketas fire. That bridge for those who sacrifice, and which is the highest imperishable God for those who wish to cross over to the fearless farther shore, that Nachiketas fire may we master. "Know the soul as lord of a chariot, the body as the chariot. Know the intuition as the chariot driver, and the mind as the reins. The senses, they say, are the horses; the objects of sense the paths. This associated with the body, the senses and the mind, he wise call 'the enjoyer.' "Those who do not have understanding, whose minds are always undisciplined, their senses are out of control, like the wild horses of a chariot driver. "Those, however, who have understanding, whose minds are always disciplined, their senses are under control, like the good horses of a chariot driver. "Those, however, who have no understanding, who are unmindful and always impure, do not reach the goal but go on to reincarnation. "Those, however, who have understanding, who are mindful and always pure, reach the goal from which they are not born again. Those who have the understanding of a chariot driver, controlling the reins of the mind, they reach the end of the journey, the supreme home of Vishnu. "Beyond the senses are the objects of sense. Beyond the objects of sense is the mind. Beyond the mind is the intuition. Beyond the intuition is the great soul. Beyond the great is the unmanifest. Beyond the unmanifest is Spirit. Beyond the Spirit

there is nothing at all. That is the end; that is the final goal. "Though hidden in all beings the soul is invisible. It is seen by the subtle seers through their sharp and subtle intelligence. An intelligent person should restrain speech in mind, and mind should be restrained in the knowing soul. The knowing soul should be restrained in the intuitive soul. That should be restrained in the peaceful soul. "Arise! Awake! Having attained your gifts, understand them. Sharp as the edge of a razor and hard to cross, difficult is this path, say the sages. What has no sound nor touch nor form nor decay, likewise is tasteless, eternal, odorless, without beginning or end, beyond the great, stable, by discerning that, one is liberated from the mouth of death. "The Nachiketas story, Death's ancient teaching-- by telling and hearing it, the wise become great in the world of God.

