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bilvAShTakam with meaning

ஸார்த<sup>2</sup> பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வாஷ்டகம்

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ஸார்த<sup>2</sup> பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வாஷ்டகம்



by N. Balasubramanian bbalu at satyam.net.in

Introduction: This is a short poem consisting of ten verses. The first nine verses speak of the glory of the bilva leaves. The leaves are considered sacred and are particularly suited for offering to Shiva. They are to be offered in cluster of three leaves and are said to have features that identify them with the Lord Himself. The tenth verse gives the benefit of reading the poem and is known as the ப<sup>2</sup>லஸ்ருதி: ।

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

PUJA. Why should one do puja?

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

அறித்யமஸுக<sup>2</sup>ம் லோகமிமம் ப்ராப்ய ப<sup>4</sup>ஜஸ்வ மாம் । Why should He brand this world as transient and joyless?

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

THE REMEDY. What then is the remedy? The remedy, Krishna says, is to worship Him. While the world is ephemeral and joyless as said above, His nature is the opposite. He is eternal - not subject to change or

decay - and He is the very embodiment of bliss. So, if we think over the truth behind these statements we will accept them as facts. This is known as viveka or discrimination. Thus by reaching out to Him we should be able to get out of our present condition that is full of sorrow and strife (this is known as samsara).

He had said this earlier : மாமுபேத்ய து கௌந்தேய புநர்ஜநம் ந வித்<sup>3</sup>யதே | BG(8-16). “On reaching Me there is no rebirth.”

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

Vedanta says that there is no question of “reaching” Him as He is our own inner Self. அஹமாத்மா கு<sup>3</sup>டா<sup>3</sup>கேஸு ஸர்வபு<sup>4</sup>தாஸயஸ்தி<sup>2</sup>த: | BG(10-20). We need not go anywhere in search of Him or do anything to reach Him as He is our own nature. If so, we too should be eternal, not subject to change or decay and be the very embodiment of bliss. Yes, says vedanta. But this idea looks preposterous and no one will be able to accept the idea that we are essentially divine. His presence in us is not evident to us. Vedanta says this is because our true nature is covered by ignorance. This is like one being not able to see his image in a mirror that is covered by a thick coat of dust. The covering had been there for such a long time, meaning so many births, that it had formed itself into a thick crust. The ignorance makes us to wrongly identify ourselves with the body-mind complex. The body subject to decay and is perishable. The mind is subject to joys and sorrows. We superimpose these qualities on us and feel we are subject to decay, death, sorrow etc., whereas our nature is just the opposite. Just as darkness is removed by light, ignorance can be removed by right knowledge. Our shastras term this right knowledge alone as true knowledge (called jnanam ஜ்ஞாநம்)as this alone will help us to understand our true nature and become free from misery and death. த<sup>3</sup>வே வித்<sup>3</sup>யே வேதி<sup>3</sup>தவ்யே இதி ஹ ஸ்ம யத்<sup>3</sup>ப்<sup>3</sup>ரஹ்மவிதோ<sup>3</sup> வத்<sup>3</sup>ந்தி பரா ஸைவாபரா ச |... அத<sup>2</sup> பரா யயா தத்<sup>3</sup>க்ஷரமதி<sup>4</sup>க<sup>3</sup>ம்யதே || (Mundakopanishad 1-1-5). This says that there are two vidyas worth knowing: Para (the superior) and Apara (the inferior). Para is that through which the

imperishable Brahman is known. All other learning is Aparā or inferior. The question, then, is how can one get the right knowledge? This is a long process, says vedānta and involves several steps. One has to perform the duties prescribed by the śāstras. These include worship of the Lord. Regular worship will slowly clear away the dust that covers the intellect and show our true nature. The śāstras say that God is without form and attributes. அஸப்<sup>3</sup>த<sup>3</sup>மஸ்பர்ஸமரூபமவ்யயம் ததா<sup>2</sup>ரஸம் நித்யமக்<sup>3</sup>ந்த<sup>4</sup>வச்ச | அநாத<sup>3</sup>யநந்தம் மஹத: பரம் த<sup>4</sup>ருவம் நிசாய்ய தந்ம்ரு<sup>3</sup>த்யமுக்<sup>2</sup>த் ப்ரமுச்யதே || (Kathopanishad-1-3-15). That which is; beyond sound; beyond touch; beyond form; beyond taste; beyond smell; beyond mutation; eternal; beginningless; endless (limitless); beyond and superior to the great (jīva)tma even; knowing that supreme Lord; the striver is released from the jaws of death. We find, thus, there is a great distance between our faculties with very limited capabilities and such a God. We will not be able even to comprehend such a God. God, in His infinite mercy, to help His devotees to worship Him, takes on various forms. அநுக்<sup>3</sup>ரஹாய ப<sup>4</sup>க்தாநாம் ஸ்வேச்ச<sup>2</sup>யா க்<sup>3</sup>ரு<sup>3</sup>ஹணதே தநும் | One who is a beginner and wants to take the first step in worship will find worship of the God with form to be convenient. He can relate with Him, communicate his sorrows and problems to Him and seek remedies. Krishna says in Gita that He welcomes even those devotees who worship Him to get relief from their problems and those who seek material benefits. It is clear then that a devotee, whatever be His motive will be blessed and will progress further spiritually. In course of time he will gain knowledge and will progress to the worship of God without form.

ஸகு<sup>3</sup>ணே ஸம்யக்<sup>3</sup>ப<sup>4</sup>யஸ்தே நிர்கு<sup>3</sup>ணே பர்யவஸ்யதி |

TYPES OF PUJA. There are two types of pujas of the Lord: (1) the externally performed one in which an idol or saligrama and is offered puja with water for bathing, flowers, camphor and other materials. Since God is present in every thing and all the time, He may be invoked in any object and worshipped. We may see this being done in

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

Because of this the recitation of the hymn before or during the puja is bound to put one in an exalted frame of mind that is conducive to the performance of worship. Thus we have the practice of offering worship to stones, trees, animals like the cows, and even snakes. It is like saying we are touching a person whether we contact his head, thumb or toe. The symbols that are used serve as the medium of worship only and the actual worship goes to the Lord present in and out of every thing in this universe. Krishna had said in Bhagavat Gita (7-21)that He accepts the worship offered by a devotee in any form.

யோ யோ யாம் யாம் தநும் ப<sup>4</sup>க்த: ஸ்ரத்<sup>3</sup>த<sup>4</sup>யா ஸ்ரீசிதுமிச்ச<sup>2</sup>தி | தஸ்ய தஸ்யாசலாம் ஸ்ரத்<sup>3</sup>த<sup>4</sup>யம் தாமேவ வித்<sup>3</sup>த<sup>4</sup>யம்யஹம் || He then adds (in the next verse) that by such a worship of the Lord

in that form chosen by him, the devotee obtains his desires. These desires are indeed ordained by Him, the Supreme Lord, alone.

