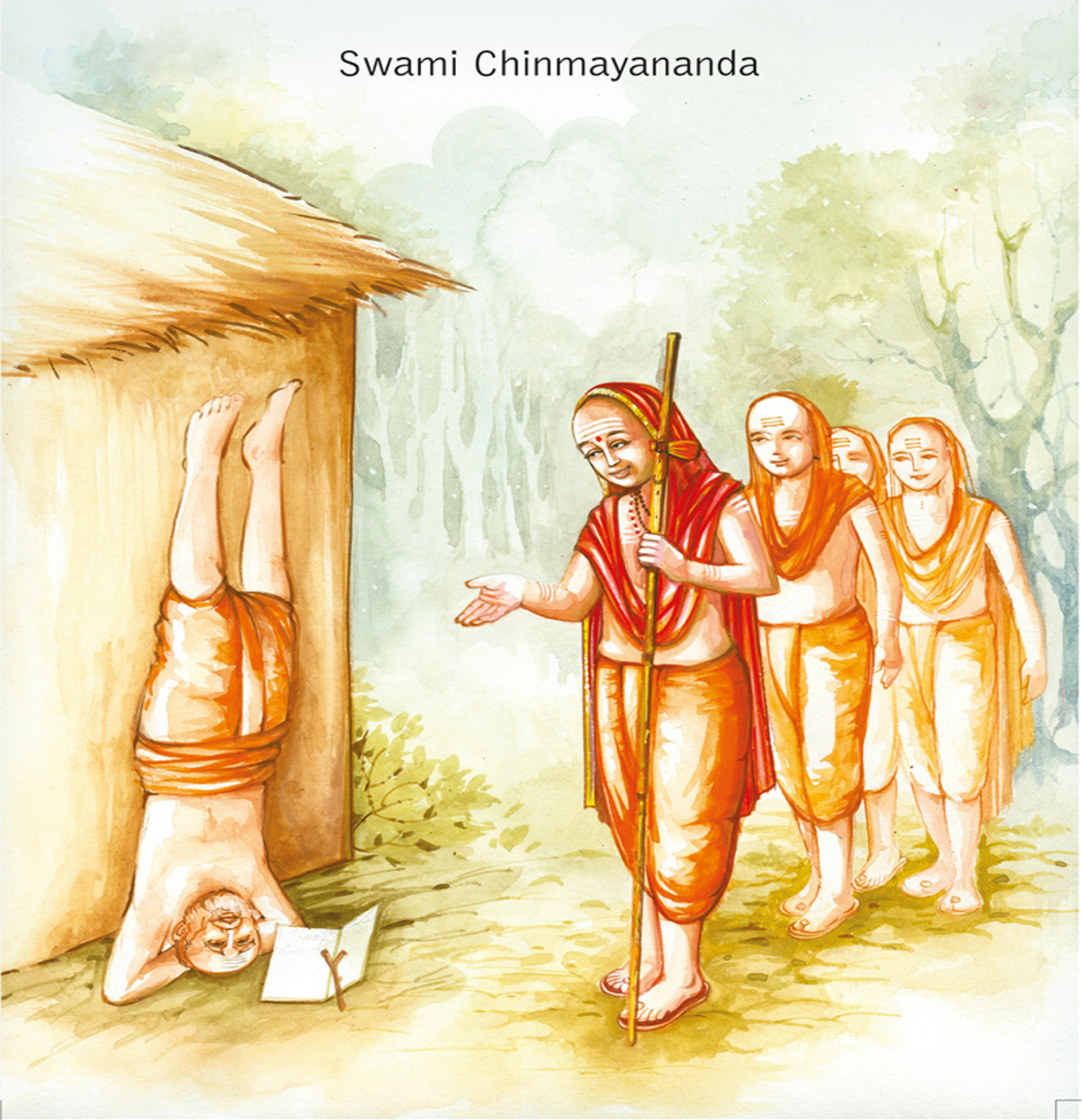


Ā D I Ś A Ñ K A R Ā C Ā R Y A ' S

BHAJA GOVINDAM

Swami Chinmayananda





Swami Chinmayananda

Hailed as the second Swami Vivekananda, Pūjya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda (1916-1993) has left a great legacy behind for mankind. On realising the true purpose of life, he worked tirelessly and with tremendous energy for more than four decades to spread the message of Vedānta. A great orator, writer, leader, patriot and spiritual giant, he is one of the finest representatives of Indian spiritual heritage. The sprawling worldwide organisation of Chinmaya Mission carries on the torch lit by this great Saint.

Ādi Śaṅkarācārya's
BHAJA GOVINDAM



Commentary by
Swami Chinmayananda



Central Chinmaya Mission Trust



PREFACE

Ādi Śaṅkara's *Bhaja Govindam* in 31 memorable verses delivers a wake up call to the slumbering seeker. Systematically removing misconceptions and lifting the veil of ignorance he forces us to detach from the impermanence of life and seek the supreme Reality.

Pūjya Gurudev in his hard-hitting commentary points to the malaise and the urgent need to eradicate it. The powerful examples he uses to elucidate the text leave an indelible impression on the reader.

Chinmaya Prakashanam have tried to eliminate errors in the text, introduced diacritical marks in original Sanskrit text with transliteration and word-to-word meaning. Chinmaya Kalpanam are responsible for the revamping of the book and the beautiful cover design. We thank them for their efforts.

CCMT Publications has great pleasure in bringing out this redesigned edition of an all time favourite, urging its readers to.....Seek Govind!

Central Chinmaya Mission Trust
Mumbai - 400 072





Transliteration and Pronunciation Guide

In the book, Devanāgarī characters are transliterated according to the scheme adopted by the International Congress of Orientalists at Athens in 1912. In it one fixed pronunciation value is given to each letter; f, q, w, x and z are not called to use.

Devanāgarī	Translit- eration	Sounds Like	Devanāgarī	Translit- eration	Sounds Like
अ	a	son	ध	ḍh	adhesive*
आ	ā	f <u>a</u> ther	ण	ṇ	u <u>n</u> der*
इ	i	d <u>i</u> fferent	त	t	t <u>a</u> bla
ई	ī	f <u>ee</u> l	थ	th	t <u>h</u> umb
उ	u	f <u>u</u> ll	द	d	t <u>h</u> is
ऊ	ū	b <u>oo</u> t	घ	dh	G <u>a</u> ndhi
ऋ	r̥	r <u>h</u> ythm*	न	n	n <u>o</u> se
ॠ	r̄	**	प	p	p <u>e</u> n
ल	l̥	**	फ	ph	p <u>h</u> antom*
ए	e	ev <u>a</u> de	ब	b	b <u>o</u> il
ऐ	ai	del <u>i</u> ght	भ	bh	ab <u>h</u> or
ओ	o	c <u>o</u> re	म	m	m <u>i</u> nd
औ	au	n <u>o</u> w	य	y	y <u>e</u> s
क्	k	c <u>a</u> lm	र	r	r <u>i</u> ght
ख	kh	k <u>h</u> an	ल्	l	l <u>o</u> ve
ग	g	g <u>a</u> te	व	v	v <u>e</u> ry
घ	gh	g <u>h</u> ost	श	ś	s <u>h</u> ut
ङ	ṅ	an <u>g</u> le*	ष	ṣ	s <u>u</u> gar
च	c	ch <u>u</u> ckle	स	s	s <u>i</u> mple
छ	ch	w <u>i</u> tch*	ह	h	h <u>a</u> ppy
ज	j	j <u>u</u> stice	ः	m	im <u>p</u> rovis
झ	jh	J <u>h</u> ansi	:	ḥ	**
ञ	ñ	b <u>a</u> nyan	क्ष	kṣ	ac <u>t</u> ion
ट	ṭ	t <u>a</u> nk	त्र	tr	t <u>h</u> ree*
ठ	ṭh	**	ज्ञ	jñ	g <u>n</u> osis
ड	ḍ	d <u>o</u> g	ऽ	'	a silent 'a'

* These letters don't have an exact English equivalent. An approximation is given here.

** These sounds cannot be approximated in English words.





INTRODUCTION

Bhagavatpāda Ācārya Śaṅkara was not only a great thinker and the noblest of philosophers of advaita, but he was essentially an inspired champion of Hinduism and one of the most vigorous missionaries in our country. Such a powerful leader was needed at the time when Hinduism had been almost smothered within the enticing entanglements of the philosophy of Buddha and consequently, the decadent Hindu society had come to be broken up and disunited into sects and denominations, each championing a different viewpoint and mutually quarrelling in endless argumentations. Each puṇḍita, as it were, had his own followers, his own philosophy and his own interpretation. Each one was a vehement and powerful opponent of all other views. This intellectual disintegration, especially in the scriptural field, was never before so serious and so dangerously calamitous as in the times of Śrī Śaṅkara.

It was at such a time, when our society was fertile for any ideal thought or practical philosophy to thrive, that the beautiful values of non-injury, self-control, love and affection of the Buddha came to enchant alike the kings and their subjects of this country. But the general decadence of the age did not spare the Buddhists also. They, among themselves, precipitated different viewpoints and by the time Śaṅkara appeared on the horizon of Hindu history, the atheistic school of Buddhists (Asad-vādīs) had enticed away large sections of the Hindu folk.

It was into such a chaotic intellectual atmosphere that Śaṅkara brought his life-giving philosophy of the non-dual Brahman of the Upaniṣads. It can be very well understood what a colossal work it must have been for a single man to undertake in those days,¹ when modern conveniences of mechanical transport and instruments of propaganda were unknown.

The genius in Śaṅkara did solve the problem and by the time he had placed at rest his mortal coil, he had whipped the false ideology of Buddha beyond the shores of our country and had reintegrated the philosophical thoughts in the then Āryāvarta. After centuries of wandering, no doubt

richer for her various experiences, but tired and fatigued, Bhārata came back to her own native thoughts.

In his missionary work of propagating the great philosophical truths of the Upaniṣads and of rediscovering through them the true cultural basis of our nation, Ācārya Śaṅkara had a variety of efficient weapons in his resourceful armoury. He was indeed pre-eminently the fittest genius who alone could have undertaken this self appointed task as the sole guardian angel of the ṛṣi culture.

An exquisite thinker, a brilliant intellect, a personality scintillating with the vision of Truth, a heart throbbing with industrious faith and ardent desire to serve the nation, sweetly emotional and relentlessly logical; in Śaṅkara the Upaniṣads discovered the fittest spiritual 'General.'

It was indeed a vast programme that Śaṅkara had to accomplish within a span of about twenty effective years: for at the age of thirty-two he had finished his work and had folded up his manifestation among the mortals of the world. He had brought into his work his literary dexterity, both in prose and poetry, and at his hands, under the heat of his fervent ideals, the great Sanskrit language became almost plastic. He could mould it into any shape and into any form. From vigorous prose, heavily laden with irresistible arguments to flowing rivulets of lilting tuneful songs of love and beauty, there is no technique in language that Śaṅkara did not take up; and whatever form he took up, he proved himself to be a master in it. From masculine prose to soft feminine songs, from marching militant verses to dancing songful words, be he in the halls of the Upaniṣad commentaries or in the temple of the *Brahmasūtra* expositions or in the amphitheatre of his *Bhagavad-gītā* discourses or in the open flowery fields of his devotional songs, his was a pen that danced itself to the rhythm of his heart and to the swing of his thoughts.

Pen alone would not have won the war for our country. He showed himself to be a great organiser, a far-sighted diplomat, a courageous hero and a tireless servant of the country. Selfless and unassuming, this mighty angel strode up and down the length and breadth of the country, serving his motherland and teaching his countrymen to live up to the dignity and glory of Bhārata. Such a vast programme can neither be accomplished by an

individual nor sustained and kept up without institutions of great discipline and perfect organisation. Establishing the maṭhas, opening up temples, organising halls of education and even establishing certain ecclesiastical legislations, this mighty Master left nothing undone in maintaining what he achieved.

Bhaja Govindam is one of the seemingly smaller but, in fact, extremely important works of Ādi Śaṅkara. Here the fundamentals of Vedānta are taught in simple, musical verses so that, even from early childhood, the children of the ṛṣis can grow up amidst the melody of advaita.

The musical rhythm in these stanzas makes it easy even for children to remember and repeat these pregnant verses. For an intelligent young man, a sincere study of this poem can remove all his delusions (moha) and so the poem is also called *Moha Mudgara* (mudgara – hammer).

A popular story describes the circumstances in which this great poem broke out from the inspiring heart of the Teacher.² It is said that, once in Banārāsa, as Śaṅkara was going along with fourteen of his disciples, he overheard an old puṇḍita repeating to himself grammar rules. At this futile effort put forth for a mere intellectual accomplishment, thus wasting his time in life without realising the spiritual unfoldment in himself, the Ācārya is said to have burst forth into these stanzas, famous as *Moha-Mudgara* now popularly known as *Bhaja Govindam*. ‘Grammar rules will never help anyone at the time of death. While living, strive to realise the deathless state of purity and perfection’.

Taking the opening stanza as a refrain or chorus, to be chanted for emphasis at the end of the following verses, tradition has it that the immediately following twelve stanzas were given out by the Ācārya himself. They together go under the name *Dvādaśamaṣjarikā* stotram. So contagious must have been Teacher’s inspired mood and the exploding poem, that each of his followers at that time in his company, contributed a stanza of his own and they together stand under the title *Caturdaśa maṣjarikā* stotram. After listening to all the verses, Śaṅkara blesses all true seekers of all times in the last four stanzas.

This set of thirty one stanzas, together titled *Moha Mudgara*, has been very popular in our country. It is but natural that it gets published again and again by various institutions and slowly, different types of readings get to be equally popular. Some of the alternative readings we have noted here and there in our commentaries.

In some editions of this poem *Moha Mudgara*, we have less number of stanzas; in some, the sequence of stanzas is different; in some, the second half of one stanza is read with the first half of another stanza – sometimes lines are interchanged and sometimes the words are slightly changed. And yet, in none of them, nowhere is the essential spirit of the verses found to have been noticeably tampered with.

The first 1 to 12 verses of this poem as it now stands are together called the *Dvādaśamaṣṭjarikā* stotram (a bouquet of 12-stanza flowers). A bouquet of fresh blooms is beautiful and rewarding even to look at from a distance. Similarly, even to hear these stanzas chanted is thrilling enough, and for the industrious bees that are capable of courting the flowers and entering deeper into them, there is always the sweeter honey as a special and extra reward. So too, to the students who are capable of entering beneath the superficial joys of the metrical rhythm and thus delving deeper into the philosophical implications suggested in these verses, there is real nectar – a consoling philosophy, a satisfying view of life – in the poem *Bhaja Govindam*.

Though it is classified as a devotional song (stotram), the chorus alone can be truly designated as a prayer verse. The rest of the thirty stanzas, with scientific precision, dissect the shell of thoughtlessness that veils the glory in man and forces him to be helplessly stupid in his relationship with the world outside. The verses, on the whole, can be considered as a ‘book of categories’ (prakriyā), in the science of Vedānta.

Unlike the other manuals of Vedānta – *Ātmabodha*, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, *Paścadaśī* and others – *Bhaja Govindam* gives, within the limited canvas of its composition, a more eloquent picture of the art of realisation and a deeper diagnosis of human unhappiness. It not only indicates to the students the goal and the path, but also reveals unto him the wretchedness of his present way of life, the horrors of his present values of life and the dire

consequences that await him if he continues to pursue the path of ego and desire.

This simple looking stotram is not addressed to other equally vehement philosophers and erudite disputants. Naturally, it contains, therefore, no elaborate logical argumentations to prove Śaṅkara's own philosophical standpoint. Nor has the author wasted any labour in breaking other unhealthy and unholy misbeliefs. In short, there are no dialectics in these stanzas.

These are addressed to seekers as a book of instruction to help them walk the path straight to their goal. It contains ideas that can refresh the seekers on their path. The students whom Śaṅkara admonishes with these stanzas are already pilgrims, all of whom, perhaps, are walking slowly under the crushing load of their own fatigue. This is a textbook of advice (upadeśa) and not a book of disputation (vāda). In *Bhaja Govindam* we meet with a teacher who is softly advising his own beloved disciples in the secret chambers of his own sacred retreat.

A disciple (śiṣya) is (a) one who is taught by the teacher,³ (b) one who has become improved – has become now relatively more introvert, having left the extrovertedness that he had in the past, as a result of his study of the contents of the śāstra⁴ (c) one who controls and curbs the activities of one's own sense organs.⁵

Therefore, a true disciple is one who is being taught by the teacher, and who, as a result of the understanding so gathered, has now become more and more introvert than what he was before, and is one, who has started independently to curb and control all sense appetites and the vagaries of his emotions and thoughts. Such disciples were the audience to whom *Bhaja Govindam* was addressed.

If these stanzas are not silencing the arguments of the opponents of advaita, they are not in any sense of the term a mild, soft, musical chant that gurgles through a heart of soft emotions and generates a feeling of divine sentiments temporarily in a man of heart; there is no such softness about this. These thirty stanzas have a 'crack-whip' style and effect about them.

There is no softness, no delicate consideration in the approach to correct the erring man. It whips up; it slashes with a cruel ‘cat-o’-nine-tails’ on the back of man because of the urgency. When the house is on fire, no formalities need be respected in waking up your respected parents, wife or children. The urgency of the moment demands that they must be awakened immediately. Thus here, in *Moha Mudgara* are a few criminally sweet slashes, with a kindly cruel whip of horrible impatience, coming with a hateful love for the welfare of the beloved disciples still sleeping in saṃsāra sorrows – when the house of life is ablaze with death.

¹ 7th/9th centuries AD

² At the end of *Dvādaśamañjarikā stotra* we read:

द्वादशमंजरिकाभिरेषः कथितो वैयाकरणशिष्यः।

उपदेशोभूद्विद्यानिपुणैः श्रीमच्छंकरभगवच्चरणैः॥

dvādaśamañjarikābhireṣaḥ kathito vaiyyākaraṇaśiṣyaḥ,

upadeśobhūdividyānipuṇaiḥ śrīmacchāṅkarabhagavaccaraṇaiḥ.

³ शिक्षते इति शिष्यः।

śikṣate iti śiṣyaḥ

⁴ शिष्यात् विशिष्यते शास्त्रादि-परिज्ञानेन।

बहिर्मुखः अपेक्ष्य इति शिष्यः॥

śiṣyāt viśiṣyate śāstrādi-parijñānena,

bahirmukhaḥ apekṣya iti śiṣyaḥ.

⁵ इन्द्रियादि प्रवृत्तिं शिक्षयति इति शिष्यः।

indriyādi pravṛttim śikṣayati iti śiṣyaḥ





MOHA MUDGARA

भज गोविन्दम्
Seek Govinda

भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं गोविन्दं भज मूढमते।
संप्राप्ते सन्निहिते काले न हि न हि रक्षति डुकृञ्करणे ॥ (१)

*bhaja govindam bhaja govindam govindam bhaja mūḍhamate,
saṁprāpte sannihite kāle na hi na hi rakṣati dukṛñkaraṇe. (1)*

भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda; भज – seek;
मूढमते – O fool; संप्राप्ते – (when) comes; सन्निहिते – appointed; काले – time
(death); न हि – surely never; न हि – surely never; रक्षति – saves; डुकृञ् –
grammar rules; करणे – to do

1. Seek Govinda, seek Govinda, seek Govinda, O fool! When the appointed time comes (death), grammar rules surely will not save you.

This opening stanza is considered as a chorus and is generally repeated at the end of the following verses. *Bhaja Govindam* is a chant that is generally sung in congregations. The leader sings each verse and the entire audience takes up the refrain ‘Bhaja Govindam, Bhaja Govindam’. In this refrain verse, the disciple is asked to pack his heart with thoughts of God rather than with his anxieties to acquire, hoard or possess secular accomplishments or even achievements.

The grammar rule that has been indicated here stands for ‘all secular knowledge and possessions’. The grammatical formula mentioned herein, ‘dukṛñkaraṇe’, is from ‘dhātupāṭha’ of Pāṇini’s grammar treatise.

The import of this condemnation, that all grammar and such other secular sciences cannot save the soul, when death reaches to snatch the individual away from this limited ambit of temporary existence here in the

world, reminds us of a similar situation in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, where Nārada approaches Sanatkumāra, humbly begging for initiation into the great knowledge. The teacher rightly asks, ‘Tell me all that you already know so that I may instruct you on what you do not know’. Nārada, thereupon, gives an endless and brilliant list of sciences that he had already mastered from astrology and astronomy to literature and art, music and dance, all the varied sciences, and so on, at which Sanatkumāra says, ‘These are all mere names. The infinite Bhūmā is to be realised. It exceeds all these’. It is interesting to note that, in the list of Nārada’s accomplishments, grammar was also especially mentioned.

Knowledge of grammar is, no doubt, necessary. It is a means to an end. To understand rightly the śāstra declarations and even to appreciate fully the advice of the teacher, grammar is useful. But to waste our precious lifetime in the pursuit of all these non-essentials and never taking up seriously the study of the greatest of sciences, which alone can save man from the thralldom of imperfections, is being condemned here by Ācārya Śaṅkara.

For, when death comes to erase you out of existence in this manifested world, of what use is your science to you? Of what charm is the art that you have mastered? Of what help is the knowledge of grammar then? While living here, man’s greatest endeavour is to understand and master the secret of life, the Reality behind it and to gain his perfect identification with It. He must be able to meet death not as a moment of utter annihilation, but as a springboard to rocket himself into an eternal Existence, peaceful and divine.

