

The Nine Blessings

Chapter 1

Introduction

Awakening to a spiritual life is a gift for the fortunate few.

Shankaracharya's **Viveka Chudamani** starts by listing 9 such blessings.

This chapter explores these blessings, guiding us on our own path to spiritual awakening.

List of nine blessings

- (1) Human birth (nara-janma)
- (2) Manhood (pumstvam)
- (3) Saatvik attitude in life (viprataa)
- (4) Steadfastness on the path of righteousness, as prescribed in the Vedas (vaidika-dharma-maarga-parataa)
- (5) Correct knowledge of the deep significances of the Vedas (vidvattvam)
- (6) Differentiation between the Self and the not-Self (Aatma-anAatma-vivechanam)
- (7) Direct experience (svanubhava)
- (8) To be established in the awareness of the identity of Brahman and Atman (brahmAtmanaa samsthiti)
- (9) Liberation (mukti)

Human birth

Blessing 1

Why is Human truly special?

While countless living beings exist, from amoebas to birds, **human birth is considered rare and special.**

This isn't because of physical strength - **whales** are immense, **cheetahs** are lightning fast. Even our senses are surpassed by some animals - **dogs** hear more sounds, and **snakes** see a wider range of colors.

According to modern science...

Modern science, focused on understanding the physical world, might view humans as superior. This knowledge has led to advancements but also dangers, like weapons of mass destruction.

Vedanata points out...

1) **Human beings alone are endowed with the faculty of self-awareness** (i.e. the ability to be objectively aware of one's actions, words, thoughts and habitual tendencies) that is capable of effecting a **quantum change** in their thinking.

2) All creatures in this world lead 'programmed' lives, largely guided by their instincts. They do not have the **ability to choose** their response and re-program themselves. Human beings alone have this rare capacity.

3) **Human beings alone** are capable of **noble and divine pursuits**. Man, alone can ponder over questions of vital importance:

Who am I?

Is there a purpose to life?

Is there a creator of the world?

What is the nature of the world?

What is my relationship with God?

Human Are superior to devas because...

The Vedas talk of births higher than that of a human, such as that of a yakshas, kinnara, devataa and so on.

By punya (Merits) earned through good deeds, one attains the state of a god (a deva);

by paapa (Demerits/Sin), or the sins accrued by doing unrighteous and prohibited actions, one goes to naraka (hell).

And by an **even combination of punya (Merits) and paapa (Demerits/Sin)**, one gains the birth of a human being.

Being born as a heavenly being (deva, kinnara, etc.) is like a luxurious vacation. You enjoy great pleasure for a while, but it runs out, and you're back on Earth. It doesn't end suffering, just postpones it.

Also, **in heaven, there is no progress in one's spiritual life**. Only in human birth (nara-janma) is there a chance to put an end to the cycle of birth and death.

It is only as a human that one gets the right mixture of joy and sorrow, which can generate dispassion for all finite pleasures and help one turn towards the Higher.

It is then that an individual becomes qualified for scriptural study, reaches a Guru, learns the way pointed out by Vedaanta and finally becomes liberated.

Manhood

Blessing 2

pumsatvam

Though some texts say a masculine temperament is rare, it doesn't exclude women from Vedic studies.

Hindu scriptures have many examples of female scholars - Maitreyi, Gargi, etc. - proving strength isn't needed for spiritual knowledge.

Swami Chinmayananda emphasizes the rarity of 'manhood' or puruṣtvam by highlighting the qualities of the head and heart that define it.

He explained that **manhood is not about gender** but about possessing qualities like ***firm determination, detachment, intellectual strength, and emotional composure.***

These qualities, traditionally associated with masculinity, are **not exclusive to men but can be found in women as well.**

Therefore, '**manhood**' signifies an intellect free from attachments and sentiments that may hinder clear reasoning and emotional stability

Manhood in the spiritual context essentially means **courage, strength, a constancy to pursue with steadfastness and the will to achieve in the spiritual path.** This is indeed rare.

Saatvik Attitude in life

Blessing 3

Vipratā

'**Vipratā**' literally means '**braahminhood**'. By this is meant once again a certain psychological nature characterized by '**sattva**'.

The Bhagavad-gīta enumerates the braahmanical Saatvik qualities as **serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness, uprightness, knowledge and belief in God.**

Thus, when Vedaanta declares that to be a '**braahmin**' is rare, what is meant is that to be endowed with these Saatvik and divine qualities is rare.

These qualities raise one from '**manhood**' to '**mature manhood**'

Steadfastness In the path of dharma prescribed in Vedas.

