

Bhaja Govindam

by Sri Shankaracharya

Adi Shankaracharya is widely known for his teachings on Vedanta. Shankaracharya was born in the village of Kaladi, in South India, about 2500 years ago to his Brahmin parents, Sivaguru and Aryamba. He traveled throughout India during his life, preaching and establishing four important maths, or centers, and accepted numerous disciples. He had also composed a number of verses and hymns of his knowledge and insight. However, the Bhaja Govindam is perhaps his greatest. He is still today one of the greatest influences in the present-day understanding of Vedic philosophy, with numerous schools of thought throughout India still expounding his teachings.

He primarily taught the non-dual, or advaita, form of understanding, teaching that everything is ultimately one. Many of the commentaries on the Vedic texts, such as the *Brahma-samhita*, the *Upanishads*, and others, are written with commentaries by those who follow his advaitic principles. Thus, many such texts have the impersonalistic sway to them, leaving out the idea that everything comes from a personal or Supreme Creator. However, before he left this world, he composed the Bhaja Govindam prayers that evokes the mood of devotion to Lord Govinda, Krishna.

It is in this prayer that he emphasizes above all else the importance for developing devotion for Lord Krishna, which is the principle means for attaining the Grace for the Supreme, and the freedom from further rounds of reincarnating in material existence. It is this prayer that leaves us no doubt that his final instruction was to give up our egotistical differences and surrender to Lord Krishna. It also encapsulates the sum and substance of all Vedantic thought in whatever other works that he had written.

There is a story attached to the composition of this Hymn. It is said that Shankara was walking along a street in Varanasi one day, accompanied by his disciples. He heard an old scholar teaching his grammatical rules. Taking pity on him, he went up and advised him not to waste his time on grammar at his age but to turn his mind to God in worship and adoration. The Hymn to Govinda was composed on this occasion. Besides the refrain of the song beginning with the words "Bhaja Govindam", Shankara is said to have sung twelve verses, hence the hymn bears the title "Dvadasamanjarika-Stotra" (A hymn which is a bunch of twelve verse-blossoms). The fourteen disciples who were with the Master then are believed to have added one verse each. These fourteen verses are together called "Chaturdasa-manjarika-Stotra" (A hymn which is a bunch of fourteen verse-blossoms).

TEXT 1

bhajagovindam bhajagovindam
 govindam bhajamuudhamate
 sampraapte sannihite kaale
 nahi nahi rakshati dukrijnkarane

Worship Govinda, Worship Govinda, Worship Govinda. Oh fool! Rules of Grammar will not save you at the time of your death.

TEXT 2

mudha jahiihi dhanaagamatrishhnaam
 kuru sadbuddhim manasi vitrishhnaam
 yallabhase nijakarmopaattam
 vittam tena vinodaya chittam

Oh fool! Give up your thirst to amass wealth, devote your mind to thoughts to the Real. Be content with what comes through actions already performed in the past.

TEXT 3

naariistanabhara naabhiidesham
 drishhtvaa maagaamohaavesham
 etanmaamsaavasaadi vikaaram
 manasi vichintaya vaaram vaaram

Do not get drowned in delusion by going wild with passions and lust by seeing a woman's navel and chest. Bodies are flesh, fat and blood. Do not fail to remember this again and again in your mind.

TEXT 4

naliniidalagata jalamatitaralam
 tadvajjiivitamishayachapalam
 viddhi vyaadhyabhimaanagrastam
 lokam shokahatam cha samastam

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

TEXT 5

yaavadvittopaarjana saktah
 staavannija parivaaro raktah
 pashchaajjiivati jarjara dehe
 vaartaam koapi na prichchhati gehe

So long as a man is fit and able to support his family, see the 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.

TEXT 6

yaavatpavano nivasati dehe
 taavatprichchhati kushalam gehe
 gatavati vaayau dehaapaaye
 bhaaryaa bibhyati tasminkaaye

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.

TEXT 7

baalastaavatkriidaasaktah
 tarunastaavattaruniisaktah
 vriddhastaavachchintaasaktah
 pare brahmani koapi na saktah

Childhood is lost in play. Youth is lost by attachment to woman. Old age passes away by thinking over many past things. Alas! Hardly is there anyone who yearns to be lost in Parabrahman.

TEXT 8

kaate kaantaa kaste putrah
 samsaaro.ayamatiiva vichitrah
 kasya tvam kah kuta aayaatah
 tattvam chintaya tadiha bhraatah

Who is your wife? Who is your son? Strange is this samsara. Of whom are you? Where have you come from? Brother, ponder over these truths.

TEXT 9

satsangatve nissngatvam
 nissangatve nirmohatvam
 nirmohatve nishchalatattvam
 nishcalatattve jiivanmuktih

From Satsanga comes non-attachment, from non-attachment comes freedom from delusion, which leads to self-settledness. From self-settledness comes Jivan Mukti (liberation).

TEXT 10

vayasigate kah kaamavikaarah
 shushhke niire kah kaasaarah
 kshiinevitte kah parivaarah
 gyaate tattve kah samsaarah

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 continuation of birth and death) when the Truth is known?

TEXT 11

maa kuru dhana jana yauvana garvam
 harati nimeshhaatkaalah sarvam
 maayaamayamidamakhilaM hitvaa
 brahmapadaM tvam pravisha veditvaa

Do not boast of wealth, friends, and youth. Each one of these are destroyed within a minute. Free yourself from the illusion of the world of Maya and attain the timeless Truth.

