

# Beyond Sorrow and Delusion

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## Starting from the Devi Mahatmyam

Today we start with the background of the 'Devi Mahatmayam'. It is a very interesting, but perhaps lesser known scripture called the Devi Mahatmayam, which starts off with a story about two people whose circumstances have changed drastically, but in similar ways.

A once mighty king was defeated by a shrewd enemy who conspired with the king's trusted allies, and to add insult to defeat; the king's family stayed back in the palace, but the new, victorious king while this king was exiled back to the forest, which was the custom in those days. If your circumstances changed drastically, you at once left for the forest.

In another setting, a very prosperous businessman was also pushed out of business by another crafty competitor who took over his assets; and in his case too, his family stayed behind while he left for the forest.

The king sought refuge at a sage's hermitage. One day, while walking in the woods outside, he encountered the businessman who just like him, appeared sad and dejected. They exchanged notes and realized how similar their situations were.

Both felt deserted due to changing circumstances. Both still felt *great* attachment to that which was not theirs any longer. The king missed his family, royal elephant and ministers while the businessman said he missed his family and business. They could not get over the fact that these things missed, were just not theirs anymore - and wondered why they kept missing those things even though they were abandoned by them. Along with sorrow, they both felt deluded as instead of thinking of what to do from here out, they were constantly thinking of all that had abandoned them.

## The king and businessman to the sage

The king and businessman both spoke to the sage. They both decided to seek guidance from the wise sage, and after explaining a little of each of their background, put their conclusions to the sage and sought his guidance on these points.

- We've both been deserted due to changing circumstances.
- We've both still got *great* attachment to that which deserted us.
- We're both filled with grief.
- We're both deluded.
- Please destroy our ignorance through your wisdom.

Now, let's take a closer look at these to see if they have some value to our lives today. The questions of both are very relevant to our lives today, as things change constantly, and we too often feel a little sad - to put things lightly - when things change.

Does anyone ever get deserted from anyone else, anything or any condition? This is only possible if you *first* accept that people, things and conditions do not change - but they do! To keep things *as they are* or as we would like them to be is the reason for all the worrying and stress in our lives. "I hope it goes this way," and "I hope it does not go that way." We never stop to examine and see if these hopes are justified and if the worrying, which often leads to planning and sometimes scheming, is a wise way to go.

The situation presents itself, and it is not what we would like - and grief arises. We never stop to *examine* and see that it is these very hopes and expectations which *instantly* change into sorrow and grief experienced. Friends, it seems so much wiser to put an end to our likes and dislikes which would then collapse hopes and expectations and we can then get on with life as it comes - but without sorrow.

Why is not possible to experience something fully without registering a like or dislike? Where do these likes and dislikes come from in the first place? They come from *memory* of other registered likes and dislikes. So, memory which is thought, is interfering with the present which is real and telling me if it is good or not good - all this while I am very much there to know for myself first hand. When memory of the past tells me this is good or no good - what am I doing? Sleeping! So, when we allow this to happen, we never experience anything in the present as we *have* no present and therefore, no future. We have surrendered to the past which is continuing to tell us how things are and how to react. The ignorance of what is actually going on is the reason for our suffering - *never things as they are*.

Attachment by its very nature does not favor change at all and gives rise to endless thinking, planning, scheming and worrying in order to 'keep things as they are'. Are attachments love? - or are they even an ingredient in what we call love? It cannot be, as love does not oppose change, or people would never grow and everything would be the same. Attachments are *errors in understanding* as the nature of every blessed thing - people included - is change and so attachments must result in sorrow that will hopefully awaken one to this great truth: *everything changes*. The king and businessman had great attachment to what had deserted them and they felt that *it* was the source of their grief. But, my friends, nothing deserts anyone or belongs to anyone - everything is following its own nature. We form associations and *then* come to believe (or hope at least) that this will be stable and enduring. They may be for some time, but everything changes. To see change and be non-opposed to its cadence is wisdom. Their grief was not because of what deserted them, but because of their feeling of loss at what they thought they had - the hope of a 'for-sure thing'. What is interesting is that all others they were connected to were probably carrying on just fine, but these two still lamented 'at their loss'.

When the heart is heavy and feels a loss, clarity is lost or eclipsed. One *constantly* thinks about how to restore or regain or at least come to terms with what has happened. Why oppose change at all? Wouldn't that be easier? Why not just see what happens and go from there? This does not mean that we freeze *acting* in life – but, why can't we do what needs to be done without connecting it to the result of making things go *our way*? A good way to stay in step with change is, just an affirmation: 'This is how it is', without thinking of how it was.

