॥ आर्तिहरस्तोत्रम् सार्थ ॥

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Artiharastotram by Shri Shridhara Venkatesa.
This is a short poem consisting of nine verses. Herein the poet prays to Lord Shiva to remove the afflictions of the devotee. He asks if it is alright for the Lord not to respond to his prayers when He is reputed to protect those who even think of Him. Then he says that he is just the opposite of the Lord who is omnipotent and omniscient in that he is a weakling and ignoramus. How is it, he asks, that Lord has not taken pity on him. These verses are very moving in their appeal. The poem is a precious gem and the reader would like to add it to the collection of hymns they recite during their prayer.

बैगिन्मेदश्लोका

॥ अथ आर्तिहरस्तोत्रम् ॥
श्री श्रंभो मायि करुणाशिशिरां दृष्टि दिशान् सुधावृम्भिम् ॥
सन्तापमपाकुरुम मन्तापसमध तव द्यायाः स्याम् ॥ १ ॥
अवसीदामि यददतिर्मनुगणमिदमोक्षोऽसंखं खलु मे ॥
तव सच्चदीदामि यदन्तकशासन नततवामुगणम् ॥ २ ॥
देव स्मरंति तव वेदेषा स्मरतोऽधि नार्तिरितकीतितिम् ॥
कलयिसि शिव पाहिितकन्दन सीदाम्यह किमुचिितमिदम् ॥ ३ ॥
आदुदयाघुष्ठूः मामन्तोभिमिि्मसावभातमेिति ॥
आदुदयुजयसे माँ किभ्वूः तवकृपकपात्रमहम् ॥ ४ ॥
मन्दाष्टिः तव मायि करुणां घटिषिवं विबोनालम् ॥
आकृतूः तात्तु बलादल्मिह मद्वैयमिति समाधसिति ॥ ५ ॥
तव सवङ्गं दुः पुनर्खोऽवद्याममश्वरतमिति ॥
तव मायि दोषां गणयिि कि कथे तुदाति कि द्या नत्ताम् ॥ ६ ॥
आधितमालंतरं मामप्येक्षसे किमिति शिव न कि दयसे ॥
ध्रुतोगोः दीनार्तिहिदिति खलु शंसिति जगति सन्तस्ताम् ॥ ७ ॥
प्रहस्गरेतििवादी फणितमदर्श्य इति पातितो भवताः ॥
शिव पाहििति वदोऽहं श्रेयोऽहं कि कां कथं न पाल्यस्ते ॥ ८ ॥
The author of this poem, Shridhara Venkatesa was a great devotee. He took immense delight in chanting and singing the names of the Lord. One of the traits of a true devotee is his concern for the welfare of other beings. Krishna mentions (दया भूतेषु) compassion to others who are suffering, as one of the noble (दैवी संपत्) qualities that one should acquire to make spiritual progress. Great devotees like Shridhara have their minds firmly fixed in the Lord and so were not unduly worried about themselves. They knew that Lord will take care of their welfare. Thus, having been freed from worries about their own welfare, they show concern about the welfare of other beings.

They are moved by the sufferings and sorrows of others. Shri Shankaracharya points out this quality of the great people in Vivekachudamani (37). They have themselves obtained God’s grace and liberation. They are willing to help others also without any motive whatsoever. It is in their nature to do good to others. In this they are like the spring season.

The poet Shridhara who was a saintly person had done exactly this in this poem. Another popular verse from the Subhashita in praise of the hearts of good people says this with a nice example. Normally their hearts are compared to butter since, like the butter they easily melt. But the verse points
out that the comparison is not correct. The reason is that the butter melts only when it is exposed to heat. But the hearts of good people melt when they are exposed to other peoples’ sufferings. The sanskrit word for heat is tApa तापः and it also means distress. Thus there is a pun on the word tApa.

\begin{shlokab}
सजनस्य हृदयं नवनीतं इति यदद्वानिति कवयः तददीकम् ।
अन्यदेवविलस्यपपरिपातू सजनो द्रवति नो नवनीतम् ॥
\end{shlokab}

Keeping the helplessness of the vast number of people who have chosen to forget the Lord in their concern for their own well being, great saints and acharyas like Shridhara have composed short and long pieces of poems that show us the way to pray and seek His grace. The present piece is one such poem. This is a short poem consisting of nine verses. Herein the poet identifies himself with one such person - a weakling and an ignoramus - and consequently is afflicted with a variety of sorrows and prays to Lord Shiva to remove the afflictions. आर्तः means distress, affliction. Four types of people worship Me, says Krishna in Gita (BG-7-16). The first among them and the most common one is the distressed.

\begin{shlokab}
चतुर्विधा भजन्ते मा जना: सुकृतिनो:धृः । आर्तः जश्वासुरश्रव्या ज्ञानी च भरतष्ठ ॥
\end{shlokab}

The Lord welcomes all of them, calls them virtuous, and says He will respond to their prayers.

In this poem Shridhara appeals to the Lord for redressal of his sufferings. These verses are very moving in their appeal. The poem is a precious gem and the readers would like to add it to the collection of hymns they recite during their prayer. The translations given are not exact, but will convey the meaning of the verses. Brief notes have also been provided. Some verses from other great acharyas are also given to show the similarity in their thinking. Happily, some of the names used to address the Lord refer to both Shiva and Vishnu and so one can take the verses as appealing to either or both.

The following abbreviations are used in the notes.
1 - VS - Shri Vishnu Sahasranama with Shri Shankaracharya’s commentary.
2 - SS - Shri Shiva Sahasranama (from Padma Purana) known as Vedasara Sahasram
   with the commentary of HH Shri Paramashivendra Saraswati.
3 - LS - Shri Lalita Sahasranamam with the commentary of Shri Bhaskararaya.
4 - BG - Shrimad Bhagavadgita with Shri Shankaracharya’s commentary.
5 - BH - Shrimad Bhagavatam.
6 - AS - Atmarpanastuti by Shri Appayya DikShitar.
7 - SA - Shiva Ashtottarashata nama stotram with commentary “Shivstattva Rahasyam” by Shri Nilakanta DikShita.

बैगिनमेडश्लोका

॥ अथ आर्तिहरस्तोत्रम् ॥
श्री शंभो मयि करुणाशिष्यर्स् दृष्टि दिशन सुधावृत्तिम्।
सन्तापमूपकृतु मे मन्ता परमेश तव द्याया: स्याम् ॥ १ ॥

Endshlokab

Meaning: - O Lord Shambhu! please cast Your vision that is full of nectar like kindness on me and dispel my suffering. Then only will I understand the truth about Your kind nature.

Note: - The Lord is addressed as शंभुः - शं सुखं भावयित उत्थादयतीित शंभुः।
शिवंकर इत्यत:। “शिव एको भ्रेयः शिवंकरः” इति श्रुते:। SA(3) and VS(38).

“Shambhu” - the name means one who will remove distress and give happiness.

Since the poet says he is distressed and wants relief he addresses the Lord appropriately as Shambhu. How does one get distress? It is the consequence of sins committed by one in this or earlier births.

This will be experienced in the form of a variety of sufferings like getting an inferior birth, bad tendencies, sickness, death, being tossed into hell etc. Devotion to the Lord can make one escape these terrible sufferings. He is known as

बैगिनमेडश्लोका
भूरिभारार्तिहर्ता। अधिक असह्यःत्विनवारः ।
अविचारित: -रागद्वयभिनविवेश-पुर्णायापुष्य-मिश्रकरः
गर्भजनम-जरा-मरणस्वार:-नारकःख-रागद्वयादिरूप
संसार:-मोचकः। स्त्रक्षाल्या देवं मुच्यते सर्वपापेः। - इति। SS(563).

Endshlokab
Another of His names says He removes the sorrows of His devotees even when He is just thought of.

शोकनाशनः - स्मरितमाणेण भक्तानां शोकं नाशयतीित शोकनाशनः। (VS-632)

Next, the poet describes the eye sight of the Lord. The eyes are cooling, implying they are comforting. Just as the moon light is soothing and brings relief to people who have been scorched by the sun’s heat during the day time, the sight of the Lord’s eyes brings immense relief to the people who are suffering from a variety of causes. As said earlier the word तापः means both heat and affliction. So, the poet prays to the Lord to dispel his sufferings by casting His eyes on him. Shiva is the repository of mercy, compassion. Shiva’s sight is comforting because they are overflowing with compassion. He has many names that allude to His kindness.

Some of them are:- दयालुः - दयाशीलो दयालुः। SS (155).
कृपानिधि: - कृपा पदुः खप्रहाणेच्छा, तस्या निधिरित्यनेन सदा वर्त्तमानत्वमुक्तेभवति।।
तत्च्छववर्त श्रुतिप्रसिद्धम् “अहंनियं द्यसी विश्वमभुवम्। न वा अपीयो रुद्र तददिति” इति। sa (30).

The Navavarnaratnamala mentions that Shiva’s eyes are brimming with compassion and as a result are moist. क्षेत्रेक्षणमतिकृपयाः।

The Lord’s vision is also like nectar. The word अमृतं or “Nectar” is used to refer to anything that is extraordinarily lovely or beneficial. Nectar is reputed to be the drink of the gods and it confers on them freedom from sickness and old age. So, it is considered to be great. But it cannot confer immortality. The Gita says that the gods like Indra and Brahma will be reborn and come down to the earth when their quota of merit is expended. आद्रभवानानाः पूनरावितिनोऽजुः। BG(8-16)

But the sight from the Lord is incomparably superior to the nectar. The Lord is reputed to have most auspicious eyes as they can not only remove sorrows of His devotees, but also confer all that is good including immortality. So He has the name शुभेक्षणः - ईश्वरं दर्शनं यद्य शुभं शुभकरं, मुमुक्षुणां मोक्षार्थीं, भोगार्थीं, भोगं, सवर्नसन्देह-विच्छेदकारणं, पापिनां पावनं, हृदयमन्थोविच्छेदकरं,
Those eyes can give liberation to those who seek liberation, worldly pleasures to those who seek them, destroy the sins of the sinners, clarify all doubts, remove the knot of ignorance in the mind and dissolve the pile of accumulated karmas. Shri Lalita also has a name that implies this meaning. She is known as भवदावसुधावृिः। भवः संसार एव दावो बनवहि: तत्र्य शामकत्वात्सुधावृिः: पीयूषवषिमव। LS(741). She is like a shower of nectar that puts out the forest fire of cyclic existence (i.e) endless cycle of rebirth.

The question that arises now is what should one do to make the Lord look at him?

Should one have to try hard and do anything extraordinarily difficult to get His favour? NO. It is very easy to please Him. Krishna has said that He accepts with delight a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water offered by a devotee. BG(9-26).

Accordingly Shiva is pleased when He is offered some water or even some grass (like the panic grass considered sacred and fit for offering to deities). This is implied in His name. का्णयनिधि - का्णयं कृपा आस्मिनिधीयते इति का्णयनिधि। अतिसुलभ-चुनूक जल, दूर्दी, तुणवीकारण भोग-मोक्षप्रदत्वात। “दलं िकं िब्रमान्य चुलूकं जलमेव वा। यो दृश्ने नियमनासौ तस्मे दृश्ने जगव्यं” - इति।

शिवगीतायाम् || “घृिणन कपिदि” इति श्रुतः। SS(872).

The devotee Shri Appayya DikShitar regrets that even after knowing the fact that it is very easy to please the Lord with such simple offerings and get even salvation in return, he failed to worship Him as he was a slave to senses and consequently is hastening towards his downfall.

शिवगीतायाम्
The poet Shridhara accepts the fact that he had committed many sins in the following verse and totally surrenders to Him saying “I am Yours now.”

Meaning:- O Lord, I am suffering as the consequence of numerous sins committed by me. But, I am yours now. So, if I am suffering in this manner it does not behoove Your greatness.

Note:- It is clear that one should not commit acts of sin. But it is in human nature, an inborn weakness to commit sins. But we have heard of expiatory rites (known as प्रायाधित कर्माणि). Can not we resort to them and get rid of our sins? No, say the shastras. These rites like performing some sacrifices, giving alms and gifts to deserving people, going on pilgrimages etc., are no doubt efficacious and will wipe off the sins. But, they are not comparable to devotion to the Lord in efficiency. This fact is repeatedly stressed in Shri Bhagavatam.

These verses say that learning (studying texts), regulation of breath, kindliness, pilgrimages, gifts, repetition of mantras - none of these practices can purify the mind (that is smitten by likes, dislikes, anger etc.) so efficiently as the constant remembrance of the Lord. The reason is simple. These expiatory rites, while they are capable of removing some sins, do not make the mind give up its inherent tendencies (called vAsanA-s). The senses will continue to exert their pull, and consequently we will, before long, fall a victim to their wiles. Even wise persons are helpless as the senses are very powerful. Krishna points out this in Gita.(2-60).
The mind is powerfully influenced by evil tendencies inherited from previous births. So, attempts to restrain or mend its ways will not yield success easily.

This is discussed at length in Book six in the story of Ajamila. The King Parikshit brings up the point giving the example of an elephant. The elephant goes to a river for a bath. After enjoying a long bath, it gets out. On going to the bank of the river it will toss mud all over its body and get dirty again. Similarly, if the mind is left to itself, it will go in its old ways.

Then, is there no way to get rid of our sins? The only way is to tie the mind to God by developing devotion to Him. The sage Shuka answers this by narrating the story of Ajamila. A part of the story is a dialogue between the messengers of the Lord and messengers of Yama. The following verses are from the explanation given by the former about expiatory rites. The translation given is not exact but gives the meaning of the verses.

The process of expiation cannot be considered complete if one’s mind runs back to its evil ways after it is completed. Because of this reason, for those who want the eradication of the stock of their sins the uttering of the glory of the Lord is the only remedy since it undoubtedly purifies the mind.

The great sages have prescribed arduous and easy processes of expiation for the case of serious and small sins.
do no doubt get rid of the sins. But the vestige in the form of impressions which is traceable to the unrighteous acts remains. These impressions (vAsanA-s वासना) too are eradicated by devotion to the Lord’s feet. The Narayaneeyam states this succinctly as follows. (22-7).

The austerities like fasting etc., prescribed in the scriptures will destroy sins but not the impressions. But service to the Lord destroys both the sins and impressions.

Because of this fact, saints and acharyas have sought God’s mercy to overcome their problems with their minds. The great acharya Shri Vedanta Desika in his Nyasa Dasakam (8) pleads to the Lord and says “You have to forgive my sins and make them inoperative. And also please make sure I do not again indulge in such sinful activities in future. It is possible for You to do this as You are all powerful and known to be the reservoir of mercy.

Thus he shows the way to pray.

It is because of this fact that Lord is known as Hari - one who removes sins of those who surrender to Him.

Also as पापनाशकरः । लोकिकवैदिक-नामभि: कीर्तित: , तथा लोकिकवैदिकः सत्तोत्सुतः
		 तथा पदाश्शारादिभिः जस: पूजितश्र उमासहायतवादिरूपेण स्मृतो ध्यानेन वा पापनाशकरः । SS(355). Whether His names are uttered or praised by hymns or remembered by chanting mantras like the panchAkShara or worshipped or meditated upon He removes the sins. तवास्मि “I am yours now These words should at once bring to our mind the famous assurance of the Lord, in His incarnation as Rama, given when Vibhishana surrendered to Him. Rama proclaimed (Yuddha Kanda- 18-33):

सकृदेव प्रपन्नाय तवास्मीति च याचते । अभयं सर्वभूतेऽयो ददामेतु बर्तं मम ॥

“I assure security from all beings to him who comes to me once and asks for protection saying “I am yours. This is my vow.”
Shri Appayya DikShita also says “I am no doubt a sinner, easily yielding to sense pleasures, always transgressing the scriptural injunctions, petty minded, not having even a trace of merit and so on. But now I have surrendered at Your feet. It is not proper on Your part to ignore me now.”

Why does the poet say that his suffering does not behoove Shiva’s greatness? Shiva is addressed here by Shridhara as अन्तकशासनः one who controls Yama - the god of death. This implies that by getting His grace and protection one can escape even death as the sage Markandeya did. The fear of death is the worst suffering any living being can experience. But Yama himself is afraid of Lord Shiva. So Shiva has the names kAlakAla and Mrityunjaya.

Yama being the destroyer of everything is known as kAla. Even Yama is destroyed by Him and so Shiva is known as kAlakAla.
to suffering. I am crying “Shiva! save me!” and still continue to suffer. Is this proper?

Note:- As said earlier, Shiva has the name Hari. The name means that he removes the sins of even those whose hearts are loaded with evil tendencies.

SS(542). Thus the author should not have been exposed to suffering.

How to express the fact that “I have surrendered to You and am yours now?” This is answered by saying that I am crying and saying “Shiva, save me!” Keeping this idea in the mind, we have the habit of saying the following verse at the end of our daily puja or prayer

अन्त्यथा शरणं नारिति लक्ष्यं शरणं मम।
तस्मात् कानृष्यप्रभावेन रक्षं रक्षं महंधर।

‘O Lord, Maheshvara! I have no recourse other than You.
So, out of mercy, please protect me.’

बृहिष्णुपदश्लोका
आदिस्याधिकृतो मामन्त्याःगिर्मिस्वायत्तैः
आतिरिष्यात्सत्साहं मा किंतौ तवकृपैकपात्महं

Meaning:- You are my inner Self. This being so, it is clear that it is by Your inducement only I committed various sins and as the result am now suffering. What can I say in this matter? I deserve to be the receipient of Your grace. Note:- An important qualification of one who claims to be the Lord’s devotee is to desist from acts prohibited in the scriptures as wrong and sinful. The scriptures were given out by the Lord Himself. So, violating the scriptural injunctions amounts to disobeying His orders and as a result become a serious offence. This being so, how can one say ‘I am a sinner’ and claim to be a devotee and have surrendered to Him? The author puts forth a specious explanation to justify his sins of omission and commission. We too would have heard the same statements from some people. They say that God is behind every act and thought of ours. The upanishads and Gita too have some
statements that seem to support this view. For example, Krishna said that different kinds of dispositions of beings, such as intelligence, wisdom, non-illusion, patience, truth, self-restraint, calmness, pleasure, pain, birth, death, fear, security, innocence, equanimity, contentment, austerity, beneficience, fame, shame all arise from Him, the Lord alone. (BG 10-4,5).

This being so, should not He be held responsible for whatever good or evil one does? The answer is that no doubt He is the cause behind all our mental dispositions. But He is the general cause, or the सामान्य कारणम् but our own deeds are responsible for our individual dispositions. An analogy will make it easier to understand. People plant different kinds of seeds on the earth. The earth supports all of them and they grow. But only a coconut tree comes out of a coconut seed, a mango tree out of a mango seed and so on. Thus, the earth is the general cause and the respective seeds are the special cause, or the विशेष कारणम्. In the same way, The Lord is the general cause, supporting all dispositions and our own deeds or karmas are the special cause.

So, it is said that बुधि: कर्मानुसारिणी or one’s thinking is shaped by his deeds. God is behind the power to think, but responsibility to use the power properly and take the right decisions rests with the individual eventually.

We may think of another example - a car. The car in the hands of a careful driver can take the passengers safely to places they want to reach. But the same car in the hands of a rash and negligent driver will become a vehicle of accident or even death. We cannot hold the car responsible for the accident.
It just provides the motive power. The result, a safe journey or an accident is in the hands of the driver. God has given us intelligence. We have to use it to travel in the right path shown by the scriptures. Because of this reason, the intellect is often compared to a driver. बुि तु सारथि बिद्धि says the Kathopanishad. (1-3-3)

The author of the popular hymn Sharada Bhujangam presents this situation from another angle, that is interesting to read. He is addressing Sharada Devi. He says that, if She does not come to his rescue and relieve the distress in his heart, then She too will suffer since She is present in his heart, as in the hearts of all beings!

यिद  मदियं शुचं नापनुः तदा टुः खवाहितमतेंस्तर्वः।
मदिये स्थितायात्माप्यं खेदैं भवनिदित्यहं चिन्त्यायस्तांतर्सिम्बिम भूय:।

मन्द्राणीरहं तत्मचि करुणा घट्यितुः विबो नात्मे।
आकृतः तां तु च ठात अलमिह महेन्द्यमिति समाद्धिसिमि ॥ ५॥

Meaning:- I am a dullard, and the foremost one at that. I have not known how to be worthy of Your grace and hence took the wrong path. I am just a wretched person. You should thrust Your grace on me and save me.

Note:- After putting forth the plausible argument, the author immediately feels remorseful and prays to the Lord to save him.

Why should the poet call himself a dull witted person?

The word “dullard” has a special meaning in the vedantic parlance. It is used to refer to one who lacks discrimination and does not have the wisdom to make the right choice when several options are open to him. For example, when a child is asked to choose between a big colorful balloon and a hundred rupees note, it will go for the balloon only. This is because the balloon appears colorful and it can derive joy by playing with the balloon. The child, being immature cannot understand the value of the currency note. Similarly, our scriptures present two options to us. One is the path
that provides for material benefits that can provide worldly enjoyment. The other is the path that shows the way to benediction or blessedness that can give lasting happiness. But the latter being not visible and immediately available, most opt for the first path that seems to give happiness here while living. The scriptures say that such people are immature and lack deep wisdom. This is because the happiness one can get in this world is short lived. They will come to an end some day. And they are not unmixed with sorrow. So, they cannot be termed as real joy. Whereas the path that leads to God assures lasting peace and happiness though the results may not be evident here and now. Because of these reasons people who have not studied the scriptures deeply and lack full faith in what they say, stay away from the superior path shown by them. Yama, the god of death, says this to his student Nachiketas in Kathopanishad. (1-2-2).

How do such “dull witted” people spend their time? Shri Bhagavata says that they slog in pursuit of wealth, security etc. But these things so earned cannot assure happiness or security. So, the text terms the effort spent in search of money and such material gains as “frivolous pursuits” and calls these people as “unfortunate ones.” They work hard during the day and by the end of the day they are totally exhausted. So, they drop off to sleep. Thus their lives are frittered away in sleep by night and in frivolous pursuits by day. They miss the very goal of life. BH(1-16-9)

God is the power behind the mind as said earlier. But He had also given us scriptures to guide our conduct. They clearly state what constitutes the right deed and what acts are prohibited and so to be given up. One who wants to grow
spiritually and seek the Lord’s grace should use his discretion and take the right path. Krishna says this to Arjuna and points out that if one still takes to neglect the scriptural injunctions under the impulse of desire or greed he will not attain happiness in this world nor the higher worlds. BG-(16-23,24).

The sages have also said this in their Smriti texts. Sage Yagnavalkya had said in his work thus -

By failing to do the prescribed duties, by doing deeds that are prohibited by the scriptures and by not having control over the senses one seeks his fall. Keeping this in mind, Shri Vedanta Desika admits his failings and prays to the Lord. (Nyasa Dasakam. 9). He says -

You, the Lord known to be the one who removes the sufferings of the devotees who surrender to You, have to pardon me for committing the acts prohibited by the scriptures and failure to perform those acts that are prescribed by the scriptures. Shri Appayya DikShitar also appeals to the Lord to excuse his transgressions that he had made knowingly. He is going about without shame or fear of the consequences of such transgressions. And he says he had done so in his previous births also. He wonders how he can get away from his innumerable problems without Lord’s grace.(AS-11).
Mind is known as one of the organs like the eyes and ears. The word mind is used to refer to the intellect, memory and the capacity to recollect also according to the context. Only, it being invisible is called an inner organ and it leads the external organs to act according to its dictates. Because our mind is scattered in many directions due to our attachments and vicissitudes in our lives it is restless. It is difficult to control and focus it on a specific object like God. Even the great warrior Arjuna had accepted this fact and said that the mind is indeed restless, turbulent, strong and obstinate. Therefore it is virtually impossible to restrain it. It is as difficult as restraining the wind.

A question may arise at this point that if the mind is so difficult to control, but is fickle and insubordinate why have we been provided with such an instrument? The reason is that, though the mind may be turbulent and difficult to control, it is a powerful instrument given to us. The minds of the animals have vastly reduced capacity compared to our minds. They are controlled by instincts and have no free will. The animal birth is meant solely to expiate for the sins committed in the previous births. In such a birth one cannot do acts, like going to the temples and offering prayers to the Lord, that will improve its quality of life in the ensuing births. On the other hand, we can do all of them. Using the free will we may discard courses that are not beneficial to us and choose the path that appears right to us. Thus, God has blessed us with a powerful organ with which we can achieve great goals. The greatest goal, said in our scriptures is mokSha or liberation from cyclic existence. This can be attained by humans only. To help us to achieve this objective, the kindly God has also given us scriptures which talk in detail about the way to attain the goal. Since all of us cannot be expected to read and understand
the texts, He has also sent us great saints who are willing to guide us. We are only required to heed their advice, get hold of the mind and channelise it towards God. It is admittedly a difficult task. The task is comparable to capturing a wild elephant and taming it. The elephant is a very strong animal. But, once it is tamed, it can be trained to do very difficult jobs. Our mind is like the wild elephant - difficult to train. If we try hard and tame it and train it to do our bidding it can lead us to liberation itself. So the upanishad says:

मन एव मनुष्यमां कारण व्यथमोक्षः। व्यथायायासर्वं मुक्तं निरंतरं स्मरणम्॥

Mind is the cause for both bondage and liberation. Attached to the objects it becomes the cause for bondage. Freed of attachments it becomes source of freedom. It is in our power to realise the wrong deeds we commit. We have to stay away from such acts in future.

ब्रह्मचर्यमेधश्लोका
ल्व सचं ग्रहान गणवति कि कथये दृशति कि दया नत्वाम॥ ६ ॥

Meaning:- I confess I am an ignoramus and a weakling. In contrast, You are omniscient and omnipotent. Because of Your omniscience You are aware of my faults. What shall I say? Does not Your compassion prod You to overlook my faults?

Note:- By saying that he is ignoramus, the author implies that the teachings of the holy texts have not fully sunk in his mind. As a result his mind still lacks total faith in the teachings of the sacred books and saints. It is wavering and has many doubts. Such people will encounter difficulty in the path of spiritual progress. Krishna says this. BG(4-40).

अद्वाताश्रद्धाधान्यथ संशयात्त्मा विनिश्चयति
नायं लोकोदितं न परो न सुरं संशयात्मनः॥

By saying he is a weakling the poet is referring not to physical weakness but to that of the mind. A weak mind is not settled in a particular
pursuit but goes after many objects. It had been doing so not only in this birth
but in the innumerable births we had prior to this present birth also. It
is not used to being controlled. When the mind is not under control, it is
easily swayed by emotions like desire or anger. One whose mind is thus out of
control cannot be expected to have discrimination and judgement. Krishna said:

इन्द्रयाणां हि चरतां यन्मोहनुविद्धियते ।
tadastu harati prabha vaapi-नांवमिवाभिस ॥ BG (2-67)
The upanishads state this clearly. They say that the supreme Being cannot be
obtained by one without strength of mind. He should have his goal clearly in
mind and work for it with determination.

नायमात्मा बलहीनेन लहः । MU (3-2-4) and again in Kathopanishad (1-3-24).
Yama says that the Supreme Being is not obtained by one who has not abandoned
evil conduct, whose is not calm, who has not subdued his senses and mind,
though the person be endowed with sharp intellect.

नाविरतो दुर्थरिताश्रयां नासमाहित: । नाशान्तमवसो वापि प्रज्ञानेनामादुयात् ॥
So, it is very necessary to get control over it and turn it to the other
direction, namely the spiritual path.
The poet said that his mind is still not fully established in the Lord’s feet.
So he still has a long way to travel before he can call himself a devotee. We
should remember here that the author Shridhara is saying this as our
representative.

beginmedshloka
आधित्यात्तरं मामुपेक्षे किमिति शिव न कि दयसे।
श्रीतंगोसा दीनार्तिहदिति खलु शंसेति जगति सन्तस्त्वाम् ॥ ७॥

endshlokab
Meaning:- I depend on You. Still why do You ignore me? Cannot You show some
mercy towards me? The saintly people say that You take care of those who depend
upon You and remove the distress of those who are destitute and helpless.
Note:- God had assured this in Gita. (9-22).

नन्याधिक्षित्यतन्ते मां ये जनः परम्परस्ते ।
तेषां नित्याभिभुजानां योगश्रेयं वहाम्महम ॥

Shri Shankaracharya puts this idea in a very nice way in his Shivanandalahari (14).

He says that he is the foremost among the weak and destitute. And Shiva is renowned to be the protector of the weak and destitute. Thus there exists a unique relationship between them. Because of this reason, his protection is the responsibility of Shiva. HE has to overlook all his weaknesses and faults and save him.

Meaning:– I have heard a story that You blessed a dacoit leader because he was unwittingly repeating Your name “Hara” whenever he said prahara प्रहर to mean “beat him up”, and Ahara आहर to mean “kill him”. I am wittingly uttering Your name “Shiva” and saying “save me”. Am I not dependant on You? Do I not deserve to be protected by You?

Note:– Even when uttered casually or unwittingly, the Lord’s names purify. They are so powerful. This is said in Shivagita. This says that even if one utters His name as an exclamation in surprise, or in fear or distress like hunger, he is purified and gets the highest goal.

आश्चयं वा भयं शोकं क्षुद्धं वा मम नाम यः ।
व्याजनं वा स्मरंधरस्तु स याति परम्म गतिमु ॥

A similar statement is seen in Shri Bhagavatam also.

Sanketé पारिहार्यं वा स्तोभं हेतुन्मेव वा ।
वैकुण्ठ-नाम-ग्रहणं अशीपध्यं विन्दुः ॥
Lord’s names uttered as a gesture or in joke or in the midst of a song or even out of disrespect washes away all sins.

यथायादं शैवतममुख्यं यहन्यः ॥
अजानतोप्रत्यात्मणुण कुर्मान्नेत्रोपुष्वदः ॥ BH(6-2-14,19)

Just as a potent medicine will certainly produce its salutary effect even when taken by one who is unaware of its efficiency, though by chance, so does the Lord’s name reveal its efficacy even when it is uttered by someone without being aware of its power. DakShayani put this forcefully to her father DakSha when he insulted Shiva in a sacrifice conducted by him.

He did not invite Shiva and His wife DakShayani. Her father added insult to the injury by not making any offering to Shiva, her husband. She was greatly outraged by all this and in her reply said the two letters (सिव) SIVA uttered by one even casually in the course of a conversation will remove the sins quickly.

यद्र्द द्वयक्षरे नाम गिरिरिते नूणं सकृत-प्रस्तृतद्विजातमाः द्वितित ततः ।
पवित्रकृपात प्रस्तृतास्तते भवानहो हेतु शिवं शिवेतरः ॥ BH(4-4-14).

Meaning:- I have heard noble people say “surrender to Shiva. He will remove your distress”. Having faith in those words I surrender to You. I admit I am a mean person. Will not You save me atleast to make their statement true?

Note:- Surrender to the Lord is the only way for one who wants to walk the new way of life that will free one from sorrows. In particular this is suited to one who does not have great deal of scholarship and had not lead a disciplined life. The poet says this in Sharada bhujanga stotram thus.

न मनः न यनः न वा स्तोत्रार्तितं विजाननेनवय वचस्य र च महुः ज्ञायताम ।
तवदिश्याणोऽस्तमपि श्रुत्व: तवदिश्व त्वम् प्रणये तत्सेव प्रसादात् ॥

He says “I do not know mantram, tantram, the manner of praisng You and not even how to express my distress. One who prostrates at Your feet will not suffer any more. Knowing this I surrender to You by Your grace only.”
Krishna says that even if a person had lived an evil life, but had decided to turn a new leaf and worships Him, the Lord considers such a person to be a righteous one and saves him. BG(9-30,31).

बै गीमेडश्लोका
अपि चेतुदुराचारो भजते मामन्त्यभाकः।
सत्युरेव स मन्तवः: सम्यग्वक्षितो हि सः: II
क्षणं भवति धर्मात्मा शाख्यच्छान्ति निगम्यति।
कौन्तेय प्रतिज्ञानीहि न मे भक्त: प्रणदयति॥
पंदश्लोकाब

Krishna assures that one who turns to Him and becomes devoted to Him will not perish. In a similar situation, Shri Vedanta Desika surrenders to the Lord accepting his weaknesses.

बै गीमेडश्लोका
अहानवारिधि-ममयूर्त्तः मां।
आद्याविभ्जन-मकिध्वनसार्वभोमम।
विन्दुः भवानु-विवृनाथ समर्तवेदी।
किन्तु पात्रमपरं मनुंते कृपाया:॥ Devanayaka Panchashat.(49).

पंदश्लोकाब

The poet says “O Lord! You are omniscient. I am an ocean of ignorance. I am the first among sinners. I have broken all Your mandates regarding the Do’s and Don’ts. I have no virtue to claim or take to the path of devotion or surrender. Thus I am the most indigent person. Thus I am the one who needs Your mercy most. Why then are You looking for another person to show Your mercy? It is seen that in these verses the poet repeatedly says he is a weakling, sinner etc. Obviously such statements do not sound nice. They sound like cringing and whining. Should one keep on making such statements before God who is said to be kind and merciful? All of us do make mistakes. Sometimes such mistakes are made knowingly and often unknowingly also. But no one likes to think of them, not to speak of admitting them before someone else. It is not in one’s nature to confess one’s serious sins to another person. Our ego stands in the way of doing so. In the normal case any person has no means of knowing other person’s mistakes unless he witnesses the act. A criminal has to confess his crimes to a judge when confronted with strong evidences. If he denies the charges or tries to evade them by telling lies etc., he will get into more trouble. On the other hand if he confesses and pleads for mercy explaining he was
forced to commit the crime under force of circumstances, the judge may consider his case with sympathy. He may let the offender off with the minimum penalty. But in our case, many of our sins might have been committed in privacy with no one seeing them. Sins are committed not only by way of bodily actions but by words and thoughts also. The question, then, is why not keep quiet without talking about them? The answer is that we may be able to hide our mistakes from other people, but not from God who sees all and knows all, including our innermost thoughts. Aptly He is known as the Great Witness or sAkShI.

So, there is no question of hiding anything from Him. But, if we are devoted to Him and sincerely repent our past mistakes He may take a lenient view and rid us of the sins that pollute our minds. Krishna tells that just as the blazing fire burns the faggots put into it to ashes quickly, devotion to Him destroys the sins of a devotee. BH(11-14-19).

Because of this reason God gets the name पापनाशनः कीिततः पूिजतो ातः पूिजतः पूिजतः ॥ यथािः सुसमृािचः करोैधांिस भसात ् ॥

Whether by chanting of His names, or worshipped or meditated upon He destroys the heaps of sins of His devotee. And also पवित्रः पावनः परमु पुमान ् पापान ् उन्मूल्यतीति Ĩ Ĩ SS(90).

Fully knowing this, great devotees have repeatedly prayed to Lord to forgive their sins. They say that they have been unable to resist the pull of senses and fallen a prey to petty desires, anger, lust, greed etc., and have committed many mistakes. They have now realised that they cannot win over these powerful enemies with their volition and have come to the Lord as the final recourse. So, it is now incumbent on Him to rescue them who are now full of repentance.

इति श्री श्रीघरवेंकेशार्यकृति आतिहरस्तोत्रं संपूणिम् Ĩ Ĩ
Artiharastotra

O Lord Shambhu! please cast Your vision that is full of nectar like kindness on me and dispel my suffering. Then only will I understand the truth about Your kind nature. 1

O Lord, I am suffering as the consequence of numerous sins committed by me. But, I am yours now. So, if I am suffering in this manner it does not behoove Your greatness. 2

O Lord, I have heard that those who think of You do not get exposed to suffering. I am crying “Shiva! save me and still continue to suffer. Is this proper? 3

You are my inner Self. This being so, it is clear that it is by Your inducement only I committed various sins and as the result am now suffering. What can I say in this matter? I deserve to be the recipient of Your grace. 4

I am a dullard, and the foremost one at that. I have not known how to be worthy of Your grace and hence took the wrong path. I am just a wretched person. You should thrust Your grace on me and save me. 5

I confess I am an ignoramus and a weakling. In contrast, You are omniscient and omnipotent. Because of Your omniscience You are aware of my faults. What shall I say? Does not Your compassion prod You to overlook my faults? 6

I depend on You. Still why do You ignore me? Cannot You show some mercy towards me? The saintly people say that You take care of those who depend upon You and remove the distress of those who are destitute and helpless. 7

I have heard a story that You blessed a dacoit leader because he was unwittingly repeating Your name “Hara Whenever he said prahara to mean “beat him up I am wittingly uttering Your name “Shiva and saying “save me Am I not dependant on You? Do I not deserve to be protected by You? 8

I have heard noble people say “surrender to Shiva. He will remove your distress Having faith in those words I surrender to You. I admit I am a mean person. Will not You save me atleast to make their statement true? 9

Thus ends the Artiharastotram composed by Shridhara Venkatesha.
LIFE OF SRIDHARA VENKATESA

Shridhara Venkatesa lived about 300 years ago in Tiruvisanallur, a village in Tanjavur district in Tamilnadu. He was called Tiruvisanallur Ayyaval (deeply respected person) out of great respect people held for him. Even today he is known by that name only. He was the son of Lingayaryar who was a minister to the Maharaja of Mysore. Even as a young boy Ayyaval was deeply religious and in particular had great devotion to Shiva but he made no distinction between Shiva and Vishnu. He studied Vedas, shastras and puranas and had a great desire to travel and spread the message of the puranas and in particular the glory of Lord’s name among the people. After his father’s death the Maharaja wanted him to take his father’s job but he politely declined and left Mysore state with his wife and mother. He came to Tiruchirapalli in Tamilnadu and stayed for some time giving talks. He was supposed to have brought back to life a woman who had died by praying to the Lord. This attracted people who wanted him to solve their problems. Ayyaval did not like this and left the place. He proceeded to Tanjavur. It seems that King Shahaji (1684-1710.AD) who was ruling at that time in Tanjavur wanted him to stay in Tanjavur but Ayyaval wanted to lead a quiet life. King Shahaji was inviting scholarly brahmins to stay in his kingdom. He renamed the village Tiruvisanallur as Shahajirajapuram. One street was allotted for their stay. Ayyaval also stayed in a house there. Ayyaval was a proponent of the view that in this dark kali age chanting the lord’s name will ward off its evil effects. He was the senior contemporary of Bodhendra Swami who was the 59th pontiff of the Shankara Math at Kanchipuram and who was an ardent advocate of the glory of the lord’s name. Ayyaval wrote a book भगवन्मभूषणम् (Bhagavannamabhusanam) on the subject which is sadly not available now. Bodhendra Swami had also written a book नामामृतरसायनम् (Namamritarasyanam) on the subject wherein he had made references to the work of Ayyaval. Once Ayyaval had to
perform a shrAddha ceremony in his house. Therein food is prepared and offered to the departed forefathers who are invoked in three brahmins invited for the occasion. When every thing was getting ready Ayyaval saw an outcaste with his family in a famished condition begging for food. His heart melted with compassion at their condition. Without any hesitation he offered them the food that was being prepared for the ceremony. He then had the house washed and prepared to conduct the ceremony again. But the brahmins in the village considered this act reprehensible and refused to conduct the ceremony again. Ayyaval pleaded with them quoting texts from the scriptures to support his action but the Brahmins were not convinced. He asked them what he should do to remedy the situation. They said that the only atonement was having a bath in the Ganges. But there was no time to go to Varanasi and return. So he prayed to Lord Shiva ( in Gangashtakam) to release the waters of Ganga from His matted hair as he did on an earlier occasion for Bhagiratha. Water started flowing out of the well in his house and flooded the streets of the village. The villagers got scared and prayed to Ayyaval to forgive them and stop the flood that was threatening the village. He accordingly prayed again to stop the flooding and requested her to appear in the well every year on that day. Even now people flock to that place every year on that day and take bath in the waters of the well in the belief that Ganga is present in the well on that day. Ayyaval had composed a number of works some of which are not yet been printed and some not available. Some of his works are listed below. (1) Bhagavannama Bhushanam. (2) Akhyashashti. (3) Daya satakam. (4) Matrubhutasatakam. (5) Stuti paddhati. (6) Shivabhakhthikalpalata. (7) Shivabhakta lakShanam. (8) Taravali stotram. (9) Artihara stotram. (10) Kuliresvarashtakam. (11) Jambhunathashtakam. (12) Doshapariharashtakam. (13) Krishnadwadasha manjari. (14) Achyutashtakam. (15) Dola navarathnamala. (16) Padamanimanjari - a sanskrit dictionary. (17) Shahajiraja charitam.

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