TEXT 12

dinayaaminyau saayam praatah
 shishiravasantau punaraayaatah
 kaalah kriidati gachchhatyaayuh
 tadapi na mujncatyaashaavaayuh

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.

TEXT 13

dvaadashamajnjarikaabhirasheshhah
 kathito vaiyaakaranasyaishhah
 upadesho bhuudvidyaanipunaih
 shriimachchhankarabhagavachchharanarih

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

TEXT 14

kaate kaantaa dhana gatachintaa
 vaatula kim tava naasti niyantaa
 trijagati sajjanasam gatiraikaa
 bhavati bhavaarnavatarane naukaa

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 that boat of satsangha (knowledge of the Truth) quickly.

TEXT 15

jatilo mundii lujnchhitakeshah
 kaashhaayaambarabahukritaveshhah
 pashyannapi cana pashyati muudhah
 udaranimittam bahukritaveshhah

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 saffron, yet others in various colors --- all just for a livelihood. Seeing truth revealed before them, still the foolish ones see it not.

TEXT 16

angam galitam palitam mundam
 dashanavihiinam jatam tundam
 vridhho yaati grihiitvaa dandam
 tadapi na mujncatyaashaapindam

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 hope.

TEXT 17

agre vahnih prishhthebhaanuh
 raatrau chubukasamarpitajaanuh
 karatalabhikshastarutalavaasah
 tadapi na mujncatyaashaapaashah

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.

TEXT 18

kurute gangaasaagaragamanam
 vrataparipaalanamathavaa daanam
 gyaanavihinah sarvamatena
 muktim na bhajati janmashatena

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

TEXT 19

sura mandira taru muula nivaasah
 shayyaa bhuutala majinam vaasah
 sarva parigraha bhoga tyaagah
 kasya sukham na karoti viraagah

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 vairagya, could any fail to be content?

TEXT 20

yogarato vaabhogaratovaa
 sangarato vaa sangaviihinah
 yasya brahmani ramate chittam
 nandati nandati nandatyeva

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.

TEXT 21

bhagavad giitaa kijinchidadhiitaa
 gangaa jalalava kanikaapiitaa
 sakridapi yena muraari samarchaa
 kriyate tasya yamena na charchaa

Let a man read but a little from the Bhagavad-Gita, drink just a drop of water from the Ganga, worship Murari (Krishna) just once. He then will have no altercation with Yama (the lord of death).

TEXT 22

punarapi jananam punarapi maranam
 punarapi jananii jathare shayanam
 iha samsaare bahudustaare
 kripayaa apaare paahi muraare

Born again, death again, birth 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.

TEXT 23

rathyaa charpata virachita kanthah
 punyaapunya vivarjita panthah
 yogii yoganiyojita chitto
 ramate baalonmattavadeva

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

TEXT 24

kastvam ko.aham kuta aayaatah
 kaa me jananii ko me taatah
 iti paribhaavaya sarvamasaram
 vishvam tyaktvaa svapna vichaaram

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.

TEXT 25

tvayi mayi chaanyatraiko vishhnuh
 vyartham kupyasi mayyasahishhnuh
 bhava samachittah sarvatra tvam
 vaajnchhasyachiraadyadi vishhnutvam

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 quality of Vishnu soon, have Sama Bhaava always.

TEXT 26

shatrau mitre putre bandhau
 maa kuru yatnam vighrahasandhau
 sarvasminnapi pashyaatmaanam
 sarvatrotsrija bhedaagyaanam

Do not waste 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.

TEXT 27

kaamam krodham lobham moham
 tyaktvaa atmaanam bhaavaya ko aham
 atmagyaana vihiinaa muudhaah
 te pachyante narakaniguudhaah

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.

TEXT 28

geyam giitaa naama sahasram
 dhyeyam shriipati ruupamajasram
 neyam sajjana sange chittam
 deyam diinajanaaya cha vittam

Regularly recite from the Bhagavad-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.

TEXT 29

sukhatah kriyate raamaabhogah
 pashchaaddhanta shariire roгах
 yadyapi loke maranam sharanam
 tadapi na mujnchati paapaacharanam

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.

TEXT 30

arthamanartham bhaavaya nityam
 naastitatah sukhaleshah satyam
 putraadapi dhana bhaajaam bhiitih
 sarvatraishhaa vihiaa riitih

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.

TEXT 31

praanaayaamam pratyahaaram
 nityaanitya vivekavichaaram
 jaapyasameta samaadhividhaanam
 kurvavadhaanam mahadavadhaanam

Regulate the pranas (life airs within), 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.

TEXT 32

gurucharanaambuja nirbhara bhakatah
 samsaaraadachiraadbhava muktah
 sendriyamaanasa niyamaadevam
 drakshyasi nija hridayastham devam

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!

TEXT 33

muudhah kashchana vaiyaakarano
dukrijnkaranaadhyayana dhurinah
shriimachchhamkara bhagavachchhishhyai
bodhita aasichchhodhitakaranah

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

TEXT 34

bhajagovindam bhajagovindam
govindam bhajamuudhamate
naamasmaranaadanyamupaayam
nahi pashyaamo bhavatarane

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.