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## Gurvashtakam with meaning

सार्थ गुर्वष्टकम्

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## Gurvashtakam with meaning

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सार्थं गुर्वष्टकम्



Commentary by N. Balasubramanian

This work consisting of eight verses and one more known as कृत्वश्रुतिः or a verse that gives the benefit of reciting the poem is attributed to Sri Sankaracharya. These verses are couched in simple language and are easy to read and understand. In these verses the poet stresses the need for devotion to one's guru or spiritual preceptor. He states repeatedly that all the wealth, fame, knowledge etc., one might have acquired will be of no avail if one does not have total devotion to his guru . Let us find out the raison d'être for making such a statement.

Strange as it may sound, our shastras and the saints who have realised the truth stated therein tell that most of us do not know what is happiness, what is sorrow, what is good for us and what is not good for us. Had we known all this we should all be living a life of utter bliss without a vestige of sorrow. But what do we find? Our lives are full of trials and tribulations. In between we come across spots of joy. This joy may be followed by grief or still worse may leave us hankering for more of the same thing, thus leading to avarice or frustration in case the desire is not fulfilled. This is anything but joy. But the scriptures aver that our true nature is totally different. They stress that we are divine in nature and free from all forms of sorrow. But as of now we are not able to digest such a statement. Why is this so? If happiness be our true nature we should be only too willing to go to any extent to find it. What

prevents us from doing so? These are vital questions that have been bugging people for a long time. These and related questions have been answered by our scriptures and also explained again and again by saints like Sri Sankaracharya in many of their works. Let us briefly review what our scriptures have to say on this important subject. The following abbreviations are used in the commentary:

(1) BG: Bhagavad Gita with Sri Sankara's commentary. (2) BH: Srīmad Bhagavatham. (3) KU: Kathopanishad. (4) MU: Mundakopanishad.(5) VC: Vivekachudamani.

When we say “I” they ask us what do we mean by “I”. This may startle us a bit, but then we will point to our body and say “I” means the body and includes the mind etc., that are at our disposal for use. The scriptures say this is a fundamental mistake and is the root cause for all our problems and misery. When we talk of the “body” as usual, they point out that it includes not only the physical body but there is an unseen entity called Self (or atma or jivatma as it is called). This is what lends sentience to the body. Krishna says that He is the Self seated in the heart of all beings. अहमात्मा गुडाकेश सर्वभूताशयस्थितः । BG (10-20). This Self is behind our speech, actions, thinking etc. But because it is behind all these activities it itself is unseen and unknown. That means the eyes, for example, cannot see what enables them to see; the ears cannot hear what enables them to hear and so on. In other words, atma is beyond the reach of our senses. This is an important fact that requires to be chewed and digested.

श्रोत्रस्य श्रोत्रं मनसो मनो यद्वाचो व वाचं स उ प्राणस्य प्राणः ।  
यक्षुषश्चक्षुरतिमुच्य धीरः प्रेत्यास्मात्लोकाद्भूताभवन्ति ॥  
(Kena Upanishad. 1-2).

That who is the mind of the mind (cause); the vital essence of vital forces, speech of the speech; ear of the ears and eye of the eyes;

(it is) He by knowing whom the wise ones become liberated, depart from the world and become immortal.

ન તત્ર ચક્ષુર્ગચ્છતિ ન વાગ્ગચ્છતિ નો મનો( ibid 1-3).

There neither the eye approaches nor the speech (includes other organs of action and perception) nor does the mind.

Sage Yagnavalkya, while teaching this subject to his wife Maitreyi

asks: येनेदं सर्वं विजानाति तं કેન વિજાનીયાત્, વિજ્ઞાતાત્મરે

કેન વિજાનીયાત્ (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. 2-4-14) “By what can one know that by which all this comes to be known? By what you can know the knower?”

Thus we have two entities, the body that by itself is inert and the atma that animates it. The body by its very nature is subject to growth, decay and finally death. But the atma who resides in the body is eternal and not subject to any change. Krishna points this out to Arjuna:

ન જાયતે મ્રિયતે વા કદાચિન્નાયં ભૂત્વા ભવિતા વા ન ભૂયઃ ।

અજો નિત્યઃ શાશ્વતોડયં પુરાણો ન હન્યતે હન્યમાને શરીરે ॥

BG ( 2-20).

It is same as the Supreme Being itself. Krishna says this in Gita :

મમૈવાંશો જીવલોકે જીવભૂતઃ સનાતનઃ । BG(15-7)

The atma being same as the Supreme Being has the same attributes like the Supreme Being - it is eternal, of the form of bliss and wisdom.

સત્યં જ્ઞાનમનન્તં બ્રહ્મ । (Taittiriyaopanishad.2-1). Vedanta

clearly states that we are that atma and not the body. Being atma we are eternal and the embodiment of bliss. But as pointed out earlier everyone identifies himself with the body and consequently suffers.

Thus when the body is sick one says he is sick, when it grows old he says he has become old and when it dies people say that particular person is dead. In addition one looks out for happiness and security.

He gathers around him people (in the form of friends and relatives)

to gain happiness and security. He imports their happinesses and sorrows also on to himself. Thus if a close relative is sick, he is worried. If a close friend dies he is very upset. All of us will be happy to have a fat bank balance as we know that a lot of money at our disposal gives a feeling of comfort and security.

But vedanta thinks otherwise. What we think is good and contributory to our happiness and security may not be so at all times. On close examination we find that these things seem to give joy and security but not in the long run. In fact it may yield the contrary results.

Too much money is a source of anxiety. A son or daughter may turn out to be a source of worry or disappointment in one's old age. Wealth, health, familial bonds are all fragile. Our own body that we cherish, becomes a source of worry when it grows old and decrepit. We all know this only too well. Still we tend to hold on to them. Why is this so?