It is important to note that though they were going through all this, for the most part they had a good idea of what was going on. There was some delusion that was not allowing them to cut through all this, but they did not know how to proceed from where they were stuck. It was with *this* feeling that they sought guidance from the sage. All too often people see others to talk about their problems, and if *that* is not enough, some talk to different people and pull from all things heard all that 'suits them' and try to make things work. They lack understanding of *where* they are stuck as they never face reality - and hence, any advice given to such people will accomplish nothing at all. If one is lost, one must either know *where one is* or where one would like to go that is not a hope but a practical possibility. Anyone seeking advice must have his act together and be receptive *before* seeking or they will dig themselves deeper. The sage saw that the king and businessman had analyzed their condition and they were receptive to guidance.

### **The sage to the king and businessman**

- There is some kind of wisdom in each creature.
- There are differences, though all possess the same wisdom.
- Why the difference in spite of the same intelligence?
- There is a great power—Mahamaya or Shakti.
- Manifestation of the Supreme Power—She is all-pervading, all of this.

The sage started right where the king and businessman had left off. They asked for their ignorance to be destroyed through *his* wisdom, and now the sage is telling them that the *same* wisdom exists in all. Every form of creation is indwelt with the same wisdom or intelligence though it manifests in *varying* degrees in different forms - and even within the same form or species, it seems to manifest differently.

He does say that there is a great power - Mahamaya or Shakti - which is a manifestation of the Supreme Power and said that She pervades all this. Now, we see that wisdom is inherent in all, ... in all forms, ... and a certain Power is also all-pervasive. The question that arises: can we once again face the indwelling wisdom and remain facing *this* light after having chased and faced shadows or ignorance for so long?

The scripture answers this but in a roundabout manner that will take quite some time and doing to explain. So, let us leave the scripture here and turn to the main questions on hand which are

very relevant in our lives today. Is it possible to live a life of clarity where sorrow and delusion do not reach? How does one live this kind of enlightened life?

## Turning to the Katha Upanishad

For the answer, we turn to the Katha Upanishad where the teacher, Yama, is instructing Nachiketas in the realization of the truth. Nachiketas is a *perfect* seeker and Yama is gradually leading him in his quest. Some of his instructions hold the answer to our questions. In the middle of the second chapter, Nachiketas refines his earlier questions in his quest for the Truth beyond all truth to razor sharp precision, and asks Yama, the teacher.

anyatra dharmādanyatrādharmā-danyatrāsmātkṛtākṛtāt |  
anyatra bhūtācca bhavyācca yattatpaśyasi tadvada ||(I.2.14)

Nachiketas asks Yama...

- What is beyond dharma and adharma?
- What is beyond cause and effect?
- What is beyond past and future?
- Please tell me what thou seest which is beyond all these.

Let us go through these three or four main points and see how they are relevant to our lives today.

**Dharma and adharma:** Dharma is usually translated as virtue and adharma as vice, but Sanskrit is a very intricate language in which words have *many* meanings and much depends on *how* one looks at things, or from one's vision of things. Dharma is also what needs to be done - and adharma, what should not be done. Here again, we come into a lot of grey area as to who defines what should be done and what should not be done. There are some collective norms and these change from time to time, but these of the outer rungs which have many inner rungs - each superseding the other. For instance, it is widely held that 'thou shalt not kill'. But, to those serving in the military, duty or doing what needs to be done may involve a loss of life. Nachiketas would like to know, "Is there an Absolute Truth which is beyond all truths that are relational or conditional?" What is beyond all such arrangements?

**Cause and effect:** A cause is something which is not made and an effect is something which is made. Both are related to each other, as cause supposes an effect and vice versa. Nachiketas would like to know, "Is there something beyond all such relationships which presuppose duality?"

**Past and future:** In his last refinement, Nachiketas asks, "Is there something beyond time process?" With these three, Nachiketas would like to know about *That* which is beyond space, time and causation. Now, this is not a wanting to know *about* but the entry into the knowledge *of* - period! The Upanishads are not like googling for information to satisfy one's curiosity or

vanity. Knowledge is the same as *being* to the sages, and this knowledge is given, so to say, in *real time*. For this, the listener has to have the capacity to hear with all-being, as it is being said, on a level of receptivity where the soul is listening - as it can act then and there and is not bound by time process.

nāyamātmā pravacanena labhyo na medhayā na bahunā śrutena |  
yamevaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyaḥ tasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūṃ svām ||(I.2.23)

Yama speaks to Nachiketas and says, this Atman cannot be attained by...

