Introduction

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 samsAra, 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 chaturdashama njariKa.

Stanza below is attributed to padmapAda.
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 vArttikAra (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 alteration 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;
நேரேகாவி = Time (here: Lord of Death, Yama);

நேரேகாவி = No; never;

நேரேகாவி = protects;

நேரேகாவி = the grammatical formula DukRi.nkaraNe;

II 1 II

நேரேகாவி = Oh fool!;

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

நேரேகாவி = wealth;

நேரேகாவி = coming/arrival;

நேரேகாவி = thirst/desire;

நேரேகாவி = Do; act;

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

நேரேகாவி = in the mind;

நேரேகாவி = desirelessness;

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

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

நேரேகாவி = obtained;

நேரேகாவி = wealth;

நேரேகாவி = by that; with that;

நேரேகாவி = divert/recreate(be happy);

நேரேகாவி = mind;

II 2 II

நேரேகாவி = woman;

நேரேகாவி = breasts that are(full-with milk);

நேரேகாவி = nAbhI+deshaM, navel+region/country;

நேரேகாவி = having seen;

நேரேகாவி = mA+gA, Don't+go;

நேரேகாவி = infatuated state(moha+AveshaM-seizure);

நேரேகாவி = this;

நேரேகாவி = flesh, fat, +etc;

நேரேகாவி = appearance (generally, grotesque/ugly);

நேரேகாவி = in the mind;
think well;
again;
and again;

= nalinI+dala+gata, lotus+petal+reached/gone;
water(drop);
ati+tarala, very+unstable;
like that;
life;
wonderful;
very+unstable;
like that;
life;
disease;
self-importance;
having been caught/seized;
world;people;
attacked(hata) by grief(shoka);
and;
entire;
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);
kaH+api = whosoever; even one;
not =
inquires/asks/minds;
in the house;
so long as;
air/breath;
lives/dwells;
in the body;
till then;
asks/inquires;
welfare;
in the house;
while gone;
air(life-breath);
when life departs the body;
wife;
is afraid;
attaching/engrossing/absorbing;
young boy;
till then (till he is young);
play;
attaching/engrossing/absorbing;
young man;
till then;
young woman;
attaching/engrossing;
old man;
till then;
worry;
attaching/engrossing/absorbing;


text translation

\( \text{परे} \) = in the lofty; high; supreme; also pare
\( \text{भृगु} \) = Brahman; God;
\( \text{कृष्ण} \) = whosoever;
\( \text{द} \) = not;
\( \text{सत्यं} \) = attached/absorbed/engrossed;

II 7 II

\( \text{का} \) = क+अ+ते, who+your;
\( \text{कान्तिका} \) = wife;
\( \text{कांग्रेज} \) = क+अ+ग+ते, who+your;
\( \text{पुत्र} \) = son;
\( \text{सन्तोषाय} \) = world/family;
\( \text{अभाव} \) = this;
\( \text{अय} \) = great/big/very much;
\( \text{वितक्षेप} \) = wonderful/mysterious;
\( \text{कर्म} \) = whose;
\( \text{कौम} \) = you;
\( \text{क} \) = who;
\( \text{कृ} \) = from where;
\( \text{अनुभव} \) = have come;
\( \text{कार्म} \) = truth/nature;
\( \text{कीर्तिकृ} \) = think well/consider;
\( \text{कृ} \) = त+िहा, that+here;
\( \text{पूज्य} \) = brother;

II 8 II

\( \text{सन्तोषाय} \) = in good company;
\( \text{निरूपण} \) = aloneness/non-attachment/detachment;
\( \text{निरुचिकृ} \) = non-infatuated state/clear-headedness;
\( \text{निरस्त्तके} \) = tranquillity/imperturbability;
\( \text{निर्माण} \) = salvation+freedom from bondage of birth;
\( \text{समसरी} \) = व+अ+ते, when age has advanced/gone;

II 9 II

\( \text{क} \) = who/what use (in the sense of kva? (where));
sensual/sexual attraction;
in the drying up of;
water;
what (use) is the;
lake;
spent-up/weakened state of;
wealth;
what (use) for;
family (is there?);
in the realised state;
truth;
what (use) is;
world/family bond;
do not;
do/act;
wealth;
people;
youth;
arrogance/haughtiness;
takes away/steals away;
in the twinkling of the eye;
Master Time;
all;
delusion;
full of/completely filled;
this;
whole/entire;
having given up/abandoned;
the state/position of Brahma/god-realised state;
you;
enter;
having known/realised; 11
= dina+yAminI, day + night;
evening; morning;
frosty season; (and) Spring season;
again; have arrived; Master Time; plays;
go (away);
life/age; not;
releases; desire;
air (the wind of desire does not let off its hold);
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)
kA+te, who+your;
wife;
धन = wealth;
धक्षिण = thinking of;
महात्म = O mad one!;
क्ष = what?;
तुम = your;
नामेश्वर = na+asti, is not there;
प्रबंधक = controller;
त्रिविश्व = in the three worlds;
मधुमेष्ठि = good people;
सांगतोपाय = sa.ngatiH+ekA, company+(only) one (way);
भभुष = becomes;
पांडांस = bhava+arNava, birth and death+ocean;
सतद्रु = in crossing;
मुखर = boat/ship;
॥ 13 ॥
धौठो = with knotted hair;
हेम = shaven head;
हार = hair cut here and there;
संदर = saffron cloth;
आयो = cloth/sky;
हत्र = variously done/made-up;
देघो = make-ups/garbs/roles;
परंपरिक = even after seeing;
तन = cha+na, and +not;
शेष = sees;
वरेण = the fool;
रामविश्वास = for the sake of the belly/living;
हत्र = various make-ups/roles;
॥ 14 ॥
कृषिक = limb(s);
कय = weakened;
वीकी = ripened(grey);
head;
dashana+vihInaM, teeth+bereft;
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;
observation/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;
= whose;
= in Brahman(God);
= delights;
= mind (here soul);
= revels;
= nandati+eva, revels alone/revels indeed;