ஸ தயா ஸ்ரத்<sup>3</sup>த<sup>4</sup>யா யுக்தஸ்தஸ்யாராத<sup>4</sup>ந்மீஹதே | லப<sup>4</sup>தே ச தத: காமாந்மயைவ விஹிதாந்ஹிதாந் || Thus in this poem the Supreme Being, in the form of Shiva, is identified with the bilva leaves and praised.

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

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

So far we have seen three types of worship:

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

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

grade in worship.

2- worship through recitation of (hymns) stotras and reading of sacred books like Ramayana, Gita etc. Herein there is less of physical work but more of vocal and possibly mental activity to some extent. This is known as வாசிகம் பூஜா ।

(3) The puja wherein the mind plays a major role and the participation of the body is still less. This is

மாநஸம் பூஜா । Devibhagavatam says that the puja offered mentally is superior to the

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

large amount of physical activity. காயிகாத்<sup>3</sup>வாசிகம் ஸ்ரேஷ்ட<sup>2</sup>ம் வாசிகாத்<sup>3</sup>பி

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

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

flowers and other materials used assume a different connotation. This

is explained in the following verse.

ஆராத<sup>4</sup>யாமி மணிஸந்நிப<sup>4</sup>மாத்மலிங்க<sup>3</sup>ம்  
மாயாபூ<sup>1</sup>ஹ்ரு<sup>3</sup>த<sup>3</sup>யபங்கஜஸந்நிவிஷ்டம் । ஸ்ரத்<sup>3</sup>தா<sup>4</sup>நத்<sup>3</sup>விமலசித்த

ஜலாபி<sup>4</sup>ஷேகை: நித்யம் ஸமாதி<sup>3</sup>குஸுமை: அபந்<sup>4</sup>வாய ॥ The effulgent Lord, shining brightly like a gem, in the form of a

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

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

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

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

the result being that the worshipper attains liberation and escapes

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

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

other methods. அந்தர்முக<sup>2</sup> ஸமாராத<sup>4</sup>யா ப<sup>3</sup>ஹிர்முக<sup>2</sup>ஸுது<sup>3</sup>ர்ஸபா<sup>4</sup> ॥ Our scriptures

insist that a worshipper should have the right frame

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

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

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

gives detailed instructions for the budding yogi. Talking about the

posture and concentration He says (Gita-6-13): ஸமம் காயஸிரோக்<sup>3</sup>ீவம் தா<sup>4</sup>ரயந்நசலம் ஸ்தி<sup>2</sup>ர: | ஸம்ப்ரேக்ஷய நாளிகாக்<sup>3</sup>ரம் ஸ்வம் தி<sup>3</sup>ஸஸ்சாநவலோகயந் || The practising yogi should sit holding the body, the head, and the

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

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

That is, he is to concentrate on the Self. The bilva leaf with its stalk represents the closed eyelid. When the eyes are closed the external world is shut off and the mind withdraws from them. In this way the meditator becomes - in a way - one with the worshipped. Thus it is said: ஸிவோ பூ<sup>4</sup>த்வா ஸிவம் ப<sup>4</sup>ஜேத் | One should become Shiva and then worship Him.

The Mahabharata makes a similar statement: நா விஷ்ணு:

கீர்தயேத்விஷ்ணும் நாவிஷ்ணு-ர்விஷ்ணுமர்சயேத் | None but the bhakta who partakes of the divinity of Vishnu should

sing His glory nor offer worship to Him. Shri Bhagavatha gives a stirring description of the manner in which the sage Bharatha performed puja. It says that by incessant worship of the Supreme Person his love for the Lord was increasing, his heart melted and was benumbed (as it were) at the time of worship. The hair stood on their end all over his body as a result of intense delight: his eyes were blinded by tears of love proceeding from an ardent longing (to meet the Lord): and his consciousness was drowned in the depth of his heart that was brimming over with supreme devotion - which was enriched by constant thought of the feet of his beloved Lord, red as a lotus, - with the result he forgot even the worship that he was doing! தயேத்த<sup>2</sup>மவிரதபுருஷபரிசர்யயா ப<sup>4</sup>க<sup>3</sup>வதி

ப்ரவர்த<sup>4</sup>மாநாநூராக<sup>3</sup>ப<sup>4</sup>ரத்<sup>3</sup>ருதஹ்ரு<sup>3</sup>த<sup>3</sup>யஸைதி<sup>2</sup>ல்ய: ப்ரஹர்ஷவேகே<sup>3</sup>ந ஆத்மந்யுத்<sup>3</sup>பி<sup>4</sup>த்<sup>3</sup>யமாந  
 ஓளாத்கண்ட<sup>2</sup>யப்ரவ்ரு<sup>3</sup>த்தப்ரணயபா<sup>3</sup>ஷ்பநிருத்<sup>3</sup>தா<sup>4</sup>வலோகநயந ஏவம்  
 நிஜரமனூருண- சராணூவிந்தா<sup>3</sup>நுத்<sup>4</sup>யாநபரிசிதப<sup>4</sup>க்தியோகே<sup>3</sup>ந  
 பரிப்லுதபரமாஹ்லாத<sup>3</sup>க<sup>3</sup>ம்பீ<sup>4</sup>ரஹ்ரு<sup>3</sup>த<sup>3</sup>யஹ்ரதா<sup>3</sup>வகா<sup>3</sup>ட<sup>4</sup>தி<sup>4</sup>ஷணஸ்தாமபி க்ரியமாணம்  
 ப<sup>4</sup>க<sup>3</sup>வத்ஸபர்யாம் ந ஸஸ்மா<sup>4</sup>ர || (5-7-12)

The question then is how to get this right frame of mind? This may be done by chanting His names or saying prayers like Vishnu or Shiva Sahasranamam that talk of His glories. As one keeps on reading and listening to the holy books like Gita, Ramayanam, Bhagavatam that describe His endearing qualities, the mind gets attracted to Him. The mind gets saturated with the thought of the Lord and there is no room for any other thought. It is said in Bhagavata (2-8-4 and 5) ஸ்ரு<sup>3</sup>ண்வத: ஸ்ரத்<sup>3</sup>த<sup>4</sup>யா நித்யம் க்<sup>3</sup>ரு<sup>3</sup>ணதஸ்ச ஸ்வசேஷ்டிதம் | காலேந நாதி<sup>3</sup>ரகே<sup>4</sup>ண ப<sup>4</sup>க<sup>3</sup>வாந் விஸுதே ஹ்ரு<sup>3</sup>தி<sup>3</sup> || 4 || ப்ரவிஷ்ட: கர்ணரந்த<sup>4</sup>ரேண ஸ்வாநாம் பா<sup>4</sup>வஸரோருஹம் | து<sup>4</sup>நோதி ஸமலம் க்ரு<sup>3</sup>ஷ்ண: ஸலிலஸ்ய யதா<sup>2</sup> ஸரத் || 5 || The Lord enters before long the heart of the person who daily listens with reverence to His stories and also narrates His doings. Reaching the lotus of His devotees' heart through the passage of their ears, Shri Krishna rids it of all impurities even as autumn turns the waters (of rivers etc.) clear.