- Much study.
- Intelligence.
- Much hearing.
- But, He whom the Self chooses, by him the Self can be gained.

Let us go into some of these main points, because it is very important, as we approach the scripture, that we realize that we are studying ourselves through the scripture.

Yama has been leading Nachiketas to the immediacy of his quest: “What is beyond all this?” - and in this verse, he starts by reinforcing that its attainment is not *really* an attainment as such, because it is not an effect of effort. So Yama is talking about a way to approach all this. This said, it is not that effort is *not* needed - but that effort does not *actualize* the truth because this great truth is Existence Itself.

**Not by much study:** Yama continues that this Atman, which in the Upanishads is not different from the Absolute, cannot be attained by much study as it is not *a* subject—it is *The Subject*. Here, Yama points out that this Atman is Pure Subjectivity, and so one has to shake-off all apparent obstructions or clouds that seem to eclipse it. Study is put in perspective in that it is not studying *of* the scripture that is beneficial but study *of the self through the scripture* that is needed. Just as you look in the mirror and shave the face, can we read the scripture and shave ignorance? If this cannot happen, we may gain some familiarity with the words of the scripture, may be able to give impressive discourses and rattle verses brilliantly, but there would not be an inch of progress in removing ignorance. On the contrary, foolishness may increase.

**Not by intelligence:** Yama then says, “Not by much intelligence either.” ‘Our intelligence’ necessitates ‘our’ which stands in the way of the realization of the Absolute, as that *includes* ‘our’. So, can we start with the intelligence but realize that ‘we’ cannot have the experience as ‘we’ *is* the problem. Remember what the sage told the king and the businessman: “This wisdom is in all”. This intelligence is the same as the wisdom that the sage was talking about, and we have a hold on it. This hold breaks the undivided intelligence into fragments which we are trying to work with. This will not work. We have to let go of this ‘our’ intelligence or ‘my’ intelligence while still being there intelligently - or being awake, alert and sincere. So, can we start off with *this* or our

intelligence without holding on - and still being there fully alert, wide awake and totally sincere? It's hard to do this in meditation which is what Yama is instructing Nachiketas in, as our individual ways of thinking and functioning are different from our universal ways - or universal ways period - and so we must universalize our *existence* if we are to succeed in meditation and realization.

**Not by much hearing either:** Yama also mentions that this realization is not had by much hearing and he is driving the point by saying 'not much' or 'nor by ...' to mean that all things help if they have quality, but sheer quantity or grinding will never achieve anything.

**He whom the Self chooses:** And the last part of what Yama says was: "He who the Self chooses." This is where Yama drops the bombshell by saying, "He whom the Self chooses, by him the Self can be gained. To *him* this Atman reveals Its true nature." Does this mean that we do our best in purifying ourselves and then wait for our number to be called? Here, Yama tells Nachiketas that this all-pervading Pure Intelligence is not only there *in* everything but *in* all things - *as* all things. When we purify ourselves to the degree where it is unhampered, the empowered intelligence within seeks its own Cosmic Counterpart. The Self within has to want the Self spread out everywhere. This is the threshold one has to reach to be a spiritual seeker, ... a true seeker. The one who seeks is the same as That which is sought and they have to face each other - unhampered - and will only do so when we surrender our resistance and let the walls - that we have ourselves created and sustained - fall.

Friends, this threshold is not something like an on and off switch that we toggle to at our convenience—living life one way or being one way in what we call our daily lives and then doing the holy, holy thing in our prayer area or in the holy place. This is foolishness and it will not work. Yama is talking about the conditions of change, which is that *we* have to change *ourselves*, from the inside out, giving up individuality or the ego *completely* if we are to experience universality first and what lies beyond—which was what Nachiketas' question was.

nāvirato duṣcaritānnāśānto nāsamāhitaḥ |  
nāśāntamānaso vā'pi prajñānenainamāpnuyāt ||(I.2.24)

Four qualities are needed in the seeker...

- To have turned away from 'bad conduct'.
- Have sense-control.
- Be concentrated.
- Be tranquil minded.

