

Title

The Yoga of the Kathopanishad

By
Sri Krishna Prem

Bird Publisher, 2015

To ...

M. R.

Best of Pupils for whom this book was written

त्वाद्भनो भूयान्नचिकेतः प्रष्टा

About this eBook

“The Yoga of the Kathopanishad” By Sri Krishna Prem

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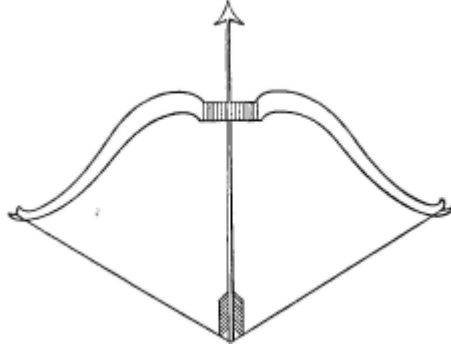
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THE YOGA OF THE KATHOPANISHAD

The Bow and the Arrow



Having taken as a bow the great weapon of the Secret Teaching,
One should fix in it the arrow sharpened by constant Meditation.
Drawing it with a mind filled with That (*Brahman*)
Penetrate, O good-looking youth, that Imperishable as the Mark.

The pranava (*Aum*) is the bow; the arrow is the self;
Brahman is said to be the mark.
With heedfulness is It to be penetrated;
One should become one with It as the arrow in the mark.
Mundaka Upanishad ii 3, 4.

Preface

The point of view from which this book has been written is that the Kathopanishad is a practical treatise written to help us achieve a very real end. It is not in the least a compendium of Brahmanical speculations, something to be studied from a purely intellectual view-point. On the contrary, it is an exposition of the ancient Road that leads from death to immortality, a Road which is as open today as it was when our text was written. Being a real Road the knowledge of it is not confined to any one country or to any one religious tradition. One of the aims in writing this commentary has been to bring out this fact, namely, that it is a Road known to a few all over the world and that, though their descriptions have naturally varied in detail, they all refer to what is recognisably the same experience. Previous expositions have been either from the point of view of purely Indian tradition, in terms of which alone the meanings have been set forth, or else they have been made from the artificial and external standpoint of Western scholarship which represents the teachings as being, at best, interesting religio-philosophic speculations, at worst, a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing. With this last class of expositor it is hopeless to argue that their interpretations often make nonsense of the text for they will reply: "My dear Sir, of course it is nonsense. Why do you expect anything but the merest gleams of sense in these ancient phantasies of a childish era?" So be it. It was at least in part to hide the truth from such as these "lest having ears they should hear and be converted" that the ancient Teachers expressed themselves so obscurely with the aid of symbol and myth.

This brings us to another point. There will almost certainly be those who will say of the present commentary, at least in places, that it darkens rather than sheds light upon the text. "The text," they will say, "was tolerably clear and straightforward, you have left us wandering in a cloud of your incomprehensible Black Fire! At least you are the first (and we hope the last) to treat the Upanishad as a text of alchemy!"

The fact is, however, that clarity (of the intellectual sort), though undoubtedly a value, is not the only value. The true clarity which is of the Spirit is something quite different, but what is usually termed such is a one-sided movement of mental abstraction which, like everything one-sided, has a shadow which in this particular case appears as loss of reality. As long as we remain what we are, partial and one-sided beings, so long each step in the direction of intellectual clarity is taken at the cost of a loss of vividness and vitality until we arrive in the end at the state of logic and mathematics, a state like that of distilled water, exquisitely clear but tasteless and sterile. On the other hand, if the archaic symbols are left without any mental clarification the modern mind is unable to grasp them at all and passes them by as meaningless. Accordingly any attempt at comment must, like any attempt at translation, be a compromise, in this case between the degree of clarity necessary to give any sort of clue to the meaning and the degree of vividness coming from the sense of a rich psychic background, necessary if the subject is to appear to have any true reality.

Naturally the proportions of these two components will have to vary according to conditions of time and place. In these days there is little danger of clarity being undervalued but rather the other way.