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

this in his Shivamanasa puja. He says: ஆத்மா த்வம் கி<sup>3</sup>ரிஜா மதி: ஸஹசரா: ப்ராணா: ஸரீரம் க்<sup>3</sup>ரு<sup>3</sup>ஹம், பூஜா தே விஷயோபபோ<sup>4</sup>க<sup>3</sup>ர்சநா நித்<sup>3</sup>ரா ஸமாதி<sup>4</sup>ஸ்தி<sup>2</sup>தி: | ஸஞ்சார: பத<sup>3</sup>யோ: ப்ரத்<sup>3</sup>க்ஷிணவிதி:<sup>4</sup> ஸ்தோத்ராணி ஸர்வா கி<sup>3</sup>ர்:, யத்<sup>3</sup>யத்கர்ம் கரோமி தத்த<sup>3</sup>கி<sup>2</sup>லம் ஸம்போ<sup>4</sup> தவாராத<sup>4</sup>நம் || You are the Atman, the self. My mind is Parvati. All my sense organs are your attendants.

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

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

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

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

வர்ணைஷ்வர்க்யசதுர்தே<sup>2</sup>ஷு தே<sup>3</sup>வதாதிபூஜகா: | .

The great devotee Prahlada accords a high place to worship of the Lord by archana. He enumerates nine types of devotion and places

archana the fifth place. ஸ்ரவணம் கீர்தநம் விஷ்ணு: ஸ்மரணம் பாத<sup>3</sup>ஸேவநம் |

அர்சநம் வந்த<sup>3</sup>நம் தா<sup>3</sup>ஸ்யம் ஸக்<sup>2</sup>யமாத்மநிவேத<sup>3</sup>நம் ||

(Bhagavatham 7-5-23).

Krishna talks at some length about puja in His advice to Uddhava (in book 11 of Bhagavatham). He discusses about the worship done at home and also at the temples. The puja done at home using vedic mantras is for the welfare of the family. This is prescribed by the smritis as one of the duties to be done daily by a householder just like taking

bath. ஸ்நாநம் ஸந்த<sup>4</sup>யா ஜபோ ஹோம: தே<sup>3</sup>வதாநாம் ச பூஜநம் | ஆதித்<sup>2</sup>யம் வைஸ்வதே<sup>3</sup>வம் ச ஷ்டக்ரமாணி தி<sup>3</sup>நே தி<sup>3</sup>நே || These verses in this poem Bilvashtakam highlight some of Shiva's

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

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

The first verse identifies some features of

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

த்ரித<sup>3</sup>லம் த்ரிகு<sup>3</sup>ணாகாரம் த்ரிநேத்ரம் த்ரியாயுத<sup>4</sup>ம் | த்ரிஜநம்பாபஸம்ஹாரம்  
ஏகபி<sup>3</sup>ல்வம் ஸிவார்பணம் || 1 || த்ரித<sup>3</sup>லம் = having three petals. த்ரிகு<sup>3</sup>ணாகாரம் =  
constituted of

three gunas. Satva guna (characterised by knowledge), rajo guna (which is of the nature of activity) and tamo guna which implies inertia. The three qualities constitute Maya. Maya is the creative power of Ishvara. These three qualities become the cause of the creation and pervade the creation. One of Shiva's names is

கு<sup>3</sup>ணத்தரயஸ்வரூப: । He is the cause behind the creation. த்ரிநேத்தரம் = having three eyes. Shiva has three eyes. They are the

sun, the moon and Agni or fire. So He is known as த்ரிணேத்தர:,

ஸோமஸூரியாக்<sup>3</sup>நிலோசந:, த்ர்யம்ப<sup>3</sup>க: and த்ரினிலோசந: । . The third eye stands for His infinite wisdom. He is the embodiment of knowledge

and knows all says the upanishad. ய: ஸர்வஜ்ஞ: ஸர்வவித்<sup>3</sup>யஸ்ய ஜ்ஞாநமயம் தப: । More about this is said in the explanation to verse No:8. த்ரியாயுத<sup>4</sup>ம் = having three weapons. The weapons are said to be of

three kinds: 1) those which can be used for hitting at the enemy, like the sword and mace. 2) those which can be aimed at the enemy like the disc, spear, trident and 3) those which are released using another instrument like the arrow

from the bow. Shiva has all the three (viz.) mace, trident and the bow (called Pinaka) and the arrow. The weapons are gods by themselves and are in the service of the Lord. Shiva bearing these weapons show He is ready to come to the rescue of any devotee who may seek His help.

Some of His names are :ஸூலஹஸ்த:, வஜ்ரீ, த<sup>4</sup>ந்ரவீ, க<sup>2</sup>ட<sup>3</sup>கீ<sup>3</sup>, பரஸூதா<sup>4</sup>ரீ, குட<sup>2</sup>ராயுத<sup>4</sup>பாணி:, பிநாகீ etc.

த்ரிஜந்மபாபஸம்ஹாரம் = who destroys the sins accumulated from past three births.

Three is just indicative and indicates many. Thinking of Him or

uttering His auspicious names destroys one's sins. ஸம்ரு<sup>3</sup>தி மாத்ரேண

பாவயந் ஸிவ: । For this reason He is also known as ப<sup>4</sup>ர்க: । ஏக பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வம் = one cluster of bilva leaves ஸிவார்பணம் = offered

to Lord Shiva. In this manner, one bilva leaf offered to the Lord with devotion is of great merit. This reminds us of what Krishna said in

Gita: (9-26). "When one, with pure mind, offers to Me with devotion a

leaf, a flower, a fruit, water, - that I accept.” பத்ரம் புஷ்பம் ப<sup>2</sup>லம் தோயம் யோ மே ப<sup>4</sup>க்த்யா ப்ரயச்ச<sup>2</sup>தி | தத<sup>3</sup>ஹம் ப<sup>4</sup>க்யுபஹ்ரு<sup>3</sup>தமஸ்நாமி ப்ரயதாத்மந: || The words ஏக பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வம் ஸிவார்பணம் occur as a refrain in all the verses. So the translation is not being repeated. This verse may be translated as:

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

த்ரிஸாகை:<sup>2</sup> பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வபத்ரேர்ஸ ஹ்யச்சி<sup>2</sup>த்<sup>3</sup>ரை: கோமலை: ஸாபை:<sup>4</sup> | ஸிவபூஜாம் கரிஷ்யாமி ஹ்யேகபி<sup>3</sup>ல்வம் ஸிவார்பணம் || 2 || த்ரிஸாகை:<sup>2</sup> = with three branches. அச்சி<sup>2</sup>த்<sup>3</sup>ரை: = not damaged, not having holes and other defects. கோமலை: = tender, soft. ஸாபை:<sup>4</sup> = auspicious, good. பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வபத்ரை: with bilva leaves (as described here) கரிஷ்யாமி = I perform. ஸிவபூஜாம் = puja to Lord Shiva. ஏக பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வம் ஸிவார்பணம் to be translated as before. Meaning of the verse: I perform puja to Lord Shiva with bunch of bilva leaves that are auspicious, soft and tender, have three leaves, which are not damaged or defective in any manner.

அக<sup>2</sup>ண்ட<sup>3</sup> பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வபத்ரேண பூஜிதே நந்தி<sup>3</sup>கேஸ்வரே | ஸாத்த<sup>3</sup>யந்தி ஸர்வபாபே<sup>4</sup>யோ ஹ்யேகபி<sup>3</sup>ல்வம் ஸிவார்பணம் || 3 || அக<sup>2</sup>ண்ட<sup>3</sup> = unbroken, whole. பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வபத்ரேண = with the bilva leaf. நந்தி<sup>3</sup>கேஸ்வரே = Shiva, the Lord of Nandi. பூஜிதே = if worshipped. ஸர்வபாபே<sup>4</sup>யோ = from all sins ஸாத்த<sup>3</sup>யந்தி == purified. நந்தி<sup>3</sup>கேஸ்வர: = the Lord of Nandi. Nandi’s story is mentioned in Kurma Purana. He was a great devotee of Shiva and was blessed by Him with a form similar to His and also a prominent position among His retinue. Meaning of the verse: By offering puja to Shiva - Lord of Nandi - with bilva leaf that is whole and without defects one is freed from all

sins.

ஸாலிக்<sup>3</sup>ராம சரிலாமேகாம் விப்ராணம் ஜாது சார்பயேத் | ஸோமயஜ்ஞ  
மஹாபுண்யம் ஏகபி<sup>3</sup>ல்வம் சரிவார்பணம் || 4 || ஏகாம் = one. ஸாலிக்<sup>3</sup>ராமசரிலாம் =  
saligrama stone.

விப்ராணம் = a brahmin equipped with the knowledge of Self.

Knowledge that leads to liberation is called vidya வித்<sup>3</sup>யா- ஸா வித்<sup>3</sup>யா

யா விமுக்தயே | Thus it is said:

வித்<sup>3</sup>யயா யாதி விப்ரத்வம் | ஜாது = at any time. அர்பயேத் = if one  
gives. ஸோமயஜ்ஞ மஹாபுண்யம் = (acquires) the great merit of performing a Soma Yaga.

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

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

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

(like samkranti) and to a worthy person is of superior type of

gift. தா<sup>3</sup>தவ்யமிதி யத்<sup>3</sup>தா<sup>3</sup>நம் தீ<sup>3</sup>யதே<sup>3</sup>ந்ருபகாரிணே | தே<sup>3</sup>ஸே காலே ச பாத்த்ரே  
ச தத்<sup>3</sup>தா<sup>3</sup>நம் ஸாத்விகம் ஸ்ம்ரு<sup>3</sup>தம் || (Gita -17-20).

Shankaracharya defines a “worthy person” to be one who has studied the

vedas with all its six branches. If in addition to mere studies he

had acquired the knowledge of the Self, and is fit to be called

விப்ர: (as mentioned in this verse), his worth increases

thousands of times. He is the most suitable person for offering a gift. The reason is that a person with the knowledge of the Self is extremely difficult to come across. Such a person is as good as the Lord Himself. Krishna says, in Gita, that such a person is not different from Him. ஜ்ஞாநீ த்வாத்மைவ மே மதம் । The shastras say that if one can find such a person one should not wait for a proper time or place for giving the gift. One should be alert and seize such a rare opportunity that presents itself and make the gift. It will earn immense merit for the giver. Meaning of the verse: If one gifts a sacred saligrama piece to a brahmin who has acquired the knowledge of Self, he earns great merit equal to that of performing a sacrifice.

த<sup>3</sup>ந்திகோடி ஸஹஸ்ராணி வாஜபேய ஸதாநி ச । கோடிகந்யா  
மஹாதா<sup>3</sup>நம் ஏகபில்வம் ஸிவார்பணம் ॥ 5 ॥ த<sup>3</sup>ந்தி = elephant. கோடி: = a crore  
or ten millions. ஸஹஸ்ரம் =  
a thousand. ஸஹஸ்ராணி is plural and means many thousands or a  
large number. So, த<sup>3</sup>ந்திகோடி ஸஹஸ்ராணி means thousands of crores  
of elephants.

வாஜபேய = name of a sacrifice. ஸதாநி = hundreds or again a  
large number. Thus வாஜபேய ஸதாநி means a large number of  
Vajapeya sacrifices. கோடிகந்யா = millions of unmarried girls.

மஹா = great or large. தா<sup>3</sup>நம் = giving or presenting.

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

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

able to discharge his social and religious obligations of grihastashrama as prescribed in the shastras. King Janaka specifically said this to Rama at the time of giving Sita in marriage to Him. He said இயம் ஸீதா மம ஸுதா ஸஹத<sup>4</sup>ர்மசா<sup>1</sup> தவ | (1-63-26). “This Sita, my daughter, is going to be your helpmate in discharging your sacred obligations.” Thus, gifting a girl in marriage is considered to be specially sacred and meritorious.

We find King Bali making a grand offer to Lord Vamana after receiving Him in the horse sacrifice he conducted. He said யத்<sup>3</sup> யத்<sup>3</sup> வடோ வாஞ்சுனி தத் ப்ரதீச்ச<sup>2</sup> மே த்வாமர்தி<sup>2</sup>நம் விப்ரஸுதாநுதர்கயே | கா<sup>3</sup>ம் காஞ்சநம் கு<sup>3</sup>ணவத்<sup>3</sup> தா<sup>4</sup>ம ம்ரு<sup>3</sup>ஷ்டம் ததா<sup>2</sup>ந்நபேயமுத வா விப்ர கந்யம் | க்<sup>3</sup>ராமாந் ஸம்ரு<sup>3</sup>த்<sup>3</sup>தா<sup>4</sup>ம்ஸ்துரகா<sup>3</sup>ந் க<sup>3</sup>ஜாந் வா ரதா<sup>2</sup>ம்ஸ்ததா<sup>2</sup>ர்ஹத்தம

ஸம்ப்ரதீச்ச<sup>2</sup> || (8-18-32). He said “Please take from me whatever you desire, O Brahmachari: I

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

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

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

but to seek Him. He says: (Gita- 7-16) ஆப்<sup>3</sup>ர்ஹ்மபு<sup>4</sup>வநால்லோகா:

புநராவர்தினோ<sup>5</sup>ர்ஜூந | மாமுபேதய து கௌந்தேய புநர்ஜநம் ந வித்<sup>3</sup>யதே

|| But worshipping the Lord Shiva by offering bilva leaves with proper understanding of the act of puja will confer wisdom that will confer liberation and eternal bliss. Thus there can be no comparison with

any other act, gifts etc.Gita says this specifically: (4-33). ஸ்ரேயாந்  
 த்<sup>3</sup>ரவ்யமயாத்<sup>3</sup>யஜ்ஞாத் ஜ்ஞாநயஜ்ஞ: பரந்தப | ஸர்வம் கர்மாகி<sup>2</sup>லம் பார்த<sup>2</sup>  
 ஜ்ஞாநே பரிஸமாப்யதே || The sacrifices, gifts etc., that involve materials, though  
 meritorious is inferior to sacrifice of knowledge. Shri Shankaracharya,  
 in his commentary, explains that a material sacrifice engenders  
 fruit: not so the sacrifice of knowledge. Hence its superiority. All  
 works are included in knowledge that leads to liberation.  
 த்<sup>3</sup>ரவ்யமய: ஹி யஜ்ஞ: ப<sup>2</sup>லஸ்ய ஆரம்ப<sup>4</sup>க:, ந ஜ்ஞாநயஜ்ஞ:  
 ப<sup>2</sup>லஸ்ய ஆரம்ப<sup>4</sup>க:, அத: ஸ்ரேயாந் ப்ரஸஸ்யதர: | Meaning of the verse: Gifting of  
 thousands of elephants or performing  
 great sacrifices like the Vajapeya or gifting of young unmarried  
 girls in marriage cannot be compared with the offering of a cluster  
 of bilva leaves to Lord Shiva.

லக்ஷம்யாஸ்தநுத உத்பந்நம் மஹாதே<sup>3</sup>வஸ்ய ச ப்ரியம் | பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வவ்ரு'க்ஷம்  
 ப்ரயச்சா<sup>2</sup>மி ஹ்யேகபி<sup>3</sup>ல்வம் சரிவார்பணம் || 6 || லக்ஷம்யாஸ்தநுத = from the body  
 of LakShmi. உத்பந்நம் = born or  
 originated. மஹாதே<sup>3</sup>வஸ்ய ப்ரியம் = dear to Mahadeva (Shiva).  
 பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வவ்ரு'க்ஷம் = a bilva tree. ப்ரயச்சா<sup>2</sup>மி = I give or offer.  
 The bilva tree is unique in that it bears fruits without apparently  
 flowering earlier as is normally the case. So it is considered as  
 superior to and master of other trees. Thus it is known as  
 வநஸ்பதி:. The fruit indicates wisdom born of the ripeness of  
 the mind. This wisdom annihilates ignorance of the self  
 (அஜ்ஞாநம்) and confers liberation. The ignorance makes the mind  
 extrovert and indulge in worldly pleasures. This is the cause of many  
 problems and leads to rebirth. The wisdom dispels the ignorance,  
 makes the mind introvert and look for the source of happiness that is  
 inside everyone. Gita describes the holy fig tree as representing  
 samsara. But the bilva tree destroys samsara and confers liberation.  
 So the scriptures ask everyone to worship the Lord with the bilva  
 leaves and get the supreme benefit. The Skanda Purana talks in detail

about the genesis and glory of the bilva tree. It sprung out of the right hand of LakShmi Devi. Vishnu worshipped Lord Shiva with the leaves of the tree. Shiva was pleased with the worship and said the tree will be known as ShrivrikSha (ஸ்ரீவ்ரு'க்ஷ:) after Shri Devi or LakShmi and will stand as the embodiment of the three vedas. It will be dear to the gods. The Shri Suktam prays to LakShmi referring to this: ஆதி<sup>3</sup>த்யவர்ணே தபஸோதி<sup>4</sup>ஜாதோ வநஸ்பதிஸ்தவ வ்ரு'க்ஷா<sup>5</sup>த<sup>2</sup> பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வ: | தஸ்யப<sup>2</sup>லாநி தபஸாநுதி<sup>3</sup>ந்து மாயாந்தராயாஸ்ச பா<sup>3</sup>ஹ்யா அலக்ஷமீ: || This says that may the bilva fruit (wisdom or jnanam) that appeared from your hand dispel ignorance and its cause maya. With maya gone may the miseries arising from various causes like external forces etc., also go. Bilva leaf is also one of the places where LakShmi is said to reside. Thus பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வநிலயா is one of Her names. So, worshipping the Lord with the bilva leaves will bless the worshipper with wisdom and incidentally dispel poverty, sickness etc. Meaning of the verse: I offer the bilva tree that sprung from the body of LakShmi Devi and is dear to Lord Mahadeva.

த<sup>3</sup>ர்ஸநம் பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வவ்ரு'க்ஷஸ்ய ஸ்பர்ஸநம் பாபநாஸநம் | அகோ<sup>4</sup>ரபாபஸம்ஹாரம் ஏகபி<sup>3</sup>ல்வம் ஸிவர்பணம் || 7 || த<sup>3</sup>ர்ஸநம் = seeing or looking at. பி<sup>3</sup>ல்வவ்ரு'க்ஷஸ்ய = bilva tree.

ஸ்பர்ஸநம் = touching. பாபநாஸநம் = destroy the sins.

அகோ<sup>4</sup>ரபாபஸம்ஹாரம் = destroys most horrible sins. The word

அகோ<sup>4</sup>ர normally means not terrific or fearful - நாஸ்தி

கோ<sup>4</sup>ரோ யஸ்மாத் இதி | . But in this context this word means most

horrible ந வித்<sup>3</sup>யதே கோ<sup>4</sup>ரம் யஸ்மாத் தத் அத்யந்த கோ<sup>4</sup>ரம் இத்யர்த: <sup>2</sup> |

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

most heinous. They are ப்<sup>3</sup>ரஹ்மஹத்யா ஸுராபாநம் ஸ்தேயம் கு<sup>3</sup>ர்வங்க<sup>3</sup>நாக<sup>3</sup>ம: |

மஹாந்தி பாதகாந்யாஹுஸ்ததஸம்ஸர்க<sup>3</sup>ஸ்ச பஞ்சம: || The reason for saying why seeing or touching the bilva tree is so

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

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

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

காஸீக்ஷேத்ரநிவாஸம் ச காலபை<sup>4</sup>ரவத<sup>3</sup>ர்ஸநம் | ப்ரயாக<sup>4</sup>மாத<sup>4</sup>வம்  
த<sup>3</sup>ரு<sup>3</sup>ஷ்ட்வா ஹ்யேகபில்வம் ஸிவார்பணம் || 8 || காஸீக்ஷேத்ரநிவாஸம் = residing  
in the holy city of Kasi.

காலபை<sup>4</sup>ரவத<sup>3</sup>ர்ஸநம் = having the darsan of Shri Kalabhairava.

ப்ரயாக<sup>4</sup>மாத<sup>4</sup>வம் த<sup>3</sup>ரு<sup>3</sup>ஷ்ட்வா = and seeing Shri Madhava at Prayag.

Though our country is dotted all over with holy places and waters the triad Prayag, Kasi and Gaya are considered to be the most important ones. Kasi is said to be one of the “mokShapuri”s - meaning it can confer mokSha or liberation. The Agni Puranam says அத்ர ஸ்நாநம் ஜபோ ஹோமோ மரணம் தே<sup>3</sup>வ்யூஜநம் | ஸ்ராத<sup>3</sup>த<sup>4</sup>ம் தா<sup>3</sup>நம் நிவாஸஸ்ச யத்<sup>3</sup>யத் ஸ்யாத் பு<sup>4</sup>க்திமு<sup>4</sup>க்தி<sup>4</sup>க்ரு<sup>4</sup>த் || It is specifically said that one who dies at Kasi is not reborn.

காஸ்யாம் ஹி மரணந்மு<sup>4</sup>க்தி: | This is because the Lord Shiva at Kasi - known as Kalabhairava grants

them liberation. Shri Shankaracharya states this in his

Kalabhairavashtakam. பா<sup>4</sup>நுகோடிபா<sup>4</sup>ஸ்வரம் ப<sup>4</sup>வா<sup>3</sup>தி<sup>4</sup>தாரகம் பரம்

நீலகண்ட<sup>2</sup>மீப்ஸிதார்த<sup>2</sup>தா<sup>3</sup>யகம் த்ரிலோசநம் | காலகாலமம்<sup>3</sup>பு<sup>3</sup>ஜாக்ஷமஸ்தஸூ<sup>4</sup>ந்யமக்ஷரம்

காஸிகாபுராதி<sup>4</sup>நாத<sup>2</sup>காலபை<sup>4</sup>ரவம் ப<sup>4</sup>ஜே || Because of these reasons many believers

prefer to live in Kasi, or

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

and escape rebirth. So காஸீக்ஷேத்ரநிவாஸம் ச

காலபை<sup>4</sup>ரவத<sup>3</sup>ர்ஸநம் is mentioned here.

Prayaga is known as தீர்த<sup>2</sup>ராஜா as all the holy rivers and streams

are said to be present there. த<sup>3</sup>ஸதீர்த<sup>2</sup>ஸஹஸ்ராணி ஷஷ்டிகோ<sup>4</sup>ப்யஸ்ததா<sup>2</sup>பரா: |

தேஷாம்

ஸாந்நித<sup>4</sup>யமத்ரைவ ப்ரயாக<sup>3</sup>ம் பரமம் தத: || க<sup>3</sup>வாம் கோடிப்ரதா<sup>3</sup>நாத் யத் தர்யஹம்

ஸ்நாநஸ்ய தத்<sup>2</sup>ப<sup>2</sup>லம் | ப்ரயாகே<sup>3</sup>

மாக<sup>4</sup>மாஸே து ஏவமாஹு<sup>4</sup>ர்மநீஷ்ண: || It is the confluence of the three sacred rivers Ganga, Yamuna and the

mythical Saraswathi and is known as Triveni த்ரிவேணி: |

Prayag is said to be the perennial city that is not submerged even

during the deluge that submerges the earth at the end of the aeons. The city remains in tact and Lord Vishnu remains here as Yogamurthy. He is known as Veni Madhava : hence having the darsan of the most glorious Lord Madhava is sanctifying and is mentioned here. Prayaga has another connotation. According to the Yoga Shastra there are six chakras or centres of energy in the body. They are: 1 - Muladhara Chakra situated near the tail end of the back bone, 2 - Svadhishтана Chakra situated four fingers above the tail end of the back bone, 3 - Manipura Chakra situated opposite the naval, 5 - Anahata Chakra situated in the middle of the chest and 6 - Ajna chakra situated on the forehead between the two eyebrows. Some texts talk of more chakras, but that is not relevant here. The Yoga Shastra says there are three nadis (channels or streams through which the energy is directed to and from the chakras). They are known as : 1 - Sushumna Nadi. This is the central channel that runs through the spinal column starting from the base or Muladhara chakra. 2 - Ida Nadi also called the Chandra (moon ) Nadi. It also starts from the Muladhara Chakra and ascends along the left side of the spinal column, criss-crossing each chakra and finally passes through the left nostril to reach the sixth or Ajna Chakra where it unites with the Pingala Nadi. 3 - Pingala Nadi also called the Surya (sun) Nadi. It also starts from the Muladhara Chakra, ascends along the right side of the spinal column criss-crossing the different chakras. It passes through the right nostril to end at the Ajna Chakra by joining the Ida Nadi. The Ida and Pingala nadis are likened to the rivers Yamuna and Ganga. Thus the sixth or the Ajna Chakra situated behind the junction of the eye brows is the confluence of the three nadis and is also called Triveni and the sixth chakra itself is, for this reason, called Prayaga. Lord Mahesvara is the deity presiding in this chakra along with His consort who represents the maya shakti. Since He is with His maya He is also known as Madhava. (Vishnu Sahasranamam.72)

மாத<sup>4</sup>வ:- மாயா: ஸ்ரியா: த<sup>4</sup>வ: பதி: மாத<sup>4</sup>வ: ।

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

He is effulgent and omniscient. ய: ஸர்வஜ்ஞ: ஸர்வவித்<sup>3</sup>யஸ்ய ஜ்ஞாநமயம் தப: ।  
தஸ்மாதே<sup>3</sup>தப்<sup>3</sup>ரஹ்ம நாம

ரூபமந்நம் ச ஜாயதே ॥ Yogis who, by intense practice, ascend to the sixth chakra are said

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

Yogis are advised to meditate on this chakra particularly in their last moments. Krishna says this in Gita (8-10). ப்ரயாணகாலே மநஸா<sup>5</sup>சலேந ப<sup>4</sup>க்த்யா யுக்தோ யோக<sup>3</sup>ப<sup>3</sup>லேந சைவ । ப்<sup>4</sup>ருவோர்மத்<sup>4</sup>யே ப்ராணமாவேஸ்ய ஸம்யக் ஸ தம் பரம் புருஷமுபைதி தி<sup>3</sup>வ்யம் ॥ At the time of death, the yogi, with steady mind, and with devotion

and the power of yoga fixing the life-force between the eye-brows reaches the supreme Spirit, divine.

So, if one stays in Kasi, performs the religious rites there as is customary, has the darsan of Lord Kalabhairava who can confer liberation on His devotees and also visits holy city of Prayaga, has a dip at the confluence of the three holy rivers, has the darsan of Lord Madhava and on the top of all also worships Lord Shiva with bilva leaves can one ask for anything more? He is assured of Lord's grace. TIRTHAM. Now, let us pause for a moment and see what our puranas and saints say about Kasi and other holy places.

The word தீர்த<sup>2</sup>ம் (tirtham) is defined as a holy place, place of pilgrimage, etc., dedicated to some holy object (especially on or near the bank of a sacred river). Kasi, Prayag, Gaya all come under this category. So people have been visiting these places, taking bath and performing all prescribed rituals with great deal of sincerity.

A different definition of tirtham is to be seen in our puranas. Rough

translations are given. பிதரோ யஸ்ய த்ரு<sup>3</sup>ப்யந்தி ஸேவயா ச கு<sup>3</sup>ணேந ச | தஸ்ய பா<sup>4</sup>கீரதீ<sup>2</sup>ஸ்நாநமஹந்யஹநி வர்ததே || The one whose parents are satisfied by his services and qualities has bath in Ganga everyday.

This one is from Padma Purana. அகா<sup>3</sup>த<sup>4</sup>ஸலிலே ஸூத்<sup>3</sup>தே<sup>4</sup> ஸத்யதீர்தே<sup>4</sup> க்ஷமாஹ்ரதே<sup>3</sup> | ஸ்நாத்வா பாபவிநிர்முக்த: ப்ரயாதி பரமாம் க<sup>3</sup>திம் || Taking a bath in the deep and clean waters of the virtue of truth and

in the large pool known as forbearance or forgiveness one is rid of his sins and gets emancipated. ஸத்யம் தீர்த<sup>2</sup>ம் த<sup>3</sup>யா தீர்த<sup>2</sup>ம் தீர்த<sup>2</sup>மிந்த<sup>3</sup>ரியநிக்<sup>3</sup>ரஹ: | வர்ணஸ்ரமாணம் கே<sup>3</sup>ஹே<sup>3</sup>பி தீர்த<sup>2</sup>ம் ஸம உதா<sup>3</sup>ஹ்ரு<sup>3</sup>தம் || Truthfulness, kindness and control of sense organs all constitute

tirtham. நோத<sup>3</sup>கக்விந்நகா<sup>3</sup>த்ரஸ்து ஸ்நாத இத்யபி<sup>4</sup>தீ<sup>4</sup>யதே | ஸ ஸ்நாதோ யோ த<sup>3</sup>ம்ஸ்நாத: ஸ பா<sup>3</sup>ஹ்யாந்தர: ஸூசி: || (Maha Bharatha).

The one who has merely got his body wet by taking a dip in the water is not considered to have taken a bath - but only the one who has got his passions under control can be really said to have had a bath. நிக்<sup>3</sup>ரு<sup>3</sup>ஹீதேந்த<sup>3</sup>ரியக்<sup>3</sup>ராம: யத்ர யத்ர வஸேந்நர: | தத்ர தத்ர குருக்ஷேத்ரம் நைமிஸம் புஷ்கராணி ச || (Shri Vedanta Desika in Sankalpa Suryodayam). Wherever one may live, in full control of his senses, those very

places are KurukShetram, Naimisham and Pushkaram.

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

மநோ யத்<sup>3</sup>யஸ்தி தீர்தே<sup>2</sup>ந கிம் | If one has pure mind (free from passions) what use is of tirthams like Prayaga?

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

the reason in his Kasipanchakam: காஸீக்ஷேத்ரம் ஸரீரம் த்ரிபு<sup>4</sup>வநஜநீ<sup>3</sup> வ்யாபிநீ ஜ்ஞாநக<sup>3</sup>ங்கா<sup>3</sup> ப<sup>4</sup>க்திஸ்ரத<sup>3</sup>தா<sup>4</sup> க<sup>3</sup>யேயம் நிஜகு<sup>3</sup>ருசரணத்<sup>4</sup>யாநயோக:<sup>3</sup> ப்ரயாக:<sup>3</sup> | விஸ்வேஸோ<sup>3</sup>யம் துரீய: ஸகலஜநமந: ஸாக்ஷிபு<sup>4</sup>தோ<sup>3</sup>ந்தராத்மா தே<sup>3</sup>ஹே ஸர்வம் மதீ<sup>3</sup>யே யதி<sup>3</sup> வஸதி புநஸ்தீர்த<sup>2</sup>மந்யத்கிமஸ்தி || The body is Kasi, the place of pilgrimage; the Ganges of knowledge is

the mother of the three worlds, pervading all; faith combined with devotion is Gaya; the yoga of meditating on the feet of one's

spiritual master is Prayaga; the Self, the witness of the minds of all is Visveswara. If then all this is in my own body, where else is any other sacred bathing place? தீர்தா<sup>2</sup>நி தோயரூபாணி தே<sup>3</sup>வாந்பாஷாணம்ரு<sup>3</sup>ண்மயாந் | யோகி<sup>3</sup>நோ ந ப்ரபத்<sup>3</sup>யந்தே ஆத்மத்<sup>3</sup>யாந்பராயணை: || (Uttara Gita).

The yogis who are ever absorbed in meditation of their Self do not seek tirthas in the form of water and gods made of stone and mud. Shri Bhagavata goes one step further and says it is the holy men who lend sanctity to tirthas.

When King Parikshit took a vow to fast unto death, many great men came to see him. This is how their arrival is described. தத்ரோபஜக்<sup>3</sup>முர்புவநம் புநாநா மஹாநுபா<sup>4</sup>வா முநய: ஸஸிஷ்யா: | ப்ராயேண தீர்தா<sup>2</sup>பி<sup>4</sup>க<sup>3</sup>மாபதே<sup>3</sup>ஸை: ஸ்வயம் ஹி தீர்தா<sup>2</sup>நி புநந்தி ஸந்த: || (1-19-8).

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

The reason for saying so is said by Yudhistira in his address to Vidhura: “devotees like you are not only consecrated themselves; but it is they who revive the sanctity of sacred places by the living presence of Lord Vishnu in their hearts.” ப<sup>4</sup>வத்<sup>3</sup>விதா<sup>4</sup> பா<sup>4</sup>க<sup>3</sup>வதாஸ்தீர்தீ<sup>2</sup>பூ<sup>4</sup>தா: ஸ்வயம் விபோ<sup>4</sup> | தீர்தீ<sup>2</sup>குர்வந்தி தீர்தா<sup>2</sup>நி ஸ்வாந்த:ஸ்தே<sup>2</sup>ந க<sup>3</sup>தா<sup>3</sup>பு<sup>4</sup>ரு<sup>3</sup>தா || (1-13-10).

