

## Sharanam – Total Refuge (In God)

### Shri Kanchi Mahaswami's Discourses

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(The *Mahaswami (late) Shri Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati Swami* is considered a saint of recent times. His discourses on various topics while on a visit to Madras in 1930's are indeed the benchmark.)

त्वत्प्रभुजीवप्रियमिच्छसि चेन्नरहरिपूजां कुरु सततं

प्रतिबिम्बालंकृतिधृतिकुशलो बिम्बालंकृतिमातनुते।

चेतोभृङ्ग भ्रमसि वृथा भवमरुभूमौ विरसायां

भज भज लक्ष्मीनरसिंहानघपदसरसिजमकरन्दम् ॥ १ ॥

लक्ष्मीनृसिंहपञ्चरत्नम्

tvatprabhujivapriyamichhasi cennaraharipūjāṁ kuru satataṁ

pratibimbālaṅkṛtidhṛtikuśalo bimbālaṅkṛtimātanute |

cetobhṛṅga bhramasi vṛthā bhavamarubhūmau virasāyāṁ

bhaja bhaja lakṣmīnarasimhānaghapadasarasijamakaramdam || 1 ||

lakṣmīnṛsimhapañcaratnam

O! Mind (which resembles a beetle); attain the sweet honey that is contained in the blemish-less lotus-like feet of Shri Lakshmi-Narasimha. You are in vain (*vruta*) roaming in the desert-like *Samsara* (constantly repeating cycle of birth and death). *Jeevan* (soul) is the lord of the mind. If one desires the welfare of the soul, one should continuously offer worship at the feet of Shri Lakshmi-Narasimha.

Our image is reflected in a mirror if we look into it. If we desire to decorate the image, we should add the decoration on to ourselves and not on the image in the mirror. All inner selves (*Jeevas*) carry the reflection of the universal self (God). That reflection (individual self or *Jeevan*) too has some energy and power. The sun spreads heat and light over the whole world. The reflected sun (*Jeevan* or individual soul) too has some heat and light. Likewise the individual soul also has some spiritual knowledge. Similarly to acquire bliss for our individual soul (reflection), one should seek the universal self or God (original or prototype). Shri Shankaracharya says all other efforts are *vrutha* (in vain).

The Acharya uses the word *vrutha* (in vain) often.

घटो वा मृत्पिण्डोऽप्यणुरपि च धूमोऽग्निरचलः

पटो वा तन्तुर्वा परिहरति किं घोरशमनम्।

वृथा कण्ठक्षोभं वहसि तरसा तर्कवचसा

पदाम्भोजं शंभोर्भज परमसौख्यं ब्रज सुधीः ॥ ६ ॥ शिवानन्दलहरी

ghaṭo vā mṛtpiṇḍo'pyaṇurapi ca dhūmo'gniracalaḥ  
paṭo vā tanturvā pariharati kiṃ ghoraśamanam |  
vṛthā kaṇṭhakoṣobhaṃ vahasi tarasā tarkavacasā  
padāmbhojaṃ śambhorbhaja paramasaukhyaṃ vraja sudhīḥ || 6 || śivānandalaharī

One studies many treatises on science, scriptures, art of debating, grammar etc. What is the good of all these studies?

We argue that the pot came out of clay, smoke was generated by fire and fabric was made up of threads and so on. Will all these arguments prevent *Yama* (the God of Death) from nearing us; in other words, save us from death? What is the use of figurative speech? Only God's grace will protect us from inevitable end. That will give us everlasting welfare. A wise person will not waste his time in vain (*vrutha*) indulging in arguments but he will seek complete refuge in God.

Shri Sankaracharya was conferred the status of a *Sanyasi* (renunciate) even at the very young age of eight by his Guru (spiritual master), Shri Govinda Bhagavatpada. In his composition *Bhajagovindam*, the Acharya sets out in general the way of good life, philosophy and faiths. *Govinda* being the name of both Guru and god is of special liking to the Acharya.

While staying in Kashi (Benares) he came across an old scholar; the latter, despite his advanced age, instead of seeking god, was studying grammar! Shri Acharya took pity on that scholar. Addressing the latter, but in reality as a sermon to the people at large, Shri Sankaracharya sang in *Bhajagovindam* as follows:

संप्राप्ते सन्निहिते काले नहि नहि रक्षति ढुकृञ्करणे।

भजगोविन्दं भजगोविन्दं गोविन्दं भजमूढमते।

नामस्मरणादन्यमुपायं नहि पश्यामो भवतरणे।

samprāpte sannihite kāle nahi nahi rakṣati ḍukṛñkaraṇe |

bhajagovindaṃ bhajagovindaṃ govindaṃ bhajamūḍhamate |

nāsmaraṇādanyamupāyaṃ nahi paśyāmo bhavatarāṇe |

bhajagovindam 1 & 33

“Will the rules of grammar save one when the time of death approaches? At that time, the oral utterance of, and the mental remembrance of the name, Govinda alone will save one from Samsara (transmigration or the constantly repeating cycle of birth and death.)”