There is a set of optimistic men of mere book knowledge who quote the *Gītā* and say that at the time of parting they shall remember the Lord and thus achieve all that is to be achieved; in the *Gītā* it is said, ‘One who leaves the mortal coil remembering Me, is saved’.¹ Book knowledge cannot save us from the unrelenting law; the law is the Lord. Even in the *Gītā* it is said: ‘antakāle ca’. The importance of the conjunction ‘ca’ is not generally well realised. Śaṅkara in his commentary explains that this conjunction ‘ca’ stands for ‘all the life through and at the time of parting’.²

The term ‘bhaja’ means worship. It is not merely a ritualistic routine and monotonous flower throwing or a mechanical chanting of some

selected mantras or hymns. ‘Seeking our identity with the Lord’ is true bhajan, true sevā – service. Be it in your private chapel or in a public temple, the services conducted therein, no doubt, have been regularised in all religions, with certain codes of instructions; this is only to bring uniformity throughout the country. To go through those movements is at best only a ‘religious drill’. True bhajan is a total subjective surrender, in love and devotion, at the altar of the Lord as conceived by the devotee.

This process of self-liquidation at the feet of the Lord has been classified under nine types, according to the means adopted: (1) listening to the glory of the Lord (śravaṇam); (2) singing the glory of the ‘Beloved’ of your heart (kīrtanam); (3) constantly thinking about His nature and beauty (smaraṇam); (4) adoring the feet of the Lord in a spirit of self obliteration (pādasevanam); (5) with the help of selected mantras and sacred Vaidika hymns, employing the necessary things prescribed for worshipping the Lord (arcanam); (6) to pay obeisance to the Lord (vandanam); (7) serving the Lord (dāsyam); (8) to invoke the Lord affectionately and to discuss with Him as a friend (sakhyam); and lastly (9) to offer oneself, in total self-surrender to the Lord, as a humble gift at His altar (ātmanivedanam).

In all of them there is a spirit of worship, ‘bhaja’, employed. The essence in all worships (bhajanam) is ‘service’ (sevā). Īśvarasevā is Īśvara bhajanam; no doubt, janasevā is certainly Janārdana sevā.

The term ‘Govinda’, to indicate Viṣṇu, appears twice in the *Viṣṇusahasranāma*.³ Śaṅkara, in his commentary, explains this term etymologically to mean, in four different ways, the same highest Reality, the supreme Brahman. He dissolves the word ‘Govinda’ in the following four ways: (1) He who finds or knows the earth – meaning, one who has realised the substratum upon which the world play is going on; (2) He who is the Lord of the cattle – not only as the divine cowherd boy of Gokula, but as the very life giving factor behind all animal passions and the very essence behind the living kingdom; (3) He who confers speech⁴ – the very power because of which all living creatures, through the medium of speech, convey knowledge mutually to each other, be it in the braying of an ass, the barking of a dog or the thunderous eloquence of a speaker; and (4) He who

is known through the Veda texts – the very supreme Reality indicated by the great statements (mahāvākyas).

In short, Govinda stands for the essence, the Ātman, which is the Truth behind the ever changing flux of things that constitute the universe of our experiences. Govinda is the Brahman of the Upaniṣads. He is the highest Reality, the great God. Therefore, Bhaja Govindam means ‘seek your identity with Govinda, the Supreme’ and do not waste your time in mere grammar hunting and in such other really unprofitable pursuits of secular knowledge, of worldly possessions, of ephemeral fame and of passing joys.

¹ अन्तकाले च मामेव स्मरन्मुक्त्वा कलेवरम्।

antakāle ca māmeva smaranmuktvā kalevaram – (Bhagavad-gītā ch. 8-5)

See Swamiji’s commentary on The *Bhagavad-gītā*.

² पूर्वमपि अन्तकाले च।

pūrvamapi antakāle ca

³ Viṣṇusahasranāma 33rd and 71st stanzas.

⁴ यद्वाचाऽनभ्युदितं येन वागभ्युद्यते।

तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते॥

yadvācā’ nabhyuditaṁ yena vāgabhyudyate,

tadeva brahma tvaṁ viddhi nedaṁ yadidamupāsate – (Kenopaniṣad ch. 1-4)

(Refer Swamiji’s discourses on *Kenopaniṣad*).





मूढ जहीहि धनागमतृष्णां कुरु सदबुद्धिं मनसि वितृष्णाम्।
यल्लभसे निजकर्मोपात्तं वित्तं तेन विनोदय चित्तम्॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (२)

*mūḍha jahīhi dhanāgamatrṣṇāṁ kuru sadbuddhiṁ manasi vitṛṣṇām,
yallabhase nijakarmopāttam vittaṁ tena vinodaya cittam.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (2)*

मूढ – O Fool; जहीहि – give up; धन-आगम-तृष्णां – the thirst to possess wealth; कुरु – create; सदबुद्धिं – thoughts of Reality; मनसि – in (your) mind; वितृष्णां – devoid of passion; यत् – with whatever; लभसे – you get (as a reward of the past); निज-कर्म – by your actions; उपात्तं – obtained; वित्तं – the wealth; तेन – with that; विनोदय – entertain; चित्तम् – (your) mind; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

2. O Fool! Give up the thirst to possess wealth. Create in your mind, devoid of passions, thoughts of the Reality. With whatever you get (as a reward of the past), entertain your mind (be content).

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

The extrovert personality wanders away from Reality to get himself enmeshed in the finite experiences of joys and seeks his fulfilment in the world outside. Desire for possessing, acquiring, hoarding and enjoying is the only motive force that takes man out of his own inner equipoise into the stormy realms of lust and greed. By so doing, man gets himself involved in the sorrows of saṁsāra, although he is really the inheritor of endless peace and perfection.

One who comes to suffer from one's own ignorance is called a fool (mūḍha). Śaṅkara hits the nail on the head of the entire problem of the sorrows in life when he appeals to man to give up 'the thirst to possess wealth'. Here the term 'wealth' (dhanam) is to be understood in the largest

sense of the term. It includes in its embrace, all worldly objects of possession, with which the possessor vainly feels a temporary satisfaction.

Wealth in itself is innocent; philosophy is not against wealth. It is not said here, 'Renounce wealth', but it is only the insatiable thirst (tṛṣṇā) for wealth that is to be given up. 'Desire for wealth' is the relationship that the individual keeps subjectively with the objects of the world, which he believes can probably give him happiness. The objects outside are not to be condemned but man's relationship with them is to be intelligent and chaste.

When the mind is thus cleansed of passions, with a passionless mind (vitṛṣṇā) one must meditate upon the Reality. If the mind is withdrawn from its present preoccupations, it becomes empty and nature abhors vacuum. If the mind is withdrawn from the objects of its entertainment, it gathers in itself an infinite momentum and if it cannot discover for itself a creative field of self application, it is sure to dissipate itself again into a different set of objects.

Cleanse the mind of its lust for objects, greed for possessions, covetousness for wealth and apply the same mind in the fields of contemplation upon the Real, the enduring, the eternal.

The practical man of the world, at this advice of the philosopher, asks a pertinent question, 'If possessions are not to be courted, if wealth is not to be acquired, how are we to live?' If a philosopher is impractical, the man of the world has got enough common sense to throw up the philosophy and walk his path of joyous fulfilment. No honest philosopher can afford to preach something impractical and impossible.

Śaṅkara here indicates how we must live in the world. His advice to us is to live joyously in contentment and satisfaction with what we would get 'as a result of our actions'. There is no limit to human imagination. An individual who has given reins to it can never stop at any conceivable point. Desires multiply the more we satisfy them. The more the desires are satisfied, the more seems to be the hunger and the deeper gnaws into our peace a sense of tragic dissatisfaction.

Man seeks satisfaction in life but wealth can purchase for us only sense gratifications. Temporarily, no doubt, the passion in us seems to get fulfilled, but ere long, the thirst (tṛṣṇā) returns to our bosom to persecute us more ruthlessly, and that too, with a merciless tyranny. To discover a sense of contentment and live on what we acquire with our honest labour and not to feed our covetousness seems to be the only method by which true happiness and inner peace can be gained. In such a bosom alone, the higher contemplation and the consequent discoveries of the new dimensions of the spiritual Reality are ever possible.

Desire for wealth degrades man. Attachment brings endless worries. There is strain in acquiring. There is struggle to preserve intelligently what one has acquired. There is pain when one comes to lose what one had acquired laboriously. There is anxiety to preserve what one has already gained – this is a game of restless sorrows only.

In the *Kaṭhopaniṣad* the young boy, Naciketa, in his answer to his teacher, Lord Death, has beautifully expressed this idea: ‘Man is never satisfied with his possessions alone’.¹ Again, Śaṅkara, in his *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, quotes the famous statement of the *Bṛihadāranyaka-upaniṣad* and says that ‘the Deathless and the Imperishable can never be hoped to be gained through possession of wealth’.²

What we have to leave in life, is only our sense of covetousness, and with this renunciation, comes the true enjoyment of the world outside. This open promise we read in the *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad*: ‘Renounce and enjoy, covet not others wealth’.³

¹ न वित्तेन तर्पणीयो मनुष्यः।

na vittena tarpaṇīyo manuṣyaḥ – (*Kaṭhopaniṣad* ch. 1-1-27).

(See Swamiji’s discourses on *Kaṭhopaniṣad*).

² अमृतत्वस्य नाशास्ति वित्तेनेत्येव हि श्रुतिः।

amṛtattvasya nāśāsti vittanetyeva hi śrutiḥ – (*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* - 7).

३ तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम्।

tena tyaktena bjuñjīthā mā gṛdhaḥ kasyasvidghanam – (Iśavasya-upaniṣad - 1).





नारीस्तनभरनाभीदेशं दृष्ट्वा मा गा मोहावेशम्।
एतन्मांसवसादिविकारं मनसि विचिन्तय वारं वारम्॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (३)

*nārīstanabharanābhīdeśaṁ dr̥ṣṭvā mā gā mohāveśam,
etanmāṁsavasādivikāraṁ manasi vicintaya vāraṁ vāram.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (3)*

नारी – of maidens; स्तन-भर – with the weight of their bosom; नाभीदेशं – their navel; दृष्ट्वा – having seen; मा – do not; गा – fall a prey; मोह-आवेशम् – maddening delusion; एतत् – this (is); मांस – of flesh; वस – of fat; आदि – etc.; विकारं – a modification; मनसि – in (your) mind; विचिन्तय – think well; वारं – again; वारम् – again; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

3. Seeing the full bosom of young maidens and their navel, do not fall a prey to maddening delusion. This is but a modification of flesh and fat. Think well thus in your mind again and again.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

In the previous stanza a true seeker is advised to give up all covetousness for the wealth of the world and here he is advised to give up lusty passions for women. From the days of the Upaniṣads to our own times, we find in all masters this constant warning against wealth (kāñcana) and woman (kāminī). But no insult is meant to either; this is a statement of a scientific truth. All intelligent living creatures have these two irresistible urges, ‘to possess more’ (wealth) and ‘to enjoy’ (woman).

All living organisms in the world move towards the one Great Harbour, seeking peace and harmony. All are always instinctively whipped up by two definite urges: (a) to escape pain¹ and (b) to attain happiness.² It is only to end all anxieties and sense of insecurity that man runs after ‘wealth’; to him possessions are barricades against his enemy – ‘fear’. Against the besieging troops of uncertainties in life, man builds imaginary fortresses around him,

with money and wealth. Even a millionaire is found to be not really happy, because he wants more!

When he feels relatively a little secure from fears, he feels fully the other urge more and more, namely, the attainment of happiness. It is under this urge that man readily falls to the irresistible enchantments of the flesh and runs after the bosom of woman.

Here the statement of man's natural attraction to woman must be understood to include woman's equally natural attraction to man. In both the cases sorrow alone is the ultimate destination, where they both reach hand in hand!

Biologically, nature has made man and woman with a natural affinity for the charms of the opposite sex. This natural urge is to be controlled, disciplined, purified and sublimated. An intelligent intellect alone can achieve this. An animal cannot; to act according to its instincts and impulses is but its privilege. The glory of man is that he can, by his rational intellect, curb and control the flow of his instincts for carnal pleasures and redivert them, thus ultimately sublimating himself into something nobler and more divine.

Seekers, in their early days of practice, should find this rather difficult, since it is against the very nature of their flesh. Human body can seek its fulfilment only in the fields of sense objects. It is the intellect that always gets visions of the higher possibilities. For the attainment of these visions, with the help of a trained mind, the intellect comes to curb the passionate flow of the flesh and thus turn the entire current personality into the more rewarding channels of spiritual upliftment. It experiences, as time passes on, a divine unfoldment within. This technique of reversing the process of instinct, to flow in the direction of rational contemplation is called in the yoga śāstra as 'pratipakṣa bhāvanā.' Throughout the scriptural texts, we meet with many an advice based upon this technique.

Here Śaṅkara gives us a line of thinking, which can be an efficient antidote to the fanciful price that the body gives to the objects of senses. The soft inviting bosom of your beloved, if scientifically analysed and mentally seen in its reality, will reveal itself to be composed of only

abhorrent flesh and fat, packed in a scaly skin! If these component parts are brought before your mental vision, spiritually the mind shall immediately retreat from the disgusting ugliness of it all. Through the practice of this ‘pratipakṣa bhāvanā’, we can re-educate our mind, not to run away with its imagined picture of happiness, in the perishable softness of the filth filled body.

Śaṅkara, thus with the very opening stanzas of *Bhaja Govindam*, cures the student of his two most powerful fascinations – his thirst for wealth and his instinctive hunger for flesh. When these two are eliminated from a personality, they will have no more fuel to jerk it out on to the outer fields of its enchantments. This cannot come about very readily; even when it comes, it cannot be maintained so easily. Millions of lives have we lived in the lower realms of evolution and each one of us has gathered this powerful instinct of self-preservation; preservation of the individual and the race. To rise above them is an achievement in itself and for this, repeated (vāram vāram) practice is unavoidable. In *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* also we meet with the same idea.³

The objects of the world exist and play their pranks upon us; but do we ever see them as they are? Each one has a knack of throwing a veil of his own fanciful imaginations to decorate the objects with his private mental likes and dislikes. Thus, we see not the world as it is, but gaze at a world splashed all over with our own mental contents.

Through close observation, diligent enquiry and scientific analysis we can remove the unnatural colour that we have thrown upon the objects around us and see them in their native beauty and in their natural forms.

In the gathering dusk of a dusty evening, we may misunderstand the things we perceive in front of us at a distance; but on moving nearer the objects with an enquiring mind, we shall realise their true worth and learn to drop them as useless. Money and woman in themselves are not a threat to man but in our false imaginations we give them both a ridiculously inflated value and, striving for their sake, we come to lay waste our powers. It is this hallucination in man and the consequent illusory fascination for the world, which he entertains, that exiles him from his own inner kingdom of joy.

¹ दुःख निवृत्ति।

duḥkha nivṛtti

² सुख प्राप्ति।

sukha prāpti

³ विरज्य विषयव्राताद्दोषदृष्ट्या मुहुर्मुहुः।

virajya viśayavrātāddoṣadr̥ṣṭyā muhurmuḥuḥ – (Vivekacūḍāmaṇi - 22).





नलिनीदलगतजलमतितरलं तद्वज्जीवितमतिशयचपलम्।
विद्धि व्याध्यभिमानग्रस्तं लोकं शोकहतं च समस्तम्॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं ...) (४)

*nalinīdalagatajalamatitaralaṁ tadvajjīvitamatiśayacapalam,
viddhi vyādyabhimānagrastam lokam śokahataṁ ca samastam.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (4)*

नलिनीदलगत-जलम् – the water (drop) playing on a lotus petal (is); अति – extremely; तरलं – uncertain (existence); तद्वत् – so; जीवितम् – life; अतिशय – ever (greatly); चपलम् – unstable; विद्धि – understand; व्याधि-अभिमान-ग्रस्तं – consumed by disease and conceit; लोकं – the world; शोक – with pangs; हतं – is (riddled), beset; च – and; समस्तम् – whole; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

4. The water drop playing on a lotus petal has an extremely uncertain existence; so also is life ever unstable. Understand, the very world is consumed by disease and conceit and is riddled with pangs.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

The previous two stanzas tried to help the student to make a correct judgement of the place of money and woman in a healthy man's dynamic living. They are not to serve as treacherous rocks upon which one's ship of life should get smashed and floundered. In this stanza, Ācārya Śaṅkara is helping us to realise how ephemeral and riddled with painful imperfections, this uncertain existence of the embodied is. With all the resources that are ever at the command of a great poet, Śaṅkara sees human life to be as uncertain as a minute particle of water trembling at the tip of a lotus petal. Life is uncertain in itself and even during its uncertain existence it is consumed by disease and conceits, persecuted by a hundred different voiceless pangs!

In the first half of the stanza, he is painting the mortality of individual existence. In the second half of the stanza, he paints the pain-ridden nature of the world itself. This is a typical example of ‘pratipakṣa bhāvanā’ upon the individual and the total life.

Since life is so uncertain and the world is in a sense nothing but sorrow, the general import of the verse is that there is no time for anyone to waste. Death rarely announces his visit and unannounced, he enters cities and hamlets, flats and fields. He respects neither the person nor the place that he visits. Therefore, strive right now. ‘Now’ and ‘here’ seems to be the urgency behind the stanza.

We are reminded here of Buddha’s cry on the same theme, with a very similar sense of urgency: ‘All is misery, all is momentary, momentary’.¹

Though I have by now indicated the beauty of the poetic picture in which Śaṅkara symbolizes the extreme uncertainty of life, the analogy of a drop of water trembling from the tip of a lotus petal has a deeper suggestion expounded in Vedānta. This is unavoidable because poet Śaṅkara was at once the incomparable advaita teacher of the world.

The lotus grows in water, exists in water and is nurtured and nourished by the waters. Ultimately, it is to perish in water. Naturally, the flower is nothing but an expression of the waters, sprung forth to manifestation due to the seed that was at the bottom! Brahman the Infinite, the One without a second, Itself expresses as the lotus – the subtle body² due to its own saṅkalpa. Existing in the infinite Consciousness, divine and all-pervading, a minute ray of It (Ātman) functioning in and through these equipments is the individuality (jīva). Ātman, expressing through the ‘lotus of the intellect’, is the unsteady, ever agitated individual (jīva) which, when it leaves and transcends the intellect, comes back to merge with the waters of Consciousness around. Students of the advaita philosophy can easily recognise in this picture an ampler suggestion than merely a poet’s fulfilment in a beautiful picture.

The return of the trembling drop back to the waters of the lake is the culmination indicated by the mahāvākya ‘That Thou Art’.

¹ सर्व दुःखं दुःखं सर्व क्षणिकं क्षणिकम्।

sarvaṁ duḥkhaṁ duḥkhaṁ sarvaṁ kṣaṇikam kṣaṇikam.

– (Shri Buddhasya vakyam)

² The inner instruments of feelings and thoughts, constituted mainly of the mind-intellect equipment, is called the ‘subtle body’ in Vedānta.





यावद्वित्तोपार्जनसक्तस्तावन्निजपरिवारो रक्तः।
पश्चाज्जीवति जर्जरदेहे वार्ता कोऽपि न पृच्छति गेहे॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (५)

*yāvadvittopārjanasaktastāvannijaparivāro raktah,
paścājjīvati jarjaradehe vārtāṁ ko 'pi na prcchati gehe.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (5)*

यावत् – as long as; वित्त – of wealth; उपार्जन – to earn; सक्तः – (is bent upon) has the ability; तावत् – so long; निजपरिवारः – your dependents; रक्तः – attached (to you); पश्चात् – afterwards (later on); जीवति – lives (comes to live); जर्जर – infirm; देहे – body; वार्ता – word; कोऽपि – anyone; न – not; पृच्छति – cares to speak (asks); गेहे – at home; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

5. As long as there is the ability to earn and save, so long are all your dependents attached to you. Later on, when you come to live with an old, infirm body, no one at home cares to speak even a word with you!

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

As an animal, man is essentially selfish. He will not generally give without hope of getting. ‘Nothing for nothing’, seems to be the law that governs nature. This being a universal law, ordinarily even intimate relations and dear and near ones are deferential towards the earning-saving member of the family. This has been observed at all levels of relationships – man and wife, father and son, brother and sister. In short, in all human relationships, one who is capable of earning and saving alone is, with due reverence, respected and adored by others around, who have some hope of being benefitted by a share of his saving!

It is a popular cry that money is respected and that money can purchase anything. And indeed this is true. But its corollary, which is generally overlooked, is rather painful. For if money is power, then a powerful man of yesterday should necessarily become, when his earning capacity is

accidentally broken up, a powerless man of today! If money can purchase happiness, the absence of money can procure only sorrow!

Here the capacity to ‘earn and save’ (vittārjanaśaktiḥ) should be taken in its widest scope, since ‘wealth’ (vittam) embraces in its meaning ‘all things that can add to human happiness’. This power to ‘earn and save’ should include all powers, spiritual and secular, everywhere, at all levels in the society – the capacity of the scientist, of the politician, of a teacher, of a speaker, of a manufacturer, of an artist, and so on. Human life being what it is, faculties and capacities must necessarily wane away, since age must sap all physical and intellectual efficiencies.