This is caused by wrong understanding of the truth, say our scriptures. The truth is that these things viz., our body, wealth, family etc., are themselves not long lasting. They will go sooner or later. They are not secure themselves. How can they confer security on others? Such being the case it is sheer folly to look to them for happiness and security. Attachment to them can only result in sorrow and misery. Recognising this fact - that is, that every thing in this universe is impermanent and Self alone is permanent is known as discrimination or विवेकः -viveka. As we ponder over this fact again and again in our mind, the truth of the scriptural statements sinks in our mind. We realise that things we hang on to are finite and limited by time and so cannot give us lasting peace and security. Our mind starts turning away from these things and towards God who has no such limitations. This is the second stage in spiritual growth. This detachment from ephemeral things of this world is called vairagya वैराग्यम्. Next as the detachment takes root our search for God also becomes intense. Our mind wants to get away from things that are in the real sense a bondage and yearns to be liberated from them.

This yearning for liberation is called મુમુક્ષુત્વમ્. Coming up to this stage is a rare phenomenon says Krishna. મનુષ્યાણાં સહસ્રેષુ કશ્ચિદતતિ સિદ્ધયે । BG( 7-3). Yama the god of death, says that people are very much attracted by wealth and such mundane pleasures that they are unwilling to give this up and look beyond it. Such people are blinded by ignorance and come within his grip repeatedly.

ન સાંપરાયઃ પ્રતિભાતિ બાલં પ્રમાદાન્તં વિત્તમોહેન મૂઢમ્ ।  
અયં લોકો નાસ્તિ પર ઇતિ માની પુનઃ પુનર્વશમાપદતે મે ॥ KU(1-2-6)

The misplaced infatuation for wealth, health etc., is caused by ignorance that veils wisdom that is our true nature.

આવૃતં જ્ઞાનમેતેન જ્ઞાનિનો નિત્યવૈરિણા ।  
કામરૂપેણ કૌન્તેય દુષ્કરેણાનલેન ચ ॥ BG(3-39).

WISDOM. The question then is how to gain the wisdom. Scriptures say that since wisdom is inherent in us as our very nature we need not do anything to gain it. We only have to get rid of the ignorance that is covering the wisdom. The source of happiness and security, thus, does not lie outside in worldly things that are not permanent. The only permanent thing is within ourselves as atma or Self. Its very nature is supreme bliss. Any joy experienced by any being is just a droplet derived from this bliss that is Brahman, says Brihadaranyakopanishad. એતસ્યૈવાનન્દસ્ય અન્યાનિ ભૂતાનિ માત્રામુપજીવન્તિ ।.(4-3-32). So if we want peace, security and happiness we should shift our focus from the body-mind complex to the Self that is inside us.

This knowledge is known as brahma vidya, atma vidya and adhyatma vidya. Krishna calls it as sovereign science or raja vidya

રાજવિદ્યા. He says રાજ વિદ્યા રાજ ગુહ્યં પવિત્રમિદમુત્તમમ્ ।  
પ્રત્યક્ષાવગમં ધર્મ્યં સુસુખં કર્તુમયયમ્ ॥ BG( 9-2).

It is the Sovereign Science, the Sovereign Secret, the Supreme Purifier. It is called Sovereign Science because it talks about the

brahman. So also it is the king of secrets. Of all the purifiers, the knowledge is the best purifier. The Mundaka Upanishad calls it as the higher vidya. It says that all other knowledge is inferior.

દ્વે વિદ્યે વેદિતવ્યે ઇતિ હ સ્મ યદ્બ્રહ્મવિદો વદન્તિ પરા ચૈવાપરા  
ચ । તત્રાપર ઋગ્વેદો યજુર્વેદઃ સામવેદોઽથર્વવેદઃ શિક્ષા કલ્પો  
વ્યાકરણં નિરુક્તં છન્દો જ્યોતિષમિતિ । અથ પરા યથા  
તદક્ષરમધિગમ્યતે ॥ MU(1-5).

“The knowers of Brahma say with a sense of certainty that there are two vidyas worth knowing: Para and Aparā. Out of these two; the four vedas - Rik, Yajus, Sama and Atharva, the science of pronunciation, Kalpa, grammar, Nirukta, Chanda and Jyotisha - all these are Aparā Vidya; Para is that through which the imperishable Brahma is known.” Sri Sankaracharya in his commentary says:

અપરા હિ અવિદ્યા સા નિરાકર્તવ્યા ।  
તદ્વિષયે હિ વિદિતે ન કિંચિત્તત્ત્વતો વિદિતં સ્યાદિતિ ।

The Aparā vidya constitutes only ignorance and so is to be rejected. By knowing it the truth does not become known. Krishna says that there is no gain that is equal to or superior to this wisdom. Once established in the Self one is not moved by even by greatest of the sorrow.

યં લબ્ધ્વા ચાપરં લાભં મન્યતે નાધિકં તતઃ ।  
યસ્મિન્સ્થિતો ન દુઃખેન ગુરુણાપિ વિચાલ્યતે ॥ BG(6-22).

Such is the glory of the wisdom about the Self that Krishna says He is this knowledge of the Self among all knowledges.

અધ્યાત્મવિદ્યા વિદ્યાનામ્ । BG(10-32). It is the chief among all knowledges, because it leads to mokSha says Sri Sankaracharya in his commentary. અધ્યાત્મવિદ્યા વિદ્યાનાં મોક્ષાર્થત્વાત્ પ્રધાનં અસ્મિ ।

Because of its exalted nature it is identified with Goddesses. Thus one of the names of Sri LakShmi and Lalitha is Vidya.

It has been said that one cannot gain the wisdom by one's own effort

by studying the books. It can create doubts or worse still misunderstanding. Our tradition says that one has to learn about it at the feet of a guru. आचार्यदेव विद्या विदित्ता साधिष्ठं प्राप्नोति । (Chandogyopanishad). Then only the learning will be fruitful. तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् । MU (2-12).

