


bilvAShTakam with meaning

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सार्ध बिल्वशुषुकरं

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ನಾರ್ಥ ಬಿಲ್ವಾಷ್ಟಕಂ



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Introduction: This is a short poem consisting of ten verses. The first nine verses speak of the glory of the bilva leaves. The leaves are considered sacred and are particularly suited for offering to Shiva. They are to be offered in cluster of three leaves and are said to have features that identify them with the Lord Himself. The tenth verse gives the benefit of reading the poem and is known as the ಫಲಶ್ರುತಿಃ .

These verses are chanted during the puja before offering the leaves to Shiva by way of archana. Let us say a few words about puja. PUJA. Why should one do puja?

Lord Krishna says in Gita (9-33) "Having reached this transient and joyless world, do thou worship Me."

ಅನಿತ್ಯಮಸುಖಂ ಲೋಕಮಿಮಂ ಪ್ರಾಪ್ಯ ಭಜಸ್ವ ಮಾಂ . Why should He brand this world as transient and joyless?

We find that everything in this world keeps on changing and ultimately perishes. This includes our friends, relatives and everything we hold on to as dear including our own body. The same truth applies to the "joys" we encounter in our lifetime. They are also short-lived only. They are mere flashes that give happiness for a few minutes or hours. Then they are followed by grief or they make us hanker for more and thus leave us unhappy. THE REMEDY. What then is the remedy?

The remedy, Krishna says, is to worship Him. While the world is ephemeral and joyless as said above, His nature is the opposite. He is eternal - not subject to change or decay - and He is the very embodiment of bliss. So, if we think over

the truth behind these statements we will accept them as facts. This is known as viveka or discrimination. Thus by reaching out to Him we should be able to get out of our present condition that is full of sorrow and strife (this is known as samsara).

He had said this earlier : ಮಾಮುಪೇತ್ಯ ತು ಕೌಂತೇಯ ಪುನರ್ಜನ್ಮ ನ ವಿದ್ಯತೇ . BG(8-16). “On reaching Me there is no rebirth.”

How then to reach Him, is the next logical question that follows.

Vedanta says that there is no question of “reaching” Him as He is our own inner Self. ಅಹಮಾತ್ಮಾ ಗುಡಾಕೇಶ ಸರ್ವಭೂತಾಶಯಸ್ಥಿತಃ . BG(10-20). We need not go anywhere in search of Him or do anything to reach Him as He is our own nature. If so, we too should be eternal, not subject to change or decay and be the very embodiment of bliss. Yes, says vedanta. But this idea looks preposterous and no one will be able to accept the idea that we are essentially divine. His presence in us is not evident to us. Vedanta says this is because our true nature is covered by ignorance. This is like one being not able to see his image in a mirror that is covered by a thick coat of dust. The covering had been there for such a long time, meaning so many births, that it had formed itself into a thick crust. The ignorance makes us to wrongly identify ourselves with the body-mind complex. The body subject to decay and is perishable. The mind is subject to joys and sorrows. We superimpose these qualities on us and feel we are subject to decay, death, sorrow etc., whereas our nature is just the opposite. Just as darkness is removed by light, ignorance can be removed by right knowledge. Our shastras term this right knowledge alone as true knowledge (called jnanam ಜ್ಞಾನಂ) as this alone will help us to understand our true nature and become free from misery and death. ದ್ವೇ ವಿದ್ಯೇ ವೇದಿತವ್ಯೇ ಇತಿ ಹ ಸ್ಮ ಯದ್ಭ್ರಹ್ಮವಿದೋ ವದಂತಿ ಪರಾ ಚೈವಾಪರಾ ಚ ಅಥ ಪರಾ ಯಯಾ ತದಕ್ಷರಮಧಿಗಮ್ಯತೇ .. (Mundakopnishad 1-1-5). This says that there are two vidyas worth knowing: Para (the superior) and Apra (the inferior). Para is that through which the imperishable Brahman is known. All other learning is Apra or

inferior. The question, then, is how can one get the right knowledge? This is a long process, says vedanta and involves several steps. One has to perform the duties prescribed by the shatras. These include worship of the Lord. Regular worship will slowly clear away the dust that covers the intellect and show our true nature. The shastras say that

God is without form and attributes. ಅಶಬ್ದಮಸ್ಪರ್ಶಮರೂಪಮವ್ಯಯಂ ತಥಾರಸಂ ನಿತ್ಯಮಗಂಧವಚ್ಚ . ಅನಾದ್ಯನಂತಂ ಮಹತಃ ಪರಂ ಧ್ರುವಂ ನಿಚಾಯ್ಯ ತನ್ಮೃತ್ಯುಮುಖಾತ್

ಪ್ರಮುಚ್ಯತೇ .. (Kathopanishad-1-3-15). That which is; beyond sound; beyond touch; beyond form; beyond taste; beyond smell; beyond mutation; eternal; beginningless; endless (limitless); beyond and superior to the great (jiva)tma even; knowing that supreme Lord; the striver is released from the jaws of death. We find, thus, there is a great distance between our faculties with very limited capabilities and such a God. We will not be able even to comprehend such a God. God,

in His infinite mercy, to help His devotees to worship Him, takes on various forms. ಅನುಗ್ರಹಾಯ ಭಕ್ತಾನಾಂ ಸ್ವೇಚ್ಛಯಾ ಗೃಹ್ಣತೇ ತನುಂ .

One who is a beginner and wants to take the first step in worship will find worship of the God with form to be convenient. He can relate with Him, communicate his sorrows and problems to Him and seek remedies. Krishna says in Gita that He welcomes even those devotees who worship Him to get relief from their problems and those who seek material benefits. It is clear then that a devotee, whatever be His motive will be blessed and will progress further spiritually. In course of time he will gain knowledge and will progress to the worship of God without form.

ಸಗುಣೇ ಸಮ್ಯಗಭ್ಯಸ್ತೇ ನಿರ್ಗುಣೇ ಪರ್ಯವಸ್ಯತಿ . TYPES OF PUJA. There are two types of pujas of the Lord: (1) the externally performed one in which an idol or saligrama and is offered

puja with water for bathing, flowers, camphor and other materials.

Since God is present in every thing and all the time, He may be invoked in any object and worshipped. We may see this being done in

Shri Rudram - the popular vedic hymn. The seer of Rudram saw the Lord in everything. The hymn contains three hundred salutations. These include salutations to both the animate beings and the inanimate objects. The animate beings saluted include horses, dogs, vultures, people of all varieties that include hunters, charioteers, potters, metal craftsmen, thieves, confidence tricksters and even robbers! The inanimate objects that are saluted include leaves (both green and the dry ones), trees, ponds, lakes, streams, clouds, lightening etc.

Because of this the recitation of the hymn before or during the puja is bound to put one in an exalted frame of mind that is conducive to the performance of worship. Thus we have the practice of offering worship to stones, trees, animals like the cows, and even snakes. It is like saying we are touching a person whether we contact his head, thumb or toe. The symbols that are used serve as the medium of worship only and the actual worship goes to the Lord present in and out of every thing in this universe. Krishna had said in Bhagavat