= 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;
= once even;
= by whom;
= the enemy of ‘MurA’ (Lord Krishna);
= well worshipped;
= is done;
= his;
= by Yama, the lord of Death;
= not;
= discussion;

= punaH+api, 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;
dee or visualise;
the entire;
worthless or without essence;
world;
having abandoned or sacrificed;
dream;
consideration or thinking;
in yourself;
in myself;
cha and ekah, and in any other place only one;
the Lord MahAviShNu;
in vain; for nothing; purposeless;
you get angry;
in me intolerant;
become;
equal-minded or equanimity;
everywhere;
you;
you desire;
without delay or in no time;
if;
the quality or state of Brahman or god-realisation;
in (towards) the enemy;
in (towards) the friend;
in (towards) the son;
in (towards) relatives;
don’t;
do;
మేకను = effort;
విచిత్రం = for war(dissension) or peace-making;
సారించిని = in all beings;
మామలు మనుషులు = see your own self;
సారించిందు ఎక్కువ సారించిందు = everywhere;
శ్రద్ధని మేము = give up;
ప్రతిఫలితం = difference/otherness/duality;
II 25 II
విదితం = desire;
ఎండునికిందు = anger;
ఎగిని = greed;
సమాధిందు = infatuation;
తిమించినిసమాధించిని = having abandoned see as one’s own self;
పాటిపిందు = deem/consider/visualise/imagine;
మాము సమాధిందు = who am I;
అనుమానిండిందు = knowledge of self;
బొమ్మింది = bereft;
విసారా = fools;
పతన్ = they;
పామక్తి = are cooked?;
పదన్ = in the hell;
మిగిలి = cast in;
II 26 II
మామ = is to be sung;
చిత్ర విశేషాం = bhagavatgItA;
మనుషులు = name of the lord;
సిద్ధముందు = 1000 times;
మిగిలి = is to be meditated;
పూర్ణింది = LakShmi’s consort MahAviShNu’s;
చిత్రింది = form/image;
అభివృద్ధి = the unborn one;
పాటిపింది = 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;
புத்தான் என்பது = even from the the son;
தன் = wealth;
பார்வையன் = acquiring people;
பேர் = fear;
ஏற்பாடு = everywhere;
ஆதார = this;
எம்பாக்கம் = understood;
செயலியா = procedure/practice/custom;
॥ 29 ॥
புருஷாத்மா = breath-control;
புருஷப்படுத்து = diet-control;
நிதியம் = always/daily/certain;
அனுந்தம் = uncertain/temporary/ephemeral/transient;
நூற்றாண்டா = awareness after reasoning;
நூற்றாண்டா = thought/considered conclusion/opinion;
புர்வார்த்த = with chanting of the names of the lord;
சான்றிப்புறா = in the state of trance;
சூழ்ந்தாரா = pay attention;
மகாந்தம் = great care attention;
॥ 30 ॥
நான் சிறுமியர் = the lotus feet of the teacher/guru;
நிதியா = dependent;
பாதுகா: = devotee;
நூற்றாண்டா = from the world;
அதிருத்தார்த்தா = in no time from the cycle of birth and death;
சமிக: = released;
சான்றிப்புறா = sa+indriya+mAnasa, with senses and mind;
சான்றிப்புறா = control alone(niyamAt eva);
சான்றிப்புறா = you will see;
சிறை = one’s own;
சான்றிப்புறா = heart-stationed;
சேஸ்நம் = God;
॥ 31 ॥

fool; = certain;
Grammar; = grammatical formula DukRi.nkaraNa;
study; = awakened/aroused?
honourable prefix; = Shankara;
God; = disciples;
was/existed; = having been taught/enlightened;
= tested or awakened senses;

॥ 32 ॥

worship; = lord Govinda;
Oh foolish mind!; = (except) through/from remembrance of the Lord’s name;
other;
plan/method/means;
not;
we see;
for crossing the ocean of births deaths;

॥ 33 ॥

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