

## SUMMARY OF KATHOPANISAD BHASYAM

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**INTRODUCTION:** We study mainly three **prasthanas** (texts) in Vedanta. The main prasthana is Sruti or **Upanisads**. The other two prasthanas are **Bhagavad Gita** called smarta prasthana and **Brahma Sutra** called nyaya prasthana, are based on Sruti.

Muktiko Upanisad gives the number of Upanisads in each of the four Vedas. There are totally **1180 Upanisads**. Of them Lord Rama lists to Hanumanji 108 **main Upanisads**. Out of them 10 are considered **major Upanisads** as Sri Adi Sankara has written bhasyam on them.

Vedas are revealed by the Lord to Rsis. Kathopanisad belongs to Katha saka of Krsnayajurveda. Katha rsi received Kathopanisad or Kathakopanisad. He was a disciple of Vaisampayana rsi. Vaisampayana rsi was a disciple of Sri Veda Vyasa.

Kathopanisad comprise of two adhyayas (chapters) each contains three vallis (sections) and totally 119 mantras. It is in the form of a dialogue between Lord Yama, the teacher and Naciketas, the disciple.

**SANTI MANTRA:** The most popular "**saha nav vavatu**" is the santi mantra. The prayer is let the Lord protect both of us, the Teacher and the Student by nourishing us with the result of knowledge. Let both of us make adequate effort so that the study be effective. Let there not be any misunderstanding between us. Let there not be obstacles from the individual, surroundings and from one's purva karma.

**PRAYER FOR BHASYAM:** The first sentence starts with '**om**' and the second sentence starts with '**atha**' as these are the auspicious words used by Brahmaji, at the time of manifestation of this jagat. Salutations to Lord Yama, the Lord of death, son of Lord Sun and Teacher of Brahma Vidya. Salutations to the glorious student Naciketas. Sri Adi Sankara says that a

brief explanation is given so that the students can grasp easily the teaching.

**MEANING OF UPANISAD:** The root 'sad' means destruction, reaching and weakening. The prefix 'upa' means going near the Teacher teaching Brahman. The prefix 'ni' means pursuit with determination. The suffix 'krip' means the doer. The first meaning is, it is the **destroyer of the seed of samsara** i.e. ignorance along with desire, karma and punya-papa by giving Nirguna Brahman jnanam. The second meaning is that the **knowledge of Nirguna Brahman makes the Mumukshu reach Brahman**. The third meaning is that the knowledge of Saguna Brahman can **weaken the effect of samsara** by taking the person to Brahmaloaka. To summarise, Upanisad means **Brahma Vidya**.

**OBJECTION:** The students who chant Upanisad say that we study Upanisad. The Teachers who teach chant of Upanisad also say that we teach Upanisad.

**REPLY:** The word Upanisad in the primary sense means brahma vidya. In the secondary sense it means the text of Upanisad.

**ANUBANDHA CATUSTAYAM OF UPANISAD: ADIKARI-** One possessing sadhana catustam. **VISAYA-** Param Brahman **PURPOSE-** Destruction of Samsara and attainment of Brahman **SAMBANDHA-Sadhana** (Knowledge is the means) **Sadhya** (Moksha is the end) Sambandha.

## CHAPTER I VALLI I

**Naciketas story** is for glorification of self-knowledge.

**Vajasravas** having a desire for svarga, performed Visvajit *yajna*, where he gave away all his wealth as *daksina*. At the end of the *yajna*, **old and unproductive cows were given as daksina**. When his son **Naciketas**, a young boy, saw this, he felt that his father would go to the undesirable worlds by offering such cows to the priests. He felt that

instead of the unproductive cows, he could be given as *daksina*. **Naciketas asked his father to whom he would be given as *daksina*.** He nagged his father by asking this second and third time. The irritated father told him that **he would offer him to Lord Yama.**

**Vajasravas** while performing Visavajit *yagna*, **inadvertently** uttered that **he would offer his son Naciketas to Lord Yama.** Naciketas contemplated on his father's words: "Among many students and sons his conduct was the best and medium sometimes but never inferior. Lord Yama does not require his service." His father should have uttered these words due to anger. Even then he was determined that his father's words should not go false.

Naciketas advised his father that the word **uttered in the *yagna sala* should be kept** and he should be sent to Lord Yama. Their forefathers and contemporary noble people kept up their word. Human beings like the crop grains die and later emerge again. Vajasravas reluctantly sent his son Naciketas to Lord Yama.

When Naciketas went to Lord Yama's palace, Lord Yama had gone out. Hence he waited outside for three nights without food. When Lord Yama returned, his ministers and wives reminded him about honouring Naciketas because a Brahmin guest was like Fire entering the house. It can either bless or burn the house down. Noble **people propitiate the guest** by offering water and honouring him. Otherwise the householder would incur *pratyavaya dosha*.

If a Brahmin guest is not duly respected and provided food by the host, the *papa* incurred from this *dosha* can destroy the person's hopes, expectations, *punya* gained through *satsangh*, noble speech, vedic rituals and social service, progeny and cattle. This is to be understood as *artha vada* to emphasise **proper treatment of the guest.**

Lord Yama offered for his well being salutations to Naciketas and **granted him three boons as compensation for three nights he stayed in his house without food.**

Naciketas told Lord Yama, that when he is sent back to his father, his father should be free from anxiety, have a calm mind, free from anger, recognize him and talk to him. **His choice of first boon was for his father's benefit.** Lord Yama granted the boon completely, without any reservation.