Gita (7-21)that He accepts the worship offered by a devotee in any form. ಯೋ ಯೋ ಯಾಂ ಯಾಂ ತನುಂ ಭಕ್ತಃ ಶ್ರದ್ಧಯಾರ್ಚಿತುಮಿಚ್ಛತಿ . ತಸ್ಯ ತಸ್ಯಾಚಲಾಂ ಶ್ರದ್ಧಾಂ ತಾಮೇವ ವಿದಧಾಮ್ಯಹಂ .. He then adds (in the next verse) that by such a worship of the Lord

in that form chosen by him, the devotee obtains his desires. These desires are indeed ordained by Him, the Supreme Lord, alone. ಸ ತಯಾ ಶ್ರದ್ಧಯಾ ಯುಕ್ತಸ್ತಸ್ಯಾರಾಧನಮೀಹತೇ . ಲಭತೇ ಚ ತತಃ ಕಾಮಾನ್ಮಯೈವ ವಿಹಿತಾನ್ವಿತಾನ್ .. Thus in this poem the Supreme Being, in the form of Shiva, is identified with the bilva leaves and praised. (2) The internally performed puja- (ಮಾನಸ) puja where the

flowers etc., are offered mentally. A devotee recognises the fact that the Lord installed in the image is available in his own heart also. In addition, since everything in this universe is His creation only, they belong to Him alone. So there is nothing that we can offer Him. The devotee recognises this limitation. So he creates items required for the worship with his mind and performs the puja. In this

worship every thing starting from the seat for seating the Lord and other materials are offered mentally. Such a puja may superficially appear to be trivial and unsubstantial, since no materials are involved. But to be effective this kind of puja requires total involvement and sincerity. The wandering mind has to be controlled and focussed on the image of the Lord seated in our heart. This is not an easy task at all. This is stated in detail in the Sivsmansa Puja. As one reads the verses one will be moved by the devotion of the composer Shri Shankaracharya. For this reason, it is advisable to recite this poem before beginning the regular, usual kind of puja. There is an advantage in offering this type of puja which the external type cannot offer. In the externally performed puja one is limited by his resources. That is, he can offer flowers, dress maerial etc., only as he can afford. His purse may not allow him to offer very costly dress, jewels, many types of fruits etc., the Lord even though he may very much wish to do. But in the manasa puja he faces no such restrictions. He can give free rein to his imagination and conceive of the best and finest items in this or even from the other worlds. He may offer the costliest of dresses, numerous items of fruits, sweets, drinks etc., for the Lord to taste, the best of music accompanied by many instruments, dance etc. all limited only by his imagination. We may see this also in the Shivamansa Puja. The poet offers a seat made of precious stones, numerous items like ghee, payasam, curd in vessels made of gold studded with precious stones, ornaments for the Lord to wear and so on.

So far we have seen three types of worship:

1- worship offered to an idol or some object representing the Lord.

This is an essential first step. In the early stages one requires an idol or some object for the mind to hold on. This is known as ಕಾಯಿಕ ಪೂಜಾ . . We use flowers, camphor, incense and other materials as is prescribed in the shastras. In addition our body is involved to a great extent in such puja. This constitutes the first

grade in worship.

2- worship through recitation of (hymns) stotras and reading of sacred books like Ramayana, Gita etc. Herein there is less of physical work but more of vocal and possibly mental activity to some extent. This is known as ವಾಚಿಕಂ ಪೂಜಾ . (3) The puja wherein the mind plays a major role and the participation

of the body is still less. This is

ಮಾನಸಂ ಪೂಜಾ . Devibhagavatam says that the puja offered mentally is superior to the

one offered vocally which in turn is better than the one involving

large amount of physical activity. ಕಾಯಿಕಾದ್ವಾಚಿಕಂ ಶ್ರೇಷ್ಠಂ ವಾಚಿಕಾದಪಿ ಮಾನಸಂ

.. There is another type of manasa puja. This is of a highest type and

is to be preferred, but also not easy to practise. Herein the water,

flowers and other materials used assume a different connotation. This

is explained in the following verse. ಆರಾಧಯಾಮಿ ಮಣಿಸನ್ನಿಭಮಾತ್ಮಲಿಂಗಂ
ಮಾಯಾಪುರೀಹೃದಯಪಂಕಜಸನ್ನಿವಿಷ್ಟಂ . ಶ್ರದ್ಧಾನದೀವಿಮಲಚಿತ್ತ ಜಲಾಭಿಷೇಕೈಃ
ನಿತ್ಯಂ ಸಮಾದಿಕುಸುಮೈಃ ಅಪುನರ್ಭವಾಯ .. The effulgent Lord, shining brightly
like a gem, in the form of a

Lingam is seated in the lotus of the heart. Faith is the river. The

pure mind, free of blemishes like greed, anger etc., is the water

used to bathe the Lord. Deep meditation on Him constitute the flowers

that are offered to Him in puja. Such a worship yields quick results:

the result being that the worshipper attains liberation and escapes

from the cycle of births and deaths. Lalitahasranamam says that the

Lord is most easily pleased by this kind of worship and not by the

other methods. ಅಂತರ್ಮುಖ ಸಮಾರಾಧ್ಯಾ ಬಹಿರ್ಮುಖಸುದುರ್ಲಭಾ .. Our

scriptures insist that a worshipper should have the right frame

of mind before he starts offering a puja. This means that he should

purge his mind of all extraneous thoughts and charge it with one

thought - that of the Lord. In Chapter 6 of Bhagavat Gita, Krishna

gives detailed instructions for the budding yogi. Talking about the

posture and concentration He says (Gita-6-13): ಸಮಂ ಕಾಯಶಿರೋಗ್ರೀವಂ
ಧಾರಯನ್ನಚಲಂ ಸ್ಥಿರಃ . ಸಂಪ್ರೇಕ್ಷ್ಯ ನಾಸಿಕಾಗ್ರಂ ಸ್ವಂ ದಿಶಶ್ಚಾನವಲೋಕಯನ್ ..

The practising yogi should sit holding the body, the head, and the neck erect and still, firm, gazing on the tip of his nose, without looking around. Shri Shankaracharya, in his commentary, while explaining the implication of the words “gazing on the tip of his nose” says: “He is to gaze - as it were - on the tip of his nose.

Here we have to understand the words “as it were”; for the Lord means to prescribe not the very act of gazing on the tip of the nose, but fixing of the eye-sight within (by withdrawing from external objects).”

That is, he is to concentrate on the Self. The bilva leaf with its stalk represents the closed eyelid. When the eyes are closed the external world is shut off and the mind withdraws from them. In this way the meditator becomes - in a way - one with the worshipped. Thus it is said: ಶಿವೋ ಭೂತ್ವಾ ಶಿವಂ ಭಜೇತ್ . One should become Shiva and then worship Him.

The Mahabharata makes a similar statement: ನಾ ವಿಷ್ಣುಃ
ಕೀರ್ತಯೇತ್ವಿಷ್ಟುಂ ನಾವಿಷ್ಟು-ವಿಷ್ಟುಮರ್ಚಯೇತ್ . None but the bhakta who partakes of the divinity of Vishnu should

sing His glory nor offer worship to Him. Shri Bhagavatha gives a stirring description of the manner in which the sage Bharatha performed puja. It says that by incessant worship of the Supreme Person his love for the Lord was increasing, his heart melted and was benumbed (as it were) at the time of worship. The hair stood on their end all over his body as a result of intense delight: his eyes were blinded by tears of love proceeding from an ardent longing (to meet the Lord): and his consciousness was drowned in the depth of his heart that was brimming over with supreme devotion - which was enriched by constant thought of the feet of his beloved Lord, red as a lotus, - with the result he forgot even the worship that he was doing! ತಯೇತ್ಲಮವಿರತಪುರುಷಪರಿಚರ್ಯಯಾ ಭಗವತಿ

ಪ್ರವರ್ಧಮಾನಾನುರಾಗಭರದ್ರತಹೃದಯಶೈಥಿಲ್ಯಃ ಪ್ರಹರ್ಷವೇಗೇನ ಆತ್ಮನ್ಯುದ್ಧಿದ್ಯಮಾನಃ
 ಔತ್ಕಂಠ್ಯಪ್ರವೃತ್ತಪ್ರಣಯಬಾಷ್ಟನಿರುದ್ಧಾವಲೋಕನಯನ ಏವಂ
 ನಿಜರಮಣಾರುಣ- ಚರಾಣಾರವಿಂದಾನುಧ್ಯಾನಪರಿಚಿತಭಕ್ತಿಯೋಗೇನ
 ಪರಿಪ್ಲುತಪರಮಾಹ್ಲಾದಗಂಭೀರಹೃದಯಹೃದಾವಗಾಢಧಿಷಣಸ್ತಾಮಪಿ ಕ್ರಿಯಮಾಣಾಂ
 ಭಗವತ್ಸಪರ್ಯಾಂ ನ ಸನ್ಮಾರ .. (5-7-12)