Keeping this fundamental point or truth in mind, Śaṅkara says that one can be popular and beloved of the people around only so long as one is capable of ‘earning and saving’. Then alone others can make use of, or make a prey of, the ‘rich’ one. When his capacities decay and he comes to live in his own old infirm body, all his friends and dependents leave him, as he is no more of any use to them. This is the sad way of the world.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Knowing this natural tendency of all comfort loving human hearts, let the man of intelligence earn as much as he can, distribute according to his abilities and enjoy as much as it is his deserts – popularity, affection, consideration and even reverence from others. But, let him not misunderstand this to be the very goal of life. Let him earn inner peace and self-sufficiency and let him save the inner peace and tranquillity, totally independent of the entire clamouring crowd around him ever trying to fatten his vanities and feed at all times his conceits!!

This stanza can be considered as providing for the seeker the ‘pratipakṣa bhāvanā’ against vanities of life. Through such contemplation, curb the mind away from these false values and deceptive sense of security and turn it towards devotion to the Higher. This can be done only ‘now’ and ‘here’ when one is young and one’s faculties and mental efficiencies are at their prime.

No doubt, let all young men seek success in life. Let them strive, struggle and adventure forth. Let everyone earn, save, give and thus serve as many as possible around, in his community and nation. But these are to

be considered only as hobbies; the main occupation of life should be the art of self purification, the craftsmanship of seeking perfection. The real achievement is to be gained in one's own personal inner contemplation, so that even long before the world comes to reject you, you can reject the world of activities and retire into a richer world of serene contemplation and more intense self engagements.





यावत्पवनो निवसति देहे तावत्पृच्छति कुशलं गेहे ।
गतवति वायौ देहापाये भार्या बिभ्यति तस्मिन्काये ॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (६)

*yāvatpavano nivasati dehe tāvatprcchati kuśalam gehe,
gatavati vāyau dehāpāye bhāryā bibhyati tasminkāye.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (6)*

यावत् – as long as; पवनः – the breath (life); निवसति – dwells; देहे – in (your) body; तावत् – so long; पृच्छति – enquires; कुशलं – of (your) welfare; गेहे – at home; गतवति वायौ – when the breath (life) leaves; देह-अपाये – (when) the body decays; भार्या – (even) your wife; बिभ्यति – fears; तस्मिन् – that very (in that very); काये – body; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

6. As long as there dwells breath (life) in the body, so long they enquire of your welfare at home. Once the breath (life) leaves, the body decays, even the wife fears that very same body.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

A sense of detachment from the blind affection for the world and from the objects of hollow enjoyments is absolutely necessary in order to turn the mind towards, seeking through contemplation, the truly Highest. In certain texts this idea is slightly overemphasized as in Buddhism, which is no doubt dangerous inasmuch as it takes away the pep of life and dullens the very enthusiasm in the seeker to live or to strive.

Meditation on life should not land the student at the bottom of some dark pit of lifeless pessimism. At the same time, he should not be blindly optimistic about the worldly achievements and the brittle vanities of life. Teachers of Vedānta are very very careful. While they try to dissuade man from overindulgence in a totally extrovert life, they vehemently exhort all to live in service of man and to develop in themselves a healthy introvertedness.

The ṛṣis, no doubt with an ideal scientific detachment, had observed life as it is, and with a relentless honesty had painted it all with shattering realism only to help the student to realise it all fully. This culminates only in a healthy optimism and where the student's old values are shattered, teachers of Vedānta are very careful to substitute for him a set of healthier and more enduring values of positive living.

Western critics, not realising the implications of such stanzas, generally criticise adversely because they jump to the conclusion that philosophers in the East paint life as dark and dreary and thus are trying to drive away from man all incentive to live and to progress.

In short, to spend one's entire lifetime in sheer body worship, in earning more so that this futile worship may be made more elaborate, is one of the abominable intellectual stupidities into which humanity readily sinks. For, if the body be the altar of worship, it may not remain permanently there, as the days of decay and old age are not far away even for today's young bodies. To sweat and toil, to fight and procure, to feed and breed, to clothe and shelter the body – are all in themselves necessary, but to spend a whole lifetime in these alone is a criminal waste of human abilities. For, ere long it is to grow old, tottering and infirm and in the end, die away.

To live in the body, for the body, is the cult of the rākṣasas – the Virocana cult. Virocana, the king of the devils, even after reaching the feet of the Lord of knowledge, could understand from his instructions only this much: 'The body alone is the Self, the Ātman, the Eternal. To worship it is the greatest of all religions.' Here in the stanza, a line of contemplation is opened up and to reflect in this direction is to end the attachment with the body and to blast all the futile vanities in man.

At least the animal body has some value when it is dead; a human body, when once dead, has only a nuisance value. It is to maintain and to fatten such a bundle of despicable filth that wealth is earned, hoarded, many throats cut, low dissipation practised and cruel wars waged! 'Even the nearest and the dearest, your own life's partner,' points out Śaṅkara, 'dreads and fears the darling body of her beloved husband, when once life has ebbed away from it.'

To meditate on this significant fact of life is to develop a healthy disregard for, and a profitable spirit of detachment from the body vanities. No doubt, the body is to be looked after, for it serves us. Keep it clean and beautiful, feed it, clothe it, wash it – just as we serve all other vehicles that we make use of in the world. Serve the body but always with a firm and steady understanding that this is only an instrument with which we may win the ampler fields. This will not remain forever, nor will it serve with equal efficiency for all times. It will perish and it must.

With this right knowledge, to live in the body is the healthiest life, where minimum sorrows can be expected.





बालस्तावत्क्रीडासक्तः तरुणस्तावत्तरुणीसक्तः।
वृद्धस्तावच्चिन्तासक्तः परमे ब्रह्मणि कोऽपि न सक्तः॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (७)

*bālastāvatkrīḍāsaktaḥ taruṇastāvattaruṇīsaktaḥ,
vṛddhastāvaccintāsaktaḥ parame brahmaṇi ko 'pi na saktaḥ.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (7)*

बालः तावत् – so long as one is in one's childhood; क्रीडा – (towards play) to play; आसक्तः – (one is) attached; तरुणः तावत् – a youth (so long as one is in youth); तरुणी – towards young women (towards passion); सक्तः – (one is) attached; वृद्धः तावत् – so long as one is old (an old man); चिन्ता – towards anxiety; आसक्तः – (one is) attached; परमे – to the Supreme; ब्रह्मणि – Brahman; कः अपि – any one (alas); न – no (seen); सक्तः – attached; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

7. So long as one is in one's boyhood, one is attached to play; so long as one is in youth, one is attached to one's own young woman (passion); so long as one is in old age, one is attached to anxiety (pang)... (yet) no one, alas, to the supreme Brahman, is (ever seen) attached!

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

Indeed life is short. Long is the pilgrimage. High above the clouds, veiled by them, rise the peaks of perfection that are to be scaled. And yet, the rational intellect is so powerful a mechanism that it can rocket a man of pure heart into the highest levels of incomparable divinity in a very short time, if only he is available for it. Alas! He is not.

He gets himself tied down to the passing sorceries of the flesh in the world. Deluded by his passions, he discovers an enchantment in the gold, a value in the baser things and sweetness in the very bitter agonies of life.

Hoodwinked by lust, drunk with passions, the tottering fool wanders away from the main road into the thorny bushes, and there, lacerated and bleeding, soon fatigued, he tumbles down into the bottomless pits of death. As the teacher realises this universal folly of man, he feels a painful desperation and the resultant song is the verse under discussion.

Chronologically following the autobiographical story of man, the Ācārya says that the childhood days of man are wasted in his attachments with the toys and the games natural to that age. As he grows up, the youthful energies are dissipated in his passion for his beloved and in lusty sports. As age gathers upon him and forces him to bend upon his staff, the grey hairs on him conceal a head heavy with anxieties and fears. All through life's pilgrimage the fool crawled upon the surface, attached to one thing or the other, never getting any chance of finding the time to attach himself to the Supreme.

Play, passion and pang – these seem to be the three common boundaries in every thoughtless man's life. No one born can struggle against the flow of time or against the law of growth. The days of ball and doll must yield their chances to the times of passion and woman, and then, at the evening of life, he arrives to live his worries and anxieties regarding himself and others depending upon him. Strangely enough – never did he get any leisure to surrender to Him who is the sole Protector of all, the all-giving Guardian at all times.

This extreme sense of attachment to the world is to be given up intelligently so that life may have a goal, a mission or at least a purpose. This extrovertedness is natural to all living creatures. But in man this is inexcusable. The other creatures live as commissioned by their instincts. Man has the freedom to rationally judge even his own inclinations, temperaments and tendencies and reject them when they are found to be foolish and dangerous. It is in this special aspect that man is “the roof and crown of things”. If well employed, he can raise himself to the highest perfection.

Around us in the world we find man is never idle, but is ever active. Playpens and playfields, love arbours and romance world, hospital beds and infirmaries – these are the usual fields of his achievements and industrious

activities! All the time, life constantly ebbs away and there is no time for him to think of Him, the Supreme! *Kaṭhopaniṣad* indicates that the very Creator has made man's sense organs turned outward and so he lives generally at the sense level and can feel a sense of fulfilment only in sense indulgences. 'It is only some rare ones', says the glorious Rṣi Kaṭhaka, 'who, desiring to realise the Highest, withdraw themselves from the preoccupations of the senses and seek the Changeless and the Immutable'.

To be attached to the Lord is to learn to withdraw from the usual fields of pain ridden sorrows – the ephemeral gains and the shocking losses. To turn to God is to attach ourselves to Him and by this attachment any sincere seeker can bring about an efficient detachment from the ever changing realms of objects.





का ते कान्ता कस्ते पुत्रः संसारोऽयमतीव विचित्रः।
कस्य त्वं कः कुत आयातः तत्त्वं चिन्तय तदिह भ्रातः॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (८)

*kā te kāntā kaste putraḥ saṁsāro 'yamatīva vicitraḥ,
kasya tvam kaḥ kuta āyātaḥ tattvaṁ cintaya tadiha bhrātaḥ.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (8)*

का – who is; ते – your; कान्ता – wife; कः – who is; ते – your; पुत्रः – son;
संसारः अयं – this saṁsāra; अतीव – supremely; विचित्रः – (indeed) wonderful;
कस्य – of whom; त्वम् – are you; कः (त्वम्) – who are you; कुत – from where;
(त्वम्) – you; आयातः – have come; तत्त्वं – of that Truth; चिन्तय – think; तद्
इह – that here alone; भ्रातः – O Brother; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

8. Who is your wife? Who is your son? Supremely wonderful indeed is this saṁsāra. Of whom are you? From where have you come? O Brother! Think of that Truth here.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

There is no denying the fact that the institution of home, the bonds of family relations, and so on, all have a beneficial influence on individuals and they can certainly liberate man from his egocentric selfishness. And yet, they are themselves, even at their best, very limited. They can never be an end in themselves. Man and woman living together in mutual love and respect as a couple and growing to the dignified status of a father and a mother, have much to learn from each other.

Both get well trained by their mutual association if they live in a true spirit of togetherness. But, ordinarily, in their folly, they grow into such an unhealthy state of attachment to each other that the very balm becomes a poison. According to the Hindu śāstras, man and woman in wedlock must live, no doubt, in a spirit of togetherness but the Ācāryas insist: 'Let there

be space between the two' – let there be no clinging attachment to each other, which is unhealthy for both.

Family is the field of trial and test, wherein the individuals can grow into healthier personalities but it is not in itself the final destination. Live life with detachment at home; it is but life's college. Mistake it not as life's main field of achievement.

If all philosophical declarations cannot be practically lived, philosophy itself becomes a utopian idealism preached by a poetic visionary and therefore must fail to influence life or culture. To live in attachment and to sink into the family mire seems to be natural for man and woman. The mind takes to it as readily as the duck to water. Therefore, the philosophy must prescribe a technique by which one can grow into the required state of detachment. That technique is described here.

Intelligent enquiry is the only antidote for the follies of delusion. The method of enquiry to be adopted is being indicated here. Ācārya Śaṅkara asks us to enquire: Who is your wife? Who is your son? On analysis, we shall find that the beloved wife 'was simply a daughter' of her father, until in marriage you were tied to her. Life being so uncertain, nobody can foresee who is to part first and in case it is your lot to precede her in death, there again she will be living as a widow. Thus in life, man and woman are born independently and each one must die and depart alone. In the pilgrimage from birth to death, in the travel from life to death, at a certain junction each met with the other and thereafter travelled together, no doubt, serving each other as all good-hearted travellers always do. The companionship parts when the destination is reached. By this analysis, one shall realise the right attitude one should have in maintaining a healthy relationship with the world.

So too is the son. When you analyse your real relationship, you shall see that the son has become yours only after his birth. Before that it was a foetus. Before that it was only a seed in your loins and that itself came from the food you assimilated. The food came from the earth. Thus a 'clod of earth', in its various manifestations became the fruit, the food, the seed, the foetus and the child, and therefore, the child itself is nothing but an effect of the ultimate cause, the mud. If you analyse yourself as the father, you too

are nothing but the product of a ‘clod of mud’ of another period of time and place. One piece of mud then gets attached to another piece of mud! How strange! How powerful is delusion – māyā!

The empirical life, the saṁsāra, is a fascination only to the thoughtless. Intelligently meditate upon them. Enquire: ‘To whom do I belong? To what divine factor does my very existence owe its continuance? From where have we all come to play this passing show in the field of this world? Where are we going? When once departed from here, what is our destination?’

If there be thus a source from which we have come and a destination to which we are going, what exactly should then be our duty ‘now’ and ‘here’? What should be our attitude to things and beings and the infinite happenings that crowd around us and march through our existence ‘here’?

O Brother (bhrātaḥ), please contemplate! Śaṅkara is assuming now not the status of a teacher advising the taught but he talks as an elder brother would, to an erring younger brother. However, it is to be noted that there are several other readings. Instead of brother (bhrātaḥ) there is a reading which means ‘mad one’ (bhrāntaḥ). This is also quite appropriate in the context of the stanza because a madman is one who is not acting as he should. The deluded fool, in his extreme attachment to things of the world outside, when he lives expressing incapacity to think rightly and act properly, is also a mad one in life.





सत्सङ्गत्वे निस्सङ्गत्वं निःसङ्गत्वे निर्मोहत्वम्।
निर्मोहत्वे निश्चलतत्त्वं निश्चलतत्त्वे जीवन्मुक्तिः ॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (९)

*satsaṅgatve nissāṅgatvaṁ niḥsaṅgatve nirmohatvam,
nirmohatve niścalatattvaṁ niścalatattve jīvanmuktiḥ.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (9)*

सत्सङ्गत्वे – through the company of the good; निःसङ्गत्वं – (there arises) non-attachment; निःसङ्गत्वे – through non-attachment; निर्मोहत्वं – (there arises) freedom from delusion; निर्मोहत्वे – through the freedom from delusion; निश्चल – Immutable; तत्त्वं – Reality; निश्चलतत्त्वे – through the immutable Reality; जीवन्मुक्तिः – (comes) the state of ‘liberated in life’; भज – seek; गोविन्द – Govinda

9. Through the company of the good, there arises non-attachment; through non-attachment there arises freedom from delusion; when there is freedom from delusion, there is the immutable Reality; on experiencing immutable Reality, there comes the state of ‘liberated in life’.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

From all that has been said so far it is very clear that to live in the world, earning and saving, is not in itself a real profit. To live in attachment is, certainly, an ill rewarding programme of existence. To waste our life in lust and passions of our flesh is dissipating ourselves in all our faculties. Through ‘pratipakṣa bhāvanā’, we must try to withdraw from them all and spend the energy so conserved in seeking and serving Govinda.

It is easy to appreciate the logic of this philosophy but not always so easy to appreciate its canons and indeed it is almost impossible, all of a sudden, to live its recommended way of life. This difficulty is experienced by all students of philosophy, everywhere, at all times. All true philosophers must appreciate this logical difficulty in the student and provide for him

various practical methods by which the poor seeker, in his frail spiritual strength at this moment, may be helped to walk the 'path'. Or else, philosophy itself would become an impractical utopia.

Ācārya Śaṅkara talks directly to his devotees, at all times. His is not the style of the ṛṣi declarations, wherein the inspired seer, closing his eyes, roared and thundered in panting words of his infinite joy of the impossible which he has rendered possible. These frightening commandments, gushing down from the soft flowing hearts of the peaceful masters, constitute the Upaniṣads. Śaṅkara, the commentator serving as a missionary in the country, with a definite goal of cultural revival to be achieved, never seems to forget the quality and calibre of his listeners' intellect.

In the stanza under review, Śaṅkara gives a simple 'ladder of progress', by carefully climbing which a seeker can comfortably arrive at the highest reaches of perfection.

In spite of our appreciation of the rationale in the philosophy so far discussed, the fact still is that we are living every hour of our existence amidst the temptations of life, where wealth and the women are the main enchantments. Artificially, I can build up an intellectual barrier against my passions and lust and thus, I may restrain them from their onward flow for some time. But the objects of fascination are so numerous and their enchantments so powerful that the mighty sorcery of the sensuous world is too irresistible for an individual seeker to fight against.

In order to reinforce the efforts of a student in his early days of seeking and to give him more courage and strength, Śaṅkara advises him to have plenty of 'company of the good' (satsaṅga). As a result of the practice of 'pratipakṣa bhāvanā', the student is, no doubt, holding the company of good thoughts within himself. This is to protect him from the rising waves of passions within. But, in order to fight against the hordes of temptations in the everyday world, he needs a fortress around him, which is drawn from his association with the good people.¹

The company that we keep is very important. The worldly seekers are carelessly choosing their friends and are indiscriminate in choosing their associations. The chances are that he, in spite of his knowledge and

determination, will be snatched away in bad company by the powerful waves of blind passions. To be in the ‘company of the good’ is to be with those who are devotees of the Lord and are themselves seekers of the Highest. In such an assembly there is a power created which, in the congregation, erects a powerful fortress against the magic of the world outside.

As a result of the influence of the ‘good company’, the human mind develops steadily a capacity to withdraw from the sensuous fields of attraction and thus discovers in itself the secret of detachment (nissāṅgatvaṁ). When the sense of attachment is sponged away from the inner bosom, delusion (moha) and all the delusory false values that we give to the world can remain no more. It is always the mind that puts a value upon the objects, and thereafter, the inert objects of the world become capable of enchanting that mind.

When once the mind has started seeing the things as they are – because the mind has redeemed itself from its own vāsanā encrustations – the immutable Reality is glimpsed by that mind. When this experience becomes more and more established in one, that individual becomes a God-realised saint, ‘liberated in life’ (jīvanmukta). The stanza reminds us of the ‘ladder of fall’ that the *Gītā* describes as follows;

When a man thinks of objects, attachment for them arises; from attachment, desire is born; from desire arises anger. From anger comes delusion; from delusion loss of memory; from loss of memory the destruction of discrimination, from the destruction of discrimination he perishes.²

Glancing over the contents of these two stanzas, it is evidently clear that the *Gītā* is showing the ‘ladder of downward fall’ while Śaṅkara is showing the ‘ladder of upward climb’. There is yet another reading of the stanza where, instead of ‘immutable Reality’ (nīścalatattvaṁ), we have ‘steadfastness’ (nīścalitattvaṁ). When the delusion of the mind is wiped away, the mind gains ‘steadfastness’ in meditation and with this steadfastness in meditation, the experience of the Highest and the consequent state of ‘Liberation in life’ (jīvanmukti) is easily attained.

¹ Company of the good – directly with living teachers, learned puṇḍitas, cultured men, and sincere seekers; if these are not available, then indirectly through great books.

² ध्यायतो विषयान्पुंसः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते।
सङ्गात्सञ्जायते कामः कामात्क्रोधोऽभिजायते॥

dhyāyato viṣayānpuṃsaḥ saṅgasteṣūpajāyate,
saṅgātsañjāyate kāmaḥ kāmātkrodho 'bhijāyate. – (Bhagavad-gītā ch. 2-62).

क्रोधाद्भवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात्स्मृतिविभ्रमः।
स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात्प्रणश्यति॥

krodhādbhavati sammohaḥ sammohātsmṛtivyibhramaḥ,
smṛtibhramśād buddhināśo buddhināśātpraṇaśyati. – (Bhagavad-gītā ch. 2-63).





वयसि गते कः कामविकारः शुष्के नीरे कः कासारः।
क्षीणे वित्ते कः परिवारो ज्ञाते तत्त्वे कः संसारः॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (१०)

*vayasi gate kaḥ kāmavikāraḥ śuṣke nīre kaḥ kāsāraḥ,
kṣīṇe vitte kaḥ parivāro jñāte tattve kaḥ saṁsāraḥ.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (10)*

वयसि गते – when the age (youthfulness) has passed; कः – where is;
कामविकारः – lust and its play; शुष्के नीरे – when water is evaporated (dried
up); कः – where is; कासारः – the lake; क्षीणे वित्ते – when the wealth is
reduced; कः – where is; परिवारः – the retinue; ज्ञाते तत्त्वे – when the Truth is
realised; कः – where is; संसारः – the saṁsāra; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda.

10. When the age (youthfulness) has passed, where is lust and its play?
When water has evaporated, where is the lake? When wealth is reduced,
where is the retinue? When the Truth is realised; where is saṁsāra?

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

In epigrammatic statements Śaṅkara drives home to the student's understanding that, where the cause has ended, the effects cannot continue. When age and its youthfulness have passed away, where is lust and its play? The maddening lust of blinding passion can remain with one only so long as the skin is tight, the muscles are hard, the blood is stormy and the individual is young and hearty. Lust springs only from youthfulness. When the cause is removed, the effects cannot remain all by themselves.

