



RAMĀ ŚAKTI MISSION

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The story of Nachiketha is a chalice of ambrosia by drinking a drop of which one becomes awake, immortal and eternally blessed. This ambrosia is knowledge of the Self, Atma Jnana.

Though small in age, Nachiketha represents the glorious spiritual heritage of ancient India. A seeker of the highest competency, Nachiketha shines as the embodiment of the great spiritual virtues on the path of Brahmajnana, namely, shraddha, viveka and vairagya.

When shraddha awakes, it forges a mystic link with the spiritual world. Atman is incomprehensible to any mode of personal consciousness. Therefore, estranged from real bliss, which is the nature of one's own reality, the beings dwell in the darkness and pain of samsara. But here is a boy in whom shraddha is awake, who possesses a marvelous intellect glistening with discrimination and insight into great moral truths.

No one can read this story without being inspired by the boy's thirst for Truth, intense dispassion, self-sacrifice, superb courage, sense of righteousness, honesty and above all, great human affection for his father. The story is set against the background of the hoary Vedic times when sacrifices (Yagas) were common among the householders.

Yagas were performed with a view to gaining worldly prosperity as also enjoyment in the next world. The Vedas prescribe the means both for worldly prosperity and for spiritual salvation. Salvation is the highest end, the ultimate purushartha. To attain salvation, one has to attain a state of desirelessness, rise to the plane of enlightenment and experience identify with the Supreme.

Man is a victim of desire. Wealth, gold, power, social position, name and fame while living and a perpetuation of fame even after death, all these are diverse desires which enslave man. These desires are in fact the diseases that afflict the subtle body of man. For diseases of the physical body there are remedial medicines. So too, for curing man of his psychological malady, there is a divine panacea. That is the Knowledge of the Atman.

Diverse are the Yagas performed for diverse purposes: for progeny, for timely rainfall, for elongation of the life span, for unrivalled kingship, for going to heaven and enjoyment of the happiness there, etc. Yagas are of course efficacious. They bring their rewards as every act brings the appropriate reward to the performer. With mind attached to the fruit, persons perform yagas, earn merit and go to the heaven, little knowing that heavenly sojourn is not permanent and that everlasting happiness is not possible through karma. Slaves of desires come again and again under the sway of Death. They remain bound to samsaric wheel.

Desire-prompted actions, however great they may appear to be, bind the jiva. Yagas too are no exception in this regard. Even heaven cannot open the gates to liberation. Path to liberation opens only for those who withdraw their minds from worldly cravings and steadily pursue Truth with whole-minded devotion and steadfastness. This is the central message of the Nachiketha episode.

Just as you earn wealth through persistent effort and deposit it in the bank, so too, through desire-prompted and ego-centric actions of innumerable births, you have deposited in the



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invisible bank of chittha, tendencies and impressions which together are known as vasanas. The obstacles that bar your entry into the Brahmic state are these vasanas only. These vasanas must perish in the blazing fire of Jnana, which is born of vichara, which has no touch or taint of any phenomenal object, which is a continuous state of Consciousness above subject-object relation, which can never be put out by anything, which is effulgent with supreme dispassion. When the deposited vasanas are annihilated, the bank of chittha itself gets liquidated. In other words, bereft of gunas, chittha emerges as Chaitanya itself. This state is known variously as Wisdom, as Liberation, as Brahmic State, etc.

In the story of Nachiketha, what comes to view, dispelling the thick fog of superstitions, the myths and the mysteries, is the royal highway to Realization. The pilgrim who marches along this luminous road, with steady steps and raised head, is not a weary pilgrim burdened with age and worries, but a boy of bright eyes and buoyant spirit, a seeker with steadfast resolve. He is Nachiketha, the hero of our story. He has the serenity of a Brahmana and the spirit of a Kshatriya. There he comes with his gaze indrawn, clearly revealing that the enchanting and alluring world that stretches before him has no hold on his mind. Though small in appearance, his knowledge eclipses all the scholastic learning in the world. He is the product of adhyatmic culture, which lived through a succession of shining centuries. He is the consummation of life itself, appearing in embodiment so as to herald a new age of hope for mankind.

