CHAPTER III

ELIGIBILITY FOR SELF-REALISATION

There are two types of human pursuits —— Šreyas and Preyas¹. These two have different objects, the first being good in the long run and the other being pleasant instantaneously. All activities of man are covered by this two-fold classification made by Yama. Every action of a living being is motivated by an irresistible instinct to be happy².

1. KU.I.ii.1
2. Chinmayananda, op. cit., p.51
Human beings having an internal organ (antahkarana) capable of conceiving (saṅkalpa), doubting (vikalpa), determining (niścaya), memorising (smṛti) and arrogating (abhimāna), are aware of the fact that an action which may produce a result characterized by pleasure to the performer may not necessarily lead to his good. For instance, drinking of coffee sweetened with sugar brings pleasure to a diabetic patient but it is not good for him as it adversely affects his health. Though the lower beings are unable to distinguish between the pleasing and the good, man with his developed mental faculty is able to analyse the results of every activity to determine whether it will be conducive to his final good. The wise who is properly educated realizes that the physical well-being and enjoyment of endless pleasures in this life is not the final good but the final good is in transcending the cycle of births and deaths.
which causes numerous sufferings. Every person is always haunted by Śreyas and Preyas. His activities for getting material prosperity and sensual pleasures are influenced by Preyas whereas Śreyas prompts him to do actions that will lead him to immortality. So he is, it can be said, bound by the two. In worldly life these two are opposed to one another. A man cannot have both at the same time. Either he should accept Śreyas which is verily Vidyā (the right knowledge) and give up Preyas which is Avidyā (nescience, which is the cause of the wordly sufferings) or he should accept Preyas and give up Śreyas. One who chooses Śreyas will achieve his eternal good. On the contrary, the person who is lacking farsightedness as he is still in the influence of ignorance chooses Preyas and slips from the path.

3. KUSB I.ii.1
towards the real goal\textsuperscript{4}.

When the two paths are in the control of man, the choice depends upon the state of his mind. The one who has a perfected mind through education or the company of good people will seek only the path which leads to the final good. He will not be distracted by temporary pleasures. However, the dull-witted who has no reasoning and distinguishing intellect chooses the path of \textit{Preyas}, always thinking of getting worldly pleasures. He will be always engaged in activities to acquire wealth and other objects of pleasures and to retain whatever he has already gained\textsuperscript{5}. One who is overpowered by temptations fail to

\textsuperscript{4}KU.I.ii.1

\textsuperscript{5}KU.I.ii.2 and KUSB I.ii.2
recognise the path of Śreyas which also remains open before him like the other path. *Kathopanisad*, projecting *Naciketas* as a seeker of Self, enlightens us on the qualities of a person eligible for Self-realisation. These qualities indirectly mentioned in a dramatic way in this ancient *Upanisad* were specifically enumerated in later Vedantic texts⁶.

Śraddhā

*Kathopanisad* presents a situation in the very beginning which gives us an idea about the origin of the *Upanisadic* philosophy in a society obsessed with Yajña. *Naciketas* is the central character of the story which pushes the Yajña culture to the background and leads the idea of the

⁶See *Vedāntasāra*, *Vedāntaparibhāṣā*, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, etc
pure knowledge to the forefront. It is a picture of the transition from *Karmakāṇḍa* to *Jñānakāṇḍa*. *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* also has this story.

Vājaśravasa, son of Vājaśravas, was desirous of attaining heaven. The *Brāhmaṇical* injunction that “one desirous of heaven should perform sacrifice”\(^7\) was prevalent at that time. So Gautama (*Vājaśravasa*) performed the *Viśvajit*\(^8\) sacrifice in which it was customary to give away all items of wealth as presents (*Daksinā*). *Naciketas*, who was still a boy, found these presents being carried away and was taken by *Śraddhā*. *Śraddhā* is defined here by *Śaṅkara* as *Āstikyabuddhi* caused by *Naciketa’s* desire for the

7. Yajeta svarga kāmah
8. KUSB.I.i.1
good of his father. By Astikyabuddhi we may understand a faith in the existence of heaven or God or fate. Naciketas was learned in scriptures and it is natural that he had faith in the results of actions which could make or mar the prospects of one’s future after death.

Naciketas thought: These cows have drunk water for the last time, eaten grass for the last time, yielded milk for the last time and are barren. He who gives such cows will go to the worlds known as Anandas (Joyless).