A previous book¹ was written with as much of it as possible. In this book, partly because it is hoped that the previous one will serve as a bridge and partly because the Upanishads have been so pawed about by intellectuals as to be in danger of being thought mere 'philosophy,' less attempt has been made to render the meaning clear to the mind. Whether the complementary value of psychic vividness has been achieved is for others to judge. If I have at all succeeded in conveying the impression that behind the words of the Upanishad lies, not a world of thin philosophic abstractions, but a world of rich and vivid experience, I shall be satisfied. "Grey is all theory, green grows the Tree of Life alone."²

To those who object to the alchemy I will quote Lalla, the 14th century Kashmiri Yogini: -

"Like a blacksmith give breath to the Bellows and thy Iron will turn to Gold. Now is the auspicious moment. Seek then the Friend."

Metaphor? Perhaps, but what else is the Universe? Lastly, for those who find this book full of insufferable nonsense here is some more: -

"There was an old man of Liskeard
Who said it is just as I feared,
Five owls and a wren,
Three ducks and a hen,
Have all made their nests in my beard."

Nonsense or not, those birds are there and not the cleanest of shaves with the latest and most scientific of Occam razors will get rid of them. For that the only instrument that will serve is the razor-edged Middle Path. As for the birds, they are shape-changers. Sometimes they dazzle our

¹ The Yoga of Bhagavatgita.

² Goethe's Faust.

senses with a flutter of tropical plumage; sometimes, as hens, they lay us useful though sulphurous eggs; sometimes, as owls they teach us wisdom of their round-eyed sort; just now on raven wings they croak above the battlefields. All these shapes are but forms of the one bird, the ugly duckling who must be led along the Middle Path from the Lower to the Upper Waters before he can assume his true Royal shape, the shape of the Eternal Swan.

"Sweet is rest between the wings of that which is not born nor dies, but is the *Aum* throughout eternal ages. Bestride the Bird of Life if thou wouldst know."

Procul este profani; Flee hence — O Academics!

Introductory Note

The germ of this Upanishad (to adopt a modern fashion of speaking) is to be found in a hymn in the Rigveda (X. 135) concerning a boy, whom the commentator Sayana declares to be Nachiketas, who visits the realm of Yama, Lord of Death.

"Thou mountest though thou dost not see, O Child, the new and wheelless Vehicle which thou hast fashioned mentally, one-poled but turning every way."

In this verse we have a clear reference to the ascent of the disembodied 'Soul' in its mental Upadbi or vehicle. Much of the hymn is somewhat obscure. A clearer treatment is contained in the Taittiriya Brahmana (3. 11. 8, 1-6) where we have the story of the visit to Yama and the three boons granted by the latter as in our Upanishad. From the point of view of ordinary scholarship the situation is one in which this old and traditional story has been made to serve as the vehicle of Vedantic Philosophising; but a truer way of looking at it is to consider the later text as an expression in the new language, the language of conceptual thought and more or less abstract symbolism, of the teachings which had previously been rendered in the older and more universal language of concrete symbol. This difference between the languages of concrete and of abstract symbol is a very important subject and one which requires separate treatment, but it may here be stated briefly that the philosophical teachings of all the older races, Sumerians, Egyptians, and ancient Indians, were imparted by means of concrete symbols, a method which in spite of disadvantages, some real and some only apparent to us who have more or less lost the art of reading such symbols, has one great advantage, namely, of fusing together thought and feeling in one unity.

It seems to have been somewhere in the middle of the 1st millennium B.C., the period of the Buddha and the Upanishads, of the Hermetic writings in Egypt (in something like the form in which we know them now) and the Pythagorean-Platonic movement in Greece that the abstract symbols which we now think of as philosophic par excellence were developed, and came to the fore on account of their great flexibility and ease of manipulation. These qualities, however, were purchased at the cost of more or less of a divorce from feeling, a divorce which tended more and more to separate the domains of religion with its concrete symbols (Myths) and philosophy with its abstract concepts. Speaking roughly, the process may be said to have begun (in the West) in the Academy of Plato where, however, it was blended with the concrete symbols of his famous 'Myths', and to have culminated in the grey sterility of modern 'academic' thought.

I. The Sacrifice of Vajashravasa; the Journey of Nachiketas to the Halls of Death; the granting of the Three Boons, the Boon of Return, the Boon of the Sacred Fire, the Boon of Knowledge of the Liberated State.