When the waters are dried up, the lake can no longer continue to exist. The dried up lake or tank can only express as the bed; only when waters are there, can they express themselves as lake or tank and serve the world as such. So long as the waters of desire are playing in the mind, the passionate youth vigorously strives to fulfill them. But when once these desires have dried up, how can the man of action strive to acquire and court?

When the wealth is reduced, where are the relations, dependents, supporters – in short, one's entire retinue? They follow behind an individual only so long as he can look after them and they can profit by him. When the capacity in the individual has ended, the retinue also disappears. And wealth is an uncertain possession. Nobody can say when and how she courts an individual or when she will, without regret, shamelessly push him into penury and starvation and depart in another direction, towards another individual!

With these three examples, it is clear that when the cause is absent, the effect is also absent. Carrying this analogy into the subjective realms of spiritual perfection, Śaṅkara asks the question, 'When the Truth is realised, where is saṁsāra?'

The ignorance of the post gives us the delusory vision of the ghost and the consequent fears. At the non-apprehension of the Reality, misapprehensions start and they provide the hosts of sorrows for the deluded. Due to vāsanā fumes called ignorance (avidyā), the perfection is not experienced and therefore man, revolting against his own sense of imperfections, desires, plans, works and strives to acquire and possess the outer world whereby he hopes that he can seek fulfilment in life.

Through the process explained in the previous stanza when the vāsanās have been eliminated, meaning, when the ignorance of the Reality is ended, all the misconceptions also must end. The delusory sense of individuality, arising from the myth of the mind and its dream objects, constitutes the 'painful sufferer' amidst the finite objects.

When once the vāsanās have ended, the cause has been eliminated and naturally therefore, the effects cannot exist by themselves. When the Truth is realised, where is the empirical phenomenon of finite objects and their unlimited tyrannies?

Herein then is the cause for our conditionings in our inner life, which in its turn created the chaos of an ego and its meaningless achievements and mad roaming of the individuality. When this inner vāsanā condition has been changed, the ego has been eliminated and where there is no ego, the world 'perceived, felt, and thought of' must necessarily recede into

nothingness. As the phenomenal play of enchantments gets obliterated, the experience of the infinite Consciousness comes to reveal as the state of Truth and, at this experience, the individuality ends and the universal Consciousness becomes the very nature of the meditator.

‘The knower of Brahman’ becomes Brahman!¹ and for this there is no other path² than that which was discussed in the previous stanza.

¹ ब्रह्म वेद ब्रह्मैव भवति।

brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati — (*Muṇḍakopaniṣad* ch. 3-2-9).

² नान्यः पन्था विद्यतेऽयनाय।

nānyaḥ panthā vidyate’yanāya — (*Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad* ch. 6-15).





मा कुरु धनजनयौवनगर्वं हरति निमेषात्कालः सर्वम्।
मायामयमिदमखिलं बुद्ध्वा ब्रह्मपदं त्वं प्रविश विदित्वा ॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (११)

*mā kuru dhanajanayauvanagarvaṁ harati nimeṣātkālaḥ sarvaṁ,
māyāmayamidamakhilam buddhvā brahmapadam tvaṁ praviśa veditvā.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (11)*

मा – do not; कुरु – take; धन – in possession; जन – in the people; यौवन – in youth; गर्व – pride; हरति – loots away (takes away); निमेषात् – in a moment; कालः – the time; सर्व – all these; मायामय – full of illusory nature; इदं – this; अखिल – all; बुद्ध्वा – after knowing; ब्रह्मपद – the state of Brahman; त्वं – you; प्रविश – enter into; विदित्वा – after realising; भज – seek; गोविन्द – Govinda

11. Take no pride in your possession, in the people (at your command), in the youthfulness (that you have). Time loots away all these in a moment. Leaving aside all these, after knowing their illusory nature, realise the state of Brahman and enter into it.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

False vanities and hollow conceits tie man to the wheel of woe in life – saṁsāra. The empirical process of change and the consequent jerks affect man only when he keeps the relationship of himself with the world of objects, feelings and thoughts through his body, mind and intellect. By this he creates a false attitude to things and beings around him as ‘my people’, ‘my things’, ‘my joys’, ‘my ideas’ and so on. These false vanities throw man out of himself to suffer the storms of finitude and the floods of change. All these are really the unavoidable contents of the objective world.

Wealth, social connections and family status, youth and its vigour – these form the tottering pillars upon which is built the platform of sense enjoyment. This drama of passion and lust can end only in utter dissipation

and personality exhaustion. These have been already discussed and clearly shown in the earlier verses.

Wealth is never constant. Nor can she ever remain faithful; she must move from hand to hand, visiting all; youth can never last for long. Relationships in this world, the social status, popularity and power – all these are indicated by the term ‘people’ (jana). All of them entirely depend upon the fancy of the moment, the mood of the hour. This world of illusory appearances is a field of preoccupation only to the delusory ego, which springs from one’s own identification with the perceiver-feeler-thinker in oneself. Seek the knower of it all, the Principle that illuminates all experiences – sākṣī Caitanya – in the very core of one’s own bosom. Realise that this Consciousness (ayam ātmā) presiding over all our inner experiences is the Consciousness Infinite everywhere (Brahman).





दिनयामिन्यौ सायं प्रातः शिशिरवसन्तौ पुनरायातः ।
कालः क्रीडति गच्छत्यायुः तदपि न मुञ्चत्याशावायुः ॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (१२)

*dinayāminyau sāyam prātaḥ śīśiravasantaḥ punarāyātaḥ,
kālaḥ krīḍati gacchatyāyuh tadapi na muñcatyāśāvāyuh.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (12)*

दिनयामिन्यौ – day and night; सायं – dusk; प्रातः – dawn; शिशिर वसन्तौ – winter and spring; पुनः – again; आयातः – come (and depart); कालः – time; क्रीडति – sports; गच्छति – ebbs away (goes away); आयुः – life (breath); तदपि – and yet; न – not; मुञ्चति – leaves; आशा-वायुः – the gust of desire; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

12. Day and night, dawn and dusk, winter and spring, come again and again (and depart). Time sports and life ebbs away. And yet, one leaves not the gusts of desires.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

The day decays to end itself in the night. The night dies only to blossom forth into the following day. The dawn grows in vigour and heat to be the noon, but soon wanes away to be the mellow dusk. On the wheel of happenings, the months steadily glide along and in its soft-footed silent march the irresistible floods of time roll up in waves of years, sweeping everything in front of its relentless might. Hushed in the silence of its own wonderment, age slips unperceived, into its slushy grave.

Time moves on. That which was future becomes the present and itself rolls away to join the endless ocean of the past. Time never stops, on any condition, for no person! It is ever on the march! Man, gathering memories from his own 'past', barricades his 'present', sets them ablaze with his excitements in his day-to-day life and the rising fumes of his bosom blur his vision to make his life rigged with his anxieties for the 'future'. As we thus

waste ourselves with our endless manoeuvres, in the irresistible stride of time, all our hopes and plans get defeated and routed.

The young courageous heart of the spiritual child Naciketa realises this ridiculous tamāśā when he consoles his old father Vājaśravas by reminding him that ‘things born must die and perish away only to be born again’ – nothing is permanent.¹

Later, the same spiritual hero, talking face to face with his teacher, Lord Death, at Death’s own portico, with utter disdain rejected the gifts that Yama offered him and there again we hear the same truth expressed in the vigorous words of the child ‘Even the longest life that you can give is but a trifle; may you keep to yourself the dance and the music’.²

Life is at time’s mercy. In not recognising this, man desires to enjoy the sense objects, strives, sweats and toils endlessly to acquire, to possess and to aggrandise – to hope, to spend – and death snatches away everything from him. He is compelled to leave everything here and with painful bundles of vāsanās acquired in his desire ridden selfish life, the miserable creature departs. How sad! Indeed, how tragic!

The objects glitter with an illusory beauty and sing their dissipation songs only because they are rendered so enchanting by our own mind – just as the objects of flaming joys in our dreams! This dazzling glow of joy in them conceals the highest Reality. ‘A golden disc covers the brilliant face of Truth³ declares *Īśāvāsyā-upaniṣad*, and therefore, the Upaniṣad student therein could not realise what the teacher declared: ‘Everything that is present here is clothed by Īśa.⁴ Sensuous passions alone make man blind to his own true state of perfection.

Desire for the fleeting, delusory golden deer is, for the time being, seemingly more powerful for Sītā than her infinite love for Rāma, her divine beloved. This is delusion at play – māyā with a vengeance.

Life steadily ebbs away, but desire, fed by sense gratifications, only grows more. Body decays and becomes infirm; it has grown to have no more strength to enjoy but the man hungers all the more for sense enjoyments. Death crawls behind; disease and decay accompany him.

Piloted by worries and anxieties, this mournful procession reaches the edge of the grave; still man wants the joys of the pain ridden objects. Be wise. Give up desires. Seek the all satisfying Reality that lies behind the mental show of change and sorrow. The Infinite alone will satisfy you. Seek it with a mind withdrawn from the fever of all passions.

¹ सस्यमिव मर्त्यः पच्यते सस्यमिवाजायते पुनः।

sasyamiva martyaḥ pacyate sasyamivājāyate punaḥ – (*Kaṭhōpaniṣad* ch. 1-1-6).

² अपि सर्वं जीवितमल्पमेव तवैव वाहास्तव नृत्यगीते।

api sarvaṁ jīvitamalpameva tavaiva vāhāstava nṛtyagīte.

–(*Kaṭhōpaniṣad* ch. 1-1-26).

³ हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम्।

hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpihitam mukham – (*Īśavasya-upaniṣad* - 15).

⁴ ॐ ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत् किञ्च जगत्यां जगत्।

om īśāvāsyamidam sarvaṁ yat kiñca jagatyāṁ jagat – (*Īśavasya-upaniṣad* - 1).





का ते कान्ता धनगतचिन्ता वातुल किं तव नास्ति नियन्ता ।
त्रिजगति सज्जनसंगतिरेका भवति भवार्णवतरणे नौका ॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (१३)

*kā te kāntā dhanagatacintā vātula kiṁ tava nāsti niyantā,
trijagati sajjanasaṅgatirekā bhavati bhavārṇavatarāṇe naukā.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (13)*

का – where is; ते – your; कान्ता – wife; (का – where); धनगत – pertaining to wealth; चिन्ता – worry; वातुल – O Distracted one!; किं – is there; तव – to you; न अस्ति – not; नियन्ता – the ordainer of rules (one who ordains or commands); त्रिजगति – in the three worlds; सज्जन – of the good; संगति – association (सज्जन-संगति – the association with the good); एका – alone; भवति – becomes (can serve as); भव-अर्णव-तरणे – to cross the sea of change (birth and death); नौका – the boat; भज – seek; गोविन्द – Govinda

13. O Distracted one! Why worry about wife, wealth and so on? Is there not for you the One who ordains (rules and commands)? In the three worlds it is the association with good people alone that can serve as a boat to cross the sea of change (birth and death).

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

‘Why worry about wife or wealth?’ There is yet another reading: ‘Why dissipate mentally over the lips of your lady?’¹ To worry over anything will not pay in life. To worry means to waste our mental energies and when once the mind is stormed with sensuous thoughts regarding any problem, the impoverished mind has no more any vitality left in it, with which it may face effectively its challenges. Worry exhausts; it saps out all the fluid dynamism that the personality has, with which alone it can confidently face the battle of life. Man fails, not because the world is strong enough to break him down but it is always only because man becomes weaker and thus relatively the world of happenings is rendered more powerful. Remember, ‘The weak must perish’ is the law of nature.

To dissipate oneself in sensuous thoughts, as indicated in the stanza, is indeed unholy, and to do so upon one's own partner in life is, indeed, a self insulting criminal meanness. Wife is something more than a mere sensuous convenience. To consider her as only a chattel for your pleasure and sense gratification is to pull down the institution of home and the sanctity of the motherhood in her. Such degrading, demeaning devolutionary thought currents, when they arise in the bosom of the seeker, should be curtailed and a man must uplift his thoughts by conscious remembrance of the Lord. The entire stanza is addressed to the sensuous man and the Ācārya here calls him, the best among fools who constantly waste themselves in lascivious thoughts (vātula).

But, having fallen into this wrong rut of thinking and having cultivated the habit of emptying one's personality vitality through such mental kink, what is now the remedy for coming out of this self ruining habit? Constant and continuous 'association with the good people' who are themselves well-educated, self-controlled, men with a vision and a mission, is the only known remedy. In the beginning, by such a continuous association, the mind will slowly take up new channels of thinking and ultimately will come to forget the old habits of thought. This alone can be the only remedy.

This 'contact' will develop in us a healthy attitude towards things, which, in their turn, will give a new purpose and direction for our thought life. When the quality and the texture of thoughts have changed for the better, the seeker shall discover in himself a new inspiration welling within, pushing him on to greater effort in more rewarding fields. This new lease of life in the fresh atmosphere of healthy thoughts will encourage him day by day, to strive for the Higher and will give him a clearer picture of the goal of life. He develops a pair of mental antennae, extremely sensitive to feel his path, the means of achieving his own goal: a radar effect.

Physical self-control (dama) brings about mental peace (śama), which creates a satisfying inner joy (santoṣa) of the spiritual heart. With such an inner instrument alone can sincere self-study (svādhyāya) and reflection (vicāra) be undertaken with assurance of creditable profit. In fact, therefore, the earliest preparation to enter into this walk of life is 'contact with the good (sajjanasaṅgati)'. This 'association with the good' is not only helpful

in the elementary stages of spiritual seeking but also beneficial at the seeker's subsequent stages of self-development and growth within.

‘Good association (satsaṅga) with the spiritual teachers and co-students’ will help us throughout our pilgrimage. Therefore, sajjanasaṅgati is metaphorically used here as the ‘boat (naukā) to cross the ocean of limitation’ (bhavārṇava). A boat is not only useful just while leaving one shore but until we land safely at our destination, all throughout the journey, the boat is that which keeps us afloat on the sea. As each wave lashes on it, the boat absorbs the direct shocks and imparts to the traveller only a little tossing, perhaps. Atop the crest of the wave, on the ascending slope of the waves, at all places, all through the passage, the boat keeps us dry, safe and relatively comfortable.

‘Constant association with the wise’ becomes thus a protective armour on the inner equipment, which are the only armaments with which a seeker has to contend alone with the dire enemies of his own false values and acquired habits of sensuous living.

This is the twelfth stanza, with which the bouquet of ‘12 verse-flowers’ (dvādaśa-mañjarikā-stotra) concludes. These are the twelve stanzas directly given by Ācārya Śaṅkara, although, in truth, we cannot say it with any amount of finality since we find that in various publications the stanzas are interchanged. In some publications we find the bunch of these 1-12 stanzas are concluded with a stanza describing the author and the circumstances under which this poem came to be composed.²

The following fourteen verses together form the companion bouquet of ‘14 verse-flowers’ called Caturdaśa Mañjarikā Stotra. Each one of them is traditionally found to have been attributed to the fourteen followers of Śaṅkara who had accompanied him on that day in Banārasi.

¹ कान्ताधरगत चिन्ता।

kāntādharaḡata cintā

² द्वादशमञ्जरिकाभिरेषः कथितो वैयाकरणशिष्यः।
उपदेशोऽभूद्विद्यानिपुणैः श्रीमच्छंकरभगवच्चरणैः॥

*dvādaśamañjarikābhireṣaḥ kathito vaiyyākaraṇaśiṣyaḥ,
upadeśo 'bhūdvidyānipuṇaiḥ śrīmacchaṅkarabhagavaccaraṇaiḥ.*





जटिलो मुण्डी लुञ्चितकेशः काषायाम्बरबहुकृतवेषः।
पश्यन्नपि च न पश्यति मूढो ह्युदरनिमित्तं बहुकृतवेषः॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (१४)

*jaṭilo muṇḍī luñcitakeśaḥ kāṣāyāambarabahukṛtaveśaḥ,
paśyannapi ca na paśyati mūḍho hyudaranimittam bahukṛtaveśaḥ.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (14)*

जटिलः – one ascetic with matted locks; मुण्डी – one with shaven head;
लुञ्चित-केशः – one with hairs pulled out one by one; काषाय अंबर बहुकृत-वेषः
– one parading with ochre robes; पश्यन्-अपि च – though seeing; न – never;
पश्यति – sees; मूढः – a fool; हि – indeed; उदर-निमित्तं – for belly's sake;
बहुकृत-वेषः – these different disguises or apparels; भज – seek; गोविन्दं –
Govinda

14. One ascetic with matted locks, one with shaven head, one with hair pulled out one by one, another parading in his ochre robes – these are fools who, though seeing, do not see. Indeed, these different disguises or apparels are only for their belly's sake.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

We are told that Cain, the second son of the only father, at that time, Adam, started murder and destruction of life on the surface of the created world. When the world was first created, according to the Christian mythology, the art of killing was inaugurated by Cain because he never wanted to work.

With minimum work he wanted food; so he found that with least effort he could have plenty to fill his belly, if he stood behind the rocks and treacherously killed any animal and ate it! Minimum labour and maximum comfort is the dangerous philosophy of selfishness that started the destruction of civilisation. Wherever there is this philosophy, man must sink into immoral, unethical and uncultured barbarous ways.

As children and grandchildren of this great first father, this human instinct to be idle has remained true to the type and is seen even now in our own times. At all levels of society and in all departments of activity, idlers and shams are plenty in all periods of history. Śaṅkara's era also was no exception to it and even mahātmās and sannyāsīs were not totally above this law. There must have been, in the Ācārya's own times, if not as many as they are available now, at least a few who must have wandered into sannyāsa as escapists from life, seeking and finding a happier life in bluffing the generation and playing upon the credulity of the people.

Such aberrations of personality are more to be pitied than condemned. But whenever they appear at important strategic points in society as politicians, as governors or as priests, they are more dangerous to the society than when they appear and play out their life in a limited field of their own private life, be it at home or even in society. With them we have no choice but to suffer them as nobly as we do the great natural calamities, such as floods or blizzards or volcanic eruptions!

Thus, the author of this verse looks around and sees to his own utter amazement that cheats and self-deceivers are often wearing the very uniform of the highest vocation in life, sannyāsa. Some of the samples of these cheats are being just hinted at in this stanza: 'one with matted locks, one with shaven head and another one has laboriously plucked his hairs one by one, yet another in spectacularly coloured ochre clothes'.

They are not conscious of the goal to reach which they have taken the robe, nor are they striving in the right direction. Maybe every one of them takes to the sacred cloth with real intentions and sure purposes, but alas, en route as time passes on, they come to forget the very purpose for which they have made the sacrifice of their domestic life and their duties in the society as individual citizens. These different disguises serve them, not for their philosophical seeking of Truth but only for filling their belly.

If this was true at the time of Śaṅkara, today, when more bellies are more often empty, it is the logic of life that more people should take to different types of disguises for the sake of satisfying their own hunger.

Thus, guided by the self-preservation instinct and the lust for power and wealth, there are such false people in every walk of life even today – false leaders, false policemen, false artists and false preachers – untruthful men, feigning by their external dress and behaviours, to be what they are not actually by themselves. Falsehood, indeed, is as much a brilliant human capacity as honesty is one of man’s heroic perfections.

Deception by matted locks, ochre robes and so on, is universal and belongs to all times: the wolf in the sheep’s skin is nothing new, but in other walks of life such deceptions are not so dangerous as on the path of spirituality. We have them everywhere, in all creeds – political, economic, scientific and even spiritual. The classical example is the sensuous king of Laṅkā approaching the hermitage of Rāma, with the basest of intentions of running away with Sītā, dressed, as he was at that time, in the robes of a sannyāsī!

Even such a fraudulent person, when he adorns the sacred garment, must be conscious of the glory of sannyāsa at least at moments when the large number of faithful Hindus prostrate at his sacred feet! Again, he is constantly reading about It. He has, of necessity, to talk about the glory of the goal. Thus, intellectually, he must be ‘knowing’ what is the noblest way of life (‘he sees’) and yet, it seems, he fails to live up to it (‘yet he sees not’).

Then why has he left home, cultivated his matted locks or shaven off his head, and so on? All we can say is that such low, despicable, insignificant worms among mankind are a threat to the society and in their incapacity to earn and live well by serving the community, they have taken to this well-paying profession of deception! It is merely ‘for the belly’s sake’ (udara-nimittam). To the unguarded mind, the whispers of the lower passions become suddenly more urgent than the call of the higher aspirations. Desire for enjoyment makes man slip from his own high values of life and his disciplines in it.¹

This stanza is traditionally attributed to Padmapāda, the famous disciple of Śaṅkara.

¹ यततो ह्यपि कौन्तेय पुरुषस्य विपश्चितः।
इन्द्रियाणि प्रमाथीनि हरन्ति प्रसभं मनः॥

yatato hyapi kaunteya puruṣasya vipaścitaḥ,

indriyāṇi pramāthīni haranti prasabhaṁ manaḥ. – (Bhagavad-gītā ch. 2-60).