Having laid out some of the ground work, Yama instructs Nachiketas on four qualities that are needed in the seeker, which are the same four qualities if we are to lead a peaceful, happy, and sane life - and these are: to have turned away from 'bad conduct', ... to have sense-control, ... be concentrated, ... and be tranquil-minded.

**What is bad conduct?:** All of us has to want all of what lies beyond, and this must reflect in our lives - in every thought, feeling, word and action. As we've discussed earlier, the words of the Upanishads have many meanings and layers in depth. The word *duṣcaritā* is usually translated as 'bad conduct' and we may feel that we are not doing bad things, as such. But, *duṣcaritā* implies doing what is good or what needs to be done - and at the same time, not doing what is not good or what should not be done - both at the same time. In the language of yoga, *duṣcaritā* involves the complete spectrum of *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, or right effort and the absence of passion or *rāgā*.

We've discussed this earlier in talking of dharma and adharma. But there, we were talking on an *outer* level. Nachiketas wanted to know what was beyond all such things. Yama now says that one has to completely abandon what in us resists, or surrender - and this is essential. To always do what is good or needs to be done and always and non-selectively avoid what is not good or what should not be done is a call to live beyond individuality and universality as well, ... to be an instrument of *That* which enables us to live while still living.

Naturally, for this there must be inner discipline which keeps the lower nature in check, not out of suppression but by having *That* which is beyond in one's sight, though unseen as yet. Just as when you have good health firmly in your sights, you stay away from things that are contrary to it - not out of suppression but by a better choice, ... by choosing good health. So also, when you have peace, real and lasting happiness in your sight, you stay away from all things that are to the contrary, including attachments and things of the past or future. This is a direct answer to the king and businessman's question on dealing with attachment and the feeling of loss at changing circumstances. Set your sights higher and let that vision guide you.

The strength to stay the course of staying with a higher, more inclusive, and more pervasive vision includes: sense control, a concentrated mind, and tranquility or a tranquil mind. Yama put these three right after he mentioned *nāvirato duṣcaritā*, which means avoiding bad conduct, ... which includes having good conduct. See, my friends, conduct is not just how you *do* things but how you conduct or manage yourself even when there is nobody around or inwardly when you are with people. It requires brutal self-honesty and self-accountability - and *if* subscribed to wholeheartedly, has the power to integrate being like none other.

Having talked about *duṣcaritā* or bad conduct, let us go to these three *essential* qualities which every person seeking a sane, peaceful, happy life should wish to inculcate.

**Sense-control:** to have this integration of being *naturally*, behavior that scatters the rays of the mind must be avoided and Yama says, right after talking about *avoiding* bad conduct, that this vision or realization does not come to one who does not have his senses under control. Sense control is not just control at the organ level but at the sense, and even below, at the understanding level. The mind should not have a taste for what appears to be pleasant, as it has

set its sights on what is *good*. What is good is quite different from what is pleasant. Yama mentioned this to Nachiketas right as he began teaching that there are two ways are open to all: the good and the pleasant, and both come to a person. You don't even have to go after them - they come. This is where free will comes in. Your choice in all things is either to face the light or darkness, the good or the pleasant.

**Concentration:** Now let us talk about concentration. After sense control, Yama mentioned that one be *concentrated*. This is more the need today than ever before, as the dependency on technology with its immediate access to all things in real time has reduced one's ability to concentrate tremendously. Technology hasn't done this; our dependency or misuse has led to this. With this, restlessness has increased, as the mind now operates at speeds and hops from one thought to another much faster than ever before. Earlier, Yama talked about sense-control; now he is talking about self-control.

Unless we wise-up to the fact that a distracted mind equates to loss of peace, happiness and even productivity and brings about a degradation in *all* relationships, we will not move towards being concentrated again. If we have had this realization, then we must take all steps to gather the rays of the mind and keep them gathered, as to be concentrated has value *in itself*. We have talked about doing the right thing in the right way - and now, we see that we have to do what we are doing with all our heart and soul, without preference and distinction, as in this, the rays of the mind come together.

**Tranquility:** The last quality Yama talked about was tranquility. Next, Yama says we are to be tranquil-minded. Tranquility has many meanings in the English dictionary, among them are 'a state of being serene, calm, and balanced'. The Yoga Vasishtha includes tranquility among four sentinels guarding the fort of liberation. See, my friends, life is a stream of change. Everything changes all the time. When we have awakened and empowered the inner intelligence that responds to life, life's vicissitudes do not shake one, as that happens when our conscious minds are in charge. The inner intelligence is a subtle and more pervasive platform which sees the outside changes, and it also sees the reactions of the conscious mind *within it* and does not lose its balance or equilibrium as these happen. This is tranquility.

If you choose the path of the good in all things non-selectively, doing what needs to be done, ... if you have sense-control and self-control, ... tranquility happens. Yama has outlined the path to tranquility but insists that these stones rest on the foundation of 'choosing the good', and this foundation has to be non-selective and reflect in the life we lead. We have already talked about this 'good' not being a *social* good or acceptable good, but having two components which guide one to do what is good and avoid all of what is not good at the same time, or *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya* in the language of yoga and the Bhagavad Gita.



parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhū-stasmātparāñpaśyati nāntarātman |  
kaściddhīraḥ pratyagātmānamaikśa-dāvṛttacakśuramṛtatvamicchan || (II.4.1)

Obstacles can be removed by fourfold sadhana...

- Being one in many.
- Being brave and wise.
- With eyes averted from sensual objects.
- Being desirous of Immortality.

Naturally, in this pursuit, obstacles are encountered; and these obstacles can be removed by a fourfold sadhana which Yama prescribes. It may seem a little odd when we look at the brevity of it, but let's go into each one of these after a little bit of understanding: *being one in many, ... being brave and wise, ... with eyes averted from sensual objects, ... being desirous of immortality.*

Yama does say that God created the senses with *outgoing* tendencies and therefore man beholds the external universe and not the Internal Self or Atman. Just as before when we read that, "He who the Self chooses...", etc., one could have felt that we have little say in the matter. Here too, one could feel: "What to do, this is how the senses are made - after all its natural, isn't it?" Earlier we forgot that the Self is our true nature too, and perhaps our true nature or Self *alone* can select its Infinite Counterpart. Here too, my friends, we should not mistake the senses being made with outgoing tendencies and completely forget that while the senses like to go outwards naturally, wisdom tends to flow inwards towards higher, ... towards the higher naturally, ... and to empower wisdom *is* to put a check on all else, as nothing can go anyplace that one's understanding doesn't find to be a good choice. For example, if saving money becomes important to you, all the sales in the world at that time will not seem lucrative, as savings has been seen as the best option.

It may seem that some of what we are being told is a tall order, but this cannot happen if we see the danger in staying the course. Staying the course must become untenable; it must become untenable to go on with life 'as is' for another way to be seen. The obstacles are often our own resistance in the present of all the past that now rises in the form of strong habits. Yama tells us through Nachiketas that *all* obstacles can be removed by his prescription: a fourfold sadhana, or a practical way of living.

**Being one in many:** True seekers are, indeed, one in many. This does not mean that you are *better* than others or belong to an exclusive club - nothing of the sort. But, to know that the path of the good is not a common choice and will never have common acceptance should give rise to the wisdom of not being socially entangled or communicative, or seeking social acceptance while pursuing the highest. People love to advertise change: "Oh, I have started yoga classes and I can see how my mind is going to become so very peaceful." But, after that they soon discover that yoga is hard work, ... of all the hard work that yoga entails,... and they see their kith and kin continuing to have such a good time. They then feel that they are in the middle - neither here

nor there - and find themselves second guessing and giving in to doubt. So, it is best not to talk about change or advertise it in any way. In matters regarding spirituality, it is best to discuss any such matters with the teacher *only* - or all kinds of doubt can arise surprisingly.

**Being brave and wise:** Some people love to discuss all good things that they have heard or read with others in the hopes that it may help them too. They are fooling themselves and only trying to satisfy their vanity because others may have an appetite of the pleasant or they would be seekers themselves. Change first! Be the change you want to be first - and remember that still waters run deep. No need to advertise change, when you have changed - at the very core of your understanding - ripples of this inner change will make things visible externally as well without advertising anything; and you will also be wise and strong enough to handle any criticism or reactions of others - especially those you consider close to you. So, *be brave* in treading the path of the good. It has been called the straight and narrow path and is never trodden by herds—it is just not wide enough and herds who stay away from such narrow paths as they find security in their herd. You will find your strength in the goodness of your aspiration - in God. Let any obstacle come, however daunting. Use *every* difficulty to strengthen your faith and perfect your surrender and you will come out wiser and stronger.

