



# RAMĀ ŚAKTI MISSION

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Nachiketha's apprehension therefore was that his father might think that some other soul had entered his son's body. This should be averted. Hence he sought the boon that his father should recognize the son and continue to love him.

Yama gladly granted the first boon. The second favour, which Nachiketha asked of Yama, was the knowledge of a certain fire sacrifice by performing which one attains heaven. He said: O Dharmaraja! In heaven there is neither death nor disease nor old age. Hunger and thirst do not affect the denizens of heaven. Sorrow has no place there. Those who go there, rejoice in the vast heavenly world. They enjoy all the celestial pleasures. Kindly tell me the way of attaining heaven. Instruct me on the fire sacrifice that leads to heaven.

Heaven, you should know, is not an ultimate abode of liberation, Moksha Dham. It is only a paradise of enjoyment, Bhoga loka. There, one enjoys the celestial pleasures, which are unmixed with sorrow and that too without any exertion. It is not a field of action. In heaven there is no creation of fresh karma, no earning of merit. One cannot do any sadhana there. Therefore, no realization of God is possible of attainment in heaven. Enjoyment of pleasure alone is the experience in heaven.

Just as you have here summer resorts like Ooty, Simla, Srinagar etc, where people go for enjoyment of salubrious weather, so too, those who have accumulated punya on earth go to heaven for enjoyment. But after some time one has to return from the summer resort to his own place of heat. Similarly, from heaven, one has to return to earth after the exhaustion of the merits through enjoyment. When punya is exhausted, not a minute further can one stay in heaven.

Moksha is beyond change. There is neither going nor coming in moksha. It is the eternal state of Atman. It is abidance in one's own pure being. But heaven is a sphere, a loka, as perishable as any other loka is. Atman alone is imperishable.

Knowing that heavenly world is perishable, why should Nachiketha, the boy of discrimination and dispassion, wants to know the way of attaining heaven? Nachiketha's third boon would reveal what type of a seeker he was. Nachiketha was an awakened soul. As such heaven had no use for him. But there were beings in the world that had not reached the high level of spiritual competency. Men in general are victims of desire. They engage themselves in ego-centric pursuits. Prompted by selfish and unholy cravings, they commit evil deeds.

Vedic sacrifices can be a discipline for such persons in that those sacrifices keep them from evil conduct. Vedas promise heavenly enjoyment through sacrifices for those who are smitten by desires. They also impart Brahmavidya who seek liberation. If the first boon sought by Nachiketha was for the sake of his father, the second boon was for the sake of generality of weak humanity. One has duties to perform towards parents, society and one's own Self.

In both these boons sought by Nachiketha, Yama did not see even a trace of selfishness in Nachiketha. On the other hand the boy rose high in his estimation as a magnanimous soul. His intentions were noble. Yama therefore explained to him the details of the rituals involved in the Fire sacrifice and also their spiritual import. Vedic rites should be observed meticulously without any mistake. The mantras should be correctly chanted; the offerings should be properly made.



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The altar should be set up according to the Vedic injunctions. Otherwise, not only that the sacrifices will not be fruitful, but even harm may befall the performer.

Hence Yama made the boy repeat what he had learned about the details of this sacrifice. The boy's intellect was very sharp and penetrating and his comprehension was quick and correct. The teacher was immensely pleased with him. Unasked, another supplementary boon was granted by Yama that the sacrifice would be named after Nachiketha. He also honoured the beloved student with a multiform necklace.

The Guru imparts the teaching so that the student may make it a part of his own knowledge. Therefore, when the student is attentive and brilliant, the Guru is pleased with him. There is nothing that a Guru will withhold when he comes across a highly qualified student. The fact that the disciple has understood the teaching is the matter of great satisfaction to the Guru.

Guru seeks nothing in return. He imparts the teaching out of sheer compassion and love. He is free from jealousy. Disciple's uplift is uppermost in his mind.

Nachiketha has proved himself to be an ideal seeker on two grounds. One is, his spiritual competency proved by his intense thirst for knowledge, shradha and capacity for comprehending subtle truths. The other is, his conduct has been ideal throughout. The children should receive proper teaching, training and inspiration for ideal dharmic acharana in home. Then, when they come to the Sadguru for knowledge of Brahman, they will have the qualities of a disciple also.

For any person lesser in competency, whose thirst for pleasures has not abated, the second boon granted by Yama itself would have been a very tempting proposition. In order to test the aspirant Yama waxes eloquent on the glories of the sacrifice leading to heaven. But Nachiketha was a seeker of the ultimate Reality. He had his spiritual doubts to be cleared.

The doubts he had in mind were of the nature of highly deep, abstruse metaphysical problems. If heaven had satisfied him, Nachiketha would not have chosen the third boon.

Thus, after pleasing Yama with humility, reverent bhava, love for righteousness, burning sincerity and intellectual competency, Nachiketha now is in a proper position for asking the third boon. The third boon relates to the problem of metaphysics and forms the soul of the Upanishad.

It is on mutual trust between the Guru and the disciple that the institution of Brahma Vidya has been flourishing in this land. The seeker should be convinced that the Guru is the spiritual authority, a Man of Perfection. Then reverence for the Guru rises up. When once reverence rises up, humility becomes the characteristic attitude of the disciple.