Naciketas told that in *svarga* there is no fear of death, no old age, no hunger or thirst, no grief and one can rejoice. He asked Lord Yama to teach him the **fire ritual, the performance of which leads one to *svarga*** and attain relative immortality. **His choice of second boon was for the society's benefit.** Lord Yama taught in detail the fire ritual along with all its accessories. Naciketas understood the teaching and repeated in detail as taught. Lord Yama was pleased. He announced that the fire ritual will be known in Naciketas's name. He also offered a *snnkam* which means a necklace made of precious gems. Alternate meaning for *snnkam* is a vedic ritual for material prosperity. **Naciketas did not accept the *snnkam*.**

Lord Yama said that the one who **invokes Naciketa fire thrice** and the one who has received proper instructions from mother, father and teacher **attains *svarga***. If he also does *upasana on Virat* **attains *brahmaloka***.

Through the first boon Naciketas asked for *ihaloka phala* for his father. Through the second boon he asked for *paraloka phala* for the society. Both fall in *anatma prapanca*. **Through the third boon he asked for knowledge of *atma***. He asked Lord Yama, "There is a doubt about a person who is dead. Some say that the surviving self is there. Others say that there is no surviving self. Instructed by you I want to understand about this self. This is the third boon."

Lord Yama wanted to test whether Naciketas was qualified to receive self knowledge. He told that self is subtle. It cannot be easily understood. Even *Devas* had doubt about that in the past. He told Naciketas to choose another boon. Naciketas told that **as even Devas had doubt about that in the past and he cannot find a better teacher than Lord Yama, he wanted only self knowledge** as his third boon.

Lord Yama tried to tempt Naciketas with material wealth. He offered instead of self knowledge, sons, grandsons with hundred years of life, many animals, elephants, gold, horses, vast kingdom and as many years life as he wished. Lord Yama further told that **Naciketas can choose in addition to that any other material wealth he desired, be emperor of this great earth and enjoyer of all the pleasures. He further offered pleasures not available to human beings.** He offered celestial women with chariots and musical instruments who will serve him.

Naciketas did not yield to the temptation. Naciketas reasoned that the enjoyments are temporary; They only weaken the sense organs; Every form of life is short. **Let all the vehicles, dance and music stay with Lord Yama himself.** Man cannot be satisfied with wealth. As he had already seen Lord Yama he will anyhow get wealth and long life. **He knew the limitations of *preyas* and he desired only *sreyas*. He declared that Naciketas cannot choose anything else other than self knowledge as the third boon.**

Naciketas requested for self knowledge as his third boon. Lord Yama tried to tempt Naciketas with material wealth. As he rejected the offer, Lord Yama was satisfied that Naciketas was qualified to receive self knowledge.

Lord Yama told that human beings have two different pursuits of *sreyas* and *preyas* that bind them. **The one who chooses *sreyas* or spiritual goal attains good and auspicious end. The one who chooses *preyas* or material goal is deprived of the highest goal.**

*Sreyas* and *preyas* both approach the human being. The intelligent person chooses *sreyas* like a swan which separates milk from water. The dull witted person chooses *preyas* for the sake of acquiring and preserving progeny and wealth.

**Lord Yama praised Naciketas for discarding the pleasant and attractive objects** and also not accepting to receive the ritual to gain wealth. There are two different goals, of ignorance and knowledge. **Naciketas was a true seeker of knowledge and numerous sense objects could not distract him.**

The deluded ones are in deep ignorance, but consider themselves to be wise and learned and wander all over like the blind led by the blind. The means to the higher world does not appeal to this non-discriminative and negligent one, deluded due to attachment to wealth. For them only this visible world exists. They come to the control of death again and again.

The self is not available even for listening for many people. Even after listening, many people do not understand this self. The teacher of this self is rare. One who understands this self being instructed by a competent teacher is also rare.

The self is speculated in many ways when taught by an incompetent teacher and cannot be understood clearly. The self is understood when taught by a competent teacher. **The self is smaller than the size of atom and cannot be attained by mere reasoning.**

Lord Yama praised that Naciketas had (almost) attained self knowledge and he may have more qualified students like Naciketas. Lord Yama told that when he was a human being earlier, he knew that permanent end cannot be attained by impermanent means. Yet he performed Naciketa fire ritual and attained the relatively permanent position of Lord Yama. He praised Naciketas for his dispassion and firmly rejecting the vast, adorable and glorious position of Hiranyagarbha with all its incidental pleasures.

***Atma* is located in the cave of intellect, is difficult to understand. A competent seeker is able to know that by fixing his mind on *atma*. A *Jnani* transcends both elation and depression.**

Lord Yama told Naciketas that a person must **comprehend the *atma tatvam* and understand the *atma* as oneself**. On understanding *atma tatvam*, he will rejoice. He praised that Naciketas was qualified to receive *atma jnana*.

Naciketas requested Lord Yama to teach him about ***atma tatvam*, which transcends righteous action and prohibited action, cause and effect and past and future**.

Lord Yama replied "All **Vedas talk about the goal to be accomplished as Brahman**. For attaining that Brahman, Vedas prescribe different austerities. I present it briefly to you. **It is OM.**"

Om is the symbol for meditation on sagunam Brahman. The symbol Om is to be analysed to understand nirgunam Brahman. Param Brahman is to be known. Aparam Brahman is to be gained by going to brahma loka.

Om is the best symbol for param Brahman and aparam Brahman. Having meditated on Om, one becomes adorable in brahma loka.