**Eyes averted from sensual objects:** The senses want little things, different things, and more of them - this is their nature. Let not the senses take hold of the reins of the mind. Let wisdom or the inner intelligence guide the mind by being *clear* about what is sought. The mind will control the senses and so on down the line. In this very Upanishad, ... this Katha Upanishad, ... there is a beautiful illustration in three verses where Yama says:

*“They say, the senses are the horses and their objects are the roads; the Atman, the senses and the mind united, the wise call the enjoyer. He who has no discrimination and whose mind is always uncontrolled, his senses are not controllable - like vicious horses of a driver. But he who has understanding and whose mind is always controlled, his senses are under control like the good horses of a driver.” (I.3.4-6)*

**Being desirous of Immortality:** The fourth and last part of this fourfold sadhana, ... and probably the most important, ... is being desirous of immortality. Here again, the best is saved for the last. All of this sounds difficult -and just *how* does one find the strength to stay the course *day after day* amidst all the turmoil within and without? Yama says, “desirous of immortality” which is the same as a strong desire for the higher, for the good, for God - or in the language of yoga, it’s called *mumukshutva* in Sanskrit: you *must* have a steady and intense desire for the good, for the higher, for the better, for God. *This* is your strength, *this* is your solace, *this* is your comfort, and *this* is your light on the path.

Yama is very clear about what is needed, the difficulties along the way and where one finds their strength. There is no ambiguity or blind trust, as in Yama we find a *perfect* Master! - a Master beyond all - and in the Katha Upanishad, we find a roadmap for the spiritual seeker.

parācaḥ kāmānanuyanti bālā-ste mṛtyoryanti vitatasya pāśam |  
atha dhīrā amṛtatvaṁ veditvā dhruvamadhruveṣviha na prārthayante ||(II.4.2)

The unawakened ones...

- Are child-like, indiscriminating, ignorant.
- Have ever increasing desires.
- Continue to fall into the widespread snares of death.

The awakened one...

- Is wise and brave.
- Knows the nature of Immortality.

### **The unawakened ones...**

Friends, we started with a little bit of background from the situation with the king and the businessman and their questions to the sage, ... the sage's answers. We cross-decked from the Devi Mahatmyam to the Katha Upanishad for the answers and took the same question, raising the bar, so it could answer not just the *practical* things of a sane and good living, but also the best living and pursuit of the higher. In three verses, Yama gives us a complete prescription for how we need to be, what we need to do, and where we find our strength. Now there's a little bit of background about the unawakened ones and the awakened ones - and this will help us in always staying on the awakened path.

The unawakened ones are child-like, indiscriminating and ignorant. They have ever-increasing desires, and therefore continue to fall into the widespread snares of death spread out everywhere.

The awakened *one* (and note we said the unawakened *ones* - we are saying the awakened *one*) - always one in many: is wise and brave, and knows the nature of immortality.

Let us go into each one of these and find its application to our life.

### **The unawakened ones...**

**Are child-like:** Yama uses the word 'childish' for ignorant ones who run after the changing - external objects and relationships - as a source of happiness because they do not know the true value, or nature, of anything. If you offer a child a ten dollar bill and a chocolate - a little child - he or she will more than likely pick the chocolate because they do not know the value of money.

In the same way, those who run after external objects and the kind are also childish, in the language of Yama, ... indiscriminating and ignorant.

**Have ever increasing desires:** If there has been even a slight awakening, one should be able to see *through* desires, as desire is itself the destroyer of peace and happiness. When one desires, whether it be for a person, a thing, or any condition - as all these are desires only - one is running on hope and expectation: "I hope this happens, ... I hope that does not happen, ... and when will it happen?". While these dark clouds are in the mind-sky, the light of wisdom never shines through. Friends, we are coming full circle to where we started from with attachment and desires that the king and the businessman had in the other scripture. Their circumstances had changed and they found themselves bereft of much they had before. Their grief was not because of where they found themselves now, but because what was before - was not there now. The past lets itself go, but we *hold on to it* in our minds and hearts - we can never hold on to the past as it goes whether you feel you are holding on to it or not. What of the past can you hold on to? Just memories! The past goes by itself. Yama tells us here not to hold on to it in the mind, as what is held within will *not* correspond with things outside and one will suffer. Suffering is never because of *things* but our reactions to them. The Master tells us that those who still have ever increasing desires, however subtle or justified, are childlike - in that they have not gained in wisdom by seeing and accepting things as they are and finding a way to live amidst change.