अङ्गं गलितं पलितं मुण्डं दशनविहीनं जातं तुण्डम्।
वृद्धो याति गृहीत्वा दण्डं तदपि न मुञ्चत्याशापिण्डम्॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (१५)

*aṅgaṁ galitaṁ palitaṁ muṇḍaṁ daśanavihīnaṁ jātaṁ tuṇḍam,
vṛddho yāti grhītvā daṇḍaṁ tadapi na muñcatyāśāpiṇḍam.
(bhaja govindaṁ bhaja govindaṁ...) (15)*

अङ्गं – the body; गलितं – (has been) worn out; पलितं – has turned grey;
मुण्डम् – the hair (the head); दशनविहीनं – toothless; जातं – has become;
तुण्डम् – mouth; वृद्धः – the old man; याति – moves (goes) about; गृहीत्वा –
having taken (leaning on); दण्डं – (his) staff; तदपि – even then; न – never;
मुञ्चति – leaves; आशापिण्डम् – the bundle of desires; भज – seek; गोविन्दं –
Govinda

15. The body has become worn out. The head has turned grey. The mouth has become toothless. The old man moves about leaning on his staff. Even then he leaves not the bundle of his desires.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

That the power of desire to enjoy the sense objects is irresistible and unending is indicated in this stanza. If the individual is young, hale and hearty, brimming with energy, then the sense passions are but natural and if not entirely inexcusable, at least to an extent it is understandable. We can very well appreciate how the world preys upon him.

But this is not all. The author paints so beautifully, with very few artistic strokes of his pen, the picture of a dilapidated physical form tottering with age! In a body worn out, hair grown grey and mouth turned toothless, the old man moves on, leaning on his own stick. Theoretically, it may be assumed that he has exhausted all passions and feels no more any hunger or thirst for flesh and pleasure; but it is very rarely so! The bundle of his desires even then leaves him not. On the other hand, it persecutes him all

the more because the mind thirsts, the intellect plans and alas, the body cannot execute! It is like the sorrows of one suffering jail life, where he remembers his home, the sweet joys in the gurgling laughter of his dashing children at home; and yet, he cannot reach them because physically this has been rendered impossible.

Suffering thus the greater tyrannies of inexpressible desires that ever storm him within, the old man lives an agonising life of unimaginable sorrows.

By the statement, the author indicates that the only way to peace is to control desires even while we are young so that it becomes a habit. Thus, at least when the youthfulness has departed, the matured old man can come to live peacefully his time of retirement in tranquillity and inner joy.

Desires grow in the mind as the body grows old and the dissipated body becomes more decrepit. The capacity for enjoyment leaves the body, but the mind, which has developed habits of immorality, cruelly persecutes the emaciated body.

In this stanza the picture of a young man growing old is beautifully screened. The sequence of the lines in the stanza is the very sequence in which age appears in man. First, the body becomes old; then the grey hairs appear; then the teeth start falling off and, at last, the backbone has no more the strength to hold the body erect and he takes the help of a stick to keep himself erect. Leaning on his staff, painfully he drags himself on tottering legs – a sad and pitiable sight indeed.

And yet, man cannot get rid of his heavy load of desires! They seem to multiply as the body moves nearer the grave. This is *māyā*, this is *moha*.

The stanza is attributed to Śrī Totakācārya.





अग्रे वह्निः पृष्ठे भानुः रात्रौ चुबुकसमर्पितजानुः ।
करतलभिक्षस्तरुतलवासः तदपि न मुञ्चत्याशापाशः ॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (१६)

*agre vahnih prṣṭhe bhānuḥ rātrau cubukasamarpitajānuḥ,
karatalabhikṣastarutalavāsaḥ tadapi na muñcatyāśāpāśaḥ.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (16)*

अग्रे – in front; वह्निः – the fire; पृष्ठे – at the back; भानुः – the sun; रात्रौ – at night; चुबुक-समर्पित-जानुः – with (his) knees held to (his) chin (he sits); करतल-भिक्षः – alms in (his own) scooped palm (he receives); तरुतलवासः – under the shelter of the tree (he lives); तदपि – and yet; न – never; मुञ्चति – spares (leaves); आशापाशः – noose of desires; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

16. In front of the fire, at the back the sun, late at night he sits with his knees held to his chin; he receives alms in his own scooped palm and lives under the shelter of some tree and yet the noose of desires spares him not!

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

In the previous stanza, a householder suffering the persecutions of his own desires was painted exhaustively and it was held up to the ridicule of all thinking persons. Is then the wandering monk in any way exempt from such subjective self persecutions? The tyrannies of desire are universal; it is a law of nature. As all scientific laws, it is also universal and it respects no personality. The reactions of desires spare none.

To bring home this idea, the picture of a true ascetic is brought out here. One may be having none of the elaborate comforts of life and having renounced everything, including even the minimum necessities of life, one may come to live with no clothing, no shelter and with scarcely any food; even such an individual may, to fight the inclemencies of weather, resort to warming himself up, on cloudy wintry days, near the fire. And in the clear and bright daytime he may bask himself in the warmth of the sun.¹ When at

night the fire goes out, he may bend himself upon himself and with his chin held tight to his own knees, spend the rest of the time of the cold night. He may not keep to himself any possession – not even a begging bowl. He may accept what is given unto him in his own palm. For shelter he may choose to be under any wayside tree.

Thus, an individual may come to leave even the utter necessities of life and for all practical purposes, may look a real man of renunciation, and yet, says the author of the verse, we find that ‘the cords of desire never leave him’ (tadapi na muñcati āśāpāśaḥ).

While indicating thus, a fact in life, all the pseudo sannyāsīs are contemptuously laughed at in this verse. Mere asceticism, however impressive it may be, will not be sufficient in itself. Renouncing the objects of the world is not real renunciation. To give up our desires for them is the real sacrifice and to dry up this desire we must distill our personality of its contents of craving. No doubt, self-denial at the level of the senses is the means but the goal is the total elimination of even the very thirst to enjoy. Śaṅkara, in *Ātmabodha*, very vividly describes that the spiritual student should give up ‘all his clinging attachments to the joy arising from the outer objects’.²

Self-denial, even when it is real, cannot produce true results unless it is accompanied by a high mental purity. The stories in the purāṇas, of rākṣasas doing tapas, are examples to illustrate this point. Out of all their tapas, the rākṣasas ultimately got only their self-destruction, brought upon themselves by their own indulgence.

The Gītācārya calls such people, who so ostensibly practise asceticism but are in fact mentally spending themselves in sensuous self dissipation, as hypocrites.³ Physical self-denial, it is now clear, alone in itself will not do. There must be elimination of desires from the mind without which all asceticism is a mental self persecution. Through asceticism the vitalities that would otherwise have been spent in indulgence can be conserved. But without redirecting it for creative self application, self-denial becomes a ruinous self suppression. Reapplying the energy so discovered in ourselves as a result of our self-denial, on the path of positive development and

spiritual unfoldment, is called sublimation of our instincts. Suppression is unprofitable; there is no profit greater than sublimation.

This stanza is attributed to Śrī Hastāmalaka.

¹ Hence the stanza says, ‘fire in front’ and ‘sun at the back’.

² बाह्यानित्यसुखासक्तिं हित्वा

bāhyānityasukhāsaktim hitvā – (Ātmabodha - 51).

³ मिथ्याचारः स उच्यते।

mithyācāraḥ sa ucyate – (Bhagavad-gītā ch. 3-6).





कुरुते गङ्गासागरगमनं व्रतपरिपालनमथवा दानम्।
ज्ञानविहीनः सर्वमतेन भजति न मुक्तिं जन्मशतेन॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (१७)

*kurute gaṅgāsāgaragamanam vrataparipālanamathavā dānam,
jñānavihīnaḥ sarvamatena bhajati na muktīm janmaśatena.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (17)*

कुरुते – goes to pilgrimage; गङ्गा-सागर-गमनं – to where the Ganga meets the ocean; व्रतपरिपालनं – observes the vows; अथवा – or; दानम् (कुरुते)– distributes gifts away; ज्ञान-विहीनः – devoid of experience of Truth; सर्वमतेन – according to all schools of thought; मुक्तिं – release; न – not; भजति – (he) gains; जन्मशतेन – even in hundred lives; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

17. One may, in pilgrimage, go to where the Ganga meets the ocean, called the Gaṅgāsāgara or observe vows or distribute gifts in charity. If he is devoid of first hand experience of Truth (jñānam), according to all schools of thought, he gains no release, even in a hundred lives.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

When Śrī Hastāmalaka has thus mentioned and criticized the futility of unintelligent tapas by recluses, Śrī Subodha contributes in this stanza an extension of the very same idea contained in the previous stanza. What about tapas in the life of devoted householders? Seekers of the true end of religion do go for pilgrimages, observe vows and offer charities. All of them are wonderful exercises for developing healthy attitudes to life and in helping one on to the path of study and contemplation. But, ordinarily, householders confuse these means as an end in themselves. This erroneous concept is being laughed at by the poet.¹

Without knowledge of the infinite Reality, Liberation from our sense of finitude is impossible. In the Upaniṣads also we often find this idea that freedom from the thralldom of life can never be gained unless one comes to

experience the infinite oneness of life. Here, walking the path of the ancient teachers, Śrī Subodha says that it is the unanimous conclusion arrived at by all schools of thought in Vedānta, that Liberation from the sorrows of life cannot be gained without the actual first hand experience of the one Infinitude. The Ācārya is sure and he asserts with emphasis, that by mere practice of these noble exercises one cannot reach one's destination 'even in a hundred lives' (janma śatena).

In the text, the phrase 'Gaṅgāsāgara' can mean the place where the Ganga meets the Bay of Bengal, called in India as 'Gaṅgāsāgara'. It can also mean 'Gaṅgā and sāgara'; meaning, pilgrimages to Kāśī, where Ganga flows and to Rameshwaram, where a bath in the sāgara, setū, is the most important item. Pilgrimages to Kāśī and Rameshwaram will bring a lot of vivid experiences for a person who is doing it with faith, dedication, devotion and sincerity, especially when it is undertaken on foot, as they used to do in the past.

Educating the intellect to hold on to higher ideals, training the mind to obey the will, sharpening one's will itself and training it to be easily wielded by oneself, are the achievements gained by the practice of vows. Through firm determination and individual will, when one orders that one's sense organs will not have, for a fixed period of time, some of the things which they always liked the most, there we have all the contents of a 'vow'! And, when it is undertaken in a spirit of dedication unto the Lord, and the entire mind is turned towards the Lord, it becomes a very efficient psychological training in recasting the mind and it becomes a 'religious vow'!

However beautifully and elaborately one may cook one's food, until that food becomes one with oneself, the sorrows of hunger cannot end. Pilgrimages, vows and charity² are all exercises to prepare the seeker's mind for the great path of meditation. Through meditation, until the Highest is actually apprehended (jñānam), total freedom (mukti) from the natural human weaknesses can never be gained – not even in a hundred lives (janma śatena). The old teachers in Vedānta used to tell us, 'The snake-on-the-rope seen by your foolishness cannot disappear by Garuḍa mantra'; nor

can, they used to add, ‘The ghosts you have projected on the post run away by ringing the bell’.

Waking up alone is the remedy for all the sorrows of the dream. Wake up, O limited ego and come to apprehend your own infinite nature, wherein there is neither matter nor spirit. That Thou Art.³

This stanza is believed to have been written by Śrī Subodha.

¹ बोधोऽन्यसाधनेभ्यो हि साक्षान्मोक्षैकसाधनम्।

पाकस्य वह्निवज्ज्ञानं विना मोक्षो न सिध्यति॥

bodho 'nyasādhanebhyo hi sākṣānmokṣaikasāadhanam,

pākasya vahnivajjñānaṁ vinā mokṣo na sidhyati. – (Ātmabodha - 2).

² Sharing intelligently, what you have, with others around you, who are in need of it, is charity.

³ तत्त्वमसि।

Tat Tvam Asi – one of the mahāvākyas found in the *Chāndogya-upaniṣad*.





सुरमन्दिरतरुमूलनिवासः शय्या भूतलमजिनं वासः।
सर्वपरिग्रहभोगत्यागः कस्य सुखं न करोति विरागः॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (१८)

*suramandiratarumūlanivāsaḥ śayyā bhūtalamajinam vāsaḥ,
sarvaparigrahabhogatyāgaḥ kasya sukham na karoti virāgaḥ.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (18)*

सुर-मन्दिर-तरु-मूल-निवासः – dwelling (sheltering) in temples, under some trees; शय्या – bed (sleeping); भूतलं – on the naked ground; अजिनं – (wearing) skin (deer's); वासः – cloth; सर्व-परिग्रह – of the possession; भोगः – of thirst to enjoy; त्यागः – renouncing; कस्य – whose; सुखं – happiness; न – not; करोति – brings; विरागः – dispassion; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

18. Sheltering in temples, under some trees, sleeping on the naked ground, wearing a deerskin and thus renouncing all idea of possession and thirst to enjoy, to whom will not dispassion (vairāgya) bring happiness?

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

Earlier,¹ a hypocrite was painted by Śrī Hastāmalaka, and now, in this stanza, a real renouncer, who has truly relinquished all his inner thirst for enjoying the world outside is being pictured by Śrī Sureśvarācārya. True dispassion brings real happiness to all. In the world outside, we find even emperors sorrowing, the rich worrying and the powerful man anxious and the man of accomplishment jealous – all are unhappy.

Everyone points out to the other man who, according to him, is happier. But the only one, who has the courage to declare and truly feel that he is happy, is he who has relinquished all his passions and hungers from within. One cried out: 'I am Caesar's Caesar', another thundered forth, 'I am Shah-en-Shah'. He alone is really rich who has no more any use for the finite joys of this ephemeral world of delusory pleasures.

Such an individual may have no shelter of his own more than the shade of a tree in the courtyard of a temple. He may sleep there under it on the naked ground. He may wear nothing but a deerskin. Renouncing thus the entire idea of possession and relinquishing all attempts to seek one's fulfilment in life through objects of the world, he lives happily ever self-sufficient unto himself. He is independent of the world outside. He has discovered an inexhaustible well of joy and a rich mine of true satisfaction in his own deep within. 'Who will not be happy in this mental mood?', asks Śrī Sureśvarācārya in this verse.

When renunciation is only external and when there is still the sense of attachment within, one cannot discover the true joy of living. This has been already said. It may then be suspected that there is no joy whatsoever to reward renunciation and tapas. This is not true; to assess so would be positively against all our scriptural declarations.

Here is painted the outer behaviour and the inner attitudes to life in a true relinquisher (viraktaḥ). He has reached the stage of desirelessness, not as a result of his deliberate running away from life, but due to a positive experience of intense self-sufficiency felt and lived within. It has been beautifully described in the picture of the 'Man of Steady Wisdom' in the *Gītā*.²

The inner riches must be the basis of the outer poverty, or else renunciation is, indeed, painful. The healthy outlook on life must be nurtured by an enduring inlook which the student must cultivate. Without insight into the Reality, the outer man can never dare to give up the enchanting things of the outer world of beauty.

Simple and unostentatious becomes the way of life of a true Master. The Emperor of emperors in him lives on the luxurious roughness under some nameless tree shading the courtyard of any wayside temple.³ Generally in a temple ground, late in the night, nobody wanders about and so, under a tree, there he is, all alone, enjoying perfect solitude.

And the sleep is comfortable, not because of softness of the bed but because of the purity of man's heart. A true man of seeking, being innocent, has no mental worry, and so, in his positive life of peaceful love for all, he

sleeps comfortably on the rough ground, luxuriously cushioned by his own sense of purity and his heart's essential goodness.

Who will not be happy then? All others are unhappy, indeed. They may have a lot of possessions but their mind has the cancer of desire and their intellect has the carbuncle of conceit. The same idea is being described in the Upaniṣads also: 'By renunciation alone can immortality be achieved'.⁴

Again, in another Upaniṣad, the Teacher, after discussing the glory of renunciation, comes to the conclusion that 'renunciation alone is the seat of fearlessness'.⁵

¹ Verse 16

² प्रजहाति यदा कामान् सर्वान् पार्थ मनोगतान्।

आत्मन्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते ॥

prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha manogatān

ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthitaprajñastadocyate – (*Bhagavad-gītā* ch. 2-55).

³ Even in a temple veranda your presence may create jealousy in the minds of the trustees.

⁴ त्यागेनैके अमृतत्वमानशुः

tyāgenaike amṛtattvamānaśuḥ – (*Kaivalya-upaniṣad* - 3)

⁵ वैराग्यमेवाभयम्।

vairāgyamevābhayaṁ – (*Vairāgya Śatakam* – *Bharṭṛhari* - 31)





योगरतो वा भोगरतो वा सङ्गरतो वा सङ्गविहीनः ।
यस्य ब्रह्मणि रमते चित्तं नन्दति नन्दति नन्दत्येव ॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (१९)

yogarato vā bhogarato vā saṅgarato vā saṅgavihīnaḥ,
yasya brahmaṇi ramate cittaṁ nandati nandati nandatyeva.
(*bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...*) (19)

योगरतः – (let) one who revels in yoga; वा – or; भोगरतः – (let) one who revels in bhoga; वा – or; सङ्गरतः – (let) one seek enjoyment in company; सङ्गविहीनः – (let) one who revels in solitude away from the crowd; यस्य – for whom; ब्रह्मणि – in Brahman; रमते – revels (sports); चित्तं – the mind; नन्दति – (he) enjoys; नन्दति – (he) enjoys; नन्दत्येव – only he enjoys; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

19. Let one revel in yoga or let one revel in bhoga. Let one seek enjoyment in company or revel in solitude, away from the crowd. He whose mind revels in Brahman, he enjoys ... verily, he alone enjoys.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

This is a verse glorifying the state of realisation of Brahman as conceived by the scriptures of the Hindus. To one who has awakened to this great Truth, it is immaterial thereafter whether he is in a crowd or living all alone, in bhoga or in yoga. In whatever condition he may live, his is the real joy.

Mind at rest is the temple of joy. So long as it is gurgling with its desires, passions and attachments in its stormy surface, the signature of joy gets ruffled out.¹ To him who has realised the Highest in himself and has thereby recognised the non-existence of the multiple world of names and forms and who has also realised the infinite bliss in the sense of oneness, his indeed is the true joy. This joy is true because it is not dependent upon things and beings or upon the arrangement of things around the individual.

To a Man of Realisation, after his experience of the Infinite, there is nothing more real to him than Brahman. And, therefore, let him remain practising self-control if he so chooses (yoga) or let him live in seeming indulgence at the sense levels (bhoga); let him be in the company of the world, serving the world by joining himself at the head of the parade or let him remain burying himself in lonely contemplation in the silence of some Himālayan cave – his alone is the true joy of the within. He no more seeks from the outer world any joy from his sense gratification.

There are very many texts where it is said that even the Vedas dare not prescribe rules (vidhi-niṣedha) to regulate a Perfect Man's behaviour. He has all the freedom; he can do anything. In explaining this absolute freedom allowed to the Man of Perfection, *Pañcadaśī* goes so far as to say: 'Killing parents, destroying embryos, even these sins cannot destroy either the Liberation achieved by the Saint or the joyous glow on his face'.²

This is not to be understood as licentiousness which the brāhmaṇa has allowed himself through the Vedas. It is something like the special powers we allow some great men in all walks of life even in our modern world: the Supreme Court judge can finally decide whether a murderer is to be hanged or not; or the President of India is given the power to pardon the condemned and reduce his punishment to life imprisonment. When these powers and the freedom to use them are allowed, it is delegated not to everybody, but only to those members of the community in whom the civilised world has perfect faith that they will be ever just, good and noble.

A full-fledged doctor alone is given the freedom to use his knife on the body of another living member of the society and the patient may even die bleeding from the wound which the doctor has created. That which would have been a murder of any other member of the society, for the doctor it is considered as an 'essential service'! Similarly, the Man of Perfection is one who will not and cannot act selfishly nor has he any need to court his fulfilment of life in the objects of the world outside and so this freedom is given to him.

The father gives the key of his cash box to his son only when he has grown up sufficiently. If the key is given in childhood or in early youth, the boy, not having realised the sanctity of wealth and understood the

difficulties of earning, may misuse the freedom and so harm himself. Only when he has grown to a sense of responsibility and has some experience of the difficulties of life, does he know the right use of money. Also, it is a fact that the father readily gives the key of his cash box to the son, only when he is confident that what the son earns and puts in there will be more than what he will be taking out of it!

By his very nature, a Man of Perfection is incapable of acting against the moral harmony and the ethical goodness in society. ‘Having realised the Self, he has become the Self in all’.³ The Upaniṣad ṛṣis, from their own experience, assure us that a Realised Saint thereafter lives ‘sporting with the Self, revelling in the Self and ever in the service of the world’.⁴

Such a Man of Perfection alone enjoys in this world – of sorrows and tribulations, of contentious competitions and endless imperfections, of disease and death – the spotless joy of the Perfect. ‘He alone enjoys’, cries Śrī Nityānanda to whom this stanza is generally credited.

¹ अशान्तस्य कुतः सुखम्।

aśāntasya kutaḥ sukham – (*Bhagavad-gītā* ch. 2-66).

² मातापित्रोर्वधः स्तेयं भ्रूणहत्यान्यदीदृशम्।

न मुक्तिं नाशयेत्पापं मुखकांतिर्न नश्यति॥

mātāpitrorvadhah steyam bhrūṇahatyānyadīdṛśam,

na muktiṁ nāśayetpāpaṁ mukhakāntirna naśyati – (*Pañcadaśī* ch. 14-17).

³ ब्रह्म वेद ब्रह्मैव भवति।

brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati – (*Muṇḍakopaniṣad* ch. 3-2- 9).

⁴ आत्मक्रीड आत्मरतिः क्रियावान्।

ātmakrīḍa ātmaratiḥ kriyāvān – (*Muṇḍakopaniṣad* ch. 3-1-4).