Gautama distributed old cows as presents which were of no use to the receivers. Naciketas, under the influence of Sraddhā, knew that his

9.KUSB.I.i.2
10.KU.I.i.3
father was not doing the proper thing. He was sure that his father was sure to go hell where there is no happiness. Naciketas thought that he could be a present and could be useful to the receiver. By his services to the receiver he could bring merit (Puṇya) to his father which would make him (father) eligible to attain a better world. As we are able to understand from the later part of the Upaniṣad, Naciketas had no correct idea about what happened after one’s death though he had full knowledge of the descriptions of the other worlds fictitiously depicted in scriptures. However, he had good faith in his resolve not to allow his father to suffer unknown hardships in his future life. So he asked for his father to whom he was being given as a present.

Swami Chinmayanada says that Śraddhā in Sanskrit is so expressive a word, pregnant with
such sacred suggestions, that it is almost impossible to translate it into any European language. He quotes Wesley: “What is faith?... not an opinion or any number of opinions put together, be they ever so true. It is the vision of the soul, that power by which spiritual things are apprehended, by the physical senses.”

Śaṅkara defines Śraddhā in the Vivekacudāmani thus: The firm belief that the Śāstra (scripture) and the word of the Guru are true is called Śraddhā by scholars and it is by it that the real thing is understood. In the verse stating this

12. Ibid
13. Śāstrasya guruvākyasya
Sā Śraddhā kathitā sadbhir-
Yayā vastūpalabhyate V.C.v.25.
Śaṅkara does not consider Śāstra and the word of the Guru as two different things, so some scholars affirm. That is why Vedāntasāra states: Faith in the Vedāntic statements pronounced by the Guru is Śraddhā. Chinmayananda comments: Śrī Śaṅkara’s commentary explains to us the term Śraddhā as “an unswerving faith in the words of the teacher, in the teachings of the scriptures and in the dictates of one’s own self.”

Naciketas had faith in the Vedic teachings, faith which was not blind but which enabled him to understand the true meaning of every dictum by applying reason. That is why he was not satisfied by his father’s presents to those who participated in the sacrifice. He knew that Daksinā was not for

14. VS. v.14
15. Chinmayananda, op.cit., p.5
its own sake but it was meant for the benefit of the donee. He was faithful to his father. When on his insistence, his father said that he was giving *Naciketas* away to *Mrtyu* (Death), he (*Naciketas*) did not hesitate to go to the home of *Mrtyu*. It is true that *Naciketas* was embarrassed at his father’s decision for he did not know how his father could be so angry as to offer him to death. Moreover he did not know what service he could render to the Lord of Death\(^\text{16}\). But it was he who demanded thrice that he should be given away as a present. Then when the result was the worst, which he never expected, he did not change his word. He very well understood that man meets with his death and is born again just like herb decays and grows again\(^\text{17}\). So he had to look at the conduct of

16.KU.I.i.5
17.KU.I.i.6
his forefathers in the past and of the great men of his own time\textsuperscript{18}. In his knowledge, great men of the past and the present were all steadfast in their commitments. He had no reason to divert himself from the path shown by them.

Thus it was the \textit{Sraddhā} of Naciketas which caused him to visit the Lord of Death and seek from him the knowledge of what was beyond death. Hence \textit{Sraddhā} is a prerequisite quality which makes a person eligible for Self-realisation.

\textbf{Viveka (Discrimination)}

Discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal objects is one of the means a student of Vedānta should have, states \textit{Vedāntasāra} and

\textsuperscript{18}KU. & KUSB I.i.6
other works on Vedānta. Though Kathopanisad does not expressly declare this, there is implication that discriminatory power is essential for acquiring the knowledge of the Self. It is Naciketas who persists in his demand to Yama to tell him all about the Self. He has knowledge of the temporary nature of all worldly pleasures and all visible objects. He had the scriptural knowledge to understand rituals people were performing to attain a world of happiness, which was different from this earth. By way of one boon, Yama had imparted to him the methods of doing a sacrifice, which could lead the performer to the heavenly world where there was happiness always. The Lord of Death further blessed him whereby this fire sacrifice became well-known in

20. KU.I.i.14
the world by the name of Naciketas. Again Yama said that the one who would practise Nāciketa sacrifice, just now taught, for three times; who would do the three things, viz., sacrifice (iṣṭā), Veda chanting (adhyayana) and charity (dāna) and who would have consultations with the three persons, viz., mother, father and preceptor; he (that one) would have good mental peace.

