Bhaja Govindam

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Bhaja Govindam was written by Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya. A biography of Shankara and his other compositions of Vedic literature can be found in the shankara.itx document. Bhaja govindaM is one of the minor compositions of the spiritual giant, Adi Shankaracharya. It is classified as a prakaraNa grantha, a primer to the major works. Though sung as a bhajan, it contains the essence of Vedanta and implores the man to think, Why am I here in this life? Why am I amassing wealth, family, but have no peace? What is the Truth? What is the purpose of life? The person thus awakened gets set on a path to the inner road back to the God principle.

The background of Bhaja GovindaM is worth examining. During his stay in Kashi, Adi Shankaracharya noticed a very old man studying the rules of Sanskrit by Panini. Shankara was touched with pity at seeing the plight of the old man spending his years at a mere intellectual accomplishment while he would be better off praying and spending time to control his mind.

Shankara understood that the majority of the world was also engaged in mere intellectual, sense pleasures and not in the divine contemplation. Seeing this, he burst forth with the verses of Bhaja govindaM. In 31 verses, he, like no other, explains our fallacies, our wrong outlook for life, and dispels our ignorance and delusions. Thus bhaja govindaM was originally known as moha mudgAra, the remover of delusions.
Shankara explains, nay chides, us for spending our time in useless trivia like amassing wealth, lusting after (wo)men and requests us to discriminate and cultivate the knowledge to learn the difference between the real and the unreal. To emphasise that, he concludes that all knowledge other than the Self-Knowledge is useless, Shankara makes the person realize how foolish he/she is in the conduct and behaviour by these verses, and shows the purpose of our worldly existence, which is to seek Govinda and attain Him.

Bhaja govindaM is divided into dvAdashamanjarikA stotram and chaturdashamanjarika stotram. At the end of composing the first stanza, it is said that Shankara burst forth with the next 12 stanzas of bhaja govindam. Thus stanzas 2-13 with 1st as refrain are called dvAdashmanjarika stotram. Inspired by the extempore recital by Shankara, each of his 14 disciples composed a verse and the 14 verse compendium is called chaturdashamanjarika stotram. (There are no evidences to prove the exact individual authorship of these 14 verses, we have some traditional hearsay evidences as attribution.) Shankara added the finishing touches by adding five of his own stanzas at the last bringing the total to 31.

The combined 31 are also termed as mohamudgaraH by some. The last two verses in this version is not found in all editions.

Bhaja govindaM has been set to musical tones and sung as prayer songs by children. It is divided into dvAdashamanjarikA and charpaTapanjarikA for this purpose. The former is a set of verses (verses 2-13) while the rest of the verses form charpaTamanjarikA. Anyone who listens to the music of Bhaja govindaM is attracted to it. However, the significance of the text goes much deeper and contains a well defined philosophy of attaining salvation.

Shankara’s words seem to be quite piercing and seem to lack the softness and tenderness often found in his other texts, thus addressing directly. The reason is that this was an extempore
recital to an old man. His words can be compared to a knife of a surgeon. The surgeon’s knife cruelly removes the tumour with much pain, but removing the tumour ultimately restores good health in the patient. So are Shankara’s words, which pierce and point out our ignorance. It is a knife into the heart of worldliness, and by removing this tumour of ignorance, we can attain everlasting bliss with the grace of Govinda.

May the AchAryA guide us from ignorance to truth.

OM tat sat.
Do not get drowned in delusion by going wild with passions and lust by seeing a woman’s navel and chest. These are nothing but a modification of flesh. Fail not to remember this again and again in your mind.

The life of a person is as uncertain as rain drops trembling on a lotus leaf. Know that the whole world remains a prey to disease, ego and grief.

So long as a man is fit and able to support his family, see what affection all those around him show. But no one at home cares to even have a word with him when his body totters due to old age.

When one is alive, his family members enquire kindly about his welfare. But when the soul departs from the body, even his wife runs away in fear of the corpse.
The childhood is lost by attachment to playfulness. Youth is lost by attachment to woman. Old age passes away by thinking over many things. But there is hardly anyone who wants to be lost in parabrahman.

Who is your wife? Who is your son? Strange is this samsAra, the world. Of whom are you? From where have you come? Brother, ponder over these truths.

From satsanga, company of good people, comes non-attachment, from non-attachment comes freedom from delusion, which leads to self-settledness. From self-settledness comes Jivan muktI.