**Continue to fall into the widespread snares of death:** What happens to those who are child-like and have ever increasing desires? Yama says, "They continue to fall into the widespread snares of death *spread out everywhere*." Everything changes - and when we put the value of happiness in the changing, we are bound to go from grief to sorrow and deeper still. Along with our ever increasing grief, we have ever increasing desires of hope of things to change. And this combination of ignorance and desires *is* what brings us back to this cycle of birth and death, or samsara, continually.

We suffer while we are still alive and then come back to go through more rounds till we can see through this and give rise to wisdom. Yama says, "Widespread snares of death spread out everywhere" - implying that all things change and change is itself death from one form to another, or from one condition to another. When we pursue desires, we are pursuing change and by that, pursuing death - here in this life and in other rounds to come.

In an earlier verse, Yama remarks:

*"Arise, awake, having reached the great teachers, or the great ones, learn (realise that Atman). Like the sharp edge of a razor is that path, difficult to cross and hard to tread - thus the wise say." (I.3.14)*

You have to arise and awaken and start moving towards the light. All the help is there on the path is there for the awakened ones, but for those who are asleep, there are just more reasons to be

asleep. The choice is up to each one. So, gird up your loins and rise to the task. When you have doubts, get them cleared by those who have trodden the path - the wise.

### **The awakened one...**

**Is wise and brave:** Now, let us look at *the awakened one*: he is wise and brave. In the earlier verse, the same word dhīrā was translated as brave and wise - and here, wise and brave seems to be in order. Having awakened, stay alert, says Yama; and this requires courage at first which *gradually* transforms or blossoms into wisdom. What takes effort in the beginning, soon becomes natural. When you start a fire outdoors, you have to gather kindling and protect the fire till the logs catch on. Once good sized logs start burning, they burn by their own flame.

**Knows the nature of Immortality:** And second, about the awakened one, Yama says: *knows the nature of immortality*. But why does one do all of this in the first place? When one knows that change is death and to pursue change in *any* form will lead one, one sees that what was pursued sorrow, understanding the true nature of things. When one sees that there is something that does not change within me - or I would never be able to *know* change - one feels inspired to know this unchanging - That which is beyond change and Immortal. When one knows the value of the sought, why should there be struggle with what is left behind? When one knows this in the heart and treads the path of its realization, one is a seeker of all things good, ... of peace, ... happiness, ... joy everlasting, ... and immortality.

### **In closing**

The questions put to the sage by the king and businessman are our questions today too. What is good? Why is it hard to pursue the good? Why do we suffer? How does one go beyond suffering and delusion? Could you please destroy our ignorance with your wisdom?

The sage starts by putting the ball *back* in their court by saying, "The same wisdom is in all." The teacher will not do what you have to do. There are no shortcuts, special pathways, or any other tricks by which you can subvert the work that each needs to do himself or herself.

We turned to the Katha Upanishad, a scripture I feel cannot and should not be ignored by a sincere spiritual seekers for answers. Yama, or death, is the teacher - and Nachiketas, or fire, is the student. Death is the pivot of change, something dies and a new form is seen. When the fire of aspiration faces this truth of life that *everything* changes - light, power and wisdom arise.

We cross-decked from the questions of the Devi Mahatmyam to the refined question of Nachiketas, taking our quest from relief to fulfillment. Then, in just four concise verses across a couple of different chapters, a pathway was found for the ascent of the spirit. In our time today, we have journeyed together across some of the teachings of the great Master, Yama. But, to understand the nature of Nachiketas is to understand the nature of the true seeker - and *this*

must be the important for us, as it is the threshold for each seeker to rise and the constant source of encouragement.

Friends, the word for study is svādhyāyā in Sanskrit. Some translate this as study of scriptures. When you look at this word and its components together, you see two words: svā from svayaṁ, which means self, and dhyāyā from dhyānaṁ, or to ponder deeply, to inquire into. In studying the scriptures, we can know about it and what the words translate into. But, if we study *ourselves through the scripture*, we can see our limitations and our ignorance and set them aside for clarity, peace, and happiness - and for That, which lies beyond all, or God.

*Nothing can move one who knows what is good and what is not. One who values serenity and tranquility will never be lured by any gimmick - even if all seem to be using them.*

Friends, thank you for joining me today.



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