The striver should approach a guru. Sri Sankaracharya in explaining this statement says that the implication is that even one proficient in scriptural studies should not try to do the inquiry by himself:

शास्त्रज्ञोऽपि स्वातंत्र्येण ब्रह्मज्ञानान्वेषणं न कुर्यादित्येतत्  
गुरुमेवेत्यवधारणकृतम् ।

THE GURU. The next question that arises as a corollary is who is a guru? What are his qualifications? Is it enough if he is a veritable scholar in scriptures? These questions have been answered in detail in the scriptures. These are important questions requiring an answer by an anxious seeker as if he falls in the wrong hands he may be mislead and would waste his time, effort and perhaps money also. Let us see a few descriptions of a guru as given in the scriptures and by our acharyas. The Prashnottararatnamalika of Sri Sankaracharya says:

भगवन् किमुपादेयम्? गुरुवचनम् ।

Question: sir, what is to be accepted?

Answer: guru's teachings.

को गुरुः? अधिगततत्त्वः, शिष्यहितायोद्यतः सततम् ॥

Question: who is guru?

Answer: one who has learned the truth. One who constantly strives for the upliftment of the disciples who have approached him.

The Mundaka Upanishad says briefly that the guru should be well versed in the secrets of vedas and established in Brahman.

श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम् । The teacher should have learned at



the feet of his guru in the traditional way and had all his doubts cleared and then got firmly established in Brahman. His knowledge is not shaky and so he can convey it with the same clarity to his disciple. Yama says that any one who is not so qualified is inferior and his teaching will not be effective.

ન નરેણાવરેણ પ્રોક્ત એષ સુવિજ્ઞેયો બહુધા ચિન્ત્યમનઃ ।

અનન્યપ્રોક્તે ગતિરત્ર નાસ્તિ અણીયાન્ હ્યતઃકર્થમણુપ્રમાણાત્ ॥ KU(1-2-8).

The knowledge is very subtle. It has to be taught by a wise person who is established in Brahman. Sri Sankaracharya talks about the qualifications of a guru in two places in his Vivekachudamani. First he briefly says सन्तं મહાન્તં સમુપેત્ય દેસિકં ।

The guru should be established in Brahman and exalted". VC (8).

What is meant by મહાન્ or exalted"? Lord Rishabha Deva defines an exalted soul or મહાન્ in the advice He gave to His sons before He renounced and left the kingdom.

મહાન્તસ્તે સમચિત્તાઃ પ્રશાન્તા વિમન્યવઃ સુહૃદઃ સાધવો યે ।

યે વા મયીશે કૃત સૌહૃદ્યાર્થા જનેષુ દેહમ્ભરવાતિકેષુ ।

ગૃહેષુ જાયાત્મજરાતિમત્સુ ન પ્રીતિયુક્તા યાવદર્થાશ્ચ લોકે ॥

BH(5-5-3).

They alone are great who are even minded, exceptionally calm and composed, (and as a result) are free from anger, (and so are) kind-hearted and pious or again they who regard love offered to Me as the (only) object of human pursuit, who take no delight in (the company of) men (solely) engaged in pursuits (merely) calculated to nourish their body.

In the above He used the word સાધવઃ or pious or saintly persons. Lord Kapila gives in detail the qualities of a sadhu in His advice to His mother Devahuti.

તિતિક્ષવઃ કારુણિકાઃ સુહૃદઃ સર્વદેહિનામ્ ।

અજાતશત્રવઃ શાન્તાઃ સાધવઃ સાધુભૂષણાઃ ॥

મથ્યનન્યેન ભાવેન ભક્તિં કુર્વન્તિ યે દૃઢામ્ ।  
 મત્કૃતે ત્યક્તકર્માણસ્ત્યક્તસ્વજનબાન્ધવાઃ ॥  
 મદાશ્રયાઃ કથા મૃષ્ટાઃ શૃણ્વન્તિ કથયન્તિ ચ ।  
 તપન્તિ વિવિધાસ્તાપા નૈતાન્મદ્રતચેતસઃ ॥  
 ત એતે સાધવઃ સાધ્વિ સર્વસઙ્ગવિવર્જિતાઃ ।  
 સઙ્ગસ્તેષ્વથ તે પ્રાર્થ્યઃ સઙ્ગદોષહરા હિ તે ॥  
 BH(3-25-21 to 24).

"Saints are forbearing, compassionate and composed: they are friendly to all living beings and inimical to none and follow the injunctions of the scriptures. Their good disposition itself serves as an ornament to them.(21) With an undivided heart they practise unflinching devotion to Me; and for My sake they abandon even their obligatory duties and forsake their kinsmen and relatives. (22) They listen to and narrate delightful stories relating to Me, their minds ever set on Me. Afflictions of various kinds, therefore, never torment such people. (23) Such are holy men, free from all attachments, O virtuous lady! Attachment to such holy men must be sought for by you, for they destroy the pernicious effects of attachment."

Then later, Sri Sankaracharya gives in greater detail the qualities of the guru.

ઉપસીદ્ધિદુરં પ્રાપ્ત્વ યસ્માદ્ધન્યવિમોક્ષણમ્ ।  
 શ્રોત્રિયોઽવૃજિનોઽકામહતો યો બ્રહ્મવિત્તમઃ ।  
 બ્રહ્મણ્યુપરતઃ શાન્તઃ નિરિન્ધન ઇવાનલઃ ।

અહેતુકદયાસિન્ધુર્બન્ધુરાનમતાં સતામ્ ॥ VC (32, 33).

The inquirer of truth should approach a wise preceptor, who confers emancipation from bondage; one who is versed in the Vedas, sinless, unsmitten by desire and a knower of brahman par excellence, who has withdrawn himself into brahman; who is calm, like the fire that has

consumed its fuel, who is a boundless reservoir of mercy that knows no reason, and a friend of all good people who prostrate themselves before him.