The third reference above is on God Vishnu. It relates to grammar. The second reference is on God Shiva. It is on logical debate. These two arts are the same in that they are both exercises in vain (*Vrutha*). As useful *Stotras* (prayers) both again are the same. They carry the same purport. All the scriptures emphasize *Bhakti* (entire devotion to god.)

नारायण करुणामय शरणं करवाणि तावकौ चरणौ।

इति षट्पदी मदीये वदनसरोजे सदा वसतु ॥ ७ ॥ षट्पदि स्तोत्र

nārāyaṇa karuṇāmaya śaraṇaṁ karavāṇi tāvakau caraṇau |

iti ṣaṭpadī madīye vadanasaroje sadā vasatu || 7 || ṣaṭpadi stotra

Narayana! You are the embodiment of mercy! I take shelter (*Sharanam*) unto your two matchless feet (*Charanau*). In this manner, let the *Shatpadi* comprising six shlokas ever live in the lotus of my mouth.

Shri Shankaracharya has rendered this *Stotram* (prayer) in an ecstasy of *bhakti* (intense devotion) without regard to various doctrines. In the end too, he has not stressed *jnanamarga* (path of knowledge) that is the core of *advaita* (non-duality) but has emphasized *Sharanagati* (total refuge) that is the principal constituent of *bhakti* (intense devotion).

In later decades, Shri Ramanujacharya enunciated *Visishtadvaita* doctrine with *Sharanagati* as its principal path. Of special importance to *Vaishnavites* (worshippers of Shri Vishnu) are two *Mantras* (holy incantations) as well as the concluding *shloka* “*Sarva Dharman Parityajya*” in *Bhagavad Geeta* (considered as its apex): and the *shloka* in the *Ramayana* where on *Vibeeshana*’s surrender, Shri Rama elucidates his vow of *Sharanagatha Rakshaka* (protecting those seeking refuge in him.)

Thus *Sharanagati* (total refuge) is basic to all sects of our *dharma* (duty as laid down by religion or custom). *Jnanamarga* has as its central principle “I am *Brahmam*”. *Bhaktimarga*’s main ideal: “I am of no consequence; one should surrender one’s senses and mind by utter devotion unto the feet of God Narayana”. Both these ideals are the same.

The two doctrines use the pronoun “I” (representing ego) differently. The *Advaiti* says that the body, senses, intellect, mind etc. do not represent his true self. The residuary *Atman* (soul) alone is *Brahmam*. The *Bhakta* (devotee) also says that one should not follow the incitements of the body, senses, intellect, mind etc.

One should consider these of no consequence and should surrender them unto the feet of God. Both the doctrines have the common ideal of giving up of the ego.

The Acharya who propagated the *Gnanamarga* in his *Bhashyas* (commentaries) and other treatises has here, as a *Bhakta* (devotee), shows *Sharanagati* as the path for attainment of the same ideal.

By *Karunamaya* the Acharya has indicated that God being full of mercy will certainly protect one who has surrendered all unto Him. In this *shloka* God is addressed as *Narayana*. The Acharya describes in his *Bhashyas* (commentaries) *Brahmam* with attributes of qualities (*Saguna Brahman*) as *Narayana*. He has stipulated that *Sanyasi* (ascetic) should respond by repeating *Narayana, Narayana*, when any one makes

*namaskaram* (obeisance) to him. In the same sense, in fact in the same wordings, the *Mantra* (holy incantation) of *Vaishnavaites* (worshippers of Shri Vishnu) is enshrined.

*Shatpadi* may refer to the six *shlokas* of the *Stotra* or alternately to six words. The six words are: *Narayana*, *Karunamaya*, *Sharanam*, *Karavani*, *Tavakau*, *Charanau*, appearing in the first half of the *shloka*. If one recites always the first six *shlokas* or these six words constituting the first half of the seventh *shloka* of *Shatpadi*, one can surely receive God's grace. The various prayers in the *Stotram* will be fulfilled by constant recitation itself of the six *shlokas* and the six words that follow. The seventh *shloka* thus forms the unspoken benediction (*Phala Sruti*).