(1) *Once Vajashravasa, desirous of heavenly reward, gave away all his possessions. He had a son named Nachiketas.*

(2) *Into him, boy as he was, faith entered, while the gifts (of cattle for the priests) were being led away and he reflected.*

(3) *"To joyless realms goes he who gives such cows as these, cows which have drunk their last water, eaten their last grass, have given their last milk and who will breed no more"*

(4) *Therefore he said to his father once, twice and thrice: "To whom will you give me (who also am one of your possessions)" Whereupon the father replied, "To Death do I give thee."*

Who and what are these two, this father and son? Tradition, as exemplified by Shankara explains the name Vajashravasa as one who is famous for his gifts of food or, as he says, the compound may be just a proper name. The 'or' here reveals the fact that Shankara was aware that such names in the ancient myths were by no means mere names but that they often, if not always, carried meanings which are of great importance in the understanding of the myths. We are reminded of the Egyptian Book of the Dead as also of the Indian Kaushitaki Upanishad in which the soul on its inward path is confronted by various symbolic objects, doorways, trees and such like, which will not let it pass unless it reveals its knowledge of their 'Names.'

In just the same way, these ancient myths (the psychic as opposed to the mere mental reading of which constitutes an initiation) confront us at the outset with names whose inner meanings we must apprehend under penalty of complete failure to enter the sacred precincts. It is just this fact that is the reason for so much of the apparently fanciful etymologising of which modern scholars accuse the ancient writers. So-called fanciful derivations, based as they often are on associations, are frequently of more real significance in these mystic realms than all the great tomes of carefully accurate but sterile learning.³

Vajashravasa is composed of two words Vaja and Shravasa of which it is quite true that the former means food and the latter fame. But these are only particular applications, special readings, as it were of the far more inclusive original symbols. Vaja, for instance, only means food because food increases the "strength, energy spirit, speed" which are some of its more fundamental meanings. The feather on an arrow again is also Vaja while Shravasa means fundamentally a loud sound, something which is heard — whence fame as a derivative.

In this context the word Vajashravasa refers to what may be called exoteric religion, the tradition about the *sustaining power* of the Universe which has been heard and handed down through generations. It is as a symbol of such exoteric religion that the man Vajashravasa speaks and acts.

³ Just before going to press my friend Thakur Jaideva Singhji sent me a set of Dr. A. Coomaraswami's Notes on the Kathopanishad which appeared in the New Indian Antiquary for April, May, and June 1938. They arrived too late to be made any extensive use of but some footnote references to them have been inserted. These 'Notes' will very well repay study as their learned author has at his command a depth and breadth of scholarship which the present writer cannot hope to compass and, moreover, what is so rare as to be almost unique in the world of modern scholarship, he takes the Upanishad seriously as a Gnostic document related as such to Gnostic literature all over the world. It should be added, however, that they are addressed to students with a knowledge of Sanskrit. In the present context he cites Rawson as saying: "probably the names which are all patronymics are not meant to be historical."

The name of the son, Nachiketas, on the other hand, is derived from *na chiketas*, that which is unperceived and refers to the quickening Spirit that lies within all things like fire, latent in wood, "hidden in the two fire sticks," unperceived by the senses and yet the spirit which giveth life as opposed to Vajashravasa, the letter which killeth.

Vajashravasa, then, represents orthodox traditional religion, devoted as always to outer forms, ignorant of the real meaning of which those forms are the vehicles, content with their literal observance, and wise like all traditionalist priests, Hindu or Catholic, in the knowledge of backdoors and short cuts by which the forms may be preserved without too great an inconvenience in practice!

Sacrifice and gifts are commanded by tradition and therefore Vajashravasa, forgetful of what is meant by that sacrifice, gives away his possessions with considerable ostentation, but, finding such giving not altogether convenient, compromises somehow and makes a great show of a lot of rather inadequate cows.

As actual facts such performances are common in India and of course everywhere else, but in the present case the meaning is not particular but universal. It is the externalism, not to say hypocrisy, inherent in all exoteric religion that is referred to, rather than individual acts of religious compromise.