Sri Vedanta Desika similarly gives a detailed description of the qualities of a guru in his Nyasa Vimsati. He says:

सिद्धं सत्संप्रदाये स्थिरधियमनघं श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठं  
सत्त्वस्थं सत्यवाचं समयनियतया साधुवृत्त्या समेतम् ।  
दम्भासूयादिमुक्तं जितविषयगणं दीर्गबन्धुं दयालुं  
स्मामित्ये शासितारं स्व-पर-हितपरं देशिकं भूषणभीप्सेत् ॥

“One who desires to attain liberation should strive to have a spiritual teacher possessing the following qualities. He must be well versed in established tradition, should have a strong mind, flawless, well versed in the vedas, full of devotion to the Lord and full of sattva guna. He must be truthful, conduct himself in accordance with the prescribed codes of the given system, should be free from arrogance and jealousy, should have control over his senses and should be one of enduring relationship. He must be full of compassion, should correct the errors, and should be a well-wisher of himself and others.”

It is clear that a person possessing such exceptional qualifications will indeed be a rare phenomenon.

**IMPORTANCE OF THE GURU.** The summum bonum of human life is liberation. This is got by removal of wrong understanding about ourselves (known as ajnanam). When the ajnanam is removed our Self shines in all its glory. The knower goes beyond sorrow, repeated birth and death cycle. We saw that a guru's guidance is required in this learning process. Thus the role of the guru is important and cannot be described adequately in words. Our scriptures say that one is not easily blessed with a guru in his life time. They say that the human birth is rare and very valuable as only humans are endowed with

discrimination to set their goals and the intelligence to work towards achieving them. Animals are driven by instinct. They cannot set any goal for themselves. Thus only a human being can understand the value of his life and work to reach the ultimate goal. It will indeed be the height of folly if this important point is not understood, but the life is allowed to drift or spent simply in pursuit of material pleasures (which we saw earlier are only ephemeral). Such pleasures that gratify the senses are sought by even animals. So if one keeps himself busy working for them he degrades himself and wastes his precious life. Lord Rishabha Deva stresses this point in His advice to His sons.

નાયં દેહો દેહભાજં નૃલોકે કષ્ટાન્ કમાનર્હતે વિદુભુજાં યે ।

તપો દિવ્યં પુત્રકા યેન સત્ત્વં શુદ્ધ્યેત્ યસ્માત્ બ્રહ્મસૌખ્યં ત્વનન્તમ્ ॥

BH (5-5-1).

This human body does not deserve to be given up to (the pursuit of) sensuous pleasures, which are (really) a source of misery and are enjoyed even by swine, dogs and other animals (that feed on ordure). It is worthy of being devoted to sublime austerities (pursuit of knowledge) whereby the mind is purified; and from the purity of mind follows the unending bliss of absorption into the Absolute. Thus getting a human birth is difficult, thereto yearning for liberation and most difficult is getting a qualified guru to guide one. These are got by divine grace only. Sri Sankaracharya points this out. VC(3).

દુર્લભં ત્રયમેતદેવનુગ્રહહેતુકમ્ ।

મનુષ્યત્વં મુમુક્ષુત્વં મહાપુરુષસંશ્રયઃ ॥

Yama, the god of death tells the same thing to his disciple Nachiketa. KU(1-2-7).

શ્રવણાયાપિ બહુભિર્યો ન લભ્યઃ શૃણ્વન્તોઽપિ બહવો યં ન વિદ્યુઃ ।

આશ્ચર્યો વક્તા કુશલોઽસ્ય લબ્યાઽઽશ્ચર્યો જ્ઞાતા કુશલાનુશિષ્ઠઃ ॥

That which many people do not have the opportunity to hear; that which many people do not understand even after hearing; the teacher of such a subject is indeed rare; the gainer of this is rare; and well versed; that who is taught by a realised great soul and thus the knower of this subject is also very rare.

Therefore, if anyone, who has got all the three gifts of god, fails to take full advantage of them, such a one is indeed the most ignorant and unfortunate. Krishna states this clearly in His advice to Uddhava. BH(11-20-17).

नृदेडमाद्यं सुलभं सुदुर्लभं प्लवं सुकल्पं गुरुकर्णधारम् ।  
मथानुकूलेन नभस्वतेरितं पुमान्मवाब्धिं न तरेत्स आत्मदा ॥

Getting the first and foremost requisite, a human body which is like a strong boat - so difficult to secure, with the guru as the helmsman, and propelled by Me as a favourable wind - with such means as these, the man who does not strive to cross the ocean of samsara, is verily a suicide. It is the guru who has to help the disciple to get rid of his ignorance. The Guru Gita defines the word guru thus:

गुकारश्चान्धकारो ऽि रुकारस्तेज उच्यते । अज्ञानग्रासकं ब्रह्म  
गुरुरेव न संशयः ॥ (1-32)

The letter “gu” denotes darkness. The letter “ru” denotes light. There is no doubt that guru is the very same brahman that dispels ignorance.

गुकारश्चान्धकारस्तु रुकारस्तन्निरोधकृत् ।  
अन्धकारविनाशित्वात् गुरुरित्यभिधीयते ॥ (1-33)

The letter “gu” denotes darkness. The letter “ru” dispels it. Since the guru dispels darkness (ignorance) he got the name.

Our scriptures accord a very high place to the guru and emphatically state he is Brahman Itself. The Taittiriya Upanishad commands that one should venrate the teacher as God. आचार्यं देवो भव । The popular verse given below confirms this notion.

ગુરુબ્રહ્મા ગુરુવિષ્ણુઃ ગુરુદેવો મહેશ્વરઃ ।  
ગુરુરેવ પરં બ્રહ્મ તસ્મૈ શ્રી ગુરુવે નમઃ ॥

“My guru is Brahma, my guru is Vishnu, my guru is Maheswara - the god of gods. My guru is verily the Supreme Brahman. Salutations to that guru.”

The guru invests the disciple with knowledge about himself: thus creates a new person out of him and in this process he is like Brahma the creator. The guru holds the disciple's hand during the learning process and watches over his progress and nurtures him with tender care like a mother bird would its chicks. In this way he takes on the role of Vishnu the sustainer. The guru destroys the disciple's ignorance and along with it his imagined limitations and misery. In this way the guru is like Siva. By taking on all the three roles the guru is verily the Brahman itself.

In fact “guru” is one of the names of the Lord. ગુરુઃ - સર્વવિદ્યાનાં ઉપદેષ્ટત્વાત્ ગુરુઃ । Vishnu Sahasranama.(209). It is also one of the names of Siva. Navaratnamala says that Devi Herself appears as the guru and shows the way to attain the goal.

દેશિકરૂપેણ દર્શિતાભ્યુદયામ્ । One of Sri Lalitha's names is ગુરુમૂર્તિઃ । ગુરુરેવ મૂર્તિઃ શરીરં યસ્યાઃ ।

તામિચ્છાવિગ્રહાં દેવીં ગુરુરૂપાં વિભાવયે દિતિ નિત્યાહુદયેપિ ।

Lalitha Sahasranama (603).

Because of these reasons our tradition insists that one should show utmost respect to his guru; treat him on a par with God Himself and never show disrespect to him. In the Taittiriyaopanishad we saw the teacher admonishing the student આચર્યદેવો ભવ । Venerate your acharya as a deity. Krishna teaches this to His disciple Uddhava in His last message.

આચાર્ય માં વિજાનીયાત્રાવમન્થેત કર્ણિચિત્ ।

ન મર્ત્યબુદ્ધ્યાસૂચેત સર્વદેવમયો ગુરુઃ ॥ BH (11-17-27).

One should know the teacher to  
be My own self and never disregard or look down upon him as a man;  
for the teacher is the personification of all gods. He advises Arjuna  
also the same thing. BG(4-34).

तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन पश्चिप्रेन सेवया ।  
उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥

“Know it (superior wisdom) by means of obeisance, exhaustive  
questionings and service to the teacher. Knowers who have realised  
the truth will impart to you that knowledge.”

One can never repay the debt one owes to the guru. The kindly guru  
also does not expect anything from the disciple. The only way in  
which the latter can show his gratitude to his guru is by serving him  
with dedication. Krishna says this in His advice to Uddhava.

शुश्रूषभाण आचार्यं सद्योपासीत नीयवत् । BH (11-17-29).The  
disciple should always worship the teacher and serve him as a  
dedicated servant. The guru is won over by his humility and teaches  
the supreme vidya. Sri Sankaracharya advises us to have devotion to  
the guru and free ourselves from the grip of this world. (Bhaja  
Govindam). (18). गुरुचरणलुब्ध-निर्भरभक्तः  
संसार-दयिराद्भव मुक्तः ।

One can also think of another reason for offering worship and service  
to the guru. Prahlada talks of nine features that mark devotion to  
the Lord. These are:

श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पादसेवनम् ।  
अर्थनं वन्दनं दास्यं सप्यमात्मनिवेदनम् ॥ BH(7-5-23).

- (1)To hear the names, praises and stories of the Lord,
- (2) chanting them,
- (3) to remember Him as well as His names and stories,
- (4) to wait upon Him,

- (5) to offer worship,
- (6) offering service to Him,
- (7) to dedicate one's actions to Him,
- (8) to cultivate friendship with Him, and
- (9) total surrender (of body and belongings) to Him.

It is clear that till one gains knowledge of Self and as a result the term “worship” takes on a different colour, one has to continue the worship of the Lord using some representation like an icon or a picture as most of the people do. In such a case how can one practise some of the forms listed above such as (1) waiting upon Him, (2) offering service to Him, (3) to cultivate friendship with Him and (4) total surrender to Him? The answer is, that with one's guru being there as the personification of the Lord one can meaningfully wait upon him, offer service to him, cultivate friendship and also totally surrender to him. Arjuna was lucky in that he could have friendship with Krishna and also surrender to Him at the time of the KurukShetra war. But one need not consider oneself less lucky as he has his guru whom he can serve and worship. It is, in all respects same as serving the Lord Himself.

Sri Sankaracharya says that there is nothing in the three worlds that can be compared with the guru.

Can one compare one's guru with the fabled philosopher's stone that is said to be capable of converting base metals into gold? No, says he; because a piece of gold thus obtained by conversion cannot convert another piece of iron into gold. But the guru blesses the disciple who had taken refuge in his feet with his own natural state. In other words the guru not only transforms his disciple into a knower but also confers on him the capability to transform another into a knower.

દૃષ્ટાન્તો નૈવ દૃષ્ટસ્ત્રિભુવનજઠરે સદ્ગુરોઽર્જુનદાતુઃ



સ્પર્શશ્ચેત્તત્ર કલ્યઃ સ નયતિ યદ્દહો સ્વર્ણતામશ્મસારમ્ ।  
 ન સ્પર્શત્વં તથાપિ શ્રિતચરણયુગે સદુરોસ્સ્વીયશિષ્યે  
 સ્વીયં સામ્યં વિધતે ભવતિ નિરુપમસ્તેન વા લૌકિકોડપિ ॥  
 (Shatashloki)

It is like the case of a lamp lit from another lamp. What would be the difference between the two? The second lamp also can light other lamps; thus there is no difference at all between them. Kalidasa says this: પ્રવર્તિતો દીપ ઇવ પ્રદીપાત્. (Raghuvamsam. 5-37).

From the above facts we derive that if one is blessed with the guru's grace, then ipso facto the Lord's grace follows. Great acharyas like Sri Vedanta Desika and Sri Sankaracharya who knew this truth have said that it is enough that they have got their guru's grace and so do not worry about getting the Lord's grace. Tamil saints like Tirumular have spoken at length on the greatness of the guru and the need to worship him. Let us see an example of what wise men have to say about the glory of the teachings of the guru. The sage minister Shukanasa said this in his advice to the prince Chandrapida. (Kadambari). There is delightful punning on words in this passage which one with knowledge of sanskrit will be able to enjoy. ડરતિ ચ સકલં અતિમલિનમપ્યન્યકારમિવ દોષજાતં

પ્રદોષસમયનિશાકર ઇવ । ગુરુપદેશઃ પ્રશમહેતુર્વયઃ પરિણામ  
 ઇવ પલિતરૂપેણ શિરસિજજાલમમલીકુર્વન્  
 ગુણરૂપેણ તદેવ  
 પરિણમયતિ । ગુરુપદેશશ્ચ નામ  
 પુરુષાણ-મખિલ-મલપ્રક્ષાલનક્ષમ-મજલં સ્નાનમ્,  
 અનુપજાત-પલિતાદિવૈરુઘ્યમજરં વૃદ્ધત્વમ્,  
 અનારોપિત-મેદોદોષં ગુરુકરણમ્, અસુવર્ણવિરચનમગ્રામ્યં  
 કર્ણભરણમ્, અતીતજ્યોતિરાલોકઃ, નોદ્ભગકરઃ પ્રજાગરઃ ।

The teachings of the guru dispel even the densest of darkness (ignorance) just as the rising moon. Just like the onset of old age

(maturity) converts the darkness of the hair white (whiteness stands for purity), so also the teachings make the turbulent sense organs pure by making them calm. They constitute a bath sans water that washes away all the (internal) impurities; they confer maturity (respectfulness) without the grey hair and other such disfigurements that mark onset of the old age; they make one weighty without the defect of obesity; they are adornments to the ears not made of artificial golden ornaments; they illumine without light; they awaken without disturbing or upsetting one.

Now let us study the verses proper.

## ॥ ગુર્વષ્ટકમ્ ॥

શરીરં સુરૂપં તથા વા કલત્રં યશઃશ્ચારુ ચિત્રં ધનં મેરુતુલ્યં ।  
મનઃશ્ચેત્ત લગ્નં ગુરોરઙ્ગિપદ્મે તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિમ્ ॥ ૧ ॥

શરીરમ્ = the body. સુરૂપમ્ = handsome. તથા વા = as  
also. કલત્રમ્ = the wife (beautiful). યશઃ = fame.  
ચારુ ચિત્રં = agreeable and pleasing. ધનં =  
wealth. મેરુતુલ્યમ્ comparable to Meru the golden mountain .  
ગુરોઃ = guru's. અઙ્ગિપદ્મે = lotus like foot. મનઃ =  
the mind. ન લગ્નમ્ ચેદ્ = if not attached. તતઃ કિમ્? =  
then what is the use? તતઃ કિમ્? = then what is the use?  
તતઃ કિમ્? = then what is the use? તતઃ કિમ્? = then what  
is the use?

Meaning of the verse. One may be blessed with a handsome body, beautiful wife, great fame and immense wealth. But what is the use of these things if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru?

The implication is that they are of no use. The repition of the question “what is the use?” four times stresses the point. The second

line is the same in all the eight verses.

કલત્રં ધનં પુત્રપૌત્રાદિ સર્વં ગૃહં બાન્ધવાઃ સર્વમેતદ્ધિ જાતમ્ ।  
મનશ્ચેન્ન લગ્નં ગુરોરુદ્ધિપદ્મે તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિમ્ ॥ ૨ ॥

કલત્રં = wife. ધનં = wealth. પુત્રપૌત્રાદિ સર્વં =  
son, grandson and all that. ગૃહં = house.

બાન્ધવાઃ = relatives. સર્વં એતદ્ધિ જાતં all these that are  
available. Second line is same as in verse No. 1.

Meaning of the verse. One may be having wife, wealth, son, grandson,  
relatives etc. But what is the use of these things if one's mind is  
not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru?

In the above two verses wife (husband included), children and money  
have been mentioned twice. This is because one is strongly attached to  
them. Attachment follows desire. Desire is for something one does not  
have. One desires to have something because one feels that thing will  
give happiness, comfort or security. Such things include wealth,  
family, friends, house etc. Having got them one holds on to them.  
This is called attachment. The utmost attachment is, of course for  
one's body. Every one wants the body to remain ever young and to last  
for ever - knowing very well that this wish is unnatural and so can  
never be had. Scriptures talk of three attachments; one towards the  
husband/wife, one towards the children and lastly the one towards  
wealth. The attachment, when it grows strong and becomes intense  
clouds one's judgement and makes one to act in unpredictable ways.  
Prahlada had talked about attachment. He said that it is impossible  
for a person who has not got control over his senses to free himself  
from the attachment to his home. BH(7-6-9).

કો ગૃહેષુ પુમાન્ સક્તામાત્માનમજિતેન્દ્રિયઃ ।  
સ્નેહપાશૈર્દૈર્બદ્ધમુત્સહેત વિમોચિતુમ્ ॥

The attachment to money, for example, can make one to sacrifice even  
one's life for it. He had given three examples - of a thief, a

soldier and a merchant.

કો ન્વર્થતૃષ્ણાં વિશુજેત્ પ્રાણોભ્યોઽપિ ચ ઈક્ષિતઃ । ચં

પ્રીણાત્યસુભિઃ પ્રેષ્ટૈસ્તસ્કરઃ સેવકો વણિક્ ॥ BH(7-6 10).

A thief will not hesitate to commit a murder or risk his own life to get at money. He may try to snatch a gold chain from the neck of a child and if necessary be ready to strangle the child to take the chain. For him a golden chain is more valuable than the life of a child. Next, a soldier goes to the battle and stakes his life - only to earn some money in return. Lastly, a merchant will take many risks and go to strange and far off places to earn money.

ષડ્ગાદિવેદો મુખે શાસ્ત્રવિદ્યા કવિત્વાદિ ગદ્યં સુપદ્યં કરોતિ ।

મનશ્ચેન્ન લગ્નં ગુરોરડ્ઘિપદ્મે તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિમ્ ॥ ૩ ॥

ષડ્ગાદિવેદઃ = veda with its six limbs. મુખે = in the mouth. શાસ્ત્રવિદ્યા as also the scriptural learning.

કવિત્વાદિ = intelligence and other qualitate. ગદ્યં = prose composition. સુપદ્યં well structured. કરોતિ = makes.

Second line is same as in verse No. 1.