The question then is how to get this right frame of mind? This may be done by chanting His names or saying prayers like Vishnu or Shiva Sahasranamam that talk of His glories. As one keeps on reading and listening to the holy books like Gita, Ramayanam, Bhagavatam that describe His endearing qualities, the mind gets attracted to Him. The mind gets saturated with the thought of the Lord and there is no room for any other thought. It is said in Bhagavata (2-8-4 and 5) ಶೃಣ್ವತಃ ಶ್ರದ್ಧಯಾ ನಿತ್ಯಂ ಗೃಣತಶ್ಚ ಸ್ವಚೇಷ್ಟಿತಂ . ಕಾಲೇನ ನಾತಿದೀರ್ಘೇಣ ಭಗವಾನ್ ವಿಶತೇ ಹೃದಿ .. 4.. ಪ್ರವಿಷ್ಟಃ ಕರ್ಣರಂಧ್ರೇಣ ಸ್ವಾನಾಂ ಭಾವಸರೋರುಹಂ . ಧುನೋತಿ ಶಮಲಂ ಕೃಷ್ಣಃ ಸಲಿಸ್ಯ ಯಥಾ ಶರತ್ .. 5.. The Lord enters before long the heart of the person who daily listens

with reverence to His stories and also narrates His doings. Reaching the lotus of His devotees' heart through the passage of their ears, Shri Krishna rids it of all impurities even as autumn turns the waters (of rivers etc.) clear.

Of course, in the case of one who has realised his identity with the Lord, the question of worshipping Him does not arise. The distinction between the worshipper and the worshipped God goes. Whatever he does constitutes a puja. Shri Shankaracharys says

this in his Shivamanasa puja. He says: ಆತ್ಮಾ ತ್ವಂ ಗಿರಿಜಾ ಮತಿಃ ಸಹಚರಾಃ ಪ್ರಾಣಾಃ ಶರೀರಂ ಗೃಹಂ, ಪೂಜಾ ತೇ ವಿಷಯೋಪಭೋಗರಚನಾ ನಿದ್ರಾ ಸಮಾಧಿಸ್ಥಿತಿಃ . ಸಂಚಾರಃ ಪದಯೋಃ ಪ್ರದಕ್ಷಿಣವಿಧಿಃ ಸ್ತೋತ್ರಾಣಿ ಸರ್ವಾ ಗಿರಃ, ಯದ್ಯತ್ಕರ್ಮ ಕರೋಮಿ ತತ್ತದಖಿಲಂ ಶಂಭೋ ತವಾರಾಧನಂ .. You are the Atman, the self. My mind is Parvati. All my sense organs are your attendants.

This body is Your temple. Every sense experience is a form of worship to You. My sleep is samadhi, where I unite with You. Whenever I walk,

it is pradakShina around You. All my words are hymns in Your praise.

Whatever action I perform, O Sambho, is only Your worship.

Puja is being done from time immemorial. It is mentioned in epics like Ramayana and Mahabharatha and in puranas also. Even Rama and Krishna, born as humans, performed puja regularly and with great devotion in order to set an example to us. Valmiki says that the people of Ayodhya belonging to all castes performed puja regularly

ವರ್ಣೇಷ್ವರ್ಗ್ಯಚತುರ್ಥೇಷು ದೇವತಾತಿಪೂಜಕಾಃ . . The great devotee Prahlada accords a high place to worship of the

Lord by archana. He enumerates nine types of devotion and places

archana the fifth place. ಶ್ರವಣಂ ಕೀರ್ತನಂ ವಿಷ್ಣೋಃ ಸ್ಮರಣಂ ಪಾದಸೇವನಂ . ಅರ್ಚನಂ ವಂದನಂ ದಾಸ್ಯಂ ಸಖ್ಯಮಾತ್ಮನಿವೇದನಂ ..

(Bhagavatham 7-5-23).

Krishna talks at some length about puja in His advice to Uddhava (in book 11 of Bhagavatham). He discusses about the worship done at home and also at the temples. The puja done at home using vedic mantras is

for the welfare of the family. This is prescribed by the smritis as

one of the duties to be done daily by a householder just like taking

bath. ಸ್ನಾನಂ ಸಂಧ್ಯಾ ಜಪೋ ಹೋಮಃ ದೇವತಾನಾಂ ಚ ಪೂಜನಂ . ಆತಿಥ್ಯಂ ವೈಶ್ವದೇವಂ ಚ ಷಟ್ಕರ್ಮಾಣಿ ದಿನೇ ದಿನೇ .. These verses in this poem Bilvashtakam highlight some of Shiva's

glories and draw one's mind to Him. Thus it will help a devotee's mind in getting involved in the puja.

Let us go to the verses proper. Each verse is a couplet (i.e.) has two lines. The verses are identified with numbers 1 through 10.

The first verse identifies some features of

Lord Shiva with the cluster consisting of three leaves of bilva and offers prayer to it.

ತ್ರಿದಲಂ ತ್ರಿಗುಣಾಕಾರಂ ತ್ರಿನೇತ್ರಂ ತ್ರಿಯಾಯುಧಂ . ತ್ರಿಜನ್ಮಪಾಪಸಂಹಾರಂ ಏಕಬಿಲ್ವಂ ಶಿವಾರ್ಪಣ್ಣಾ .. 1.. ತ್ರಿದಲಂ = having three petals. ತ್ರಿಗುಣಾಕಾರಂ = constituted of

three gunas. Satva guna (characterised by knowledge), rajo guna

(which is of the nature of activity)and tamo guna which implies inertia. The three qualities constitute Maya. Maya is the creative power of Ishvara. These three qualities become the cause of the creation and pervade the creation. One of Shiva's names is ಗುಣತ್ರಯಸ್ವರೂಪಃ . He is the cause behind the creation. ತ್ರಿನೇತ್ರಂ = having three eyes. Shiva has three eyes. They are the sun, the moon and Agni or fire. So He is known as ತ್ರಿಣೇತ್ರಃ, ಸೋಮಸೂರ್ಯಾಗ್ನಿಲೋಚನಃ, ತ್ರ್ಯಂಬಕಃ and ತ್ರಿಲೋಚನಃ . . The third eye stands for His infinite wisdom. He is the embodiment of knowledge and knows all says the upanishad. ಯಃ ಸರ್ವಜ್ಞಃ ಸರ್ವವಿದ್ಯಸ್ಯ ಜ್ಞಾನಮಯಂ ತಪಃ . More about this is said in the explanation to verse No:8. ತ್ರಿಯಾಯುಧಂ = having three weapons. The weapons are said to be of three kinds: 1) those which can be used for hitting at the enemy, like the sword and mace. 2) those which can be aimed at the enemy like the disc, spear, trident and 3) those which are released using another instrument like the arrow from the bow. Shiva has all the three (viz.) mace, trident and the bow (called Pinaka) and the arrow. The weapons are gods by themselves and are in the service of the Lord. Shiva bearing these weapons show He is ready to come to the rescue of any devotee who may seek His help. Some of His names are :ಶೂಲಹಸ್ತಃ, ವಜ್ರೀ, ಧನ್ವೀ, ಖಡ್ಗೀ, ಪರಶುಧಾರೀ, ಕುಠರಾಯುಧಪಾಣಿಃ, ಪಿನಾಕೀ etc. ತ್ರಿಜನ್ಮಪಾಪಸಂಹಾರಂ = who destroys the sins accumulated from past three births. Three is just indicative and indicates many. Thinking of Him or uttering His auspicious names destroys one's sins. ಸ್ಮೃತಿ ಮಾತೃಣ ಪಾವಯನ್ ಶಿವಃ . For this reason He is also known as ಭರ್ಗಃ . ಏಕ ಬಿಲ್ವಂ = one cluster of bilva leaves ಶಿವಾರ್ಪಣಂ = offered to Lord Shiva. In this manner, one bilva leaf offered to the Lord with devotion is of great merit. This reminds us of what Krishna said in Gita: (9-26). "When one, with pure mind, offers to Me with devotion a

leaf, a flower, a fruit, water, - that I accept.” ಪತ್ರಂ ಪುಷ್ಪಂ ಫಲಂ ತೋಯಂ ಯೋ ಮೇ ಭಕ್ತ್ಯಾ ಪ್ರಯಚ್ಛತಿ . ತದಹಂ ಭಕ್ಯುಪಹೃತಮಶ್ನಾಮಿ ಪ್ರಯತಾತ್ಮನಃ .. The words ಏಕ ಬಿಲ್ವಂ ಶಿವಾರ್ಪಣಂ occur as a refrain in all the verses. So the translation is not being repeated. This verse may be translated as:

“ I offer to Lord Shiva cluster of three bila leaves which stand for three gunas that make up His Maya shakti, which represent His three eyes, the three kinds of weapons He bears and whose very thought or uttering of names destroys one’s accumulated sins.”

ತ್ರಿಶಾಖೈಃ ಬಿಲ್ವಪತ್ಯೈಶ್ಚ ಹ್ಯಚ್ಛಿದ್ಭೈಃ ಕೋಮಲೈಃ ಶುಭೈಃ . ಶಿವಪೂಜಾಂ ಕರಿಷ್ಯಾಮಿ ಹ್ಯೇಕಬಿಲ್ವಂ ಶಿವಾರ್ಪಣಂ .. 2.. ತ್ರಿಶಾಖೈಃ = with three branches. ಅಚ್ಛಿದ್ಭೈಃ = not damaged,

not having holes and other defects. ಕೋಮಲೈಃ = tender, soft.

ಶುಭೈಃ = auspicious, good. ಬಿಲ್ವಪತ್ಯೈಃ with bilva leaves

(as described here) ಕರಿಷ್ಯಾಮಿ = I perform. ಶಿವಪೂಜಾಂ =

puja to Lord Shiva. ಏಕ ಬಿಲ್ವಂ ಶಿವಾರ್ಪಣಂ to be translated as

before. Meaning of the verse: I perform puja to Lord Shiva with bunch of bilva leaves that are auspicious,

soft and tender, have three leaves, which are not damaged or defective in any manner.

ಅಖಂಡ ಬಿಲ್ವಪತ್ರೇಣ ಪೂಜಿತೇ ನಂದಿಕೇಶ್ವರೇ . ಶುದ್ಧ್ಯಂತಿ ಸರ್ವಪಾಪೇಭ್ಯೋ ಹ್ಯೇಕಬಿಲ್ವಂ ಶಿವಾರ್ಪಣಂ .. 3.. ಅಖಂಡ = unbroken, whole. ಬಿಲ್ವಪತ್ರೇಣ = with the bilva leaf.

ನಂದಿಕೇಶ್ವರೇ = Shiva, the Lord of Nandi. ಪೂಜಿತೇ = if worshipped. ಸರ್ವಪಾಪೇಭ್ಯೋ = from all sins ಶುದ್ಧ್ಯಂತಿ ==

purified. ನಂದಿಕೇಶ್ವರಃ = the Lord of Nandi. Nandi’s story is

mentioned in Kurma Purana. He was a great devotee of Shiva and was blessed by Him with a form similar to His and also a prominent

position among His retinue. Meaning of the verse: By offering puja to Shiva - Lord of Nandi - with

bilva leaf that is whole and without defects one is freed from all sins.

ಶಾಲಿಗ್ರಾಮ ಶಿಲಾಮೇಕಾಂ ವಿಪ್ರಾಣಾಂ ಜಾತು ಚಾರ್ಪಯೇತ್ . ಸೋಮಯಜ್ಞ
ಮಹಾಪುಣ್ಯಂ ಏಕಬಿಲ್ವಂ ಶಿವಾರ್ಪಣಂ .. 4.. ಏಕಾಂ = one. ಶಾಲಿಗ್ರಾಮಶಿಲಾಂ =
saligrama stone.

ವಿಪ್ರಾಣಾಂ = a brahmin equipped with the knowledge of Self.

Knowledge that leads to liberation is called vidya ವಿದ್ಯಾ- ಸಾ ವಿದ್ಯಾ

ಯಾ ವಿಮುಕ್ತಯೇ . Thus it is said:

ವಿದ್ಯಯಾ ಯಾತಿ ವಿಪ್ರತ್ವಂ . ಜಾತು = at any time. ಅರ್ಪಯೇತ್ = if one

gives. ಸೋಮಯಜ್ಞ ಮಹಾಪುಣ್ಯಂ = (acquires) the great merit of performing a Soma
Yaga.

Saligrama is a stone like pebble. It is spherical or ellipsoidal in
shape. It is considered sacred in the worship. The Lord, we saw, is
available for worship in His two aspects: - with form and without
form. The saligrama stone because of its shape can be viewed as being
with form and also without a form (as an icon having limbs). It, like
the Lord, has no beginning and end. The Lord is difficult to
comprehend in His formless aspect; but with form an icon may prevent
one from visualising His formless aspect. The saligrama is a via
media solution. Thus it is considered similar to worship the Lord in
a Lingam and is superior to worship of an icon.

The gifting of a saligrama to a deserving person helps him in his
spiritual progress by performing puja and is thus a meritorious act.

Krishna says that the gift which is given to one who does no service
(one who cannot return the good, or to one from whom no return is
expected) in a holy place (like KurukShetra), and in proper time
(like samkranti) and to a worthy person is of superior type of

gift. ದಾತವ್ಯಮಿತಿ ಯದ್ಧಾನಂ ದೀಯತೇನುಪಕಾರಿಣೇ . ದೇಶೇ ಕಾಲೇ ಚ ಪಾತ್ರೇ
ಚ ತದ್ಧಾನಂ ಸಾತ್ವಿಕಂ ಸ್ಮೃತಂ .. (Gita -17-20).

Shankaracharya defines a “worthy person” to be one who has studied the
vedas with all its six branches. If in addition to mere studies he
had acquired the knowledge of the Self, and is fit to be called
ವಿಪ್ರಃ (as mentioned in this verse), his worth increases
thousands of times. He is the most suitable person for offering a

gift. The reason is that a person with the knowledge of the Self is extremely difficult to come across. Such a person is as good as the Lord Himself. Krishna says, in Gita, that such a person is not different from Him. ಜ್ಞಾನೀ ತ್ವಾತ್ಮೈವ ಮೇ ಮತಂ . The shastras say that if one can find such a person one should not wait for a proper time or place for giving the gift. One should be alert and seize such a rare opportunity that presents itself and make the gift. It will earn immense merit for the giver. Meaning of the verse: If one gifts a sacred saligrama piece to a

brahmin who has acquired the knowledge of Self, he earns great merit equal to that of performing a sacrifice.

ದಂತಿಕೋಟಿ ಸಹಸ್ರಾಣಿ ವಾಜಪೇಯ ಶತಾನಿ ಚ . ಕೋಟಿಕನ್ಯಾ ಮಹಾದಾನಂ ಏಕಬಿಲ್ವಂ ಶಿವಾರ್ಪಣಂ .. 5.. ದಂತಿ = elephant. ಕೋಟಿಃ = a crore or ten millions.ಸಹಸ್ರಂ =

a thousand. ಸಹಸ್ರಾಣಿ is plural and means many thousands or a large number. So, ದಂತಿಕೋಟಿ ಸಹಸ್ರಾಣಿ means thousands of crores of elephants.