भगवद्गीता किञ्चिदधीता गङ्गाजललवकणिका पीता ।
सकृदपि येन मुरारिसमर्चा क्रियते तस्य यमेन न चर्चा ॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (२०)

*bhagavadgītā kiñcidadhītā gaṅgā-jala-lava-kaṇikā pītā,
sakṛdapi yena murārisamarcā kriyate tasya yamena na carcā.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (20)*

भगवद्गीता – The *Bhagavad-gītā*; किञ्चित् – (even) a little; अधीता – has studied; गङ्गा-जल-लव-कणिका – a drop of Ganga water; पीता – has sipped; सकृत्-अपि – at least once; येन – by whom; मुरारिसमर्चा – worship of the Lord Murāri; (मुरस्य अरिः – the enemy of Mura, a rākṣasa); क्रियते – is done; तस्य – to him; यमेन – with Yama, the Lord of Death; न – never; चर्चा – quarrel (discussion); भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

20. To one who has studied the *Bhagavad-gītā* even a little, who has sipped at least a drop of Ganga water, who has worshipped at least once Lord Murāri, there is no discussion (quarrel) with Yama, the Lord of Death.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

Three divine exercises for spiritual unfoldment are being indicated here: (1) the study of the *Gītā*, (2) the Ganga baptism and (3) the worship of Murāri. *Śrīmad Bhagavad-gītā*, being the essence of all the Upaniṣads, a study of its eighteen chapters is an intellectual discipline by which we can come to understand what exactly is the secret essence of life, what exactly is the goal of life and what are the methods by which this goal can be gained.

The heavenly Ganga (Ākāśa Gaṅgā), flowing so high above the human intellectual approach, was brought down to man's level of experience by the continuous efforts of King Bhagīratha and today it is emerging out from the pure intellect of Lord Śiva, who alone could stand the onslaught of Her devastating wisdom descent. The eternal tapasvin, the Lord of Kailāsa, realised this great Knowledge Absolute (jñānam) first, and, thereafter, at the

request of Bhagīratha, he gave out that Knowledge in a thin stream which could perennially water the country's 'heart' rather than rape the land below with its irresistible deluge.

Thus Ganga stands for the 'spiritual knowledge' for the Hindu – the eternal river of the knowledge of the Self that has been kept up till today, flowing from teacher to the taught in an unbroken perennial stream. To sip a drop of this 'spiritual flow' (Ganga) is to enjoy the serenity and fullness of the inner kingdom.

Ordinarily, the modern children of this country, due to the power of tradition and faith, take Ganga to mean the Himalayan river and like the multitudes, they too have come to give a special potency to Her elemental waters. In their scientific outlook, this is a faith and there is no convincing meaning. Naturally, they believe, and yet they believe not.

Some positively decry this belief – 'what is so sacred in a river?' ask some! What a colossal ignorance of the symbolism! What is there in your national flag as such, except three coloured pieces stitched together with a wheel-figure in the centre? The sanctity of my country's flag is not in the material contents or the form of it, but in the significance that I have given to it. So too, Mother Ganga is sacred, for she signifies the 'spiritual wisdom' and the flow of it along the teacher-taught unbroken stream.

To the ordinary folk, this eternal river and worshipping it – the ritualism itself – is a great consolation, a wondrous achievement, a consoling action, a purifying religious pilgrimage. But to the seeker of the highest knowledge who walks the path of knowledge, more than the idol, the ideal interpreted in the idol is important. Thus here, in the context of the stanza, the statement, 'who has sipped at least a drop of the Ganga water', should mean 'those who have at least had a glimpse of the Infinite and the higher possibility of the divine way of living'.

If the study of the *Gītā* gives an intellectual and objective picture of the goal and the path to the scholarly student, a few drops of the Ganga sipped from the hollow of his palm give to the ardent devotee the flicker of a joyous vision of the distant goal. To him the harbour is no more too far away because he has seen the flashes from the lighthouse! And yet he is

still in the open sea of life, buffeted by the stormy waves of sorrows around him. But he has hope; he is now confident. The harbour is not far and he makes a dash towards it.

When a ship enters the harbour, it is not allowed to sail and enter in as she likes but a pilot ship must go out and pilot the guest ship in. The ship that seeks the harbour must have the patience to stand out, constantly sending radio messages to the harbour tower. A seeker who has thus become assured of the harbour at hand must thereafter call out for help (kīrtana), wait till the ‘pilot ship’ arrives (Guru) and implicitly follow the foams left by the guiding ship. This ‘piloting-in’ is accomplished in spirituality by the worship of Murāri. The ‘weighing the anchor’ is meditation.

Until the ego (mura) is annihilated, there is no hope of entering the harbour of Truth, the glorious state of immaculate peace. The body consciousness and the ego sense, arising out of a false identification with matter, can be rubbed off only by devoted worship and prayer at the altar of the very destroyer of ego (Murāri).

Withdrawing the mind from all other preoccupations and surcharging it constantly with the memory of the goal, the nature of the Self, is the only method by which intellectual and mental limitations are battered down, when the individual realises that the life within is the life everywhere present. And in fact, in the supreme logic of the *Śrīmad Bhagavad-gītā* this is fully endorsed.¹

A seeker who has accomplished all these three – study of the śāstra, glimpsing the goal and striving to reach it – to him there is no more any fear of death. He is no more questioned by Lord Death nor does the seeker care any longer to question about the phenomenon of death. It is interesting to note that in Hinduism, Lord Death is called the ‘Great Controller’, Yama. But for the principle of death, so efficiently working all around, existence would have been impossible; nor can creation ever take place. For to create is to annihilate the present condition of a thing, thereby making it into a new form and presenting it in a new condition. Thus viewed, the very creation is a continuous process of annihilation.

The question of change can arise only in the realm of death. Change is experienced through the vehicles of the body, mind and intellect. When a seeker, through the process of yoga, has transcended these three vehicles, he rises above the realm of change, a realm where infinite Existence alone is!² There, neither is he to question or to fear death, nor can the principle of change (death) ever enter to question him! There is an alternative reading: ‘Not even death dares to question him’.³

This stanza is traditionally believed to have been given out by Śrī Ānandagiri.

¹ यदा ते मोहकलिलं बुद्धिर्व्यतितरिष्यति।
तदा गन्तासि निर्वेदं श्रोतव्यस्य श्रुतस्य च॥

yadā te mohakalilam buddhirvyatitarīṣyati,
tadā gantāsi nirvedaṁ śrotavyasya śrutasya ca – (Bhagavad-gītā ch. 2-52).

श्रुतिविप्रतिपन्ना ते यदा स्थास्यति निश्चला।
समाधावचला बुद्धिस्तदा योगमवाप्स्यसि॥

śrutivipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati niścalā,
samādhāvachalā buddhistadā yogamavāpsyasi – (Bhagavad-gītā ch. 2-53).
See Swāmījī’s Commentary on The *Bhagavad-gītā*.

² नित्यः सर्वगतः स्थाणुरचलोऽयं सनातनः।

nityaḥ sarvagataḥ sthāṇuracalo ’yaṁ sanātanaḥ – (Bhagavad-gītā ch. 2-24).

³ क्रियते तस्य यमेन न प्रश्नः।

kriyate tasya yameṇa na praśnaḥ – (Bhaja Govindam - 20).





पुनरपि जननं पुनरपि मरणं पुनरपि जननीजठरे शयनम्।
इह संसारे बहुदुस्तारे कृपयाऽपारे पाहि मुरारे॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (२१)

*punarapi jananaṁ punarapi maraṇaṁ punarapi jananījathare śayanam,
iha saṁsāre bahudustāre kṛpayā'pāre pāhi murāre.
(bhaja govindaṁ bhaja govindaṁ...) (21)*

पुनः अपि – once again; जननं – birth; पुनः अपि – once again; मरणं – death;
पुनरपि – (and) again; जननीजठरे – in the mother's womb; शयनम् – lying; इह
– here; संसारे – in this saṁsāra (process); बहु-दुस्तारे – (saṁsāra) which is
very hard to cross over; अपारे – (saṁsāra) which has no end; कृपया –
through Thy infinite kindness; पाहि – save; मुरारे – O Destroyer of Mura;
भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

21. Again birth, again death and again lying in mother's womb – this saṁsāra process is very hard to cross over. Save me, Murāri (O destroyer of Mura) through Thy infinite kindness.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

The wheel of birth and death is never at rest for the jīva. The individualised ego, prompted by desires – entertained by his imagination and cultivated by his habits, but not yet completely fulfilled – must seek ever fresh fields of experiences repeatedly. In each lifetime, instead of exhausting the existing desires or vāsanās, each one gathers to himself a new set of vāsanās. We come here for purgation, but due to our ignorance of the way and the goal, the extrovertedness in us compels us to get ourselves attached to the objects, which have a beauty and a charm created by the imaginations of our minds! Māyā at work!

We come with our own vāsanās¹ into 'vāsanās playing criss-cross', which is the world of objects and beings, the actual field of man's endeavour. To live up to the sahaja vāsanās and to exhaust them through

actions undertaken without ego and egocentric desires (aham-mama), so that no new vāsanās may precipitate in us, is really the ‘way’. By all means, act and achieve, but let your actions be in an attitude of dedication (mayi sannyasya), with an idea to serve (loka saṅgraha), in a spirit of yajña (yajña-bhāva), says the *Gītā*.

Thus, when the existing vāsanās are reduced, the thought disturbances calm down, and thus, when the subtle body (mind and intellect) dies a ‘mystic death’, meaning it is transcended, the experience is of the infinite Spirit.

Thereafter, since there are no vāsanās in the individual, there are no thoughts in him and so no subtle body to claim a new embodiment to function in any fresh environment. The causes for all repeated births thus totally cease.

Birth is painful; death, of course, is excruciatingly so and again, to come to life in the horrid cell of the womb, there to be crushed, twisted, imprisoned and persecuted by the physical and mental strains and jerks of the mother, is indeed abhorrent, terrible, cruel. And yet, as we are today, we are seemingly helpless.

The momentum gathered by this great fall from perfection is too powerful to be halted all by ourselves. The ego, born out of me, has now become a mighty power ruling over me relentlessly and in front of this usurper of my bosom I am but a slave. To free myself from this great inner tyrant I need now a mighty friend, a powerful and sympathetic friend. And who can It be?

‘O Destroyer of Mura, Lord Kṛṣṇa, save me ... help me, please’, is the ardent prayer unto Him and seeking His feet of love is the only way out.

‘And even here, what right have I, the slave of my own passions, the non-believer all these years, to seek His help now?’

‘True, I have no faith to meet Thee, O Lord; I have nothing to offer Thee, except my own tears. I have nothing to claim for myself except the fatigue of my indulgence, the stink of my selfish acts, the sweat of my

passions and the cords of my attachments. In fact, I don't deserve to be saved. Yet, Lord, I am tired – beaten out completely, exhausted thoroughly – repentant fully – helpless wholly.'

'I surrender myself to Thee and Thy grace. I claim a hearing and expect help from Thee. Are not Thou the ocean of kṛpā – of grace, of kindness and of love? Are Thou not the Destroyer of the demon Mura? Won't Thou, in Thy kindness, take pity on me and once more destroy the old enemy Mura in my bosom – the bundle of my own wretched vāsanās?'

Thus, to surrender unto Him and to sincerely invoke His grace is to create in us divine and godly vāsanās, which are the only antidote to the ego and the egocentric vāsanās that constantly clamour in our bosom for gratification. Once these are hushed, the song of the Flute-bearer shall be heard; the blue light of His aura can be seen; the fragrance of His garland of wild flowers can be smelt; the butter of His hand can be tasted; the embrace of the Infinite can be experienced!

¹ सहजं कर्म

sahajam karma – (*Bhagavad-gītā* ch. 18-48).





रथ्याचर्पटविरचितकन्थः पुण्यापुण्यविवर्जितपन्थः ।
योगी योगनियोजितचित्तो रमते बालोन्मत्तवदेव ॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (२२)

*rathyācarpaṭaviracitakanthaḥ puṇyāpuṇyavivarjitapanthaḥ,
yogī yoganiyojitacitto ramate bālonmattavadeva.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (22)*

रथ्या – the road; चर्पट – pieces of old cloth; विरचित – made of; कन्थः – godhaḍī (a shawl); पुण्य-अपुण्य – merit and demerit; विवर्जित – well left; पन्थः – the path; योगी – the yogin (sage); योग नियोजित चित्तः – whose mind is joined in perfect yoga; रमते – sports (lives thereafter); बालः – as a child (or); उन्मत्तवत् एव – as a madman; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

22. The Yogin who wears but a godhaḍī,¹ who walks the path that is beyond merit and demerit, whose mind is joined in perfect yoga with its goal, revels (in God-consciousness) and lives thereafter as a child or as a madman.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

A Man of Realisation, after achieving the goal and realising the liquidation of his individuality and, therefore, of his personal proprietorship over his body, is described in our sacred books as living on thereafter as a child (bālavat), as a madman (unmattavat), or as a ghost (piśācavat). These examples are given to express one or the other aspect of his mental attitudes to the world outside. He is not a child or a madman or a ghost – yet, he is like them. He has in him some qualities of these and so he is like a child, like a madman or like a ghost.

Love and hatred we find even in children. They express all emotions as and when they arise in their innocent minds. But the very next moment they have forgotten all about those feelings. Children are always found to be fully engrossed with their immediate mental mood. They have no capacity to drag the past into present and colour the present happenings with the

dead past. There is perfect spontaneity both in children and in the perfect seer.

A Man of Perfection also lives from moment to moment and lives fully and entirely in the chaste present. He carries no regrets from the past, nor has he any anxiety for the future. Right here and now, like the children ever do, the Man of Realisation lives and revels (bālavat).

A madman moving amidst us – his mind is full of his own thoughts and the ordinary folks have no entry into the thought world of the demented man. So too, the Man of Perfection moves amongst us and his inner experiences are too deep and strange for us to gauge and understand. He lives amidst us. Often he conforms to the discipline of our social actions. But even though his feet are amidst us in our own world, his head is held ever above the clouds of likes and dislikes, ego and its vanities, joys and sorrows (unmattavat).

He revels in the peaceful state, the sām̐ya avasthā, in the great equipoise. He, in his inner life, walks the path which is beyond both merit and demerit, good and bad, pleasure and pain. These opposites are experienced only when the empirical world is projected by the mind. Merit and demerit cannot affect the perfect. And not even the Vedas prescribe or prohibit the actions of such Mahāpuruṣas. The Upaniṣad exclaims: ‘For one who is moving above the three guṇas, where is prescription, where is prohibition?’

Fearlessly he moves. Alone, in lonely jungles and in quiet places, by day and by night – fearlessly he moves about. Others are afraid of him in due reverence (piśācavat). The ghost is afraid of none; all fear it.

Such a Man of Perfection, his mind totally plucked away from its usual fields of passion and lust, when it has reached a perfect yoga with the goal, has reached its God-realisation. When such an individual transcends his mind-intellect and treads the surface of the globe, he is no more a slave to his body and so his body dare not demand anything for itself. However, the perfect man allows his body a minimum of protection and this is indicated by the godhaḍī.

In society everyone has got duties; and duties go hand in hand with rights. If you are to enjoy the privileges in a nation as a citizen under its constitution, you have also definite duties towards the community in which you are living. The lesser the privileges, of course, lesser the duties.

It is also very well known that a dead man has neither any duty nor has he any privilege among the living. After the ‘mystic death’ of the individual concept, the ego, the Master no more has any ‘right’ to demand, but out of his infinite love for mankind he cannot but take upon himself all ‘duties’. Thus, a true sage in India, according to our scriptures, serves the society day in and day out, without relaxation, with as much sincerity and diligence as a selfish man would work for his own personal gains in the world’s various departments of activity.

And yet, a sage takes from the world only a minimum, the barest need. This is indicated by the very traditional uniform of the ṛṣis in India. They lived in the jungles and fed themselves upon wild fruits, roots and leaves. They sheltered themselves under the trees, preferably very near the burial ground! They kept for themselves, for their use, only a shell called the kamaṇḍalu. The attitude of taking from life the least but giving back to life the most is that which earned for the Mahātmās of this country the respect and reverence that we even today show to them.

All these ideas are indicated when Śaṅkara describes here that this God-man moves in the world, covering himself with only a godhaḍī. This is called a ‘patchwork-quilt’ and it is a shawl made out of all sorts of available cloth pieces picked up by him from the wayside as and when he came across them and stitched together at random to serve him as a multi coloured, ‘many-designed’ shawl of variety textures! The idea being that since he has nothing more to gain from the world, he does not want to increase the competition of the world by demanding his rights even for the so-called utter necessities of life.

What a contrast! Today the best ones among us strive under the philosophy of ‘minimum effort and maximum gain’, while the fathers of our culture lived in our land with the healthy philosophy of ‘maximum effort and minimum gains’ to themselves. The difference between these two philosophies is like night and day; and the joyous life in a cultured society

should necessarily be poles far removed from the sorrows of a barbarous, uncultured, immoral society.

This stanza is traditionally attributed to Śrī Nityānanda.

¹ A shawl made up of pieces of cloth rejected by others, picked up from the streets and stitched together, is called the godhaḍī.





कस्त्वं कोऽहं कुत आयातः का मे जननी को मे तातः।
इति परिभावय सर्वमसारं विश्वं त्यक्त्वा स्वप्नविचारम्॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (२३)

*kastvaṁ ko 'haṁ kuta āyātaḥ kā me jananī ko me tātaḥ,
iti paribhāvaya sarvamasāraṁ viśvaṁ tyaktvā svapnavicāram.
(bhaja govindaṁ bhaja govindaṁ...) (23)*

कः – who; त्वम् – (are) you; कः – who; अहम् – am I; कुतः – from where;
आयातः – did I come; का – who (is); मे – my; जननी – mother; कः – who (is);
तातः – my father; इति – thus; परिभावय – enquire; सर्व – all; असारं –
essenceless; विश्वं – the entire world of experience; त्यक्त्वा – leaving aside;
स्वप्नविचारम् – a mere dreamland (born of imagination); भज – seek; गोविन्दं –
Govinda

23. Who are you? Who am I? From where did I come? Who is my mother?
Who is my father? Thus enquire, leaving aside the entire world of
experience (viśvaṁ), essenceless and a mere dreamland, born of
imagination (svapnavicāram).

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

An individual's life in this world is played out in an intricate web of mutual relationship. In the tapestry of existence, individuals and their relationship between each other are the warp and woof. A right relationship between me and the objects and beings around me can be maintained only from the standpoint of my awareness and understanding of myself. If I am drunk or mad or by any other reason if I have come to forget myself, I will certainly keep an unhealthy and even dangerous relationship with things and beings around.

In life we are called upon to keep intelligent contacts with the world around and therefore, the most profitable knowledge is indeed, to know ourselves. In our ignorance of ourselves, we become abnormal and act

either as a lunatic or a drunken fool. The poison of ego renders us completely delirious and hence we are made to feel shattered and fall into utter dejection, an Arjuna-sthitih. Close observation and intelligent enquiry alone are the methods by which all misapprehensions are ended – be they about the outer world of objects or the inner world of experiences.

In life it has been well noted that wherever there is a non-apprehension of a thing, misapprehensions about it arise. When things of the world are not understood as they are, they start playing their pranks upon the observer and according to the observer's imaginations, the world becomes a caricature, at once vulgar and ugly, with exaggeration and lopsided magnifications. Therefore, a spiritual student is advised in Vedānta to exhaustively and scientifically enquire about the 'subject' in himself.

Enquire the source from which we must have risen. Let us not take things for granted. Let us make use of our rational intellect. Enquire wherefrom we have come and where we are bound to – whence? And whither? 'Who are you? Who am I? Where have we come from? Who is really my mother? Who is the father?' – these are the lines of enquiry suggested in the verse, along which we must try to investigate in order to end our misconceptions and reach the true apprehension of the Reality.

This is not possible for us at this moment because our mind is not readily available to turn upon itself and make such subjective enquiries. Our minds are at present too much preoccupied with their enchantments regarding the world of objects outside. Until the mind gets relieved from these dissipating preoccupations, that mind will not have the necessary freedom to apply itself totally within.

'Viśvam' is a pregnant Sanskrit word with an endless width and depth in it; for, it contains in its meaning all the human possibilities of experiences – physical, emotional, and intellectual. 'Leaving aside', advises the author, Śrī Yogānanda, 'the entire world of experiences (viśvam), realise that it is essenceless and that it is a mere dreamland born of imaginations (svapnavicāram).' In the empirical field of experiences, everything perishes constantly and so all are unreal. In *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*, Śrī Gauḍapāda argues and shows us logically¹ that the waking state experiences are as unreal as our experiences in our dream.

Thus, having dismissed all the haunting sense passions from our mind, turn it towards a close observation of our own subjective personality. Such enquiries will reveal not only the hollowness of the world of names and forms of endless bewitching enchantments, but it will also reveal the empty vanities of the life we now live.

This stanza is attributed to Śrī Yogānanda.

¹ १ अनुमान २ प्रतिज्ञा ३ हेतु ४ दृष्टान्त ५ उपनयन ६ निगमन

Śaṅkara, in his commentary upon the Kārikā, brings this out in a five-membered syllogism (anumāna). Things seen in waking are illusory (pratijñā); because they are seen (hetu); like the things seen in the dream (dṛṣṭānta); as in the dream there is illusoriness for the things seen, so even in the waking, characteristics of being seen is the same (hetu-upanayana); therefore, even in waking the illusoriness of things is declared (nigamana).