What is the attitude of humility? It is the feeling that one knows nothing and that the Guru is omniscient. The Guru is incomparably high in spiritual status whereas the seeker is in utter ignorance. This attitude of high and low, 'ucha neecha bhava' is essential on the part of the disciple. It is this bhava that inspires the mood of surrender.

One may be learned in the secular sense. But so long as he has not known himself, he is ignorant only. Self-knowledge alone is recognized as Vidya in spiritual tradition. It is for this knowledge that Nachiketha looks towards Yama.



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One who is not humble, who claims equality of status with the Guru or thinks that he knows better than the Guru can never be a disciple. It is dharma that installs one in discipleship. If the Guru has given the initiation, it only betrays the Guru's inherent compassion. But the receiver of the Word, the candidate for spiritual initiation, should be an ideal seeker and disciple. Then only he opens himself to the saving grace. This is the spiritual law.

Nachiketha has chosen Yama as the adhyatmic preceptor, the Sadguru. His first and second boons were favours from the Deity, Yama. Now Yama is looked upon as the Master of Wisdom. Nachiketha asks:

There is that doubt, O Master, that when a person dies, some say, It exists, whereas others say, It does not exist. Kindly instruct me on the truth regarding this.

Evidently this question has not suddenly sprung up in the mind of Nachiketha. It must have been there with him as a burning problem of life itself. It is not a mental doubt that Nachiketha refers to here. His is a spirit of enquiry, a deep thought concerning life beyond. Such a question cannot rise in a worldly mind, in a mind in which the fever of enjoyment has not yet abated. Only mumukshus of the highest order are assailed by such doubts. Even the born ascetic Sukadeva, had such a doubt concerning the Reality and Enlightenment, even though discrimination had dawned on him.

The unknown entity which Nachiketha wants to realize, is referred to as 'It'. This shows that the entity is beyond the range of intellectual conceptions. There is a spiritual entity, which survives the destruction of the gross body, which is distinct from the senses, mind and intellect.

This entity gets connected as it were, with another fresh body in the subsequent birth. This is the Self, the subject matter of Nachiketha's enquiry. The boy is aware of the current philosophical notions regarding the Soul. Being born in a Brahmin family, the boy might have heard about the doctrine of the Self. Also, he seems to be aware of the views of the materialistic philosophy, which denied the existence of a spiritual Self.

The question of Nachiketha reveals his deepest passion for Truth and not a mental curiosity. He has reflected deeply and enquired within himself in his own inward seclusion. Man is not the body, body is his house. The house perishes after some time, but the dweller is imperishable. He enters another house. As the snake that sheds its slough, is different from the slough, so too, jivatman who sheds the body is different from the body. Then, what is the essence of the Jivatman? It is this problem that revolves in Nachiketha's enquiring mind.

Nihilists too have arguments to advance that nothing is left out after death. They trace everything to shunya, void. Is the reality of man, a void then? This position is not acceptable to Nachiketha, since the boy is possessed of shraddha. Shraddha is always related to the Real.

Diversity of arguments do crop up because Atman is not an object of direct sense cognition; nor is it an object of inference, 'anumana'. Until the highest evidence, namely, intimate experience, 'Anubhoothi' comes, one is assailed by doubt.

Shruti (shastra), yukti (one's own reasoning) and anubhoothi (experience) should point to the same Truth. That is the test of a genuine spiritual realization. The realized wisdom should become a dynamic force in conduct. Even from a worldly point of view, conduct is the ultimate



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touchstone of knowledge. Even a competent aspirant for Realization is full of virtues. Then what to speak of a Sage of anubhoothi! When experience comes, right conduct becomes natural. Nachiketha is convinced that Yama holds the key to the supreme secret of existence. Through Nachiketha, the immortal spiritual tradition is upholding the greatness of the system of Upadesha Deeksha.

There is truth in the heart of the scripture. No superficial study can reveal it. One has to sit at the feet of the Sadguru and listen to the authentic version of anubhoothi.

Nachiketha has grown in a religious atmosphere of ancient India, bearing in his bosom this burning fire of spiritual yearning. It is only to Yama that he opens his heart and gives expression to the inner fire raging in him.

The Lord of death, Yama, became aghast when he heard the profound question raised by the boy Nachiketha. There could not be a greater question than this. It is answer to this fundamental question, revealed from within as the flash of insight that puts an end to all problems, which ends samsara itself and unites the seeker with the Sought. Such a question is coming from a mere boy! Yama was wonderstruck. But he did not answer straightaway.

This is a knowledge, which should not be imparted without testing the fitness of the disciple. The gift of spiritual knowledge is greater than gift of wealth. It is not to be transmitted to the undeserving. Those who have a pure intellect, who have desisted from evil conduct, who have no hankering for worldly pleasures, alone are fit to receive the Upanishadic Knowledge.

If one is ignorant of spiritual knowledge, it is of course an individual loss. But if this knowledge is imparted to the undisciplined minds, to those who understand the doctrines wrongly, they will mislead even society. Hence the ancient Sages took fitness into account.