Whoever recites this supreme secret before an assembly of priests, or devoutly at the time of the ceremonies for the dead, this prepares one for immortality. This prepares one for immortality. 4 "The self-existent pierced the openings outward; therefore one looks outward, not inside the soul. A certain wise person, however, seeking immortality, looking within saw the soul. "The childish go after outward pleasures; they walk into the net of widespread death. But the wise, aware of immortality, do not seek the stable among things which are unstable here. That by which form, taste, smell, sound, and caressing are discerned is with that. What is there that remains? This truly is that. "By recognizing as the great, omnipresent soul that by which one perceives both the dream state and the waking state, the wise person does not grieve. Whoever knows this honey-eater as the living soul close-by, Lord of what has been and what will be, one does not shrink away from it. This truly is that. "The ancient one born from discipline, the ancient one born from the waters, who stands having entered the secret place and looked forth through beings-- this truly is that. "She who arises with life, infinity, the soul of the gods, who stands having entered into the secret place, who was born with the beings. This truly is that. "Agni, the all-knower hidden in the fire-sticks like the embryo well born by pregnant women, worthy to be worshipped day by day by watchful people with oblations. This truly is that. "From where the sun rises and where it goes to rest; in it are all gods founded, and no one ever goes beyond it. This truly is that. "Whatever is here, that is there. Whatever is there, that also is here. Whoever seems to see a difference here goes from death to death. "By the mind is this to be attained: there is no difference here at all. Whoever seems to see a difference here goes from death to death. "Spirit, the size of a thumb, lives in the middle of one's soul, Lord of what has been and what will be. One does not shrink away from it. This truly is that. "Spirit, the size of a thumb, like a flame without smoke, Lord of what has been and what will be. It is the same today and tomorrow. "As water raining upon the mountains runs down the hills on many sides, so whoever views virtues separately runs to waste after them. As pure water poured into pure water stays the same, so is the soul, Gautama, of the seer who has understanding. 5 "By ruling over the city of eleven gates, the unborn who is not devious-minded does not grieve, but when set free is truly free. This truly is that. "The swan in the sky, the god in the atmosphere, the priest at the altar, the guest in the house, in people, in gods, in justice, in the sky, born in water, born in cattle, born in justice, born in rock, is justice, the great one. Upwards it leads the out-breath, downwards it casts the in-breath. The dwarf who sits in the center all the gods reverence. When this incorporate one that is in the body slips off and is released from the body, what is there that remains? This truly is that. "Not by the out-breath and the in-breath does any mortal live. Buy by another do they live on which these both depend. "Look, I shall explain to you the mystery of God, the eternal, and how the soul fares after reaching death, Gautama. Some enter a womb for embodiment; others enter stationary objects according to their actions and according to their thoughts. "Whoever is awake in those that sleep, the Spirit who shapes desire after desire, that they call the bright one. That is God; that indeed is called the immortal. On it all the worlds rest, and no one ever goes beyond it. This truly is that. "As one fire has entered the world and becomes varied in shape according to the form of every object, so the one inner soul in all beings becomes varied according to whatever form and also exists outside. "As one air has entered the world and becomes varied in shape according to the form of every object, so the one inner soul in all beings becomes varied according to whatever form and also exists outside. "As the sun, the eye of the world, is not defiled by the external faults of the eyes, so the inner soul in all beings is not defiled by the evil in the world, being outside it. "The inner soul in all beings, the one controller, who makes this one form manifold, the wise who perceive this standing in oneself, they and no others have eternal happiness. "The one eternal among the transient, the conscious among the conscious, the one among the many, who grants desires, the wise who perceive this standing in oneself they and no others have eternal happiness. "This is it. Thus they recognize the ineffable supreme happiness. How then may I understand this? Does it shine or does it reflect? The sun does not shine there, nor the moon and the stars; lightning does not shine there, much less this fire. After that shines does everything else shine. The whole world is illuminated by its light. 6 "Its root is above, its branches below this eternal fig tree. That is the bright one. That is God. That is called immortal. On it all the worlds rest, and no one ever goes beyond it. This truly is that. "The whole world, whatever here exists, was created from and moves in life. The great awe, the upraised thunderbolt - they who know that become immortal. "From awe of it fire burns; from awe the sun gives heat; from awe both Indra and wind and death, the fifth, speed on their way. "If one is able to perceive here on earth before the body falls away, according to that one becomes fit for embodiment in the world-creations. "As in a mirror, so is it seen in the soul; as in a dream, so in the world of the parents; as is seen in water, so in the world of the spirits; as light and shade in the world of God. "Recognizing the separate nature of

the senses and their rising and setting apart, the wise does not grieve. Beyond the senses is the mind; above the mind is true being; over true being is the great soul; above the great is the unmanifest. Higher than the unmanifest is Spirit, all-pervading and without any mark whatever. Knowing this a mortal is liberated and reaches immortality. "This form is not to be observed. No one ever sees it with the eye. It is apprehended by the heart, by the thought, by the mind. They who know that become immortal. "When the five sense perceptions together with the mind cease, and the intuition does not stir, that, they say, is the highest state. This they consider to be uniting, the steady control of the senses. Then one becomes undistracted, for uniting is the arising and the passing away. "Not by speech, not by mind, not by sight, can this be apprehended. How can this be comprehended except by the one who says, 'It is.' It can be comprehended only as existent and by the real nature in both ways. When it is comprehended as existent, its real nature becomes clear. "When every desire found in the human heart is liberated, then a mortal becomes immortal and here one attains to God. When all the knots of the heart here on earth are cut, then a mortal becomes immortal. So far is the teaching. "There are a hundred and one channels of the heart. One of them rises up to the crown of the head. Going upward through that, one becomes immortal. The others are for going in various directions. "Spirit, the size of a thumb, is the inner soul, always seated in the heart of creatures. This one should draw out from one's own body, like an arrow-shaft out from a reed, steadily. This one should know as the bright one, the immortal. Yes, this one should know as the bright one, the immortal." Then Nachiketas gaining this knowledge taught by Death and the whole discipline of uniting, attained God and became free from emotion and from death; and so may any other who knows this concerning the soul.