Nevertheless, a genuine religious tradition, though externalised into more or less sterile forms, is not to be despised. That is the mistake of the so-called rationalists. Neither religion nor life itself is, has been or ever will be a matter of reason alone. Religion springs from the depth of the psyche and its rational elements are only part of its total content. Not only the 'rationalist,' but also the protestant type of reformer, is apt to make this mistake and, in rationalising religion, to render it sterile. For instance in India there are some people who do not like the rowdy horse-play, not to say the verbal license, which characterises the ancient festival of Holi and they wish to substitute a day of quiet meditation on the birth of Chaitanya which happened to coincide with the festival. Such quiet meditation is certainly excellent, but it just isn't Holi, and in making such a substitution the deep psychic meanings of the ancient festival are entirely lost.

This, however, is a digression. Within the heart of the old traditions, if they be not too utterly dead, there comes to birth from time to time a son who is a re-birth of the ancient ever-living Spirit which gave rise to the religion.

Such a son is Nachiketas. He is the new born Spirit, ever breathing the Upanishadic prayer "From the unreal lead me to the Real." Such births as actual individual events are continually taking place at all times and then we have a mystic, one who seeks to pierce through the outer veil and re-enter the deserted inner sanctuary. Such a man becomes a disciple of the Inner Path and therefore we have Nachiketas, standing first as a symbol of the reborn Spirit which slumbers in the heart of all religions, and secondly as a glyph of the individual mystic, he who seeks out and treads the "Ancient narrow path that stretches far away."⁴ It is particularly in this latter sense that we shall read the symbol here.

Into his heart, we read, faith (*Shraddha*) entered. This *Shraddha* is never to be confounded with what passes for faith in the exoteric religion, namely, a blind belief, accompanied, as is all

⁴ Biihadaranyaka Upanishad 4. 4. 8.

such, by hidden doubt. In this latter sense *Vdjashravasa* himself had faith, or else why did he perform the sacrifice at all but it is a faith which is balanced by equal and opposite concealed doubts: the faith of all exoteric religion which hopes and at the same time fears. The *Shraddha* which entered Nachiketas is the true faith, the Fair Faith as Hermes calls it, which is a form of knowledge, being the reflection in the personal self of Knowledge that has been realised at deeper levels of being. In technical terms it is the reflection in the personal mind of the Knowledge that results from the union of the higher *manas* with the *buddhi*. For the personal mind it is not quite knowledge, because that personal or lower mind is not yet properly united to its higher self, and therefore the latter's Knowledge can only appear as the reflection which we term faith.

The transmutation of such faith into Knowledge is indeed the task which the disciple will have to perform, the Path which he must tread. Nevertheless, though as yet only a reflection, it is reflection of the Truth and if he clings to it as to a guiding star, "the dim star which burns within," it will transmute his whole being into the divine solar light of perfect Knowledge.

"Steadily as you watch and worship its light, will grow stronger. Then you may know you have found the beginning of the way. And when you have found the end its light will suddenly become the infinite light."⁵

It is by the light of this faith that Nachiketas realises the inadequacy of all mere outward forms. The true sacrifice, though it may be usefully embodied in forms, is the sacrifice of the self and it is just this that *Vajashravasa* withholds. Hence the protest implied in his son's question. I who am also your possession, the most valued one in fact, your very self, to whom will you give me? To whom am I, the spirit born of your heart, to be offered? Nor does the question spring from the mind alone but from the whole of his being, hence its triple repetition for man is a citizen of three worlds and must ask and be willing for the sacrifice on every level of his being.⁶

"Those that ask shall have. But though the ordinary man asks perpetually his voice is not heard. For he asks with his mind only; and the voice of the mind is only heard on that plane on which the mind acts."⁷

It is this threefold integration of man's being that is the real root of such current feelings as of the sacred and binding quality of a threefold affirmation, the 'third time of asking,' that is found in one form or another all over the world.

"To Death do I give you." These are the solemn words which are pronounced when the offer is complete. One well-known Christian missionary translator considers these tremendous words to have been pronounced in mere irritation and suggests that they might be rendered as, "Oh! go to Hades!" Did he not remember Christ's "Ye must be born again" and is it not obvious that before we can be reborn we must first die? To all such we will only quote their Teacher's words. "Art thou a master of Israel and knowest not these things?" Do we not die every night to be reborn next day? Does not the very Sun himself die every year to be reborn at the X'mas solstice and is it not true that, as St. Paul has it: "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not

⁵ *Light on the Path.*

⁶ Those who know the Sanyasa mantra will remember how the Sanyasi renounces the world of forms not only on this but on all three levels *Bhu, Bhuvan, Swar.*

⁷ *Light on the Path.*

quicken except it die."⁸

Leaving controversy aside, let us turn to that fragment of ancient initiatory teaching that is known as the Naasene Document.