ವಾಜಪೇಯ = name of a sacrifice.ಶತಾನಿ = hundreds or again a large number. Thus ವಾಜಪೇಯ ಶತಾನಿ means a large number of Vajapeya sacrifices.ಕೋಟಿಕನ್ಯಾ = millions of unmarried girls. ಮಹಾ = great or large. ದಾನಂ = giving or presenting.

The preceding lines list three gifts which confer great deal of merit on the giver.

The first one, namely the gifting of elephant may be taken to imply gifting it to a temple for taking part in the temple rituals which indeed will bring in a great deal of merit to the donor. The performing of a sacrifice that involves lot of effort and materials is also a commendable act. The third one, is gifting of a girl in marriage to enable a young man who had completed his studies under a guru to settle down as a householder. He, with her help, will then be able to discharge his social and religious obligations of grihastashrama as prescribed in the shastras. King Janaka

specifically said this to Rama at the time of giving Sita in marriage to Him. He said ಇಯಂ ಸೀತಾ ಮಮ ಸುತಾ ಸಹಧರ್ಮಚರೀ ತವ . (1-63-26). “This Sita,

my daughter, is going to be your helpmate in discharging your sacred obligations.” Thus, gifting a girl in marriage is considered to be specially sacred and meritorious.

We find King Bali making a grand offer to Lord Vamana after receiving Him in the horse sacrifice he conducted. He said ಯದ್ ಯದ್ ವಟೋ ವಾಂಚಸಿ ತತ್ ಪ್ರತೀಚ್ಛ ಮೇ ತ್ವಾಮರ್ಥಿನಂ ವಿಪ್ರಸುತಾನುತರ್ಕಯೇ . ಗಾಂ ಕಾಂಚನಂ ಗುಣವದ್ ಧಾಮ ಮೃಷ್ಟಂ ತಥಾನ್ನಪೇಯಮುತ ವಾ ವಿಪ್ರ ಕನ್ಯಂ . ಗ್ರಾಮಾನ್ ಸಮೃದ್ಧಾಂಸ್ತುರಗಾನ್ ಗಜಾನ್ ವಾ ರಥಾಂಸ್ತಥಾರ್ಹತ್ತಮ ಸಂಪ್ರತೀಚ್ಛ .. (8-18-32). He said “Please take from me whatever you desire, O Brahmachari: I

infer you to be seeking something. Therefore accept from me, a cow, gold, a house provided with all luxuries and comforts, as well as delicious food and drinks, or even a maid, prosperous villages, horses or elephants and chariots.”

These acts by themselves are great but the merit they can produce are finite in nature and so will exhaust themselves in course of time.

Even if one gets to stay in heavens for long years it will be a temporary stay only as all worlds, including the one of Indra and the creator Brahma himself are perishable. One who goes there will be reborn. Krishna says this in Gita and warns one to be wise and not to aspire for these worlds,

but to seek Him. He says: (Gita- 7-16) ಆಬ್ರಹ್ಮಭುವನಾಲ್ಲೋಕಾಃ ಪುನರಾವರ್ತಿನೋಽರ್ಜುನ ಮಾಮುಪೇತ್ಯ ತು ಕೌಂತೇಯ ಪುನರ್ಜನ್ಮ ನ ವಿದ್ಯತೇ .. But worshipping the Lord Shiva by offering bilva leaves with proper

understanding of the act of puja will confer wisdom that will confer liberation and eternal bliss. Thus there can be no comparison with

any other act, gifts etc. Gita says this specifically: (4-33). ಶ್ರೇಯಾನ್ ದ್ರವ್ಯಮಯಾದ್ಯಜ್ಞಾತ್ ಜ್ಞಾನಯಜ್ಞಃ ಪರಂತಪ . ಸರ್ವಂ ಕರ್ಮಾಖಿಲಂ ಪಾರ್ಥ ಜ್ಞಾನೇ ಪರಿಸಮಾಪ್ಯತೇ ..

The sacrifices, gifts etc., that involve materials, though

meritorious is inferior to sacrifice of knowledge. Shri Shankaracharya, in his commentary, explains that a material sacrifice engenders fruit: not so the sacrifice of knowledge. Hence its superiority. All works are included in knowledge that leads to liberation.

ದ್ರವ್ಯಮಯಃ ಹಿ ಯಜ್ಞಃ ಫಲಸ್ಯ ಆರಂಭಕಃ, ನ ಜ್ಞಾನಯಜ್ಞಃ
ಫಲಸ್ಯ ಆರಂಭಕಃ, ಅತಃ ಶ್ರೇಯಾನ್ ಪ್ರಶಸ್ಯತರಃ . Meaning of the verse: Gifting of
thousands of elephants or performing

great sacrifices like the Vajapeya or gifting of young unmarried
girls in marriage cannot be compared with the offering of a cluster
of bilva leaves to Lord Shiva.

ಲಕ್ಷ್ಮ್ಯಾಸ್ತನುತ ಉತ್ಪನ್ನಂ ಮಹಾದೇವಸ್ಯ ಚ ಪ್ರಿಯಂ . ಬಿಲ್ವವೃಕ್ಷಂ ಪ್ರಯಚ್ಛಾಮಿ
ಹೈಕಬಿಲ್ವಂ ಶಿವಾರ್ಪಣಂ .. 6.. ಲಕ್ಷ್ಮ್ಯಾಸ್ತನುತ = from the body of LakShmi. ಉತ್ಪನ್ನಂ
= born or

originated. ಮಹಾದೇವಸ್ಯ ಪ್ರಿಯಂ = dear to Mahadeva (Shiva).

ಬಿಲ್ವವೃಕ್ಷಂ = a bilva tree. ಪ್ರಯಚ್ಛಾಮಿ = I give or offer.

The bilva tree is unique in that it bears fruits without apparently
flowering earlier as is normally the case. So it is considered as
superior to and master of other trees. Thus it is known as

ವನಸ್ಪತಿಃ. The fruit indicates wisdom born of the ripeness of
the mind. This wisdom annihilates ignorance of the self

(ಅಜ್ಞಾನಂ) and confers liberation. The ignorance makes the mind
extrovert and indulge in worldly pleasures. This is the cause of many
problems and leads to rebirth. The wisdom dispels the ignorance,
makes the mind introvert and look for the source of happiness that is
inside everyone. Gita describes the holy fig tree as representing
samsara. But the bilva tree destroys samsara and confers liberation.

So the scriptures ask everyone to worship the Lord with the bilva
leaves and get the supreme benefit. The Skanda Purana talks in detail
about the genesis and glory of the bilva tree. It sprung out of the
right hand of LakShmi Devi. Vishnu worshipped Lord Shiva with the
leaves of the tree. Shiva was pleased with the worship and said the
tree will be known as ShrivrikSha (ಶ್ರೀವೃಕ್ಷಃ) after Shri Devi or

LakShmi and will stand as the embodiment of the three vedas. It will be dear to the gods. The Shri Suktam prays to LakShmi referring to this: ಆದಿತ್ಯವರ್ಣೇ ತಪಸೋಧಿಜಾತೋ ವನಸ್ಪತಿಸ್ತವ ವೃಕ್ಷೋಽಥ ಬಿಲ್ವಃ . ತಸ್ಯಫಲಾನಿ ತಪಸಾನುದಂತು ಮಾಯಾಂತರಾಯಾಶ್ಚ ಬಾಹ್ಯಾ ಅಲಕ್ಷ್ಮೀಃ .. This says that may the bilva fruit (wisdom or jnanam) that appeared from your hand dispel ignorance and its cause maya. With maya gone may the miseries arising from various causes like external forces etc., also go. Bilva leaf is also one of the places where LakShmi is said to reside. Thus ಬಿಲ್ವನಿಲಯಾ is one of Her names. So, worshipping the Lord with the bilva leaves will bless the worshipper with wisdom and incidentally dispel poverty, sickness etc. Meaning of the verse: I offer the bilva tree that sprung from the body of LakShmi Devi and is dear to Lord Mahadeva.

