

The body should be kept and looked after only as an instrument, a vehicle. Always keep it as best as it can be kept. Take out of it as much work as possible, so that the vāsanās may get exhausted, for, if it falls away in death prematurely, without exhausting the vāsanās, another body will have to be taken, but do not get attached to it. Free as you are, be free and use the instrument efficiently, continuously.

In the last line, with the peculiar usage of the negative mā (ought not to), instead of the usual negative nā (don't), Śaṅkara implies more of a humble request than a categorical warning. He means, it would be good for the sādḥaka if he were to maintain this mental attitude towards his physical body. This is a classical usage of negation often used in our śāstras¹. It has not the force of the imperative, it is a suggestion.



देहात्मधीरेव नृणामसद्धियां
जन्मादिदुःखप्रभवस्य बीजम् ।
यतस्ततस्त्वं जहि तां प्रयत्नात्
त्यक्ते तु चित्ते न पुनर्भवाशा ॥ १६४ ॥

*dehātmadhīreva nṛṇāmasaddhiyām
janmādiduḥkḥaprabhavasya bījam,
yatastatastvaṁ jahi tāṁ prayatnāt
tyakte tu citte na punarbhavāśā. (164)*

164. For those who are attached to the unreal, identification with the body is the seed from which the misery of birth and so on, stems forth. Therefore, put in all your efforts to destroy it. There can be no chance of rebirth if this identification caused by the mind is renounced.

This verse concludes the reflection upon the body.² The body, like all other objects in the world outside, must undergo the fivefold

¹ mā śucaḥ – ought not to worry – Bhagavad-gītā-18.66

² This discussion started from verse 154.

change – birth, growth, disease, decay and death. Every change has inherent pain and consequent sorrows in it. When identified with the body, one has to undergo all the sorrows which arise from it and its unavoidable modifications. Therefore, the cause for these sorrows is the identification with the body. The idea that ‘I am the body’ is the seed from which all these sorrows stem forth.

So the only way to get rid of these sorrows is to renounce this devastating identification. Each one of us have been living with this identification for ages, all through our many past lives. Any amount of study and logical arguments will not help us to stop this identification. At times, no doubt, we may feel that we are not the body but the very next moment, alas, we fall back into this natural delusion.

Ācārya Śaṅkara advises us to give up this identification through effort, practice and exercise of the will (prayatnāt). Time and again, we are required to study and reflect, to feel and think, to contemplate and meditate, that we are not the body and that we are the supreme Reality. When this study and contemplation has taken deep roots in our understanding (citta) and when glimpses of Reality are perceived, then there is no more any ‘becoming.’ ‘Becoming’ means, getting subject to change. These fivefold changes will not affect the individual who has disengaged himself from the sense of being the body and has identified himself with the nature of the supreme Self.

When the idea, ‘I am the body’ is removed from the intellect, when the subtler equipment is disengaged from the body, then there are no more any vāsanās in the inner equipment. The body will go on like a car as long as its momentum lasts. Thereafter, since it has no more vāsanās for taking up another body, the individual crosses all ‘becoming’.

The analysis of the body (annamaya kośa), is over with this verse. Next is the prāṇamaya kośa, the vital air sheath, also known as the physiological layer of man’s personality.