Blessing 4

Vaidhika dharma marga paratā

Many believe being good is sufficient, **but it's not.**

Goodness leads to Godhood; we need a **pure mind** and **focused intellect** for God-Realization.

Shankaracharya highlights that only a few among those with virtuous qualities diligently engage in spiritual practices like **studying scriptures, avoiding prohibited actions, offering duties to the Lord, and practicing japa and pooja.**

Many do not start these practices even when advised, and among those who do, **only a few possess the mental strength to persist.**

Engaging in spiritual practices like **studying scriptures** leads to purity of mind and single-pointedness of intellect, aiding in **spiritual evolution.**

Those who consistently follow scriptural teachings are rarer than those who are merely good individuals.

Knowledge of the deep significances of veda

Blessing 5

vidvattvam

Understanding the inner meanings of Vedic verses through **insight and faith is more effective than mere recitation.**

Shankaracharya's **analogy of a gemmologist and a fisherman** with a diamond illustrates the importance of knowledge in benefiting from spiritual teachings.

The gemmologist profits from the diamond due to understanding its value, unlike the fisherman who misses out due to ignorance.

It emphasizes the significance of comprehending the profound meanings guided by a Guru, beyond mere recitation and rituals.

Differentiation between self and not self

Blessing 6

Self and the non-self

Atma anatma vivechanam

The 'Self' is the pure Consciousness, and the 'not-Self' is the inert matter vestures – the body, the mind and the intellect.

A right understanding of the **Vedas (vidvattvam)** gives one the ability to differentiate the pure Consciousness from the matter vestures and, thus, one comes to be intellectually convinced that **one is not the body, mind and intellect.**

Those who can intellectually differentiate between the two – the Self and the not-Self, the Real and the unreal – **have progressed to a more advanced state of spirituality.**

Direct experience

Blessing 7

svanubhava

The previous qualification – Atma Anatma vivechanam or differentiation between the Self and not-Self – is of the **nature of intellectual knowledge**.

But '**svanubhava**' is **higher** than mere intellectual conviction, for it is of the nature of direct experience.

By the steady process of **meditation (samādhi)**, one transcends the conditioning of body, mind and intellect and merges with the pure Consciousness within.

Very few people can come to this sanctum sanctorum of the Lord in one's heart. **This is rare...very rare.**

To be established in the awareness of brahman and atman

Blessing 8

Brahmatmana samsthithi:

While a **fleeting moment of self-awareness** during contemplation might occur, it's not enough.

The **danger of backsliding** lurks.

Consistent recognition of your true essence is crucial.

You must reside in the understanding that **the innermost Self, the Atman within you, is one and the same with Brahman, the universal Self, everywhere.**

This unwavering state of being, termed "brahma-Atmanaa-samsthithi," represents the **very pinnacle of our existence in this world.**

It's the reason we're born.

Achieving this connection fills the deepest emptiness of your heart with overflowing bliss.

liberation

Blessing 9

mukthi

A person **who has thus reached the very pinnacle of spiritual life is liberated from the cycle of birth and death.**

Once his body drops after the exhaustion of its destiny (prārabdha), he no more takes a new embodiment. **This final Liberation from the body is called 'videha-mukti'.**

A person free of all desires and selfishness has no rebirth. **To fulfil which desire will he have to be born again?**

Shankaracharya declares that this kind of perfect Liberation cannot be had without **the earned merits of a hundred crores of lives lived intelligently.**

Those who are **ignorant** of their true nature, bound by the fetters of desire and cocooned in their own selfishness, they alone **have to be reborn.**

Milestones on the road to perfection

Milestones on the road to mukthi

HUMAN BIRTH -> manhood -> noble attitude in life à steadfastness on the path of dharma as prescribed in the Vedas -> knowledge of the deep significances of the Vedas -> differentiation between the Self and the not-Self -> direct Experience à establishment in the awareness of the identity of Brahman and Atman -> **LIBERATION.**

Manhood, burning desire for Liberation, the capacity to surrender completely to a Man of Wisdom – these three things are rare indeed, and wherever they are found, they are due to the Lord's own Grace. (*Vivekachudamani* of Shankaracharya, verse 3).

Knowledge is that which quietens the senses. That Knowledge alone is worthy of knowing which is the ascertained theme of the *Upanishads*. They alone are blessed persons who strive to realize the Supreme Truth, whereas all others are wandering in the quagmire of delusion. (*Dhanyashtakam* of Shankaracharya, verse 1)

Om Namah Shivaya: