
Gurvashtakam with meaning

సార్థ గుర్వష్టకమ్

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Transliterated by : N.Balasubramanian bbalu at satyam.net.in

Proofread by : N.Balasubramanian bbalu at satyam.net.in

Translated by : N.Balasubramanian bbalu@satyam.net.in

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Send corrections to : sanskrit@cheerful.com

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Commentary by N. Balasubramanian

This work consisting of eight verses and one more known as ఫలశ్రుతిః 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 be 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: Srimad 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. అహమాత్మా గుడాకేశ సర్వభూతాశయస్థితః । 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.

శ్రోత్రస్య శ్రోత్రం మనసో మనో యద్వాచో హ వాచః స ఉ ప్రాణస్య ప్రాణః ।
చక్షుషశ్చక్షురతిముచ్య ధీరాః ప్రేత్యాస్మాల్లోకాదమృతాభవన్తి ॥
(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.

న తత్ర చక్షుర్గచ్ఛతి న వాగ్గచ్ఛతి నో మనో(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: యేనేదఁ సర్వం విజానాతి తం కేన విజానీయాత్, విజ్ఞాతారమరే కేన విజానీయాత్ (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:

న జాయతే మ్రియతే వా కదాచిన్నాయం భూత్వా భవితా వా న భూయః ।
అజో నిత్యః శాశ్వతోఽయం పురాణో న హన్యతే హన్యమానే శరీరే ॥
BG (2-20).

It is same as the Supreme Being itself. Krishna says this in Gita :
మమైవాంశో జీవతోకే జీవభూతః సనాతనః । 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. సత్యం జ్ఞానమనంతం బ్రహ్మ । (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 వివేకః -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 vairagyaం వైరాగ్యమ్. 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 ముముక్షుత్వమ్. Coming up to this stage is a rare phenomenon says Krishna. మనుష్యాణాం

సహస్రేషు కశ్చిద్యతతి సిద్ధయే । 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.

న సాంపరాయః ప్రతిభాతి బాలం ప్రమాద్యన్తం విత్తమోహేన మూఢమ్ ।
అయం తోకో నాస్తి పర ఇతి మానీ పునః పునర్వశమాపద్యతే మే ॥ KU(1-2-6)

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

ఆవృతం జ్ఞానమేతేన జ్ఞానినో నిత్యవైరిణా ।
కామరూపేణ కౌన్తేయ దుష్పూరేణానతేన చ ॥ 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. ఏతస్యైవానందస్య అన్యాని భూతాని మాత్రాముపజీవంతి ।.(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

రాజవిద్యా. He says రాజ విద్యా రాజ గుహ్యం పవిత్రమిదముత్తమమ్ ।
ప్రత్యక్షావగమం ధర్మ్యం సుసుఖం కర్తుమవ్యయమ్ ॥ 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.

దేవ విద్యే వేదితవ్యే ఇతి హ స్మ యద్బ్రహ్మవిదో వదన్తి పరా చైవాపరా
చ । తత్రాపర ఋగ్వేదో యజుర్వేదః సామవేదోఽథర్వవేదః శిక్షా కల్పో
వ్యాకరణం నిరుక్తం ఛందో జ్యోతిషమితి । అథ పరా యయా
తదక్షరమధిగమ్యతే ॥ 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:

అపరా హి అవిద్యా సా నిరాకర్తవ్యా ।
తద్విషయే హి విదితే న కించిత్తత్త్వతో విదితం స్యాదితి ।

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.

యం లబ్ధ్వా చాపరం లాభం మన్యతే నాధికం తతః ।
యస్మిన్స్థితో న దుఃఖేన గురుణాపి విచాల్యతే ॥ 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.

అధ్యాత్మవిద్యా విద్యానామ్ । BG(10-32). It is the chief among all knowledges, because it leads to mokSha says Sri Sankaracharya in his commentary. అధ్యాత్మవిద్యా విద్యానాం మోక్షార్థత్వాత్ ప్రధానం అస్మి । 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. ఆచార్యుడేవ విద్యా విదితా సాధిష్ఠం ప్రాపయతి । (Chandogyopanishad). Then only the learning will be fruitful. తద్విజ్ఞానార్థం స గురుమేవాభిగచ్ఛేత్ । 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:

శాస్త్రజ్ఞోఽపి స్వాతంత్ర్యేణ బ్రహ్మజ్ఞానాన్వేషణం న కుర్యదిత్యేతత్ గురుమేవేత్యవధారణఫలమ్ ।

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:

భగవన్ కిముపాదేయమ్? గురువచనమ్ ।

Question: sir, what is to be accepted?

Answer: guru's teachings.

కో గురుః? అధిగతతత్త్వః, శిష్యహితాయోద్యతః సతతమ్ ॥

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.

శ్రోత్రియం బ్రహ్మనిష్ఠమ్ । 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.

న నరేణావరేణ ప్రోక్త ఏష సువిజ్ఞేయో బహుధా చిన్త్యమనః ।
అనన్యప్రోక్తే గతిరత్ర నాస్తి అణీయాన్ హ్యతర్క్యమణుప్రమాణాత్ ॥ 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 సన్తం మహాన్తం సముపేత్య దేసికం ।

The guru should be established in Brahman and exalted". VC (8).
What is meant by మహాన్ or exalted"? Lord Rishabha Deva defines an exalted soul or మహాన్ in the advice He gave to His sons before He renounced and left the kingdom.

మహాన్తస్య సమచిత్తాః ప్రశాన్తా విమన్యవః సుహృదః సాధవో యే ।
యే వా మయీశే కృత సౌహృదార్థా జనేషు దేహమ్భరవార్తికేషు ।
గృహేషు జాయాత్మజరాతిమత్సు న ప్రీతియుక్తా యావదర్థాశ్చ లోకే ॥
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 సాధవః or pious or saintly persons. Lord Kapila gives in detail the qualities of a sadhu in His advice to His mother Devahuti.

తితిక్షవః కారుణికాః సుహృదః సర్వదేహినామ్ ।
అజాతశత్రవః శాన్తాః సాధవః సాధుభూషణాః ॥
మయ్యనన్యేన భావేన భక్తిం కుర్వన్తి యే దృఢామ్ ।

మత్కృతే త్యక్తకర్మాణస్త్యక్తస్వజనబాన్ధవాః ॥

మదాశ్రయాః కథా మృష్టాః శృణ్వంతి కథయంతి చ ।

తపంతి వివిధాస్తాపా నైతాన్మృగతచేతసః ॥

త ఏతే సాధవః సాధ్వీ సర్వసంజ్ఞవివర్జితాః ।

సంజ్ఞేష్వపి తే ప్రార్థ్యః సంజ్ఞదోషహరా హి తే ॥

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.

ఉపసిదేద్గురుం ప్రాజ్ఞం యస్మాద్బంధవిమోక్షణమ్ ।

శ్రోత్రియోఽవృజి నోఽకామహతో యో బ్రహ్మవిత్తమః ।

బ్రహ్మణ్యపరతః శాస్త్రః నిరీగ్ధన ఇవానలః ।

అహేతుకదయాసిన్ధుర్బంధురానమతాం సతామ్ ॥ 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:

సిద్ధం సత్సంప్రదాయే స్థిరధియమనఘం శ్రోత్రియం బ్రహ్మనిష్ఠం
సత్త్వస్థం సత్యవాచం సమయనియతయా సాధువృత్త్యా సమేతమ్ ।
దమ్భాసూయాదిముక్తం జితవిషయగణం దీర్ఘబుద్ధం దయాలుం
స్థాలిత్యే శాసితారం స్వ-పర-హితపరం దేశికం భూష్టమీప్సేత్ ॥

“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 tha 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 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.

నాయం దేహో దేహభాజాం నృలోకే కష్టాన్ కమానర్హతే విడుభజాం యే ।
తపో దివ్యం పుత్రకా యేన సత్త్వం శుద్ధ్యేత్ యస్మాత్ బ్రహ్మసౌఖ్యం త్వనన్తమ్ ॥
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).

దుర్లభం త్రయమేతద్దేవనుగ్రహహేతుకమ్ ।
మనుష్యత్వం ముముక్షుత్వం మహాపురుషసంశ్రయః ॥

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

శ్రవణాయాపి బహుభిర్లో న లభ్యః శృణ్వంతోఽపి బహవో యం న విద్యుః ।
ఆశ్చర్యో వక్తా కుశలోఽస్య లభాఽఽశ్చర్యో జ్ఞాతా కుశలానుశిష్టః ॥

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).

న్యదేహమాద్యం సులభం సుదుర్లభం ప్లవం సుకల్పం గురుకర్తృధారమ్ ।
మయానుకూలేన నభస్వతేరితం పుమాన్భవాభిం న తరేత్స ఆత్మహా ॥

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:

గుకారశ్చాన్ధకారో హి రుకారస్తేజ ఉచ్యతే । అజ్ఞానగ్రాసకం బ్రహ్మ
గురురేవ న సంశయః ॥ (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.

గుకారశ్చాన్ధకారస్తు రుకారస్తన్నిరోధకృత్ ।
అన్ధకారవినాశితాత్ గురురిత్యభిధీయతే ॥ (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. ఆచార్య దేవో భవ । The popular verse given below confirms this notion.

గురుర్బ్రహ్మ గురుర్విష్ణుః గురుర్దేవో మహేశ్వరః ।
గురురేవ పరం బ్రహ్మ తస్మై శ్రీ గురవే నమః ॥

“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. గురుః - సర్వవిద్యానాం ఉపదేష్టృత్వాత్ గురుః । 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.

దేశికరూపేణ దర్శితాభ్యుదయామ్ । One of Sri Lalitha's names is గురుమూర్తిః । గురురేవ మూర్తిః శరీరం యస్యాః ।

తామిచ్ఛాచ్ఛిగ్రహం దేవీం గురురూపాం విభావయే దితి నిత్యాహృదయేపి ।
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 ఆచర్యదేవో భవ । Venerate your acharya as a deity. Krishna teaches this to His disciple Uddhava in His last message.

ఆచార్యం మాం విజానీయాన్నావమన్యేత కర్త్తవీత్ ।
న మర్త్యబుద్ధ్యాసూయేత సర్వదేవమయో గురుః ॥ 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).

తద్విద్ధి ప్రణిపాతేన పరిప్రత్నేన సేవయా ।
ఉపదేక్ష్యన్తి తే జ్ఞానం జ్ఞానినస్తత్త్వదర్శినః ॥

“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.

శుశ్రూషమాణ ఆచార్యం సదోపాసీత నీచవత్ । 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). గురుచరణాంబుజ-నిర్భరభక్తః
సంసార-దచిరాదృవ ముక్తః ।

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:

శ్రవణం కీర్తనం విష్ణోః స్మరణం పాదసేవనమ్ ।
అర్చనం వందనం దాశ్యం సఖ్యమాత్మనివేదనమ్ ॥ 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.

దృష్టాన్తో వైవ దృష్టస్త్రిభువనజరే సద్గురోరానదాతుః
 స్పర్శశ్చేత్తత్ర కల్ప్యః స నయతి యదహో స్వర్ణతామశ్మసారమ్ ।
 న స్పర్శత్యం తథాపి శ్రితచరణయుగే సద్గురోస్స్వయశిష్యే

స్వీయం సామ్యం విధత్తే భవతి నిరుపమస్తేన వా లౌకికోఽపి ॥

(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: ప్రవర్తితో దీప ఇవ ప్రదీపాత్. (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. హరతి చ సకలం అతిమలినమప్యన్ధకారమివ దోషజాతం

ప్రదోషసమయనిశాకర ఇవ । గురూపదేశః ప్రశమహేతుర్వయః పరిణామ ఇవ పలితరూపేణ శిరసిజజాలమమలీకుర్వన్

గుణరూపేణ తదేవ

పరిణమయతి । గురూపదేశశ్చ నామ

పురుషాణ-మఖిల-మలప్రక్షాలనక్షమ-మజలం స్నానమ్,

అనుపజాత-పలితాద్విరూప్యమజరం వృద్ధత్వమ్,

అనారోపిత-మేదోదోషం గురుకరణమ్, అనువర్ణవిరచనమగ్రామ్యం

కర్ణాభరణమ్, అతీతజ్యోతిరాలోకః, నోద్వేగకరః ప్రజాగరః ।

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.

॥ గుర్వష్టకమ్ ॥

శరీరం సురూపం తథా వా కలత్రం యశశ్చారు చిత్రం ధనం మేరుతుల్యం ।
మనశ్చేన్న లగ్నం గురోరజ్ఞిపద్మే తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిమ్ ॥ ౧॥

శరీరమ్ = the body. సురూపమ్ = handsome. తథా వా = as also. కలత్రమ్ = the wife (beautiful). యశః = fame.

చారు చిత్రం = agreeable and pleasing. ధనం = wealth. మేరుతుల్యమ్ comparable to Meru the golden mountain .

గురోః = guru's. అజ్ఞిపద్మే = lotus like foot. మనః = the mind. న లగ్నమ్ చేద్ = if not attached. తతః కిమ్? = then what is the use? తతః కిమ్? = then what is the use?
తతః కిమ్? = then what is the use? తతః కిమ్? = 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 repetition of the question "what is the use?" four times stresses the point. The second line is the same in all the eight verses.

కలత్రం ధనం పుత్రపౌత్రాది సర్వం గృహం బాన్ధవాః సర్వమేతద్ధి జాతమ్ ।

మనశ్చేన్న లగ్నం గురోరజ్ఞిపద్మే తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిమ్ ॥ ౨॥

కలత్రం = wife. ధనం = wealth. పుత్రపౌత్రాది సర్వం =
son, grandson and all that. గృహం = house.

బాన్ధవాః = relatives. సర్వం ఏతద్ధి జాతం 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).

కో గృహేషు పుమాన్ సక్తమాత్మానమజితేంద్రియః ।
స్నేహపాతైర్ధృతైర్బద్ధముత్సహేత విమోచితుమ్ ॥

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.

కో న్వర్థతృష్ణాం విసృజేత్ ప్రాణేభ్యోఽపి య ఈప్సితః । యం

ప్రీణాత్మసుఖిః ప్రేష్టైస్తస్కరః సేవకో వణిక్ || 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.

షడఙ్గాదివేదో ముఖే శాస్త్రవిద్యా కవిత్వాది గద్యం సుపద్యం కరోతి |
మనశ్చేన్న లగ్నం గుర్రోరజ్ఞిపద్మ తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిమ్ || 3||

షడఙ్గాదివేదః = veda with its six limbs. ముఖే = in the mouth. శాస్త్రవిద్యా as also the scriptural learning.

కవిత్వాది = intelligence and other qualitate. గద్యం = prose composition. సుపద్యం well structured. కరోతి = 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: శిక్షా = the science of proper articulation and pronunciation; ఛందస్ = the science of prosody; వ్యాకరణం = grammar; నిరుక్తం = etymological explanation of difficult vedic words; జ్యోతిషం = astronomy and; కల్పం = ritual or ceremonial.

శిక్షకతోప వ్యాకరణం నిరుక్తం ఛందస్సాం చయః |
జ్యోతిషామయనం వైవ వేదాఙ్గాని షడేవ తు ||

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.

నాయమాత్మా ప్రవచనేన లభ్యో న మేధయా న బహునా శ్రుతేన । 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.

వాగ్దైఖరీ శబ్దభరీ శాస్త్రవ్యాఖ్యానకౌశలమ్ ।
వైదుష్యం విదుషాం తద్వద్భక్తయే న తు ముక్తయే ॥

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.

కిం వేదైః స్మృతిభిః పురాణపఠనైః శాస్త్రఈర్మహావిస్తరైః
స్వర్గగ్రామకుటీనివాసఫలదైః కర్మక్రియావిభ్రమైః ।
ముక్త్యైకం భవదుఃకభారరచనావిధ్వంసకాలానలం
స్వాత్మానన్దపదప్రవేశకలనం శేషైర్వణిగ్స్వత్తిభిః ॥

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?

విదేశేషు మాన్యః స్వదేశేషు ధన్యః సదాచారవృత్తేషు మత్తో న చాన్యః ।
మనశ్చెన్న లగ్నం గురోరజ్ఞిపద్మే తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిమ్ ॥ ౪॥

విదేశేషు = in the foreign countries. మాన్యః =
respected. స్వదేశేషు = in his own country. ధన్యః =

wealthy, fortunate. సదాచారవృత్తేషు = in the virtual or moral conducts or in observing traditional observances. మత్తః = proud or arrogant. న చ అన్యః = 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)

చిత్తస్య శుద్ధయే కర్మ న వస్తూపలబ్ధయే ।
వస్తుసిద్ధిర్విచారేణ న కించిత్కర్మకోటిభిః ॥

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?

క్షమామణ్డలే భూపభూపాలవృన్తైః సదా సేవితం యస్య పాదారవిన్దమ్ ।
మనశ్చేన్న లగ్నం గురోరఙ్ఘ్రిపద్మే తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిమ్ ॥ ✕॥

క్షమామణ్డలే = in this great globe/earth. భూపభూపాలవృన్తైః = by many kings and rulers. సదా సేవితం = always served, attended. యస్య పాదారవిన్దమ్ = 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.

క్షోణీకోణశతాంశ-పాలన-కలాదుర్వారగర్వానల-
క్షుభ్యత్తుద్రనరేంద్ర చాటురచనా ధన్యాన్ న మన్యామహే ।
దేవం నేవితుమేవ నిశ్చినుమహే యోఽసౌ దయాలుః పురా
దానాముష్టిముచే కుచేలమునయే దత్తే స్మ విత్తేశతామ్ ॥

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 acquired at the feet of his preceptor.

త్వం రాజా వయమప్యపాసితగురుప్రజ్ఞాభిమానోన్నతాః
ఖ్యాతస్తవం విభవైర్యశాంసి కవయో దిక్షు ప్రతన్వంతి నః ।
ఇత్థం మానధనాతిదూరముభయోరప్యవయోరన్తరం
యద్యస్మాను పరాఙ్ముఖోఽసి వయమప్యేకాంతతో నిఃస్పృహః ॥

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?

యతో మే గతం దిక్షు దానప్రతాపాజ్జగద్వస్తు సర్వం కరే యత్ప్రసాదాత్ ।
మనశ్చేన్న లగ్నం గురౌరజ్ఞిపద్మే తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిమ్ ॥ ౬ ॥

మే యశః = my fame. దానప్రతాపాత్ = by the glory of the gifts. దిక్షు = in all directions. గతం = gone or is spread.
యత్ ప్రసాదాత్ = by whose favour or condescension. సర్వం
జగత్వస్తు = all the things in this world. కరే = 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.

న భోగే న యోగే న వా వాజిరాజౌ న కాంతాముఖే నైవ విత్తేషు చిత్తమ్ ।
మనశ్చేన్న లగ్నం గురోరజ్ఞిపద్మే తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిమ్ ॥ ౭॥

చిత్తం = (my) mind (is) న భోగే = is not in enjoying
sensuory pleasures. న వా వాజిరాజౌ = not in either horses or in
being a king. న కాంతాముఖే = not in (looking at) my wife's face;
(ie), not having attachment to wife, child, and other members of the
family. నైవ విత్తేషు = 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?

అరణ్యే న వా స్వస్య గేహే న కార్యే న దేహే మనో వర్తతే మే త్వనర్హ్యే ।
మనశ్చేన్న లగ్నం గురోరజ్ఞిపద్మే తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిం తతః కిమ్ ॥ ౮॥

మే మనః = my mind. న వర్తతే = does not dwell on.
అరణ్యే = (living in the) forest or వా స్వస్య గేహే = (living
in) my own house. న కార్యే = not in indulging in prescribed
activities. న దేహే = or my body. తు అనర్హ్యే = 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 ఫలశ్రుతిః 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.

గురోరష్టకం యః పఠేత్పుణ్యదేహీ యతిర్భూపతిర్బ్రహ్మచారీ చ గేహీ ।
లభేద్వాఞ్ఞోత్తార్థం పదం బ్రహ్మసంజ్ఞం గురోరుక్తవాక్యే మనో యస్య లగ్నమ్ ॥ ౯ ॥

గురోః అష్టకం = the composition consisting of eight verses on the

guru. పుణ్యదేహీ = one who has done meritorious deeds. యః

పఠేత్ = if he reads. యతిః = be he a sanyasi (ascetic).

భూపతిః = a king. బ్రహ్మచారీ = a student studying under a

teacher. చ గేహీ = or a householder. He will లభేత్ =

get. వాఞ్ఞోత్తార్థం = desired goal. బ్రహ్మసంజ్ఞం పదం =

the status known as brahman. గురోరుక్తవాక్యే = in the teachings of

the guru. యస్య = whose. మనః = mind. లగ్నం = 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.

ఇహ చేదవేదీదథ సత్యమస్తి న చేదిహోవేదీన్మహతీ వినష్టిః ।

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.

॥ ఓం తత్సత్ ॥

Written and encoded by N. Balasubramanian bbalu at satyam.net.in

Gurvashtakam with meaning

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Please send corrections to sanskrit@cheerful.com