"The Phrygians call Him (Man) also Dead - when buried in the body as though in a tomb or a sepulcher ... The same Phrygians again call this very same (Man) after the transformation God or a God and they call him also "Plucked Green Wheat Ear" and after the Phrygians, the Athenians (so designate Him) when in the secret rites at Eleusis, they show those who receive in silence the final initiation there into the Great Eoptic mystery, a plucked wheat ear. And the wheat ear is also with the Athenians the Light Giver from the Inexpressible. And the law is that after they have been initiated into the Little Mysteries they should be further initiated into the Great. 'For greater Deaths do greater lots obtain,' (and) they to whom 'Deaths' in them (the Greater Mysteries) are appointed receive greater lots."⁹

This is the same eternal wisdom, the wisdom that teaches us that if we would find our true life we must first lose the false one that is lived in the sunlight of the world and take the other Path, "death-cold" to sense, but leading to the true Sunlight of Eternity, for as we may remember from the Gita: "that which is Day to the many is Night to the Sect and that which is Day to the seer is Night to the ordinary man."

The mystic death which played an essential part in all the ancient rites of initiation is in fact the gate through which must pass all who seek the light of wisdom. Psychologists will explain it in terms of introversion and ethical writers in those of self-abnegation and what they write will be all quite true. It is these things but it is also very much more for here, as always, the ancient symbols have a wealth of content to which it is impossible to do full justice with our modern conceptual thought. The Mystic Death is a real death and, like all that is real, it has its dangers. We know that candidates were often terrified during the process of initiation both in Greece and elsewhere and Tibetan gurus of the so-called Direct Path warn their pupils that they run three grave risks — illness, madness and (literal) death. It has also been said that "he who would cross the threshold of any world must leave fear behind him."¹⁰ Here, however, let us return to our text. Those who seek the Mystic Death will assuredly find it if they ask for it "Three Times."

Once embarked on this path Nachiketas reflects within his heart.

(5) Of many I go as the first (and yet) of many I am in the midst. What is the task that Yama, Lord of Death, will accomplish on me today?

(6) Bear in mind how went those who have gone before. Note how in the same way go others now. Like grain a mortal ripens and like grain is he born again.

One of the characteristics of the ordeal through which Nachiketas has to pass, a characteristic that has been noted by so many of those who have left any record of their passing,

⁸ Gf. Coomarswamy — "Hume's paraphrase of the Father's words, e.g., 'Oh! go to Hades' is bad enough, but far more shocking is Rawson's 'His father, however, angered by the persistence of his priggish son butts forth with the equivalent of an angry Englishman's 'Go to hell !' With the angry Englishman we are only too familiar: his introduction here is a profanity."

⁹ The quotations are from G. R. S. Mead's version in *Thrice Greatest Hermes I*, 148, et seq., omitting the interpolations of another, though, allied school. The Naasenes were the followers of Naas, the serpent or Dragon of Wisdom.

¹⁰ *Lilith* by George Macdonald.

is the sense of loneliness that accompanies it. Just as he who dies physically has to leave behind all possessions, all friends, and all relations, even the dearest, so does the candidate on this inner path have to leave behind all the ties he has contracted, to sever all the links that bind him to the life he now leaves behind forever, and voyage on alone. But this is not all. The teachers who have so far guided him along the Path can take him no further while that Teacher "who is to give thee birth in the Hall of Wisdom, the Hall which lies beyond,"¹¹ has either not yet shown his face or else has for the time withdrawn it from the disciple's vision. Not that he has really withdrawn. In reality He is ever at the side of his spiritual son but it is an immutable law that the latter must pass alone through this ordeal, seemingly unaided, and relying solely on his own inner strength.