If Naciketas was satisfied with the new knowledge he got from Yama regarding the sacrifice and its results, he would not have asked the next question as to what was beyond death. He was aware that the world of happiness, svarga, which could be thus reached was also not absolutely eternal but was relatively permanent in

21. KU.I.i.16
22. KU. & KUSB.I.i.17
view of the life on earth. Though he had no clear idea of what was it that remained eternal even after the physical phenomenon called death, he had the discretion there was something, which was absolutely eternal. This discretion is *Viveka* which prompted *Naciketas* to ask Yama, as the third boon, what was there when a man died. Here it is clear that *Naciketas* could distinguish the eternal from the non-eternal. But it does not seem that he had a clear vision of *Brahman*. *Vedāntasāra* and similar modern *Vedānta* works explain “*nityāntyavastuviveka*” as the distinct knowledge that *Brahman* alone is the eternal thing and everything else is non-eternal. But if that knowledge of *Brahman* is there, then what is the

23. KU.I.i.20
24. VS.p.13
need for further investigation. The one who has that knowledge is already a *Vedāntin*. So it is the *Viveka* found in *Nāciketas* that is the quality of the seeker of the eternal being.

**Virāga (Indifference)**

*Vedāntasāra* shows indifference to the enjoyment of results (obtained by activities) in this world or the other world as an essential quality of a student of *Vedānta*. *Kathopaniṣad* indicates this by presenting *Nāciketas* in a situation where he reached himself by renouncing all pleasures. He, as a boy, was having a happy life in his father’s house. His father was performing a sacrifice for gaining more and more gains in the worldly life.

Naciketas very well knew that he was entitled to a share of whatever his father gained. Though he had such prospects, he did not long for pleasures. On the contrary, he was ready to a present to be given away in the sacrifice whereby he could serve the receiver. Even when his father pronounced his decision in a fit of anger to give away the boy to death, he did not change his mind. At the house of Yama, he was offered many objects of pleasures instead of his demand for the knowledge of the Eternal Being.

_Sanīyama_ (Control of senses etc)

_Vedāntasāra_ speaks of six types of control of mind and other faculties as a group among the qualities of a seeker of _Brahman_. They are _Sama_,

\[26\text{VS., p.13}\]
Of these Sraddhā is explicitly referred in the Katha Upaniṣad and it, being prominent, has already been discussed here as the first qualification. In fact it is not a control of the faculty but a positive attitude of the mind which leads to the control.

Śama is the withdrawal of the mind from objects of hearing etc. which are not favourable for the Vedāntic understanding.27 Dama denotes the withdrawal of the external sense organs from objects which are not relevant to the Ātmavidyā28. Uparati means keeping the sense organs fixed on

27. VS.,p.13. śamastāvācchīvāpanādīvyaśati kta-
viṣayebhyo manaso nigrahaḥ.
28.Ibid. Dama bahyendriyāṇāṁ tadvyatirikta-
viṣayebhyo nivartanam
the objects relevant to *Vedantic* thoughts preventing any diversion. *Titikṣā* is tolerance of the sufferings, which appear as opposite pairs like heat and coldness, pleasure and pain, etc. *Samādhāna* or *Samādhi* is concentration of the mind on hearing, etc., favourable for the knowledge of the Eternal Being. *Śama*, *Dama*, etc., practised in a systematic way constitute Yoga which finds an important place in the instructions of Yama to *Naciketas*.

The conversation between the Lord of Death and *Naciketas* contains ample proof to state that the boy had self control of all types meant by


30. Ibid., *nigṛhitasya manasaḥ śravanadāu tadanuguṇa viṣaye ca samādhiḥ samādhānam.*
Sama, Dama, etc. When he was given a chance to demand a third boon, Naciketas wanted to know clearly what was beyond the death of a being. He knew that it was a very difficult subject and the best person to impart that knowledge was Mrtyu, the Lord of Death. The Lord wanted to test the steadfastness of the boy because no ordinary man could understand that knowledge. An ordinary student would discontinue his effort to get that knowledge since it is too subtle to grasp. Yama tried to dissuade him by saying that even gods had doubt about it in the past and he should not insist on such a demand\textsuperscript{31}. He was advised by Yama to ask for some other boon. But the very same fact that the gods even were eager to get this particular knowledge was a reason enough for Naciketas to hold on to his demand. He knew that there was