ದರ್ಶನಂ ಬಿಲ್ವವೃಕ್ಷಸ್ಯ ಸ್ಪರ್ಶನಂ ಪಾಪನಾಶನಂ . ಅಘೋರಪಾಪಸಂಹಾರಂ ಏಕಬಿಲ್ವಂ ಶಿವರ್ಪಣಂ .. 7.. ದರ್ಶನಂ = seeing or looking at. ಬಿಲ್ವವೃಕ್ಷಸ್ಯ = bilva tree.

ಸ್ಪರ್ಶನಂ = touching. ಪಾಪನಾಶನಂ = destroy the sins.

ಅಘೋರಪಾಪಸಂಹಾರಂ = destroys most horrible sins. The word

ಅಘೋರ normally means not terrific or fearful - ನಾಸ್ತಿ

ಘೋರೋ ಯಸ್ಮಾತ್ ಇತಿ . . But in this context this word means most

horrible ನ ವಿದ್ಯತೇ ಘೋರಂ ಯಸ್ಮಾತ್ ತತ್ ಅತ್ಯಂತ ಘೋರಂ ಇತ್ಯರ್ಥಃ .

While any type of sin is bad, Manu names five as ಮಹಾಪಾತಕಾನಿ or

most heinous. They are ಬ್ರಹ್ಮಹತ್ಯಾ ಸುರಾಪಾನಂ ಸ್ತ್ರೀಯಂ ಗುರ್ವಂಗನಾಗಮಃ

. ಮಹಾಂತಿ ಪಾತಕಾನ್ಯಾಹುಸ್ತತ್ಸಂಸರ್ಗಶ್ಚ ಪಂಚಮಃ .. The reason for saying why seeing or touching the bilva tree is so

purifying is because it represents all the gods. This is said in the

verse No.9 that follows. Meaning of the verse: Even having a look at the bilva tree or

touching it destroys the most horrible sins one might have committed.

ಕಾಶೀಕ್ಷೇತ್ರನಿವಾಸಂ ಚ ಕಾಲಭೈರವದರ್ಶನಂ . ಪ್ರಯಾಘಮಾಧವಂ ದೃಷ್ಟ್ವಾ

ಹ್ಯೇಕಬಿಲ್ವಂ ಶಿವಾರ್ಪಣಂ .. 8.. ಕಾಶೀಕ್ಷೇತ್ರನಿವಾಸಂ = residing in the holy city of Kasi.

ಕಾಲಭೈರವದರ್ಶನಂ = having the darsan of Shri Kalabhairava.

ಪ್ರಯಾಘಮಾಧವಂ ದೃಷ್ಟ್ವಾ = and seeing Shri Madhava at Prayag.

Though our country is dotted all over with holy places and waters the triad Prayag, Kasi and Gaya are considered to be the most important

ones. Kasi is said to be one of the “mokShapuri”s - meaning it can

confer mokSha or liberation. The Agni Puranam says ಅತ್ರ ಸ್ನಾನಂ ಜಪೋ ಹೋಮೋ ಮರಣಂ ದೇವಪೂಜನಂ . ಶ್ರಾದ್ಧಂ ದಾನಂ ನಿವಾಸಶ್ಚ ಯದ್ಯತ್ ಸ್ಯಾತ್ ಭುಕ್ತಿಮುಕ್ತಿಕೃತ್ .. It is specifically said that one who dies at Kasi is not reborn.

ಕಾಶ್ಯಾಂ ಹಿ ಮರಣಾನುಕ್ತಿಃ . This is because the Lord Shiva at Kasi - known as Kalabhairava grants

them liberation. Shri Shankaracharya states this in his

Kalabhairavashatakam. ಭಾನುಕೋಟಿಭಾಸ್ವರಂ ಭವಾಭಿತಾರಕಂ ಪರಂ

ನೀಲಕಂಠಮೀಪ್ಸಿತಾರ್ಥದಾಯಕಂ ತ್ರಿಲೋಚನಂ . ಕಾಲಕಾಲಮಂಬುಜಾಕ್ಷಮಸ್ತಶೂನ್ಯಮಕ್ಷ

ಕಾಶಿಕಾಪುರಾಧಿನಾಥಕಾಲಭೈರವಂ ಭಜೇ .. Because of these reasons many believers prefer to live in Kasi, or

spend their last days there so that they can breathe their last there

and escape rebirth. So ಕಾಶೀಕ್ಷೇತ್ರನಿವಾಸಂ ಚ

ಕಾಲಭೈರವದರ್ಶನಂ is mentioned here.

Prayaga is known as ತೀರ್ಥರಾಜಾ as all the holy rivers and streams

are said to be present there. ದಶತೀರ್ಥಸಹಸ್ರಾಣಿ ಷಷ್ಠಿಕೋಟ್ಯಸ್ತಥಾಪರಾಃ . ತೇಷಾಂ ಸಾನ್ನಿಧ್ಯಮತ್ಯೈವ ಪ್ರಯಾಗಂ ಪರಮಂ ತತಃ .. ಗವಾಂ ಕೋಟಿಪ್ರದಾನಾತ್ ಯತ್

ತ್ಯಹಂ ಸ್ನಾನಸ್ಯ ತತ್ಪಲಂ . ಪ್ರಯಾಗೇ

ಮಾಘಮಾಸೇ ತು ಏವಮಾಹುರ್ಮನೀಷಿಣಃ .. It is the confluence of the three sacred rivers Ganga, Yamuna and the

mythical Saraswathi and is known as Triveni ತ್ರಿವೇಣಿಃ .

Prayag is said to be the perennial city that is not submerged even during the deluge that submerges the earth at the end of the aeons.

The city remains in tact and Lord Vishnu remains here as Yogamurthy.

He is known as Veni Madhava : hence having the darsan of the most glorious Lord Madhava is sanctifying and is mentioned here.

Prayaga has another connotation. According to the Yoga Shastra there are six chakras or centres of energy in the body. They are: 1 -

Muladhara Chakra situated near the tail end of the back bone, 2 -

Svadhishтана Chakra situated four fingers above the tail end of the back bone, 3 - Manipura Chakra situated opposite the naval, 5 - Anahata Chakra situated in the middle of the chest and 6 - Ajna chakra situated on the forehead between the two eyebrows. Some texts talk of more chakras, but that is not relevant here. The Yoga Shastra says there are three nadis (channels or streams through which the energy is directed to and from the chakras). They are known as : 1 - Sushumna Nadi. This is the central channel that runs through the spinal column starting from the base or Muladhara chakra. 2 - Ida Nadi also called the Chandra (moon) Nadi. It also starts from the Muladhara Chakra and ascends along the left side of the spinal column, criss-crossing each chakra and finally passes through the left nostril to reach the sixth or Ajna Chakra where it unites with the Pingala Nadi. 3 - Pingala Nadi also called the Surya (sun) Nadi. It also starts from the Muladhara Chakra, ascends along the right side of the spinal column criss-crossing the different chakras. It passes through the right nostril to end at the Ajna Chakra by joining the Ida Nadi. The Ida and Pingala nadis are likened to the rivers Yamuna and Ganga.

Thus the sixth or the Ajna Chakra situated behind the junction of the eye brows is the confluence of the three nadis and is also called Triveni and the sixth chakra itself is, for this reason, called Prayaga. Lord Mahesvara is the deity presiding in this chakra along with His consort who represents the maya shakti. Since He is with His maya He is also known as Madhava. (Vishnu Sahasranamam.72)

ಮಾಧವಃ- ಮಾಯಾಃ ಶ್ರಿಯಾಃ ಧವಃ ಪತಿಃ ಮಾಧವಃ .