Hence, at this point, Nachiketas, in his loneliness can only seek strength within by reflection that he is but one of a chain, that many have safely made the passage before and that others are even now doing so. What has been done by man, man can do again. So without regrets for that past life towards which, if one looks back, he is lost, he prepares himself for the mystic journey by reflecting on its significance so that he may make it in full consciousness instead of having to pass through a dark belt of unconsciousness such as is passed through in the involuntary death of the ordinary man.

"Easy is the descent into the World of Death! But to retrace one's steps ! That is the task, that the labour!"¹² This ability to retrace one's steps, to bring back into this world the secret knowledge gained Beyond, it is this that above all characterises the voluntary death of the Initiate and distinguishes it from the physical death which comes to all men and also from the death-like trance of the mere passive medium.

None can confer this power on him who is not able to find it in himself. Out of the depths of our own being must come the strength that is to carry us over the barrier. Reflecting, therefore, on the fact that his predecessors on the Path have successfully achieved the journey, Nachiketas reminds himself also of the fact that such death and rebirth is the great law of the Cosmos.

Once more we have this famous Corn, the grain of St. Paul's teachings already quoted, the Plucked Wheat Ear of the Greek (Eleusinian) Mysteries, the Corn seven cubits high of the Egyptian Fields of Aahlu.

Modern man is only too ready to consider all this as mere irrelevant metaphor, of no serious importance in a discussion of what he calls the problem of survival. He marvels that anyone can have derived comfort from what, if it is not what he calls a 'fertility Myth,' is mere analogy and (to him) not a very good one at that. Surely his God has sealed up his eyes and ears "lest having eyes he should see and having ears understand." To him the sacred Plucked Wheat Ear may be nothing but an ear of wheat, but to him who trod, as to him who now treads, the ancient Path it is no mere *triticum vulgare* but the "Great, marvellous, and most perfect Mystery of Initiation, the Light Giver from That which is Inexpressible," That which is the Darkness beyond all light. He who, having passed through the proper training and discipline, gazes on the mysterious Wheat Ear finds in it a window through which he can gaze deep into the inner World of Causes and see there the realities which underlie this outer world of appearances and effects. It was not mere faith, based on childish reasoning by analogy, that gave strength of soul to the ancient initiates, and, as we know from the testimony of Greek writers even in those later days when the Mysteries were in decline, conferred on them *knowledge* of their own immortality. Almost

¹¹ *Voice of the Silence.*

¹² *Aeneid VI.*

alone among the academic moderns, the philosopher Whitehead seems, with his doctrine of universal prehensions, to be within measurable distance of understanding how each point in the universe apprehends all other points and how it is thus possible to see "Infinity in a grain of sand."¹³ It is useless to say more. Those who have seen the Wheat Ear will understand what is meant: those who have not will never be able to see anything more than *triticum vulgare* and unsound analogy.

Note, however, that even at this stage, Nachiketas is perfectly aware that after death, like corn, we are born again; in other words, that death is not the end and that re-incarnation is a law of nature. The importance of this will be seen later.

Something, however, must be said of Yama, the Lord of Death, whose name is mentioned in verse five. The name itself has several meanings, most fundamental of which appears to be the idea of checking and restraining, as with a bridle (whence Yama the first branch of eightfold Yoga). It is also important to note that it, means a twin and in the Vedic symbolism Yama has a twin sister Yami.¹⁴

In the Rigveda,¹⁵ these two speak of themselves as "the children of Gandharva and the Water-nymph, in other words, as born of the intercourse of the Spirit of Harmony, the *Buddhi*, above and the Spirit of Water, the lower world of 'Matter' and desire. It is in this sense that we have to read the hymn which relates Yami's consuming passion for her twin brother. In another hymn (X. 14) Yama is spoken of as the first "who travelled to the lofty heights above us, who searches out and shows the path to many, Yama first found for us a place to dwell in; this pasture never can be taken from us." The imaginary first man who died, say the scholars, Doubtless; but, at least in this context, what sort of 'death' is it with which we are concerned? Others, however, are nearer the mark for we have E. Meyer saying that Yama is the alter ego, the other Self of man. The actual nature of the Path he discovered is shown clearly enough in the previous hymn X. 13. "Five paces (the five levels of consciousness) have I risen from the Earth This by the sacred Syllable (The Om, the divisions of which measure the worlds, see *Mandukya Upanishad*) have I measured: I purify (the Soma, the drops of which signify the process of individualisation) in the central place of Order (the central point between the two inverted triangles)."