\textsuperscript{31}KU.I.i.21
nobody else as competent to impart that knowledge as Yama himself and there was no other boon equal to this boon of this wonderful knowledge. Even if a search was made for a preceptor to teach this knowledge, Naciketas was unlikely to meet one. This boon was unrivalled because it alone was enough to bring final liberation (Mokṣa). All other boons could bring only results of a temporary nature. Insistence of Naciketas shows that his mind was entirely confined to the only objective of acquiring the knowledge of the Self.

Yama tried again and again to tempt Naciketas to give up his concentration. He offered

32. KU.I.1.22
33. KUSB.I.22
him sons and grandsons of life upto one hundred years, many cattle, elephants, horses, a large quantity of gold, a very large area of land and also a life for Naciketas upto as many years as he wished to live. Yama’s efforts were numerous to lure him to the world of pleasures. Naciketas was offered the status of a king of a very big country with endless wealth and very long life. Yama would make him enjoy all covetable pleasures. Naciketas could ask for all desirable objects, which were not available on earth. Naciketas was offered the Apsaras ladies who were giving all sorts of sensual pleasures to the gods in the heaven. These ladies were to be accompanied by chariots for pleasure trips and musical instruments.

34. KU.I.i.23
35. KU. & KUSB.I.i.24
for merry-making. Yama requested *Naciketas* to have the heavenly ladies to serve and enchant him and not to ask questions about death and related issues\textsuperscript{36}.

All the things offered were enough to entice any person but *Naciketas*. He was sure that all these were not equal to what he wanted to know by the third boon. He emphatically declined all allurements. He said that these were all transient. There was no guarantee that these would remain for the next day. These would perish. These would take away the power from all sense organs. So he said Yama to keep the horses, dance and music for himself. The life was only shortlived\textsuperscript{37}. Here

\textsuperscript{36}KU.& KUSB.I.i.25

\textsuperscript{37}KU.I.i.26
Naciketas is speaking from the position of a very intelligent human being who has very well understood the meaninglessness of the worldly life and pleasures attached to it. Naciketas, though a boy, has lived a fruitful life of intelligent Self-analysis and critical discrimination of men and things.

As Naciketas says, man is not to be satisfied by wealth. The span of life of a person is subject to the authority of Death. It is an obvious truth that by arranging the external world in which we are living we cannot guarantee our happiness. Happiness is a state of mind arrived at by itself during its transactions with the external set-ups.

39. KU.I.i.27
functioning in time, place and condition\textsuperscript{40}. All the statements of Naciketas declining the objects of pleasures clearly indicates that he has Ātman. When Naciketas asks who would rejoice in long life after having pondered over the pleasures produced by colour or music (Varna) and sports\textsuperscript{41}. Naciketas is denouncing the existence of the men of the world struggling to earn, striving to possess, labouring to hoard, hurrying to spend\textsuperscript{42} and indulging in conjugal pleasures. Here it is indicated that Naciketas has attained Dama. He has full concentration on the eternal truth, his detachment is not temporary and he is prepared to suffer

\textsuperscript{40} Chinmayananda, Op. cit., p. 47
\textsuperscript{41} KU.I.i.27
\textsuperscript{42} Chinmayananda, Op. cit., p. 48
anything to achieve his goal. All these indicate that he has Uparati, Titikṣā and Samādhi. In short Naciketas is a typical example of a seeker after the Eternal Being, since he has full control of his mental faculty and senses.

**Duty not to be shirked**

A question may arise whether it is necessary for one to give up his duties in daily life to be eligible to be a recipient of the knowledge of the Self. The answer we get from the *Kathopanisad* is in the negative. That is why when Yama offered three boons, Naciketas opted for his father’s goodwill and happiness as the first boon and Yama consented his happy reunion with his father. By the second boon Naciketas asked for the details of the sacrifice by which one could get peaceful and happy life here and in the next world. The
sage to whom the *Upaniṣad* was revealed has thus made us know that a householder can very well be eligible for Self-realisation if he has the qualifications of Śraddhā, etc.