The vedas have six members.that help in the correct pronunciation and interpretation of the text. They are:શિક્ષા = the science of proper articulation and pronunciation; ઇંદ્રિય = the science of prosody; વ્યાકરણં = grammar; નિરુક્તં = etymological explanation of difficult vedic words; જ્યોતિષં = astronomy and; કલ્પં = ritual or ceremonial.

શિક્ષાકલ્પો વ્યાકરણં નિરુક્તં ઇન્દ્રિયાં ચયઃ ।

જ્યોતિષામયનં ચૈવ વેદાઙ્ગાનિ ષડેવ તુ ॥

One may have thoroughly studied the vedas and its six branches; be able to reel off words of learned length and thundering sound from them and quote from the scriptures extensively. This may greatly impress an innocent audience and earn him accolades besides money. Similarly one may be able to compose great literary pieces - prose or

poetry. But these achievements will not help in gaining knowledge about the Self. The upanishads very emphatic about this.

नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लब्धो न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन । MU (3-2-3).

The knowledge about the Self can be had only at the feet of the guru. Till it is got all the learning one carries in his head can only be termed a burden. Sri Sankaracharya says this clearly.

वाग्वैभरी शब्दभरी शास्त्रव्याख्यानकौशलम् ।

वैदुष्यं विदुषां तद्गद्गुक्तये न तु मुक्तये ॥

Loud speech consisting of a shower of words, the skill in expounding the scriptures, and likewise erudition - these may bring in some money or fame and as a result some joy to the scholar; but they are of no use in gaining liberation. VC(69).

Bhartruhari also says this in his Vairagaya Satakam. He asks what is the use of studying vedas, smritis, puranas, extensive shastras or the maze of ceremonials? They may take us to heaven. One may stay there for a long time ; but the stay is not permanent . As soon as one's stock of merit that has taken him to the place is exhausted he is flung back to earth to take birth again. MokSha or liberation is the only thing that will guarantee escape from rebirth.

किं वेदैः स्मृतिभिः पुराणपठनैः शास्त्रधर्मडाविस्तरैः

स्वर्गाग्रामकुटीनिवासकृतैः कर्मक्रियाविभ्रमैः ।

मुक्त्यैकं भवद्गुःकमारयथनाविध्वंसकालानलं

स्वात्मानन्दपदप्रवेशकलनं शेषैर्विज्ञिगृत्तिभिः ॥

Meaning of the verse. One might have thoroughly studied the vedas with its six limbs, mastered the scriptures and be able to compose wonderful poetry and prose pieces. But what is the use of these things if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru?

विदेशेषु भान्यः स्वदेशेषु धन्यः सदाचारवृत्तेषु भक्तो न यान्यः ।

भनश्चेन्न लग्नं गुरोरङ्घ्रिपद्मे ततः किं ततः किं ततः किं ततः किम् ॥ ४ ॥

વિદેશેષુ = in the foreign countries. માન્યઃ = respected. સ્વદેશેષુ = in his own country. ધન્યઃ = wealthy, fortunate. સદાચારવૃત્તેષુ = in the virtual or moral conducts or in observing traditional observances. મત્તઃ = proud or arrogant. ન ચ અન્યઃ = none like him. Second line is same as in verse No. 1.

One may be honoured in other countries and also be respected in his own country. He may be virtuous and follow the prescribed duties as per custom. But they cannot help in gaining the knowledge of the Self. Works prescribed by the scriptures when properly done lead to the purification of the mind. Knowledge can be had only by enquiry under the guidance of the guru. Sri Sankaracharya says: VC(11)

ચિત્તસ્ય શુદ્ધયે કર્મ ન વસ્તુપલબ્ધયે ।  
વસ્તુસિદ્ધિર્વિચારેણ ન કિંચિત્કર્મકોટિભિઃ ॥

Meaning of the verse. One may be respected in his own country as well as in other countries. He may also be known to be a follower of duties as prescribed by tradition. But what is the use of these things if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru?

ક્ષમામણસે ભૂપભૂપાલવૃન્દૈઃ સદા સેવિતં યસ્ય પાદારવિન્દમ્ ।  
મનશ્ચેન્ન લગ્નં ગુરોરુદ્ઘ્રિપદ્મે તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિમ્ ॥ ૫ ॥

ક્ષમામણસે = in this great globe/earth. ભૂપભૂપાલવૃન્દૈઃ = by many kings and rulers. સદા સેવિતં = always served, attended. યસ્ય પાદારવિન્દમ્ = whose lotus like foot. Second line same as in verse No.1.

One may be very great and exalted. Kings may wait at his feet. But wise men do not attach any importance to such a person if he carries only a crown and not knowledge of Self on his head. Sri Vedanta Desika refers to kings who are puffed up with pride with contempt in

his Vairagya panchakam. He says a king never rules over the entire world but only a small portion of it. But even this is enough to make him proud. Sri Desika says he does not care for them but is determined to worship the Lord who, in return for a handful of pounded rice, made Kuchela rich as Kubera himself.

क्षोणीकोशतांश-पालन-कलादुर्वारगर्वानल-  
क्षुब्धत्क्षुद्रनरेन्द्र यादुरयना धन्यान् न मन्यामहे ।  
देवं सेवितुमेव निश्चिनुमहे योऽसौ दयालुः पुरा  
दानामुष्टिमुये कुयेलमुनये दत्ते स्म वित्तेशताम् ॥

Bhartruhari says the same thing in his Vairagya Satakam. This verse is addressed by a yati or sanyasi (one who has renounced the world) to a king. The yati speaks of the vanity of the king's possessions, and declares that a yati is greater than a king. The reason is that a king may be rich in wealth but the yati is rich in wisdom aquired at the feet of his preceptor.

त्वं राजा वयमप्युपासितगुरुप्रज्ञाभिमानोन्नतः  
प्यातस्त्वं विभवैर्यशांसि कवयो दिक्षु प्रतन्वन्ति नः ।  
एतत् मानधनातिदूरमुभयोरध्यावयोरन्तरं  
यद्यस्मासु पराङ्मुषोऽसि वयमप्येकान्ततो निःस्पृहाः ॥

The yati says that if the king chooses to be cold towards him, he too is perfectly indifferent towards the king!