By inborn temperament, the boy is contemplative; plunged in thought; he lives in a world of his own, to which the extroverts and the worldly minded have no access. Though he is in a home of happiness, living in the company of his affectionate father, he is alone, aloof, a solitary seeker in the inner mystical world. It is not play, or food, or dress, or comfort of parental love, or shelter of home, or pleasures of the world that the boy attaches himself to. As you proceed in this story you will find that the boy is seeking something, which this world or the high heaven cannot give. Silent is his search.

Jnana Yoga, which Nachiketha pursued, is remarkable for enquiry, steadfastness, sincerity and undeviating loyalty to Truth. What predominates the vichara path trod by Nachiketha is the quest of 'I'. Self is central to investigation. God comes afterwards. The enquiry must end in the experience of the boundless sea of Consciousness. The 'I' must get fused with the Absolute.

For such a daring pursuit of Truth, through the instrumentality of buddhi, one should have the intelligence and earnestness of Nachiketha. He should have a buddhi free of ego. In consciousness vitiated by ego and mind agitated by desires, even flashes of subtle insight pertaining to Truth cannot appear. How then can the Ultimate Truth, the profoundest wisdom be revealed! Brahman is subtler than the subtlest. To apprehend this Reality, the buddhi should be absolutely pure and a penetratingly subtlest instrument.

The intuitive buddhi vritti, which apprehends the Atman, is not a vritti at all though it is called so; it is unbroken consciousness, 'akhanda jnana'. Vritti is a mode of the anthakarana and arises so long as it is associated with the ego. Vritti encompasses an object. It rises and sets.

When buddhi is liberated from the ego, it is no longer a vritti, but consciousness itself. Akhanda Jnana is nirvishaya. It reveals the Atman, and hence is one with the Atman.

So long as one clings to the perishable body and craves for pleasures of the world, one cannot enter the path of vichara. What is required first is awareness that the world is unreal, that every created thing is perishable, that all pleasures are evanescent. When this awareness dawns,



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one develops a natural distaste for sense objects and the mind turns away from transiences. Nothing in the world can attract or entrap such a mind. Such an abiding state, in which the mind is withdrawn from the ephemeral world of objects, is called vairagya.

But there is a temporary feeling, of distaste for pleasures of the world, a feeling of disgust for life itself, which comes from experiences of the trials, the tests and the blows of life, from the experience of miseries like old age, disease, disappointments, poverty, death of the dear ones, loss of wealth etc. This is called 'smashana vairagya', vairagya of the burial ground. This is not vairagya at all. This is only a mental weakness. It is a negative mood created by pressure of life-situations. When the situations become favourable, the mind comes back to desires. Philosophizing mood gives place to pleasure hunting. With such a mood of despair, one cannot tread the path of Jnana Yoga. Atman cannot be attained through weakness.

If supreme vairagya, arising from discrimination, has taken an embodiment, it is Nachiketha. How the boy spurns the offer of the entire world of enjoyments with the power of mature understanding and persuasive argument is a thrilling part of this episode. Nachiketha is therefore no more an individual. He is immortalized in the heart of all God-seekers as an ideal and an institution. He is the source of perennial inspiration. The Nachiketha ideal points to the history of spiritual India shrouded in myths and symbols and sacrifices and arduous search after the Eternal. You also get a glimpse of social life that prevailed in India of Vedic age.

Nachiketha belongs to an age in which India was at the peak of her spiritual glory. Sages of Upanishads were not recluses. They were active men of the world, householders. They loved life not for the sake of pleasure but as an occasion for divine communion. While warning the seekers against the danger of the sense lure, they teach men to discover the Reality in the midst of life. Some of these great Masters were Kings and Queens who wielded power with humility, performed duties with detachment and pursued vichara in the inward solitude. Those who argue that spiritual life is meant only for the sannyasis have no idea that their own forefathers, venerated for spirituality, were busy householders who had scaled the heights of yoga. Duties and responsibilities were never an obstacle to them even in their chosen path of vichara. What counts in a life of quest is the fitness of mind and nothing else.

The names of Gargi, Maitreyi, Madalasa and Chudala continue to ring in the corridor of history. They are the immortal stars that shine in the galaxy of India's greatest of sages. All have to bow down in reverenceto their great spiritual attainment. They are the ideals for India's enlightened womanhood.

Nachiketha was a person like you. He was not a heavenly being. But in him the dormant spiritual impulse awoke. Good samskaras started operating. His reflecting mind could not find satisfaction in the passing pleasures of the world. It is this urge for the eternal wisdom that qualified him for Enlightenment.