The fact is that Yama is the individual soul, the higher *manas* with his twin sister, the lower or personal mind. That is why the pair are born between the Harmony above and the Desire nature beneath; why also, according to a different myth, that is referred to in our Upanishad, he is Vaivaswata, son of the Sun and so is equivalent to Manu who also is a symbol of the central point, the microcosm, the little Sun of the true Individuality. Hence, he is depicted¹⁶ as green in colour, clothed in red and riding on a buffalo, the symbol of the lower nature, tamed and made into a vehicle for the higher. He is the inner controller, the Voice of true conscience, ("the fear of death!") and elsewhere has been described as dwelling in a palace made of iron and copper. Those who are aware of the symbolic meanings of the various colours and metals will be able from the above description alone to understand His nature.

Exoterically he is, like the Greek Minos, the Judge of the dead, but this of course only

¹³ Blake.

¹⁴ We may also note the parallel with Yima and Yimeh, who in the Avestan tradition, were the primaeval twins who produced the human race.

¹⁵ Rv., X lo. 4. quoted by Macdonell.

¹⁶ See Monier Williams' Sanskrit Dictionary.

confirms the interpretation given above, for it is by man himself that man's acts are judged and he who judges us is not any external power but, as stated in the twelfth chapter of Manu, our higher Self. That he should seem to most men a sinister and menacing figure is the inevitable consequence of the fact referred to in the Gita that "the Self is the friend of the self and the same Self is the enemy of the self. It is the friend of him whose (lower) self is mastered but to the uncontrolled (lower) self the Self manifests as a veritable enemy."¹⁷

It is thus that, to the ordinary man, Yama appears as the grim Judge, while, to the disciple of the inner Path who has controlled and harmonised his lower mind it is not as Judge but as the great Initiator, "he who will give thee birth in the Hall of Wisdom," that he manifests. It is, as we shall see in this guise that he appears to Nachiketas.

Nachiketas then undertakes the journey, the Death that Eugenius Philalethes well calls "a regress into the hiddenness," and travelling along that inner Path whose gateway is in the heart, arrives at the Halls of Yama, where, however, he at first finds naught but emptiness. In that mystic Emptiness an impersonal Voice is heard setting forth one of the universal laws of life.

(7) As a very fire, the Brahman guest enters into homes, therefore, O Son of the Sun, bring water to assuage him.

The text goes on to add an explanation of this somewhat cryptic utterance.

(8) Hope and expectation, friendly intercourse, the merits gained by sacrifice and charitable acts, off-spring and cattle — for the foolish man in whose house a Brahman (guest) has to fast all these things are destroyed.

The Hindus, like all other ancient peoples, have always attached great importance to the hospitable treatment of the stranger who comes within their doors and innumerable precepts lay down that a stranger guest is to be considered as a god and treated as such. Especially is this the case when the guest, is a man of learning and austere life — such as were the Brahmans in ancient times. Such a man, coming unasked to one's house, is a great blessing and to slight his advent or to fail to show him respect is an act which is fraught with grave consequences. This fact is one which was known to all the ancient peoples, to primitive tribes at the present day and to all who have not sold their psychic birthright for a mess of mental pottage. A magic mantle is always on the shoulders of the Stranger and therefore he is always a potential danger if not properly and hospitably received. "As a fire he enters the house." Moreover, the word used for fire in this verse is not that used for the everyday fire of the hearth but Vaishvanara, the Universal Fire, that which is 'common to all men,' the great Fire, which is the unity of all life. It is because he comes, as an embodiment of this ultimate unity and not as a mere bearer of those ties of relationship which we ourselves create and project on our surroundings, that the opportunity of serving the Stranger Guest is so golden a one for us, and that the slighting of him, a slight against the very Spirit of Life, is fraught with such serious consequences.

The water which Yama, Son of the Sun, is asked to fetch is the water for washing the feet, which is the first offering made by Hindus, whether to Gods or guests.

In all this, however, we are still only dealing with the outer garments of our text. A deeper insight is afforded by the words of *Light on the Path*. "When the disciple is ready to learn, then

¹⁷ Gita VI 5 and 6.