Meaning of the verse. One may be very powerful and kings may wait at his feet. But what is the use of these things if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru?

यशो मे गतं दिक्षु दानप्रतापाजगद्भस्तु सर्वं करे यत्प्रसादात् ।  
मनश्चेन्न लग्नं गुरोरङ्घ्रिपद्मे ततः किं ततः किं ततः किं ततः किम् ॥ ६ ॥

मे यशः = my fame. दानप्रतापात् = by the glory of the gifts. दिक्षु = in all directions. गतं = gone or is spread.  
यत् प्रसादात् = by whose favour or condescension. सर्वं  
जगत्त्वस्तु = all the things in this world. करे = in hand.

Second line as in verse No. 1.

The same idea as in the previous couple of verses is restated for emphasis.

Meaning of the verse. One may claim that by his charities and gifts his fame has spread in all directions and nothing in this world is not obtainable by him. But what is the use of these things if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru?

So far the poet has been talking of a person who has attachment to wealth, home, family, fame etc. In the next two verses he says that what is said is equally applicable to one who claims to have shed such attachments.

ન ભોગે ન યોગે ન વા વાજિરાજૈ ન કાન્તામુખે નૈવ વિત્તેષુ ચિત્તમ્ ।  
મનશ્ચેન્ન લગ્નં ગુરોરુદ્ધિપદે તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિમ્ ॥ ૭ ॥

ચિત્તં = (my) mind (is) ન ભોગે = is not in enjoying  
sensuory pleasures. ન વા વાજિરાજૈ = not in either horses or in  
being a king. ન કાન્તામુખે = not in (looking at) my wife's face;  
(ie)., not having attachment to wife, child, and other members of the  
family. નૈવ વિત્તેષુ = never in wealth. Even if one makes such  
a claim; which implies that he has got detachment, what is the use of  
this if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru?

Meaning of the verse. Even if one has developed intense aversion to  
worldly possessions and relations, such a detachment is of no use if  
one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru?

અરણ્યે ન વા સ્વસ્ય ગૃહે ન કાર્યે ન દેહે મનો વર્તતે મે ત્વનર્થ્યે ।  
મનશ્ચેન્ન લગ્નં ગુરોરુદ્ધિપદે તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિં તતઃ કિમ્ ॥ ૮ ॥

મે મનઃ = my mind. ન વર્તતે = does not dwell on.  
અરણ્યે = (living in the) forest or વા સ્વસ્ય ગૃહે = (living  
in) my own house. ન કાર્યે = not in indulging in prescribed  
activities. ન દેહે = or my body. તુ અનર્થ્યે = not to  
invaluable or priceless things. Second line as in verse No.1.

Meaning of the verse. Even if one claims that his mind is not



attached to forests, or house, or his own body or even wealth such a detachment is of no use if one's mind is not attached to the lotus like foot of the guru?

Now the poet concludes after mentioning the ફલશ્રુતિ: or benefit of reciting the poem. They are stated so that one will develop deep interest in studying the poem, mull over the contents and in due course accept and act on them (ie.) develop devotion to his guru. This devotion will, in due course bear fruit.

ગુરોરશ્લોકં યઃ પઠેત્પુણ્યદેહી યતિર્ભૂપતિર્બ્રહ્મચારી ચ ગેહી ।  
લભેદ્વાઞ્ચિતાર્થં પદં બ્રહ્મસંજ્ઞં ગુરોરુક્તવાક્યે મનો યસ્ય લગ્નમ્ ॥ ૯ ॥

ગુરોઃ અશ્લોકં = the composition consisting of eight verses on the guru. પુણ્યદેહી = one who has done meritorious deeds. યઃ પઠેત્ = if he reads. યતિઃ = be he a sanyasi (ascetic). ભૂપતિઃ = a king. બ્રહ્મચારી = a student studying under a teacher. ચ ગેહી = or a householder. He will લભેત્ = get. વાઞ્ચિતાર્થં = desired goal. બ્રહ્મસંજ્ઞં પદં = the status known as brahman. ગુરુરુક્તવાક્યે = in the teachings of the guru. યસ્ય = whose. મનઃ = mind. લગ્નં = is attached.

Meaning of the verse. Any one whose mind dwells on the teaching's of his guru, be he a king or an ascetic or a bachelor who is studying or a householder reads these verses regularly he will, by the grace of his guru, get his wishes fulfilled in this world and also attain the highest goal known as mokSha.

CONCLUSION. The human birth is rare. One gets it after many inferior births as birds, animals, insects etc. Such inferior births are meant solely for reaping the consequence of their past deeds. One who has got such a birth cannot make any conscious effort to gain spiritual progress. Only the one who has been blessed with a human birth has the discrimination to distinguish between what is good for him and

what is not; what is temporary and what is permanent. Having found this, he alone (not the animals, insects or birds) can set his goal and make efforts to get at it. In this the Lord has been very kind to give us scriptures that discuss about the goals. He has also sent us many acharyas who, out of immense mercy, talked at great length on this subject and answered every possible question one may have. It is up to us to study them and make the best of the precious human life. If we were to miss the chance we cannot say with certainty what our next birth will be. The Kenopanishad (2-5) says that if one fails to make a sincere attempt to attain the goal of life he makes a grave error. The loss is inestimable.

ઇહ ચેદવેદીદથ સત્યમસ્તિ ન ચેદિહાવેદીન્મહતી વિનષ્ટિઃ ।

Thus the only way to make our life meaningful (that is to avoid sorrow and miseries) is to pursue the spiritual path in this life itself with the guidance of a guru. One has to hold on to his teachings with absolute faith and serve him sincerely knowing he is the very personification of the Lord.

॥ ૐ તત્સત્ ॥

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*Gurvashtakam with meaning*

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Please send corrections to [sanskrit@cheerful.com](mailto:sanskrit@cheerful.com)