त्वयि मयि चान्यत्रैको विष्णुः व्यर्थं कुप्यसि मय्यसहिष्णुः ।
भव समचित्तः सर्वत्र त्वं वाञ्छस्यचिराद्यदि विष्णुत्वम् ॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (२४)

*tvayi mayi cānyatraiko viṣṇuḥ vyartham kupyasi mayyasahiṣṇuḥ,
bhava samacittaḥ sarvatra tvaṁ vāñchasyacirādyadi viṣṇutvam.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (24)*

त्वयि – in you; मयि – in me; च – and; अन्यत्र – in all other places (too); एकः – (there is) but one; विष्णुः – all-pervading Reality (Viṣṇu); व्यर्थ – unnecessarily; कुप्यसि – you are getting angry; मयि – with me; असहिष्णुः – being impatient; भव – become; समचित्तः – equal-minded; सर्वत्र – everywhere (in all circumstances); त्वं – you; वाञ्छसि यदि – if you want; अचिरात् – soon; विष्णुत्वं – The Viṣṇu-status; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

24. In you, in me, and in (all) other places too there is but one all-pervading Reality (Viṣṇu). Being impatient, you are unnecessarily getting angry with me. If you want to attain soon the Viṣṇu-status, be equal minded in all circumstances.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

The teacher here asserts the eternal Truth that has been the experience of thousands of Masters, for thousands of years, in all the different spiritual paths in our country and declares that in you, in me and in all other places too there is but one all-pervading Reality (Viṣṇu – the long strider).

There are certain truths which are so fundamental in a science that a teacher in it can ill afford to avoid the monotony of their repetitions. Intellectual students thirst for knowledge, ever hungry for variety, for new ideas, for fresh ideals and ever new Truth declarations. The inner man seeks variety even at the intellectual level. The laborious repetitions of the teacher sap out the patience of the student and perhaps unconsciously, on his face he expresses his restlessness. The teacher, noticing it, openly says here:

‘Being impatient, you are unnecessarily angry with me’. There is no other way in which this subtle knowledge can be conveyed to the seekers. Repetition alone is the way, for, if the student had already understood, he would never have returned to the teacher.

When once he has realised the Perfection, there is no necessity for him to feel anymore any sense of imperfection. *Pañcadaśī* says: ‘Only in the realm of multiplicity there are doubts and explanations; in the experience of the oneness, there is no doubt and therefore, no answer is needed’.¹

Therefore, so long as the student has not realised the Highest, the teacher has to talk of the same Truth again and again for purposes of emphasis until the student, in a flash, comes to realise the Highest, all by himself, in his own heart.

Thus, ‘It is futile for you, in your impatience, to feel angry with me’, says the teacher. ‘In case you want to attain soon the great realm of peace, Viṣṇuhood’, then, the teacher advises him, ‘be equal minded in all circumstances’.

‘Please don’t get angry if you are not having the experience of the Infinite even after studying all the voluminous tomes of scriptural literature. There is nothing for you to despair of. There is certainly a way to get the fulfilment in knowledge’, thus assure the teachers by the general import of their words.

To know of love is indeed quite entertaining, but to experience love and be in it is altogether a different and highly enriching experience. Similarly, to know the scriptural contents and to intellectually appreciate the infinite Reality is a satisfying job, no doubt. But it is not the voiceless fulfilment of the all shattering experience, the utter *Ātmasākṣātkārah*. In order to gain this, it is not sufficient that we have intellectually followed the textbooks or logically understood the arguments in the book. We have to accomplish it solely in our own bosom, for which certain elaborate preparations of the mind are unavoidable. It must be made receptive to the subtle influences from the higher planes of consciousness.

The secret is revealed in this stanza: ‘Practise equanimity of mind (samacittatvam)’. While living in the world, desirable and undesirable happenings will float down upon the stream of time to meet us, and, in all these vicissitudes, to learn to remain unshaken is ‘the practice of even mindedness’ advised here. The external world of objects and happenings can disturb us only when we have the positive or the negative vāsanās in ourselves. Objects conducive to our existing vāsanās will attract us and objects contrary to our vāsanās will repel us. In order to develop the mental equipoise, one must strive to filter away from one’s mind all the existing vāsanās. This is accomplished through (1) dedicated action; (2) devotion to the Lord; (3) service of mankind; (4) contemplation upon the Highest; and (5) constant study and reflection.

This reminds us of the *Bhagavad-gītā* which advises the cultivation of this trait as one of the most essential preparations for jñāna, ‘constant even mindedness, both in desirable and undesirable circumstances’.² This samatvam, ‘equal vision on all things and beings and in all circumstances’, is declared by the Gītācārya as the very content of yoga.³ When once this equanimity of mind has been regained, ere long (acirāt) the experience of the Infinite shall descend on you and you shall come to gain the status of one ‘Liberated in life’ (jīvanmukta). This is the experience of Viṣṇutvam.

¹ चोद्यं वा परिहारो वा क्रियतां द्वैतभाषया।

अद्वैतभाषया चोद्यं नास्ति नापि तदुत्तरम्॥

codyaṁ vā parihāro vā kriyatāṁ dvaitabhāṣayā,

advaitabhāṣayā codyaṁ nāsti nāpi taduttaram. – (Pañcadaśī ch. 2-39).

² नित्यं च समचित्तत्वं इष्टानिष्टोपपत्तिषु।

nityaṁ ca samacittatvaṁ iṣṭāniṣṭopapattiṣu – (Bhagavad-gītā ch. 13-9).

³ समत्वं योग उच्यते।

samatvaṁ yoga ucyate – (Bhagavad-gītā ch. 2-48).





शत्रौ मित्रे पुत्रे बन्धौ मा कुरु यत्नं विग्रहसन्धौ।
सर्वस्मिन्नपि पश्यात्मानं सर्वत्रोत्सृज भेदाज्ञानम् ॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्द) (२५)

*śatrau mitre putre bandhau mā kuru yatnaṁ vighrahasandhau,
sarvasminnapi paśyātmānaṁ sarvatrotsrja bhedājñānam.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (25)*

शत्रौ – against an enemy; मित्रे – against a friend; पुत्रे – against a son; बन्धौ – against a relative; मा – never; कुरु – do; यत्नं – strive; विग्रहसन्धौ – for strife and for making friends; सर्वस्मिन् अपि – in everything (everywhere); पश्य – see; आत्मानं – the Self; सर्वत्र – everywhere; उत्सृज – lift away; भेद अज्ञानम् – the sense of difference (born out of ignorance); भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

25. Strive not; waste not your energy to fight against or to make friends with your enemy, friend, son or relative. Seeking the Self everywhere, lift the sense of difference (plurality), born out of ‘ignorance’.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

Nobody can afford to hate himself. Even when a part of the body is ulcerated and gives endless pain and the doctor may advise an amputation, yet man hesitates. The leg that kills me with pain is one with me and I have no enmity with it. But, if another one, even if it be my most beloved brother, gives me a little disturbance of mind, I hate him, his wife and his children! Hatred can come only when we see the thing hated as something other than us.

No doubt, my leg is my own. But even then I do not cultivate purposefully an intimacy with my leg. I never court my leg nor develop a special friendship with it. It is not necessary. In and through every cell in my body, I live at all spots, at all moments. I am myself an artistic whole and from the tip of my toe to the roof of my crown, everywhere, at all

times, I exist. It is ridiculous for me to give a greater love to any part of my body, more than any other part. If my teeth unfortunately bite my own tongue, justice is not meted out by breaking the teeth. For the tongue is as much mine as the teeth are. Automatically I feel total forgiveness for the teeth and I comfort and console the tongue that has suffered the tyranny of the teeth.

When the whole universe has emerged out from the one womb of Reality, who is the other one whom I can afford to hate! Nor is there one whom I can afford to court particularly and love specially. All are His manifestations alone, including me.

Thus, the author of the stanza advises a true seeker of this universal harmony around: ‘Strive not (waste not your energy) to fight against or to make friends with anyone: be it an enemy, friend, son or relative’. It may be asked then, what exactly is life meant for? What exactly is the direction in which one’s emotional energy should flow out? The Ācārya gives the answer in the closing line of the verse.

If you are a seeker of the fuller life, if you are thirsty to hear the melody in the harmonious existence, if you are hungry to taste and enjoy the essence of life, seek to realise the one Reality which holds together the whole universe into one garland of beauty. The universe is a cosmos and not a chaos. There exists a mutual affinity, a scientific law, a rhythm of mutual relationship in which the entire living world is held together, in one web of love. To assume differences in the world is to belie this great oneness in life.

In a loveless life of hate and meanness, of littleness of heart and limited viewpoint, there is nothing but suffocation, sorrow and agitation. Expand. Come in contact with the melody of the great ‘Flute Player’ who enchants us all to dance our life around Him. There is, in fact, none other. Shift your attention to this central source of beauty and song, the rewarding vision of this mass of flaming song. In the author’s own language: ‘See the Self everywhere and rise above the sense of difference, born out of stupidity’.

When my beloved children play with mud and with it look abominably ugly and dirty, do I not see my child in and through the mud and the dirt on

him? When my beloved changes her garments, do I not see and recognise her always in and through what she wears? Similarly develop the vision to look far beneath the externals of life and watch to detect the one substratum, the manifestations of which are the convulsions of society, the hysterical expression of love and hatred, together constituting the total world of play around. Whatever be the language in which music is sung, one who has got the knowledge of the rāga can very easily detect the melody and enjoy it. For enjoying the tune, the words need not be familiar. Couched in those words run the ravishing beauty of its melody. Similarly, beneath the surface of the flesh and its fatigues, behind the mind and its wretchedness, hidden under the intellect and its vulgarities, there runs the enchanting chord of beauty and truth. Contact this infinite Self and thus rise above the sense of difference – he, you, they and I. These have a meaning only with reference to the equipment, but the one vitalising force holds us all together.

In case anyone in the world feels unhappy, miserable, neglected and wretched, it is only his fault and not the fault of the world. The *Gītā* says: ‘You yourself are your own friend and you yourself your own enemy’.¹ Happenings around, by themselves, cannot storm our within, but we in our false values, give them importance, open the doors of our heart and allow them to come in to ransack our bosom with their relentless tyranny. We hate and then we start recognising hatred reaching us from all sides.

The moment we start loving honestly, sincerely and unconditionally, love of the same depth and texture must reach us back. What we receive in the world is but an echo of our own heart’s cry. What we see in others’ faces is nothing but a reflection of our own features!

To recognise the one eternal source, as expressing through all the names and forms, is to change the very nature of our environment, the very vision of our world around. *Kāṭhōpaniṣad* expresses this one cardinal Truth in the most poetic form and says: ‘Just as one fire, having reached various wicks, expresses itself as different flames, so the one Truth, burning in different bosoms, expresses as the good, the bad, the wretched, the noble’.² *Īśāvāsyā-upaniṣad* declares that, having realised this one substratum in the universe,

‘the Man of Realisation has thereafter no occasion to feel repelled (jugupsā) from anything or from any situation’.³

Incapacity in us to be in harmony with the situation or with an individual and the consequent discordant ruffle in our bosom is called jugupsā. This cannot take place when we see our own Self expressed everywhere – just as a mother cannot have any revulsion (jugupsā) for her own child, because, to her the child is a part and parcel of her own life’s essence. *Īśāvāsya-upaniṣad*, while discussing this state of Realisation, goes to the extent of even exclaiming: ‘What delusion, what sorrow, can reach there, where one experiences the Oneness everywhere?’⁴

¹ आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुः आत्मैव रिपुरात्मनः।

ātmaiva hyātmano bandhuḥ ātmaiva ripurātmanaḥ – (*Bhagavad-gītā* ch. 6-5).

² अग्निर्यथैको भुवनं प्रविष्टो रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव।

एकस्तथा सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बहिश्च॥

agniriyathaiko bhuvanaṁ praviṣṭo rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo babhūva,
ekastathā sarvabhūtāntarātmā rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo bahiṣca.

– (*Kaṭhōpaniṣad* ch. 2-2-9).

³ ततो न विजुगुप्सते।

tato na vijugupsate – (*Īśāvāsya-upaniṣad* - 6).

⁴ तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः।

tatra ko mohah kaḥ śoka ekatvamanupaśyataḥ – (*Īśāvāsya-upaniṣad* - 7).





कामं क्रोधं लोभं मोहं त्यक्त्वाऽत्मानं पश्यति सोऽहम्।
आत्मज्ञान-विहीना मूढास्ते पच्यन्ते नरकनिगूढाः ॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (२६)

*kāmaṁ krodhaṁ lobhaṁ mohaṁ tyaktvā 'tmānaṁ paśyati so 'ham,
ātmajñāna-vihīnā mūḍhāste pacyante narakanigūḍhāḥ.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (26)*

कामं – desire; क्रोधं – anger; लोभं – greed; मोहं – delusion; त्यक्त्वा – having left; आत्मानं – the Self; पश्यति – sees (the seeker); सः अहम् – He am I; आत्मज्ञान विहीनाः – those who have no Self-knowledge; मूढाः – the fools; ते – they; पच्यन्ते – are tortured; नरक निगूढाः – in hell as captives; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

26. Leaving desire, anger, greed and delusion, the seeker sees in the Self, 'He am I'. They are fools who have no Self-knowledge and they (consequently), as captives in hell, are tortured.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

The conditions under which the seeker reaches the state of God-realisation is painted here vividly by the author Bhārati Vamśa. So long as we are not able to get rid completely of all our unnecessary mental agitations and the natural extrovertedness, this subtle melody of the infinite Bliss cannot be contacted or clearly received in our bosom. Therefore, the Ācārya says, 'leaving desire, anger, greed, and delusion' the seeker must strive with an enthusiastic alertness to feel the inspired experience of the transcendental Reality. Such a true seeker, when he realises this eternal harmony in life, 'understands' the Truth – not as we generally understand things in the world outside.

All our knowledge in the outer world is 'objective' and therefore, we understand it as something other than ourselves. This spiritual Truth being the very core of our own existence, when the Realisation comes, it will not

be that I have understood It (Him), but the experience will be: ‘He is I’ (soham) – ‘That am I’ (tadasmī). This is something like discovering after a lot of searching the lost key, at last, in your own pocket! No doubt the man will cry out: ‘I have got the key ... I have got the key’. But in fact, there was no ‘getting it’. It was only a process of discovering the key that was already there in his pocket, which was lying concealed under his own ignorance of its existence.

So too, this perfect state of tranquillity is man’s real nature. Due to ‘desire, anger, greed, and delusion’ this bliss seems to be, for him, veiled from himself and when his agitations are quietened, behind it stands the Truth in all Its resplendency.

Angry and impatient, restless and agitated, when Rādhā waits for the Lord under the tree, some rough hand sweetly closes her eyes from behind. She protests, gets angry, gets worried ... really afraid. Holding the hand that covers her eyes, she fights, howls, curses and in the end discovers that the very hands that covered her eyes belong to the very one for whom she was waiting all the time! Once the passions of the heart are removed, Truth, self-evident, stands revealed as the very eternal sweetness of perfection.

He who has not gained this Self-knowledge (ātmajñāna), who has not experienced this infinite perfection comes to live in a sorrowful misunderstanding that life is a stream of vulgar sorrows, perspiring passions, exhausting desires and endless sentiments; and he, indeed, is a crown jewel among fools (mūḍha śīromaṇi). In the non-apprehension of Reality, misapprehensions of ego, its desires, greed and anger, likes and dislikes, and such other misapprehensions arise and they create a self-made hell for man to live in and suffer continuously. Tortured by them, torn limb by limb by the buffeting waves of passions in his own bosom, man cries as a sorrowful creature, eternally suffering in a self-condemned existence, in a hell created by himself, for himself!

This stanza reminds us of another verse attributed generally to Śaṅkara, which says: ‘Desire, anger, greed are looters that stand within the body, ready to plunder the knowledge gem – therefore, be vigilant! Be vigilant!’¹

Therefore to sum up, renounce desire, anger and greed and come to experience in your own personal subjective experience that 'He am I'; this alone is the fulfilment of a man's mission in life. In fact, God alone is: the concept of 'I' is a stupid dream. Surrender and realise. Through right knowledge reject what you are not and assert your real nature and come to realise the oneness of the life in you and the life everywhere present.

¹ कामः क्रोधश्च लोभश्च देहे तिष्ठन्ति तस्कराः।

ज्ञानरत्नापहाराय तस्माद् जाग्रत जाग्रत॥

kāmaḥ krodhaśca lobhaśca dehe tiṣṭhanti taskarāḥ,

jñānaratnāpahārāya tasmād jāgrata jāgrata. – (Vairāgya Diṇḍimā - 1)





गेयं गीतानामसहस्रं ध्येयं श्रीपतिरूपमजस्रम्।
नेयं सज्जनसङ्गे चित्तं देयं दीनजनाय च वित्तम्॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (२७)

*geyaṁ gītānāmasahasraṁ dhyeyaṁ śrīpatirūpamajasram,
neyaṁ sajjanasaṅge cittam deyaṁ dīnajanāya ca vittam.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (27)*

गेयं – is to be chanted (sung); गीता – *Bhagavad-gītā*; नामसहस्रम् – *Sahasranāmam*;¹ ध्येयं – is to be meditated upon; श्रीपति-रूपं – the form of the Lord of Lakṣmī; अजस्रं – always; नेयं – (the mind) is to be led; सज्जन-सङ्गे – in the association (company) of the good; चित्तं – the mind; देयं – is to be distributed; दीनजनाय च – to the needy; वित्तम् – wealth; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

27. The *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Sahasranāma*¹ are to be chanted; always the form of the Lord of Lakṣmī is to be meditated upon; the mind is to be led towards the company of the good; wealth is to be distributed to (shared with) the needy.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

This verse represents the conclusion of the ‘Bouquet of 14 Verse Blossoms’² and it is attributed to the last of the fourteen followers of Śaṅkara who were with him in this particular Kāśī pilgrimage of the Ācārya. The author is named, traditionally, as Śrī Sumati.

It is indeed a fitting last stanza inasmuch as it declares a spiritual programme which a student can follow when once he is convinced of the necessity of realising the highest. Advices of all spiritual preceptors are worded the same, but very rarely do the students try to understand their significance. Here also there is nothing new in the advice as such. It only enumerates four unavoidable ‘musts’ in the daily programme of a sincere

seeker: (1) *Gītā* study (2) worship of Nārāyaṇa (3) company of the good, and (4) serving the needy.

The *Bhagavad-gītā* is a summary of the truths explained in Upaniṣads with special reference to their practical application in man's everyday conduct in life. To study them intelligently is to bring about a reorientation in our intellectual outlook on life and in our attitudes to the world of happenings around. It explains both the goal and the path and also gives different techniques of living religion in our everyday life.

Study in itself cannot accomplish Self unfoldment in the seeker, although study is absolutely necessary for the intellectual satisfaction of the seekers. The ideas which are rationally appreciated may not bring about by themselves their promised glow to life unless one lives them diligently and thus brings them within the subjective experience of oneself. Philosophy enumerates ideals and supplies the logical sequence of thinking by which contemplative minds can come to appreciate the entire implications of the philosophers' viewpoint.

But without a definite technique of living up to those values, the best philosophy can only be a mere utopian dream. All the practical methods by which philosophical ideas are woven into our everyday life, together in their entirety constitute the very essence in all true religions. Hence teachers of the past like Vivekananda and others cried that religion without philosophy is superstition and philosophy without religion is a lunatic dream!

When a seeker has studied the *Gītā* and has understood its logic, he has to plough those perfections into himself and this is done through religion, indicated here by the term 'worship of the Lord of Lakṣmī'. To contemplate upon 'the thousand and one glories of Nārāyaṇa' (*Sahasranāma*) and thus to learn to surrender ourselves at His altar and thereby get ourselves attuned to Him, is true worship. This helps to integrate the inner personality, lifting our mind high above its ordinary fields of self polluting agitations. By tuning the mind with the higher, it imbibes into itself the noble qualities of the very 'Lord of Nobility', Śrī Lakṣmīpati.

All our efforts at study and worship can be washed down in a single moment's high tide of passion in the bosom. To protect the fields of our heart from such tornadoes, the 'company of the good' (sajjanasaṅga) is very essential. To be in the company of noble spiritual leaders, cultured men of inspiring vision, will keep us constantly warmed up in our enthusiasm to live up to our ideals.

Again, satsaṅga helps us to walk the path with an assured self-confidence, where fear and hesitation, despondency and despair have no chance to despoil our sincerity and eagerness. In the constant association with the noble souls alone can our knowledge of the scriptures become clear and the devotion of our hearts can become really deep and firm.

An individual seeker may (1) study the *Gītā*, (2) practise religion, and (3) pursue the 'company of the good', and yet, his evolution cannot be assured unless in his daily contacts with his fellowmen he has got the heroism to live the spiritual ideals of the one infinite life everywhere. The Lord of my heart is the One indweller in all bosoms.³ If I fail to revere the Lord in the heart of all, but worship Him elaborately with flowers and bells only in the inert metal or wooden idols, I am, to be certain, not a very sincere and true devotee.

Therefore, the teacher here insists that the seeker of the Lord must practise 'charity'; this is very often misunderstood by even those who diligently practise it. 'Charity' must flow from one's own abundance. Thus, the first requirement would be efforts to earn sufficiently in order that you may share it with those who have a need for that commodity which they have not got now with themselves.