He creates the universe, sustains it and also dissolves it at the time of pralaya. He is beyond time and space. Mundaka Upanishad says

He is effulgent and omniscient. ಯಃ ಸರ್ವಜ್ಞಃ ಸರ್ವವಿದ್ಯಸ್ಯ ಜ್ಞಾನಮಯಂ ತಪಃ .
ತಸ್ಮಾದೇತಬ್ರಹ್ಮ ನಾಮ

ರೂಪಮನ್ನಂ ಚ ಜಾಯತೇ .. Yogis who, by intense practice, ascend to the sixth chakra are said

to acquire similar omniscience. Their sins get washed off with the wisdom or jnanam they gain and they become pure. This is the idea of visiting Prayaga and having darsan of Madhava at Prayaga.

Yogis are advised to meditate on this chakra particularly in their last moments. Krishna says this in Gita (8-10). ಪ್ರಯಾಣಕಾಲೇ ಮನಸಾಽಚಲೇನ ಭಕ್ತ್ಯಾ ಯುಕ್ತೋ ಯೋಗಬಲೇನ ಚೈವ . ಭುವೋರ್ಮಧ್ಯೇ ಪ್ರಾಣಮಾವೇಶ್ಯ ಸಮ್ಯಕ್ ಸ ತಂ ಪರಂ ಪುರುಷಮುಪೈತಿ ದಿವ್ಯಂ .. At the time of death, the yogi, with steady mind, and with devotion and the power of yoga fixing the life-force between the eye-brows reaches the supreme Spirit, divine.

So, if one stays in Kasi, performs the religious rites there as is customary, has the darsan of Lord Kalabhairava who can confer liberation on His devotees and also visits holy city of Prayaga, has a dip at the confluence of the three holy rivers, has the darsan of Lord Madhava and on the top of all also worships Lord Shiva with bilva leaves can one ask for anything more? He is assured of Lord's grace.

TIRTHAM. Now, let us pause for a moment and see what our puranas and saints say about Kasi and other holy places.

The word ತೀರ್ಥಂ (tirtham) is defined as a holy place, place of pilgrimage, etc., dedicated to some holy object (especially on or near the bank of a sacred river). Kasi, Prayag, Gaya all come under this category. So people have been visiting these places, taking bath and performing all prescribed rituals with great deal of sincerity.

A different definition of tirtham is to be seen in our puranas. Rough translations are given. ಪಿತರೋ ಯಸ್ಯ ತೃಪ್ಯಂತಿ ಸೇವಯಾ ಚ ಗುಣೇನ ಚ . ತಸ್ಯ ಭಾಗೀರಥೀಸ್ನಾನಮಹನ್ಯಹನಿ ವರ್ತತೇ .. The one whose parents are satisfied by his services and qualities has bath in Ganga everyday.

This one is from Padma Purana. ಅಗಾಧಸಲಿಲೇ ಶುದ್ಧೇ ಸತ್ಯತೀರ್ತೇ ಕ್ಷಮಾಹ್ರದೇ . ಸ್ನಾತ್ವಾ ಪಾಪವಿನಿರ್ಮುಕ್ತಃ ಪ್ರಯಾತಿ ಪರಮಾಂ ಗತಿಂ .. Taking a bath in the deep and clean waters of the virtue of truth and in the large pool known as forbearance or forgiveness one is rid of

his sins and gets emancipated. ಸತ್ಯಂ ತೀರ್ಥಂ ದಯಾ ತೀರ್ಥಂ ತೀರ್ಥಮಿಂದ್ರಿಯನಿಗ್ರಹಃ

. ವರ್ಣಾಶ್ರಮಾಣಾಂ ಗೇಹೇಽಪಿ ತೀರ್ಥಂ ಶಮ ಉದಾಹೃತಂ .. Truthfulness, kindness and control of sense organs all constitute

tirtham. ನೋದಕಕ್ಲಿನ್ನಗಾತ್ರಸ್ತು ಸ್ನಾತ ಇತ್ಯಭಿಧೀಯತೇ . ಸ ಸ್ನಾತೋ ಯೋ ದಮಸ್ನಾತಃ ಸ ಬಾಹ್ಯಾಂತರಃ ಶುಚಿಃ .. (Maha Bharatha).

The one who has merely got his body wet by taking a dip in the water

is not considered to have taken a bath - but only the one who has got

his passions under control can be really said to have had a bath. ನಿಗ್ರಹೀತೇಂದ್ರಿಯಗ್ರಾಮಃ

ಯತ್ರ ಯತ್ರ ವಸೇನ್ನರಃ . ತತ್ರ ತತ್ರ ಕುರುಕ್ಷೇತ್ರಂ ನೈಮಿಶಂ ಪುಷ್ಕರಾಣಿ ಚ .. (Shri

Vedanta Desika in Sankalpa Suryodayam). Wherever one may live, in full control of his

senses, those very

places are KurukShetram, Naimisham and Pushkaram.

Bhartruhari has similar idea. In his Nitisatakam he asks: ಶುಚಿ

ಮನೋ ಯದ್ಯಸ್ತಿ ತೀರ್ಥೇನ ಕಿಂ . If one has pure mind (free from passions) what use is of tirthams

like Prayaga?

Shri Shankaracharya says he has no need to go after thirtas. He gives

the reason in his Kasipanchakam: ಕಾಶೀಕ್ಷೇತ್ರಂ ಶರೀರಂ ತ್ರಿಭುವನಜನನೀ ವ್ಯಾಪಿನೀ

ಜ್ಞಾನಗಂಗಾ ಭಕ್ತಿಶ್ರದ್ಧಾ ಗಯೇಯಂ ನಿಜಗುರುಚರಣಧ್ಯಾನಯೋಗಃ ಪ್ರಯಾಗಃ

. ವಿಶ್ವೇಶೋಽಯಂ ತುರೀಯಃ ಸಕಲಜನಮನಃ ಸಾಕ್ಷಿಭೂತೋಽಂತರಾತ್ಮಾ ದೇಹೇ

ಸರ್ವಂ ಮದೀಯೇ ಯದಿ ವಸತಿ ಪುನಸ್ತೀರ್ಥಮನ್ಯತ್ಕಿಮಸ್ತಿ .. The body is Kasi, the

place of pilgrimage; the Ganges of knowledge is

the mother of the three worlds, pervading all; faith combined with

devotion is Gaya; the yoga of meditating on the feet of one's

spiritual master is Prayaga; the Self, the witness of the minds of

all is Visveswara. If then all this is in my own body, where else is

any other sacred bathing place? ತೀರ್ಥಾನಿ ತೋಯರೂಪಾಣಿ ದೇವಾನ್ಪಾಷಾಣಮೃಣ್ಮಯಾನ್

. ಯೋಗಿನೋ ನ ಪ್ರಪದ್ಯಂತೇ ಆತ್ಮದ್ಯಾನಪರಾಯಣಾಃ .. (Uttara Gita).

The yogis who are ever absorbed in meditation of their Self do not

seek tirthas in the form of water and gods made of stone and mud.

Shri Bhagavata goes one step further and says it is the holy men who

lend sanctity to tirthas.

When King Parikshit took a vow to fast unto death, many great men came to see him. This is how their arrival is described. ತತ್ರೋಪಜಗ್ಮುರ್ಭುವನಂ ಪುನಾನಾ ಮಹಾನುಭಾವಾ ಮುನಯಃ ಸಶಿಷ್ಯಾಃ . ಪ್ರಾಯೇಣ ತೀರ್ಥಾಭಿಗಮಾಪದೇಶೈಃ ಸ್ವಯಂ ಹಿ ತೀರ್ಥಾನಿ ಪುನಂತಿ ಸಂತಃ .. (1-19-8).

Their arrived with their pupils sages of great spiritual power, who brought sanctity to the whole world. Under the pretext of visiting holy places the saints generally consecrate the places of pilgrimage themselves.

The reason for saying so is said by Yudhistira in his address to Vidhura: “devotees like you are not only consecrated themselves; but it is they who revive the sanctity of sacred places by the living presence of Lord Vishnu in their hearts.” ಭವದ್ವಿಧಾ ಭಾಗವತಾಸ್ತೀರ್ಥೀಭೂತಾಃ ಸ್ವಯಂ ವಿಭೋ . ತೀರ್ಥೀಕುರ್ವಂತಿ ತೀರ್ಥಾನಿ ಸ್ವಾಂತಃಸ್ಥೇನ ಗದಾಭೃತಾ .. (1-13-10).