What good is lust when youth has fled?
What use is a lake which has no water?
Where are the relatives when wealth is gone?
Where is samsAra, the world, when the Truth is known?
Do not boast of wealth, friends, and youth. Each one of these are destroyed within a minute by time. Free yourself from the illusion of the world of Maya and attain the timeless Truth.

Daylight and darkness, dusk and dawn, winter and springtime come and go. Time plays and life ebbs away. But the storm of desire never leaves.

Oh mad man! Why this engrossment in thoughts of wealth? Is there no one to guide you? There is only one thing in three worlds that can save you from the ocean of samsāra, get into the boat of satsanga, company of good people, quickly.

This bouquet of twelve verses (2-13) was imparted to a grammarian by the all-knowing Shankara, adored as the bhagavadpada.

The following 14 form chaturdasha njarikā. Stanza below is attributed to padmapāda.
There are many who go with matted locks, many who have clean shaven heads, many whose hairs have been plucked out; some are clothed in orange, yet others in various colours — all just for a livelihood. Seeing truth revealed before them, still the foolish ones see it not.

Stanza attributed to toTakAchArya.

Strength has left the old man’s body; his head has become bald, his gums toothless and leaning on crutches. Even then the attachment is strong and he clings firmly to fruitless desires.

Stanza attributed to hastAmalaka.

Behold there lies the man who sits warming up his body with the fire in front and the sun at the back; at night he curls up the body to keep out of the cold; he eats his beggar’s food from the bowl of his hand and sleeps beneath the tree. Still in his heart, he is a wretched puppet at the hands of passions.

Stanza attributed to Subodha.
One may go to Gangasagar, observe fasts, and give away riches in charity! Yet, devoid of jnana, nothing can give mukti even at the end of a hundred births.

Stanza attributed to vArttikakAra (sureshvara).

Take your residence in a temple or below a tree, wear the deerskin for the dress, and sleep with mother earth as your bed. Give up all attachments and renounce all comforts. Blessed with such vairgya, could any fail to be content?

Stanza attributed to nityAnanda.

One may take delight in yoga or bhoga, may have attachment or detachment. But only he whose mind steadily delights in Brahman enjoys bliss, no one else.

Stanza attributed to Anandagiri.

Let a man read but a little from bhagavadgItA, drink just a drop of water from the Ganges, worship but once murAri. He then will have no altercation with Yama.
Stanza attributed to dRiDhabhakti.

Born again, death again, again to stay in the mother’s womb!
It is indeed hard to cross this boundless ocean of samsAra. Oh Murari! Redeem me through Thy mercy.

Stanza attributed to nityanAtha.

There is no shortage of clothing for a monk so long as there are rags cast off the road. Freed from vices and virtues, onward he wanders. One who lives in communion with god enjoys bliss, pure and uncontaminated, like a child and as an intoxicated.

Stanza attributed to yogAnanda.

Who are you? Who am I? From where do I come? Who is my mother, who is my father? Ponder thus, look at everything as essence-less and give up the world as an idle dream.

Stanza attributed to surendra.
In me, in you and in everything, none but the same Vishnu
dwells. Your anger and impatience is meaningless. If you wish to
attain the status of Vishnu, have samabhAva, equanimity, always.

Stanza attributed to medhAtithira.

Waste not your efforts to win the love of or to fight against friend
and foe, children and relatives. See yourself in everyone and give
up all feelings of duality completely.

Stanza attributed to bhArativamsha.

Give up lust, anger, infatuation, and greed. Ponder over your real
nature. Fools are they who are blind to the Self. Cast into hell,
they suffer there endlessly.

Stanza attributed to sumati.

Regularly recite from the Gita, meditate on Vishnu in your
heart, and chant His thousand glories. Take delight to be with
the noble and the holy. Distribute your wealth in charity to
the poor and the needy.

Stanza attributed to sumati.

He who yields to lust for pleasure leaves his body a prey to disease. Though death brings an end to everything, man does not give-up the sinful path.

Wealth is not welfare, truly there is no joy in it. Reflect thus at all times. A rich man fears even his own son. This is the way of wealth everywhere.

Regulate the prAna-s, life forces, remain unaffected by external influences and discriminate between the real and the fleeting. Chant the holy name of God and silence the turbulent mind. Perform these with care, with extreme care.

Oh devotee of the lotus feet of the Guru! May thou be soon
free from Samsara. Through disciplined senses and controlled mind, thou shalt come to experience the indwelling Lord of your heart!

The following two are not found in standard text of Bhajagovindam.

Thus a silly grammarian lost in rules cleansed of his narrow vision and shown the Light by Shankara’s apostles.

Worship Govinda, worship Govinda, worship Govinda, Oh fool!

Other than chanting the Lord’s names, there is no other way to cross the life’s ocean.

Appendix: Word meanings

The following words and meanings are added as an appendix to allow the reader to learn Sanskrit words. They may not follow exact word construction in the above verses. Reader is requested to consult a dictionary and commentaries for additional details.

= worship;
Govinda;
O, foolish mind!;
( when you have) reached/obtained;
(in the) presence/nearness of;
= Time (here: Lord of Death, Yama);

= No; never;

= protects;

= the grammatical formula DukRi.nkaraNe;

= Oh fool!;

= jahi+iha, leave/give up+here(in this world);

= wealth;

= coming/arrival;

= thirst/desire;

= Do; act;

= sat+buddhiM, good+awareness(loosely speaking:mind);

= in the mind;

= desirelessness;

= yat+labhase, whatever+(you)obtain;

= nija+karma, one’s+duty(normal work);

= obtained;

= wealth;

= by that; with that;

= divert/recreate(be happy);

= mind;

= woman;

= breasts that are(full-with milk);

= nAbhI+deshaM, navel+region/country;

= having seen;

= mA+gA, Don’t+go;

= infatuated state(moha+AveshaM-seizure);

= this;

= flesh, fat, +etc;

= appearance (generally, grotesque/ugly);

= in the mind;

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think well;
again;
and again;

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nalinI+dala+gata, lotus+petal+reached/gone;
water(drop);
at+i+tarala, very+unstable;
like that;
life;
wonderful;
fickle-minded;
knowledge;
disease;
self-importance;
having been caught/seized;
world;people;
attacked(hata) by grief(shoka);
and;
entire;

4

so long as;
wealth;
earning/acquiring;
capable of;
tAvat+nija, till then+one’s;
family;
attached;
later;
while living(without earning);
old/digested (by disease etc);
in the body;
word (here enquiry/inquiry);
καθ’ ἐν πάντων, ὡσποδέ�; καθῖν; 

μὴ = not; 

ἐνquiries/asks/minds; 

ἐν in the house; 

5

ὡς long as; 

ἄρσ = air/breath; 

ἐνlives/dwells; 

ἐν in the body; 

ἐν till then; 

ἐν asks/inquires; 

ἐν welfare; 

ἐν in the house; 

ἐν while gone; 

ἐν air(life-breath); 

ἐν when life departs the body; 

ἐν wife; 

ἐν is afraid;fears; 

ἐν tasmin+kaye, in that body; 

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ἄρσ = young boy; 

ἄρσ = till then (till he is young); 

ἄρσ = play; 

ἄρσ = attached/engrossed/absorbed; 

ἄρσ = young man; 

ἄρσ = till then; 

ἄρσ = young woman; 

ἄρσ = attached/engrossed; 

ἄρσ = old man; 

ἄρσ = till then; 

ἄρσ = worry; 

ἄρσ = attached/engrossed/absorbed;
परेम = in the lofty; high; supreme; also pare
प्रभु = Brahma; God;
वी = whosoever;
= not;
सकक = attached/absorbed/engrossed;
॥ 7 ॥
का = kA+te, who+your;
कातिक = wife;
काङड = kaH+te, who+your;
= son;
बनकल: = world/family;
= this;
अय = great/big/very much;
वीकीक = wonderful/mysterious;
कळ = whose;
क = you;
क: = who;
क: = from where;
अकाक = have come;
कातिक = truth/nature;
कातिक = think well/consider;
कातिक = tat+ihA, that+here;
= brother;
॥ 8 ॥
कातिक = in good company;
कातिक = aloneness/non-attachment/detachment;
कातिक = non-infatuated state/clear-headedness;
कातिक = tranquillity/imperturbability;
कातिक = salvation+freedom from bondage of birth;
कातिक = vayasi+gate, when age has advanced/gone;
॥ 9 ॥
к: = who/what use( in the sense of kva?(where));
காமவிகார்: = sensual/sexual attraction;
பசாவேகு = in the drying up of;
விடாத = water;
இ: = what( use) is the;
காசேர் = lake;
விடேக = spent-up/weakened state of;
கிளீத = wealth;
இ: = what( use) for;
நிலமார = family(is there?);
நிலேக = in the realised state;
நிளீத = truth;
இ: = what (use) is;
சபேசார் = world/family bond;

॥ 10 ॥
மா = do not;
டே = do/act;
தேத = wealth;
ஏது = people;
நிலேயிரா = youth;
ச3கிளீத = arrogance/haughtiness;
நியர்கிளீத = takes away/steals away;
நிலேவார்காத = in the twinkling of the eye;
நவா = Master Time;
நவார = all;
மாயா = delusion;
மாயம = full of/completely filled;
இத3ம = this;
நிலேவாரா = whole/entire;
நிலேவாரா = having given up/abandoned;
ப்னேயேசார்கேம = the state/position of Brahma/god-realised state;
தேத = you;
பம்ஸியத = enter;
having known/realised;

Ⅱ 11 Ⅱ
dina+yAminI, day + night;
evening;
morning;
frosty season;
(and) Spring season;
again;
have arrived;
Master Time;
plays;
goes (away);
life/age;
tat+api, then even;
not;
releases;
desire;
air (the wind of desire does not let off its hold);

Ⅱ 12 Ⅱ
by the bouquet consisting of 12 flowers (12; shlokas above)
without remainder/totally;
was told;
to the grammarian+this;
advice;
was;
by the ace scholar Shankara (Plural is used for reverence);
by the Shankaracharya who is known;
as shankarabhagavat +charaNAH or pAdAH (plural for reverence)
Ⅱ 12 Ⅱ
kA+te, who+your;
wife;
| குரு = wealth;          |
| கூறுக்குறி = thinking of; |
| மாது = O mad one!;      |
| கி லோ = what?;         |
| தம் = your;             |
| கால்பாநி = na+asti, is not there; |
| நீள்மார்கா = controller; |
| குருக்குறி = in the three worlds; |
| கால்மார்கா = good people; |
| கால்மார்கா = sa.ngatiH+ekA, company+(only) one (way); |
| தம்பேறு = becomes;     |
| தம்பேறு தம்பேறு = bhava+arNava, birth and death+ocean; |
| தம்பேறு = in crossing;  |
| தம்பேறு = boat/ship;    |

॥ 13 ॥
| தியார் = with knotted hair; |
| தியார் = shaven head;      |
| தியார் = hair cut here and there; |
| தியார் = saffron cloth;    |
| தியார் = cloth/sky;        |
| தியார் = variously done/made-up; |
| தியார் = make-ups/garbs/roles; |
| தியார் = even after seeing; |
| தியார் = cha+na, and +not; |
| தியார் = sees;             |
| தியார் = the fool;          |
| தியார் = for the sake of the belly/living; |
| தியார் = various make-ups/roles; |

॥ 14 ॥
| தியார் = limb(s);         |
| தியார் = weakened;        |
| தியார் = ripened(grey);   |
head;
dashana+vihInaM, teeth+bereft;
having become;
jaws/mouth?
the old man;
goes;
holding the;
stick(walking);
then even;
not;
lets go/releases/gives up;
AshA+pindaM, desire+lump(piNDaM also means rice-ball given; as oblation for the dead)

in front of/ahead/beforehand;
fire (for worship);
pRiShThe+bhAnuH, behind+sun;
in the night;
face dedicated to(huddled up between) the knees;
taking alms in the palms;
living under the trees;
then even;
not;
releases/lets go;
desire;
rope/ties;

one takes resort to;
the sea of Ganga (banks of the Ganges);
going;
austerities;
obsANCE/governance;
= or/else;
= charity;
= (but) bereft of knowledge of the Self;
= according to all schools of thought/unanimously;
= salvation/freedom;
= not;
= attains;
= birth(s);
= hundred;

= temple of god;
= tree;
= root;
= living;
= bed;
= on the surface of the earth;
= skin (of Antelope);
= living;
= all attachments;
= sacrificing/abandonment of enjoyable things/worldly pleasures;
= whose;
= happiness;
= not;
= does;
= Non-attachment/desirelessness;

= indulging in yoga;
= or;
= indulging in worldly pleasures;
= or;
= indulging in good company;
= or;
bereft of company;
who's;
in Brahman(God);
delights;
mind (here soul);
revels;
revels alone/revels indeed;

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god's;
song (here the scripture ‘bhagavatgItA’);
a little;
studied;
river Ganga;
water drop;
a little droplet, drunk;
Even a little drop of Ganga water;
one even;
by whom;
The enemy of ‘MurA’ (Lord Krishna);
well worshipped;
is done;
his;
by Yama, the lord of Death;
not;
discussion;

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again again;
birth;
again again;
death;
again again;
mother;
in the stomach;
sleep;
in this world/here;
family/world;
fordable with great difficulty;
out of boundless compassion;
protect;
Oh MurA’s enemy!(KriShNa);

= torn/tattered cloth lying in the street;
created;
rag;
virtues sins;
without/ having abandoned;
way;
the man seeking union with god;
controlled by yoga;
mind;
delights;
like a child who has gone mad;

= who (are);
you;
who(am);
I;
whence;
has come;
who;
my;
mother;
who;
my;
= father;
= thus;
= deem well/visualise;
= the entire;
= worthless/without essence;
= world;
= having abandoned/sacrificed;
= dream;
= consideration/thinking;

= in yourself;
= in myself;
= cha+anyatra+ekaH, and+in any other place+only one;
= the Lord MahAviShNu;
= in vain; for nothing; purposeless;
= you get angry;
= mayi+asahiShNuH, in me+intolerant;
= become;
= equal-minded/equanimity;
= everywhere;
= you;
= you desire;
= without delay/in no time;
= if;
= the quality/state of Brahman/god-realisation;

= in (towards)the enemy;
= in (towards) the friend;
= in(towards) the son;
= in (towards) relatives;
= don’t;
= do;
effort;
for war(dissension) or peace-making;
in all beings;
see your own self;
everywhere;
give up;
difference/otherness/duality;
desire;
anger;
greed;
infatuation;
having abandoned see as one’s own self;
deem/consider/visualise/imagine;
who am I;
knowledge of self;
bereft;
fools;
they;
are cooked?;
in the hell;
cast in;
is to be sung;
= bhagavatgItA;
= name of the lord;
1000 times;
is to be meditated;
= LakShmi’s consort MahAviShNu’s;
form/image;
the unborn one;
is to be lead/taken;
good people;
in the company;
mind;
is to be given;
to the poor (humble state) people;
and;
wealth;

for happiness;
is done;
sexual pleasures?
later on in the end;
in the body;
disease;
even though;
in the world;
death;
resort/surrender;
even then;
not;
releases/gives up;

pApa+AcharaNa, sin-practising;

wealth;
purposeless/in vain/danger-productive;
deem/consider/visualise;
daily/always;
not;
is;

from that;
(even a little) happiness;
Truth;
= even from the the son;
wealth;
acquiring people;
fear;
everywhere;
this;
understood;
procedure/practice/custom;

breath-control;
diet-control;
always/daily/certain;
uncertain/temporary/ephemeral/transient;
awareness after reasoning;
thought/considered conclusion/opinion;
with chanting of the names of the lord;
in the state of trance;
pay attention;
great care attention;

= the lotus feet of the teacher/guru;
dependent;
devotee;
from the world;
in no time from the cycle of birth and death;
released;
sa+indriya+mAnasa, with senses and mind;
control alone(niyamAt eva);
you will see;
one’s own;
heart-stationed;
God;
Il 31 Il

蠢 = fool;

.turn = certain;

कस्मातकारण = Grammar;

धक्कानविधिनकारण = grammatical formula DukRi.nkaraNa;

क्यावसाय = study;

विज्ञान = awakened/aroused?;

कार्य = honourable prefix;

संकार = Shankara;

गुण = God;

संदेश: = disciples;

काय = having been taught/enlightened;

केश = was/existed;

करण = tested or awakened senses;

Il 32 Il

गण = worship;

केशवातिक = lord Govinda;

दुः = Oh foolish mind!;

कार्यक्रम = (except) through/from remembrance of the Lord’s name;

अद्य = other;

संस्कार = plan/method/means;

भीम = not;

संस्कार = we see;

कार्यक्रम (कार्यक्रम) = for crossing the ocean of births deaths;

Il 33 Il

Encoded and translated by M. Giridhar.

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The audio renderings have different sequence for verses.
Bhaja Govindam

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Please send corrections to sanskrit@cheerful.com