The message then is clear. One may travel all over the country, visit many holy places and take bath in sacred rivers. This may serve a limited purpose only. What will really help is obtaining control over one’s senses and shedding tendencies like desire, anger and jealousy. Krishna describes desire and anger as the twin enemies one should be wary of. காம ஏஷ க்ரோத<sup>4</sup> ஏஷ ரஜோகு<sup>3</sup>ணஸமுத்<sup>3</sup>ப<sup>4</sup>வ: | மஹாஸநோ மஹாபாப்மா வித்<sup>3</sup>த<sup>4</sup>யேநமிஹ வைரிணம் || (3-37). He puts it again more forcefully later on and describes them as door ways to hell. He wants us to avoid them. By avoiding them one will be

doing good to self and will be fit for liberation. த்ரிவித<sup>4</sup>ம் நரகஸ்யேத<sup>3</sup>ம் த்<sup>3</sup>வாரம்  
நாஸநமாத்த்மந: | காம: க்ரோத<sup>4</sup>ஸ்ததா<sup>2</sup> லோப<sup>4</sup>ஸ்ததஸ்மா<sup>3</sup>தே<sup>3</sup>தத்ரயம் த்யஜேத்  
|| ஏதைர்விமுத்த: கௌந்தேய தமோத்<sup>3</sup>வாரைஸ்த்ரிபி<sup>4</sup>ர்நர: | ஆசுரத்யாத்த்மந:  
ஸ்ரேயஸ்ததோ யாதி பராம் க<sup>3</sup>திம் || (16-21 and 22). Only a mind free from passions

can develop devotion to God. But a  
mind polluted with passions will render all spiritual practices to  
become waste. Krishna points this out to his friend Uddhava in

Uddhava Gita. (Bhagavatam -11-16-42,43). வாசம் யச்ச<sup>2</sup> மநோ யச்ச<sup>2</sup> ப்ரா<sup>3</sup>ணந்யச்சே<sup>2</sup>ந்த<sup>3</sup>ரியாணி  
ச | ஆத்மாநமாத்த்மநா

யச்ச<sup>2</sup> ந பூ<sup>4</sup>ய: கல்பஸே<sup>5</sup>த்<sup>4</sup>வநே || யோ வை வாங்மநஸீ ஸம்யக<sup>3</sup>ஸம்யச்ச<sup>2</sup>ந்தி<sup>4</sup>யா  
யதி: | தஸ்ய வ்ரதம் தபோ

தா<sup>3</sup>நம் ஸ்ரவத்யாமக<sup>4</sup>டாம்பு<sup>3</sup>வத் || Control speech, control the mind, control the pranas  
and organs;

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

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

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

மூலதோ ப்<sup>3</sup>ரஹ்மருபாய மத்<sup>4</sup>யதோ விஷ்ணுரூபிணே | அக்<sup>3</sup>ரத: ஸிவரூபாய  
ஹ்யேகபி<sup>3</sup>ல்வம் ஸிவார்பணம் || 9 || மூலத: = at the root level. ப்<sup>3</sup>ரஹ்மருபாய = having  
the form of

Brahma the creator. மத்<sup>4</sup>யத: = in the middle portion.

விஷ்ணுரூபிணே = having the form of Vishnu, the sustainer.

அக்<sup>3</sup>ரத: = at the top portion. ஸிவரூபாய = having the form

of Shiva the destroyer.

The bilva tree is conceived as the supreme being who takes the forms of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva for creating, sustaining and finally resolves what is created. The vedic hymn Shri Rudram salutes the Lord saying நமோ வ்ருக்ஷேப்<sup>4</sup>யோ ஹரிகேசேப்<sup>4</sup>ய: । The commentator says that the Lord who can take any form, assumes the form of Bilva, Peepal and other holy trees which can be used in worship and sacrifices for gaining His grace. Worshipping the tree with this concept in the mind will purge one of the sins, as mentioned in verse No. 7 and confer supreme benefit.

The root is under the ground and thus hidden from our eyes. Similarly the creation is shrouded in mystery. One cannot satisfactorily explain the origin, the cause and so many other facts relating to creation. So it is said to be அநாதி<sup>3</sup> - its origin cannot be determined. Shri Gaudapada in his Karika on Mandukya Upanishad discusses this topic at great length and concludes these are beyond our comprehension or அசிந்த்யா: ஸதை<sup>3</sup>வ தே । . So the creator Brahma is represented at the root level of the tree. The stem or the middle portion is visible just as the world. We see beings being born and sustained. There is also an orderliness in the world. So the middle portion represents Vishnu. Meaning of the verse: worshipping Lord Shiva with a leaf from the bilva tree which represents Brahma, the creator in the root portion, Vishnu, the sustainer in the middle portion and Shiva, the destroyer in the top portion one can derive the supreme benefit.

பில்வாஷ்டகமித<sup>3</sup>ம் புண்யம் ய: படே<sup>2</sup>த் சரிவஸந்நிதௌ<sup>4</sup> । ஸர்வபாப  
விநிர்முக்த: சரிவலோகமவாப்நுயாத் || 10 || பில்வாஷ்டகம் = Bilvashtakam stotram.  
இத<sup>3</sup>ம் = this.

புண்யம் = meritorious, sacred. ய: = whosoever. படேத் = reads.  
சரிவஸந்நிதௌ<sup>4</sup> = in the proximity or presence of Shiva.  
ஸர்வபாப விநிர்முக்த: = absolved or emancipated from all sins.

ஸிவலோகம் = the world of Shiva. ஆப்நுயாத் = will reach.

This verse is called the ப<sup>2</sup>ல்ஸ்ருதி: and gives the benefit one will gain by reciting this hymn. This says that one who reads these verses in the proximity of the Lord, either in a temple or in one's puja room will get absolved of the sins. It goes without saying that the reading should be done with faith and devotion. We may see this point being stressed in the VishnuSahasranamam and all other hymns. Mere recitation by rote will be least effective. Also, it is necessary that one should not doubt in the least the fact stated here and ask whether mere recitation can absolve one of the sins? It is to be understood that these verses are in vogue for a long time and should have been composed by a saint, a mahatma who had done the worship of Shiva with bilva leaves and actually enjoyed the results. So he is putting his experience in these verses for the benefit of others and the future generations. We may see similar statements about the benefits in all stotras. On one hand they induce one to read the verses and in addition they plant the seed of devotion in the reader's mind and thus make one the recipient of Lord's grace in due course of time. Meaning of the verse: whoever reads these sacred verses of Bilvashtakam in the proximity of Lord Shiva will be freed of all sins and attain the abode of Lord Shiva. ॥ ஓ தத்ஸத் ॥

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*bilvAShTakam with meaning*

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