The message then is clear. One may travel all over the country, visit many holy places and take bath in sacred rivers. This may serve a limited purpose only. What will really help is obtaining control over one’s senses and shedding tendencies like desire, anger and jealousy.

Krishna describes desire and anger as the twin enemies one should be wary of. ಕಾಮ ಏಷ ಕ್ರೋಧ ಏಷ ರಜೋಗುಣಸಮುದ್ಭವಃ . ಮಹಾಶನೋ ಮಹಾಪಾಪ್ಮಾ ವಿದ್ಧ್ಯೇನಮಿಹ ವೈರಿಣಂ .. (3-37). He puts it again more forcefully later on and describes them as door

ways to hell. He wants us to avoid them. By avoiding them one will be doing good to self and will be fit for liberation. ತ್ರಿವಿಧಂ ನರಕಸ್ಯೇದಂ ದ್ವಾರಂ ನಾಶನಮಾತ್ಮನಃ . ಕಾಮಃ ಕ್ರೋಧಸ್ತಥಾ ಲೋಭಸ್ತಸ್ಮಾದೇತತ್ರಯಂ ತ್ಯಜೇತ್ .. ಏತೈರ್ವಿಮುಕ್ತಃ ಕೌಂತೇಯ ತಮೋದ್ವಾರೈಸ್ತ್ರಿಭಿರ್ನರಃ . ಆಚರತ್ಯಾತ್ಮನಃ ಶ್ರೇಯಸ್ತತೋ ಯಾತಿ ಪರಾಂ ಗತಿಂ .. (16-21 and 22). Only a mind free from passions can develop devotion to God. But a

mind polluted with passions will render all spiritual practices to become waste. Krishna points this out to his friend Uddhava in

Uddhava Gita. (Bhagavatam -11-16-42,43). ವಾಚಂ ಯಚ್ಚ ಮನೋ ಯಚ್ಚ
ಪ್ರಾಣಾನ್ಯಚ್ಛೇಂದ್ರಿಯಾಣಿ ಚ . ಆತ್ಮಾನಮಾತ್ಮನಾ
ಯಚ್ಚ ನ ಭೂಯಃ ಕಲ್ಮಸೇಽಧ್ವನೇ .. ಯೋ ವೈ ವಾಙ್ಮನಸೀ ಸಮ್ಯಗಸಂಯಚ್ಛಂಧಿಯಾ
ಯತಿಃ . ತಸ್ಯ ವ್ರತಂ ತಪೋ
ದಾನಂ ಸ್ರವತ್ಯಾಮಘಟಾಂಬುವತ್ .. Control speech, control the mind, control the
pranas and organs;

control also the impure intellect by the purified intellect. Then you
will no more return to the world.

For the seeker who has not fully controlled his speech, mind and
intellect, vows, austerities and charity leak out likewater from an
unbaked pot. Thus the first step in spiritual practice should be the
control of passions. Only devotion born in a pure mind devoid of
passions will remove sins and help in gaining knowledge of the Self
which in turn will result in liberation. Meaning of the verse: if one stays at the holy city of
Kasi, then has

darsan of the Lord Kalabhairava there, visits Prayag and has darsan
of Lord Madhava there and also offers worship to Lord Shiva with bilva
leaf he is assured of Lord's grace.

ಮೂಲತೋ ಬ್ರಹ್ಮರೂಪಾಯ ಮಧ್ಯತೋ ವಿಷ್ಣುರೂಪಿಣೇ . ಅಗ್ರತಃ
ಶಿವರೂಪಾಯ ಹೈಕಬಿಲ್ವಂ ಶಿವಾರ್ಪಣಂ .. 9.. ಮೂಲತಃ = at the root level.

ಬ್ರಹ್ಮರೂಪಾಯ = having the form of

Brahma the creator. ಮಧ್ಯತಃ = in the middle portion.

ವಿಷ್ಣುರೂಪಿಣೇ = having the form of Vishnu, the sustainer.

ಅಗ್ರತಃ = at the top portion. ಶಿವರೂಪಾಯ = having the form
of Shiva the destroyer.

The bilva tree is conceived as the supreme being who takes the forms
of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva for creating, sustaining and finally
resolves what is created. The vedic hymn Shri Rudram salutes the Lord
saying ನಮೋ ವೃಕ್ಷೇಭ್ಯೋ ಹರಿಕೇಶೇಭ್ಯಃ . The commentator says that
the Lord who can take any form, assumes the form of Bilva, Peepal and
other holy trees which can be used in worship and sacrifices for
gaining His grace. Worshipping the tree with this concept in the mind

will purge one of the sins, as mentioned in verse No. 7 and confer supreme benefit.

The root is under the ground and thus hidden from our eyes. Similarly the creation is shrouded in mystery. One cannot satisfactorily explain the origin, the cause and so many other facts relating to creation. So it is said to be **ಅನಾದಿ** - its origin cannot be determined. Shri Gaudapada in his Karika on Mandukya Upanishad discusses this topic at great length and concludes these are beyond our comprehension or **ಅಚಿಂತ್ಯಾಃ ಸದೈವ ತೇ** . . So the creator Brahma is represented at the root level of the tree. The stem or the middle portion is visible just as the world. We see beings being born and sustained. There is also an orderliness in the world. So the middle portion represents Vishnu. Meaning of the verse: worshipping Lord Shiva with a leaf from the

bilva tree which represents Brahma, the creator in the root portion, Vishnu, the sustainer in the middle portion and Shiva, the destroyer in the top portion one can derive the supreme benefit.

ಬಿಲ್ವಾಷ್ಟಕಮಿದಂ ಪುಣ್ಯಂ ಯಃ ಪಠೇತ್ ಶಿವಸನ್ನಿಧೌ . ಸರ್ವಪಾಪ ವಿನಿರ್ಮುಕ್ತಃ ಶಿವಲೋಕಮವಾಪ್ನುಯಾತ್ .. 10.. ಬಿಲ್ವಾಷ್ಟಕಂ = Bilvashtakam stotram. ಇದಂ = this.

ಪುಣ್ಯಂ = meritorious, sacred. **ಯಃ** = whosoever. **ಪಠೇತ್** = reads.

ಶಿವಸನ್ನಿಧೌ = in the proximity or presence of Shiva.

ಸರ್ವಪಾಪ ವಿನಿರ್ಮುಕ್ತಃ = absolved or emancipated from all sins.


ಶಿವಲೋಕಂ = the world of Shiva. **ಆಪ್ನುಯಾತ್** = will reach.

This verse is called the **ಫಲಶ್ರುತಿಃ** and gives the benefit one will gain by reciting this hymn. This says that one who reads these verses in the proximity of the Lord, either in a temple or in one's puja room will get absolved of the sins. It goes without saying that the reading should be done with faith and devotion. We may see this point being stressed in the VishnuSahasranamam and all other hymns.


Mere recitation by rote will be least effective. Also, it is necessary that one should not doubt in the least the fact stated here

and ask whether mere recitation can absolve one of the sins? It is to be understood that these verses are in vogue for a long time and should have been composed by a saint, a mahatma who had done the worship of Shiva with bilva leaves and actually enjoyed the results. So he is putting his experience in these verses for the benefit of others and the future generations. We may see similar statements about the benefits in all stotras. On one hand they induce one to read the verses and in addition they plant the seed of devotion in the reader's mind and thus make one the recipient of Lord's grace in due course of time. Meaning of the verse: whoever reads these sacred verses of Bilvashtakam in the proximity of Lord Shiva will be freed of all sins and attain the abode of Lord Shiva. .. ಓಂ ತತ್ಸತ್ ..

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bilvAShTakam with meaning

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Please send corrections to sanskrit@cheerful.com