'Charity' is an attempt wherein I try to expand and bring into the ambit of my life all others around me and grow to consider the other man's needs and requirements to be as important as my own personal needs. To live seeking thus an identity with at least those who are immediately around me is to live away from the suffocating selfishness and the throttling grip of my body consciousness. To ignore the needs of others around is not religion. Religious unfoldment can reach only to a heart that has steadily unrolled itself to invite into its chambers a wider circle of loving brotherhood.

¹ Viṣṇusahasranāma

² चतुर्दश मंजरिकास्तोत्रम्।

caturdaśa mañjarikāstotram.

³ क्षेत्रज्ञं चापि मां विद्धि सर्वक्षेत्रेषु भारत।

kṣetrajñaṁ cāpi mām viddhi sarvakṣetreṣu bhārata – (Bhagavad-gītā ch. 13-2).





सुखतः क्रियते रामाभोगः पश्चाद्धन्त शरीरे रोगः।
यद्यपि लोके मरणं शरणं तदपि न मुञ्चति पापाचरणम्॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (२८)

*sukhataḥ kriyate rāmābhogaḥ paścāddhanta śarīre rogaḥ,
yadyapi loke maraṇam śaraṇam tadapi na muñcati pāpācaraṇam.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (28)*

सुखतः – for the sake of happiness; क्रियते – (is done) one indulges in;
रामाभोगः – carnal pleasures; पश्चात् – later on; हन्त – alas; शरीरे – in the
body; रोगः – disease (comes); यद्यपि – even though; लोके – in the world;
मरणं – death; शरणं – (is) the ultimate end; तदपि – even then; न – (he) does
not; मुञ्चति – leaves; पाप-आचरणम् – sinful behaviour; भज – seek; गोविन्दं –
Govinda

28. Very readily one indulges in carnal pleasures; later on, alas, come
diseases of the body. Even though in the world the ultimate end (śaraṇam)
is death, then also man leaves not his sinful behaviour.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

In the scheme of the development of thought in this sacred philosophical
chant (stotram) we have the first twelve verses attributed to Śaṅkara and the
following fourteen verses attributed to the fourteen great followers, who
accompanied the Ācārya on one of his trips to Kāśī. We have now, in these
concluding four tail end stanzas, a fitting conclusion to the entire sacred
chant.

Here, the spiritual seeker is directly addressed to, and he is encouraged
and blessed by the Ācārya. In the absence of any evidence to disprove, it
will not be very wrong, for the purposes of our own inspiration, if we
accept these closing stanzas as the declarations made directly by the teacher
of Advaita. In fact, the vigour of expressions employed, the anxiety with
which the impatient words flow down each verse, the depth of significance

and the breadth of their philosophical embrace – all definitely point out that it must be the enchanting words of the Master from Kālaḍi himself.

To live in the animal instincts is no strain at all for man because it is a devolutionary process; to fall and slip down the slope of a mountain is much easier than to climb across the summits of its very peak. Evolution is the result of effort and struggle, sweat and suffering. There is no new birth ever possible without its own delivery pains.

Thus, to live in the flesh implicitly obeying its wretched biddings is universally easy for all. This is simply because the flesh craves constantly and therefore, to live in sense gratification no practice is necessary; everybody seems to be very competent and extremely adept at it. The animal in us is yet to fight against its own low instincts and come to win the divine mastery over the flesh.

One who thus freely indulges in excessive self dissipation soon comes to suffer, alas (hanta) the persecutions of an invading army of merciless diseases. Physically suffering many pains, disabilities, his faculties slowly decaying, he ultimately comes to tumble down into some unwarranted grave!

Even when death is thus inherent and implicit in the very birth and existence of the individual, man leaves not his sinful behaviour. Actions that bring about dissipation of the personality strength at all levels are called sins (pāpas).

This verse is not merely an uncoloured observation of man as he lives now in the world, but there is a strain of sorrow in the very cadence of the verse. Even he who realises that the ultimate destination is death and complete obliteration thereafter of the individual from the surface of the globe, yet he finds it difficult to take himself away from his temptations to do the wrong actions.

This is māyā – the vigorous push and pull of the vāsanās to express themselves. They push us into sin and pull us away from our attempts to live the nobler and the divine virtues of spiritual living.





अर्थमनर्थं भावय नित्यं नास्ति ततः सुखलेशः सत्यम्।
पुत्रादपि धनभाजां भीतिः सर्वत्रैषा विहिता रीतिः ॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (२९)

*arthamanartham bhāvaya nityam nāsti tataḥ sukhaleśaḥ satyam,
putrādapi dhanabhājāṃ bhītiḥ sarvatraiṣā vihitā rītiḥ.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (29)*

अर्थ – wealth; अनर्थ – (is) calamitous; भावय – (thus) reflect; नित्यं – constantly; न-अस्ति – there is not; ततः – from it; सुखलेशः – (even) a little happiness; सत्यं – truth; पुत्रात्-अपि – even from his own son; धनभाजां – to the rich; भीतिः – there is fear; सर्वत्र – everywhere; एषा – this; विहिता – is (the ordained); रीतिः – the way; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

29. ‘Wealth is calamitous’, thus reflect constantly: the truth is that there is no happiness at all to be got from it. To the rich, there is fear even from one’s own son. This is the way with wealth everywhere.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

If, as the teacher has expressed in the previous stanza, the enchantments of the lower nature in us are to be so all-powerful in us, then philosophy and its vision are profitless dreams – mere poetic consolations – dreadful opiated hallucinations. A scientist must face facts; he sees things as they are and plans to improve the world and the life thriving upon it. The above stanza is a naked statement of a couple of facts known to all and realised by everyone, whatever be the field of their functions in life.

Every creative thinker is an impatient revolutionary inasmuch as he is not satisfied with merely maintaining the status quo in life. His demand is always to pull down the edifice of sorrow and rebuild in its place the temple of joy. The māyā – fascination for what money can procure – or at least promises to procure – is so powerful in us that we never give wealth its right and appropriate value. It is strange, indeed, that money was discovered

and made by man and yet man has become a slave to the very thing which is his own creation. Today money rules the foolish man.

The teacher here advises the seekers of the higher life to reflect constantly, ‘wealth is calamitous’ (artham-anartham). By repeatedly remembering the dangers of wasting one’s entire life under the fascination for wealth, the delusory enchantment for money as such will retire from one’s heart. Money, no doubt, has a value; but it is only inasmuch as it can procure things for us. But, to give an over exaggerated importance to money as such is thoughtlessness and it will breed lovelessness, hatred and a thousand subhuman impulses in the money mad people.

Strange! Wealth estranges us to all. It is all very strange, the money psychology! When you have not any, you will pant to get some! When you get some, you grow jealous of others who have more and feel conceited among those who have less!

In the grabbing game, in the profit hunting commerce of the world, when you become a little more successful, your jealousy and conceit are not thereby going to recede proportionately, but, strangely, in the arithmetics of the money mad world, your jealousy becomes powerful and your conceit limitless.

Not only does more wealth bring more jealousies and conceits, but the individual starts entertaining unholy suspicions and unhappy fears – suspicions that those who have not got as much as you have, are planning to destroy you and fears that they may loot away all that you have from your secret treasures.

Wealth is not welfare – artham-anartham. As Ācārya Śaṅkara indicates here, even one’s own son becomes a source of fear for the unholy man of riches. Therefore, ever keep in one corner of your mind the same idea that money or wealth is only a means and not an end in itself: ‘wealth is calamitous’. Have it in sufficient measure to use it; liberally employ it in your service. Let not money use you or employ you in its service. When you possess money, wealth is a blessing. Allow money to possess you; then wealth is a curse and it will give you not even a suspicion of comfort (sukha leśaḥ). This is the truth (satyam) about wealth. This is the way of wealth.





प्राणायामं प्रत्याहारं नित्यानित्यविवेकविचारम्।
जाप्यसमेत-समाधिविधानं कुर्ववधानं महदवधानम्॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (३०)

*prāṇāyāmaṁ pratyāhāraṁ nityānityavivekavicāram,
jāpyasameta-samādhividhānaṁ kurvavadhānaṁ mahadavadhānam.
(bhaja govindam bhaja govindam...) (30)*

प्राणायामं – the control of all activities (of life’s manifestations in you);
प्रत्याहारं – the sense withdrawal (from their respective sense objects); नित्य-
अनित्य-विवेक-विचारम् – the enquiry (reflection) consisting of discrimination
between the permanent and the impermanent; जाप्य-समेत-समाधि-विधानम् –
along with japa and the practice of reaching the total inner silence; कुरु –
perform; अवधानं – with care; महत्-अवधानम् – with great care; भज – seek;
गोविन्दं – Govinda

30. The control of all activities (of life’s manifestations in you), the sense
withdrawal (from their respective sense objects), the reflection (consisting
of discrimination between the permanent and the impermanent), along with
japa and the practice of reaching the total inner silence (samādhī) - these
perform with care ... with great care.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

Now Śaṅkara advises a seeker, who has thus withdrawn his mind from all
its hunting after ‘wealth’,¹ in the outer world of mind and matter, of men
and things, of joys and sorrows. The seeker should learn to control all the
subjective activities within his personality. A path in five stages was drawn
up, by which, a true seeker, who has accomplished all the conditions that
the teacher had prescribed, can easily trot up to his goal. Study of the *Gītā*,
worship of Lord, satsaṅga and charity, along with the elimination of all the
wealth hunting distractions by a process of correct thinking, together
constitute what in Vedānta we call ‘the outer exercises’ (bahiraṅga
sādhana).

Here, in this stanza, we have all the elements of ‘inner exercises’ (antaraṅga sādhanā). They are, as indicated by Śaṅkara: (1) control of all life’s activities in the body (prāṇāyāma), (2) the sense withdrawal (pratyāhāra), (3) discrimination (nitya anitya viveka vicāra), (4) japa, and (5) as a cumulative effect of all these reaching a state of utter silence within, which is the springboard to the Highest (samādhi).

Prāṇāyāma is a term which, due to its hasty translation and equally superficial practice, has come to be translated and known among us as ‘breath control’. In Sanskrit, to express ‘breath control’ we have altogether a different phrase (śvāsāyāma). ‘Prāṇa’ in Sanskrit means ‘life’ and as used by the Upaniṣad seers, they have considered it as consisting of five distinct modifications.

The definitions of these five distinct names, as given in Upaniṣads are found to stand for the five physiological ‘systems’ of activity – the five active departments of manifested life in a living intelligent man. They are: perceptions and reception of things into the subjective life (prāṇa); rejection of things and responses (apāna); the digestive system (vyāna); the circulatory system (samāna); and the capacity to lift ourselves from our present state of understanding to a nobler and better peak of thought on the mount of Knowledge (udāna). To control all these five expressions of life in a living being is called ‘control of prāṇa’ (prāṇāyāma).

In order to achieve this, one of the outer methods generally advised to the dull in temperament and to the inefficient in emotions is a system of very regulated exercises of breathing. True prāṇāyāma can really be achieved only through sustained and sincere practice of devotion to the Lord, of study of the scriptures and of selfless service to the society for sufficiently long time.

When a seeker has thus succeeded in controlling the outflow of life’s energy into its spectacular manifestations, he must also learn to roll his mind back to himself, away from its wanderings through the sense organs to the sense world. This capacity to whistle back the wandering mental rays away from sense objects back into our bosom is called pratyāhāra.

Neither prāṇāyāma nor pratyāhāra is possible unless the intellect is re-educated to hold enduring and healthy values of life. Hence the importance of developing a discriminative intellect that can readily make us see through the impermanent (anitya) glitter of the multiplicity and recognise the eternal (nitya), immutable Truth. This can come only through constant, scientific thinking, as indicated in the greatest of all philosophical textbooks that man has today – called the Upaniṣads.

In order to develop the required subtlety of intellect and discover in it the necessary amount of balance and vigour, the intellect still must undergo a certain type of previcāra training and this is available in japa.²

When through japa the intellect has become steady, it discovers a better capacity to understand the subtler suggestions and the deeper imports of the declarations of Upaniṣads and thus it comes to recognise and develop viveka in itself. With the help of this ‘power of discrimination’ which can distinguish the Real from the unreal, the individual gains dexterity in withdrawing his mind from the unreal. This capacity to withdraw one’s attention from the unreal is called pratyāhāra.³

When such a discriminating man withdraws his mind at will without much difficulty from all sense objects in him, the control over his physiological activities is almost perfect. When thus the seeker has at all the layers of his personality tuned himself with the Highest, his flesh, mind and intellect will not ever come to disturb him during his contemplations upon the Real. They will retire from their respective fields of explosive activities and in this hushed silence within – a state of relative thoughtlessness (samādhi) – the stage is set for him to receive unobstructed intimations from the Infinite.

This state of final beatitude is never as such expressed in any śāstra – only the last stage of the human effort, called the practice of samādhi, is indicated. The final experience is not gained by anyone. It is there already with all of us. Practice of samādhi only lifts the veil and reveals what was, is and shall ever be: the eternal nature of the Infinite: ‘That Thou Art’, roars the teacher in *Chāndogya-upaniṣad*.

These various disciplines at the mental, intellectual and physical levels are to be undertaken with an artistic poise, with a literary delicacy, a poetic finish. There is no question of forcing the mind, crushing the instincts or belabouring the passions. Force will create only suppressions, deformities and abominable ugliness of personality. There cannot be any hurry in the natural unfoldment of one's personality.

Hurry is unknown to all creative expressions in nature outside – sun rising, the moon setting, the blossoming of the buds, the arrival of the fruits, the germination of the seeds, the foetus in the womb, the bird in the egg; all have no hurry, but each takes its own time to grow and emerge out. If the seeker tries to hurry up and double up his march to reach the goal, 'haste is waste' on the path of Truth. This warning is so beautifully given here when Śaṅkara advises so lovingly: 'Please perform with care ... with great care (avadhānam mahadavadhānam)'.

¹ A term used in its largest sense.

² See Swamiji's *Kindle Life*. Chapter on 'Japa Yoga and Gāyatrī'.

³ See Swamiji's *Ātmabodha*. Commentary on stanza 44.





गुरुचरणाम्बुजनिर्भरभक्तः संसारादचिराद्भव मुक्तः।
सेन्द्रियमानसनियमादेवं द्रक्ष्यसि निजहृदयस्थं देवम्॥
(भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं...) (३१)

*gurucaraṇāmbujanirbharabhaktaḥ saṁsārādacirādbhava muktaḥ,
sendriyamānasaniyamādevaṁ draakṣyasi nijahr̥dayasthaṁ devam.
(bhaja govindaṁ bhaja govindaṁ...) (31)*

गुरु-चरण-अंबुज-निर्भर-भक्तः – great devotee of the lotus feet of the teacher;
संसारात् – from the saṁsāra; अचिरात् – soon; भव मुक्तः – become liberated;
सेन्द्रिय-मानस-नियमात् – through the discipline of the sense organs and the
mind; एवं – in this manner; द्रक्ष्यसि – you will experience; निज-हृदयस्थं – that
dwells in one's own heart; देवम् – the Lord; भज – seek; गोविन्दं – Govinda

31. O Devotee of the lotus feet of the teacher! May you become liberated soon from the saṁsāra through the discipline of the sense organs and the mind. You will come to experience (behold) the Lord that dwells in your own heart.

(Seek Govinda, Seek Govinda...)

Faith and devotion to the Guru are necessary in order to ease the student's path and level down the slopes enroute his pilgrimage. Faith is a very powerful secret source of energy in the human bosom. One of the greatest definitions of 'faith' has been given to us by St. Augustine when he says: 'Faith is to believe what you do not see and the reward of this faith is to see what you believe'.

What the teacher says, we cannot immediately apprehend, but the logic of his discourses helps us to intellectually comprehend it. When we have once embraced an ideal to the bosom of our dimly comprehending intellect, belief in that ideal becomes natural. Thus, faith indeed is that secret power in the human mind to hold on to what he intellectually believes but has not yet come to experience (see) in his life.

This secret might of faith ultimately takes man, as though upon the comfortable wings of some magic, to his destination of fulfilment in a total and complete experience. Sans faith in the teacher, the student is a wayfarer, entirely blind, completely deaf and sadly paralysed.

Ācārya Śaṅkara addresses here his students of all times and across the mounting centuries to the end of infinity he blesses all the pursuers of his path. ‘May you become liberated from saṁsāra soon’, is the burden of the Master’s good wishes.

This Liberation is not in some distant time and in some distant place; it is here and now. This is indicated by the champion of the advaita by again blessing the student: ‘Through discipline of the sense organs and the mind, may you come to experience (behold) the Lord that dwells in your own heart’.

Sincere adoration and devoted surrender to the teacher is indeed practised, not only by the disciple class but even by the teachers themselves. Ācārya Śaṅkara is perhaps prostrating to his own teacher by this stanza. For, it is not a mere happy coincidence here to remember that Śaṅkara’s own teacher was Govindācārya – ‘Bhaja Govindam Bhaja Govindam’.

In the Upaniṣads also the importance of teachers has been very frequently indicated. *Muṇḍakopaniṣad* prescribes the qualities of a true teacher.¹ Again, in *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* the ṛṣi has once and forever blasted even the possible traces of any doubt regarding the necessity of a teacher on the path of spiritual progress. The Upaniṣad says: ‘One who has a teacher alone comes to realise’.²

With prostrations to the teacher, this essential manual on Vedānta (prakriyā book) concludes: ‘Bhaja Govindam Bhaja Govindam’.

Bhaja Govindam is generally considered among the minor works of Śaṅkara. All great scriptural Masters have a knack of giving the highest Truth, at their greatest moments of inspiration, in the simplest language. The artificially bloated intellects of the professional puṇḍitas will generally declare such works as minor.

Because of the simplicity of the vocabulary employed, the melody of the verses, the cadence in the metre chosen and the general atmosphere of song and thrill in this congregation song, *Bhaja Govindam* has become very popular in our country and till recently we could hear these stanzas in almost all the streets, throughout the length and breadth of Bhārata. Children lisped it, boys thundered it, intelligent people appreciated it and practitioners (sādhakas) made use of these stanzas and fulfilled their life.

When anything is so frequently used by such a large number of people all over the country with all licentiousness for about ten centuries, the thing even if it be only a poem must carry with it signs of wear and tear. No two publications of this great song of devotion pregnant with philosophical suggestions are the same. I have followed a reading which struck me as the best in bringing out all the essential truths in their ampler suggestiveness.

The poem as it stands now has got thirty-one stanzas. The opening verse is a refrain and it is used for the crowd to chant in the congregation as a chorus, while a selected few chant the other stanzas one by one. The first set of twelve stanzas (2-13) is attributed, as we have already mentioned earlier, to Ādi Śaṅkara himself while the following fourteen stanzas (14-27) are attributed to the fourteen disciples who were with the Master during his pilgrimage to Kāśī.

Now, really speaking there is no evidence to prove the exact individual authorship of these 14 verses – we cannot say which stanza belongs to whom. Nothing is definitely known, since in the storms of time they all have got so totally mixed up and erased! No direct evidence is available; we have but some traditional hearsay as evidence.

The last four concluding stanzas (28-31) are again attributed to Ācārya Śaṅkara and the poem pregnant with its philosophical meaning comes to a close in a most befitting manner with the blessings of Ācārya Śaṅkara upon all true seekers.

May His blessings be always upon us all.

OM TAT SAT

¹ स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम्।

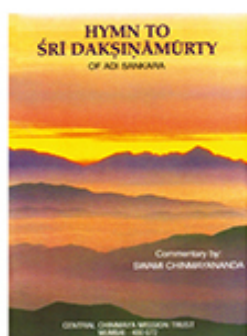
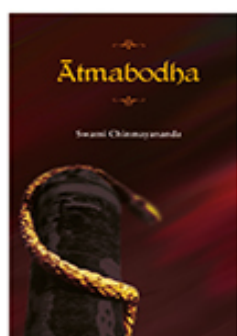
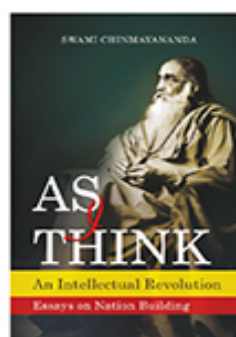
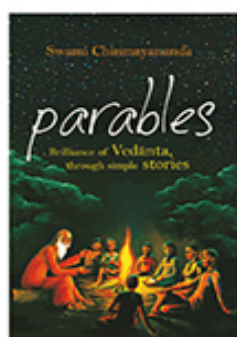
sa gurumevābhigacchet samitpāṇiḥ śrotriyaṁ brahmaniṣṭham – (Muṇḍakopaniṣad ch. 1-2-12).

² आचार्यवान् पुरुषो वेद।

ācāryavān puruṣo veda – (Chāndogya-upaniṣad ch. 6-14-2).



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Ādi Śaṅkarācārya is among the greatest revolutionary thinkers of all time. He renewed, uplifted and restored Vaidika culture to its true greatness. He was not only the founder of a great philosophical movement but also a compassionate teacher, a tireless missionary and a brilliant poet-writer who could convey complex and profound truths in words of elegant simplicity. *Bhaja Govindam* is one of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya's most beautiful works, composed in clear and effective language and addressed to simple folk struggling with the demands of life, but also capable of keeping intellectual philosophers engrossed. It is rightly described as a fragrant bouquet of verses. The clear, precise and eloquent commentary of Swami Chinmayananda adds to the fragrance of the original composition, inviting the spiritual seeker to reflect upon the meaning of the verses, attempt to understand, absorb and live the truth behind the words.



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